

By George B. Thomas\*

## Black Theology of Liberation

### Introduction

We are all united or ought to be united by the vision and hope as well as the purpose and struggle of liberation.

Coming from the context of the black experience in the United States of America, our contingent of Brothers and sisters is profoundly proud to join the ranks and voices of our brothers and sisters from various quarters of the Motherland and the Third World. Let us here, together, proclaim and engage the struggle of liberation as the gospel. In this we are one in the spirit; one in Jesus . . . Christ, the Lord of liberation.

On behalf of the black american contingent, one kind of representation of the peoplehood of Africa's children from the black church and black community in the United States, we thank you for the invitation and privilege to participate in this significant consultation.

We acknowledge with gratitude the untiring and inspiring efforts of those providing leadership from the ecumenical association of Third World theologians, especially recognizing the work of Sergio Torres, Executive Secretary of the Theology in the Americas Program, and Kofi Appiah Kobia, African Secretariat of the Christian Commitment in Africa Today. We are also cognizant of all the labors of love which have been given by the support systems of various committees, groups and persons in the process of hosting this consultation.

Coming this far by faith, "leaning on the Lord," we, as you, have persevered. We, because of you, have prevailed in being able to be here and join in support of African Theology of Liberation as the vital center of the christian commitment in Africa today. In a sense, we are now becoming a particular company of witnesses, advocates for the spiritual claims of economic reconstruction. Now having been brought together from across some peculiar sets of obstacles: of time, geography and circumstances, to be one voice in every place for liberation.

As we greet you with the special affections from the sons and daughters of Africa in the United States of America, we would also include greetings from the special concerns of those friends of the faith, allies holding humanistic commitments to the gospel of liberation. We are seriously and uncompromisingly devoted to you and those you represent, who are enjoined with all who believe and struggle to overcome all oppression in each and everyplace. Therefore, there is a precious way, under God, whereby our collective will, faith and strength are

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\*Dr. Thomas is Associate Professor of Church and Society and Director, Religious Heritage of The Black World, a research project at The Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta.



incorporated here to connect with the labors of those in pain and want, hunger and love who continue to advocate and struggle for liberation.

We build from and upon the continuity of those past and parallel consultations and strivings in the various contexts of the Third World as well as in the light of those consultations yet to come. From this connected sense of interpersonal human-mass-and-spirits in historical motion infused with the Spirit of God, we are persuaded that the gospel of liberation creates in us, through us and beyond us the New New World Community. Here, let us be resolute that we are uniting for one humanity, one heritage and one hope. Here let us dare be the new dreamers, the new transformers under our banner of Liberation Theology in Action for Transformation.

#### Some Black Theological Definitions Explored

In such a gathering as this, with the diversities of gifts, historical experiences and cultural styles, it affords a necessary opportunity to deal with, clarify and share the stances we bring that enhance and express the particular terms we employ. There are vital implicit and explicit meanings in the language we use. Our language illustrates the substantive as well as the symbolic reality of our particular situation of experience which represents our part in the total human experience. We would therefore clearly expose the presuppositions behind the positions that are taken, the logic of belief expressed, form of analysis pursued and the conclusions set forth. Therefore, we are determined to speak forthrightly about Black and Blackness, Black Theology and Black Church, African-Americans and African Christianity, and organize them around the Theology of Liberation. We say them with struggle and hope. We say them above all under God through Christ and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

When we speak of Black, let us understand Black as the healthy self-conscious identity affirmed by the descendants of African peoples in the United States. It is an ethnic and ethical description expressive of the cultural experiences and human predicament and struggle of those African People in the United States who define themselves. It has also become a symbolic definition expressive of any who identify with the liberation struggle of any or all oppressed peoples.

