A COMPARISON OF AFRICAN EVANGELICALISM WITH SOUTH AFRICAN BLACK THEOLOGY AND INDIAN DALIT THEOLOGY

BY

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SUMMARY
Evangelicals have an unquestionable heritage for involvement in the world and its social problems and the Bible provides a basis for a liberative gospel. For the God of the Bible is not only a God of love and peace, but also of justice and he is therefore on the side of the poor, oppressed and suffering. He has given us a spirit of engagement with the world as salt and light and not escapism. As we give serious consideration to the challenges of liberation theologies, we need to hear the voice of him who calls his people in every age to go out into the lost and lonely world (as he did), in order to live and love, to witness and serve like him and for him and that is what African Evangelicalism is all about.
KEY WORDS

1. Evangelicalism
2. African Evangelicalism
3. Latin American Liberation Theology
4. American Black Theology
5. Indian Caste System
6. Dalit Theology
7. Evangelical Theology of Liberation
8. Contextualization
9. Dualism
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Introduction

There is unquestionable consensus amongst most theologians that the most significant theological development of recent years has been the emergence of theologies of liberation. According to James Cone, all theologies of Liberation began as a reaction to the dominant theologies of Europe and North America. (Cone and Wilmore 1993:388) This development, according to Cone signals the rejection of the missionary theologies by Third World Churches and seminaries. What is so obvious amongst Third World Churches and Seminaries is a passionate quest for a contextual theology that brings about liberation. Third world people have been oppressed and subjugated for too long and they will not accept anything less than total liberation.

At the heart of South African Black theology and Dalit theology is the attempt to fundamentally rethink theology from the standpoint of the poor and the oppressed. What is common amongst Black and Dalit theologians is a special interest in liberation, which they understand as the attempt of the poor and oppressed people to gain their freedom. The central theological foundation of this approach is the thesis that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. This foundational thinking is in fact a reaction to the missionary over-emphasis of spiritual salvation, as if the gospel of Jesus Christ had no interest in the material conditions of life. (Cone and Wilmore 1993:388) It is this basic thesis that I would want to probe further as I look at two non-Western theologies of liberation from an African Evangelical perspective. The two non-Western theologies that will form the bulk of this thesis share the same theological foundation as all the other liberation theologies. The
thread that will run through this thesis is a response to the question, ‘How biblical is the view that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed?’ How accurate is the realization that the Bible is concerned about the salvation of the whole person, including his or her physical well-being? To what extent does evangelical Christianity authenticate the claim that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and what does it mean?

The purpose of this thesis is therefore two fold. Firstly I would want to make an analytical comparison (themes, context, methodology) of Indian Dalit Theology and South African Black theology, two theologies which share this central theological foundation of Liberation. Furthermore, I will examine the factors responsible for their emergence focusing on the inter-relatedness of the content of the two theologies to existential and other factors in their contexts. The major themes would then be highlighted to portray similarities and differences between them. Secondly, I would want to relate all this to African Evangelicalism primarily to make the point that it is possible to develop a comprehensive African Evangelical theology of liberation. My thesis is therefore a theological reflection on Indian Dalit theology and South African Black theology as two theologies attempting to rethink theology from the standpoint of the poor and oppressed and Evangelical theology as a theology that can be developed into a comprehensive liberation theology.
To do justice to these two non-Western theologies, I will attempt to explore how they have been influenced by other similar theologies or systems. In the case of South African Black theology, I would like to demonstrate its roots in the American Black theology as well as the impact of Latin American Liberation theology. Indian Dalit theology cannot be understood apart from the Indian Caste system and so I will attempt to do a caste analysis with the assumption that this will help us to have a deeper appreciation of where Dalit theology has come from. In order to establish the evangelical basis from which I will look at these two theologies, I would like to begin by highlighting the basic contemporary challenges facing evangelicalism in Africa today and then argue that this theology has a historically proven heritage for social involvement and can therefore be developed into a comprehensive African Evangelical theology of liberation.
CHAPTER ONE
1. Challenges Facing Evangelicalism Today

The intention of looking at the challenges facing evangelical Christianity in the third world today is to try to paint the background under which Black theology and Dalit theology have found fertile ground to grow and influence people of the third world. The two have emerged in two completely different contexts and yet they grapple with the same questions and raise the same objections to traditional evangelical Christianity. The third world context is one in which many people have become disillusioned by evangelical Christianity and this has turned this diverse and rich context into a breeding ground for all sorts of situational theologies and ideologies. All this, because Evangelical Christians have failed to preach a gospel that liberates in total, in other words a holistic gospel that does not discriminate between spiritual, political, economic, social and physical needs.

When asked to give their perceptions of Christianity, many third world people, especially the educated still perceive it as a legacy of the colonial era. This reason is given precisely because history tells the story of how Christianity was one of the instruments the colonizers used to dominate our minds. Christianity is therefore given this huge label – ‘White man’s religion.’ Professor George Kinoti has powerfully described the current situation of African Christianity and with it the African Christian thought in the following words:
There is a sense in which Christianity in Africa is the White man’s religion. The denominations we belong to, the liturgies we use, the hymns we sing, the theologies that govern our beliefs and conduct, be they liberal or evangelical, are all made in then West. Most of the Christian books we read originate from the West and usually written for the Western readers. This is not to blame the Western church: it’s time to say to the African Christians to begin to think and do things for themselves. (Kinoti 1997:74,75)

Kinoti’s observation is obviously an embarrassment to the 351 million Christians in Africa today because he has said it as it is. The notion is that with most third world countries having gained their independence, they must rid themselves of all neo-colonial and imperialist institutions and Christianity is one of these. ‘Moreover before the Colonizers came’, the argument goes on, ‘we had viable religions of our own. We worshipped God. But these missionaries told us that all that was pagan and dismissed the rituals and regulations as backward and primitive superstitions.’ Many of us, especially in Southern Africa are quick to point to the politicized gospel from the western world to confirm the suspicion of an imperialist agenda of even today’s missionaries and evangelists. There is even suspicion of humanitarian organizations or the so-called Non-governmental organizations, most of whom have a religious motivation for what they do. Matters are made worse when they concern themselves with issues of human rights and democracy.
These are the voices of man and woman right across the third world who have been influenced in one way or another by Christianity and now feel dissatisfied and some of them betrayed when they consider what Christianity has accomplished particularly in the area of economic and political liberation. The dissatisfaction comes in the context of a troubled people trying to make sense of their various situations of poverty, discrimination and oppression and in doing so they begin to question the relevance of traditional evangelical Christianity. These people cannot keep quiet any longer; they feel they have had enough. Their evaluation of evangelical Christianity is that it has failed to proclaim a relevant message of hope and salvation to the oppressed and dominated sections of society. If anything, in many instances evangelical Christianity has tended to perpetuate the status quo by failing to be a prophetic voice for the voiceless, and to uphold God’s standard of peace and justice. In Zimbabwe for instance, the institutionalized racist structures are still intact twenty-two years after independence and up to today we still have evangelical churches that are still predominantly white and unwelcoming to the black majority of Zimbabweans. What is even more offensive is the fact that most whites don’t see anything wrong with this and use the ‘preference’ argument to support why things are still the way they are twenty two years after independence. Up until recently, 3% of the population (Whites) still owned 75% of all the arable land in the country and they were also the predominant players in commerce and industry.
It is most unfortunate that evangelical Christianity has not responded to this reflective and contextual questioning by people in the third world. This state of affairs is what has resulted in the construction of Liberation theologies as more and more people seek for answers to their questions. Black theology and Dalit theology are two examples of such theologies. Most people might not wear the Black or Dalit theology label, but their thinking, questions and objections fit the label.

Perhaps this was the reason why James Cone’s polemic was directed primarily against the White church, but at the same time insisting on the applicability of the Christian faith in the cause of liberation. Cone analyses the Black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus, in order to create a sense of Black dignity and to provide people the ‘soul’ necessary to destroy white racism. (Cone 1970:20-21)

Black theologians are convinced that traditional Evangelical Christianity has failed to adequately express all the diversity of the human encounter of God. The result has been the rejection of the authoritarian God of traditional evangelicalism because such a God is responsible for establishing racial or class domination in society. Black theologians have respond by constructing a picture of a more humane God who understands and sympathizes with the plight of Black people and is willing to assume the role of being an advocate for the oppressed and defenseless.
Since the Independence of most African countries, the deep-rooted influence of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy or worldview as a tool for social analysis has become more and more obvious as people try to understand their situation of perpetual poverty and underdevelopment. This has remained so even after the collapse of the communist block a few years ago. Most reflective and sensitive Third world people subscribe to the belief that 'Religion is the opiate of the people', a kind of tranquillizer. People are told about the eternal life of heaven in order to forget the present reality of life on earth. Hence these saved people, we're told; only preach about peace and comfort of the soul in the midst of much poverty, inequality and oppression. Instead of hard work and the overthrowing of systems of injustice, the classic answer from this 'saved' lot is, 'Let us pray about it' or 'God cares'. Hence such Christianity is branded escapist or obscurantist.

Many Third world people have expressed how evangelical Christianity has failed to address issues of poverty and oppression and has therefore been dismissed as irrelevant. Evangelical Christians are preoccupied with questions no one is asking. They are absorbed in heavenly pursuits and are therefore confused about the real world. Their life consist of singing, fellowship and crusades, Bible Study and all-night vigils that bear little relation to 'worldly matters'. We are quickly reminded of how few Christians participate in politics at all levels and how the so-called 'dirty game' of politics is 'taboo' for the saved. In fact amongst most evangelical Christians the 'Christian in Politics debate' hasn't quite began yet and there is a general confusion on the subject. In Zimbabwe, in the
last Presidential election, the majority of people who did not go out to vote were Christians.

'What answer', we are asked, 'does Christianity offer to the many millions of impoverished and poverty-stricken people of the Third World?' 'Are some of these nations the most Christianized? we are asked. 'Moreover, you tell us of a Christian America and Europe, but they are responsible for our poverty! What about North-South economic inequality and the debt crisis? Has Christianity got a positive response to these? Look at Zimbabwe. What hope does Christianity offer? And so evangelical Christianity is dismissed as irrelevant and acceptable only to the uninitiated and the aged. As a system of thought, it is inadequate to deal with such questions.

Evangelical Christianity is being challenged here to recover its temporarily mislaid social conscience. It would seem that for the past fifty years or so, evangelicals have been preoccupied with the task of defending the historic biblical faith against attacks of liberalism, and reacting against its 'social gospel'. Perhaps its now time to emphasize the fact that God has given us social as well as evangelistic responsibilities in this world. To be relevant to these challenges, the Evangelical community has a lot of catching up to do.

This catching up is not going to be easy, especially when you consider that more and more people in third world countries are getting convinced that Christianity is a religion just like all others. Many people who have only a nominal commitment to Christianity wonder how
unique the Christian faith is. What is it that makes Christianity uniquely different from other faiths? Some of the corollary questions are: is it all right for us as Africans to practice our own African Traditional Religions? What has Christianity got to offer? This objection always comes up when people are not convinced of the relevance of the Christian faith. Relevance is always associated with the concept of contextualization, which in my opinion is a must for every Christian theologian. Whilst it is true that the Gospel in its content is unchanging and supra cultural, the problem for us in Africa is to do with the manner of expression and communication of this Gospel. The objection points to the fact that the Gospel has not been clothed in African culture and life ways, hence it has been labeled foreign and irrelevant.

Contextualization is therefore what Black and Liberation theologians are trying to do in order to make the gospel relevant to the African context. Worse still, a lack of genuine contextualization has also resulted in syncretism, the idea of assimilating elements of one religion into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions. (Gehman 1989:271)

In a nutshell this is the background that is representative of the wider Third world context and has produced not only Dalit theology and South African Black theology, but also many other theologies of liberation. It is against this background that an attempt to define evangelicalism is necessary.
1.1 Defining Evangelicalism

Despite all these challenges no one can doubt the growth and influence of evangelical Christianity in the world today, especially in the third world countries. The statistics of David Barrett indicate that at the turn of the century, Africa will become largely Christian. (Barrett 1970:39-54) The picture is however less clear when the meaning of Evangelicalism is considered.

Robert K. Johnston has written thus:

*It is increasingly difficult to provide an inclusive definition of evangelicalism.... Even Billy Graham has been quoted as saying, “Evangelicalism is a great mosaic God is building, but if you asked me to, I’d would have a hard time giving you a definition of what it is today”. This is the same Graham about whom Martin Marty writes; evangelicals can be defined as “people who find Billy Graham or his viewpoints acceptable” (Johnston 1985:2)*
Writing as far back as 1976 leading evangelical theologian Carl Henry spoke of an identity crisis among evangelicals. Referring especially to the situation in America, Henry said that the earlier cohesion of evangelicals had been lost "through multiplied internal disagreements and emerging counter forces" (Christianity Today 1976:32-33).

Though diversity of emphasis has made it more difficult to identify evangelicals today, there are certain basic elements, which define its character. Clearly "evangelical" is a term associated with developments flowing out of the Protestant Reformation. It describes the conviction of those who believe in salvation through God's grace received by faith alone. This salvation is provided through the death and resurrection of Christ and is totally unmerited. The Bible is viewed as the final authority for faith and life. It is to be studied and obeyed and is a crucial element in the life of the faith. Evangelicals are associated with the term "born again". This is seen as the transformation of the individual by the power of the Holy Spirit issuing in new patterns of behavior and involving following Christ and being his witness in the world.

This outline of Evangelicalism does not however reflect the diversity that is obvious of Evangelicalism. Evangelicals have however dealt with this diversity by accepting unity in diversity on matters non-essential, uncompromising unity on essentials or the fundamentals of the Christian faith and in all things, love. I would argue that the distinctives amongst evangelicals are mostly to do
with non-essentials and not fundamentals. My major concern in this discussion is therefore with the fundamentals or essentials of Evangelicalism. One such fundamental is the emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ. Evangelicals claim the uniqueness and finality only for Christ and not for Christianity in any of its many institutional or cultural forms. Professor John Mbiti endorses this statement and has written: ‘The uniqueness of Christianity is in Jesus Christ.’ (Mbiti 1969:277) The late Bishop Stephen Neill strongly emphasized the centrality of Christ in the debate with pluralism. In his fine book Christian Faith and Other Faiths, he wrote: ‘the old saying “Christianity is Christ” is almost exactly true. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth is the criterion by which every Christian affirmation has to be judged, and in the light of which it stands or falls.’ (Neill 1984:23)

While the assessment that Evangelicals are often seen to be lacking in their concern for social justice is amply justified, we need to admit that it does not tell the whole story. There is another strand in evangelical history, which tells of a tradition of deep involvement in the struggle for social justice. It is important to note however that the word ‘evangelical’ describes a theology, not an activity, and so we speak of the evangelical faith, or the faith of the gospel. Evangelical Christianity is not a recently invented brand of Christianity. On the contrary, evangelical Christianity is in my opinion the original, apostolic, New Testament Christianity. The very same claim and counter-claim were made during the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church often
dubbed the Reformers innovators, but they refuted the accusation. The Reformers were renovators, seeking to go back to the beginning and recover the authentic, original gospel. 'We teach no new thing,' wrote Luther, 'but we repeat and establish old things, which the apostles and all godly teachers have taught before us.' (Luther 1953:53) Hugh Latimer, the popular preacher of the English Reformation, made the same claim: 'you say it is new learning. Now I tell you it is old learning.' (Latimer, Works, Vol 1:30f) More eloquent still was the insistence of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury from 1560, in his famous Apology (1562): 'It is not our doctrine that we bring you this day, we wrote it not, we found it not out, we are not the inventors of it, we bring you nothing but what the old fathers of the church, what the apostles, what Christ our Saviour himself hath brought before us.' (Jewel, Works, Vol 1:1034)

Evangelical Christianity is not a sectarian oddity held by a few fanatics. On the contrary, it is original, biblical, apostolic, and historic mainstream Christianity. Evangelical Christians are not deviationists from the truth, but loyalists who are seeking to be faithful to a heritage. It is this faithfulness to the authentic, original gospel that should make it possible for Evangelical Christians to reflect more seriously on the challenges posed by liberation theologies.
In a nutshell, the Evangelical faith is the Trinitarian faith. This is why evangelical Christians place such emphasis on the Word of God, the Cross of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word concentrates on the Cross of Christ, and is endorsed by the Holy Spirit. Each necessitates a prior renunciation, not human wisdom, but God’s word, not human merit, but the Cross of Christ, not human personality, but the power of the Holy Spirit. (Stott 1992:57-62) This is the essence of Evangelical Christianity. God’s three most precious gifts to the world are – the Bible, the Cross, and the Spirit, and the most authentic characteristics of Evangelical believers is humility before the Bible as our authority, before the Cross for our salvation, and before the Spirit for our witness.

And so, my thesis is that authentic Evangelical theology, although in our day unceremoniously dislodged from its former throne as “Queen of the Sciences,” nevertheless remains a rich, multidimensional discipline, which demands a cluster of complimentary responsibilities. It is a systematic reflection on scripture and tradition and the mission of the church in mutual relation, with scripture as the norm. (Davis 1984:43) Theology therefore becomes an attempt to think systematically about the foundations of the Christian faith and its contemporary/contextual applications. African Evangelical theology is born when the African Evangelical attempts to think systematically about the foundations of Evangelical faith in his/her context. According to Davis, the goal of this exercise is to have an understanding of biblical truth that is
sound, coherent, and comprehensive in whatever context you belong to. (Davis 1984:43) John Stott, in his article, 'Theology: A Multidimensional Discipline,' highlights the complimentary responsibilities of an authentic Evangelical theology (Stott 1992). I will attempt to summarize some of them.

The first one is a fundamental conviction that Evangelical theology is a response to divine revelation. It is argued that we would know nothing if God had not taken the initiative to make himself known. So Evangelical theology takes its primary content from the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures. (Erickson 1992:16) Without revelation theology would inevitably degenerate into idolatry, since there would be no criterion by which to distinguish between true and false images of God. But the biblical revelation protects from idolatry.

The divine revelation, to which Evangelical theology is a response, is not mediated only through Christ and the biblical witness to Christ, but also through the created order. Following Calvin’s teaching on the similarities and dissimilarities between general and special revelation, it was Sir Francis Bacon, the seventeenth century scientific pioneer, who spoke about God’s two “books” – the book of his word and the book of his works. (Torrence 1984:100)
Secondly, Evangelical theology is Historical theology bringing together theology and tradition. Historical, not only because of the historical person, Jesus Christ, but also that it rests on certain historical events, which involved him, especially his birth, death and resurrection. (Stott 1992:15) The God of the biblical revelation is the God of history, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the God of Moses and Joshua, the judges, kings and prophets, the God and Father of the Jesus of history, the God of the apostles and of the post-apostolic church. It is in the area of history that God’s eternal purpose is being unfolded. (McGrath. Ed 1996:6-7)

All theologizing on the basis of biblical revelation comes under the heading of “tradition.” For tradition is precisely the church’s interpretation of Scripture from one generation to the next, as the Holy Spirit enlightens it. But the interpretation does not possess the authority, which belongs to the text being interpreted. We must follow Jesus both in his distinction between Scripture as the Word of God and tradition as the teaching of men, and in his insistence that all traditions of the elders must be subordinated to the supreme, reforming authority of Scripture (Mark 7:1ff). This principle means that we always have the duty and the right to appeal back from tradition to the Scripture, which it claims to be interpreting.

Thirdly, Evangelical theology is systematic theology marrying theology and reason. Christians plainly attribute supreme authority
to Scripture. This does not deny the importance of tradition and reason, but assigns to them their proper and humbler place. It is not the office of tradition and reason to stand in judgment over Scripture; it is the office of tradition and reason to sit in modesty under it. The role of tradition and reason is to elucidate, synthesize and apply Scripture. Indeed, if it is in historical theology that the importance of tradition is seen, it is in systematic theology that reason comes into its own. (McGrath 1996:8-9)

The legitimacy of systematic theology has been assumed from the beginning, as theologians have endeavored to collect the teaching of Scripture on different themes, to trace their development, to relate them to each other, and to weave them into a coherent whole. It is clear in the NT that the apostles recognized the existence of a body of doctrine which they variously called “the truth,” “the faith,” “the tradition,” “the teaching” or “the deposit,” and which had to be guarded and passed on. This came to be condensed in the creeds and confessions of the church, and to be elaborated with growing sophistication in the later modern systematic theologies. (John Robinson in Mayflower Pilgrims in 1620)

Fourthly, Evangelical theology is Moral theology. A notable feature of God’s self-revelation is that a strong moral imperative is built into it. God has not disclosed to us his purpose and will, in order that we may merely “know” and “believe” his truth, but rather that we may “obey” it. God will not take us seriously if we do not take
him seriously and "tremble" in humility at his word (Is 66:2). God's continuous summons to us is that we will so listen to his word as to believe and obey it. For if we claim to enjoy fellowship with the God of light, even while we are walking in the darkness of sin, "we lie and do not live by the truth," literally, "we do not the truth" (1Jhn 1:6). That is our life contradicts our claim. By contrast, God's purpose is that we "walk in the truth" (2Jn 4; 3Jn 3f), conforming our lives to its moral standards. Throughout John's letters truth is not just to be "known" and "believed," but to be done."

The true teacher determines never to separate duty from doctrine, behavior from belief. Paul's instruction to Titus was plain: "You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Tlt 2:1). In other words, he must teach on the one hand "the sound doctrine," a recognizable body of apostolic truth, and on the other, "the things which fit it," namely the standards of ethical conduct which are appropriate to the gospel. Theology and ethics belong indissolubly to each other. We must never teach either without theological foundations, or a theology without ethical consequences. So we must repudiate every theology, which lacks ethical seriousness. (McGrath.Ed 1996:11-12)

Fifthly, Evangelical theology is contextualized theology. It is important to emphasis here the Evangelical conviction that God continues to speak through what he has spoken. In other words, His word is a living message for the contemporary world. Through
his ancient Word God addresses the modern world with all its immense complexities and his Word remains a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. (Psalm.19: 105; cf.2 Peter.1: 19) This perhaps, more than anything else explains why the Bible is the primary source and standard not only for all Christian theological reflection but also for Christian living. This is important for this thesis because this point addresses the question of authority in theological reflection and could be what makes the difference between African Evangelical theology and the rest. The African Evangelical takes the Bible, God’s self-revelation to human kind as his/her authority or standard in all matters of faith and conduct and this includes the dynamic of theological reflection.

