By CHARLES S. BROWN*

Black Theology and African Heritage[1]

Scholars interpreting the power of Zionism frequently emphasize its being rooted in "the continuity of nation, land, and God." When I heard this point made by a scholar from Israel, after my return from a sabbatical in Nigeria, I was struck by the aptness of the phrase in describing the aspirations and the issues in the resurgent interest of Blackamericans[2] in Africa.

My experience of indigenous life in Africa emphasized that who a particular people are is inextricably bound up with the land they inhabit and their religion. The major qualification of this finding in relation to Zionism, as described above, is the plurality of religions that claim the loyalty of Africans and the plurality of spirits and powers that must be included in divinity.

With respect to the plurality of religions that claim the loyalty of Africans, it must be understood that African religious life is characterized by interaction among three major religions: indigenous African religion, Christianity, and Islam. However, the nature of this interaction is not what it might appear to be on the surface, especially when viewed from the perspective of the Western understanding of religion. Nor are the terms of the interaction equal.

Everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, Christianity and Islam have been appropriated and operate in environments that, to a significant degree, have developed coextensively with indigenous African religions. These religions sustain the societies of which they are a part and, in turn, are sustained by them. Thus, a faculty member of the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Ibadan early remarked to me that Islam and Christianity had more to gain from commitment to dialogue than from competitive hostility because, in African societies, both are built on the platform of indigenous religion. Similarly, John Mbiti

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observes that, while an official religious census of the African continent numbered only 80 million followers of African religion as compared with 150 million Christians and 150 Muslims, "the majority of those who were counted as Christians, and many of the Muslims, still stuck to some of their African religious ideas and practices."[3] Mbiti goes on to state that many millions of Africans involved are, in effect, "followers of more than one religion, even if they may register or be counted in the census as adherents of only one religion."[4] This is especially true of sub-Saharan Africa as Mbiti's religious map of the continent shows.

With respect to the plurality of spirits and powers, African theologians such as Mbiti and Bolai Idowu have consistently maintained that African religious beliefs and practices concerning such beings are related to a monotheistic understanding of God as Creator and Supreme Power. The language used by both to describe the status and role of spirits draws on images of angels as mediators between God and human beings.[5] Their point is to focus attention on the widespread belief in the existence of a Supreme Being among sub-Saharan Africans. Typically, this Supreme Being created the world, human beings, and all other creatures, including spirits through whom the powers of the Supreme Being are more readily available to humans. This is so because the spirits live closer to the human world and are viewed as more directly concerned, or "interested" in everyday human affairs. Thus the spirits are frequently appealed to or invoked for aid, although there are also instances of direct appeal to the Supreme Being. Of course, some of the spirits are former human beings, ancestors, or heroes, who lived praiseworthy lives and are believed to be able to help their descendants or devotees by making the powers of the spirit world more available to them. Nevertheless, all of the spirits, and the powers available to them, depend on the Supreme Being—whom we more commonly call God.

The major differences between this understanding and traditional Christian and Jewish interpretations are the sense of the direct involvement of God in the lives of believers and beliefs regarding the efficacy of direct address to the Supreme Being. This could lead into a debate over the monotheistic character of African religion, but that would have no relationship to our present concern.

The Significance of Black Theology

Having given attention to preliminary matters resident in the threefold principle of continuity it is also necessary to explain why I chose to consider the issues involved from the standpoint of Black Theology, and why the focus on sub-Saharan Africa in the preceding discussion. Since the latter task is simpler, it will be undertaken first.

During my sabbatical, I became familiar with the phrase "Africa south of the Sahara" as a geographic specification referring to peoples and

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[3] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (New York: Praeger Publs., 1975), p. 30.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 40 and E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 57-70.

cultures of black Africa, as distinguished from the Arabic people and cultures in the northern part of the continent. Although all belong to the Organization of African Unity, and a policy of solidarity on issues of vital concern to either of the two main geographic and cultural areas is promoted, the distinction does serve to identify more basic communities of political, economic and cultural interest within the umbrella organization and on the continent as a whole. The distinction is also particularly relevant to Blackamericans because it identifies more specifically the peoples, cultures and geographic area we are referring to when we speak of "Africa."

