

THE CHARLES STRONG MEMORIAL TRUST

**TOWARDS A BLACK
THEOLOGY
(1971)**

&

**LEARNING FROM BLACK THEOLOGY
(2011)**

**Historic Papers
by Basil Moore**



**CHARLES STRONG
(Australian Church)
MEMORIAL TRUST**

**For the Promotion in Australia
of the Sympathetic Study
of World Religions
www.charlesstrongtrust.org.au**

ISBN 978-0-9804379-4-2

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Preface

The aim of the Charles Strong Trust is to promote—in Australia—a sympathetic study of world religions and of the interplay between religion studies and other academic disciplines. Each year the Charles Strong Trust sponsors at least one lecture in accord with this aim. Annual lectures are now accessible on the Trust website (www.charlesstrongtrust.org.au).

In this volume the Trust honours the work of Basil Moore, former Professor of Curriculum Studies at the University of South Australia, by printing two of his papers – delivered 40 years apart. The first paper is an historic document prepared for the South African University Christian Movement in February 1971 and the second for the Rhodes University Graduation in April 2011.

Basil Moore was honoured by Rhodes University at the Graduation Ceremony in April 2011 when he received an honorary doctorate and also received an apology from the University for refusing him a lecturing post during the apartheid regime. The basis for this honour is detailed in a release by the University (<http://www.ru.ac.za/latestnews/name,36114,en.html>).

He has also been nominated for an honorary doctorate by the South African University (KwaZulu-Natal) for his work in Black Theology and its role in the struggle against apartheid.

With the release of this volume at the AASR (Australian Association for the Study of Religion) Conference in October 2013, we again honour Basil Moore for his contribution to the liberation of oppressed people in South Africa as well as for his radical re-reading of the Christian tradition, a reading in line with the theology of Rev. Charles Strong back in the nineteenth century.

Reflecting upon the writing of his historic paper of 1971, Basil says:

This paper was written after I had attended a conference of the American University Christian Movement (UCM) in Cleveland Ohio in late 1967 along with 2 colleagues from the South African UCM. At the conference we were exposed to the ideas and strategies of the Black Power Movement in the United States. I was persuaded to go on to meet with the black theologian, James Cone.

I was convinced by the case he made for a black theology and when I got back to South Africa spent a few years trying to work through the implications of a black theology for the South African context. This paper, written in 1970 (and delivered in 1971), is the outcome of that reflection.

When the paper was circulated through the UCM network it was immediately banned by the South African government. The views expressed were also strongly condemned by the Methodist Church in which I was an ordained clergyman.

The most significant outcome of this paper was that it gave birth to a vibrant black theology movement, which enabled vast numbers of black Christians to become politically active, as Christians, in the struggle against apartheid. The engagement of black Christians in the struggle played a very significant role in the eventual demise of apartheid and the birth of the New South Africa.

With the benefit of hindsight I now cringe at the sexist language that permeates the paper. I have chosen not to edit this language out but to present the paper in the form as it was presented some 40 years ago.

The second paper (2011) is a more complete reflection on the course of events related to the release of Basil Moore's first paper (1971) and highlights the significance of Basil Moore's role in the struggle of specific Christian groups against apartheid.

With the publication of these papers, the Strong Trust honours Basil Moore here in Australia for his contribution to the study of religion in Australia. In 1975 Basil joined the newly formed Department of Religion Studies at the then Adelaide College of Advanced Education which later became part of the University of South Australia.

Basil was a key figure in the introduction of Typology as a vehicle for studying religion from a non-partisan perspective in Australia. Among the publications which reflect this perspective are *When Religion Goes to School*, *Typology of Religion for the Classroom* and *Finding a Way: The Religious Worlds of Today*.

Basil's commitment to social justice gained from his experiences in South Africa is reflected in two volumes: *Teaching for Resistance* drafted by the Education for Social Justice Research Group in which Basil played a key role and *Social Justice in Today's World*.

The Charles Strong Trust applauds Basil Moore for his work in the Study of Religion, work that achieved penetrative and lasting results.

Norman Habel (chair),
Robert Crotty,
Michael O'Donoghue
(trustees of the Charles Strong Trust)

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Learning from Black Theology

*Paper prepared by Basil Moore
for Rhodes University Graduation
8 April 2011*

Chancellor, Professor Gerwel, Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Badat, Deputy Vice Chancellors Drs Clayton and Mabizela, Councillors and members of the University Senate, I want to take this opportunity to express my delight and heartfelt thanks for the honour the University community has bestowed on me today. I also want to offer my congratulations to the graduands, who are joining the alumni of this renowned university.

I wish to use this occasion to reflect on Black Theology, now 41 years from its emergence as an overt, self-conscious and radically new theology in South Africa. I choose to do this because I was intimately involved with the emergence of Black Theology in South Africa and secondly because of its link to your Vice Chancellor's passionate recognition of the part played by black university students in the struggle for liberation in his recent history of SASO. Here I recount something of the story of a different group of black students and the ideas that informed their struggle.

Black Theology is now a spent force but nevertheless I believe it has lessons for us all. I offer now my story which I have entitled 'Learning from Black Theology'.

Black Theology will forever be associated with the University Christian Movement (UCM) which formed in 1967 in opposition to the long established Student Christian Association (SCA)

I remind you that in Apartheid South Africa, the SCA was for white English-speaking Protestant students. There was a separate organisation for white Afrikaans-speaking students and also distinct organisations for those labelled 'non-white'- black, coloured and Indian students. When the World Students Christian Federation demanded an end to this racist structuring, the SCA refused preferring to disaffiliate from the world body. At this time I was Methodist Chaplain to Rhodes and in concert with Fr. Colin Collins, the national Catholic Chaplain and Fr. John Davies, the national Anglican Chaplain, we proposed a new student Christian body which would be both non-racial and radically ecumenical by including both Catholics and Protestants. We submitted our ideas to our parent church bodies in 1966 and they agreed to sponsor the new body which we called the University Christian Movement (UCM). Its inaugural conference was held in July 1967 at the Anglican-run teacher training college here in Grahamstown with about 90 students attending. Over the next 2 years 30 branches were established in universities seminaries and training colleges. The government at this time banned the student wings of all the black political parties, so black students joined up with the UCM as virtually the only place they could meet, making it almost overnight a black majority body.

At this time on the other side of the world it also happened that a student Christian body, also called the University Christian Movement, had been formed in the USA. They invited our fledgling UCM to send three members to their conference in Cleveland Ohio in December of 1967. I was chosen as one of the three to attend. One of the others was, as we were to discover later, an undercover security branch policeman. The third member, Bob Kgwane, was murdered (by driving a bicycle spoke through his heart) by unknown assailants (but presumably the security police) very shortly after our return.

In America we met black Americans who were deeply involved in the Black Power Movement and who were subjecting the Civil Rights Movement and its political strategies to powerful criticism. Here we were also able to get hold of some of the early writings of the influential American black theologian, James Cone, notably *Black Theology and Black Power* and later to meet Cone himself. These encounters had a lasting impact on me and I was persuaded of the validity of Cone's theology.

Back in South Africa in 1968 at the second national conference of the UCM held at Stutterheim, one of the historically most important events was the holding of a black caucus initiated by Steve Biko. From this came the decision to form a body where black students could meet to discuss issues directly relevant to their personal and living experiences. This led to the formation of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) shortly after.

While this piece of historical curiosity locates the birth of Black Theology within the institutional context of the UCM, it doesn't answer the question of how and why it emerged there in 1970 since SASO, the parent body of the Black Consciousness Movement with which Black theology was undisputedly associated in its beginnings had been up and running vigorously since late 1968. The formation and rapid growth of SASO raised difficult questions about the relations between it and the UCM. Many of the founding members of SASO like Steve Biko (also an executive member of the UCM) and Barney Pitso were Christians who wanted to maintain their involvement with the UCM. They recognised that SASO was not and could not become a Christian organisation. So SASO, committed as it was to the development of Black Consciousness ideology was recognised as the coordinating agency for black student politics. What the Christian members demanded of the UCM was the development of a theological counter-point to Black Consciousness which would address the issue of black liberation. The demand became more strident in 1970 as black students became increasingly scornful of UCM's engagement in humanistic 'encounter groups' and the like, which reflected a liberal reconciliation mind-set.

As a trained theologian now under the influence of James Cone I wrote an exploratory study paper called 'Towards a Black Theology' in 1970. This paper was distributed to all members, affiliates and the sponsoring churches. The immediate and tangible effect was that the UCM established a Black Theology Project and appointed Sabelo Ntwasa as its full-time organiser. Out of this came a sequence of conferences on Black Theology across the country during 1971, with the publication at the end of the year of a selection of conference papers. The publication was immediately banned by the South African government. In the following year, however, the collection was published by the London publisher Christopher Hurst, under the title *Black Theology the South African Voice*.

Black theology took its understanding of 'black' from the Black Consciousness movement, which used 'black' as a positive identifier opposed to the negative term 'non-white'. Thus 'black' referred to all the victims of racism collectively (that is, it included 'Coloured' and 'Indians'). But 'black' had much stronger political force as well. It was not simply about pigmentation but more importantly about attitudes of mind. So 'black' referred specifically to those victims of racism who were engaged personally and directly in the liberation struggle. 'Black', if you like, referred exclusively to black freedom fighters. Thus Black Theology had to grow out of and be part of the liberation struggle.

What was most distinctive about Black Theology was its theological method. In essence this was grounded in the conviction that in a racist society, racism not only structures the experiences of the oppressors and their victims differently, it also makes them 'see' and interpret things differently. As such, the nature and meaning of Gospel is understood differently when it is approached within the experiential context of white oppressors from what it is when black experiences and aspirations inform the interpretation. Thus whites are likely to see the heart of the Gospel as being about salvation of the soul. Whereas for blacks the primary message is that Jesus came to set the oppressed free. It is about liberation. Thus Black Theology is about black people interpreting the Gospel in the light of black experiences as well as interpreting black experiences in the light of the Gospel. What was central to black experience in South Africa was their systematic racist oppression and interpreting the Gospel called for an answer to how the Scriptures address this reality of oppression. The answer advocated by the black theologians was that the Gospel was a message of liberation of the oppressed. This had to be understood as an authentic Christian response to oppression.

It is useful to reflect a little on some of the core issues addressed by Black theology as they were reported in the banned collection of papers which I had edited and then published as 'Black theology; the South African Voice'.

One was an attack on authoritarianism in all its social formations including religion. The essence of the argument by Mokgethi Motlabi was that to allow others to rule over us and make decisions for us compromises our dignity and authenticity as human beings. This argument was carried over into an attack on the authoritarian images of God (omnipotent, king, ruler, Lord, etc.). We were supposed to obey the will of these authoritarian figures. Authoritarian images of God were seen as locking human beings into a permanent childhood and legitimating the social manifestations of authoritarianism in both church and state. Throughout the UCM and thus also in early Black Theology, there was a relentless quest to find ways, especially theological ways of affirming human beings as adults. It was argued by Sabelo Ntwasa that we need to explore relational images of God rather than remain locked in the traditional person images. In the Scriptures there are, he argued, two sets of images of God. One is a set of 'person' images, like King, Lord, Father etc. The other is a set of relational images which assert that God is love, peace, justice, etc. Traditional theology takes the 'person' images literally and the relational images as expanding on the person images so that 'God is justice' needs to be understood as One who acts justly.

