

On being African and Reformed? Towards an African Reformed theology enthused by an interlocution of those on the margins of society

Author:

 Rothney S. Tshaka¹
Affiliation:
¹Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, University of South Africa, South Africa

Correspondence to:

Rothney S. Tshaka

Email:

tshakrs@unisa.ac.za

Postal address:

 Samuel Pauw Building,
Room 4–35, Preller Street,
Muckleneuk, Pretoria 0003,
South Africa

Dates:

Received: 12 Sept. 2013

Accepted: 22 Feb. 2014

Published: 17 June 2014

How to cite this article:

 Tshaka, R.S., 2014, 'On being African and Reformed? Towards an African Reformed theology enthused by an interlocution of those on the margins of society', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1), Art. #2070, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2070>
Copyright:

© 2014. The Authors.

Licensee: AOSIS

OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This article was first given as an inaugural lecture. As such, it sets out a particular agenda for the researcher's interest. Here, the notions of being African and Reformed are interrogated. The research notes that these notions are rarely used in the same vein. It is admitted that notions tend to pick up different meanings as they evolve, so these notions are especially seen in that light. The theological hegemony, which in the South African academic circles had become enveloped in the Reformed identity, is here forced to critically consider Africanness. This is considered significant, especially in a context where the Christian faith is seen to be flourishing in the global South. The article challenges attempts at explaining what Africanness mean as a front to perpetuate a status quo that from its inception never thought much of Africa and or Africanness. The author argues that the African Reformed Christian must acknowledge its status as a partial outsider in Reformed theological discourses.

Introduction

For quite some time now, we have been fiddling deliberately with the notions of being African and Reformed in our theological reflections (Tshaka 2007).¹ Whilst fiddling with these two notions seems *au fait* in some instances,² this exercise seem to have elicited irritation in some circles, particularly within South Africa. In most cases, this irritation is apparent in the questions that at a face level are asked, under the pretence of wanting to better understand the underlying issues.

At this questioning, the notions relating to Africa and or Africanness are to be explained, especially when used alongside a notion such as Reformed. It is particularly interesting to note that when these notions – African and Reformed – are used in the same sentence it is not expected of the notion Reformed to be explained as well. One gets a sense that the notion Reformed or Reformedness is understood and therefore, unlike the notion African or Africanness, stands in no need of explication. In the words of Beverly Tatum (1997) when referring to whiteness, the notion Reformed seem to take the position of being the unexamined norm and therefore does not need clarification.

Another matter that follows very closely in a conversation as the one suggested here, is an explanation relating to the question of interlocution. It then becomes significant for someone who enters into a debate on being African and Reformed, to consider the conversational partners with whom one is having this conversation. We admit that further questions are significant. Questions such as what is meant when reference is made to those on the margins of society, and so forth.

All these, and perhaps many others, are relevant concerns and questions which, in my view, form the prologue to a debate that still remains very relevant in present day South Africa. The question of interlocution refers to nothing other than the proverbial preferential option for the poor. With this we argue that it is the place of critical theologies to align themselves unapologetically with those on the margins of society. Hopkins (2002) puts this succinctly, when he argues that:

the preferential option for the poor serves as a spiritual calling to redefine our humanity based not on our individual possessions but on serving people who struggle to attain basic material and spiritual possessions. (p. 54)

1. Our preference to speak of an African theology and not Black theology is informed by our assumption that the notion of Black theology in South Africa does not significantly capture the notion of African culture and worldviews. This point is made clear for us within Reformed circles by Alan Boesak, especially in his black and Reformed contribution, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, liberation and the Calvinist tradition* (1984). It is furthermore our contention that the notion of culture and African worldviews was always perceived negatively, also within black theological circles of the mainline church tradition. This view is illustrated especially within the church order of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC), a portion of which joined to establish the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) in 1994. One must focus especially also on decisions and teachings of the DRC, as they relate to the African and the DRC's patronising attitude towards the African person and his or her worldviews. For a thorough and detailed exposition of these attitudes, see J.H.P. Serfontein's *Apartheid change and the NG Kerk* (1982).

