

EXODUS AND BLACK THEOLOGY. AN INVESTIGATION.

by

ZACHARIAS PETRUS LE ROUX

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR : PROFESSOR J.A. LOADER

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Summary:

Black Theology uses the Exodus episode as its *locus classicus* for its view of God's preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. The purpose of the dissertation is to determine to what extent Black Theology is scripturally justified in doing so.

The investigation concludes that -

- i) the use of a praxis 'claimed to be Christian' in the hermeneutic of Black Theology, becomes questionable and unconvincing in that there is an illogical vacillation between a self-determined praxis-horizon and a text-horizon and that,
- ii) when some aspects of Black Theology are measured using constraint criteria suggested by Kelsey, Black Theology exceeds the limits of acceptability by taking the exodus event as the *locus classicus* for the slogan that God is always on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

While for some Black theology is indeed an important new stage in theologizing it must however be remembered that liberation theology, in Africa at least, is still in its infancy.

Key Terms: Old Testament Theology; Liberation Theology; Black Theology; Exegesis; Hermeneutics; Patriarchs; Exodus; Freedom; Oppressed; Poor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Voluminous publications exist concerning Black Theology. Yet it is strangely difficult to come to grips with the precise biblical foundation on which this mass of erudition is predicated. Seen superficially, statements by black theologians concerning Black Theology seem to be made without being underpinned by convincing evidence or argument.

Questions which need to be addressed in this regard are the following:

- a) To what extent does the Exodus episode correlate with the appropriation thereof by Black Theology?
- b) Is it sufficient merely to propose a hermeneutic without having to indicate scientifically in which respects and why this hermeneutic should replace or supersede or be preferable to an existing orthodox hermeneutic?
- c) To what extent is the Bible the authority and the norm for Black Theology in the development of its doctrine and hermeneutic?

If theology is to be considered a science predicated on the Bible, then surely presuppositions should not merely be stated but also be able to be validated by or from the source on which the science is claimed to be predicated, in this instance the Bible? The foundations of presuppositions need to be well laid.

Of course the above would entail work of such a broad sweep that in a dissertation such as this it would be impossible to do justice to such an undertaking. In this dissertation attention will therefore be paid in the main to the Exodus episode and to the hermeneutic of Black Theology regarding the Bible as the foundational authority.

1.2 Purpose of the dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is therefore to investigate the Exodus episode and to determine to what extent, if any, Black Theology is justified in using the Exodus episode as its *locus classicus* for its view of God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed. In this investigation the narrative found in the book of Exodus is taken as the primary authority.

1.3 Method of Investigation

It would seem logical to conduct the investigation in the following order:

- a) An Introduction will be provided
- b) The Exodus narrative, seen in the light of the narrative found in the book Exodus will be discussed
- c) Aspects of Black Theology in South Africa with regard to its point of departure and its hermeneutic will be highlighted
- d) A conclusion, which will discuss aspects of Black Theology and its hermeneutic with regard to the Exodus episode will be drawn.

1.4 Perspectives

The dissertation is done from the perspective of a white South African male person who has a Reformed theological background.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXODUS FROM EGYPT NARRATIVE

2.1 Introduction

The word "exodus" means "the way out". The name of the book in the Hebrew Bible is אִוֹת וּמוֹתָיִם and means "names", signifying the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt with Jacob. In the second century BC the Alexandrian Jews translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek and entitled the book "exodus".

Owing to the close interlinking of the covenant of God with Abram and the exodus from Egypt, it is necessary to consider the patriarchs with special reference to -

- a) their historicity and
- b) the covenant,

as these relate to the descent from Palestine into Egypt. It would therefore be fitting in this chapter to treat the covenant, the offspring of Abraham in Egypt, God's fulfilment of his part of the covenant and a conclusion as to the meaning and purpose of the exodus from Egypt in the light of this close link.

Noth (1962:21) mentions, as far as the word "Hebrew" is concerned, that it was the custom in the ancient Orient of the second millennium BC to describe as 'Hebrews' people who were deprived of the rights of the old-established inhabitants of the land. This description is for instance used in the Old Testament narrative where the Book Exodus refers to the 'Hebrew women'. The word 'Hebrew' as used in the Old Testament, often sounds as though it were the name of a people. In the Old Testament the Israelites are only called 'Hebrews' when particular situations, such as the sojourn in Egypt, are referred to and in this we can still see the special significance of the word 'Hebrew'.

2.2 General background

2.2.1 Overview

'In Exodus 1-24, a religious revolt and a social revolt clearly go hand in hand. A people decides no longer to accept passively their difficult social situation because they hear that a God, previously unknown to them (at least by his true name) wants to change their social position in a short time. Likewise, they welcome this new god who is proclaimed to them by one who has received a revelation because it is from him that the change in their social situation is expected. A new religion makes a people revolutionary. And on the other hand, the difficult social situation of this people makes them ready for a new religion'. (Gottwald 1979:xxi quoting Jan Dus 1976:28)

2.2.2 Historical concept

It is often said that the Bible is a religious book and not a history book, and in particular that -

- a) the Old Testament was written as a book of religion and
- b) the concept or notion of history of the writers thereof was different from our concept of history.

The result is that in the Old Testament 'it is difficult... to draw a dividing line between what is "history" and what is "religion" because its "religion" is not our "religion" and its "history" is not our "history" at least as an object of analysis' (Garbini 1986:xv). Therefore, says Garbini (1986:xvi), once one becomes aware of this diversity it becomes easy to define the historical concept of the Old Testament as being 'that political thought which identifies itself with religious thought (the prophets) and that religious thought which makes itself historical thought (the history writers) and creates a fictitious but sacral history come together in a circularity which in our all too knowing language is no longer politics or history - but only ideology'.

Johnstone (1990:35) concurs that the writer of Exodus 'is concerned to portray religious institutions and beliefs in terms of a narration which reflects historical realities only in broad outlines and is concerned only in so far as it is necessary to present a verisimilitude of conditions of the general period while being quite eclectic in its choice of detail.'

The genre of the book Exodus is arguably that of a 'confession of faith expressed in a narrative of origins...The purpose is not to reconstruct the past for its own sake but to express the constants of Israel's experience of life under God' (Johnstone 1990:39).

Gottwald (1989:253) is of the opinion that it can safely be said that at no stage in the development of the single units and complexes of tradition was there any intent to render a coherent account according to historiographic conventions.

'What distinguishes the history narrated in the Old Testament from all others? It is not the presence of an ideological motivation which controls the exposition of events but the fact that the ideological motivation has a determinative value and often conditions and directs the historical narrative itself. It is because of this that we talk of sacral history' (Garbini 1988:14).

The fact (Gottwald 1979:4) is that although we are provided with innumerable stories in the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Samuel the central difficulty is that 'these materials come to us in the form of a corpus of religious documents deriving from the monarchy and still later periods of Israel's history...the earliest sources that we can identify are not earlier than about 950 BC at best.' The literature encompassing these stories is then quasi-historical and 'most incidents [are] reviewed from a temporal distance and all of them are shaped in one way or another by cultic and ideological considerations' (Gottwald 1979:27). This means that these early traditions of Israel stem from the peculiar structure and the peculiar needs of

premonarchic Israel as a cult community. And, 'the spatio-temporal lines of connection among these bodies of tradition and even between specimens of the same type, are often less evident than their discreteness. They provide brightly colored (*sic*) bits of a mosaic which touch one another here and there and suggests intriguing patterns. Because sizeable numbers of pieces are missing, however, the total design is far from patent' (Gottwald 1979:59).

2.2.3 The Traditions

2.2.3.1 The patriarchs

The Old Testament is a religious book and not a history book. The accounts relating to the patriarchs characteristically do not 'provide information of a historical kind: we have family happenings, religious episodes, romance-like events...The patriarchal period is in reality a period outside time and history, because that is what the biblical narrator wanted: by making these archetypal figures move against a background which is outside historical time (as is also the case with their superhuman longevity), the author has indicated in his own way mythical time [*sic*]: The time in which God talked directly with men and came down beside them' (Garbini 1988:15). Outside the Bible we know virtually nothing of Hebrew history. We can conclude then that the 'Old Testament has set out a sacred history of universal value, but it is not very reliable as an evidence of a secular history of the kind that the Hebrew people actually experienced' (Garbini 1988:18).

The figure of Isaac is a rather flimsy one as gleaned from the narratives. This means that there are essentially two patriarchs, namely Abraham, who moves in a southern area, and Jacob who moves in a northern area. It is surprising that the Hebrews like to call themselves the sons of Jacob or the sons of Israel. (Garbini 1988:80) and 'we know absolutely nothing about this Israel, the eponymous ancestor of the northern kingdom - in other

words , the Bible is completely silent about this figure, who was only identified with Jacob at a late stage and almost incidentally' (Garbibi 1988:80).

It seems that it was at the time of Josiah, King of Juda (in about the year 640 BC) that a completely new history of the Jewish people was established which had the following main features:

- a) the exiles from Judah affirmed their right to represent all Israel:
- b) making their ancestor Abraham the direct ancestor of Jacob and
- c) making Abraham the repository of the divine promise. (:82)

However, at times a historical incident can be detected, for example, the building of the Egyptian store cities Pithom and Raamses. Even so it still remains difficult to draw a line between what is historical or not within these accounts. (Gottwald 1979:30). Gottwald (1979:35) goes on to say: 'Many of these purportedly 'historical' traces in the patriarchal accounts are evidently the naïve retroprojection of later Israelite experiences and social forms, a process facilitated by the later canonical division of the "history" of all Israel into patriarchal, Mosaic and settlement phases.'

2.2.3.2 Moses

There are historical traces in the Moses traditions which stand out, for example traditions concerning his kinship, marriage, burial and priestly line (Gottwald 1979:35). However, more confidence can be placed in the experience and religious belief of a proto-Israelite 'Moses' group than in the specific person Moses (1979:36). He became a legendary figure in the course of a few generations. He became a sacred figure for legitimizing virtually everything later regarded as normative by the Yahwists. (1979:37). He had so many different roles 'overloaded' on him that 'there is no consistently principled way of knowing which

leadership roles and which aspects of the roles, actually were performed by the real Moses' (Gottwald 1987:197).

The Moses group in Egypt was not yet Israel (Gottwald 1979:39). Gottwald (1987:494) hypothesises that the name Israel was given to a pre-Yahwistic union of Canaanite peoples. The name was adopted because an earlier 'association of Canaanite underclasses had employed it and it was the single comprehensive term available with adequate historical associations to communicate the intent of Yahwistic Israel to be an egalitarian social order' (Gottwald 1987:494-495). Lemche (1985:414) states that, as regards composing a hypothesis about Israel's pre-national existence in the absence of adequate sources, the axiom applies that 'our most important duty is to acknowledge our ignorance.'

The homogeneity of the 'Israelite' community in Egypt cannot be taken for granted. They were most likely a conglomeration of people having in common that they were lower classes 'oppressed by the Egyptian crown who sought relief under opportune leadership and were only gradually welded together in the cult of Yahweh' (Gottwald 1987:455). The Moses group appears to have been composed of a mixture of stock-breeders, small gardeners and fishermen and war captives or migrants from Canaan who were forced by the harsh imposition of state slavery into migratory habits for survival (Gottwald 1987:39). Johnstone (1990:74) says that the Hebrews in Egypt were in some sense slaves but that our resources for reconstructing that experience in historiographic detail are not available in Exodus.

In all this it is clear that 'the Mosaic age is not a separate autonomous phase in the history of Israel, although it is a separate autonomous phase in the history of Yahwism which contributed basic beliefs and practices to the later united Israel. Insofar as the autonomy of the Mosaic age as a phase of Yahwism is cast as a phase in the history of all Israel, the Mosaic age is also a synthetic creation of canonical Israelite tradition in which the authentic continuity between the two

phases of Yahwism is transformed into monolithic unity in the form of a "history of all the tribes of Israel under the single prototypical leader Moses" (Gottwald 1979:40).

2.2.3.3 In sum

In summarising the traditions of the patriarchs and Moses, extrabiblical documents and archaeological excavations have not been useful in tracing the specific origins of Israel and Judah and the words of Miller & Hayes (1986:72) are apposite, namely 'if any specific conclusions are to be reached about the origins and earliest history of Israel and Judah, therefore, these must be based on biblical materials, primarily the Genesis-Joshua narrative ...'

2.2.4 Religion and politics

In relating Yahwism to the wider Israelite society, Mendenhall (1973) seems to reason as follows (as mentioned by Gottwald 1979:599 *et seq*):

a) Rejection of power.

Israel's God is seen as the source of all power. Thus the sphere of the exercise of power, namely politics, is removed from Israel's religion, it being proper to the sphere of the God, the source of all power.

b) Ethical norms.

Ethical norms are seen to be grounded in the revelation and authority of Israel's God.

c) Politics and religion.

Israel is seen by Mendenhall as a society in which religion and ethics are separate from, and in decisive ways, above politics.

It is this separation of religion and ethics from politics and this logical and procedural priority of religion and ethics above politics that distinguishes Israel from its environment. The paradigm seems to run like this: 'Whereas in the Near Eastern world at large, centralized politics determine social order and religion, in Israel religion determines an ethical social order that not only excludes centralized politics - i.e. the state - but makes all uses of human power optional or immaterial to social order'.

Gottwald (1979:600) attempts to refute Mendenhall's assumptions (see below).

d) Power distribution.

The form of political power is that which the community distributes in a more egalitarian design than that distributed by a centralized power base of the state.

