

# **Discourse**

**Learning and Teaching in  
Philosophical and  
Religious Studies**

# Discourse:

## Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies

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# Discourse:

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## Editorial—Supporting learning and teaching in difficult times

Welcome to the sixteenth issue of *Discourse*.

In troubled economic times higher education can quickly become a target for politically charged debate. It could, of course, be argued that this has always been the case, but when budgets are tightened and the role and value of a university education is placed under intense scrutiny many underlying assumptions about political and educational values are exposed in public and private debate. A few days before writing this editorial higher education was moved in the UK governmental hierarchy to lie within the Department for Business and Skills. It is not clear what this will mean for the wider appreciation of our disciplines and what changes will result. However, the Subject Centre for PRS, as part of the Higher Education Academy, has a role in informing policy and we intend to ensure that the disciplines we support are given the best representation in national discussions on funding, research, learning and teaching and the connections between these.

As the humanities, no less than any other area of higher education, come under pressure in competition for scarce resources, it is vital that the quality of student education remains a central concern for the academy. The UK has an internationally high standard to maintain. It has always been the aim of the Subject Centre to encourage and promote diversity, quality and innovation in subject-specific education and we will continue to do so, giving the national debate evidence that philosophy, theology, religious studies and history and philosophy of science provide students with an education that is world class. Although they are 'small' disciplines in terms of numbers their significance and value is huge because they give individuals and society the means to examine, question and form ideas about the most fundamental of issues.

In this issue we have focused on the papers from a conference on Black Theology. This is a rapidly growing and diverse area within theology itself. The enthusiasm of the

conference participants was testimony to the dynamism of the debates taking place across this field. The exploration of apparent minority concerns informs the assumptions that are made across the whole of theology and this can be seen from all the papers we publish here. We are particularly pleased to include an interview with Anthony Reddie alongside his informed ideas on the nature of Black Theology teaching. We anticipate that the interest in these papers will be wide and we encourage feedback on these.

All good wishes for the summer.

David Mossley  
Editor

**david@prs.heacademy.ac.uk**

## **News and Information**

## The Higher Education Academy

**T**he Higher Education Academy's mission is to help institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students.

Its aims and objectives are:

1. To be an authoritative and independent voice on policies that influence student learning experiences;
2. To support institutions in their strategies for improving the student learning experience;
3. To lead, support and inform the professional development and recognition of staff in higher education;
4. To promote good practice in all aspects of support for the student learning experience;
5. To lead the development of research and evaluation to improve the quality of the student learning experience;
6. To be a responsive, efficient and accountable organisation.

**<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>**

## The Subject Network

The Subject Network is a network of 24 subject centres based in higher education institutions throughout the UK. It is funded by the four HE funding bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of successful practice in all subject disciplines.

# The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

The Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies is based at the University of Leeds and at a partner site at the University of Wales, Lampeter and covers the disciplines of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science, History of Science (including the History of Medicine and Technology), Theology, and Religious Studies.

## Mission statement

Supporting teachers and learners in Philosophical and Religious Studies in higher education in the UK.

## Strategic Aims

- To work in collaboration with PRS colleagues and students in order to be effective advocates for our disciplines in the development of national and regional policies.
- To fund and take part in projects and events that support the development and recognition of good teaching practice in PRS.
- To participate in relevant research developments.
- To provide a repository of relevant knowledge and expertise within our subject communities.
- To maintain a well managed, flexible and properly structured subject centre staffed by appropriately qualified people with academic and creative strengths.

Visit our website at <http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk>  
or contact us directly:

## **Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies**

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Leeds

Leeds LS2 9JT

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## Departmental Visits and Workshops

### Departmental visits and requests

We have visited almost all of the departments in our subject communities—however, we are always happy to come and see you to gather information about existing effective practice and to discover the most pressing issues for your department and for individual lecturers and tutors. Regular contact with the academic communities we serve is a vital part of our mission, as it enables us to ensure that we meet your needs in the best ways possible. If you would like a subject expert in your discipline to come to your department, then please get in touch, or feel free to contact us at any time to discuss matters to do with learning and teaching.

### Departmental workshops

With learning and teaching issues of central importance to the future of higher education in university strategies and government policies, it is essential for individual departments and academics to be able to articulate the values that underpin their teaching methods, and to show how these are developed reflectively. Students are taking an ever growing interest in the ways they are taught and the benefits they gain from education at university. Furthermore, the scholarship of teaching attracts more research funding than ever before into departments.

The Subject Centre for PRS runs workshops to facilitate reflection on these issues. These are offered free of charge, and can be tailored to the specific needs of your department.

The Subject Centre has recently published a booklet detailing the workshops we have developed and successfully run for philosophers, called *Thinking About Teaching Philosophy*. If you would like a copy of this, or have any other ideas of work we could do with your department, please get in touch. The list of workshops is also available online at:

**<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/events/workshops.html>**

We are in the process of developing a similar booklet for theology and religious studies and related disciplines, and if you have any ideas for TRS workshops that would be useful to you then please contact us.

# HumBox, JISC and the HEA Open Educational Resources Programme

Funding for a project exploring the use and repurposing of education resources in the humanities has been won by the Subject Centre for PRS in conjunction with three other Subject Centres—Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, English and History.

The overall programme was announced last December:

Between April 2009 and April 2010, JISC and the Higher Education Academy are supporting pilot projects and activities that support the open release of learning resources; for free use and repurposing worldwide. This pilot programme is intended to inform a larger programme covering a significant portion of the HE Sector. (JISC)

David Sadler, Higher Education Academy Director of Networks said,

A positive student experience depends on having access to resources. Students and academics will benefit from this move to make more content available. The Higher Education Academy will be taking the lead on subject-based pilots, with consortia of departments, subject associations, professional or statutory bodies being led by our relevant Subject Centres.

The HumBox project was proposed and was successful in receiving funding because the humanities offer rich opportunities for the sharing of online resources both within and across disciplines. Individual disciplines within the humanities have the capacity to repurpose materials from cognate subject areas for differing teaching and learning contexts.

The HumBox project will address the lack of shared and accessible resources in the humanities by collecting a broad range of diverse digital learning resources which provide both a wide subject coverage and varied formats. It will also address the lack of an embedded culture of sharing across the humanities disciplines with an active programme of education, awareness raising, peer review and dissemination. Central to these activities will be the provision of a community

repository for the humanities (adapted from an existing repository developed for the language teaching community) which will raise the status, accessibility and shared ownership of open educational resources in the community as a whole.

Further information is available from the PRS and JISC websites:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/oer>

<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/oer>

## Projects funded by the Subject Centre for PRS

There are currently 13 projects running in departments across the UK. Further details of all the projects below, and details of funding available and awarded, can be found on our website at:

<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/grants/>

### **Abstracta in Concreta: engaging museum collections in PRS research**

*Dr Victoria Harrison and Dr Philip Tonner*

*Department of Philosophy, University of Glasgow*

Provision of a one day seminar for PRS research students with the tools to engage critically with museum collections.

### **British Postgraduate Philosophy Association (BPPA) Masterclass Series: training and continuation**

*Bob Clark and Rachael Wiseman*

*Department of Philosophy, University of York*

Project to institute a framework for the ongoing relocation of organizational responsibilities for the BPPA Masterclass.

### **Developing active and autonomous learning among philosophy students**

*Dr Keith Crome*

*Department of Politics and Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University*

Project to examine the experiences of first year philosophy students in terms of developing autonomous learning skills.

## **Developing advanced research methods training in the study of religion in London and the South-East**

*Prof. Gordon Lynch*

*Centre for Religion and Contemporary Society, Birkbeck, University of London*

Creation of a new postgraduate training network for students working in the field of the study of lived religion across a range of academic disciplines.

## **Helping to bridge the gap? Philosophy**

*Dr Derek Matravers*

*Department of Philosophy, Open University*

The project is to run a pilot, with eight teachers of philosophy at A-level, to see if the Open University's open access philosophy material can be used to bridge the gap between secondary and higher education.

## **Helping to bridge the gap? TRS**

*Dr Marion Bowman*

*Department of Religious Studies, Open University*

This pilot project aims, through creative engagement with 'A' level RE teachers, to use Open University open access RS material to help bridge the gap between secondary education and higher education.

## **Learning styles, learning outcomes and student retention**

*Prof. Leslie Francis*

*Institute of Education, University of Warwick*

Project evaluating the experiences of students on a Certificate of Higher Education course in theology, against a theoretical background concerned with learning styles.

## **Midlands philosophy research training network**

*Dr Mark Addis and Prof. Helen Beebe*

*Faculty of Law, Humanities, Development and Society, Birmingham City University*

A regional network to support research 'training' and professional development for doctoral students in philosophy in five participating departments—Birmingham, Birmingham City, Keele, Staffordshire and Warwick.

### **Philosophical theory and contemporary relevance**

*Dr David Rose*

*Philosophical Studies, University of Newcastle upon Tyne*

Investigation of an innovative learning methodology which develops students' reflective self-awareness of the core, critical skills of philosophical thought.

### **Postgraduate students in health sciences studying philosophy**

*Dr Stephen Timmons*

*School of Nursing, University of Nottingham*

Continuation of existing project to build e-learning resources for philosophy postgraduates in the School of Nursing.

### **Theological texts reading group**

*Dr Dave Clough*

*Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Chester*

A new seminar for TRS students in institutions in the North West of England focussed on developing skills in reading and engaging with theological texts.

### **Wot u @ uni 4?**

*Prof John Lippitt and Dr Brendan Larvor*

*Department of Humanities, University of Hertfordshire*

Project investigating the understanding of higher education held by beginning undergraduate students in philosophy.

## **e-Learning edition of *Discourse* available now online**

A special online edition of *Discourse* has been made available, showcasing the outcomes of the 2007-8 PRS e-learning project and the conference 'e-Learning in Dialogue' which took place in May 2008:

**[http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/discourse/8\\_3.html](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/discourse/8_3.html)**

# A level above? Progression to Undergraduate Studies in Philosophy Conference

July 2nd-3rd 2009

St Anne's College, Oxford

This conference will provide an opportunity for academics, school teachers, exam boards and policy-makers to consider ways to enhance students' progression in philosophical education, with a particular focus on the transition from school or further education (including A Level, Highers, International Baccalaureate and Access courses) to undergraduate level study of Philosophy in the UK.

A lively two day programme of papers, workshops and panel discussions is planned, addressing a diverse range of issues pertaining to transition and progression in philosophy.

Full details of the conference can be found at:

**<http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/view.html/prsevents/420>**

Please look out for conference proceedings in a future edition of *Discourse*.



# *Philosophical Writings*

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A Journal for Postgraduates and New Academics

## ***Who reads *Philosophical Writings*?***

Philosophers with an interest in new and stimulating research. With an international subscription list our audience is large.

## ***Who publishes in *Philosophical Writings*?***

Our aim is always to publish the work of postgraduate students and new academics. But we will consider any article of a sufficiently good quality.

## ***What is the standard of work?***

Because *Philosophical Writings* draws from an international pool of philosophers all work must be of a very high standard.

## ***Who edits the journal?***

The journal is produced by the University of Durham with an international editorial board.

## ***Why subscribe?***

To keep up to date with the best work being produced by postgraduates and new academics.

## ***Why should I submit work?***

If you are a postgraduate philosopher or a new academic then you are working at a high standard. We want to ensure that your ideas are heard by others. It is our aim to encourage future generations of philosophers.

For more information please look at our website:

**<http://www.dur.ac.uk/philosophical.writings/>**

Or email:

**[philosophical.writings@durham.ac.uk](mailto:philosophical.writings@durham.ac.uk)**

Philosophical Writings, Department of Philosophy, 50 Old Elvet, Durham,  
DH1 3HN, Tel: 0191 334 6550, Fax: 0191 334 6551

## **Information articles**



# Supporting Philosophical and Religious Studies:

Striving to Deliver High Quality Resources to the UK Academic and Research Community

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**Brian Mitchell**

JISC Collections

**J**ISC Collections was established by the UK higher and further education funding councils in 2006 to negotiate at a national level with publishers and owners of digital content on behalf of the academic and research community.

Originally operating within the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), JISC Collections is now a limited company that mutually trades with its members—all higher and further education institutions, and research councils that receive direct funding from the UK higher and further education funding councils.

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A JISC-funded service, JISC Collections also provides a service for an expanding range of affiliate members—organisations in the UK and overseas which qualify for membership through their engagement in life-long learning, for example schools and museums.

This article will:

- outline the licensing activities which JISC Collections undertakes on behalf of universities, colleges and research councils in the UK.
- provide an overview of the portfolio of online resources available for philosophical and religious studies.
- illustrate how these online resources can be used to enrich education and research.

## Introduction to what JISC Collections does

To help teaching staff, researchers and students enjoy the full benefits of e-learning and e-research, JISC Collections licences an extensive collection of high-quality online resources. JISC Collections' mission is to support UK education and research by delivering affordable, relevant and sustainable online content.

JISC Collections provides its members with a catalogue of free and subscription-based online resources such as journals, e-books, full text databases, digital images, historical records, online film, reference resources and geospatial data. Many of these resources are available through your institutional library/learning resource centre. Core to the service provided by JISC Collections is the quality evaluation of online resources. JISC Collections always strives to widen accessibility to high quality online resources, to save its members time and money and to evolve licensing in line with members' needs and the digital environment.

## Our portfolio of resources available for philosophical and religious studies

The JISC Collections UK National Academic Archive includes an expanding range of specially selected archive resources which are available in perpetuity to UK higher and further education institutions and research councils. This important programme is part of JISC Collections' ongoing commitment to widening access to essential material across the subject spectrum. The majority of these archives are available completely free of charge to institutions.

The UK National Academic Archive offers unrivalled online access to a vast range of journals, historical map data, newspapers, periodicals, and books published between 1473 and 2006.

Many of the original works included in the archive resources are very rare and/or fragile. However, an unlimited number of users at institutions across the UK can now access these essential materials, alongside a range of other resources, simultaneously—from wherever they are, and whenever is convenient.

22 digital archives are currently available in this initiative, with six new archives being added to the UK National Academic Archive since March 2008. The following new archives will be of interest to those teaching and researching in philosophical and religious studies:

- **Brill Journal Archive Online**—this includes over 50,000 articles from more than 80 journals published by Brill before 2000. The archive is available free of charge to subscribing institutions.
- **British Periodicals Collections I and II**—these collections comprise nearly 6.1 million pages from over 460 journals published from 1681 to 1939. These collections are available free of charge to subscribing institutions.
- **The Burney Collection**—this is a collection of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century newspapers published in England, Ireland and

Scotland that also includes a selection of early papers from British colonies in the Americas and Asia. The resource is available free of charge to subscribing institutions.

- **Periodicals Archive Online: JISC Collections Selection**—this archive provides access to over 288,000 articles from a subset of 80 full-text journal backfiles published between 1891 and 2000, from the Periodicals Archive Online collection. The resource is available free of charge to subscribing institutions.

Other archives that form our UK National Academic Archive, which will be of interest to philosophical and religious studies, include:

- **Early English Books Online (EEBO)**—the content has been purchased by JISC in perpetuity, although a fee applies for access via the publisher’s server.
- **Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)**—the content has been purchased by JISC in perpetuity, although a fee applies for access via the publisher’s server.
- **Oxford Journals Archive**—JISC’s purchase of the content on behalf of the UK academic community means that institutions can benefit from free access until at least July 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, via the publisher’s server.
- **19<sup>th</sup> Century UK Periodicals Online, Series 1**—the content has been purchased by JISC Collections in perpetuity, although a fee applies for access via the publisher’s server.
- **18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Century House of Commons Parliamentary Papers**—over 300 years of official parliamentary records can now be cross-searched on a single platform. Funding from JISC as part of its Digitisation Programme for the 18th Century Parliamentary Papers and JISC Collections’ purchase of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century House of Commons

Parliamentary Papers means that institutions can benefit from free access to these resources.

To find out more about the JISC Collections UK National Academic Archive, please visit <http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/archives>.

### Other free-of-charge online resources

JISC and JISC Collections fund a number of other agreements which are available free of charge to the JISC community.

- **Film & Sound Online**—this database contains the Logic Lane series of films which cover philosophy.
- **Jorum**—this is a free online repository service for teaching and support staff in UK further and higher education institutions, helping to build a community for the sharing, reuse and repurposing of learning and teaching materials.
- **NewsFilm Online**—this is a collection of over 3,000 hours of television news and cinema newsreels taken from the ITN/Reuters archive spanning the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Funded by JISC, as part of its Digitisation Programme, content is free to higher and further education subscribers until July 2012.
- **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**—institutions have free access to authoritative peer-reviewed material to support those studying philosophy.

### Subscription-based online resources

Here are some of the resources which JISC Collections has licensed on behalf of the UK academic community that are relevant for philosophical and religious studies.

- **Academic OneFile**—a journal database designed to fit the specific needs of an academic library by providing students, academic staff and researchers with mostly peer-reviewed, full-text articles with minimal embargo periods.

- **ACLS Humanities E-Book**—a fully cross-searchable and growing collection of over 2,200 high quality full-text books in the humanities, which are recommended and reviewed by humanities scholars, based on their continuing relevance to teaching and research.
- **Cambridge Companions Online**—this is the electronic version of the Cambridge Companions series.
- **Credo Reference**—this is an online reference service providing access to the full-text of dictionaries, bilinguals, thesauri, encyclopaedias, quotations and atlases, plus a wide range of subject-specific scholarly titles.
- **Education Image Gallery**—this resource is a selection of 50,000 copyright-cleared images from the renowned Getty Images® collections. By 2010 a further 10,000 images will be added to the collection.
- **Electronic Enlightenment**—this resource offers access to the web of correspondence between the greatest thinkers and writers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their families and friends, bankers and booksellers, patrons and publishers. Users can cross-search letters from nearly 6,000 writers, scientists, philosophers, politicians, political thinkers and others including Bentham, Hume, Kant and Voltaire.
- **JSTOR**—this is a digital archive collection of over 770 core multidisciplinary and discipline specific scholarly journals, some of which date back as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- **The Literary Encyclopedia**—this reference work provides detailed profiles of author, texts, and literary topics, primarily of literature originally written in English. The Encyclopedia lists more than 6,400 writers, philosophers and other persons of note.
- **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography**—this resource enables users to explore the lives of over 55,000 people

worldwide who have shaped British history over the last 2,400 years.

- **Oxford Islamic Studies Online**—this resource promotes accurate and informed understanding of the Islamic world. It contains more than 3,000 reference articles, and covers subjects such as global Islamic history, people, politics, faith, concepts, tenets and practices, and culture.
- **Oxford Reference Online**—the Premium Collection combines rich and scholarly resources offered by acclaimed titles in the Oxford Companions series. It also offers a wide range of additional material such as maps, illustrations and timelines.
- **Oxford Scholarship Online**—this is a cross-searchable library containing the full text of over 2,500 Oxford books, which includes titles on philosophy and religion.
- **Scran**—this extensive educational image archive contains over 360,000 high quality images, video clips, sound files and over 3,000 packs to support research, learning and teaching across the curriculum.
- **Taylor & Francis Online eBook Library**—the Library includes some 22,000 titles from the Taylor & Francis book publishing programme.

### Online journal agreements—NESLi2

NESLi2 is the UK's national initiative for facilitating access to online journals on behalf of the higher and further education and research communities. Over 7,000 online journals are now available. NESLi2 is an 'opt-in' initiative, so libraries can review each of the agreements that JISC Collections' appointed Negotiation Agent has negotiated and decide which ones they wish to join. The following NESLi2 agreements for 2009 will be of interest to philosophical and religious studies:

- Cambridge University Press

- Project MUSE
- Oxford University Press
- SAGE Publications
- Springer-Science and Business Media
- Wiley-Blackwell

### **Online journal agreements—NESLi2 SMP**

The NELi2 Small and Medium Publishers programme extends the NESLi2 initiative to include online journals from small and medium sized publishers. NESLi2 SMP seeks to offer a broader range of journals from more publishers and facilitate access for staff, students and researchers to a broader range of online journals.

The following NESLi2 agreement for 2009 will be of interest to religious studies:

- Berg Publishers—the NESLi2 SMP offer includes the title *Material Religion*.

### **Getting the most out of the online resources which your library/learning resource centre subscribes to**

The basis of all JISC Collections agreements is the JISC Model Licence and the NESLi2 Model Licence in the case of e-journals. The JISC Model License contains provisions which allow students and staff to make effective use of online resources for learning, teaching and research. For example:

- Provisions for unlimited, simultaneous user access, whether working from campus or from home.
- Distance learners also have access to the resources.
- Staff and students of the institution can incorporate extracts from the licensed resources in all types of teaching and learning materials whether electronic or paper. This



includes course packs, PowerPoint presentations, VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), dissertations, project work, etc. The only requirement for such use is usually that the material is properly cited.

- Staff can adapt materials to meet the special needs of students—e.g. in Braille format.
- To support research purposes staff and students can publicly display or present as part of their work at seminars, workshops or conferences.

Further details can be found in our Guide to the JISC Model Licence: [http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/model\\_licence/coll\\_guide\\_jisc-model](http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/model_licence/coll_guide_jisc-model).

## Copyright essentials

### Free interactive copyright tools

JISC Collections has commissioned a number of copyright tools which are designed to help staff at institutions and schools understand copyright issues in the use of online resources.

### Online copyright activity

The Online Copyright Activity tool helps institutions understand copyright issues in the use of online resources.

### JISC CASPER

JISC Collections has been working with 20 projects funded by the JISC e-Learning Programme to explore the future of repurposing and sharing learning materials in education. The Copyright Advice and Support Project for Electronic Resources programme (CASPER) is

providing advice and help on best practice to institutions that are repurposing online content and learning materials—both in terms of their own Intellectual Property but also in clearing third party rights—so that digital content can be used and re-used across the education sector. Our Interactive Copyright Tools help staff make sense of copyright as well as providing resources to manage rights.

Find out more about CASPER at <http://jisc-casper.org>.

## Call for feedback from the academic and research community

JISC Collections is always keen to get feedback from the academic and research community on their experiences of using the online resources which we licence (whether good or bad), and how they are being embedded in teaching, learning and research. This feedback will be used to generate support materials such as case studies, podcasts, vidcasts, showreels and testimonials. If you would like to take part in these activities or if you would like further information, please contact Brian Mitchell at JISC Collections on 020 3006 6004 or [b.mitchell@jisc.ac.uk](mailto:b.mitchell@jisc.ac.uk).

## How to find out more about JISC Collections

For more information on JISC Collections, the resources which we license or any of the issues raised in this article, please visit <http://www.jisc-collections.ac.uk>, or email [collections@jisc.ac.uk](mailto:collections@jisc.ac.uk) with any specific enquiries.



# **Discussion, Reports, Articles and Practical Teaching**

## The *Discourse* Interview

# Dr Anthony Reddie

## Queens Theological Foundation

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**Interviewed by: Natasha Pyne**

Consultant on Black Theology

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies

Continuing our series of interviews with academics with a special interest in teaching issues, Natasha Pyne talked to Anthony Reddie about his route into theology, the relationship between Black theology and mainstream theological study, and his use of innovative teaching methods. The interview was conducted in Birmingham on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

**Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed by *Discourse*. Could we start off with you telling us a bit more about your background, and your career to date?**

I was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire, in a predominantly White working class area, to parents of Jamaican background. My parents

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worked in textiles, they'd been invited to come from the Caribbean to do that, and we went to a Methodist church. As I was growing up, the smaller church we attended closed, and then the church I remember most clearly was the Eastbrook Hall Methodist Mission. It was very White, very middle class, very evangelical, and it was a good experience in some respects, but looking back, perhaps not as good as I had thought of it at the time.

In terms of my influences, it was a mix of Caribbean, Jamaican culture in the home, older Labour socialist politics—my father was a very active trade unionist—and then my Methodist church. I went to secondary school, and did reasonably well, mainly because I was quite a compliant child; I never challenged anything and just put my head down and did my work. I then went to the University of Birmingham to read history, in the mid eighties, and I've been in Birmingham ever since.

The development into being an academic was entirely by accident and not what I had planned at all—apart from anything else, I finished my first degree having been a very poor undergraduate student. I spent more time in the pub than I did in the library, truth be told. I really had no desire to go back and do any further study. Through a circuitous route I found myself involved in community activism. I was a community worker for a number of years, for a variety of organisations, but latterly for the Methodist church in Handsworth, predominantly an African Caribbean and Asian area, and the location of two major rebellions—I wouldn't call them riots. In that guise, as a community worker, I went to Queens College to do some extra training.

Although I'd done history, and mainly religious history, we'd not really talked about Black people, and certainly again when I got into youth and community work, there was very little about Black or Asian people, or if there was it was more from a secular communitarian perspective, rather than a religious perspective. I came to Queens to do a course in Black Religious Studies and met Robert Beckford, who had just been appointed the first tutor in Black theology, here at Queens. He taught an evening class, which I took, and I absolutely fell in love with it, it was the best thing I'd ever done. I suddenly came across books of people I'd never heard of, and I wondered why I'd never done anything like this before. I mean, I remember doing a whole term on St Augustine at university, as an undergraduate, in church history. I

managed to do a 12 week course, involving reading lots of books, and no-one ever mentioned that St. Augustine was actually Black! He was actually African, and this somehow never came up in Church History, it was never looked at from a Black perspective. I'd never heard that he was African and so was Teutullian and so were many of the other Church fathers, and that discovery changed my perspective altogether.

So from that, I abandoned whatever thoughts I'd had of what I was going to do and decided to do a doctorate. I decided to do it in education and theology, rather than solely theology, because it seemed to me that part of the concern I had, particularly looking at Black theology, was why no-one had ever heard of it. In one sense it's a comparatively new discipline, from the late 60s onwards, but in another sense it's not actually that young at all, and I was concerned about the impact that its being ignored was having on ordinary, poor Black people, my Black people, because mainstream theology was not reflecting their struggles. I figured that just doing straight theology was not going to help—I wanted to do something that was also about how you communicate theology, and how you engage with the people that should be at the centre of the discourse. So I did my doctorate at the University of Birmingham, and at the completion of that I got a research fellowship, largely funded by the Methodist Church here, [Queens Theological Foundation] in Black theological studies. That was 1999, and I've been here ever since.

**Thanks. I'm sure this is a question that you often get asked, but for the sake of our readers, what is Black theology?**

As a short answer, Black theology is a theology that grows out of the experiences of Black people, and by Black people I mean predominantly people of African descent, in the African diaspora, as they reflect on their experiences of suffering, marginalisation, oppression and hardship, and try to answer the question, 'who is God and where is God in the midst of this?' Without wanting to be too stereotypical, because there are quite a lot of heterodox people as well, Black theologians tend to be people of Protestant Christian faith. I wouldn't want to make too much of that, but I would say that they are for the most part. Although not exclusively the case, most Black theologians are Christian.

Black theology seeks to ask who God is for us in the light of our

experiences, using a whole number of different sources and tools in order to locate where God is, and what God is doing, in the light of Black suffering and struggle. The Bible, the scriptures, are one source, Black culture is another, as is Black history, which of course really, in the context of the British empire, is all our histories, not just Black history, but in this context history through the lens of those who have often been marginalised and silenced. For example, when I did my first degree, we had a class looking at Africa. We did look at one African writer, when we were talking about Africa, but it was entirely from a European perspective on Africa, as if the people who lived there themselves had nothing to say about their own existence. So Black theology is a re-reading of history, using critiques such as critical race studies, and some use of Marxist analysis in terms of how systems operate. In effect, it's a way of doing theology that involves a certain consciousness of oneself in terms of history, and it's certainly a very ideological way of actually trying to reinterpret the meaning of God. From a Christian perspective certainly it regards the revelation of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of liberation and transformation of individuals and communities as key.

I think the other important thing to say, especially in a British context, is that the term 'Black' doesn't just mean people of African descent—it also means all people who come from minority ethnic groupings, and actually have more in common than in what separates them in terms of their relationship to colonialism, and to British empire. Margaret Thatcher used the term many years ago, 'the enemy within', and there's a sense in which all minorities are the enemies within, so that's one of the things about Black theology that tends to make it different from normative evangelical theologies. For example, in the whole question of the war on terrorism and the way in which there's a particular marginalisation and denigration of Islam and Muslims, I think a Black theology would also want to identify with their plight and say that as a matter of fact, although notionally there's a difference of faith and belief, the reality is how one gets treated within this postcolonial context, and this treatment really makes no differentiation between faith adherence whatsoever. In actual fact, Black people, or Caribbean people if one wants to use those terms, have more in common with marginalised Muslims than they do with White middle class people who actually share the same faith, because our faith has



never given us any concessions within the British empire at any point in the past. That's part of my critique of the way in which some Black evangelicals would say, 'we have to defend Christianity'—I would ask, whose Christianity are we defending? My final comment would be a quote by a good friend Randall Bailey, an African American Hebrew scholar, who remarked, 'When I meet Black Christians who say they are conservatives, my question is, 'What are you conserving?'

**A lot to think about. We have touched on the differences between Black theology in Britain and Black British theology done by Black people – would you like to expand on this? And what do you think about the association of Black theology, or theologies, with the type of liberation theologies arising out of countries such as South Africa?**

The most significant difference, I think, between Black theology (in Britain) and Black British theology (done by Black people) goes back to some of the other comments I made around the sense of the understanding of religion as always having an ideological perspective to it. One of the cons, and I use that word specifically in terms of being conned, is this notion that somehow imperial mission Christianity is perceived as being without ideology—that somehow it's the reflection of the pure word of God. Clearly it is in fact ideological, as to what gets regarded as truth, and then whose truth legitimates particular forms of action, and different activities. Black theology is part of the wider branch of theologies of liberation, and liberation theologies are also clearly ideological in the sense in which they put forward as their starting point the real material issues in history, for instance 'the poor' and 'the marginalised'. So there are parallels between Black theology and other liberation theologies in terms of gender, in terms of class, in terms of sexuality, and disability as well. When one uses one's material experiences as a point of departure, and then asks, in light of our real historical struggles and existence, what then can we say about God, we immediately find ourselves in a position that takes us away from the dominant evangelical hinterland of post-Reformation mission theology. The difference therefore before between that and Black British theology is that Black British theology does not necessarily have an ideological perspective. It can do, and in a sense any theology that

proposes some sense of Black agency and Black humanity is in itself doing something subversive, but that's often at a much more kind of implicit level. I'm not dismissing Black British theology as being without any agency or being without any importance, it's just that I think that part of my critique would be that most Black British theologians would still want to re-read Black experience within the frameworks that mission theology has already given us. Because of this, part of the problem therefore is the fact that when we do talk about Black agency and Black experience, some experiences become more important than others because of the existing framework of the Christianity that Black British Christian theology still wants to work with, which Black theology actually rejects.

I'll give you some examples. I've yet to meet any Black British person of Caribbean roots who would countenance the idea that slavery was a good thing, even though the scriptures, from a non-humanist perspective, will never explicitly tell you that slavery is wrong. So even Black contemporary evangelicals can find ways to try to read round the text where it seems to condone slavery, and say, well of course you have to understand it's about politics, context and so on. So therefore at that point all of us can be implicitly subversive in terms of trying to read against and challenge the text. However, when you then take gender equality as another example, such as where in parallel passages in Ephesians Paul talks about slaves being obedient to their masters, and how they are obedient then to God, and then talks about how wives should be submissive to their husbands, and women to men, it's interesting that even though conservative Black Christians can create a kind of critical analysis by reading against the text regarding slavery, and say, well you have to take Paul in his context, you can't take him literally, when it comes to gender equality, suddenly we have to take Paul literally, because Paul says women should be submissive to men, and male leadership is the only acceptable form of leadership in the Bible. For me, and I guess this is even more contentious, when we look at the similar issues around sexuality, again, if you're a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person, the hermeneutics of reading the text in order to affirm your own selfhood would be exactly the same that enslaved Africans used, and yet, again, there is a sense in which Black British theology at its more conservative end would still want to make that qualitative difference between the two perspectives. The point is, if

you're actually working from the point of view of a theology of liberation, you'd say that all humanity is created in God's image, irrespective of the frameworks that imperial Christianity has given us which make qualitative differences between some people being of God and some people being not of God at all. So therefore when one talks about liberation, it's about liberation of all people, and so all people should be free. It means that we have to condemn and challenge and critique those scriptures that seek to speak against that sense of agency that individual people or groups of people should have. So I think essentially the difference between the two comes down to theological method—I think Black theology as an example of a theology of liberation would take human experience as being important, and we would say that God resides not only within scriptures, which are themselves largely only cultural, social and political constructions of the people of power trying to talk about God. Scriptures only talk about God, rather than being divine nuggets that fell down from the heavens, that God wrote. But that sense in which God resides in equal measure within human experience, as well as within codified authorised forms of scriptures, is an essential difference between Black theology and Black British theology.

**If we could move on to your current work in relation to teaching, having read a couple of your books and heard you speak, it's evident that you use diverse teaching tools and resources, ranging from using autobiography, to historical narrative, to drama and music. Could you say a bit about why you use these resources, and the students' reaction to them?**

I use those for two reasons. One, just from a purely selfish perspective, is that I enjoy using them. My ambition was never to be a theological scholar—my interest was very much in creative writing, and one of the things I would have done had history been different would have been to write stories and plays, and there's a sense in which that's never left me. Part of what I try to do is to incorporate my previous desires and ambitions into my present work, so at one level it's nothing more than very self-indulgent—I like it so let's see if other people will go with it as well. But there's a slightly more strategic side to it, seriously—I think it's about understanding that we have a variety of ways of

learning. Part of the problem with traditional theology is that it is assumed that it is the rational mind only that will help us to make sense of who God is and where God is, and of course that has never been true. If we look at the role of the Church, for example, the Church has been a major sponsor of art, music and drama, because we have to use the whole of our senses in order to engage with the divine, to understand the work of the spirit, to understand spirituality in our embodied sense, and to get the sense of what it is to be a human being. I try to bring that into my teaching, my work, my theology, because I recognise that we all have different ways of tapping into our understanding of ourselves. It is about our engagement with the other, and our engagement with the ultimate reality of the Creator. So part of it is trying to tap into different ways of knowing.

I think all good theology requires some appreciation of the imagination; that in the final analysis we need metaphor and analogies to help us to talk about God. As important as it is to engage in critical, rational thought, the critical rational thought that depends on words can only get us so far, and therefore I think one also needs other modes of being able to engage with the self and questions of ultimate significance. For me there's a sense in which the use of drama, role play, music, anecdotes and stories are just different ways of people trying to grasp what it is that you're trying to communicate.

In terms of how that works with students, I've found from my experience that it works really well; I've found that people really appreciate it, for a number of reasons. Partly, I think it helps us to get past that kind of dense deductive reasoning, which certainly has its place, but in actual fact only really suits some kinds of students. Some students can sit in a classroom and have a long abstract intellectual conversation about being and knowing and it seems to me that although there's merit in that, if we can then create a narrative or create a story or an exercise that can maybe embody some of the central ideas of the deep philosophical questions about being and knowing, but in a way that helps people who are perhaps more analogous in their thinking, that's helpful. I think that a lot of us, certainly myself, grew up within a very oral culture, with lots of storytelling, whereby if you want to communicate something you find a story or an analogy to present it, and whilst that doesn't work for everyone, I've found it works for quite a lot of people.

Particularly speaking as a Black liberation theologian, I find it works very much for people who come from poorer and more marginalised backgrounds. I think that one of the things that secondary and tertiary education does for you is that it socialises you into a particular way of engaging with knowledge. Now I've learnt to do that, clearly by definition—I'm on the staff of an academic institution—but I think that this issue is one of the critical failings of Black and liberation theologians—the lack of engagement with other forms of media in order to engage with the very marginalised subjects themselves, who don't have the benefit of going to tertiary education and therefore being trained in the way in which academics have been trained. Because of this, what tends to happen at worst is that we write for each other, because we all know the codes and the keys to engage with it, and the people for whom we are supposedly working are the ones that remain totally oblivious to our stuff because they look at it and think, that just passes me by.

One of the things that impressed me a lot in my initial work was the way that some of the first generation of liberation theologians in South America, Latin America, used poetry. Alongside very acute and very critical philosophical analysis around the theology of liberation and the norms and sources and critical methods, was the sense in which liturgy, storytelling, and poetry were also other ways in which you could engage with ordinary people, perhaps in a much more successful fashion. So I kind of use that, not just because it's my own predilection, but it's also a way of being able to get beyond the kind of barriers of intellectualism that many of us have been schooled to take part in. I think for the most part, it has been successful, but sometimes perhaps in more informal settings than formal settings, although I tend not to discriminate—if I'm doing a lecture with post-graduate students or I'm doing a workshop in Black communities, I tend to use the same methods to teach in both, I don't differentiate really.

