

# APPENDIX: A HARARE MESSAGE OF BLACK LUTHERANS

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## I. An Introductory Overview

**W**e, African and African-American theologians and church leaders of the Lutheran family of churches, have been holding a Conference of International Black Lutherans (CIBL) at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, from September 4–12, 1986, to explore what it means for us to be both black and Lutheran, and to share our experiences of this doubly rich heritage. The participants comprised of Lutheran pastors, teachers, students, church officials, and bishops from the Lutheran churches in Africa and North America.

The choice of Harare as the venue of this conference was not entirely fortuitous. Zimbabwe has enormous significance for us as one of the Front-line states which border on South Africa, a country which symbolizes the denial of human rights and dignity to the people of color, especially of the African ancestry. Therefore, our conference, held in Harare at the heels and in the shadow of the eighth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which focused on the economic problems between the North and South, and between the rich and poor countries, was intended to call the world's attention to South Africa as the embodiment of the plight and oppression of the people of color as well as of the hope of victory for blacks in their struggle to break the chains that hold them in bondage on the global level.

The conference brought together 39 African and African-American Lutherans to dialog with one another and to reflect together on the theme: "The Lutheran Heritage and the Black Experience in Africa and North America." Under the rubric of this general theme, a number of lectures were read on the topics: "Justification by Faith and Its Social Implications," "The Two Kingdoms Doctrine and Its Continuing Relevance," "The Theology of the Cross," "The Priesthood of All Believers," "Apartheid and

Racism," "Ecumenical Issues," "Relationships to Ideologies and Non-Christian Religions," "Liberation Theologies," "Theological Education and Preparation for Ministry," "Worship and Theology in the Black Context," and "Daily Bible Studies." These lectures were intended to stimulate discussions and thereby help us to speak to one another and to share our experiences as blacks and as Lutherans. In addition, these lectures were intended to help us achieve the following objectives:

- (a) to dialog about our African and African-American experience, our identity, our relationships and mission as blacks and Lutherans;
- (b) to develop our God-given potential for the continued passing on of our historical legacy through research, production, and publication of materials for theological education;
- (c) to posit common solutions and to create new theological insights based on the black experience in order to enrich the Lutheran church in particular and the church catholic in general.

As we wrestled with our theme for the conference and what it means for us to be both black and Lutheran, we were struck by the fact that there was a general consensus that the Lutheran heritage and its doctrinal formulations continues to be a resource for us in our present situation. This, notwithstanding, we could not, however, help but sense that the manner in which this heritage has been appropriated by Lutherans in different historical contexts leaves much to be desired. In consequence, Lutherans have not been in the forefront of human struggles for sociopolitical and economic liberation. Our awareness of the contradictions between theory and praxis in Lutheranism with its detrimental consequences for black Lutherans has made us appreciate all the more the significance of our being both black and Lutheran, a significance that we would like to give a theological affirmation and interpretation, namely that:

- (a) We are irrevocably black by divine act and therefore are a gift of God to the Church;
- (b) We are Christians by miraculous divine intervention and through the work of the Holy Spirit;
- (c) We are Lutherans by paradoxical circumstances reflecting the sinful human condition and the sin of denominationalism.

This twofold heritage of being both black and Lutheran should be understood as God's special gift to enrich the church. It challenges the Lutheran church to become more open to the excluded experiences and theological insights of its black constituents, so that the Lutheran portrayal of God's

presence in and among humanity might yet become inclusive of all of human experience.

It is out of our appreciation of this divine gift of our twofold and rich heritage that we joyfully affirm our commitment to the continuing reformation of the church for the purpose of the salvation of humanity in all its spiritual and physical aspects, and for the transformation of our world and interpersonal relationships through our understanding and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, the writings of Martin Luther, the Confessions, and our black heritage.

## II. A Black Critique of the Lutheran Heritage

As black Lutherans of Africa and North America, we both affirm and claim as our own the essence of the Lutheran heritage, which we understand to be the faithful confession, in every age, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. We, however, wish to assert unequivocally that for Lutherans and Lutheranism to be faithful in the contemporary confession of Christ as Lord and Savior, the Christian faith must be understood, interpreted, and lived out in a theologically wholistic, ethnically inclusive, and culturally contextual manner. Therefore, we take issue with any and all expressions of Lutheranism which are less than faithful to its essence, the gospel. As such, we respectfully and charitably raise several issues with those of our European-American Lutheran sisters and brothers in Christ who, in our day, understand, interpret, and live out the Christian faith in theologically dichotomous, ethnically exclusive, and culturally monolithic, if not imperialistic, fashion. In so doing, we declare our commitment to join with them in the common struggle to be faithful to the gospel.