Although Gottwald (1979:602) criticises Mendenhall for his 'arbitrary extrapolation of a distinctive Israelite social movement from a distinctive Israelite religion via the medium of "ethical norms"' because he 'employs no sociological method and offers no theory to bridge the various social processes and historical movements and to articulate the religious...dimensions or plane', I think that Mendenhall is completely justified in relying on 'philosophical and religious idealism' (Gottwald 1979:599) as a basis for his conclusions in this regard. In my opinion this is especially so where 'Israel' in Egypt could hardly be seen to have been a homogeneous sociological unit. Bosch (1991:429 quoting Knapp 1977:161) states that the problem 'seems to be that Christians tend to sacralize the sociological forces of history that are dominant at a particular time, regarding them as inexorable words of providence and even of redemption.' Lemche (1985:61) writes that both Mendenhall and Albright are confident that Israel was a unique society possessing a unique and individualistic religion which was innocent of all influence from the sinful Canaanite 'religion of

violence' and which existed in sharp opposition to it. As regards the biblical horizon for viewing the late exilic and post-exilic restorers of Judah as a religious and cultural community that had lost its political independence, Gottwald (1989:257 et seq) states that 'we observe a decided separation between 'religion' and 'politics'...this completely understandable tendency ..in (this) version of exodus joins with the heightened stress on the initiatives of God to further separate religious ends and means from the contingency of political and social history.'

In sum I accept Mendenhall's position in the argument for the procedural priority of religion and ethics over politics in the 'Israelite' life in Egypt and the time of the exodus.

2.2.5 Conclusion

As regards the Patriarchal and the Moses traditions the Old Testament has set out a sacred history of universal value but it is not very reliable as evidence of a secular history of the kind that the Hebrew people actually experienced (Garbini 1988:18). 'If there is something to be retained out of the religious ideology of old Israel, it is certainly not the distorted, alienating line of tradition which absolutizes and falsely projects the traditional religious models into eternal idols and spectres of the mind...In particular we must assess to what degree and in what respects inherited religion converges on and reinforces social struggle and precisely which social sectors and tendencies religion validates and motivates and which social sectors and tendencies religion invalidates and discourages and obstructs...The analyses, praxes and ideologies of the past are all instructive but they are not blueprints or lodestones' (Gottwald 1979:705-707).

For the purposes of this dissertation, then, the narratives found in the Bible will be accepted as the history of Israel bearing in mind that the historical value attached to such narratives have been discussed in this paragraph.

2.3 The Covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

Exodus is one chapter in the "history" of Israel. It is a sequel to the Book of Genesis and the descent of Jacob's people into Egypt. Exodus cannot be properly understood if isolated from that which went before, for it is a part of the development of the themes of the covenant stemming from the patriarchal tradition.

2.3.1 Abraham

Genesis 12:1-2: The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."

Gen. 15:18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river {Or Wadi} of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--"

Abram had no particular claim to be used as the instrument of revelation or of blessing by God - he came from a family which had served other gods (Joshua 24:2 et seq).

Dalglisch (1977:11 et seq), discussing the call of Abram, is of the opinion that this part of the biblical narrative is foundational in the sense that the narration refers to an occurrence -

'... when an individual became conscious of a purpose of universal import: "in thee shall all the nations be blessed." The call is similarly universally oriented. It transcends all particularized culture, social or ecological milieu, race, ritual and nature. All these played a part in his call. He was chosen not because he was a Semite or a resident in Mesopotamian high culture, or born in a challenge-response of a geographical locale. He was called

without priest, without sacrifice, without rite. In a word, his call like his mission transcended all the particularities of his situation; it was a universal call for a universal mission, a call and mission reproducible in the experience of his imitators. To be sure it was a particular election: God called Abram. But its particularity was purely economic, administrative; it was the subordination of the particular for the universal good. It was the commissioning of one for the blessing of all. There was no favouritism, no chauvinism involved' (underlining mine). The basic promise, then, was the blessing of all humankind through Abram. Three subsidiary assurances were added -

- 1) there would be a posterity to effect the blessing (Gen.12:2;13:6;15:4-6;17:2-6;18:10,14,18;21:1,2; 22:16 f.;25:23;26:4,24;28:3,14;35:11,48:4)
- 2) there would be protection in order to ensure the mission's completion (Gen. 12:3; 27:29; 28:15 in particular); and the many deliverances exhibited in the Genesis narratives); and
- (3) there would be provision (sic) (of descendants) and the (gift of the) land (underlining is my interpolation) (Gen. 12:7; 13;13f ,17; 15:18-21;17:8; 24:7; 28:4,13; 35:11-12 (in particular); 48:4 also to be particularly noted).

The major theme, the universal blessing of humankind was to be implemented by these three subordinate assurances. Again and again in Genesis and Exodus it appears that (sic) the divine purpose is going to be thwarted; yet ever and again the mysterious providence obviates the difficulties and moves step by step to fulfilment. In Exodus the scene may change, the personnel be other, but the same drama, the same themes the essential purpose are maintained.

We note that -

- a) the patriarchs, including Abraham, received revelations in

theophanies, but had no commission to transmit any message to others (Childs 1991:56)

- b) Abraham was a rich and powerful man when God entered into a covenant with him (Gen.13:1-5)
- c) the oppression of his descendants in a foreign land had been foretold without mentioning the name of the foreign country concerned.

2.3.2 Isaac

Genesis 26:2-4: The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed."

We note that:

- a) Isaac at this point in time is enjoined specifically not to go down to Egypt, in spite of a drought reigning in his country of residence
- b) Isaac was a rich man when God entered into the covenant with him (Gen.26:12-14)
- c) prosperity and land were promised to his descendants.

2.3.3 Jacob

Genesis 46:3-4: "I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

God now allows Jacob to go down to Egypt having paved the way for the salvation of Israel and his descendants in the time of this famine via Joseph's position at the Egyptian court.

We note that -

- a) it is promised that Israel will be made a great nation in Egypt;
- b) God himself will go down to Egypt and remain with his chosen nation;
- c) God himself will surely bring his nation back to Palestine after
 - i) having punished the nation among which they had sojourned as strangers and which they had to serve (Gen 15:13)
 - ii) having blessed them, so that they will come out of Egypt with great possessions, as a rich nation (Gen 15:14).

2.4 Entry into Egypt

2.4.1 Continuation of the Genesis narration

Exodus 1:1-7: These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all (see also Gen. 46:27; and see Acts 7:14 where the figure seventy-five is mentioned); Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

The narration begins with the phrase 'These are the names...'. This formula serves the author in much the same way as the phrase 'These are the generations of ' The formula which

connects the names to the entrance into Egypt derives from the tradition in Genesis 46.

2.4.2 The בני ישראל

Exodus 1:1 begins with the tradition of the patriarchs. The בני ישראל (translated as 'sons of Israel') are the sons of Jacob, but the transitional function of the introduction emerges in v 7. In v 7 the בני ישראל are now the Israelites, the people of Israel. The writer has moved from the tradition of a family to that of the nation. His fusion of the two traditions makes it clear that he understands the Exodus as a direct continuation of the history begun in Genesis. Indeed the nature of the continuity is made explicit in v 7. In this verse the narrator has moved beyond the Genesis narrative of 46.27 of the בני ישראל as the sons of Israel (Jacob) and begins the Exodus account of the nation Israel (Childs 1991:2).

2.4.3 The time of entry into Egypt

Miller and Hayes (1986:67) mention that the Egyptian pharaohs of the period of about 1320 - 1085 BC undertook major construction works in the Nile Delta and some see this as a convincing setting for the building of the store-cities Pithom and Raamses referred to in Exodus 1:11. Again, other scholars would argue that Raamses II (who rules from about 1304 - 1237 BC) is the most likely candidate for the pharaoh of the exodus. However, the problem with the proposed correlation between biblical narrative and Egyptian history is that it does not agree well with biblical chronology which seems to place the exodus as having already occurred in the fifteenth century.

Considering that what we are dealing with is a sacred history of Israel one can only say *non liquet* and agree with Miller and Hayes (1986:67) that a fixed point between biblical and Egyptian history has not been established, or, for that matter, that this could serve "as actual proof of the historicity of the biblical

account."

The inherent difficulties in such reckoning must be candidly admitted, and "precise" dates will at best be held only very tentatively.

2.5 The stay in Egypt

2.5.1 The land of Goshen

At first it went well with the offspring of Jacob in Egypt. Not only were they settled (Gen. 47) in the best part of the land, in Goshen, the district of Rameses, and were provided with food according to the number of their children but also, since they were shepherds, some of them at least were probably put in charge of Pharaoh's livestock.

They also enjoyed comparative freedom and peace. When Jacob died his sons went freely to Palestine to bury him in the cave at Machpela (Gen. 50:13) and they returned to Egypt without hindrance.

When Joseph died, he died in peace, was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt (Gen 50:26). Still the Lord kept on blessing them and they were fruitful (Ex.1:7) and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, living in peace and enjoying freedom of movement.

It is necessary to note that in this blessing of the offspring of Jacob no mention is made that the Lord evinced any predilection or preferential option for the poor.

2.5.2 Oppression

2.5.2.1 Biblical text

Exodus 1:8-14: Then a new king, who did not know about

Joseph, came to power in Egypt. "Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labour the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

2.5.2.2 A new king

The new king arose who did not know Joseph and oppressed (dealt shrewdly with) the Hebrews. We noticed in paragraph 2.4.3 *supra* that this period could not be dated with any certainty.

So it came to pass as it was narrated -

Genesis 15:13-14: Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions.

2.5.2.3 Social conditions in Egypt

What were the social conditions like in the Egypt of Raamses II? In his book on Moses, Andre Neher reconstructs the social situation in the empire ruled by Raamses II as that of an almost totalitarian state in which the vast masses were forced into classes, the lowest of which were distinguished only by gradations of misery. The Egyptian proletariat is represented by

those who say, in the papyrus of Turin, 'we are putrefying with hunger'; yet theoretically, at least, they still had some value as human beings, and of the proletariat it was said, 'He still has a heart. But of the slaves it was said, "They have no hearts"' - the heart signifying the personality itself.

Neher writes as follows:

In Egypt the proletariat is numerous. However, in their drawings there are spaces around the peasants and workmen who, in spite of their numbers, seem to retain a minimum of individuality. On the other hand the scenes depicting slavery and forced labour are brutal in their massiveness. Human beings are so closely packed and piled upon each other that they appear as a single whole yoked as such to its work, without any individuality at all.

These human masses are the victims of the totalitarian empire of Rameses and its passionate and fanatical cult of power. The State and its prestige demand the systematic construction of colossal depots, fortresses, palaces, temples, cities and tombs. The slaves provide the gratuitous and inexhaustible pool of labour for this immense task.

Rameses II was the kind of man who could be at the top of a system of this kind. He may have dwelt in his great city "content of heart and free," but among the slaves who populated his labour camps there was only discontent and servitude of the bitterest kind. Among those slave people were the children of Israel (Neher 1959: 73,75.).

2.5.2.4 The motivation for the oppression

In Exodus 1: 8-14 one discerns an immediate motive for the Egyptian oppression of the 'people of Israel'. Israel had increased in number and became strong. This seemed so undesirable to the Egyptians that a new Pharaoh, who by this time knew

nothing of Joseph's former good offices to the Egyptian administration, which had under an earlier Pharaoh led to a ceremonial invitation of the whole of Jacob's family to Egypt (cf. Gen. 45. 16 ff. ; 47. 1 ff), saw himself compelled to take countermeasures. These countermeasures consisted of -

- a) a restriction of freedom by the general conscription of 'Israelites' for forced labour in building and agricultural work, and
- b) later in the brutal slaughter of their male children. (Noth 1962: 20)

And so the scene was set for the coming to pass of the 'prediction' of cruelty found in Genesis 15:13-14 referred to above.

2.5.2.5 The oppressive corvée

The situation of the corvée was well known in the Old Testament tradition. Even alien elements of the population were subject to this system. It often happened that people, especially those with no settled dwelling, living in the neighbourhood of the fertile Nile country from the area to the north-east of Egypt which borders on Asia, would come into Egypt like the 'Bedouin tribes of Edom'. These tribes were, for example, admitted into the land on the eastern border of the Nile delta by an Egyptian frontier official in about 1200 BC (Noth 1962:52).

Since these people were in Egypt as forced labour in the royal service, only a decision from Pharaoh could free them from their immediate situation unless they were ready and willing to resort to force or to deception. Thus the request to Pharaoh and the negotiations with him were the obvious move. Thanks to a simple way of thinking it is here supposed that the Israelite labour force was able to speak directly to the Egyptian ruler through their representatives. The children of Israel were not Egyptian citizens, they were sojourners without political rights and though personally free, were often the victims of injustice and

oppression. They grew strong and the Egyptian King saw in them a potential threat.

So it became expedient for Egypt to adopt a policy of the corvée system. They imposed the obligation to perform gratuitous labour for the sovereign. While the Israelites were not reduced to actual slavery, the heavy demands of the corvée were extremely rigorous. Egyptian taskmasters supervised the labour gangs and these taskmasters in turn appointed Israelites who were the immediate overseers of the workforce. The purpose the Egyptians probably had in mind was to break the power of the Israelites, exact free labour from them and to control the lives of those in this alien population (Dalglish 1977: 18).

Still, from the Egyptian point of view, the Israelites continued to multiply ominously and this became an excuse for the continued abuse of the Israelite population. The logic of totalitarianism is surprisingly consistent. Resistance is stamped out by utterly exploiting the energy of the slaves (Childs 1991:106).

So it came to pass, in the circumstances prevailing at the time, that the Israelites were discouraged (in anguish of spirit). They were broken physically by the cruel lash of the taskmaster, the blazing sun, heat and scanty provisions for their task. They were broken psychologically since they developed a slave mentality and were broken spiritually as well.

Josephus states :

Full 400 years they endured these hardships: it was indeed a contest between them, the Egyptians striving to kill off the Israelites with drudgery and these ever to show themselves superior to their tasks (Finegan 1963:22. Quoting Josephus: Antiquities II, 204 (= II,ix,1)).

2.5.2.6 The proscription

Exodus 1:15-17: The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.

