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Blackness and the God of the Oppressed

Quo Vadis Technology?

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Abstract

The state of blackness oscillates between two speculative positions: The first puts forward the irrelevance of race in the modern technological period, a view often coming from those who are colour blind and "optimistic" futurists. The second postulates the need to reaffirm the condition of blackness in a racist and capitalistic production-driven society. The article argues that in whatever direction technology is going, perhaps through its God complex, idolatry, and the enormous funding behind artificial intelligence, technology and so on, blackness in the age of technology is still an insignia toward humanization and liberation. The eschatological dystopia often portrayed in science fiction is, in fact, here and now; therefore, we must pause and ask if modern technology is a friend, a foe, or just a distraction leading us into the abyss of decay, hopelessness, and landlessness. Political blackness should continue guiding our steps and reality in a world that fails to acknowledge the depths of its racism.

Keywords

blackness, Black theology, technology, God of the oppressed

Modern technology is Western in nature, just as white racism is part of the modern enterprise. Thus, technology is not neutral, and blackness is not coincidental. In 2001, South African musician Suthukazi Arosi released a song entitled "Abelungu Abamnyama" (whites who are Black). The song further asserts, "*bayakhala abokhokho bethu lapho balalekhona, liyakhula isiko labelungu, labamnyama liyaphela*" (our ancestors are crying where they are

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sleeping, the white man's tradition is growing while that of Blacks is ending). The song's lyrics point to an understanding that the growth of Western development, modernity, and technology is an extension of whiteness, which the ancestors decry. When considering this song, it is clear that whiteness is presented as an embodiment or essence of these pigmented bodies that look Black but are essentially white. This song was not the first of its kind. Similar songs exist, usually labelling those who could compromise the Black struggle. Such songs often critique betrayal in the liberation struggle and unjust reconciliation or negotiation. These liberation songs were found within the tradition of Black liberation movements, specifically the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania and the Black Consciousness Movement. The song entitled "Amabhunu Amnyama Asibangela Iwari" is another good example. The literal translation of this song is "Black Boers are causing us to worry."[1] In both songs, white embodiment clearly carries not merely the desires of non-whites who fit in and maintain the status quo but an inherent continuum of oppression. In contemporary South Africa, even the so-called white do-gooders (those who are ostensibly colour blind) and the majority of Blacks have lost any ethical conceptualization and value of what blackness means. In 1996, one of the Black consciousness formations argued that Mandela was the first president of the Republic of South Africa who was not white. This reference to Mandela as "non-white," as opposed to referring to him as the first Black president of South Africa, was not an inaccurate syntaxial arrangement or verbiage.[2]

The point being made was that a pigmented body occupying an office does not equate to a Black president. In South Africa, especially after serious depoliticization, the betrayal of the petty bourgeoisie and academic class, who ignored Onkgopotse Abram Tiro's[3] call that an education separate from Africa and its problems, is meaningless and useless. Opportunists of all kinds have contributed to the vulgarization of blackness. Biko,[4] after defining Black consciousness, argued, "Non-whites do exist and will continue to exist and will continue to exist for quite a long time. If one's aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white."[5] Indeed, non-whites and posturing Blacks[6] continue to leave South Africa

1 The term "Boers" was used to refer to the apartheid government and Afrikaans Volk.

2 In the founding of the Socialist Party of Azania (SOPA) after the breakaway from Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), SOPA released a statement that Mandela was not a Black president.

3 In April 1972, at Turfloop University, popularly known as the university of the North, Onkgopotse Abram Tiro delivered a speech that led to his expulsion on graduation day and resulted in mass demonstrations across universities. Later, the speech would be dubbed the Turfloop Testimony.

4 This gender-exclusive language in the quote by Biko, referring to humans as "man," is in the original.

5 Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Cambridge: African Writers Series, 1987), 49–50.

6 The notion of a posturing Black is not fully similar to non-whites, because a non-white willingly refuses to come to the fold but a posturing Black enjoys the radicalism as long as it does not come with a cost to their well-being.

after apartheid because there is an inescapability of non-whites from the continuity, almost perpetuity, of the system of white supremacy. Therefore, there is a need to redeem blackness and its God, the Black God of the oppressed,[7] from the vulgarity and clutter of modern political opportunism and theological complacency.

