Prof. M. Cloete
Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, University of South Africa.
cloetm@unisa.ac.za

ALLAN BOESAK: INNOCENCE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMANITY

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ABSTRACT

As a Black theologian and political activist, deeply committed to the cause of freedom, reconciliation and justice in South Africa, Allan Boesak has embraced the philosophy of Black consciousness as a legitimate moral-political foundation for the development of national unity. Boesak is of the view that post-apartheid South Africa is still deeply plagued by a racist legacy of moral-political "innocence". I explore the validity of Boesak's position from the perspective of his fundamental claim that the philosophy of Black Consciousness represents a legitimate framework for addressing the legacy of "innocence", construed by him as an epistemic condition that refuses to engage with the historical "truth" of race thinking.

1. INTRODUCTION: BLACK THEOLOGY AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS PHILOSOPHY

The struggle for political and economic freedom in South Africa has, over the years, been inseparably associated with a moral struggle for the recognition of the humanity of Black people in the face of White oppression under colonial-apartheid rule. Implicit in the moral struggle for recognition has been the fundamental idea of human equality as a principle of universal significance. While the politically organised anti-apartheid movement was primarily concerned with the removal of the historically repressive practices, structures and institutions of White supremacist rule in South Africa, the moral struggle for recognition of the denied, distorted and devalued humanity of the oppressed Black South

African people has always been – and remains to this day – an extremely difficult challenge.

The normative question of the humanity of the oppressed, Black communities seems to be incapable of meaningful articulation beyond the racialised identities of the colonial-apartheid regimes of the past, a seemingly unavoidable consequence of the differential historical experiences of anti-Black racism and White supremacy within the different Black communities of South Africa. In post-apartheid South Africa, the normalisation of apartheid categories of classification such as "African", "Coloured", "Indian", and "White", now openly paraded under the placatory banner of "previously disadvantaged" and 'previously advantaged' categories of social identification, within government institutions, civil society and the business world, has done very little to stem the rising tide of racist hostility and racial suspicion in the country. The struggle for alternative, non-racial, emancipatory social identities, capable of transcending the restrictions and impact of the racial categories of apartheid, has been systematically undermined by the African National Congress (ANC)-led government's pivotal role as the sole creator and custodian of identity in the "new" South Africa. The institutionalisation of "ethnicity from above" has thus resulted in

> the most impoverished definitions of identity. It [has] also suppressed and distorted identity to the extent that it [has] excluded and suppressed all constituents of identity except race and ethnicity (Zegeye *et al*. 2000:2).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the moral struggle for recognition of the humanity of the historically oppressed Black communities in South Africa became the central focus of the philosophy of Black Consciousness. Under the inspirational leadership of Steve Biko, the exponents of Black Consciousness philosophy have sought to test the validity, credibility and relevance of their thoughts by focusing their attention on the subjective dimensions of the lived experience of being Black, the "fact of blackness" (Fanon 1967:82), as the normative foundation for articulating the possibility of a new humanity in a truly liberated South Africa/Azania (Biko 1978:87-98).

The existential self-awareness of being-Black-in-the-world has been a central thematic concern of the tradition of African philosophy, associated most notably with the work of the American philosopher, Lewis R. Gordon (2008). In the (South) African context, the work of various Black-African philosophers such as, among others, Mogobe B. Ramose (1999), Mabogo P. More (2008:45-68), and Adam Small (1973:11-17) has, over the years, succeeded in establishing a normative and conceptual link between "Black" theology, on the one hand, and 'Black'liberation philosophy, on the other.

From this perspective, the suffering of Black people has represented a common point of departure, a common source for their various reflections and common engagement with the apartheid regime. These reflections and that engagement were also directed against the apologetics of the majority of White theologians and church leaders, especially within the ranks of the Dutch Reformed Church of the White Afrikaner community. These reflections and that engagement arose within a specific historical context that spoke to the specificity of the suffering of Black people in apartheid South Africa. According to Moore (1973:6),

> Black [t]heology ... begins with people – specific people, in a specific situation and with specific problems to face. Thus it starts with [B] lack people in the South African situation facing the strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult, and dehumanisation. It tries to understand as clearly as possible who these people are, what their life experiences are, and the nature and cause of their suffering. This is an indispensable datum of Black [t]heology.

As a Black Christian theologian, political activist, community leader, and "accidental politician", Allan Boesak (2009) has, over many years, distinguished himself as a leading voice in the South African liberation struggle. Along with many others, most notably, the anti-apartheid activists, civic and student leaders, as well as theologians associated with the United Democratic Front (UDF) – Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Dennis Hurley, and respected activists from the 1950s such as Albertina Sisulu, Helen Joseph and Oscar Mpetha, Boesak sought to apply the main ideas, principles and values of Black theology and the liberation philosophy of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), to the oppressive political, social, and economic conditions of apartheid South Africa. While he accepted that the existential "truth" of the philosophy of Black Consciousness ultimately resides in the possibility of establishing its resonance with the existential "truths" of the Black experience in South Africa, Boesak was always quick to point out that the existential fact of blackness in South Africa – and the rest of the world – must always be understood from the perspective of the revelatory force of the Word of God:

> The [B]lack situation is the situation within which reflection and action takes place, but is the Word of God which illuminates the reflection and guides the action (Boesak 1977:12).

It should be noted that, for Boesak, the normative foundation of Black Consciousness philosophy was not much different to the founding principles associated with the *Belhar Confession,* formally adopted by

the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) in 1986, which proclaimed as a matter of confession that

> it is impossible to be a Christian in the Reformed tradition without being opposed to and working for the eradication of apartheid and all forms of social justice in society (Villa-Vicencio 1988:28).