2.6 Moses

Against this background of the oppressive corvée and the proscription, the child Moses was born. Unable to conceal him for long, his mother set him into the Nile in a basket. From there he was rescued by the daughter of Pharaoh, reared in safety and adopted as a son by the princess. He enjoyed the privileges of a member of the royal family while he was growing up.

2.6.1 In Egypt:

Exodus 2:10: When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, [Moses sounds like the Hebrew for draw out] saying, "I drew him out of the water."

The name Moses is Egyptian. This construction is, for example, found in names like Thut-mosis and Ra-meses. The princess would probably have given him such a name and it seems as though part of his name had disappeared and it had been shortened to Moses (Dalglish 1977:26).

Exodus 2:11-15: One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating (or killing - see below) a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no-one, he

killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"¹⁴ The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known." When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.

The incident also shows what a pitch the bondage of the Israelites had by this time reached. For some apparently trivial reason an Egyptian could kill a Hebrew on the spot (the Hebrew verb הָרַג must surely have the same meaning here in verse 12 as it doubtless has in the following verse 13 and thus means 'kill' and not just 'beat' per Noth 1962:36).

It is assumed that Moses had not hitherto lived among his fellow countrymen and had not shared their hard lot. He had to 'go out' to them from the surroundings of the royal court in which he had grown up. Meanwhile he grew up and according to Acts 7:23 he would by then already have been 40 years old whereas the Old Testament narrative has pictured him as still being quite a young man. The Old Testament tradition has nothing to say about the time he spent at the Egyptian court. It was only at a later date that this gap in the tradition was filled with the observation that he was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians' (Acts 7:22). At the court of the king of Egypt Moses did not forget that he belonged with 'his people', a fact of which he became aware in some way not documented in Exodus. He immediately proved this at the first opportunity with an act in which he defended a fellow Hebrew.

Sufficient reason for his flight from Egypt is given by v. 14b, for once the Hebrews knew about the affair it would not remain long hidden from the Egyptians, who would then take steps

concerning it. Moses fled from Egypt at, for him, the right time. However, he did not hear a word from God directing him to flee.

The action taken by Moses against the unjust assault (killing) perpetrated on a 'Hebrew' in Egypt which compelled him to flee from Egypt and the exemplary readiness to help which he displayed in the scene at the well in the land of Midian are the narrator's explanations of how Moses came out of Egypt and how he came to be connected with the household of a Midianite priest.

It is most remarkable that Moses fled to Midian (Ex. 2:15) as he clearly considered himself to be one with the Hebrews to the extent that he even physically defended one of them (Ex 2:12). In the narrative tradition of the Old Testament the Midianites appear as the dreaded foes of Israel (Num. 31:3). They, the Midianites, had meanwhile become settled in Palestine (Noth 1962:30-31) and are known to us as the oldest camel nomads who from time to time used to invade the settled land (cf. Judges 6:1 ff.).

Moses had made a conscious decision to identify with the plight of his kinsmen. But, although this element appears in the text, the emphasis falls fully on the act and not on the decision itself. Moreover the events which are subsequently described point in no way to a single-minded commitment to a divine purpose. Rather, an occurrence is described which touches off a series of incidents, most of which are only accidentally connected with each other as follows :

- a) He kills an Egyptian, thinking that his act is secret
- b) But he is seen, rebuffed by his fellow Hebrew
- c) And betrayed
- d) In terror for his life he flees as a fugitive from his country to seek shelter in Midian
- e) There he remains shepherding for a living, and raising a family.

There is very little here of the hero of faith who decides for God. The selfless action against the Egyptian, committed in

anger, accomplishes nothing of lasting effect for Israel's plight (Childs 1991: 43).

2.6.2 Midian

Exodus 3:7-10: The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey - the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

2.6.2.1 The call

a) In Midian

The Lord revealed himself to Moses. As in the case of Abraham there seems to be little to commend Moses as a vehicle for God to lead his nation out of the house of bondage into Canaan. Here we have a person who had enjoyed all the luxury of Pharaoh's house, had killed an Egyptian who had done him no personal harm, then had fled to people who could be considered to be the enemies of the children of Israel. He also confessed that he was not a fluent speaker. Yet God chose him and called him to lead his people out of Egypt.

The motive force in all this is the Lord for he has seen their misery, heard them crying and is concerned about their suffering and thus God has come to rescue them and bring them out of the land. To this end Moses receives a commission to fulfil the

divine purpose. He has to go to Pharaoh and bring God's people out of Egypt, that is, deliver them from physical slavery.

Childs (1991:88) states the following: Firstly, the God of Israel makes known his being in specific historical moments and confirms in his works his ultimate being by redeeming a covenant people. Secondly, that history is the arena of God's self-revelation, but that history receives its definition in terms of what this God is doing. Thirdly, that God's redemptive will for Israel is not tied to a philosophy of history...The divine reality of which this passage speaks encounters Moses...in a particular historical situation and seeks to evoke a response of obedience within God's plan.

b) In Egypt

Exodus 6:2-8: God spoke to Moses and said to him, `I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give to them the land of Canaan the land in which they lived as sojourners. Now I have heard the moaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians have enslaved, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the Israelites: "I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. And I will take you for my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will lead you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord (Yahweh)."

For the biblical writer the revelation of the different names is important because hereby the character of God is made known. He had made a covenant with the patriarchs as El Shaddai ("the Almighty". See Childs 1991:110), but they had not experienced the fulfilment of that promise. Indeed Moses had complained that God had done nothing (Ex. 5:23). Now God reveals himself through his name as the God who fulfils his promise and redeems Israel from Egypt (Childs 1991:115).

The message which Moses is commanded to announce to Israel begins and ends with the proclamation of the name : I am Yahweh. The content of the message which is bracketed by this self-identification formula, is actually only an explication of the name itself and contains the essence of God's purpose with Israel (Childs 1991:115), namely:

- a) First, there is the promise to deliver: "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. "
- b) Secondly there is their adoption into the covenant as the people of God : "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God.
- c) Thirdly, there is the gift of the land which had been promised to the fathers. "I will give it to you for an inheritance." The name Yahweh functions as a guarantee that the reality of God stands behind the promise and will execute its fulfilment.

"Indeed, as Zimmerli has pointed out, in the divine name is encompassed the whole redemptive power of God. Ezekiel 20:5 speaks of the revelation of the name as a solemn oath which God swore, committing himself to Israel as God (Childs 1991:115).

The nucleus of the story of Moses's stay in Midian is the divine commission which he received there from God (Noth 1962:40).

2.6.3 The return to Egypt

2.6.3.1 The message delivered

Exodus 4:20 : So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his right hand.

Moses reaches Egypt and there fulfils his commission by delivering his message. To do this he gathers together the elders of Israel, which was apparently possible without any difficulty as the Israelites in Egypt lived quite near to one another . The 'people' represented by the elders also hear the message and believe it willingly (Ex 4:27-31). They bow themselves in worship before their God who has taken them to himself, and thereby show themselves ready for whatever God has prepared to happen to them.

2.6.4 Struggle with Pharaoh

God intends redeeming Israel. Israel is his possession. There exists a special relationship between God and Israel:

Exodus 4:22: Then say to Pharaoh: This is what the Lord says: Israel is my first-born, and I told you: Let my son go that he may worship me. But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your first-born son.

Redemption is the exercise of the right of possession. It is because Israel belongs to Yahweh that he demands sole mastery. A shared mastery with Pharaoh is unacceptable (Dennison 1982:2). In fact, the conflict concerns paternal power.

The struggle with Pharaoh was not arbitrary, its purpose was both revelatory and redemptive -

- a) that you may know that I am (the Lord) Yahweh (Ex 7:17);
- b) that you may know that all the earth is the Lord's (Ex 9:29);
- c) that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel (Ex.11:7);

- d) that it might be demonstrated that the Lord is long-suffering and has forbearance with even an obdurate ruler (Dalglish 1977:46).

2.6.5 The plagues

Pharaoh did not listen to the words of Moses which he spoke as a prophet of the Lord. Ten plagues were visited upon the Egyptians with the result that Pharaoh let God's people go.

2.7 The exodus commences

Exodus 12:29-32: At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."

The exodus from Egypt comes about as a direct consequence of the slaughter of the Egyptian first-born on the night of the Passover. Exodus 12:41 to 12:51 expressly affirms that in view of the present narrative this happening was the decisive event that led to the Exodus. This section was attached to the preceding plague narrative because in the slaughter of the first-born we have the last plague, which now produces the intended result, the release of the Israelites from Egypt.

Indeed the aim underlying the plagues is achieved beyond expectation. Not only does Pharaoh now at last declare himself ready to let Israel go with all their cattle, but he drives

Israel out of his land with the greatest speed - in the middle of the night -because the overwhelming power of Yahweh has been shown to him in the slaughter of the first-born, and he now has to fear something even more deadly if Israel were to remain in his land but a moment longer (Noth 1962:88).

Exodus 12: 36: The Lord made the Egyptians favourably disposed towards the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

It seems probable that the Exodus commenced at Raamses in Goshen (Dalglish 1977:60; Gottwald 1987:198).

Exodus 12:36-39 reports that six hundred thousand Hebrews of fighting age left Egypt, plundering the Egyptians along the way. This number plus their wives and children along with the multitude said to have accompanied them would have totalled some two and a half million people (Miller & Hayes: 1986:60).

There seems to be an incongruity in asking the Egyptians for treasures. So there may once have been a clandestine flight with stolen goods and the experiences of more than one group of escapees from Egypt may have been combined in the biblical tradition, in which case the secret flight and the crossing of the sea should be associated with two different exoduses (Gottwald 1987:199).

2.8 The pursuit

Exodus 14:8-9: The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians - all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops - pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi-Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

After Israel's release from Egypt had been effected through powerful and terrible divine signs and wonders, there unexpectedly came a further conflict with the Egyptians which was extremely dangerous for Israel. For although Pharaoh had consented to the release of Israel, he nevertheless then summoned up his powerful battle-strength in order to pursue the Israelites who had journeyed into the wilderness east of the delta and bring them back by force, not because he had already heard, or could possibly have heard, that they were not going on the pilgrimage into the wilderness which they had purposed, but because afterwards he regretted his release of Israel. In the framework of the present narrative context this event acts as a postlude which in consequence of the miraculous divine help given to the Israelites comes to nothing. Within the history of tradition it is more than just a postlude. In contrast, it is the very act which was first and chiefly meant when Israel confessed Yahweh as 'the God who led us up out of Egypt.'

In any case it is clear that a 'flight' from Egypt by the Israelites provides an especially clear reason for the pursuit by the Egyptian host; and that in fact the story of the deliverance at the sea is very closely connected with the traditional theme of the flight (Noth 1962:112).

Exodus 14:23-24: The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.

2.9 Crossing the Reed sea: Nucleus

Exodus 14:13-14: Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Exodus 14:27-28: Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing towards { from} it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

And so came to pass the words that the Lord spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15:13.

From this point in the narration all the previous acts of God against the Egyptians seem like a prelude which culminates in the decisive event at the sea. In this way then the narrative of the deliverance at the sea is to be regarded as the real nucleus of the exodus theme, and in the present tradition it forms not only the end but also the climax of the whole (Noth 1962:104-105; Gottwald 1987: 199; Dalglish 1977:68). The variants of the story of the miracle wrought by Yahweh at the sea (Noth 1962:104-105; Gottwald 1987:199; Dalglish 1977:64-68) which are in part certain, in part only demonstrable with probability, clearly disagree in their representation of the details of the event. But the essential elements of the contents are the same in all forms of the story. This similarity shows itself all the more clearly against the background of the differences in the individual narratives. All agree in the following respects:

- a) In speaking of an act of God in which it was God alone who acted
- b) In handing down as the nucleus of the story that the fatal danger to the Israelites journeying from the delta to the Sinai peninsula consisted in their being pursued by the Egyptians, and that the Israelites were saved from this danger by the annihilation of the Egyptians in a 'sea'.

Now this annihilation is represented in different ways. The most simple, but at the same time most imposing, is the narration of how the sea was divided, how first the

Israelites passed through and how the Egyptians wanted to follow. The other narration is more mysterious. In this main narrative the Egyptians are driven into the sea through the fear of God, but alongside it is preserved the traces of what was probably another version, according to which the Egyptians, presumably encamped, were engulfed by the return of a sea which had at first been 'driven back'.

Common to all these variants is the thought that the event must be described as a concrete happening, which really took place in space and time. We simply have variants of the single theme of the destruction of the Egyptians in 'the sea' .

This saving of Israel through the destruction of an Egyptian chariot force in the sea forms the historical basis of the tradition (Noth 1962:119-120; Bright 1970:112). Furthermore, the passage of Israel through the Sea of Reeds, (for the Sea of Reeds is its proper name in twenty-eight instances which occur in the Old Testament (sic)) is recounted in prose (in Ex. 14) and in poetry (Ex. 15) (Dalglish 1977:66).

2.10 Summary and conclusion

From the foregoing exposition of the biblical narration of the exodus event the following is reasonable to infer and indeed clear:

- a) The sojourn of Israel in Egypt is seen as God's particular plan for Israel. It did not just happen: God so stipulated it to Abram, and in his particular time he will complete his plan with his nation.
- b) God entered into a particular covenant with Abraham. Abraham was commissioned as one person to obtain the blessing of all humankind. There was no favouritism or chauvinism involved in God's choosing of him.
- c) Abraham, Isaac, Jacob as well as the לְאֵלֵינוּ in Egypt became rich and powerful. Indeed a preferential option for the poor and powerless surfaces not at all. This is borne

out by what is stipulated in Leviticus 19:15 to the following effect '... do not show partiality to the poor nor favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.'