Ntwasa argued that we need to take literally the relational images of God that God is love, peace and justice. So that in Ntwasa's thinking, as he said 'where I see justice at work in the world, there I see God. That act of justice is itself what I mean by God. God is not something extra over and above the real-world manifestations of love and justice'. If we persist in giving priority to the 'person' images we end up with authoritarian ideas about God, such as King, Lord, etc. and thus legitimate authoritarianism in Church and state. We also end up subjecting God to the Race Classification Act according to which God is undisputedly 'White'

A second major issue arose from the character of the UCM as a radically ecumenical movement including Protestants and Catholics. Having Protestants and Catholics together at conferences and in local branches raised serious practical questions about how they could worship together. The response of the UCM was to develop occasion-specific liturgies. These liturgies had a number of fairly consistent characteristics. They were modelled on relational images of God and human beings. They used dance and drama extensively. They drew for their music and songs on the protest song traditions of Europe, the USA and South African black workers, black townships and black universities. There was, thus, an unmistakable political thrust to these occasions of worship, which carried over into the infant Black Theology Movement. In the liturgies and papers of the Black Theology conferences the felt need was to translate into forms of worship the understanding of 'black' as those involved in the liberation struggle. Thus there was experimentation with liturgies which set worship in the context of the black liberation struggle to promote that struggle by celebrating it, by firing the will to resistance, by supporting people in the struggle and by exploring resistance strategies. Specifically they used traditional African 'praise songs' to celebrate leaders of the liberation struggle, like Nelson Mandela. During the 1971 Black Theology conferences it was these acts of struggle-based worship which were most consistently broken up by the security police. I know of no copies of those liturgies which survived the police raids.

A third major issue was feminism. Feminist issues had become dominant across most of the white women members among the branches on white campuses and in regional seminars. This emergence of feminism led to the formation of a women's caucus at the 1968 UCM conference in Stutterheim, out of which grew a national women's project, which focused on exploring the issue of the oppression of women. This development had 2 important effects. One effect was the presence of a lively women's project which attracted a significant number of radical women into the UCM many of whom argued that Christianity had always played a significant role in the marginalisation and oppression of women. The attacks on Christianity as inalienably sexist led many of the sponsoring churches to have doubts about the Christian character of the UCM and to withdraw sponsorship and funding. This put pressure on the UCM to search for the possibility of a feminist theology which resulted in the dissemination of my study paper, 'Towards a Theology of Sexual Politics' in late 1970. This paper even more urgently attacked the "Person" and "Person in Authority" images of God in traditional theology and argued the need for inclusive relational images. This was because if you insist on using 'person' images you will inevitably end up giving God a gender, invariably a male gender and thus legitimising the subordination of women. Thus strong theological links were forged between this emerging feminist theology and Black Theology. The links, however, went deeper than this.

As is well known, and as already mentioned, the 1968 UCM Conference at Stutterheim also saw the emergence of a black caucus out of which SASO was born. This placed black women students in a practical dilemma of whether to participate in the women's or the black caucus. This generated heated debate on the priority of women's liberation or black liberation struggles. In essence the arguments boiled down to claims by those who gave priority to the women's struggle that black liberation would be no liberation for black women if it left sexism intact and to counter-claims by those who gave priority to the black struggle that to focus on the women's struggle would be divisive. Since the women's and the black caucuses and the Women's and Black Theology projects became permanent features of the UCM the arguments became ongoing throughout its life.

This feminist strand within the UCM and the challenges it posed for black women had significant consequences for the emergent Black Theology movement. All but one of the Black Theology Conferences had papers addressing this issue by such significant black women speakers as Winifred Kgwane, mother of the murdered Bob Kgwane, and Ellen Kuzwayo. Sadly none of these women would consent to the publication of their papers since sexism in the Church saw that they had no formal training in theology and they recognised that their insights would be dismissed because of it. However, for as long as Black Theology remained within the context of the UCM the issue of feminism remained on the theological agenda.

When the UCM disbanded in 1974, it handed the Black Theology project over to SASO

In 1992, on a visit to South Africa, I undertook a small research project interviewing over 60 people who had been engaged in the Black Theology movement to gauge its significance for the liberation struggle and for their own work. Transcripts of recordings were published as an occasional paper by the University of South Australia in 1993 under the title 'Lord, help Thou our Outrage: Black Theology Revisited'. I quote here from only 2 of them, whose words I think have direct relevance to us here today.

I begin with Frank Chikane, then Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. He had this to say:

I see myself as a black theologian. You can't have learned your theology and your practical politics together like I have and not be a black theologian at heart. Black Theology has always provided me with the tools to reflect on and to direct my practical struggles. And these struggles have always been with other black people for liberation. That, for me, is the most fundamental characteristic of Black Theology. The black theologians are political activists who reflect on their praxis. If you theologise without involvement, the people will see through you. The struggle of black people against oppression and for freedom; that is what black theology is about. (in Moore, 1993)

Frank Chikane again argued that Black Theology is a theology which advances the struggle by empowering people. In his words;

The yardstick by which I judge any theology and thus Black Theology, is whether it advances the struggle of the people. And it does this by empowering people; by providing them with the spiritual and emotional resources to engage in the struggle. For me black consciousness and Black Theology was a conversion experience. It unleashed in me energies and commitments I never knew were there. It enabled me to engage in political action as a Christian in a way that I would never have believed possible with my conservative Pentecostal background. It brought me into the struggle.

It can be seen that what Black Theology did at that historical point in time was to enable black clergy and black Christians to engage in the political struggle for liberation as Christians. This as we know, Frank Chikane likened to a conversion experience. Traditionally black Christians had seen their faith as lying outside the political arena. Black Theology located their faith in the very heart of the struggle for liberation. What Black Theology did was engage black Christian students in the liberation struggle.

Black Theology was intimately associated with the Black Consciousness movement. But as leading Christian activists moved into the ANC they ceased to call themselves Black theologians even though Mcebisi Xundu claims that:

Every black Christian who today is directly engaged in the struggle as a Christian is a product of black theology. Of course, there were black Christians who did engage in the struggle before black theology. They did so, however, without being able to hold their political activism and their Christian commitment together. And they were roundly condemned in their churches for being political activists. Today we act as Christian political activists holding it all together and even our church leaders are out there on the streets with us. I don't think that the young people of today who have not had to live in a South Africa without black theology will ever appreciate how draining that schizophrenia was for us. As we moved to engage the system we always had to do battle with our churches who told us this was against the will of God. (in Moore, 1993)

It is time to reflect in closing on the timeless and lasting significance of Black Theology and to ask what we can learn from it as a new generation of young intellectuals. Firstly I want to reflect on its significance for the business of doing theology. As we saw Frank Chikane claim, 'the yardstick by which I judge any theology is whether it advances the struggle of people. And it does this by empowering people by providing them with the spiritual and emotional resources to engage in the struggle'. Even though I no longer see myself as a theologian, I have the temerity to say that I heartily concur with that analysis of what constitutes authentic theology. In today's South Africa, however, 'race' is no longer the primary social and political cleavage. As your Vice Chancellor has said in his conclusion to his study of SASO,

During the past 15 years of democracy there have been important economic and social gains. Yet the reality is South Africa continues to be one of the most unequal societies on earth in terms of disparities in wealth, income, opportunities, and living conditions. The cleavages of 'race', class, gender and geography are still all too evident. Hunger disease, poverty and unemployment continue to blight our democracy. Millions of citizens are mired in desperate daily routines of survival (Saleem Badat, 2009).

Today's struggle in South Africa is no longer for liberation from the systematic structures of the racist oppression of Apartheid. The arena has shifted to those who suffer the ravages of poverty. The struggle has to be for social justice and thus a more equal society. For me, this means that authentic theology has to listen to the experiences and aspirations of those suffering human beings and, like black theologians of 40 years ago, today's theologians have to be engaged with these victims of oppression in their struggle for liberation and give voice to their cries. They have to empower them spiritually and emotionally to engage in their struggle and they have themselves to be involved in their struggle. The authentic theologian is still one engaged in that struggle as a political activist.

Graduands, I know that you are not theologians and some of you may not be Christians, but in conclusion I would admonish you in similar vein. Our task as intellectuals is still to engage with the victims of injustice, to analyse their plight, to give voice to their distress and their hopes. But it is not to do this standing aloof from their struggle. It needs to be done from the very heart of that struggle. It is to devise and implement strategies that will restore to people their dignity and humanity. Each of you in your own chosen field is being called upon to become liberation activists for social justice. This is a tough commission requiring courage, great skill and determination. I am sure, however, that your experience here at Rhodes has inspired and skilled you for this vocation. This is what makes it a great university.

Thank you, once again, members of the Rhodes community for the honour you have done me today, but even more thank you Rhodes for your contribution to my own growth and the values you have instilled in me.

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Towards a Black Theology

Paper prepared by Basil Moore
For the South African University Christian Movement,
February 1971

Introduction

A Definition

I have been told so often that there is only one Gospel that I have almost come to believe it. But this is nonsense. To be sure the Gospel has to do with the man Jesus of Nazareth: what he did and what he taught, but that statement conceals more than it reveals.

Firstly it conceals the fact that what Jesus did and what happened to him, and what he said and what was said to him was deeply embedded in and took its meaning from the time and place in which he lived. This means that everything about Jesus has its first point of reference and thus the primary basis of interpretation in the religious, ethical, and political cross-currents of a first century Jewish people under Roman colonial rule. This point is vital. Christianity takes its character from being in history. It is not the filtering through of some eternal truths from an uncorrupted, unpopulated and apolitical paradise. It is this being in history that made it from the start such a realistic revolutionary force that its advocates were not laughed off as 'religious fanatics', but were met with violent counter-revolutionary acts like politically-motivated killings.

Secondly, it conceals the fact that there are always two sides to the communication of any idea. There is what the speaker intended to communicate, and what the hearer understood to be the message. What the hearers hear will always be as situational as what the speaker said. They will hear against the back-drop of their beliefs, fears, aspirations, etc. Thus the words of Jesus reach us not only through the filter of the hearers, but also through the filter of the fact that were written not for first century Jews to whom Jesus spoke but largely for Greeks and Romans. And then, equally important we have to hear through the filter of our own historical and social situation what has been recorded.

So the Gospel always was and always will be situational. This is its eternal relevance. If you want a relevance tied to no time and no place, then you don't want Christ. You need a god who can write eternal non-words on eternal non-paper with eternal non-ink. How you, a man living in a particular historical situation would read and interpret that I leave to your elastic imagination.

Accepting the situational character of Jesus, his first interpreters, and his 1970 South African followers, black theology ceases to be theological nonsense. Black theology has to ask, 'At what crucial points does the human situation of blacks in South Africa fit in with the human situation of Jesus in Roman occupied Israel? What message of hope did Jesus have for his contemporaries whose situation parallels that of black South Africans? How can black South Africans interpret that message and translate it into Christian action in their situation? Or, to put it differently, black theology is applying what we 'hear' to be the message and actions of Jesus to the situation of black people in South Africa.

