

**Struggle for justice and fullness of life:
Catholic Social Teaching in Genesis and
development of South African black theology
(with specific reference to Buti Tlhagale and Mandlenkosi Zwane)**

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Abstract

Black theology arising in the South African apartheid context as a collective theological, vigorous and subversive reaction to the injustices of a system claiming Christian justification will be presented. Some of the inhuman deprivations imposed on black people, especially the injustice that denied them their human rights; and the restrictions that made the attainment of a fullness of life impossible will be the first focus in this article. Two black theologians, namely the South African, Buti Tlhagale and the Swazi, Mandlenkosi Zwane, discussed these issues in light of the Papal documents which expose the Catholic church's social teaching will be presented. Reaching into the biblical roots of the Christian message, they formulated a theological approach which reflects the South African and Swazi situations at the time. They also attempted to respond to the weighty problems imposed by apartheid and to offer possible solutions according to gospel values.

I came so that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10)

Introduction

Jesus described His mission which is aimed at the restoration of the full life of human beings and the beloved children of God envisaged in the creation story. This was the Good News (Lk. 4:16-21) that He brought to the whole world. It was for this reason that He healed the sick (Mt. 8:1-17; 8:28-34; 9:1-7; 9:20-22; 9:27-30; 9:32-34; 14:34-36; Mk. 5:21-43; 7:24-37; 10:46-52; Lk. 17:11-14; 18:35-43), even on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:10-17; 14:1-6 Jn. 5:1-17). His healing was also available to all (Mt. 15:21-28). For the same reason, He also raised the dead (Lk. 7:11-17; 8:49-56; Jn. 11:1-44) and spiritually and physically fed thousands of people who came to listen to Him (Mt. 14:14-21). This fullness of life was far more than mere physical wellbeing; it meant making a person feel human and capable of being loved by the Father, as He manifested this by "touching even the untouchables" (Mk. 1:40-45).

Jesus offered His life on the cross for this mission and then entrusted its universal continuation to His followers (Lk. 9:1-6; 10:1-9). The restoration of justice and the fullness of life for the entire human race were to become the main concern of his disciples and of the church that was to spring forth from their mission. For some Catholic theologians, black theology was one of the responses to the mission Jesus entrusted to the church.

Initially, black theology arising in the South African apartheid context as a collective and theological, vigorous and subversive reaction to the injustices of a system which claims Christian justification will be presented. Some of the inhuman deprivations imposed on the black people, especially the injustice that denied them their human rights, and the restrictions that made the attainment of a fullness of life impossible will be the first focus in this article. Two black theologians, especially, the South African, Buti Tlhagale and the Swazi, Mandlenkosi Zwane, who discussed these issues in light of the Papal documents, that expose the Catholic Church's social doctrine, will then be presented. Reaching into the biblical roots of the Christian message, they formulated a theological approach which reflects the South African and Swazi situations at the time. They also attempted to respond to the weighty problems imposed by apartheid and to offer possible solutions according to gospel values.

Nature and role of black theology in the apartheid era

In the social sciences it is maintained that one of the fundamental differences between the experience of pain in animals and humans is that humans are able to reflect on their suffering, and then seek ways to overcome it. Oppressed people in South America, in the southern states of USA and in colonial Africa found solace in the belief that God loved them viscerally, because He had allowed his Son to be crucified for each of them. He was the God of the Exodus who liberated the Israelites from Egyptian slavery; and was surely going to bring forth a new Exodus experience to liberate them from racial, cultural and social oppression; and allow them to grow into a fullness of life in a liberated society. God was powerfully on the side of the oppressed, slaves, all the victims

of colonialist and oppressive systems universally. Black South African theology, in parallel with black American movements, highlighted the chasm between life realities and the Christian ideals of a full life; and between a creative and liberating the Word of God and the oppressive words and actions of the Pharaoh of the day. God's righteousness and liberating love were to be basic elements on the agenda of black theology in South Africa, in stark opposition to the apartheid mentality which presents God as the exclusive defender of white superior rights.

Black convictions led to reactions such as: black consciousness as a valid and equally unique mode of existence in a world where whiteness had become the norm. Secondly, the consciousness that God's concern expressed in the redeeming work and death of Christ is the liberation of his people from all forms of oppression; and thirdly, the reinterpretation of Christ's incarnation in light of the Black experience of oppression and poverty. Black theology holds that:

Jesus takes upon himself the oppressed condition so that all men may be what God created them to be. He is the liberator par excellence, who reveals not only who God is and what he is doing, but also who we are and what we are called to do about human degradation and oppression. The free man in Christ is the man who rebels against false authorities by reducing them to their proper status. The Christian Gospel is the Good News of liberation (Cone and Wilmore 1979:467).

Slavery to sin following the initial fall permeates all aspects of human life, rendering the entire nature oppressed and enslaved and easily taken advantage of by the unscrupulous. Liberation from sin and sinful ways – as preached by Christianity – is a return to a share of life in God's family – as children, not slaves. But this demands a heartfelt embracing of the ways of Christ: completely dedicated obedience to the Father, by embracing his covenant demands, and overflowing from this, a dedication to the service of others to the point of complete selfless, following the example of the crucified Lord.

