

## Response to Bishop John Adams

Dr. Copher, President Roberts, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen: At the offset I should like to congratulate the Interdenominational Theological Centre for its wisdom in selecting a distinguished Black Liberation Theologian as its President. This is a fitting thing to do since Liberation is what the Black church has been all about. I am pleased to have had the good fortune of knowing Dr. J. DeOtis Roberts as colleague and personal friend for many years and am confident that you have in him one who is not only an internationally recognized scholar, but, also one who is fully committed, both by experience and disposition, to the task of training men and women for ministry in the Black churches.

Now, Bishop Adams has provided us with a manifesto for Black Theological Education in the 1980's. He has said it all with great eloquence and no small amount of persuasion. There is nothing he has said with which I can take issue. I think that we have all been helped by this splendid presentation. Hence, my comments will be merely supplementary.

Racial Liberation has been the central motif of the Black church's origin, ministry and mission. While some may have certain difficulties with the rhetoric of liberation theology, clearly, its substance has been agreed upon totally by every generation of Black Christians. Black Americans received the Christian gospel in a veil of racism but, by some miracle, they were able to see through that veil to the reality of the Christian faith and institutionalized a non-racist form of the Christian gospel. This, and this alone, makes the Black churches unique in this land because no other social or religious institution in this country has a tradition that is non-racist. The aim and function of the Black churches has been that of actualizing that reality in all of its life. Hence, while we have inherited our several denominational forms of doctrine and polity from our white brethren, it is, nevertheless, true that whether we be Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Apostolics, or whatever, we are all united in our common efforts to oppose racism in all of its cruel forms. The bed-rock on which we are all firmly established is racial liberation by the grace of God.

Thus, the formation of the Black church, our Black church founders enacted a Black theology. Their theology was much more radical than

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ours is because the Black churches they brought into being constituted the first Black Nationalist Movement. They felt themselves morally and religiously obligated to separate themselves from their white brethren who believed in and practiced racism, lest they, themselves, become corrupted by such defiance of God's will. Hence, they felt called by both God and conscience to disassociate themselves from such beliefs and practices.

Not only is this liberation thrust and its rationale the essence of the Black Christian tradition, it is also the root of our ecumenicity. We did not need either the National or the World Council of Churches to remind us of the nature of our unity. Rather, we have always been united in the common cause that has brought us into being and which forges our common unity daily, namely, our commitment to the non-racist appropriation of the Christian gospel and the many and various attempts to express its implications for all phases of our national life.

The Interdenominational Theological Centre here in Atlanta can and must become the scholarly and professional institutionalization of Black Liberation Theology and be a model for theological education everywhere: viz, one that is faithful to our Lord by its vigorous and unfaltering commitment to fight racism in thought and practice everywhere. This is, and should be, the life and destiny of ITC and it is pleasing to see that Dr. J. DeOtis Roberts has the capacity to direct that pilgrimage. May God bless all of you in this endeavor.