Apart from its political mandate, the *Belhar Confession* also sought to address the complicity of Afrikaner Reformed theology in the justification and institutionalisation of apartheid (Nolan & Broderick 1987:71-80). A key component of the *Belhar Confession* is the moral imperative for unity and reconciliation within a United (later, Uniting) Reformed Church, beyond the racially separated Reform churches of apartheid South Africa. The very possibility of unity within the Reformed tradition thus resides in the willingness of Afrikaner theologians and White church leaders to denounce (confess) apartheid theology as a "false gospel" and a heresy that violates the founding principles of the Christian faith (De Gruchy & De Gruchy 2004:186-187; Smit 1984:14).

The emphasis that the philosophy of Black Consciousness places on the idea of Black solidarity, Black unity, and Black agency has inspired Boesak to explore the conditions for the possibility of an (authentic) reconciliation and social justice in South Africa. To date, the question regarding the nature and significance of his contribution to the liberation struggle has focused primarily on "the political", and rightly so. As a Christian leader committed to the moral principles of liberation theology, Boesak soon came to realise the inescapable nature and impact of "the political".

Boesak lived for "the political", in all of its highs and lows, but his political vision was also deeply inspired by a profound interest in the human mind as an expression of human spirituality that has sought, over many centuries, to express itself in the liberatory languages of the Black-African experience. From this perspective, Boesak speaks of the Black church's historical struggle as a struggle for truth:

> In this struggle, two theologies were fighting for supremacy within its ranks. On the one hand, there has been the theology we inherited from Western Christianity: the theology of accommodation and acquiescence. It engendered an individualistic, other-worldly spirituality that has no interest in the realities of this world except to proclaim the existing order as the God-ordained order … On the other hand, there was a theology of refusal; a theology that refuses to accept that God was just another word for the status quo; a theology that understood that the God of the Bible is a God who takes sides with the oppressed and who calls persons

> to participate in the struggle for liberation and justice in the world (Boesak 2009:31).

Boesak is of the view that the path of Black liberation is premised on the possibility of overcoming the "slave mentality" induced in the minds of Black people over many centuries of White supremacist rule, with the complicity, in many respects, of Black people themselves:

> Our minds might have been colonized, but we were not innocent. We actively participated in our own oppression. We help[ed] forge the chains of our slavery (Boesak 2009:38).

An important idea associated with the struggle for Black liberation is the possibility of a radical transformation of the hegemonic Eurocentric epistemological paradigm (the Western philosophical text) that has largely gone unchallenged within current academic discourse. A major consequence of this unfortunate situation has been the perpetuation of the racist myth that the "Western mind" is the exclusive, privileged centre of human knowledge, reason and rationality. The imposition of the European colonial system of education on the minds of the indigenous, colonised African people is a direct consequence of Western philosophical racism, which denies the non-Western Other, in general, and the African, in particular, the inclination and the ability to reason philosophically. An acknowledgement of the right to reason would necessarily entail the further acknowledgement that the non-Western Other is also a human being, equal in status to all other human beings. The struggle for reason in Africa, as Ramose (2002:4-8) has argued, is also a struggle for the liberation of the (denied) humanity of the indigenous, conquered African peoples, which is the fundamental condition of the possibility of racism. Within this context, Boesak (2005:6) also claimed that

> the full might of Western academic thought was mustered to keep Africans inferior, without merit, without a past and therefore without measure of a humane future. There was no field of Western academic endeavour since the seventeenth century, whether science, philosophy, literature, art, and especially theology in which the dehumanization of the African did not become the acid test of the superiority of both Western man and Western culture.

In this article, I focus on Boesak's deep concern about the (self-) conscious perpetuation of "race thinking" in post-apartheid South Africa. In this regard, I explore the validity of his position from the perspective of his fundamental claim that the philosophy of Black Consciousness represents a legitimate alternative to the "innocence" of "race" and ethnicity as the

primary markers of personal and social identity. Boesak's approach to the question of 'race' and personal and social identity has consistently been shaped within the normative context of Black Consciousness thinking:

> There are things that seem to be unique to my generation, and yet continue to plague South Africans as we wrestle with becoming a nation. One of these is the persistent matter of race and identity … My thinking on these matters has irrevocably been shaped by the philosophy of Black Consciousness. So I speak of '[B]lack' in terms of the way we used it: meaning '[B]lack African', '[C]oloured', and 'Indian' people … My generation, in that most formative of times (the late sixties and seventies) learnt to overcome the consciousness of race and ethnicity like no generation before (Boesak 2009:9).

Implicit in his account of the philosophy of Black Consciousness is a basic epistemic claim, namely that, without the unifying moral potential of Black Consciousness thinking, post-apartheid South Africa is without vision. In this article, I seek to analyse the significance of that claim.

2. INNOCENCE AS AN EPISTEMIC CATEGORY OF "RACE THINKING"

The epistemic category of "innocence" has played a constitutive role in Boesak's conception of liberation theology. The category of innocence was of such importance to his epistemological approach that it featured prominently in the title of his published doctoral thesis, *Farewell to innocence: A socio-ethical study of Black theology and Black power* (1977). Boesak conceptualises innocence as a function of Western theology's deliberate and systematic ignorance of the realities on which liberation theology is based, namely "realities of rich and poor, of [W]hite and [B]lack, of oppressors and oppressed, of oppression and liberation from oppression" (Boesak 1977:3). He proceeds to assert that these realities

> move through history with a bland kind of innocence, hiding these painful truths behind a façade of myths and real or imagined anxieties (Boesak 1977:3).

As a form of "racial thinking", innocence provides the condition for the possibility not only of White power and privilege in colonial-apartheid South Africa, but also the violent conquest of the mind, the land, and the life of the pre-colonial indigenous African people. The conquest of the African mind through colonisation and enslavement has resulted not only in the genocidal violation of the African person's right to life, but also in the loss of self-confidence and profound scepticism with regard to the

epistemological relevance, validity, and moral significance of pre-colonial African indigenous systems of thought.