An Apology

This definition of black theology raises a major problem. If the interpretation of the Gospel is situational and its situational application is to be relevant, then it follows that the man who attempts this interpretation and application must himself be a living part of that situation. The suggestion that there is a need for a 'black theology' implies what is patently obvious, that the situation of the black South African is not that of the white. This means that the writer should be black and know it.

The problem is that the writer is white. Being white forces on me all the privileges, status, power, authority, and prejudices of the average white South African, and shuts the door to my being able to feel in my guts what it means to be a black South African. I can't apologise for having white pigmentation. I can hardly even apologise for having a whole range of white prejudices and white values. I can only sensibly apologise for having the unbelievable impertinence of writing this article.

This apology means in effect that the perceptive reader should stop reading at the point. If, however, the subject fascinates you, then what follows should be read with the expectation that it will, at best be hollow.

But since I have written the article for which I am apologising means that I must try to justify why I, a white, have dared the venture.

A Justification

I am writing this because there is an emotion tearing around inside me for which the best label seems to be 'anger'. I can't, however, say 'I am angry' for the moment I take a closer look at it the anger seems to change into sorrow, pity, longing, despair, hate, love, concern, and uncertainty. All these competing emotions are there when I try to hold together the situational message of Jesus and the situation of blacks in South Africa. This compelling emotion forces me to write.

A strange justification? We are so used to the Western love for cold, factual, and analytical reason that we assume that 'confused anger' can succeed only in clouding reason. So we try to push strong emotions aside as an unreasonable and shaky foundation for analysis.

But the truth is that strong emotions are facts of our experience, and may be reasonable or unreasonable. How can you appeal to reason when a woman weeps over her dead son? She would be unreasonable not to cry if she loved her son deeply.

The question then is, 'Is my anger reasonable?' If it is then it is a justifiable starting point however one-sided it makes my subsequent analysis in the eyes of those who do not share my emotional response.

I am angry because I am sick of being treated as a white man. I am not revolting against my white pigmentation. I've got white genes and there is nothing I can do about it. In any event white is as beautiful as any other colour. I am rebelling because my whiteness determines my being as a man. South Africa defines and circumscribes my responses by my whiteness and not by my being as a man.

And people respond to me not as a unique 'thou' who has to be encountered to be understood, but as an 'It' defined in terms of whiteness. I am known because I am white and not because I am me. There are a whole range of things I can do without exception being taken because I am white which would be met with a totally different reaction if I were not. I can eat my lunch in a central Johannesburg restaurant. I can urinate in a public toilet, I can bump accidentally into another man on the street, and I could whistle with sex-inspired gusto at a blonde in a mini-skirt. My whiteness is my social disinfectant. What I do is acceptable because I am white.

Not only whites classify me by my whiteness, so also do blacks. They classify me as the one with all the rights, with all the power, and therefore always right and in the process classify themselves as things, slaves, servants, animals, almost anything but men. Yes my baas! Could I drink water from an old tin can, never, never, never from the great white master's china cup. I know that there are a thousand very good reasons for this sick, cringing behaviour. But my stomach turns over when I watch a man see white and play dog. I hate this not just because it is humiliating watching a man pushing the nose of his human dignity to the dung before my whiteness, because in the process he has taken away my humanity and left only whiteness in its place.

And there are blacks who reject me not because of what I am as a man, what I think, say, and do, but because I am white. My whiteness makes me suspect, unreliable, useless and unredeemable. Again it is easy to understand this as a natural reaction springing out of a situation of oppression. But understanding this only makes me more frightened-mad about this oppression that breeds thingness.

I rebel against being treated as a white thing in the form of a man by both whites and blacks. This would be a valid justification for both a white theology and a black theology. The system is dehumanising us all in different ways. Therefore we all need to know how the Gospel can be a liberating force. But because the response of blacks hurts and frightens me so much more deeply than the response of whites, I have decided to venture into black theology. I am more interested in trying to discover what I think the message of Jesus is to men with their black backs against the wall than to men with their white bums in the butter.

Jesus a First century Jew With His Back to the Wall

The first important fact about Jesus is that he was poor. Luke records that at the dedication of Jesus at the Temple his parents accepted that according to law they had to offer as sacrifice a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. What the law required under normal circumstances was a year old lamb and either a turtledove or young pigeon, but if the family was too poor, they could bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. From this it is clear that Jesus' parents were too poor to afford a lamb.

If Mary and Joseph were poor people so were the vast majority of the people of Israel and certainly the early followers of Jesus. After the Roman conquest of Israel in 53BC the humiliating loss of status and independence was etched deeper and deeper into the soul of the people. Taxes of all kinds increased, extracted from the vitals of the people, to glorify Rome and its Emperor, and to reduce the possibility of mass resistance. The result was that list of the elite rich in Jesus' Israel would have consisted of Roman civil and military leaders, possibly a few apostate Jewish tax collectors, and perhaps some of the religious leaders. For the rest mere existence was a grinding day-to-day struggle.

That it was among the poor that Jesus did his main work is clear from the list of his disciples, which included struggling fishermen and at least one fanatical zealot. It is clear also from the fact that the late letter of James is addressed to the poor living under the crushing oppression of the rich, counselling against an easy acceptance of the rich into the Christian fellowship and pandering to their fads.

The fact that Jesus was himself a poor man, and that it was the poor who clung avidly to him and his words, gives us a vital clue in our interpretation. The poor must have found in him a realistic message of hope against their poverty. What that message was remains to be discovered. Was he a moral reformer who they hoped would bring moral pressure to bear on the rich to be more free with their charitable hand-outs to the poor? Or was he more revolutionary than this?

Obviously the answer to this question is very relevant, for Jesus, by his poverty, stands identified with the vast mass of men on earth. The masses of the people are poor. What has he to say to them?

The second crucial situational fact about Jesus is that he was a man living in the land of his birth deprived of his rights as a citizen by white Western rulers from Rome. He was one of those people who had no say in determining the laws by which he had to live- not that Israel was a democracy before Rome came, but at least their rulers were Jews with whom there was a deep-seated bond. (It is true that the Jewish Herod ruled from 37BC to 4AD, but his Jewishness did not go further than his Jewish nose). He was also one of those people whose religious sensitivities were insulted by Roman temples in honour of Augustus Caesar rising up on the holy land itself. And he was one of those who could be degraded freely by a Roman- if he was pushed into the gutter by a Roman he could make no appeals. He was just another Jew in the gutter.

It is important to note here before going any further a huge difference between Jesus and Paul. Paul, the first great interpreter of Jesus, was also a Jew, but he was a free Jew. He was a Roman citizen. He shared the blood and religion of the colonised Jews, but the status and privilege of the ruling Romans. If he was being ill-treated by a Roman soldier in a prison in Asia Minor he could appeal directly to Caesar for protection. Since the Roman minions valued Roman citizenship his appeal guaranteed a hearing. Although there is only one recorded incident in which Paul used this privilege, it was always there in any emergency.

Paul's status of security in relationship to the state was so different from Jesus' position that we should be very cautious of using Paul as a reliable interpreter of Jesus' attitude to the state. To be sure there is a great deal in Paul about a new society of free men in Christ which transcends the barriers of race, class, sex, and privilege. But not surprisingly there is also another side. A side in which there is a divine legitimising of the status quo; slaves are counselled to be 'good slaves' and obey their masters, all civil government is ordained by God, and the 'haves' should be generous in their giving to the 'have-nots'. It is this side of the message which is always available to those who want divine sanction for humiliating and oppressing their fellows.

A vast ocean of human experience of insecurity and fear separates the day-to-day living of Paul with his Roman citizenship and Jesus who was one of the disinherited. As in poverty Jesus stands identified with the vast mass of men. The vast masses of people have no civil authority as citizens of a country. They are refugees, colonised, ruled by dictators and police states, or are arbitrarily denied civil rights.

A third vital fact about Jesus was that he lived in a society in which violent revolutionaries were active, and counter-revolutionary moves were brutal.

In Galilee the zealot Judas laid siege to the armoury at Sepphoris and, capturing the weapons led an army against Rome. He failed and the whole city of Sepphoris was regarded as hostage. The army moved in. The city was burned to the ground and men, women and children killed. Sepphoris was a neighbouring village to Nazareth, the early home of Jesus.

Josephus, a Jew and a Pharisee with overt Roman sympathies who later became a Roman citizen, writing in his *The Antiquities of the Jews* tells of the Jewish struggle for freedom which ended in the final humiliation of Jews in AD70 when the Temple was sacked. He tells how '*the whole nation grew mad with distemper*' and adds that there were no less than ten thousand disorders in Judaea. Apparently 'the calm hills of Galilee' were alive with guerrilla fighters, plotting, scheming, and acting for freedom. Josephus reports that in these hills the Romans ran to earth a zealot family. His wife and children begged him to surrender, but instead he stood in the mouth of the cave and killed them all as they came out and then committed suicide and so 'underwent death rather than slavery'.

The usual form of Roman reprisal against the zealots was crucifixion. So the cross was a badge of zealot defiance long before it became a Christian symbol.

Although the Gospels tell us little about this revolutionary Galilee and its highways lined with the crosses of Jewish 'terrorists' or 'freedom fighters'. It is impossible to believe that Jesus was totally ignorant of it and had nothing relevant and meaningful to say about it. What his attitude was remains to be seen.

Attempting to interpret Jesus in the situation of his day is inordinately difficult. Two factors make this difficult. The first is that by the time the Gospels were written the Jewish revolt against Rome had ended, or in the case of Mark, was about to end. They were writing to present Jesus as the saviour of the world when the Jews were scattered, revolt had little meaning and Rome was undeniably master. Most critics are agreed that Mark wrote his Gospel for Roman readers. So we know from these writings what Jesus meant in this new situation in which Roman sympathy is overt and the Jewish religious leaders are painted in the worst colours. But we don't know what he meant for his own time. Where did he stand on the most pressing issue of his day; the issue of the politically dispossessed and the violent fight for freedom?

The second difficulty is that again Paul can hardly be accepted as a reliable witness. Besides the fact of his Roman citizenship which influences his theology of political power and slavery, there is the fact that his missionary enterprises took him out of colonial Israel into Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. Consequently his letters were addressed not to Christians who might have been involved in the struggle in Israel for freedom but to men in Asia Minor and the West.

Thus Jesus emerges as identified with the poor and politically disinherited of his day in a situation which was bubbling and seething with violent unrest in the struggle for freedom. How closely does his situation parallel that of black people in South Africa?

Jesus and the South African Blacks

The first important situational fact about the black man in South Africa in 1970 is that he is poor. He is degradingly, cripplingly, inhumanly, starvantly poor. To be sure there is a Transkeian herbalist who can rate mention in South Africa's list of millionaires, and there must be a fair number of religious leaders, business and professional men, and possibly even 'tax collectors' in the Special branch whose income places them in the upper-middle income group. They are not among the conservative estimate of 70%-75% blacks living below the poverty-datum line (i.e. approximately 9.5 million people). Their children will not be among the 50% of black children who die before reaching the age of 5, or the 50% of black school children suffering from various malnutrition diseases.

The poverty of Jesus was political poverty. There is nothing in the records to suggest it was the effect of ineptitude, laziness, or drunkenness. Jesus and his followers were poor because of Roman colonialism, Roman taxation, Roman reprisals and Roman looting.