**What are the key challenges that one confronts when teaching Black theology in British universities?**

There are lots of challenges. The first one is just about trying to establish the relevance of your discipline. One still meets, even in 2009, the attitude 'there's no such thing as Black theology, surely theology's just

theology’. There’s a well known academic, I won’t say his name, who said, ‘use of the term Black theology implies that there’s a White theology, but there isn’t any White theology’, to which my response was, when I’d counted to 10, ‘White theology is everything that we’ve been taught as the norm, it just never names itself as such’. So partly it’s a basic epistemological problem, really, trying to defend the right to talk about something that we can legitimately call Black theology. That’s the first problem, just to establish its basis as a discipline, given that for the most part, British universities completely ignore it. You can count on one hand the number of places that even acknowledge its existence, let alone try to teach it.

Then you have a second problem, which is, when you’re asked to teach it, it’s usually as a very late addendum to a traditional normative curriculum, which of course is anything but objective and neutral. It’s not uncommon, and certainly I’ve come across this in the past, that I’ve been asked to come and teach a session on Black churches, in Church History, in an hour and 15 minutes. When I ask how long they have been doing Church History, I’m told there’s a whole curriculum of Church History that their scholars and academics have been teaching, so of course they’ve ignored the presence of Black people, and then suddenly introduced it as a last minute thing. The most cynical ones will make it optional, and put it right at the end of the course. I remember teaching in one place where I turned up to do something on Black church history, and out of a class of 26 only 5 turned up. The tutor had actually given them a nod and a wink to say well, you don’t really have to turn up next week, if you don’t want to, and quite clearly if you put it right at the end of the course, and then you say if you’ve got outstanding essays or work to do you might want to get on with that, but if not you might want to come and hear Dr Reddie, you make it optional. How many people do you think would then turn up to hear you speak, on Black Church history, in the context of an hour? So secondly I think it’s the way in which it’s positioned as being an adjunct of the normative important stuff, and if it’s important, it’s important maybe only to other Black folk. The perception is that it doesn’t have anything to say to theology *per se*, it’s not generic in the way in which White British scholars and their work is automatically universal and generic, it’s just a contextual theology—but of course all theology’s contextual. So part of the difficulty, therefore, is, do you

then not take those opportunities to teach that seem tokenistic, in which case, we don't get anything at all, or do you agree to do it on the basis that something's better than nothing, but then again, are you then guilty of colluding with that kind of tokenism? That's a really hard question.

It's only Queens, where I teach, here, and maybe a couple of other places, that provide a whole module in Black theology. I've found the importance of having a whole module is that it allows you to recognise the fact that Black theology is also heterodox. If you read James Cone or you read Robert Beckford or you read myself or J. Deotis-Roberts or Jacqueline Grant or Delores Williams, etc., you'll find many common themes within their work. Clearly, all theological movements have parameters that help define what particular form of theological insight is consistent with the overall tradition, but there's a certain point where, within those very broad parameters, there are significant differences. The point of view of Delores Williams, a Baptist, is not the same as Robert Beckford, who's a Pentecostal, which is not the same as myself who is Methodist and trained as a Christian educator, therefore interested in pedagogy and different forms of teaching methods within Black theology. The point is, if you then invite one guest lecturer to come in and do one session, you end up collapsing what is a broad movement into something that becomes very stereotypical. I'll give an example: all Black theology is not Christian. Anthony Pinn is a well known Black theologian who is a humanist, so Pinn would say that you should not even presume the presence of a theistic other as a way of talking about Black theology. And of course Pinn's right. The fact that my work falls within a Christian context is largely circumscribed by the fact that I work within a confessional Christian theological college and I guess as a practical theologian I'm working with the assumed belief structures of people where they are, rather than where perhaps I might want them to be. That doesn't mean, however, that I shouldn't have my own approach, but it's not normative, it is an approach, amongst many possible approaches. So I think part of the difficulty therefore of having that guest lecturer syndrome is that it collapses differences and diversity into something that makes it appear much more homogenous than it actually is. Part of the challenge, therefore, is to find a way to create space that gives the opportunity for a much broader form of teaching.

In terms of my own work, there's only really been one place, a Methodist theological college in Bristol, Wesley College, that has an

association with the University of Bristol, where I've actually taught a 10 week course in Black theology where I was able to actually go into the differences. So then, even if you do a session on Womanist theology, you can show that there are different approaches to Womanist theology: there is a big difference between Delores Williams, who does not believe that the cross is redemptive, and basically would say that it's much more realistic to talk about survival rather than liberation, and Jackie Grant. There are differences between her and Emilie Towns and Kate Cannon who are more ethicists than theologians, and Renita Weems who's a biblical scholar, and so on. Now, outside of Queens I can't tell you another place where you can give that kind of space to say you know something, this is not just an addendum.

The third challenge is the way in which you begin to integrate the effects of Black theology into what is seen to be the normative curriculum. So again, I stand to be corrected, but I think it's only Queens and possibly the University of Birmingham, for example, where if you were looking at Biblical scholarship, you really have to look at the works of Cain Hope Fedler and Clarice Martin and Randall Bailey alongside the so called generic icons like Bultmann or Schweitzer or whatever. Because that's a fact, Black people have something critical to say about every aspect of the curriculum, not just as a discrete discipline in and of itself, but also as a way of critiquing and challenging the normative perspectives as I'm talking about God. Again, people are looking at Christology with big gaps. How you can look at Christology and not look at Cone, for example? The challenges are innumerable, really, to be honest with you.

**So as you've said, Black theology in the UK in HE is still a peripheral minority interest, taught in very few departments. Do you envisage any change?**

I believe so, but I think it will be an incremental drift leading to incremental change rather than a revolution. Partly I think, hopefully, this will come through a critical mass of both Black and White people who will be interested in, or perhaps demand, a greater level of recognition from the curriculum. I think the way in which HE is now to some extent driven by economics, and driven by market demand, is one of the critical ways therefore in which Black theology will come over into the



mainstream curriculum—through the greater engagement of Black and White young people, hopefully, coming from people wanting to do Religious Studies at A-level.

**We have a problem in that I remember reading a report about two years ago, in which they found that at school, the first group of people to pull out from RE were Black youths, males, and this is before they've hit GCSE level, so if we haven't got it right even at this basic level, what hope is there?**

Yes, that's a really hard challenge. I think part of it is in terms of how we've always presented the teaching of religion. The reason why, for example, areas like sociology and cultural studies have all been much further advanced, really, than religion in general, and theology in particular, among the Black community, is because they've always had much more immediacy, in terms of relevance, and basically when you're able to teach in a way that shows its recognition of social reality, then people find it interesting. I think what's happened is so often, we present religion as a very esoteric conversation around ancient texts, and around truth claims, some people believe this and some people believe that, and of course I'm not denying the importance of that, but if you look more critically in terms of how religion functions in Black communities, its importance has not been around the relative merits of truth claims: proposition A versus proposition B. It has been at its best when it engages with people and gives them an interpretative framework for dealing with reality, by saying that a certain belief in God will help you then to make sense of this experience or give you a particular way of engaging with school or with the police etc. It seems to me that when teaching starts from the praxis of religion, that then immediately makes it much more relevant and much more transformative with the people whom one's teaching, and it seems to me that therefore presenting it in that way, even at an early point, within Religious Studies, would have a knock on effect on people who would then do it for examination at A-level or AS level, so other people would then come and study theology at university.

**There's a wealth of knowledge and critical analysis behind that.**

Yes, and then you would get that critical mass of people who will then

say, we're actually interested in studying this, and why don't you have a Black theologian, why don't you have a Womanist theologian, why don't you have courses looking at how Black and Asian people re-read the Bible, historically, why don't you have courses in Black ethics or Black ecclesiology? For example if one looks at the relationship between, let's say, theology and Christian practice, why is it that in all the major denominations, whether historic mainline denominations or Pentecostal Black-led independent churches, the fastest growing wing of Christian faith in Britain is Black Christian faith expression, yet when one takes that and says how then is that experience or that phenomenon matched in terms of what is taught in theology, there's no relationship between the two whatsoever?

So I think that partly it needs to be a top down and a bottom up change, I've more faith in the bottom up change, obviously, as a liberationist, which is about that critical mass of people who will come to study, and not just Black people. That is one of the critical things that's happened in our kind of post-modern generation, which I think is an entirely good thing, that people from different communities now know much more about each other than was the case 20, 30 years ago. White young people are very interested in Black popular culture, Black aesthetics, have Black and Asian friends, and friends across a whole spectrum of cultures and communities, and hopefully it would catch that sense of commitment to things like environmental politics, anti-globalisation, poverty reduction, all the things that Black theology has been addressing, perhaps not as well as it should have done, but it's certainly been addressing them for many years. I think that in marketing terms there should be, and I'm sure there will be, a significant take up for that. We need to be able to find a way of marketing it in such a way that people will be interested in doing it, and you then have a commitment at a certain point to teach it.

**You've spoken about Black theology being transformative, before, and I wonder if you could outline what you see as being the implications for students, of teaching a subject which is intended to be transformative? How does such transformation manifest itself in the classroom, and how can it be managed, that is if you want to manage it?**

The most important thing one has to acknowledge is the fact that such teaching is meant to have an impact on people, and that impact must be cognitive, but won't be effective unless it also impacts on people's emotions as well. A lot of times there's a certain type of teaching, certainly within theology and religious studies, that tends to be more conservative than the kind of stuff that you would see in sociology and cultural studies, where in actual fact the engagement and the acceptance of the place of the emotions is seen as perfectly right and proper. I think part of the managing of it, and I'm not quite sure how to phrase this, is that we need to think in terms of creating spiritual experiences in the classroom that affirm and challenge, but don't abuse students, that don't work in a pejorative manner, that don't have sort of winners and losers, and that kind of oppressive use of power. To work in a transformative fashion means that you have to take account of the fact that this teaching will have an impact on people, it will challenge people individually and force them to re-think questions of individual identity, and questions regarding our collective identities, and questions of narrative, just to give an example.

**Can I just clarify something, we are talking here about both White and Black students?**

Absolutely, we're talking about students full stop. I teach very mixed classes for the most part. For example one source I use in my teaching is a very good BBC series, which has never been repeated, which I think is interesting, called *The History of Racism*. It was broadcast in 2007, in three parts, on three successive evenings, on BBC 4. It was shown in commemoration of the Bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire and has never been shown again. Basically it looks at the relationship between history and racism and power, from classical antiquity going right up to Stephen Lawrence's death.

Now, there are parts of that DVD that portray absolutely, jaw-droppingly evil things—basically, it's the kind of stuff that just makes all of us think, how can human beings be so vicious, and so despicable in their actions one to another? Now, I defy anyone to sit through that, any more than you could sit through a programme on the Holocaust, and not be moved by it. Clearly there are major theological questions

that are posed, in terms of what on earth was God doing when all this was happening? So on the one hand there are the questions of theology, and on the other hand there are the more emotional questions, like, how do I handle this? If you're a Black person, how do you handle the sense of anger? Watching, for example, a whole section about the Belgian Congo, and the way in which the henchmen of King Leopold would remove the right hand of African children within the Congo as a motivating technique to ensure that their parents would collect the requisite quota of rubber—when you watch the re-creation of that scene, for Black people, there's a sense of real anger. On one occasion I was aware of at least two people who came from the Congo, in a class I was teaching at the time, alongside a sense of guilt and shame for the White religious people who say, this happened and our countries did nothing, the Europeans did nothing about it. Now, as an educator, as someone interested in pedagogy, I think it's right and proper for people to feel moved by that, but the important thing then, because often people get trapped in their emotions, is to say, well, how then do we deconstruct what we're feeling, and what we've experienced? This is the crucial thing: in terms of praxis—what then do we do in response to that? So I think part of it for me in terms of the transformation is what happens outside the classroom, when people then go on with their lives. For me it's more than just giving people information, it's more than just a form of data transfer, you know, it's actually about thinking, ok, well, how then do we create a critical mass of people who feel sufficiently righteously moved to say, 'you know something, as individuals we can make a difference'?

I heard a comment from a White leader in the Methodist church a number of years ago, who said, 'If you think you're too small to make a difference, then you've never been in bed with a mosquito'. I've often used that as a kind of motto in the classroom, to say, I do believe individuals can make a difference. What's required is individuals acting together in concert, so it's not some kind of isolated individual action. How then do we act together, with the knowledge that we have not just gained, but the knowledge that we've helped to construct ourselves? Part of the use of experiential exercises is that I don't want you to accept the notion of a Black God because I'm telling you to, it's basically that you come to a knowledge of truth yourself through the interactions with each other, so that you are formed and socialised by what

you have learned. You don't write an essay because Anthony Reddie said you should. Well, ok, if I'm your tutor you should do it on that basis, but much more importantly, you should do it not because I said so, but because you feel moved and transformed that you yourself can make a difference. The way in which the status quo has been propagated on us has been through the sense that there was no alternative—that somehow this is so self-evidently true there is no other narrative—and of course there always are other narratives, there always are other forms of truth, there always are other discourses that we need to engage in.

I think that's part of the challenge, but also part of the excitement of teaching—that every class and every group of people you work with is different, and within that, there are obviously different dynamics for knowledge. On several occasions I've heard people say something that makes me think, 'I've been writing this stuff for years, and I've never thought of it like that. I've been set on this, but you know, you've just said something that I've got to go away and process, and come back, because you've actually floored me.' Part of it, therefore, in the best kind of teaching, is that collapsing of power and authority. When I teach, what I try to do is to model a form of dialogue that says that if we start from experience, if we start from the way in which experience helps to shape knowledge, and helps to shape truth, how then do I create a framework and a space within this teaching moment that says that you have all got something critically to contribute? Because all of us come from experience, all of us do not come as blank tablets on which someone from authority then writes, but it's the sense that you have something critically to contribute, and we can teach each other, that is often hard to really carry through. I think one of the things about going through the process of the Academy, in order to become an expert, is that we all then want to stand on our authority. The whole point of me getting a PhD and writing all these books is that I can turn them into a kind of magic wand and impress you with how clever I am because you and I are not on the same level, by the definition of my grade of learning. I think true liberatory teaching has to be one that says, we have to get past that kind of hierarchy. Ok, I'm not going to say that my years of learning have not given me some form of knowledge that gives me certain responsibilities in the context of the classroom, but I'm more interested in the truth that does not reside just in

me because I've read a few books.

**So, looking towards the future, as an educator, what advice would you give to a theology or religious studies tutor who is considering including Black theology in their courses?**

Probably a couple of things. First is this very critical question about why they want to do it. Is it because you genuinely think that Black theology has something to contribute towards the sum of our knowledge in terms of the discipline of theology and religious studies and the various subsets of it? Or is it some cynical attempt to say that there'll be a QAA inspection coming at some point, and wouldn't it be good to be able to show some form of diversity, therefore let's ring up someone and get them to put on something? So first, I think, it's about integrity.

Of course I would say Black theology has an immense amount to offer, so called marginalised studies all do, so part of it is about how they are going to manage its integration within the curriculum in a way that takes us beyond tokenism. There needs to be an acknowledgment that this has both a specific set of identities and a specific set of issues, but they are also universal. Black theology is not just of interest to Black students, it's of interest to all people. Clearly, if we want to take seriously some of the universal claims that different religious traditions make about God, then that God is revealed then not just through experiences of power, and the status quo, but is also revealed through so called marginalised experiences of people whose voices are often not being heard. So I think the question is, how do you manage it so that it still maintains a kind of specificity?

For example, part of the challenge I often make is that we have to take Womanist theology as a specific discipline, not just as a subset of Black theology, it is a specific discipline in itself, and yet, taking that as a case study, specific disciplines also have something to say to every other area. So there are Womanist perspectives on ethics, Womanist perspectives on church and society, Womanist perspectives on Church history, in terms of who gets to define the traditions. There's lots of stuff out there, but it actually requires a working commitment.

The third thing that I would say is that you then need to be in conversations with the people who help to shape it. Not that they own it—I

wouldn't want to make the claim that Black people own Black theology, any more than I own Black theology, we don't, and it's essential that the knowledge and learning that comes out of that always transcends the group that creates it itself—but at the same point, I think there's always a danger of a sort of neo-colonialism in these kinds of situations. A particular discourse has been developed, and suddenly institutions have a new hobby horse, it's thought to be important to engage with it, and they then pick it up and run with it, without any recourse to the people who helped to create it, often with no support, no institutional encouragement and no financial backing at all. Again, I'd like to use feminist theology as an analogy. Suddenly it becomes the flavour of the month, and all of a sudden an authority decided by men dictates that this is really popular and so we're going to teach it. Quite rightly, women who've been working at the coal face trying to develop this with scant regard are going to say, hang on a minute, how come now suddenly you're coming in and running with this and excluding us, when it's about us? Now that doesn't mean that men cannot engage with feminist theology, that's not the point I'm making, but in its development, and in its creation, within any institution, there has to be a dialogue with the people who have some kind of experiential basis with it. Not that their experience trumps anyone else's experience, but there has to be a kind of mutuality that takes seriously the fact that all bodies of knowledge come out of the people that are experiencing them, and therefore to honour the experience itself is important, when you're going to engage with that particular subject matter. So I think, using that as an analogy, that then says, yes, I would love lots of institutions to start teaching Black theology, and I certainly would not necessarily believe that it's my job or anyone else's job to police how they should do that—each institution has to find its own way—but a way of doing it with integrity is to have dialogue with those people who've helped to shape it, and that's the critical question. How then do we manage this in a way that then gets us beyond tokenism?

**It's been a fantastic interview and I would like to say, on behalf of our *Discourse* readers, thank you very much Dr Anthony Reddie.**

It's a pleasure.





# Understanding and Teaching Black Theology

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**Anthony Reddie**

Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological  
Education

**T**his work is offered as a means of both understanding and ultimately, communicating the basic intent of Black theology. This paper provides an outline to the broad parameters of the meaning, methodological perspectives and major themes of Black theology. Whilst this work attempts to offer a broad, inclusive and representative understanding of Black theology, it is influenced also by the perspectives, bias and subjective views of the author of this paper. The author of this paper is a 44 year old Participative Black theologian in Britain. I was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire of Jamaican parents and was socialised into and remain within the British Methodist church. I work in Birmingham at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education and the Methodist.<sup>1</sup>

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## What is Black theology?

Black theology can be broadly understood as the self-conscious attempt to undertake rational and disciplined conversation about God and God's relationship to Black people in the world, across space and time.<sup>2</sup> 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 who is the Christ' in light of the historical and contemporary reality of being 'Black'. Black theology is most often, although not exclusively, understood as a branch of the wider family of 'theologies of Liberation'—i.e. part of a wider family of theologies that seek to re-interpret the central meaning of the God event within history, particularly, in terms of in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; seeking to offer a politicised, radical and socially transformative understanding of the Christian faith in light of the existential experiences of the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed.<sup>3</sup>

This enterprise named 'Black Theology' has branches across the world. The most obvious and perhaps significant examples can be found in such diverse places as North America<sup>4</sup>, the Caribbean<sup>5</sup>, South

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<sup>1</sup> Professionally and academically, at the time of writing, I have written 11 books on Christian education and Black theology in Britain. My most recent text is entitled *Working Against The Grain: Reimagining Black Theology in the 21st century*. In addition to the books, I have written 25 articles in peer review journals and 19 essays or chapters in books, again looking at the interface between the Christian formation of Black people and the educative approaches connected to this task, which, in turn, is linked to the conceptual analysis of Black theology as a means of doing the former. I am also the editor of the only Black theology journal in the world: *Black Theology: An International Journal*.

<sup>2</sup> An important aspect of Black theology is the extent to which it attends to existential realities of lived experience of Black people within history, both in the past and present epochs. This emphasis upon the lived realities of Black people is one that seeks to displace notions of theology being 'distant' and unresponsive to the needs of ordinary people in this world and is less concerned with metaphysical speculations about salvation in the next. For a helpful discussion on this issue see Hopkins, Dwight N., *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1999), pp.1-14.

<sup>3</sup> For an important recent text that delineates the comparative developments in 'theologies of Liberation' see Althaus-Reid, Marcella, Patrella, Ivan and Susin, Luis Carlos (eds.), *Another Possible World* (London: SCM, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> For the best overview on the historical development of Black theology in North

America (particularly, Brazil)<sup>6</sup>, Southern Africa<sup>7</sup>, in mainland Europe, particularly, in the Netherlands<sup>8</sup>, and of course, in Britain, especially through the prism of the Black theology journals.<sup>9</sup> In these differing

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America see Wilmore, Gayraud S. and Cone, James H. (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979) and Cone, James H. and Wilmore, Gayraud S. (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History Vol. 2, 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> It could be argued that there is a semantic problem with naming the theory and practice of contextualised, liberative-praxis based approaches to theology that emerge from within the Caribbean context as 'Black Theology' as the term 'Black' was eschewed in favour of the alternative naming strategy of 'Caribbean Theology'. Given the plural realities of the Caribbean, where the term 'Black' might be understood to pertain to only one section (albeit the numerical majority) of the population has meant that its usage has proved problematic in this context. Nonetheless, one can point to a number of texts that include work that clearly engages with the overarching, substantive and thematic ideas that are replete within Black theology. See Erskine, Noel Leo, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981), Davis, Kortright, *Emancipation Still Comin': Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990), Williams, Lewin L., *Caribbean Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), Gonzalez, Michelle A., *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture and Identity*, (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2006) and Reid-Salmon, Delroy A., *Home Away From Home: The Caribbean Diasporan Church in the Black Atlantic Tradition* (London: Equinox, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> See Sant'Ana, Antonio, (National Ecumenical Commission to Combat Racism, Brazil), 'Black Spirituality: The Anchor of Black Lives' and Fernandes dos Santos, Diana, (Youth of the Methodist Church, Brazil) 'Black Heritage in Brazil' in Hopkins, Dwight N. and Lewis, Marjorie (eds.) *Another World Is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Peoples* (London: Equinox, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Mosala, Itumeleng J., *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: WM.B. Eerdmans, 1989), Mosala, Itumeleng J. and Tlhagale, Buti (eds.) *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology From South Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> See Witvliet, Theo, *A Place in the Sun: an Introduction to Liberation Theology in the Third World* (London: SCM press, 1985) and The Womanist Theology Group, 'A Womanist Bibliodrama', in Grant, Paul and Patel, Raj, (eds.) *A Time To Act: Kairos 1992* (Birmingham: A Joint Publication of Racial Justice and the Black and Third World Theological Working Group', 1992), pp. 25-32.

<sup>9</sup> *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* began in October 1998 and ran for 7 issues, ending in 2001. The journal was re-launched in 2002 as *Black Theology: An International Journal*. Both journals were founded by the overarching movement that is 'Black Theology in Britain' and have remained the main conduits for the dissemination of Black theology in Britain and across the world. Important

contexts, the point of departure for Black theology is the reality of being ‘Black’ in the world and the experience that grows out of this lived actuality of how the world treats you as a person of darker skin. This reality is then explored in dialogue within the overall framework of the Christian faith. This relationship between Black experience and Christianity continues, for the most part, to be the effective conduit that constitutes 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 insuperable odds.<sup>10</sup> African American scholars, such as Asante, estimate that upwards of 50 million African people were transported between Africa and the Americas over a four hundred year period.<sup>11</sup> 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 the Black self.<sup>12</sup> The continued

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Black scholars based in Britain who have written for the journal include Valentina Alexander, (see Alexander, Valentina, ‘Afrocentric and Black Christian Consciousness: Towards an Honest Intersection’, *Black Theology in Britain*, Issue 1, (1998) pp. 11-18), Joe Aldred (see Aldred, Joe, ‘Paradigms for a Black Theology in Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain*, Issue 2, (1999) pp.9-32), Mukti Barton, (see Barton, Mukti, ‘I am Black and Beautiful’, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol.2, No.2, (July 2004) pp. 167-187), Robert Beckford (see Beckford, Robert, ‘Doing Black Theology in the UKKK’, *Black Theology in Britain* Vol. 4, (2000) pp. 38-60), Kate Coleman (See Coleman, Kate, ‘Black Theology and Black Liberation: A Womanist Perspective’, *Black Theology in Britain* Issue 1, (1998) pp. 59-69), Lorraine Dixon (See Dixon, Lorraine, “‘Teach It Sister!’: Mahalia Jackson as Theologian in Song”, *Black Theology in Britain* Issue 2, (1999) pp. 72-89), Ron Nathan (See Nathan, Ron, ‘The Spirituality of Garveyism’, *Black Theology in Britain*, Issue 3, (1999) pp.33-50), Michael Jagessar (see Jagessar, Michael N., ‘Cultures in Dialogue: The Contribution of a Caribbean Theologian’, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol.1, No.1, (May 2003) pp. 139-160), Emmanuel Lartey (See Lartey, Emmanuel Y., ‘After Stephen Lawrence: Characteristics and Agenda for Black Theology in Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain*, Issue 3, (1999) pp.79-91) and Anthony Reddie (see Reddie, Anthony G., ‘Towards a Black Christian Education of Liberation: The Christian Education of Black Children in Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain*, Issue 1, (1998) pp. 46-58).

<sup>10</sup> See Hopkins, Dwight N., *Down, Up and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp.11-36

<sup>11</sup> See Asante, Molefi Kete, ‘Afrocentricity and Culture’ in Asante, Molefi Kete and Asante, Kariamu Welsh (eds.), *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity* (New

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.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the structural and disproportionate material poverty of Black people, is the more ephemeral phenomenon that is the continuing tendency of Black people to internalise the damaging effects of such racialised demagoguery within the confines of the fragile human psyche.<sup>14</sup> The internalisation of this demonised instruction has led to Black people directing the fire of their repressed and disparaged selves onto their own psyche and that of their peers with whom they share a common ancestry and ethnic identity.<sup>15</sup>

Black theology as an academic discipline and as a form of concrete faith based practice takes as its point of departure the reality of Black suffering in history. For many Black theologians, the brutal realities of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade provide the essential backdrop against which the ongoing drama of Black suffering in history is played out.<sup>16</sup>

Black theology is, then, the deliberate attempt to connect the reality and substance of being Black and the development of ideas surrounding Blackness with one's sacred talk of God and God's relation-

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Jersey: First Africa World Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> See Williams, Eric, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> See Hopkins, Dwight N., *Heart and Head: Black Theology, Past, Present and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) pp.127-154.

<sup>14</sup> The issues of Black self-negation have been explored by a number of Black pastoral and practical theologians. See Harris, James H., *Pastoral Theology: A Black Church Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1991), Watkins Ali, Carroll A., *Survival and Liberation: Pastoral Theology in African American Context* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), Ashby, JR, Homer U., *Our Home Is Over Jordan: A Black Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003), Smith Jr., Archie, *Navigating The Deep Waters: Spirituality in African American Families* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1997). In the British context see Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *In Living Colour: Intercultural Approaches to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2003) and Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> West, Cornel, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) pp.11-15.

<sup>16</sup> See Hopkins, Dwight N., *Down, Up and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

ship with the mass suffering of humanity who might be described as being Black people. It is important to note that the ‘invention’ of Blackness, as opposed being ‘African’ is part of ongoing development of human re-construction that is a post enlightenment-modernist conceit.<sup>17</sup>

Black theology, then, is an action based form of conversation about God that seeks to respond to the deep-seated racialised depictions of people of darker skin within the cultural imagination of Euro-Americans.<sup>18</sup> One may argue as to the appropriateness of using the term ‘Black’ as opposed to ‘African’ and, therefore, pose the concomitant question as to why slavery and suffering should feature so starkly within the framework of Black theology? What about the African presence that existed long before the horrors of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade?<sup>19</sup> These questions, of course, are very valid ones and aspects of this intricate debate and conversation were undertaken in some of the other presentations given at the conference where this paper was originally presented.

In a previous piece of work I have argued that whilst the terms ‘Black’ and ‘African’ have much in common and often work as synonyms, there are, nonetheless, some significant differences between the two.<sup>20</sup> Whilst ‘African’ may automatically translate into ‘Black’, not everything that is ‘Black’ necessarily translates into African. Let me explain what I mean by this statement.

This lecture in understanding and teaching Black theology emerges from within the British context. Whilst this work seeks to provide a comprehensive and representative overview of Black theology, it is influenced also, by the very distinctive context of the UK, in which this author resides. As I will detail shortly, the term ‘Black’ can be used in a two specific ways within the British context.

For many people who use the term ‘African’ with which to name

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<sup>17</sup> See Eze, Emmanuel C., *Race and the Enlightenment* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent treatment of the phenomenological features of ‘race’ and the attempts of Black theology to respond to it, see Hopkins, Dwight N., *Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> See Walker, Robin, *When We Ruled* (London: Every Generation Media, 2006)

<sup>20</sup> See ‘The Prologue’ in Reddie, Anthony G., *Working Against The Grain: Re-imagining Black in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox, 2008), pp.1-8.

themselves and would indeed describe themselves as being ‘African’ or being of ‘African descent’, these descriptors could also echo to the term ‘Black’. That in effect, one could easily (if one so chose) substitute the term ‘Black’ for ‘African’ without any substantive loss of meaning to the person or persons being described. To articulate a position that uses the term ‘African’ is to connect oneself to a geographical area, a political and philosophical idea (as in the case of Afrocentricity)<sup>21</sup> or the historical phenomenon of a land mass and the peoples associated with it.<sup>22</sup>

But to use the term ‘Black’ in a theological sense is to argue for a specific and intentional commitment to the cause of human liberation and transformation from *all elements that might be considered oppressive irrespective of the source from which that oppression has emerged*. I have put part of the last sentence in italics for this is of crucial import in understanding the central force of Black theology. Black theology is the attempt to reflect upon the presence and agency of God in connection with the suffering and oppression of people of largely African descent, who see in this God, the basis for their fight against all the structured and systemic elements that oppress them and cause them to suffer.

The cause of their suffering might well be elements or activities that have their basis in African cultures, such as female genital mutilation, for example. The ‘Black’ in Black theology is committed to challenging all forms of oppression, even that which may have a cultural African basis to it. Black theology is more than simply African-cultural retention, or the reification of African cultural tropes; nor is it reducible to notions of African inculturation.<sup>23</sup> That is not to say that none of the

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<sup>21</sup> Afrocentricity is an overarching religio-philosophical framework adopted, primarily by Diasporan Africans, to construct in order to outline an approach to Black existence that is informed by a corporate, collective and consistent unitary set of ideas and cultural norms that define what it means to be a Black African human being. The founder of Afrocentricity is Molefi Kete Asante. For further details see Asante, Molefi Kete, *Afrocentricity Trenton* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> For further details see Asante, Molefi Kete and Asante, Kariamuw Welsh (eds.), *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> In order to see the difference between Black Theology and African Inculturated Theologies see Martey, Emmanuel, ‘Theology and Liberation: The African Agenda’

aforementioned cannot be understood as Black theology or that they do not contribute to the development of Black theology, but they are not necessarily understood as Black theology either. This is the case, particularly, if such cultural factors are the cause of patriarchy, sexism, hetero-normativity and essentialised discourses that eschew the reality of cultural diversity and heterogeneity.

Using the term ‘Black’ as opposed to ‘African’ is also to take seriously the Diasporan routes or migratory journeys (most accurately to be seen as physical and economic forced migration) of people of African descent. The term ‘Black’ was a deliberate and intentional naming strategy for people primarily of African descent living away from the continent of Africa, who were struggling under the yoke of racism and other forms of structural injustice at the hands of White people with power in the west.

The Black Power Movements<sup>24</sup> in the US, the Caribbean and in Britain<sup>25</sup>, for example, sought to draw on the African roots of Black

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and Hopkins, Dwight N., ‘Theologies in the USA’ in Althaus-Reid, Marcella, Patrella, Ivan and Susin, Luis Carlos (eds.), *Another Possible World* (London: SCM, 2007), pp.80-93 and 94-101 respectively.

<sup>24</sup> The ‘Black Power Movement’ came into full fruition in the 1960s, across the world, particularly in the US and the Caribbean. The central ideas of the Black Power Movement included the attempt of Black peoples of African descent to develop a framework and a form of practice in which there was a marked sense of ‘African pride’, a commitment to ‘Self determination’, and a desire to challenge the racism, paternalism, and arrogance of White authority and control that had exploited and oppressed Black peoples for centuries. Important antecedents of Black Power Movement can be found in the life and work of figures such as Marcus Garvey and Franz Fanon. For further information on these figures see *The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, edited by Amy Jacques Garvey, and vol.3, *More Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, selected and edited from previously unpublished material by E.U. Essien-Udom and Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Cassell, 1977). See also, Martin, Tony (ed.) *Message to the people: the Course of African Philosophy* (Dover, Mass: Majority Press, 1986), Vincent, Theodore G. *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (San Francisco: Rampart Press, 1972), Moses, Wilson Jeremiah (ed.), *Classical Black Nationalism: from the American Revolution to Marcus Garvey* (New York, London: New York University press, 1996), Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated from the French by Charles Lam Markman (London : MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), Stubbs, Aelred (ed.), *I Write What I Like: a Selection of his Writings, Steve Biko* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent overview of the movement of Black Power and anti-colonial



life, whilst seeking to respond to the reality of being Black in an era when slavery and colonialism had drastically changed the very nature of what it meant to be a Black person in the world. Black Power drew on the nature of African cultures as part of its rationale, but did not limit itself solely to the provision of describing oneself as African in any strict historical sense.

It is important to note that Black Power as a concept pre-dates the formal development of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s. The development of Black Theology as an academic discipline emerges largely from the work of James H. Cone who sought to combine the Christian inspired activism of Martin Luther King Jnr with the militant Black Nationalism and Black Power protests of Malcolm X in order to create a Black Theology of Liberation.<sup>26</sup> Cone uses the term 'Black' as opposed to the terms 'Afro' or 'African' in order to denote the explicit ideological and liberationist perspective to this theological formulation.

In the context of this work, in the UK, the term 'Black' is used in a dual sense. The more obvious use of the term refers to Black people of African descent who have experienced oppression, suffering and poverty in a world run by and organised for the benefit of White people with power. The other, alternative understanding of the term 'Black' that sits alongside the first is one that draws upon the sense of a shared experience of marginalisation, oppression and hardship; in which other peoples, who might also be described as being marginalised, share a common experience of struggle. The term 'Black' within this paper does not refer simply to one's epidermis, but is also a political statement relating to one's sense of a lived experience within the world that often overlooks the needs and concerns of darker skinned peoples. In this second understanding, 'Black' has come to represent the common struggle of all persons from minority ethnic groupings seeking to reflect on and challenge White hegemony.<sup>27</sup>

In a previous piece of work, Michael Jagessar and I describe 'Black' in the context of 'Postcolonial Britain' as to being a socially

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struggle see Adi, Hakim and Sherwood, Marika (eds.), *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and Diaspora since 1787* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> See Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997). See also Cone, James H., *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).

constructed marginalised ‘other’ in the body politic of this nation.<sup>28</sup> That in effect, in a nation whose indices for belonging and acceptance are still predicated on assumptions around normative ‘Whiteness’, to be ‘Black’ and or to organise oneself around the conceptual realities of ‘Blackness’ is to adopt the positionality of the ‘other’ or, to quote the former British Prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, to be ‘The Enemy within’.

So the ‘Black’ in Black theology in Britain, for example, becomes a symbolic totem that unifies all minority ethnic peoples who have been oppressed and marginalised in economic, political, cultural and gendered ways and who desire, in and through their belief in God, to change and transform the world.

This transformation that Black people seek is one that better represents and reflects the ‘Kingdom of God’ or ‘God’s rule’ or ‘Reign’ or the ‘Economy of God’—different terms for a specific time within history and beyond it, when justice, freedom and liberation will be available for all people and not just some. The motif of the coming Kingdom or ‘Reign’ of God’ and the need for oppressed Black peoples to work in solidarity with God in anticipation of this moment in history, is one that resonates throughout the entire literature of Black theology.

In a very real sense one can say that the underlying rationale for Black theology as an academic discipline in addition to its attempt to convert its ideas into concrete practice rests and falls on the belief in the possibilities of transformation—in the possibilities of individual and collective change for justice and equity for all poor people across the world. If God is not one of justice then Black theology ceases to have any intellectual meaning or any practical application to the lives of Black peoples across the globe.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G. (eds.), *Postcolonial Black British Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2006), pp.xiii-xv.

