

Prevent the rise of a black messiah: Madness or revolution

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In the late 1960s, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), a United States of America (US) intelligence agency, developed what is famously known as Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). Its mission was to surveil, misinform, misdirect and subvert or destroy black 'subversive' militant groups. The main intention of COINTELPRO was to 'prevent the rise of a messiah' who could 'unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement'. This insight is important as it reveals how those outside of black life (FBI) would invoke biblical language to define the possibility of revolution. This article through Black liberation theology seeks to present the idea of messianism as both an experience of Africans and oppressed peoples in the Global North and Global South. The idea of messianism is part of biblical reception in Africa and the African experience of colonialism. In South Africa, messianism would be observed from the perspective of African Christianity, while another form of messianism would be seen from Nat The Prophet Turner as well as the radical identity of Christ in Black liberation theology. The article will not take lightly the idea of surveillance of black militant groups in the same way as the priestly class surveillance Christ ministry. At the same time, the article would reflect on why lunacy is associated with those that seek to subvert oppression. This article seeks to discuss the role of messianism and militancy in Black or African Christianity and highlighting biblical reception and African affectivity.

Contribution: This article explores the imaginative ways the Bible or its themes have been used by both the oppressor and the oppressed, often the latter using the Bible for its prerogative, namely, revolution and liberation.

Keywords: messiah; blackness; revolution; madness; liberation; messianism; black and African Christianity biblical response.

Introduction

Biblical reception in the Black World is actually a given for both the continent and anywhere the Gospel has been preached and received (Pheko 1982:75, 78), but what is profound is the re-reception of the Bible by Africans. The idea of re-reception seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the Bible shapes African or black life behind the backdrop of colonialism especially in accelerating the liberation struggle (Pheko 1982:77). The idea of a black messiah seems to be a suitable point of inquiry especially in understanding how the Bible tallies the black condition and the world with its white supremacy that sees the black condition in a constant antagonistic engagement with white supremacy while having to grapple with 'divine revelation'. The black religious radical tradition found in black Christianity is insightful in terms of seeing how biblical faith has motivated a need to wage the struggle against oppression (Raboteau's 1978:290). However, even more important is a seldom aspect of our reflection on how oppressors view the use of biblical motif as stimulus to revolt or even viewing the socio-economic, historic and political conditions as stimulus to biblical imagery. Here we must consider two aspects: firstly, the fact that most black nationalist militant groups are part of the African or African-American black church (Dwane 2004:81; De Gruchy 2004:46; Stewart 1999:103), and secondly, the fact that the biblical motif of 'messiah' is not solely an expectation from the religiously zealous, but also is somehow reality of how the oppressor anticipates messianic figures because of those who would emerge to negate oppression, that is, Vesey and Turner (see Raboteau 1978:290, 295). The latter point finds explicit expression in the report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), which has as its main mission – white supremacy – to wage war against the black radical militants emerging after the clarion call for Black Power. The FBI aims to prevent the rise of the black messiah. This divergence between the political and the religious is of interest perhaps because of the close

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affinities of the black church to fight against oppression. Certainly, Cone clears this up for us in expressing that in the current modern period the importance of Black Power as a social, political, economic, cultural and existentially philosophy reconfigured the mission of the church. In fact, Cone notes that Black Power was in fact God's revelation to America and the world (see Cone 2013:37–38).

Thus, an inquiry into biblical reception will methodologically operate through the role of reinterpretation, agency and Black liberation theology. The subject of black messianism will be an example of the re-reception of the Bible in Africa and in the black experience. The re-reception of the Bible implies that the agency placed upon believers and the irreconcilability of bondage and faith as the immutability of God has existential pertinence to believers. Another factor worthy to be mentioned is the aspect of rediscovering the Gospel anew and the willingness of faith in engaging the madness of oppression with the risk of being deemed mad.