- d) The oppression suffered was suffered by the 'first-born of the Lord'. A special relationship existed between God and the Israelites.
- e) The Lord was present with them all through their suffering.
- f) There is no mention that Moses, when he was called, was a poor or powerless man at all. Shepherding was a most honourable occupation.
- g) The Israelites did not contribute anything to their exodus since -
 - i) through miraculous deeds God forced the Pharaoh to let his people go. In particular it was the death of the first born that was the catalyst. The 'Hebrews' had no struggle against the Egyptians to contend with.
 - ii) through his power God destroyed the Egyptian army (the army of the oppressors) when it posed a deadly danger to the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds. Again we note that the 'Hebrews' had no need to fight for their deliverance in any way.
- h) God who redeemed his covenant people was not tied to a particular philosophy of a "preferential option for the poor" but acted in a particular historical situation to show that he is Lord, that he distinguishes between Egypt and Israel and that he is long-suffering and patient. God was with them in Egypt.
- i) Considering the narration related and further recognizing the point of view of Mendenhall referred to in paragraph 2.2.4 above, it is further opined that religion - the trust placed in God - and not politics, was the motivating force behind the exodus.
- j) I think that it is clear that the religion/theology of 'Israel' at this stage was not a theology from below but a theology revealed from above.

I conclude at this stage that the exodus event does not lend itself either as a paradigm for the philosophy of God having a preferential option for the poor or as a paradigm for an armed or political struggle by a people to free themselves from oppression.

CHAPTER 3

ASPECTS OF BLACK THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter a brief overview of Liberation Theology will be given. I thereafter intend *inter alia* to look at the interpretations which Black Theology, as a Liberation Theology, gives to words and concepts. It will be noted that many statements are often used in an undefined general sense, that norms are seldom fully set out and that there is a dearth of biblical references quoted in support of statements made. Most arguments are thus seen to be of a philosophical apologetic nature containing little or only superficial supporting biblical references.

The Bible, as Black Theology candidly admits, is not the starting point, the *terminus a quo*, for Black Theology and therefore it is understandable that arguments have to be of a philosophical nature.

Black Theological hermeneutics will be looked at and its point of departure, claimed Christian praxis and its internal logic will be discussed.

3.2 General background

3.2.1 Liberation Theology

'The theology of liberation is a multifaceted phenomenon manifesting itself as Black, Hispanic, and Amerindian theologies in the United States, as Latin American theology, as feminist theology, South African Black Theology and various analogous theological movements in other parts of Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific' (Bosch 1991:432).

Theology is an understanding of the faith (Gutierrez 1983:36). It is a reading of the faith from the cultural universe that

corresponds to this involvement in history and this religious experience, while faith is always given in concrete gestures and precise conditions. 'Liberation Theology is an attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive praxis of the poor of this world - the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups and marginalized cultures' (Gutierrez 1984:37).

The theology of liberation is a theology of salvation in the concrete, historical and political conditions of our day (Gutierrez 1984:63).

'From the beginning the theology of liberation had two fundamental insights... referring to its theological method and its perspective of the poor... From the beginning, the theology of liberation posited that the first act is involvement in the liberation process, and that theology comes afterwards as a second act. The theological moment is one of critical reflection within and upon concrete historical praxis in confrontation with the word of the Lord as lived and accepted in faith... It is not a matter of setting an inductive method over against the deductive method of such and such a theology... It is rather an attempt to situate the work of theology within the complex and proliferous context of the relationship between practice and theory' (Gutierrez 1984:200).

'The second insight of theology of liberation is its decision to work from the viewpoint of the poor - the exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups and scorned cultures...As a result the poor appear within this theology as the key to an understanding of the meaning of liberation and the meaning of the revelation of a liberating God' (Gutierrez 1984:200)

Bosch (1991:438) states that the theology of liberation has a strong social concern and rejects both the tendency to interpret the Christian faith in 'otherworldly categories and excessive individualism. In spite of its critique of the West and Western

theology, liberation theology is also committed to the motif of earthly prosperity... Both theological tributaries appear to be anthropocentric rather than theocentric..'

3.2.2 Types of Contextual Theologies

Bosch (1991:420) mentions that the word 'contextualization' was coined in the 1970's and became a blanket term for a variety of theological models of which two major types were identified, namely, the indigenization model and the socio-economic model. There are several types of each of these models. In the opinion of Bosch only the translation model situated in the indigenization motif and the revolutionary model situated in the socio-economic motif qualify as contextual theologies proper. Liberation theology, Black Theology and feminist theology are classified as belonging to the socio-economic revolutionary model (:421).

3.2.2.1 Epistemological break

Contextual theologies claim an epistemological break when compared to traditional theologies. Bosch (1991:424) mentions several features of the new epistemology now emerging from contextual theologies:

- a) A profound suspicion exists that Western theology was designed to serve the interests of the West, in particular to legitimize its worldview
- b) The world has not only to be interpreted, it has to be changed
- c) Commitment, in particular to the poor and marginalized, is the first act of theology; the point of departure is orthopraxis which aims at transforming human history, redeeming it through a knowledge born of subject-empowering, life-giving love, which heals the biases needlessly victimizing millions
- d) Theology can only be done legitimately if it is done with those who suffer

- e) The emphasis is on the deed, the doing of theology; hermeneutic language has to be challenged by the hermeneutic of the deed
- f) The hermeneutic circle begins with experience (quoting Segundo 1976:7-38), with praxis usually the experience of marginalization. The hermeneutic circle now proceeds to reflection as a second act (not secondary act, cf. Gutierrez 1988:xxxiii) of theology.

The result is that in the 'best of contextual theologies it is therefore no longer possible to juxtapose theory and praxis, orthodoxy and orthopraxis as orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other' (Bosch 1991:425).

3.2.2.2 Feminist theology

Feminist theology is classified among the socio-economic revolutionary contextual theologies as a liberation theology. Cone (1981:165) considered that the subjugation of black women by a patriarchal society and its institutions was a gross violation of the mandate of the Christian gospel (1981:165, cf. Kunnie 1990:64). Kunnie (1990:96) mentions, quoting J.Cone that

' black men are often more insensitive and rude towards black women feminists than they are towards white women. I have heard black women express their legitimate demands in black caucuses, churches and the community as a whole. But black men often ignore to listen to them or treat their pain as a laughing matter.'

Against this background Maimela (1990:198-204) mentions that women began to reflect theologically on their suffering and sought ways out of that oppression to freedom and dignity. Feminist theology therefore is an appeal for the enrichment of theology by making the experience of women the data and source for theology. "Feminist theology believes that its proper role is one of reconciliation , the overcoming of the fundamental sin

of alienation between male and female..' (Maimela 1990:204).

It seems as if the liberation sought by feminist theologians is still a long way off, for, as Fiorenza (1995:137) states: 'Although critical feminist liberation theologians and scholars in religion speak from within the disciplinary discourses of academy and church, we do sofrom the sociopolitical location of resident aliens. The identification "resident alien" positions one as both insider and outsider: insider by virtue of residence or family affiliation to a citizen or institution: outsider in terms of language, experience, culture and history.'

As this dissertation will focus more on Black Theology the above exposition should suffice to indicate that there is also this form of liberation theology, namely, feminist theology.

3.2.3 Certain aspects of liberation theology

3.2.3.1 Form

Cone (1982:99) mentions that, as a result of his encounter with the Third World poor existentially and intellectually, 'my perspective has been enlarged and reinforced. The universal dimension of the gospel was revealed... It was this universalism of the gospel that prevented me from elevating the black experience or the African reality to an absolute norm in Black Theology.'

Segundo (1984:321) says in his paper entitled *Two theologies of liberation* that 'I will speak of at least two theologies of liberation coexisting in Latin America today' : the one being theologizing in the context of remaking the whole of theology while the second is seen in the context of theologizing among the common people.

On the other hand, some have seen liberation theology not as a 'new theology' but as a 'new stage' in theologizing and as such

both continuous and discontinuous with the theologizing of earlier epochs (Bosch 1991:447).

Yorke (1995:149) refers to afrocentrism as being an attempt to reread the Scripture from a premeditatedly Africa-centred perspective and in doing so break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold what white 'Western' biblical scholars have long enjoyed in relation to the Bible, but 'afrocentric biblical hermeneutics, as a hermeneutic of suspicion and liberation, is still in its infancy..' (Yorke 1995:153).

One can conclude, rightfully, that there exists no one form of liberation theology.

3.2.3.2 Point of Departure

In view of the different forms of liberation theology one would expect different departure points for doing liberation theology. Gutierrez (1983:61) says that liberation theology is a reflection 'from a point of departure in the concrete historical praxis of human beings' and 'our theology will have no proper, distinct focus of its own until it takes its point of departure in the social practice of the Latin American peoples - the lowly, repressed, and, today as yet, silent peoples of Latin America" (Gutierrez 1983:66).

Kunnie (1990:70) sees that 'essentially the point of departure of Black Theology according to Cone, is the liberation of the oppressed.'

Segundo (1984:322) is of the opinion that no amount of subtle argument can conceal that the only methodological feature of Latin American Theology is to start thinking, not from a systematic listing of theological problems so as to give credible answers for the sake of orthodoxy, but in the context of the common people, to start from both a commitment to think for the sake of the poor and from a consideration of their praxis. 'Every

time we perceive that this praxis is linked, through theology, to the oppressive mechanisms of the whole culture' orthopraxis is aimed at. The starting point is now transferred to a consideration of the praxis of the poor when linked theologically to oppressive mechanisms, or differently put, institutionalized violence.

Gutierrez (1988:xix) states that liberation has to be effected on three levels, namely, liberation from social situations of repression and marginalization, from every kind of personal servitude and from sin .

The point of departure seems to be the liberation of the oppressed in the setting of their historical concrete social praxis of being oppressed.

3.2.3.3 Praxis

Gutierrez (1983:vii) states that theology is always the second act. The first act is commitment, that is 'commitment to the struggle of the "wretched of the earth". As people live out and reflect on that commitment, a theology emerges. The word used to describe this ongoing give-and-take between action and reflection is *praxis*...' Further, an approach to the transformation of history from the viewpoint of the oppressed , marginalized and dominated peoples, from the viewpoint of the poor of this world 'leads us to look on this transformation as a praxis of liberation'(Gutierrez 1983:50).

Praxis can thus be seen, I suggest, as an ongoing transformation of history from the vantage point of the poor occasioned by the interplay between action and reflection in commitment to the cause of the poor.

3.2.3.4 Exodus

Croatto (1981:15) mentions that 'we are enjoined to prolong the

Exodus event because it was not an event solely for the Hebrews but rather the manifestation of the liberative plan of God for all peoples'. Further says Croatto, although the Hebrews cry out to their God instead of acting 'the Exodus could have been, from an initial perspective, an intention that arose from among the Hebrews themselves' (Croatto 1981:20). No biblical reference is quoted in support of this possibility which has been mentioned. However '...we stress once more that the account is essentially religious and that, therefore, the initiative and the guarantees, or the power, of liberation are attributed to God...' (Croatto 1981:22).

Christ, as the liberator, was not a zealot, he was a religious leader. 'Let us recall that the Exodus was a symbol of liberation but only for the people of Israel. Only from the time of Christ was this symbol universalized'(Croatto 1981:62).

It seems clear that liberation, in the context of the Exodus event was occasioned by and through the power of God.

As regards the taking of slaves by the Israelites, Croatto opines that '"the vocation of freedom" to "be more", claimed for all people ... was not implemented in Israelite social praxis. It always happens that praxis draws inspiration from an ideal or worldview, but never attains their total actualization' (Croatto 1981:36).

3.2.3.5 Preferential option for the poor

It was at Puebla in 1979 that the phrase 'preferential option for the poor' was coined (Bosch 1991:435). As regards the poor, Gutierrez (1983:137) says 'those found in this category are mainly the indigenous peoples, peasants, manual labourers, marginalized urban dwellers and in particular, the women of these social groups'. And, continues Gutierrez (1983:138) 'the poor merit preferential attention, whatever may be the moral or personal situation in which they find themselves ... the

preference for the poor is based on the fact that God, as Christ shows us, loves them for their concrete, real condition of poverty, "whatever may be" their moral or spiritual disposition....The conclusion is unmistakable. The preferential option is for the poor as such, the poor as poor.'

Bosch (1991:435-436) says the following, 'as Gutierrez (cf. 1988:xxvf) has explained, the very word "preference" denies all exclusiveness as though God would be interested only in the poor, whilst the word "option" should not be understood to mean "optional". The point is rather that the poor are the first, though not the only ones, on which God's attention focuses and that therefore the church has no choice but to demonstrate solidarity with the poor...'. There is a danger in this, opines Bosch (1991:436) in that one may then easily fall into the trap of 'the church for others' instead of 'the church with others'. One is to bear in mind that Jesus ate not only with the poor and exploited, but also ate with the righteous and sinners and the exploiters (1991:442). The fact is that God loves all persons equally, says Gutierrez (1983:207), 'The gift of filiation, by which we become the daughters and sons of God, occurs in concrete history...The proclamation of a God who loves all persons equally must take flesh in history, must become history.'

In view of the above and also in view of Leviticus 19:15 where the imperative is used in the words '...do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly...'

it becomes difficult to see just on what biblical grounds, if any, a preferential option for the poor could be postulated.

3.2.3.6 Hermeneutics

Yorke (1995:147) has put the following well:

'Human language, the limitation of the human imagination, the imprisonments imposed on us by culture, personality, gender and upbringing, the particularities of our own

socio-economic and other contexts, plus the presence of sin in the life of the believer theologian, one who is *simul iustus et peccator*, are all factors and forces that make what we see and say inevitably perspectival in nature' Elliot (cf. 1986:5) is quoted by Yorke (1995:147) as saying that 'All perception is selective and constrained psychologically and socially; for no mortal enjoys the gift of "immaculate perception"... this is a basic hermeneutical lesson we have also learned...'

Gutierrez (1983:15) describes the basic hermeneutic circle as follows, namely, as moving 'from the human being to God and from God to the human being, from history to faith and from faith to history, from love of our brothers and sisters to the love of the Father and from love of the Father to the love of our brothers and sisters, from human justice to God's holiness and from God's holiness to human justice, from the poor person to God and from God to the poor person.'