At the same time, the redemptive process is faced with the monstrosity of technology, which often poses as neutral. Veldsman has noted how technological advances run parallel with unprecedented "poverty, hunger, death of children, unemployment, misery and the destruction of nature."[8] Furthermore, the effects of technology, no matter how remarkable they are, are unacceptable, especially in a country like South Africa, where more than 30 million people are poor. According to 2021 South African statistics, the 31.8 million that are poor are, in fact, Black. Neither a pigmented token of power nor technology will solve the problems of South Africa. A proper stance on blackness and on the God of the oppressed offers a revolutionary resolve to dislodge Blacks from the perennial absurdity of life. The God whom we have known from the missionaries has always reigned in "his" omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, immanence, and omnipresence alongside unfathomable suffering. Technology and its God complex perpetuate similar characteristics, and there is no heterogeneous paradigm on the horizon. Thus, we must ask: *Quo vadis* technology?

Dystopia, Blackness, and Technology

When watching apocalyptic sci-fi movies about the final fate of the earth and humanity due to the "imminent" war between machines, technology, and humanity, we are presented with an image of dystopia often characterized by the distinction between the inhabitants of the colony fighting the machines. They are often attired in rags, eating from tins – a hand-to-mouth situation – and living in deplorable conditions. At the same time, we are presented with collaborators with super-intelligent artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and machines (such as movies like *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *Transcendence*). These provide a telling tale of the role of collaborators within the current democratic dispensation with the oppressors (capitalists, racists, i.e., the continuance of the non-whites Biko spoke of[9]) and the anticipated role of technological collaborators in the future. Often in these depictions, we are presented with white saviours; the Terminator is white, and Neo and Trinity from *The*

[7] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 33.

[8] Daniel Veldsman, "Embracing the Eye of the Apple: On Anthropology, Theology and Technology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75 (2019), 2.

[9] Ibid., 49–50.

Matrix are white.[10] The only science fiction film that depicts great technological know-how with a human-centric ethic is *The Black Panther*, which displays a binary between technological know-how and a sense of socialism or egalitarian values. One can perhaps tie this presentation of the character of the Black Panther to Biko's[11] position on Black people bestowing o or contributing to the world a true humanity with a humane face. This is a critique of the technological know-how of the West, which does not have a sense of humanity imbued in it.[12]

Similarly, Black people, in particular the Black liberation movement, always knew of the great might and power of the technological weapons of the West. However, their view seemed to include a resolve that they could overcome insurmountable technological know-how – somehow, humanity would survive beyond the West's weapons. Malcolm X[13] suggested that we could counter-attack their weapons by engaging in guerrilla warfare. Tiro,[14] in his graduation speech, contrasted the resolve of the God of the oppressed beyond the tanks and technology of the enemy. He suggested that their weapons and technology would not "reverse the course of events" – the dehumanized would eventually win. Indeed, the issue of AI raises fundamental issues about the crossroads between great "invention" and "doom."[15] However, what is essential concerning this dystopia is that the ruggedness of those who resist is a fictional and not a proleptic event. Instead, in Alexandra Township,[16] Khayelitsha,[17] Soweto,[18] and so on, you can witness ragged, poor people. This is worse for Alexandra, located behind the developed, affluent, and opulent Sandton city. Thus, the futurist dystopia is within reach.

[10] White here is not only a race category, though it is inseparable from race, but linked to white privilege, white self-styled messianic presentation, and white supremacy.

[11] Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 108.

[12] Ibid., 51.

[13] Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements* (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 36–39.

[14] Abram Tiro, *Graduation Speech by Onkgopotse Tiro at the University of the North, 29 April 1972*.

[15] Hlulani Mdingi, "The Black Church as the Timeless Witness to Change and Paradigm Shifts Posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76:2 (2020), 2.

[16] Alexandra Township is a poor, crowded, rat-infested, and filthy township located in Johannesburg north, next to one of South Africa's richest suburbs, Sandton.

[17] Khayelitsha is a township located in Cape Town; it is a poor, crime-ridden, and crowded area that houses Black people.