The focus on Black Theology requires more extensive consideration. In a real sense, the first concrete opportunities for me to visit both the Caribbean and Africa grew out of interest in theology on the part of persons in these regions. With respect to the Caribbean, I had the privilege of being invited to be the theological consultant to a Consultation on the Responsibility of the Churches to the Family in that area.[6] As for Africa, I was first elected to participate in a consultation on African and Black theology as a member of the U.S. delegation. The consultation met in Ghana at the end of December 1974, and marked the first time that Blackamerican and African scholars engaged in systematic, intense, and in-depth dialogue on their respective theological projects.[7]

My second opportunity to visit West Africa proved to be the most persuasive. It came as the result of the suggestion by the Reverend Professor E. Bolaji Idowu, then Head of the Department of Religious studies at the University of Ibadan, that the public feature of my residence at the university be a series of lectures on *"Theological Revolution* Among Afro-Americans in the United States." The significance of his interest is underscored by the fact of his rejection of the term Black Theology, while being profoundly aware of the importance of the theological movement to which it refers. Thus, although this concern was tangential to my field research interests and—I might add—quite time-consuming, implementation of this proposal in two public lectures sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies proved to be the most productive activity of my sabbatical.

In addition to these biographical considerations, there are structural, disciplinary reasons for the focus on theology. Charles Long, now of the University of North Carolina, has made much of the fact that, prior to the popularity of Black Theology, black scholars had done theology from the standpoint of ethics.[8] In this light, the emergence of Black Theology, *for the first time,* established the theological work of Blackamericans on the foundational discipline of the Christian religious enterprise.

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[6]Cf. Lillith Haynes, ed. *Fambli.* Proceedings of a Consultation conducted by CARIPLAN (available through Church World Service).

[7]Proceedings from the Consultation were published by the Howard University School of Religion in *The Journal of Religious Thought,* Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Fall-Winter, 1975).

[8]To my knowledge, this observation has not appeared in print. Although, it has been made in a variety of informal and formal settings where the nature and significance of Black Theology were being discussed.

One need only remember theology's claim to be "queen of the sciences," articulated in the Medieval period. This reflected a basically Thomistic understanding of the precedence of the theoretical intellect over the practical intellect, with theology being the highest form of scientific knowledge.[9] Although theology has since been dethroned, especially in major American universities, it has remained the *queen of the Christian religious sciences—the authenticating discipline* for all forms of religious knowledge and religiously-motivated activity.

We may be helped to understand the function ascribed to theology here by borrowing some concepts from Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales, and Edward A. Shils' work on the sociology of the American family. Looking at nuclear family patterns at mid-century, Parsons and his colleagues found that the structure of the nuclear family, could be treated as a consequence of differentiation on two axes: one of hierarchy or power, and the other of instrumental vs. expressive functions.[10] Instrumental functions are described in terms of the management, technical expertise, and rational tasks of the family, while expressive functions are described in terms of fellowship, affectional ties and tension-reducing activity.

The preceding discussion would indicate that among the Christian religious sciences, viewed as such, theology performs an instrumental function. Ethics, on the other hand, performs an expressive function— especially when viewed in terms of its practical aspects; and these aspects are particularly relevant when the issue of race is involved because, in American life, race is never experienced as an abstract issue. Lest I be misunderstood, it should be noted that the terms are used only for illustrative purposes and are not intended to describe a model for family relations in the 1970's and beyond or, for that matter, a model for relationships among the disciplines necessary for theological education and ministry. The point is, as these disciplines have developed and tended to interact, theology has served a foundational and normative function while ethics have been regarded as secondary and, to some extent, peripheral to the basic concerns of Christian religionists.

In this sense, the emergence of Black Theology marks a breakthrough in the long-standing efforts of Blackamericans to challenge white American Christianity on ethical grounds. The significance of this change in approach and emphasis is suggested by the previous discussion. While the immediate problem lies in the domain of ethics, theology is the foundation of the superstructure and, as such, makes possible the accommodation of ethical criticism as a secondary rather than a primary concern. In this exchange, the superstructure sighs benignly while remaining profoundly undisturbed. However, the sheer *credibility* of Black Theology calls into question the character and the content of the Christian religious enterprise.