Black poverty in South Africa is political. Of course there is laziness, some 'won't work' attitudes, drunkenness and ignorance. But these are more often the effect of poverty and not its cause. They are often also the result of despair in their political blind alley. The historical and contemporary cause of black poverty is political.

It began when the Western, Christian whites, with their love of slavery met 'heathen' blacks on the southern tip of Africa. Here they found a ready supply of slaves, together with the availability of land and the challenge to Christian missionary zeal, became a major inducement to white settlers from Britain and the Continent. Not only did they find slaves, they bred their own from Hottentot, Bushmen, and black women. So slavery came to reside on the soil of Southern Africa with the advent of the white man and the Bible. The white man brought Western feudalism also, and feudalism + slavery. = poverty for the dark-skinned slaves. Those who did not become slaves became dead.

But an agricultural economy brought not only slavery but also land hunger. So the whites spread eastwards where the Xhosa tribes were encountered, fought, defeated, enslaved and driven from the land. Here black land wealth turned to poverty, the legacy of the disinherited.

Then came the emancipation of the slaves, and the British colony in the cape reluctantly capitulated. But the early rugged Boers were no nigger-lovers, and they found the Old Testament a valuable ally in their attempt to keep their black slaves. When they were legally and politically defeated in their struggle they were not out-witted. To the north lay vast tracts of land to which no man had title, that is, no Western white power had moved in to colonise it. So with a proud, independent, defiant spirit they trekked north. Here the Bible lessons they had learned in their fight against British emancipation stood them in good stead. They were the world-famous people of Israel leaving the tyranny of Egypt and destined by God to claim for Him the new promised land inhabited by God-defying Canaanites. That the Canaanites were black meant only that they were the sons of Ham destined for ever to be the hewers of wood and drawers of water of God's chosen white Boers.

Soon the once-independent free-moving black tribes found white agricultural settlements springing up like mushrooms all over the place. They could not counter the impressive military might of these invaders. Without land or power they were excluded from participation in the white Republics that were established, and a poverty-stricken disinheritance became their lot. How can you be rich in an agricultural economy if you can own no land? And how do you get land if you have no political rights?

So it happened and so it remains. Slavery had gone but in its place has come a politically-sanctioned, sophisticated slavery. The whites own all the land, except for the small tracts they half-give to the blacks and then enforce disastrous over-population. Here they set up the breeding grounds for cheap labour to bring without their families, into the white-owned cities and industries. Denied the right of collective bargaining and action for higher wages, the white owners can pay as much or as little as they find profitable. The whites find it unnecessary to ensure that if a man is employed he is paid a living wage. They also find it unnecessary to do anything about the vast black over-crowding of black agricultural areas or the enormous unemployment. To keep the whites in the driver's seat and blacks in a state of economic subservience foreign whites are imported, and blacks legally debarred from almost every form of skilled labour.

The education of slaves has never been a favoured enterprise of the white masters. Education might make them cheeky, give them notions of their ability and worth, and stir up trouble. So it was in the early days and so it remains. It is true that many blacks who can afford formal schooling can get it. It is also true that most blacks cannot afford it. While whites have free and compulsory education to a higher primary level, blacks have no free education and it is optional. So poverty breed ignorance, and ignorance breeds poverty And as this invidious spiral keeps moving blacks are kept in their subservience while whites justify this with the sick logic of, 'Well, just look at them they're uneducated'.

So blacks are kept poor for the sake of white power and white gain. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer – and any comparison of the lot of blacks in South Africa with the lot of blacks in other parts of Africa is odious. We have enough deaths and disease through sheer grinding poverty here to make any man cringe with shame. If some blacks have climbed the ladder of capitalist success in South Africa, that ladder has been the backs of other blacks.

Jesus and the suffering blacks of South Africa bend low under the same suffocating burden of politically inspired poverty. They share also the terrifying insecurity of living in a political no mans land.

Nationalists (white ones) in South Africa will immediately object that blacks live in a state of disinheritance only so long as they choose to remain in the prosperous white areas. They could have some say in the administration of their own affairs if they would move into their own 'homelands'. Indeed they could for the great white master has decided out of the goodness of heart that 80% of the total population can decide to die together on the over-crowded 13% of the land.

But the homelands policy reveals just how disinherited the black man is in the country of his birth. Who consulted him on whether he wanted to develop separately or where he wanted to do it? So high an evaluation is placed on white/black consultation that a law is passed prohibiting racially mixed political parties or 'interference' by any member of one race group in the affairs of another.

Whites alone must decide how and when and where and why the blacks will 'develop'. They will decide what political aspirations of the black man are permissible. They will decide what political parties they will allow. They will decide which political leaders must be isolated from their people in political prisons.

Blacks must tolerate that their existence is tolerated in 'white' areas only because their labour is cheaper than machines. It is just terribly unfortunate that black labour cannot be had without black bodies. Since it is merely a technical difficulty that labour involves people, and it is labour only that is wanted, the people become incidental. From this flows the whole tragic dehumanising scene of the disinherited in South Africa.

Blacks will live where whites say they can for as long as whites say they can. Blacks can sell their labour where whites say they can and at a price whites want to pay. Labour knows nothing about the anatomy of family life, so wives and children are unnecessary encumbrances in white areas. It is man who feels pain and humiliation not cheap labour. So you can insult cheap labour, you can make him come in the back door, you can push it into the gutter, you can laugh at it, it doesn't need medical attention, it can die so long as it can be replaced, you can hit it, starve it, torture it cram it into filthy over-crowded quarters, let its children die of tuberculosis or kwashiorkor. You can do all these things so long as it keeps working and producing profits for its owner. Like machines cheap labour should be able to start at the push of a button. So it is not expected to be late – even if the trains are full or had an accident or were behind schedule. It shouldn't get colds or flu or appendicitis. And, again, like a machine it can always be dumped on a scrapheap like Limehill, Stinkwater or Horsgat. Nobody worries much what machines do once the office door is locked for the night so long as they are ready for use next day, and don't wreck the owner's person or property. Who cares about the murder and violence done in the black townships by night, or the wreckage of excessive booze, or the despair of men longing for their manhood, their dignity, their freedom, their wives, their children? Whites really only care when these seething emotions spill over the edges of the black areas into the white suburbs. Then you can expect action.

So the black man must live known to the white power only as cheap labour. On some minor things he has recourse to the courts. But on the major things concerning his manhood and his destiny he, like Christ, has no one to whom he can appeal. Will the police protect him from police brutality? To whom can he appeal if the white baas chooses to kick his arse? What legal sympathy will he get if he tries to organise for a political future which is different from the white man's plan?

Jesus and the black man of South Africa bend low under the same suffocating burden of being political non-entities.

We have seen that Jesus lived in a situation of revolutionary and anti-revolutionary counter-violence. With at least one zealot in his party he could not possibly have been unaware of the plotting and scheming that was going on among the disinherited to take their freedom. Walking around Galilee he must have seen the avenues of Roman crosses bearing the dead and dying who failed in their attempts to wrest freedom for their people.

Blacks in South Africa also live in a situation of occasional outbreaks of revolutionary violence and massive anti-revolutionary counter-violence. Daily the press carries reports of the violent struggle of black people for freedom in neighbouring states not directly ruled by South Africa, guerrillas in Zambia, fighting in Rhodesia, Frelimo in Portuguese East Africa, liberation movements in Angola. Just as white South Africa is one in sympathy and support for the anti-revolutionary violence in these countries- food parcels for the Portuguese soldiers and police assistance for the Rhodesian forces- so also many blacks are sympathetically identified with the black fighters for what they believe to be their rights. Within South Africa itself sporadic outbreaks of black violence for political ends pepper the scene; widespread riots in the 1950s with occasional outbreaks in the 1960s, carefully planned sabotage, and plans for sabotage which never got off the drawing boards in the 1960s, and the continuing ferment of the banned political parties such as the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress etc. Counter-violence too comes up to the surface for occasional display, most dramatically in Sharpeville on March 21st, 1960, but regularly in 'terrorist' trials, sabotage trials, anti-Communist trials, in rumours of police brutality, in imprisonment without trial, in bannings and house arrests, in whites-only military training, in careful separation of black living quarters from white suburbs to ensure that blacks can easily be cordoned off. Here blacks can be imprisoned or condemned under laws they never made and which the vast majority never wanted (at least nobody ever bothered to find out whether they wanted them or not).

So violence like latent malaria lives continually under the skin of South Africa, occasionally erupting in terrifying bouts. Jesus knew all about this in his own day. What does he have to say to a situation like ours? More particularly what does he have to say to blacks with their noses in the dirt whose patience wears thinner as their anger mounts?

Before trying to answer this, we need to look briefly at what this poverty and disinheritance, violence and counter-violence has done and is doing to the soul of the black man in South Africa.

Look into any black township on a dark night. Here murder, rape, stabbing, pointless and inhuman violence stalks down the unlit, unpaved roads which run between over-crowded, leaking, filthy, disease-carrying shanties. Here a black will drive a spoke into the lower spine of another black, cutting through the spinal cord and crippling him for life, just because he looked at him the wrong way. Yet the same black will say, and worse still, believe 'you're right my baas' when a white miner thrashes him underground. Here a black man will kill another for stealing ten cents. Yet the same black will allow a white man to exploit his labour at a monthly salary of sometimes as little as R5.00, and will tolerate that the white man can take away his home, his wife and children, his land, his sheep and cattle, his citizenship in the land of his birth. Here a black man will beat and abuse his black wife (because she is not white, the only adequate model of feminine beauty?) yet the same black man will accept with servile obedience orders and insults from the white 'missus'. Here a black woman will beat her child as it whimpers sickly. Yet the same woman, when a nanny, will fuss and fume over her sick white charge insisting on medical attention.

What is it that has happened to a soul of a people that it accepts the cheap uselessness of black life, and falls down to worship in humiliating grovelling before the great white master and missus? Here in his squalor and brute existence he has accepted the white man's label 'thing' for himself and other blacks.

There are other scenes too in those black ghettos we euphemistically call townships. In damp houses with dung floors, heavy with the stench of unwashed bodies and stale urine, while babies cry weakly too many people try to sleep on or under pitiful rags. So they talk argue, fight, get drunk, have sordid violent sex in semi-public. Existence is too congested and cheap to bother about rats, lice, or cockroaches. Out of these hovels men come to kill their meaningless existence in street brawls, or squalid shebeens, or in futile gambling with their bare feet in the mud under the odd street light. Occasionally from dwellings where poverty has lifted just a little the most exquisite, violent sweating-body jazz can be heard. But generally a dark futility hangs over the place.

In these human garbage heaps which border the white areas what creative human potential has been smothered? - poets, playwrights, philosophers, musicians, dancers- those prophets and rallyers of the human spirit. It appears as if the tragically predictable has happened. The combination of white power and black 'thingness' has eaten away the heart of the people leaving only a withered kernel. It's like cracking open a walnut and finding that cancer and worms have eaten away the promise. Here hunger and despair and thingness are too real for the creative human spirit to take wings and fly. It is small wonder that some men are crying-angry at this assassination-cum-suicide of the sense of manhood which is the *sine qua non* of prophetic art.