<sup>29</sup> This central theological question pertaining to whether God can be best (if ever) understood as one of liberation whose predisposition is to be in actual solidarity with poor, marginalised and oppressed Black peoples, has been challenged most vociferously by William R. Jones, in *Is God A White Racist?: A Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon press, 1973) and Anthony B. Pinn, in *Why Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

## Black Theology and the Christian faith

This lecture in understanding and teaching Black theology seeks to outline the main features and definition of this intellectual movement. It should be noted, from the outset, that Black theology is a broad movement that encompasses a variety of perspectives and methods. For example, not all scholars who seek to work within the framework of Black theology would necessarily describe themselves as people of Christian faith.

Indeed, it should be noted that Black theologians have attempted to write within a variety of religious frameworks and none. In seeking to outline the definitional dimensions of Black theology, we need to acknowledge that there is a growing wealth of literature that has explored Black theology from within other religious paradigms, including Rastafari<sup>30</sup>, Hinduism<sup>31</sup> and traditional African religions.<sup>32</sup> In the U.S., Anthony Pinn has sought to use humanism as a vehicle for exploring notions of Black theology that reject the traditional theism of Christian inspired theology.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst noting these significant alternative versions of Black theology, it is equally important to remember that the bulk of writing and reflection in the area of Black theology in Britain, however, has been dominated by a Christian purview. At the heart of Black theology within the Christian framework is the concept of 'Liberation'. In using this term, what I mean to suggest is that 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.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Spencer, William David, *Dread Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1999).

<sup>31</sup> Jagessar, Michael N., 'Liberating Cricket: Through the Optic of Ashutosh Gowariker's Lagaan', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol.2, No.2, (July 2004), pp.239-249.

<sup>32</sup> See Harvey, Marcus Louis, 'Engaging The Orisa: An Exploration of the Yoruba Concepts of Ibeji and Olokun as Theoretical Principles in Black Theology', *Black Theology: An International Journal* Vol.6, No.1, (2008), pp. 61-82.

<sup>33</sup> See Pinn, Anthony B., *Why Lord?* (New York: Continuum, 1995). See also Pinn, Anthony B., *African American Humanist Principles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> See Cone, James H., *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York:

Black theology is committed to challenging the systemic frameworks that assert particular practices and ideas as being as they should be (i.e. normative—usually governed by the powerful) whilst ignoring the claims of those who are marginalised and are powerless; often demonising the perspectives of the latter as being aberrant or even heretical.<sup>35</sup> This process of seeking to change the actual workings of the world and to assist the oppressed and the marginalised to be free ‘in this world’ and in the world to come is one that is understood as ‘liberation’.

The methodological point of departure in my understanding of Black theology aligns itself with the most well known and representative of the different traditions of Black theology, namely the ‘Hermeneutical School’.<sup>36</sup> The term ‘hermeneutics’ is one that is drawn from the world of Biblical studies and can be understood as the art or the science of interpretation; particularly what one might term as ‘sacred texts’. This school of thought is one that seeks to locate Black theology from within the Christian tradition. Scholars in the ‘Hermeneutical school’ seek to re-think and re-interpret the meaning of Christian faith and the work of the Church in light of the liberating ministry of Jesus the Christ, which in turn is correlated with the very real existential struggles of Black people. This non-foundational model of Black theology seeks to utilise the tools within Christian tradition in order to create a liberative framework for articulating the quest for Black existential freedom.

I would argue that this branch of Black theology is the most representative of the bulk of scholars who would identify themselves with the cause of Black theology. It is also worth noting the comparative schemas developed by many Caribbean theologians such as Kortright Davis<sup>37</sup>, Noel Erskine<sup>38</sup>, and Lewin Williams.<sup>39</sup> South African

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Orbis, 1986)

<sup>35</sup> See Kwok Pui-Lan’s excellent text in this regard: Pui-Lan, Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> See Ware, Frederick L., *Methodologies of Black Theology*, (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002), pp. 28-65.

<sup>37</sup> Davis, Kortright, *Emancipation Still Comin’* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> Erskine, Noel L., *Decolonizing Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983).

Perspectives include Allan Boesak<sup>40</sup>, Itumeleng Mosala<sup>41</sup>, and Itumeleng J. Mosala & Buti Tlhagale.<sup>42</sup>

Central to the Christian perspective on Black theology is the position and role of Jesus. Black theology has always been an essentially a Christocentric movement. What I mean by this term is that Black theology has taken as its definitive central point, the person and the work of Jesus and his relationship with the suffering and struggles of the grassroots proletariat in the 1<sup>st</sup> century epoch of Judea.<sup>43</sup> The relationship of the 'Jesus of history' in his context is then juxtaposed with the 'Christ of faith's' continued involvement in the lives of the economically marginalised, and the socio-political and cultural oppression of Black people in the epoch of modernity.

The concentration on Christology in Black theology is not to suggest that Black theology does not believe in the Doctrine of God as Supreme Creator or in the Holy Spirit as Sustainer; but there is a definite sense that Jesus is the central gaze and focus of theological reflection within Black theology across the world. For many, the most important person in the Christocentric development of Black theology has been the African American Black theologian, James H. Cone. Cone's landmark trilogy of books in the late 1960s and early 70s, *Black Theology and Black Power*<sup>44</sup>, *A Black Theology of Liberation*<sup>45</sup> and *God Of The Oppressed*<sup>46</sup> remain the dominant texts in outlining the importance of conceiving Christology from the perspective of disenfranchised and oppressed Black peoples across the world.

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<sup>39</sup> Williams, Lewin L., *Caribbean Theology* (Frankfurt: Peter Laing, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Boesak, Allan, *Farewell to Innocence : a Socio-ethical Study on Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1977).

<sup>41</sup> Mosala, Itumeleng J., *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: W.M.B. Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Mosala, Itumeleng J. and Tlhagale, Buti, (eds.) *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology From South Africa* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1986).

<sup>43</sup> See Hertzog II, William R., *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox press, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> See Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (20th Anniversary Edition New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> See Cone, James H., *A Black Theology of Liberation* (20th Anniversary Edition New York: Orbis, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> See Cone, James H., *God Of The Oppressed* (New York: Harper SanFrancisco, 1986).

Despite the central importance of James Cone to the development of Black theology, it should be noted that Black theology did not begin with his writings in the late 1960s and 70s. Instead, we have to look to the era of slavery and the mass incarceration of enslaved Africans for the birth of Black theology. When enslaved Africans began to re-imagine their existence and their destiny, and sought to fight for their freedom, using the frameworks of a re-interpreted Christian faith as they did so, these people were engaging in the very first documented examples of Black theology.

When such luminaries as Sam Sharpe, a Baptist Deacon who initiated one of the largest rebellions against slavery in the Caribbean, in Jamaica, in the Christmas period of 1831—when he and other enslaved Africans were working with a concept as ‘Jesus, as the Liberator’—the who came to bring freedom to the captives—in proclaiming Jesus as a liberator, they were outlining a nascent model of Black theology.<sup>47</sup> Texts like Luke 4: 16-19 or Matthew 25: 31-46 from the Synoptic Gospels became ‘proof texts’ that God as reflected in the life and teachings of Jesus was on the side of the oppressed and the suffering, and against the perpetrators of the slave trade. So long before the great Latin American Liberation theologian Jon Sobrino wrote his landmark text, *Jesus The Liberator*<sup>48</sup>, enslaved Africans were already working with an acute, practical, experiential theological framework attuned to their existential realities—albeit, not written down in the form of a systematic theology!

This Black radical tradition in Christianity—Black Theology—continues in the present day. 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.

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<sup>47</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> See Sobrino, Jon, *Jesus The Liberator: A Historical-Theological View* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993).

## So how can we help people to understand Black theology then?

As I have illustrated, Black theology did not begin with the intellectual musings of a people who had the luxury of being able to reflect benignly on their comfortable existence, imagining what God might be like. Conversely, Black theology emerged from the fiery furnace of oppression and hardship. In the midst of the tumultuous struggles, pains and sufferings, Black people began to imagine and then struggle for a better world; a new existence in which there will be justice, dignity and freedom for all people, including themselves.

To understand Black theology one needs to understand the reality of what it means to be exploited, oppressed, overlooked, ignored and consigned to death, mainly on the grounds of the colour of one's skin, which in turn, is informed by the prejudices of others! What does it mean to be considered a 'nobody' in the world?<sup>49</sup>

In order to understand and teach Black theology one has to engage with one's emotions. It is essential to engage with one's affective domain. In using the term 'affective domain', what I mean to suggest is that one has to find ways in which one engages with the emotional and feeling centres of the self, as opposed to relying purely on our intellectual and thinking processes—i.e. cognition.

Much of my own work over the last several years has been concerned with helping predominantly Black and White students to understand the central ideas of Black theology. In undertaking this work, I have often relied on a participative approach to doing Black theology, which has been drawn from the arena of Christian education, as a branch of practical theology.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The theme of being considered a 'nobody' is addressed by me in one of my previous books. See Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> The development of this approach to undertaking Black theology can be seen in the following texts: Reddie, Anthony G., *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-talk* (London: Equinox, 2006), Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Reddie, Anthony G., *Working Against The Grain* (London: Equinox, 2008).

This approach to undertaking Black theology has been used in order to help others to ‘get it’, i.e. to see and to feel the necessity for Black theology. This work has largely been undertaken in theological education, where my pedagogical and polemical charge for Black theology has been an inductive rationale that seeks to change hearts and minds, rather than the mere deductive *raison d’être* of simply seeking to provide more and better information. My individual approach to undertaking Black theology is one that seeks to use models of transformative learning and participative group reflection (what I call a ‘participative process’ or method)<sup>51</sup> as a way of explaining and developing new ways of understanding Black theology and the concomitant practice of engaging in radical and liberative God talk in light of Black suffering, struggle, marginalisation and oppression. In effect, my approach to teaching Black theology rests upon the dialectical challenge of re-framing epistemology.

One of my favourite exercises for enabling adult learners to understand something of the central force of and the necessity for Black theology is entitled *What Do You See?*<sup>52</sup> The aim of the exercise is to assist adult learners in seeing how one’s position and reality in the world leads inevitably to particular ways of imagining the Divine, and the resultant relationship of the Divine to the situation and the context in which the individual or any group of peoples live.

As a way of assisting the learner to come to terms with the most foundational of ideas and concerns that are central to Black theology I am going to introduce this exercise, and describe how it has been used as a means of teaching Black theology—i.e. enabling others to ‘get it’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This work is best expressed in two of my published texts. See Reddie, Anthony G., *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-talk* (London: Equinox, 2006), Reddie, Anthony G., *Working Against The Grain* (London: Equinox, 2008).

<sup>52</sup> This exercise was first developed and published in my first book. See Reddie, Anthony, *Growing into Hope: Christian Education in Multi-ethnic Churches – Vol.1 Believing and Expecting* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1998), pp. 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> A major thematic thrust of this work is the Irish-American Practical Liberation theologian and religious educator, Thomas H. Groome. See *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980) and *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral*



## ‘What do you see?’

For the exercise to work, I have sometimes used a large circular item like a laundry basket, or more recently, a more portable item like a series of A2 boards that can be pinned together to make a 3-sided free-standing object that stands on top of a coffee table.

On the board or on the laundry basket (or something similar) you should place a series of A4 sized pieces of paper that are comprised of different colours. Most times, there are five pieces of paper. Each piece of paper has a letter written on the top of it. Most times, the letters simply read ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, ‘E’ and are written across the top of each sheet. I then place the sheets on which the letters are placed at regular intervals around the central/circular object.

On each piece of paper, underneath the letter, I usually write a short pithy statement. Examples of statements I have used include, (1) ‘A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle’, (2) ‘God has no hands except our hands’, (3) ‘If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride’, (4) ‘To educate a man is to educate an individual. To educate a woman is to educate and liberate a nation’, (5) ‘To Overcome is to Undertake’. There is one statement for each piece of paper and the statement is written beneath the letter.

As the facilitator of the group, I stand next to the central object on which the letters are situated. I then ask all the other participants to form a circle around the central object. The central object on which the pieces of paper and the letters are placed is covered so that the individuals cannot see what is written.

When all the individuals are seated in a circle around the central object, I uncover the central object and then ask the various participants seated in their various places around the circle, ‘What do you see?’ Each person, depending upon his or her particular vantage-point, position or perspective, will see something slightly different from the person sitting next to them or close by. None of us sees things the same way. This central fact is a result of how the various participants are seated, namely in a circle around an object that has different pieces of paper placed at different points on the object itself.

The exercise continues with me asking selected individuals how many A4 sheets of paper exist on the central object? In most cases, I have placed five such pieces of paper (but it could be more or less depending on the size of the group) on the central object. Depending upon where individuals are sitting, they may be able to see 1, 2, 3 or in some exceptional cases even 4 of the A4 pieces of paper. One of the most basic learning points that emerge in the early proceedings of the exercise is that no one person or group of people can see everything that exists on central object. Some individuals can see letters A, B C, others can see only the E, other, C and D, or whatever combination, depending upon their particular vantage point in the circle. Whilst most people can only see particular letters, if they are even remotely observant, they will be aware that there are more letters/pieces of paper in existence than what they can necessarily see for themselves. Why is that the case? Well, simply put, if each person listens to what the others on the opposite side of the circle, for example, are saying, then they will be aware that others can testify to the existence of other letters/pieces of A4 paper that they themselves cannot see.<sup>54</sup>

So many, if not most of the group participants will know that more letters/pieces of paper exist than they can see, simply because they will learn from other people. The first obvious point of learning from the exercise is that no one position has the monopoly on knowledge. The sum of what the group ‘knows’ derives from the sharing or pooling of knowledge between the different participants. This simple ‘fact’ may seem a benign or even an axiomatic truth, but when one considers the various ideologies or religious traditions that assert that their one perspective or position has the monopoly on truth<sup>55</sup>, often asserted

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<sup>54</sup> This initial learning point in the exercise demonstrates the limitations of empiricist forms of epistemology. Namely, that rational, materialist objective knowledge construction, often the favoured method since the enlightenment, is of great import, but has its limitations when one seeks to make sense of so-called truths such as beauty, love and the aesthetic appreciation of the other. This is of particular import when one considers the role and importance of revelation to our ways of knowing and the construction of religious and theologically derived epistemology. This issue is addressed very well in Willows, David, *Divine Knowledge: A Kierkegaardian Perspective on Christian Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> The African American Womanist theologian, Kelly Brown Douglas argues that embedded within Evangelical Christianity is the concept of a ‘Closed Monotheism’

through the prism of ‘revelation’ and notions of election, it does not take much imagination, therefore, to see the radicality of this seemingly innocent assertion.<sup>56</sup>

The exercise now becomes a more ideological one when the facilitator, me, then arbitrarily decides that only one letter is of any importance from this point onwards in the game. From this point forward, I usually decide that those who can see the letter ‘E’ (I have tended to choose the letter ‘E’ in order that it can stand for Europe or ‘E’ for Enlightenment) are charged with the task of describing the letter on the piece of paper facing them, and to interpret it for those who cannot see it. This is ‘their burden’, to evangelise and civilise those who are less enlightened, having not received the revelation of being able to witness to the ‘E’ for themselves. The slogan that accompanies the ‘E’ usually states ‘If wishes were gorses then beggars would ride’.

As the exercise now develops, I charge those who cannot see the ‘E’ to remember that the only letter that matters is the one they cannot see. They are told repeatedly that the letters they can see are worthless and without any merit, and they are forbidden to speak about or mention them again for the remainder of the exercise.

As the exercise develops, it soon becomes obvious that particular members of the group that cannot see the ‘E’ will not acquiesce and accept the superiority of a letter, which they cannot grasp the truth of

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in which the rubric of salvation is reserved for those who claim allegiance to the saving work of Jesus Christ. The truth claims of other religious traditions are rejected as being of a lesser substance or altogether false, depending upon the branch of this tradition to which one adheres. See Brown Douglas, Kelly, *What's Faith Got To Do With it?: Black Bodies/Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2005), pp.42-49.

<sup>56</sup> One of the crucial elements of learning that emerges from this, the first part of the exercise, is the sense that there is an inherent form of ethnocentrism to many forms of religious faith in that the construction of knowledge within the prism of revealed truth, leads almost inexorably to notions of preference for some and exclusion for others. Religious scholars such as John Hull have argued that only a form of critical openness to the ‘other’, formed from within the orbit of an inclusive liberal theological ethic, can safeguard against the worst excesses of religiously derived models of superiority, which as a corollary, leads to the negation of the other. See Hull, John M., ‘Critical Openness in Christian Nurture’, in Astley, Jeff and Francis, Leslie J., (eds.) *Critical Perspectives On Christian Education* (Leominster: Gracewings, 1994) pp. 251-275.

in any empirical sense. What I mean by this statement is that those who cannot see the ‘E’ can only take the accounts of those who can see it on trust. Those who cannot see the ‘E’ (which is the majority of the people in the exercise) are forced to accept the superiority of something of which they cannot be a part, whilst being instructed or even forced to deny that which is a direct part of their own immediate experience—i.e. the letters that are immediately before them.<sup>57</sup>

When I have used the exercise with a variety of people in many workshops, across the length and breadth of the UK and in other countries also, it soon becomes patently obvious that there is an inherent unfairness and irrationality in the set-up of the game itself. Those participants who cannot see the ‘E’ begin to question the inherent unfairness and illogical premise of the exercise. Why should only one letter and those who can see it be deemed superior to all the others? Why is there this kind of arbitrary division between ‘some’ who are given great privileges in the game, simply because of an accident of where they are seated, versus those who are not so blessed? Hopefully, many of you can see the direct parallel between the set up in the game and White, ethnocentric, Evangelical mission theology?

Often times, when I have enacted this exercise, I have ‘upped the anti’ in colloquial terms, by asserting that not only are the non ‘E’ symbols of no value, but those who follow them are savage and demonic.<sup>58</sup> I have then given permission to those who can see the ‘E’

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<sup>57</sup> This exercise has been used as a means of highlighting the ethnocentric compliance of Christianity in its decision within the formative years of this religious tradition to work primarily within the framework of Greek Hellenistic thought, at the expense of other religio-cultural frameworks. In the salient words of Robert Hood ‘Must God Remain Greek?’. See Hood, Robert E., *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro-Cultures and God Talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1990). In the exercise many of the participants who cannot see the ‘E’ have remarked on the naturally polarising tendencies of existing within a religious/ideological set up where one group is deemed to be the possessor of truth. It is this form of missionary based Evangelical theology that Black theology seeks to displace.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Warrior, a Native American scholar, has argued that it was precisely this form of closed monotheistic notion of ‘Manifest Destiny’ and election that enabled White Euro-American Protestants to commandeer the land from native peoples on the basis that the gods/God followed by the latter were aberrant and therefore, as a corollary, the people who followed such deities were themselves dangerous and not deserving of liberty or respect. See Warrior, Robert Allen, ‘A Native American

resort to punitive measures in order to convince those that cannot see it to acquiesce to the power of the former. Those that can see the 'E' often invoke a variety of coercive measures in order to 'persuade' their fellow participants in the exercise to 'see' the superiority of that letter.

On occasions, some have resorted to powerful forms of evangelical preaching, seeking to exhort their fellow game players to resist the claims of the false untruths that confront them, namely the other letters in the exercise, in order to convert these 'heathens' to the one true 'enlightenment'<sup>59</sup>—namely, that of the 'E'. Yet on other occasions, those trying to exhort their fellow participants to change their minds have simply used the threat of violence, plus various forms of intellectual coercion, such as the questionable theories of election, with which to 'win over their converts' to their way of thinking.

Hopefully, as I have described the workings of the exercise, you will begin to see the metaphorical basis of this participative activity. As the exercise develops, many of the participants begin to experience and feel some of the dynamics of oppressive structures and frameworks and how these elements impact upon those caught up within them.

For those who can see the 'E', their actions often vary from easy compliance<sup>60</sup> to subtle forms of resistance to the notion that they are superior to others. What has always fascinated me when using this exercise is the extent to which it has proved all too easy for those given power in the exercise arising from an arbitrary accident of seating to begin to believe the myths of their superiority! Most of the participants

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Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians', in Sugirtharajah, R.S. (ed.), *Voices From The Margin* (New York: Orbis, (pp.277-285).

<sup>59</sup> It has been interesting to witness the different forms of interpretation those who can 'see' the 'E' invoke when trying to convince their fellow participants who cannot see that letter. Some will state that 'E' stands for 'Enlightenment', or 'Europe', or 'Education'. Of course it needs to be said that the favoured letter does not have to be an 'E' but for the sake of argument and tradition, I have usually resorted to the 'E' when playing this particular game/exercise.

<sup>60</sup> I once used this exercise in a theological college setting with a former police officer who was then training for ordained ministry. This individual could see the 'E' and most expertly, showed great skill and subtlety in coercing, cajoling and using terrorizing tactics to get others into accepting his will regarding the superiority of the 'E'. In the debrief following the exercise he was of the view that his former career as a police officer had fitted him well for the supposed 'game playing' in this exercise.

who can see the ‘E’ soon learn not to question their alleged and spurious superiority.<sup>61</sup> Others, in the context of the game, grow to enjoy and even love their status as the superior beings. Of course, one should add that there are many who can see ‘E’ but resist the temptation to exploit their supposedly exalted position.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of the majority of participants who cannot see the ‘E’ their actions are also quite varied. Most, if not all of them, will try to resist the imposition of those who can see the ‘E’. Some resist by means of simply asserting their right to self-determination and the fact that they can see other letters aside from the ‘E’ that is being imposed upon them. Scholars such as Valentina Alexander<sup>63</sup> and Robert Beckford<sup>64</sup> have termed this form of resistance ‘Passive Resistance’. This mode of anti-oppressive struggle is one that is based on a form of a pneumatologically-inspired connection with the Divine, whom the oppressed come to believe has created them to be free, through the power of the spirit and spirit-filled forms of religio-cultural practices. This form of assertion is an expression of an innate belief that it is a fundamental right on behalf of those who are being oppressed to seek to claim their freedom with God in and through the power of their religious association with the Supreme Being.

The freedom they claim is one that asserts their innate connection

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<sup>61</sup> James H. Cone argues that the greatest sin in Christian theology has been the silence of most White people to the vicious lie and unpalatable untruths of White supremacy. See Cone, James H., ‘Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy’, *Black Theology: An International Journal* (Vol.2, No.2, July 2004), pp.139-152.

<sup>62</sup> It can be argued that in the context of the game, the minority who can see the ‘E’ and yet refuse to collude with the oppressive and exploitative structure of the game and the spurious superiority of their position are the ones who can be seen as exemplifying the radical change agents advocated by James Perkinson. Perkinson challenges White people to exercise a form of group traitor-like existence in the desire to stand against White supremacy and in solidarity with oppressed Black peoples. See Perkinson, James W., *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> See Alexander, Valentina, ‘Passive and Active Radicalism in Black Led Churches’, in Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G. (eds.) *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007), pp. 52-69.

<sup>64</sup> See Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostalism* (London: SPCK, 2000), pp.46-48.

with a deity whose love and concern for them might not give rise to any concrete or material change in their existential realities, but nonetheless, it bolsters their thinking and imagination to resist the imposition of others. In effect, this is an internalised form of resistance, where the ontological basis of Black humanity is preserved from the contaminating stain of the oppressor. Passive radicalism has tended to be most visible and operative within the Black Pentecostal movement within Britain.

Active radicalism, where those who are marginalised and oppressed seek to confront the oppressive and dehumanising structures in a more deliberate and explicit manner, can also be witnessed in the exercise. This occurs when those who cannot see the 'E' seek to adopt more confrontational measures for seeking to challenge the unfair and biased system of the game. Active radicalism is the form of resistance fiercely advocated by James Cone, in the very first self-articulated book on Black theology.<sup>65</sup> Cone seeks to provide a theological rationale for the militant activism of the 'Black Power Movement' that was a powerful resource for Black self-determination and Black pride in the second half of the 1960s in North America.<sup>66</sup> One can witness aspects of active radicalism in Walter Rodney's groundbreaking 'Rasta inspired text' *The Groundings with My Brothers*<sup>67</sup>, also published in 1969.

In using this exercise, I am not suggesting that the participants who engage within it are suddenly and miraculously enabled to 'get' Black theology in all its terms. Clearly, that would be a nonsensical and risible contention. I am also at pains to stress that the exercise is, essentially, 'only a game' and can, at best, only seek to reflect in an approximate manner, the broader realities of White hegemony and Black suffering. It cannot mirror the true complexities, horrors and sheer absurdity of racism, racialised oppression, sexism, patriarchy and heterosexism. What it can and has done is to begin to sensitise and make partic-

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<sup>65</sup> See Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989) pp.5-61.

<sup>67</sup> See Rodney, Walter, *The Groundings with my Brothers* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1969).

ipants politically aware of the ways in which mainstream, White Euro-American theology has been used to restrict and oppress Black people and other peoples from the global south.

Secondly, the exercise seeks to work as an active form of metaphor, in that it invites participants to make connections between the game, their experiences and emotions that have arisen from taking part in this activity and the theological reflections that follow. It is in this nexus of reflections on the exercise, and the further thoughts around the development of Black theology, that the central truths of this theological movement begin to emerge for the learner.

## Black theology reflections from past workshops

The importance of this exercise is that it assists in making us aware of the many differing epistemological frameworks that exist in our world. The exercise, ‘What Do You See?’ challenges participants to see how particular standpoints and perspectives govern how we understand and accept what is truth! Essentially, what one learns from the exercise, which is itself a central tenet of Black theology, is that all philosophical claims for truth (epistemology) are invariably linked to the realities of power, i.e. that truth is not only some kind of objective and tangible reality, but it is also subjective and intangible! What one believes and claims to be true is very much dependent on how much power and influence one has to insist that one’s claims are legitimised.<sup>68</sup> The exercise enables those who experience marginalisation and any resultant oppression to ask whether truth resides solely with those with power who can see the ‘E’? The understanding of Black theology that arises from this exercise is one that reminds us all of the continued

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<sup>68</sup> This exercise has been used as a means of showing the relationship between theology and ideology. I have often linked this exercise to a later experiential, participative form of embodied theological game playing entitled ‘Re-defining the Norm’. In the latter exercise participants are challenged to reconstruct a narrative using partial pieces of the story that are available to them, whilst another group has all the pieces of the stories at their disposal. The exercise demonstrates how knowledge and truth claims are often policed and controlled by those with power. See Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003), pp.132-140.



erroneous belief at the heart of the globalized world order that only one set of people essentially matter in the world.<sup>69</sup>

Very often as Black people in marginalised contexts, we have had to continue to argue, speak out, raise our voices and construct militant forms of protest in order to challenge the systemic workings of the world; simply in order to be heard.<sup>70</sup> This struggle is often a debilitating one. It requires Black people to challenge the systemic workings of White hegemony in order that our marginalised presence is realised.

Black people, seeking faithful change, have had to learn the hard lessons of keeping faith and maintaining dignity, integrity and self worth against all the odds. This can be a hugely difficult and thankless task, and probably explains why some Black people decide to opt out of White, western inspired epistemologies, as they will claim that the knowledge base inherent in these systems is one that is arbitrary and outside of their own experiences.<sup>71</sup> This can be seen in various forms of religious Black Nationalism. At the opposite end of the religious continuum, one can see the attraction of pietistic modes of spiritual resistance to White hegemony and globalized and indeed localized oppressions.<sup>72</sup> This becomes all the more operative when one witness-

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<sup>69</sup> The notable Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuriya has commented on the economic capitalistic Euro-American world (although since he wrote his article, China and India have become members of this elite world financial undertaking) and claims that it is constructed in order to benefit a few at the expense of the many across the globe. See Balasuriya, Tissa, 'The Liberation of the Affluent', *Black Theology: An International Journal* Vol.1, No.1, (November 2002), pp.83-113.

<sup>70</sup> See Grant, Paul and Patel, Raj, (eds.) *A Time To Speak: Perspectives of Black Christians in Britain* (Birmingham: A Joint Publication of 'Racial Justice' and the 'Black Theology Working Group', 1990). See also Grant, Paul and Patel, Raj, (eds.) *A Time to Act: Kairos 1992* (Birmingham: A Joint Publication of 'Racial Justice' and the 'Black Theology Working Group', 1992).

<sup>71</sup> This can be witnessed in varying forms of Black religious nationalism that will eschew any contact or accommodation with White Euro-American thought forms. For an excellent scholarly work that outlines these various developments, see Austin, Algernon, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006). See also Murrell, Nathaniel Samuel, Spencer, William David and McFarlane, Adrian Anthony, (eds.) *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Some of these concerns are addressed in Beckford, Robert, *Dread and*

es the entrenched nature of the interlocking power systems that incarcerate the Black self and make any semblance or even notion of change appear to be a seemingly impossible one.<sup>73</sup>

These existing reflections have since been supplemented by an extensive knowledge base accrued from the countless ‘performances’ of this exercise. The exercise has been used to raise questions of epistemology. How do we know what is true when widely divergent truth claims exist? This exercise also demonstrates the ideological nature of knowledge and truth.<sup>74</sup> As many Black people have always stated, “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know and who knows you that counts”.<sup>75</sup> The exercise has been used to demonstrate how arbitrary claims for the superiority of one position over and against others, inevitably leads to tyranny and oppression.<sup>76</sup> This exercise enables participants to experience the ‘abject nothingness’ of non-being, which arrived through the pernicious epoch of the Transatlantic slave trade.

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*Pentecostal* (London: SPCK, 2000) pp.178-182.

<sup>73</sup> The notable African American Womanist ethicist, Emilie Townes provides a penetrating analysis of the interlocking, systemic and embedded nature of evil within the workings of the globalized White Euro-American world order, where what passes for truth and justice is constantly being disguised and distorted; for the benefits of White hegemony. See Townes, Emilie M., *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Harry Singleton constructs a comparative analysis of the differing and yet complimentary theological methods of Juan Luis Segundo and James H. Cone, in order to demonstrate how their respective work constructs robust theological models that expose the death-dealing religio-political ideologies of the rich and powerful. See Singleton III, Harry H., *Black Theology and Ideology: Deideological Dimensions in the Theology of James H. Cone* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> I first encountered this salient truth when I was undertaking earlier research looking at the means by which Black theology when used within a Christian education framework (to create a Black Christian education of liberation) could become a vehicle for conscientization and empowerment of Black youth in Britain. This can be seen in the development of an experiential learning exercise entitled ‘Re-defining the norm’, which became the central enacted metaphor for framing the essential truth in the contention that it is ‘who you know and who knows you’ that helps to shape what we come to understand as truth. See Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth press, 2003) pp. 134-140.

<sup>76</sup> See Hood, Robert E., *Must God Remain Greek: God Talk and Afro-cultures* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 1993).

In the context of the exercise, those who have been disenfranchised through their position of not being able to see the 'E' have naturally rebelled at the sheer absurdity of the premise at the heart of the game. How can it be that some people should be deemed superior to others on the basis of the accident of an arbitrary position? From experience, the more powerful, erudite or socially advantaged the participant in 'real life', the more they have reacted with anger and frustration at their position of marginalisation and exclusion in the game. I have witnessed very well connected and educated White people react in a kind of repressed-pent-up fury at the privations heaped upon them as they have been deprived autonomy, respect or perceived intelligence, within what is a simple exercise or game lasting no more than an hour! When one cannot see the 'E', nothing in your reality, including the letters you can see are afforded any value or merit whatsoever! Suddenly, one is reduced to being an object.<sup>77</sup>

The sharp sense of learning for many White participants in this exercise has arisen from the realisation that this seemingly 'innocent game' suddenly maps onto a larger set of realities and experiences for Black and Asian people in Britain and across the world, which are anything but a game. The brutal realities of slavery, colonialism, racism, neo-colonialism, globalisation, patriarchy, sexism and homophobia that have affected millions of Black people the world over are not trivial incidences that can be overcome by stating 'I don't like this game, I'm not playing anymore!'

On only one occasion when using this exercise have I encountered the phrase written in the previous sentence! On that occasion, a very conservative and repressed White woman training for the Anglican ministry got up and proceeded to walk out of the room. In response to her retort that 'she wasn't playing anymore' I said 'And your actions show the necessary empathetic skills for ministry how again?'

Conversely, when Black and Asian people have taken part in the

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<sup>77</sup> See Pinn, Anthony B., *Terror and Triumph* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2003) for an excellent treatment on the absurdities of racialised forms of oppression in which the Black self is reduced to 'absurd nothingness' and the Black body becomes a mere object on which notions of inferiority and primitivism are projected.

game and found themselves on the side of the oppressed unable to see the ‘E’, they have often revelled in the exercise. For many of them, this exercise is simply a faint echo of the continued reality of oppression and hardship many of them face on a daily basis. When responding to the de-briefing<sup>78</sup> that follows the ‘action’ part of the exercise one Black participant said ‘Sitting on the other side of the circle and finding that what I can see and know to be true is completely disbelieved and ridiculed; this simply reminds me of the many times I’ve been stopped by the police whilst driving my BMW. It doesn’t matter how much I try to explain what I know to be true about me and this car, the copper still looks at me like I am an idiot who is incapable of telling the truth’.<sup>79</sup> The inescapable connection between a seemingly simple and innocent game and the larger experiential truths of Black life is one that lies at the heart of this exercise and my use of it as a way of explaining the central meaning of and indeed teaching Black theology.

Black theology seeks to respond to the question of how and in what ways does God care about and is in solidarity with peoples who are oppressed and marginalized on the basis of their God-given, God created Blackness? How can faith in God and the attempt to live in harmony and relationship with that God become the basis for oppressed peoples to imagine, to have hope and indeed live with the consciousness of history in light of this new reality, as the basis for life?<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> It is essential that participants are enabled to ‘de-brief’ and come out of role when the active part of the exercise is completed. I have always sought to give participants opportunities to explore their feelings and reflect upon their thoughts as they attempt to make sense of the exercise in which they have been immersed. This and the many other exercises and dramas I have written attempt to connect the resultant emotions and thoughts that have emerged in the ‘game playing’ with a larger set of realities and experiences that have impacted upon Black people in the world, in both contemporary and historical periods in history. This method for undertaking Black theology lies at the heart of my ‘participative’ approach to this subject. Reference is made to ‘de-briefing’ or ‘coming out of role’ in the introduction to Reddie, Anthony G., *Acting In Solidarity: Reflections in Critical Christianity* (London: DLT, 2005), pp. xvii-xxii.

<sup>79</sup> This statement was made during a performance of this exercise in a community church setting in North London in 2000.

<sup>80</sup> My earlier attempts at creating an accessible and participatory based approach to assisting people to understand the importance and relevance for Black theology can be found in Reddie, Anthony, *Growing into Hope (vol.1): Christian Education in*

This experiential practical-activity based approach to Black theology is one that attempts to engage learners in an embodied, emotional and literal fashion into the central dynamics of issues concerning power, 'race' and knowledge claims for truth, especially if the latter asserts that its truths emanate from some process of revelation from a divine being. In the salient words of words of great African American religious historian, Robert Hood, 'Must God Remain Greek?'<sup>81</sup> Why is it that the bulk of revelation in Christianity has been safely ensconced from within Hellenistic derived thought forms, often at the expense of African derived epistemologies?

The questions posed by Black theology on these important questions are of vital importance because this model of Christian-inspired theological reflection represents the sacred faith inspired thinking and action on the life of Black people, detailing their hopes, aspirations and beliefs for another world, within and beyond the present reality, in which their existence is one largely of struggle, oppression and sheer hardship.<sup>82</sup>

It is my belief that one should approach Black theology as a very different entity from the mainstream of White Euro-American God talk. What I mean by this is that when James H. Cone or Womanists like Jacquelyn Grant helped to give voice to a radical Black focus on re-thinking the basic tenets of Christianity, they did so in order to provide resources for the mass of suffering and oppressed Black humanity. Their scholarship and the activism of those that followed them was a plea to create a model of Christian inspired thinking and action that would give voice to the cries of pain, frustration, hardship, sorrow, joys and the sheer unquenchable life force of Black people to

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*Multi-ethnic churches – Believing and Expecting* (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998) and *Growing into Hope (vol.2): Christian Education in Multi-ethnic churches – Liberation and Change* (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> See Hood, Robert E., *Must God Remain Greek?: Afro-cultures and God-talk* (Minneapolis: Fortress press 1990)

<sup>82</sup> This notion of 'another world' being possible is addressed with great eloquence by a number of Black (in the wider political sense) scholars from across the world. See Hopkins, Dwight N. and Lewis, Marjorie, (eds.) *Another World is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Skinned People* (London: Equinox, 2009).

survive and thrive in a world in which they are often treated as mere objects and not subjects.<sup>83</sup> Black theology represents a committed and rational response to the challenges of being a Black human being in a world run by White people with power for the benefit of others like themselves.<sup>84</sup>

The experiential dimension of Black theology is summarised in one of my favourite sayings, first expressed to me by my Mother—namely ‘Who feels it knows it’.<sup>85</sup> Black theology seeks to pose the critical question regarding Black existence—‘what have we felt?’ This question is followed by the corollary, namely, ‘What have we known to be true?’ The second question naturally grows out of the implications of the first. In light of what have we felt, in what way does that basic foundational question give rise to the challenge to seek meaning and truth from ones continued existence of struggle in the world? And let us not be persuaded by neo-conservative apologists who will point to the disproportionately small number of Black successes as the basis for arguing that the unremitting reality of marginalisation, economic poverty, societal indifference, disproportionate levels of ill health, poor provisions for education and psycho-psychotic nihilism are not the lot of the bulk of Black peoples the world over. The election of a Black president in the USA is indeed a moment of celebration but let us not forget that he largely had to disavow his very Blackness in

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<sup>83</sup> I am indebted to my friend and colleague The Revd Inderjit Bhogal for his insights on the developmental process of oppressed and marginalised people moving from a reactive mode of survival to a more proactive sense of seeking to thrive and indeed thriving within the present world order. For an example of Bhogal’s work in Black theology in Britain, see Bhogal, Inderjit S., ‘A Table In The Wilderness (Psalm 78/9)’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2007), pp.242-246.