Setting the scene

The quest for liberation has always been met with resistance by the oppressor and in most instances it is frowned upon as a symbol of madness. In the 1960s, COINTELPRO was established to destroy black militants, the Black Panther Party, and more importantly to prevent the rise of the 'Messiah' who would electrify the black nationalist movement. Malcolm X was seen as the martyr of this movement, Dr Martin Luther King Jr could have been a possibility if he had abandoned his non-violence stance. Again, the COINTELPRO was left to decide between Stockley Carmichael, Huey P. Newton, Fred Hampton and others. It is a great concern for this article and for the biblical discourse as to why would the director of the FBI, Edgar Hoover, use biblical language to describe the socio-economic, cultural and political revolution as led by the messiah. Among the many factors that underline the significance of black Christianity and the black church is that the church does not associate itself with the emerging messiah, despite the fact that the art of freedom fighting and most of the freedom fighters came from the black church (see Stewart 1999:103). The assertion of COINTELPRO reflects outsiders gleaning inside black life, the crossroad that defines black faith and politics in the world. While black people have used biblical stories to tally their reality with scripture and to draw inspiration from scripture (see Cone 1997:15; Frazier 1964:11; Mosby-Avery 2004:36; Mofokeng 1987:38, 41), the FBI and Hoover saw the Messiah coming from the marginalised, oppressed, dehumanised and disenfranchised. This article explores these imaginative ways the Bible or its themes have been used by both the oppressor and the oppressed, often the latter using the Bible for its prerogative, namely, revolution and liberation. At the same time, attention will be paid to the association of revolt, resistance and courage as madness on the part of blacks. This article will dialogue between Africa and the United States of America (US) especially around the idea of black Christianity, the Bible and the black church, all factors that are important in the meaning of the black experience especially theologically.

Messianism in black faith

Western biblical interpretation, hermeneutics and praxis as it relates to colonialism, conversion and the system of white supremacy have witnessed the important role played by the Bible in Africa. The Gospel is a bitter sweet taste in the history of black people. The 'bitterness' expresses the cost of its acceptance, while 'sweet' expresses the sublime effect of responding to the bitterness caused by oppression through a change of interpretation and praxis. One important outcome from the change of interpretation and praxis is how biblical concepts, such as that of a messiah, take root in the very presence of their oppression. Renate (1974:38) notes that concepts such as messianism have been associated with groups in Africa, Asia and Latin America that used messianism as a tool of 'nascent' nationalism against colonialism while simultaneously deforming Christianity. Such is an example of reconstructing faith within a historic paradigm and giving faith existential agency. The author of the *Black Messiah and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth*, Wilson Jeremiah Moses (1982) explains the importance of messianism in black life beginning from its Hebrew origin. He (Moses 1982:5) asserts that '[d]ivinely inspired rebellion against the social order is, of course, a traditional aspect of Judeo-Christian messianism'. At the same time, he (Moses 1982:49) locates messianism in relation to the Christo-soteriological duty to be played by the black race as the messianic figure in an existential and historic context characterised by slavery, oppression, colonialism and racism in tandem with the Christian faith or theology. A similar insinuation is found in Biko (1978:51) without theological embellishments or humanist liberalism that Africa will give to the world a more humane face. Though Biko's essay on *Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity* carves a theological landscape to this new humanity through Black liberation theology and Christ as a fighting God invoking a messianic impulse to blacks, theologically blackness will inaugurate this true humanity (Biko 1978: 104–108). Perhaps, a theological twist is that there is a triune fold of Adamic expression: firstly, the Adam of the Fall; secondly, Adam who destroys sin; and, thirdly, Adam who in a socio-economic and political context redeems humanity anew. The first two Adamic expressions are intramural factors of salvific history and God's agency, while the third occurs after the act of salvation, in a world where the Gospel should redeem and liberate sinners and the oppressed but has not fully done so. Thus, messianism is established among the disenfranchised and black Christianity is part of that dialogue. Dwane (2004:76, 80) notes the ecclesiastical rapture from European churches by the likes of Reverend Mangena Mokone and others from the western church was because of humiliation, racism and the rediscovery of Africa in the Bible through Ethiopianism, a literal move to the wilderness – the roots of the African Independent Churches (AICs). Dwane (2004:80) notes that in the wilderness they discovered God the creator and sustainer of life, a God concerned with total human existence (material and spiritual) and wholeness – a reality of African cosmology. Bujo (2009:82) has noted that for Africans value creation and life and that creation reveals the

highest form of life, namely, God who triumphs over death. Thus, for the African the cosmos has a sacramental dimension and this is one example of African Christianity and a critique of western theological thinking and experience. Daneel (1999:209) has noted that the AIC prophets understand the Spirit better than the west.