The message of Jesus Through the White South African Filter

We saw earlier that Paul's status as a Roman citizen opened a huge gap between himself and the politically disinherited Jesus making him an unreliable witness of Jesus' theology of politics. We saw also that the freedom struggle in Israel was over by the time the Gospels were written giving them a bias to present Jesus in this new situation, forcing us to read between the lines to discover what Jesus had to say about his situation (and ours). This being so, a great deal of caution needs to be exercised in accepting the presentation of Jesus given in the white-dominated churches, i.e. the churches of the rich, politically ruling, and counter-revolutionary forces. As closely as the situation of Jesus fits the situation of South African blacks, the Roman rulers fit the situation of South African whites. What then is the ruling party's interpretation of the message of Jesus in the situation of black poverty, black disinheritance, and black revolution? What does it have to say about the cheap labour 'thingness' of black people?

Let us look firstly at poverty.

There is no church of which I am aware that is not intellectually concerned about the phenomenal black poverty of South Africa. Some churches, Christian bodies and ecumenical agencies are involved in relief work, in few (if any) of them would the amount of time, energy, and money spent compare at all favourably with the amounts of the same commodities spent in maintaining the organisation, its buildings, and furnishings. (How many churches over the last two years have spent on poverty relief half of what they have spent on stipends and church buildings?).

But on the question of poverty it would undoubtedly be true to say that the white interpretation of the message of Jesus is relief. Perhaps the favourite Bible passage on this theme is the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25. In the poor and hungry black man the wealthy and well-fed white congregations (as also the white congregations in black skins) are exhorted to see Christ himself. As the sheep were rewarded for sharing their goods with the suffering poor, so now the comfortable whites are promised that if they will but share something of their goods with Christ in the miserable black skin then they too will be counted among God's good sheep destined for eternal blessing.

Without questioning this interpretation at this point, a number of things about it need to be noted. The first is that it fails to note the political character of black poverty. No matter how generous the hand-out, it will not make one iota of difference to the politics that breeds the poverty. It may feed one empty belly for one day. It may even feed 15,000 empty bellies for one day or one week. But it will not fill 9.5 million bellies from Sunday to Saturday from birth to the grave. These bellies are empty because it is necessary to keep economic progress down to a rate that will maintain a vast reserve of unemployed labour to choke the possibility of collective action by workers to secure better wages and working conditions. Think of the dock workers' strike in Durban which was rendered totally ineffective by black workers clawing at each other to get the jobs their brothers had just lost as a result of their actions. Kindly hand-outs may alleviate here and there but they will not change the face of poverty in black South Africa.

Does the white church see the Jesus-message as having anything to do with changing the face of black poverty? It does not seem like it. If it did we would expect to see it involved in the messy business of political economics as well as being realistically busy about the far easier and very necessary first aid work.

The second thing about this moralistic message of wealthy hand-outs is that it needs both rich and poor to make it practicable. The rich must remain rich-or get richer still-so that the poor can always be with us to receive our bounty. And what better way to do this than to preserve the capitalistic economic system in which the rich climb over the backs of the poor to get richer? In this you can have both things, the rich staying rich and the poor staying poor. Now the rich have the message of Jesus all buttoned up- give a little excess to some recognised charity rather than the tax man and, hey presto: you're a sheep destined for eternal leisure. So the hand-out message of Jesus in the well-manicured white church has locked within its bowels the command to preserve the status quo of white-dominated capitalism- or if any concessions are to be made at all by the more liberal white churchmen, let a few blacks share our dominance as the capitalistic elite. For the blacks this is a message without any ray of hope in it.

The third thing to be noted about this hand-out interpretation is that it can shatter the receiver's pride and dignity. Many are the white Christians who would dig tolerably deeply into their pockets to feed or clothe a black man, woman, or child. Few indeed are the white Christians who would tolerate the presence of a black man in their churches, homes or social gathering. Giving relief relieves white consciences, it has nothing whatever to do with treating the black man as a man with the rich potential of becoming a rewarding personal friend. So the black is treated as a belly to be filled, a back to be shirted, or a body to be warmed. He is still a thing.

This hideous dehumanisation may not be overtly intended. The intentions are most kindly. It is the conditions that go with the giving that show it for what it is. "Thou canst eat my bread or wear my son's old jersey, but only in your own home, own church, or social gathering. I have no need of YOU'. This is surely the message the black man hears. In the anonymous food parcel with never a white face visible over the top of it, the black man knows himself to be but a belly. He must eat the crumbs that fall from the white man's table and be grateful, even though it is out of his sweated labour that the white man has his table so heavily stocked that he can afford to sweep the crumbs to the hungry dogs in the black ghettos.

So the kindly hand-out interpretation of the parable of the sheep and the goats hammers home with sickening force in South Africa that the poor black can be exploited, so long as you spare him a crumb of your riches, and that he can fill his belly with your hand-outs so long as he does not expect you to fill your heart with his being.

The Jesus-message of the white churches to the black poor is, 'be patient, friends. We will try to squeeze more money out of the rich whites for you with our moralising sermons and study groups. But don't expect too much. If you expect us to get all messed up by trying to change the total structures of your economic enslavement, you have come knocking at the wrong door'. They are right. How could they do anything more? They themselves pay the black staff half the white staff's wage for the same work. They too are in business where it pays handsomely to exploit the exploitable cheap labour. They too have servants whom it is more convenient to have sleeping in their back yards where they can be available at a moment's notice, rather than out of reach sleeping with their husbands, wives and children. They will not give up their permanent luxury so that the black can have some permanent ease through the redistribution of economic power and property.

So the Jesus-message as it seeps out through the white church in its words, attitudes, and actions is a message which has no hope locked inside it for the poor black man with his nose in the dung. But is this the message of Jesus? We must return to this in the next section.

And what is the message of the white church in word and deed about the question of political disinheritance? At its most extreme left where numbers are still sufficiently large to bother about counting the adherents, the scene is still dismal. In the liberal churches where black membership by far outweighs white membership it still makes sense to call them white churches. Ecclesiastical power rests snugly and securely in the hands of whites, and often white imports at that. It is specious to argue that whites are in fact the best administrators and academically the best equipped to staff the hierarchies and even the black seminaries. To be sure there are few blacks who are able to handle Western-style economic and business procedures, or to teach academics nurtured in the West.

But few whites would feel at all at home in traditional African social, religious, philosophical or artistic systems. And who has decided whether African or Western ways of doing things are better suited to the church in South Africa? Have the churches not simply stepped in on the pattern of disinheritance of the blacks, maintained it in their organisational and teaching structures, and now argue from the effects of disinheritance to maintaining disinheritance? This is sick logic.

Admittedly a few blacks have risen through the ranks to positions of ecclesiastical power. They remain a tiny minority but, and more important, they have risen to those lofty heights by being able to make white-sounding noises with black mouths. They have been 'leaders' who have kept their eyes on the slightly liberal whites in the churches and not on the disinherited blacks. They seldom represent or lead in any realistic way the black Christians in their churches. They stand as advertising gimmicks for the whites and not as symbols of hope for the blacks.

The spoken message differs very little from the structural one. The liberal white churches occasionally (less often now than a few years ago) throw up their hands in righteous indignation about the disinheritance of the blacks. They used fairly frequently to pass resolutions condemning the government for its increasing insistence on separation coupled with the denial of more and more civil liberties to the blacks. This message of opposition was never coupled with serious onslaughts on the increasing segregation in Christian congregations. The black man is not welcome at white hymn-singing and praying and he knows it. So when it really comes to the crunch on the question of political disinheritance of the blacks it is not surprising that Christ speaks through Paul in the churches.

There was the famous occasion when Jesus was asked about Jews paying taxes to the Romans. Jesus then replied that Caesar should be given what belongs to him, while God should be given what is his. Paul comes to the rescue in interpreting this enigmatic saying. It is assumed that, like Paul, Jesus was asserting the God-given right of any government to rule. Few in our 'liberal' spectrum would go so far as Paul and divinise the particular ruling party at this particular time, but infinitesimal would be the number who would question the political procedures by which a political party is established in power. Even conceding 'democracy' in South Africa cannot lay claim to being a national ballot-box democracy of the normal Western ilk, it is by these voting procedures claimed that undisruptive change is to be brought about. It may not be said very often, but no South African white church would question that the voting paper is the major divinely appointed way of exercising political power and expressing Christian support or dissent.

Again without questioning this interpretation at this point it is important to note one vital consequence of this interpretation. In South Africa it is the whites alone who have the right to vote in national elections. This means that a change in the lot of blacks must come about solely through the changed attitudes of the whites. As the wealthy whites must hand over the crumbs of their wealth to the poor blacks, so the whites should be persuaded to hand over some of their civil rights and voting political power to the disinherited blacks. It is the whites who possess social freedom. They must be morally persuaded to bequeath some of this freedom to the enslaved blacks. It is the whites who are allowed to be human. They must be helped to recognise that the blacks too are human beings and so to make appropriate ballot-box responses.

This means that for every social, political and economic change in the lot of the blacks it is the whites who must set the pace. Further, it is the whites who will set the conditions.

The two results of this are: firstly, that very little that is significant will happen for the blacks. Ballot-box democracy is designed to look after one's self. The parliamentarian is going to look after those who elected him with a view to getting elected again. Consequently, those who have no say in electing him are likely to get very scant consideration.

Who would be so foolish as to enfranchise people who are almost certain to vote for a different candidate with a different policy and so lose political power? When both electors and elected are white, with the inevitable result that policy is heavily biased in favour of whites, is it conceivable that black electors and black elected are going to be permitted, with the inevitable result that black interests will be protected? Thus the message of the divine sanction of present democratic procedures has locked within it the practical implication of the preservation of the status quo. It is no viable message of hope to South Africa's disinherited.

The second result of this interpretation of the message of Jesus about the divinely ordained legitimacy of government is that the black is still the receiver of the white hand-out. The black dare not claim the right to be an initiator. But freedom can never be given to a man. It is something that has got to happen on the inside. He has got to become free himself and express his freedom by asserting himself as a responsible human being. Blacks in North America have had to learn this. They were not free when slavery was abolished. All they could do was accept the white gift, but they certainly were not free to express themselves in the still white-dominated and prejudiced society. Freedom did not happen when emancipation was granted, but it is happening now as they are asserting their own humanity. Now, taking pride in their humanity they are able to take pride in their blackness- 'Black is Beautiful'- and they mean to make their presence and will felt and responded with- 'Black Power'. To think that South African blacks should be grateful for the efforts of the few whites who are trying to use the present structures of the democratic processes, is to suppose that they should be happy about this particular style of paternalism. Why should they be happy that we recognise, on the one hand, their rights which our forefathers stole, and then, on the other hand, fall down to worship before the 'democratic system' in which all the dice are loaded against them? Why should they be elated when we want freedom for them on our terms? If whites recognise that blacks have the right to civil liberties in South Africa then, if we are not immediately to degrade them by dictating the terms, we must recognise also that it is for the blacks to determine the means to their freedom.

Since the white churches interpret the message of Jesus on the question of political disinheritance in terms which dictate following a system which is unlikely to succeed and, by its dictation of the means, is a denial of the assertion of human value, is it claiming too much to say that the white church does not really take the situation of the disinherited seriously? But again the question needs to be asked whether this white interpretation is the message of Jesus? If so, he was politically irrelevant.

What is the white church's message concerning the third situational fact about Jesus and the South African blacks? This is the question of disruptive anger.