This theologising about the black experience under colonialism and apartheid was the foundation and *raison d'être* for black theology in South Africa. Says Boesak (1984:4):

Our theological reflection must take into consideration – more strongly still, must emerge out of – that which white theology has never taken seriously: the black experience.

In the same way that Egyptian slavery brought Israel to discover and accept the Yahweh of Sinai, so the oppressive experiences of injustice, deprivation and prejudice were a stimulus to feel and understand God as the only hope of South African blacks to liberate them from an unjust, inhuman situation to return them to fulfil their life aims. Black theology can, therefore, be defined as a theology arising from the need to articulate the significance of the black presence in an inhuman and hostile white world. It is the black people's reflection on their experience under the guidance of the gospel values. It affirms blackness and black humanity. Biko (1978:94) defines it in a similar manner when he states that black theology is:

A theology that seeks to relate God and Christ once more to the Black man and his daily problems ... It grapples with existential problems and does not claim to be the theology of absolutes. It seeks to bring back God to the Black man and to the truth and reality of his situation.

As a way of relating human experience to Christian values, black theology gave the church in South Africa an agenda to fight for justice, that is, the recognition of the black person as a fully-fledged human, a person seen by God as worthy of the death of his Son on the cross. It was the aim and objective of black theology to present God to the suffering and oppressed blacks as a God who does not merely liberate people from suffering, but liberates them so that they should live in a suitable situation, able to do and proclaim justice to all human beings and, in turn, help liberate the oppressors from the oppression caused by their insecurity. Therefore, black theology sought to liberate both the black oppressed and the white oppressor from the grip of oppression, fear and insecurity. In this way it could be seen as a theology of liberation, says Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:26). Black theology taught that it is God who liberates and his justice is the source of all humanity, including black humanity. The liberation of the black community from oppression was a mandate to fight against any kind of social injustice. Hence, it is justice, peace and unity that liberation needs to bring to all people who are otherwise oppressed. Such justice, peace and unity must characterise a liberated society and produce the abundance of life that Christ promised.

Put in another way, black theology was a reflection of black people who were trying to make sense of the life-giving mission of Jesus in the face of all that was a threat to a full life. It was, as Tlhagale (1985:126) suggests: "a direct, aggressive response to a situation where Blacks experience alienation at political, economic and cultural level". Black theology, in unison with Catholic social doctrine states that God is on the side of the

poor, the weak and the oppressed; and whatever benefited these would improve social justice. Black theology sought to help the black people rediscover their dignity in the eyes of God and in their own eyes.

Challenges facing black theology in apartheid South Africa

It is natural for humans to jealously guard their privileges and possessions. South African whites offer many excuses to secure what they had amassed over the centuries: a privileged situation guarded by a plethora of laws, land and business possessions often usurped from legitimate black owners, religious exclusivity as if God only belonged to them and was the guardian of their rights.

Christian churches played contradictory roles, often diametrically opposed. At one extreme, the Dutch Reformed Churches (NGK)¹ offered a theological and ideological-political justification for the tyrannical apartheid authorities who usurped the majority of human rights from the black majority, reducing it to practical slavery. At the other extreme, churches closer to the black majority opposed the regime and favoured the growth of black consciousness and of a theology of liberation.² Shining examples of the second approach can be considered to be, among others, Desmond Tutu, Alan Boesak, Denis Hurley, Albert Nolan and Frank Chikane.

Black theology as a religious reflection by black Christians on their experience of suffering and oppression was faced with a number of challenges, not least the entrenched Calvinist belief that the Afrikaners had an exclusive right to the God of the Bible.³ This led the colonists to consider black theology as a philosophical and political movement aimed at wrenching the initiative of culture, thought and politics from white hands to transfer it into black hands. It was initially regarded not as a theology but a philosophical movement with only religious overtones, perhaps because of its relationship with the Black Consciousness Movement. Furthermore, white scholars insisted that black theology had arisen from a broken, shattered, dehumanised, illiterate and hungry community and was not worthy of any serious consideration. Bonganjalo Goba (1988: Introduction) points out these reasons in the following manner:

Doing theology in South Africa constitutes a problem and a challenge. It is a challenge because of the nature of our political situation in which blacks are not expected to think critically or for that matter theologise. For many of us it is a risk to think and express our views openly, a risk which can lead to one's death. Cases in point are Steve Biko and many unknown heroes of the black struggle in South Africa. It is a challenge especially for black Christians, for it is an invitation to test the authenticity of our faith and to make a contribution to the current struggle for freedom that is going on in South Africa and for that matter in the world.⁴

Such problems and challenges were inherent to the entire colonisation process in Africa, as colonists maintained that blacks were *tabula rasa* when it came to critical thinking, culture and civilisation. Promoters of apartheid, an extreme offshoot of colonialism, never realised that the system oppressed the black mind and prevented people from expressing views contrary to those of the oppressor.