As a project of colonial conquest, Western modernity has sought the assistance of its leading philosophers of the Enlightenment movement, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel – to mention but a few – to legitimise its economic and cultural agenda of European global imperialism. To this end, Western modernity has identified human reason and rationality as the exclusive, privileged possession of the Western mind, and the uncontested proof of Western civilisational superiority (Serequeberhan 2002:64-78; Eze 1977:103-133).

In mainstream academic programmes and curricula, epistemology is conceptualised as the branch of philosophy that is primarily focused on the question of knowledge, the justification and validation of knowledge claims, the relevant scope and limits of human knowledge. From this perspective, epistemology is projected as a fundamental challenge to the belief that ignorance is bliss. The purpose of knowledge is to seek "truth" as the only condition and desideratum for overcoming the unwanted condition of ignorance. The recognition of ignorance is, therefore, a first step in the noble pursuit of knowledge. Thus, we witness, for example in Plato's famous allegory of the cave, the ascent of the philosopher from a condition of ignorance and (self-) deception, conveyed by images of darkness, shadows, prison chains, and a generally unpleasant life deep below the earth's surface, to the bright (white) light of knowledge and reason, metaphorically associated with the sun as the original source of all light and all life on earth (*Republic, Bk VII*). Plato's epistemology thus views ignorance as a deficit, an accident, a mistake, an oversight that can, in principle, be remedied under the correct guidance and supervision of the philosopher as teacher. The possibility of knowledge thus ultimately resides in the absolute overcoming of the condition of ignorance, which Plato associates with a morally debased and inferior mode of existence (Plato 1955 [380 BC]).

Plato's Socrates' radical questioning of the accepted truths and conventions, his so-called "ignorance" is a consequence of a struggle for truth in the face of the almost unshakeable epistemic weight of public opinion (popular belief, prejudice and tradition), on the one hand, and a fundamental critique of knowledge in the service of power (disguised in the Sophistic form of rhetoric and excellence of speech), on the other (Plato 1956 [360 BC]). The fact that Socrates hailed from a relatively poor economic background made him even more suspicious of the popular association of wealth (social prestige) with knowledge (wisdom), thus implying that wisdom can also reside among the poor and the less privileged.

Socrates' philosophy of radical questioning, in the struggle for truth, invites comparison with Jesus' radical questioning of religious truth (or authority-thinking) during his lifetime, based on an unshakeable conviction that the only epistemic authority worth accepting is the authority of truth itself. As Nolan (1976:123) puts it:

> Jesus was unique among the men [*sic*] of his time in his ability to overcome all forms of authority-thinking. The only authority which Jesus might be said to have appealed to, was the authority of truth itself. He did not make authority his truth, he made truth his authority.

The Socratic epistemology of ignorance, like Jesus' epistemology of truth, is clearly at odds with the hegemonic epistemic structures of their day, which basically served the interests of the rich and powerful (the elite) – to the exclusion of the 'others': ordinary people and slaves, in the case of Socrates; "sinners" in the case of Jesus.

The radical-questioning epistemologist often calls for an epistemological break, that is, a radical rejection of hegemonic epistemologies. This rejection is based on the belief that the existing epistemic models cannot be improved upon or "fixed" from within. From the epistemological perspective of the excluded and marginalised, the devastating consequences of the hegemonic theories of "truth" should never be construed as a "mistake" that can be remedied, nor should they be viewed as the product of an innocent oversight or misunderstanding. In this regard, the significance and relevance of Bosch's (1991:423) comments below exceed the disciplinary parameters of contextual theology:

> [At] least since the time of Constantine, theology was conducted *from above* as an elitist enterprise … its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was *philosophy*, and its main interlocutor the *educated non-believer*, contextual theology is theology *"from below"*, "from the underside of history", its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the *social sciences*, and its main interlocutor the *poor* or the *culturally marginalized* (italics in the original).

In recent times, the epistemology of modernity has been construed "from below" as epistemological project based on the racist ideology of White supremacy. From this perspective, modern (Western) epistemology is viewed as a deliberate and systematic attempt to disregard and dismiss the decisive influence of non-European philosophical influences on the origins of European philosophy (Bernal 1987; Park 2013). The devaluation and dismissal of non-European sources of philosophical thinking were undertaken in order to absolutise and privilege the European "mind" as the exclusive and universal source of authentic philosophical thinking.

From the perspective of those "from below", the modern epistemological tradition is inextricably structured around an epistemic core of racism, which can only be overcome by means of a radical epistemological break. Sullivan & Tuana's (2007:1) comments on the significance of epistemic ignorance are worth noting:

> Sometimes what we do not know is not a mere gap in knowledge, the accidental result of an epistemological oversight. Especially in the case of racial oppression, a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known often is actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation. At times this takes the form of those in the center refusing to allow the marginalized to know: witness the nineteenth-century prohibition against [B]lack slaves' literacy. Other times it can take the form of the center's own ignorance of injustice, cruelty, and suffering, such as contemporary [W]hite people's obliviousness to racism and [W]hite domination. Sometimes these "unknowledges" are consciously produced, while at other times they are unconsciously generated and supported.

In a similar vein, Mills (1997) makes an important contribution to our understanding of the epistemic status and role of "White ignorance" as an actively, systematically produced form of non-knowledge, by arguing that White supremacist thinking is a logical consequence of the radical inversion of the Platonic epistemological paradigm. Mills (1997:19) argues:

> One could say then, as a general rule, that *[W]hite misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race* are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. And these phenomena are in no way *accidental, but* prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the [W]hite polity (italics in the original).