Undoubtedly the message on this is terribly confused. Clearly the love ethic is the main verbal message. To hate a man, to injure him, to force him to do something, to be angry with him and to kill him; all of those are seen to be incompatible with the command that we should love both our neighbours and our enemies. But the positive content of this gets all fouled up in the practical application.

To love one's black fellow Christian does not involve meeting him either socially or at worship. He must remain a social outcast from the white society. Then we can love him?

To love one's fellow Christian in another denomination involves a prior doctrinal agreement. So it is not incompatible with love to remain secluded in our denominational enclaves.

To love one's fellow man most certainly does not appear to be incompatible with shooting him in a bloody war. There may be a few very genuine Christian pacifists, but participation and encouragement to participation in two World Wars by Christian leaders is little more than the continuing war-mongering of Christians through the centuries. Always some immediate socio-political issue has justified the use of violence; be it Nazism in Germany or Communism in Vietnam, killing is accepted as the necessary means of halting some disastrous evil. It is recognised that love should be the only weapon with which to fight for the good of society. At the same time it is recognised that the love armoury of the other side (always the other side) is empty. Thus force is accepted as tragically necessary.

And love has never appeared to be incompatible with violent reprisals. Despite Christ's drastic revision of the *lex talionis*, Christians have made very sporadic and very pathetic attempts to rid any country of capital punishment. If a man chooses to kill, rape, steal, then he must pay for his violation of sacred life with his own life. Few South African Christians would condemn the killing of guerrilla fighters in Rhodesia, Mozambique, or Angola. Even fewer would object to the (preferably legal) killing of any who resort to violence in South Africa itself to alter the dehumanising situation of the disinherited blacks.

The message appears to be: Love is incompatible with directly and intentionally doing violence to any man, but if I am threatened in my security and freedom, or if any man does violence to me, then to react violently is justifiable. The implication of this is that violence to protect and entrench the status quo is justifiable (though not a full expression of the Christian love ethic), but unconstitutional violence to bring about change in the status quo is never justifiable. Is this really what the love ethic of Jesus is all about?

Finally, what is the message of the White churches on the 'thingness' of blacks? No church today would dare to make the claim that when *homo sapiens* has black skin pigmentation he is merely a thing. No church could claim that and claim to be Christian. In fact the white churches are vociferous in their assertions that blacks are also human beings. In the light, however, of poverty, disinheritance, and the deification of the 'whites only' democratic system, it is clear that blacks are not REALLY accepted as persons. At best they are backward and wayward children who need the leadership of their white parents/guardians.

Whites -both Christian and otherwise- can be expected to object violently to this analysis. One can almost hear them saying: 'Your analysis is so terribly negative. You have not taken into account the positive advances that have come to the southern tip of Africa with the advent of the white man; like economic and industrial development'. In this sort of objection the thing/child attitude of whites to blacks stands out so clearly. To be sure the whites have brought new and vastly complicated bits of technical machinery. But in ethico-religious terms progress should be measured in human and not gadget categories. In South Africa human relations, pride, dignity, justice, and freedom have been continually and savagely eroded. Whites place a greater value on their technical civilisation than on human beings- especially if those human beings happen to be black.

Quite clearly the white man's assertion of the black man's humanity has very little indeed to do with being human in an economic, social, and political sense. He is not free to be a man.

What is the message of Jesus to these poor, disinherited black children whom kindly whites insult as much by their ineffectual kindness as by their deprivations? Before answering that we need to turn to try grasp the message of Jesus in his own setting.

Jesus another Interpreter's Guess

I have quite deliberately entitled this section a guessing at the message of Jesus to the poor, disinherited Jews of his day in their situation of recurring scuffles for freedom. I have done this because the Gospels were **written** not with this audience in mind. We, therefore have to try, very often, to read between the lines and this is a very tricky business. Since the situation of blacks in South Africa is so desperate and corresponds so clearly to that of Jesus' first hearers, and since the interpretation of the message of Jesus through the white South African filter is frequently so degrading, the attempt at re-interpreting Jesus must be made, however risky.

Perhaps the best and least risky place to begin this re-interpretation is with the Jesus-message to those whom white South Africa treats as if they were black things. What did Jesus say about the humanity of the disinherited of his day? There appear to be three major things in the Jesus-message which constituted its revolutionary character. It is these three things which made the Gospel not an opium for the people which intoxicates and incapacitates, but made it a ferment for a new freedom.

The first is that man's worth is grounded in God's Love for him. It is not grounded in any natural ability, historical culture, human achievement, or the assessment of other people. No man is inherently worthy or inherently unworthy. God's love is seen to be the sole creator of worth. A man has value simply by being loved by God. To affirm God's love, therefore, is by the same move to affirm the value of all men as human beings.

As trite as this may sound the consequences are enormous. It is not simply a moralistic message that we should be prepared to affirm the worth of others, though that is implied. It is far more radical. It means that to affirm God is to affirm my own human worth. Christ commanded not simply that we should love our neighbours but that we should love them as we love ourselves. If we were meant to deny our own worth and to denigrate ourselves, the logical implication of the great commandment would be that we should treat others also as having no value. It is only when we attach value to ourselves that it becomes meaningful to attach it to others. The white church's lip-service to the philosophy that 'I am but nothing in the sight of God' is a monstrous social and religious lie- and a solid foundation on which to build the black man's nothingness.

Throughout the pages of the New Testament Jesus walks trying to persuade people to affirm their humanity in a Roman society which has disinherited them. He tells them to love themselves. He tells them they are worth more than birds and flowers, he tells them that he loves them. He affirms them in everything he does and says so that they will affirm themselves. The incident of the woman caught in the act of adultery by Jewish legalists is most instructive. First he deals with the men who wanted to stone her by saying that only the faultless men should throw stones at her. Then, not wanting to have her grovelling in self-reviling before him, he tells her that she is forgiven, must stand up and affirm her womanhood. When she does so her personal liberation begins.

So the Gospel begins with a great big demand for self-affirmation. Here the fight for freedom begins. This is its true revolutionary potential. When a man asserts his value as a human being despite all the labels that society puts on him, then, and only then will he begin to be able to say to any man, society, or social system, 'No, I won't conform to your degrading and dehumanising stereotypes'. Such a message must have been political dynamite.

But freedom is not doing what I want to. It is becoming what I should. A man is free when he sees clearly the fulfilment of his being and is thus capable of making the envisioned self a reality. To put this in theological terms it is not enough to affirm God's love. That leads to sheer gentle mentality. We have to affirm also the righteousness of God. Love saves righteousness from being legalistic, but righteousness gives content to the human voice that is affirmed by God's love.

It is never enough in Christ's terms simply to affirm my being. Living is meaningless until one has found something to live for which is worth more than life itself. To be human is to find something worth dying for. As Jesus put it, 'the man who tries to find life will lose it, but the man who is prepared to lose life for my sake will find what life is all about'. If the assertion of God's love demands that we should affirm ourselves. God's righteousness demands that we should affirm God, Christ, and our neighbour. In this, it is affirming that Christ is central. All the rest flows from this. Thus the question becomes what does it mean to be prepared to lose one's life for the sake of Christ? Does this mean to become an other-worldly, a-political, a-social being?

This question brings us to the third vital element in the Jesus-message of what it means to be human which makes Christianity so revolutionary. The question is 'what was Jesus about that gives the 'righteousness' content to the love of God?'

In answer to this question it is important to remember, as we have seen, that Christ was identified with the poor, totally disinherited Jews of his day. He was one of them. Socially and politically he had no privileges.

He did not sit among the 'haves' waving gaily to the 'have-nots' with vague promises that their patience would one day be rewarded. Rather, he worked among and for the disinherited so that what message and programs he had sprang from the bowels of the people. It was of the people, for the people, and had to be put into effect by the people. If they were to be free they would have to take their freedom, they had no Roman Jesus who might induce a moral hand-out.

Jesus' message was clearly not an other-worldly 'religious' one. It was social to the core. Jesus himself says that God's spirit has been given to him to preach the good news to the poor, and the content of that good news was 'deliverance to captives, recovering of sight to the blind, liberating the oppressed' (Luke 4.16). This was not pious talk suitable for aseptic little religious prayer meetings. In Christ God had identified himself with suffering man. He has taken sides with them to bring them freedom from the things that crush them.

Not only does Christ side unmistakably with the wretched of the earth for their liberation, he takes sides against evil. His whole life was deliberate offensive against those powers which held man captive. It began with a conflict against Satan at the beginning of his ministry, and every exorcism was a binding and spoiling of Satan.

There is absolutely no need to get bogged down in the quaint problems of the personification of Satan. It is sufficient to note that men are really controlled by real powers of evil. They are forces from the outside that cripple men spiritually, physically and socially.

The usual message of the cross is that here Christ finally defeated Satan. Many interpreters, noting the continuance of evil in the world, take this to mean that the major battle has been fought and won but minor battles and mopping up skirmishes are still going on. This is a totally unrealistic view of evil. Paul is more pertinent when he speaks of our dying **with** Christ, being buried **with** him and rising **with** him. What this message of our contemporaneity with Christ appears to mean is that we are still involved in Christ's fight against evil. As much for us as for him, this is a real fight against real evil. But the fight is worthwhile because evil is not omnipotent. That is the heart of the message of the resurrection.

One does not need a theological degree to grasp the significance of a message like this. He approached those wretched poor men, and firstly he lit the dangerous fire of their sense of dignity and worth as human beings. Next he fanned this flame saying that living is nothing unless you have got something big enough to die for. Finally he stood alongside the poor, the traitors, the prostitutes, the political nobodies, the cripples and said 'God's love and justice demand that you be free', and he pointed the way by tackling any and every debilitating social evil from the upper-class religious snob who was destroying the dignity to physical disease. Maybe Jesus never did lead a band of Zealot guerrillas, but Romans would undoubtedly have known that their security was tied up with his death.

So when Jesus affirmed a man he most certainly affirmed his humanity not simply in religious terms, but morally, socially, and politically. His whole message is about the liberation of man from everything that crippled, degraded, or dehumanised him. Paul was absolutely right when he summarised the Gospel as 'for freedom did Christ set you free', and it was a freedom which tore through the barriers of race, class, nationality, and sex.

What then in particular did Jesus have to say about the three particular issues of poverty, political disinheritance and the use of force?

On the question of poverty it is to be noted that Christ's taking sides with the poor was coupled often with a harsh rejection of wealth. This is seen with outstanding clarity in the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking him about salvation. Jesus said to him that to obtain salvation he should keep the law. Immediately the man protested that he had done this since his youth but there was no salvation for him in this- even though it involved loving God as he loved himself. Jesus then told him that if he wanted to be a disciple he had to first go and sell everything that he had and to give the proceeds to the poor. Then as a poor man he could come and follow him. Jesus was not simply advocating a program of poverty relief. His concern was for the young man who was being destroyed by the chains of excessive wealth. He saw to the heart of the problem which was that wealth destroys a man's capacity to be human and to act in terms of human (not economic) ethics. As he walked away Jesus generalised on the incident saying, 'It is easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to inherit the kingdom of God'.

It is also worth noting that the famous letter of St. James is saying much the same thing. This is the favourite letter of Christian liberals who interpret the message of 'faith without works is dead' to mean that rich Christians should be putting their wealth to some relief purpose.