2. Maluleke has written has written a powerful contribution to this debate, *Of Africanised bees and African Churches: Ten theses on African Christianity*, and I will touch on some elements later on in this article. In a way, the indirect insistence that Christianity in Africa cannot continue to exist like it did during its immediate colonial past is justified and informed by the fact that Christianity is flourishing in the global South. Sanneh and Carpenter have captured this reality aptly in *The changing face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the world* (2005).

Read online:


Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

With this, Hopkins is clearly underlying the fact that although the middle class partly loses its organic credibility when escaping the masses, its conscience does not allow it to completely forget the challenges that are faced by the common masses. Therefore, it cannot be argued that this class cannot speak on behalf of the masses, although this talk must take the organic credibility rule seriously.

It is our hope that we will address these concerns and questions, perhaps not exhaustively in this article, but as we set out to continue to do research on this subject which we have elected to start a conversation on as we accept the honour of Professor of Systematic Theology and Theological Ethics at this august institution.

In what follows, we shall consider the significance of engaging the notions of being African and Reformed. We shall take care to lay out the continued relevance of an academic trajectory, which has been controversial in many instances. In a context where questions are asked about the continued relevance of theology as an academic discipline to be taught at universities,³ we elect instead to speak of a theological reflection that takes its African heritage very seriously and rebuffs insinuations that taking seriously the lived experiences of the poor, who mostly happen to be black and African, is not proper theology. In a direct way, we argue that the envisioned interlocution is one that comes from below and is embodied in the most vulnerable of society.⁴

Continuing a conversation on being African and Reformed?

The Reformed faith⁵, to which we have made reference in this conversation, is part of a theological tradition that has

3.The fact that universities across the globe seem to be duty bound to account for funding that they receive from governments of their countries places significant pressure on the humanities, of which theology as an academic discipline remains part of. It is this very same pressure that is instilling a culture of publishing or perishes in academics. The consequences in our view are dire. Lately, the humanities seem to have fallen prey to this clarion call. The consultation attitude seem to have replaced deep learning, which usually brought with it better ways of dealing with the challenges faced by humanity. For a detailed exposition of this challenges posed by the so called business model in academia, Mamdani's *Scholars in the marketplace: The dilemmas of neo-liberal Reform at Makerere University, 1989–2005* (2007).

4.Taking our cue from Black theology of liberation by the vulnerable and the marginal in society, we refer to those black peoples of African descent whose largest displacement and forced migration happened around the year 1441 when they were given as a gift to Prince Henry of the Christian country of Portugal. This is the initial context if we are to deal with this subject in a proper perspective. The modern context of globalisation and capitalism must be understood in view of this initial displacement. It is the argument of this article that the current socio-economic, cultural and political challenges are as a direct result of the action first engineered in the 1400s. Thus, the nervous condition that has been created by the initial greed and exploitation on the African continent cannot and must not be seen as a singular event unrelated to the original large displacement and exploitation of African people. For a more detailed discussion on this issue, see D.N. Hopkins and E.P. Antonio's *The Cambridge companion to Black Theology* (2012:4ff.) and W.J. Jennings's *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race* (2010).

5.The notion Reformed, in brief, refers to the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 in the university town of Wittenberg, in the German principality of Saxony. Bard Thompson is also correct to assert that Europe began the 16th century Catholic, but left it part Catholic, part Protestant, with a variety of Evangelical parties competing with each other over the question of the truth. He is correct to record that Europe opened that century with a capitalism, which was to prove different towards the end of that century (Thompson 1996:371). It is perhaps significant to point out here that over the years, there have been various approaches to the notion of the Reformation. There are therefore those that locate it within the time of Luther's personal challenges with Roman Catholicism and those invariably refer to the counter-Reformation, which in a way tended to dispute the claims of Luther and located the real challenge in Luther's personality. A recent approach, in which we are personally interested, is an approach that views the Reformation not as a single unified movement to which a second movement in the counter-reformation, as already noted, responded to, but the Reformation as a complex series of interdependent religious, social and political movements (Lossky et al. 2002:967). Having pointed this out, it must not be forgotten however, that the main emphases