<sup>84</sup> See Hopkins, Dwight N., *Head and Heart: Black Theology, Past, Present and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 127-154.

<sup>85</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G., *Dramatizing Theologies* (London: Equinox, 2006), pp. 22-24.

<sup>86</sup> It is worth noting that Barack Obama, in his Democratic Nomination Acceptance speech of 28<sup>th</sup> August 2008, did not once make reference to or mention that he was ‘Black’ or ‘African American’. In his reference to Martin Luther King Jnr’s famous ‘I Have A Dream Speech’, no reference was made to the fact that King’s speech was in the context of the fight for Civil Rights and anti-racist struggle or the speaker of those eloquent words was also a Black man or ‘African American’ like

order to do so.<sup>86</sup>

Black theology has not died, as some recent doom sayers have predicted<sup>87</sup>, but it is definitely in need of re-energising.<sup>88</sup> Black theology must re-affirm its commitment to the massed ranks of ordinary Black people consigned to the margins of the so-called New World Order.<sup>89</sup> The vision for the ongoing protesting and iconoclastic presence of Black theology in the world remains undimmed. The systemic and systematic workings of the present globalized world order that leaves the few able to see 'the E' in a position to control of the world's resources whilst the many who cannot see the 'E' are consigned to lesser status, has not abated. Black theology, to my mind, remains the most potent of faithful frameworks of re-imagining a world that has peace, justice and equity at the centre of its daily operations for all people, regardless of the colour of one's skin! Long may that struggle continue! Long live Black theology!

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the person invoking the speech in the first place. See <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=dtL-IV3OZ0c>.

<sup>87</sup> See Kee, Alistair, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (Aldershot, Kent: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> This form of re-energising and challenge can be seen in a number of comparatively recent texts, such as Thomas, Linda E., (ed.) *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), Carruther, Iva E., Haynes III, Frederick D. and Wright Jr, Jeremiah A., (eds.) *Blow the Trumpet in Zion: Global Vision and Action for the 21st century Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2005), Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Reddie, Anthony G., *Working Against The Grain: Re-imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London: Equinox, 2008).

<sup>89</sup> Although the term has a long derivation going back to the end of the first World War and the foundation of the League of Nations, I am using this term in light of the more recent usage by George Bush Snr. as reported in the Time Magazine cover story of the 11th December 1989. The notion of the new world order of western globalized power has been addressed from within the context of religion and theology by Dwight Hopkins *et al*. See Hopkins, Dwight N., Lorentzen, Lois Ann, Mendieta, Eduardo and Batstone, David, (eds.) *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).





# Teaching Black Biblical Studies in the UK:

Special Issues for Consideration and Suggested  
Hermeneutical Approaches

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**B**lack theology as an academic discipline can be said to have had its roots within the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements in 1960s America and the radical efforts of Black clergy in the struggle for freedom.<sup>1</sup> James Cone, the father of Black theology, in his groundbreaking works *Black Theology and Black Power*<sup>2</sup>, *A Black Theology of Liberation*<sup>3</sup>, and *God of the Oppressed*<sup>4</sup>, took the bold and unashamed step of articulating what God means to African Americans.

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Through racial and social oppression, it became important for Black people of America to articulate their experience in the light of God and the people of Israel as illustrated in the Bible. The Israelites' lives were blighted with the peril of slavery and suffering. For Blacks, they too had undergone slavery and were still suffering through racial discrimination and injustice. It was no longer adequate for Blacks in America to accept the theology of a dominating culture that upheld the inferiority of Black people by asserting they were somehow less than human, and as such, not subject to the same rights as Whites, nullifying their experience of faith in the process. Tired of their situation, the development of Black theology became the voice of an oppressed people affirming their faith in God who identified with their struggle. Black theology became a theology of liberation. It is the *faith* of Black Christians in America that Cone sought to place under the spotlight of critical reflection in order to rigorously defend an understanding of God through the lens of the Black Church. This understanding is rooted in the perspective that God is Black, because of the very fact that he is on the side of the oppressed. Black in the sense that he understands the language of suffering as experienced through Black people in slavery. As Black theology emerged, the central focus became seeing the gospel of Jesus as essentially one of liberation.<sup>5</sup> Jesus identified himself with the poor who were at the heart of his mission.<sup>6</sup> A mission that proclaimed freedom to the captives as seen through the account of Luke 4.16ff. For Black people, being able to reflect on the plight of their struggle in light of the Jesus tradition reinterpreted, was a means of

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<sup>1</sup> According to James Cone there are three major contexts for the origin of Black Theology: 1) the civil rights movement, 2) the publication of Joseph Washington's book, *Black Religion* (1964), 3) the rise of the black power movement. See Cone, James, *Black Theology and the Black Church* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1985), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power, 20th Anniversary Edition* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Cone, James H., *A Black Theology of Liberation, 20th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Cone, James H., *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> See Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> See Cone, James H., *Black Theology and Black Power*, *ibid.*, p. 36.

seeing Jesus as present with them in their contemporary situation. This provided the source of empowerment needed to fight for freedom and justice. Jesus became liberator, an affirmation of Black power. Power to demand to be treated as human beings, power to fight to be accepted in society, power to be treated with dignity and respect.

Since the early works of Cone and other theologians<sup>7</sup> who represented the prophetic voices of the 1960s, Black Theology in America has gone on from strength to strength with a new generation of scholars who have developed the discipline further like Dwight Hopkins<sup>8</sup>, Kelly Brown Douglas<sup>9</sup>, and Delores Williams.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, for more than two decades now, we have also seen the development of Womanist Theology through notable exponents like Williams<sup>11</sup> and Douglas<sup>12</sup> again, Katie Cannon<sup>13</sup>, Jacquelyn Grant<sup>14</sup>, Emillie Townes<sup>15</sup>, and Karen Baker-Fletcher<sup>16</sup> to name a few.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See theologians such as Cleage Jr., Albert B., *Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church* (Detroit: Luxor Publishers of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church, 1972); *The Black Messiah* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1989); Jones, Major J., *Christian Ethics for Black Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1974); *The Color of God: The Concept of God in Afro-American Thought* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987); Roberts, J. Deotis, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology, Revised Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> See Hopkins, Dwight N., *Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture and Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989); *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993); *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999); *Down, Up and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000); *Head and Heart: Black Theology - Past, Present and Future* (New York/Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> See Brown Douglas, Kelly, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994); *What's Faith Got to Do with It: Black Bodies/ Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> See Williams, Delores, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993); *Black Theology in a New Key: Feminist Theology in a Different Voice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See Williams, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> See Brown Douglas, Kelly, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999).

It is the demand of these African American scholars to articulate their faith through their Black experience that gave rise to emerging voices across the Atlantic on British shores. Although having a shorter life existence than its African American counterpart, Black theology in Britain gained particular momentum in the late nineties through the particularly vocal writings of Robert Beckford in *Jesus is Dread*<sup>18</sup>, *Dread and Pentecostal*<sup>19</sup> and *God of the Rahtid*.<sup>20</sup> What Beckford did through his works was focus our minds on what it is like to be Black living in Britain in light of Christian faith and critiqued it through Black popular cultural optics. In recent years, we have seen the expansion of voices on the subject, in particular, through the prolific works of Anthony Reddie.<sup>21</sup> He has sought to cast a particular look at Black

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<sup>13</sup> See Geneva Cannon, Katie, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988); *Katie's Cannon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> See Grant, Jacquelyn, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1989)

<sup>15</sup> See Townes, Emilie, *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993); *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993); *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997); *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Baker-Fletcher, Karen, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2006); Baker-Fletcher, Karen and Baker-Fletcher, Garth Kasimu, *My Sister, My Brother: Womanist and Xodus God-talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> This is by no means an exhaustive list of womanist scholars. For a helpful bibliography of select womanist writings from the first quarter century (1979-2004) within the area of theology and religious studies, refer to Phillips, Layli, (ed.), *The Womanist Reader* (New York/London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), pp. 407-409.

<sup>18</sup> Beckford, Robert, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Beckford, Robert, *God of the Rahtid: Redeeming Rage* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2001).

<sup>21</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G, *Faith Stories and the Experience of Black Elders:*

God-talk through the life experience of Black people in Britain. Emmanuel Lartey<sup>22</sup>, Michael Jagessar<sup>23</sup>, Mukti Barton<sup>24</sup>, Mark Sturge<sup>25</sup>, Joe Aldred<sup>26</sup>, Kate Coleman<sup>27</sup> and Lorraine Dixon<sup>28</sup> are also

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*Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001); *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003); *Acting in Solidarity: Reflections in Critical Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2005); *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-talk* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2006); *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); *Working Against the Grain: Re-imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century* (London/Oakville: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2008); Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *Postcolonial Black British Theology: New Textures and Themes* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007); *Black Theology in Britain A Reader* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007).

<sup>22</sup> See Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling, 2nd Edition* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003); *Pastoral Theology in an Intercultural World* (Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2006); 'After Stephen Lawrence: Characteristics and Agenda for Black Theology in Britain,' *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* 3 (Nov 1999), pp. 79-91.

<sup>23</sup> See Jagessar, Michael N. , 'Spinning Theology, Trickster, Texts and Theology,' *Postcolonial Black British Theology*, pp. 124-145; 'Spinning Texts – Anancy Hermeneutics,' *The Journal of the College of Preachers* 117 (July 2004), pp. 41-48; Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *Postcolonial Black British Theology: New Textures and Themes* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007); *Black Theology in Britain A Reader* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007).

<sup>24</sup> See Barton, Mukti, 'Hermeneutical Insubordination Toppling Worldly Kingdom' in Aldred, Joe, *Sisters with Power*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 24-35; 'I Am Black and Beautiful', *Black Theology: An International Journal* Vol 2, No.2, (2004), pp. 167-187; *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking Out on Racism and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> See Sturge, Mark, *Look What the Lord Has Done! An Exploration of Black Christian Faith in Britain* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> See Aldred, J. D., *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> See Coleman, Kate, 'Black Theology and Black Liberation: A Womanist Perspective', *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 1 (Oct 1998), pp. 59-69; 'Black Women and Theology', *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* Issue 3 (Nov 1999), pp. 51-65; 'Black to the Future: Re-Evangelizing Black Youth', *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 6 (May 2001), pp. 41-51; *Exploring Métissage: A Theological Anthropology of Black Women's Subjectivities in Postcolonial Britain*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Birmingham, 2005); 'Another Kind of Black,' in *Black*

notable names, who have in various ways provided new theological insights on Black British life. However, what has been largely missing from these writings is a focused and systematic treatment of the biblical texts in light of Black experience.<sup>29</sup> It is Aldred himself, who, in his article ‘Paradigms for a Black Theology in Britain’<sup>30</sup> asserts the need for engagement with the biblical text in order to arrive at any kind of Black British theological paradigm. He writes:

Biblical models are crucial for Black Theology in Britain because the Black Christian community, especially the Black-led churches, is a biblio-centric community. Any theology therefore that does not engage in a primary way with the biblical text will find itself ipsofacto divorced from the Black Church with which it seeks to engage.<sup>31</sup>

Given the centrality of the Bible to Black Christian faith in Britain, it

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*Theology: An International Journal*, Vol 5, No.3 (Nov 2007), 279-304.

<sup>28</sup> See Dixon, Lorraine, “‘Teach It, Sister!’: Mahalia Jackson as Theologian in Song’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 2 (April 1999), pp. 72-89; ‘A Reflection on Black Identity and Belonging in the Context of the Anglican Church in England: A Way Forward’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 4 (May 2000), pp. 22-37; ‘The Nature of Black Presence in England Before the Abolition of Slavery’, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. 5, No.2 (July 2007), pp. 171-183; ‘Tenth Anniversary Reflections on Robert Beckford’s Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain’, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. 6, No.3 (Sept 2008), pp. 300-307.

<sup>29</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that Mukti Barton has made a particular effort in analysing aspects of the Bible through Black and Asian optics: see Barton, Mukti, *Creation and Fall and the Women of Bangladesh: A Contextual Study* (Dhaka: Netritto Proshikkhom Kendro, 1992); *Scripture as Empowerment for Liberation and Justice: The Experience of Christian and Muslim Women in Bangladesh* (Bristol: Centre for Comparative Studies in Religion and Gender, 1999). As a Tutor in Black and Asian Theology at The Queen’s Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Barton has also been instrumental in developing the curriculum there that focuses on using the Bible as a tool for liberation. See the staff page on the official website of The Queen’s Foundation:

<http://www.queens.ac.uk>.

<sup>30</sup> Aldred, Bishop Joe, ‘Paradigms for a Black Theology in Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 2 (April 1999), pp. 9-32.

<sup>31</sup> Aldred, Bishop Joe, ‘Paradigms for a Black Theology in Britain’, *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Issue 2 (April 1999), p. 9.

is essential that a critical reading of Scripture through the lens of Black British experience be developed. Herein lies the context for introducing Black biblical hermeneutics. If there is to be any meaningful discourse on matters of faith as lived through the lives of Black people in Britain, if 'Black God-talk' is to be truly effective, then the cultural distinctive must be realised and brought to the foreground. How this underpins the reading of the biblical text becomes of crucial importance. African-American Hebrew scholar Randall Bailey outlines the way in which the Bible has been interpreted from a colonial and dominant perspective. His expressed concern in his essay 'The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text'<sup>32</sup> is that,

unless one is aware of one's own cultural biases and interests in reading the text and appropriating the tradition, one may be seduced into adopting another's culture, one which is diametrically opposed to one's health and well-being.<sup>33</sup>

Against this backdrop, the matter of reading the biblical text in light of one's own culture is to be taken very seriously. What this essay seeks to address then is the need for the development of a form of biblical scholarship that applies a reading strategy that is distinct to a particular aspect of Black culture. I want to make a case for the use of Black vernacular and vernacular hermeneutics for critical dialogue and interpretation of the Scriptures through an assessment of the Bible Society of the West Indies' work, 'A Who Run Tings?'<sup>34</sup>—translated passages of the Gospels into Jamaican (otherwise known as patois)<sup>35</sup>, in audio

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<sup>32</sup> Bailey, Randall C., 'The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text,' in Sugirtharajah, R.S., (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 66-90.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, Randall C., 'The Danger of Ignoring One's Own Cultural Bias in Interpreting the Text,' in Sugirtharajah, R.S., (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> 'A Who Run Tings?' (Audio Cassette) (Kingston, Jamaica: Bible Society of the West Indies, 1996).

<sup>35</sup> It is important to point out that 'patois' is the term that African Caribbeans in Britain as well as in Jamaica itself would use to describe the language of Jamaicans rather than the term 'Jamaican' itself. However, I use the term 'Jamaican' to reflect the validity of the language as spoken by Jamaicans as a bona fide language and not something as less than or a form of broken English as the term 'patois' connotes.

form, and subsequently the Bible Society's effort to build upon this seminal work in a bid to translate the entire Bible into Jamaican. Through this, I want to bring to the fore how the application of Jamaican to the biblical text can be appropriated within the teaching of under-postgraduate programmes of study in Higher Education institutions that open up the way for serious reflection on issues surrounding discourse and power that give space to unheard voices and the integrity of their experience. This I believe is a key aspect to theological education and training if we're to produce the kind of ministers, leaders and biblical scholars at the cutting edge of their ministry and field.

## Black vernacular and vernacular hermeneutics

For decades African Caribbeans in Britain have been expressing their world view, their selfhood, through their own developed verbal power and word music.<sup>36</sup> The Black vernacular has been the uniting force of Black communities<sup>37</sup> that have struggled to maintain their cultural identity in a White dominated society. R.S. Sugirtharajah points out that 'Etymologically, 'vernacular' connotes the language of household slaves, hence of ordinary people, rather than that of the masters or the elite.'<sup>38</sup> It is in essence the means in which a once colonised people endeavour to recapture a sense of their local identity in ways which communicate their distinctiveness and give validity to their existence.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In his introduction, David Sutcliffe points out that the essays in the book *The Language of the Black Experience* explore such ways of expression. See Sutcliffe, David and Wong, Ansel, (eds.), *The Language of the Black Experience: Cultural Expression through Word and Sound in the Caribbean and Black Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> I use the term 'Black communities' to reflect the fact that Black people in Britain do not form a homogenous community due to heritage, age and experience and how that is negotiated in responding to British life. See Tomlin, Carol, *Black Language in Sacred and Secular Contexts* (New York: Caribbean Diaspora Press, Inc., 1999), p. 43, who makes this point describing the complex phenomenon of Black British society in terms of 'a continuum of attitudes and behaviours.'

<sup>38</sup> Sugirtharajah, R.S., 'Thinking about Vernacular Hermeneutics Sitting in a Metropolitan Study' in Sugirtharajah, R.S., (ed.) *Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1999),p. 94.



As the vernacular in this connotation reflects the language of the poor, it has particular significance to the Black community that from history they have reflected an impoverished class. Sugirtharajah notes that the definition of what is vernacular largely depends on the context.<sup>40</sup> From the British context, the Black vernacular can be described as 'Black language' in Britain. This language employs Caribbean Creoles. Marlon Winedt in his article, 'A Survey of Creole Language Studies'<sup>41</sup> provides a working definition of a Creole as '...a contact language whose lexicon is predominantly derived from a lexifier language, but whose syntax is at least partially derived from another (substrate) language.'<sup>42</sup> In the case of Caribbean Creoles, it can be said that their origin dates back to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when Black people from many different parts of West and Central Africa were thrown together on the Caribbean plantations and so created their own new social networks which emerged new common languages.<sup>43</sup> An emergence which would have arisen abruptly and out of urgency.<sup>44</sup>

Although a variety of Creole languages are employed by a number of Black people in Britain, particularly the youth, the most influential of Creoles is Jamaican.<sup>45</sup> It is this creative stability and variation in the tension between Jamaican and English that has provided a vehicle for the ordinary Black communities in Britain to express their own experiences; a vehicle that has been expressed through the realm

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<sup>39</sup> Sugirtharajah, R.S., *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> See Sugirtharajah, R.S., *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> Winedt, Marlon, 'A Survey of Creole Language Studies', *TIC Talk Newsletter of the United Bible Societies Translation Information Clearinghouse*, No.57 (2004), pp. 1-5.

<sup>42</sup> Winedt, Marlon, *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> See Sutcliffe, David and Wong, Ansel, (eds.), *The Language of the Black Experience: Cultural Expression through Word and Sound in the Caribbean and Black Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986), p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Winedt, Marlon, 'A Survey of Creole Language Studies', *TIC Talk Newsletter of the United Bible Societies Translation Information Clearinghouse*, No.57 (2004), p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> See Hewitt, Roger, *White Talk Black Talk: Inter-racial Friendship and Communication Among Adolescents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 102-3.

of music, poetry and within the religious sphere. More will be said about how and where the language has been used as a creative expression of cultural identity later, however, it is important to say at this point that given the strength of the Black vernacular within Black communities in Britain being in the spoken word, it is crucial that any study that seeks to bring to light the experiences of Black culture through the biblical texts must centralise its investigation within interpretations that have a vernacular reading. Such hermeneutical practices aim ‘...to overcome the remoteness and strangeness of these biblical texts by trying to make links across the cultural divides by employing the reader’s own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narratives.’<sup>46</sup>

### Biblical Scholarship from a cultural perspective

Before we consider the translation work of BSWI, it is important to say a brief word about what biblical scholarship from a cultural perspective currently looks like globally. Exegetical work from a particular cultural lens has been going on as exemplified through African biblical scholarship. Musa Dube<sup>47</sup> and Itumeleng Mosala<sup>48</sup> are two notable scholars in the field. There is also the landmark publication of the Africa Bible Commentary.<sup>49</sup> In his essay ‘Academic Biblical Interpretation among African Americans in the United States’, Randall Bailey named all the African Americans with doctoral degrees—there were forty five (twenty one in Hebrew Bible; twenty four in New Testament).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sugirtharajah, R.S., *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>47</sup> See Dube, Musa, (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta, Georgia/Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature/WCC Publications, 2001); Dube, Musa W. and Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A., (eds.), *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa/ Maryknoll, New York: Cluster Publications/ Orbis Books, 2004); West, Gerald O. and Dube, Musa (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> See Mosala, Itumeleng, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Adeyemo, Tokunboh, (ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> See Bailey, Randall, ‘Academic Biblical Interpretation among African Americans

Although not an official or comprehensive list, it gave us a good indication as to the developments of biblical scholarship across the Atlantic. In 2007, with the groundbreaking publication of the first ever African American New Testament commentary entitled *True to Our Native Land*,<sup>51</sup> this list was built upon with a total of forty names of African Americans holding doctorates in New Testament alone. It is evident then that African-American biblical scholarship is continuing to grow. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition within biblical studies of the importance of scholars reading with people at grassroots level in a way that identifies with them culturally and socially. This is something that Gerald West and Musa Dube set in motion in 1996 with the *Semeia 73* publication of “Reading With’: An Exploration of the Interface Between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible,”<sup>52</sup> where their aim was to bring to particular attention African voices and the various techniques they offer in ‘reading with’ ‘ordinary readers.’ The recent publishing of *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities*<sup>53</sup> is in fact a follow-up project of the first conversations of the 1996 *Semeia 73* publication but this time widens the geographical field to include scholars from around the world (South Africa, India, Jamaica, Brazil, UK, USA) ‘...who share similar commitments to do their scholarship in the interface between the academy and community.’<sup>54</sup> Other publications which also follow a similar theme of scholars reading with ‘ordinary readers’ are Bob Ekblad’s *Reading the Bible with the Damned*<sup>55</sup> and Musimbi

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in the United States’ in Wimbush, Vincent L., (ed.) *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York/London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 696-711.

<sup>51</sup> Blount, Brian K., (ed.), *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> See West, Gerald and Dube, Musa, (eds.), “‘Reading With’: An Exploration of the Interface Between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible’, in *Semeia 73* (1996).

<sup>53</sup> West, Gerald O., (ed.), *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> West, Gerald O., *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ekblad, Bob, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). In the case of this book, the reading is with those on the extreme margins of society, those who feel ‘damned.’

R.A. Kanyoro's *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*.<sup>56</sup>

There are more biblical scholars than ever before who are writing from cultural perspectives and bringing to bear the fascinating insights that can be gained through an intercultural approach to biblical learning. However, this is virtually absent in Britain. The need for something specific to the Black British landscape is vital.

## A Who Run Tings?—its development

In 1996, the Bible Society of the West Indies (BSWI) took the bold step of launching *A Who Run Tings? (Who is in Charge?)*, the first ever scripture cassette portions of the Gospels into Jamaican. It is the mission of the BSWI to carry out the effective distribution of the Word of God in languages that people can understand and at affordable prices. In an interview with the BSWI's General Secretary, Revd Courtney Stewart, in the summer of 2007<sup>57</sup>, he points out that the Scriptures have always been available in English to Jamaicans, however, they believed that patois was the vehicle that could '...convey the Scriptures and the truths and realities of the Scriptures, to Jamaicans, at a much deeper level than English ever could.'<sup>58</sup> These truths and realities were set against the backdrop of what Revd Stewart points out was a growing drug culture, a growing underworld culture in Jamaica with the emergence of persons called 'dons.' That is, community leaders who would terrorise and hold captive communities and establish political strongholds, frequently asserting their rights with a popular saying 'A me run tings.'<sup>59</sup> However, as a means of speaking

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<sup>56</sup> Kanyoro, Musimbi R.A., *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). Here in this text, Kanyoro's focus is to bring to attention the readings of the women of the Kenyan village of Bware on the book of Ruth.

<sup>57</sup> Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings, Thursday 26th July 2007 at the Bible Society of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, (unpublished PhD research).

<sup>58</sup> Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>59</sup> See "Who Run Tings?" United Bible Societies World Report 338, (Feb 1999), available on the web at:

out against such self-appointed leaders, ten Scripture passages which deal with the miracles of Christ, His death and resurrection, were carefully chosen against this cultural background to convey God's sovereignty in nature, in people's lives and even in death.<sup>60</sup> As Revd Stewart emphatically asserts when explaining in light of the social situation, how they came up with the title for the New Testament series, '...undoubtedly, a who run tings? It's not the dons—a God run tings!'<sup>61</sup> In effect, the message that was being conveyed in audio form was that God is in control; God, ultimately, is in charge.

The bold step BSWI took in the *A Who Run Tings?* translation project was not without its challenges and controversy along the way, from the first time the idea was broached at committee level,<sup>62</sup> to when it was launched with the coverage it received through the media and national newspapers; the controversial factor being the fact that the sacred Scriptures were translated into the Jamaican language itself which was not considered a language by many Jamaicans. English is the official national language in Jamaica. Arguments abounded for and against the translation of the Bible passages. One of the fiercest critiques levelled at the BSWI was that by Morris Cargill writing in *The Sunday Gleaner* on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1996 who argues for retaining the King James Version as representing 'elegant English.' It is worth quoting him at length:<sup>63</sup>

Now a bunch of well-meaning idiots has announced the intention of 'translating' the Bible into the broken English some call patois. If this wrong-headed scheme comes about it will signal our lost hope of getting good English spoken by the majority of Jamaicans.

What causes people to want to vulgarise everything and to reduce

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[http://www.biblesociety.org/old/wr\\_338/wr\\_338.htm#Tings](http://www.biblesociety.org/old/wr_338/wr_338.htm#Tings) (accessed 23/03/2009); Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>60</sup> See "Who Run Tings?" *United Bible Societies World Report*. The ten Scripture passages used are: Mark 4.35-41; 5.1-20; 5. 21-43; Luke 7.11-23; 19.45-48; 20.1-8; John 9. 1-41; 19.1-42; 20.1-31; Matt 28.16-20.

<sup>61</sup> See Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>62</sup> See Dr Faith Linton interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings at Cranbrook Flower Farm, St Ann, Jamaica, Friday 27th July 2007, (unpublished PhD research).

<sup>63</sup> Cargill, Morris, 'The Patois Bible', *The Sunday Gleaner* (June 30, 1996), 9A.

them to the lowest common denominator? I cannot understand the lack of pride which makes some people think that to speak and write good English is beyond the capacity of Jamaicans. And in our case if you destroy English you are depriving Jamaicans of a whole world of fine literature.

What are these jackasses going to do next? 'Translate' Shakespeare and Milton into patois?<sup>64</sup>

Note the pejorative way Cargill talks about the translation as vulgarising the language and reducing it down to 'the lowest common denominator' with patois being nothing more than 'broken English.' Rather than view Jamaican as a separate language in itself, Cargill sees its use in the translation of a sacred text as destroying English. That somehow, by applying Black language to this biblical enterprise, it will corrupt and downgrade the very essence of English prose eventually leading to its erosion. Given that the official national language of Jamaica is English, one can see why there would be opposition. Yet Cargill's comments represent an arrogant mindset and are a contradiction in terms. By making the statement 'If you degrade the language of a people you are destroying their capacity to think and their capacity to understand elegance and good taste,' Cargill has failed to recognise that Jamaican is the language of the people of Jamaica, their first language, and not English as many would like to believe. Cargill has elevated English to a high and superior status from which only 'fine literature' can be found. This Western language bias is not an untypical view as Viv Edwards points out in her book *Language in a Black Community*.<sup>65</sup> She notes that in most people's minds, Black language is associated with oral culture and unfortunately the truth is that languages that are vehicles of a written language are considered more prestigious than those that are not.<sup>66</sup>

The matter concerning oral versus scribal discourse and what constitutes good taste is the focus of Jamaican academic Carolyn

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<sup>64</sup> Cargill, Morris, *ibid*.

<sup>65</sup> Edwards, Viv, *Language in a Black Community* (Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1986).

<sup>66</sup> Edwards, Viv, *ibid.*, p. 7.

Cooper's book, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*.<sup>67</sup> She argues that the 'vulgarity' of the vulgar must itself be contested. Analysing definitions of the words 'vulgar' and 'taste' from the Oxford English Dictionary spanning the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, she points out that in the 1643 definition of 'vulgar' as '[h]aving a common and offensively mean character, coarsely commonplace; lacking in refinement or good taste,'<sup>68</sup> such a conception of the term '...seems to originate in a fear of the coarse texture of the (feminised) body and baseness of the flesh that must be made subject to the refining influence of magisterial 'good taste': not eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.'<sup>69</sup>

Although Cooper points out the oral nature of the term 'taste', i.e. the sense of touch, feeling (with the hands) and the act of tasting or perceiving the flavour of a thing with the organ of taste,<sup>70</sup> she asserts that the 1671 Oxford English Dictionary definition is narrowly circumscribed, that is to say that taste is 'the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like...'<sup>71</sup> In this way, Cooper argues that taste becomes aesthetics, the criticism of taste and has precise ideological implications for what she calls '...the playful exploration of the body of Jamaican popular culture.'<sup>72</sup> It is the pejoration of the 'vulgar'—the people, the language and the corpus of culture produced, that Cooper notes marks the high/low-euro/afrocentric cultural divide that is encoded in the Jamaican body politic. She points out that from the relative neutrality of the Latin *vulgus*, 'the common people,' the vulgar becomes 'coarsely commonplace.' Therefore, the vulgate, that which is of language or speech, the ordinary, vernacular, as according to the 1513 Oxford English Dictionary definition becomes the sign of illiteracy. The use of understanding language, words or ideas that is common to the people who

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<sup>67</sup> Cooper, Carolyn, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the 'Vulgar' Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, Ltd., 1993).

<sup>68</sup> Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>70</sup> See Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Cooper, *Noises in the Blood*, *ibid.*, p. 8.

produce this vulgar body of knowledge (1533 definition) and is commonly current or prevalent, generally or widely disseminated, as a matter of knowledge, assertion, or opinion (1549 definition) is devalued.<sup>73</sup> Cooper concludes from this that ‘In all domains, the ‘vulgar’ is that which can be traced to “Africa”; the “refined” is that which can be traced to “Europe”.’<sup>74</sup> Thus, she further goes on to say that, ‘In the domain of language and verbal activity, English is “refined” and Jamaican is “vulgar”; oral texts are “vulgar”; written texts are ‘refined’.’<sup>75</sup>

Cooper provides a compelling analysis of the prevailing colonial attitude towards Black culture that views it as an inferior culture to the White Western world that put such hostile comments like Cargill’s into sharper focus and it is the White, Euro-centric dominant discourse who have set the parameters in deciding what represents good taste. To translate the Bible into Jamaican is problematic because ‘patois’ is a Black idiom and anything that is a creation of Black people cannot be of quality or inherent good. This is the crux of the matter. Cargill finds it offensive that a *Jamaican* translation of the Bible could be envisaged as worthy of time and effort in producing because it is unrefined. His final comments are no less cutting:

Personally, I’ve never regarded the Bible as much of a book and it seems to me that to describe it as God’s Word is singularly unflattering to the Almighty. But the King James Version is redeemed by the beauty of its language. Now even that is to be lost.

The kind of people who seek to ‘translate’ the Bible into patois claim that they want to help the people, but in fact they are insulting them by demonstrating the false belief that fine things are beyond their reach.<sup>76</sup>

It should be said, however, that opposition to the translation of the Bible into another language is nothing new. The history of Bible translation has been in operation for centuries such as the Septuagint, the

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<sup>73</sup> See Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> See Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> See Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> Cargill, Morris, *ibid.*



Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible during the third to the first century BCE, and William Tyndale's translation into English (1526) where he himself was burned at the stake for daring to translate the Bible into what was considered a common and inferior language in comparison to the much heralded Latin!<sup>77</sup> Many such translations were caught up with the question of what makes a good translation and the techniques used either in translating into the language in which the receptors spoke or whether a more literal rendering was appropriate in keeping with the Hebrew or Greek. Thus, the nature of the controversy is varied; the derision (and, of course, praise too) can abound. American Bible Translator, Eugene A. Nida, the major exponent of translation theories within the 20<sup>th</sup> century, puts it quite plainly when summarising the translator's task. He says:

The translator's task is essentially a difficult and often a thankless one. He is severely criticized if he makes a mistake, but only faintly praised when he succeeds, for often it is assumed that anyone who knows two languages ought to be able to do as well as the translator who has labored to produce a text. But even if his work is rarely rewarded by the praise of others, the task itself has its own rewards, for successful translating involves one of the most complex intellectual challenges known to mankind. Moreover, in our present world the need for extensive, accurate, and effective communication between those using different languages gives the translator a position of new and strategic importance.<sup>78</sup>

It is the intellectual challenge and the new and strategic importance of the translator that Nida refers to that is of particular significance. For in the process of producing an effective Bible translation in a language

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<sup>77</sup> For a very brief overview of the landmark translations of the Bible, see Chapter 7, 'Translation Theory' in Gooder, Paula, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2008). For a more detailed overview of the history of Bible translation from the time of the Septuagint to the present-day, see Noss, Phillip A., (ed.), *A History of Bible Translation* (Roma: Edizioni Di Storia E Letteratura, 2007), in particular Section I, 'History: The Septuagint to the Vernaculars'.

<sup>78</sup> Nida, Eugene A., *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1964), p. 155.

not translated into before, the potential for it to lead to other literacy breakthroughs is huge, not to mention the impact it stands to have on that particular language community on a number of levels, socially, educationally, spiritually and psychologically despite the fact that that particular language community may not realise it yet.<sup>79</sup> The potentiality of literacy breakthroughs can be said of a Jamaican translation of the Bible. More will be said about that later in this paper, but at present, more needs to be said about the wider questions resistance to *A Who Run Tings?* raises.

As previously stated, history is not devoid of opposition, criticism and ridicule to certain translations of the Bible, so one could say the translation of New Testament passages into Jamaican is another in a line of controversial translations.<sup>80</sup> However, there are some particular factors associated with this translation that cause it to be problematic; factors relating to the colonial past of Jamaican society, the conditions in which the language evolved and its subsequent inferior status as a broken form of English, creating a sense of shame in terms of the negative attitude towards it and thus, viewed as not fit for any type of language learning in an education setting.<sup>81</sup> In the minds of many, how then can such a ‘tampering’ of the sacred Scriptures take place with

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<sup>79</sup> As a world fellowship of 145 Bible Societies, not only are United Bible Societies (UBS) involved in Scripture translation and distribution but they are also involved in literacy programmes, produce audio products for the visually impaired, Bible-based HIV/Aids resources for sufferers and their carers and develop special programmes for those facing challenging circumstances such as woman facing abuse, children living without parents and people in prison. See <http://www.biblesociety.org> (accessed 31/10/08).

<sup>80</sup> It is interesting to point out that a number of Bible translations (whether as Scripture portions or the complete Bible) into Caribbean Creole languages have already been carried out by the various Bible translation agencies in the Caribbean. For an account, refer to Yorke, Gosnell L., ‘Patois Bible in Pan-African and Pan-Caribbean Context’, *Jamaica Gleaner* (Sunday June 29, 2008) for an account. Available online: <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080629/lead/lead8.html> (accessed 17/11/08).

<sup>81</sup> See Tomlin, Carol, *Black Language in Sacred and Secular Contexts* (New York: Caribbean Diaspora Press, Inc., 1999), p. 41, where Tomlin talks about children arriving in England from Jamaica and entering the school system and the struggles the children faced concerning their language needs.

such a low, slang-like language? However, M.A.K. Halliday states that language is the primary means for the transmission of culture from one generation to the next.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, taking Chris Barker's work, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*<sup>83</sup> into account, he highlights the significance of the relationship between language and culture, which has risen to the top of the agenda within the discipline of cultural studies for two central and related reasons. The first reason is that language is the privileged medium in which cultural meanings are formed and communicated. The second reason is that language is the means and medium through which we form knowledge about ourselves and the social world.<sup>84</sup> Based on such understandings of the nature of culture and language and their essential relatedness, one can begin to see how the Jamaican language represents not just a language in and of itself, but represents the very essence of a nation's cultural heritage.