"African" is to be understood as a term that includes those descendants—with linkages with those ancestors whose place of origin has been on the continent of Africa, from the beginning of humanity and history. (There are those of "dignified dust" who are born in the bosom of the Motherland. There are those of "dignified dust" who are born in other parts of the world.) Theologically, all are members of the extended family or the basic "African human geography," even those now living on lands of other continents in what has been termed, the Black Diaspora (St. Clair Drake, *Redemption of Africa and Black Religion*, Chicago: III World Press, 1971). The children of Africa living in the new world of the United States are now in the widest range of physical appearances in color and size, in cultural life styles and in religious, economic, political and social identities and loyalties.



The reality of Africanness and Blackness for all descendants of Africa is of historical significance from the past, in the present and for the future—in terms of being, belonging and becoming in the fullest realization of God's gift to African peoplehood in the familyhood of all peoplekind.

When we speak of African Christianity, we refer to the religious practices among Blacks who have embraced Christ as the vital center of life in commitment of faith and in loyalty of service as well as expression of cultural life style. Wherever the descendants of African people profess, practice and institutionalize christianity, in those cultural forms, which enhance and express black spiritual creativity, there is African Christianity.

Consequently, the Black Church has come out of African Christianity in the United States, moves through it and has a mission beyond it. The Black Church in the United States is the historical institutionalization of the Black Religious Experience, organizing around Jesus Christ as Lord and Liberator—the humanity of the “High God.” The “High God” is the African precursor of “de lawd” of the “invisible institution” during slavery. Black church movements have emerged from and through various types of religious structures such as (1) independent folk movements—Holiness and Pentecostal and other so-called cult and sect groups; (2) the black governed connectional associations as the AME, AMEZion, CME as well as the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc., Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.; (3) the Black Caucuses of black christians, members in European-American Churches who are in fraternal relations in ethnic consciousness and fellowship with the struggles of black people, third world, poor and oppressed peoples. These are all parts of the historical manifestation of God's empowerment of the Black Christian Church, including the recent independent movement, the Black Christian Nationalists, now called the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church.

The reality of Black Theology primarily comes out of the Black Church. The Black Church comes out of the historical continuity of the black religious community. There are those in Black Theology who engage black biblical hermeneutics, scientific social analysis as well as those of non-scientific mental activity who share in shaping the Theology of Liberation. Both are inspired and come out of the same reality, expressing the interpretations of the spiritual and existential situation, humanizing beliefs and practices, reverencing God's providential care through Christ and the Holy Spirit as manifested through the Black Christian experience and the Black Church. Black theology serves the commitment to salvation history for the liberation of the black community, “the black dead, the black living and the black unborn” (Leronne Bennett, *The Challenge of Blackness*).

#### For the Transformation of all Peoplekind

A biblical description of Black Theology of Liberation organizes around the calling, commitment and commission inherent in the gospel:



"the Spirit of the Lord is upon (Black Theology) because God has anointed (Black Theology) to . . . (Lk. 16).

In a real sense Black Theology has been historically commissioned to the ministry of liberation. It has been the cutting and creative edge of the vanguard of the Black Church—pressing black self-consciousness through Christ to realize a new kind of peoplehood in ethnic and spiritual, critical and communal consciousness. By the Holy Spirit, Black Christian soul power is in the Jerusalem of the body of Christ; in the Judea of ministry, to oppressed of Africa and the third world. In the Samaria of ministry, to other oppressed peoples; at the uttermost parts of the earth, in ministry to the oppressors—that all knees might bend to the Lordship of the Creator-Sustainer who has given the mandate of liberation with a universal obligation.

Since liberation is for world redemption, God calls and challenges all peoples in and though, from and beyond their particular structures of loyalties, to give them up in order to witness and work for the ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. . . . "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven," St. Matt. 6:10. God is indeed no respecter of peoples or nations. Salvation is for all peoples and nations and worlds.

Black Theology of Liberation has an eschatology or world view wherein the future of the realized Lordship is accomplished in cooperation with other Christian and even non-Christian peoples and movements to be and build up the new humanity for the new earth. To the inevitable end, "when the government shall be upon His shoulders" (Is. 9:6), and He shall be called wonderful.

