CROSS AND SUFFERING: A BLACK AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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More than eighty years ago W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in The Souls of Black Folk his classic statement of the paradox of black life in America.

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1)

The "two warring ideals" that Du Bois described in 1903 have been at the centre of black religious thought from its origin to the present day. They are found in the heated debates about "integration" and "nationalism" and in the attempt to name the community--beginning with the word "African" and using at different times such terms as "Coloured", and "Negro", "Afro-American", "Black" and "African-American."

In considering black religious thought in this essay, let us give clearer names to the "two warring ideals"--clearer, that is, from the point of view of religion. I shall call them "African" and "Christian". Black religious thought is not identical with the Christian theology of white Americans. Nor is it identical with traditional African beliefs, past or present. It is both--but reinterpreted for and adapted to the life-situation of black people' struggle for justice in

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a nation whose social, political and economic structures are dominated by a white racist ideology. It was the "African" side of black religion that helped African-Americans to see beyond the white distortions of the gospel and to discover its true meaning as God's liberation of the oppressed from bondage. It was the "Christian" element in black religion that helped African-Americans to re-orient their African past so that it would become more useful in the struggle to survive with dignity in a society that they did not make.

Although the African and Christian elements have been found throughout the history of black religious thought, the Christian part gradually became dominant. Though less visible, the African element continued to play an important role in defining the core of black religion, thus preventing it from becoming merely an imitation of Protestant or Catholic theologies in the West. Of course, there are many similarities between black religious thought and white Protestant and Catholic reflections on Christian tradition. But the dissimilarities between them are perhaps more important than the similarities. The similarities are found at the point of a common Christian identity, and the dissimilarities can best be understood in light of the differences between African and European cultures in the New World. While whites used their cultural perspective to dominate others, blacks used theirs to affirm their dignity and to empower themselves to struggle for justice. The major reason for the differences between black and white reflections on God is found at the point of the great differences in life. As white theology is largely defined by its response to modern and post-modern societies of Europe and America, usually ignoring the contradictions of slavery and oppression in black life, black religious thought is the thinking of slaves and of marginalized lacks whose understanding of God was shaped by the contradictions that white theologians ignored and regarded as unworthy of serious theological reflection. In this essay, I will analyze black religious thought in the light of Du Bois' "warring ideals" that emerged out of the struggle for justice -- beginning with its origin in slavery and concentrating mainly on its 20th century development in the civil rights and black power movements, culminating with the rise of black theology.

Roots of Black Religious Thought: Slavery.

The tension between the "African" can "Christian" elements acted to reorder traditional theological themes in black religion and to give them different substance when compared to other theologies in Europe and America. Five themes in particular defined the character of black religious thought during slavery and its subsequent development: justice, liberation, hope, love and suffering.

No theme has been more prominent throughout the history of black religious thought than the justice of God. African-Americans have always believed in the living presence of the God who establishes he right by punishing the wicked and liberating their victims from oppression. Everyone will be rewarded and punished according to their deeds, and no one - absolutely no-one can escape the judgement of God, who alone is the sovereign of the universe. Evildoers may get by for a time, and good people may suffer unjustly under oppression, but "sooner or later, ... we reap as we sow." (2)

The "sooner" referred to contemporary historically observable events:punishment of the oppressors and liberation of the oppressed. The "later" referred to the divine establishment of justice in the "next world" where God "gwineter rain down fire" on the wicked and where the liberated righteous will "walk in Jerusalem just like John." In the religion of African slaves, God's justice was identical with the punishment of the oppressors, and divine liberation was synonymous with the deliverance of the oppressed from the bondage of slavery - if not "now" then in the "not yet". Because whites continued to prosper materially as they increased their victimization of African-Americans, black religious thought spoke more often of the "later" than the "sooner". (3)
The themes of justice and liberation are closely related to the idea of hope. The God who establishes the right and puts down the wrong is the sole basis of the hope that the suffering of the victims will be eliminated. Although African slaves used the term heaven to describe their experience of hope, its primary meaning for them must not be reduced to the "pie-in-the-sky" other-worldly affirmation that often characterized white evangelical

Protestantism. The idea of heaven was the means by which slaves affirmed their humanity in a world that did not recognize them as human beings. (4) It was their way of saying that they were made for freedom and not slavery.

> Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom! Oh Freedom, I love thee! And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave, And go home to my Lord and be free.

Black slaves' hope was based on their faith in God's promise to "protect the needy" and to "defend the poor." Just as God delivered the Hebrew children from Egyptian bondage and raised Jesus from the dead, so God will also deliver African slaves from American slavery and "in due time" will bestow upon them the Gift of eternal life. That was why they sang:

> Soon-a-will be done with the trouble of the world; Soon-a-will be done with the trouble of the world; Going home to live with God.

Black slaves' faith in the coming' of justice of God was the chief reason why they could hold themselves together in servitude and sometimes fight back, even though the odds were against them. The ideas of justice, liberation, and hope should be seen in relation to the important theme of love. Theologically God's love is prior to the other themes. But in order to separate black reflections on love from a similar theme in white theology it is important to emphasize that love in black religious thought is usually linked with God's justice, liberation, and hope. God's love is made known through divine righteousness, liberating the poor for a new future. God's creation of all persons in the divine image bestows sacredness upon human beings and thus makes them the children of God. To violate any person's dignity is to transgress "God's great law of love." (5) We must love the neighbour because God has first loved us. And because slavery and racism are blatant denials of the dignity of the human person, God's justice means that "he will call the oppressors to account." (6)

Despite the strength of black faith, belief in God's coming justice and liberation was not easy for African slaves and their descendants. Their suffering created the most serious challenge to their faith. If God is good, why did God permit millions of blacks to be stolen from Africa and enslaved in a strange Land? No black person has been able to escape the existential agony of that question.

In their attempt to resolve the theological dilemma that slavery and racism created, African-Americans turned to three texts - the Exodus, Psalms 68:31, and the story of Jesus'life, death and resurrection. (7) They derived from the Exodus text the belief that God is the liberator of the oppressed. They interpreted Psalms 68:31 as an obscure reference to God's promise to redeem Africa: "Princess shall come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God."

The Jesus story was the key text. They were empowered by Jesus' ministry - "King Jesus preaching to the poor," "making the dumb to speak," "the cripple to walk," and 'giving the blind his sight." "Jesus," they said, can "do most anything". However, it is the cross of Jesus that attracted the most attention of black people. Oppressed blacks were moved by the Passion story because they too had been rejected, beaten, and shot without a chance to say a word in defense of their humanity. In Jesus' death poor blacks saw themselves, and they unleashed their imagination, describing what they felt and saw.

> Oh, they whipped him up the hill, and he never said a mumbalin' word, He just hung down his head and cried.

They "nailed him to the cross", "pierced him in the side," and "the blood came twinkling down," but "he never said a mumblin' word," "he just hung down his head and he died." The death of Jesus meant that he died on the cross for black slaves. His death was a symbol of their suffering, their trials and tribulations in an unfriendly world. Because black slaves knew of the significance of the pain and shame of Jesus' death on the cross, they found themselves by his side.

> **Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**
> **Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**
> **Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble tremble; Were you there when they crucified my Lord?**

Through the blood of slavery, blacks transcended the limitations of space and time. Jesus' time became their time, and they encountered the theological significance of Jesus' death: through the crucifixion, Jesus makes an unqualified identification with the poor and the helpless and takes their pain upon himself.

Jesus was not alone in his suffering. Blacks were not alone in their oppression in the United States. Jesus was with them! He was God's Black Slave who has come to put an end to oppression. Herein lies the meaning of Jesus' resurrection. It means that the cross was not the end of God's drama of salvation. Despite African-Americans' assurance that oppression was not the last word regarding their humanity, the contradictions remained between oppression and their faith.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

No thinker has made a greater impact upon black religious thought than Martin Luther King, Jr. A product of the black church tradition; its faith determined the essence of his theology. (9) From the beginning of his role as the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott to his tragic death in Memphis, Tennessee, the heart of his beliefs revolved around the ideas of black religious thought - love, justice, liberation, hope and redemptive suffering. The meaning of each is mutually dependent on the others. Though love may be appropriately placed at the centre of his thought, he interpreted it in the light of justice for the poor, liberation for all, and the certain hope that God has not left this world in the hands of evil men.