Another challenge faced by black theology in South Africa arose from the fact that many Christian initiatives were considered to be hand-in-glove with the white minority government. Misgivings about the universally saving message of the Bible considered a white-owned religious book were even expressed by mostly school-baptised Christians, whose 'conversion' was only skin-deep. Thus, these Christians were unable to say anything about the African reality (cf. Banana 1993:17). This brought into question the reliability of black church ministers, trained by whites in a white religion, to speak meaningfully to the black community about the latter's experiences in light of the Christian gospel, without betraying either their black community or the white-owned gospel. Tlhagale (1985:126) answers this by pointing out that black theology was also "an exercise in self-criticism".

Historical context under which black theology was formulated (1972-1989)

Black South Africans constituted a nation under siege during the state of emergency proclaimed several times between 1962 and 1989. They had to raise their eyes in faith to implore God and prepare for his liberation. On the one hand, the regime was not prepared to lose its grip on any sphere of power. On the other hand, townships went up in flames in protest against a situation the youth judged as unbearable. The loss of life on both sides made the tragedy and cruelty of the situation a reality. Christians asked themselves, "How can we, as followers of the Prince of Peace, bring to an end the cycle of violence? What does the Gospel ask us to do?" The traditional parameters of Christianity were no longer sufficient. New visions suitable for the situation of black South Africans had to be investigated.

¹ Usually white Afrikaner.

² Included here would be some of the churches from the Reformed tradition whose membership was mainly Black.

³ Akenson, DH 1992. *God's people: Covenant and land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 74

⁴ See also Mofokeng 1983:1

Brazilian Bishop Helder Camara (1971:30), one of the paladins of South American Liberation Theology, in his book, *The spiral of violence* describes how the violence of popular oppression by the state leads to a violent reaction from the oppressed:

The egoism of some privileged groups drives countless human beings into this subhuman condition, where they suffer restrictions, humiliations, and injustices; without prospects, without hope, their condition is that of slaves ... this established violence, the violence no.1, attracts violence no. 2, revolt, either of the oppressed themselves or of the youth, firmly resolved to battle for a more just and humane world.

Unfortunately, this is never the end, because the oppressor, instead of reflecting on the reasons for popular violence and trying to remedy them, considers it as a duty to suppress opposition with an iron rod (see Kane-Berman 1993:11). Helder Camara continues:

When conflict comes into the streets, when violence number two tries to resist violence no.1, the authorities consider themselves obliged to preserve or re-establish public order, even if this means using force; this is violence number three. Sometimes they go even further, and this is becoming increasingly common: in order to obtain information which may indeed be important to public security, the logic of violence leads them to use moral and physical torture as though any information extracted through torture deserved the slightest attention (Camara 1971:34).

We also maintain that violence by the state machinery bred township violence. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1987:74) also perceives it in this way:

White South Africa regards violence and terrorism as that which normally emanates from the oppressed Black community either internally or externally. They refuse to accept that the South African situation is inherently violent, and the primary violence is the apartheid system.

State violence

The entire minority regime apparatus was founded on the blood of black people. Its terrorist violence was manifested in Acts and Laws aimed at keeping black populations in practical slavery without a glimpse of hope of ever growing out of it. This is demonstrated by the following:

- i. Pass Laws
- ii. Forced Removals
- iii. Land Act of 1913 which basically gave all land (especially fertile land) to whites and left the Black majority practically landless and without its traditional source of livelihood.

When the dispossessed showed signs of resistance, they were hit by violence number three, as demonstrated by the following actions by the state machinery:

- i. Harassment by police and state security agents.
- ii. Banning of individuals and liberation movements struggling for justice for all South Africans.
- iii. Detention of black leaders and those who were fighting for the emancipation of black people. Resultant from this was that a number of individuals died at the hands of police or their agents.
- iv. The State of Emergency proclaimed at intervals constituted a clear declaration of war by the state on its own people. Constraints and checks included:
 - a. Restrictions of meetings
 - b. Suppression and banning of black media, and of organisations and individuals
 - c. Detentions without trial
 - d. Deaths in detentions
 - e. Police freedom to extract information
 - f. Army occupation of townships and black residential areas.

Township response to state violence

Townships with their younger generations school-educated and ready to take on socio-political responsibilities became furnaces of revolution directed at any institution established or supported by the regime; and any person perceived to support the government or its policies. An example of township violence was the reaction to and the contempt shown the townships' so called "mayors and councillors", as they were seen as stooges of their white master.

After the 16 June 1976 Soweto student uprising to protest against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a medium of school instruction, and the violent reaction of state police, the anger of students meant that structures, offices and people perceived to be working for the enemy bore the brunt of resident anger. As a result, millions of rands were lost in the destruction of property. Many of the institutions created by the government were forced to close and the workers to resign because they were seen to be institutions created "to administer apartheid in the townships", stated Magubane (1986:11-13):

It's a known fact that when oppressed people cannot meaningfully vent their anger against their oppressor, they vent it on each other, as the first available object. Black on Black violence is perhaps the most brutal manifestation of township violence. A few examples will illustrate how severe this violence could be.