Arguing in a similar vein, Boesak foregrounds epistemic ignorance (in the form of innocence) as the epistemological foundation of White supremacy in South Africa. His choice of the word "innocence" in preference to "ignorance" is significant. While both concepts denote the epistemic condition of ignorance as a state of mind, 'innocence' goes much further. As an emotional condition of childishness – as opposed to childlikeness – it is suggestive of naivety, a desperate dependency and neediness, an unwarranted trust and unconditional love, a relationship characterised by blind faith in the authoritative guidance and protection of the political patriarch, who will always ensure the safety and well-being of

his political offspring, especially in a politically hostile environment. White supremacy, therefore, sustains and reinforces its credibility by inducing a permanent (pathological) state of childhood in the political unconscious of its citizens. It is from this perspective that we could, perhaps, explain why, in spite of the possibility of change (apartheid was, after all, a White democracy), the White electorate persisted, nonetheless, in putting its democratic vote and political destiny behind the same racist dictatorship every time, without fail, and in total disregard of the cry for justice, so deeply entrenched in the historical memory of the majority of Black people. In this regard, Boshoff's (1980:113) appropriation of Boesak's idea of innocence is certainly worth noting:

> It is the attitude of the [W]hite person to take for granted that he is unavoidably placed in a position of power over [B]lack people. As if he is forced, against his own will, into accepting that responsibility – the inescapable duty and task – the [W]hite man's burden. This is his innocence – an innocence that never questions the arrogance and superiority that he claims for himself. He does not realize that he is treating other people as less than human. Because he does not acknowledge any guilt, he cannot be converted – which is why reconciliation is not possible (my translation).

The most damaging consequence of White epistemic ignorance is a pathological failure to face – and thus live meaningfully – in the present political reality. The political children of White supremacy will, therefore, seek to escape the "truth" of the present by clinging either to a fabricated heroic past that "never was", on the one hand, or an idealised future, on the other, that "never will be" in a bid to find metaphysical comfort in the present. From this perspective, metaphysical comfort is nothing more than a tragic manifestation of a cognitive dissonance and distortion of present reality, which makes it extremely difficult to connect with the "Other" human being in a meaningful way. For Boesak (1977:3-4), the phenomenon of moral-political escapism, as a form of metaphysical (read: meta-political) comfort, is the ultimate expression of political innocence:

> When people face issues too horrendous to contemplate, they close their eyes to reality, and make a virtue out of powerlessness, weakness and helplessness. This innocence leads to a helpless utopianism – either an idealization of the present (bad) situation, or escapism into a "better" world other than the present one.

The racist pathology of political innocence provides the rulers of the state with their greatest weapon, namely the pathologically stunted "mind" of the racialised citizen. The racialised zone of innocence destroys the desire

for change insofar as its self-validating logic of racism does not allow for a contradictory possibility that might lead to a different conclusion, namely the world is not what it seems to be; another world is possible. Boesak's (1977:4) account of political innocence strikes at the heart of the foundational myths of the White epistemology of innocence:

> In order to maintain the status quo, it is necessary for w[W]hites to believe, and keep on believing, that they are innocent. They are innocent because they 'just happen to have the superior position in the world, or in some mysterious way, they have been placed in a position of leadership (guardianship) over [B]lacks by nature, by virtue of their "superior" culture, or by God. They thus may believe themselves to have a "divine calling" vis-à-vis [B]lacks, or to uphold "[W]estern Christian civilization".

Boesak (2005:104) speaks of innocence as a form of "unremembering", which he seeks to distinguish conceptually from mere "forgetting" or "forgetfulness":

> Unremembering is a deliberate political act for reasons of domestication and control. A people's history, or their memory, is falsified, rewritten or denied. The process is not a confluence of accidental political factors, neither is it the result of inevitable political "shifts". It is an act of appropriation … as an act it is deliberately ideological and serves a political agenda.

A major consequence of "innocence", as a systemically produced epistemic activity of "not-knowing", is that the "innocent children" of apartheid-race thinking can dispense with the need to engage with Others as human beings worthy of respect. The ideology of innocence, therefore, rules out the possibility of meaningful and empathetic understanding of "where Black people really come from". From this perspective, innocence and dialogue are mutually exclusive concepts, whose underlying logic continues to divide the South African landscape into two diametrically opposed, contradictory camps of "us and them".

Not even the opportunity presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to overcome the racially induced pathology of moral indifference could succeed in breaking down the walls of racial division in the face of Black suffering. The TRC's mandate to investigate the gross violation of human rights unfortunately assumed a liberal approach, which focused on the acts of individuals (either as perpetrators or as victims of apartheid) – thus ruling out the need to deal with apartheid as a system. By focusing on the crimes of apartheid, the TRC failed to acknowledge

apartheid as a crime (Johnston 2014:158). This failure can also be viewed as another form of innocence.

Lest we believe that the epistemology of innocence applies exclusively to White people, Boesak does well to remind us that the mind of the Black person is equally susceptible to the pernicious ideological influence of White racial thinking. As Fanon (1967) has argued so persuasively, the Black person constantly seeks reassurance for his/her ontological non-being and lack of ontological credibility by means of what Gordon (2008:80) has referred to as the "failed dialectics of recognition". This involves both conscious and unconscious processes of White imitation, assimilation, and approval on the part of Black people in order to assert their human equality in a world of White supremacy. This situation is, of course, a contradiction in terms, given the Eurocentric racist assumption that humanness is the exclusive privilege of the White man. When the Black person seeks to overcome the failed dialectics of recognition, however, s/he soon realises that there is no way to escape the zone of non-being, except by way of a radical destruction and transformation of White supremacist society as a whole – and the creation of "a new humanity" (Fanon 1963:251-255) – a society "with a more human face" (Biko 1978:98). Between now and then, the Black person is condemned to a zone of non-being, a world of double consciousness (Du Bois 1969), in which the political and economic power of White normativity serves as a powerful reminder of his/her constant alienation. The liberation of the Black person thus begins with the protection of the 'integrity of his/her inner life', of his/her own subjectivity in the face of White oppression. The protection of the integrity of Black subjectivity is not, however, a process of self-isolation, but rather the first step in the direction of Black solidarity as a necessary prerequisite for the overthrow of White supremacy, whose greatest "achievement" has been the creation of the slave mentality. According to Boesak (1977:5-6),

> [t]here is, after all, a great truth in the saying: The greatest ally of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Getting rid of an implanted slave mentality is central to the philosophy of Black Consciousness. The affirmation of one's personhood is a powerful act that constitutes a farewell to innocence. Blacks realize that their situation is not caused by a cosmic inevitability by powers beyond their control. Historical structures are created and maintained by people. Oppression is also a system.