Martin King took the American democratic tradition of Freedom and combined it with the biblical tradition of justice for the poor, liberation for all, and the certain hope that God has not left this world in the hands of evil men.

Martin King took the American democratic tradition of freedom and combined it with the biblical tradition of justice and liberation as found in the Exodus and the prophets. Then he integrated both traditions with the New Testaments idea of love and suffering as disclosed in Jesus' cross and from all three, King developed a theology that was effective in challenging all Americans to create the beloved community in which all persons are equal. While it was the Gandhian method of nonviolence that provided the strategy for achieving justice, it was, as King said, the black church faith that empowered him to struggle. As a Christian whose faith was derived from the cross of Jesus, Martin King believed that there could be no true liberation without suffering. Through nonviolent suffering, he contended blacks would not only liberate themselves from the necessity of bitterness and feeling of inferiority toward whites, but would also prick the conscience of whites and liberate them from a feeling of superiority. The mutual liberation of blacks and whites lays the foundation for both to work together toward the creation of an entirely new world.

It was the faith of the black church that empowered King to take a stand against the war in Vietnam. Because the civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Bill (1965) did not affect significantly the life-chances of the poor, and because of the failure of President Johnson's War on Poverty, King became convinced that his dream of 1963 had been turned into a nightmare. (10) Gradually he began to see the connections between the failure of the war on poverty and the expenditures for the war in Vietnam. In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and against the advice of many of his closest associates in black and white communities, King stood before a capacity crowd at Riverside Church and condemned America as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." (11) He proclaimed God's judgement against America and insisted that God would break the backbone of U.S. power if this nation did not bring justice to the poor and peace to the world. Vicious criticisms came from blacks and whites in government, civil rights groups, media and the nation generally as he proclaimed God's righteous indignation against the three great evils of our time - war racism and poverty.

During the severe crises of 1966-68, King turned to the faith of his own religious heritage. It was the eschatological hope, derived from his slave grandparents and mediated through the black church, that sustained him in the midst of grief and disappointment. This hope also empowered him to "master [his] fears" of death and to "stand by the best in an evil time." (12) In a sermon, reached at Ebenezer Baptist Church, he addressed the problem of violence at home and abroad.

> I've decided what I'm going to do; I aint going to kill nobody ... in Mississippi ... and... in Vietnam, and I ain't going to study war no more. And you know what? I don' care who doesn't like what I say about it. I don't care who criticizes me in editorial; I don't care what white person or Negro criticizes me. I'm going to stick with the best ... Every now and then we sing about it: 'If you are right, God will fight your battle.' I'm going to stick by the best during these evil times. (13)

It was not easy for King to "stand by the best", because he often stood alone. But he firmly believed that the God of black faith had said to him:"Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you, even until the end of the world." (14)
Martin King combined the exodus-liberation and cross-love themes with the message of hope found in the resurrection of Jesus. Hope for him was derived from his belief in the righteousness of God as defined by his reading of the Bible through the eyes of his slave fore-parents. The result was the most powerful expression in black history of the essential themes of black religious thought from the integrationist viewpoint.

> Centuries ago Jeremiah raised a question, 'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician?' He said it because he saw the good people suffering so often and the evil people prospering. Centuries later our slave fore-parents came along and they too saw the injustices of life and had nothing to look forward to, morning after

> morning, but the rawhide whip of the overseer, long rows of cotton and the sizzling heat; but they did an amazing thing. They looked back across the centuries, and they took Jeremiah's question mark and straightened it into an exclamation point. And they could sing, 'There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.' (15)

Black Power and Black Theology

From the time of its origin in slavery to the present, black religious thought has been faced with the question of whether to advocate integration into American society or separation from it. The majority of the participants in the black churches and the civil rights movement have promoted integration, and they have interpreted justice, liberation, love suffering and hope in light of the goal of creating a society in which blacks and whites can live together in a "beloved community".

