

By GAYRAUD S. WILMORE

## The Black Messiah: Revising the Color Symbolism of Western Christology

### I

In *An Introduction To African Civilizations*, Willis N. Huggins writes that "one of the earliest flares of the race and color question" is recorded in hieroglyphics on a huge granite stele erected about 2,000 B.C. by the Egyptian Pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty, Usertesan III. It stood like a modern highway sign on the boundary with Nubia and contained the following advertisement:

No Black man whatsoever shall be permitted to pass this place going down stream (the Nile) no matter whether he is travelling by desert or journeying in a boat — except such Blacks as come to do business in the country or travelling on an embassy. Such, however, shall be well treated in every way whatsoever. But no boats belonging to Blacks, shall in the future be permitted to pass down this river.<sup>1</sup>

In India, race prejudice may be as much as 5000 years old. Here we see blackness, as a contemptible color, being rejected by Indra, the God of Aryas. The Rig-Veda describes an invasion by the Aryas, or Aryans, of the land of a dark-skinned people. Indra is described as "blowing away with supernatural might from the earth and from the heavens the black skin which Indra hates." The account goes on to tell how Indra slew the flatnosed barbarians," and after conquering the land for the Aryas, he ordered the Anasahs to be flayed of their black skin with whips.<sup>2</sup>

During the Middle Ages Talmudic and Midrashic sources sought to explain Blackness with such suggestions as "Ham was smitten in his skin" or that Noah told Ham "your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned," or that Canaan was "the notorious world-darkener."<sup>3</sup>

Frank M. Snowden in *Black in Antiquity* writes concerning the ancient Greeks and Romans:

"There was a belief in certain circles that the color of the Ethiopian's skin was ominous, related no doubt to the association of the color black with death, the underworld, and evil. It was noted, for example, among omens presaging disaster that ill-starred persons were known to have seen an Ethiopian before their misfortune. An Ethiopian who met the troops of Cassius and Brutus as they were proceeding to battle was considered an omen of disaster. Among the events listed as foreshadowing the death of Septimius Severus was his encounter with an Ethiopian.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Huggins, Willis N. and John G. Jackson, *An Introduction to African Civilizations* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969) p. 55.

<sup>2</sup>Gossett, Thomas F., *Race: The History Of An Idea In America* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963) p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Jordan, Winthrop D., *White Over Black* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969) p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Snowden, Frank M. Jr., *Blacks In Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1970) p. 179.



These and other evidences of color prejudice from very ancient times seem to cast doubt upon the allegation of some Western historians that prejudice against black skin color and African ancestry is of recent origin.

It is true that it was not until justification was sought for the African slave trade that what scholars today call racism developed. But to regard racism as only the highly-reasoned, pseudo-scientific theories of the natural superiority of whites over blacks which arose in the 19th century, seems much too limiting. Some people evidently assigned a pejorative meaning to blackness long before the beginning of African slavery — for whatever reason — and if the Bible itself seems relatively free of this prejudice it is only because the Jews, after many years of residence and intermarriage in Africa, were themselves a dark-skinned people by the time the Old Testament had been written. Victims of prejudice themselves, the Medieval Jews simply consigned black people to a lower status than themselves. It was not the Jews of the Old Testament period, but Jews and Gentiles of medieval Europe — especially of Northern Europe and Great Britain — who were repelled by black skin color and African physiogamy and gave renewed vigor to the color prejudice that had been sporadic and peripheral in the ancient world.

We ought not to be surprised therefore, when we come to the 19th century and find such opinions of black people as is cited by William R. Jones of an American divine, the Reverend Buchner Payne.