#### Some Black Theological Purposes and Objectives Extended

Our urgent and mediating objective is to illustrate the revelation of God in the particular reality of Black Theology as an ideology with a revolutionary agenda of action for the gospel. Our ultimate objective obviously does not make this particular exclusive but inclusive in the struggle for justice and the establishment of righteousness in the ways of any peoplekind, anywhere.

Therefore, our noblest purpose has been and is to proclaim and advocate that special revolutionary revelation, that is, the way God through Christ Jesus maximizes our liberation struggle in any place where we are as a means of world liberation—beginning in any given reality of our particular context of experience.

In order to deal with economic exploitation (captivity), and racism (institutional and personal (captivity), as well as to deal with the indignities of oppression internalized in the psyche of the oppressed (also a form of captivity), Black Theology of Liberation has accepted the challenge-response of the providential design and spiritual call for the African-American to struggle. Through Black Theology of Liberation several purposes and objectives are significant:

- 1.) To reclaim and restore the positive legacy of the Black Religious Experience as continuous from the African into the American context.



- 2.) To demythologize those religious and non-religious anti-black and anti-poor conceptions and perspectives which demean African, Black and poor, oppressed humanity.
- 3.) To engage the liberation struggle of all oppressed peoples against the concepts, structures and systems that assault human dignity.
- 4.) To press the black church and community into the wider society of America and the world to be prophetic and political in the witness and action for socio-economic justice.
- 5.) To share in the ultimate transformation of human life styles in every place for the coming of the global village and the new world community.

#### Aspects of Contextualization of Black Theology of Liberation

It is clear however, that the scope of this discussion on liberation begins and continues within the context of our humanity as African-Americans, in the setting of our historical experience primarily with European-Americans in the geographical boundaries of the Indian native land, now called the U.S.A. Although this is the context in which our faith and struggle have been forged over the past 400 years, yet our scope in faith and fraternity as well as fellowship is open ended toward a future where co-existence and interdependence give us a perspective of the transnational and transracial function of Black Theology—with a world view of liberation that is also obedient to the great commission.

Theologically, we do affirm the preciousness of God's creating Blackness as dignified dust from the African soil and sustaining Blackness as "humanized geography" anywhere, including the U.S.A. The context of theologizing, therefore, authentically has both an ethnic and national application and, at the same time, bearing an international and universal obligation.

Contextualization of theology of liberation sharply focuses on fundamental geopolitical significance in analysing the meaning and understanding the role of Black Theology of Liberation in the U.S.A.

The U.S.A., as a country in the temperate zone, has a diverse and dynamic habitat. The climate, topology and natural resources are crucial factors in correctly analysing and understanding one side of the coin of the liberation-contextualization struggle. On the other side of the coin, the U.S.A. is a multiracial nation with peoples of diverse cultural traditions of long standing. The historical events, trends and patterns have continuously illustrated the contacts and confrontations, conflicts and cooperation encountered in the liberation struggles and agenda in the U.S.A.

In the relationship between habitat and people, the economic factors and forces have fundamentally affected the conditions, relationships, and form of all the social systems and cultural institutions. An historical analysis of contextualization of Black Theology of Liberation is one that makes us more fully cognizant of three basic and distinctive Americas in the U.S.A. They are Indian America (red): European-America (white):



and plantation-america (blue, that's black). It is from the context of the socio-economic condition and historical realities of plantation-america that the politics of liberation is the truth that is best understood.

We speak now from Black Theology of Liberation which has emerged from the socio-economic and religious struggles of Africans colonized in the context of the U.S.A.

#### The Reality of Oppression: Foundations of Black Dispossession

Theologically, oppression is the sinful foundation of Black dispossession historically and existentially. Historical analysis enables us to understand that Africans were colonized in America purely and exclusively for economic reasons. Racism in the course of history has reinforced the economic exploitation of black existence and has evolved an ontological rationale and reality pervading all the social systems of the society. We speak then of institutional racism.