## Cultural expressions of Jamaican—its uses

In terms of influence, the Jamaican language has found its place within a variety of literary and musical art forms: reggae, dancehall and dub poetry are just some of the key examples of its use and such emergences of its use has had a profound effect on the culture of Black life in Britain as a language of resistance and declaration of Black independence.<sup>85</sup> For example, the lyrics of Bob Marley represented an ideology that could be ascribed to and resonated in the hearts and minds of young people who felt socially marginalised and oppressed in Britain.<sup>86</sup>

In a particularly revealing interview with Carolyn Cooper in

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<sup>82</sup> See Halliday, M.A.K., *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1973), p. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Barker, Chris, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* 2nd Edition, (London: SAGE Publications, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> See Barker, Chris, *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>85</sup> See Sutcliffe, David, *Black British English* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. viii.

<sup>86</sup> For an analysis of Bob Marley's lyrics see Cooper, Carolyn, *ibid.*, pp. 117-125; also Erskine, Noel Leo, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (Trenton, New Jersey/Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 1998), pp. xvi-xvii, xix; for an

2007<sup>87</sup>, she makes the point that as a musical genre, dancehall provides the spaces in culture where the language has great visibility. It is the working class, she notes, who form their identity from dancehall asserting that the language represents the space where one's identity is affirmed, so the body of the language, in relation to the freedom of the pelvic movements, symbolises verbal freedom to express oneself in the mother tongue.<sup>88</sup> In relation to dub poetry, there are a number of notable artists who can be said to have used the language creatively through literary means. Linton Kwesi Johnson<sup>89</sup> is one of the most radical, prolific, and leading names within Black British literature for creating a new form of poetry called 'dub poetry.'<sup>90</sup> It was revolutionary in terms of the language (Jamaican), content (social and political commentary on Black life in Britain), and style (use of rhythms of reggae). What is particularly interesting is that in its written form, Linton Kwesi Johnson's spelling is approximately phonetic, making the impact of what is being said even more expressive when read aloud. Poets such as Birmingham-born Benjamin Zephaniah also followed in

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account of the source of solidarity and collective identity among Black youths in Britain as transmitted through the ideology of Rastafari see Sewell, Tony, *Black Masculinities and Schooling: How Black Boys Survive Modern Schooling* (Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire: Trentham Books Ltd., 2000), p. 147; see also Wong, Ansel, 'Creole as a Language of Power and Solidarity', in Sutcliffe and Wong (eds.), *The Language of the Black Experience*, pp. 114-117 specifically; see also the article by Lerleen Willis where she also describes the key role language plays in the negotiation of identity, expression of culture and also of resistance to oppression: Willis, Lerleen, 'All Things to All Men? Or What Has Language to do With Gender and Resistance in the Black Majority Church in Britain', *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis*, Vol 4, No.2, (May 2002), pp. 195-213.

<sup>87</sup> Carolyn Cooper interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings, Tuesday 31 July 2007 at the Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of the West Indies Mona Campus, Jamaica (Unpublished PhD research).

<sup>88</sup> Carolyn Cooper interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>89</sup> See Johnson, Linton Kwesi, *Dread Beat and Blood* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications Ltd, 1975); *Inglan is a Bitch* (London: Race Today Publications, 1981); *Tings an Times Selected Poems* (Newcastle Upon Tyne/London: Bloodaxe Books Ltd./LKJ (Music) Publishers, 1991).

<sup>90</sup> According to Mervyn Morris, the word 'dub' is borrowed from recording technology, where it refers to the activity of adding and/or removing sounds. See Morris, Mervyn, "'Dub Poetry'?", *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No.4, (Dec 1997), 1.

a similar way in engaging this unique style of poetry.<sup>91</sup> Jamaican-born dub poets such as Michael Smith<sup>92</sup>, whose celebrated poem ‘Mi Cyaan Believe It’ is a classic<sup>93</sup>; Jean ‘Binta’ Breeze<sup>94</sup> Mutabaruka<sup>95</sup>, and Yasus Afari<sup>96</sup> can all be said to carry the tradition of using Jamaican as the driving force for their poetry. Indeed, it is Afari’s poem ‘Pat Wah Talkin’ that celebrates the significance of Jamaican as a language that sets a trend in terms of verbal display.<sup>97</sup> Performer, comedienne and poet, Louise Bennett<sup>98</sup>, however, can be said to be the mother of valourising the use of the Jamaican language in artistic form from a very early age. Bennett has never shied away from advocating its value as a language in its own right through her poetry and used it as a vehicle to speak about Jamaican life, although in a humorous way.<sup>99</sup>

There are also examples of where Jamaican is employed within the religious sphere, as Carol Tomlin’s study into Black preaching style shows us.<sup>100</sup> She observes that Creole seems to be used especially in

<sup>91</sup> See Benjamin Zephaniah’s most recent book of poems that address the struggles of Black Britain: *Too Black, Too Strong* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, Ltd., 2001); On his album entitled *Naked* Zephaniah utilises the music of Drum n Bass, Jungle and Garage to back his poetry which give a contemporary style to his work that would appeal to young people in particular. See *Naked* (One Little Indian Ltd., 2004).

<sup>92</sup> See Morris, Mervyn, (ed.), *It A Come: Poems by Michael Smith* (London: Race Today Publications, 1986).

<sup>93</sup> See ‘Me Cyaan Believe It’, in *It A Come: Poems by Michael Smith* pp. 13-15.

<sup>94</sup> Breeze, Jean ‘Binta’, *On the Edge of An Island* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1997); *The Arrival of Bright Eye and Other Poems* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000); Morris, Mervyn, (ed), *Riddym Ravings and Other Poems* (London: Race Today Publications, 1988).

<sup>95</sup> See Mutabaruka, *The Next Poems/The First Poems* (Kingston, Jamaica: LMH Publishing, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> See Afari, Yasus, *Eye Pen (Philosophical Reasoning and Poetry)* (Kingston, Jamaica: House of Honour Publishing & Ke-Ya Publishers, 1999).

<sup>97</sup> See Afari, Yasus, *ibid.*, pp. 53-56.

<sup>98</sup> See Bennett, Louise, *Jamaica Labrish* (Kingston: Sangster’s Books Stores Ltd., 2005); Morris, Mervyn, (ed.), *Louise Bennett Aunty Roach She* (Kingston: Sangster’s Books Stores Ltd., 2005); *Louise Bennett Selected Poems* (Kingston: Sangster’s Books Stores Ltd., 2005).

<sup>99</sup> See ‘Bennett On Bennett Interviewed by Dennis Scott’, *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1 & 2 (March-June 1968), pp. 97-101.

<sup>100</sup> Tomlin, Carol, *Black Preaching Style*, Unpublished MPhil Thesis (University of

situations such as: (1) to tell a joke (often in a mixture of Standard English and Jamaican Creole); (2) to tell a proverb; (3) to tell a story (particularly when mimicking); and (4) to forcefully make a point.<sup>101</sup> All this is undergirded by particular communicative stylistic features of Black preaching.<sup>102</sup> One can also see Jamaican's strong use in Gospel Reggae through artists such as Caribbean-born Papa San<sup>103</sup>, Lieutenant Stitchie<sup>104</sup>, and British-born artists such as Spanna<sup>105</sup>, Witness<sup>106</sup>, Alan Charles<sup>107</sup>, and The Watchman.<sup>108</sup>

## Recent developments of BSWI

Since the production of *A Who Run Tings?*, BSWI went on to produce an audio recording in 2003 in CD format of the Advent entitled *De Krismos Stori*.<sup>109</sup> Again, as a result of the production, it raised the

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Birmingham, 1988).

<sup>101</sup> See Tomlin, Carol, *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>102</sup> Tomlin lists the particular communicative stylistic features as the voice; improvisation—the Holy Spirit to guide; call and response; group reaction and interaction; repetition- hyperbolising; rhythmic delivery; story-telling; proverbs and proverbial expressions; imagery (use of imaginative language) See *ibid.*, pp. 89-113. For further details in relation to the particular communicative stylistic features of call and response and repetition in Black Preaching, see chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>103</sup> See Papa San, *Victory* (CD Album)(California: B-Rite Music, 1999); *God and I* (CD Album) (Inglewood, CA: Gospocentric Records, 2003); *Real and Personal* (CD Album) (Zomba, 2005).

<sup>104</sup> See Lieutenant Stitchie, *The Governor* (CD Album) (Germany: Atlantic, 1989); *Kingdom Ambassador* (CD Album) (Drum & Bass, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> See Spanna (The Tool in God's Hands), *Blessed Redeemer* (CD Album) (Shekinah Music, 2005).

<sup>106</sup> See Witness, *It's Your Move* (CD Album) (2005). It's important to note that Witness is of Barbados heritage and not Jamaican although the influence of the Jamaican speech pattern is evident in his music.

<sup>107</sup> See Charles, Alan, *Strength Ah Mi Life* (CD Album) (Focus Arts, 2006). It's important to note that Alan Charles is of Barbados heritage and not Jamaican although the influence of the Jamaican speech pattern is evident in his music.

<sup>108</sup> See The Watchman, *Tongues of Fire* (CD Album) (Jetstar, 2002).

<sup>109</sup> *De Krismos Stori* (Audio CD) (Kingston, Jamaica: Bible Society of the West Indies, 2003).

debate about its legitimacy because of the Jamaican language.<sup>110</sup> However, this has not stopped the work from progressing and so, as it currently stands, with the full backing of the United Bible Societies, both financially and morally, BSWI are now forging ahead with translating the entire Bible into Jamaican. Not only will it be an audio translation, but working with academics from the University of the West Indies to standardise the orthography into what is known as the Cassidy system, there will be a complete written version.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, they already have over half of the New Testament already translated in first draft form. The entire translation project is set to take twelve years to complete and will cost £250,000.<sup>112</sup> According to Revd Stewart, he sees the Jamaican Bible translation project as the most serious piece of work that will ever be produced globally.<sup>113</sup> One may contest his passionate claim, but the significance of the project and the far-reaching benefits it has the potential of fostering certainly cannot be underestimated. Let us go back to my earlier point concerning the literacy breakthroughs an effective Bible translation has the potential to lead to. According to linguist R. Anthony Lewis, one of the consequences of translation on a language is its standardisation.<sup>114</sup> As the language is written down then

<sup>110</sup> See 'Patois Xmas story launched,' *The Gleaner*, (Friday December 19, 2003), A7; Faith Linton, 'God speaks Patois,' *The Gleaner*, (Tuesday December 23, 2003), C2; Devon Dick, 'De Krismos Stori: In Defence of Patois,' *The Gleaner*, (Tuesday December 23, 2003), A4.

<sup>111</sup> See 'Translating the Bible into Jamaican Patois': <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/l3.php?id=800> (accessed 28/10/08); 'Why they want a Patois Bible,' *Jamaica Gleaner Online* (Sunday June 22, 2008) (accessed 25/03/09). The Cassidy system is the orthography developed by Robert LePage and Frederick Cassidy as is reflected in the Dictionary of Jamaican English. See Cassidy, F.G. and LePage, R.B., (eds.), *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, Second Edition. (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies, 2002); for a further example of the Cassidy system as actually used for the Jamaican Bible translation project, also see 'The Good Samaritan Story':

<http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/l3.php?id=801>.

<sup>112</sup> See 'Translating the Bible into Jamaican Patois' <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/l3.php?id=800>; 'Why they want a Patois Bible,' *Jamaica Gleaner Online*.

<sup>113</sup> See Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>114</sup> R. Anthony Lewis, 'Patois, Bible and translation,' *Jamaica Gleaner Online* (Sunday June 22, 2008): <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20080622/focus/focus7.html> (accessed 17/11/08).

the boundaries in which the language can be used have the potential to expand. For example, Jamaican language courses can be developed in order to teach people the rudiments of reading and writing Jamaican. Certainly the Jamaican Language Unit at the University of the West Indies has been involved in a pilot project in Bilingual education for primary school students enrolled in Grades One to Four. The aim of the project is to determine the most effective means of encouraging full bilingualism for primary level students at the Grades One to Four in Jamaican (Jamaican Creole) (JC) and Standard Jamaican English.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, here in Britain, the way has been pioneered with the first ever course in Jamaican Language and Culture that ran at City College Handsworth, Birmingham for 10 weeks in 2005.<sup>116</sup> Since its first successful run, City College then went on to develop the programme further, working with UK based Jamaica 2K and the University of the West Indies by developing a course for teachers of Jamaican and those interested in learning the language. The course is accredited by the Awarding Body Consortium and offered at Levels 1 and 3 (A Level equivalent).<sup>117</sup>

The Bilingual Education project and the Jamaican Language and Culture course are just two examples of the impact in the area of literacy alone that learning the language could have for both children and adults. In light of this, such claims made by Revd Stewart of the significance of the Jamaican translation of the Bible in written form is not so hard to envisage in light of this. What is particularly interesting about the BSWI's seminal work, *A Who Run Tings?* is the fact that it is in audio form. Revd Stewart said this was deliberate because they wanted it to be accessible for those who can't read and those who can

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<sup>115</sup> See the Jamaican Language Unit webpage at the University of the West Indies at <http://www.mona.uwi.edu/dllp/jlu/projects/index.htm>. (accessed 23/03/09).

<sup>116</sup> See 'City Course on Jamaican Patois' *Birmingham Evening Mail*, (Wednesday 2 March, 2005), p. 3; Xavier Murphy, 'City College in Birmingham, UK to Teach Patois Course: An Interview with Course Facilitator Heather Reid,' (1 May 2005) <http://www.jamaicans.com/articles/primeinterviews/patoisecourse.shtml> (accessed 27/03/09).

<sup>117</sup> See 'City College Offers New Course for Jamaican Teachers', *Regional Language Network* (31 October 2006) [http://www.rln-westmidlands.com/News/News%20archive/citycollege\\_jamaicanteach.htm](http://www.rln-westmidlands.com/News/News%20archive/citycollege_jamaicanteach.htm) (accessed 27-03/09).



but choose not to.<sup>118</sup> By hearing the biblical accounts in this way, in the mother tongue of Jamaicans, the impact is at its greatest.<sup>119</sup> Then there is the use of the particular scriptures e.g. Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4.35-41); the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5.1-20); the healing of Jairus' daughter and the haemorrhaging woman (Mark 5.21-43); the raising of the widow's dead son (Luke 7.11-17) Such narratives represent the sovereignty of God through Jesus in that He is Lord of nature; Lord of the spirit world; Lord of human suffering and Lord of death. An image of an all mighty and powerful God in such texts are important to Jamaicans and I would say Black people in general as He is identified as one of us and on our side. In this sense he is re-imagined as a Black hero.<sup>120</sup> In addition, the dialectical tension we see at work in the selected passages in relation to belief/unbelief, fear/trust in Jesus, the one who carries out the miracles and the contention as to the authority and validity of His power, all contribute to the underlying discourse of God as in charge and not the violent gangs and self-appointed leaders in Jamaica. Furthermore, the use of reggae music as accompanying the audio text represents it as Jamaican, thereby celebrating the nation's music in a positive way and heralding its culture.

All that has been said in this present discussion about the translation project and the current developments in getting the entire Bible translation into Jamaican, really sets the context for some serious work to begin in the area of Black Biblical Studies—Black biblical hermeneutics especially—and how it can be built on in Britain. Particularly given the fact that according to the 2001 census, Caribbeans represent one of the largest ethnic groups in the UK (216,048 by birth), Jamaicans the largest (131,108 by birth).<sup>121</sup> What I

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<sup>118</sup> See "Who Run Tings?" United Bible Societies Word Report; Revd Courtney Stewart interviewed by Lynnette J. Mullings.

<sup>119</sup> See "Who Run Tings?" United Bible Societies Word Report and the mother tongue in which Revd Stewart describes one's 'heart language.'

<sup>120</sup> See chapter 4, 'Jesus as a Black Hero' in Reddie's, *Working Against the Grain*, where he develops the theme of Blacks' identification with Jesus as 'one of us' and a Black hero.

<sup>121</sup> See 'Country of birth by ethnic group, April 2001', Additional Data October 2004 (Census, April 2001, Office for National Statistics; Census April 2001, General Register Office for Scotland; Census, April 2001, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). While I recognise that Jamaican is just one of the

am trying to advocate here is the need to establish the Caribbean origins of Black British Theology by a careful and systematic treatment of the biblical texts that draw out themes, motifs and paradigms that exemplify a cultural focus that speak to the needs of Black people. Hence, the use of Black vernacular and vernacular hermeneutics are essential to such a process. The development and subsequent teaching of biblical studies in Higher Education institutions in Britain should be informed by Black popular culture, particularly linguistic studies and the vernacular, so that a reading strategy can be developed that does not solely depend on the historical-critical method, yet, at the same time, is not just a hermeneutical approach either.

Although arguing from the standpoint of looking for ‘...alternative hermeneutical sources in secular fiction,’<sup>122</sup> Sugirtharajah in his new book *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Colonial and Contemporary Culture* calls for mainstream biblical interpretation to re-think its traditional pursuits. He articulates that,

Rather than being simply inward and backward-looking, investigating ancient parchments and scrolls and pretending that these documents are made modern and significant through their appearance in digital editions, which have in fact no use but to a small, exclusive club of die-hard biblical scholars, it should look to the future and move outwards and address the needs and concerns of the people.<sup>123</sup>

I do not fully agree with Sugirtharajah’s view, in that current biblical scholarship and its pursuits of investigating ancient parchments and scrolls *does* have some purpose and validity as new knowledge comes to bear, particularly of the most early documents which can lead to new translations of sections of the Bible that can be made available to the wider community beyond the academic guild. Furthermore, it is

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many Creole languages spoken in the Caribbean, Britain and around the world, so is not representative of the language of all Caribbeans, however, I offer critical reflection of the biblical texts through Jamaican as one example of how Black Biblical Studies can be developed.

<sup>122</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Troublesome Texts: The Bible in Contemporary Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>123</sup> Sugirtharajah, R.S., *ibid.*, p. 6.

through investigating ancient parchments and scrolls that we have been able to access English translations of the Scriptures. However, Sugirthajah is certainly correct that if it remains within the exclusive club then it serves no purpose but their own. Sugirtharajah's comments help to shed light on the usefulness of the development of Black biblical scholarship and the significance of *A Who Run Tings?* It is an attempt to address the needs and concerns of a particular group of people and in a way that is aimed to resonate with them through the use of the Jamaican language. The fact that it is in audio form also presents us with a different way in which the Scriptures are heard and understood that make way for particular psychological and social processes to be at work.<sup>124</sup>

## Some issues affecting the development of Black biblical studies in Britain

I recognise that what I am advocating here may be quite radical for some people, but given the British landscape is a diverse one, it is high time that the views and perspectives of Black people of faith were rep-

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<sup>124</sup> See Crockett, Joseph V., 'Engaging Scripture in Everyday Situations: An Interactive Perspective that Examines Psychological and Social Processes of Individuals as They Engage Scripture Texts,' *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol 3, No.1 (Jan 2005), pp. 97-117 where he talks about the psychological and social processes at work in an individual's interaction with the Bible and that the ultimate goal of Scripture engagement is '...deliberate thought and continuous pledges of allegiance.' (p. 99). Julian Sundersingh, in his article 'Call for a New Translation: A Media-Based Translation for Audio Scriptures' in *Bulletin United Bible Societies* 194/195 (2002), pp. 191-214, reveals in his study based on field research in Tamil Nadu, India testing out media-based translation, that indeed audio listeners much prefer the media-based aural text over against the print-based literary text and that they prefer audio programmes that employ creative formats over against a pulpit-style straight reading. This suggests that engagement with the texts as presented in audio-form is significantly heightened and encourages more active participation in the process of hearing. As Sundersingh finely puts it: 'It is an irony of our times that it is the least preferred text and the least preferred format that are widely used in communicating Scriptures for aural reception in our churches.' 'Call for a New Translation', *Bulletin*, p. 203.

resented in the programmes and courses of theological colleges and universities across the country. The Bible is a book largely about a marginalised people, so why do we not recognise the need to study it in relation to marginalised people in the present-day?<sup>125</sup> The point is about encouraging people to see themselves in the biblical text and respecting their cultural difference. To not do so is to negate their human experience. According to Professor of Ministry and Black Church Studies, Joseph V. Crockett, he sees the purposes and process of Christian education as embedded in particular cultures.<sup>126</sup> It is worth quoting his strong remarks at length on this matter:

Representing the Christian faith in the context of specific cultures is not necessarily destructive or evil, although it is limiting. It is destructive and evil when the purposes and processes of Christian education are dominated by one culture's perspective. It is destructive and evil when one culture determines the purposes and processes for teaching and learning for every culture. Inevitably the culture that determines what will be taught, how it will be taught, and how it will be made available to the public is the dominant culture.<sup>127</sup>

Crockett's comments reflect the seriousness to which he ascribes the educational process for intercultural teaching and learning that demands justice for space to be made in bringing the understandings of a variety of cultural voices to theological education. One that is contextual and representing a lived reality.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> A poignant point made by Bishop Delroy Hall in a conversation (Friday 2nd January 2009).

<sup>126</sup> See Crockett, *Teaching Scripture from an African-American Perspective* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 1990), p. 56.

<sup>127</sup> Crockett, Joseph V., *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>128</sup> See Crockett, Joseph V., *ibid.*, p. 62. For further insights into the importance of intercultural teaching and learning in Christian/theological education, see Reddie, Anthony G., 'An Educational Approach to Intercultural Teaching and Learning By Means of Black Theology: Some Preliminary Reflections', *Discourse: Learning and Teaching in Philosophical and Religious Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Autumn 2006), pp. 175-188; see also Balia, Daryl, 'Review Article: A Reader to 'Read' the British Reader: Teaching and Learning by Means of Black Theology', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol 7, No.1 (April 2009), pp. 100-111.

In light of this, I would like to posit six major issues<sup>129</sup> surrounding the teaching of Black theology and Black biblical studies at under-post-graduate levels:

**1) The acceptance in higher education institutions that Black theology and Black biblical studies is a legitimate theology and discipline respectively.**

Without such recognition, and beyond that, a concerted effort on the part of faculty to foster its development, theological education in Britain will always reflect Eurocentric, White hegemonic perspectives. A reflection that I have offered as personal experience during my days as an undergraduate student in my essay ‘Reading Black: Language and Biblical Interpretation in a Black British Context’<sup>130</sup> where, in terms of teaching, I state:

...at that white conservative evangelical college, issues regarding cultural perspectives were not addressed. For example, matters that pertained to the experience of Black people including Black and Womanist theologies, were not discussed and, in fact, were not regarded as theology at all. More detrimental was my unconscious collusion in the notion that this was not theology. Unwittingly, I reinforced the status quo for Eurocentric hegemony to reign supreme, while voices at the margins of society remain unheard.<sup>131</sup>

During my undergraduate days of theological education, I was not aware of the necessity of ‘colouring my thinking.’ I bought into the dominant culture!<sup>132</sup> Such are the dangers that ignoring one’s cultural

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<sup>129</sup> Points 4-6 are noted in W.J. Hollenweger’s article ‘Black Christian Interpretation’ in Coggins, R.J., and Houlden, J.L., (eds.) *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 90-92.

<sup>130</sup> Mullings, Lynnette J., ‘Reading Black: Language and Biblical Interpretation in a Black British Context,’ in Ellens J. Harold, (ed.), *Text and Community: Essays in Memory of Bruce M. Metzger Vol. I* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), pp. 79-102.

<sup>131</sup> Mullings, Lynnette J., *ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>132</sup> An insightful and useful phrase used by Lorraine Dixon in ‘Tenth Anniversary Reflections on Robert Beckford’s Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain’, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. 6, No.3 (Sept 2008), p. 300.

bias can have.

**2) The acceptance by the Black Christian community in Britain that Black theology is a legitimate form of theology and ought to be studied and taught.**

It must be said that not all Black Christians in Britain embrace Black theology. Largely due to slavery and their colonial past, they have never been taught to see Black experience as a valid tool for critical reflection. The term ‘Black’ is problematic for many Black Christians as they find it difficult to associate the particularities of their culture with theology. So the conscientizing process needs to happen for both Whites and Blacks!

**3a) Acceptance by Jamaicans in particular and Caribbeans in general (whether in the Caribbean or Britain or elsewhere in the world) that Jamaican is a language.**

It is interesting to note that the Chartered Institute of Linguistics in the UK (the professional body serving the interests of professional linguists throughout the world and acting as a respected language assessment and accredited awarding body) have already officially declared Jamaican as a language in its own right and it is now on their list of named languages that can be taken for the exam in the Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI).<sup>133</sup> This is a breakthrough at a truly significant level. It remains for Jamaicans themselves to ‘catch up’ and be now convinced of its value and legitimacy.

**3b) The acceptance that Jamaican (and any other Caribbean language for that matter) is a language to be studied in religious/biblical studies.**

If it can be said that the immanence and transcendence of God suggests that God holds all humanity and all of creation in holy regard<sup>134</sup>, then

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<sup>133</sup> See [http://www.iol.org.uk/qualifications/exams\\_dpsi.asp](http://www.iol.org.uk/qualifications/exams_dpsi.asp) (accessed 23/03/09).

<sup>134</sup> See Crockett, Joseph V., *Teaching Scripture from an African-American*

this holy regard must be articulated through the diversity of cultures that interact with God and how God is understood in those contexts.

**4) More Black academics need to be trained in biblical studies.**

If there is going to be any serious exegetical work to be done on the biblical texts, then knowledge of biblical languages will be required. Current Higher Education institutions are devoid of such staff, indeed the dearth of Black biblical scholars working in British institutions of Higher Education is perilously stark. They are virtually absent.<sup>135</sup>

**5) Black academics need to be well versed in their own Black culture.**

Knowledge of the biblical languages must be complemented by a good grounding in Black culture in order for creative critical reflection to take place between the text and contemporary culture.

**6) Higher education institutions need to encourage more Black post-graduate students to develop their specific exegetical approaches.**

Indeed, as Dwight Hopkins comments on his discussion on language that ‘If the majority of Blacks in our communities and churches are to see themselves in our work, then we must see them when we write.’<sup>136</sup>

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*Perspective* (Nashville, Tennessee: Discipleship Resources, 1990), where he argues that the nearness of God is acknowledged through His response to human need within the context of culture.

<sup>135</sup> Although an African American living and serving as an Anglican Priest in Britain, Rosalyn F.T. Murphy was the first Black woman to receive a PhD in Biblical Studies from the University of Durham (England). Although an achievement for her personally, the fact that she was the first Black woman to receive her doctorate in this field from a British University, exemplifies the gravity of the situation that there is a dearth of such needed scholars. See *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 1 (April 2009), p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Hopkins, Dwight N., ‘Black Theology and A Second Generation: New Scholarship and New Challenges,’ in Cone, James H., and Wilmore, Gayraud S., (eds.), *Black Theology A Documentary History Volume Two: 1980-1992* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), p. 68.

Thesis supervisors and tutors have a moral duty to recognise the richness of perspectives their students bring to research and encourage them to find their own voice.

## Benefits of teaching Black biblical studies in Britain

Although I have highlighted some very real challenges associated with the prospect of teaching Black biblical studies within higher education institutions in the UK, there are also some significant benefits that are important to point out. They are by no means exhaustive but at least provide a brief overview of particular worthwhile outcomes such an enterprise would entail.

**1) To use Black vernacular and vernacular hermeneutics as a reading strategy to interpret Scripture is to help preserve and value the language and culture of African Caribbeans in Britain.**

At stake here is the acute need to develop the conditions where respect for heritage will be celebrated and that can only be positive.

**2) The development of Black biblical scholarship in Britain helps to contribute to new learning within the field of modern biblical scholarship and theological education as a whole.**

If we are to take Crockett's statement seriously, that is that 'The purposes and processes of Christian education need to rise to new possibilities and overcome old boundaries'<sup>137</sup>, then, it means there is a world of possibilities to be explored where Black biblical studies are concerned, especially in light of the prospect of having the entire biblical account in Jamaican in a few years to come. The focus is shifted, indeed, it is to 'change the subject'<sup>138</sup> of biblical studies.

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<sup>137</sup> Crockett, Joseph V., *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>138</sup> See Elizabeth A. Castelli's response to Wimbush, where African American experience is placed at the centre of the process of interpretation of biblical studies: 'Ultimately, It's Not a Change of Color, but a Whole Change-of-Subject-Kind-of-Thing,' in Wimbush, V., (ed.), *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Text and Social Texture* (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 849-851.



**3) Teaching Black Biblical Studies challenges the institutional racism within the academic guild.**

The significance of embedding intercultural teaching and learning within the curriculum of theological education cannot be underestimated as it challenges the inherent notion of superior forms of what it is to be human through the lens of biblical reflection.<sup>139</sup>

**4) Teaching Black Biblical Studies forms a better balance of power within the academic guild.**

The diversity of optics amongst faculty creates this balance of power so that Black academic staff are givers of information and not receivers; producers of curriculum and not purchasers.<sup>140</sup>

**5) Teaching Black Biblical Studies cultivates a conscientizing of minds for both Blacks and Whites.**

The aim is to heighten cultural awareness for self and the ‘other’ to be encountered.<sup>141</sup>

**6) Teaching Black Biblical Studies better prepares White ordinands who will pastor Black Majority Churches or ministry located in a ethnically diverse context.**

As the leading institution for teaching Black Theology, it is mandatory for all students (preparing for ordained and/or authorised ministry) of

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<sup>139</sup> For a helpful brief survey of White scholars who have ‘bucked the trend’ of racist approaches to Christian theological reflections, see Reddie, Anthony G., ‘An Educational Approach to Intercultural Teaching and Learning’, *Discourse*, Vol 6, No. 1, (Autumn 2006), pp. 180-182 specifically.

<sup>140</sup> Although speaking from an African American perspective, this is a discussion that Crockett engages in relation to the patterns of relationships as an expression culture that exists in the realm of education. See Crockett, Joseph V., *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>141</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G., *ibid.*, p. 182-185 specifically, for an account of the role Black Christian education has for encountering self and the ‘other’ through what Reddie calls ‘performative action.’

The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham where I am currently a tutor, to do the modules in Black and Asian Theology and Bible and Liberation. Furthermore, aspects of Black and Womanist Theology are taught within the curriculum as a whole, through single lectures or seminars. The Queen's Foundation has by no means 'arrived' at a fully integrated model of intercultural teaching and learning but it certainly leads the way, so this and further development in this area needs to be reflected in higher education institutions throughout Britain.<sup>142</sup>

**7) Teaching Black biblical studies better prepares Black ordinands to be able to more effectively articulate ways in which to read the Bible within their pastoral ministry.**

Whether they pastor Black majority or White majority congregations (or a mixture of both), it is envisaged that they would have a better understanding and appreciation of themselves and the distinct gifts/skills they bring to their ministry and seek to hear the voices of others.

**8) Black biblical studies engenders a transformative outworking of biblical understanding on contemporary life.**

Given the centrality of culture as a lens for knowing, it seeks to speak to people both within the Church and beyond to people in the wider community in concrete ways as a means of addressing contemporary needs.

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<sup>142</sup> It is worth pointing out Reddie's observations. He identifies Oxford Brookes University outside of the Queen's Foundation and the University of Birmingham, as probably the only other institution that offers a taught course in Black theology in the UK. See Reddie, Anthony G., 'Exploring the Workings of Black Theology in Britain: Issues of Theological Method and Epistemological Construction', *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol. 7, No.1, (April 2009), footnote 26.

Interestingly enough, The Queen's Foundation is pioneering the way in celebrating the gifts and skills of Black and Asian Christians and fostering their development through intercultural teaching and learning with the new set up of the Centre for Black Ministries and Leadership. See:

[http://www.queens.ac.uk/black\\_ministries/](http://www.queens.ac.uk/black_ministries/) (accessed 27/03/09).

## Conclusion

This paper has challenged the current approach to biblical studies to re-orient itself towards embracing a new development in biblical scholarship, one that recognises the use of Black vernacular and vernacular hermeneutics as a reading strategy for biblical interpretation. A very real and practical example has been offered through BSWI's seminal work *A Who Run Tings?*, for advocating the use of Jamaican as the starting point for critical reflection on the biblical texts in light of Black culture, specifically African Caribbean culture, and the systematic development of Black biblical studies in Britain as a discipline. It is my firm and passionate belief that the time has come and is coming for change to be embraced where teaching from a specifically cultural perspective on under- and post-graduate programmes is concerned. I, along with a new generation of theological and biblical educators I hope for, for the future, will come along bringing new insights and understandings into the religious thoughts and practices of what is known as Black Christianity in Britain. The critical mass is desperately needed to be a part of that facilitating process to encourage that specifically Black exegetical research. For the health and well-being of a people who live out their Christian identity through the context of faith, and for equity and justice in the curriculum development of theological education, the urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. The challenge is, will institutions, the gatekeepers, who hold the power to help bring about the much needed change, open their doors to a new awakening?

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# Toward Teaching Black Theology Through Black Gospel Music in Britain

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**T**his essay is representative of work towards my doctoral thesis, and a modified version of a presentation given in January 2009 at the conference ‘Teaching Black Theology,’ hosted by the Higher Education Academy Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. It considers the notion of teaching Black theology through the tradition of Black gospel music that emerged in Britain.

To date, Black gospel music in Britain is a neglected area in literature, particularly in Black theological discourse. It has never before been the subject of sustained treatment in scholarship, and as a direct

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result, there is little understanding about its evolution. For that reason, my main intention in this essay is to discuss the immediate feasibility of teaching Black theology through Black gospel music in Britain.<sup>1</sup> I question the notion, and contend that because of the huge gap in knowledge concerning its origin, development, and advancement in Britain, to employ it as a tool to teach Black theology is presently inconceivable.

On the other hand, despite the lack of understanding of the roots and route of Black gospel music in Britain, this essay also discusses the importance of Black theology as a discipline taking responsibility for advancing the knowledge of Black gospel music in Britain in research and scholarship at postgraduate level. Should Black theology deem the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain an important subject area of study, it will propel it as an effective tool for teaching and learning.

By way of discussing the issue of ignorance concerning Black gospel music in Britain, and the role of Black theology, this essay is divided into three main parts. First, given that a definitive documented history or an agreed formal narrative of Black gospel music in Britain does not exist, in order to give this discussion a context, I begin with a personal account of some of my own experience and observations of the emergence and development of Black gospel music in Britain. Secondly, because of the absence of a definitive documented history, I demonstrate how Black gospel music in Britain is perpetually historically misrepresented. In the final part of this essay, I place the spotlight on Black theology as a discipline looking first at America in order to demonstrate how Black gospel music there is theologically assessed and employed to teach Black theology. For that I reason I conclude this essay with tasks for Black theology as a discipline in Britain.

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<sup>1</sup> At the moment I am hesitant to assert a definitive definition for Black gospel music in Britain, as it is an area that is a 'work-in-progress' in my doctoral thesis. Nevertheless, in the meantime, in this essay I refer to the singing tradition that emerged out of Black congregational worship in Black majority churches in Britain, and see the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain as different to that which has emerged in America.



## Setting the scene—an insider's view

Significantly, I am able to reflect on the emergence of Black gospel music in Britain as an insider. My personal experience goes back to my formative years as a daughter of ministers within Black Pentecostalism in Britain.<sup>2</sup> My parents were active members of an emerging Black Pentecostal church in Leicester—the New Testament Church of God (NTCG)<sup>3</sup>, which is where I began my earliest days in church. In the early 1960s, my parents migrated from Jamaica to Britain and as ardent Pentecostals, on arrival to Britain, they, like many other African Caribbean Christians, thought it essential to continue attending church.