contributed immensely to the many struggles that we are faced with locally and globally. When telling the story of the Reformed faith, some have referred to the Reformed faith tradition as a tale of many stories (Smit 2007:27). These many stories have been no less prevalent within our own South African context. Our yearning to entertain Reformed theology here is simply informed by the fact that it has been this theological trajectory which has become synonymous with academic theology in South Africa.⁶ The debates of the pre-democratic South Africa of what constituted 'pure theology' can also not be understood apart from a milieu that arrogantly insisted that proper theology is one that claim the centrality of the Word of God and eschews the socio-economic and cultural realities which exist within the sphere of that claim. History, it was discovered by those who engaged in alternatives hermeneutics, was and remains important. West (1999) put this tersely when he asserts:

while professional philosophers lingered under the spell of the grand Quine-Goodman-sellers breakthroughs, and academic theologians nested in Barthian cocoons or emulated logical positivists and linguistic analysis, liberation theologians discovered history. (p. 366)

West (1999) continues to maintain:

this discovery did not consist of systematic reflections on historicity, which has been long a priority of German trained theologians and Heideggerian influenced philosophers, but rather linking historical processes in society to political praxis. (p. 366)

It is this that separates the Occidental theologian and philosopher from the African theologian and philosopher; nonetheless, this African scholar remains at pains to have to explain his actions and interest to the hegemonies that be.

It seems therefore that a tendency of needing to explain to theological hegemonies arises every time when the socio-economic, cultural and political aspects are mentioned as significant issues that are very relevant to theological reflection. For the most part, at least during the time of colonialism and legal apartheid, dominant theological hegemonies had intentionally ignored these facets, especially when applied to those who were not considered truly human. The interlocution of these theological hegemonies was with those steeped in a methodology known unto them only.

(Footnote 5 continues ...)

of Reformed teaching has been on the sovereignty and authority of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ as the divine saviour, and the centrality of Scripture (Lossky et al. 2002:967). That the ecclesial tradition was nonetheless also used to justify its inherent capitalist inclinations is beyond doubt, as seen especially within the writing of Max Weber (Schluchter 1996:275ff.). The notion Reformed is therefore tainted by its inherent capitalism, which became imperialist when it was applied to Africa and this view is corroborated poignantly by none other but Boesak, who speaks of the first response of the *Khoi* people of the Cape to this new faith and were soon to discover that it is a faith with many contradictions and justifies the exploitation of difference (Boesak 1998:416).

6.The inference to academic theology here stems from the fact that theology was, and is still offered as an academic discipline in many universities in South Africa. In fact, before the dawn of a democratic South Africa, one sees a number of Faculties of Theology operating in South African universities. In most of these institutions, one is faced with strong Reformed theological centres. Many are also not aware of the Reformed dominance in academia. This became clear to me recently when I was invited by members of the Practical Theology discipline in the department I am heading.

It was the African philosopher Sophie Oluwole (1991:i) who argued that 'every literary convention has some unwritten norms which generally serve as guides to thinkers and authors working under its influence'. She continued to argue that 'a literary tradition evolves when such conventions become established principles of style, methodology and procedures of what is to be regarded as ideal modes of thought within particular societies' (Oluwole 1991:1). Perhaps one ought to add the significance of interlocution here as well. Failing to understand this, one is left in a perpetual state of always wanting to prove to others that what one is in fact engaged in is proper, albeit applied differently.

Others have already bemoaned a methodological restlessness which had become apparent as a result of insisting that using Marxist analytical tools to analyse society alongside Scripture, as Black Liberation theology tended to do, was in fact to engage in serious theological reflection (Maluleke 2004:182). Questions that beg explanation for the notion of Africa and or Africanness to be explained are encouraging in as far as they help the narrator to make his or her point clear, but also to expose the cynicism behind the question.

That we use the designation African and Reformed in this conversation is not haphazard, but intentional. W.E.B. du Bois speaks about the psychological condition from which African-Americans are suffering from. In his epic book, titled *The souls of black folk*, Du Bois (1903) writes:

the negro [*sic*] is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him [*sic*] no true self consciousness, but only lets him [*sic*] see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 66)

In a manner similar to the challenge experienced by Du Bois in reflecting on his position as an African American, so we believe that the Reformed Christian of African descent has to think in this dichotomy, especially if he or she is to engage seriously with his or her own particularity.