Now as Adam was white, Abraham white and our Savior white, did he enter heaven when he arose from the dead as a whiteman or as a negro? If as a white man, then the negro is left out; if as a negro then the white man is left out. As Adam was the Son of God and as God is light (white) and in Him is no darkness (black) at all, how could God then be the father of the negro, as like begets like? And if God could not be the father of the blacks because He was white, how could our Saviour "being in the express image of God's person," as asserted by St. Paul, carry such a damned color into heaven, where all are white, much less to the throne?<sup>5</sup>

There is no point in wrangling over what is meant by racism, either ancient or modern. If one prefers one skin color over another, whether white over black, or black over white, with the implication of aesthetic, genetic or cultural superiority, the seeds of racial prejudice are already present. Racism waits in the doors. And when that preference is not simply a natural, almost subconscious ethnocentrism, but a self-justifying concomitant of economic, political and cultural domination and exploitation, color prejudice is raised to the level of an ideology that stretches from a rather benign "racial thinking" to full-blown racial hatred, brutality and potential genocide. That is an all too human phenomenon — a fact of human sin. It exists with or without sophisticated theories and systematic rationalizations. It can be conscious or

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Jones, William R., *Is God A White Racist? A Preamble To Black Theology* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1973) p. 5.



unconscious, continuous or sporadic. But it is racism and it goes far back into human history, although its classic expression and prototype is White European Christian racism which reached its most developed and pernicious form during the period of African slavery in the New World.

One suspects that the argument of the anthropologist Ruth Benedict that white racism is of recent origin and limited to pseudo-scientific theories of racial purity, is a well-intentioned liberal attempt to make the white rejection of blackness and African ancestry a secondary and peripheral characteristic of Western civilization. She seems to want to say that most white people are not as prejudiced as they seem and have only been so a short time. But the dichotomy of whiteness and blackness, and the imputation of positive value to the former and negative value to the latter, is deeply etched into the consciousness of the white people of Europe and America. Rather than something "unnatural" and peripheral to Western civilization it is of the essence of this civilization and, in modern times, has been elevated almost to the status of an ontological reality. God himself is white for Western man and the Christian faith, inextricably bound in its development to the history and culture of the great Western powers, is a white religion — a religion of, by and for white people. That is not a fantastic idea concocted by fanatical African priests and storefront preachers to persuade their people to resist white domination. It is not some wild allegation dreamed up by the Rastafarians or the Black Muslims. It just happens to be the simple, unadorned truth about what has been given to Black people as Christianity and something white people themselves believed.

Roger Bastide in a brilliant analysis of color symbolism in Western Christianity writes:

Although Christ transcends all questions of race or ethnology, it must not be forgotten that God incarnated himself in a man of the Jewish race. The Aryans and the Gentiles — even the most anti-Semitic — worship their God in a Jewish body. But this Jewish body was not white enough for them. The entire history of Western painting bears witness to the deliberate whitening or bleaching effort that changed Christ from a Semitic to an Aryan person. The dark hair that Christ was thought to have had come to be rendered a very light-colored, and his big, dark eyes as blue. It was necessary that this man, the incarnation of God, be as far removed as possible from everything that could suggest darkness or blackness, even indirectly.

His hair and his beard were given the color of sunshine, the brightness of the light above, while his eyes retained the color of the sky from which he descended and to which he returned. The progressive Aryanization of Christ is in strict accordance with the logic of the color symbolism. It did not start, however, until Christianity came into close contact with the other races — with the African race, in particular. Christian artists began to avoid the darker tints in depicting Christ in order to remove as much as possible of their evil suggestion.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Bastide, Roger, "Color, Racism and Christianity" in Franklin, John Hope (ed.) *Color and Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968) p. 37.



In the book *The Dark Center: A Process Theology of Blackness*, Eulalio R. Baltazar makes this further comment implicating Calvinism and later Protestantism in this conspiracy of color symbolism:

To see the transference of the black-white symbolism from the theological to the economic, the key concept is that of election. In the theological sense, white skin came to mean the possession of grace and spiritual poverty, the "voluntary and stubborn abandonment of race in sin."