According to Erickson, Theology is done in the context of human culture. (Erickson 1992:16) John Davis defines Contextualization as the articulation of the biblical message in terms of the language and thought forms of a particular culture or ethnic group. (Jefferson 1978:169) He argues that Contextualization is not an academic matter, but an existential necessity for effective evangelism, Bible translation, church planting, Christian social action and pastoral ministry. The word of the gospel is no more external word, but a message whose destiny is to “become flesh” in the lives of people in every tongue and tribe and ethnic group (Rev. 7:9). Clark Pinnock, in an inaugural lecture at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, urged evangelicals to adopt a “bipolar” method in preaching and theology. “We should strive to be faithful to historic Christian beliefs taught in scripture, and at
the same time to be authentic and responsible to the contemporary hearers.” (Pinnock 1980:23) Pinnock agrees on the need for greater self-critical awareness among evangelicals and on the need for new contextualizations of the gospel that are both contemporary and biblically sound.

Some theologians are justly criticized for living in an ivory tower. For in an ivory tower one is further distanced from the world. An ivory tower is also a place of refuge, in which one is so far removed from harsh reality as to be ignorant of it and even unconcerned about it. But this concept runs counter to the very essence of God’s chosen method of communication. For no part of his revelation was given in a vacuum; every part was given in a context. So must it be with our theologizing. Communication without contextualization is an impossibility.

Perhaps it is here that the enduring legacy of all liberation theologies is to be found and appreciated. We, Evangelical Christians have been legitimately critical of them, especially of their hermeneutics (interpreting salvation in socioeconomic, ethic, political or sexual terms, and the exodus as a paradigm of modern revolutionary movements) and of their seemingly naïve espousal of Marxist social analysis and violent revolution. “Dangerous innocence” one reviewer has called it. Yet we can have no quarrel with the longing to liberate human beings from everything, which dehumanizes them and is therefore profoundly offensive to the God who created them in his image. Indeed, we must be ashamed
that we were not the first to develop a truly biblical theology of liberation, and that instead we have been guilty of dragging our feet.

In particular, we should have been more open to liberation theology’s emphasis on “praxis,” and on the need to “do theology” in the market place rather than in the monastery, and in “base communities” rather than in theological seminaries. Gustavo Gutierezz and his pioneer liberation thinking profoundly impressed Henry Nouwen, who visited Peru in 1981-1982. From it he learned (as he wrote in his journal) “one of the oldest of truths: the theologia is not primarily a way of thinking, but a way of living. Liberation theologians do not think themselves into a new way of living, but live themselves into a new way of thinking.” (Nouwen 1993:159) This may overstate the antithesis, but the point is forcefully made.

All this is part and parcel of our responsibility to contextualise Christian Evangelical theology. It is possible only for those who practice “double listening,” tuning in both to the voice of God as he speaks through his ancient word, and to the varied voices of the modern world in all its alienation and pain, in order to relate the one to the other. Commenting on ‘double listening’, John Stott says, “To take time to listen to God and to our fellow human beings begins as a mark of courtesy and respect, continues as the means to mutual understanding and deepening relationships, and
above all is an authentic token of Christian humility and love.” (Stott 1992:112-113)

John Stott sums it up by saying: “Christian theology is a serious quest for the true knowledge of God, undertaken in response to his self revelation, illumined by Christian tradition, manifesting a rational inner coherence, issuing in ethical conduct, resonating with the contemporary world and concerned for greater glory of God.” (Stott, 1996:18) Evangelical theology presents itself not as a religion, let alone as one religion among many, but as God’s good news for the world. This implies that the gospel has both a divine origin (it comes from God) and a human relevance (it speaks to our condition).

Such a theology is not developed quickly or by purely human endeavor. It requires the humility of Christian patience and of dependence within the Christian community on the Holy Spirit of truth.
CHAPTER 2
2. AFRICAN EVANGELICALISM – THE CHALLENGE TO CONTEXTUALIZE

In the communication of this authentic Evangelical faith, the challenge is that we should be oriented to the cultural heritage of the receivers if we are to communicate effectively. Gehman argues that in any culture, Christ must be presented in a manner that is both true to scripture and meaningful to the people. He must be seen and understood in the context of each culture, even as God, the eternal Spirit, became incarnate as a human being in a particular culture, so Jesus Christ must belong to each society in a unique way. (Gehman 1987:1-4)

John Mbiti echoes the same sentiment when he challenges Evangelicals to think through this evangelical faith in our African context, but always under the authority of the Word of God. Let us seek to be genuinely and thoroughly African in our Christian theology and absolutely biblical in our conclusions. (Gehman 1987:5-7)

Every theologian is faced with this challenge to incarnate the Evangelical faith to his or her context. In the words of John Stott, the challenge is to be ‘contemporary’. To be ‘contemporary’ according to Stott, is to live in the present, and to move with the times, without necessarily concerning ourselves with either the past or the future. To be a ‘contemporary Christian or theologian’, however, is to ensure that our present is enriched to the fullest.
possible extent both by our knowledge of the past and by our expectation of the future. (Stott 1992:11) Genuine theological reflection demands this.

This argument is true for every Christian theologian irrespective of whether you are African, European or Asian. The long and the short of it is that Evangelical theology is contextual. In other words the Gospel must be expressed in a truly African or Indian or any other context for that matter, allowing it to judge culture and never allow culture to take precedence over Gospel. To do otherwise would isolate Evangelical Christianity today from historical Christianity. The challenge that confronts all of us is to creatively express theological concepts in terms of our particular situations. Simply put, African Evangelical theology is the incarnation of the Historic Evangelical Christianity in the African context. This in my opinion is what creates the possibility for an Indian or South African Evangelical theology for the same reason.

Orlando Costas has proposed that the real difference between Evangelical theology and Western theology lies in the Western concern for the formal principle of Protestant theology. This contrasts with evangelical theology where:

*The emphasis is on the content of the gospel and the teaching of the biblical text rather than on formal questions of authority and the philosophical presuppositions behind a particular doctrine of inspiration. This frees African evangelical to employ contextual*
hermeneutics patterned after the transpositional method of the New Testament. This also explains why African evangelicals are more willing to deal with questions of religious pluralism and social, economic, and political oppression than are most evangelical theologians in the One Third World (Costas 1986:320)

Costas sees mainstream Western evangelical theologians as "too obsessed with the Enlightenment and not enough with the social, economic, political, cultural, and religious reality of most people in the world" (Costas 1986:320)

John Stott explains transposition this way: When we are faced with a biblical passage whose teaching is obviously clothed in ancient cultural dress (because it relates to social customs which are either obsolete or at least alien to our own culture) we do cultural transposition. The procedure is to identify the essential revelation in the text (what is God saying here), to separate this from cultural form in which he chose to give it, and then to reclothe it in appropriate modern cultural terms. To transpose a biblical text is to put it into a different culture from that in which it was originally given. The truth of the revelation remains the same; only the cultural expression is different. (Stott 1992:186-190)

The argument is really about Jesus' words in Luke 5:37-38: "No one puts new wine into old wineskins, for the new wine bursts the old skins, ruining the skins and spilling the wine. New wine must be put into new wineskins" (Living Bible).
Howard Snyder, in his book, 'The Problem of Wineskins', explains that the distinction Jesus makes is between something essential and primary (the wine) and something secondary but also necessary and useful (the wineskins). Wineskins would be superfluous without the wine they were meant to hold. (Snyder 1975:13-15) There is therefore that which is new and potent and essential - the gospel of Jesus Christ. And there is that which is secondary but also necessary, subsidiary, man-made. These are the wineskins, and include traditions, structures and patterns of doing things, which have grown up around the gospel. Wineskins are the point of contact between the wine and the world. They result when the divine, supra-cultural gospel touches human culture. The gospel is new - always and for that reason we should never try to contain it in old wineskins - outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits. With time the old wineskins begin to bind the gospel, then they must burst, and the power of the gospel pour forth once more.

This in my opinion is the reason why, as an African Evangelical, I need to acknowledge that I have an Evangelical foundation, established by the apostles and the prophets, on which to think through issues that relate to my particular context in the light of the Gospel. That is what Christian theologizing is all about. Christian believers everywhere struggle with problems, which need resolution through theological reflection on the Scriptures. Yes, the problems we face in Africa and indeed the rest of the non-Western world are unique. The obvious reason being the unique
circumstances in which we find ourselves, but we have at our disposal the unchanging Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Our greatest challenge in this regard is therefore one of time handling – bringing the past, present and the future together in our thinking and living.

The excitement in Africa today is to do with the growing number of mature, educated believers who are able to study the Scriptures in the light of their context. Of course the unfortunate part is that most of them have been trained in the western context, but nonetheless they are making the effort to take their context seriously. This is exciting because the normative pattern in Christian theological reflection has always been in conformity with the western cultural grid. The result has been the contextualization of the gospel to the western cultural grid with the assumption that it was the most Christian and acceptable way. It is therefore not surprising that the history of missions in most parts of the world is inevitably rooted in the character of western post-reformation missionary movements. The result has been the growth of Churches in non-western contexts that took on western forms of church life, worship and spirituality.

The fact that theological reflection has been essentially western in approach means that its main preoccupation has been more with orthodoxy, negligent of interaction with realities of non-western existential situations. Of concern to the emerging leadership in
non-western contexts is the fact that western Christianity and theology have not addressed existential questions and issues in their contexts. Contextual questions of relevance or irrelevance have arisen from the encounter between Christianity clothed in Western garbs and African culture, and what has begun is a process of various quests for identity and new approaches to theological reflection. I would want to argue that this could only be changed by Africans taking their context seriously in the process of doing theology because only them can make Evangelical Christianity relevant to Africa and there is therefore scope to argue for African Evangelical theology.

Newly emerging theologies in the non-western world are manifestations of the search not only for identity but new methodologies for theological reflection. This trend has been most notable in Asia, Latin America and Africa, where new methodologies have made theological reflection much more relevant to people in their various contexts. As a result, it is no longer strange to hear of Liberation Theology in Latin America, Dalit Theology in India or Black Theology in South Africa. All these are signs of a new dawn for theological reflection that is contextual and relevant. These emerging theologies are concerned not only with Orthodoxy but Orthopraxis as their hermeneutic principle.
Indian Dalit theology and South African Black theology are two good examples of newly emerging theologies in the non-western world that are still in process and whose methodologies differ from the usual western approach. They are a confirmation that theological reflection does not take place in a cultural vacuum. Both theologies deal with Biblical and situational issues that traditional western theology supposedly has not been seen to address. Both types of theology have their methodology rooted in their historico-social situations.

Dalit and Black theologies are not only counter-theologies in that their methodology differ from the western approach but they are also seen as being counter-culture because their quest runs against the normative socio-cultural situations in their contexts. Most significantly, they are people based theologies that are not just dealing with abstract or academic issues. Both have been referred to as types of Liberation Theology because they are concerned with issues of oppression and response to oppression even though their ethos differs from that of the Latin American context.

The real crisis with regards to contextualization is to do with the reality that the African Evangelical Christian belongs to two worlds. One world is one to which he was ushered into when he gave his life to Christ in a dramatic conversion experience. This is the world of Christ, the gospel, the Spirit. The other world is the world of African culture represented by the name he bears, the ancestry to
which he belongs, and the headlines of the daily newspaper, alive with political, economic, intellectual and social pulsations. The vocabulary of this world is filled with words like "tradition," "spirits," "development," "poverty," "cultural authenticity," and "selfhood."

The crisis here is the yawning gap between these two worlds and the search amongst African Evangelical Christians is for a theology, which bridges the chasm between Christ and culture. The search is for an African theology which bridges this gap by applying the truths of the world faith, the lordship of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Scriptures, to the world of African culture, issues and problems.

I would argue therefore that any theology that would claim to be both African and Evangelical, should include the following:
(a) A commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the powers of this world. This is precisely because the African evangelical has, as the very heart of his theology a person – the divine human mediator, Jesus Christ. He/She recognizes the centrality of Christ in all life. The Lordship of Christ is such that it is either he is Lord of all and not at all. Thus African Evangelical theology can never be merely academic, its aim is intensely personal – to follow, exalt, worship and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

(b) A commitment to the Word of God and the Spirit of God as the only guides to understanding the truth about the Lordship of
Christ. The point here is that, while Christ is the center of Christianity, the Bible is the cradle where he is displayed. The African Christian therefore turns to the Word of God for truth about salvation, man, the world and right living. Why? Because only the Bible gives him the truth about Christ as redeemer and Lord. The African evangelical does not recognize as Savior the prophetic Christ of the Q’uran, the hidden Christ of Hinduism, the silent Christ of African tradition, the revolutionary Christ of liberation theology or the middle class Christ of Western culture. Only the Biblical Christ is the object of saving faith.

(c) A commitment to applying this biblical, Christ-centered faith to life in Africa. What makes evangelical faith African? The key is the area of application. African Evangelical theology is simply evangelical theology applied to the African context. For any African evangelical Christian to be authentic, he/she must let Christ and his power speak to African questions, issues and needs. (East Africa Journal of Evangelical theology, Vol 2. No. 1 – 1983)

The bottom line is that true African evangelicalism cannot lie sleeping, for it clothes the naked, it comforts the sorrowful; it gives to the hungry food, and it shelters the destitute. It cares for the blind and lame, the widow and orphan child; that’s true evangelical faith. (Hymn of Menno Simons)
2.1 Is there a Biblical basis for Contextualization?

Contextualization is not a modern idea being imposed on the Bible from without but is reflected in the very fabric of biblical revelation itself. In both testaments divine revelation is expressed through cognitive and social forms of particular cultures, as God also deals progressively with his people in history. (Davis 1984:68) Charles Kraft suggests that the entire Bible can be seen as an inspired collection of "canonical case studies" in the contextualization of divine revelation. As God’s revelation unfolds in history, various cultural forms provide the vehicle for the message, but the authority of the message and it’s abiding significance derive not from the culture, but from the sovereign God who is Lord of both revelation and culture. (Kraft 1980:100)

Victor Cole in his article, “How can we Africanize our faith?” presents a very strong argument for a biblical basis for contextualization. He argues that the spread of the church from the Jewish to the Hellenistic cultures presents us with biblical precedents for contextualization. The church took on Hellenistic characteristics as it moved from Judea to the Gentile territories. These characteristics included the liturgical and the doctrinal. (Cole 1984:3-10)

In their liturgy, the Hellenists transcribed the Christian message into the Greek context. On the doctrinal side, we know that there were bodies of doctrines that were passed on from hand to hand. Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 when he speaks of
passing on what he had received. The content of that body of doctrines was kerygmatic. However, the Hellenistic colouring given to the doctrines is evident. For examples, the adoption of the Greek kyrios for the Hebrew Yahweh; the introduction in Pauline writings of the Greek concept of bond-slave/master to explain the Christian’s relationship to Christ; the adoption of the Greek logos to refer to Christ as the eternal logos – a clear borrowing from Greek culture; and the many illustrations given by Paul from the Hellenistic and Roman cultures in the setting forth of doctrines. Examples include Christ’s triumphal nailing of our sins to the cross and making a public show of principalities and powers and the doctrine of the Christian life as set forth in the “Christian panoply” that is reminiscent of Roman gladiators (Ephesians 6). (Cole 1984:3-10)

It goes without saying that all the biblical examples given in this argument match doctrine and practice. Theology was formulated and taught in real life situations. Usually it is not so much that Paul presents doctrines and then concludes with application. A careful examination shows application sprinkled within heavily doctrinal portions and doctrines sprinkled all over the heavily applicational portions.

I will not be very far from the truth if I said that contextualization is a must for every Christian theologian. Contextualization in this regard ceases to be something only Africans do, but a dynamic that involves everyone wanting to make sense of the gospel of our
Lord Jesus Christ. If churches all over the world are attempting to contextualize in every generation for their particular cultural contexts, one will begin to see hitherto non-salient but highly relevant issues emphasized in theological education. For example, Christian liberty will not be taught to the exclusion of God’s answer to political and economic repression; the Christian’s riches in Christ will not be taught to the exclusion of God’s viewpoint on materialism; the churches will formulate divine responses to both polygamy and serial marriages and not ignore these matters because they are too sensitive; churches will begin to allow the Bible to deal with both the spirit world as manifested in contemporary scenes and naturalism as represented in our contemporary mechanistic world views.

There is unquestionably an element of risk involved in any attempt to recontextualize the Christian message in a new cultural setting. As missiologist Arthur F. Glasser has warned, “Unless there is a disciplined effort put forth to listen to the voice of God in the whole scripture, distortion of truth and deviation from its central concerns will inevitably play havoc with what many herald as insightful contextualizing of theology and praxis.” (Glasser 1974:409)

There is always danger that, in the pursuit of communicable relevance, the substance of the gospel will be compromised through its amalgamation with non-Christian religious traditions or humanistic ideologies. But inspire of these potential hazards,
recontextualization must be attempted. In fact we do not have a choice. (Davis 1984:70)
CHAPTER 3

3. The basis for an African Evangelical Liberation Theology.

A relevant question worth asking is whether or not African Evangelical theology provides a basis for Christians to be involved in the world and its social problems? Does Evangelical theology cultivate amongst Christians a spirit of ‘escapism’ or ‘engagement. By ‘escapism’ I mean turning our backs on the world in rejection, washing hands of it and steeling hearts against its agonized cries for help. By ‘engagement’ I mean turning our faces towards the world in compassion, getting our hands dirty, sore and worn in its service, and feeling deep within us the stirring of the love of God, which cannot be contained. My answer to this very important question is, yes, Evangelical theology provides a basis for the Christian to engage the world head-on. This however does not discount the fact that there are many evangelicals in the world who are irresponsible escapists, most of whom who think that fellowship with each other in the church is more congenial that service in an apathetic and even hostile environment outside.

To fellow evangelicals I would want to argue that, instead of seeking to evade our social responsibility, we need to open our ears and listen to the voice of him who calls his people in every age to go out into the lost and lonely world (as he did), in order to live and love, to witness and serve, like him and for him. For that is mission, and mission is our response to the divine commission. It is a whole Christian lifestyle, including both evangelism and social responsibility, dominated by the conviction that Christ sends
us out into the world as the Father sent him into the world, and that into the world we must therefore go - to live and work for him.

Evangelical theology presents five great doctrines of the Bible, which constitute the basis not only for mission and evangelistic responsibility but social responsibility also. By holding these doctrines in their biblical fullness, we’re left with no choice but engage the world. In other words, these doctrines lay upon us an obligation to be involved in the life of the world. (Stott 1984:13-26) Any one of them should be sufficient to convince us of our Christian social responsibility; the five leave us without excuse. I will attempt to give a summary of the five doctrines.

3.1 A Fuller Doctrine of God.
Carl Henry in his final major feature of his thought emphasized the centrality of the doctrine of God as the linchpin of theology. He consistently argued that a fuller doctrine of God demonstrates that God is concerned for the whole of the human race and for the whole of human life in all its entirety and that includes color, diversity and complexity. (Mohler. Ed 1990:518)

The God of the biblical revelation is both Creator and Redeemer, He cares about the total well being (spiritual and material) of all the human beings he has made and is concerned for the whole of mankind and for the whole of human life in all its colour and complexity. Having created them in his own image, he longs that
they will discover their true humanness in their relationships to him and to each other. On the one hand, God yearns after his creatures in their lostness and on the other hand, He cares for the poor and the hungry, the alien, the widow and the orphan. He denounces oppression and tyranny, and calls for justice. He tells his people to be the voice of the voiceless and the defender of the powerless, and so to express their love for them. It is neither an accident nor a surprise, therefore, that God's two great commandments are that we love him with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. (Stott 1992:343)

The living God is the God of nature as well as religion, of secular as well as of the sacred. God made the physical universe, sustains it, and still pronounces it good (Gen 1:31). The argument of Scripture is that, 'everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' (1Tim 4.4) This calls upon us to be more grateful for the good gifts of a good Creator – for sex, marriage and the family, for the beauty and order of the natural world, for work and leisure, for friendships and the experience of inter-racial-cultural community, for music and other kinds of creative art which enrich the quality of human life. According to the OT prophets and the teaching of Jesus Christ, God is very critical of 'religion', that is divorced from issues to do with real life. 'Religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after the orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27).
The living God is the God of Creation as well as of the Covenant. Most Christians make the mistake which Israel made in the Old Testament when they concentrated exclusively on the God of the Covenant, who had chosen them out of all the nations to be the holy nation, and who pledged himself to them saying ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’. The notion of ‘covenant’ is a major biblical theme; the biblical revelation is unintelligible without it. But it is a dangerous half-truth. When Israel overemphasized it, they diminished the living God; they reduced him to the status of a tribal deity, a petty godling. He became Yahweh the god of the Israelites, more or less at par with Chemosh the god of the Moabites and Milcom the god of the Ammonites. They also forgot the other nations, or simply despised and rejected them.

But the Bible begins with the nations, not Israel, with Adam not Abraham, with creation not the covenant. When God chose Israel, he did not lose interest in the nations. On the contrary, Amos bravely gave voice to the word of the Lord: ‘are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites (or Ethiopians)? Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor (Crete) and the Arameans from Kir?’ (Amos 9:7). Similarly, the arrogant emperor Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that ‘the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes’ (Dan 4:32). He rules over the nations and their destiny is under his control. Although Satan is called ‘the ruler of this world’ and is de facto its usurper, God remains the ultimate governor of everything
he has made. 'From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind, from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth – he who forms the hearts of all, who considers all they do' (Ps 33:13-15). More than that, he has promised that in blessing Abraham and his posterity he will bless all the families of the earth, and that one day he will restore what the fall has marred, and bring t perfection all that he has made.