For this scholar to reflect in this manner, a conceited effort is made to address amongst other things, the internal conflict which is brought about by this reconstructed personality. The African Reformed scholar is indeed different than his or her European counterpart. He or she insists on this identity because it speaks to a flight from the black or African self, the catalyst of which was the interruption that occurred as a result of colonialism and the exploitation of Africa and her people. Commenting on the crisis of black intellectual in his United States context, Cornel West is quick to remind us of a deep distrust and suspicion of the black community towards black intellectuals. West (1999) explains:

this distrust and suspicion stem not simply from the usual arrogant and haughty disposition of intellectuals towards ordinary folk, but, more important, from the widespread refusal of Black intellectuals to remain, in some visible way, organically linked with Afro-American cultural life. (p. 305)

For West (1999:305), this lack of being organically linked with African cultural life is seen in the abandonment of black institutions – *if there are any*, and the preoccupation with Euro-American intellectual products, which are sometimes perceived by black communities as efforts to escape the negative stigma of blackness as symptoms of self hatred. It is to this that we refer to as the flight from the black self (Tshaka 2009:156–164, 2010:124–125). West (1999) warns:

for black intellectuals this search *to be acceptable* requires immersing oneself in and addressing oneself to the very culture and society that degrade and devalue the black community from whence one comes. (p. 305)

West (1999:305) indicates that at best, this puts black intellectuals into one of two camps; the successful ones and the unsuccessful ones. It is the successful ones, he argues, who becomes distant (and usually condescending toward) the black community and the unsuccessful ones are the ones who becomes disdainful of the white intellectual world. Yet both camps remains marginal to the black community, he asserts. The sentiments shared here by West are echoed by Carter Woodson in his classic work, titled *The mis-education of the Negro* (2008).

In this conversation, we wish to locate the reasons for this apparent migration from the African or black self and argue that the pathological self-hate of black people is a direct result of European hubris, of which the Reformed faith was and remains a significant element of. Commenting on the icons of the Occidental tradition, the Eritrean scholar Tsenay Serequeberhan (2007) asserts:

Eurocentrism is not simply a tradition that places Europe as a universal cultural ideal embodied in what is called the West, but rather a pervasive condition of thought. It is universal because it affects both Europeans and non-Europeans, despite the specific questions and situations each might address. (p. 30)

Serequeberhan was making these remarks as a response to the Continental philosopher Robert Bernasconi⁷, who had invited Continental philosophers to ponder the question what it would mean to do Continental philosophy in the light of African philosophy. He reveals that in his attempt at reading the great thinkers of the Occident, he could only read them critically or sympathetically as a Westernised African; hence, a partial outsider (Serequeberhan 2007:xv).⁸ This sentiment comes very close to the one expressed by Du Bois. In fact, he admits to a kind of Du Boisian double consciousness already mentioned in this article. This is no less different from African Reformed scholars wishing to engage with Occidental Christian scholars, yet having the interest of those who are considered to be of the margins at heart.

7. Robert Bernasconi is professor of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University in the United States of America (USA). He is a boffin on Martin Heidegger and Emanuel Levinas and is especially known for his works on race. For more on Bernasconi's work, Cf. R. Bernasconi (1985).

8. See also a similar sentiment shared by Kwame Nkrumah later in this article.

To suggest a conversation on the subject of being African and Reformed or to insist on the continued relevance of African philosophy, as Serequeberhan has done, seem to somehow invariably elude a response from those who continue to hold uncritically that the Occidental tradition need not explain itself. In other words, those within the Occidental tradition listen to our suggestions in the examples of what Paulo Freire calls a bad parent patronising a child: *Oh yes, lets listen to what little John can tell us* (Cone & Wilmore 1993:405).

So what is this intellectual who is perceived to be in a permanent state of infancy to do then? The Du Boisian double consciousness seem unavoidable, given that in the wisdom of Gabriel Setiloane, the African is bewitched by this Christian (and in our case Reformed) faith that he or she simply has to devise a way to live with these two significant aspects of his or her existence (Maluleke 2007:503–527).