The European underdevelopment of Africa has been the same pattern of European-American underdevelopment of African-Americans. Throughout the different periods of black economic captivity, profits, progress and prosperity of western systems have been privileged at the price of exploiting black humanity and human dignity.

African-Americans were made captives to the economic systems of the western world since the 16th century. There have been different forms in the nature of organization of captivity and in the stage of the extension of captivity, directly and indirectly.

Direct dispossession was manifest wherein black people were as commodities for the world market place; as merchandise for trade; as slaves for property; as slave labor for exploitation; as agricultural workers, tenant farmers, share cropping and migrant laborers; as private and public handy workers: in the shops, factories, commercial enterprises and industries, usually underemployed or unemployed and more recently defined as unemployable.

As commodities, millions were captured from these shores, bought or traded, stored in forts (the factories) that supplied and richly financed the development of the foundations for international banking systems. As merchandise, millions were stocked in middle passage ships on the triangular trade route cycle of America, Europe, and African networks of world trade, with our ancestors as the products. As slaves, blacks were bought, sold and exchanged on auction blocks in the marketplaces of Savannah, Charleston, Mobile, etc. and became the profitable property as assets of the plantation holdings, listed with the horses, cattle and other animals or things. As slave labor, our ancestors were captive to the production systems of plantation fields and farms or in the mines and spent time on the cross, immeasurably undergirding the economic wealth of the U.S.A. and the western empires. As chattel slavery passed, our grandfathers and grandmothers were then subjected to the captivity and exploitation as tenant farmers who for the most part remained landless and labored for absentee landlords. Other families, in the millions, were locked into labor pools institutionalized in the migratory cycles of



following crops—living from hand to mouth in different places in the seasons of harvesting.

In menial labor within the poverty structures of the private sector, our parents were generally subjected to the status of underemployment and domestic roles as: servants, mammies, handymen, yard boys, house maids, cooks, butlers, etc.

In the public sector, as Blackness was the badge of high visibility, working cadres were conveniently and permanently kept available and identifiable for cheap labor in the underpaid tasks of street sweepers, messenger boys, grocery boys, elevator operators, garbage collectors, janitors, et al. In the shops, factories and industries, our older brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, now numbering in the millions, were programmed to be maintained as black labor reserves exportable and expendable. When hired, it was understood that they were designed to be the first fired. The unemployed African-Americans would always be available and cheap labor.

We have now come to an ominous time in which we are living at the end of the systematic and systemic underdevelopment of many African-Americans as well as other poor and oppressed peoples. Some state that Blacks are being defined as oblescent. Millions of Black and poor peoples are described as vagabonds who exist in double jeopardy permanently unemployed and functionally unemployable. The future shock of the emerging american technological culture is already present and has a "throw away" mentality or component of sensitivity in the subtle disposing of people as things.

Certain economic institutions have historically and systematically augmented enormous benefits from the exploitation of the working or laboring class of people, especially african-americans.

Exorbitant profiteering resulted from the world trade market of exchange in trade of rum, tobacco and slaves. Enterprising investments gave rise to financial shipping magnets and plantation barons of cotton and sugar production as well as land controlling conglomerates that exploited tenant and share croppers or migrant laborers. The mercerial rise of world monopolies in banking, the development of interlocking international cartels and the institutionalization of transnational new nations, the multinational corporations, have come of age on the eve of the twenty-first century.

The exploitation and appropriation of natural resources of the earth in any quarter of the earth and the importation and exportation of peoples as property as well as the crass commercialization of labor as the cheapest cost in the scheme of production for profiteering continue to give least priority to the dignity of human life, completely oblivious of the creative spiritual value of human labor.

Black and poor people understand very well these realities of exploitative greed, theologically, as sin and evil. Some analyze them as the manifestations of the free play of profiteering in historical materialism and economic determinism. By any name they represent the reality of oppression which cause injustice and inhumanity.