[18] Soweto means the Southwestern Township; it is one of the largest townships in South Africa, housing Black people because of the special arrangement of apartheid. It is a crowded, drug-ridden, violent, and poor area.

However, despite the development and promises that technology claims to present, a much more sinister aspect of it is the idea of race as a technology – an extension of white agency and control. Coleman asserts,

> Is it possible to think of race as a disinterested object of our delight, as opposed to one that is overinscribed? Can race survive as something other than the remnant of a traumatic history? Race as technology tells the tale of the levered mechanism. Imagine a contraption with a spring or a handle that creates movement and diversifies articulation. Not a trap, but rather a trapdoor through which one can scoot off to greener pastures. As an object of history, race has been used as a contraption by one people to subject another. An ideological concept of race such as this carries a very practical purpose. It vividly and violently produces race-based terrorism, systems of apartheid, and demoralising pain.[19]

What Coleman posits is a significant feature of the current political, economic, cultural, and social system: somehow, the world has been filled with endemic racism and biases, often disempowering Blacks. At the same time, Coleman distinguishes technology simply as a mechanica tool, true to its ancient Greek meaning, which presents a study of technique that is far from its current association with machines.[20] This is fundamental in this respect, as it presents the epistemology and the metaphysics/ontology of technology in the current racist society and capitalist mode of production. Similarly, Coleman argues, "Race as technology recognises the proper place of race not as a trait but as a tool – for good or for ill – to reconceptualise how race fits into a larger pattern of meaning and power. The question comes down to this: who organises that pattern?"[21] Coleman then shows how Barack Obama employed racial fluidity – using race as a tool – to win his campaign through his oratory appealing to US perfectionism and his expectation that people would not fixate on the colour of his skin. Coleman asserts, "Race became, in the hands of Obama in that speech, a levered mechanism in an overall campaign for the electorate, as opposed to a contraption by which he was framed."[22]

Nonetheless, despite Obama's use of race, racism/race remained a system of power that was insurmountable; to use race as a tool for good in winning the campaign still explicitly presents the ill side of technology. Ruha Benjamin notes that if racism is a technology, then the assumption of post-racialism is the genius bar. Benjamin notes that post-racialism is, in fact, a "new killer" application, "deadly and disenfranchising,

[19] Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 24:1 (2009), 177–207, at 180.

[20] Ibid., 178.

[21] Ibid., 184–85.

[22] Ibid., 198.

minimalist and minimising, and always one-step ahead."[23] She further asserts that NextGen racism comprises homemade nooses, violent voter intimidation tactics through voter ID laws, and predatory lending. Benjamin argues, "Racial technologies, in other words, are in the business of manufacturing natures. As with the fabrication of urban green spaces, postracial environments are ones in which the pleasure of some is predicated on the misery of others."[24]

It would be difficult to critically maintain a utopian view of technology based on the Black experience, then and now, but technological development has occurred parallel to the existential dystopia daily experienced by many. Veldsman is correct in noting, "Indeed! Greater technological progress than ever before, yet even greater misery, economic ruin and ecological catastrophes."[25] Furthermore, he asserts, "The voices of the 'have nots' and 'never will haves' must not be silenced, and every effort must be made for their voices to be heard on every possible societal platform and to be taken seriously."[26] Thus, technology as race and race as technology cannot continue to be predicated on the misery of others. Benjamin notes that technologies have the propensity to allow more racist violence to be less and less discernible. She asserts, "Consider the nomenclature around micro-aggressions, obscuring as it does the way racism gets under the skin and into the placenta, restricting blood flow so that black American babies are disproportionately born premature due to the accumulation of stress and strain shouldered by expectant mothers."[27]

Benjamin notes that technology is not a "metaphor for innovating equity but an effective conduit for Remaking Race"[28]; thus, such analysis has a crippling effect on how African leaders think that technology, and not justice, is what will help the third world. There are myriad examples of afterlives of whiteness and white power. In the 1960s, the impact of Black power was the idea of self-determination, self-definition, self-representation, and self-reliance, but it was also the view of Black aesthetics, that is, "Black is beautiful," which is currently being attacked by the new modes of technology that further expose whiteness. Benjamin is correct in paying attention to the current genome project that plays an essential role around gene editing, an endeavour that

[23] Ruha Benjamin, "Innovating Inequity: If Race Is a Technology, Postracialism Is the Genius Bar," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39:13 (2016), 2227–34, at 2227.