Our rereading of the kerygma -

'is made from our own vantage point. By recovering the core meaning of the evangelical kerygma we understand it from a horizon that forces surplus-of-meaning to emerge (Croatto 1981:57). In so doing we find 'an answer to a question often posed in hermeneutical studies: which route is to be taken: from the biblical text to us - affirming the "us" - or from the situation back to the text in order to illumine the text and then return to the situation? We reply: when the "hermeneutical circularity" is profound, the distinction between the two approaches is blurred and they become simultaneous' (Croatto 1981:82).

We shall return in this regard to Loader (1987:3f) who has analysed this approach of Croatto.

When it is also borne in mind that theology is only the second act while praxis, the commitment to the struggle is the first act

(Gutierrez 1983:vii) it seems that where the 'hermeneutical circularity' is profound, preference is given to the approach which is from the situation back to the text in order to illumine the text and then to return to the situation.

3.2.4 Problems and ambiguities

3.2.4.1 Manifestations and overreactions

Bosch (1991:425-432) has set out certain manifestations and overreactions which remain a constant danger to every legitimate attempt to allow the context to determine the nature and content of theology for that particular content. These are as follows:

a) Where God is identified with the historic process God's will and power too easily becomes identified with the will and the power of Christians and with the social processes that they initiate. Indeed, Kelsey (1975:180) mentions that 'continuing philosophical discussion has not yet persuaded any large number of students of the matter that the concept of "God's action in history" is intelligible'. The argument being, *inter alia*, that this would presuppose that we know what 'God' means and how to identify his particular 'action'.

b) Contextualization suggests the experimental and contingent nature of all theology. This should, however, not lead to 'an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual theologies' which leads to the danger of relativism. For, says Bosch (1991:427), there 'are faith traditions which all Christians share and which should be respected and preserved...Every *theologia localis* should therefore challenge and fecundate the *theologia oecumenica* and the latter similarly enrich and broaden the perspective of the former.'

c) There is the danger of absolutism which could lead to the universalizing of one's own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it.

d) Reading the signs of the times could be necessary, but, the questions remain, which signs are to be read and how they are to be interpreted? So often with hindsight previous readings of the signs of the times have been discredited (for example the policy of apartheid which was read by some as being God-willed). So often also 'the situation is further compounded when exponents of contextualization claim special or privileged knowledge about God's will and declare those who do not agree with them as suffering from "false consciousness"'. There exists also the danger that the 'hermeneutic of suspicion', which in itself is commendable, could lead thereto that 'suspicion tends to become an end in itself'(as a sign of the times - my insert) and this again could lead to less and less dialogue with others and more and more to power struggle about who is to be allowed to speak (Bosch 1991:430). This approach ends up having a low view of the importance of the text and the message of the gospel is viewed, not as something which we bring to contexts, but as something which we derive from contexts. Bosch continues as follows:

'In major ecclesial traditions people not only look at where they are but also where they have come from... This means that it is the gospel which is the *norma normans*' (norming norm) and while our 'reading of the context is also a norm it is a norm in a derived sense, a *norma normata*' (normed norm).

What Bosch is saying is that Christians tend to use the Bible as the norm or authority.

Kelsey (1975:125) suggests that scripture may properly be said to be 'authoritative' for a theological proposal when appeal is made to it in the course of making a case for the proposal. In this context the approach of Bosch has been supported. Kelsey (1975:196) further makes the important suggestion that there are constraints on the imaginative construals of scripture by theologians namely -

a) Biblical patterns set outside limits as to how God's presence can be construed. For example, God cannot be construed

as demonic.

b) There is a limited range or a set of patterns of possibilities for construing the mode of God's presence. These patterns taken singly and as a whole should be able to be reasonably elaborated into new theological proposals. 'It is sometimes said that if one takes the New Testament as such as "authority" one is acknowledging that its theological diversity exhaustively exhibits the variety of types of theology that are Christianly acceptable' (Kelsey 1975:196).

c) 'The concept "canon" brings with it the judgment that the patterns characteristic of one "part" of the canon stand in some determinate relationship to the paradigmatic forms of speech characteristic of each of its other "parts"' (Kelsey 1975:197). Imaginative construals of the mode of God's presence would then be subject to the controls of the canon.

3.2.4.2 Methodological problem

Loader (1987:8) mentions a serious methodological problem which liberation theology seems to have. With reference to the merging of horizons postulated by Croatto (see paragraph 3.2.3.6 above), Loader's insightful comment is that horizons can only be merged when one proceeds from a canon. Let us consider two horizons, the textual and the situational:

i) The textual horizon can be construed only if there is a fixed canon from which the reader can construe it. In so doing the reader is conferring authority on the text. The reader needs to have the textual horizon authorized by scripture, as can be expected of a Christian putting a case for a proposal.

ii) In the situational context the reader decides what his canon for construing the situational horizon shall be.

iii) 'This means that we move from our situation to the next (sic, should read "text") and only then allow 'the textual-horizon to merge with our situational horizon. So while the

situation takes precedence over the text the 'hermeneutical interpreter' needs a biblical basis so that his situational horizon can merge with an authoritative horizon.

Loader (1987:8) states that it is clear that there is an oscillation between the two poles of the text and the situation, and draws attention to the way in which Croatto sometimes focuses on the Bible and sometimes on the situation - Croatto vacillates between these two.

3.2.4.3 In sum

From the above it is clear that liberation theologians also seek to validate their theology and hermeneutic by calling upon the Bible as authority. We also notice that there are norms which can act as constraints upon the imaginative constructs of theologians. Both these aspects will again be referred to when a closer look is taken at South African Black Theology, a subject to which I now return.

3.3 Certain concepts of Black Theology considered

3.3.1 Words and concepts considered

The definitions of certain words will be considered while brief comments on the definitions/descriptions will also be made.

a) 'Black Theology'

Several writers have set out their definition or description of Black Theology. It is an 'attempt by black Christians to grasp and think through the central claims of the Christian faith in the light of black experience' (Mgojo 1973:28). Boesak again states that Black Theology is 'a theology of liberation in the situation of blackness' (1977:144) while 'The black situation is the situation in which the (theological) reflection takes place...' (1977:12). Maimela states that Black Theology

interprets the oppression of the black people (my underlining) 'in the light of the biblical witness to a God whose justice requires that the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden be set free' (1984:46). A working definition of Black Theology is given by Goba (1986:2) as 'a critical reflection on the praxis of the Christian faith, which participates in the ongoing process of liberation within the life of the Black Christian community'.

Comments: For Goba and Maimela the 'black' in Black Theology is ontological (since it concerns black people as such) while for Boesak and Mgojo it is existential-symbolic (a condition in which white oppressed people can be included).

b) 'Blackness'.

The intention is that blackness should not denote colour *per se* but that it should relate to the 'oppressed condition (of people) as the outcasts of affluent white society' (Gerhart 1978:277).

Comment : In this study it will be noted that, in spite of what is said above, "black" is mainly used in the ontological-racial sense.

c) 'Liberation Theology'.

Deutsch (1981:192) states the following:

'We find that Black Theologians virtually overcharge the concept of Liberation Theology by making it imply and include just any kind of liberation; the liberation of man from himself, from exploitation and oppression by others and from defilement by a sinful government, from self-pity and from the anger and bitterness which seeks nothing but revenge... Liberation Theology focuses on social-political-economic liberation as an indispensable element of salvation, but it does not get the two confused ... Liberation is ethical, and thus a penultimate concern, salvation on the other hand is eschatological and thus

ultimate concern... It is a conflict oriented theology...'
(Deutsch 1981:193).

Liberation Theology differs from other theologies in that it 'consciously insists on reflecting on the concrete situation of suffering and oppression so that it can at last answer the questions which the poor majority ask in their quest for liberation through the creation of social conditions in which they might have room to breathe' (Maimela 1977:75).

Comment: It is clear that the main focus of Black Theology as a Liberation Theology is on the socio-political-economic situation of black people and that it is conflict oriented.

d) 'Politics'.

The term does not refer to party politics only. It can be broadly defined 'as an attempt by human beings to structure, construct and institutionalise their interpersonal and personal social relationships so that they could live humanely and justly thus realising their fullest potentialities as responsible and free selves' (Maimela 1977:3).

Comment : It is to be noted that nowhere are the words 'justly' and 'humanely' defined. They are thus relativised and emotionalised and do not as such have a universal content.

'Humanely' could refer to feelings proper to humans (in the existential condition which varies from day to day as daily experience varies) and 'justly' could mean 'according to justice'. But then again 'justice' is also a relative term. One can rightly conclude that this description of politics given by Maimela is woolly, emotional and indefinite and possibly largely intended to justify a socio-political approach by Black Theology.

e) 'Salvation'.

The salvation 'of the individual is incomplete without simultaneous creation of new relationships, relationships which will not simply drop from the skies some day but will have to be created through the sweat and labours of believers' (Maimela 1977:119).

Comment: It seems as if sweat and labour is a prerequisite for complete salvation. '... there will be no salvation and new world before the socio-political conditions are transformed'. This is, I suggest, without foundation in Scripture and it is at best a philosophical argument based on an anthropocentric point of departure.

Indeed, the question can be asked whether all the people who died before the transformation of the world, which admittedly is incomplete as yet, are unsaved. The Bible teaches, on the contrary, that the time of salvation is now (2 Cor 6:2).

f) 'Sin'.

Sin 'is a collective, a community concept which manifests itself in a refusal to love one's neighbour, a refusal to have fellowship with one's neighbours and therefore a refusal to have fellowship with God (this, I suggest, is a *non sequitur*: a refusal to have fellowship with a neighbour who could be an atheist, for example, does not amount to a refusal to have fellowship with God). To sin is to deny that which makes for life of the community, here and now'. It is 'a state of absence of brotherhood and love in interpersonal relations. Only because sin is real in this concrete and social sense is it possible for sin to become secondarily an interior personal or subjective fracture of one's life' (Maimela 1987:94/95).

Comment: If one looks at the Bible one, for example, finds the following:

- i) Genesis 6:5: The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (A personal trait.)
- ii) 1 John 5:19: We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.
- iii) Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (personal trait). (And see also John 8:7.)

It is concluded, on the contrary, that sin is primarily personal and not primarily collective. If there is a collective black culture, it seems at least to be one in which the community is deemed to be a distinctive personality which is paramount.

g) 'Theology'.

'...an organised and critical reflection with the aim of understanding and expressing in the clearest and most coherent language what it means to be involved in the dynamics of God's creative and redemptive acts' (Maimela 1987:3). '...it is in the light which (*sic*) God does to and within a people's struggle to be fully human that Yahweh might vindicate his/her divinity as the only true God" (Maimela 1987:2).

Comment: Firstly, it seems to be required of God to vindicate himself or else his divinity could be in doubt. Secondly, what is meant by 'fully human' is not set out. If humanhood is evil in all its thoughts, then, to my mind, this is not a situation to be desired.

h) 'Theory'.

It is 'an historical, relative strategy or means by which the truth can work itself effectively in the world thereby transforming the world and overcoming untruth (sin and oppression) in socio-political relations' (Maimela 1987:79).

Comment: One notes that the 'truth' can work itself (or itself

can work?) thereby transforming ...etc. 'Truth' seems to be equated to a self-actualising power. We know from the Bible that Jesus said : 'I am thetruth...(John 14:6). This is not the context in which the word "truth" is used here - it seems as if a reservoir of truth waiting to become effective is postulated. This approach is not surprising since the Bible is not taken as the starting point in the vision of Black Theology. (But see paragraph 3.4.1 *infra*.)

3.3.2 In sum

Black Theology, which is admittedly a form of Liberation Theology, has constructed its own vocabulary. It becomes especially difficult to abstract an essence from the diverse 'definitions', especially where words are used by different people in different senses which in turn differ from the meaning which dictionaries assign to words. In the light of the above one could be forgiven if one does not always grasp the content and aim of Black Theology, for, as Deutsch (1981:192) mentions, a plethora of meanings is ascribed to Liberation Theology and consequently to Black Theology.

3.4 Thrust of Black Theology

3.4.1 Starting point

'...the starting point of liberation theologians is not the Bible or some once-and-for-all given, existent pure kerygmatic "truths" which can be distilled and reproduced so as to apply them at the right moment. Rather, the starting point in liberation theology is the concrete, historical praxis which claims to be Christian, that is, real life itself in which the "germinal events" of Christianity are believed to be incarnated (embodied). (The "germinal events" of Christianity referred to here include the totality of God's dealings with Israel and more specifically the Christ event (embracing his birth, life, death and resurrection and the hope of the coming Kingdom...)' (Maimela 1987:79). It is

noted that Exodus is not specifically referred to as a germinal event.

3.4.2 The virgin birth

The virgin birth of Christ, the nature of God and his perfections, problems of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith etc., are all irrelevant to the Black experience (Maimela 1984:46).

Contrary to the irrelevance of the virgin birth posited, the virgin birth, I suggest, is indispensable for understanding the capacity of God-man Jesus as the one and only One able to fulfil the covenant God made with humankind. By simply considering it to be irrelevant for this conceptualisation, Black Theology is negating one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith.

But Maimela goes further and states 'It (Black Theology) tries to show that God has authorised black existence, and therefore that God loves them and has created them in his image...' (1984:47). This, of course, is stating the obvious but perhaps there is a hint of exclusivity to be found for this is clearly true of the existence of all persons, and not only as regards the existence of the black person. An egalitarian approach requires that, in the eyes of God, the birth of all should by implication be equal.

3.4.3 Forging own destiny

Maimela states the following with regard to the black person: '...and (God) had given them full authority to have dominium over their (own) created selves and over their (own) environment' (Maimela 1984:46).

It is not clear what is meant by this. However, when one reads the following, namely that Black people are prepared to assume full responsibility for their future and to be 'the masters of

their own destiny' (Baqwa 1973:2) it seems as if the hand of God in the determination of the destiny of the Black person is not seen as being of overriding importance. It seems that God's expected (likely) role is to side with Blacks against white (and not black) power structures (cf. Maimela 1984:47).