Africanness and its relationship to Reformedness

The notions of being African and Reformed are perceived as problematic, given the history of how this faith came to impact itself on South African soil. The Dutch Calvinists, who were later followed by the French Huguenots, and later still by the Scottish Presbyterians and Swiss Missionaries, transported the Reformed ecclesial tradition to South Africa more than three hundred years ago from Europe (Boesak 1998:416). Boesak reminds us that that when the Khoi people of the Cape were confronted for the first time with Christianity, it was the Reformed expression of it that they experienced. It also soon became clear that upon entry into this faith, they discovered the contradictions that characterised it (Boesak 1998:416). Contrary to Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism, this faith trajectory has always prided itself in the authorship of its confessions as expressions of what it believes at given times in the history of its evolution.⁹ The confessing of the faith here is perceived to be totally different to the act of simply reciting confessions. In fact, the confessional basis that is insisted upon here calls for the embodying of that which is being confessed.

It is for this reason that the confessional theology of the Reformed tradition takes its particular situation seriously in its reflection. The particular context of confessional theology in South Africa is its African context and reality.¹⁰ Whilst we must never lose sight of the fact that confessional theology was immensely influenced by the fathers of the

9. For a complete and detailed explication of the significance of confessions, as well as how the interpretation of this relates and differs from Lutheranism, see Barth (2005:1ff).

10. In the summer of 1968 Barth received a letter from a writer from Singapore who was unknown to him. The writer was Kosuke Koyama, who had translated *The Christian Dogmatics* into Japanese. Koyama was a Japanese Missionary and had been involved for some years with the Theological Seminary of Thailand, becoming dean of the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology. He later took over the position of editor of the South East Asia Journal of Theology. Koyama wrote to Barth with a request that he write something about his theology for this journal. At the time, Barth was ailing and permitted his assistant Eberhard Busch to see to this request. Busch compiled some of the issues that Barth was thinking about at the time and Barth endorsed them. However, there are a number of important issues that Barth thought he had to communicate to these Christians. Within the letter, Barth made it clear that 'boring theology' was unacceptable and that it had become time for these Christians to understand that it was now the time that they spoke and that he listened. He continued to make it clear that theology had to be conducted with a degree of humour, and more importantly, that they had to understand that the God that they were talking about was also his God. Barth (1984:555) made it clear that they should not repeat what he said in a different context, but should appropriate that which will be relevant in their context.

Reformed faith tradition, it nevertheless must deal with its particular African context and realities. What is this African context and realities that this faith must take seriously if it is to retain its significance and relevance on this continent? Africa is essentially a creation of the West; it is a wounded continent and a land characterised by different worldviews and cultures. At the same time, it is a land that is plagued with conflicts and wars, disease and famine. It has a well documented history of colonialisation and was pillaged and maimed by Western countries for their own leisure. In short, Africa is a land with complexities.

We contend that the Reformed faith and therefore confessional theology, whilst making attempts at challenging the rouge biblical hermeneutics propagated by apartheid theology in the later years of the apartheid South Africa, did virtually nothing to establish an intentional platform for a needed and serious conversation on Africanness and Reformedness. It cannot be denied that the deliberate attempts at establishing this faith in South Africa, without inviting integration between this new faith and African culture, was informed by agendas that did not think Africa had anything to contribute to this debate. In fact, it was thought that it is more worthwhile to lose one's identity in an attempt to be welcomed into this faith. No one has made this point more poignant than Boesak (1998:416), who refers to the experience of the Khoi people of the Cape.

Quite often, the question is asked what the person has in mind when calling for the Africanisation of the Reformed church in Africa. Maluleke (2010) believes that the Africanness question in theological discourse:

is informed either by the assumption that Christianity (or in our case, the Reformed faith) is universal or that Africanisation can only mean a lowering of universal Christian standards in order to fit in with some local African standards. (p. 372)

Be that as it may, we need to admit with Kwame Nkrumah that the meeting of African ways of life with the rest of the world had placed Africa and its people on a path of no return to the rock whence they were hewed from. Yet this admission must not prevent us from seeing how in a sophisticatedly coached language, Africa is perceived in the very same manner that it was during colonialism.

Nkrumah (1967) writes quite poignantly, that:

the defeat of colonialism and even neo-colonialism will not result in the automatic disappearance of the imported patterns of thought and social organisation. For those patterns have taken root, and are in varying degree sociological features of our contemporary society. Nor will a simple return to the communalistic society of ancient Africa offer a solution either. To advocate a return, as it were, to the rock from which we were hewn is a charming thought but we are faced with contemporary problems, which have arisen from political subjugation, economic exploitation etc. (n.p.)