The living God is the God of justice as well as of justification. Of course he is the God of justification, the Saviour of sinners, 'the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exodus. 34:6) But he is also concerned that our community life be characterized by justice.

'He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
The Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the alien
And sustains the fatherless and widow,
But he frustrates the ways of the wicked'
(Psalm 146. 7-9)
This obviously does not mean that God does all these things invariably, but rather that this is the kind of God he is. Moreover, God's concern for justice, although he expects it particularly among his own people, extends beyond them to all people. Social compassion and justice mattered in the nations as well as in Israel. There is no clearer evidence of this than in the first two chapters of the prophecy of Amos. Before Amos rebuked Judah for rejecting God's law and turning to idolatry, and Israel for crushing the poor and denying justice to the oppressed (2:4-8), he pronounced God's judgment on all the surrounding nations (1. 3-2.3) – on Syria for savage cruelty, on Philistia for capturing whole communities and selling them into slavery, on Tyre for breaking a treaty of brotherhood and Edom for pitiless hostility to Israel, on Ammon for atrocities in warfare and Moab for desecrating the bones of a neighboring king.

Several of the prophetic books similarly contain a section of oracles about or against the nations. That God is the God of justice, and desires justice in every nation and community, is particularly evident from the book of Nahum, which is a prophecy against Ninevah, the capital and symbol of Assyria. Yahweh's denunciation of Assyria is not just because she was Israel's long-standing enemy, but because of her idolatry (1.14) and because she is a 'city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims' (3.1). Twice Yahweh says the terrible words 'I am against you' (2.13; 3.5), and the oracle ends with the rhetorical question (3.19): 'who has not felt your endless cruelty?'
It is clear from these Old Testament passages that God hates injustice and oppression everywhere, and that he loves and promotes justice everywhere. Indeed, wherever righteousness is to be found in our fallen world, it is due to the working of his grace. All human beings know this too, for we have an inbuilt sense of justice, to which the child’s expostulation ‘it isn’t fair!’ bears eloquent witness. It is solid evidence of Paul’s teaching that God’s moral law was written on the human heart (Rom 2. 14,15) Both God’s law and God’s gospel is for our good.

Here then is the living God of the Bible. His concerns are all-embracing – not only the ‘sacred’ but the ‘secular’, not only religion but nature, not only his covenant people, but all people, not only justification but social justice in every community, not only his gospel but his law. So we must not attempt to narrow down his interests. Moreover, our interests should be as broad as his.

John Gladwin sums up this argument in his book, ‘God’s People in God’s World’: “It is because this is God’s world, and he cared for it to the point of incarnation and crucifixion, that we are inevitably committed to work for God’s justice in the face of oppression, for God’s truth in the face of lies and deceits, for service in the face of abuse of power, for love in the face of selfishness, for cooperation in the face of destructive antagonism, and for reconciliation in the face of division and hostility.’(Gladwin 1979:125)
3.2 A Fuller Doctrine of Man

The Evangelical faith provides a sounder basis for service to fellow human beings. Evangelical Christians serve fellow human beings not because of what they may become in the speculative development of the human-race, but because of what they already are by divine creation. Human beings are godlike beings, made in God’s likeness, and possessing unique capacities, which distinguish them from the animal creation. True human beings are fallen, and divine image is defaced, but despite all contrary appearances it has not been destroyed (Gen 9.6; James 3.9). It is this which accounts for their unique worth and which has always inspired Christian philanthropy.

These human, but godlike creatures are not just souls, not just bodies, not just social beings, they are all three. A human being might be defined from a biblical perspective as ‘a body-soul-in community’. For that is how God has made us. So, if we truly love our neighbors, and because of their worth, desire to serve them, we shall be concerned for their total welfare, the well-being of their soul, body and community. And our concern will lead to practical programmes of evangelism, relief and development. We shall not just prattle and plan and pray, like the country vicar to who a homeless woman turned for help, and who promised to pray for her. She later wrote this poem and handed it to a regional officer of the Shelter:
I was hungry,
And you formed a humanities group to discuss my hunger.
I was imprisoned,
And you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed for my Release.
I was naked,
And in your mind you debated the morality of my appearance.
I was sick,
And you knelt and thanked God for your health.
I was homeless,
And you preached to me of the spiritual shelter of the love of God.
I was lonely,
And you left me alone to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God
But I am still very hungry – and lonely and cold.
(Stott 1984:19)

Motivated by love for human beings, the early Christians went everywhere preaching the Word of God, because nothing has such a humanizing influence as the Gospel. Later they founded schools, hospitals, and refugees for the outcast. Later still they abolished the slave trade and freed the slaves, and they improved the conditions of workers in mills and mines, and of prisoners in goals. They protected children from commercial exploitation in the factories of the West and from ritual prostitution in the temples of the East. Today they bring leprosy sufferers both the compassion of Jesus and modern methods of reconstructive surgery and
rehabilitation. They care for the blind and the deaf, the orphaned and the widowed, the sick and the dying. They get alongside the junkies, and stay alongside them during the traumatic period of withdrawal. They set themselves against racism and political oppression. They get involved in the urban scene, the inner city, the slums and the ghettos, and raise their protest against the inhuman conditions in which so many are doomed to live. They seek in whatever way they can to express their solidarity with the poor and hungry, the deprived and the disadvantaged. I am not claiming that all Christians at all times have given their lives in such service, but a sufficiently large number have done so to make their record noteworthy. Why have they done it? Because of the Christian doctrine of man, male and female, all made in the image of God, because people matter to God and therefore we should matter to each other. Because every man, woman and child has an intrinsic, inalienable value as a human being. Once we see this we shall both set ourselves to liberate people from everything dehumanizing and count it a privilege to serve them, to do everything in our power to make human life more human.

3.3 A Fuller Doctrine of Christ

(Identified with us and calls us to identify with others)

There have been many different reinterpretations and reconstructions of Jesus. Indeed it is right that every generation of Christians should seek to understand and to present him in terms appropriate to their own age and culture.
The Evangelical needs to recover an authentic picture of him whom the Lausanne Covenant calls 'the historical, biblical Christ'. We need to see him in his paradoxical fullness – his sufferings and glory, his servant hood and lordship, his lowly Incarnation and cosmic reign. It is perhaps the Incarnation, which most Evangelicals have tended to neglect, in both its theological significance and its practical implications. (Lausanne Covenant)

The Son of God did not stay in the safe immunity of his heaven. He emptied himself of his glory and humbled himself to serve. He became little, weak and vulnerable. He entered into our pain, our alienation, and our temptations. He not only proclaimed the good news of the Kingdom of God, but demonstrated its arrival by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving the sinful, befriending the drop-out and raising the dead. He had not come to be served, he said, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom price for the release of others. So he allowed himself to become a victim of gross injustice in the courts, and as they crucified him he prayed for his enemies. Then in the awful God-forsaken darkness he bore our sins in his own innocent person.

This vision of Christ must affect our understanding of his commission, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21)? If the Christian mission is to be modeled on Christ's mission, it will involve for us, as it did for him, an entering into other people's world. In evangelism it will mean entering their thought world, and the world of their tragedy and lost-ness, in
order to share Christ with them where they are. In social activity it will mean a willingness to renounce the comfort and security of our own cultural background in order to give ourselves in service to people of another culture, whose needs we may never before have known or experienced. Incarnational mission, whether evangelistic or social or both, necessitates a costly identification with people in their cultural situations. Jesus Christ was moved with compassion by the sight of needy human beings, whether sick or bereaved, hungry, harassed or helpless; should not his people's compassion be aroused by the same sights?

A good example of the impact of this biblical truth is the Roman Catholic Bishop, Leonidas Proano. Basing his thinking on the Bible, he is concerned for social justice in his country, not least for the Indians whose culture he wants to see preserved against those who threaten to erode and even destroy it. Although he refuses to identify himself with Marxism, and is in fact not a Marxist, he is critical – indeed defiant – of political and ecclesiastical system in his country. He opposes feudalism and the oppressive power of the wealthy landowners. It is perhaps not surprising that there have been threats to assassinate him. Bishop Proano portrays Jesus as the radical, the critic of the establishment, the champion of the downtrodden, the lover of the poor, who not only preached the Gospel but also gave compassionate service to the needy. After one of his sermons students commented that if they had known this Jesus, they would never have become Marxists. (Stott 1992:21-22)
3.4 A Fuller Doctrine of Salvation (A radical transformation)
There is a general tendency in the church to trivialize the notion of salvation, as if it meant no more than self-reformation, or the forgiveness of our sins, or a personal passport to paradise, or a private mystical experience without social or moral consequences. It is urgent that we rescue salvation from these caricatures and recover the doctrine in its biblical fullness. For salvation is a radical transformation in three phases, beginning now, continuing throughout our earthly life and brought to perfection when Christ comes. In particular we must overcome the temptation to separate truths, which belong together.

First we must not separate salvation from the kingdom of God. For in the Bible these two are virtually synonymous, alternative models to describe the same work of God. According to Isaiah 52:7 those who preach the good news of peace are also those who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” That is, where God reigns, he saves. Salvation is the blessing of his rule. Again when Jesus said to his disciples ‘how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God’, it seems to have been natural for them to respond with the question, ‘who then can be saved?’ (Mark 10:24-26). They evidently equated entering the Kingdom with being saved.

Once this identification has been made, salvation takes on a broader aspect. For the kingdom of God is God’s dynamic rule, breaking into human history through Jesus, confronting, combating and overcoming evil, spreading the wholeness of
personal and communal well-being, taking possession of his people in total blessing and total demand. The church is meant to be the kingdom community, a model of what human community looks like when it comes under the rule of God, and a challenging alternative to secular society. Entering God’s kingdom is entering the new age, long promised in the Old Testament, which is also the beginning of God’s new creation. Now we look forward to the consummation of the kingdom when our bodies, our society and our universe will all be renewed, and sin, pain, futility, disease and death will all be eradicated. Salvation is a big concept; we have no liberty to reduce it.

Secondly we must not separate Jesus the Savior from Jesus the Lord. It is little short of incredible that some evangelists teach the possibility of accepting Jesus the Saviour, while postponing surrender to him as Lord. But God has exalted Jesus to his right hand and made him Lord. From that position of supreme power and executive authority he is able to bestow salvation and the gift of the Spirit. It is precisely because he is Lord that he can save. The affirmations ‘Jesus is Lord’ and ‘Jesus is Saviour’ are almost interchangeable. And his Lordship extends far beyond the religious bit or our lives. It embraces the whole of our experience, public and private, home and work, church membership and civic duty, evangelistic and social responsibilities.

Thirdly, we must not separate faith from love. Evangelical Christians have always emphasized faith. Sola fide, ‘by faith alone’,
was one of the great watchwords of the Reformation, and rightly so. ‘Justification’, or acceptance with God, is not by good works, which we have done or could do; it is only by God’s sheer unmerited favour (grace), on the sole ground of the atoning death of Jesus Christ, by simple trust in him alone. This central truth of the gospel cannot be compromised for anything. But although justification is by faith alone, this faith cannot remain alone. If it is living and authentic, it will inevitably issue in good works, and if it does not, it is spurious. Jesus himself taught this in his ‘sheep and goats’ description of judgment Day. Our attitude to him, he said, will be revealed in, and so judged by, our good works of love to the least of his brothers and sisters. The apostles all lay the same emphasis on the necessity of good works of love. We all know that James taught it: ‘faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.... I will show you my faith by what I do’ (2.17,18). So does John: ‘If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?’ (1John 3.17). And so does Paul. Christ died to create a new community who would be ‘eager to do what is good’ (Titus 2.14) We have been re-created in Christ ‘to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do’ (Eph 2.10). Again, ‘the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love... Serve one another in love’ (Gal 5.6,13). This, then, is the striking sequence – faith, love, and service. True faith issues in love, and true love issues in service.
It is especially those of us who are called ‘evangelical’ Christians who need to take this New Testament emphasis to heart. We have to be aware of magnifying faith and knowledge at the expense of love. Paul did not. If he were able to ‘fathom all mysteries and all knowledge’, he wrote, and if he had ‘a faith that can move mountains’, yet without love he would be nothing (1Cor 13.2). For saving faith and serving love belong together. Whenever one is absent, so is the other. Neither can exist in isolation.

3.5 A Fuller Doctrine of the Church
(Distinct from the world as its salt and light, yet penetrating for Christ)
Many people think of the church as a kind of club, rather like the local golf club, except that the common interest of its members happens to be God rather than golf. They are religious people who do religious things together. They pay their subscriptions and are entitled to the privileges of club membership. In that frame of mind they forget William Temple’s perceptive phrase that ‘the church is the only cooperative society that exists for the benefit of non-members’. (Hodder&Stoughton 1959:106)

In place of the ‘club’ model of the church we need to recover what could be described as the church’s ‘double identity’. On the one hand, the church is a ‘holy’ people, called out of the world to belong to God. But on the other it is a ‘worldly’ people, in the sense of being sent back into the world to witness and to serve. This is what Dr Alec Vidler, following a lead of Bonhoeffer’s, has
called the church's 'holy worldliness'. (Stott 1984:25). Seldom has the church managed to maintain its double identity. Sometimes, in a right emphasis on its holiness, the church has wrongly withdrawn from the world and become insulated from it. At other times, in a right emphasis on its worldliness, the church has wrongly assimilated to the world’s standards and values, and so become contaminated by them. Yet without the preservation of both parts of its identity, the church cannot engage in mission. Mission in my opinion arises out of the biblical doctrine of the church in society. An unbalanced ecclesiology makes mission unbalanced too.

These five fundamental Evangelical doctrines provide a basis to develop an argument for an Evangelical theology of liberation. The African Evangelical and the Indian Evangelical is left without an excuse, but to take contextual issues of poverty, injustice and oppression seriously and reflect on them from this perspective. It is therefore on the strength of these challenging fundamentals that I would want to engage Dalit theology and South African Black theology.

3.6 The Evangelical Heritage of Social Concern

John Stott in his book 'Issues Facing Christian today' highlights what many evangelicals have come to accept as the evangelical heritage of social concern. The 18th century tells a story of the Evangelical revival in Europe and America which stirred both continents not only with the preaching of the gospel and the
conversion of sinners but also involved widespread philanthropy. John Wesley remains the most striking. The gospel he preached inspired people to take up social causes in the name of Christ. Historians have attributed to Wesley’s influence rather than to any other the fact that Britain was spared the horrors of a bloody revolution like France’s.

J. Wesley Bready’s book England Before and After Wesley, subtitled ‘The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform,’ describes ‘the deep savagery of much of the 18th century’, which was characterized by ‘the wanton torture of animals for sport, the bestial drunkenness of the populace, the inhuman traffic in African Negroes, the kidnapping of fellow countrymen for exportation and sale as slaves, the mortality of parish children, the universal gambling obsession, the savagery of the prison system and penal code, the prostitution of the theatre, the growing prevalence of lawlessness, superstition and lewdness; the political bribery and corruption, the shallow pretensions of Deism, the insincerity and debasement rampant in Church and State – such manifestations suggest that the British people were then perhaps as deeply degraded and debauched, as any people in Christendom’. (Ibid. p. 405)

But then things began to change. And in the 19th century slavery and slave trade were abolished, the prison system was humanized, conditions in factory and mine were improved, education became available to the poor, trades unions began, etc, etc.
This pronounced humanity; passion for social justice, and sensitivity to wrongs came from a new social conscience, which was mothered and nurtured by the Evangelical revival of vital, practical Christianity. The Evangelical Revival ‘did more to transfigure the moral character of the general populace, than any other movement British history can record. (Ibid. p.327) For Wesley was both a preacher of the gospel and a prophet of social righteousness.

The evangelical leaders of the next generation were committed with equal enthusiasm to evangelism and social action. The most famous among them were Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, James Stephen, Charles Grant, John Shore (Lord Teignmouth), and Henry Thornton. Their guiding light was of course William Wilberforce. Because several of them lived in Clapham Parish and belonged to the Clapham Parish Church, they came to be known as ‘the Clapham Sect’, although in Parliament and in the press they were mocked as the Saints.

What brought them together was their concern over the plight of the African slaves. Three days before his death in 1791, John Wesley wrote to Wilberforce to assure him that God had raised him up for his ‘glorious enterprise’ and to urge him not to be weary of well doing. It is largely to these men under the leadership of Wilberforce that the credit belongs for the first settlement of free slaves in Sierra Leone (1787), the abolition of the trade (1807), the registration of slaves in the colonies (1820),
which put an end to slave smuggling, and finally their emancipation (1833)

In addition to the slavery question, they involved themselves in penal and parliamentary reform, popular education, British obligation to its colonies and factory legislation. They also campaigned against dueling, gambling, drunkenness, immorality and cruel animal sports. And throughout they were directed and motivated by their strong evangelical faith. Ernest Marshall Howse has written of them: "This group of Clapham friends gradually became knit together in an astonishing intimacy and solidarity. They planned and labored like a committee that never was dissolved. At the Clapham mansions they congregated by common impulse in what they chose to call their ‘Cabinet Councils’ wherein they discussed the wrongs and injustices, which were a reproach to their country, and the battles, which would need to be fought to establish righteousness. And thereafter, in Parliament and out, they moved as one body, delegating to each man the work he could do best, that their common principles might be maintained and their common purposes be realized.’ (Ernest Marshall Howse, Saints in Politics, the ‘Clapham Sect’ and the growth of freedom (Allen and Unwin, 1953:26)

Anthony Ashley Cooper was elected to the British Parliament in 1826, aged 25. First in the House of Commons, and then in the House of Lords as the 7th Earl of Shaftsbury, he concerned himself successively with the plight of lunatics, child workers in the
factories and mills, 'climbing boys' or chimney sweeps, women and children in the mines, and the children of the slums, more than 30,000, of whom in London were without a home, and more than a million of whom in the whole country were without schooling.

The same story can be told in the United States in the last century. Social involvement was both the child of evangelical religion and the twin sister of evangelism. This is clearly seen in Charles Finney, who is best known as the lawyer turned evangelist and authors of Lectures on Revivals of Religion (1835). Through his preaching of the gospel large numbers were brought to faith in Christ. What is not so well known is that he was concerned for 'reforms' as well as 'revivals'. He was convinced, both that the gospel 'releases a mighty impulse toward social reform' and that the church's neglect of social reform grieved the Holy Spirit and hindered revival. It is astonishing to read Finney's statement in his 23rd Lecture on Revival that 'the great business of the church is to reform the world ... The Church of Christ was originally organized to be a body of reformers. The very profession of Christianity implies the profession and virtually an oath to do all that can be done for the universal reformation of the world'. (Dayton 1976:15-24).

It is hardly surprising to learn, therefore, that through Finney's evangelism God raised up 'an army of young converts who became the troops of the reform movement of his age'. In particular, 'the anti-slavery forces. Were drawn largely from the converts of
Finney's revivals. Chief among these was Theodore Weld who gave his whole life to the anti-slavery struggle.

The 19th century is known also for the enormous expansion of Christian missions, which it witnessed. According to the American missiologist Dr Pierce Beaver, Social action in mission can be traced from the time of the apostles. Concern was never limited to relief. The itinerating missionary carried with him a bag of medicines, new or better seeds and plants, and improved livestock. Nevius introduced the modern orchard industry into Shantung. The Basel missionaries revolutionized the economy of Ghana by introducing coffee and cocoa grown by families and individuals on their own land. James McKean transformed the life in Northern Thailand by eliminating the major curses – smallpox, malaria and leprosy. Wells and pure water often came through the help of missionaries. Industrial schools were stressed through the 19th century, and industries were established. In addition, 'the missionaries were constantly the protectors of the native peoples against exploitation and injustice by government and commercial companies. They played a very important part in the abolishing of forced labor in Congo. They resisted black birding in the South Pacific. They fought fiercely for human rights in combating opium, foot binding, and exposure of girl babies in China. They waged against widow burning, infanticide, and temple prostitution in India, and above all broke the social and economic slavery of the caste system for the low and outcaste people'. (Escobar and Driver 1978:7-9)
3.7 Reason for ‘The Great Reversal’

So it seems to be an established fact that at least during the last century, not only in Britain and America but also through the agency of missionaries in Africa and Asia, the gospel of Jesus Christ produced the good fruit of social reform. But then something happened, especially among evangelical Christians. At some point a major shift took place, which the American historian Timothy L. Smith has termed ‘The Great Reversal’.

The first cause was the fight against theological liberalism, which at the turn of century was sweeping into the churches of Europe and America. Evangelicals felt they had their backs to the wall. Understandably, they became preoccupied with the defense and proclamation of the gospel, for nobody else seemed to be championing historic biblical Christianity. When evangelicals were busy seeking to vindicate the fundamentals of the faith, they felt they had no time for social concerns.

Secondly, evangelicals reacted against the so-called ‘social gospel’, which theological liberals were developing at this time. The third reason for the evangelical neglect of social responsibility is the widespread disillusion and pessimism, which followed World War 1, because of its exposure of human evil. Earlier social programmes had failed. Man and his society appeared to be irreformable.
Fourthly, there was the spread of the pre-millennial scheme. This portrays the present evil world as beyond improvement or redemption, and predicts instead that it will deteriorate steadily until the coming of Jesus, who will then set up his millennial reign on earth. If the world is getting worse, and if only Jesus at his coming will put it right, the argument runs, there seems no point in trying to reform it meanwhile. The fifth reason was probably the spread of Christianity among the middle class people, who tended to dilute it by identifying it with their own culture.

This ‘great reversal’ is explicable for these five reasons. Probably the first voice to recall he evangelical constituency to its social responsibilities was that of the American Christian scholar Carl F. H. Henry in his book The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism (1947). Not many seemed to listen, but gradually the message caught on. And in 1966, at the conclusion of an American conference on world missions, the participants unanimously adopted the ‘Wheaton Declaration’ which firmly bracketed ‘the primacy of preaching the gospel to every creature’ and ‘a verbal witness to Jesus Christ’ with ‘evangelical social action’, and urged ‘all evangelicals to stand openly and firmly for racial equality, human freedom, and all forms of social justice throughout the world’.