Under the influence of Calvinism and later Puritanism, however, the notion of election became secularized to mean economic and material success. The whiteness or blackness of the skin accordingly came to have a secular meaning also. Thus whiteness of skin came to symbolize material, scientific and technological successes while blackness of skin came to be equated with a prescientific mentality, with economic poverty and with ignorance.<sup>7</sup>

## II

In the face of this evidence of the religious and psychological depths of the consciousness of color in Western culture it is impossible to suppose that the calamities African peoples, and those who have descended from them, have suffered at the hands of white people is not related, in some significant measure, to the various combinations of superiority feelings, fear, sexual attraction and repulsion, guilt, contempt and hostility that many whites experience in the presence of blackness.

Black color and calamity cannot be separated in the history of the West. As the boys I grew up with on the street corners of North Philadelphia used to say:

Dark man born of a dark woman sees dark days,  
Rises up in the morning like a hopper-grass,  
Cut down in the evening like asparagas.

This harsh truth is authenticated over and over everyday for the masses of black people. It forces us, in our search for a way out of the meaninglessness and absurdity of the inseparable connection between blackness and oppression, to discover at the most profound depths of our religious sensibility something that reinterprets that historic coherence. Instead of creating for ourselves the sentimental illusion that the coherence does not exist (for the sheer intensity of reality in a white world makes that assumption impossible) we can create a new meaning for the coherence of color and calamity. Instead of attempting to whitenize blackness and make it a symbol of something other than the unjust suffering and oppression it has always meant to blacks (as opposed to the evil and degradation it signifies to whites) we can perceive blackness as a symbol of the human struggle against the sterile, oppressive "whiteness" of the principalities and powers. Thus, blackness takes

<sup>7</sup>Baltazar, Eulalio R., *The Dark Center: A Process Theology Of Blackness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973) p. 46.



on positive theological meaning grounded in the experience of the human struggle for liberation and redemption.

This reinterpretation of the color symbolism of Christianity has been a consistent principle of radical Black religion. In a similar way blacks in Africa, the United States and the Caribbean made Christianity satisfy the most immediate and existential requirements of their sanity and survival. Black religionists refashioned the preaching, teaching and worship style of the missionaries to make it suit their needs and to cohere with whatever was left of their African belief systems and religious disposition. This was, however, never as radical a theological transformation as black theologians are inclined to make today. Only a few black leaders like Bishop Henry M. Turner of the AME Church and Bishop George Alexander McGuire of the African Orthodox Church had the intellectual courage and prophetic zeal to speak of a Black God, or to attempt a basic revision of the color symbolism of Christianity. Most had been so smitten by the white symbolism of the culture that dominated their conscious and subconscious life that they could not personally authorize a structure of religious belief that gave blackness a positive and constructive meaning without falsifying daily experience.

But today, as the masses of black people in Africa and the Caribbean area come into political independence and self-determination for the first time in almost 500 years and as black people in North America search for the roots of the culture of survival they created during slavery, a new possibility opens up. A new structure of meaning is now possible for blackness that not only transforms the external or physical features of economic, political and cultural life, but can also transform the inner life of the people through a reinterpretation of Christian symbolism. As Newbell N. Puckett noted:

The mere fact that a people *profess* to be Christians does not necessarily mean that their Christianity is of the same type as our own. The way in which a people interpret Christian doctrines depends largely upon their secular customs and their traditions of the past. . . . Most of the time the Negro outwardly accepts the doctrines of Christianity goes on living according to his own conflicting secular mores, but sometimes he enlarges upon the activities of God to explain certain phenomena not specifically dealt with in the Holy Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

If indeed the God of the oppressor and the God of the oppressed is the same God, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, he cannot truly reveal himself as the God of the oppressed until he identifies himself with the condition of their oppression and their yearning for liberation. When Moses and Aaron went to the people to tell them the message that Moses had received in the land of Midian the Scriptures tell us, "And the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and *that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped.*" (Exodus 4:31)

<sup>8</sup>Puckett, Newbell N., *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926) p. 545.