We have argued elsewhere that this very important acknowledgement is not to be confused with sentiments

held by some that Africa must forever remain grateful to the West for having brought the Christian faith to it, even though they exploited the continent in exchange (Tshaka 2009:1–16). In fact, Nkrumah was very serious about the need for an African consciousness. About the African conscious colonial student Nkrumah (1966) indicates:

a colonial student does not by origin belong to the intellectual history in which the university philosophers are such impressive landmarks. The colonial student can be so seduced by these attempts to give philosophical account of the universe, that he [*sic*] surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental societal fact that he is a colonial subject. (p. 2)

One can therefore understand why it is always expected that in mentioning the concepts 'Africa' and 'African', more still needs to be said. Yet it is not recognised by the very people who insist on further clarity that this so-called search for more clarity is as a result of some notions that are deemed normative, whilst others are not. It is for this reason that uneasiness becomes apparent when it is insisted on a space for dialogue between these phenomena, which remains a tangible reality at least to the African Christian.

Having pointed to these challenges, at the end of the day it remains the responsibility of the Black African Reformed Christian to see to it that the Africanness in theological deliberations does not only remain an unimportant appendix. The attempt to take it seriously need to find expression, particularly also in curricula (Tshaka 2009:1–16). African and Reformed theology need to acknowledge a particular history that in essence contributed towards a flight from the black self. The repercussions of this have been devastating, as evidenced by the Afrophobic attacks aimed at Africans north of the Limpopo from River (Tshaka 2010:124–135).

Towards a space for debating Africanness and its relationship to Reformedness

Statistics increasingly indicate that Christianity is gravitating towards the global South (Bediako 2008:107). Reformed theology in South Africa has become notorious for insisting on academic standards. In essence, like so many other mainline church traditions, Reformed theology had imposed its methodologies indiscriminately, without seeking ways of learning from the African situation. We have already alluded to this attitude in passing in this article. Yet the fact that there is much talk about Christianity changing its face, does leave some with the impression that perhaps there is much that can be learned from the African and his or her situation.

Academic theology, which has become a synonym for Reformed theology in South Africa, has always had a judgemental attitude towards those theologies that were not enmeshed with rigorous method. This attitude, argues Jennings (2010), can be traced to the initial appearance of Christianity in Africa. Jennings contends that from the beginning of the age of discovery, Europeans perceived Africans as having the most bestial, debased forms of religious practice. He continues to argue that 'the designation of native

religious practices as superstition rather than religion became an important discursive practice within this stratagem of denial' (Jennings 2010:134). Because of this denial, it then became possible for the Occidental tradition and people to deal with Africans and their beliefs as they wished. It was therefore self-evident why an opportunity was never seen for debating being African with being Reformed.

An African Reformed theology is one that recognises our inter connectivity. Yet it asks for more than that. It realises the need to enter into a conversation with the majority in a manner that is not arrogant. It realises that the issues that are important to the black African communities of the Reformed faith can only be dealt with when the very members of these communities belligerently insist that they be considered important conversational partners in any Reformed theological discourse.

The problem of race in contemporary theological discourses

W.E.B du Bois made his exit from history leaving a stark challenge. Du Bois (1903) argued that:

the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men [*sic*] in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. (p. 165)

It would seem to Du Bois that the issue of race remained one of the subjects that history was not able to solve. This is true because at present, we are still wrestling with the very subject. Race was important subject for Du Bois, who laboured all his life to illustrate the point that black people are indeed *bone fide* human beings and therefore must have the rights bequeathed to full citizenry in any society.

It is our contention that this very subject must be approached with all seriousness, particularly within the changed and changing context of present day South Africa. Reformed Christians of African descent have for a long time now engaged in a process of explaining to outsiders what is meant when they insist on taking the particular situation of Africans seriously in theological reflection. The Reformed church tradition in this country, although bendable, has been too careful and vague in criticising the racial exploitation of Africans on the continent. We have made reference to the fact that the Reformed church tradition was in fact flexible in as far as those who disagreed with the Afrikaner version of Calvinism were able to challenge a theological and biblical sanction of apartheid by appealing to the very same tradition. We have also seen, however, that this was to be expected, given the ideological origins of this church tradition.