In June 1982, under the joint sponsorship of the Lausanne Committee and the World Evangelical Fellowship, the ‘Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility’
(CRESR) was held in Grand Rapids, and issued its report entitled Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment. In this report there was a remarkable degree of consensus. Social activity was said to both a consequence of and a bridge to evangelism, and indeed the two declared to be partners. Besides they are united by the gospel. 'For the gospel is the root, of which both evangelism, social responsibility and socio-political involvement are the fruits'. (op.cit. p.28)
Chapter 4
4. Latin American Liberation Theology

Though Liberation theology is primarily a Latin American phenomenon, it is mirrored somewhat in Black Liberation theology in America and the South African Black theology. Before I can highlight the impact of Liberation theology in South African Black theology, it is important that I begin by explaining what this Latin American phenomenon is all about.

What is obvious about this phenomenon is that it has taken theology out of the academic ivory tower of Europe into the streets and shantytowns of Latin America. This has inevitably resulted into a complete change of focus in the way theology is discussed, a change from the intellectual discourse of Western philosophy to the life and death struggles of poor and oppressed communities. The outcome, according to Charles Villa-Vicencio has been a call for a fundamental reorientation of theology itself, providing a radically new perspective on the theological task. (Gruchy & Vicencio .ed 1994:184) The doing of theology will never be the same again and the result of this change of orientation has not spared not only Evangelicalism but South African Black theology also. Who wants a theology that is completely divorced from the reality on the ground? Who wants an irrelevant gospel? Because of this influence, South African Black Theology is a theology in which black theologians take seriously the black experience of oppression and resistance; the black tradition; black people’s questions about God.
Generally speaking, Liberation theology is a worldwide phenomenon that arose from the experience of different forms of human oppression and injustices. In his book, 'The power of the poor in history,' Gutierrez defines Liberation theology as an attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive praxis of the poor of this world — the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups, and the marginalized cultures. (Gutierrez 1984:37) From this standpoint, Liberation theology has arisen out of an awareness of the poor and their predicament, and a genuine desire to do something to alleviate their situation.

Its starting point and focus are the dysfunctional human relationships in society characterized by a variety of alienations and tries to find ways of resolving them so that men and women can at last break out of oppression and bondage and come to liberation and freedom. Liberation theology therefore seeks to interpret the Christian faith from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed and they struggle with issues of faith and post-colonial deprivation, searching for hope in a world of poverty. They ask, 'Where is the God of righteousness in a world of injustice?' Deane Ferm sums up South American Liberation theology this way:

"Basically Liberation theology is the effort to relate the teachings of the Christian faith to the lives of the poor and oppressed. To that extent theology begins and ends with the downtrodden and their vision of life."(Ferm 1981:62)
It is understandable therefore that Liberation theology views itself as a new way of doing theology. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff describe their understanding of Liberation theology in this way: 'Reflecting on the basis of practice, within the ambit of the vast efforts made by the poor and their allies, seeking inspiration of faith and the gospel for the commitment to fight against poverty and for the integral liberation of all persons and the whole person – that is what Liberation theology.' (Gutierrez 1973:134)

This new way of doing theology involves two very important choices: the first is to show a preferential option for the poor, and the second is to turn theology into a critical reflection on praxis. The basic of Liberation theology is a self-conscious choice to side with victims. The basis of this understanding is the theological affirmation that the God of the Bible is the God of justice and therefore he siding with the oppressed against the oppressors. What Liberation theology is communicating very clearly here is that, it is first and foremost a theology of the poor and its primary concern is with questions, which are of concern to the poor. In other words, the poor themselves engage in the struggle for life in the light of their faith.

Gutierrez makes the point that Liberation theology is 'critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word' (R.M Brown, Theology in a new key – Responding to Liberation Themes (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978:64) His argument is that, to understand theology is by definition a 'second act'. The 'first act' is
the praxis of the believing community acting in obedience to the gospel. Praxis according to Gutierrez is the process of action and reflection of a person engaged in the struggle for justice and liberation. He calls this the socio-analytical mediation where Marxist and neo-Marxist social analytical tools are used to understand and uncover the root causes of the poverty and oppression of the poor. (Gutierrez 1973:13)

Liberation theology is therefore not concerned so much with correct thinking as it is with correct action. Not orthodoxy so much as orthopraxis. According to Gutierrez praxis is the very matrix of theology. Theology is basically critical reflection upon praxis in the light of the word of God. This expresses the belief that priority to Liberation theology is praxis and theoretical reflection comes later as the “second act”. (Gutierrez 1986:11-12)

Miguez Bonino expressed this same thought this way:

*Theology, as here conceived, is not an effort to give a correct understanding of God's attributes or actions but an effort to articulate the action of faith; the shape of praxis conceived and realized in obedience. As philosophy in Marx's famous dictum, theology has to stop explaining the world and to start transforming it. Orthopraxis, rather than orthodoxy, becomes the criterion for theology.* (Miguez Bonino 1980: 81)

Maimela calls it a conscious self-articulation by the oppressed and dominated sections of humanity who are no longer prepared to
put up with things as they are. (Maimela 1983:3) Hence Liberation theology is directed against major social evils such as class, racial and sexist domination. In fact these are the factors, which gave rise to Liberation theology.

4.1 Types of liberation theologies

Liberation theologians acknowledge that, because there is no single and universally valid form of experiencing oppression and suffering, it would be a mistake for theology to prescribe and impose one universal message on different situations of human bondage. Accordingly, different types of liberation theologies were allowed to emerge within the family of liberation theology, all of which are understood to be complimentary to one another and necessary to cater for the situation – variable nature of oppressions.

The rationale behind promoting and accommodating these different emphases (types) of liberation theology is the principle of particularity of theological assertions. Simply put, for the gospel to be worthy the name, it must speak a specific message to a particular concrete situation. For example, what is good news to the guilt-laden conscience of the well-fed person need not be the gospel to the poor and racially oppressed.

Three distinct types of Liberation theology are Theology of Liberation in Latin America, Black Theology in North America and South Africa, and Feminist theology in America. To this list I would
want to add the Indian Dalit Theology. The canon in all these Liberation theologies is that good theology does not arise out of a vacuum but out of a specific situation. These specific situations or day-to-day struggles for existence are the context in which theologians try to apply the gospel message. In this thesis I will attempt to analyze the social context from which some of these theologies have arisen, in particular, South African Black theology and Indian Dalit theology.

4.2 Impact of Liberation theology on South African Black theology.

The impact of Liberation theology on South African Black theology cannot be ignored. Liberation theology has brought to the Christian world's attention, the plight of the suffering poor in the world and that has helped Black Christians suffering under the apartheid system in South African to begin to appreciate that they too can do something about their suffering. It has inspired hope and courage in the hearts of millions and prophetically denounced the apathy and injustices lying at the root of their plight. The foundational principles in Liberation theology have therefore become the basis of the self-examination of Christianity by Black Christians, which has resulted in the construction of Black theology.

Liberation theology has influenced the emerging agenda in Black theology where the right questions are asked about theology. Questions to do with how theological reflection relates to the
concrete, social and political problems of the poor and oppressed? How the orientation of theology is influenced by the practice of justice and compassion towards the marginalized? Questions to do with the recognition that all theological reflection takes place in a social context and whether or not that particular situation should be taken as the norm. To a great extent, Black theologians reflect the fundamentals of Liberation theology when they grapple with issues of the development of a better method of hermeneutics that takes more seriously the socio-cultural setting of the Bible and the interpreter's blindness to his or her own set of socio-cultural presuppositions. Liberation theology forces Black theologians to question the distinction between principle and application and consider what hinders theologians from linking the transforming power of the Gospel and the transformation of society and its structures? Does our understanding of the hermeneutical process still leave us with a gap between action and reflection that silently models a Christian commitment only to the status quo?

The impact of Liberation theology on South African Black theology is therefore unquestionable. The movement has brought to the attention of the oppressed the need for a new "social appropriation of the gospel" in a world of social and economic conflicts between the "haves" and "have nots." It is just not enough to talk the talk without walking the walk.
4.3 Tracing the Roots of South African Black Theology - American Black Theology.

My intention to trace the roots of South African Black theology will mean doing an exposition of American Black theology and in doing so the link between the two theologies will become obvious.

Like all the other theologies of liberation, Black Theology is a phenomenon that should be understood against the social context of pain, humiliation, degradation, and oppression to which people of African descent were subjected in both North America and South Africa. That is, Black Theology is a particular theological response to a unique situation of racial domination and oppression – both of which are by-products of the slave trade in the case of American Black theology and colonialism in the case of South African Black theology. (Maimela 1988: 29) That is the reason why both theologies have been called ‘situational theologies’; situational because they take seriously the circumstances of the black people and reflect on the meaning and significance of faith in such conditions. By racial domination we refer to that conscious or unconscious belief in the inherent superiority of all people of European ancestry, a superiority which entitles Whites to a position of power, dominance and privilege, and which justifies their subordination and exploitation of people of colour, especially those of African ancestry, who are regarded as inferior and doomed to servitude.
The task of Black theology in this regard is therefore to restore the full humanity of black people and to imbue them with the confidence that they are creatures of God. That sense of value and worth finds its highest expression when the oppressed and the poor rise up against injustice and oppression. (Gruchy & Vilencio. Ed 1994:174)

Racial domination and oppression in North America revolve around the history of slavery, which, was developed by the Europeans during the expansion of modern capitalism. It was brutal and degrading and had a shattering effect on Black personhood. Millions of Africans, captured in surprise raids on villages were driven like animals, treated as beasts of toil, and shipped in chains across the sea to North America. Upon their arrival, they were herded and sold like animals, and were stripped of their language and culture thus exposing them to destructive fear and suffering. Racial prejudices and other stereotypes developed about the people of colour in order to depersonalize and exploit them without qualms of conscience. Racism thus determined the most basic institutions of American society. This ensured that Blacks were to remain on the fringe of society, deprived, dependant, humiliated and without freedom, justice or a fair share in the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

In short, Black experience in the racist society of North America refers to the way Africans were brought there as slaves, treated as non-persons, and subjected to a systematic destruction of their
personhood through physical and spiritual torture, intimidation, degradation and oppression as well as the denial of basic human rights and services. It is out of this painful situation that Black theology was born, really as a protest against the domination and oppression that has persisted for many centuries in North America.

Under such circumstances it was inevitable that the social and political condition of the black population would begin to raise fundamental questions about the meaning of the Christian faith. In essence the Christian faith became a problem for the reflective and sensitive black Christian. Questions were raised about God and justice, Christian doctrine, especially the nature of God, Christian witness, the role of the oppressive and dominant culture in determining the parameters of belief, and the role of the those same religious beliefs in ensuring subjugation and conformity. (Gruchy & Vilencio. Ed 1994:174)

Under close scrutiny, it could not be denied that the Christian faith was an instrument of continuing white racism in the same way that it was the handmaid of colonialism and the spirit behind the slave trade. James Cone resolved this dilemma for black Christians when he said that ‘when the murderers of humanity seize control of the public meaning of the Christian faith, it was time to seek new ways of expressing the truth of the Gospel’. (Raines.Ed 1982:43) Black people had to take charge of their own faith, its content and its meaning had to be expressed and developed by them and them alone.
This ‘new way’ of expressing the faith of the black people within the universal faith, which had become appropriated by the forces of colonization and domination, was itself a practice of liberation. Allan Boesak called this ‘a new way of theologizing; a new way of believing’ (Boesak 1978:10) Black theology therefore arises as a critique both of the social conditions of the black folk and of the inadequacies of traditional religion. Referring to this critique James Cone argues that theology is the critical side of faith and that without it faith loses its distinctive identity. (Raines. (Ed) 1982:43) Once Black people arose in revolutionary action under the slogans of Black Power (in the USA) and Black Consciousness (in South Africa), Black theology became the necessary adjunct to this rising tide of consciousness and revolutionary thought and activity. Black theology therefore arises out of reflection and action from the black situation. (Gruchy & Vilencio. Ed 1994:174)

It is, accordingly without significance that the context of the struggles against racism in the US and South Africa was so determinative. James Cone commenting on the Black Power movement in the United States, says: ‘If Christ was not to be found in black people’s struggle for freedom, if he were not found in the ghettos with rat-bitten black children, if he were in rich white churches and their seminaries, then I want no part in him.’ (Ibid., p.44.)

He went on to argue that Black Power was part of the re-humanization of black people. They were exercising their right to
say no to racism and asserting their right to human dignity. So essential was this exercise of right to Cone’s theology that he believed that this power was derived from Christ. (Kee 1974:121)

To call Christ the Black Messiah was not to claim any exclusive identification with the person and redemptive activity of Christ. It was to state that in Christ there is a full, total identification with the suffering and struggles of the oppressed. Christ, however cannot be reduced to ‘the Black Messiah’ since his reality is multidimensional.

Black theology in America became the foundation of South African Black theology. In other words South African Black theology was developed in dialogue with American Black theology as the two shared the same context with the main variation being the difference between Black power and Black consciousness, as well as slavery and colonization. The product of these variations is nonetheless the same in both cases – the unique situation of white racial domination and oppression.

4.4 South African Black Theology - Definition

For a start it is necessary to clarify that this paper is primarily concerned with Black theology as it was in the period of its initial emergence in the late 1960’s in the context of apartheid before the reforms following the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress. Most of the analyses made in this paper are as things were before the release of the 1985 Kairos document from when Black theology appeared to
have entered a new stage. Since then theological responses to the South African situation have been very diverse. Black theology as being discussed here is prior to the incursion of Marxist philosophy into the process of Black theology. But as a matter of priority I would like to begin by describing the link between South African Black Theology and the American Black Theology as well as demonstrate the impact of Liberation Theology on South African Black Theology.

Black theology has been defined variously but most of its pioneer theologians would agree with Madras Buthelezi that "the phrase "Black Theology" comes out of an attempt to characterize by means of a word or phrase the reflection upon the reality of God and his word which grows out of that experience of life in which the category of blackness has some existential decisiveness". (Moore 1973:29) According to Engelbert Mveng, the basic problem of South African Black theology is race and colour since race and colour determine all sectors of political, economic, social, cultural and religious life, falsifying the Bible, prostituting the gospels, dividing the churches and sowing hatred and conflict everywhere. (Mveng 1988:24) The long and short of it is that Black people in South Africa have been victims of racial oppression and accordingly they have propounded Black Theology in protest against a system that denies their personhood. Frank Chikane stressed this so profoundly:
"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 tools to reflect on and to direct my practical struggles. And those struggles have always been with other black people for our liberation." (Chikane 1990:100)

In a similar vein Takatso Mofokeng characterized Black theology as:

"An instrument of struggle by the victims of society. It has worked to delegitimise racist and racism theology and it has worked to legitimate Christian resistance. Black theology does not even begin until those who engage in it are also engaged in the struggle against racist oppression. They engage in theological reflection in order to move the struggle forward and they engage in the struggle in order to move theology forward. Black theology takes its cues from the very struggle which enables it." (Mofokeng 1999:50)

This existential situation for Blacks in South Africa is one in which they face the challenges of racial segregation, oppression, fear and dehumanization as a result of how their being black is categorized in South Africa. But, unlike Black Americans, South Africans were not directly enslaved and held in bondage. Rather their domination and oppression are by-products of European Imperialism, which used its cultural, scientific, economic, and military power to
subjugate people of colour and, to rob them of their land and dignity. (Maimela 1999:30)

Put differently Africans were oppressed militarily, unless they cooperated politically and culturally, so that practices that constituted a danger to the Whites could be terminated. They were also discriminated against economically so that so that Blacks would not compete with Whites, for profits engendered by trade. In other words, racial prejudices and stereotypes were developed to rationalize the depersonalization and domination of Blacks, who were considered inherently inferior und undeveloped as children from the point of view of cultural development. Here I think the church and its theologians were co-opted by the dominant White class either to ignore the oppression and destruction of Black personhood or consciously to justify the White superiority and domination of the people of colour.

This racial domination and negation of Black personhood has been in existence from the first contact between Whites and Blacks to the present. Under the apartheid political dispensation, racial domination has been perfected and has reached its apogee. Allan Boesak, one of the leading exponents of Black Theology offers, perhaps, the best description of what Black existence connotes in racist societies, when he writes:

*Blackness is a reality that embraces the totality of black existence. To paraphrase a central passage in The Message to the People of
South Africa: People's blackness dooms them to live the life of second-class citizens. It determines who their friends may be, whom they can marry, what work they can do and that they work they eventually do is considered inferior to that of the white people. Their blackness determines that if they do the same jobs as white people they get paid less. It not only determines what education they can get; it often means that they will get no education at all. It determines whose hospitality they may accept, or to whom they may extend hospitality, if they are in a position to do so. It determines where they can get medical treatment, if they are fortunate enough to live in an area where they will not die of malnutrition and neglect before they reach the age of five. It determines their whole life, every single day. It means living in constant fear, always being dehumanized and humiliated, at the mercy of people who for three hundred years have shown in so many ways that they do not know the meaning of the word. (Boesak 1977:26-27, 57)

The point of departure for Black theology from the traditional approach to theology is therefore the socio-political situation of Blacks in South Africa. Alan Boesak affirms that it is a situational theology. He says, "It is the black man's attempt to come to terms theologically with their black situation. It seeks to interpret the gospel in such a way that the situation of blacks will begin to make sense". (Boesak 1978:13)
Black theology is therefore a theology, which "listens to the heart beat of the struggle" as Beyers Naude put it. But this is black people listening to the heartbeat of the black struggle. David Mosoma emphasized this:

*Black theology is a theology in which black theologians take seriously the black experience; the black tradition; black people's questions about God. That is what makes it unique. It is the context of black oppression and resistance.... (Boesak 1978:20f)*

Exponents of Black theology are in search of a theology that is relevant to Blacks in their context. It therefore takes seriously the issue of what it means to be black and Christian in the South African situation. For Buthelezi, the crucial question theology must answer is the existential question, "Why did God create me black" in a context dominated by white values? (Moore 1973:55) This was a question that western theology was not seen to have addressed. Boesak with this position describes what it means to be black in South Africa. He says, "to be black in South Africa means to be classified as a 'non-white': a non-person, less than white and therefore less than human. Blackness spells shame"(Boesak 1978:27)

He goes on to say, blackness "means more than colour ... It points mere colour to the suffering and struggles of the descendants of all enslaved and colonized people"(Ibid. pp27-28) In South Africa to be black is to be suppressed to white domination, injustice,
inequality and other dehumanizing conditions. On this issue of the black existential situation, while Boesak expatiates on Black theology as a liberation theology, Buthelezi concentrated more on the whole issue of the meaning of life. Buthelezi sees the dehumanizing experiences of Blacks in South Africa as contradictory to God's plan for man's life. He says to be created in the image of God is to be really human and enjoy it fully. However the situation of Blacks in South Africa is one of powerlessness in which Blacks are deprived of all it means to be fully human. The context of white domination therefore hinders Blacks from experiencing what it really means to be created in the image of God. The state of powerlessness and poverty that the racist policy of apartheid has imposed on Blacks in South Africa alienates them from the wholeness of life. The situation robs them of the dignity of humanity. This is why Desmond Tutu says, "the campaign of Black theology must succeed to exorcise from the souls of Black Christians the self contempt and self hatred which are the blasphemous effects of injustice and racism."(Tutu 1976:10)

For Boesak, this existential situation calls for a radical and authentic Christian ethic. For him this ethic is one of total liberation and he sees it as the primary task of Black theology. In his words, "Black theology believes that liberation is not only 'part of' the gospel, or 'consistent with' the gospel, it is the content and framework of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Born in the community of the oppressed, it takes seriously the black experience, the black situation. Black theology grapples with suffering and oppression; it
is a cry unto God for the sake of the people. It believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people has come."(Boesak 1978:9-10)

Boesak sees Black theology as a response to the context of oppression in which Blacks have to live. To him, it is a theology of hope to a people in a state of powerlessness. According Takatso Mofokeng, who emphasizes the same, Black theology is not simply a theology of an for struggle, it is also a theology of hope:

Black theology follows the footsteps of oppressed people to search out symbols of hope. It does this in the contemporary struggles of black people. It searches the Scriptures for biblical communities who were underdogs and celebrates their acts as signs of hope in their faith. It traces the struggles of oppressed people across time and space and finds in their indomitable spirit, their acts and their achievements signs of the hope that history does not always belong to the oppressors. Thus Black theology says to Black people, "you are not the only ones. You are brothers and sisters with a vast community of resisters."(Mofokeng 1999:100)

In addition to these, Black theology has been defined as a pastoral theology that seeks not only to liberate blacks but also whites from a state of human brokenness. Bonganjalo Goba sees the liberation as extending to whites that also need to be healed from a state of brokenness and inhumanity. (Goba 1979:8) He
sees whites as also being less than human by being involved in the practice of apartheid.

From the above, the primary concern of Black theology is therefore the existential situation of Blacks in South Africa. It is a response to the dehumanization of Blacks, which results from the policy of apartheid. This is the primary basis for Black theology's departure from the traditional approach to theology, which was seen as not addressing the needs of this socio-political context.