3.4.4 *Raison d'etre*

The reason for embracing Black Theology as the only theology for blacks is because it addresses itself to the situation which blacks regard as basically unjust and discriminatory, in order to transform it (cf. Maimela 1987:71).

Firstly, a certain exclusivity seems to be required for embracing Black Theology - an exclusive cultural or ethnic identity. As Bosch (1977:334) states, and his conclusion is accepted :

'Theology must be contextual, that is true, but may it ever be exclusive? We have to ask in all seriousness whether the category "people" or "nation" may be the church's concern for liberation. "People" as cultural and ethnic entity is not a theological category and wherever it is made into such a category (as an "ordinance of creation" or "God-given distinctive entity") it cannot but lead to mutual exclusiveness which endangers the life of the church as the new community.'

Secondly, only if one relativises the norm of 'justice' or 'truth' and considers that one person's truth, or interpretation of Scripture, is as good as any other person's truth or interpretation, then the viewpoint that Black Theology is the only theology for Blacks, becomes acceptable. The question is however: Is this relativising the correct answer or approach from a Christian point of view ? Surely not.

Relativism produces no truth. On the contrary, it produces a different truth for everybody, millions of truths! And, if that is the case, how can anyone be persuaded of moral turpitude? Can moral turpitude exist? How can anyone be guilty even if such a

person is 'perverting the truth as generally accepted' as long as such a person thinks that the truth is actually being served? I agree with Bosch (1991:427) that this should 'however not lead to an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies. This danger...the danger of relativism...is present...'

3.4.4.1 Values clarification

The fundamental assumption in values clarification is that there are no absolute truths. Values are considered to be essentially neutral. They are subjectively chosen by each student (Martin 1989:60). Martin goes on to quote Baer as follows:

"On a deeper level ... the claim to neutrality is entirely misleading. At this more basic level the originators of values clarification simply assume that their own subjective theory of values is correct ... If parents object to their children using pot or in engaging in premarital sex, the theory behind values clarification makes it appropriate for the child to respond. 'But that is just your value judgment. Don't force it on me.'"

3.4.5 Another starting point

If the Bible is not the starting point :What is ?

A starting point is the 'Concrete historical praxis which "claims" to be Christian '. (See paragraph 3.2.1 above.)

Firstly and with insight Deutsch says (1977:193):

'Like any other theology, Liberation Theology is not a purely biblical plant; its roots may be firmly grounded in the biblical soil, but the stem grows away from that ground and the leaves and the blossoms receive air and light from outside that ground. The Bible is fundamentally concerned about justice and freedom, but the ideas of justice and freedom that Liberation Theology today proclaims are formed and informed by a long history of struggle and are

virtually inconceivable without the light and air of liberation ideas and experiences that have determined the minds and lives of people all over the world for centuries - many of them inspired by biblical thinking, many however inspired from other sources (humanism, enlightenment, etc.).'

Deutsch then gives examples of words or concepts advocating the fundamental equality of all people in words that one does not find in the Bible:

- a) 'The Deity has created all persons as free persons, nobody is a slave by nature' (One can remark that all are indeed slaves to sin: Rom 6:16).
- b) The idea of peoples' participation being a major component in the shaping of their own lives, so crucial to Liberation Theology is not a biblical idea but has grown out of 'seminal' biblical motifs such as set out in Matthew 7:12.
- c) Women's liberation was not a central concern of the prophets and apostles.
- d) Racism was not a problem (Gal 3: 28 is a clear prescription referring to the children of God and their attitude towards one another).

I suggest that one can rightly conclude that the starting point of Black Theology is a conglomerate of ideas of which only some are biblical and that Black Theology, influenced by other ideas to a high degree, is moving away from the biblical soil in which it started to grow.

Secondly, one notices that there is reference to a praxis which 'claims' to be Christian. It seems that a 'claim' to Christianity is necessary in order for such a praxis to be incorporated into the starting point of Black Theology. This is an important point for, if that is the only requirement, it becomes unnecessary to establish whether such a claim is indeed founded in the Word of God or not. What is then incorporated is a 'claim'; the question concerning how cogent such a claim is, is left hanging in the

air. In fact this is begging the question.

I suggest that this approach to its starting point is of vital importance for Black Theology's hermeneutical approach. It is important to note that the Bible is not the primary starting point.

3.4.6 Praxis

The word 'praxis' needs to be considered more closely when used in the terminology of Black and Liberation Theology.

'"Praxis" is in the use of Latin American theologians a much more profound term than "practice". It does not simply refer to the active, practical dimension of human life as opposed to pure theory, but refers to a particular mode of practice: It is practice that "transforms history"; "it is the point where people re-create their world and forge their own reality, where they come to know reality and discover their own selves". "Praxis" is thus innovative, creative practice. Bongajalo Goba does talk about "praxis" in his essay "Doing Theology in South Africa" but he qualifies it rather vaguely as a new mode of hermeneutics and calls even theology itself "praxis" (Deutsch 1977: 195).

So "praxis" refers to a narrow band of practice, namely, a practice which is aimed at bringing about the result that people should forge their own reality (it not clear whether the word 'people' in this context refers to individuals or to people as a community).

However, I suggest that the claimed Christian habits and practices of Christian men and women which are aimed at creating a new society could not be a norm for the Christian life without being imbedded in the teachings of Scripture (Anderson 1985:112). The question is: Should a praxis, claimed to be Christian, be adopted and then judged in the light of Scripture - that is,

first do and then judge - or should the judging of what to do come first and then be followed by the praxis - the active putting into practice of deeds with a view to transforming the world? This is a question proper to hermeneutics and one to be discussed more fully later.

Black Theology has raised the issue of praxis for it is said that it is impossible to know God apart from what God does. 'And what God does is to liberate those who are oppressed in any way whether physically or spiritually...' (Echols 1984:31). We note from this statement of Echols, taken in its context and at face value, firstly that God is also subject to be judged by the evidence of the result of a certain praxis: God is thus limited in the sphere of his reign. Secondly, that God is under an obligation to liberate all those who are oppressed physically, irrespective of whether those people are the children of God or not (and there are children of Satan: John 8:42-47), and irrespective of whether they are oppressed in the exercise of practical justice. This, of course, is an egalitarian approach and apparently philosophically derived from 'God is love', but no Scripture is mentioned to substantiate this viewpoint in Black Theology. Indeed none could be found.

3.4.7 In sum

The main thrust of Black Theology is not that of using the Bible as the starting point for the development of its theology. Rather, the approach is philosophical and egalitarian. Humans and their deductions, or rather inductions, from selected germinal events, are put at the centre of the development of the theology. The human being becomes the master of his/her own fate and God is expected (and likely) to side with him/her, especially because of an ontological blackness. This is a germinal exclusivity.

Black Theology is considered to be the only true theology for black persons - the other theologies, especially orthodox

theology is said to be unacceptable for the black person because orthodox Christian thinking is and results in a "white" man's theology. This shows a certain germinal sectarianism. It is certainly not conducive either to the unity of the Church or to the manifestation of the Body of Christ on earth.

The praxis so often used as a base from which to build Black Theology, is a rather narrow base which puts humans in the centre of this Theology. Indeed it transpires that Black Theology is arguably an anthropocentric and not Theo- or Christocentric theology.

It also seems that the point of departure is not the liberating power of the God of the Exodus but a narrow 'claimed' Christian praxis.

In all this it is to be borne in mind that Black Theology is not prophetic in nature. In the Old Testament prophets challenged Kings and Priests but liberation theology is at present significantly different. 'The primary addressee of Liberation Theology is not the "system", not the oppressor, not the government. The primary addressee is the group of the oppressed and exploited themselves' (Deutsch 1977:194). Deutsch (1977:194) quotes Archbishop Desmond Tutu as follows: "Liberation Theology challenges those whom it addresses..."

3.5 God and humanity

3.5.1 The children of God

3.5.1.1 Liberation

For Maimela, the theology, namely that this God is willing to take sides and right wrongs humans have brought about, is still too new and maturing to make any real political difference in South Africa (1987:18). Further in the preface to his book Maimela (1990:3) states that "God is by definition a God of

liberation and liberty who is offended by human domination and enslaving of their fellows".

It seems as though the second statement above is a rather bold statement and that it is not substantiated by any reference to biblical authority. Undoubtedly the Bible teaches that God in Jesus Christ is the liberator from sin for those humans who accept him as their Saviour. As far as 'enslaving' their fellows is concerned, the Old Testament, which also contains the Exodus event, relates specific ordinances with regard to slavery as such. To say that God is offended by human domination and enslavement of their fellows is to my mind unsubstantiated. Deutsch (1977:193) states that one does not find examples of words or concepts in the Bible to the effect that the 'The Deity has created all persons as free persons, nobody is a slave by nature.' Indeed God is a God who has made it possible for humans to be freed from the slavery of sin. However, the development of humankind since the French revolution and the industrial revolution correctly militates against slavery as an immoral, unethical economic and/or social institution.

It seems as if Maimela does not always clearly qualify his statements in the light of the Bible which then in effect does not mirror the whole truth contained in biblical authority (as can be expected - see paragraph 3.3.2 above). Of course, what Maimela has stated is something which is arguable from germinal statements in the Word of God. To declare that, by definition, God has certain human-attributes, is quite something else.

3.5.1.2 Freedom

Indeed if our profession that humans are God's children who are ineluctably related as brothers and sisters was applied to our relations, we would be having the most ideal interpersonal relations in the world (Maimela 1987:42).

In the light of the fact that 'Black Theology ...invites human

existence beyond the oppressive structures to a future society in which all people will be free from all forms of oppression, be they spiritual, physical, racial, political or economic" (Maimela 1987:69), it becomes clear that the teaching of Black Theology, or least its presupposition, is that all people are considered to be God's children and that all will be free from spiritual oppression. This is in conformity with the view that salvation is a communal affair. This point need not be belaboured further: John 1:12 and Matthew 25:31-43 contradict the idea that all people are the children of God. And in the children of God one would expect to see the fruits of the Spirit manifested in practice (Gal 5:22). Conversely one could argue that if the fruits of the Spirit are absent it is difficult to prove that one is a child of God - which of course makes a theological hermeneutic based on the 'claim' to Christianity most unsatisfactory.

3.5.1.3 Domesticated

God is also likely to side with the Blacks against white power structures (Maimela 1984:47). The question whether God will side with Blacks against black power structures is not discussed. That this is not an idle question is clear from recent history in Africa: The atrocities committed by Idi Amin and those committed in Rwanda by black against black are still fresh in the mind and need no further elaboration.

The fact that this question was not raised seems to point to the conclusion that God is particularly concerned with White power structures in order to dismantle them. Is this not racist? Is God racist in his preferences? Is this not hitching God to the waggon of Black Theology? Witvliet (1984:83) opines that

'een nieuwe manier van theologie bedrijven is slechts dan, wanneer zij in staat is de A(a)nder niet te domesticeren, maar ruimte te geven' en 'Ruimte scheppen zodat de stem van de ontrechten en onaanzienlijken wordt gehoord, is echter theologisch onmogelijk zonder dat er tegelijkertijd ruimte

ontstaat voor God als "konkrete Gegenwirklichkeit"'. Black Theology, in terms of what Witvliet has said, seems not to qualify as a new way of doing theology where Black Theology in effect portrays God as having been domesticated to cater to the demands of the black people against white oppressors only.

I think that Black Theology illogically forces its apologetic when it deems all humans to be children of God and when in the process it domesticates God to its purposes.

3.5.2 The completion of creation

Maimela (1987:19) expounds that creation had not been completed in the remote past but that it is an ongoing creation which 'must be carried forward to its completion by political action' (my underlining). No Scriptural references are given for the above statement nor could any be found.

Then if this 'completion by political action' has no foundation in Scripture the question arises: Why is such a statement made in the context of Black Theology? Is it necessary to make such a statement? I suggest that it becomes necessary for Black Theology to make such a statement for it goes towards justifying -

- a) its focus on social-political-economic liberation and its orientation towards conflict, and
- b) its stance that people have to participate in the shaping of their own lives and obtain salvation through their sweat and labour.

It seems as if Black Theology is, in the words of Matsheru (quoted in an admittedly different context, the Business Section, Pretoria News, September 7, 1995 : 4) 'To a certain extent ... still married to Nkwame Nkrumah's discredited philosophy of "seek ye first the political kingdom"'.

3.5.2.1 Liberation from limitations

The fundamental message of Liberation Theology is that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were aimed at the total liberation (salvation) of humanity from all kinds of limitations, both spiritual and physical, and that this liberation is a dynamic historical process in which humans are given the promise, the possibility and power to overcome all the perverted human conditions this side of the grave (Maimela 1987:96). Thus humankind is to be totally saved and has the power to overcome all perverted human conditions, apparently as Jesus Christ had overcome the world.

3.6 Atonement, sin and salvation

3.6.1 Atonement

The doctrine of atonement was not part of the vocabulary of Liberation Theology. Apparently, as with the virgin birth, the feeling among Liberation Theologians is that 'it is no longer serviceable for theology in our time' (Maimela 1987:87). After setting out three types of atonement theories he makes a critical evaluation of them and accepts none of them completely as being in line with Black Theological thinking. For, states Maimela, although the ransom theory of atonement is attractive for Liberation Theology it 'fails to acknowledge that the war against evil was just begun by Christ's resurrection and must continue until all evil forces are vanquished and until freedom and self-realization have become the common property of humankind' (Maimela 1987:93).

As regards the three types of atonement alluded to (Maimela 1987 :91) the following:

- a) The satisfaction theory of atonement might very well be true (!) but that such a picture of God which reflects a feudal system land (*sic*: lends?) itself readily to oppressors. Thus Anselm's theory is problematical for Black

Theology. This is a facile argument advanced for discarding an atonement theory. But this is the more remarkable when no substantive theory of atonement is advanced by Liberation Theology at all.