## III

God reveals himself in solidarity with the affliction of the oppressed by the revelation of his Son, Jesus Christ, as the Oppressed One of God. Although the slaves did not articulate this as a "Black Theology" in the terms we know it today, they recognized themselves in the description of the Lord's Servant in Isaiah 53. Generations of the oppressed have pondered the meaning of the Suffering Servant of God in relation to their own condition, but none more consistently than the sons and daughters of Africa — the black people of the world. Black people have been struck, not only with the similarity of what seemed to be their inexorable fate as a race and the Messianic vocation of suffering, but also with the profound, if not exact correspondence between their experience of blackness in Western civilization and the description of the Messiah.

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at  
him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men;  
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . .

And we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:1-3).

Not even the story of the Exodus from Egyptian captivity, the Scriptural prefigurement of Black emancipation in the 19th century, suggested the identity of Biblical prophecy and the historic experience of the black man in the West as clearly as these passages from Isaiah:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,  
so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut out of the land of the living. (Isaiah 53:7-8)

It is the symbolic meaning of blackness in relation to redemptive suffering, and not the claim that Albert B. Cleage makes for the actual skin color of Jesus, that gives warrant to our designation of Jesus as the Black Messiah. To call Christ the Black Messiah is not to infer that he looked like an African, although that may well have been the case considering the likelihood of the mixture of the Jewish genetic pool with that of people from the upper Nile, Nubia and Ethiopia. Nor are we implying, by calling him the Black Messiah, that other people may not find it meaningful to speak of Christ as the White Messiah, or the Yellow Messiah, or the Red Messiah! Indeed the American Indian lay theologian, Vine Deloria, has recently written a book entitled *God Is Red*.<sup>9</sup>

To speak of Christ as the Black Messiah is rather to invest blackness in Western civilization, and particularly in the United States and South

<sup>9</sup>Deloria, Vine, *God Is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973).



Africa, with religious meaning expressing the preeminent reality of black suffering and the historical experience of black people in a racist society. But more than that, it is to find in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection a theological explanation of all suffering, oppression and an ultimate liberation. To speak of the Messiah figure in terms of the ontological significance of the color black is to provide both black people and white people, if the latter are open to the possibility, with a way of understanding the relevance of the Person and Work of Christ for existence under the condition of oppression, and to call both the Black and the White Church to the vocation of involvement in the liberation of the oppressed in history.

Certainly one would have to admit that the symbolic power of this Christological formulation has not yet been fully disentangled from the difficulties it poses, nor has its theological, ethical and liturgical possibilities been fully explored. That is the future work of black theologians and others who are drawn to what this radical thinking about what Christ can mean for the American churches, if not for Christians in situations of domination and exploitation everywhere in the world.

In the meantime, perhaps the most serious challenge to the implications of this concept is presented by the black humanist philosopher and theologian, William R. Jones of Yale Divinity School, whose book *Is God a White Racist? A Preamble To Black Theology*, makes the contention that any theodicy which presumes that black suffering under oppression is redemptive either denies the existence of God or makes him a demon.<sup>10</sup>

I do not think that the Christian nonviolent philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. or a specific interpretation of black suffering such as the *Politics of God*, by Joseph Washington, satisfies the demands of the Christology I am proposing. Jones' objections are cogent with respect to both of these theologians. This is not the place to review the argument he makes. Rather I will set forth my own approach to the problem that is raised by Jones and attempt to defend the concept of the Black Messiah as the most meaningful way to understand and proclaim the Cross as God's eternal presentation of the judging and gracious presence of the oppressed in the world.

#### IV

Jesus comes to us as the Oppressed One of God. He comes not only to atone for our sins, but to destroy the power by which Satan rules the world and to bring to an end the contradictions and conflicts that have been introduced into human life since the fall of man. That was the Messianic work and that was what the Apostle Paul referred to when he wrote in Colossians 1:19 — "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all

<sup>10</sup>Jones, op.cit., p. 9.



things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

One reconciles that which is estranged or in conflict and throughout the New Testament witnesses to the fact that the conflict is not merely personal and interpersonal, but is cosmic in scope.