4.5 North American and South African black theologies (Link)
The context for Blacks in South Africa is one in which they face the challenges of racial segregation, oppression, fear and dehumanization as a result of how their being black is categorized in South Africa. Racial domination and oppression in North America revolve around the history of slavery, which was brutal and had a shattering effect on Black personhood. It is out of this painful situation in these two different but similar contexts that Black theology was born really as a protest against white domination and oppression. To understand the rise of liberation theology among racial – ethnic minorities in the United States, James Cone argues that it is necessary to know something of the history of their struggle to be recognized as first class citizens in a land defined by whites only and blacks in South Africa face the same struggle except that they are the majority. While it is true that American Black theology did not borrow anything from Latin
American Liberation theology, Black theology in South Africa was however impacted by it and at the same time has its roots deep in American Black theology because of the similarities of the contexts. (Cone 1998:16)

What is common here is first and foremost, the point of departure, the black experience in a racist society, be it South Africa or North America. The search for cultural identity in a society defined by white supremacy. The point is that in both contexts black people are subjected to white racism and the social context is one of pain, humiliation, degradation and oppression. In any case both the slave trade and colonialism produced racial domination and oppression as by-products. The understanding of racial domination is also the same in these two contexts: a conscious or unconscious belief in the inherent superiority of all people of European ancestry, a superiority which entitles whites to a position of power, dominance and privilege, and which justifies their subordination and exploitation of black people who are regarded as inferior and doomed to servitude.

It is this Black experience that both North American Black theology and South African Black theology consciously and systematically responds to. But the history of continuous struggle against the forces of White racism, domination, and oppression stretches further back in history in the case of North American Black theology. It began with Black church leaders breaking away from
White churches for racial, political and theological reasons, thereby laying the foundations for later explicit Black theology.

In both cases, the Christian faith was co-opted and used to justify the enslavement and colonial domination of one racial group by another. It was only a question of time before the oppressed Blacks, reflecting on their situation in the light of the gospel, rejected current Christianity in order to affirm their humanity, thus turning the gospel into an instrument for resisting the extreme demands of racial oppression.

In South Africa Black theology arose in response to Apartheid and obviously in dialogue with the Latin American theologies of Liberation. In doing this the oppressed Blacks gave birth to Black theology, which seeks to interpret these oppressive conditions in the light of the biblical God whose justice requires that the poor, oppressed, and downtrodden be set free. Black theology, as a response to White theology, which sanctifies racist social institutions, is thus a passionate call to freedom; it invites authentic human existence and liberation from racial people of colour.
CHAPTER FIVE

5. Towards a Definition of Dalit theology

5.1 The Roots of Dalit Theology - The Caste system in India

Before we can understand Indian Dalit Theology, it is necessary to do an analysis of the Caste system in India. This is important because the Dalits are essentially part of this Caste system and this analysis will help us appreciate the fundamental issues coming out Dalit theology.

While scholars differ on the origins of the caste system in India, they however agree that it is a very ancient institution. According to the Encarta Encyclopedia College Dictionary, Caste (social) is a rigid system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation and allows little mobility out of the position to which a person is born. The term is often applied to the hierarchical hereditary divisions established among the Hindus on the Indian subcontinent. The 16th-century Portuguese traders first used the word caste; it is derived from the Portuguese casta, denoting family strain, breed, or race. The Sanskrit word is jati. The Sanskrit term varna denotes a group of jati, or the system of caste. (Barnes and Noble: Caste (Social)

Aharon Daniel in his article ‘The Beginning of the Caste system’ outlines the different theories on the establishment of the caste system and he describes three, which I will briefly outline. There
are religious-mystical theories, biological theories and socio-historical theories.

5.1.1 Religious - mystical theories

These theories explain how four Varnas were founded, but they do not explain how the Jats (communities) in each Varna or the untouchables were founded. Varna is the religious word for caste. According to the Rig Veda, the Ancient Hindu book, the primal man – Purush – destroyed himself to create a human society. The different Varnas were created from different parts of his body. The Brahmans were created from his head; the Kshatrias from his hands; the Vaishias from his thighs and the Sudras from his feet. The Varna hierarchy is determined by the descending order of the different organs from which the Varnas were created. (Rig Veda, X,90:11-12) Other religious theory claims that the Varnas were created from body organs of Brahma, who is the creator of the world.

These four Varnas (castes) arranged in a hierarchy form the fundamental groupings in Hinduism. Each Varna has certain duties and rights and the members have to work in certain occupations, which only that Varna members are allowed. Each Varna also has a certain type of diet.

The highest Varna is the Brahman. Members of this class are priests and the educated people of the society. The Varna after them in hierarchy is Kshatria. The members of this class are the
rulers and the aristocrats of the society. After them are the Vaisia. Members of this class are the landlords and businessmen of the society. After them in the hierarchy are the Sudra. Members of this class are the peasants and working class of the society who work in non-polluting jobs. The understanding in Hinduism is that a Sudra was created to be the slave of a Brahmin. (Sastra, VIII, 413-414) The caste hierarchy ends here. Below these castes are the outcasts who are untouchable to the four castes. These outcasts worked in degrading jobs like cleaning, sewage etc. The untouchables are the Dalits.

The Bhagavad Gita says this about the Varnas:

[41] The works of Brahmins, Kṣ.atriyas, and Shudras are different, in harmony with the three of their born nature.

[42] The works of a Brahmin are peace; self-harmony, austerity, and purity; loving-forgiveness and righteousness; vision and wisdom and faith.

[43] These are the works of Kṣ.atriya: a heroic mind, inner fire, constancy, resourcefulness, and courage in battle, generosity and noble leadership.

[44] Trade, agriculture and the rearing of cattle is the work of a Vaishya. And the work of the Sudra is service. (Mascaro 1962:18)

The first three castes had social and economical rights, which the Sudra and the untouchables did not have. The first three castes are also seen as ‘twice born’. This has nothing to do with reincarnation. Being “twice born” means that you come of age
religiously, making you a member of the Vedic religion, eligible to learn Sanskrit, study the Vedas and perform Vedic rituals. The "second birth" is thus like Confirmation or a Bar Mitzvah. Boys are "born again" at specific ages: 8 for Brahmins; 11 for Ks.atriyas; and 12 for Vaishyas. (Ross 1996-2001)

Each Varna and also the untouchables are divided into many communities. These communities are called Jat or Jati (The caste is also used instead of Jat). For example the Brahmans have Jats called Gaur, Konkanash, Sarasvat, Iyer and others. The outcastes have Jats like Mahar, Dhed, Mala, Madiga and others. The Sudra is the largest Varna and it has the largest number of communities. Each Jat is limited to the Varna diet and members are only allowed to marry within their Jat members. People are born into their Jat and it cannot be changed. Daniel argues that even if this is how the caste system is supposed to be in its religious form, in reality it is much more complicated and different from its religious form. (Daniel 1999-2000)

Almost every commentator on the caste system agrees that it is inextricably bound up with certain notions found only in Hindu systems of belief. For example, a man who accepts the caste system and the rules of his particular sub-caste is living according to dharma, while a man who questions them is violating dharma... If he observes the rules of the dharma, he will be born in his next incarnation in a high caste, rich, whole and well endowed. If he does not observe them he will be born in a low caste....
(Ibid., p.267, cf. also M.N. Srinivas, Caste and Other Essays and J. Hutton, Caste in India.)

Dharma is a strict code of practice, which applies traditional cultural norms. The most easily recognizable feature of the caste system is the emphasis on purity and pollution:

Contact of any kind, touching, dining, sex and other relations between castes results in the higher of the two castes being polluted. The polluted member of the higher caste has to undergo a purifactory rite in order to be restored to normal ritual status. (Srinivas, op. cit., :267)

5.1.2 The Biological Theory

The biological theory claims that all existing things, animated and inanimated, inherent three qualities in different apportionment. Sattva qualities include wisdom, intelligence, honesty, goodness and other positive qualities. Rajas include qualities like passion, pride, valor and other passionate qualities. Tamas qualities include dullness, stupidity, lack of creativity and other negative qualities. People with different doses of these inherent qualities adopted different types occupation. According to this theory the Brahmans inherent Sattva qualities. Kshatrias and Vaishias inherent Rajs qualities and the Sudras inherent Tamas qualities.

Like human beings, food also inherits different dosage of these qualities and it affects its eater's intelligence. The Brahmans and
the Vaishias have Sattvic diet, which includes fruits, milk, honey, roots and vegetables. Most of the meats are considered to have Tamasic qualities. Many Sudra communities eat different kinds of meat (but not beef) and other Tamasic food. But the Kshatrias who had Rajasic diet eat some kinds of meat like deer meat, which is considered to have Rajastic qualities. Many Marathas who claim to be Kshatrias eat mutton. The drawback of this theory is that in different parts of India the same food was sometimes qualified to have different dosage of inherent qualities. For example there were Brahmans who eat meat, which is considered Tamasic food. (Caste & Varna.htm)

5.1.3 The Socio-historical theory
The socio-historical theory explains the creation of the Varnas, Jats and of the untouchables. According to this theory, the caste system began with the arrival of the Aryans in India. The Aryans arrived in India around 1500 BC. The fair skinned Aryans arrived in India from south Europe and north Asia. Before the Aryans there were other communities in India of other origins. Among them Negrito, Mongoloid, Austroloidal and Dravidian. The Negrito have physical features similar to people of Africa. The Mongoloid have Chinese features. The Austroloids have features similar to the Aboriginals of Australia. The Dravidians originate from the Mediterranean and they were the largest community in India. When the Aryans arrived in India their main contact was with the Dravidians and the Austroloids. The Aryans disregarded the local cultures. They began conquering and taking control over regions in
north India and at the same time pushed the local people southwards or towards the jungles and mountains in north India.

The Aryans organized among themselves in three groups. The first group was of the warriors and they were called Rajayana, later they changed their name from Rajayana to Kshatria. The second group was of the priests and they were called Brahmans. These two groups struggled politically for leadership among the Aryans. In this struggle the Brahmans got to be the leaders of the Aryan society. The third group was of the farmers and craftsmen and they were called Vaisia. The Aryans who conquered and took control over parts of north India subdued the locals and made them their servants. In this process the Vaisias who were the farmers and the craftsmen became the landlords and the businessmen of the society and the locals became the peasants and the craftsmen of the society.

In order to secure their status the Aryans resolved some social and religious rules, which allowed only them to be the priests, warriors and the businessmen of the society. For example take Maharashtra. Maharashtra is in West India. This west region is known by this name for hundreds of years. Many think that the meaning of the name Maharashtra is in its name, Great Land. But there are some who claim that the name, Maharashtra, is derived from the Jat called Mahar who are considered to be the original; people of this region. In caste hierarchy the dark skinned Mahars were outcasts. The skin color was an important factor in the caste
system. The meaning of the word “Varna” is not class or status but skin color. Between the outcasts and the three Aryan Varnas there is the Sudra Varna who are the simple workers of the society. The Sudras consisted of two communities. One community was of the locals who were subdued by the Aryans and the other were the descendants of Aryans with locals. In Hindu religious stories there are many wars between the good Aryans and the dark skinned demons and devils. The different Gods also have dark skinned slaves. There are stories of demon women trying to seduce good Aryan men in deceptive ways. There were also marriages between Aryan heroes and demon women. Many believe that these incidences really occurred in which, the gods and the positive heroes were people of Aryan origin. And the demons, the devils and the dark skinned slaves were in fact the original residence of India whom the Aryans coined as monsters, devil, demons and slaves.

As in most of the societies of the world, so in India, the son inherited his father’s profession. And so in India there developed families, who professed the same family profession for generation in which, the son continued his father’s profession. Later on as these families became larger, they were seen as communities or as they are called in Indian languages, Jat. Different families who professed the same profession developed social relations between them and organized as a common community, meaning Jat.
Later on the Aryans who created the caste system, added to their system non-Aryans. Different Jats who professed different professions were integrated in different Varnas according to their professions. Other foreign invaders of ancient India – Greeks, Huns, Seythains and others – who conquered parts of India and created kingdoms were integrated in the Kshatria Varna (warrior castes). But probably the Aryan policy was not to integrate original Indian communities within them and therefore many aristocratic and warrior communities that were in India before the Aryans did not get the Kshatria status.

Most of the communities that were in India before the arrival of the Aryans were integrated in the Sudra Varna or were made outcast depending on the professions of these communities. Communities who professed non-polluting jobs were integrated in Sudra Varna. And communities who professed polluting professions were made outcasts. (Aharon Daniel, 1999-2000)

So, it is understood that the Aryan priests, according to the ancient sacred literature of India, were responsible for dividing society into a basic caste system. Sometime between 200BC AND AD100, the Manu Smriti, or Law of Manu, was written. In it the Aryan priest – lawmakers created the four great hereditary divisions of society still surviving today, placing their own priestly class at the head of this caste system with the title of earthly gods, or Brahmans. Next in order of rank were the warriors, the Kshatriyas. Then came the Vaisyas, the farmers and the
merchants. The fourth of the original castes was the Sudras, the laborers, born to be servants to the other three castes, especially the Brahman. Far lower than the Sudras – in fact, entirely outside the social order and limited to doing the most menial and unappealing tasks – were those people of no caste, formerly known as Untouchables.

In the 1930s Indian nationalist leader Mohandas Gandhi applied the term Harijans, or "children of God," to this group. The Dalits (the oppressed) was the name given by Dalit leaders to describe themselves in the political process. The Untouchables were the Dravidians, the aboriginal inhabitants of India, to whose ranks from time to time were added the pariahs, or outcasts, people expelled for religious or social sins from the classes into which they had been born. Thus created by the priests, the caste system was made a part of Hindu religious law, rendered secure by the claim of divine revelation. (Barnes&Noble: Not Dated) Sudheer Birodkar argues that the introduction of the Untouchables played a vital role in keeping the hereditary character of the caste system intact. And as their function was to hold intact the caste system it is logical that they were introduced after caste divisions had already developed.

(Birodkar: Matrix.htm)

5.2 The Caste System in Modern day India.
According to the records, the caste system is still intact today but the rules are not as rigid as they were in the past. Because of
western education, contact with foreigners, media and modern communications, people are progressive in many aspects. In 1962, a law was passed making it illegal to discriminate against the untouchable castes. The leaders of independent India decided that India would be a democratic, socialist and secular country. According to this policy there is separation between religion and the state. Practicing untouchability or discriminating a person based on his caste is legally forbidden. Along with this law government allowed positive discrimination of the depressed classes of India. In practice however, discrimination still continues.

In the past, when Brahmins came into contact with Sudras, they used to bathe. Now, some people just sprinkle water on their body and some do not even care at all. Today Brahmins have land, work in the field and are involved in government service. Some Vaisya and Sudra caste people are teachers, high officials, and successful politicians. Previously Brahmins were not subject to the death penalty and were instead given the same status as cows in the Hindu religion. But now, the law equally treats all castes. Education is free and open to all castes. Discrimination is only done socially.

In modern day India technological advancement and modernization has had the greatest impact on caste practice. Indians have become more flexible in their caste system customs. In general the urban people in India are less strict about the caste system than the rural. In cities one can see different caste people
mingling with each other, while in some rural areas there is still discrimination based on castes and sometimes also on untouchability. In urban areas for example, physical separation is more difficult to achieve in than in rural environment.

It is interesting to note that pollution through physical contact was first challenged when Hindu women began to go to Christian hospitals for delivery of their babies. Doctors, nurses and orderlies had to touch people of other castes. Divisions based on occupation break down in modern society, because the division of labour is far more widely spread. Strong cultural forces still promote the system of arranged marriages and the accompanying practice of giving dowry. So-called love marriages are the exception, though increased social mobility (not least work overseas) may make it more likely in the future.

Since the Indian Constitution of 1948, which technically outlawed the caste system as it had been known and practiced, those who were formerly called outcastes were now called "Scheduled Castes" needing protection. While one might still be born into particular strata, e.g. a Brahmin or a Dalit, and would always remain so, they were no longer limited in terms of education and social achievement. For example, the President of India is a Dalit. At the same time, it is to be remembered that some people will not shake hands with him because he is a Dalit. So even though caste is outlawed in the Constitution, the reality of caste is so ingrained into the cultural fabric of Indian society that I wonder,
short of demolition of the culture, if it will change. Even within the Christian community, the outcaste/caste system shows up. In certain Christian communities, people who come say from the Brahmin caste will not commune from the same communion cup following a Dalit. This, in spite of the fact that Dalits have become Bishops and the equivalent, in their respective denominations. Although outlawed, still in rural villages in India one will find two glasses at the water faucet – one to be used by Dalits; the other to be used by all others.

5.3 Indian Dalit Theology - Definition
The difficulty associated with defining this theology simply is that Dalit theology is still in the process of emergence. Dalit theologians are still trying to construct a Dalit Theology or theologies even though it could be nearer where they’re going than where they’re coming from. According to Webster, Dalit Theology could be defined in at least three different ways: First Dalit theology is a theology about the Dalits or theological reflection upon the Christian responsibility to the depressed classes. Secondly, it is a theology for the depressed classes, or the theology of the message addressed to the depressed classes and to which they seem to be responding. Thirdly, Dalit theology is a theology from the depressed classes that is the theology, which they themselves would like to expound. (Webster: 2000:100)

It goes without saying that Webster's three-pronged definition of Dalit theology emphasizes the fundamental focus of Dalit Theology
- the socio-cultural and economic realities of the existential situation of oppressed peoples in India. Various attempts have been made to define Dalit theology and it is only recently that through writings of people like M E Prabhakar, A P Nirmal and others that the essence of Dalit Theology can be put together. A P Nirmal sees Dalit Theology as a people theology and describes it as "a theology by, for and of an oppressed people." (Nirmal (not dated): 139) He sees the word "people" here as both a theological and sociological reality. But the primary significance of this theology rests in the word 'dalit', which describes the situation of the people being focused upon.

According to Prabhakar, "Dalit, both in its sanskritic and Hebrew root and usage means 'broken', 'downtrodden', which words really describe the effects of oppression" (Prabhakar 1989:1) A P Nirmal affirms this and goes further by saying, "The term "dalit" means (1) the broken, the torn, the rent, the burst, the split, (2) the opened, the expended, (3) the bisected, (4) the driven asunder, the dispelled, the scattered, (5) the downtrodden, the crushed, the destroyed, (6) the manifested, the displayed." (Nirmal (not dated): 139)

The word 'dalit' therefore refers to people who are victims of a socio-political, cultural and economic situation that has oppressed and suppressed them to a state of deprivation and dehumanization. That is why both Nirmal and Prabhakar see dalits as a sociological and theological category. Exclusively, in India
Dalits would refer to people who by legislation are listed under scheduled castes. However, in a wider sense, Dalits would include all poor and oppressed people within the society. Dalit theology is therefore a response of those concerned about the needs of the poor and oppressed both within and outside the church. Dalit theology focuses on the state and needs of all Dalits, and aspires to remedy their situation. Concerned about the realities of the condition of Dalits in India, Dalit theology is therefore a protest against the social inequality and injustice that has made them less than they were created to be.

The long-term goal of Dalit Theology is therefore the total liberation of Dalits from all state of deprivation and dehumanization into a state of selfhood, identity and self-determination. It is a theology essentially done by participants in the Dalit cause. According to James Massey, the life of Dalit Theology therefore must be rooted in experience. According to him, Dalit theology "has to come out from the experience of Dalits themselves. It must be based on the content of many living stories of Dalits. (Ibid, pp58) It also means that the history of Dalits has to be prepared first. Otherwise this may appear as an appendage to liberation theology. Therefore one of the dire needs while we are thinking about "Dalit theology" is "Dalit history". (Prabhakar 1989:60) For Prabhakar, as well as other emerging Dalit theologians, the most qualified people to define Dalit Theology are Dalits themselves, who have experienced what it means to be Dalit. Dalits themselves can best narrate their own
Dalit experiences, their own sufferings, their own aspirations and their own hopes.

This calls for some kind of analysis of the Indian Christian theology. In essence, Dalit Theology is a counter-theology in that it departs from the traditional way of doing theology. Like western theology, Indian Christian theology which is Brahmanic in character is not reflective of the real situation and experience of the majority of people. James Massey asserts that, "The roots of Indian Christian Theology lie in the experiences of mostly upper caste/class Christian converts of this century and last century". (Ibid.pp58) He sees as missing from this theology the real life experiences of Dalits who form a majority of the church. Furthermore, Indian Christian theology has been like an appendage to western theology. Dalit theology departs from this approach by focusing on the real life and historical experiences of Dalits themselves.

Dalit theology is also a counter-culture because it runs contrary to the prevailing socio-cultural situation that promotes the oppression of the defenseless poor through the sacred-profane dichotomy and social inequality perpetuated by the Brahmanic culture and religion. Against these, Dalit theology is concerned with the identity and fulfillment of the poor and oppressed Dalits.
5.4 Comments on Dalit theology

Having taken time to reflect on this subject a little deeper, it is not too difficult to notice that the infamous caste system is the result of the reincarnation and karma doctrines. The four castes eventually developed into a social mosaic of 3,000 sub-castes with the untouchables at the bottom of the list, as virtually inhuman, good only to clean dirt and excrement, without any hope of redemption or betterment because their miserable destiny has been predetermined by a former existence.

And the priestly Brahmin class, the highest one, sees no need to extend acts of kindness to the less fortunate; because to do so would interfere with the karma of those beneath them and bring disrespect upon the privileges of their class, a status which they deserve because of their conduct in previous reincarnations. To do good to one of the lower classes, according to reincarnation, would only interfere with the divine cosmic law of karmic punishment.

If you are born an Untouchable, no other class will even "touch" you; if you are born a shoemaker in India you will die as a shoemaker, no other class will accept you, no hope of improving your life... it is the greatest prejudice and discrimination system of a nation...

It is not surprising that even Buddha and the founder of Jainism condemned the caste system; Gandhi in 1949 persuaded the
Indian Parliament to outlaw Untouchability in the Constitution... but it still remains a hallowed tradition in the villages where most Indians live. And the caste system will stay as far as the doctrines of reincarnation and karma are practiced... it is the only way to live them! These doctrines are foundational to Hinduism as a religion and for as long as Hinduism remains intact in India, the caste system will continue. The best hope to get rid of the caste system is a liberative faith and my argument is that African evangelical Christianity with an emphasis on all encompassing liberation of the whole person is what the Indian people need.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta left behind a heritage for such a liberative faith and many other Christian missionaries are doing the best to end the caste system, loving, cleaning and feeding the Untouchables. Evangelical Christianity was the solution for the slavery in the Roman Empire and for the blacks in America and much of Africa... and I believe Christianity is the best solution to end the caste system and the chronic poverty in India.
CHAPTER SIX
It is important to assess the contexts that have given rise to these counter theologies. This should give insight into the issues being addressed by these theologies.