While integrationists have emphasized the American side of the double consciousness of African-Americans, there have also been nationalists who rejected any association with the U.S. and instead have turned toward Africa. Nationalists contend that blacks will never be accepted as equals in a white racist church and society. (16). The nationalist perspective on the black struggle for freedom is deeply embedded in the history of black religious thought. Some of its prominent advocates include: Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the A.M.E. Church; Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association; and Malcolm X of the religion of Islam. Black nationalism is centred on blackness, a repudiation of any value in white culture and religion. Nationalists reversed the values of the dominant society by attributing to black history and culture what whites had said about theirs. For example, Bishop Turner claimed that "We have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe that God is a fine looking symmetrical and ornamented white man." (17) Marcus Garvey held a similar view:

> If the white man has the idea of a white God, let him worship his God as he desires -- We negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God -- God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, the one God of all ages. (18)

The most persuasive interpreter of black nationalism during the 1960s was Malcolm X who proclaimed a challenging critique of Martin King's philosophy of integration, nonviolence, and love. Malcolm X who advocated black unity instead of the "beloved community," self-defense in lieu of nonviolence, and self-love in place of turning the other cheek to whites. (19)

Like Turner and Garvey, Malcolm X asserted that God is black, but unlike them he rejected Christianity as the white man's religion. He became a convert initially to Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam and later to the world-wide Islamic community.His critique of Christianity and of American society as white was so persuasive that many blacks followed him into the religion if Islam, and others accepted his criticisms even though they did not become Muslims. Malcolm pushed civil rights activists to the left and caused many black Christians to re-evaluate their interpretation of Christianity.

> Brothers and sisters, the white man has brainwashed us black people to fasten our gaze upon a blond-haired, blue-eyed Jesus! We're worshipping a Jesus that doesn't even <u>look</u> like us. Now, just think of this. The blond-haired, blue-eyed white mass has taught you and me to worship a <u>white</u> Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's his God, the white man's God. The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we <u>die</u> to wait until <u>death,</u> for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we're <u>dead</u>, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars right here on <u>this</u> earth (20)

During the first-half of the 1960's, Martin King's interpretation of justice as equality with whites, liberation as integration, and love as non-violence dominated the thinking of the black religious community. However after the riot in Watts (Los Angeles), August 1965, some black clergy began to take another look at Malcolm's philosophy, especially in regard to his criticisms of Christianity and American society. Malcolm X's contention that America was a nightmare and not a dream began to ring true to many black clergy as they watched their communities go up in flames as young blacks shouted in Jubilation, "burn, baby, burn."

It was during the James Meredith "march against fear" in Mississippi (June 1966, after Malcolm' assassination, February 1965) that some black clergy began to question openly Martin King's philosophy of love, integration, and nonviolence. When Stokely Carmichael proclaimed "black power", it sounded like the voice of Malcolm X. Though committed to the Christian gospel, black clergy found themselves moving slowly from integration to separation, from Martin King to Malcolm X.

The rise of black power created a decisive turning point in black religious thought. Black power forced black clergy to raise the theological question about the relation between black faith and white religion. Although blacks have always recognized the ethical heresy of white christians, they have not always extended it to Euro-American theology. With its accent on the cultural heritage of Africa and political liberation "by any means necessary" black power shook black clergy out of their theological complacency.

Separating themselves from Martin Luther King's absolute commitment to nonviolence, a small group of black clergy, mostly from the North, addressed the black power movement positively and critically. Like King and unlike black power advocates, black clergy were determined to remain within the Christian community. This was their dilemma: How could they reconcile Christianity and black power, Martin King and Malcolm X.