How long, will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?  
For the wickedness of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because men said, He will not see our latter end. (Jer. 12:4)

And II Peter 3:13 tells us that "according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

From whence comes this cosmic estrangement and conflict which is taken up, experienced and then cancelled out and destroyed in the Cross of Christ? It arises because of our disobedience, because we have dared to be like God rather than the men that we are. Even the law was not able to reconcile the Creation. It was rather God's gracious judgment upon our sinful, finite human existence that in both our highest moral attainment under the Law and in our deepest sinfulness, apart from it, we remain frustrated, incapacitated, broken by an intrinsic imperfection symbolized by the difference between heaven and earth, the creature and the Creator.

"So I find it to be a law," writes Paul, "that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:21-24)

He is not speaking here merely of the physical form of flesh and blood. What is this "war," this "body of death" but symbolic representations of experience itself, of existence in conflict with itself, of a universe in bondage to decay? It is in this world of conflict and contradiction that the good must perforce suffer, revealing the fatal deficiency in all human virtue, and evil must prosper only to destroy itself by the very consequence of its success.

This is what reveals the inescapable anguish and doom that is the inevitable harvest of both man's powerlessness and power, misery and exaltation. The Bible tells us that this is what life is really like for all men, saints and sinners alike. "Everything before them is vanity," Ecclesiastes has written, "since one fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean . . . This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that one fate comes to all." (Ecclesiastes 9:1-3) This is the inexplicable conflict which Paul saw in his own life and found written into the very structure of the creation which groans in travail waiting for its redemption.

There is, of course, a mystery about man's responsibility or irresponsibility for this condition of life upon the earth. The problem between



guilt and finitude has been debated for centuries and there is still no easy solution. This is the paradox of the Book of Job and before it, the paradox of Adam and Eve who, as human creatures made in the image of the God who gave them life, yearn for the fullness of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — a tree, let us remember, good for food and a delight to the eyes! (Gen. 3:6) And yet, tempted by Satan rather than by evil designs of their own, they taste its good fruit only to receive banishment and death. Paul wrestles with the paradox and mystery of this strange contradiction under the law of the Creator.

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin . . . the very commandment which promised life proved to be death for me. (Rom. 7:7-10)

It is in this life of conflict, where both goodness and evil, sin and sinlessness, oppression and liberation seem to cancel each other out and, in this incapacity, unable to deliver human existence from the closed circle of futility, that God has made man a little lower than the angels. Into this life Christ comes in human flesh. The meaning of the Incarnation is that God himself chooses blackness in solidarity with his imperfect sinful creatures by entering into their historical existence at a given time and place — in the reign of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria and Herod the king of Judea. By becoming black, which is to say by suffering oppression and death, God reveals to mankind the nature of its life in a fallen world and his decision to be identified with both its willful self-assertion and its virtuous and frustrated hopes, forever. If blackness is made to stand for conflict, oppression, suffering and death, we may say that God became black! In the symbolism of the liberation Christology, God became black in order to show that blackness is the ultimate reality for all men and that the final reconciliation of blackness and whiteness, of the oppressed and the oppressor, of death and life, is not in man's making of history, but in God himself.

## V

What then is the meaning of the earthly struggle of the oppressed for liberation? Is it all a mirage, a divine hoax, a cruel joke? No, because in the anguish and suffering of *the struggle itself* the oppressed come to the revelation of the meaning of existence on earth and of their gracious union with the Oppressed One . . . "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Ephesians 3:9). And in the anguish and suffering of that same struggle the oppressors come to know the judgment of God upon their sinful attempt to become gods over their fellowmen. In that judgment is the possibility of their salvation . . . "for this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God." (I Peter 4:6)



The most profound meaning of the liberation of the oppressed is the consciousness of the meaningfulness of the struggle for life and hope and the vindication of their determination to be human beings conformed to the command of God to be free for him. That is the significance of Christ's words from the Cross: "Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit." In God's hands is perfect freedom. Now the stage is set for the manifestation of the liberation of the Oppressed One in the resurrection and exaltation. That is the ultimate liberation, for without diminishing the significance of historical freedom, political, economic and cultural liberation can only refer penultimately to an incomplete and fragmentary experience which inevitably yields to the temptation to exercise mastery over others. Thus, historical freedom has its own rewards *and* temptations.