People considered government informers were designated for violent treatment. In 1976 people suspected to be on the side of the oppressor were brutally killed. Necklacing, tribal courts, burning of houses and properties became the order of the day. Who can forget the scenes of burnt bodies strewn in the streets of black townships? These were seen to be the agents of the oppressive government. Also, who can forget the scene shown on SABC-TV where a young woman named "Maki" was burnt alive by "necklacing" only because she was suspected to be a regime informer.

The 1980s saw the emergence of another form of violence against those who were regarded as agents of the oppressive regime in KwaZulu-Natal Black townships, especially Clermont in Pinetown, Sobantu in Pietermaritzburg and Mpophomeni near Howick. This was notoriously known as 'modelling': the victim was made to walk around the township completely naked in full view of everybody. The age and the status of the victim did not matter. This was a measure taken to discourage any individual from working for and with the enemy.

During "stay-aways" and boycotts of businesses seen to be gaining from apartheid, some people were made to eat and drink what they had bought. The South African media reported in many a news bulletin in the 1980s that in one of the Eastern Cape townships a woman was forced to drink five litres of cooking oil she had bought in one such shop. As a result she died. Kangaroo courts regularly disciplined some of the notorious collaborators, by means of sjambokking or even sentencing them to death by necklacing.

The loss of self-esteem and of any religious restraint made people behave worse than wild animals. The silent majority was now afraid of both the ruthless agents of apartheid and of the so-called township comrades.

The 1985 Kairos Document, written by 151 clerics from 16 church groups called on Christians to "participate in the struggle for liberation" by supporting civil disobedience campaigns, consumer boycotts and strikes. The dilemma was how to fight apartheid, clearly contrary to the teachings of Christ; and follow Jesus' message of peace and reconciliation. Christians had to find a way to revive the conscience of human dignity based on the fact that we are all children of God, loved and redeemed by Christ's precious blood, waiting for the miracle of liberation from all surrounding evils. A conversion was needed by both blacks and whites. Desmond Tutu appealed to "dear white fellow South Africans to recognise the humanity of non-whites and allow them the possibility to be with our wives every day, to come home to our children, to live where we can afford ... in a new kind of South Africa, where we all, black and white, can walk together ... into the glorious future which God is opening up before us ..."

In the following sections I intend to present in summary the ideas and observations of two black Southern African theologians, Buti Tlhagale and Mandlenkosi Zwane, who reflected on the situation of the black masses during the violent 1980s and tried to offer solutions in light of the biblical values and of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. These two problems with negative repercussions are linked to labour and violence. Naturally issuing from these as inversions are visions of human dignity, peace and culture. In other words, justice for individuals and groups can allow a growth into fullness of life.

Buti Tlhagale

Buti Tlhagale was born on 26 December 1947 in Randfontein, into a Methodist family, and only became a Catholic because he went to St. Patrick Catholic Primary School in Randfontein. He attended secondary school at Inchanga near Cato Ridge, in the Valley of Thousand Hills (KwaZulu-Natal). The school was run by a

missionary congregation of priests called the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I), a congregation of which Tlhagale later became a member. He did his undergraduate and post-graduate studies in philosophy and theology in Lesotho and Rome. Tlhagale was involved in the birth of AZAPO, the Azanian People's Organisation, a black consciousness movement. His ministry included seminary teaching, parish ministry in Soweto and the position of Secretary General for the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. Tlhagale also served as the Archbishop of Bloemfontein from 1999 to 2003, and is now the Archbishop of Johannesburg. His earlier writings focussed on black theology, labour and enculturation issues.

Buti Tlhagale on labour issues

In his 1985 paper, "Towards a Black Theology of Labour", Black theologian, Buti Tlhagale(in unison with Catholic social teaching) developed the view of a God-given right to self-improvement through work which further fosters self-improvement and the possibility to sustain oneself and one's family. Where social conditions render self-employment impossible, society should intervene to provide the possibility of gainful employment. Unfortunately, the colonial capitalist system prevailing globally and in Southern Africa is based on corporate profit principles, with the consequent exploitation of the "faceless and nameless masses" that desperately need work at whatever cost. Labourer exploitation deprives God's children of dignity and a decent level of human life.

Buti Tlhagale's reflections were based on the situation in the old Transvaal and Orange Free State, where mining and commercial farming were based solely on cheap black labour; the entire South African economy has always run on black labour. *The Study Commission on US Policy Toward Southern Africa* published in 1981 gives the following statistics: of the total South African workforce of 9.4 million, 80% are black, 11% Coloured and 3% Asian (1981:80). Obvious questions are: Does the profit principle justify the crass suppression of human rights? Or inhuman sufferings inflicted on blacks who desperately need employment? These were the questions raised by the first great encyclical letter, by the aging Leo XIIIth, in 1891, *Rerum Novarum* [literally, The advent of new things, that is, the human philosophy of labour]. Guided by Tlhagale's reflection, we enumerate some of the negative experiences endured by blacks with regard to labour issues.