Under the influence of Malcolm X and the political philosophy of black power, many black theologians began to advocate the necessity for the development of a black theology, and they rejected the dominant theologies of Europe and North America as heretical. For the first time in the history of black religious thought, black clergy and theologians began to recognize the need for a completely new starting point in theology, and they insisted that it must be defined by people at the bottom and not at the top of the socio-economic ladder. To accomplish this task, black theologians focussed on god's liberation of the poor as the central message of the gospel. (21)

To explicate the theological significance of the liberation motif, black theologians began to re-read the Bible through the eyes of their slave grandparents and started to speak of God's solidarity with the wretched of the earth. As the political liberation of the poor emerged as the dominant motif, justice suffering, love and hope were re-interpreted in its light. For the biblical meaning of liberation, black theologians turned to the Exodus , while the message of the prophets provided the theological content for the theme of justice. The gospel story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus served as the biblical foundation for a re-interpretation of love, suffering, and hope in the context of the black struggle for liberation and justice.

As black theologians have re-read the Bible in the light of the struggle of the oppressed, the idea of the "suffering God" has become important in our theological perspective. Our theological imagination has been stirred by Jurgen Moltmann's writings about the "Crucified God" as well as Luther's distinction between the "theology of glory" and the "theology of the Cross". But it has been the actual suffering of the oppressed in black and other Third World communities that has been decisive in our reflections on the cross of Jesus Christ. As Gustavo Gutierrez has said: "We cannot speak of the death of Jesus until we speak of the real death of people." For in the deaths of the poor of the world is found the suffering and even the death of God. The political implications of Luther's insight on this point seemed to have been greatly distorted with his unfortunate emphasis on the two kingdoms.

Many modern-day Lutheran scholars are often even worse, because they turn the cross of Jesus into a theological idea completely unrelated to the concrete historical struggles of the oppressed for freedom. For many Lutheran scholars, the theology of the cross is a theological concept to be contrasted with philosophical and metaphysical speculations. It is a way of making a distinction, between faith and reason, justification by faith through grace and justification by the works of reason. But when the poor of the North American and Third World read the passion story of the cross, they do not view it as a theological idea but as God's suffering solidarity with the victims of the world. Jesus' cross is God's solidarity with the poor, experiencing their pain and suffering. Black slaves expressed this theological point in the song:

> They nail my Jesus down, They put him on the crown of thorns, O see my Jesus hangin' high! He look so pale an' bleed so free: O don't you think it was a shame, He hung three hours in dreadful pain?

Modern-day black theologians make a similar point when they say that "God is back" and that "Jesus is the Oppressed One." Our rejection of European metaphysical speculations and our acceptance of an apparently crude anthropomorphic way of speaking of God are black theologians' way of concretizing Paul's saying that "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring together to nothing the things that are" (I Cor. 1:27-28 RSV).

Another characteristic of black theology is its de-emphasis, though not complete rejection, of the western theological tradition and its affirmation of black history and culture. If the suffering of God is revealed in the suffering of the oppressed, then it follows that theology cannot achieve its Christian identity apart from a systematic and critical reflection upon the history and culture of the victims of oppression. When this theological insight impressed itself upon our consciousness, we black theologians began to

realize that we have been miseducated. In fact, European and North American theologians have stifled the indigenous development of the theological perspectives of blacks by teaching us that our own cultural traditions are not appropriate sources for an interpretation of the christian gospel. Europeans and white North Americans taught us that the western theological tradition as defined by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher is the essential source for a knowledge of the Christian past. But when black theologians began to concentrate on black culture and history, we realized that our own historical and cultural traditions are far more important for an analysis of the gospel in the struggle of freedom than are the western traditions which participated in our enslavement. We now know that the people responsible for or indifferent to the oppression of blacks are not likely to provide the theological resources for our liberation. If oppressed peoples are to be liberated, they must themselves create the means for it to happen.

The focus on black culture in the light of the black liberation struggle has led to an emphasis upon praxis as the context out of which Christian theology develops. To know the truth is to do the truth, that is, to make happen in history what is confessed in church. 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.

Because black theology is to be created only in the struggles of the poor, we have adopted social analysis, especially of racism, and more recently of classism and sexism, as a critical component of its methodology. How can we participate in the liberation of the poor from poverty if we do not know who die poor are and why they live in poverty? Social analysis is a tool that helps us to know why the social, economic and political orders are arranged as they are. It enables us to know not only who benefits from the present status quo, but what must be done to change it.