- b) Liberation Theology has qualms concerning the ransom theory of atonement, in that it fails to focus on concrete political structures that make for human suffering and in that it fails to say anything about God's empowerment of the oppressed. On what biblical ground the atonement has to be politicized is not made clear. No biblical foundation is laid for such criticism.

Dennison (1982:2) is of the opinion that redemption is the exercise of the right of possession. It is because Israel belongs to Yahweh that He demands sole mastery. Israel becomes the possession of Yahweh not only by elective birthright, but by ransom of formal purchase price. Foreign lordship is replaced by Divine lordship.

One can conclude that, in effect, Liberation Theology still does not have the atonement as part of its vocabulary.

Further, apparently, the war started by Christ's resurrection must continue until freedom and self-realization have become the property of humankind. As previously stated, this concept is not to be found in the Bible. (See paragraph 3.2.5 above where Deutsch is quoted).

It seems as if Maimela is very much imbedded in the communal aspect of salvation and thus atonement also has to be the property of humankind (the human community as a whole).

Great importance is attached to the fact that liberation theology has not mentioned any atonement theory, or mentioned it in any developed sense. The following is apposite:

"It is a fallacy to suppose that by omitting a subject you teach nothing about it. On the contrary, you teach that it

3.6.3 Salvation

The salvation 'of the individual is incomplete without simultaneous creation of new relationships, relationships which will not simply drop from the skies some day but will have to be created through the sweat and labours of believers' (Maimela 1987:119). As has been alluded to previously (paragraph 3.3.1 above) it seems as if sweat and labour is necessary for complete salvation : '... there will be no salvation and new world before the socio-political conditions are transformed...'.

The question can be asked whether all the people who died before the transformation of the world, which admittedly is incomplete as yet, are unsaved? The Bible teaches, on the contrary, that the time of salvation is now (2 Cor 6:2).

3.6.3.1 Personal relations

Clearly, much emphasis is placed on proper personal relations. While proper personal relations are a true Christian practice, it should not be overemphasized to the exclusion of the work of reconciliation brought about by the Holy Spirit.

3.6.4 God is to prove that he is God

God might vindicate his divinity as the only true God in the light of what God does to and within a people's struggle to be fully human. 'In other words what happens to and with humans should make the difference as to whether they are under the lordship of the demon or the lordship of the true God who can and must demonstrate that this God is their Creator...' (Maimela 1987 :2).

In the above approach of Black Theology nothing is heard of salvation through faith by grace. The daily experience is the determinator whether God is functioning in a community: it is in the communal life that God must demonstrate that he is God. There

is very little left to 'hope' and trust - things seen are made the requirement God had to comply with in order to validate himself.

This approach is not according to what Scripture says. Scripture states that it is belief (or faith) in God that is paramount (Rom 10:9, 9:33).

Firstly, it seems as if Black Theology postulates that if there is suffering within a community in this world, this would be a pointer that God is present in such a community. Suffering in this world is the locus where God is working. Children of God can expect to suffer in this world for his name. Indeed, according to the Bible the children of God will be blessed if they suffer for his name (Rom 8:18, John 16:1-4, Eph 6: 10-12).

Secondly, the struggle in which Black Theology sees itself engaged seems to be a concrete political, economic and social struggle against the forces of oppression. The fact that our struggle, the struggle of all people, is put as follows: 'not against flesh and blood is our wrestling but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places '(Hendriksen 1972:269), is not alluded to at all (Eph 6:10-12). Hendriksen (1972:272) mentions that the struggle is 'against an innumerable supermundane host of evil spirits'.

Thirdly, if God can only manifest himself through liberation of the poor and the oppressed in this world, Black Theology should argue that for the period that the children of Abraham were serving in Egypt God had forsaken them, that he had forsaken Job, that testing of the faith through suffering oppression is indeed a forsaking by God. This of course is not biblical at all, but is a philosophical conclusion based on a viewpoint of Black Theology. Perhaps it is a simplified approach to theodicy.

3.6.5 'White' Theology is heretical

Some black theologians exclude white Christians from any possibility of salvation. With facile ease a value clarification is made and the assumption is made absolute that the subjective theories of Black Theology are correct. Echols (1984:31) states that:

"...White Theology and the church have been enemies rather than allies of God. They belong to the principalities and powers of this world against which the people of God must contend as they identify and participate in God's struggle for human liberation."

3.6.6 In sum

The concept of God and the role he is expected to play in the community or in the lives of people, is one which places humankind at the centre of things and postulates a God who has to prove himself. In this approach to God, in particular the approach that suffering should not be part of the normal Christian life, *vide* the belief that God delivers from it, and that the struggle is against human institutions and organisations, the Exodus event is only seminally present.

Theodicy, namely that God has to justify the suffering occasioned to people (Lederle 1989:186) is avoided by stating simply that where there is suffering he (God) justifies himself by being present in a process of removing suffering, especially from the poor.

No mention is made that God led his chosen people, the Israelites, out of Egypt at his pleasure. If only the last year or two of the sojourn in Egypt is looked at to expound the exodus as an event for the Black person, then it must follow that Black people are considered to be the new Israel and the chosen of God. This is in direct conflict with Galatians 3:28 -29 where all the children of God are heirs to his promise made to Abraham.

The use (perhaps unwittingly) of value clarification to assume that only Liberation Theology is the true theology and that white theology is practised by anti-Christians, can be either sectarian, idolatry or heresy or a combination of the three.

3.7 Hermeneutics

The hermeneutical approach of Black Theology will now be considered. What surprises is that there still seems to be uncertainty concerning the approach which has to be adopted.

3.7.1 Starting point

3.7.1.1 The black struggle

It is unlikely that there will emerge only one Black Theology of liberation (Mosala 1987:220) recognising a plurality of black theologies of liberation is a reality in contemporary society. Some of these theologies will represent a royalist in its theological perspective (seeking to fight for the restoration of former black ruling class positions) and be nationalist in character. Again some others could have a more middle class cultural, ideological and political perspective. Some would consciously adopt a working class perspective. Of the three types mentioned it seems as if the latter - the adoption of a working class perspective - is the most genuinely liberative (Mosala 1987:222). Such a religious practice has been in terms of the approach of the Zion-Apostolic churches.

However, in the absence of a proper theological grounding this approach could become a 'subversive non-systematic working class distortion of the Bible in favour of the struggles of its members'. Here the 'struggle' is conceptualised as a hermeneutic tool. (Mosala 1987:222).

3.7.1.2 Non-universality

Mosala opts for a biblical hermeneutical method which seeks to decide the questions of which the texts are answers to. In such a method a mutual interrogation between text and situation takes place. The social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class is the only valid hermeneutical starting point (Mosala 1987:8). This is however an abstract starting point and leads to problems concerning the validity of the particularist character of their theology. As Mosala puts it: '... if the black people are right in their claim that Jesus is on their side, how can the same Jesus remain the supreme universal disclosure of the Word of God?'

Here lies a problem for Black Theology. Gqubule states that Black Theology is not an attempt to localise Christ in the black situation but to make him so universal that (all people) can say: 'This man Jesus is bone of my bone...' (Gqubule 1974:18). Mgojo (1977:261) also believes in the universality of the gospel through the history of doctrine in which we see that in each period theology developed in response to challenges from the larger society. Manas Buthelezi also seems to opt for the universality of the gospel since he states (1978:62):

'Rightly or wrongly one cannot help but sense something panicky about the mood which has set the tenor and tempo of the current concerns about indigenous theology.'

For Mosala the inherent universality of the Bible is a problem. (1987 :12) But it is probably in view of the above that Mosala says the " appropriation of the black struggle as a hermeneutical starting point is not unproblematic." (Mosala 1978:101)

3.7.1.3 Cultural background

Cone (1975:18) states that 'Black Theology is a theology of and for black people, an examination of their stories, tales and sayings... theology must uncover the structures and forms of

black experience because the categories of interpretation must arise out of the thought forms of the black experience itself'. There can be no Black Theology which does not take the black experience for the starting point (Cone, s.l., as quoted by Goba 1988:1). For Goba there is still the quest for a new biblical hermeneutic. For him black theological reflection is a hermeneutical praxis emerging out of the contemporary historical and cultural situation of the community of faith (Goba 1988:10). Black theological reflection is also a cultural revolutionally praxis (Goba 1988: 15). Does Goba then mean that black theological hermeneutics has to be culturally revolutionary? It seems as though this is the case for it is in accordance with the statement that 'our interpretation is determined by our existential understanding or act of self-understanding' (Goba 1988:7), the purpose being to transform society (Goba 1988:8). Goba agrees with Jones (1973:76) that Black Theology is by definition committed to a theological development not only beyond this white theology but in conscious and fundamental opposition to it. The white theology which is being opposed is an unacknowledged (sic) white theology. In all this there is a certain uniqueness to the black people as the people of God (Goba 1988:9).

But, says Goba, what is needed is a theological hermeneutic geared to active involvement in the liberation process (1988:17). In this search 'faith' is defined in that it 'becomes a commitment to change and to be with God's people in their struggle for liberation. The gospel is a public announcement of God's involvement in the struggle for liberation' (Goba 1988:30).

Deutsch, on the contrary, is of the opinion that '... the Sitz-im-Leben of traditional theology was certainly not an egalitarian society. It was rather characterised by a hierarchial and feudal order, largely determined by kinship, age and sex. For the sake of harmony, which was the social ideal, every member of the family was assigned a well-defined position in relation to other members' (1981:4).

Maimela (1987:112) says that we learn of man-made miseries which are due to ethnic suppression and cultural suppression and which lead to constant wars and floods of refugees throughout the African continent. He goes on to say that African humankind is one characterised by socio-political and structural injustice. Africa is a place where many are starving and where so few exploited the powerless majority. However Manas Buthelezi (1978:62) warns that -

'there is a danger that the "African past" may be romanticized and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present'.

De Gruchy also sounds a warning note when he asks -

'... to what extent is black theology deriving its theology from culture rather than the Christian tradition? ... The problem remains for us all to ensure that theology does not become captive to culture but rather serves as a basis of the gospel' (Maimela 1984:52).

Thus the particular cultural background seems to be an unsuitable starting point.

3.7.1.4 Claimed Christian praxis

As Black Theology is the only theology which makes sense to black persons (Maimela 1987:71,73) the starting point of liberation theology is to be the concrete historical praxis which claims to be Christian. In this Maimela has followed Bonino (see Maimela 1987:84). Bonino's point of view is that hermeneutics is not concerned with establishing through deduction the consequence of conceptual truth, but with analysing a historical praxis which claims to be Christian.

As regards the relationship between Scripture and a social praxis it appears that, while Boesak insisted that the '"light of the Word of God" is the only final judgment of all action and reflection', many other black theologians contended that the light shines both ways because of the unifying and enlightening

Word of God" is the only final judgment of all action and reflection', many other black theologians contended that the light shines both ways because of the unifying and enlightening presence of Jesus the Messiah in the struggle of faith. However while Roberts in effect agrees with Boesak that the light can only shine from the Bible, Cone (1982:82) opines 'that God was not absent from the life of the oppressed as they struggle in life and as they read Scriptures in the light of their actual concrete actions. Thus the light of that practice shines on the scriptural texts making certain things in the text perceptible as it does on the practice' (Mofokeng 1987:27). Mofokeng states the following:

" I don't see why and how the spirit (sic) of God can be involved in the life of the biblical community of faith as well as in the contemporary community of faith and not be involved in bringing the two communities together when the contemporary community desires to dialogue with and learn from their predecessors... The Bible witnesses to many occasions and situations where people or communities were abandoned by God and from whom the spirit (sic) of God deserted. The spirit (sic) of God is free and frees.' (Mofokeng 1987:28)

It is therefore clear that the arguments concerning a concrete historical praxis as the starting point for a hermeneutic are not uniformly acceptable.

3.7.1.5 Preferential option for the poor

Maimela (1990:198) mentions that, in the arguments for the preferential option for the poor, 'black theologians are proposing a sophisticated hermeneutic approach to the Bible which provides a critical principle whose sole aim is to provide critical insight into the building of a more human (sic: humane?) society'.

3.7.2 In sum

3.7.2.1 Viewpoints

As there is a plurality of liberation theologies, it is also to be expected that there would be a plurality of viewpoints concerning the hermeneutics of this theology. Thus we find points of view that -

- a) hermeneutics should be practised from a working class perspective
- b) in this there is no unanimity as to whether the disclosure of Jesus is of universal import or local particular import, meant for and directed only to the poor and the oppressed. So it is not an undisputed statement to say that God is only on the side of the poor
- c) to approach hermeneutics from the cultural point of view does hold dangers and is not, in view of the non-egalitarian history of the black culture, a logically valid lens with which to view hermeneutics
- d) one thing is clear and that is that 'white' or orthodox theology is to be avoided and to be deemed an enemy of the black liberation cause
- e) 'claimed' Christian praxis is to be ascertained and then used to throw light onto the Scripture. Even here there are dissenting voices
- f) the whole object seems to be the creation of a more humane society. This is a nebulous concept which varies from cultural entity to cultural entity and could even lead to opposing concepts of what a more humane society is. The Bible is not the norm, and it seems as if 'proper' human relationships are lifted out as the *terminus ad quem* for liberation theology and its hermeneutic in this regard. Hence the preferential option for the poor.

So it seems in sum that the 'black' hermeneutic, although not generally so accepted, is a working class, non-universal, active anti-orthodox claimed Christian praxis. It is through this lens

that a Christian, or rather liberation theological hermeneutic, is still to be decided upon.