De Gruchy (2004:44) notes that the AICs were characterised as either being Zionist or messianic, the messianic characterised often the structure they adopted when modelling themselves after a specified leader and 'his' lineage. But nonetheless African people as people of the book (Bible) ultimately signify a revolt against white ecclesiology, culture and a white God. This is a result of how the Bible has been received as well as interpreted and re-interpreted. The re-interpreters do so not out of theological necessity but because of the African existential and spiritual experience with western Christianity and black oppression. De Gruchy (2004:46) asserts that the AICs are a revolt against European Spirituality and a part of black nationalism.

This approach of being people of the book is both elevating and a self-mutilation when one employs biblical values at odds with the black reality and the legacies of white supremacy. An example of values that have a negative impact on black people and their quest for justice can be seen by Tutu employing concepts such as forgiveness and the rainbow nation without an insistence on justice and black liberation. However, when black people are seen as 'people' or savages in the book by whites, they often encounter a portrait of themselves as heathens. Grosfoguel (2013:81, 84–85) notes that racism is preceded by religious racism and the belief of pigmented bodies having the wrong God and soul, thus characterised as soulless. Ogbar (1997:57) reflecting in the book *White over Black* cites the fact that blacks were seen as inherently devilish idolatrous people whose flesh had been already been scorched by the devil, thus it is black. However, one significant figure in the Global North who really took the mantle of messianism with its soteriological and pneumatological implication is Nat the Prophet Turner. The act that later resulted in the formation of the AIC has a proleptic figure in Nat Turner as part of the black religious nationalist group who rejected plantation Christianity that promoted docility (Ogbar 1997:51). Turner made use of a crude and inchoate type of black religious nationalism imbued with his mysterious character (a mystic, prayer worrier and believed to be ascetic), as he could foresee the past and future, which confirmed him to be a prophet. Furthermore, Turner believed that the Spirit that spoke to the prophets of old spoke to him to destroy the Peculiar Institution of slavery (see Ogbar 1997:52–53). It is intriguing to note that the verse 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all shall be added to you' captivated Turner and was descriptive of his own life of piety. However, more interesting is the apocalyptic imagery or visions that are typical of messianic expectation but more fundamentally how those visions carry a serious theological and social critique in Turner's Spirit and mind. Turner (in ed. Sernett 1999) asserts:

And on the 12th of May, 1828, I heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first. (p. 94)

Turner was a preacher (see Ogbar 1997:52) and well read on the Bible, which makes the link between his black Christian nationalism, eschatology, pneumatology and apocalypticism much more interesting. Such insight tabulate themes of his theology and gives us a glimpse to his own formidable practice of black liberation theology that is not exclusive to Turner but is known because it was recorded in his Confessions. Nonetheless, it is a significant feature of the Christian Spirit revolting against oppression despite Turner's prayerful life (see ed. Sernett 1999:93; Ogbar 1997:53); it remained clear that bondage could not be tolerated even by a pious Christian. One significant factor to Turner's vision is the vision of white spirits and black spirits engaged in a battle with the sun being darkened and thunder in heaven (see ed. Sernett 1999:93; Ogbar 1997:53). The symbolic representation of the colour symbolism is significant especially as Turner places black liberation as seen through the 'black spots moving across the sun' as a cosmic event towards black liberation; at the same time, Turner's insurrection has a human face to it as Turner spared poor whites (Ogbar 1997:54) who lived in deplorable conditions, thus affirming the human-centric spirit of Black or liberation theologies that centre the poor irrespective of colour. The messianic responsibility that Turner carries with him is of significance on a number of points rooted in the change of guise and colour symbolism. Ogbar (1997) asserts:

The most salient example of black religious nationalism was the very conscious physical identification with heavenly deities and God. This perspective was a sharp departure from the traditional English depictions of Anglo-looking angels and deities. The palpable phenotypical identification with deities provided a psychological element to the process of resistance and liberation. (p. 55)

The change of colour symbolism under the influence of the Spirit, firstly, reveals that for Turner Christianity is Afrocentric as God speaks to Turner as the prophet of the subjugated; secondly, the white spirits are not the normativity of western colour symbolism because these (white) spirits represent evil (the children of darkness). Thirdly, seeing divinity in blackness meant that heaven was on the side of the enslaved coupled with the image of the enslaved anthropomorphically in contrast to blackness as colonial slave Christianity claimed blackness as a curse (see Ogbar 1997:56–57). Ogbar (1997:58) notes that Turner's theology was antithetical to white colour symbolism and his theosophy was of black divinity. Both Turner and later Marcus Garvey understood the God of the Oppressed as the Fighting God (see Biko 1978:104) and as the God of war rejecting the sterility of colonial Christianity and reading the Bible from the master's perspective. Ogbar (1997:60) notes that Garvey was disgusted at the Negro¹ mass falling under the religious illusions of divine interventions in the fight for liberation.