In our struggle to make a new start in theology, we discovered to our surprise and much satisfaction, that theologians in Asia, Africa,

and Latin America were making similar efforts in their contexts. (22) The same was true among other ethnic minorities in the U.S. and among women in all groups. (23) Black theology has been challenged to address the issues of sexism (24) and classism in a global context, and we have challenged them, especially Latin Americans and feminist theologians of the dominant culture, to address racism. The focus on liberation has been reinforced and deepened. What many of us now know is that a turning point has been made in the theologies of black and Third World communities as radical as were Luther, Schleiermacher, and Barth in the 16th 19th and 20th centuries in Europe. Let us hope that the revolution in liberation theology will change not only how we think about God, but more importantly what we do in this world so that the victims might make a future that is defined by freedom and justice and not slavery and oppression.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, The souls of Black Folk (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier Book, 1968), pp. 16-17. Originally published 1903.
2. A concise statement of the major themes in black religious thought, during and following slavery, is found in a 1902 sermon of an ex-slave and Princeton Theological Seminary graduate, Francis J. Grimke: "God is not dead, -- nor is he an indifferent onlooker at what is going on in this world. One day He will make restitution for blood; He will call the oppressors to account. Justice may sleep, but it never dies. The individual, race, or nation which does wrong, which sets at defiance God's great law, especially God's great law of love, of brotherhood, will be sure, sooner or later, to pay the penalty. We reap as we sow. With that measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again". (See C.G. Woodson (ed.), The Works of Francis J Grime, I (1942), p. 354) Grimke's statement was undoubtedly influenced by the slave song, "You shall reap yes what you sow."
3. For an interpretation of the slaves' idea of justice and liberation, see my The Spirituals and the Blues (New York: Seabury, 1972). See also Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Vincent Harding, There is A River (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981); and Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

Books, rev. 1983).
4. For a fuller discussion of he idea of heaven in slave religion, see my The Spirituals and the Blues, chapter 5. See also John Lovell, Jr Black Song (New York: MacMillan, 1972), especially pp. 310-312, 315-374.
5. Works of Grimke, p. 354.
6. Ibid.
7. For an interpretation of these texts see Albert J. Raboteau, "Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch Forth Her Hands': Black Destiny in Nineteenth-Century America," The University Lecture in Religion at Arizona State University (January 27, 1983); The Spirituals and the Blues, chapter 3.
8. Adam C. Powell Jr., Marching Blacks (New York: Dial Press, 1945; rev. 1973), p. 194.
9. The importance of the black religious tradition for King's theology has not received the attention that it deserves of scholars. See my "Martin Luther King, Jr., Black Theology - Black Church," Theology Today, January 1984. See also the important essay of Lewis V Baldwin, "Martin Luther King, Jr., The Black Church and the Black Messianic Vision," Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Centre (forthcoming).David Garrow's definitive biography on Martin King is soon to be published under the title of Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership conference, 1955-1958. It will show the important role of the black church tradition in his life and thought.
10. On many occasions, Martin King talked about his dream of 1963 being turned into a nightmare. The most informative reference in this regard is his "Christmas Sermon on Peace," delivered in Ebenezer Baptist Church at Atlanta, December 24, 1956. In that sermon, he said: "In 1963 ... in Washington, D.C ... I tried to talk to the nation about a dream that I had had, and I must confess ... that not long after talking about that dream I started seeing it turn into a nightmare, just a few weeks after I had talked about it. It was when four beautiful ... Negro girls were murdered in a church in Birmingham, Alabama. I watched that dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negroes' problem of poverty. I saw that dream turn into a

nightmare as I watched my black brothers and sisters in the midst of anger and understandable outrage ... turn to misguided riots to try to solve that problem. I saw that dream turn into a nightmare as I watched the war in Vietnam escalating, and as I saw so-called military advisers, 16,000 strong, turn into fighting soldiers until today over 500,000 American boys are fighting on Asian soil. Yes, I am personally the victim of deferred dreams, of blasted hopes..." (See King, The Trumpet of Conscience (New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 75-76) See also similar comments at an Operation Breadbasket Meeting, Chicago Theological Seminary (March 25, 1967) and also during his appearance on Arlene Francis Show (June 19, 1967). (King Centre Archives)

11. See Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam". a pamphlet published by Clergy and Laity Concerned, 1982 reprint of his April 4, 1967 speech at Riverside Church in New York City, p. 2.