But that cannot have been what James intended. He is writing to poor Christians warning them to be very, very careful about taking rich people into their fellowship, because it is always the rich who oppress the poor. So he tells them to quit the sickening practice of bowing and scraping to the rich.

It is also significant that on the day of the first Pentecost when Christians made their first attempt at putting into practice the Jesus-message, they obliterated wealth distinctions between themselves by sharing everything they possessed.

So the moralistic hand-out message of the white church's interpretation of Matthew 25 could not have been what Jesus intended at all. The white interpretation depends on assuming Jesus' sanctioning of private wealth which creates the poor. Instead Jesus appears to have insisted that men should stand on an equal economic footing if money is not going to blind us to people, and the first Christians interpreted this to mean that they must share their possessions. Thus Jesus never stood alongside the poor aiding and encouraging them to rob the rich and become rich themselves. That would have meant accepting that the system of private capital is right, fair and the best for just and liberating human relationships. Instead he attacked the rich because their riches made them grind the faces of the poor. But he never robbed or tried to become a rich man himself. His message to the poor was simply for a sharing of the things necessary for life.

The message of Matthew 25, therefore, needs re-interpretation. When placed alongside what Jesus had to say to the rich young ruler, it cannot be paraphrased as: 'Please you wealthy people scrape a few crumbs to the poor'. It cannot work either because there is no indication it was addressed to the rich elite. It was a message to the poor and for the poor and excludes the rich whose riches will always blind and bind them. The message to rich was addressed to the rich young ruler. Since it was message addressed to the poor who themselves would have known what it was to be hungry, thirsty, homeless and in prison, it cannot mean simply: 'See Christ being down-trodden in your neighbour's wretchedness and do something to break that evil'. It says also; 'See Christ in your own wretchedness and break free.' If you look after yourself and your neighbour at the same time you will either be all poor together, or all rich together, and so be free to be human.

But it is noteworthy that Christ promises no divine assistance in the process of freeing one's self and society from the economic enslavement of the system of 'haves' and 'have-nots'. All that is promised is an eternal 'well done'. It is to be man's endeavour once he has been inflamed by his sense of his own and his neighbour's value. That freeing was what Christ was all about. And Christ said that if we but discover this secret of real living we will be prepared to lose our lives for the sake of it. He was realist enough to know that this message was highly dangerous in the situation of his day, so he said that life will be found only if we are prepared to lose it for his sake- the sake of 'the man'.

On the question of political disinheritance it is again a pertinent fact that in Jesus God identified with the disinherited. Before starting from this basis to attempt an interpretation of the saying "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's", it is important to remember that Jesus was a Jew. The significance of this is that it is not unlikely that Jesus shared the Jews' understanding of their history.

That history began at the Exodus when Moses led a straggling bunch of ex-slaves out of Egypt, fired by the dream that this was God's plan. The Jews were God's chosen people and he had sent Moses not only to free them from their slavery but also to establish them as His people in the land that He would give to them. When, therefore, they eventually settled in Canaan and subdued the inhabitants one great belief stuck firmly in their minds. Israel was God's land which God had set aside for God's people. From this flowed two great convictions: (a) God alone was King in Israel and to no one else could a true Israelite give his allegiance: no one else could he serve. (b) The people of Israel alone had a God-given right to the land and no one else- though God might have punished Israel in the past by letting a foreign power rule the land temporarily. It was always simply a temporary arrangement.

Jesus undoubtedly shared the Jewish view that God alone was to be served by his followers with their whole being. On the second issue it is not clear that the universalism we find in the Gospels was stated quite so clearly and unequivocally by Jesus. Undoubtedly a parable such as that of the Good Samaritan would have provided a basis of it, but it is equally clear that early Christians needed a lot of persuading that gentiles could be accepted by the Christian church. So some Jewish particularism must have been a part of the message of Jesus, and that would have included a shared belief that Israel was God's land for God's people. In any event the hearers of Jesus were Jews who, especially the Zealots, would have believed that God alone was king, that Israel was God's land for God's people. This Jesus would have known, and he must have been aware of these sentiments when he answered their question about paying taxes to Rome.

In the light of this situation and this faith it is not so easy to assume that Jesus was giving any legitimacy at all, not even a limited divine right, to the Roman government. 'Render to Caesar what is Caesar's. What was Caesar's anyway? Did he have the right to their allegiance simply because he had invaded their land and colonised it? Hardly. Only the quisling tax-collectors and collaborationist Sadducees might have conceded that. Those who heard would have said that Caesar had the might but not the right to rule in Israel. Was the land Caesar's and what it yielded out of which taxes had to be paid? Hardly. It was God's land and Jews were His appointed husbandmen. God had the right to claim taxes for the sake of his work. Rome had no claim to the produce of God's land for the purposes of advancing her land and power hunger.

So 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' could quite legitimately be interpreted as his first hearers probably interpreted it: 'Give Caesar precisely nothing, for everything in Israel is God's'. This interpretation certainly makes sense of the accusation brought against Jesus that he incited the people not to pay taxes to Rome. This means that he incited the people to claim their inheritance and to reject their Roman disinheritance.

In support of this interpretation is the fact that while Jesus frequently condemned the collaborationist Sadducees and even the upper class and more genteel nationalist Pharisees, there is no record whatever of his condemnation of the violently nationalistic Zealots. It is significant also that he ridicules the Gentile rulers and calls the Roman puppet, Herod, a 'fox'. Further, Jesus did die on a cross- the death of a political insurgent.

It is true that the Gospels consistently try to place the responsibility for the death of Jesus at the door of the Jewish rulers, to dismiss the political accusations brought against Jesus as being Jewish lies, and to present Pilate as a weak pawn in the hand of the Jewish rulers. But there are gaping holes in this presentation which are probably occasioned by the writers' desire to present Jesus as the saviour of the world to their non-Jewish readers.

According to contemporary assessments of men like Philo, Pilate was anything but a weakling. He knew how to act cruelly and violently against Jewish insurgents and it does not seem likely that he was the sort of man who would have allowed himself to be pushed around by a few Jewish priests. Further, why would he have offered Barabbas as an alternate to Jesus if Jesus had been as lily-white politically as we are led to believe. Such a choice would have been a farce. Imagine the South African President thinking that he could realistically get away with it if he decided to let the people decide whether they wanted a harmless Zionist preacher released or Robert Sobukwe. If the prime Minister wanted the Zionist released he would never have given him the unfair competition of Sobukwe. He would need at least a Mandela if he wanted the people to have a live option. So the question 'Jesus or Barabbas' itself indicates that Jesus was somewhat of the same ilk.

And the carefully planned ride of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey must have, and did, call to mind the people's dream of a liberating Messiah, about which their prophets and wise men had spoken, and inflamed their hopes and passions. Surely Jesus could not have been so naïve and so out of touch with his situation as to think that either the Romans or the disinherited Jews crying out for their freedom would have interpreted this as being without any political significance.

So by Rome's laws and by Rome's standards Jesus was an agitator. In terms of these laws they were justified in crucifying Jesus. He was dangerous, for very subtly and very courageously, but without taking up arms himself, he was inciting the Jewish people to affirm their humanity, to affirm their history and thus to affirm their political rights in the land of their God. No wonder Romans sarcastically stuck up the placard 'King of the Jews' over his dying body on the cross. He had come to open prison doors not simply to thieves and cheats but to a people in a very much larger prison; the prison of their disinheritance. He did not himself unlock that door for them. What he did was provide the key of affirming the dignity of the disinherited poor and their history, and this combination must have ignited the flames of freedom.

Finally what was the Jesus-message on the questions of the means to freedom? This is an inordinately difficult question to answer. Was Jesus the king of all pacifists?

Against the easy conclusion that Jesus was totally committed to pacifism the following facts need to be noted carefully.

- (a) Although Simon the Zealot was a faithful member of the Twelve, implying that Jesus could not have been unaware of Zealot thinking and activities, at no stage is there an overt condemnation of the Zealot party. This is startling. It is even more startling when it is remembered that biblical critics have shown how many of the sayings of Jesus are probably to be accepted as creations of the early church. Since they were prepared to put sayings in the mouth of Jesus, and were writing for Romans, it is strange that they did not commend their Master by presenting him as opposed to the Zealots- the arch-enemies of Romans in Israel. This does not prove that Jesus

approved of Zealot methods. It simply points out that it cannot be easily shown that Jesus was opposed to them.

- (b) Barabbas was apparently offered to the people as an alternate to Jesus. Barabbas also was clearly a Zealot revolutionary. We have already suggested that if Pilate was making a serious effort to have Jesus released then presumably, relying on the sympathies of nationalistic Jews, Jesus must have had a viable political appeal.
- (c) There is the strange fact that in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus' disciples were carrying swords. A thoroughgoing pacifist or non-violent man like Ghandi would never have tolerated such a practice among his inner circle of followers. Admittedly Jesus did not approve of the use to which the disciples put their swords, saying "he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword". But that could mean a lot of things. The Romans lived by the sword. Would they not also have to die by the sword? If so, the command to put their swords away may have meant that this was not the time or place for it. If, on the other hand, his remarks were intended solely for his disciples, his saying and his command might be interpreted as being that violence is not in fact the way to achieve freedom.
- (d) Finally, while there is no record of Jesus having killed a man, there is evidence that he was prepared to act illegally, that he did insult the political and religious leaders of his day, and that he was prepared to use physical force when he was strongly convinced about some political evil. He acted illegally when he broke civil and religious laws which he believed were pointless restrictions on human compassion. He was quite prepared, for example, to heal a man despite the huge weight of Sabbath laws. It is important to note here that he did not wait to get the laws changed before acting. He acted in disregard of the laws. And Jesus poked fun at the gentile leaders and rulers, he called Herod 'fox' and lumped the Sadducees and Pharisees together as a bunch of 'whited sepulchres' - very respectable-looking gravestones hiding the useless putrefying corpses underneath. The temple was a place where 'unclean' Roman currency had to be exchanged for ceremonially clean Jewish money for the sake of worshippers buying the sacred sacrificial animals. So the courtyard of the temple thronged with worshippers attending the tables of the money-changers. What was it that angered him so much that he rushed in and then, brandishing a whip, chased the money-changers out of the place? (if that is not using force, then I don't know what it is - it wasn't killing force, but it was force). It is certainly possible that this was both a religious and a political anger. Political, because it is well known that the Zealots refused so much as to touch money bearing the insignia of Caesar. Here were Jews in the temple, the very heart and symbol of the faith that this land and its people were God's and not Caesar's, doing traffic with Caesar's money for God's purposes. It was tacit admission that God's claims were purely religious and had nothing to do with politics. Politics and economics were Caesar's rightful field. Such a notion would have been abhorrent to most of the poor, disinherited Jews, and would explain Jesus' forceful action. As an explanation it is certainly more satisfying than the usual one - given without any solid supporting evidence - that a lot of filthy cheating and stealing was going on among the money-changers.

We know that the tax-collectors certainly robbed the people, but these money-changers were not tax-collectors. There is in fact more evidence that they were honourable men performing a religiously necessary task than that they were exploiters of the ignorant poor. If this interpretation is correct there is at least one recorded incident in which he reacted with startling violence against the political subjection of his people.