How does the Black person live in an historical present that systematically denies the very possibility of an "authentic" Black existence? How does the Black person position him-/herself in a social order that cannot "see" the (subjective) humanness of the Black person's presence in the world,

given the systemic objectification of Black personhood as a necessary consequence of White supremacy? How do the oppressed, conquered Black communities interact with one another socially and politically, given the almost unavoidable internalisation of White racism which has for over three hundred years provided such a powerful symbolic frame of reference for both mutual and self-recognition in the social and political spheres?

3. INNOCENCE LOST

In certain respects, Boesak's idea of innocence may be construed as a distorted mode of communication, one that excludes the possibility of meaningful dialogue with the "other" within the public sphere. This implies that, if we wish to move beyond the irrationality of the apartheid "race" thinking, we must be able to develop a language (a political discourse) that is capable of carrying the memories of past suffering, injustice and humiliation, not in order to remain "stuck in the past", but in order to provide the necessary and relevant hermeneutic context for dealing with the past as a precondition for seeking a future in which "race" no longer matters. The hermeneutic context that Boesak (2005:152-154) invokes as the relevant sphere of communication is one that presupposes the possibility of a "farewell to innocence", which he characterises as a form of self-reflection, accompanied by a sense of spiritual freedom, upon discovering the distorted, untruthful, and unjust nature of apartheid South Africa. When faced with the possibility of change, the revolutionary invariably has to make a choice between violence and non-violence as a preferred option. For Boesak, however, who had always cherished the ideal of spiritual wholeness in the face of the destructive fragmentation and alienation of the Black experience in apartheid South Africa, revolutionary non-violence was the only way forward. In this context, Boesak advocated the spiritual sphere of religious faith as an indispensable dialogical partner to the public sphere of secular-political discourse. He was highly critical of many of the current South African leaders and academics who tend to devalue or dismiss the decisive and inspirational role played by religious faith in the South African liberation struggle. The significance of the liberation struggle should never, therefore, be reduced to the secular realm of political triumphalism. From this perspective, Boesak (2005:213) speaks of a "paradigm for a spirituality of politics" to serve as an oppositional (normative) force in the public sphere of politics. At the core of his call for "a spirituality of politics" is a deep commitment to the priority of the ethical in relation to the political within a liberated post-apartheid South Africa. Tahmasebi-Birgani (2014:3), a leading scholar of Emmanuel Levinas,

articulates the significance of maintaining the priority of the ethical (sphere) over the political (sphere):

> Politics as it stands, separate from ethical and moral considerations, has exhausted itself in the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first. Atrocities committed in the name of Truth, Justice, Equality, Liberation, Freedom, or God – we have exploited and exhausted them all in an effort to justify a means to an end in an incessant flow of political struggles both local and global. For Emmanuel Levinas, the question of the political is primarily a question of one's relationship with the absolute alterity of the other human being. As such, the question of politics is irreducibly bound with the question of ethics. If there is no other, why should there be the question of politics at all? If this other is always reducible to the same universe as that of the subject, why bother with questions of justice, liberation, and democracy in polity?

The freedom of the oppressed person emanates from the realm of the ethical. The Black person's realisation of the historically contingent nature of White power and privilege is the first step in the struggle for freedom from White supremacy and Black oppression. The primary goal of the hegemonic system of White thinking was to instill the fundamental idea that the Western value system is the only legitimate norm for determining the civilised status of the human being. With the help of the mass media, education and religion, the oppressor thus attempted to transform the oppressed into docile, submissive, complaint subjects, thus rendering them complicit in their own oppression as they seek, dialectically, to achieve the standards and norms of whiteness in a world of White supremacy. This is, of course, impossible, given the fact that the racist logic of White superiority denies Black people the possibility of being the White man's equal. This denial is of a violent nature; it threatens the oppressed person on many levels at the same time. As Fanon (1963:29) puts it, "[The colonizer] is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native". From Boesak's perspective, however, violence is not only about intimidating and silencing the Black threat to White power; it is also the catalyst for the loss of innocence by the oppressed:

> [The] 1980s brought a full and painful understanding of what began as the loss of our innocence in 1976, when the state turned the full wrath of its violence against the defenseless and unprepared children of Soweto. The revolt, and the violent reaction it called forth, spread across the country and in the Cape found a dismal climax in the death of the children in Elsies River, which for the [C] oloured communities of the Western Cape carries the same symbolic weight as Soweto. We were then made to see and experience just

> how far the South African government was willing to go, and how much it would make us pay, to maintain the system of apartheid (Boesak 2005:152).

As a Black Christian theologian, deeply committed to the liberation struggle in South Africa, Boesak never wavered in his belief regarding the moral superiority of non-violence in the face of violence. He was deeply disturbed by the militarisation of the anti-apartheid movement by certain senior members of the ANC returning from exile (Boesak 2009:185). The deliberate portrayal of the anti-apartheid struggle as a violent struggle – instead of a revolutionary non-violent struggle against violence – thus betrayed, in Boesak's eyes, the spiritual-religious dimension of the liberation struggle. The militarisation of the struggle by the ANC led him to declare in frustration:

> It was as if the years of struggle we knew had been simply and effortlessly wiped away … the incongruity of it all mystifies even history (Boesak 2009:185).