6.1 Context of Dalit Theology
The first thing to be noted about the Indian context is that there is a religious and a socio-culturally established hierarchical structure of people into castes and classes which leaves certain people groups in a perpetual state of deprivation and dependence. Indian society is controlled by the varnashrama dharma ideology of caste which, based on the dogma of purity and pollution, dichotomizes people into a hierarchical structure that determines powers and privileges. This ideology divides humans into four castes - the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Judras, which are believed to be divinely ordained from the beginning. Then there are the outcastes or scheduled castes, the avarnas who, being outside the caste system, are considered as no humans. They are considered to be virtually unclean and are referred to as untouchables. This dichotomy empowers the privileged caste categories to dominate and oppress the deprived categories of people in all socio-cultural, economic and political matters.

This Varna ideology is noted in Hinduism and provides the basis for social, economic and political discrimination against Dalits who
are mostly non-scheduled castes. Dalits by extension also include other deprived people such as tribes who were believed at some point to have gone through "forced sanskritisation" to convert them into Hinduism. The primary victims of this context are the Dalits who are forced into a dehumanizing state of powerlessness and dependency. The realities of life in this socio-cultural context extended into the church where Dalits are also discriminated against. This is so because the church accepted the existential situation in society as normative.

6.2 Context of Black Theology
The context of Blacks in South Africa is also one of socio-political and economic oppression under the policy of apartheid. Apartheid is a political system that legalized the mastery of the white race over blacks and coloureds. The system was enforced by the South African white parliament through several laws designed to exploit Blacks and limit their socio-political and economic rights. Allan Boesak describes it as a "power structure" which represents the economic, political, cultural, religious and psychological forces which confine the reality of black existence."(Boesak 1978:57) This power structure is the means by which the major resources of South Africa are accessible only to Whites. This is the unjust system that restricts Blacks, through pass laws, to "homelands" in which their stature is that of migrant workers. They are compelled to carry passes, which allow them in designated white areas for only limited periods. Blacks have no rights to residence or property in the white areas. Subsequent to finding jobs, they are allowed to
live in illegal shantytowns from which their wives and children are barred. The migrant worker can only contact his home by means of letters about once a month or visit once in a quarter. (J.S.A 1982:63)

The educational systems also discriminates against blacks, who even with their qualifications after, are not as rewarded as their white counterparts. The migrant workers believe their children ought to go to school but poverty prevents them. This situation leaves the future bleak for most Blacks. Bonganjalo Goba sees apartheid as a "political system, which engenders separation and racial hostility, distorts God's purposes for all humanity" as well as a "social sin, which denies the intrinsic divine oneness of God's people irrespective of race or colour."(The Role of the Black Church in process of Healing Human Brokenness, in Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, 28 Sept 1979:10) It is therefore a dehumanizing context for blacks to live in generally.

**Comments**

The sobering thought in both contexts here is the fact that the Church has become part of this evil system of oppression and it has been used to justify and perpetuate the status quo. Its not surprising therefore that traditional Christianity has been rejected as irrelevant and oppressive. Under such circumstances I would have been the first one to make an outright rejection. But it didn't have to be that way, if only evangelical Christianity was taken seriously with all its potential to become a comprehensive theology
of liberation. The five fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity allow no room for a faith that justifies and perpetuates evil systems; in fact such faiths are an abomination before God. If Evangelical Christianity is true to these fundamentals, it should come along side the oppressed and discriminated with a message of hope and deliverance.
CHAPTER SEVEN
7. Interplay of context and victims
7.1 Effects of Context on Dalits
It is worth focusing on the state of Dalits as victims of their socio-cultural context. It is inevitable that the social hierarchy ended up producing an underprivileged category of people whose lives were being marginalized. These are the Dalits. A M Abraham portrays the dilemma of Dalits vividly by saying, "The dalit experience in one word can be described as dependency and powerlessness. Self-reliance in any sphere of their life such as economic, political, educational, legal, religio-cultural is impossible for them. Therefore we way that theologically their problem is living in a framework of meaning, experiencing dependency in all walks of life."(Prabhakar 1989:85)

In analyzing this state of dependency, he concluded, "A dependent people are not a free people."(Ibid. pp85) Economically most Dalits live below the poverty line because they are deprived of engaging in meaningfully rewarding jobs. Educationally they are discriminated against. They are not allowed access to quality schools and have no representation in the educational curriculum. Even when allowed in schools, there is a rapid drop out and they have the lowest rate of literacy. In the religio-cultural life, Dalits are also made dependent. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, once an Associate Director of the CISRS in Bangalore, says "nearly 90% of Dalits live in villages but segregated in sectors known as colony, chevi, palli in opposition to the main village inhabited by the Caste
Hindus." (Ibid., pp88) They are not allowed access to common village wells, burial grounds and are barred from Hindu Temples. Dalit gods and rituals are considered inferior and unclean by Caste Hindus.

As regards justice in legal matters, the words of a leading Indian judge in the Supreme Court of Justice, V R Krishna Iyer, best describes the dalit situation -"justice in words and injustice in deeds." (Ibid. pp90) for the depressed people. The result of all these is a loss of self image amongst Dalits, many of whom have come to accept their state of powerlessness and dependency as divinely ordained.

If that is the state of Dalits in general, the state of Christian Dalits is even worse. Their situation is best described by Saral K Chatterji who says, "The Christian Dalits are "twice alienated". They are regarded as society's non-dalits, whether poor or rich, in the same way as are the Dalits and tribals and they suffer from the same economic, social, and educational disparities as the other Dalits. In addition, the hope of the dalit convert for a better life, free from stigma and humiliation appears not to have been fulfilled for the bulk of them within the Churches" (Ibid. pp10)

Within the Church, Dalits still face discrimination from Caste Christians, who treat them as low caste people. In some Churches, they are to sit in separate places, bury their dead in separate burial grounds and are not allowed in leadership. This
state of rejection in society and within the Church was one of suffering and agony, which prepared the ground for the emergence of Dalit theology.

7.2 Effects of Context on Blacks

The context of apartheid for the black man in South Africa is, simply put, bad news. In the words of Allan Boesak, "for Blacks, it means bad housing, being underpaid, pass laws, influx-control, migrant labour, group areas, resettlement camps, inequality before the law, fear intimidation, white bosses and black informers, condescension and paternalism, in a word, black powerlessness." (Boesak 1978:57)

This is a dehumanizing context to live in. Apart from the economic, social and political exploitation, Bishop Desmond Tutu says the worst crime of apartheid has been that it succeeded in filling most blacks with "self disgust and self hatred" which he sees as "the most violent form of colonialism" (Tutu 1987:47). Apartheid succeeded in restricting Blacks to a state of powerlessness, poverty, fear and dependency, but above all, to a situation in which his dignity as a person is at stake. What the context does to a black person is further emphasized by Simon S Maimela, who says, "As a black person who is part of the weak, powerless, oppressed and exploited section of the population, to talk about southern Africa is to talk about the experience of a total system which negates my being as a person, a situation that threatens my life and the life of all people of colour" (Maimela 1982:59)
This negation of humanity deprives the black man of the power to be human as created in the image of God. Buthelezi uses this to emphasize the shift from a sociological to a theological category. He sees black Christians in South Africa being exploited in such a way that their very existence becomes dehumanized. He therefore argues that a situation in which blacks lack opportunity in education, employment and general development is a denial of God's gifts to humanity. And once a man cannot receive the gifts of God, he is alienated from the meaning of life or the wholeness of life. He sees the task of Black theology as helping Blacks to rediscover the wholeness of life. Like the dalit situation in India the interplay of context and victims prepared the ground for the emergence of Black theology as a response to this dehumanizing situation.

7.3 Factors Responsible for the Emergence of Dalit Theology

It was only a matter of time before the realities of the socio-cultural and religious contexts analyzed above generated a theological response. Essentially the state of powerlessness and deprivation led to the beginning of a struggle and protest movement against the dominant Hindu culture and caste system. Sundar Clarke describes the emergence of Dalit theology as a "contextual inevitability". (Clarke 1978:31) He notes that the majority of Christians are Dalits. "60% to 75% of the people are dalits and the Christian community must become fully aware of people not only in terms of brokenness but in terms of size."(Ibid.,
The state of Dalit deprivation was seen as unacceptable both within society and the church. The theological response owes a lot to the modern Dalit Movement whose origins date back to the 19th century when the Dalit quest began in earnest. That period saw the rise of mass movements which were "localized grassroots, somewhat simultaneous, conversion movements, initialed and led by Dalits" to Islam or Christianity (Webster 1992:33). Many Dalits saw conversion to Christianity or Islam and at times to Sikhism as a means of escape from the existential situation of powerlessness. Majority of Dalits chose to become Christians, and the final quarter of the 19th century saw an increase of these in rejection of the hierarchy which kept them down. This trend, according to Webster, "changed the course of the history of Christianity in India and pushed the Dalit movement on to the next stage." (Ibid.pp33) Dalits themselves, who were mostly in the rural communities, initiated the mass movements. Amongst the notable mass movements were the Punjab ones amongst the Chuhvas which began in the 1870's and continued through the 1920's, the Tamilnadu one amongst the Paraiyars, and the Karela Mass movements.

These mass movements and mass conversions, especially to Christianity gave Dalits a sense of hope for new identity in relationship with God and launched them into a quest for freedom from the life of degradation and deprivation they were used to. In the modern ear, the Dalit Panther movement also played a significant role by being the first to coin the word 'dalit' to
represent an anti-caste protest. While they shared some sense of identity with the Black Panther Movement in the US, the primary concern was the Dalit dilemma in India. These movements were influential in the subsequent rise of Theology.

Another major factor for the emergence of a Dalit theology was the dissatisfaction with both Western Christianity and theology as well as Indian Christian theology. If Dalits thought conversion to Christianity meant freedom from the dalit dilemma, early converts soon discovered that there was not much difference between the church and the larger society in attitude to dalits. Even though Christian Dalits were the majority within the Church of India, they found that the Church accommodated and continued with the same alienation and segregation within the larger society. They continued to suffer as much discrimination within the Church as they did outside. They soon discovered that the whole Church structure favoured people within the higher castes and discriminated against the poor. Dalits became disenchanted with Western Missionaries who were not seen to have taken deliberate steps to alleviate the dalit situation. Some Missionaries who were sympathetic to Dalit Courses were ostracised by their colleagues. Some Missionaries even saw Dalit converts as "rubbish" being raked into the Church. If anything, western missionaries and the emerging Indian Church were seen as inflicting a double dilemma on Dalits. Saral K Chatterji says "the hope of Dalit converts for a better life, freedom from stigma and humiliation appears not to
have been fulfilled for the bulk of them within the Church."(Chatterji 1999:16)

Church discrimination was reflected in the inequality shown in seating arrangements within the Church, double standards in training and ordination of leadership, and inequality in the Church's educational system. If Dalits were dissatisfied with western missionaries, they were even more so with Indian Christianity and theology, which was seen as ignoring the concerns of Dalits. It is the insensitivity of the church and Indian Christian theology to dalit concerns and aspiration for fuller humanity that heightened the sense of urgency for a Christian Dalit theology.

Indian Christian theology was seen as failing to take serious account of the sufferings of Dalits who were the majority of Indian Christians. It was seen to be more concerned with the philosophical theological concepts of the dominant Brahmanical religion and culture than the real life situation and aspirations of Dalits. Indian Christian theology was therefore seen as being irrelevant. Thus began a new method of theological reflection, which is based on the living experiences of Dalits themselves. The climax of this process was the gathering of 125 participants in Madras, in December 1986 for a consultation on the theme, Towards a Dalit Theology". Convened by the Christian Dalit Liberation Movement, with assistance from the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, the consultation brought together social activists, scholars, pastors, theologians and others
to begin the process of clarifying the concept, content and direction of Dalit theology.

7.4 Factors Responsible for the Emergence of Black Theology

Black theology is essentially a response against the oppression of black people and their sense of human dignity as a result of apartheid. In a similar way to Dalit theology, it has been described by Basil Moore as "a theology of the oppressed, by the oppressed for the liberation of the oppressed." (Moore (Ed):IX) It is fundamentally a cry against apartheid. Pioneers of Black theology were expressing anger against racism not only in the society but also in religious institutions. This was more so because the existing white government justified apartheid on the basis of being grounded in Christian principles. Some South African white theologians were also known to have justified apartheid on grounds of scripture. (Hastings 1979:145) It was also a response of Black theologians to the silence of western missionaries and western Christian theology concerning the atrocities of apartheid. The missionaries were seen not to have been sensitive to the cries of oppressed blacks. Elliot K M Mgojo, a lecturer at the Federal Theological Seminary, Pietermaritzburg attributes the appearance of Black Theology to "the failure of white Christians in general and white theologians in particular, to relate the gospel to the pain of being left with no dignity as a black man in a white governed society." (Mgojo 1977:28)
White Christian theology was seen as being irrelevant to the black existential situation, because as Boesak emphasized, "White theology could never give answers to the urgent questions of black people" (Boesak 1978:76) The fundamental question Blacks were faced with was how to be black and Christian in a context of white oppression.

Black theologians were also inspired by the whole philosophy of "Black Consciousness" which was a forerunner to Black theology. Black Consciousness could be said to be the most significant influence on the emergence of Black theology in South Africa. The growing anti-racist mood in South Africa eventually found a spokesman in the person of Steve Biko who founded the South African Students Organization in 1971 and was its first president. Prior to this, all over Africa there have been the anti-colonial nationalist movements. The leading advocates of independence for African nation states had sought to restore the dignity of Africans and their rights to political self-determination. The influence of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana as an advocate of Pan-Africanism was felt all over the continent. Between Nkrumah's concept of African personality and Senghers Negritude, there emerged a collective sense of the dignity of "blackness". This was the beginning of the move to do away with the connotation of 'black' as evil or negative. This trend and the gains of the civil rights movement in the United States influenced the rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Blackness in South Africa was viewed not just as skin pigmentation but a mental attitude and
socio-political symbol for oppression and degradation. Black Consciousness emerged as a corrective to this situation with the aim of setting the black man free to see himself as "a being complete in himself"(Biko: 41) In Steve Biko's words, "Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude."

(Ibid. pp41)

Steve Biko did not see Black Consciousness and Black theology as being mutually exclusive. He sees Black theology as seeking "to relate God and Christ once more to the Black man and his problems". (Ibid. pp43) It was in fact at a conference organized in July 1971 by SASO that a resolution was passed affirming the belief that Black theology is an authentic and positive articulation of the black Christian's reflection of God in the light of their experience."(Pityana: 63) The papers resulting from that conference were published by the University Christian Movement in 1972 but were immediately banned by the South African government. In March 1973 Steve Biko himself was seen as a threat to security of state and banned under the Suppression of Communism Act. His death in 1977 sparked off violent demonstrations but served as a major thrust for greater
articulation of Black theology’s resistance of apartheid. This was the context in which Black Theology emerged in South Africa.
CHAPTER EIGHT

8. Substances of Dalit and Black Theologies

Before examining the significant themes in the theologies under review, it is essential to understand their methodologies. It is their methodologies that gave them their distinctives as “counter theologies” that are also authentic theologies in their own rights.

8.1 Theological Methodologies: Dalit Theology

For Dalit theology, the hermeneutical principle is orthopraxis. Dalit theology seeks to relate scripture to the existential situation of its participants. Experience is therefore essential. It was M.M. Thomas that said, "Living theology is the manner in which a church confesses its faith and establishes its historical existence in dialogue with its environment."(Prabhakr 1989:57)

By environment, M. Thomas means the context. James Massey says "life context" one of the "three main requirements for the formation of a living form of theology."(Ibid., pp58) Dalit theologians emphasize the dialectic between the Indian context and theological reflection. This context comprises the socio-religious, economic and political dynamics of the life situation of Dalits in India. Hence Dalit theology deals not just with philosophical categories but takes into cognizance the sociological factors affecting Dalits in their context. These factors include socio-cultural realities of segregation, oppression, deprivation, and alienation. Emerging Dalit theology is therefore based on reflections on experiences within this social context and the
aspiration for social justice and equality with the church and society.

Closely related to the context is the place of historical consciousness of Dalits. For the theology to be authentic, it must have its root in the historical experiences of Dalits themselves. Most Dalit theologians view Indian Christian Theology as an appendage to the history of Western missions in India just as the Indian Church took after the character of the missions. A P Nirmal argues: "the present academic historians because of the 'rigorous' and 'academic' demands of their historiography try to reconstruct dalit histories through the sources that are hostile to Dalits. What is really needed is historical scholarship that is "interested" in dalit issues and which will look at oral traditions more sympathetically and consider them as "alternative" historical sources. Such a scholarship may have to start with "family histories" of the dalits" (Nirmal (Ed) 1987: 144)

This is why it is essential that Dalits themselves do Dalit theology. Equally important for its methodology is the understanding of Dalit theology as a people theology, its primary concern is a category of people who are believed to have been denied 'essential human hood'. The context in which they live makes them less than human and therefore a violation of what it means for them to have been created in the image of God. A P Nirmal observes further that this theology has "moved away from propositional to people's life experiences." (Ibid., pp140) The process of Dalit theology is
therefore people centered. It is a theology of identity in which the suffering of the dalits becomes of primal concern. This is different from an academic or philosophical approach to theology that may deal with abstract issues rather than real life situations. The ultimate goal is the liberation motif. To see a radical transformation of the Dalits who are victims of an unjust and inhuman socio-cultural and religious situation. Dalit theology can therefore be seen as a response to the quest of Dalits for identity, human-hood, justice and equality in society. In its methodology there is also emphasis on theological reflection being done in the indigenous languages for the outcome to be authentic and reflective of the real Dalits situation. Then for international consumption, translation could be made from the local dialects into English or other international languages.

8.2 Theological Methodologies: Black Theology

Black theology's methodology is one of reflection on the hermeneutical praxis, of the situation of Blacks in South Africa. It is also a people theology whose point of departure is the existential situation of a specific category of people. Basil Moore says, "It starts with black people in the South African situation facing the strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult and dehumanization. It tries to understand as clearly as possible who these people are, what their life experiences are, and the nature and cause of their suffering."(Moore (Ed) 2000:6)
It is not just concerned with orthodoxy but seeks to analyze existence of blacks in the South African context and interpret it in the light of scripture with the goal of participation in the process of liberation. Boesak also stressed the need for Black theology to be contextual by being "critical and prophetic as regards the situational experience" with the ultimate goal being "liberation praxis under the word of God". (Boesak 1987:87)

Perhaps the most radical advocate for a departure from the western methodology is Manas Buthelezi who emphasized an anthropological, rather than ethnographic approach. He sees the western ethnographic approach as putting too much emphasis on cultural objectivism and tending to overlook present day realities. In his words,

"There is the danger that the African past may be romanticized and conceived in isolation from the realities of the present. Yet this "past" seen as a worldview is nothing more than a historical abstraction of "what once was" (Buthelezi in Ibid., pp62)

Buthelezi emphasizes that there is a difference between psychologically living in the past and the harsh realities of the present. Hence for him the point of departure for Black theology is not the past but the realities that confront the African in his present existential situation. Buthelezi's anthropological approach is concerned with people not as 'objects' of study but as God's creatures and a rediscovery of what it means for them to be fully human 'here and now'. It is with this methodology that Buthelezi
goes on to develop his concept of the wholeness of life. His approach is as Biblical as it is situational. It is rooted in Biblical faith by seeking to understand what salvation means to the black man in the South African situation. For him, Allan Boesak and some others, for theology to be relevant to the black man in his situation, the reflection must be done by the African himself. Boesak argues that "white theology could never give answer to the urgent questions of black people, simply because in that sphere that whites created, blacks could never ask existential questions." (Boesak in Ibid., pp78)

The other element that Boesak stresses in this approach is the role of tradition. He sees the need for Black theology to seek out the good things that African tradition can contribute to building a new social order.

8.3 Re-occurring themes in Dalit theology
Among the most prominent themes are the following:

8.3.1 Identity and Selfhood
There is a strong emphasis on Dalits having a clear sense of identity. K. Wilson describes this as the need for Dalits to "know who they were and who they are and whom they intend to become". (Prabhakar (Ed) 1987:48) Having been a people in a context that has dehumanized them, Dalits are seen to be a people who have almost lost their sense of identity. The context in which they live is one that constantly imposes on them, wrong perceptions of their identity, thereby making them accept a sense
of inferiority. Dalit Theology is therefore concerned for Dalits to rediscover their true identity. The process of this rediscovery must involve a change of mentality from being a suppressed people who must accept the yoke of caste degradation to a people with a clear sense of human dignity. This brings in the whole issue of what it means to be human and have a fulfilling sense of selfhood. Dalit theology seeks to re-educate Dalits by affirming their selfhood in what it means to be created in the image of God. True selfhood lies in recognizing that while other people may look down on Dalits because they are poor, powerless or uneducated, God has made them his people, accepts them as they are and identifies with them. This affirmation is Biblical and transcends their rejection as a sociological category.

Evangelical theology would acknowledge God’s acceptance of all people as they are and identifies with them, especially the poor and the powerless. The depth of this comes from the understanding that human beings are created by God in his image, like him and therefore has value, worth and dignity in and of themselves. So human dignity has nothing to do with what you have and do not have, can do or cannot do, but the fact that every human being has dignity by virtue of having been created in the image of God. There should never be important and unimportant people.

Evangelical theology would also argue that human identity and selfhood is found when questions of origin and destiny are
answered sufficiently. Having been created by God and like God, our identity and selfhood will therefore be found in him first and foremost before we find it in our common experience as a people. It is in him that we find our being.