- Since 1911 and even more after 1923, race was the determining factor with regard to the kind of job a person had and the salary he could claim (Job Reservation Laws). This prevented any form of meaningful progress for the black majority under successive white governments. The fear of black competition, if economic and cultural development were allowed, generated legislation such as the Mines and Works Act of 1911 and the Black Urban Act of 1923.
- Labour was primarily viewed as a means of boosting capital therefore black workers were given contemptible remuneration:

The priority of capital over labour crushes the worth of the black worker ... Labour in service of capital runs contrary to the Christian understanding of justice (Tlhagale 1985:130).

- Black education was restricted to basic menial tasks equipping Blacks for menial jobs only to avoid black advancement and job competition. Through Bantu Education blacks were deliberately denied training for personal self-advancement in the work place. Blacks were, therefore, left with fewer skills than their white counterparts. Says Tlhagale (1985:130) again:

Blacks have been denied training in the various technical fields so as to prevent them from competing with white workers ... Workers seem destined to remain in the subservient order.

- Black women suffered the double yoke of being black and female in the patriarchal system. being used as an even cheaper source of labour. Consequently, they were employed in situations where they were easily exploited through low wages, long working hours and miserable work environments (cf. Letsoalo 1986:228).

Thus, the black worker came to see work as a curse rather than a blessing, a bane rather than a privilege. They saw themselves as a tool used for the growth of an economy only benefiting white interests.

From the above account it emerges that, historically, black workers have been considered as objects, as part of the productive machinery organised in such a way as to produce wealth only to be appropriated by the white ruling class. Under such circumstances, black labour can hardly be seen as an activity aimed at self-realisation. In the eyes of the black worker, work ceases to be the “place of human growth” or the “clearing” where the absolute manifests itself. Sheer drudgery and confinement to subsistence levels negate the concept of work as the continuation of the creative-redemptive work of God. The dimension of work as “liberating force” is completely subordinated to the negative dimension that shows human labour as the “topos” where punishment is unleashed in its painful form (Tlhagale 1985:129).

There was, however, an additional burden blacks experienced: wide-spread unemployment, as government and business reserved employment for better trained and educated whites. This left millions of blacks destitute as they could not develop themselves and their talents and provide for the upkeep of their families.

Work means food, clothing, shelter and medicine. For the jobless work redeems, work liberates, work gives life. Without work there can be no growth, no development, no education for the children, no control over one’s life. A life with long periods of unemployment renders one sub-human (Tlhagale 1993:5).

The reflective response of some black theologians

After quoting extensively from Tlhagale’s observations, we will now take a closer look at his response concerning:

- labour and employment
- the armed struggle
- and township violence

The articles: *Towards a black theology of labour* (1985) and *The right to employment* (1993) will be considered. Later we will present Tlhagale and Zwane’s ideas on issues concerning:

- social justice
- Christian involvement in social justice and development.

The correspondence of these ideas with the themes of Catholic social teaching, to show that South African black theologians are familiar with the official Catholic approach to social justice will be emphasised.

- Labour, common good and human dignity in Tlhagale’s work

In his first article, *Towards a black theology of labour* (1985), Tlhagale explains that, according to biblical theology, work is supposed to help people develop themselves and contribute to the constant re-creation and growth of society. Work should stimulate inventiveness and self-actualisation, while providing a source of reasonable physical, economic and social support. This was unfortunately not the case in South Africa, particularly for the black masses. Work, as far as the black workers were concerned, was used to subjugate and enslave them.

Quoting J. Habermas, Tlhagale states that, “labour is a fundamental category of human existence”. It is through labour that nature is transformed and labour becomes an activity that leads to collective growth, clothing society with dignity. Therefore, through human labour a person realises a fundamental mode of existence (Tlhagale 1985:127). Black theology of labour objects to the perspective that black workers being used as objects and faceless wheels of the productive machinery to produce wealth to the sole benefit of ruling capitalist whites (Tlhagale 1985:129).

The disparaging language code used in work places to describe a black worker is another element to be abolished, according to Tlhagale. Such language distorts reality and conditions the mind (Tlhagale 1985:131). Such was the reality of South Africa that work— instead of being seen in the positive light of a contribution to human development— was considered an unavoidable curse.

Tlhagale’s second article, *The right of employment* (1993) introduces the difficulties of unemployment in the context of foreign sanctions such as the drop in the gold price. He states that unemployment is the suppression of talents that are God’s gift to humankind to contribute towards a new creation, enabled by God’s Spirit. He returns to various ideas discussed in the previous article regarding the nobility of human labour, and the consequent destructive influence of unemployment (Tlhagale 1993:35). Unemployment, therefore, means

denying a partnership with God. This means that the unemployed are reduced to inactive observers, rather than active participants. Work and employment, according to the author, are central to Christian life. Quoting the Book of Genesis, he states that humans were created in God's likeness and image and that God placed them in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it, so as to have dominion over nature and subdue the earth (Tlhagale 1993:35–36). Therefore, employment is a fundamental aspect of humans and it reflects God's image. Work constitutes a contribution to advancement and human progress; and unemployment is the denial or absence of such (Tlhagale 1993:33).