The Belhar Confession of the URCSA¹¹ remains one of the rare challenges to the race issue in South Africa today.

11. The Belhar Confession is a confessional document that was brought about to repudiate the theological and biblical justification of apartheid. It appeared in draft form in 1986. Subsequent to this confessional document, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church, considered the Reformed church for Coloured people, merged with the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa, considered the Reformed church for those classified as Black in South Africa. Another Reformed church for Indian people is called the Reformed Church in Africa. The name of the newly merged church is the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. For a detailed exposition of the theological justification of apartheid and therefore, the justification for churches established along racial lines also within the Reformed church tradition see, G. Cronje (1947:147) and Moodie (1975).

However it is also clear that this confession was not allowed to speak directly to the racial exploitation of Africans. This point is clearly illustrated in the accompanying letter to the Belhar Confession of the URCSA. This accompanying letter, which in my view negates the very issues confessed in Belhar, served the singular liberal purpose of evading and soft padding the real issue, which is that of racism and racial exploitation.

The letter does not take into account the years of racial teachings and perceptions. In fact, it cannot even be compared with the many DRC discussion documents, which in a paternalistic manner express the relationship of the DRC with Africans, and to which this confession indirectly responds to. One only has to read the *Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S en die Naturelle Vraagstuk* (s.a.) and many other documents to see how the African other has been created and why his or her exploitation was justified. Our interest in an African Reformed theology is one that is of the view that much still has to be done by Africans themselves to avoid our prevailing self-destruction.

In his crisis of the Negro intellectual, Harold Cruse (2005:364) raise the question of the perpetual *infantilisation* of the African, and argues that 'the African foster child in the American racial equation must grow to manhood, break the psychological umbilical ties to intellectual paternalism'. If we agree that there seem to be particular challenges that gang up more so on African people, then it makes no sense to insist that these challenges are collective. The suggestion is intentionally not meant to be general, but specific to African Reformed Christians. There is no doubt that other Christians have challenges, we are here more concerned with the volume of these challenges and their relationship, especially with African Reformed Christians. The flight from the black self, which is manifested in the pathological self hate of black people, is an experience that is uniquely African and does not need collective address.

Given that Africans are perceived as perpetual children, it is not expected that they can articulate their challenges. They are not seen to be able to deal with their own challenges and problems by themselves. The *Afrophobia* tensions between Africans and their brothers and sisters from other parts of the continent are a serious issue that is exacerbated by the current political and economic nervous condition, which is partly fuelled by our colonial and apartheid past. The service delivery protests that has characterised present day South Africa is a serious matter that seems to affect mostly darker people of our communities. These and many more other issues are the very issues which this theological reflection must take up seriously.

Conclusion

The race question, which undoubtedly includes issues of culture and African worldviews, is therefore a significant aspect in our drive to halt the flight from the black self. The issue of race is deeply entrenched in the psyche of South

Africa. This is evidenced by the literature, which pointed to both the establishment of racist tendencies in South Africa and the means undertaken to safeguard that particular racism. It is therefore not by chance that challenges, which are in some instances preventable, are the same challenges that contribute to the destruction of Africans. They are numerous; diseases, poverty, exploitation, violence and so forth, are all issues that seem to take on a different form when examined in African contexts and the flight from the black self has contributed in part to these challenges.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my lovely wife and partner (Mma Tshaka) for her continued support. I also thank God for our wonderful children whose love sustains me in my journey of scholarship.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