From the account of my parents however, and that of other African Caribbean men and women in Britain of that generation, the host churches in Britain were hostile and unwelcoming.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the style of worship was not what they experienced in the Caribbean, hence many African Caribbean Christians searched for a church like back 'home'.<sup>5</sup> Not able to find a church of the kind they were familiar with; my parents joined other likeminded African Caribbean Christians

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<sup>2</sup> For a background study of Black Pentecostalism, see Gerloff, Roswith I. H., *A Plea for British Black Theologies – the Black Church Movement in Britain in Its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992); MacRobert, Iain, 'Black Pentecostalism in Britain' (Edinburgh: Unpublished, 1997); Hollenweger, Walter J., *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> For a breakdown of the development of churches within the New Testament Church of God, see Brooks, Ira, *Where Do We Go from Here* (London: Charles Raper, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Whilst this is the experience for many African Caribbean migrants of Black Pentecostalism, many others were Methodists, Anglicans, and Baptists. On arrival to England, they sought out their 'home church' in order to maintain their affiliation with these churches. See Wilkinson, John L., *Church in Black and White* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Some African Caribbean men and women came to Britain with the mission to start a church congregation: see Aldred, Joe, *Respect – Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005); Gerloff, Roswith I. H., *A Plea for British Black Theologies – the Black Church Movement in Britain in Its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) p. 23; Sturge, Mark, *Look What the Lord Has Done* (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2005) p. 84.

who gathered in a front room in order to worship together in singing and praying.<sup>6</sup> Similar to my parents, the late Rev Io Smith, an African Caribbean migrant of the 1950s paints a vivid picture of her experience of searching for a place to worship:

What I found in the British churches was rejection and unfriendliness. That's what made me change from being a Baptist to a Pentecostal. In East London in the 1950s there was only one black-led church, in Holloway Road, and everyone who heard about it would travel to find it. There were times of real joy. Meeting together, singing, tambourine, music, rejoicing and hallelujahs. The way we know to worship. It was then I found what I needed...<sup>7</sup>

As Pentecostalism was of immense significance to my parents, it should be no surprise that they would raise their children in the same tradition. Consequently, my siblings and I, (five of us in all), lived by the strict moral codes and values dictated within Black Pentecostalism<sup>8</sup>, and in truth, there was no distinction between home and church. Home endorsed the 'rules' of the church and this partnership was very real. We observed the view of a sacred and secular world.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> African Caribbean men and women met in front rooms until it was necessary to find a larger location. After worshipping in school halls, the congregations were able to purchase their own church buildings.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Io and Green, Wendy, *An Ebony Cross: Being a Black Christian in Britain Today* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989) p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Moral codes were linked to the 'holiness tradition', driven by the quest to oppose worldly distractions. See Becher, Virginia, *Black Christians: Black Church Traditions in Britain* (Birmingham: Centre for Christian Black and White Partnership and Westhill RE Centre, 1995); MacRobert, Iain, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on how Black Pentecostals spend the bulk of their leisure time involved in activities related to church, and the teaching against worldly entertainment, see MacRobert, Iain, *Black Pentecostalism in Britain* (Edinburgh: Unpublished, 1997) p. 257. For another helpful background to understanding people who see themselves as 'in the world but not of the world' see Parsons, Gerald, (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945, vol. 1, Traditions* (London: The Open University, 1993); Sanders, Cheryl J., *Saints in Exile – the Holiness Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

When my father first became a Pastor, all of us as sons and daughters were expected (note, there was no negotiation), to be heavily involved with the activities of the church. For us, playing musical instruments was a stimulating activity and we became the resident church musicians and singers<sup>10</sup>, as well as taking part in the rest of church activities throughout the week.<sup>11</sup> Church life was both our social and leisure outlet, and our involvement in church activities extended into the community whereby we organised events such as youth clubs, summer schemes, and gospel concerts, which featured our family as a singing group called 'The Dixons'.

## A wider church community

The church that my father 'Pastored' for many years was part of the New Testament Assembly (NTA). As an independent international denomination that began in Jamaica, the majority of churches emerged in London, with other branches established in America, Canada, and Ghana.<sup>12</sup> Like other Black Pentecostal Churches, the NTA had regular conventions and special services that we attended as a family, and sometimes with members of the church congregation. We travelled in a minibus (sometimes a coach) to attend the special services hosted by other churches within the NTA, and we also visited other Black

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the importance of music and the use of instruments as an integral part of Caribbean religious experience, see Kortright, Davis, *Emancipation Still Comin' - Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 112.

<sup>11</sup> The weekly meeting activities would look like this: Mondays, business meeting; Tuesdays, choir practice; Wednesdays, prayer meeting; Thursdays, evangelising; Fridays, young people's night; Saturdays, a convention or church programme to attend.

<sup>12</sup> See reference to the New Testament Assembly amongst the listings of Black churches in Becher, Virginia, *Black Christians: Black Church Traditions in Britain* (Birmingham: Centre for Christian Black and White Partnership and Westhill RE Centre, 1995); Sturge, Mark, *Look What the Lord Has Done* (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2005); Aldred, Joe, *Respect – Understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2005); Gerloff, Roswith I. H., *A Plea for British Black Theologies – the Black Church Movement in Britain in Its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

Pentecostal churches outside of our own organisation to attend conventions and fundraising events, such as building programmes, and rallies.<sup>13</sup> As we travelled the long distances, significantly, there was lots of singing along the way. In the main, we would sing Sankey songs,<sup>14</sup> with someone ‘tracking’ the words from the songbook, as well as choruses that came out of the oral liturgy of Black Pentecostalism.<sup>15</sup> Very rarely was there silence as we travelled along. In essence, ‘we were having church.’<sup>16</sup>

I personally loved the trips, and visiting other churches for many reasons. For one, going to different churches deepened my musical experience. In those days (during the early 1970s), we did not have a collection of recorded Black gospel music at home, rather, it was my mother’s limited collection of vinyls that featured artists like Jim Reeves, Elvis Presley, and Johnny Cash.<sup>17</sup> This was the type of music that ‘entertained’ us at home, as we were not allowed to sing, play, or listen to any music perceived as worldly. My mother however, would add to her collection of music by recording the services on her ‘Hitachi’ cassette recorder. She would regularly record the congregational singing, and sermons, and although there were occasions when she ‘ran out of cassette tape’, somehow we were always able to

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<sup>13</sup> Services that had a focus on raising funds for the church were called building programmes and building rallies. During the formative years of the emerging Black Pentecostal churches, this is how many of the churches were able to raise enough funds to purchase their own church buildings.

<sup>14</sup> A collection of songs authored by White evangelist Ira Sankey during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See his biography, Sankey, Ira D., *My Life and the Story of the Gospel Hymns: And of Sacred Songs and Solos*, 2003 ed. (The Netherlands: Fredonia Books, 1907).

<sup>15</sup> Tracking is when the lyrics of a hymn or song is either read or recited line-by-line in order to guide either group or congregational singing. See Barry Chevannes, (ed.), *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> See Sanders, Cheryl J., *Saints in Exile – the Holiness Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 71. From an African American perspective, Sanders usefully explains how Black gospel music is both a product and a by-product of ‘having church,’ and it is the most appropriate sound, in terms of rhythm, and lyrics, for use in worship.

<sup>17</sup> For an explanation of how African Caribbean Christians used Jim Reeves for their gospel music, see Bradley, Lloyd, *Bass Culture – When Reggae Was King* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 17.

memorise songs, and when we returned to our ‘home church’ the songs that we learnt in the visiting churches, would be added to our own repertoire of congregational singing. This oral form of learning and preserving of songs is a key feature in Black Pentecostalism.<sup>18</sup>

## A vibrant concert scene!—the acceleration of Black gospel music in Britain

Another important aspect of my personal experience and observations of the development of Black gospel music in Britain was the vibrant ‘concert’ scene that occurred amongst Black Pentecostals during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was the era when Black church musicians and singers developed their musical talents on a wider scale<sup>19</sup>, and as a result, there was a thriving ‘concert scene’ where church musicians and singers formed singing groups, musical bands, and choirs; and each outfit developed a new repertoire of songs in readiness for the regular Saturday evening concerts. I remember attending numerous concerts that featured many of the emerging groups and choirs, and as my ongoing research will address, it is against this backdrop that Black gospel music in Britain began to take shape.<sup>20</sup>

As well as an opportunity for musicians and singers to develop their musical skills and new repertoire of songs, the regular concerts would become a significant social scene for young people and other church members of Black Pentecostalism in Britain. Notably, the venue for the frequent concerts was at first in the same church buildings that were acquired through the financial sacrifices of the first generation of African Caribbean migrants.<sup>21</sup> However, with the proliferation of visi-

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<sup>18</sup> See Hollenweger, Walter J., *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Sturge, Mark, *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>20</sup> Singing outfits such as the Majestic’s, Highgate choir, Simon Wallace and the Angelic Voices Choir and the London Community Choir to name just a few.

<sup>21</sup> Most African Caribbean men and women came to post war Britain with little more than a valid passport and a small amount of savings. Nevertheless, church members continuously contributed to fundraising in order to help purchase church buildings.

tations by African American gospel artists regularly touring Britain to share their style of Black gospel music, gospel concerts in Britain extended into Town Halls, theatres and other public venues.

## Black gospel music in Britain—reaching a wider audience

I have so far, shared elements of my own observations of the emergence of Black gospel music in Britain, emerging out of the Black church tradition in Britain<sup>22</sup>, and admittedly, my account is through the lens of Black Pentecostalism.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, from a lifetime of involvement with Black Pentecostalism as a Sunday school teacher, church administrator, and church musician, my experience and observations of Black gospel music took a new direction when I became a radio presenter with the BBC on a weekly basis. I started with the BBC in the mid 1980s when Black gospel music in Britain was a growing phenomenon in public spaces in Britain. Apart from a few recordings of gospel outfits in Britain,<sup>24</sup> there was little in the way of ‘professional’ recordings by Black gospel music artists in Britain.

Consequently, rather than featuring Black gospel music expressed by Black British gospel artists, my earliest presentations of Black gospel music on BBC radio was essentially the tradition that emerged in America. Black gospel music of America, nonetheless, was already a ‘fixed entity’ amongst young followers of Black gospel music in Britain, as it became possible to purchase recordings of the high profile gospel artists at the time, such as James Cleveland, Walter Hawkins, Andraé Crouch, and later, the Clark Sisters, the Winans, and

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Black churches in Britain and a suggestion of three typologies of the Black church, see Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) pp. 48-49.

<sup>23</sup> Although the first organised Black gospel groups in Britain are believed to have emerged from the Seventh Day Adventists tradition, the majority of artists came out of the Black Pentecostal tradition. See Broughton, Viv, *Black Gospel – an Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound* (Dorset: Blandford Press, 1985) pp. 138-157.

<sup>24</sup> Artists such as John Francis and the Inspirational Choir, Paradise, London community Gospel Choir, The Majestic Singers, Merrybells, Dalton Kerr, Lavine Husdon.

Commissioned and others.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as already stated, many of the African American gospel artists had already started visiting Britain on tour.

Without a doubt, Black gospel music in Britain has advanced and trickled into wider British society and has permeated public spaces such as on the radio and television, commercial CDs and DVDs, theatres, competitions, and award ceremonies.<sup>26</sup> However, despite its advancement there is still immense societal ignorance about its advent and evolution. I would say that the lack of knowledge is because of the absence of a definitive documented history as well as the misguided application of literature that primarily attends to Black gospel music in America. The lack of history is therefore the focus for the next section.

## The absence of a definitive documented history—a major concern

Although Black gospel music in Britain has advanced into wider British society, a most disturbing fact is that it is without a definitive documented history. What is striking is that an agreed narrative or formal historical account of its unique roots and route does not exist. By contrast, however, there is a plethora of data documenting the history and advancement of Black gospel music in America, whereby there are numerous studies by scholars from a variety of disciplines dedicating time to it in literature. What follows is a brief overview of the proliferation of literature attending to the advent, development, and advancement of Black gospel music in America.

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<sup>25</sup> Initially, many of the recordings were largely available by import; however, with new distribution deals in Britain, Black gospel music of America became easily available.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, the MOBO Awards (Music of Black Origin Awards) has a category for 'Black gospel music artist.' The most recent winner for that category is Jahaziel (2008).

## Black gospel music in America—a plethora of literature

As a musical tradition that is deeply entrenched in the ‘folk church’ tradition amongst African Americans<sup>27</sup>, Black gospel music in America attracts attention and scrutiny from a variety of scholars. Since its formal beginnings in the 1920s<sup>28</sup>, it has been the subject matter of enormous interest in a multiplicity of disciplines in respect of its roots, history, advancement, significance, and influence in America. Over the years, the writings have been progressive such as in history<sup>29</sup>, religious studies<sup>30</sup>, cultural studies<sup>31</sup>, and musicology.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the serious attention given in literacy to its overall development in America, there are also autobiographical writings profiling key figures

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<sup>27</sup> Jackson, Joyce Marie, ‘The Changing Nature of Gospel Music: A Southern Case Study’, *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>28</sup> This seems to be the consensus amongst scholars of Black gospel music in America based on the autobiographical details of former Blues artist Thomas A. Dorsey who is attributed as one of the founding figures of Black gospel music in America, and the father of Gospel Blues. Dorsey renounced his career as an accomplished blues and jazz pianist composer, to become, as he describes, ‘a great singer and worker in the kingdom.’ See Harris, Michael W., *The Rise of Gospel Blues – the Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> See Darden, Robert, *People Get Ready! – a History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004); Reagon, Bernice Johnson, *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); Reagon, Bernice Johnson, (ed.), *We'll Understand It Better By and By*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> See Pinn, Anthony B., (ed.), *Noise and Spirit* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Pinn, Anthony B., *Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995), pp. 21-38; Williams, Juan and Dixie, Quinton, *This Far by Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> See Dyson, Michael Eric, *Reflecting Black – African American Cultural Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Boyer, Horace Clarence, *The Golden Age of Gospel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Reed, Theresa L., *The Holy Profane – Religion in Black Popular Music* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003); Southern, Eileen, *The Music of Black Americans – a History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).



of Black gospel music in America, such as Thomas A. Dorsey<sup>33</sup>, Mahalia Jackson<sup>34</sup>, Rosetta Tharpe<sup>35</sup>, and many of the quartets and other key figures of the Golden Age.<sup>36</sup> There are also self-authored autobiographies by artists such as Shirley Caesar<sup>37</sup> and Kirk Franklin<sup>38</sup> and notably, the range of autobiographical sources tend to have more of a populace appeal. For instance, a helpful source largely profiling more contemporary figures of Black gospel music in America and those deemed as contributors to its history is Bil Carpenter's encyclopaedia, *Uncloudy Days*.<sup>39</sup>

An encyclopaedia that should be noted for its historical attention to both Black and White gospel music is the *Encyclopaedia of American Gospel Music*<sup>40</sup>, which is a collection of essays on key figures and events linked to the development of both Black and White gospel music in America through the decades. For instance, from an essay on the Azusa Street Revival<sup>41</sup>, to a discussion on Zondervan Publishers<sup>42</sup>, this A-Z guide provides interesting general reading concerning the overall proliferation of gospel music in America.

Mostly, the collection of literature is impressive and clearly authenticates the history and advancement of Black gospel music as a significant tradition in America, and scholars demonstrate how the mass of information can be classified chronologically, historically, and

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<sup>33</sup> Harris, Michael W., *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Orgill, Roxane, *Mahalia: A Life in Gospel Music*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2002); Schwein, Jules, *Go Tell It: Mahalia Jackson Queen of Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, Jerma A., *Singing in My Soul – Black Gospel Music in a Secular Age* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Heilbut, Anthony, *The Gospel Sound – Good News and Bad Times* (Updated and Revised) (New York: Limelight Editions, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Caesar, Shirley, *The Lady, the Melody, and the Word* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Franklin, Kirk, *Church Boy – an Autobiography* (Nashville: Word, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> Carpenter, Bil, *Uncloudy Days: The Gospel Music Encyclopedia* (San Francisco: Backbeat books, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> McNeil, W. K., (ed.), *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> McNeil, W. K., (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> McNeil, W. K., (ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 435-436.

by designated years.<sup>43</sup> Some of the categories do overlap; nevertheless, from the writings it is possible to see the proliferation and the succession of phases, as well as historical key points relevant to the development of Black gospel music in America.

By contrast, in regards to literature pertaining to the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain however, there is a dearth of sources, and this is because it has never before been the subject of a systematic study. As a direct result, its history is continuously misrepresented.

## The historical misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain in text

Contrary to the literary in American writings and scholarship, attention to Black gospel music in Britain is inadequate. Broadly speaking, the literature is either vague or is a historically misleading. This section discusses the misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain in text.

So far, there is only one source that gives serious attention to the advent of Black gospel music in Britain, and that is Viv Broughton's *Black Gospel—an illustrated History of the Gospel Sound*.<sup>44</sup> It is a highly regarded text, often cited as an authoritative source regarding the history of Black gospel music in America and Britain. To accompany this publication, Broughton also compiles a four-part compilation double album on vinyl to feature recordings of notable artists in the publication.<sup>45</sup>

Broughton starts his history with a short commentary about the brutal treatment towards Africans enslaved in North America. He cites the creation of Spirituals as the contributing factor to the development of Black gospel music. It is a pictorial presentation where Broughton

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<sup>43</sup> Jackson, Joyce Marie, 'The Changing Nature of Gospel Music: A Southern Case Study', *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>44</sup> Broughton, Viv, *Black Gospel – an Illustrated History of the Gospel Sound* (Dorset: Blandford Press, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> For instance, the Mighty Clouds of Joy, the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, Clara Ward and Rosetta Tharpe. See MCA Records © and (P) 1985, MCLD 614.

goes on to give interesting biographical details of those who he considers as major figures such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Thomas A. Dorsey, and those he calls gospel mothers, namely, Sallie Martin, Willie Mae Ford Smith, and Mahalia Jackson.<sup>46</sup>

Broughton also gives biographical treatment to the Golden Age, featuring quartets such as the Dixie Hummingbirds, the Swan Silvertones, the Spirit of Memphis, the Sensational Nightingales, and the Blind Boys of Mississippi, before illustrating the proliferation of female artists and super groups.<sup>47</sup> Broughton points out that numerically, the male quartets dominated the golden age, however, many other female groups made their own mark. For instance, female groups such as Clara Ward Singers, Inez Andrews and the Caravans, which also featured Albertina Walker and Shirley Caesar, Dorothy Love Coates and the Gospel Harmonettes. Broughton singles out former jazz singer and musician Rosetta Tharpe as the female gospel artist “whose music defies all gospels’ categorisation.”<sup>48</sup> Her style of performance attracted churchgoers and non-churchgoers, and in her hey day, she was able to draw huge crowds usually by the thousands.<sup>49</sup>

Broughton continues to give pictorial and biographical details of other major artists, right up to the decade of the mid 1980s, and concludes his illustrated history by turning his attention briefly to the advent of Black gospel music in Britain in the final chapter. He features some of the participatory figures of Black gospel music in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s<sup>50</sup>, pointing out that the first organised gospel groups in Britain emerged from the Seventh Day Adventist churches, namely, Singing Stewarts, and the Golden chords among others. However, many more gospel outfits would emerge from Black Pentecostal churches, with groups coming to their own during the 1970s.<sup>51</sup>

Some ten years after this first publication, Broughton pursues his

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<sup>46</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, pp. 61-74.

<sup>48</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> Broughton lists notables such as Basil Meade, The Doyley Brothers, John Francis, Paradise and Lavine Hudson. See Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, pp. 144-150.

<sup>51</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, pp. 140 -141.

interest in documenting Black gospel music with a subsequent manuscript, *Too Close to Heaven*<sup>52</sup>, which is another biographical presentation of notable figures of Black gospel music in America.<sup>53</sup> This time, however, Broughton totally ignores Black gospel music in Britain. Although by the time of his second publication Black gospel music in Britain was making further advances in wider British society<sup>54</sup>, Broughton nevertheless, did not take the opportunity to examine the subsequent advances of Black gospel music in Britain, or made any attempt to present a separate history. Instead, he completely ignores Black gospel music in Britain as though there was nothing more to add or clarify in the treatment given in 1985.

Overall, Broughton's documented history of Black gospel music in Britain showcases 'high profile' participants of Black gospel music in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, such as Basil Meade, John Francis, and other leaders of choirs and groups. However, he appears to have missed the opportunity to document the particularities that contributed to the emergence of so many gospel outfits emerging from Black Pentecostalism in Britain, particularly in Black independent churches<sup>55</sup> that nurtured the development of Black gospel music in Britain. Besides the brief mention of racism as a contributory factor for the emergence of Black independent churches, essentially, Broughton pays little attention to the particular historical, social, and religious roots of Black gospel music in Britain.

Broughton's contribution is the only text that is a serious attempt to provide a history of Black gospel music in Britain. However,

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<sup>52</sup> See Broughton, Viv, *Too Close to Heaven – the Illustrated History of Gospel Music* (London: Midnight Books, 1996). A supplementary television documentary supported this publication featuring interviews with key Black gospel artists of America.

<sup>53</sup> This publication accompanies the television documentary of the same title.

<sup>54</sup> Such as in the media, and record contracts and sales.

<sup>55</sup> A contentious term. For a debate about identifying Black churches or Black majority churches, see Trotman, Arlington, 'Black, Black-Led or What?', in Edwards, Joel, (ed.), *Let's Praise Him Again* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1992), reprinted in Sturge, Mark, *ibid.* For a more recent discussion on how the 'Black churches' can be classified, see Reddie, Anthony, 'Churches', in Dabydeen, David, Gilmore, John and Jones, Cecily, (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

because he integrates it with an American narrative and pays little attention to events that predate the advent of Black gospel music in Britain, his account is limited and in many ways misleading and effectively Broughton's American history of Black gospel music subsumes the unique history of Black gospel music in Britain.

Although Broughton acknowledges that there is no link between the early introduction of 'Afro-American' Spirituals and the emergence of Black gospel music in Britain<sup>56</sup>, he is unsuccessful in presenting a separate history for Black gospel music in Britain and unwittingly authenticates the myth that the rise of Black gospel music in Britain is fundamentally an African-American artefact.<sup>57</sup>

In sum, as there is no other source that gives serious treatment to the emergence of Black gospel music in Britain; Broughton's contribution is uncritically accepted and serves as the authoritative text concerning the history of Black gospel music in Britain. However, as his history does not address the definitive roots of Black gospel music in Britain, in essence Broughton's history plays a major part in the historical misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain in text.

Another example can be found in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*.<sup>58</sup> David Dabydeen *et al* attempt to chart Black British history, and in this publication properly include an essay on Gospel Music.<sup>59</sup> The entry however, is merely a 'carbon copy' of the American historical narrative, detailed in Viv Broughton's history. The reproduction of the American context is typified in this statement: 'Gospel music's roots lie in late 19th-and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America in the 'Holiness' movement churches.'<sup>60</sup> That might be the case for the roots of Black gospel music in America; however, concerning the history of Black gospel music in Britain this assertion is misleading. The statement is too general and does not address the specific roots of Black gospel music in Britain.

Again, like Broughton, this publication does not predate the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Broughton, Viv, *ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>57</sup> The origin of Black gospel music is perpetually attributed to the descendants of Africans in America and the creation and development of Spirituals.

<sup>58</sup> Dabydeen, David, Gilmore, John and Jones, Cecily, (eds.) *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Dabydeen, David, Gilmore, John and Jones, Cecily, (eds.) *ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> Dabydeen, David, Gilmore, John and Jones, Cecily, (eds.) *ibid.*, p. 192.

century by examining particular historical events that influenced the Christianisation of Africans and their descendants enslaved in the Caribbean, nor how White Christianity shaped their worldview, and religious practices.<sup>61</sup> Although Black gospel music is an integral part of Black religious expression in Britain, rather than a detailed examination of its emergence through Black Christianity in Black churches, this entry merely chronologies observations of people and events that contributed to the development of Black gospel music in Britain since the 1950s.

## The historical misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain—in singing

By way of expanding the point further of an enduring historical misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain, here I cite an example of how even the historical context of the singing tradition of Black gospel music in Britain is sometimes misrepresented in Black British history. For instance, the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2007 marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the British colonies, and in that year, there were many community events to mark the bicentenary. Some of the proceedings featured Black gospel music in Britain, where several artists and musicians participated in events.

Arguably the highest profile of events regarding the commemorations was a special service held at Westminster Abbey on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2007, with Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh; honoured guests; the Prime Minister (at the time) Tony Blair; other parliamentary delegates; and a large congregation. The service was televised live and contained hymns, readings, special music, and featured a most notable Black gospel music outfit in Britain, the Adventist Vocal Ensemble. The ensemble sang traditional African-American Spirituals, which is further evidence of the ongoing misrepresentation inherent in the expression of Black gospel music in Britain from a historical context.

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<sup>61</sup> Moore, Brian and Johnson, Michele A., *Neither Led nor Driven* (Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2004), p. 176.

For instance, the service of commemoration was to mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British colonies, which includes descendants of Africans in the Caribbean. The members of the gospel outfit Adventist Vocal Ensemble are of African-Caribbean descendants, yet the selection and rendition of ‘songs’ at the service did not musically represent Africans enslaved in the Caribbean. Instead, the singing group followed the trend and ‘copied’ the musical heritage of Africans enslaved in America by singing a selection of Spirituals understood to have emerged amongst Africans and their descendants in America.<sup>62</sup>

In sum, this ‘Black British’ gospel outfit missed the opportunity of presenting a version of ‘Black sacred’ singing that would have been more representative of Africans and their descendants enslaved in the British colonies of the Caribbean, and subsequently migrated to Britain during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, the opportunity to give a ‘flavour’ of the singing tradition of the first generation of African Caribbean migrants to post war Britain was also missed.

Arguably, a reflection of African Caribbean folklore or sacred singing would have been a ‘more accurate’ representation.<sup>63</sup> Knowledge of this however is scarce; therefore, consequently, the Adventist Vocal Ensemble borrowed songs understood to represent the historical context of Africans and their descendants enslaved in America. In essence, although it was a bicentenary to mark the abolition of the slave trade in the British Colonies, the gospel singing at this service of commemoration was a historical representation of Black gospel music in Britain.

On reflection, because of the absence of a definitive history of Black gospel music in Britain, arguably, the Adventist Vocal Ensemble

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<sup>62</sup> Such as: Steal Away; Nobody Knows the Trouble I See; My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord; Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Calling My Name; and I Want Jesus to Walk With Me.

<sup>63</sup> In the Caribbean Africans and their descendants sang traditional work songs to lighten labour and more. Music helped them to communicate and discreetly protest against the system. Africans and their descendants enslaved in the Caribbean collectively composed songs for fieldwork. For a description of music and lore of Africans enslaved in the Caribbean from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, see Lewin, Olive, *Rock It Come Over: The Folk Music of Jamaica* (Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2000).

did what any other Black gospel choir or group in Britain would have done at that time. They unwittingly borrowed the singing tradition of Black sacred singing in America because they did not have a full understanding of its own heritage of Black sacred singing in Britain.

## The impact of the absence of a definitive history of Black gospel music in Britain

As a direct result of the absence of a definitive documented history of Black gospel music in Britain, the American narrative of history of Black gospel music misplaces its history. To be specific, the history of Black gospel music in America is uncritically accepted as a one-size-fits-all, ‘all-inclusive’ narrative and the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain falls victim to this. The ‘off-the-peg’ use of the American narrative to explicate the history of Black gospel music in Britain subsumes the specific particularities of the roots and route of the evolution of Black gospel music as a tradition in Britain.

In effect, the history of Black gospel music in Britain so far is misleading. Its narrative is presently from an American perspective, which means, arguably, it has started at the wrong place. Constructing an argument about starting history at the wrong place, Jeremiah A. Wright makes this important statement; ‘When you start at the wrong place, you are going to end up in the wrong place.’<sup>64</sup> Wright also puts it another way; ‘Faulty assumptions lead to faulty analyses; and faulty analyses inevitably produce faulty conclusions.’<sup>65</sup>

In addition, to Wright, a Jamaican proverb is very poignant for this discussion concerning African Caribbean and Black British history. The proverb goes like this; ‘If e-no start good a-morning, it nar come right a-evening.’ Everal McKenzie offers a translation for this:

What was wrong to start with will remain wrong in the end. Things will not get better by themselves, if something has gone wrong you

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<sup>64</sup> Wright, Jeremiah A., ‘An Underground Theology’, in Hopkins, D., (ed.), *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone: Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Orbis, 1999), p. 96.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, Jeremiah A., *ibid.*, p. 96.



need to take positive action. A broken chair in the morning will still be broken at night unless it is repaired. Also, something that is wrong will always be wrong.<sup>66</sup>

To concur with both the Jamaican proverb and Wright, the application of an American historical narrative of Black gospel music to explain the narration of the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain means that for too long the story of Black gospel music in Britain has been misleading. Put simply, the historical narrative of Black gospel music in Britain tends to start with the Spirituals, which is a common assumption in populace debates and commentaries. Commentators and observers borrow this part of the American narrative as a starting point for Black gospel music in Britain.

Indeed the American historical narrative provides stories of similarities, perspectives, and experiences to that of Black gospel music in Britain, as the historical description cannot be separated from the ramifications of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Undoubtedly, all people of the African diaspora displaced by the brutality of the Slave Trade share a history of enslavement and oppression<sup>67</sup>, however, the journey of survival and triumph has taken different routes. A careful examination therefore of the distinct roots and route of Black gospel music in Britain within the African diaspora is central to understanding the complexities of how Black gospel music has ‘dispersed’ globally, in particular, in America and Britain.

An exploration of sociologist Paul Gilroy’s concept of a *Black Atlantic*<sup>68</sup> contributes to my notion of a historical distinction of Black gospel music. Gilroy coined the term *Black Atlantic* to refer to the creation of an African Diasporan culture as a result of the Transatlantic Slave Trade that was organised and maintained by Europeans, yet sustained by religious propaganda. The Black Atlantic is a conceptual framework located geographically in a triangular relationship between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Gilroy asserts that it is a complex

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<sup>66</sup> McKenzie, Everal, (ed.), *Jamaica Proverbs and Culture Explained* (Jamaica: Blue Mountain Media, 2004) p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Usry, Glen, and Keener, Craig S., *Black Man's Religion* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996) p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> See Gilroy, Paul, *Black Atlantic – Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

unit that consists of people from different ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and religious groups; and although there are differences in background, they are people of the African Diaspora who are still able to influence each other.<sup>69</sup>

That said, Black gospel music is a theological tradition that reflects Black musical cultural forms, and despite its global evolution, it has been shaped locally. More in-depth research will help to make distinctions and comparisons concerning the evolution of Black gospel music in Britain and America. In the meantime, however, historical references to Black gospel music in Britain need to reflect historical events and experiences that directly shaped the religiosity of the ancestors of African Caribbean men and women in Britain.<sup>70</sup>

The absence of a definitive documented history of Black gospel music in Britain is currently a major problem for Black theological discourse, hence its present inability to use it as an effective tool for teaching. Black gospel music in Britain is therefore an urgent subject area of study for Black theologians in Britain.

## Towards Black theological attention to Black gospel music in Britain

As an intellectual discipline with a firm commitment to practical application, Black theology seeks to provide theological insights to Black life. It engages with Christian theological ideas in order to make sense of the social, historical, and religious experience of Black people. What follows is a discussion about Black theology as a discipline, and its importance to Black gospel music. It begins with an overview of the advancement of Black theology in America.

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<sup>69</sup> See Gilroy, Paul, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> See Braithwaite, Kamau, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaican* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2005); Frey, Sylvia R., and Wood, Betty, *Come Shouting to Zion – African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

## Black theology in America—an overview of its development

The development of Black theology as a discipline in America is well documented. It is not necessary therefore, for me to replicate it all here. What is worth noting however, is that unlike contemporary theological movements in Europe and North America, its origin in America did not start in the seminary or university. Rather, as an idea, Black theology grew amongst Black clergy during the civil rights protests of America in the 1960s, primarily to provide a Christian theological reflection upon the black struggle.<sup>71</sup> Leading proponent of Black theology in America, James Cone, describes how it developed out of three contexts, namely the Civil Rights Movement; the publication of *Black Religion* by the African American scholar Joseph Washington<sup>72</sup>; and the Black Power Movement.<sup>73</sup>

Significantly, in America, all those involved in the formation of Black theology were also deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement that sought to initiate racial justice. In the form of various organisations, the Black churches began to relate the Christian gospel to the struggle for racial justice in American society<sup>74</sup>, and in June 1969, clergy of the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) produced the following statement, which provides a definition for Black theology:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the

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<sup>71</sup> Cone, James, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> Washington, Joseph R., *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

<sup>73</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 7.

humanity of white people in that it says No to the encroachment of white oppression. The message of liberation is the revelation of God as revealed in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Freedom IS the gospel. Jesus is the Liberator! “He ...hath sent me to preach deliverance to the captives!” (Luke 4:18). Thus the black patriarchs and we ourselves know this reality despite all attempts of the white church to obscure it and to utilize Christianity as a means of enslaving blacks. The demand that Christ the Liberator imposes on all men requires all blacks to affirm their full dignity as persons and all whites to surrender their presumptions of superiority and abuses of power.<sup>75</sup>

Following the inception of Black theology in America, what is clear is that radical Black clergy started to interpret the meaning of the Christian faith from the perspective of the Black struggle for liberation in America, as they wanted to ‘theologise from within the Black experience rather than be confined to duplicating the theology of Europe or White North America.’<sup>76</sup>

Despite the three specific circumstances noted as the backdrop for contemporary Black theology to emerge as an academic discipline in America; Black religious thinker Gayraud S. Wilmore offers a clue that Black theology did not begin in the 1960s. Rather by studying the sermons of Black preachers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and before that, recognition of the Black presence in the bible for five hundred years, it is possible to see that Black theology began long before the Atlantic Slave Trade.<sup>77</sup> Wilson cites Old Testament Biblical text and events in scripture to suggest that such raw material has always been available and can help to explain the emergence of Black theology in North America, the Caribbean, and West Africa since the beginning of the second introduction to Christianity.<sup>78</sup> Hence, similar theological developments have occurred in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud S., and Cone, James H., (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966 - 1979* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 101.

<sup>76</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud S., ‘Pastoral Ministry in the Origin and Development of Black Theology’, in Cone, James H., and Wilmore, Gayraud S., (eds.), *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume 2 (1980 - 1992)*, (New York: Orbis, 1993), p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> Wilmore, Gayraud S., *ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

As an academic discipline in America, Black theology seeks to interpret the meaning of God's liberating presence in a society where black people are economically exploited and politically marginalized because of the colour of their skin.<sup>80</sup> Frederick L. Ware helpfully provides a detailed analysis and explanation for some of the complexities in Black theology in his publication of *Methodologies of Black Theology*.<sup>81</sup> In his classification of Black theological scholars, Ware suggests that there are three different schools of academic Black theology; namely, the Black Hermeneutical School<sup>82</sup>, the Black Philosophical School<sup>83</sup>, and the Human Science School.<sup>84</sup> Within the various schools, writers provide a wide range of theological reflections, which demonstrates the extent of the range of analysis within the American academy of Black theology.

As an intellectual discipline, Black theology in the American context can be commended for its scholarship and theological attention to Black gospel music in America, and next I cite a few examples.

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<sup>79</sup> Hopkins, Dwight, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1999), pp. 167-180.

<sup>80</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Ware, Frederick L., *Methodologies of Black Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

<sup>82</sup> Ware suggests that this school of theology centres on liberation, as defined by biblical conceptions of God's liberating activity, using the bible, and black experience as some of the sources. Ware lists some of the main scholars in the hermeneutical school of black theology as Katie Cannon, Kelly Brown Douglas, Jacquelyn Grant, James Cone, Dwight Hopkins, J. Deotis Roberts, and Gayraud Wilmore. See Ware, Frederick L., *ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>83</sup> Ware suggests that the black philosophical school of theology uses areas external to theology and faith, such as reason that is exercised in philosophical traditions like humanism, metaphysics and pragmatism. The method of enquiry is philosophical and empirical analysis, and logical argument, as well as biblical and philosophical hermeneutics. Prominent scholars are Anthony Pinn, Alice Walker, and Cornel West. See Ware, Frederick L., *ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>84</sup> This third school takes on a descriptive role in its task of Black theology, centring on empowerment, transformation and overcoming various conditions of human life in order to gain knowledge for multiple of purposes, particularly for intellectual development in Black theology. Ware identifies Key scholars such as Cheyl Townesnd Gilkes, C. Eric Lincoln, and Charles Long. Ware, Frederick L., *ibid.*, Preface.

## Black theological attention to Black gospel music in America

Strictly speaking, and by way of simplifying this discussion, Black theological attention to Black gospel music in America can be split into three categories, namely, the Spirituals, Black Church studies, and Black hymnody. I will discuss these three areas briefly.