Specifically we take issue with that European-American understanding of justification that affirms and maintains a radical dichotomy between God's activity of justification and sanctification. As black Lutherans, we agree that the confession of Christ has profound significance for humanity in terms of God's love and unconditional acceptance of the repentant sinner in Christ and God's promise of eternal life. Yet we believe that the confession of Christ also extends to an understanding of the transformation (sanctification) of the believer which is rooted in the converting reality of justification. Hence, while acknowledging that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners (*simul justus et peccator*), we also assert unequivocally that there is an inextricable link and relationship between who one is, namely a baptized and adopted child of God, and what one does, namely living and acting in conformity to the will of God. Given our black experience, characterized by racial oppression and which currently assumes

the forms of apartheid, discrimination, and lingering effects of Western colonialism and cultural imperialism, and our understanding of the biblical witness, we declare that God is concerned about the whole of life, and that means that justification and justice must never be separated. For God's will for humanity is justice. In consequence, those who have God's mercy in Christ are called to seek after, work for, and engage themselves in those activities that will bring about justice to those who are oppressed. In the final analysis justification has to do with the right relationships, namely the reconciliation between God and alienated human beings, and between human beings themselves. In this regard, the message of the epistle of James with its emphasis upon the connection between faith and good works embodies an understanding of discipleship which is indispensable to the faithful confession of Christ.

Secondly, we take issue with what we consider to be Lutheranism's misinterpretation and misappropriation of the two kingdoms doctrine. From our perspective, there is an essential theological truth reflected in this formulation which provides the basis for Christian activism in the world. Yet scholars have persuasively pointed out that Lutheran quietism has been grounded in a dualistic interpretation of the two kingdoms doctrine, and we know from black experience that, in the face of racial, colonial, sexist, and class oppression, this tradition of political conservatism and quietism more often than not predominates.

Hence, with exceptions, Lutheranism proclaims the liberating message of the gospel in a way that dichotomizes reality, proclaiming spiritual liberation while ignoring the implications of that liberating message for those suffering under sociopolitical structures of oppression. Theologically we declare that our God is the God of both heaven and earth whose will extends to the totality of reality. Even as we recognize that some Lutherans have misappropriated the doctrine in a manner that has led to the tradition's legacy of quietism, we summon Lutheranism to understand, interpret, and live out the doctrine in accord with the injunctions of Matthew 7:21, Acts 5:29, and James 2:26, so as to faithfully confess Christ.

Thirdly, we take issue with the manner in which some Lutherans have articulated and institutionalized the ministry of the whole people of God (the priesthood of all believers). This theological insight has often been employed, in the life of the church, to give lip service to the calling and the ministry of the whole baptized community. Quite to the contrary, however, it has actually encouraged clericalism by effectively making the sacrament of Baptism a rite, while making the rite of ordination a sacrament. Thus the ministry of the whole people of God is vertically conceived, being

grounded in clerical authority and prerogative. Yet both the biblical witness and our cultural experience confirm the fact that an understanding, interpretation, and embodiment of the ministry of the whole people of God should be horizontally oriented, emphasizing servanthood and communal cooperation in the utilization of God-given gifts for the sake of the gospel. In addition, to faithfully confess Christ with respect to both the whole people of God and the doctrine of justification is to be ethnically inclusive, rather than exclusive, since God's diverse humanity is present among all the baptized people of God.

Finally, we take issue with that European-American understanding of Lutheranism that imposes upon black Lutheranism a culturally monolithic expression of the tradition rather than culturally contextual and diverse expressions of the tradition. We consider to be culturally monolithic that approach to ecumenism which views it from the singular perspective of creedal theology. While valuing an exploration of creedal theology, our cultural experience and the biblical witness require us in our ecumenical contacts with all Christians to raise the issue of ethics or praxis in relationship to the concern for liberation, wholistically understood. We consider to be culturally monolithic that approach to theological education which exclusively emphasizes the Western theological tradition, a tradition that is to be grasped intellectually and mastered. While valuing intellectual reflection, our cultural experience and the biblical witness requires us as regards ministerial formation to insist upon the integration of all theological knowledge with professional skills and personal belief. And we consider to be culturally monolithic forms of worship which, while grounded in a particular culture, are claimed to be universal. While valuing all forms of worship through which God is praised, we are persuaded by the spirit of God and Luther's concern for indigenous worship, that the African and African-American cultures are gifts of God to us. Accordingly we declare our intention to embrace both our Lutheran heritage and our respective cultures in worship, to indigenize worship. Thus, as black Lutherans of Africa and the United States, we intend to commit ourselves to culturally contextualizing the Lutheran heritage we share in common with others.