[24] Ibid., 2228.

[25] Veldsman, "Embracing the Eye," 2.

[26] Ibid., 5.

[27] Benjamin, "Innovating Inequity," 2228.

[28] Ibid., 2229.

seems helpful on the surface regarding health but that has serious implications for traits deemed "socially undesirable."[29] What are those traits given the dehumanization of Blacks? Of course, Black aesthetic features are chief among the problems that white racism and aesthetic traits have had with how Black people look. Benjamin points out that one of the achievements of the International Summit on Human Gene Editing in 2015 was to make low-cost technologies for diseases and other uses as well. She focuses on how low-cost technologies have reinforced white racist and misogynist standards and notions of beauty and fitness:

> One need only look to the number of people getting double eyelid surgeries and narrowing nose jobs, yet hardly ever the reverse (single eyelids and broadening nose jobs), to understand that discourses of "personal choice" with respect to altering human bodies obscure the way that dominant ideologies shape the direction of preference. In that way, analogising genetic modification to cosmetic surgery may indeed be apt, but only if we understand how both sets of techniques invigorate hegemonic forms of whiteness.[30]

Benjamin's stance is interesting, considering that in South Africa, skin lightening and European styles of hair have been reintroduced. For the most part, this is a silent issue that we seldom talk about.

Here, theology, white racism, and technology should engage, and Biko becomes relevant again in stressing that Black consciousness negates Black people trying to be white both on a political level because they are not white and on a theological level because they insult the intelligence of whoever created them Black.[31] Technology cannot and should not attempt to transcend or circumvent blackness because in light of 400 years of white racist and capitalist exploitation, blackness exists *ipso facto*. The issue of Black aesthetics and technology as race is amplified when considering Hankerson's text "Does Technology Have Race?" Hankerson notes the variation of racial biases based on pigment: "We have cataloged a range of incidents where race has adversely affected technology's usability for underrepresented minorities. We will discuss three areas where this has occurred – in sensor design, in algorithms and in interface design."[32]

Hankerson notes how automatic taps or faucets and the Apple Watch failed to detect Black skin for the soap dispenser function or to pick up a pulse from dark-skinned

[29] Ibid., 2232.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 53.

[32] Hankerson et al., "Does Technology Have Race?" in *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference* (Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2016), 476.

people. This inherent racism continues in biased algorithms as well as in interface designs of video games that depict white heroes mercilessly shooting at Black people depicted as savages and where Black persons are presented as inessential characters.[33] Given this, Blacks are not out of touch with reality in being suspicious of technology in response to oppression, sovereignty, and the quest for justice. Or in observing the confluence of the survival mode of oppression in race being technology or technology as race. Indeed, the confluence between the Enlightenment period during the early stages of slavery and the current period is not only syllogistic in approach but affirms each in terms of white people's power. The agency of seeking to evangelize and civilize the world has not changed; thus, the agency in response to oppression and the God of the oppressed, a God in history, requires a response. In a previous article, I asserted: "Intrinsically, in Africa, the Bible goes tandem with 'civilisation' and therefore serves as roots to the technological turn witnessed in the 21st century."[34] In the current technological age, blackness exists in myriad forms of expression. Because of the pervasiveness of racism, continual use of Black cheap labour, and disregard of Black people as people, speaking through the wound will continue as a clarion call. Blackness and power should be a political and ecclesiastical manifestation of God in history and in the existential context.[35]

Blackness and Divinity

Blackness is not merely an insignia for the notion of Black identity but is, in fact, transcendence. A transcendent reality, within Black liberation theology, is a meeting place of revolutionary otherworldliness in this world of abject suffering caused by white supremacy and capitalist modes of production. It is a (Black) eschatological experience that prioritizes an existential soteriology of Black bodies and souls. Cone[36] and Frazier[37] postulated that the Negro spirituals articulated the rejection of bondage and a vision of liberation from white Christian salvation and barbaric civilization. When dealing explicitly with this world, Stokely Carmichael caused a stir on 16 June 1966 after the call for Black power. At the time, Mike Wallace, on the broadcast *60 Minutes*, hosted a television programme called "Black Power, White Backlash,"[38] in which he interviewed Carmichael. Wallace posed the question, "Mr Carmichael, if you had an opportunity to stand before

[33] Ibid., 476–77.