Sometimes referred to as slave songs, Spirituals are the collection of songs that emerged amongst Africans enslaved in America, and as Gwendolin Sims Warren explains, they are the ‘true folk songs of the American experience.’<sup>85</sup> In her collection of *101 Best-loved Psalms, Gospel Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Warren goes on to make the point that in other cultures and societies, most folk songs are primarily secular, whereas the Spirituals are sacred and religious, and are not attributed to individual authors; rather, they reflect the musical genius of African American people who collectively created the songs.<sup>86</sup>

In her seminal work, *In Spirit and in Truth*, Melva Wilson Costen also contributes to the discourse on Spirituals, and points out that they provide a record of the history, beliefs, and values that African people hold collectively in their memory.<sup>87</sup> It is no wonder then that Anthony B. Pinn in *Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology*<sup>88</sup>, suggests that the Spirituals ‘narrated the community’s collective physical and psychological experience and development.’<sup>89</sup>

In respect to the physical and psychological experience of the African, there is a groundbreaking monograph by James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*.<sup>90</sup> Cone offers a theological interpretation in

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<sup>85</sup> Warren, Gwendolin Sims, *Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Although Spirituals have been overwhelmingly credited to Africans as their own, there are critics who have denied this source of origin. For a discussion on this see Johnson, James Weldon and Johnson, Rosamond, *The Books of American Negro Spirituals* (Da Capo Press, 1925; reprint, 1969), pp. 11-50.

<sup>87</sup> Costen, Melva Wilson, *In Spirit and in Truth – the Music of African American Worship* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p 11

<sup>88</sup> Pinn, Anthony B., *Why Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> Pinn, Anthony B., *ibid.*, p. 23.

equal measure to the Spirituals and the Blues, and starts with a thorough survey and critique of scholarship attending to the origin and meaning of Spirituals.<sup>91</sup> Cone goes on to present a perceptive interpretation of the Spirituals and the Blues, claiming that there is a definite dualism between the two. He states vehemently that:

The spirituals and the blues record black people's feelings—their hopes and disappointments, their dreams and nightmares. We must view them as two artistic expressions of the same experience.<sup>92</sup>

Making a point about the liberating effect of Spirituals, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan in *Exorcizing Evil*<sup>93</sup> presents a Womanist perspective of the impact of Spirituals. Kirk-Duggan asserts that Spirituals can be used to teach liberation, justice, hope and new life. Moreover, they can empower people as they represent an uncompromising exorcizing of oppression.<sup>94</sup> Yolanda Y. Smith in *Reclaiming the Spirituals*<sup>95</sup>, therefore, encourages African Americans to reclaim their triple heritage as Africans, African Americans, and Christians, and urges African Americans to draw upon the wisdom and rich cultural heritage of Spirituals as a viable and relevant resource for the development of Christian education.<sup>96</sup> Smith wraps up her monologue with insights for building a triple heritage model using Spirituals.

To summarise this brief summary of literacy attention to Spirituals in Black theology from an in American context, it is generally accepted that the Spirituals are the definitive historical foundation for Black gospel music in America. For instance, Oral L. Moses, makes this statement, 'Spirituals provide one source for much of the textual content of today's gospel music,'<sup>97</sup> meanwhile, much earlier on, Cone

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<sup>90</sup> Cone, James, *The Spirituals and the Blues – an Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1992; reprint, 9th, February 2003).

<sup>91</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 9-19.

<sup>92</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 129-130.

<sup>93</sup> Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A., *Exorcizing Evil: A Womanist Perspective on the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>94</sup> Kirk-Duggan, Cheryl A., *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Smith, Yolanda Y., *Reclaiming the Spirituals* (Cleveland The Pilgrim Press, 2004).

<sup>96</sup> Smith, Yolanda Y., *ibid.*

concludes his interpretation of the Spirituals and the Blues, making the assertion that ‘gospel music replaced the Spirituals, and Jazz replaced the Blues.’<sup>98</sup>

Here I move on to another aspect of Black theological attention to Black gospel music in America, and that of Black Church studies. Notably, part of the historical narrative of Black gospel music in America is the significance of the emergence of ‘the Black Church,’ and in a wide range of literature, it is possible to see that Black gospel music is understood to be a by-product of the Black church in the African American experience. For instance, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya<sup>99</sup> conducted a ten year comprehensive study of the Black church in the African American Experience.<sup>100</sup> It is a much-respected source, where, amongst other things, Lincoln and Mamiya examine ‘Music and the Black Church.’ Their reflection provides a useful chronological overview of the developmental phases of Black gospel music in America, such as concerted Spirituals, Spirituals arranged as hymns, Civil Rights Hymnody, Freedom songs, types of contemporary Black church music, social gospel hymnody, hymn-lining tradition, and various transitional stages of gospel music, which includes the ‘Golden Age’ and Contemporary gospel music.<sup>101</sup>

A more recent publication of *Black Church Studies* is by Stacey Floyd-Thomas *et al*<sup>102</sup>, who make the point that the historical Black Church was the place where many nightclub musicians and singers learnt how to perform in public places.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, many noteworthy contemporary Black musicians and performers of Soul and R&B, such as the late James Brown and Aretha Franklin, recognise the

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<sup>97</sup> Moses, Oral L., ‘The Nineteenth-Century Spiritual Text: A Source for Modern Gospel’ in Keck, George R. and Martin, Sherrill V., (eds.) *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Music* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 49.

<sup>98</sup> Cone, James, *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>99</sup> Lincoln, C. Eric and Mamiya, Lawrence H., *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (London: Duke University Press, 1990).

<sup>100</sup> See Lincoln, C. Eric and Mamiya, Lawrence H., *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Lincoln, C. Eric and Mamiya, Lawrence H., *ibid.*, pp. 346-381.

<sup>102</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey *et al.*, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey *et al.*, *ibid.*, pp. 26-27.



importance of Black Church music and how it was their training ground.<sup>104</sup>

Floyd-Thomas *et al* also remind us that Black sacred music in the Black Church, such as Spirituals and Black gospel music, came out of the oral tradition of the Black Church,<sup>105</sup> and that singing remains one of the cornerstones of the Black worship experience.<sup>106</sup>

Amidst the literature concerning the Black church and music, there is a collection of essays, where editor James Abbington in *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*<sup>107</sup> gathers the voices of notable authors to provide a source of essays and articles on music and worship, and this publication is used as a key college text. In this publication, there are altogether seven sections with specific essays that expand on the theological virtues of Black church music, which, in essence, is represented more widely in Black gospel music in America.

In order to emphasise the fact that the Black church is the social centre for Black people in America, the first section of this publication, 'Historical Perspective' starts with extracts of the essay *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>108</sup> The other six sections contain thought provoking essays by clergy and scholars, such as Sister Thea Bowman<sup>109</sup>, Eileen Southern<sup>110</sup>, and Obery M. Hendricks<sup>111</sup>, amongst others.

A most distinguished category of literacy in Black theological discourse regarding Black gospel music in America is Black hymnody. Quintessentially, hymnody is the study of hymns and songs, where

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<sup>104</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>105</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>106</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey *et al.*, *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>107</sup> Abbington, James, (ed.), *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship* (Chicago: GIA, Inc, 2001).

<sup>108</sup> Burghardt, William Edward, 'Of the Faith of the Fathers', in Abbington, James, (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 3-13.

<sup>109</sup> Bowman, Thea, 'The Gift of African American Sacred Song', in Abbington, James, (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 209-216.

<sup>110</sup> Southern, Eileen, 'Hymnals of the Black Church', in Abbington, James, (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 137-151.

<sup>111</sup> Hendricks, Obery M., 'I Am the Holy Dope Dealer: The Problem with Gospel Music Today', in Abbington, James, (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 137-151.

lyrical qualities are assessed theologically. Jon Michael Spencer has been most vocal in setting the agenda for hymnological discourse.<sup>112</sup> For instance, in his monologue *Protest and Praise*<sup>113</sup>, Spencer discharges theological interpretations on what he describes as theomusicology, assessing the historic-theological contexts of Black sacred music. In a notable chapter concerning Black gospel music in particular, Spencer enters into a discourse on the meaning of gospel music, and examines the theological qualities of hymns and songs through an examination of the lyrics of key hymn and songwriters.<sup>114</sup>

A landmark source however is that of Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name*.<sup>115</sup> Walker escorts the reader through a journey of the development of Black gospel music in America, citing Anthemic Spirituals as the foundation for all forms of Black music in America through the model of a 'music Tree.' Walker traces the relationship between Black sacred music and social change by examining a selection of Spirituals, hymns and songs.

Cheryl J. Sanders, Professor of Christian Ethics, also contributes to the scholarship of hymnody in *Saints in Exile*.<sup>116</sup> From an insider's perspective, Sanders examines the worship experience of those known collectively as Saints in the Sanctified church. She investigates Black gospel music as a product of the sanctified worship experience. Meanwhile, to return to Melva Costen, *In Spirit and in Truth*<sup>117</sup>, she examines the basis for the various types of genres in African American worship, by surveying, for instance, the emergence of camp meetings,

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<sup>112</sup> See Spencer, Jon Michael, *Black Hymnody – a Hymnological History of the African-American Church* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Spencer, Jon Michael, *Protest and Praise – Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Spencer, Jon Michael, *Sing a New Song – Liberating Black Hymnody* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

<sup>113</sup> Spencer, Jon Michael, *Protest and Praise – Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

<sup>114</sup> Spencer, Jon Michael, *ibid.*, pp. 199-223.

<sup>115</sup> See Walker, Wyatt Tee, *Somebody's Calling My Name – Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979).

<sup>116</sup> See Sanders, Cheryl J., *Saints in Exile – the Holiness Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>117</sup> See Costen, Melva Wilson, *In Spirit and in Truth – the Music of African American Worship* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

black-metered hymns, and Pentecostalism.<sup>118</sup>

From this brief discussion, it is possible to see that Black gospel music in America is an important part of Black theological reflection. As an effective tool it clearly enhances educational development and as a tradition, Black gospel music in America is an effective means of exploring Black religious cultural roots, plus, social and political concerns through a Black theological lens. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case for Black theology in Britain. Before discussing the deficiency of Black theological attention to Black gospel music in Britain, what follows is a brief overview of the development of Black theology in Britain.

## Black theology in Britain—an overview of its development

Trailing behind America as a growing intellectual discipline is Black theology from a British context. Although accused of being excessive in its use of literature in Black theology of America<sup>119</sup>, the development of Black theology in Britain is advancing in its own context. For instance, in a review of a decade of Black theology in Britain, Chigor Chike identifies the development of Black theology in Britain by three streams, namely, the era of slavery; the Caribbean immigration of the 1940s; and the more recent immigration of Africans, and Asians.<sup>120</sup> Chike cites an early example of Black theology in the writings of Equiano pertaining to the subject of slavery.<sup>121</sup> In 1786, Equiano wrote to a friend regarding the supporters of slavery, ‘can any man be a Christian who asserts that one part of the human race were ordained to be in perpetual bondage to another.’<sup>122</sup> Here we see a Christian reflec-

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<sup>118</sup> Costen, Melva Wilson, *ibid.*, pp. 26-73.

<sup>119</sup> Reid-Salmon, Delroy A., ‘A Sin of Black Theology: The Omission of the Caribbean Diasporan Experience from Black Theological Discourse’, *Black Theology* vol. 6, no. 2, (2008).

<sup>120</sup> Chike, Chigor, ‘Black Theology in Britain – One Decade On’, *Black Theology* vol. 4, no. 2, (2006).

<sup>121</sup> Chike, Chigor, *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>122</sup> Chike, Chigor, *ibid.*, p. 194. See also Fryer, Peter, *Staying Power – the History*

tion upon the struggle of Black people in Britain needing justice and liberation.

Following the arrival of SS Empire Windrush in June 1948, carrying some 492 Caribbean men and women to Britain, the continuous influx of Caribbean people arriving in Britain on mass invoked new challenges for white Britain, and hostility and rejection became a daily reality for those who migrated from the Caribbean islands to ‘Mother Country.’ Britain, in particular, the host churches in Britain, now had new ‘brothers and sisters’ in Christ as neighbours, however, the ‘colonial subjects’ from the Caribbean were not welcome in the host congregations.<sup>123</sup>

This state of affairs revealed a racist Britain whereby Black people encountered British racism in three forms. For instance, white people believed that Black people were inferior, therefore hurled public and private insults towards them, and subjected them to anti-social behaviour.<sup>124</sup> In the process of the ill-treatment, Black people were considered second-class citizens and therefore pushed to the bottom of the social ladder, experiencing discrimination in employment, poor housing, education, criminal justice system, and social services.<sup>125</sup>

For Black people attempting to settle in Britain the social conditions were hostile enough, however, at legislative level, the termination of the unrestricted entry of Commonwealth citizens in 1962 sent a clear message of refusal to other intended ‘immigrants,’ when controls were tightened in 1968. These, and other subsequent immigration controls were deliberate acts to undermine the security of non-British citizens.<sup>126</sup>

In sum, amidst this crisis of racism levelled towards Black people in British society, Black Christianity positively emerged in Britain. What follows is a brief overview of key texts in Black theological discourse from a British context.

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*of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 109 & p. 515.

<sup>123</sup> Wilkinson, John L., *Church in Black and White* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), p 33.

<sup>124</sup> Wilkinson, John L., *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>125</sup> Wilkinson, John L., *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>126</sup> Wilkinson, John L., *ibid.*, p. 32.

## Black theology in Britain—an overview of key texts

In a striking contrast to scholarship in America, Black theological attention to Black gospel music in Britain is limited. Regrettably, nowhere in the literature is there clear evidence of Black gospel music prevailing as a tradition in Britain. Rather, writers merely acknowledge its existence, or fail to engage with the social, cultural, historical, and theological concerns in any meaningful way. It is beyond the scope of this essay however, to mount a detailed survey of Black theological treatment of Black gospel music in Britain; the aim here nevertheless, is to illustrate the overall lack of attention in key texts of Black theology in Britain.

As an example of the unremitting progress of Black theology in Britain, I start with a key source that is considered as a textbook for Black theology in Britain. *Black Theology in Britain*, edited by Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie<sup>127</sup>, is a collection of actual writings previously published of Black British theologians. In this single volume text there is a selection of excerpts from significant texts aimed at encapsulating important features or themes in Black theology in Britain. For instance, text that offers contextual narrative to the development of theology; background information to the roots of British religiosity; a number of writings by Robert Beckford; and writings by Black British Christian women such as Valentina Alexander, Kate Coleman, and Lorraine Dixon; plus other significant texts.

The heuristic approach by the editors in terms of the structure of this text is notable; however, nowhere in this textbook is there any treatment of Black gospel music in Britain. Whilst there is some reference to Black music through the writings of Paul Gilroy in his discussion of ‘the Black Atlantic,’<sup>128</sup> from the absence of Black gospel music in this collection of writings, it appears that Black gospel music in Britain is not a significant theological tool for Black British theologians.

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<sup>127</sup> Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *Black Theology in Britain* (London: Equinox, 2007).

<sup>128</sup> Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *ibid.*, pp. 30-31. For a full reading of Gilroy’s thesis, see Gilroy, Paul, *Black Atlantic – Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

There is one exception however, namely Robert Beckford. Whilst Jagessar and Reddie recognise Beckford as a ‘key organic intellectual’ on the development of Black theology as a discipline in Britain<sup>129</sup>, the canon of Beckford is impressively large<sup>130</sup>, for instance, *Jesus is Dread*<sup>131</sup>, *Dread and Pentecostal*<sup>132</sup>, *God of the Rahtid*<sup>133</sup>, *God and the Gangs*<sup>134</sup>, and *Jesus Dub*.<sup>135</sup>

Beckford’s scholarship tends to provide Black theological reflections on Black cultural concerns in Britain, and he could be reputed as the only Black theologian in Britain so far, to discuss Black gospel music in Britain in any meaningful way. For instance, in his thesis *Jesus is Dread*<sup>136</sup>, Beckford reflects on the symbols, icons, and systems within the Black church and Black expressive culture in Britain. He spends some time, albeit brief, to discuss the liturgical integrity of Black British gospel music. In his discussion about Black culture however, his attention is limited. Primarily he sets out to critique Black gospel music in Britain for the lack of lyrical engagement with socio-political issues, rather than to use the opportunity to emphasise in more helpful detail that gospel music that comes out of the Black church tradition, serves as an important source of cultural identity and stability.<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, Beckford correctly points out that Black sacred music in popular culture is marginalised, and symbolically writes:

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<sup>129</sup> Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>130</sup> Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> Beckford, Robert, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Logan and Todd, 1999).

<sup>132</sup> Beckford, Robert, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> Beckford, Robert, *God of the Rahtid: Redeeming Rage* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001).

<sup>134</sup> Beckford, Robert, *God and the Gangs: An Urban Toolkit for Those Who Won't Be Sold out, Brought out or Scared Out* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004).

<sup>135</sup> Beckford, Robert, *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>136</sup> See Beckford, Robert, *Jesus Is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (London: Darton, Logan and Todd, 1999).

<sup>136</sup> Beckford, Robert, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>137</sup> Beckford, Robert, *ibid.*, p. 16.

Despite the large number of sociological and anthropological studies on Black popular culture, very few explore or expose the spirituality of Black expressive cultures.<sup>138</sup>

Amongst the scholars of Black theology in Britain there are Black women theologians such as Valentina Alexander, Kate Coleman, and Lorraine Dixon. Here I will cite two examples of missed opportunities to include Black gospel music in Britain as part of the theological reflections. For instance, Alexander's thesis *Breaking Every Fetter?*<sup>139</sup> is an investigation into the concept of theological liberation, and how it is both interpreted and used by Black Christians in what she describes as Black-led churches in Britain. In her theological investigation however, Alexander does not use the opportunity to deliberate on the relationship between theology and music, in particular, how liberation theology presents itself through the lyrical content and music in Black churches, which is arguably, the bedrock for Black gospel music in Britain.

Meanwhile, here I cite the scholarship of another Black British theologian, in order to draw attention to how the tradition of Black gospel music in America is a preference for Black theological reflection rather than the tradition that has evolved in Britain. For instance, Lorraine Dixon in *Teach it Sister!*<sup>140</sup> reviews the songs sang by Mahalia Jackson, the renowned African American gospel singer of the 1950s and 1960s before her death in 1972. Dixon provides a brief historical background to the development of Black gospel music in America, before reflecting briefly on the undeveloped debate about the origin and definition of the term 'gospel music.' Dixon argues that Mahalia Jackson was a theologian in song, which was shaped by both Womanist and Black theology. The song, We Shall Overcome for example, portrays Mahalia Jackson's commitment to the wholeness and liberation of her own African American people.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Beckford, Robert, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>139</sup> Alexander, Valentina, 'Breaking Every Fetter? To What Extent Has the Black Led Church in Britain Developed a Theology of Liberation?' (University of Warwick, 1996).

<sup>140</sup> Dixon, Lorraine, 'Teach It, Sister! Mahalia Jackson as Theologian in Song', *Black Theology in Britain: a Journal of Contextual Praxis*, no. 2, (1999).

<sup>141</sup> Dixon, Lorraine, *ibid.*, p. 80.

Dixon's choice of artist however, emphasises a critical point. A Black British theologian takes on the task of assessing the theological integrity of a selection of songs sang by Mahalia Jackson, the popular Black gospel figure of America. It could be that at the time of writing Dixon was not aware of the various established artists or those emerging of Black gospel music in Britain. Nevertheless, Dixon, a Black British theologian, fails to attend to the theological qualities of a 'home-grown' Black British gospel singer, and misuses the opportunity to initiate an intellectual theological dialogue on an African American gospel artist rather than to assess the theological qualities of lyrics in Black gospel music in Britain.

As a final look at this brief overview of key texts in Black theology in a British context, it must be said that Britain has a most prolific scholar and writer in Black theology. So far, Research fellow and Consultant in Black theological studies Anthony G. Reddie has published some eleven books, plus some forty articles in Black theology.<sup>142</sup> For instance, his publication *Faith Stories and the Experience of Black Elders*<sup>143</sup> is a constructive monologue that observes the significance of working through oral histories provided by the 'Windrush Generation.' This publication makes an important contribution to facilitating the stories and experiences of Black elders on religious and spiritual dimensions. Reddie's main area of scholarship is primarily with the teaching and learning of Christian education through Black theology, however his work rarely mentions music. In his publication *Nobodies to Somebodies*<sup>144</sup>, however, he takes a systematic approach to teaching and learning of the Christian faith, paying particular attention to the experiences of multi-ethnic and Black majority

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<sup>142</sup> For instance, see Reddie, Anthony G., *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Reddie, Anthony G., *Dramatizing Theologies – a Participative Approach to Black God-Talk* (London: Equinox, 2006), Reddie, Anthony G., *Faith Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001), Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).

<sup>143</sup> Reddie, Anthony G., *Faith Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001).

<sup>144</sup> See Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).



inner-city urban churches in Britain. Reddie identifies Black styles of music as an important role in signifying identity and providing an essential resource for engagement and belonging within faith community.<sup>145</sup>

Whilst examining the importance of an African-centred approach that reflects the ecclesiological traditions of historic-mainline churches in Britain, Reddie acknowledges the ministry of *Soul Spirit*, a Black gospel music trio based in a local Methodist Church in Birmingham. Reddie pays tribute the role their music plays in helping to develop a new model of Christian education in the form of music within Methodism. Reddie cites the ministry of *Soul Spirit* that includes original material influenced by traditional songs, and he uses this group to demonstrate the importance of music in education.

*Soul Spirit*, however, are barely recognised within the national framework of Black gospel music in Britain, and Reddie's exclusion of identifying and discussing other Black gospel music outfits in Britain raises some questions. Why did he only use a local gospel outfit, rather than acknowledge other gospel outfits, particularly from the Black Pentecostal tradition where there are many examples of longstanding models that depict education in the form of music?<sup>146</sup> Additionally, Reddie appears to disregard more longstanding Black gospel music artists and the ongoing contributions they make to education in the form of music.

In sum, the lack of serious attention to Black gospel music in Britain in Black theology in the British context gives the impression that Black gospel music in Britain has little to contribute to the discourse of Black theology in Britain. There is little evidence in Black theological texts of the longstanding tradition of Black gospel music in Britain. I seek however, to test this inference by making suggestions of possible tasks for Black theology in Britain concerning Black gospel music in Britain.

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<sup>145</sup> Reddie, Anthony G., *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003), p. 172.

<sup>146</sup> For instance, many Black gospel music artists in Britain conduct workshops, visit schools and youth meetings to share aspects of gospel music—artists such as the Witness, Freddi Kofi and LCGC.

## Black theological tasks ahead concerning Black gospel music in Britain

I begin this brief discussion of Black theological tasks with a concise description about the role of Black theologians. Emmanuel Lartey, a pioneer of Black theological thinking in Britain, asserts that:

...theologians are people who reflect upon their faith and attempt to articulate it.... Theology is expressed through many media and in many forms. Art, music, and drama are valid ways through which the fruits of a theologian's efforts may be made known. These can in themselves be theological forms.<sup>147</sup>

This statement comes from a discussion article first published in 1999 by Lartey<sup>148</sup>, who seeks to offer theological reflections about the aftermath of the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, and suggests seven specific items on the agenda for Black theologians in Britain.<sup>149</sup> Lartey's suggestions could be seen as parameters for Black theological focus within the British context, namely, a Biblical task, historical task, philosophical and cultural education, socio-economic attention, political consideration, psychological analysis, and deliberation of aesthetics.<sup>150</sup> Lartey concedes that although the tasks are clear, they are daunting; nevertheless, if Black theology seeks to engage with the realities of Black people in Britain, each task is imperative.

From the list of seven items in Lartey's agenda, this essay will focus on two, which I believe are most pertinent to Black gospel music in Britain, namely, historical task, and aesthetic. For instance, because of specific historical events that locate Black people in Britain, an important task in Black theology is to trace the heritage of Black gospel

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<sup>147</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., 'After Stephen Lawrence: Characteristics and Agenda for Black Theology in Britain', *Black Theology in Britain: a Journal of Contextual Praxis*, no. 3, (1999), p. 81.

<sup>148</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., 'After Stephen Lawrence: Characteristics and Agenda for Black Theology in Britain', republished in Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.), *Black Theology in Britain* (London: Equinox, 2007), pp. 288-307.

<sup>149</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, pp. 87-91.

<sup>150</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, pp. 87-91.

music as a musical tradition in Britain. In other words, a historical investigation through a theological lens, of the enslavement and subsequent Christianisation and enculturation of Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean, will help to explain the adoption and adaptation of Christianity amongst Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean. Additionally, the mass migration of African Caribbeans leaving the Caribbean to journey to post war Britain; will help to establish the historical, social, political, and religious particularities inherent in Black Christianity, as many of them carried what Roswith Gerloff termed 'a cultural theological baggage' with them<sup>151</sup>, which helped to shape the advent of Black gospel music in Britain.

As Lartey suggests, history is sometimes misunderstood and there is a need to set the record straight<sup>152</sup>, and this is the case for the history of Black gospel music in Britain. Because of the misuse of American literature so far, which contributes to the tendency of applying the American narrative to historical references of Black gospel music in Britain, the historical task is an urgent one for Black theology in Britain. Black theology has an essential role in charting the advent and development of Black gospel music as a tradition in Britain, in order to explain the roots of Black gospel music emerging out of Black Christianity in Britain, and as Jagessar and Reddie explain:

The roots of Black Christianity lay in the counter-hegemonic struggles of Black peoples in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Britain to challenge the worst excesses of oppressive Christian inspired supremacist practices through a radical interpretation of the central tenets of the Christian faith.<sup>153</sup>

The history of Black gospel music in Britain therefore needs to be unearthed, and more research will unlock the mystery of its advent and evolution in Britain. It is a task waiting to be addressed in the discipline of Black theology. By way of looking at how Black theology can attend to Black gospel music in Britain, here I cite some of the benefits based

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<sup>151</sup> Gerloff, Roswith I. H., *A Plea for British Black Theologies – the Black Church Movement in Britain in Its Transatlantic Cultural and Theological Interaction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>152</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>153</sup> Jagessar, Michael N. and Reddie, Anthony G., (eds.) *ibid.*, p. 2.

on Lartey's earlier suggestions of tasks for Black theology in Britain.

First, an important task for Black theology that has largely been ignored is to attend to Black arts, such as, music, drama, and dance. Lartey correctly makes the point that these expressions have so far been condemned as worldly in Black theological thought.<sup>154</sup> However, whilst there is a need to claim the heritage inherent in Black expressions of art<sup>155</sup>, Black theological interest in Black gospel music in Britain will help to authenticate Black gospel music in the British context as a product of Black Christianity. It will also validate its emergence from the distinct liturgical music of Black congregational worship in Britain in the Black church tradition.<sup>156</sup>

Black theological attention could also authenticate the tradition of Black gospel music in Britain as a vehicle for Black aesthetics and an unequivocal artistic expression of God-talk, with Black cultural significance.

As a subject area, Black gospel music in Britain needs to be seen as an important area of enquiry in scholarship, and part of the enquiry should involve the exploration of key historical points, in order to explain its eschatological emphasis, and how it emerged out of liturgy in the Black church tradition.

Black theological attention to Black gospel music in Britain will authenticate it as an important area of enquiry in scholarship, in order to validate it as a subject area worthy of scrutiny concerning its roots, history, advancement, and significance to Black Christianity in Britain.

In sum, Black theology in Britain has a duty to inform, interpret, and to teach<sup>157</sup>, therefore as an intellectual discipline it needs to be interdisciplinary in its approach and have more dialogue with other disciplines.<sup>158</sup> To this end, Lartey commends fellow theologian Robert Beckford, for his willingness to adopt 'plurality, interfaith interaction, and dialogue'<sup>159</sup>, in his publication, *Jesus is Dread*.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>155</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>156</sup> Edwards, Joel, *Let's Praise Him Again*, (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1992), p. 75.

<sup>157</sup> Roberts, J. Deotis, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), p. 117.

<sup>158</sup> Roberts, J. Deotis, *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>159</sup> Lartey, Emmanuel Y., *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>160</sup> See Beckford, Robert, *ibid.*

Embracing other disciplines will assist Black theological thinking in terms of discovering the shaping of Black sacred music. In truth, Black gospel music in Britain is presently an enigma to Black theology in Britain; therefore as a discipline, it has an important role in establishing scholarship for Black gospel music in Britain, in order to advance knowledge and employ it as an effective tool to teach Black theology.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the lack of attention to Black gospel music in Britain in literature, particularly in Black theology. It highlights an urgent need for a definitive documented history. The absence of history contributes to the ongoing historical misrepresentation of Black gospel music in Britain and the misuse of American literature whereby commentators and observers apply the American historical narrative to explicate the history of Black gospel music in Britain.

The overview of Black theological attention to Black gospel music in America in this essay, demonstrates how Black gospel music can be a vital tool for Black theological reflection, teaching and learning. Black theologians in Britain therefore, can learn from this.

Without a doubt, Black theology in Britain is a compelling discipline that provides theological insights to Black life. As an intellectual and practical entity, it appropriates the activity of God in human history<sup>161</sup>, using Christian theological ideas in order to make sense of the social, historical, and religious experience of Black people.

Due to the absence of a definitive documented history, assuming as we may that Black gospel music emerged out of Black congregational singing in the Black church tradition; given the context and the circumstances by which it emerged, Black gospel music is a vital tool for Black theology in Britain, and an area in urgent need of theological attention.

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<sup>161</sup> Floyd-Thomas, Stacey, Floyd-Thomas, Juan, Duncan, Carol B., Ray, Stephen G. and Westfield, Nancy Lynne, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).

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# Making Connections:

## Some Initial Thoughts on Communication, Constructivism and Formative Assessment

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Quite reasonably, it could be argued that at the heart of any philosophy of education lies the notion of communication; and further, at the heart of sensitive and engaging teaching practice, that philosophy will be put into action. Communication, in order to reach mutual understanding and comprehension, is the central concern of teaching. In this paper we shall suggest some ways in which a concern with communication as a central dimension in teaching connects to the constructivist paradigm of learning. From this, we will show how this constructivist paradigm is enacted by the recent turn towards formative methods of assessment in educational practice via a discussion of Black and Wiliam's work in *The Black Box* (1998 and

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2002). We shall also discuss summative assessment in contrast to formative assessment placing the discussion of assessment practices in line with our concern with constructivism. It is hoped that this paper will initiate a concern to relate the notions of communication, constructivism and formative assessment in a more systematic and formal way.

There is nothing new in insisting on communication as central to the practice of teaching and the undertaking of learning. At the very start of the tradition of Western thinking on education can be found the insistence on communication as the very conductor of good practice in the education of children. This is so since, for Socrates, as Rowe notes,

if it will do our children little good to be punished, neither will it do them much good even to be rewarded. There is just no substitute, except in the short term, for reasoning with them, and explaining why what we want them to do is good for them (if it is) – and, Socrates would want to know, have we thought that through?<sup>1</sup>

There can be no substitute to ‘reasoning with’ and ‘explaining why’ to children the rationale behind tasks set for them and the only way of doing this is through communicative action. Genuine communication is the very conductor and facilitator of the kind of learning that could lay claim to the term Socratic and it would seem reasonable to extend this notion to adult learners as well.

In this connection, it is centrally important that we note the connection to critical self-reflection or reflexivity insisted upon by the Socratic method: ‘that “we” have thought it through’. The ‘that’ which “we” as educators must think through is nothing less than the very usefulness and general good of that which we are attempting to communicate to learners. Educators need to be reflective and aware of their own practices. Through reflexivity and a willingness to communicate a teacher can become a true facilitator of learning such as they aspire to be throughout their career.

There is one further condition for true communication to happen. This condition is centrally important since without it no communication that leads to genuine ‘mutual’ understanding and comprehension will take place. This condition is the willingness of the learner to

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<sup>1</sup> Rowe, C.J, ‘Socrates 469-399 BCE’, in Palmer, J.A., (ed.), *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education, From Confucius to Dewey* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 8.

engage in the practice of communicative learning. At its best communicative learning is *hermeneutic*. It involves both teacher and pupil in a self-aware and reflexive engagement where ‘speaking’ with each other aids both parties in their willingness to engage. As Hans Georg Gadamer has put the point:

(g)enuine speaking, which has something to say and hence does not give prearranged signals, but rather seeks words through which one reaches the other person, is the universal human task...<sup>2</sup>

This kind of genuine speaking put to work as a teaching style should be contrasted with the programmatic style where a ‘teacher talks’ and ‘students listen and do their homework’. For, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison have put it, in the programmatic style ‘(t)he negative effects...on student motivation and achievement are legion’.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, and providing that willingness is present on both sides of the teaching-learning equation, genuine learning, on both sides of the conversation, will occur.

## Constructivism

By engaging learners in communicative learning, by engaging them in educational ‘conversations’ in the class or tutorial room, educationists will necessarily engage the past learning and general life experience of learners and concern on the part of the teacher with engaging the past learning of students at all stages of education brings their practice squarely in line with the constructivist paradigm of education. For the constructivist, learning is conceived as an active process wherein learners ‘construct’ and ‘internalise’ novel concepts, ideas and bodies of knowledge based on their own past experience and current knowledge in conjunction with the active process of learning within the horizon of the present. Essentially, ‘knowledge is constructed rather

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<sup>2</sup> Gadamer, H.G, ‘The Universality of the Hermeneutical Problem (1966)’, in Linge, D. E., (trans. and ed.), *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1976), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., *A Guide to Teaching Practice*, Fifth Edition (London, New York: Routledge Falmer, 2004), p. 229.

than received'.<sup>4</sup> Broadly, there are two forms of constructivism, cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. The former is particularly associated with the thought of Piaget and the latter with Vygotsky.

For the cognitive constructivist learning involves the active construction of one's own knowledge of the world. Learning is not construed as the passive retention of received wisdom. Rather, it is construed as an individual's active and self-directed search for meaning amidst the manifest phenomena of the world. Importantly, from the point of view of cognitive constructivism, the active process of creating knowledge is ongoing. Learners are continually appropriating, organizing and reorganizing the manifest structure of 'things' into determinable bodies of knowledge. Knowledge is located in and mediated by society and culture. Typically, the cognitive constructivist would regard successful learning to involve both higher order thinking, where the learner synthesizes, evaluates, interprets and critically engages with novel ideas and phenomena and metacognition.<sup>5</sup> Metacognition is that process wherein learners think about their own thinking and learning. It involves reflective self-awareness with regards to one's own learning strategies and successful learning. A concern with metacognitive issues is a central plank underpinning both constructivism and formative assessment.

The social constructivist would agree with virtually everything we have said so far about the constructivist paradigm for learning. They would, however, place more emphasis on the social grounds of a great deal of learning<sup>7</sup>, particularly higher order cognition.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Vygotsky's qualified, in the sense that Piaget had already noted the 'social' dimension of learning, augmentation of Piaget's view was to place an emphasis on the 'social, collaborative and interactional'<sup>8</sup> dimensions of learning. That Piaget regarded the social dimension of

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Cohen et al, (ibid.) p.167. For my characterization of constructivism see Cohen *et al*, chapter 10.

<sup>5</sup> This list ('synthesizes, evaluates' and so on) is not intended to be exhaustive. For a fuller account, see Cohen et al, (ibid.) p.172.

<sup>6</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> For details of this, see Smith's entry 'Jean Piaget 1896-1980' in, Palmer, J.A., (ed.), *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education, From Confucius to Dewey* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 37-44.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen *et al*, p. 168.



learning to be important is evidenced by the following remark on the nature of language:

Language is a group institution. Its rules are imposed on individuals. One generation coercively transmits it to the next, and this has been true for as long as there have been men.<sup>9</sup>

From the point of view of the social constructivist the programmatic style of teaching is a non-starter. Rather, from this perspective the teacher becomes the true facilitator of learning in that they are charged with setting up the relevant conditions constitutive of the learning situation that will enable successful learning to occur. That is, to quote Cohen et al, '(t)eaching and learning have moved from instructivism to constructivism'.<sup>10</sup>

From the subject specialist's point of view, it is important to reflect on how their subject can be approached from the point of view of constructivism. Although it is the conviction of the constructivist that the teaching of all subjects must be approached from this vantage point, from the point of view of practice, the teaching of social subjects lends itself well to this. Particularly, by engaging them in conversations where learning takes place students at all levels and at all ages systematically reveal themselves to be the single greatest resource for the teacher. Significantly, the current turn towards formative assessment attempts to harness the conversational-constructivist paradigm of learning and put it to work in the service of that key aspect of educational practice, assessment. We shall now introduce the principles of formative assessment and connect them to the constructivist paradigm.

## Formative assessment

In *Working Inside the Black Box*, the equally successful and provocative follow-up paper to *Inside the Black Box*, the authors are unequivocal regarding the aim of the class teacher (their focus is on schools).

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<sup>9</sup> Piaget, J., *Structuralism* (trans. and ed. Maschler, C., ) (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen et al, p. 169.

As a facilitator of learning, the overarching aim that all activities in a classroom are subordinate to is the ‘teacher’s core aim—enhancing pupil’s learning.’<sup>11</sup> They are equally unequivocal regarding their experience in carrying out their research: it demonstrated that widespread change in contemporary educational provision in schools is needed. The image of the classroom conjured up by the author’s diagnosis of educational policy and some educational practice was a ‘black box’ wherein inputs from ‘outside’, such as policies, rules, pupils, teachers and ‘tests’ are fed in and certain ‘outputs’ generated. Amongst the outputs of the ‘black box’ are more ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘competent’ pupils and improved test results. Assessment in some form or other is central to the normal functioning of this black box called the classroom.