Many prominent leaders and activists, including the Reverend Calata, Chief Albert Luthuli, Z.K. Mathews and Steve Biko, to mention but a few, widely and openly acknowledged the spirituality of the struggle. Boesak (2009:181-182) explains his own position as follows:

> Up until the 1990s, the language of the ANC and the litmus test for true commitment and genuine comradeship was the violent revolutionary struggle; the 'socialist, democratic revolution'. My own insistence that our struggle inside was a true non-violent revolution, that it was as much about values and ideals as about politics and economics (I sometimes said 'the only revolution that mattered'), must have sounded like heresy.

Boesak's defence of non-violence as a viable political alternative is grounded in a universalist system of values which, he believes, is capable of transcending the most repressive and hostile political situations. His commitment to non-violence places him in the company of leading political pacifists such as Mahatma Gandhi (1961), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1958; 1964), Kenneth Kaunda (1980) – each of whom believed that revolutionary non-violence is not only about destroying an oppressive society, but also presupposes the possibility of transforming the (false) moral consciousness of the oppressor. In this regard, he embraces dialogue as a rational manifestation of human spirituality. If violence begets violence, then non-violence begets the will to confront the "other" in the spirit of dialogue. The degeneration of the spirituality of the struggle, however, into a political theatre of power politics initiated by the ANC was clearly part of a general

strategy to neutralise the widespread support that the UDF enjoyed at the time, and to transfer that support into the hands of the ANC, who clearly saw themselves as the only legitimate voice of "the People". Throughout his activist years, Boesak was deeply troubled by the constant tension between violent and non-violent political action, and the implications of that tension for the possibility of authentic reconciliation, justice, and peace in a post-apartheid South Africa. With the militarisation of the liberation struggle, the ANC elite renounced the spiritual foundations of a truly liberated South Africa. From this perspective, Boesak (2009:186) writes:

> In my view, the climate of violence created, the language, the deliberate fashioning of a revolutionary dream of violence, even though it was a deception, the normalisation of violence through the romantic portrayal of war, sacrifice and death, played a vital role in the militarization of the UDF. It was also, I think, a desperate measure to gain control over an internal movement that had committed itself to the same struggle, the same ideals, the same goals, but had elected to walk a different path.

The liberation struggle was never far removed from the daily struggle of ordinary Black South Africans to overcome poverty, as both a material and spiritual condition. In this context, poverty has always been construed as a form of violence. As a structural component of racial capitalism, poverty was deliberately and systematically created among Black people to ensure their lasting subjugation within White supremacist South Africa; class and race thus worked together in unison as the primary determinants of structural division in South Africa (Alexander 2013:122-123; 2002:34). As a form of violence, poverty produces alienation insofar as it separates its victims from life-enhancing possibilities that we all need as human beings in order to fulfil our potential in a social context that foregrounds the moral imperatives of inter-subjectivity, mutual respect, cooperation, and solidarity. From this perspective, the right to life should always be our primary moral concern. As Buthelezi (1973:151) puts it:

> We do not precede life, but we find that life is already waiting for us. Life precedes us because God, who is the ground of life and before whom we live and exist, is there before us, waiting with his gifts. The theological consciousness of the giveness of the social, economic and political structures of life is not one of fatal resignation, but of awareness of an inevitable responsibility in those structures. This is so because to have life does not mean just to be alive, but also to contribute critically and creatively to one's neighbour's well-being.

The liberation struggle had promised its followers the promise of life itself. It was, therefore, extremely difficult for Black South Africans to accept the increasingly deepening levels of socio-economic inequality – with the vast

majority of Black people still at the receiving end of meager government grants to make ends meet, and with the basic conditions of life ("service delivery") but an empty promise in the rhetoric of self-serving politicians. Forced now to swim in a political ocean of governmental omniscience, technical and professional experts and consultants (especially in the field of economics), "the people" soon realised that the hard-earned gains of the liberation struggle, especially the freedom from fear to "speak their own minds" in the struggle for a better future, had been unilaterally sacrificed at the altar of neo-liberal global capitalism.

The de-spiritualisation of the struggle thus represents a betrayal of the philosophical significance of Black Consciousness thinking which foregrounds the liberation of the mind (the rational potential of every Black person). In the post-apartheid dispensation, however, instead of acknowledging the rational ability of 'ordinary' people as critically minded, independent thinkers, the ANC urges 'the People' to put their faith

> in reified forms such as the Party, the Struggle, the Leader, the Nation, the Market, Law, Culture, and so on ... [This] takes the place of critical thought and conceals the true condition of men and women suffocating from what Biko calls 'their quest for a true humanity' (Gibson 2008:132).

4. THE IDEA OF UNITY IN BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

The introduction of a post-apartheid, democratic South Africa in 1994 was widely hailed both locally and internationally as a miraculous triumph over, among other things, the centrality of "race" as a formal organising-structural principle of political governance and social coordination. Shortly after the newly elected political leaders of the ANC government assumed office, however, it became apparent that the apartheid categories of social classification that had caused so much pain and humiliation in the lives of Black people in the past, were here to stay. It was as if the political-historical awareness of unity in the struggle, and the related moral self-awareness of Black subjectivity as the potentially normative source of a "true humanity" (Biko 1978: 87-98) had lost their relevance in the new South Africa. The unity of Black Consciousness thus dissipated before the more economist approach by the leaders of the post-apartheid government, who firmly believed that the only realistic path to national unity is through the creation of a patriotic Black (African) bourgeoisie. The capitalist system would thus open up the path to national unity and the creation of patriotism among both Blacks and Whites. Whereas, in the past, the policies of racial capitalism favoured White interests, in the present, it is

hoped that the interests of all Black people will eventually be served. Once the newly created Black elite have had enough time to create their own wealth, it is hoped that they will eventually "plough back" into the economy by creating job opportunities for the poor. As Marais (2001:240) puts it:

> The rise of African capitalists therefore is also deemed to address a facet of the 'national question'. Vested in the rise of an African capitalist class is the expectation that racial solidarity (in this case with the African poor) would eclipse class solidarity and become the wellspring of a 'patriotic capitalism'.