The intentional economic underdevelopment of blacks takes different forms in the nature and organization of controls, and stages in the extension of styles of captivity. There is oppression indirectly, as well as directly: via welfare systems and the destabilizing effects on family life: miseducation and the dysfunctional effects on the vocational life: prisons as pacification camps: drug addiction as opiate of the mass, especially the youth: as well as the use of the military and religion as means of stabilizing controls over sectors of the population.

The welfare program has been the legacy of the economic life styles of the plantation system. It has functioned historically, to keep the black and poor people captive and available in the cheap labor reserves and pools. This program has been the most demeaning factor affecting the black family life and accomplishing the same objectives of black demoralization as obtained during slavery. (In some areas and ages unemployed and unemployable Blacks are as high as 40-60%).

The captivity promoted through some of the educational systems has been in the programs of miseducation which render people unselfconscious, with distortions of self-esteem, sensate mindedness, deprived of functional skill essential for the Twenty-First century.

The captivity induced through selective permissive drugs and alcohol addiction on the one hand, supporting the profit-making syndicates as well as serving as the "hooker," debilitating the have-nots, the underclass; on the other hand, reducing the capacity of poor people's self-consciousness for struggle.

There is another form of captivity in the entrapment systems of criminal justice where charges and fines keep the poor and blacks in the hands of certain kinds of loan sharks, who along with exploiting merchants, reinforce the cash flow of capital in circulation among those designed and addicted as the consumer class. Prisons are also alarmingly and disproportionately populated with young black boys and men.

The captivity and exploitative function of religion functions as an opiate that produces a false euphoria. At the same time, it is a means of fostering black on black or poor on poor exploitation whereby religious leaders rip off the poor, pimp the profession with irrelevant professionalism, and ego-tripping popularism that prostitute leadership for the people. On the other hand, there are those who sanctify the status quo of the society to accept suffering and poverty as providential, accommodating the dominating class in order to gain class privileges. Religion for the oppressor is encouraged to function as an escape mechanism or defense mechanism thereby allowing people to engage sublimations of deferred gratifications rationalizing, "you take this world and give me Jesus."

There are certain religious institutions which, through the years, have sanctified the status quo of the ruling lords of economic wealth, the captains of commerce and industry as well as the barons and managers, or owners of systems of people, property and production, who directed and direct the means of distribution and the levels of consumption. Those vested-interest as the ruling class with sectors of the religious



establishment have always attempted to mute the prophetic voices of those who spoke against the oppressors of the poor.

In Black American history, we note that religious leaders had invited slavery to replace African for Indians or poor Europeans as the laboring class on the plantation and in the mine producing enterprises of the new world.

There is sufficient evidence to document the veneer christianity of slave masters, who named some ships religiously, eg, *Jesus*. Religious hymns were created on slave journeys. Slave masters were christian. Christians fought wars to maintain slavery, slave labor, and racism.

Religious systems also blessed the benefits from exploration-expansion and exploitation and acquisitions through various forms of slave trade and slave labor. The rising spirit of capitalism was enhanced by the ethical accommodations of christianity.

Certain religious systems and institutions continue to work with hand in glove with the power grasping enterprises which are determined to maintain a deadly hold as if with manifest destiny and mandate to dominate the conditions of human existence the world over disinheriting and dispossessing the poor.

The Black American, throughout history, has been aware of the captivity to "spiritual wickedness in high and low places" and the rulers of this world-darkness who assume divine sanction to dominate those bearing in their bodies the stigma of Blackness.

#### The Reality of Struggle: Black Theology of Liberation

In the engagement of human dignity, theologically, the black american children of Africa have been in a protracted, historical and psycho-social identity-struggle which has linked the moral imperative of liberation as human dignity with self determination. Liberation is more than physical emancipation from chattel slavery, more than political independence or freedom to exercise or realize voting and civil rights. Black Theology of Liberation also has to do with the rights, privileges and opportunities to experience growth in personal development and peoplehood under God, and through authentic self knowledge in educational experiences and authentic self control in economic development.