Black and Wiliam’s paper is about the ‘inside of the black box’<sup>12</sup> and it is focussed on a single aspect of teaching: formative assessment. Their claim is that far from being an afterthought to the successful facilitation of learning, formative assessment is firmly at the heart of effective teaching. As the authors use it, the term assessment designates the totality of all the activities undertaken by teaching staff and by pupils ‘*in assessing themselves*’<sup>13</sup> that provides information that can be used as feedback in the service of modifying the teaching and learning practices with which pupils and teachers are engaged. It is their claim that:

(s)uch assessment becomes ‘formative assessment’ when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs [of those engaged in teaching and learning].<sup>14</sup>

It is common among educationists when dealing with the complex subject of assessment to distinguish the primary and secondary functions it serves in the facilitation of learning. Amongst the primary func-

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<sup>11</sup> Black *et al*, *Working Inside the Black Box, Assessment for Learning in the Classroom* (London: King's College, Department of Education & Professional Studies, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> Black, P and Wiliam, D., *Inside the black box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment* (London: King's College, c1998), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* , p. 2. Square brackets: my addition.

tions are certification, diagnosis and improvement of learning and teaching.<sup>15</sup> Of these three functions, arguably, diagnosis and improvement are central to formative assessment. Certification is part of *summative* assessment: assessment *of* learning rather than the formative assessment *for* learning.<sup>16</sup> The current drive towards *Assessment is for Learning* recognises the central role that formative assessment should play in the facilitation of learning. In this approach assessment is at the heart of the learning process. Formative assessment is intended to be *for* learning rather than assessment *of* learning.

Before turning to the account of formative assessment presented in *Working Inside the Black Box* and related work, it will be useful to augment our discussion and focus for a moment on the nature of questioning itself since questioning will be at the heart of formative assessment. It is useful to distinguish, as Cohen *et al* do, between lower order cognitive questions and higher order cognitive questions.<sup>17</sup> Whereas lower order questions target student or pupil recall, comprehension and application of the material they have been presented with higher order questions involve analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the material. Both orders have a role to play in formative assessment within the classroom.

Lower order questions seek to establish whether or not pupils have remembered what they have been presented with, whether they have understood that material and whether they can employ the appropriate rules and strategies in solving such questions. Higher order questions seek to identify whether and to what extent pupils can identify motives, causes, inferences and premises in making their arguments and statements; whether they can predict, problem solve and produce relevant and interesting contrasts between phenomena and whether they can evaluate the quality of ideas, solutions to problems and works of art.<sup>18</sup> As such, this order of questioning is bound up intrinsically with

<sup>15</sup> Cohen *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 327. The secondary functions of assessment include accountability, evaluation and motivating students and teachers. See Cohen *et al*, p. 327 for full accounts of these and of the primary functions of assessment.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.*, p.329. In addition to summative and formative assessment there are norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, domain-referenced, diagnostic, ipsative, authentic and performance assessment. For a full account of these see Cohen *et al*, pp. 328-331.

<sup>17</sup> See Cohen *et al*, p. 239.

critical and evaluative thought.

One key suggestion made by the authors in their account of questioning in *Working Inside the Black Box* for teaching practice is to allow a longer ‘wait time’ for a response/answer to a question posed in or to the ‘class’.<sup>19</sup> This is a useful and instructive method to employ, particularly in the service of higher order questioning.

This is so since it is not obvious that there are any ‘quick’ answers to higher order questions in the first place. Consider the following example of questioning regarding the death penalty that could be posed in all manners of philosophical and/or social and religious studies. The common justifications offered by theorist of punishment for punishment are reform, retribution, deterrence and protection. Sometimes vindication is also put forward as a justification. Now, if an instructor posed the following question: ‘would any of the justifications for punishment fail to justify the death penalty?’ A pupil/student may say; ‘the death penalty cannot be justified by any appeal to ‘reform’ since any prisoner cannot be reformed after they have been executed.’<sup>20</sup> This question and answer can feed directly into the asking of ‘big questions’<sup>21</sup> such as ‘is killing ever justified?’ Such higher order questions are ‘open’ in the sense that there is no obvious or quick answer to them. Any answer is a matter of reasoned argument rather than mere opinion and as such, these questions remain open to further argument.

In the class or tutorial the stimulus to further debate, although not limited to the teacher or tutor, can often fall to them and to their communicative skills in providing good feedback to pupils and students. Feedback is central in formative assessment and Black *et al* are unequivocal regarding this issue:

It is the nature, rather than the amount, that is critical when giving pupils feedback on both oral and written work.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> See Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> The death penalty may or may not be justified by one or more of the other three justifications for punishment. Such issues were explored in the lesson openly.

<sup>21</sup> On the use of ‘big questions’, see Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 8.

Rather than overburdening learners with copious amounts of feedback, facilitators of learning should instead focus on the nature and quality of the feedback given. In service of this, Black *et al* point out that the central issue is that ‘to be effective, feedback should cause thinking to take place’.<sup>23</sup> It is this *causal* function of feedback that is at the heart of its productivity.

Black *et al* summarize their ideas for improving feedback to school pupils as follows: they suggest that written tasks (such as re-writing pieces of work) should encourage individuals to progress and display their understanding of what they have taken on board.<sup>24</sup> They further suggest that ‘comments’ should pick out what has been done well in addition to what needs further improvement. Comments should give guidance to students on exactly how they are to achieve that suggested improvement. Black *et al* further suggest that pupils should be given the opportunity to follow up the teachers’ comments and that such opportunities be timetabled and planned as part of the ‘overall learning process’.<sup>25</sup> This is a particularly important aspect to the overall suggestions for improvement in practice Black *et al* make since it can be employed as part of the self-assessment and self-critical dimensions of formative assessment.

Since assessment is *for* learning, students who engage in such an active appropriation and exploration of the teachers’ comments in seeking to improve their own work are engaging with the comments to such a degree that thinking has been caused to take place. Employing such reforms takes the critical force of teacher’s comments away from the broadly summative use of marks and instead reterritorializes the pupils’ focus onto the creative appropriation of comments in the service of genuine learning. By so doing, assessment becomes genuinely formative and here, the quality of feedback is crucially important since, as Cohen *et al* point out, ‘formative assessment should lead to rich, formative feedback to students, i.e. feedback on which they can know how to act to improve their learning and achievements, something which a mark or a grade simply does not have the power to do’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Here we follow Black *et al*’s account, *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen *et al*, *ibid.* p. 329.

## Summative assessment

In the current educational climate the use and effectiveness of summative methods in assessing student produced work is receiving considerable attention. Since the work of Wiliam *et al*, that suggests that pupils' work 'should be assessed but not graded' the use and effectiveness of summative assessment in engendering genuine learning has been put in question. The effect of the current climate has been to raise a question regarding the effectiveness of summative assessment. Nonetheless, the practice of summative assessment is widespread and firmly established as one of the key ways in which learners' achievement and/or attainment can be measured. The summative paradigm has formed the corner stone of much of the thinking hitherto regarding the practice of assessing achievement and as such achievement is measured quantitatively. Given that it is this culturally enshrined practice of using grades as the measure of educational achievement that has been put in question, the question about grades becomes: 'how and/or in what ways can summative assessment be implemented constructively in a way that promotes learning?'

In order to answer this question we must first understand more fully what is meant by summative assessment. Summative assessment is assessment of learning and as such it is usually contrasted with formative assessment.<sup>27</sup> Whereas formative assessment is qualitative in that it 'suggests and shapes the contents and processes of future plans for teaching and learning'<sup>28</sup> and in that it operates in line with a broadly constructivist approach to teaching and learning which holds that learners 'construct' their own knowledge of the world drawing on their past learning and appropriating their current course work and so on, summative assessment is quantitative: in summative assessment a discrete mark or grade is awarded and is then taken as the sole measure of achievement.<sup>29</sup>

As Cohen *et al* draw the distinction, summative assessment contrasts with formative assessment in both purpose and timing.

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<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> On constructivism, see Cohen *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 168.

Summative assessment is terminal, it occurs at the end of a programme of study and it assesses a student's overall achievement, knowledge acquisition and relevant practice for that programme of study. In essence, summative assessment is 'the stuff of the GCSE formal examination, the end of term test, the A level...[and]...the final examinations for a degree programme'.<sup>30</sup>

In this regard, Cohen *et al* are right to point out that summative assessment is regularly concerned with certification and the attendant public recognition of achievement. In this sense, formative assessment differs sharply from summative assessment. The practice of summative assessment is deeply entrenched in our cultural practices regarding assessment. Compared to such public recognition of perceived achievement the entirely qualitative method of formative assessment can seem to be no alternative.

In this regard, critics of summative assessment point out that there is a major risk inherent in its structure. Summative assessment risks a 'negative backwash effect on the curriculum'<sup>31</sup> to the extent that the curriculum itself can be narrowed to meet only that which the final exam will recognize and the activities of learning will narrow in line with this.

By virtue of this, so Cohen *et al* contend, such summative assessment tends towards a broadly *behaviourist* view where, it is held, if you apply a particular stimulus to a machinic like being, a particular response will follow. A behaviourist interpretation of teaching and learning stands in stark contrast to the constructivist paradigm. Behaviouristic accounts of teaching and learning are seductive when the evidence from the chalk face suggests that the expectations of pupils and students have been conditioned to be such that they believe that all there is to education is to provide the correct response/answer to the appropriate stimulus/question. Trying to counteract this effect in the service of promoting the practice of formative assessment can be an uphill struggle.

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that summative assessment necessarily excludes formative assessment, for it does not. There can be, as Black *et al* argue, the 'formative use of summative

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<sup>30</sup> Cohen *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 329. Square bracket: my addition.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 330.

assessment' and it is precisely here that summative assessment has a positive role to play in education.<sup>32</sup> The key here is the suggestion made in *Working Inside the Black Box* that '[t]he aftermath of tests can...be an occasion for formative work'.<sup>33</sup> In this broad approach pupil involvement is central. Black *et al* suggest that 'peer marking' of test papers can be a useful strategy to employ, particularly if the class have been required to formulate in advance a marking scheme for the test. Such an exercise, it is argued, focuses the attention of learners onto the 'criteria of quality' employed in the assessment of their work. Such an approach draws on the student's past and present experience and engages the *whole person* in such a way as to operate in line with the formative-constructivist paradigm.

Two further examples warrant mention: they are first, a student produces a traffic light scheme highlighting curriculum areas on which the test will be set and second, that students are required to generate and then answer their own questions. Both of these examples further engage the whole person in reflection on the nature of 'success' both in terms of discrete marks, since these are the objective criteria that students will attach to their self-generated success criteria, but also in terms of their personal success in relation to these. In this, both summative and formative assessment are put to work with the aim of promoting reflective practice by all concerned in the facilitation of learning and it is precisely here that summative assessment can maintain a key role in educational practice. In essence, the key message regarding summative assessment is that it 'should be, and should be seen to be, a positive part of the learning process'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Black *et al*, *ibid.*, pp.12-14.

<sup>33</sup> Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Black *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 14. Black *et al* summarize the main possibilities for improving classroom practice as follows: 'Pupils should be engaged in a reflective review of the work they have done to enable them to plan their revision effectively. Pupils should be encouraged to set questions and mark answers to help them, both to understand the assessment process and to focus further efforts for improvement. Pupils should be encouraged through peer- and self-assessment to apply criteria to help them understand how their work might be improved'. By implementing the strategies suggested above such aims can be achieved.



## Conclusion: metacognition, formative assessment and constructivism

What is essential in supporting learners in their studies and ultimately in improving their learning is that they, working in conjunction with support staff, are made aware of the metacognitive issues relating to their own learning. One way of doing this is by communication. By engaging learners in discussions about learning, learners can be 'caused' to reflect on their learning strategies. Further, squarely inline with this communicative drive in educational practice is the drive towards formative assessment practices and the formative use of summative assessment. One consequence of implementing practices inline with the formative-constructivist paradigm is that everybody involved in teaching and learning will be talking about it with each other much more.

Metacognition, as a discrete theme in educational theory, is now at the forefront of the practice of helping students improve their learning. Inculcating an appreciation of metacognitive issues involves helping students understand their own learning, how best they learn and how best they can improve their studies to promote their own learning.<sup>35</sup> As we have said, such a concern with metacognitive issues in facilitating learning is in line with a constructivist approach to teaching and learning and this, as we have seen, is squarely in line with a formative approach to assessment. Underpinning the concern with formative assessment methodologies and with the constructivist approach is a concern with metacognition. Implementing the formative-constructivist paradigm in educational practice must improve the metacognitive understanding of learners if it is to be successful. Simply by communicating, in what Gadamer called the 'universal human task', educationists will be able to create metacognitively aware learners who can continue to actively engage in lifelong learning outside the classroom or lecture theatre. To this extent, formative-constructivist practice in education empowers learners.

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<sup>35</sup> On metacognition, see Cohen *et al*, *ibid.*, p. 176.

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# **Ethical Dilemmas in Practice:**

## Development of an Ethical Reasoning Assessment Tool for Veterinary Undergraduates

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This paper is a collaboration between the Pain and Welfare Research Group, Department of Statistics, the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute, Faculty of Arts, and the Division of Animal Production and Public Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Glasgow.

**A** recent, brief survey of UK veterinary professionals has revealed that they experience difficult ethical dilemmas regularly and often up to five times per week, that some situations with which they are confronted are more stressful and/or common than others, and that years of experience do not necessarily make these situations any easier to handle (McKeegan et al., 2007). Repeated exposure to challenging ethical conflicts may cause an erosion of emotional well-being

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and even a state of ‘moral distress’, a phenomenon which has been the subject of extensive investigation in medical ethics (see, for example, Kaylemark *et al.*, 2004). Although not formally presented and described in the literature, there can be little doubt that moral distress exists in veterinary clinical environments. The moral distress associated with euthanasia has been particularly highlighted by Rollin (1990), who states that ‘Moral stress...arises out of a fundamental conflict between one’s reasons for going into animal work and what one is in fact doing, or being asked to do’. Such moral distress can only add to other causes of emotional distress in veterinary practice, such as those associated with clinical mistakes (Mellanby & Herrtage, 2004) and may contribute to the relatively high suicide rate amongst veterinary graduates (Mellanby, 2005).

Studies in Britain and Australia have found that many veterinary students view their education as a rite of passage from ‘tender minded’ pet owner to ‘tough minded’ clinician. In particular, students appear to reduce their beliefs about the sentience of animals, and their empathic reactions to animals in distress (Paul & Podberscek, 2000). Although this process of hardening one’s attitudes towards animals may help some students cope with the emotional and ethical challenges of veterinary work, it may also threaten the welfare of animals in their care. Consequently, education programmes fostering reflective thinking about ethical issues are increasingly included in the veterinary undergraduate curricula in a number of European countries. However, the scope and extent of inclusion varies widely and the effectiveness of this teaching is currently not assessable.

The need for ethical tuition and assessment in other ethically challenging professions has been recognised (Corley *et al.*, 2005; Redman & Fry, 2000) and existing measurement tools are available in nursing, dentistry and midwifery. More generally, tests such as the self-administered Defining Issues Test (DIT) have been developed and applied to measure moral reasoning capacity in various (mostly undergraduate) contexts (King & Mayhew, 2002). The challenge of developing a tool for assessing the capacity for moral reasoning in the veterinary community is currently being undertaken by a small, interdisciplinary group with expertise in animal welfare and veterinary ethics, philosophy, statistics, and the development of psychometric instruments.

## What do we want to teach? What do we want to assess?

It is essential, when developing an instrument of any kind, to define at the outset what it is that you intend to assess. Competence in making decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas, reflecting upon one's thinking, and engaging in debate which will shape the professional codes of conduct of the future are important components of the veterinary professional role that can be developed through a programme of veterinary ethics teaching at undergraduate level (and beyond). The first of these may be regarded as a 'Day 1' competency<sup>1</sup> on a par with reading a radiograph, making a differential diagnosis, or communicating bad news to a client; all of which are currently rigorously tested at the end of the undergraduate course. Those students who do not meet the standards required in all such areas are not considered ready to join the profession. Given the complex demands of dealing on an almost daily basis with challenging decision-making and with having to produce a competent defence of such decisions, it seems essential that a means of determining such competence be added to our armoury of assessment practices.

Equipping the veterinary professionals of the future to be reflective practitioners, and to provide them with sufficient knowledge and understanding to discuss relevant issues within and beyond the profession, requires a pluralistic approach to ethics teaching—one where the intended pedagogical outcome is that students understand that there are different ethical perspectives, that they can identify and discuss these perspectives, and that they do not simply take refuge in either the assumption of a professional moral absolutism or a risky and impotent moral relativism. These outcomes are largely concerned with acquiring knowledge and understanding of various ethical perspectives and an appreciation of the complexity of such varied perspectives. Assessment of such knowledge and understanding can most readily be carried out by means of an essay or examination process. Building on this knowledge and understanding is a crucial further requirement if we

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<sup>1</sup> "Day 1" competency' refers to the competencies that the veterinary practitioner must have on their first day on the job, not on the first day of their training.

are to equip students with Day 1 competency in decision-making when confronted with a situation that presents an ethical conflict.

The first step in such decision-making is to be able to recognise an ethical conflict when you are faced with one. So, let's start with a sufficiently vague and, let us hope, non-controversial definition of an ethical conflict: an occasion on which it is not clear which is the right course of action to take. Ethical conflicts occur frequently in veterinary practice and generally include patient-centred considerations about the quantity and/or quality of the animal's life, the negative and the positive effects of different treatment options, the divergence between the duty of care for an animal and other duties to the owner (both enshrined in legislation and in professional codes of conduct), to other animals, to members of the veterinary team, and so on. The net result of such dilemmas may be a compromise of either professional responsibilities or of the animal's interests in terms of welfare or continuation of life. Rest (1997) has proposed that such decision-making requires 'moral judgement', which involves defining what the moral issues are, how conflicts among parties are to be settled, and the rationale for deciding on which course of action should be adopted. It is these which we deem to be the ethical reasoning skills necessary for Day 1 competency in veterinary practice, that is, those with which a new veterinarian will be deemed to be competent enough to join the profession.

A number of existing tools provide a starting point for the development of a veterinary-specific instrument, providing possible formats and scoring mechanisms; examples include Self *et al.* (1988), Self *et al.* (1991), and Self *et al.* (1995) who have used Sociomoral Reflection Measures (SRM), Moral Judgement Interviews (MJI) and Defining Issues Test (DIT) in veterinary medicine contexts; Clarkeburn *et al.* (2003) who used a Meta-ethical Questionnaire (MEQ) to measure ethical development in Life Sciences students; and Eckles *et al.* (2005) who used a Problem Identification Test (PIT) to measure medical students' and professionals ethical sensitivity. Some tests are 'open ended', where the subject is provided with a scenario and simply asked for their responses. Others are self-administered and provide a scenario followed by a series of pre-determined statements which the subject must rank in order of importance, that is, how much they should or should not influence their decision-making process. This approach provides a number of perspectives that the subject might not otherwise

have considered, and time-consuming individual marking of tests is avoided by a system of automatic scoring from ranked values previously assigned to the statements. With the inclusion of an 'Other' option the assessors also allow for the possibility that students might come up with another significant influencing factor that the assessors had not.

All assessment requires that statements or scores be ranked in some way. We do not seek to minimize the difficulty of this task and propose at this stage just one possible approach that has been taken in the assessment of ethical reasoning skills in other contexts (McAlpine *et al.*, 1997). This approach implements levels of attainment which are broadly similar to the 'pre-conventional', 'conventional' and 'post-conventional' stages of moral reasoning defined by Kohlberg (1973), with the expectation that students would progress towards higher levels in the course of their training:

*Level 1 (Traditional response):* Reasoning is based on self interest and practical considerations; the aim is to win rewards and avoid punishment; it utilizes 'gut level' responses; there is non- or low recognition of the ethical issues involved and a fundamental belief in decisions being classifiable as either right or wrong.

*Level 2 (Conventional response):* Reasoning is based on conformity to social norms and expectations; some relevant ethical issues are recognised; and although they may raise questions they will tend to act within traditional boundaries.

*Level 3 (Post-conventional/reflective response):* Reasoning is based on universal ethical principles; centred on the notion of justice; there is critical thinking about relevant ethical issues, and use of an ethical framework within which to clarify, evaluate and justify various viewpoints; there will also be a willingness to challenge unethical practices, and a recognition of personal accountability and responsibility for choices.

## Assessment of learning

So, now our question must be, how can we assess the progress that students are making towards the goal of Day 1 competency and whether or not Day 1 competency has been achieved by the end of a course of veterinary training? Our first step towards answering this

question is to generate a suitable assessment tool using established approaches to the development of psychometric instruments. It is an approach with which we have considerable experience (Wiseman-Orr *et al.*, 2004, 2006) and is one which will reflect, with a high degree of accuracy, the kinds of ethical dilemmas that are faced routinely by vets in practice and for which the application of Day 1 competency skills will be required.

The development of such an instrument will begin with the creation of appropriate scenarios representing ethical dilemmas or conflicts in veterinary practice. These will be sourced from the literature (Rollin 1990) and from interviews with veterinary practitioners. The scenarios will reflect those that are commonly encountered and have the potential to cause moral distress to either the veterinarian or the owner and which will have a significant animal welfare impact. The range of scenarios will also address the main types of veterinary practice in the UK: companion, equine and farm. Once potential scenarios have been identified, key informants will be asked to identify issues that they would consider relevant to the decision-making process in each scenario. Key informants will include experienced vets, veterinary undergraduates, those with expert knowledge of veterinary ethics, and members of the public, to ensure that associated statements are generated which represent the widest possible range of views and include those commonly held by the target respondent (the veterinary student). Thereafter, an expert panel, consisting of philosophers and veterinary experts, including those with detailed knowledge of relevant legislation and codes of conduct, will rank these statements according to the response levels described above or, possibly, according to other criteria which will be established by the expert group prior to exposure to the generated statements, and subject to refinement through exploration of the statements. This statement ranking will allow a scoring method to be devised that will accurately reflect a range of skill levels, including those required for Day 1 professional competency. It is envisaged that the finished prototype instrument will consist of a number of scenarios, each one associated with 12-15 statements. Respondents will be required to indicate the relative importance of each of these statements, and the extent of their agreement with expert ranking will be considered to provide evidence for the respondent's level of ethical reasoning and their attainment of certain Day 1 competencies.



The content validity of the instrument—the extent to which a measure represents all facets of a given ethical or social concept—will be assessed by independent experts in veterinary ethics and by field-testing of the instrument using naturally-occurring known groups (construct validity) which would be expected to differ in terms of moral judgment, for example, members of the public, those completing the Royal College of Veterinary Science Certificate in Animal Welfare, Ethics and Law, and moral philosophers. This form of ‘field-testing’ or construct validity differs from content validity in that it tests whether, and to what extent, a scale correlates with the theorized professional construct.

Following validation of the instrument and its process of development, it is envisaged that an online, self-administered, that is, self-assessment format will be devised. This format, with the addition of a substantial database of further scenarios, their associated statements and rankings, and with appropriate formative feedback would provide an invaluable educational tool offering the student the opportunity to self-assess and to practice the relevant skills. The addition of other scenarios will make it possible to avoid the student learning what might be considered to be a set of rote responses to a limited number of cases, whilst also broadening their horizon of possible real life experiences.

In their final examinations, this tool could form part of a composite assessment consisting of traditional forms of assessment and understanding of ethics and of veterinary ethics involving: (1) assessment of their ability to recognise scenarios that present ethical dilemmas from among a selection of scenarios that represent difficult decisions of various other kinds, and (2) measurement of ethical reasoning using the tool developed as described above.

## Assessment of teaching

Because it would assess that which we want students to learn, the same instrument could be used to assess the effectiveness of both the teaching practice and what is being taught to the extent that it enhances or diminishes the students’ knowledge, understanding and skills. The validated method and online self-assessment tool could be used in veterinary schools throughout the UK—and, if appropriate, further

abroad—to examine the effects of a range of educational interventions. The instrument could also provide a mechanism for examining ethical abilities in related disciplines, for example, in veterinary nursing, and the effectiveness of continuing professional development.

## Conclusion

We do not seek to unduly simplify the challenging complexity of ethical decision-making or the intricacies involved in ethical theory and theorizing. Nevertheless, we maintain that, just as it is possible to assess all other aspects of professional competence, it should be possible to assess the professional competence in veterinary ethics of veterinary students. We have outlined a process for the development of a specialized tool for the assessment of such competence as part of the assessment of outcomes for a comprehensive approach to the teaching of professional ethics to undergraduate veterinary students. The validation of such an approach opens the way to the development of an online self-assessment tool to raise students' awareness of, and create familiarity with, the sorts of ethical dilemmas with which they are only too likely to find themselves confronted in their professional lives. It also opens up the possibility of devising appropriate instruments for use in other parts of the world where professional codes of conduct may vary from those employed in the UK and Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

Used as a teaching tool incorporating formative feedback, this instrument will enhance veterinary education and training. It will benefit the profession as a whole by encouraging the development of reflective ethical thinking in veterinary students and professionals and, perhaps most importantly, it has the potential to reduce moral distress and its negative consequences for individuals and for the profession as a whole. As an assessment instrument it will provide a means of gauging both individual student competencies and overall teaching effectiveness, and it will serve to guide the development of teaching approaches and materials in this vital area of professional development. We consider that valid and reliable assessment of the kind we describe

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the professional codes of conduct in the UK, Ireland and abroad see Hewson, 2006.

will encourage rigorous thinking about the aims and intended learning outcomes of ethics teaching in vet schools, and will allow future developments in this field to be evidence-based which will be to the benefit of teachers, their students, and the animals in their future care.

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# Only Connect:

## A Web-based Approach to Supporting Student Learning in the Philosophy of Social Science

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### Background

**T**he University of Nottingham School of Nursing has 15 years experience in the development of high-quality e-learning resources, using a wide range of methods and platforms. A large number of its staff is involved in e-learning developments, and the School has attracted over £2 million in funding for these projects. An overview of the School's activity in this area can be found at <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/sonet/>.

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‘Philosophy of Social Science’ is a compulsory module for post-graduate students in the School of Nursing (and Sociology) at the University of Nottingham. This is necessary in order for postgraduate programmes in both schools to achieve ESRC recognition for funding. However, it is also thought to be a good introduction to post-graduate study. A major object of the philosophy of social science course is to increase students’ awareness of the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that underpin various research strategies. Students employ or encounter these concepts in the studies they read and rely on to extend their knowledge of the world, even if the assumptions are implicit rather than explicit. The module aims to help students understand debates in philosophy and about the nature of knowledge claims so that they are able to critically examine assumptions that are built into the available methods of data gathering and analysis.

Most of the students on this module have never studied any philosophy before. Many are experienced health care professionals (for example, nurses, occupational therapists and so on). As such, they tend to be ‘concrete’ thinkers and are often uncomfortable with abstract concepts. It is perceived as being a difficult module, though our own research (Morgan et al 2008) shows that students find it very valuable, but not until they are further on with their research. One of the issues that students unfamiliar with philosophy find difficult is making the links between different ideas and concepts discussed in the taught sessions, and the connections with their own research. There is insufficient time in the lectures to draw out all of these connections, and seminars often end up being devoted to going over the key concepts again. Hence there is a need to help students to make these connections. In addition to these problems, students are often very anxious about studying philosophy.

In order to better support students, a project to create a module website was funded by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies. This project was completed in 2008, and more details of the module, the website and the evaluation data can be found in Timmons (2008). As has long been recognised with all IT projects, (Brooks 1975) what seems at the planning stage like a straightforward project turned out to be more complex than originally assumed.

A website was developed that used the hypertextual nature of the

Internet to help students understand the connections between philosophical ideas. The website is integrated with, and supplementary to, existing programme of lectures and seminars. It elucidates how various themes thread through the material covered in the module, and how philosophical innovations are often a reaction to others. It situates each of the lectures in the wider history of philosophical ideas, and provides links to high-quality web resources in this field. Philosophy is not a subject that lends itself to linear exposition, and it was hoped that a web representation would be more productive in explaining philosophical concepts and their connections.

### What the website is not

The website was not intended to be a substitute for doing the reading or coming to the lectures and seminars. As such, the material included comprised brief summaries, with the clear intention of showing the links between different concepts and philosophers, not expositing them in depth. The students were explicitly told that they could not reference the website in their assignments.

## e-Learning in the PRS subject area

Mossley (2003) provides a useful overview of the advantages and disadvantages of using e-learning in the PRS subject area. However, the student groups discussed in this report are quite different from those studying the module reported on here. The approach taken has some parallels with that used by Victoria Harrison (reported in Lamb 2006).

### Existing e-learning resources

Both the Stanford Encyclopaedia (<http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/contents.html>) and PhilWeb (<http://www.phillwebb.net>) are brilliant resources but are not suitable for these students as they are too advanced.

## The content

The site is based around the nine lectures which make up the teaching, but only uses them as a starting point. Links are provided to definitions of terms, but in addition, themes are threaded through the whole site to help students understand the evolution of debates within the subject. A historical time line is also provided to help show how more recent thinkers are critiquing or adding to the whole canon of the subject.

The module covers the following topics:

- Introduction: ontology, epistemology, methodology.
- Epistemology: an introduction to positivism and beyond
- Structure and agency
- Hermeneutics and phenomenology
- Is truth the purpose of enquiry?
- Feminism as situated methodology
- Social constructionism and critical realism
- Ideology
- Scientific paradigms and the sociology of knowledge

Due to the diverse nature of the students on this module both in terms of level (studying Master's, PhDs and professional doctorates) and subject (Nursing, Sociology, Social Policy and Education), the website provides links to examples which show the relevance of the philosophical debates to research in each of these subjects.

### Building the website: the process

The function of the website was explicitly not to be a repository of the module content in the form of lecture notes and slides, but to show how the different ideas covered in the module related to each other. This meant that the individual pages had to be fairly short, and focussed on links, rather than content. Philosophy, by its nature, tends to be discursive, and relies on the reader making the connections through a knowledge of the background to the issues being discussed. This was, in a sense, the main rationale for the project, in so far as the students taking



this module did not have that background knowledge. Therefore, the links had to be made explicit (in fact, hypertext links are probably the best way of doing this). However, this made the task of writing the material for the individual pages harder, as it is difficult to express complex ideas briefly.

There are philosophical texts that are written in a compressed format. *The Tractatus* and *The Philosophical Investigations* spring to mind. Intriguingly, there are hypertext versions of both at <http://www.kfs.org/~jonathan/witt/tlph.html> and <http://users.rcn.com/rathbone/lwtocc.htm> respectively, suggesting that the hypertext format works well with ideas expressed in this way. However, they could not be said to constitute a model for the website discussed here.

The process I used started with the topics covered in the lectures for the module. In collaboration with the lecturers who delivered these lectures, I broke each lecture up into between 5 and 10 topics. So, for instance, the lecture which covered the sociology of knowledge was broken up into Merton, Kuhn, critique of Kuhn, sociology of science, the ‘strong programme’ and actor-network theory. These sub-topics formed the basis for the individual web pages. Before being coded as html they were written on index cards. An initial set of about 40 cards was created. These were then all placed on a large table to attempt to draw the connections between them. This also proved to be harder than it might appear, as it was difficult to keep track of which connection had already been made. Connections to other cards/pages were noted at the bottom of the card. It was at this point that the first phase of coding and site-building took place. The grant enabled me pay a student studying computer science to write the html to create the individual web pages and links.

This proved to be the next practical problem: explaining the website and its function to a non-philosopher. As I tried to do this, it became clear that he did not, conceptually, see the website as I did, in terms of interlinked ideas, but in terms of a data structure (Standish 1980) ; a fundamental concept for a programmer, but one which I struggled to remember. This proved to be more successful at explaining what I want than trying to give a computer scientist a crash course in epistemology. Once I explained (and he understood) the site as a data structure, he was able to work quickly and efficiently to produce the pages. At this point, the website was ‘released ‘ to the module team for

comments. This generated a new list of pages to be created and links to be included. I wrote most of the content for the new pages myself, but this time five were written by another member of the team.

### Additional features

The main additional feature implemented at this stage was a timeline, originally written by a member of the module team. This showed the historical development of the main themes of the module, with key thinkers shown in their historical context. It can be seen at [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social\\_science/timeline.php](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social_science/timeline.php). I did not appreciate until after the website was complete that this use of a historical approach would signify to some that we were ‘Continental’ rather than analytic philosophers. Neither myself nor the module team have any clear allegiance, and it was not my intention to identify the project with any particular approach.

A feature which probably should have been included, but was abandoned due to its complexity, was some sort of concept map, which would reprint the various ideas and connections graphically. It is possible that this sort of representation may help certain types of students to understand these ideas better than a more text-based approach. I was quite attracted by something akin to ‘The Great Bear’ by Simon Patterson, (the picture based on the London Underground map). I hope to develop this in the future.

### The final website

The module website created to help these students ([http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social\\_science/index.php](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/students/research/social_science/index.php)) is about making the connections between the various topics in the module, and showing how philosophy is an ongoing debate between different thinkers and schools. This is difficult to achieve in the lectures (and hard for these students). Topics are broken into ‘bite-sized chunks’, in common with other e-learning approaches in the University of Nottingham School of Nursing (see, for instance, <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/nursing/sonet/index.php>). The material included (over 50 individual pages) is richly interconnected, taking full advantage of

the Internet in its original manifestation as hypertext.

## Evaluation

The formal evaluation of the website, via a survey, is reported below (and Timmons 2008). However, some interesting points were made by students informally, which were not covered in the main evaluation. The first of these was that the website showed that the ideas covered in the module were connected, and that those connections were important. This concept, which seemed so obvious to the module team, was, up until that point, unclear to some of the students. Some students also appreciated that the team were making an effort on their behalf. For them, the website said, symbolically, that the module team acknowledged that the subject was difficult, and that we were prepared to make an effort ourselves to help students make progress.

In addition to the survey another technique that I should probably have used in the evaluation is the kind of simple usability testing suggested by Nielsen (2000) who argues that fairly simple observation of as few as five users can generate almost all the useful usability information that can be gathered about a website.

Evaluation data are given below. Evaluation was done using the University of Nottingham School of Nursing's e-learning evaluation instrument, to enable comparison with other e-learning projects within the School of Nursing. 12 students returned surveys (out of 20 on the module). Questions marked with an asterisk allowed multiple answers.

	<b>At home</b>	<b>At university</b>	<b>Else-where</b>	
Where do you have access to the Internet?*	8	9	2	
	<b>Only used by me</b>	<b>Shared with family</b>	<b>Shared with others</b>	
The computer I use is*:	4	5	4	
	<b>Very high</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Very low</b>
How do you rate your confidence in using computers?	2	8	2	
How do you rate your confidence in using MS Office?	2	8	2	
How do you rate your confidence in using the web?	3	8	1	
How do you rate your confidence in using multimedia?	3	4	5	
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>		
Any problems in accessing the module website?	4	8		
	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Dis-agree</b>	<b>Strongly dis-agree</b>
Was the website clear about its purpose?	4	8		

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Dis-agree</b>	<b>Strongly dis-agree</b>
Was the website easy to navigate ?	3	8		1
Did it introduce new concepts/language clearly ?	3	8	1	
Would you recommend the module website ?	4	8		
Should there be more of these websites in other modules ?	3	8	1	
Was the content appropriate for the course ?	4	8		
Was the content well integrated ?	3	8	1	
Was the content pitched at the right level ?	3	9		
I enjoyed being able to learn on my own	4	8		
The website helped me address specific gaps in my knowledge	2	10		
The website helped me meet the requirements of the course/module	1	10	1	
The website helped me retain knowledge in this area	3	8	1	

These data are encouraging, in so far as they are almost exclusively positive. The difficulties in accessing the website were all due to an incorrect URL being published in an early version of the module handbook.

Using the ‘CAMEL’ model of tangible benefits from e-learning (Ferrell et al 2007), the website provided benefits for students in terms of student achievement. Overall marks were higher on the module than in previous years. While this cannot be directly attributed to the website, and is certainly a product of several factors, the website may have contributed to this improvement.

## Possible future developments

Among the future developments actively under consideration by the module team is the transfer of the platform to the University of Nottingham standard VLE, Blackboard. An idea which was initially considered as part of this project, and will be implemented in the future, is using the existing website as the basis for a wiki, with contributions from both students and the module team.

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