**8.3.2 Suffering**

Suffering is an underlying theme for all of Dalit theology. A P Nirmal sees it as the basis for the theology. He says, "Dalit theology wants to assert that at the heart of the dalit people's experiences is pathos or suffering. The pathos or suffering is prior to their involvement in any activist struggle for liberation. Even before a praxis of theory and practice happens, they (the dalits) know God in and through their suffering."

(Nirmal, (Ed) 141)

It is in and through their suffering that Dalits know God and it is in this that they discover that God participates in their human pain as symbolized by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. The distinctive characteristic of Dalit theology is that it is a reflection of a people who have and are still experiencing afflictions, maltreatment and suffering. It is this quality that gives Dalits a sense of identity with God. As they turn to God they realize that the incarnation makes sense out of their own experience of suffering. For God to identify fully with humanity, he must participate in their suffering, and for Him to be seen to participate in human suffering, he had to become human. This participation in suffering and pain is not just a story but also a methodology for Dalit theology. A P Nirmal argues that "authentic Dalit theology
must arise out of dalit pain pathos". (Ibid., pp142) Non-dalits cannot therefore effectively do Dalit theology without having participated in the dalit experience of suffering.

8.3.3 Total Human and Societal Liberation

Dalits ultimate concern is to see God's liberating presence in society and the restoration of all oppressed humanity to a state of human dignity, equality and social justice. Dalit is therefore not only concerned with changing human consciousness but also the transformation of society's unjust and oppressive structures. Liberation is therefore twofold; freeing a people from acceptance of subhuman conditions as well as freeing society from oppressive systems through the new consciousness of the people. Dalit theology emphasizes the need for Dalits to accept responsibility for changing their circumstances both internally and externally. Internally, for a new consciousness of their identity, dignity and power, and externally by countering the forces of oppression within the society. The liberation motif sees unjust economic and social systems as contrary to the will of God. There is an understanding that before liberation is attained, there may be a process of suffering. Sundar Clarke sums this up by saying, "Dalit theology is liberation theology entailing people's participation in pain, hardship, bitterness but eventually it is a theology of hope for there is the promised land. There is the land flowing with milk and honey."(Prabhakar (Ed) 1989:33)
8.3.4 Concept of Power

For Dalit theology, power is seen as a force not only for self-definition but social change. The power is demonstrated in the Dalit struggle for liberation on all fronts when they experience inequality. The struggle is fundamentally against Brahmanism, which took away the autonomy of dalits and made them dependent by being co-opted in Hindu society. Power for Dalits is not understood in terms of status but liberating acts of love. The most integral aspect of power for Dalits begins with dalit consciousness, which affirms the authenticity and significance in their dalitness. It is this that gives them the necessary incentive to resist any force that dehumanizes them.

8.3.5 Concept of Community and Church

There is a strong emphasis on community, the essence of which is defined in the context of the church as a community of the faithful and a community of love. The church is seen as a community that stresses the oneness of humanity and particularly that of all suffering people. By the Church, Dalit theology does not mean the established Indian church, which failed to stop caste discrimination or address the needs of the oppressed lower castes or non-scheduled caste Christians. Rather it refers to the body of Christ as a new community of God's people, which takes seriously the struggle of all suffering people for justice and equality. There is also a strong sense of the Church as a servant church in identification with Christ. Prabhakar identifies three things that the Church shares in common with Christ as being, "the
humiliation and suffering and apparent powerlessness that go with the ministry." (Ibid., pp46) He says, as in Christ, the beauty of God is to be seen in the despised and the marginalized.

The Church is therefore seen as a community of suffering people. It is also in the context of the Church that Dalits can find healing and encouragement for their suffering and power for liberation. Beyond this the Church is seen to be a community that identifies with those in the world who are poor, weak and marginalized. The sense of community is therefore not limited to Christian dalits but extends to others who may not be Christians but are victims of an oppressive context.

8.3.6 View of God
Dalit theology emphasizes the dalitness of God, which consists in his being a suffering and 'serving God.' It rejects all non-dalit deities, who are seen as not able to identify with them, and embraces the God revealed through Jesus Christ as the God who identifies with Dalits. It is in this God that Dalits find their roots. God's identity with Dalits is seen in His being a 'dhobi' or 'bhangi' - a waiter who serves others. The serving acts of God are seen as being in identification with the lot of Dalits who are made to do the most menial and despicable jobs. God as revealed in Christ is seen as one who has endured suffering and brokenness. The suffering of Christ is seen as the suffering of God and descriptive of His dalitness. In relationship to a dalit-God, Dalits are seen as to be the manifestation of God to the world, and a demonstration of
His saving grace. This is emphasized by Arvind Nirmal, in saying that, "It is precisely in and through the weaker, the downtrodden, the crushed, the oppressed and the marginalized that God's saving glory is manifested or displayed. This is because brokenness belongs to the very being of God. He is one with the broken. He suffers when his people suffer. He dies in his people's death and He rises again in their resurrection. He weeps when they weep and laughs when his people laugh."(Ibid., pp82)

8.3.7 View of Christ
Closely related to the view of God is the view of Christ as a dalit-Christ who is in solidarity with victims of oppression. Christ is seen to have identified with the poor and suffering by His own life and suffering, and is viewed to still be. Christ is seen throughout his humanity to have identified with the weak and to have given them dignity by his participation in their healing. Using examples of the paralytic and the Samaritan woman, Dalit theologians emphasize the role of Christ in enabling oppressed people to find selfhood and healing. He was not seen to discriminate on the basis of race or social hierarchy but fraternized with the "untouchables" and outcastes of his time. Christ's identity with such people is seen to have affirmed their humanity and dignity, as well as given them a sense of hope. Dalit theology stresses the need for the Church to reflect the life of Christ by identifying with the oppressed and seeking to provide healing hope and liberation for them. However, Christ is seen not just as Lord of Christian Dalits but of non-Christian Dalits as well. His suffering was for all of humanity.
Sundar Clarke stresses the need for Dalit theology to be Christocentric. He sees Christ as the motivating factor for social action.

8.3.8 View of Women
Dalit theology is committed to the cause of all oppressed and marginalized people. In this category, special attention is given to women. Women in India are seen to be thrice alienated on basis of class, caste and gender. They are known as the 'dalit among the dalits' and 'downtrodden among the downtrodden'. As Ruth Manodrama, a woman puts it, "The Dalit women walk under most exploitative dehumanizing and unhealthy conditions. Either their work or their wages are not regularized. The women have to work to meet the survival needs of their families. They have been denied all basic amenities (even drinking water), proper health care, land ownership rights in the villages and cities, and constantly they face the insecurity of being evicted from the places where they manage their lives and livelihood"(Ibid., pp147)

Yet Dalit women constitute half the population of the church in India. In response to this situation, Dalit theologians like Dr Anbedkar advocate that the needs of the women be addressed. Dalit women are also beginning to be outspoken for Dalit theology to give women the opportunity to participate in theologizing on matters affecting them. While not much has been written on this, it is clear that Dalit theology is concerned about the dignity, rights and needs of women.
8.4 Re-occurring Themes in Black Theology

8.4.1 Wholeness of Life

Buthelezi is the most fervent advocate of the concept of the wholeness of life. Departing from the western tendency to create a dichotomy between sacred and secular life, Buthelezi's starting point is traditional African belief in the wholeness of life. Life and religion, the physical and the spiritual, are one and cannot be separated. For Buthelezi the wholeness of life is also fundamentally theological. Life in its completeness is both spiritual and physical as lived in the presence of God. Life is to be lived in the presence of God who created man in his image and bestowed on him dignity and true humanity. To experience completeness in life is to be in a position to relate to God and benefit from his gifts of food, health, protection, children etc. However Buthelezi finds that the South African context limits black people from experiencing the wholeness of life. Blacks are faced with conditions of powerlessness and poverty that denies them of the gifts of God and therefore of experiencing life in its fullness. In his words, "The passport to the place of receiving God's gifts is the opportunity in education, employment and general development. To deny a person these opportunities is to displace him from his God-given place; it is to alienate him from the wholeness of life. The experience of displacement or alienation from the wholeness of life is directly related to the reality of faith." (Parrat, (Ed) 1978:100)
The quest of Black theology is therefore how to experience God's full salvation in a context where, even with faith in God, a black person is conscious that he is not in position to receive the gifts of God to him. This raises existential questions on the meaning of life and humanity. The black South African lives in a state of "colonized humanity" which destroys his sense of worth. For Buthelezi, true humanity is not just the bliss of life after death but what should also take place in the context of daily earthly life.

8.4.2 Poverty and Suffering
The theme of poverty and suffering occurs over and over again in Black theology. Buthelezi sees the inability of South African Blacks to receive the gifts of God as a state of poverty and suffering. He defines poverty as "a state of displacement from the rendezvous with God as He comes to distribute gifts to His children."(Ibid., pp100) Boesak also stresses that the use of terms like "poor", "captives", "blind", "oppressed" in Scripture are not to be spiritualized or seen as an inward experience but as terms that designate actual real life experiences of people. (Boesak 1978:21) They describe the realities of life for Blacks in the South African socio-political context. The remedy is an urgent liberation from that existential situation.

8.4.3 Liberation
Allan Boesak seems to have picked up from Buthelezi's emphasis on the wholeness of life by emphasizing that the only remedy for the black man's situation is the Christian ethic of total liberation.
For him, that is what would enable Blacks in the South African context to experience life in its fullness. Boesak sees Black theology as a liberation theology with specific concern for the poor and oppressed. He sees Black theology coming to terms with their situation and seeking non-violent remedies to it. Boesak argues that "Black theological reflection must take seriously, precisely what Christian theology has hitherto ignored, the black situation. In its focus on the poor and oppressed, the theology of liberation is not a new theology; it is simply the proclamation of the age old gospel, but now liberated from the deadly hold of the mighty and the powerful and made relevant to the situation of the oppressed and the poor."(Ibid., pp10)

Beyond the liberation of the poor and oppressed, Boesak sees the need for the gospel to be liberated from all distortion and exploitation. He sees the gospel as being originally a gospel of the poor and of liberation. It is when the gospel is liberated from distortion that Black theology can make people see that the God of the Bible "is totally and completely different from the God whites have for so long preached to Blacks. The God of the Bible is the God of liberation rather than oppression, a God of justice rather than injustice, a God of freedom and humanity rather than enslavement and subservience, a God of love, righteousness, and community rather than hatred, self interest and exploitation."(Ibid., pp10)
Equally important for the liberation motif is the input of Sigzibo Dwane, who said liberation also involves black Christians being "set free from the hatred of the oppressor which can easily become the invisible companion of the zeal for justice and the dedication to the cause of total liberation". (Dwane 1981:31) If Blacks need to be set free from their state of being oppressed and possible anger against the oppressor, Elliot K M Mgojo brings in the dimension of the need for whites to be liberated from their superiority complex, which imposes an inferiority complex on Blacks. (Mgojo 1977:31) So one finds the theme of liberation in Black theology running full circle. Blacks need to be liberated from their state of oppression and possible hatred against their oppressors, the Gospel needs to be liberated from distortions, Whites need to be liberated from their oppressive inhumanity and the whole society needs transformation through involvement in non-violent acts of liberation.

8.4.4 Concept of Power

Black theology sees power as not residing with the powerful of the world but with the oppressed. Power is not seen as a force to be used against others but in serving others. Boesak sees power as "the power to be" which he describes as "the courage to affirm, in spite of everything else, one's human dignity"(Torres&Fabella (Eds) 1987:85) Beyond affirmation of one's human dignity the affirmation is to be used in serving others. Real power is seen as power shared with others. Rather than power misused, as with the policy of apartheid, Boesak sees real power as one that is
grounded in the power of the creator and made available for the service of others. Both Boesak and Buthelezi see power as essential to humanity. It flows from God's power, which is creative and liberating. To have such power and be able to share it with others is to be fully human. It frees both the oppressed and oppressor from inhumanity and creates possibility for the realization of full humanity. Power is not seen as compatible with violence but a positive non-violent force for fundamental change of society.

8.4.5 Concept of Community and Church
There is a strong emphasis on communal praxis. Black theology is seen as a theology of the black Christian community struggling with existential problems and seeking to provide answers as part of the process of liberation. Desmond Tutu emphasized the need for "corporateness of human existence" in the face of excessive western individualism. Bonganjalo Goba sees the role of the Church as that of a Christian community seeking to heal human brokenness. He defines this healing as "that manifestation of the liberating presence of the grace and spirit of God promoting and generating wholeness. Those creative presences of the liberating spirit of God fostering human relationships especially that are committed to change and social justice."(Goba 1979:8)

The role of the Church is not just to preach the gospel but also to be the presence of Christ fostering healing in a situation of broken relationships. Salvation is therefore not only a personal experience
but a corporate one in which horizontal relationships are renewed and restored to what God intends it to be. Healing faith, which flows from the Church, is also to be taken into the socio-political context towards transformation of oppressive structures in such a way that both the white and black communities are healed of their brokenness. This process of communal praxis would involve seeking to understand not only Black identity but White identity as well, being guided by Christian understanding of humanity and relationships. It is only thus that the gospel can bring reconciliation. Goba sees the black church in South Africa as being called into a pastoral theology with enables Blacks and Whites to participate in God’s healing and liberating activity. He sees this as” a pilgrimage to the rediscovery of authentic personhood and Christo-centric human relationships.”(Ibid., pp13)

African Evangelical theology takes seriously the fuller doctrine of the Church as taught in the scriptures. This doctrine shades a lot of light on the emphasis of communal praxis as taught by Black theologians. Communal praxis in my opinion can only be realised when the church lives up to her double identity. The Church is distinct from the world as its salt and light, yet it penetrates the world for Christ, it engages the world. On one hand the church is a ‘holy’ people called out of the world to belong to God. But on the other hand it is a ‘worldly’ people, sent back into the world to witness and to serve. It is this witnessing by being and doing which brings the church to the centre of the experiences of human oppression, for witnessing happens in the context of incarnation.
The same is true with service, the church is sent back into the world to serve. The dynamic to note is that the church serves as part of the oppressed because the church shares the same context and therefore understands what it means to be discriminated against.

8.4.6 Concept of God and Christ
There is an underlying perception of God in Black theology as the creator-liberator of all mankind. There is also a rejection of the concept of God as preached by some Whites who justify the apartheid policy in the name of God. Black theology seeks to rediscover God in His character as revealed in the Bible. In this, they find a God of love, justice, righteousness and liberation who cannot be in sympathy with apartheid. African Evangelical theology would endorse this understanding on the basis of the fuller doctrine of God. In the Bible God is seen as the Creator, Lawgiver, Lord and Judge. He is concerned for the whole of the human race and for the whole of human life in its entirety and that includes color, diversity and complexity. These universals have important consequences for our thinking.

There is however more emphasis on Christology in South African Black theology. Christ is seen as God in the flesh participating in the sufferings of the oppressed. There is much emphasis on the humanity of Christ, which gives an understanding that God in Christ identifies with those who suffer. Sigzibo Dwane says, "what makes the life of the man from Galilee redemptive, is the fact that
it is God who suffers with him as one of the outcastes and oppressed." (Sigziba Dwane 1977:9)

The incarnation is seen as God identifying with humanity's weakness, suffering and pain. Black theologians believe that the truth about Christ has been obscured by western theology. Frank Chikane says this theology needs to be de-hellenised and de-westernized for the full implication of the humanity of Christ to be appreciated. (Chikane 1985:41) It is in His humanity that Christ suffers, and paradoxically it is suffering, climaxed by His death on the cross that He offers liberation. His resurrection is seen to be the guarantee that He is alive today and present with the oppressed in their context. The identification of Christ with the poor and oppressed is what makes some black theologians refer to Him as soul brother or black brother.

As an African Evangelical I cannot agree with this thinking more. A fuller doctrine of Christ emphasizes how Christ identified with us and calls us to identify with others. We therefore need to come face to face with the historical, biblical Christ in order to appreciate this. Jesus Christ needs to be seen in his paradoxical fullness – his sufferings and glory, his servant-hood and Lordship, his lowly incarnation and cosmic reign. I would agree with Black theologians when they accuse Evangelicals for neglecting the incarnation in both its theological significance and its practical implications. But the incarnation can never be overemphasized, for through the
incarnation, Christ entered into our pain, our alienation and our temptations.

I would also agree totally with Frank Chikane’s comment on contextualisation. I have argued at the beginning of this thesis that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is always fresh and relevant, but to communicate it relevantly we must practice what John Stott calls it double listening. We must on one hand listen to God through his word in order to receive the message and on the other hand keep our ears on the ground in order to understand the people we intend to communicate the gospel to. This dynamic is what will help us to de-hellenise and de-westernize the gospel and package it in appropriate attire. This exercise should be easier for the African Evangelical because he/she is part of the African context and the exercise is therefore carried out from within and not from without. The African Evangelical is part of the oppressed and is therefore speaking from experience and not from hear say.

8.5 Similarities
8.5.1 Rejection of Dominant theologies
The two theologies are in agreement that the dominant theologies of Europe and North America must be rejected and liberation affirmed. In their rejection of the white theologies, black and Dalit theologians used the term “liberation” as a focus of their theological concern.
8.5.2 Re-reading of the Bible in the light of the struggles of the poor for freedom.

Both theologies speak of the “hermeneutical privilege” of the poor, and of God’s option for the poor – that is God’s decision to reveal God-self to all humankind preferably in and through the poor. Rereading the Bible in the light of God’s option for the poor has led to an emphasis on the Exodus, the prophets, and Jesus Christ as liberator of the poor and the downtrodden.

8.5.3 De-emphasis of the Western theological tradition and an affirmation of their own cultural traditions.

If the sufferings of God are revealed in the sufferings of the oppressed, then it follows that theology cannot achieve its Christian identity apart from a systematic and critical reflection upon the history and culture of the victims of oppression. Black and Dalit theologians both feel that they were mis-educated into believing that their own cultural traditions were not an appropriate source for an interpretation of the Christian gospel.

The focus on culture in the light of the liberation struggle has led to an emphasis on praxis as the context out of which Christian theology develops. To know the truth is to do the truth – that is, to make happen in history what is professed in church. All proponents of liberation theology contend that the masses are not poor by accident. They are made and kept poor by the rich and powerful few. This means that to do liberation theology, one must make a commitment, an option for the poor and against those
who are responsible for their poverty. (Cone and Wilmore 1985:392)

8.5.4 Marxism as a tool for social analysis
Social analysis is a critical component of all forms of liberation theology. It helps us to know why the social, economic, and political orders are composed as they are. It enables us to know who benefits from the present status quo. In the use of the tools of the social sciences for an analysis of the social, political, and economic structures that dehumanize the poor, both Black and Dalit theologies endorse democratic socialism. Although there are no perfect exemplifications of this socialist vision, its authentification is based upon the struggles of the poor who believe that there is no invincible reason why the present unjust order must continue.

8.5.5 Comparative Analysis
It is clear from all that has been discussed and highlighted that Dalit theology in India and Black theology in South Africa have very much in common. In spite of the distance between both contexts, they are essentially identical theologies even if the issues they deal with in their existential situations are different. Basically one has tried to establish that both are contextual theologies committed to their respective existential situations. It is in that commitment that their authenticity and relevance lie. Both are counter theologies and counter cultures, both are pastoral theologies seeking to bring healing and restoration to their
contexts. Furthermore they are people theologies that are concerned not just with academic or abstract issues. Dalit and Black theology have succeeded in taking theology out of the classroom into the community of real life people in their existential situation. Both are types of liberation theologies addressing specific needs in their contexts.

In terms of circumstances responsible for their emergence we have seen that both are responding to needs within their existential contexts. They are similar in being dissatisfied with Western Christianity's negligence of issues being faced in their non-western contexts. Both are equally dissatisfied with the silence of Indian Christian theology and African Christian theology's silence on issues of social injustice, inequality and oppression. Both are dissatisfied with spirituality that ignored the sufferings of oppressed people. The contexts in which both theologies emerged are identical in terms of the oppression and dehumanization of certain categories of people. The situation of oppressed Blacks in South Africa is quite similar to the Dalit situation in India even if the day-to-day experiences are different. The state of victims is similar in terms of their identities. Dalits are considered less than human and Blacks were considered as non-persons.

Furthermore, one finds that the themes addressed by both theologies are essentially the same. The priority placed on selfhood and identity for Dalits in India is equaled by the emphasis
on Black theology in the wholeness of life in South Africa. The ethos of pain and suffering is the source and process of both theologies. Both are concerned with their victim’s search for identity, equality and justice in pain-filled existential situations. The quest for total human liberation is as identical as their strong sense of community and the Church being the presence of Christ in the world bringing healing, restoration and reconciliation to oppressed people. Their view of God and Christ as participating in suffering in identification with the poor and oppressed; and as creator-liberator strengthens the unity of both theologies.

Dalit theology however makes two emphases on which Black theology seems to be silent. One is the role of women. There is a specific concern for the plight of women in Dalit theology that is not as clear in Black theology. Secondly, Dalit theology emphasizes the place of local dialects and languages in theological reflection, before translation into international languages. On the other hand, Black theology stresses the strength that lies in positive aspects of African tradition, e.g. the sense of communal praxis that could be significant for theological reflection. Perhaps more than anything else, the thrust of these two theologies lie in the significance of their contribution to theological reflection worldwide.

As an African evangelical, what is most disturbing is how both theologies have come out of evangelicalism fade up of its irrelevance. This is disturbing because history tells us that this
could have been avoided, if only evangelicals had discerned the purposes of God in scripture and chose to obey God rather than man. Thank God that it has not always been like this, Evangelicals have an undisputable heritage for social involvement and can therefore reclaim their rightful place within the different communities of the world as a contextual theology of liberation. This heritage confirms the argument that God always takes the side of the poor and the oppressed and his church is challenged to emulate the same.

**8.5.6 Thrust and Contribution to World Wide Theology**

The significance of Davit and Black theology lies in their methodology. The methodology of both is significant for contextualization of theology world-wide. Both are as concerned for orthopraxis as they are for orthodoxy. One would like to emphasize that commitment to orthopraxis is not necessarily the relinquishing of orthodoxy. Both can go together. Dalit and Black theologies are as Biblical as they are situational or contextual. Their strength lies in their commitment to relating scripture to real life situations and issues of poverty and oppression are real life issues for the third world. In doing this, they advocate that sociological existential situations are essential for relevant theological reflection.