Nevertheless, we discover the real meaning of the Cross in the struggle of the oppressed for liberation. Even though Christ went ostensibly to the Cross without resistance — the lamb of God led unprotestingly to the slaughter — the Cross represents God's struggle against the principalities and powers of this world. It represents, therefore, man's oppression by the contradictory existence he is destined to live in his sinfulness and finitude.

In the suffering of the struggle for liberation both the oppressed and the oppressors are given knowledge of the judgment and the grace of God. But the Gospel must be preached! When the struggle is related to God's liberating activity in Jesus Christ the oppressed receive the transforming revelation of the meaning of their humanity and the joy of their gracious incorporation into the Oppressed Man on the Cross. And the oppressors, for their part, are drawn into the ambience of God's purpose to reveal his judgment and grace in the Cross. In the resistance of those who are oppressed and the futility of the struggle to keep them oppressed, the oppressor discerns, through the Gospel, the power of the humanity of the oppressed as the judgment of God upon his unauthorized mastery. Therefore, the oppressor who seeks to dehumanize others is himself humanized by the revelation of the limitation of his own power and the demystification of his false security in it. When the Gospel is proclaimed to the oppressor and God acts for the freedom of the oppressed, the grace of God frees the oppressor from his deluded self-aggrandisement and, through restitution and reparation, gives him also the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation as the consequence of repentance.

## VI

In this construction of a theological framework for understanding the Cross in its relation to the struggle of the oppressed, I have attempted to show how the concept of the Black Messiah clarifies the meaning of the crucifixion in the context of Western civilization, where blackness



symbolizes oppression and whiteness must therefore symbolize the arrogance of dominating power.

The Cross is the eternal manifestation of God's identification with the conflict and oppression of man's sin and finitude, man's blackness. In the grace and judgment which flows from the Cross of Jesus, as the Oppressed Man of God, the Black Messiah, both the oppressed and the oppressor, both the angels and the principalities and powers, are judged and given the hope of liberation and reconciliation beyond lightness and darkness.

The chastising judgment and gracious hope which God sets before us in the death of his Son, is not something we experience beyond history, but is the actual experience of our historical existence. Just as the truth of Good Friday awaited the resurrection event of Easter morning, the transhistorical truth of the liberation of all mankind from the oppression of blackness and the delusion of whiteness awaits the ultimate consummation of the purposes of God for his whole creation. But in the meanwhile, black liberation is a real experience. That is where Jones' error lies. In the midst of suffering and conflict, the wretched of the earth, typified in Black Theology by the humiliated and exploited people of color, experience liberation by the power of God's saving word. This liberation ultimately transcends political, economic and cultural freedoms, but it nevertheless, includes them. The historical experience black people have had of Emancipation as both an event and a continuing process, confirms this contention.

But it is the struggle against oppression itself that I have emphasized. Understood in the light of the Person and Work of Christ as the Black Messiah, the struggle we have carried on for 400 years has freed black people to be human beings in solidarity with the oppressed and liberated Son of God. In that struggle we have received the assurance and joy of our incorporation into his vocation of redemptive suffering for the whole creation, and we come to the Cross bringing our oppressors with us, to find there our mutual reconciliation and redemption.

White racism has been one of the most endemic features of the white societies of the West. Black skin color and calamity have seemed to be inseparable in this civilization. It has been the prototype of all oppression based on ethnic, class, cultural and religious differences. But God has not forsaken black people nor rendered their struggle absurd. It may well be that he has given them the key to the real meaning of oppression and liberation through the Cross of Christ.