¹'Negro' is a term historically used to denote persons considered to be of Black African heritage. The word negro means the color black in both Spanish and in Portuguese, where English took it from. (Wikipedia contributors 2022: n.p.)

Madness and revolution

The subject of messianism is important in both the Old Testament and New Testament; certainly in the New Testament it presents *Yeshua* as the messiah. However, his role as messiah faces great disputation from the priestly class throughout his ministry. *Yeshua's* ministry as a prophet from the subjugated is under constant surveillance (Lk 20:20; Mk 12:13; Mt 22:15–16) by the powerful who intends to discredit his ministry and blur his identity from the people. This attitude is typical of how even in the modern period the powerful often plot to discredit revolutionaries. The methods employed in the 1st century in the ministry of Christ saw the priestly class running a rudimentary surveillance on those they deem will incite the masses to a revolt and change a set of values (Lk 11:5). There is a case to make about such surveillance and highly developed counterintelligence programmes in light of the black experience, the irreconcilability of faith and bondage, and the fear of a rise of the messiah. It is intelligence agencies that run surveillance to subvert the potency of the revolutionary struggle, such as the role played by COINTELPRO, Bureau of Secret Services (BOSS), and other agencies throughout the Black World. The COINTELPRO has this to say concerning its objectives against militants:

Prevent the COALITION of militant Black Nationalist groups. In unity there is strength; a truism that is no less valid for all its triteness. An effective coalition of Black Nationalist groups might be the first step toward a real Mau [Black revolutionary army] in America, the beginning of a true black revolution. Prevent the RISE OF A MESSIAH who could unify, and electrify, the militant Black Nationalist movement. Malcolm X might have been such a Messiah; he is the martyr of the movement today. Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael and Elijah Muhammed all aspire to this position. Elijah Muhammed is less of a threat because of his age. King could be a very real contender for this position should he abandon his supposed obedience to white, liberal doctrines (nonviolence) and embrace Black Nationalism. Carmichael has the necessary charisma to be a real threat in this way. (n.p.)

Similarly, this act of surveillance on Christ runs tandem with his messianic secret, which Mofokeng (1987:5) posits has no mystical meaning to it but purely an orientation to behold *Yeshua's* praxis and to a certain extent entails an attitude of knowledge being disseminated at a need to know basis, like in any other liberation movement. Furthermore, this surveillance in *Yeshua's* ministry presents him as insane, crazy and a lunatic (see Mk 3:21–22; Jn 10:20). If one would go by the logic of the oppressors, any attempt to be a contrarian to oppression, deceit, death and injustice warrants a person viewed as insane; it is in fact safe to not go against the grain and this attitude exists today as many refuse to go against the grain but preserving people's sensitivities despite the monstrosity of oppression. Drexler-Dreis (2014:232) notes that the actions of Nat Turner need to be viewed anew instead of seeing Turner as a religious fanatic – a trait often ascribed to those who desire change. Drexler-Dreis (2014) asserts:

In the weeks and months after the rebellion, the White population asserted its control through legislation and propaganda in an attempt to hold onto the political economy that allowed for their continued hegemony. Following the rebellion, Turner described his motivation as a turn towards God. Despite his description of his revolt as a response to his commitment to God, White-controlled newspapers portrayed Turner as a sub-human fanatic, and distanced his motivation from any accepted religious experience. One article likened those who fought slavery with Turner to 'a parcel of blood-thirsty wolves rushing down from the Alps' and called Turner 'a fanatic preacher', one who 'pretends to be a Baptist preacher', who rebelled 'without any cause or provocation'. Another article, also pointing to Turner's lack of purpose, claims he 'was stimulated exclusively by fanatical revenge, and perhaps misled by some hallucination of his imagined spirit of prophecy.' (p. 232)

Drexler-Dreis (2014:231) has also noted that Nat Turner rebellion was a theological event in nature and that his rebellion is a process of conversion, if one was to participate in God's grace through praxis. The same argument can be made concerning *Yeshua* and the call for the coming kingdom which is greater than the empire and is in fact tearing the empire from within. The messiah is linked with the apocalyptic expectation, a messianic age that promises defeat of the oppressors, an establishment of a theocracy and an egalitarian society (see Moses 1982:4).