References

- Barth, K., 1984, *Offene Briefe: 1945–1968*, Theologischer Verlag, Zürich.
- Barth, K., 2005, *The theology of the Reformed Confessions*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Bediako, K., 2008, 'Whose religion is Christianity? Reflections on opportunities and challenges in Christian Theological scholarship: The African dimension', in A. Walls & C. Ross (eds.), *Mission in the 21st century: Exploring the five marks of global Mission*, pp. 107–117, Orbis Books, Maryknoll.
- Bernasconia, R., 1985, *The question of language in Heidegger's History of Being*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands.
- Boesak, A., 1984, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, liberation and the Calvinist tradition*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll.
- Boesak, A., 1998, 'Black and Reformed: Contradiction or challenge' in D. McKim (ed.), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, pp. 416–425, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene.
- Cone, J. & Wilmore, G. (eds.), 1993, *Black Theology: A documentary history, 1966–1979*, vol. 1, Orbis Books, Maryknoll.
- Cronje, G. (ed.), 1947, *Regverdige rasse-apartheid*, CSV Maatskapy van Suid Afrika, Stellenbosch.
- Cruze, H., 2005, *The Crisis of the Negro intellectual*, New York Review Books, New York.
- Die N.G. Kerk in die O.V.S en die Naturelle Vraagstuk*, s.a., Nasionale Pers Bpk, Bloemfontein.
- Du Bois, W.E.B., 1903, *The souls of black folk*, McClurg Publishing, Chicago.
- Jennings, W.J., 2010, *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Hopkins, D.N., 2002, *Heart and head: Black Theology, past, present and future*, Pelgrave, New York. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780312299187>
- Hopkins, D.N. & Antonio, E.P. (eds.), 2012, *The Cambridge companion to Black Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521879866>
- Lossky, N., Bonino, J.M., Pobee, J., Stransky, T.F., Wainwright, G. & Webb, P. (eds.), 2002, *Dictionary of ecumenical movement*, 2nd edn., WCC Publications, Geneva.
- Maluleke, T.S., 2004, 'African Christianity as African Religion: Beyond the contextualization paradigm', in E. Conradie (ed.), *African Christian theologies in transformation*, pp. 181–191, EISA, Stellenbosch.
- Maluleke, T.S., 2007, 'Postcolonial mission: Oxymoron or new paradigm', *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95(4), 503–527.
- Maluleke, T.S., 2010, 'Of Africanised bees and African churches: Ten theses on African Christianity' *Missionalia* 38(3), 369–379.
- Mamdani, M., 2007, *Scholars in the marketplace: The dilemmas of neo-liberal reform at Makerere University, 1989–2005*, CODESRIA, Dakar.
- Moodie, T., 1975, *The rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, apartheid and Afrikaner civil religion*, University of California Press, Los Angeles.
- Nkrumah, K., 1966, *Consciencism: Philosophy and ideology for decolonization and development with particular reference to the African revolution*, Heinemann Educational Books, London.



- Nkrumah, K., 1967, *African socialism revisited*, Peace and Socialism Publishers, Prague.
- Sanneh, L. & Carpenter, J. (eds.), 2005, *The changing face of Christianity: Africa, the West and the world*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/0195177282.001.0001>
- Serequeberhan, T., 2007, *Contested memory: The icons of the occidental tradition*, Africa World Press Inc., Asmara.
- Serfontein, J.H.P., 1982, *Apartheid, change and the NG Kerk*, Taurus Publishers, Pretoria.
- Schluchter, W., 1996, *Paradoxes of modernity: Culture and conduct in the theory of Max Weber*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Smit, D.J., 2007, 'Reformed faith, justice and the struggle against apartheid', in *Essays in Public Theology: Collected Essays 1*, pp. 27–40, SUN Press, Stellenbosch
- Tatum, B.D., 1997, *"Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?" and other conversations about race*, Basic Books, New York.
- Thompson, B., 1996, *Humanists and reformers: A history of the Renaissance and Reformation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Tshaka, R.S., 2007, 'African you are on your own! The need for African Reformed Christians to seriously engage their Africanity in their Reformed Theological Reflections', *Scriptura* 96(3), 533–548.
- Tshaka, R.S., 2009, 'Academic theology as the yardstick of being reformed in South Africa today: An appreciative critique of Calvin on the occasion of his 500th birthday', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae* XXXV, 1–16.
- Tshaka, R.S., 2010, 'Do our theological methodologies help us to deal with situations of violence in black communities, specifically Afrophobia', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 138, 124–135.
- Oluwole, S., 1992, *Witchcraft, reincarnation and the God-Head: Issues in African philosophy*, Excel Publishers, Lagos.
- West, C., 1999, *The Cornel West reader*, Civitas Books, New York.
- Woodson, C.G., 2008, *The mis-education of the Negro*, Classic House Books, New York.