There have been several stages in the social metamorphosis as it were, which African people made slaves, have had to pass through and are passing through in the social revolution in America to regain the respect and recognition of African personhood and peoplehood of humanity in the context of the U.S.A., as Black Americans.

The quest for authentic human identity and the struggle of liberation in the social revolution in the U.S.A. may be viewed in five stages of psychosocial phases of consciousness of personality and humanity; (1) the African; (2) the American Negro; (3) the Negro American; (4) the Black Man, and; (5) the African American. There have been other terms which have been used to label or define the African-American in crude racists categories as "nigger" or self definitions as "colored." The word negro



had been imposed and rejected because it was synonymous with slave or masked the paternal plantation label of "our nigger," made in America.

The persistence of the african consciousness and the strong feeling almost instinctive self-awareness, has been recently portrayed in *ROOTS*. Through wholesome self-esteem, under persecution, Kunta Kunta typified the determination to hold on to self-pride, to internalize it deep in the soul of and throughout the entire history of, black people in America. There have always been those who continued to speak theologically as African in the sense of ethnic, ethical and religious identities.

As the American Negro, the African was repressed to (the role and status of involuntary servitude and slavery, nevertheless, the struggle against the dehumanizing and depersonalizing existence was a moral and spiritual one. Theologically, liberation is God's gift of freedom, the staff of the spiritual life. The myths of racism had been enhanced in slavery. The accommodations to the plantation mentality were programmed to produce personality characteristics or types as Topsy, to be historyless and completely unself-conscious; Sambo to be childish and dependent, totally incapable of handling adult responsibilities; Tom to be patiently absorbing all indignities and wait for the afterwhile beyond history and for divine satisfaction. After emancipation from slavery, the struggle for freedom and for equality of opportunity came up against other forms of racism-in segregation and discrimination as interpreted in the Constitution, "separate but equal" (*Plessy vs. Ferguson*, 1896).

The Negro American revolted against the imposition of an identity where humanity was subordinated to nationality. The black folk movements having escalated confrontations, the Supreme Court reversed the decision of separate but equal, May 1954, changing the legal and psychological status and role of the Negro Identity as an American, now to be identified as the Negro American. But the initiative in the struggle for freedom, equality and identity was only a part and stage of the social revolution undergirded by theological groundings.

As the Black Man, the folk-consciousness of emancipation was realized as an inner experience that broke through the psyche which had been conditioned or programmed for self-rejection or low self-esteem. Black consciousness, theologically, was the moral and spiritual self-awareness to transform the conditions that produced the indignities of the Sambo, Topsy, and Tom tendencies our characteristics of behavior. The Black Man throughout the land and in every quarter of social life exerted a more militant and radical brand of leadership. A new national presence of the african-american personality emerged in black power with a new black agenda. This black revolution was consistent within the endless line of splendor of the freedom fighters throughout the whole history of african-european contacts, whether in Africa, on the seas, in the islands as well as in any quarter of this land and history of the U.S.A. The black power movement was the last recent catalytic force in the social revolution which galvanized unity in struggle—that raised the cry



“liberation” as the object of the Black Man and whereby Black Theology centered the Black man as the object of God’s providential hand on the move in a special way through American history.

#### In the Expression of “Spiritual” Resources

Spirituals are the resources of strength and struggle in Black Theology of Liberation. The liberation motif was expressed in songs and communicated summons to struggle. From the Black Experience, the “exodus story” is theologically illustrated in two spirituals:

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus . . . mah lawd  
cawls me . . . he cawls me by de thunder . . . the lightnin  
liberation\* aint got long to stay heah.

O freedom, o freedom, o freedom ovah me and befo I’d  
be a slave I’d be buried in my grave and go home  
to my God and be free (liberation)

Four meanings were manifest: 1.) to withdraw from the plantations like the “fighting maroons”—in the secret societies who instigated revolts, revolutions and guerilla warfare; 2.) to escape via the “underground railroad “the human freedom train” from slavery or servitude; 3.) to resist oppression in everyplace; 4.) to be free at last-beyond oppression.