The early church stance on having to wait for the eschatological *parousia* is a deep-seated Christian hope. However, in the black experience, the socio-economic and existential reality is disastrous when considering such hope in the midst of oppression and brutality. Thus, in some regard through biblical language revolution or revolutionaries in the present context perhaps represent to a certain degree apocalyptic expectation and vision of the eschaton exercise of praxis as hope. Attempts to changing the socio-economic and political order does not negate eschatological expectation but rather implies we actively participate to the envision order while we wait for God. Drexler-Dreis (2014) asserts:

In the book of Revelation, John creates a symbolic universe to imagine a new reality or re-present the social reality he is confronted with, which has the potential to persuade others to participate in that alternate or re-signified reality. Turner does something similar out of his own apocalypticism. He imagines reality in a different way than it is presented within the slave institution, and then sees himself as participating, in a concrete way, in this trans-historical or re-signified reality. (p. 241)

The act of participating in bringing out God's egalitarian kingdom is significant and the quest for black liberation is in fact a positive development linking the world of the Bible and the coming messiah. Thus, Turner's actions together with all other freedom fighters must be understood in this light. Rhodes (1991:2) asserts: 'Most blacks accepted the slave brand of Christianity at face value. Moreover, white missionaries persuaded the blacks that life on earth was insignificant because 'obedient servants of God could expect a reward in heaven after death'. However, this attitude would not last especially through a hermeneutic based on the experience of

bondage and being in the faith. To the slave to believe in God negates bondage (see Cone 1997:169). Cone (1993:3) asserts that God's justice is punishment to the oppressor.

It is significant to note that Nat Turner's rebellion claims its inspiration from divine origin and as emanating from the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time the material conditions are sufficient to expose injustice and invoke whether by spirit or by ideology a need to respond to that oppression. Cone (1993) asserts:

People are not poor by divine decree or by historical accident. They are made poor by the rich and powerful few. This means that to do black liberation theology, one must make a commitment, an option for the poor and against those who are responsible for their poverty. (p. 14)

This option for the poor and being against the purveyors of poverty is in itself a messianic stance, a true footing of being Christian especially in a racist and capitalistic society. It still boggles the mind to think that the COINTELPRO would make use of biblical language, especially a messianic expectation concerning the Black liberation movement. What is evident is that the FBI was not speaking with deep knowledge of the black church or slave rebellion; however, the black church has always been an alternative society for the oppressed. While it is possible that whiteness without any clear hermeneutical leg to stand on is correct by chance to associate black nationalism with the messianic movement given that apocalyptic expectation in the 1st century was linked to a form of nationalism and the eschaton. This marriage between messianic nationalism and apocalyptic in the context of the slave religion is best expressed in Nat Turner's rebellion. Cone (2004:151) when commenting on the slave songs asserts that those songs were a rejection of a future made by white hands.

In the context of black liberation in Africa and the Diaspora black people struggle songs, which were either sang as protest in the church or society expresses the same sentiments of a refusal to accept a future built by white hands. The Christian experience in the context of the liberation movement shares a common bond because of the experience of bondage. There is also a strong emphasis on blackness being somewhat of a soteriological tool for the oppressed. Individuals such as Marcus Garvey express this soteriological insignia and present a continental and international Christian and political response to oppression taken from the Bible and politics. Pheko (1982:77) asserts that '[t]he Gospel accelerated the political awakening of Africans as a whole'. He (Pheko 1982:77) argues that '[i]ndeed, it was the Christian leaders who came up with the slogan 'Africa for Africans, Africans for humanity and humanity for God' – long before some African political leaders ever popularised the slogan "Africa for Africans"'. Another thing worthy to mention is the view that there has always been a strong association of black rage with mental illness (see Street 2015:342) – , an attitude that the oppressor presupposes when considering prospects of freedom. The struggle for freedom is associated with madness as in the case on Turner (see Drexler-Dreis 2014:232), Yeshua (Mk 3:21–22, Jn 10:20) and even in the case of Huey P, Newton,

the founder of the Black Panther Party (BPP) (see Street 2015:342). When considering the effect of COINTELPRO one area in which it succeeded in preventing the so-called black messiah, Huey P. Newton, is a good example as experiencing the effects of the prison industrial complex and highly sophisticated psychological tactics to destroy and break one's soul. Street (2015:344–345) notes the condition of Huey P. Newton in Alameda County Jail where he witnessed grown men screaming and begging to be freed from solitary confinement, which was known as the 'Soul breaker'. Street (2015) records:

When placed in the so-called 'hole' at San Luis Obispo, which Newton described as a 'torture chamber' with no sanitation facilities or furniture, he refused the unidentified 'green substance' that passed for food until he was moved to a single cell that had a bed. 'I looked upon lock-up not as punishment but as liberation from servitude,' he declared. 'Once a month I was called before the disciplinary board and asked if I was ready to co-operate with them and come off lock-up. Every month I refused.' 'I was prepared to stay in isolation for the entire fifteen years', he concluded. It was 'the easiest solitary confinement I ever pulled'. Later, when Lee Lockwood suggested to Newton that solitary confinement 'shakes a lot of men very deeply', Newton demurred: 'Not me'. (pp. 345–346)

Huey in fact demonstrated the unwillingness to break by writing his famous 'Prison, Where Is Thy Victory' (see also Blake 2012:248). Sowers (2020:25) has done a comparative study in 'Prison, Where Is Thy Victory' through reading that essay in comparison with 1 Cor (15:55) and Hosea (13:14). Through this text Sowers (2020:26) reveals how Paul, Hosea and Huey bemoan the trappings of materialism (physical bodies, economic comfort, etc.) and result in a call higher than the physical self. Though earlier in the BPP religion was not really an area of focus, later Huey would argue that the BPP divorced itself from the church, which is the longest institution that has been around for black people in the US (see Hughey 2005:644). Huey would revert back to this institution in order to reorganise the people; however, for him it would be late as COINTELPRO would have succeeded in destroying him. Street (2015) asserts:

Newton was among California's first high-profile African American prisoners to witness a return to the 'Big House' concept of incarceration, an experience that doubtless exerted a defining influence on his later life, and that helped prevent, in the words of the FBI, the 'rise of a messiah' who might 'unify and electrify' black Americans. Newton's case is consequently significant if we are to understand the long-term outcome from the rehabilitative experiment for African American prisoners. It demonstrates the authorities' acute awareness of the importance of prison in the development of African American radical political movements, and their successful attempts to ensure that Newton could not catalyze a second generation of inmate activists. His inability to resume effective leadership of the BPP was undoubtedly linked to his personal flaws, but the efforts of the authorities to isolate and then undermine him played a key role in the BPP's decline after his release. (pp. 362–363)

Perhaps, here is the difference of the experience of Black Power in the America and South Africa. The Black Consciousness Movement unlike the BPP remained close to the church; in fact South African Student Organisation (SASO) made use of Lk

4:18 to express its position. Here we see how the Bible plays a significant role not only in forming church structures but in giving a movement its mandate, a mandate similar to Nat the Prophet Turner's vision instructing him to pick up Christ mantle to fight against the serpent who has been unloosed. Biko (1978:30) was correct in asserting that spiritual poverty impedes on the struggle. The Bible has been a reservoir for black people and has been a guiding force for change and affirming the righteousness of struggle against oppression.

Conclusion

In the New Testament we read of Yeshua crucifixion and perhaps our basis to salvific history evades the reality that the ruling elites killed Jesus in order to prevent the messianic age. Throughout the black experience there has been an attempt to destroy anyone who seeks to change the status quo, black leaders have been branded as lunatics just as Christ was perceived in the New Testament. The role that the Bible plays is significant in showing the diverging paths of the faith of the oppressed 2000 years ago and now. Certainly, the Bible is an important text for the black people and white people know it. The fact that the FBI judged black liberation through biblical language is no different to how South African democracy appealed to biblical themes (forgiveness and reconciliation) in order to inaugurate democracy. While that remains true in our messianic expectation, we have lost many; but those we lost accept the fate associated with messianism. When Nat Turner was questioned about his visions of carrying the yoke of Christ that landed him in prison, he was asked: Do you not find yourself mistaken now? He responded by saying: 'was not Christ crucified?' (see ed. Sernett 1999:94). Black Christianity whether has an invaluable friend in the Bible, however, to read the Bible with the different set of eyes is tantamount to madness, a madness necessary to remove the veil of structured oppression – revolutions (revolutions of either ethics, values or of systems) is madness to the oppressor.

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