With this evidence we need to look again at the message of Jesus about going the second mile, turning the other cheek, loving one's enemies, and the fact that Jesus never took up arms with the Zealots against Rome.

The usual interpretation of going the second mile and turning the other cheek is that Jesus is enjoining his disciples to an absolute self-denying humility in the face of what men did to them. They are to make themselves happy doormats if other people choose to walk all over them. If, however, the message about the love of God creating human value and self-respect has any claim to validity, this interpretation seems to be an abortion of the truth.

The disinherited could make no appeal against a Roman soldier who felt too lazy to carry his own bags or wanted to have a little Jewish sport. That was a Roman privilege. He could even satisfy the fancy he took to a Jewish coat. Jewish resistance to any of this could mean a severe beating and even death in the nearest ditch. So Jesus counsels his disinherited followers, maybe, 'Look, it is humiliating to be pushed around like this, but it is pointless to die for refusing. That will change nothing. How can you then, when you are alone out on the road and a Roman accosts you, keep both your life and your dignity. You can obey him and yet set the conditions of your obedience. Don't go one mile, go two. The first mile will be his, but the second yours. If he hits you once, challenge him to hit you again- don't cringe and crawl and plead for mercy. Confuse him with your defiant pride in yourself. You must maintain whatever initiative you can in your humiliating circumstances if you are not going to accept total annihilation as a person.'

This interpretation is backed by Paul who advises Christians not to return evil for evil because in doing good and keeping the initiative one 'heaps coals of fire on his head' (Romans 12.28), i.e. probably you will shame him.

This advice of Jesus to his followers need not be interpreted as a general rule for all forms of political behaviour in all circumstances, but as very sound advice to people who, like the Jews to whom he spoke, could often find themselves in hopelessly tight corners within their situation of disinheritance.

What then of the counsel to love one's enemies and the fact that Jesus himself did not move in with violence to take over political control and apparently never counselled his followers to do so either?

What would have happened if Jesus had led a violent revolution against Rome? Would there have been a parity of political power among all the people that would have eradicated the recurring problem of disinheritance? It is hardly likely. Jesus knew only too well what Jewish exclusiveness could do to people. He knew, for example, that Samaritans were despised by Jews and would hardly be any more likely to get any more sympathy from Jewish rulers than Roman rulers. He also knew that Jews would have to come a long, long way before they would open their doors to Gentiles and accept them as people.

So a violent revolution would most likely replace Roman dictatorship with Jewish dictatorship and so Jewish disinheritation with non-Jewish disinheritation. His unbelievably uphill battle was against the demon of political power itself, which when it is not shared because men recognise their own worth and that of every man, breeds the misery of disinheritation. Violence helps shoes to change, it does not change dehumanising power-hunger and prejudice.

Thus what Jesus was at amongst his own followers was calling for a love for God which would affirm the human value of every man, myself included- 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself'. In a prior and genuine acceptance of that alone is there any realistic hope of chaining the devil of disinheritation

Yet, and the point must be made again, Jesus did not condemn those Jewish revolutionaries who did turn to violence. He does not seem to have agreed with the wisdom of their enterprise, or he would have joined them. But equally he does not tell them to stop. Why? It is just possible that Jesus saw these efforts as politically futile and would not alter the human condition, but that he saw also that they were flickers of recognition among this humiliated people that they themselves really were human beings and not things. Even here they were affirming their own being and affirming at least one consequence of their belief in God. He could not go along with them, but nor could he extinguish this tiny ray of hope. For himself and those who chose to follow him. Self-affirmation really became hope for the death of disinheritation only when it had room to allow for the affirmation of the human value of others.

Suggestions, therefore, like 'love your enemies' must have sounded empty and cowardly to people suffering under Rome, and who wanted the political shoe on the other foot. But for Jesus real hope for man lay with all feet being politically shod. 'Love your enemies' does not mean crawling around on your bellies before those who disinherit you and treat you like things. It means that you should have no enemies at all, and that is possible only when there is a parity of power.

For that the Christian is committed to work. He will undoubtedly be hounded and killed for this revolutionary vision, but he will accept nothing short of it. Love that is prepared to stop short of power must breed a race of self-dehumanising beggars.

So the Jesus-message to the disinherited is a message of hope. It shouts that we have to destroy the devils of human indignity the thingness whether they eat like a cancer from within or crush like a vice from without; we have to destroy the devil of economic disparity which means poverty, and power disparity and prejudice which means disinheritation. But it says also that your humanity is worth nothing if someone else becomes a thing in the process, your wealth is the devil if it makes another poor, and your power will have to be destroyed if it disinherits another. So Jesus puts a dampener on the means of violence if it is dreamed that violence will produce the real thing, but the exercise of power, even physical force, is not extinguished if through it man expresses his own God-given human worth.

An Attempted Application

We have seen and rejected the interpretation and application of the Jesus-message of the white churches in South Africa. We have tried to come to grips with the Jesus-message by taking our point of departure from the situation of Jesus' disinheritance and that of his first followers. What is to be said of its application to the lot of the poor, disinherited blacks in South Africa? What does 'black theology' mean here in practical and theological terms?

In Christ God identified himself with the politically disinherited poor for the purpose of affirming their humanity, liberating them, and calling them to a vision of society which would bind the devil of economic and political disparity.

From this it follows that if the church is in any sense the body of Christ, an extension of the incarnation, then it will be where Christ was and is, sharing in his work of liberation.

In South Africa the poor, dehumanised, enslaved and politically disinherited people live in the black ghettos in urban townships, on rural farms, and shut off in tribal 'homelands'. Where the church stands identified with these people, there is the only thing that deserves to be called church. The rest is a hollow façade making Christian noises without being Christian.

But being identified with the suffering blacks alone does not constitute the church. That is the church where people are involved up to their necks in the struggle for the liberation of these blacks, fighting the present-day devil of huge economic and political power disparities and racial prejudice. It is out among the people struggling to stamp dead every satanic lie of 'thingness'. This church will not have to have a black pigmentation, though that will give it a head start. But its heart will have to feel the agony of blackness. Being identified with and being part of that agony, and so be able to see and respond to the devil of disinheritance realistically.

But where does the struggle against 'thingness' begin? For Christ it began not with his seeking out the ear of the Roman rulers to persuade them to set his people free. It began by his moving among his disinherited people affirming and reaffirming their humanity so that they could sit up and take stock of themselves and say 'yes' to this message and 'no' to Rome's stereotypes. Then when their own sense of humanity had stirred enough for them to say, and mean, **I am a man**, then and only then did the rest of what Jesus had to say about loving one's neighbour take on significance. He moved among them quite obviously inflaming their hopes, and when they were ready to kill for freedom, he introduces infuriatingly sane riders about loving and sharing. Jesus could not have been sure whether his hearers would have heard only the bits about their own humanity and been inflamed by their passion for freedom, and heard nothing about the implied change in the structure of society. This was a risk he took even though it might have had something to do with the final blood-bath show-down between Jews and Romans that led to the end of Israel and its Temple.

I am convinced that the implication of this is that the proclamation of the Jesus-message to those who are treated by many whites, and who sometimes regard themselves, as 'things' must begin with clear and unequivocal affirmation of their humanity. They must drink in the message that they are men because God's love has declared them such, until they are deeply, deeply angry about their exploitation and powerlessness.

They must be enabled by the Gospel to affirm not only their own humanity but also their blackness. They must not feel ashamed that they are not white, or wish that they were white so that they could also be human. They must know that black as the ace of spades they are men.

That message will undoubtedly bring the anguish of absurdity. Knowing deeply within their own hearts that they are men will not in itself change their dehumanised lot. They will still find that men will want them to fit into their own categories of being children/things. What they know within themselves will clash in terrifying absurdity with the message about themselves they receive from society and the restrictions that are placed on their manhood.

If the Jesus-message continues to have any relevance, then the church will fan the flames of that dangerous hope, knowing full well that in the process it has lost control. In the biblical sense men are responsible creatures- they are responsible for their own actions and reactions. If the church will not allow men to be responsible, it will not allow them to be men. So it cannot even want or try to retain control. This does not mean that its work is finished. It has only just begun. It has begun the process of liberating men and must allow them to be responsible. Here things might go totally awry, and the rest the church has to say may never be heard. But it can legitimately only attempt to have its voice heard. It cannot impose its will on the men it has made. It cannot dictate the terms, conditions, or means of their freedom.

When it has set alight the flames of human dignity and freedom, then the terrifyingly difficult task begins of pointing to what love means when it is translated into terms of systems of economic and power distribution. Here it can expect disappointed rejection. But the church dare not sell its soul by sacrificing the future to the immediate. Its immediate concern is with the suffering blacks. But its ultimate concern is man without any labels. The blacks have the right to freedom now, but that right itself will become a devil if their freedom means an enslavement for others. This means that the church will be involved in the struggle for human affirmation and freedom among the black people. It is easy to imagine that being responded to with enthusiasm. Then it will have to appeal to the new, glorious, true human beings, even when it cannot have control. That love which expresses itself in authentic sharing is the only sure barrier against the new poor and the new disinherited. It is easy to imagine that being rejected. This should not surprise us for the Jesus-message always was both good news and offence. It is easy to imagine violence as the outcome of inflaming a sense of human dignity and a passion for freedom- just as it is easy to imagine the biblical message of Jesus being rejected. If it happens the church will both rejoice and weep. It will rejoice that at least part of the Jesus-message has been heard. It will weep because it will know full well that it will have to fight the same old devil of disinheritance in a new form.

What I see this to mean in more concrete and practical terms is that the Christian will be involved in working for the liberation of the blacks at a number of different levels. He will be fighting the debilitating devil of illiteracy, but the content of his reading primers will not be about the blackness of cats but about the humanity of man, e.g., 'I am a man' and 'black is beautiful'.

He will be using pre-school teaching opportunities to inculcate a sense of dignity before white-controlled formal schooling tries to make him accept its stereotypes. He will be using the vast platform of his pulpit to shout and scream that the message of love of God: 'we are men'; **WE** are men; 'We **ARE** men, 'We are **MEN**. And in his own personal actions he will try to stand alongside these people affirming their humanity by his actions.

At the next level he will inflame the passion for freedom. He will lead his people in their demand to be acknowledged as men. He will struggle for their rights to a living wage, and to own and have a voice of power in the land of their birth. And he will neither accept nor give any hand-outs knowing that the people of God have to work out their own salvation. He will be saying that freedom must happen within themselves and then be claimed by themselves, and that it cannot be a kindly gift of the whites, for freedom like faith is far too personal a thing to take on second-hand. And he will stand alongside these people affirming their right to freedom by discovering and expressing his own.

At another level he will be setting up working models within this sick society of what he understands to be a working model of the love ethic of Jesus. But he will not allow himself to be fooled into thinking that these Christian communities are havens of escape from the world, for he will know too well that enslavement, poverty and disinheritance is not simply a little personal thing, but a vast political devil. Thus his communities will be working models for the vital political offensives. To sacrifice the total society for little self-congratulatory enclaves is to have sacrificed the liberating mission to which a Christian worth the name is committed.

He will work at many other levels too to effect the liberation of the disinherited poor of South Africa, but at the same time he will measure progress not in terms of money or gadgets or which little group has the monopoly of power- he will measure progress in terms of total human relations based on the affirmation of human dignity. And that means human **relations**, not human separations!