God of the Oppressed sent his son and sends leaders to get down with the people in what Sergio Torres describes as “The underside of History,” down is not just a place as Egypt or a direction for location; but way down is a condition as slavery or any dehumanizing conditions of exploitation. (God sent God’s son “way down.”)

Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land, tell ole Pharoah, let my people go.

“Way down” there are walls of racism, of poverty, of apartheid and slavery that are thick with human attitudes and social attitudes of pride and arrogance and social systems of hate (racism) and greed (exploitation). Leaders and people were called to struggle on the battlefields of human dignity and social equality and justice. The spirituals were the theological ways of “doing revolution” by transmitting the messages. For leaders, there are the Moses in everyplace. For the Jerichos, there are the places where walls divide and obstruct freedom and justice and must come down.

Joshua fit de battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho and de walls came tumblin down.

#### For personal commitment:

I’m on the battlefield for mah lawd, yes I’m on de battlefield for mah lawd, and I promised Him that I would serve Him till I die, yes I’m on the battlefield for my lawd.

The systems, principalities, powers and kingdoms of inhumanity supported by spiritual wickedness in high and low places have been the same in organization, purpose and program. They have different names. For those in slavery, they were plantation boss man, overseer, slave driver, the big house, mastah and missy. Today, they are the



organizations, systems, institutions, cartels, monopolies, multinational corporations, or the "isms" where they function in dehumanizing ways, they are described as the satanic forces.

The spirituals contained the language of identifying the enemy of humanity and the systems of oppression and Black folk prayed for the eschatological intervention of the powers of the "high god" to prevail to bring down the kingdoms of inhumanity and injustice that are in defiance to the kingdom of God:

Satan your kingdom must come down, Satan your kingdom must come down, you've been building up your kingdom all over the land, but Satan your kingdom must come down. God's gonna bring you kingdom down!

It is clearly evident that black theology of liberation has a spiritual legacy in the message of the gospel and in the music that communicated the motto of resistance, the spirit of struggle, the mood of hope.

The spirituals came from the souls of black folk and theology of the soul is both the essence of black reality and the existential point where the spirit of God impinges and empowers the human quest and affirmation of the abundant life. In the here and now as well as "by and by when the morning comes." Therefore the spirituals are the resources of strength and struggle in black theology of liberation: expressed in the call of God, the quest for freedom, prophesy against injustice, the prayer and struggle to bring down evil, sinful conditions and evil structures, the loyalty to service; building a new world.

#### In the Emerging Perceptions and Praxis From the Black Theological Academic Arena

We can analyze and illustrate certain aspects of black theology of liberation through source and norm, content and form as well as the ways and means of "doing theology" in the dialectic-context of the historical experiences of african-americans.

As source and norm, God care and God consciousness have prevailed in every situation of experience in renewing human life inspite of every situation of oppression tearing down the human life. God care always affirmed before knowledge and was rooted in the wisdom of our ancestors, we are reminded:

"no one has to teach a child God."

Our foreparents brought this God-consciousness into slavery and throughout our history. A caring God is the source and norm of liberation from exploitation and oppression, from atheism and skepticism, and from cynicism and ignorance.

As slavery and its legacy assaulted every relationship of dignity-personal, social and supernatural, there was a theological thread of pathos in the multiple pains of brokenness evident in the spiritual: Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home.

Oppression is the sin that established the interposition of dehumanizing and depersonalizing circumstances in the predicament of being or



feeling "a long way from" home. (Home is the providential relationship of God care and the theological relationship of God consciousness.) Estrangement from self "I feel": separated from maternal roots (from Africa) "A motherless child": separated from God "a long way from home."