This is particularly true of the audacious claim of the normative validity

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[9]Cf. Ralph L. Pounds, *The Development of Education in Western Culture* (N.Y.: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1968), p. 89.
[10]Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1955), pp. 45ff.

of Black Theology in the work of James Cone. Arguing persuasively on the basis of a sound principle of Biblical hermeneutics, and against the background of substantial work in the sociology of knowledge, Cone maintains that the starting point for valid exegesis of the Scriptures from a Christian perspective is "the revelation of God in Christ as the Liberator of the oppressed *from* social oppression and *to* political struggle."[11] Related to this is Cone's understanding of the nature and task of Christian theology:

> Theology is always a word about the liberation of the oppressed and the humiliated. It is a word of judgment for the oppressors and the rulers. Whenever theologians fail to make this point unmistakably clear, they are not doing Christian theology but the theology of the Antichrist.[12]

This conception of the *starting point* and the criterion of Christian theology constitutes the essence of Cone's argument for the normative validity of Black Theology. His proposal clearly inverts the order and the priorities of established contemporary forms of Christian theology. In so doing, Cone's work indicates that perhaps the genius of Black Theology, in relation to the circumstances described in this discussion, is the fact that it effectively transforms moral issues into theological questions. This leads to the development of theological affirmations having truly normative character and truly imperative force, in comparison with more secondary moral assertions.

Moreover, by means of this shift of emphasis and focus, Black theology not only makes a breakthrough of substantial proportions, but also, and more importantly, achieves a new level of legitimation for theological reflection upon the personal and communal experiences of black people. Thus, the breakthrough achieved by Black Theology has not only affected Christian theology as a whole, but it has also established black religious experience as theologically significant to blacks as well as others. For it must be said that some Blackamericans and many West Indians and Africans, would have paid no attention to Black Theology if it had not created such a stir among whites. This is not to deny that the traditional practitioners, as well as the chief protagonists, strategists and supporters of Black Theology are, and always have been, black. It is, rather, to call attention to the indigenous significance of the tacit acceptance of Black Theology within the larger academic and ecclesiastical communities.

Grounded in that tacit acceptance, this paper is concerned to explore further some central considerations in the enterprise of theological reflection on black experience. It does so by focusing and lifting up some of the criticial issues involved in the concern of Blackamericans with their African heritage and the concern of Africans to critically evaluate their own religious traditions in light of the claims and contributions of Black Theology. I have chosen to discuss these matters in terms of two issues: (1) the issue of peoplehood or identity; and (2) the issue of land or ownership. The issue of corporate religious loyalty or God will be treated in another context.

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[11] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 81.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 83.

The Issue of Peoplehood or Identity

I began this paper with the assertion that the Zionist understanding of continuity of nation, land, and God in modern Israel was similar to my own experience of indigenous life in Nigeria; more specifically, I stated that *who the people are is inextricably bound up with the land they inhabit and their religion.* In subsequent discussion, I also pointed out the continuing role and presence of African religion, not only through its exclusive adherents but also through the persistence of some beliefs and practices among adherents of Christianity and Islam. Both of these previous observations are important to more in-depth consideration of issues of continuity and discontinuity in African experiences of peoplehood and the relation of these to indentity questions involved in the concern of Blackamericans to investigate their African heritage.

It cannot be stressed too much that traditional African ways of life provide the soil and the conditions in terms of which the rapid modernization of African societies is taking place. This is the basic sense in which the three-fold principle of continuity is manifested. Just as African religion provides the environment and the "platform" for participation in Christianity and Islam, African culture and social tradition provide the environment and the "platform" for the modernization of African societies. Thus, in understanding the issues raised in this section of the paper, it is exceedingly important to recognize that despite the considerable influence of Islam and Christianity in shaping African societies and despite the education and sophistication of a growing number of Africans, *indigenous social patterns, life styles, and world-views constitute the underlying fabric of existence.* Underneath the veneer and manners of modernization, older world-views and ways of life continue to operate.

On the other hand, there are discontinuities involved in the transitions associated with education, economic development, and the nation-building that are presently underway. Most important among these for our purposes are the appropriation of larger identities, some breakdown of extended family patterns, and increasing commitment to individualism as a philosophy of life. A brief discussion of each is in order to clarify the nature of these transitions and their relevance to the issue being considered.

The need to appropriate larger identities is particularly related to the formation of nation-states in former colonial territories. It is common-place to point out that present political boundaries in Africa were arbitrarily established by patterns of European colonization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, without regard to indigenous political or cultural boundaries. The result is the division of some cultural groups among two or more modern nations and the amalgamation of others into a single nation.