From Boesak's (2005:12) perspective, the deliberate manipulation of the capitalist system in the interest of Black ('African') wealth is a betrayal of the moral principles of Black theology and Black Consciousness philosophy:

> [B]lack Consciousness's deep concern was that the ethnicising of South Africa's oppressed masses was one of the most powerful tools of our oppression in the apartheid arsenal, and that overcoming it was absolutely essential to our understanding of our own role and the role of '"race" in the struggle for freedom. Overcoming the divisions between "Bantus", "Coloureds" and "Indians" was one of the most significant and enduring victories of that phase of the struggle and without it, it is hard to imagine how apartheid would have been overcome.

Dismissing the normative significance of Black unity and solidarity as a legitimate point of departure in the creation of a new South Africa, the political leaders of post-apartheid South Africa duly proceeded to embrace the idea of unity in cultural diversity (the "rainbow nation") as an alternative to the unity of Black Consciousness. The idea of cultural diversity and integrity is certainly worthy of respect. In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, however, the problem is that "culture" performs a divisive role in the new South Africa similar to that of "race" in the past. A significant consequence of the ANC's re-racialisation of the South African political landscape, based on a dogmatic retention and consolidation of the capitalist economic system of their former oppressors, has been the retreat of the moral imperative for historical and social justice, and hence the possibility of a "nation at peace with itself' (Boesak 2005:171). The Black Consciousness idea of unity in the struggle was ill-suited to the economic imperatives of the ANC's neo-liberal agenda of building a new Black ('African') upper-middle class elite to work together with the existing White upper-middle class, as their preferred option in the fight against poverty and the creation of a non-racial society. Alexander's (2002:68) comments in this regard are worth noting:

> [O]vert class struggles are beginning to reshape the political terrain which had previously been dominated by the apparent primacy of the struggle of [B]lack people against the ill-gotten power and wealth of the [W]hite minority with their ideology and practices of [W]hite supremacy. Today, [B]lack and [W]hite middle class, and even bourgeois groups and individuals, properly so called, have formed what in effect is an alliance against the laboring poor.

The ANC government's neo-liberal economic approach has created a paradox of tolerance insofar as "race" has to be tolerated as a necessary (realistic) criterion for identifying the most deserving candidates to benefit from government policies of Black economic empowerment and programmes of affirmative action. The tolerance of "race", however, has also reinforced "race and race thinking" as the (intolerable) default position, the unofficial twelfth language of the non-racial, democratic South Africa. Posel's (cited in Alexander 2013:119) comments regarding the continued significance of 'race thinking' and the related apartheid classificatory forms of social identification within post-apartheid South Africa are quite instructive:

> If constructs, these categories were powerfully rooted in the materiality of everyday life. The ubiquity of the state's racial designations, and the extent to which they meshed with lived hierarchies of class and status, meant that apartheid's racial grid was strongly imprinted in the subjective experience of race … [It] would be difficult to deny the extent to which the demarcation of South African society into [W]hites, Indians, [C]oloureds and Africans has been normalised – for many, a "fact" of "life".

The race consciousness of apartheid thus, paradoxically, provided the "practical" starting point for the transformation of post-apartheid South Africa into a non-racial society. It was linked to the "noble" project of redressing the material inequalities that had historically accompanied the racial capitalism of the apartheid regime. Boesak was deeply disturbed when confronted by this highly controversial legacy of apartheid thinking. The political manipulation of Black suffering and Black hopes – and the accompanying racial reclassification of South African society – to coincide with the economic imperatives of neoliberal capitalism was a tragic manifestation of retrogressive, backward thinking. Boesak (2009:12) states:

> Before we knew it, we were once again saddled with the racial terminology of apartheid. We were once again Coloureds, Whites, and Indians. But something had changed: now only [B]lack people were "Africans". Before we knew it, we had to prove that we were in the struggle. Suddenly there were layers of suffering during apartheid

> and hence layers of reward. Suddenly we had less right to speak and less of a claim on our history. Suddenly there was real anger among us, racial anger, and not just anger caused by that convenient and ubiquitous 'scarcity of resources'. But this makes the issue much more than just a coloured one, since all of us have been inflicted with these new contradictions, which are fundamental to our self-created dilemmas with race. We will now, all of us, have to deal with this if we want to honestly re-embrace our non-racial ideal.

Boesak is of the view that the philosophy of Black Consciousness represents both a conceptual falsification as well as a rational alternative to the "race" consciousness that has historically represented the major determinant of personal and social identity. Black identity is thus a personal and political definition of the self, formed dialectically within the Black struggle for freedom from White domination and racial oppression. The struggle for Black liberation as a moral struggle is of such universal consequence that it excludes the need for collusion with any form of racism, no matter how benign, well intended, or innocent. Black Consciousness, therefore, makes it impossible, in principle, to accommodate the "false consciousness" of racial thinking that remains stuck within the particularistic margins of race-based identities as the ontological centre of the world. Moreover, the foregrounding of "racial problem" as the central moral concern in post-apartheid South Africa, to the disregard of class as an equally disturbing "economic problem", is to deny the historical conditions at the root of White supremacy. Capitalism under any other name (whether "racial capitalism" or "democratic capitalism") would still be a structurally divisive and exploitative system.