3.7.2.2 Viewpoint discussed

The hermeneutic of Liberation Theology is declared to be biased: a bias-free starting point for biblical interpretation is not sought. One should indeed have a bias but one should make this bias come as close to the bias of the Scriptures as possible (Brown 1974:84). To be steeped in biblical hermeneutics in the fashion of Tutu and Boesak is not acceptable as they fail to identify the oppressor in the text or to describe Jesus in themes of Isaiah 61:1-7. This, says Mosala (1987:25,26) is to collude with the oppressor.

Mosala continues and seems to say that the text should be viewed from the point of view of the 'oppressed and exploited peasant and underclasses of monarchial (sic) Israel'.

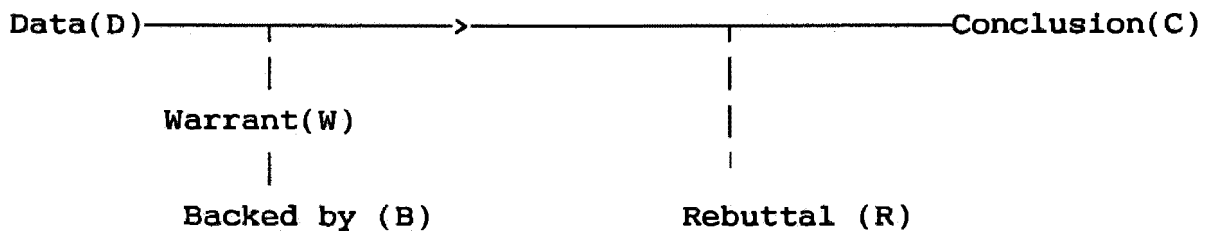
I now revert to a discussion of the methodological problem mentioned by Loader in paragraph 3.2.4.2. above.

Loader (1987:14ff), referring to Toulmin-logic (1964:9) as put to use by Kelsey (1975:122ff), arrives *inter alia* at the conclusion that the cross of Jesus is a less contentious symbol than exodus for expressing the liberation of peoples by God. Another point made by Loader is that liberation theologians (*in casu* Croatto) use the Bible in an attempt to validate or to authorize their theological proposals. This is to be expected as otherwise the nomenclature of being a 'Christian theology' would be a smokescreen only.

In the event that one wants to move from a claimed Christian praxis to arrive at a theological proposal, I suggest that two moves are logically required. Firstly, a move from the claimed Christian praxis is necessary to determine whether such a claimed praxis is indeed a Christian praxis; of course, if such a claimed

praxis is not found to be Christian praxis *cadit quaestio*. Assuming then that such a claimed praxis is substantiated as being a Christian praxis then the second move is to determine whether such a Christian praxis can found an envisaged theological proposal.

Applying the method as proposed by Kelsey, I suggest that the following could be an approach followed in order to use a claimed Christian praxis to construct a Christian theological proposal. The sketch below is indicative of the use made of the method.



The data (D) (a claimed Christian practice of the Christian community to bring about change in its situation) is weighed to determine whether the Bible could serve as a warrant (W) for such a praxis. To be able to use the nomenclature of 'Christian theology' it is, I suggest, necessary that the Bible be so used. A search is now made, in the Bible, for an appropriate textual foundation or backing (B). If such a backing (B) for the warrant (W) exists and should there be no contra-indications or rebuttal (R), the conclusion (C), namely that a certain claimed Christian praxis is indeed a Christian praxis, is arrived at. Now, using this conclusion, namely that a certain praxis is a Christian praxis, as new data (D), a second movement is investigated to ascertain whether the Bible could serve as a warrant (W) for a certain theological proposal - again I suggest this is obviously necessary. An undergirding by appropriate texts is sought, namely the backing (B) and, if there is no rebuttal (R), then the conclusion (C) could be arrived at that the movement from the Christian praxis to a certain theological proposal is acceptable for the purpose of building a Christian theology or, say, a theology of liberation.

The above approach indicates a way in which one claimed Christian praxis could be converted into one theological proposal. Just how many such proposals would be required to give rise to a full-blown, coherent Christian theology is quite indeterminable. It becomes clear that to draw up a theology from diverse Christian practices depends on the practices, chosen by the theologian, to be so evaluated and treated. In this way a 'praxis-canon' can be envisaged which will depend on the acceptance or otherwise of certain practices for inclusion in the investigation.

I suggest that theoretically the eventual 'praxis' theology arrived at from a replete praxis-canon would agree with the biblical theology. The question becomes : Why then draw up a praxis-canon and a 'praxis' theology at all ? If such a 'praxis' theology does not agree with the biblical theology something would be wrong as the Bible had all along been used as the warrant for the drawing up of the 'praxis' theology. The hermeneutic using the starting point of a 'claimed Christian praxis' to build a theology becomes questionable.

To my mind Loader has shown, as regards the approach adopted by liberation theologians (*in casu* Croatto), that they vacillate between a self-determined praxis-horizon and a text-horizon. This is not a logically acceptable approach.

As set out in paragraph 3.5.4.1 above by Kelsey, the concept of a canon also brings about constraints on the acceptable imaginative construals of theologians which we now consider briefly as follows:

a) To construe Gods presence from his acts in history is unconvincing. To say that he is present whatever the moral turpitude of a poor person may be is acceptable because he is present everywhere. In that sense this statement is correct. But, to say that God is present there because he favours the poor purely because they are poor and then to say that all people are equally loved by God does not assist the argument of the preferential option for the poor, a phrase coined recently in

1979.

b) When the Bible is accepted as authority to validate proposals, then the Book of Exodus cannot be read independently of the Book of Joshua unless, as Marcion did, one selectively accepts only some Books of the Bible as canon.

c) In accepting the canon of the Church one should be able to elaborate reasonably on theological proposals in a fashion fitting this canon. If one does this and the Book of Joshua is taken into account, then the slogan 'God is on the side of the oppressed' rings hollow. In any event, assuming that liberation theology is successful in practice and there are no 'poor and oppressed' left, the question then becomes whether there is any reason for God to exist any longer at all - his function has been fulfilled. Clearly this is untenable.

I suggest that using the constraint criteria suggested by Kelsey, Black Theology exceeds the outside limits of acceptability when the exodus event is taken as the basis for the slogan that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. This, I suggest, is in essence also what Bosch says (paragraph 3.2.4.1), namely, that the Bible is the *norma normans* while the reading of the context is a *norma normata*.

The hermeneutical circle, or circulation used by Black Theology seems to be as follows: P → A → B → P → A etc., where P is the person, A is the claimed Christian praxis, B is the Scripture. Hidden within this approach lies the implicit requirement for the validation of the praxis by the Bible, used as a warrant. What then happens is that the circularity becomes the circulation P → B → A → P → B etc. This is the 'white' theology's hermeneutical method and is in effect what Boesak, Tutu and Roberts have accepted, apparently to the chagrin of Mosala.

3.8 Exodus

The Exodus event does not play a leading role as a starting point for the black hermeneutic. Perhaps the reason could be found in

the following where Mosala (1987:21) honestly and frankly says that :

'There is no doubt that black theology is "projective" and "appropriative" albeit vaguely and loosely in its use of the Bible. It is certainly not polemical, in the sense of being critical. Rather, themes from Exodus, prophetic and Jesus traditions are lifted and appropriated in the service of a liberation project. The rhetorical structures that inhere in and circumscribe those themes and that have an inbuilt proclivity to produce politically undesirable effects are uncritically enlisted on the side of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed.'

Croatto mentions (paragraph 3.2.3.4) that the exodus event is essentially a religious event and that the initiative of the liberation of the Hebrews is attributed to God. The Hebrews did cry out to their God but apart from that they did not actively cause their own liberation.

Very little is thus heard of the praxis in Exodus, for example of how the people forged their own freedom and further no cultural parallel with Israel is discerned in the above. It seems rather as though the use of the Exodus motif as used by black theologians has become primarily an emotional call which aims at the 'conscientization and motivation of their respective constituencies' (Deutsch 1981:194) by the proponents of Black Theology.

3.9 Summary

The main thrust of Liberation Theology starts from a rather narrow base - the narrow base of a 'claimed' Christian praxis. Liberation Theology is not prophetic in nature as it addresses in the main the poor and the oppressed and not the oppressors. One does not find a balancing of the tensions between freedom and equality - unrestrained freedom leads to inequality, while enforced equality places restraints on the initiative of

individuals and thus curbs their freedom (Nürnbergger 1986: 154).

The seeking of a political kingdom seems to be implicit in the black theological approach, atonement is not part of the vocabulary of Liberation Theology and sin becomes a disruption of relationships in a society structured on relationships (König 1987:70). Salvation is likened to a socio-political-economic transformation of the world brought about by the sweat of the people while orthodox theology is to be abhorred as belonging to the principalities and powers of this world against which the people of God must strenuously contend.

The use of the exodus event as the *locus classicus* of God being on the side of the poor and oppressed seems to be unjustified. As regards the black theological hermeneutic, it seems as if it has not proved sufficiently why it should be adopted in preference to the orthodox hermeneutical method. On the contrary, the hermeneutic of Black Theology seems to be methodologically doubtful and logically to exceed the bounds of acceptable imaginative theological proposals.

Black Theology is indeed at present seen by some as an important new stage in theologizing which stresses the way in which Christians should strive to conduct their daily lives in the image of Christ and truly to love their neighbour. However, one should bear in mind the words of Yorke (1995:147), namely that no one person has immaculate perception and also that liberation theology is still, in Africa at least, in its infancy.

Much cross-pollination between orthodox and liberation theology has taken place and I envisage that much more will still take place.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 it was stated that the purpose of the dissertation was to investigate the exodus episode in order to determine to what extent Black Theology uses the Bible and is scripturally justified in using this episode as its point of departure for the claim of God's 'preferential option for the poor and the oppressed'.

In Chapter 2 the conclusion was reached that the God who redeemed his covenant people from bondage in Egypt, was not tied to a particular philosophy of a preferential option for the poor, but it was concluded with deference, that he acted to show the peoples that he is Lord and that 'my word that goes out from my mouth....will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it' (Isaiah 55:11) and that, in his long-suffering love, he does not distinguish among peoples. He is a just God who commands: 'do not show partiality to the poor nor favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly' (Leviticus 19:15). He is a God who is true to his promises.

In Chapter 3 it was concluded that the main thrust of Black Theology was the starting point from a 'claimed' Christian praxis. There is an admitted bias in the use of the biblical narrative in favour of the poor and the oppressed. Therefore, as one could expect an unduly heavy accent is placed on political, social and economic liberation while important matters concerning orthodox Christian dogma such as the virgin birth and the atonement, which do not play a role in the praxis of liberation, are neglected. This neglect could stem from the point of view that all 'white' (orthodox) theology is suspect as its proponents are enemies rather than allies of God.

The hermeneutic used by Black Theology in my opinion contains certain unsatisfactory aspects. The following are mentioned here:

a) One point of departure used is a certain praxis 'claimed'

to be Christian. This praxis, it is posited, will transform society as and when people can forge their own destiny. This approach appears to be rather utopian. This seems to be a recipe for a continual political, social and economic warfare since each individual, human beings being what they are, wishes to transform the society in which he/she lives into a society according to such a person's personal inclination and advantage. No norms are laid down, and such a freedom, supposedly egalitarian, could lead to serious inequality. This view corresponds with what Bosch stated (see paragraph 3.2.4 above), namely that there is the danger of absolutism which could lead to less and less dialogue between peoples and more and more to a power struggle to determine who is to be allowed to determine the praxis to be accommodated.

b) In order to substantiate its hermeneutic, Black Theology gave special definitions to certain words such as, for example, sin. This was set out in paragraph 3.3 *supra*. A new vocabulary has been created which makes it difficult to compare these concepts with the concepts found in the Bible. Indeed, it is a negation of the authority of the Bible to give other meanings to words which the Bible, in its pages, created. In a sense, then, a new Bible is formulated and raised up.

c) I concluded in paragraph 3.7.2.2 that -

- i) the use of a praxis 'claimed to be Christian', when measured by the application of Toulmin-logic, becomes questionable and unconvincing in that there is an illogical vacillation between a self-determined praxis-horizon and a text-horizon and that,
- ii) when some aspects of Black Theology are measured using the constraint criteria suggested by Kelsey, Black Theology in my opinion exceeds the limits of acceptability by taking the exodus event as the *locus classicus* for the slogan that God is always on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

The Exodus event, as I concluded in paragraph 3.8, does not play a leading role as a *locus classicus* for Black Theology in its slogan of God siding with the poor and the oppressed. This is probably due to the influence of such theologians as Mosala, Deutsch, Tutu and Boesak. The Exodus theme is admittedly lifted and appropriated in the uncritical service of the liberation project and struggle. It appears that the more critically the exodus episode is hermeneutically considered by Black Theologians, the more it becomes disregarded.

Little has been said in Black Theology about the emancipation or liberation of women. It seems as if much lip service is paid to this aspect of total liberation but little application is found in practice. Feminist theology believes, among other matters, in overcoming the fundamental sin of alienation between male and female (Maimela 1990:204). However in the black cultural context there seems to be a long way still ahead before this goal is reached. Deutsch (1981:194) states that Black Theology has paid very little attention to sexism and the resulting oppression of women - even though Black Theology has been warned of this. As mentioned in paragraph 3.2.2.2, Cone considered black men to be insensitive to the problems of black women and Fiorenza has stated that even in 1995 one finds that women are still only accepted as resident aliens in academic and church circles (see paragraph 3.2.2.2 above).

The conclusion arrived at is that the use of the Exodus episode as *locus classicus* for the justification of the call that God has a preferential option or predilection for the poor, is not convincing. Its use seems to be mainly an emotional call to the ontologically black person to become more involved in the advancement of the black political, social and economic situation.

Black Theology is indeed an important new stage in theologizing. It emphasizes the way in which Christians should conduct their daily lives by following in the footsteps of Christ and loving

their neighbour. Though much cross-pollination has taken place between orthodox and Black Theology in South Africa, more will undoubtedly still take place. For, as Yorke (1995:153) has expressed it, liberation theology, in Africa at least, is still in its infancy.

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