The disadvantaged situation of black people was rendered even more tragic by the massive unemployment rate of the late 1980s and early 1990s which left many feeling sub-human because of lack of opportunities to contribute to the development of self and society. Tlhagale bitterly regrets that the dramatic massive unemployment was not squarely faced by the entire church, including religious leaders and theologians, to find suitable remedies, because it is through work that the individual is redeemed, liberated, and given life. Tlhagale maintains that human creativity 'belongs to the essence of the human being' and work affords the person the right to live a human life, not a sub-human life.

Therefore, for Tlhagale, there is a need to focus on the unemployed (Tlhagale 1993:37). He warns against disregard that is often shown to the unemployed and the tendency to make them feel discarded and marginalised. These feelings breed crime, anarchy, chaos and moral degeneration of societies and families (Tlhagale 1993:37–38). It also denies people the right to contribute to culture and civilisation (Tlhagale 1993:39). But also the unemployed need our sympathy and active support.

Tlhagale's position resonates with the main principles of Catholic social teaching as found in a number of official documents, namely:

- i. People have a right to work to take care of themselves and their families, for both the present and the future (*Laborem Exercens* 10)
- ii. Work should be a free expression of one's personality (*Gaudium et Spes* 67);
- iii. Workers should not be treated as mere tools (*Rerum Novarum* 20);
- v. In work, people become co-creators with God and perfect God's creation (*Laborem Exercens* 9; *Gaudium et Spes* 67);
- vi. In work and through just remuneration, people perfect themselves and can enjoy a decent standard of living (*Rerum Novarum* 44);
- vii. Through labour, workers contribute to the common good (*Mater et Magistra* 55, 68, 71);
- viii. Labour enables workers to earn towards private property and thus be able to take care of their families (*Mater et Magistra* 9,10);
- ix. Labour also enhances human dignity and is integral to the development of this (*Populorum Progresio* 55–56).

- Tlhagale's ideas concerning Peace, Violence and the Just War

Tlhagale's following articles deal with the possible justification of a violent popular response and the armed struggle as a last resort when all peaceful means achieve no result. The articles are: *On violence: a township perspective* (1986) and *Christian soldiers* (1987).

In the first article, Tlhagale discusses the situation of injustice in South Africa from a black perspective and evaluates the arguments about the use of violence within the Christian tradition. He clearly distinguishes among legitimate self-defence, the violent and belligerent approach of the armed struggle and the absolute pacifist stance of passive resistance which advocates demonstrations to lead to negotiations (Tlhagale 1986:135).

He then describes the violent nature of the apartheid state which, through the State of Emergency of 1961 and 1986, legitimised the use of violence against 'unruly' township residents, especially the youth, and the denial of most basic rights to black people, suspected, one and all, to be inveterate 'rebels'. Such draconian measures provoked the youth to adopt as its modus operandi the approach of violent resistance (Tlhagale 1986:136–137).

Taking up the armed struggle was a last resort, a response to police and army invasions of the townships, treating blacks as enemies in their own country (Tlhagale 1986:143). Africans were robbed of the social character of their existence, by denying them all the rights that should be accorded persons for their authentic development. Tlhagale concludes that "If violence is to be avoided and peace to be established then apartheid must be uprooted completely. Nothing less than the fulfilment of this simple demand will do" (Tlhagale 1986:150).

In the second article, *Christian Soldiers*, Tlhagale criticises the pacifist Christian perspective on violence as an implicit support of the apartheid system, while he also sees the black American strategy of passive resistance as impractical in the South African context. This was further exacerbated by the regime's lack of political legitimacy; it was not democratically elected by the majority of the people.

He sees a conspiracy and diabolic collaboration between the security forces, the legal system and the correctional service as a chain reaction system to ensure that black persons were subjugated forever. Also, the homelands system is viewed as a psychological ploy to keep the indigenous people away from the centres of earning and learning. He singles out the army in particular, as a mechanism of preserving the apartheid hegemony, defending the ideology through the barrel of the gun (Tlhagale 1987:80–87).

The just-war theory and its conditions of application are not seen as relevant to apartheid South Africa. The only way out of the political impasse is a democratic, general election but it was not foreseeable at the time; so he suggests violence as the last resort to uphold the dignity of the indigenous people.

Tlhagale sees no worthy international body with the objectivity and credibility to monitor and oversee a democratic transition. He also states that, despite the banishment, imprisonment and exile of the leadership of the liberation movements, there are still conscientious objectors prepared to carry the baton.

For Tlhagale, the damage inflicted by apartheid on the people far outweighs the damages of sabotage waged against the regime. Yet these acts of sabotage have somehow softened the attitude of the international community and the pressure inside the country led to the regime making some concessions to accommodate the aspirations of the people. The psychological impact of apartheid is characterised by paranoia and despair, causing people to take refuge in utopia and resignation.

Connected with this, Tlhagale sees the embrace of atheist communism as a public statement of rejecting the God of Christianity who seems to condone such dehumanising ideology. Amid all this, he is inspired by the youth that is prepared to give their lives for the betterment of the life of others, thereby following the mandate and example of Christ.