It is not hard to imagine that the process of amalgamation generates substantial conflict in situations where indigenous ethnic and cultural identities are strong and are exacerbated by a history of hostilities among the groups involved. The Nigerian civil war of the 1960's decade is a

classic instance of such conflict. Factors of this kind are also significant to present tensions in Uganda, Kenya, and Zaire. Thus, while the continuity referred to is readily apparent in the indigenous geographic region of any significant African cultural and ethnic group, it does not tend to be characterisitc of modern African nations as political, economic, cultural, and religious entities. Indeed, the ability of these nations to solve the most critical problems of nation-building depends on their effectiveness in promoting *a sense of nation-hood* among the diverse ethnic and cultural groups within their boundaries.

This process is underway but is far from complete in most of the countries with which we are concerned. Significantly, there is a sense in which it is easier for many people to appropriate the larger identity African than it is for them to appropriate the national identity under which they claim citizenship. This may have much to do with the fact that "African" is more of a symbolic identity than citizenship in a nation-state, and whatever claims "Africa" makes on one's loyalty does not involve the kinds of conditions, rewards, and sanctions that pertain to citizenship.

Breakdown of extended family patterns and increasing commitment to individualism as a philosophy of life are more directly related to education and economic conditions than to political considerations. Increasing involvement in an economy based on capital accumulation and emphasis on education as a means for improving one's viability have been major contributing factors.

In the first instance, patterns of divestment wherein personal wealth was shared broadly among family members have given way to a sense of the burden of responsibility for aiding siblings or their children out of the relatively small amount of means that one has managed to accumulate. There simply is not enough money available to first-generation professionals and entrepreneurs to meet the expectations regarding the economic value of their success to other family members. Moreover, largely by means of education, they have been resocialized into an individualistic value system. This value system is reinforced by an opportunity structure in which their ability to continue to advance depends on their avoidance of encumbrances that restrict capital accumulation and vocational mobility.

This situation places considerable strain on the exercise of extended family obligations. Thus, it is somewhat surprising to find the high degree of loyalty and substantial effort to fulfill such obligations on the part of many who complain about them. Nevertheless, there is also clear evidence of significant modifications of previous definitions of these obligations and negotiation of limitation on the extent of obligation involved.

With these factors of continuity and discontinuity in African experiences of peoplehood before us, we will now turn our attention to questions of identity in the concern of Blackamericans for investigation of their African heritage.

Manifestations of continuity in African identity are extremely important to Blackamericans in their quest to discover continuities in the

identity Afro-American. This is clearly demonstrated in Alex Haley's study of his own "roots."[13] It is also evident in the considerable writing, literary and scholarly, on the Africanness of Blackamericans; a sense which is frequently expressed in the testimonies of Blackamericans who have visited or lived in Africa.

These works and testimonies are given additional impetus by the emphasis of some anthropologists and religion scholars on the underlying unity of the cultures in sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, Daryll Forde[14] has made a case for the basic cultural unity of West Africa and Jacques Maquet[15] has made a similar case for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. John Mbiti has long been an advocate of this point of view in the study of African religion.[16] While these contentions are debated by scholars who cite phenomena of considerable diversity in general structure and detail among the societies involved, the issue and proposal of cultural unity merits the serious attention of anyone engaged in the Blackamerican quest for continuity with African heritage.

But this is not the whole story. Blackamericans, for whom a trip to the African continent is always in some sense a pilgrimage, frequently encounter the continuity of peoplehood, land, and religion in African societies as a problem. This is partly due to the fact that we experience profound discontinuities in our understanding of ourselves as a people (a community of suffering-oppression), in corporate relationship to the land in which we live (alienation), and the ambiguous role of religion as a foundational element in the cultural, social and personal dimensions of our existence. It is also partly due to inability to enter directly and immediately into either the easy participation of Africans in indigenous patterns or their modes of appropriation of Western cultural forms and values.

Thus, one of the important learnings of the sabbatical experience for me was the realization that I could be a part of indigenous life, but I could not act as if that life *belonged* to me. I could belong to it, and by belonging, acquire a measure of ownership. But I could not begin by assuming a measure of ownership that gave me the right to shape indigenous life according to my own needs and images.

Moreover, I did not go to Africa to find out who I am. My sense of corporate and personal identity as a Blackamerican was, and is, quite clear. And it was in light of this sense that I was able to participate in the identity African, without making Africans over in my image or making myself over in theirs.

A second issue of identity in the exchange between Blackamericans and Africans is the role of color in the self-definition and theologizing of Blackamericans. This issue is expressed in the question put to Gayraud

[13] Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, N.Y.,: Doubleday, 1976).