It was from the residue of sensitivity to care and the resilience of trust in God-consciousness that affirmed the deeply compassionate God who always knew and cared for the predicament of black folk, bearing the burden of oppression in the heat of the day.

We are all our heavenly Father's children and we all know that God loves us one and all . . . and God knows . . . Yes, God knows just how much we can bear . . ."

As source of Black Theology of Liberation, God is the unmoveable given, creator-parent of the humanity of african children known as black americans and the providentially-guiding, sustaining-parent through every situation and circumstance of experience. Therefore, as norm, God of the oppressed is the kind of God reality necessary for "doing theology" the God of our fathers unconditionally and ultimately identifies with the disinherited and dispossed (through Jesus), and wills against the depersonalizing inhumanity of oppressors and the sinfulness in the historical existence and ongoing existential predicament of exploiting black people and poor people in the U.S. otherwise, because of the magnitude of oppression and the implication inherent in divine powerlessness, the conclusion would be "Is God a white racist?"

Black Theology of Liberation is the prophetic proclamation that the liberation struggle has the highest priority on God's agenda:

"I have heard the cry of my people . . ."

Consequently, Black Theology perceives the liberation message and pursues the mission of empowerment of African-Americans as paramount in the light of the biblical revelation. The word of God in divine revelation and human faith inspired to assure Black Americans to trust the will of God in the struggle for freedom, justice and the future where providence has the ultimate design.

In the light of history, philosophy, social ethics and the multiple ministries of the church in the life of the world, that knowledge which is essentially the substance of the Black experience is the primary reference and *raison d'être* for Black Theology of Liberation.

The history of Black Americans has been a religious one—from the African heritage, the experience of Christ in America, the emergence of the Black Church to the vanguard of Black Theology of Liberation. There has been the agony of oppression, of being caught in the "underside of history," "topos," the black victimization of historical materialism and racism, being "opaque." But the hand of God has been in support of the ministry of black religion and the purposes of the redemption of Africa and African people.

The philosophy of survival, for the most part of Black Christianity, has been the pragmatic approach to the existential realities of the protracted exploitation. However, the philosophy of liberation has increased the



understanding of the Black Experience in the dialectic process and its method in confronting and changing the empirical conditions.

In social ethics, the black experience rejects the dualism or separation of the sacred and secular values, personal and social gospel, the anti-human character of individualism and competition for selfish ends, supporting the praxiological approach, struggle for change where values come alive in transformed human and social relationships. The ministries of the Black Church have provided the spiritual resources from which Black Theology has been informed and enriched. The liberation struggle has always been the black agenda, incognito, for building up and maintaining a people through it all. Black Theology of Liberation advocates theological reconstruction from existential praxis.

In Black Theology of Liberation as content and form, Christ Jesus is "de Lawd" of the high God made flesh and engagingly empathizes in the humanity of the black experience. Jesus Christ is seen both as "one in the father" and "one in the least of these my brethren" (the black oppressed).

The African social analysis and affirmation: I am because we are and since we are, I am, is now a divine human dialectic, synthesized in Jesus Christ, the content and form of black theology of liberation.

Liberation is the knock like Jesus on the door-houses of the oppressed with the good news, the gospel of liberation, for the oppressed that Jesus makes the house of the black religious experience, a home . . . steal away home. . . .

As content, Jesus Christ is the Redeeming Liberator accomplishing that part of the mission of salvation history wherein black people become a part of the new humanity in our father's household on earth, indeed in the context of African-American humanity in the U.S.A. The Christ of God as Jesus identified in the oppressed humanity is despised and rejected by men who dominate those considered without comeliness, to be hid in humiliation.

But by the paradox of the wisdom of God and the foolishness to dominating men, Jesus Christ has become the Black Messiah the Word made flesh in the humanity, the history and the hope, accomplishing the prophesy of the Black Madonna, in the magnificent annunciation of the Gospel of Liberation:

God will put down the mighty and send them empty away.

Jesus said, "To this end was I born and for this cause come I into the world."