12. The most reliable sources for Martin King's theology are the unpublished sermons at the King Centre Archives. They include: "A Knock at midnight," All Saints Community Church, Los Angeles, Ca. (June 25, 1967); "Standing By The Best In An Evil Time", Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga. (Aug. 6, 1967); "Thou Fool," Mount Pisgah Baptist Church, Chicago, Ill. (Aug. 27, 1967); "Mastering our Fears," Ebenezer (Sept 10, 1967).

13. "Standing By The Best In An Evil Time," p.7.

14. "Thou Fool," p. 14. This quotation is taken from King's account of his "conversion experience", that is, his existential appropriation of the faith he was taught during his childhood. There is no doubt that the "kitchen experience," as it might be called, was the turning point in King theological development. During the early stages of the Montgomery bus boycott, the constant threats of death to him and his family (about 40 telephone calls per day) eventually caused him to admit that he was "weak,... faltering, (and) ... losing (his) courage." In that crisis moment when the fear of death engulfed him, he said: "I pulled back on the theology and philosophy that I had just studied in the universities, trying to give philosophical and theological reasons for the existence and reality of sin and evil, but the answer didn't quite come there" (p.13). The answer came in his dependence on the God of black faith. "Don't be a fool," he said in his climactic conclusion to this sermon. "Recognize your dependence on God. As the days become dark, and the nights become dreary, realize that there is a God, who rules above. And

so I'm not worried about tomorrow. I get weary every now and then, the future looks difficult and dim, but I'm not worried ultimately because I have faith in God." (p. 14).

15. This is an often used conclusion of many of King's sermons. This quotation is taken from "Thou Fool."

16. For an excellent introduction to black nationalism, see Alphonso Pinkey, Red, Black, and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). See also John H. Bracy, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (eds.) Black Nationalism in America (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.

17. Edwin S. Redkey (ed.), Respect Black: The Writings and Speeches of Henry McNeal Turner (New York: Arno Press, 1971), p. 176.

18. Amy Jacques-Garvey (ed.) Philosophy and Opinions of marcus Garvey, Two Volumes in One (New York: Arno Press, 1968), p.44

19. The best introduction to Malcolm X's philosophy is still The Autobiography of Malcolm X, with the assistance of Alex Haley (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

20. Ibid, p. 222.

21. For an account of the origin of black theology, see my For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984). See also Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone (eds.) Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979 Maryknoll NY: Orbis 1979). The best narrative history of black theology by one of its creators is Gayraud S. Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, rev. 1983). My Black Theology And Black Power (New York: Seabury, 1969) and A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970) were the earliest published books on black theology. They were followed by J. Deotis Roberts, Liberation and reconciliation: A Black Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) and Major Jones, Black Awareness: A Theology of Hope. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971.

22. For an account of black theologians' dialogue with theologians in Africa via and Latin America, see Black Theology: A Documentary History, pp. 445-608; For My People, pp. 140-156. See also my essays in the volumes that have been published from the conferences of the ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians: " A Black American Perspective on the Future of

African Theology" in Sergio Torres and Kofi Appiah-Kubi (eds.) African Theology en Route (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979); A Black American Perspective on the Search for Full Humanity" in Virginia Fabella (ed.) _Doing Theology in a Divided World (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1985)

23. The Dialogue between black theology and other ethnic theologies in the U.S. has taken place in the context of the Theology in the Americas. For an interpretation of this dialogue, see For My People, chapter vii; see also Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (eds.), Theology in the Americas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1976) and Cornel West, Caridad Guidote, and Margaret Oakley (eds.) Theology in the Americas: Detroit II Conference Papers (Maryknoll NY: Orbis-Probe, 1982).

24. See especially Black Theology: A Documentary history, pp. 363-442, J. Cone, My Soul Looks Back (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); My People, chapter vi.