

Liberation Theology

A Brief Outline of Black Theology
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SCM

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Black Theology can be broadly understood as the self-conscious attempt to enter into rational and disciplined conversation about God and God's relationship to Black people in the world throughout history. The God that is at the centre of Black Theology is the one who is largely, although not exclusively, understood in terms of God's revelation in Jesus Christ in light of the historical and contemporary reality of being 'Black'.

Black Theology has branches across the world. The most obvious and perhaps significant examples can be found in diverse places such as North America, The Caribbean, South America (particularly, Brazil), Southern Africa, mainland Europe (particularly in the Netherlands), and of course, in Britain. In these differing contexts, the starting point for Black Theology is the reality of being 'Black' in the world and the experience that grows out of the lived reality of how the world treats you as a person of darker skin and of African descent. This reality is then explored in dialogue within the overall framework of the Christian faith. The relationship between Black experience and Christianity continues, for the most part, to be the effective framework for the ongoing development of Black Theology across the world.

Black Theology has grown out of the ongoing struggles of Black peoples to affirm their identity and very humanity in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. Some scholars estimate that upwards of 50 million African people were transported between Africa and the Americas over a four hundred year period. Inherent within that Black, transatlantic movement of forced migration and labour, was a form of biased, racialised teaching that asserted the inferiority and sub-human nature of Black people. The continued struggles of Black people that arise from the era of slavery can be seen in the overarching material poverty and marginalisation of Black people across the world.

At the heart of Black Theology is the concept of 'Liberation'. In using this term, the word 'Black' comes to represent God's symbolic and actual solidarity with oppressed people- the majority of whom have been consigned to the marginal spaces of the world solely on the grounds of their very Blackness, having been identified as 'lesser' human beings.

For many, the most important person in the development of Black Theology has been the African American theologian, James H. Cone. Cone's landmark trilogy of books in the late 1960s and early 70s, *Black Theology and Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God Of The Oppressed* remain the dominant texts in outlining the importance of understanding God's revelation in Jesus from the perspective of disenfranchised and oppressed Black peoples across the world.

Black Theology in many parts of the world is committed to a radical appropriation of the Gospel in order that those who are the 'least of these' (Matthew 25: 31-46) might live, and have that life in all its fullness (John 10:10). This ongoing work is a praxis or action-orientated approach that is not mindful of either doctrinal purity or Biblical literalism.

Black people have continued to re-interpret the meaning of the Christian faith in order to challenge illegitimate White power (and Black power, also, when it should be called to account) and to proclaim freedom for all people.

For further reading see the Liberation Theology Reading list.

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