The problematic, though understandable, tendency to identify and absolutise "race" as a major obstacle in the path towards national unity, a common South Africaness, has invariably resulted in a political reluctance to deal with the harsh impact of class and the morally disturbing measures of material inequality that currently prevail between the rich and the poor. The Black majority, "the poors" – as designated by Desai (2002) – remain for the most part systemically marginalised within a political economy that is still deeply rooted in colonial-apartheid practices and institutions of White economic privilege (Terreblanche 2002).

It is widely accepted that the socialist dream, which once inspired the commitment of so many progressive organisations within the national liberation movement, has effectively been laid to rest with the introduction of a liberal-democratic post-apartheid South Africa. The post-apartheid liberal-democratic is viewed as an integral part of the Western victory of global capitalism and political liberalism, following the collapse of the

former Soviet Union and its satellite states towards the end of the twentieth century. This state of affairs prompted political theorist Francis Fukuyama (1992:xii) to assert:

> [At] the end of twentieth century, it makes sense for us once again to speak of a coherent and directional History that will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy.

The triumphalist ideology of the seemingly unstoppable and irreversible "progress" of Western modernity has provided the leaders of post-apartheid South Africa with grounds for optimism, as they seek to deracialise the economy through policies of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) in a bid to close the historical gap between the former white economic oligarchs and the new Black economic oligarchs (Mbeki 2009:66). The sense of entitlement by the new Black elite invariably betrays a lack of awareness or a profound indifference to the moral imperative of historical justice; it negates the violent history of colonial conquest and land dispossession; it formerly gives its blessing to the "divine right of conquest" of colonial-apartheid South Africa, with all its devastating consequences for the oppressed Black communities of South Africa (Ramose 2007:313). The reclassification of apartheid forms of racial classification within the context of the neoliberal project of economic transformation in post-apartheid South Africa has thus resulted in an indirect, but powerful, endorsement of White superiority. Reflecting on the implications of the dramatic conversion of certain former Black socialist leaders and activists of the struggle into supporters of neoliberal capitalism, Alexander (2013:51) declares:

> [In] essence, the philosophical and economic stances these people take towards "the masses", that is, the Great Unwashed, hardly differ from those that the *herrenvolk* used towards [B]lack people in general and towards the [B]lack worker in particular. They, too, believed that people are differently 'endowed' and that those lucky few who are well endowed have to use their talents to the full and enrich themselves without apology to anyone.

Like all philosophies, Black Consciousness philosophy is a philosophy of a particular time and a particular place. As a systematic response to the historical legacy of colonial conquest and apartheid rule in South Africa, the philosophy of Black Consciousness has sought to position itself as an emancipatory, reflexive moment of Black self-consciousness in the face of White superiority and White supremacy. As a philosophy of liberation, Black Consciousness has sought to emphasise the humanity (in unity) of the historically conquered and oppressed communities in the wake of colonialism, enslavement, and apartheid in South Africa. A

direct (moral-practical) consequence of Black Consciousness thinking has been a political awakening to the fact of the historically contingent nature of White supremacy as an unjust system of rule. Boesak embraces the philosophy of Black Consciousness (Black power and Black theology) as the only meaningful normative corrective to the colonial-apartheid mentality of political separateness within a racially structured hierarchy that once privileged White people simply because they happened to be White.

While the concept of "blackness" generally refers to a common experience of solidarity in the face of White supremacy, it is also simultaneously grounded in a perceptual experience that foregrounds the differential specificities of the "African", "Coloured", and "Indian" historical encounter with White supremacy. In this context, the idea of unity in blackness does not invalidate or devalue the moral significance of "belonging" within those culturally embedded, socially separated, communal zones of racial experience under apartheid. Unity in blackness is a Janus-faced idea. On the one hand, it is embedded in a historical sense of self – as a "Coloured" person – for example; on the other hand, it recognises the fact that the struggle against White racial injustice is a struggle that includes all Black people – beyond the racial designations of "African", "Indian" and "Coloured", and beyond the "double consciousness" of simultaneously being and not being "Coloured" (Du Bois 1969), which Boesak (2009:28) describes as an "existential paradox that caused immense internal tensions, communal and personal".

Unity in blackness is a moral endorsement of the humanity of all Black people. There should, therefore, not be a conceptual dissonance between the idea of a common Black humanist identity, on the one hand, and the racial experience, on the other. These are complimentary forces that are inextricably co-implicative within the moral-political universe of the Black person. Without the racial experience, the idea of being Black is empty; without the idea of being Black, the racial experience is blind.

5. CONCLUSION

The history of colonial conquest and apartheid in South Africa was based on a violent and systematic denial of the humanity of African people. The epistemological tradition of European humanism (the philosophical discourses of modernity) has as its point of departure a radical scepticism and a radical questioning of the humaneness of the African person, in particular. Colonial-apartheid thinking is, therefore, an extension of a European philosophical tradition of humanism that celebrates European superiority and the problematic racist claim that the philosophical right

to reason is the exclusive preserve and privilege of "the White man's mind", the paradigmatic expression of philosophical racism in the form of "innocence". The deafening silence of mainstream (White) academic philosophy on these matters bears witness to a stubborn refusal to bid farewell to a philosophical innocence, which refuses to debunk the racist myth that the power of reason is the exclusive privilege of the "White man's mind". As a consequence, our students and Black academics continue to be shamelessly exposed to the unrepentant persistence and hegemony of White philosophy as the condition of the possibility of philosophical racism in our institutions of "higher learning", while their historical-moral consciousness cries out for an epistemological break. Boesak's engagement with the spiritual foundations of Black liberation philosophy-theology, no doubt, represents an important step in that direction.

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