

The theology of liberation

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People of the community and my congregation have asked me many times why I preach so many sermons on Black liberation, and why I tend to interpret the scriptures through the Black experience in America. I have tried here to raise some important questions that will make people think about their selfhood. Why is Black liberation theology needed?

First, a part of the Black man/woman's identity problem lies in the fact that he/she has not been too sure who she/he was at any given moment in the context of American culture. This is because the religious institutions in America have played important roles in the dehumanizing process and stripping the Black race of their sense of personhood. Black liberation demands that Blacks and other oppressed people of the world affirm their identity. Black theology proclaims the emancipation of every man/woman in the name of Christ. It promotes awareness for Black churchmen that the Black idiom is a life giving, liberating, redeeming and reconciling force with power to salvage christian worship from coldness, sterility and impotence; the gift of soul. Black theology is affirmation of one's self-awareness that his/her Blackness is no longer a burden to him/her but a gift of God.

The ideology of racism that originated in the white churches in America, and the development of a cast system that would institutionalize racism and leave Blacks helpless, and was used as a rationale to justify slavery on the basis that whiteness was superior and perpetuated by the white theologians through their interpretation of scripture that somehow said that it was God's will that Blacks were the chosen race to be slaves.

The Black slaves in America internalized these beliefs to be facts, and thus the Black church and clergy perpetuated a gospel that was seen through the eyes of a white racist society to condemn them to an inferior state of existence. White theologians developed the concept of the American Christ that became the enemy of Blacks and other minorities. The problem with the American Christ is, that he says that the Black man never has to be fully recognized. Therefore, whites derived their right to rule over Blacks from God. To question this right was to question the will of God and to incur divine wrath. Catechisms for the instruction of slaves in the christian religion often contained such instruction as: **Q. Who gave you a master and a mistress? A. God gave them to me. Q. Who says that you must obey them? A. God says that I must.**

Black theology is the theology of Black liberation. It seeks to plumb the Black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the Black community can see the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of Black humanity.

Black theology is a theology of Blackness. It is not racist as many Black preachers believe. It is the affirmation of Black humanity that emancipates Black people from white racism thus providing authentic freedom for both white and Black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says "NO" to the encroachment of white oppression.

Along with the development of a white ideology of racism, came also the white only signs, that appeared in the white churches long before they appeared in the public utility places. During the post-civil war years the Black church lost its zeal for freedom in the midst of the new structures of white power.

Although the Black church was organized as a protest movement, during this period the Black ministers remained the spokesman for Black people, but faced by insurmountable obstacles, he succumbed to the cajolery and bribery of the white power structure and this became its foil. The passion for freedom was replaced with innocuous homilies against drinking, dancing, and smoking, and injustice in the present were minimized in favor of a kingdom beyond this world.

Black churches adopted for the most part then, and still today, the theology of the white missionaries that taught Blacks to forget the present and look to the future. One of the short comings of the Black church is that its leaders convinced themselves that they were doing the right thing by advocating obedience to white oppression as a means of entering a death, the future age of heavenly bliss.

The Black church identified white words with God's word and convinced its people that by listening in faithful obedience to the great white father they would surely enter the pearly gates. Thus, the Black minister perpetuated the white system of Black dehumanization, and Black churches encouraged the Black communities to satisfy themselves with white solutions to earthly injustices.

White theology has had Blacks trying in vain to purge themselves of their Blackness. Why, because the American Christ says that Black represents the mean, the ugly, the sinful, the no good. But, though the eyes of the Black experience, and Black liberation theology, sin for Black people is the loss of their identity. It is saying yes to white absurdity; accepting the world as it is by letting white people define Black existence by white criteri. For Blacks to be in sin is to be contented



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with white solutions for the "Black problem" and not rebelling against every infringement of white being on Black being.

Black theology differs from traditional theology by the simple reason that it may not be as concerned to describe such traditional themes as the eternal nature of God's existence. Much of the task of Black theology is to reclaim a people from humiliation, and in the process of so doing, it may well neglect such unrelated subjects as humility before man and guilt before God.

If Black theology is to speak realistically and cogently to a people whose lives have been worn down, whose best hopes have so often been frustrated, and who have been reminded at every turn by human word and action that they are less than worthy of so much that other ordinary humans possess, it must have a new and fresh message of hope for the future.

Black theology has given new meaning to Blackness, and it seeks to relate that Blackness to a truth that is liberating, thus, in current times, it has become a new light of freedom under. Having tasted that freedom through identification with God's intention for Black humanity, the Black man/woman/

child, will stop at nothing in expressing an even stronger affirmation of Black selfhood.

Black theology seeks to answer such questions as; what the gospel has to say to a man/woman who is jobless and cannot get work to support his/her family because the society is unjust. Or what is God's word to a person who has just been brutalized by some racist policemen? Or what is God's word to the countless Black boys and girls who are fatherless and motherless because white society decreed that Blacks have no rights?

What does God's word say to the countless numbers of Black boys/girls who has been forced to live on the reservations of our urban ghettos? Unless there is a world from Christ to the helpless, and the hopeless, then why should they respond to him or to the church?

Black liberation theology is a theology which has emerged out of the experiences of Black women/men/Black men/women who were committed to christian faith and who brought to the christian faith the totality of their experiences, accepted this christian faith and when this christian faith flowed through the contours of their souls a new interpretation of this faith emerged.