### **III. Contributions and Gifts of Black Lutherans**

While there is much in the Lutheran heritage and its historical appropriation that deserve to be criticized, there is also much in this heritage which continues to be a resource in our present situation. Not wanting to throw out the baby with the bath water, black Lutherans have gathered in Harare to initiate a critical as well as constructive examination of Lutheran theology

in the light of black experience and our understanding of biblical witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Liberator. This initiative was undertaken in the belief that our unique historical experience which has given rise to a particular appropriation of the biblical and Lutheran heritage has much to offer the church which is at present dominated by a European-American theological and cultural outlook. This we herewith offer for discussion among the whole international family of the Lutheran church.

Out of the myriad of insightful theological concepts that were presented and discussed in the course of this conference, a number of general theological themes and statements may be drawn which point to the fundamental and distinctive theological contributions and innovations that African and African-American Lutherans may make to the Lutheran theological heritage, *inter alia*:

1. Justification by faith points to the intrinsic relationship that exists between faith and deeds, and between who one is, as a forgiven sinner and child of God, and what one does, in relation to one's neighbors and in fulfillment of God's will. But somewhat differently, justification by faith points to the effecting of reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships between God and humans, and between humans themselves who, as forgiven sinners and brothers and sisters in Christ, engage themselves in acts of love toward one another, thereby building up God's world.
  - (a) This black insight enlarges the traditional emphasis on faith almost to the exclusion of good deeds. To the average Christian, traditional Lutheranism has been understood to teach a separation between justification and sanctification, and between Christian righteousness before God (*coram Deo*) and social righteousness before *our* fellows (*coram hominibus*).
  - (b) To overcome this separation, black Lutherans are persuaded that Lutheranism would be greatly enriched if it were to embrace the epistle of James as the epistle of wholistic Christian power rather than an epistle of straw. For this epistle rightly asserts that faith and good deeds belong together, and that faith without works is useless and inauthentic.
2. The two kingdoms doctrine points to the better theological portrayal of God's twofold but mutually interpenetrable governance which, correctly understood, should lead to a healthy Christian activism that leads to the transformation of the world politically, socially, and economically without collapsing into one the realized and future kingdom of God.

3. The theology of the cross points to a methodology which challenges Lutheranism to synthesize our Christian symbols and pragmatic actions beyond mere methodology to become a way of life.
4. Priesthood of all believers points to a fundamental understanding of the nature of Christian ministry, one which is inclusive and emphasizes the servanthood of all the people of God, who must be horizontally oriented and cooperatively serve one another in the utilization of their God-given gifts for the sake of the gospel. In so doing, believers build up Christian community, edify one another, and develop solidarity among themselves. Therefore, this doctrine criticizes and proposes alternatives to the present clericalism and hierarchical church structures in the preoccupation with the ordained ministry.
5. Ecumenism points beyond the Western, European-American ethnocentrism of many Lutheran ecumenical ventures, particularly those that point to a recovery of (or return to) "catholic unity," especially between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and Anglicans. Black Lutherans assert that "catholic unity" is more than consensus on the Western creedal theology. We consider such a European-American understanding nothing but a culturally monolithic expression of the Western catholic tradition which is pursued at the expense of an authentic ecumenism which is culturally, ethnically, and contextually diverse in its expressions of the Christian faith. We commit ourselves to ecumenism that is more inclusive and culturally contextualized; it is a Christian unity whose vision is diverse and broad enough to include African and African-Americans and similar non-European cultural expressions of Christian faith. Our findings thus present a new vision of ecumenism.
6. Theological education points to a contextualization of the Lutheran curriculum so that we might produce leaders with a clearer proclamation of the gospel and more relevant ministry among black Lutherans.
7. Worship points to a contextualization of the liturgy as the work of the people. This must be one with and inseparable from the brothers and sisters around the world who struggle for liberation in a variety of ways.

We have initiated at this conference answers to the critical question of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Who do you [black Lutherans] say that I am?" We have begun the task of answering this question by rescuing theology from the hands of European-American Lutherans, from the shelves of the seminaries and universities and from arrogant absolutism, thereby allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our path toward wholeness.

Faith in Christ, active in love and justice, is the cure, the healing balm from Gilead.