



RECOVERING A CO-OPTED BIBLE IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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POST-APARTHEID CO-OPTATION

- The Bible has been co-opted by the post-apartheid South Africa *state* in a number of ways:
- In de-nationalization, ie. reconnecting the South African economy to the global economy;
- In re-nationalization, ie. reconstructing the South African nation;
- In separating spheres of influence and work, with the state responsible for the political/economic (structural) sphere and the churches responsible for the moral (personal) sphere.

- The Bible has been co-opted by the post-apartheid South Africa *churches* in a number of ways:
 - In a shift towards 'Church Theology';
 - In an attempt to control the spiritual-material realm of individual prosperity;
 - In an emphasis on personal-moral corruption.
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- For both the churches and the state the Bible has a unitary, singular, moral message.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

- “Thus, in South Africa today, the themes of individual responsibility, the importance of personal change in mind-set and self-sacrifice have become particularly pertinent. When Cyril Ramaphosa quoted *Send Me [thuma mina]*, he was not only honouring the memory of one of the best musicians [Hugh Masekela] in Africa and the world, but he was also summoning the power of the rich history of the ANC and invoking the bewitching lyrics of African church music [drawing on Isaiah 6]”. [Tinyiko Maluleke, 21 February 2018]

BREAKING NEWS 'THE BIBLE IN SA' THIS WEEK!

- Addressing the congregation, at the KwaMashu Christian Centre, in the north of Durban, Zuma said: "We decided to start here in church to gain strength as we would be embarking on a voter registration drive the whole day." He also encouraged church members to register to vote. "If those who believe vote for us, then we know we're blessed," he said. [Mxolisi Mngadi, 2018-03-11]

- It's like 'South Africa is being healed' by God – Ramaphosa [Tshidi Madia 2018-03-11]. Speaking during a church service at the Hope Restoration Covenant Church in Olievenhoutbosch, Tshwane, Ramaphosa said the ANC's watershed December elective congress was a prayer to God in order to save the country.
- "It was like praying, praying to our God, saying please come down and heal South Africa, come and heal our land. South Africa is being healed cause there's a new dawn, new spirit flowing through South Africa," said Ramaphosa.
- During the church visit, Ramaphosa quoted several bible verses, telling congregants about the importance of humbling oneself and the renewal which he believed South Africa was undergoing. "We are now in healing mode. God is addressing our problems, he is addressing our challenges," said Ramaphosa.

PROPHETIC = SYSTEMIC

- When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we [Blacks] had the land. The white man said to us, “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we [Blacks] had the Bible.
- Mosala: “The task now facing a black theology of liberation is to enable black people to use the Bible to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible”.
- “We remain committed to the principle that the social value of land must come before its commercial value. Occupation, which is expropriation from below, is the organised decommmodification of land. Corruption that results in the selling of land and housing, whether from above or below, is the informal recommodification of land”.
[Abahlali baseMjondolo, 13 March 2018]

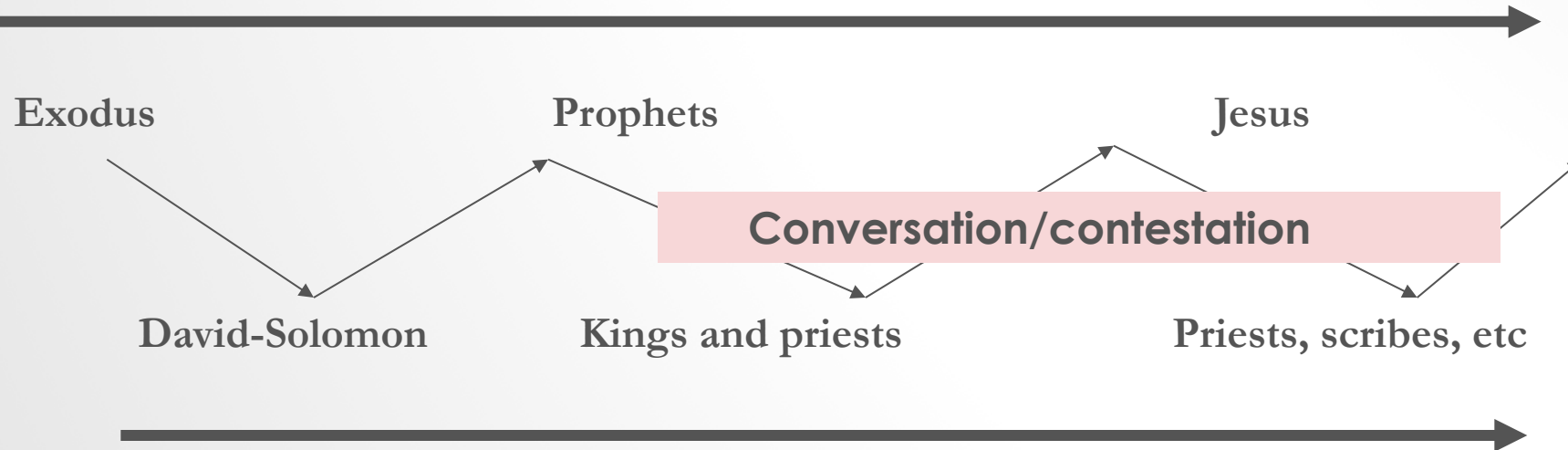
RECOVERING BIBLICAL RESISTANCE THEOLOGY

- Itumeleng Mosala argued that Black Theology could only “detect *glimpses* of liberation and of a determinate social movement galvanised by a powerful religious ideology in the biblical text” (1989).
- But Gunther Wittenberg, who was doing similar biblical work within Contextual Theology, argued that there were *significant* redactions/editions within the composition of the Bible that could be characterised as “resistance theology” (1987).
- “There are indications that we do not have in the Old Testament a uniform theology supporting state power, but rather, as Brueggemann [1983] has affirmed, a complex picture of contending theologies, including a theology that challenges and resists state power, a resistance theology”.