Buthelezi’s anthropological methodology is important for theological reflection that would be relevant to people where they are contemporary. In fact, the goal of all theological reflection
should be to meet the needs of people in their current existential situations. This is what Dalit and Black theologies are seeking to do. The emphasis on the wholeness of life and the oneness of life is corrective of the western approach of creating dichotomies between sacred and secular or spiritual and physical. The significant distinctive of these theologies is that they are seeking to provide answers to questions that classical western theology has been silent on. And the answers found in the midst of the existential struggles and conflicts in which the theologies are emerging can be applied to other situations worldwide. For instance, concerning the definition of the Church as the community of Christ's body continuing Christ's liberating ministry of healing and reconciliation, the need for people to be healed and relationships restored is a global need extending beyond the contexts of Dalit and Black theologies. By making this emphasis and identifying with people in contexts of struggles and needs Dalit and Black theology are essentially demonstrating that theological reflection is not just a philosophical exercise but part of God's saving acts in existential situations. African evangelical theology of liberation endorses and shares this understanding and would seek to make the same contribution as a contextual theology that reflects genuine evangelicalism.

African evangelical theology understood in this light would have even a great impact especially in Africa today because the foundation has been laid down over a long period of time and now the challenge is to marry orthodoxy with orthopraxis as two
inseparable fundamentals of the Christian faith. Marrying the two in my opinion will mean taking seriously the doctrine of God, especially that he is on the side of the poor and the oppressed.
CHAPTER NINE

9. Personal reflection

Realizing that I have said very little to support what could quite easily be an explosive debate on African Evangelical theology of liberation, I would like to make a number of clarifications on my argument so far. It should be obvious by now how sympathetic I am to South African Black theology and Dalit theology as two non-Western theologies attempting to articulate the Christian gospel contextually. I have to a certain extent, argued in this thesis that the five fundamental doctrines of evangelicalism provide a basis for an evangelical theology of liberation. The thesis of these biblical doctrines is, among other things the evidence that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. Tragically, evangelical theology has largely ignored these doctrines or has been very picky as to what should be obeyed and what should not. This tendency amongst evangelicals to ignore what is most important for the third world context in favor of what is important in the Western world is what has provided fertile ground for Black theology and Dalit theology to flourish.

But for purposes of clarification, I will outline here some things I do not mean when I argue in support of the thesis that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. I need to acknowledge that I am first and foremost an African Evangelical Christian and my appreciation of the challenges posed by these two theologies stems from the fact that I am a strong believer in a God who
speaks to his people right where they are, identifying with them and their struggles and meeting their needs.

First, by saying that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, I do not mean that material poverty is a biblical ideal in any way. If anything we need to acknowledge that this glorious creation is a wonderful gift from our Creator. God therefore wants us to revel in its glory and splendor. It is God’s gift to us and poverty can never be justified in that regard.

Second, I do not mean that the poor and oppressed are to be idealized or automatically included in the church just because of their situation. The poor sinfully disobey God in the same ways that the wretched middle-class sinners do, and they therefore need to enter into a living personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only then do they become a part of the church.

One of the serious weaknesses in both Black theology and Dalit theology is an inadequate ecclesiology, especially the tendency to blur the distinction between the church and the world. And one can understand that tendency. It is understandable that black and Latin American theologians would be impressed by the fact that whereas most of the organized church regularly ignores the injustice that causes poverty and oppression, those who do care enough to risk their lives for improved conditions are often people who explicitly reject Christianity. Hence one can understand why
someone like Hugo Assmann would conclude that the true church is:
"The conscious emergence and the more explicit enacting of the one meaning of the one history, in other words, a revolutionary consciousness and commitment. The explicit reference to Jesus Christ becomes in this view gratuitous in the original sense of the word -- something which is not demanded by or needed for the struggle [of socioeconomic liberation] . . . The reference to Jesus Christ does not add an 'extra' to the historical struggle but is totally and without rest identified with it". (Assmann 1986:100)

In spite of my deep appreciation for the factors that lead to an identification of the church with the poor and oppressed or with the revolutionary minority that seek liberation for them, one must insist that such a view is fundamentally unbiblical.

Third, when I say that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, I do not mean that God cares more about the salvation of the poor than the salvation of the rich or that the poor have a special claim to the gospel. It is sheer nonsense to say with Enzo Gatti: "The human areas that are poorest in every way are the most qualified for receiving the Saving Word. They are the ones that have the best right to that Word; they are the privileged recipients of the Gospel."(Gatti 2000:12) God cares equally about the salvation of the rich and the poor. To be sure, at the psychological level Gatti is partly correct. Church-growth theorists have discovered what Jesus alluded to long ago in his comment on
the camel going through the eye of the needle. It is extremely difficult for rich persons to enter the Kingdom. The poor are generally more ready than the rich to accept the gospel. But that does not mean that God desires the salvation of the poor more than the salvation of the rich.

Fourth, to say that God is on the side of the poor is not to say that knowing God is nothing more than seeking justice for the poor and oppressed. It is most unfortunate that some liberation theologians do jump to this radical conclusion. Jose Miranda says bluntly, "To know Yahweh is to achieve justice for the poor... The God who does not allow himself to be objectified, because only in the immediate command of conscience is he God, clearly specifies that he is knowable exclusively in the cry of the poor and the weak who seek justice." (Miranda 1999:100) It is precisely Miranda's kind of one-sided, reductionist approach that offers comfortable North Americans a plausible excuse for ignoring the radical biblical Word that seeking justice for the poor is inseparable from knowing God, even though it is not identical with knowing Yahweh.

Finally, when I say that God is on the side of the poor, I do not mean that hermeneutically we must start with some ideologically interpreted context of oppression (for instance, a Marxist definition of the poor and their oppressed situation) and then reinterpret Scripture from that ideological perspective. Black theologian James H. Cone's developing thought is interesting at this point. In 1969, in *Black Theology and Black Power*, he wrote:
"The fact that I am Black is my ultimate reality. My identity with blackness, and what it means for millions living in a white world, controls the investigation. It is impossible for me to surrender this basic reality for a higher, more universal reality." (Cone 1969:100)

By the time Cone wrote God of the Oppressed (1978), however, he realized that such a view would relativize all theological claims, including his own critique of white racist theology. How do we distinguish our words about God from God's Word...? Unless this question is answered satisfactorily, black theologians' distinction between white theology and Black Theology is vulnerable to the white contention that the latter is merely the ideological justification of radical black politics.

To be sure, Cone believes as strongly as other liberation theologians that the hermeneutical key to Scripture is God's saving action to liberate the oppressed. But how does he know that? In God's revelation in Scripture we come to the recognition that the divine liberation of the oppressed is determined not by our perceptions but by the God of the Exodus, the prophets and Jesus Christ, who calls the oppressed into a liberated existence. Divine revelation alone is the test of the validity of this starting point. And if it can be shown that God as witnessed in the Scriptures is not the liberator of the oppressed, then black theology would have either to drop the "Christian" designation or to choose another starting point. One can only wish that all liberation theologians agreed with Cone.


9.1 God on the side of the poor and oppressed

In what sense then is God on the side of the poor and oppressed? Let us first look briefly at three central points of revelation history, the Exodus, the destruction of Israel and Judah, and the incarnation. At the central moments when God displayed his mighty acts in history to reveal his nature and will, he also intervened to liberate the poor and oppressed.

God displayed his power at the Exodus in order to free slaves. When God called Moses at the burning bush, he informed him that his intention was to end suffering and injustice: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus. 3:7-8). Each year at the harvest festival, the Israelites repeated a liturgical confession celebrating the way God had acted to free a poor, oppressed people.

A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there . . .. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand [Deut. 26:5 ff., RSV].
Unfortunately, some liberation theologians see in the Exodus only God's liberation of an oppressed people and miss the fact that he also acted to fulfill his promises to Abraham, to reveal his will and to call out a special people. Certainly God acted to call a special people so that through them he could reveal his will and bring salvation to all. But his will included the fact that his people should follow him and side with the poor and oppressed. The fact that Yahweh did not liberate all poor Egyptians at the Exodus does not mean that he was not concerned for the poor everywhere, any more than the fact that he did not give the Ten Commandments to the Near East means that he did not intend the laws to have universal significance. Because God chose to reveal himself in history, he disclosed to certain people at particular points in time what he willed for all people everywhere.

At the Exodus, God acted to demonstrate that he is opposed to oppression. We distort the biblical interpretation of that momentous event unless we see that at this pivotal point, the Lord of the universe was at work correcting oppression and liberating the poor. The prophets' explanation for the destruction of Israel and then Judah underlines the same point. The explosive message of the prophets is that God destroyed Israel not only because of idolatry (although certainly because of that too), but also because of economic exploitation and mistreatment of the poor.

The middle of the eighth century BC was a time of political success and economic prosperity unknown since the days of Solomon. But
it was precisely then that God sent his prophet Amos to announce the unwelcome news that the northern kingdom would be destroyed. Why? Penetrating beneath the façade of prosperity and economic growth, Amos saw terrible oppression of the poor. He saw the rich "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth" (2:7). He saw that the affluent life style of the rich was built on oppression of the poor (6: 1-7). Even in the courts the poor had no hope because the rich bribed the judges (5:10-15).

God's word through Amos was that the northern kingdom would be destroyed and the people taken into exile (7:11, 17). A very few years after Amos spoke, it happened just as God had said. Because of its mistreatment of the poor, God destroyed the northern kingdom.

When God acted to reveal himself most completely in the incarnation, he continued to demonstrate his special concern for the poor and oppressed. St. Luke used the programmatic account of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth to define Jesus' mission. The words, which Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah, are familiar to us all:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord [Luke 4:18-19, RSV].
After reading these words, Jesus informed his hearers that this Scripture was now fulfilled in himself. The mission of the Incarnate One was to preach the good news to the poor and to free the oppressed.

Many people spiritualize these words either by simplistically assuming that Jesus was talking about healing blinded hearts in captivity to sin or by appealing to the later Old Testament and inter-Testamental idea of "the poor of Yahweh" (the *anawim*). It is true that the latter Psalms and the inter-Testamental literature use the terms for the poor (especially *anawim*) to refer to humble, devout Israelites who place all their trust in Yahweh. But that does not mean that Jesus' usage had no connection with socioeconomic poverty. Indeed, it was precisely the fact that the economically poor and oppressed were the faithful remnant that trusted in Yahweh that led to the new usage according to which the words for the poor designated the pious faithful.

**9.2 He works in History to cast down the rich and exalt the poor.**

The second aspect of the biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed is that he works in history to cast down the rich and exalt the poor.

Mary's Magnificat puts it simply and bluntly:

*My soul magnifies the Lord...*
He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away


Why does Scripture declare that God regularly reverses the good fortunes of the rich? Is God engaged in class warfare? Actually, our texts never say that God loves the poor more than the rich. But they do constantly assert that God lifts up the poor and the disadvantaged. And they persistently insist that God casts down the wealthy and powerful. Why? Precisely because, according to Scripture, the rich often become wealthy by oppressing the poor and failing to feed the hungry.

For example, through his prophet Isaiah, God declared that the rulers of Judah were rich because they had cheated the poor. Surfeited with affluence, the wealthy women had indulged in self-centered wantonness, oblivious of the suffering of the oppressed. The result, God said, would be devastating destruction (Is. 3:14ff). Sometimes Scripture does not charge the rich with direct oppression of the poor; it simply accuses them of failure to share with the needy. But the result is the same. The biblical explanation of Sodom’s destruction provides one illustration of this terrible truth. If asked why Sodom was destroyed, virtually all Christians would point to the city’s gross sexual perversity. But that is a one-sided recollection of what Scripture actually teaches.
Ezekiel shows that one important reason God destroyed Sodom was because the city stubbornly refused to share with the poor. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty, and did abominable things before me; therefore I removed them when I saw it [Ezek. 16:49-50, RSV]. The text does not say that the people of Sodom oppressed the poor (although they probably did). It simply accuses them of failing to assist the needy.

9.3 The People of God on the side of the poor and oppressed.

The third aspect of the biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed is that the people of God, if they are really the people of God, are also on the side of the poor and oppressed. Those who neglect the needy are not really God’s people at all, no matter how frequent their religious rituals or how orthodox their creeds and confessions. The prophets sometimes made this point by insisting that knowing God and seeking justice for the oppressed are inseparable. At other times they condemned the religious rituals of the oppressors, who tried to worship God while continuing to oppress the poor.

Jeremiah announced God’s harsh message that King Jehoiakim did not know Yahweh and would be destroyed because of his injustice:
Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice;

"Who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages; . . . Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord"[Jer. 22:13-16, RSV].

Knowing God necessarily involves seeking justice for the poor (cf. also Hos. 2:19-20). The same correlation between seeking justice for the poor and knowledge of God is equally clear in the messianic passage of Isaiah 11:1-9. Of the shoot of the stump of Jesse, the prophet says: "With righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (v. 4 RSV). In this ultimate messianic shalom, "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (v. 9, RSV). Nor has God changed. Jesus repeated the same theme. He warned the people about scribes who secretly oppress widows while making a public display of their piety. Their pious-looking garments and frequent visits to the synagogue are a sham. Woe to religious hypocrites "who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers" (Mark 12:38-40).

The prophetic word against religious hypocrites raises an extremely difficult question. Are the people of God truly God's people if they oppress the poor? Is the church really the church if
it does not work to free the oppressed? As George Ladd has said, "Jesus redefines the meaning of love for neighbor; it means love for any man in need." In light of the parable of the Good Samaritan and the clear teaching of Matthew 5:43 ff., one is compelled to say that those who fail to aid the poor and oppressed (whether they are believers or not) are simply not the people of God.

Lest we forget the warning, God repeats it in 1John. "But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth" (3:17-18. [RSV]; cf. also James 2:14-17). Again, the words are plain. What do they mean for Western Christians who demand increasing affluence each year while people in the Third World suffer malnutrition, deformed bodies and brains, even starvation? The text clearly says that if we fail to aid the needy, we do not have God's love, no matter what we may say. The text demands deeds, not pious phrases and saintly speeches. Regardless of what we do or say at Sunday morning worship, those who neglect the poor and oppressed are not the people of God.

But still the question persists. Do professing believers cease to be Christians because of continuing sin? Obviously not. The Christian knows that sinful selfishness continues to plague even the most saintly. We are members of the people of God not because of our own righteousness but solely because of Christ's death for us.
That response is extremely important and true. But it is also inadequate. All the texts from both testaments, which we have just surveyed, surely mean more than that the people of God are disobedient (but still justified all the same) when they neglect the poor. These verses pointedly assert that some people so disobey God that they are not his people at all despite their pious profession. Neglect of the poor is one of the often-repeated biblical signs of such disobedience.

In light of this clear biblical teaching, how biblical is evangelical theology? Certainly there have been some great moments of faithfulness. Wesley, Wilberforce and Charles Finney’s evangelical abolitionists stood solidly in the biblical tradition in their search for justice for the poor and oppressed of their time. But 20th century evangelicals have not, by and large, followed their example. The evangelical community is largely on the side of the rich oppressors rather than that of the oppressed poor. Imagine what would happen if all the evangelical institutions: youth organizations, publications, colleges and seminaries, congregations and denominational headquarters, would dare to undertake a comprehensive two-year examination of their total program and activity to answer this question: Is there the same balance and emphasis on justice for the poor and oppressed in our programs as there is in Scripture? If those of us who are evangelicals did that with an unconditional readiness to change whatever did not correspond with the scriptural revelation of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed, we would unleash a new movement
of biblical social concern that would change the course of modern history.

9.4 Evangelical Theology - Unbiblical and Heretical?

But our problem is not primarily one of ethics. It is not that we have failed to live what our teachers have taught us. Our theology itself has been unbiblical and therefore heretical. I think James Cone is right when he says: "Theologians of the Christian Church have not interpreted Christian ethics as an act for the liberation of the oppressed because their views of divine revelation were defined by philosophy and other cultural values rather than by the biblical theme of God as the liberator of the oppressed." By largely ignoring the central biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor, evangelical theology has been profoundly unorthodox. The Bible has just as much to say about this doctrine as it does about Jesus' resurrection. And yet we evangelicals insist on the resurrection as a criterion of orthodoxy and largely ignore the equally prominent biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

Now please do not misunderstand me at this point. I am not saying that the resurrection is unimportant. The bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is absolutely central to Christian faith, and anyone who denies it or says it is unimportant has fallen into heresy. But if centrality in Scripture is any criterion of doctrinal importance, then the biblical teaching I have been analyzing ought to be an extremely important doctrine for evangelicals. I am afraid
Evangelicals have fallen into theological liberalism. Of course, we usually think of theological liberalism in terms of classical 9th century liberals who denied the deity, the atonement and the bodily resurrection of Jesus our Lord. And that is correct. People who abandon those central biblical doctrines have fallen into terrible heresy. But notice what the essence of theological liberalism is; it is allowing our thinking and living to be shaped by the surrounding society’s views and values rather than by biblical revelation. Liberal theologians thought that belief in the deity of Jesus Christ and his bodily resurrection was incompatible with a modern scientific worldview. So they followed the surrounding scientifically oriented society rather than Scripture.

Evangelicals rightly called attention to this heresy and then tragically made exactly the same move in another area. We have allowed the values of our affluent, materialistic society to shape our thinking and acting toward the poor. It is much easier in evangelical circles today to insist on an orthodox Christology than on the biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor. We have allowed our theology to be shaped by the economic preferences of our materialistic contemporaries rather than by Scripture. And that is to fall into theological liberalism. We have not been nearly as orthodox as we have claimed.

Past failure, however, is no reason for despair. I think we mean it when we sing, "I’d rather have Jesus than houses or lands." I think we mean it when we write and affirm doctrinal statements
that boldly declare that we will not only believe but also live whatever Scripture teaches. But if we do mean it, then we must teach and live, in a world full of injustice and starvation, the important biblical doctrine that God and his faithful people are on the side of the poor and oppressed. Unless we drastically reshape both our theology and our entire institutional church life so that this fact becomes as central to evangelical theology and evangelical institutional programs as it is in Scripture, we will demonstrate to the world that our verbal commitment to *sola scriptura* is a dishonest ideological support for an unjust, materialistic status quo. But I believe that in the coming years millions of us evangelicals will allow the biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed to reshape fundamentally our culturally conditioned theology and our un-biblically one-sided programs and institutions. If that happens, we will forge a new, truly evangelical theology of liberation that will alter the course of history.

9.5 Criticism of Dualism

I will conclude by commenting on a concept that is not only un-African but also unbiblical with regards to why African evangelicals have failed to develop a comprehensive Evangelical theology of liberation. It is the dualism of the Western world, which came packaged together with the communication of the gospel and civilization. This concept divides life into the church and the world or society, secular and spiritual, sacred and profane, the Christian and the non-Christian. In fact according to Professor E. van
Niekerk, these dualistic divisions fall into three different societal models namely, the secularization model, the ghetto and the Diaspora models. (Niekerk 1980:45)

The problem with this dualistic thinking is that the main emphasis is put on the church or the religious, the sacred, the Christian organization etc. The world is therefore dissociated from God’s activities and God and salvation are reserved exclusively for the church.

This is Western thinking at its worst and has done a lot to which in my opinion has worked against the potential for African Evangelicals to engage the world and its social problems because of the gospel. The African context takes seriously issues of community, the extended family and African identity.

African Evangelicalism rejoices in the fact that God is concerned for the whole of mankind and for the whole of human life in all its colour and complexity. The living God is therefore the God of nature as well as religion. Everything is sacred because it was created by God and for God and nothing is excluded from him. It is in this sense that we should be grateful for the good gifts of a good Creator – for sex, marriage and the family, for the beauty and order of the natural world, for work and leisure, for friendships and the experience of inter-racial inter-cultural community, for music and other kinds of creative art which enrich the quality of human life.
The living God is the God of justice as well as of justification. He is concerned that justice characterizes our community life. God’s concerned for justice extends beyond the Church. He there hates injustice and oppression everywhere. His concerns are all embracing, not only the ‘sacred’ but the ‘secular’, not only religion but nature, not only justification but social justice in every community, not only the gospel but also the law.

John Gladwin sums up this argument in his God’s People in God’s World: ‘It is because this is God’s world, and he cared for it to the point of incarnation and crucifixion, that we are inevitably committed to work for God’s justice in the face of oppression, for God’s truth in the face of lies and deceits, for service in the face of the abuse of power, for love in the face of selfishness, for cooperation in the face of destructive antagonism, and for reconciliation in the face of division and hostility.’ (Gladwin 1979:125)

In the light of the above discussion it is evident that God is concerned about the world because it is his, he created it. He is concerned about humanity for the same reason and therefore his approach when dealing with all his creation is holistic. Like I’ve already said in this thesis, dualism is not only un-African but also unbiblical. God is concerned about all of life because all life belongs to him and must be lived for him. What we say, think and do matters to God. In other words every aspect of human life is important to God. Doing sport is just as important and spiritual as
studying or going to church or spending time with family. There is no such thing as spiritual life and secular life. If this is true, then it means feeding the hungry and looking after the orphans is just as important and spiritual as preaching the gospel. It's no longer a case of either/or but both, doing both is what being Christian is all about. This is what walking the walk and talking the talk is all about.

The church should therefore be understood as an institution of the world and shares the same context as everybody else. It is a superstructure of society that serves society and it is in serving society that it plays its role of being a prophetic voice and individual Christians as salt and light. The church like any other structure of society has to face the challenges of living in this world responsibly and those challenges include issues of poverty, oppression, unemployment, just to name a few. Only a holistic approach to life and ministry and its challenges can make this happen for African Evangelicalism. A holistic approach to life and ministry is what will help the African church articulate and live the message of the gospel to the African people.
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