[14] Cited in Charles Long, "Perspectives for a Study of Afro-American Religion in the United States," *History of Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (August 1971), p. 57.

[15] Jacques Maquet, *Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa,* tr. Joan Rayfield N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972).

[16] *Op. cit.,* pp. 7ff.

Wilmore and James Cone by a young Ghanaian: "Why do you speak of *black* theology? Why don't you call the theology you are doing today African theology?"[17] Similar questions were put to me in Nigeria.

Significantly, one of my questioners pointed out that the color of God would not be an issue for African children in her culture because they would tend to assume that God was the color of their parents. An important exception to this claim is the Republic of South Africa where an indigenous form of Black Theology has emerged.[18] Thus, it is important to recognize that the issue of color turns on the relevance of color to the social and political context of theologizing.

With respect to the American scene it is clear that Black Theology draws its color designation from a profound movement within the black community in America whereby Blackamericans were required to *face up* to the problem of color. *Color* was the basis of our degradation and dehumanization. Color marked us off for special treatment as "inferiors." And the problem with our color was not that we were "colored," but, to the extent that we were "colored," we were colored *black*—in a white world.

Thus, our blackness was the deepest and most profound symbol of our degradation, and, whatever our "color," to be *called* black was the worst insult we could experience, or inflict upon one another. Happy day, when we gave up trying to be "Negroes" and declared to the world that *we knew we were black, and saw that blackness as the foundation of our humanity*. When the fear and insult of the taunt from my childhood, "A.B.C.: America's Blackest Child" gave way to "Say it loud! I'm black, and I'm proud."

The Issue of Ownership

Charles Long's essay from the Ghana Consultation makes some important observations regarding Blackamerican and African theologizing on the issue of land. The first is that the image of Africa, as "a place where the natural and ordinary gestures of the Black man were and could be authenticated," has been a primordial religious image of great significance for Blackamericans.[19] Africa is the ground symbol and concrete place of origin of those who know themselves—and are known—by the color designation black. Thus, the image of Africa has always been an important dimension of self-designation in the rise and development of independent religious institutions and the dominant sign in every nationalistic movement among Blackamericans.[20]

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[17] In Priscilla Massie, compiler, *Black Faith and Black Solidarity: Pan-Africanism and Faith in Christ* (New York: Friendship Press, 1973), p. 104.

[18] Basil Moore, ed., *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1974).

[19] Charles H. Long, "Structural Similarities and Dis-Similarities in Black and African Theologies," *The Journal of Religious Thought* (JRT), Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1975), p. 11.

[20] *Ibid.*

Long goes further to point out the uniqueness of this image in light of the fact that the Black community in America is a landless people.[21] It is clear that we don't own any land in Africa. And, *despite the fact that we may own pieces of property in this country, the land is not viewed as belonging to us.* Indeed, similar to my experience of ownership with respect to indigenous culture in Nigeria. Blackamericans are primarily regarded as belonging to the land. We are *a special possession of America, required to belong but not allowed to acquire any ownership of the land in which we live.* Indeed, belonging to the land, we are still in a sense, the property of those who claim sole ownership of the land. Thus, the image of Africa is the image of a land to which we belong and which is still owned by the descendants of our African ancestors. But that land, too does not belong to us.

Thus, Long described Blackamerican theologizing as *utopian* in comparison with African theologizing which is tempered by *topos*—a concrete sense of place. In Long's words, the African sense of *topos* is

> the sense of being in a place and knowing what that place means and having traditions, languages, (and) modes of life that make that place, your place, an intimate and familiar place. It is also the sense that one's ancestors know that place, that they humanized it and gave it a name, and that in their customs and languages there is a wisdom for the coming generations.[22]

By contrast, Long maintains that the topos for the Black American is not a land. It is, rather, "a place defined by a legal and sociological relationship." Thus the notion of "being in one's place" which, for the Blackamerican, has always defined an inferior legal status. In light of this, Long states: "Black American theological thought thus tends to be utopian in its orientation, *seeking a proper place,* place here including also land where the Black will not be alien." (Italics added).

These factors account for the expectations and investments in Africa of many Blackamericans who succeed in making the pilgrimage "home." That these very expectations and investments frequently lead to profound, and sometimes bitter, disappointment should surprise no one who is both aware of them and knowledgeable with respect to the African context.

