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African Liberation Theology

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various aspects of life. Evangelicals must learn "how God-given structures of church and vocational life nourish Christian community." (3) The Reformed have an appreciation for a sound theological tradition. Noll called attention to the three Standards of Unity, which constitute the Reformed confessions in the Dutch tradition, saying, "The Heidelberg Catechism is justly the crown jewel of the Standards of Unity." Wisely, Noll did not compliment the

complements without considering cautions. There is no cause for boastful chest thumping. It is possible to turn every virtue into a vice. They have sometimes been so turned. Noll maintained a fine balance between compliment and critique. The former never degenerated to flattery and the latter never penetrated to the quick. We are looking forward to a return engagement by our Wheaton friend.

Nick Van Til

African Liberation Theology

Talk of liberation theology, not only for Africa but also for Latin America, began in 1974 in Tanzania at a conference attended by black Christian leaders from across the African continent. Although problems differed, the need for liberation on the two continents was obvious and imperative.

So said Dr. Christian Goncalves Baeta, professor emeritus of evangelical theology at the Ecumenical Institute of Rulin Universitat, Bochouu, West Germany. Dr. Baeta, a citizen of Ghana, West Africa, earned his doctorate in philosophy at the University of London. He has been awarded honorary degrees in the United States, Japan, Germany, and Ghana. Dr. Baeta addressed the Dordt faculty in October, speaking on Black liberation theology as it is currently articulated in Africa.

Revolution, said Dr. Baeta, must of necessity be included in liberation theology. Just as Diedrich Bonhoeffer knew that for the Christian comes a time when he must resist, so revolution must of necessity be considered in liberation theology. African liberation theology is concerned with implementing Christ's words, taken from Isaiah 61:1:

He has sent me to bind up the

brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners

"While the poor are becoming poorer, the rich are becoming richer," said Dr. Baeta. Therefore, theology must be liberated from irrelevance. One must hear the pains and sighs of the people—and reflect on them. Starting, not from tradition, but from this kind of reflection, theology should develop new insights for practice.

Although Dr. Baeta expressed criticism of the "social gospel" in its attempt "to liberate without the gospel," he insisted that "liberation is the key of the gospel" for the Third World. He defined the Third World as "first of all, the non-Western world; secondly, the non-Russian world; and finally, the non-Australian and non-Japanese world."

Dr. Baeta compared America's "Black problem" with the problem of Blacks in South Africa; America's 11 percent Black population aspires only to peaceful coexistence based on equal justice for all, while South Africa's 84 percent Black population may someday take control. America's Blacks were uprooted involuntarily, while South African Blacks continue to live in their own environment.

In addition, Dr. Baeta pointed out, the plight of America's Blacks must be seen in its fundamental difference from the well-being of America's white population. Blacks were dragged in chains to tyranny in America, while America's whites emigrated freely from Europe to escape tyranny. White theology concerns itself with infant baptism, free will, and predestination, while Blacks are concerned with the fact that Christ came to make men free. Blacks do not inquire whether God exists; they assume this to be self-evident. All they want to know is that God is present and on their side.

It was necessary for Blacks to develop a special language appropriate to their reality; the telling of fables enabled slaves to work out an imperfect picture of their future. God is not a metaphysical idea, but rather He is a God of history, a God who can liberate. Jesus Christ is not an abstract God, but the God who came to earth to set the captive free. He is Alpha and Omega. If God could deliver Israel from Pharaoh, He can also deliver Blacks from slavery. This was and is expressed in sermon, song, and prayer.

Dr. Baeta also asked rhetorically why the church of South Africa has played a leading role in the efforts to degrade the Bantus. "There is no excuse in taking a man made in the image of Almighty God and making him into something less than a man." Apartheid is worse than slavery because at least in slavery the owner owned and therefore took care of his property. South African theology, Dr. Baeta said, is really white theology because, like white theology, it has retained for itself alone the right to determine what is acceptable or unacceptable as related to human life. No effort is made in South African theology to assert Christian freedom and maintain it.

In South Africa even political rights

are dependent upon skin color. Economy and society are based on political rights; South Africa boasts the highest living standard in the whole world. In this social structure, the majority of the population is at the disposal of a small minority at practically no cost.

What is a prognosis for South Africa? Dr. Baeta said they will start with what they are able to do. The point is not whether the Blacks are successful, but rather, that they express their opposition! "We don't know what God is going to do about apartheid, but His will is that we be against it, and we do whatever little we can. Christians must come out and show that they stand for justice. They should not be coming out with silly irrelevancies to evade the issue."

History has shown, Dr. Baeta explained, that describing African life as savage enabled the white missionary to wish to "wipe the (African) slate clean, to establish a *tabula rasa*" upon which he could build his own religious superstructure. It was actually a culture which, like Saul's armor placed on David, was "awkward and uncomfortable," the net effect of which was "loss of identity" for the African.

African studies are continuing and efforts are being made to further construct an African theology. The first act of theology, all theology, is to recognize that all men are members of the human family. Thus, to see any of the human race in penury and distress is unworthy of man. This, then, is the first task of Christians.

Dr. Baeta concluded by reminding his audience that new light is needed on what already is. God appears to be bringing a variety of nations—both black and white—together in Christ, so that in Christ all things can be made into one—unto God's glory.

Lillian V. Grissen