Mandlenkosi Zwane

Mandlenkosi Zwane was born in April 1932 at Msunduzi in Mbabane, Swaziland. Zwane was schooled at Esigangeni Primary School and eventually went on to complete his primary education at Mbabane Central. He then went to Matsapha Secondary School for a short while, says Langa (1998:37). He had to start working soon after primary school as he had been jailed for inciting the students to protest at Matsapha. On his release, Zwane went to Benoni, Transvaal (South Africa) to work in a bottle factory. He then returned to Swaziland to complete his secondary education which he did at Salesian High School, Sikhakhane points out (1983:1). Zwane was not a Catholic at this stage. The Salesians had great influence on young Mandlenkosi Zwane; and as a result, he converted to Catholicism and later wanted to become a priest (Langa 1998:38). Zwane studied philosophy and theology at St Peter's Seminary, Pevensey, KwaZulu-Natal. He was ordained in 1964 and in 1974 he became the bishop of Manzini, Swaziland and as a bishop he focussed his ministry on social development, communications and refugee issues. He unfortunately died in a car accident in 1980. Zwane's writings are focused on issues of human development, freedom and human rights.

Zwane's key writings

- Mandlenkosi Zwane's ideas on the common good, human dignity, culture, subsidiarity and peace

Mandlenkosi Zwane, Bishop of Manzini in Swaziland became the voice of the extremely poor Swazi people, robbed of their human dignity by both colonial-style capitalism and an absolute monarchical regime. He died in a road accident in 1980, but his several writings slowly emerged after his death, revealing his vision of a society in search of the common good based on human dignity and the principles of traditional culture. His posthumous 1983 paper, *The church and development* (1983) reflects on the most urgent needs of the black population to be able to survive in the hostile environment of the after effects of colonialism; and to achieve the human and Christian life goals of dignity and peace. He discusses the teachings of the Catholic church regarding the integral development of the whole person, a development that respects both the individual and the group to achieve the common good and peace. He is not afraid of taking Christian churches to task, because of the Dutch Reformed churches' support and moral-theological justification of apartheid. Also, the cosy co-existence of most missionary churches with tyrannical regimes, taking advantage of the privileges afforded to white institutions and not taking seriously the tragic needs of the poor is included. This is why he feels that many church hierarchies did not take a clear stand in the face of apartheid aberrations to support socially uplifting programmes.

Starting from Proto-Genesis, God gives Adam the task of cultivating the Garden of Eden as a sign of trust that recognises Adam's personal dignity, encouraging the development of his talents. Zwane stresses the urgency of land reform to restore self-worth to rural workers whose existence can be enhanced by enjoying the fruits of the labour of their hands; and the concrete possibility of looking after their families. The Catholic church has often benefited from high-handed policies regarding land distribution. On their farms, foreign missionaries have established schools and hospitals, workshops and other self-supporting enterprises with the

visible aim of evangelising and helping black populations; in most cases, however, without consulting the supposed beneficiaries. This situation has given the perception that missionaries were just a slightly different shape of commercial farmers, exploiters of black labourers. Zwane sees the urgent need to correct this negative perception which stigmatises the church as a justifier and beneficiary of colonialism which robbed the rural people of their primary means of livelihood and self-actualisation. The church's initiatives in the fields of learning and health are viewed as benefiting the church more than the indigenous people, thereby failing to empower the people to be self-sufficient (*Populorum Progresio*7).

Zwane further accuses the missionary church of social engineering. By denying any value to African culture, customs and religion as incompatible with the Christian faith, this church has radically alienated the people by stigmatising the traditional social structures that had served the population for centuries. Christianity should have been preached as completing African ways of feeling about, and worshipping the one universal God, already worshipped by Africans in their own ways, Zwane points out.

Zwane proposes the following mind-set and method changes to render the church a true engine of transformation and development. They reflect the social teaching of the Catholic church in its official documents:

- i. Any meaningful development must be in the context of local religion, history and culture (Culture: *Populorum Progresio* 12, 14).
- ii. This means that the Church has to go back to the basic Christian message, and discover her mission of liberation, to be a sign of God's reign of justice, love, peace and abundance of life (Peace: *Populorum Progresio* 13).
- iii. Therefore, the Church needs to seek her own conversion as a matter of priority.
- iv. Development does not mean working for the people, but with the people. Therefore the Church's authorities cannot make decisions for the people but in collaboration with those whose development the Church is seeking (Subsidiarity: *Populorum Progresio* 73: 7778).
- v. The Church needs to be a student of world affairs to be aware of the signs of the times. Observing and learning will help her to respond accordingly, vis-a-vis the developmental needs of the people (Common Good: *Populorum Progresio* 73).
- vi. Projects should only be seen as means for building people, because people are more important than projects (Common Good: *Populorum Progresio* PP 34).

Zwane continues by challenging the church to be pro-active in dealing with the people's alienation and in ensuring that, through her witness, she brings the message of Christ to fruition by allowing people to assert, develop and express themselves and their creativity. This is realisable only if the church is grounded in the experience, culture, customs and traditions of the people.