The factors identified in Long's analysis also have profound significance for a fundamental difference between most African versions of Christian theology and Blackamerican versions. The preponderant issue for African theology is Africanization: the task of making Christ "more real in and through African life and thought."[23] For Blackamericans, the fundamental theological issue is freedom, or, in more contemporary terms, *liberation.* To be sure, there is an element of liberation in the task of Africanization, but that element is primarily *cultural.* On the other hand the spiritual and physical transformations implied in the liberation emphasis of Blackamericans is primarily *political.*

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[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 12.

It must be pointed out that politically-oriented understandings and ventures are also present among Africans. This is especially true of conciliar organizations, such as the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Institute of Church and Society sponsored by the Christian Council of Nigeria. It is also true of the theological perspectives associated with the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Nevertheless, the best-publicized efforts in African Christian theology emphasize cultural rather than political concerns.

In closing, I want to note briefly a further implication of the circumstance of Blackamericans being a landless people. This implication is the suggestion by C. Shelby Rooks that the image of "an African Diaspora," based on the Biblical story of the Babylonian Exile and the Final Jewish Diaspora is a more accurate and a more useful image in the "quest for Black selfhood" than the prevailing Exodus image.[24] Rooks writes: "Black Theology in these days must construct or utilize a new image, that lifts up the African roots of Black Americans, an image that recognizes an extended sojourn in an alien culture, and that fixes the collective eye on a future unconnected with physical possession of this land or assimilation of its culture."[25] What Rooks is proposing is not emigration to Africa, but a new Afro-American religious venture in which liberation is understood in terms of *transformation* of the personal and social existence of black people rather than in terms of Exodus-wilderness-conquest.

On the other hand, the Exodus image is much too powerful, and too necessary, an image to be discarded lightly. What is needed is not the choice of one of these images over against the other, or the elimination of one in light of the other. What is needed is the creation of a new image that draws on these meaningful, powerful and relevant Biblical images without being determined by their Biblical context. The fact is that Blackamericans are in diaspora and that the liberation we seek does involve overcoming our alienation from the land in which we live and the land of our origin.

Important differences with the Biblical context are that Exile comes before Exodus and that the Exodus itself takes place inside Egypt. Our Exodus is not in terms of a place to which we are going, but it requires the transformation of ourselves and the place we already inhabit: the land of our oppression—which we cofounded by virtue of our participation in the Revolutionary cause, which we helped to build with our labor, which we have blessed with our gifts of song, poetry, and inventive imagination, and which still demands of us an ardent struggle for justice. The "promised land" envisioned by Martin Luther King is not out there somewhere: it is *freedom, inside us,* waiting to be born through our

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[23] Kwesi Dickson, "African Theology: Origin, Methodology and Content" *JRT*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1975), p. 38.

[24] C. Shelby Rooks, "Toward the Promised Land," The 1972 Scott Lectures, Texas Christian University, February 15-17, 1972, pp. 7-14.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

continued struggle in the land of our oppression so that it may be transformed into the promised land we seek.

The project involved is not a new one. Indeed, it is the project we have been involved in since the first slaves were brought to this land of opportunity aboard a ship named the Jesus; and since, some 150 years later, a new republic was born declaring that all human beings are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *inalienable* rights and, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is a project well described by Langston Hughes.

> Let America be America again.
> Let it be *the dream* it used to be.
> Let it be the pioneer on the plain
> Seeking a home where he himself is free.
>
> (America never was America to me.)
>
> Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
> Let it be that great strong land of love
> Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
> That any man be crushed by one above.
>
> (It never was America to me.)
>
> O, let my land be a land where Liberty
> Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
> But opportunity is real, and life is free,
> Equality is in the air we breathe.
>
> (There's never been equality for me,
> Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")
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> O, let America be America again—
> The land that never has been yet—
> And yet must be—
> The land where every man is free.
> The land that's mine—
> The poor man's, Indian's, Negro's ME—
> Who made America,
> Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
> Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
> Must bring back our mighty dream again.
>
> Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—
> The steel of freedom does not stain.
>
> O, yes,
> I say it plain,
> America never was America to me,
> And yet I swear this oath—
> America will be!
> An ever-living seed,
> Its dream
> Lies deep in the heart of me.
>
> We, the people, must redeem
> Our land, the mines, the plants, the rivers,
> The mountains and the endless plain—
> All, all the stretch of these great green states—
> And make America again![26]

[26] Langston Hughes, "Let America Be America Again," in Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1970* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 193-195.