PROPHETIC/CONSOLIDATING & STATE/RESISTANCE THEOLOGY [WALTER BRUEGGEMANN & GUNTHER WITTENBERG]

Mosaic, prophetic theology; “the embrace of pain”
Resistance theology in Israel and Judah

“Prophetic
theology”



Davidic, consolidating theology ; “structure legitimation”
Royal state theology, combining palace and temple

“Church theology”
& “State theology”

- For Wittenberg, the *am ha'aretz* (people of the land) are a key sector in the formulation, codification, and practice of 'resistance theology'.
- *Am ha'aretz* refers to village based clan elders, specifically, and the peasant farmers they represent, more generally.
- Under the monarchy, sectors of the *am ha'aretz* benefitted from this new development and participated, with urban social sectors within the emerging city-state, in "exploiting the poorer Judahite fellow citizens who were sinking deeper into debt or serfdom".
- However, within the *am ha'aretz* there was "also a counter-movement. The struggle against the oppression of the peasant community is not only reflected in the social message of the great prophets but also in the deuteronomic movement and in wisdom".

RECOGNISING AND RECOVERING CONTESTATION

- For both Mosala and Wittenberg their socio-historical method was vital for four reasons:
- First, this method offered a way of analysing both biblical text and contemporary socio-historical context. The method was useful for each of these terrains of struggle, whether the ancient sites of struggle that produced the biblical texts or the contemporary sites of struggle that generated the marginalised masses.
- Second, this method offered Black working-class Christians a way of connecting “kin struggles”, identifying and foregrounding the economic and ideological connections between biblical text and contemporary context.

- Third, this method, by identifying the ideological and economic agenda of a particular (layer of) text, enabled Black working-class Christians to recognise when they must interpret with the ideo-economic grain or when they must interpret against the ideo-economic grain of a particular (layer of) text.
- And fourth, this method is meant to demonstrate that ideo-economic sectoral co-optation does take place, for it is evident in the redactional history of the Bible's formation, with dominant ideological and economic forces coopting and displacing the ideological and economic perspective and practices of marginalised sectors.

- But both Mosala and Wittenberg recognise that “there are enough contradictions within ... [biblical texts] to enable eyes that are hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kin struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absences of those struggles in the text”.
- The contradictions are embodied – textually inscribed – within the final form of the text because, insist both Mosala and Wittenberg, the Bible is itself “a product and a record of [actual historical] class struggles”.

BIBLICAL STUDIES METHOD

- Mosala and Wittenberg maintain that a significant contribution of biblical studies to contemporary appropriations of biblical texts is that it has “always been aware of the tendency in biblical literature for older traditions to be reused to address the needs of new situations”.
- What Mosala and Wittenberg add to this biblical studies understanding is the ideological nature of the such reuse.
- So socio-historical methods are key resources, for they attempt to identify the ‘sources’ that have been used in the composition of a biblical ‘text’ and how these sources have been ideologically ‘redacted’.

- While my own work has recognised the value of socio-historical method, my worry has been that it is inaccessible to ordinary African readers of the Bible.
- Fortunately, literary analysis, which is more accessible to ordinary African Bible users, has come a long way since the 1980s when Mosala and Wittenberg were doing their work.
- ‘Constructive’ literary analysis has recognised the need for ‘deconstructive’ literary analysis, in which readers (now recognised as actually present) need not necessarily follow the ‘rhetorical’ agenda of the biblical authors/redactors. They can probe other features of ‘the text’.
- My example last week from Isaiah is a good example of socio-historical analysis and my example from Judges is a good example of deconstructive literary analysis.

BUT, WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLE-READING ‘MASSES’?

- Biblical ‘methods’ (whether socio-historical or literary) reside in the hands of scholars, who are, by definition, middle-class. So what about Mosala’s working-class masses, with their ‘struggle-trained eyes’?
- My work, since the late 1980s, has been in developing a Bible reading process in which ‘socially engaged biblical scholars’ read the Bible ‘with’ ‘ordinary readers’.
- Without them, I have argued, we cannot access ‘kin struggles’ within the Bible, for their ‘struggle-trained eyes’ are necessary resources alongside and ‘with’ biblical studies literary and socio-historical method.

Summarizing 'Contextual Bible Study' (CBS)

CBS begins with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness' = people's theology

SEE

In-between we re-read the Bible,
slowly, carefully and closely
using the critical resources of biblical scholarship ...
'critical consciousness'

=

Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)
Literary-narrative (on-text)
Socio-historical (behind-text)
Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)

JUDGE

... and ends with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...
'community-consciousness' = prophetic theology

ACT

APPROPRIATING 'STRUGGLE': THE NEXT LECTURE

- In the fourth and final lecture, “Working with the Bible as a site of struggle in local communities”, I will focus on actual examples, across a range of contextual issues, including unemployment, gender-based violence, HIV, and sexuality.
- I will demonstrate, too, how both socio-historical and literary-narrative methods offer access to ‘struggle’.
- I will refer to the following biblical texts: Mark 11:27-13:2; 2 Samuel 13:1-22; Matthew 20:1-16; Job 1:21+3; 47:7-11; Genesis 37-50 (41:39-49+47:13-21)