Finally, Zwane warns the church to undertake this inner and outer development project with zeal and conviction as an institution that seeks the affirmation of the downtrodden; not out of obligation, pretension, or because it feels it has the resources to do so.

- Zwane's ideas in *The church and human rights* (1983)

Reflecting on the internationally forgotten status of Swaziland, Zwane encourages the church to be a more visible moral conscience of the universal community, evoking a conscientious objective stance as a modern global phenomenon to awaken the international community from its moral slumber, through a constant challenge to the status quo.

The theologian outlines the church's task to be an agent of transformation, which calls for: the respect of the dignity of every person (Dignity of the Human Person: *Rerum Novarum* 11–13, 24; *Laborem Exercens* 1); transparency and co-operation between all the stakeholders and dignitaries in international bodies, to uphold the wellbeing of the person in all its aspects (Human Rights Watch). This ideal unfortunately falls short in its application, because of the eschatological tension unfolding between the ideal and the existential situation of sin, which is evident in the degrading effects of materialism, the systematic ideological distortion of facts and the myopic issue of national security.

He commends the church for its relentless efforts to inform the international community of global repressive situations. He further challenges the church to avoid complacency and to use its privileged position to help create a climate conducive to dialogue and reconciliation. He advises the church to be sensitive to the aspirations of those who seek the truth. He advocates the stance of political neutrality to be able to maintain the autonomy necessary to remain critical and transformative in repressive contexts.

He sees this propagation under the guise of common good, yet favouring the ambitions of ruling minorities as a stumbling block to the moral conscience around the myth of national security. It is sustained by the ideological tools of propaganda and censorship which stifle voices of criticism, dissent and protest, thereby

justifying multiple violations of the human rights of the masses. The church should be a catalyst and morale booster of the oppressed and an agent of contemplative activism by being visible and firm in its witness through involvement. Yet the dignity of people who struggle for human dignity and rights must simultaneously be defended (*Rerum Novarum* 11, 12, 26, 38; *Populorum Progresio* 12).

- Zwane's ideas in *Black Catholics* (1982)

In this essay, Zwane throws a series of challenges to the church:

- The task of the church is to reassert the principle of justice as an essential dimension in the proclamation of the gospel.
- It is imperative for the church to work out a sound, forceful and popular biblical theology of the development of the whole human person with special emphasis on social justice.
- The church must come out very strongly in defence of the human person.
- The church has a role in society as a medium of truth (Zwane 1982:121–122).

Conclusion

The demeaning environment of apartheid forced right-thinking people to question the oppressive situation imposed by a supposedly Christian government, in light of the gospel message of abundant grace, fullness of life, or at least basic human justice and dignity. The deeply religious African people, who had turned to Christianity in very large numbers, were now wondering where the God of Exodus, who set his chosen people free from Egypt, was. Biblical insights gradually formulated a vision of Christianity as a theology of liberation, to free people from: widespread sin that pitted human beings against one other or allowed them to take advantage of the socially weak; and the oppression of a foreign minority claiming absolute ownership of the country and its institutions.

Laws, acts of parliament, rules and regulations first by Westminster, then by Pretoria or Cape Town, systematically produced the enslavement of the black people in their own country. Such inhuman laws were to be challenged, one by one, initially by legal, cultural and religious arguments; then, when such arguments proved powerless, by the armed struggle against the white minority regime. Violence became commonplace during the second half of the 20th century, because the regime reacted cruelly to any popular request for respect of human rights or freedoms; thus, each violent act of the authorities caused new flare-ups of violence in the townships.

Black liberation theology became a powerful tool of reflection, and a rallying cry of the oppressed masses. Unfortunately not all authorities in the various Christian denominations univocally condemned the diabolic system of apartheid. But some great people, both black and white, ran the gauntlet at their personal risk to act and speak out, or to write about the South African situation at national and international forums. Eventually, internal and international pressure forced the fall of apartheid and ushered in the beginning of a new era as a 'Rainbow Nation', blessed by God as He had blessed Noah after the flood by displaying his rainbow, fittingly representing the multi-racial and multi-cultural situation of South Africa.

Two black Catholic theologians, Buti Tlhagale and Mandlenkosi Zwane used their context to attend to the main concerns of black people living either under apartheid, or a dictatorial traditional kingship; this approach was presented in the second section of the paper. They saw it as their duty to restore people's confidence in the liberator God, and help them to look at themselves through the eyes of God who sent his only Son to redeem – or liberate – them: God's Exodus day would certainly arrive to restore justice and fullness of life. The theologians firstly exposed the fallacies and heresy of apartheid. In essence their theses were that the South African blacks were experiencing government impositions clearly opposed to the Gospel message and to human values. Their contributions were issue-driven and did not emphasise racial and ethnic approaches.

Looking at the main principles of the church's social teaching, we can see a close correspondence with our black theologians' approach. The study of the church's documents enhances black theology and greatly enriches its reflections and insights.

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