[34] See Hlulani Mdingi, "The Irrevocable Pedagogical Value of the Bible: Liberation Transcends Technology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77:1 (2021), 1.

[35] James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 37–38.

[36] James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 170.

[37] Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), 16.

[38] *Black Power, White Backlash*, CBS Documentary, 1966, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otMQeJFOAzM.

whites, what would you say, if you could say understand me, what would you say?" Stokely responded with, "Civilise yourself, Whiteman."[39]

Stokely Carmichael's appeal to white people can be considered a "pedagogical disjuncture," a disruption of assumed learnings, as suggested in my previous article,[40] and a rejection of falsified and distorted images of Blacks[41] that was accompanied by the "Gospel" and "civilisation." More importantly, his articulation crystallizes the view that Western civilization, economic logic, and technological advancements do not consider Black people as human beings. In some sense, this underpins the false expectation of utopianism heralded in Western technological development of any form. It is also clear that the eschatological pronouncements of blackness have various strands, which are not out-of-body experiences but a survival mode that is historical. At the same time, the transcendental elements are not rudimentary, considering that the Black body is at the centre of humiliation in aesthetics and intellect and as a mainstay of white sadism under white supremacy and the barbarism of capitalistic exploitation, such as was seen in the recent urination on a Black student's laptop at Stellenbosch University.[42]

Therefore, Black transcendence is existential in its form of survival; it does not concede defeat but is fixed on a firm foundation despite the crushing powers against it. Similarly, real Black people, as asserted by Biko,[43] are unfazed by racism and its pigmented collaborators and methods of white continuity through technology, AI, posthumanism, and transhumanism, as noted by Ali[44] and Cave and Dihal.[45] Technology is thought to improve people's or humanity's life, but the "human" remains questionable because the human is normatively white and because developed nations signify humanity while underdevelopment signifies the status of the subhumans. At the same time, it is worrying that from conquest and colonialism, through its mantra of evangelization and modernity, we have not learned that their preaching and quest for civilization were an extension of whiteness and Europe. Similarly,

[39] Ibid.

[40] See Mdingi, "The Irrevocable Pedagogical Value of the Bible", 7.

[41] See ibid., 101.

[42] Karabo Ledwaba, "Student Whose Desk Was Urinated on Told It's a 'White Thing,'" *Sowetan Live*, 17 May 2022, https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2022-05-17-student-whose-desk-was-urinated-on-told-its-a-white-thing.

[43] Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 50.

[44] Syed Ali, "Transhumanism and/as Whiteness," Presented at the IS4SI 2017 Summit Digitalisation for a Sustainable Society, Gothenburg, Sweden, 12–16 June 2017.

[45] S. Cave and K. Dihal, "The Whiteness of AI," *Philosophy and Technology* 33:4 (2020), 686.

modernity would be, in fact, a white world controlled, thought of, and built by white hands in theory through physiologically subjugating Black bodies as cheap labour.

Again, Stokely Carmichael is correct in pointing out that "we came to America as Blacks; it took 400 years for us to become Negroes."[46] In the 1960s, the Black Power Movement would thrust Black pride of our identity infused with a revolutionary ethic. This was done because being a non-white or Negro, with whiteness as the "legitimate and authentic" barometer of existence, is not only, in Fanonian terms, an explicit state of non-being; it is death itself. But how does a dead body survive death given the simultaneity of the perpetuity of suffering and dehumanization that only changes intervals of methods of death?

The lynched, oppressed, whipped, and exploited Black body, which faced ritualized acts of white horror through the mouth of the enslaved person, identified the crucified as himself/herself, according to Cone.[47] Jesus 2000 years ago experienced a first-century lynching, which would become the slave's time after two millennia[48] – a convergence of the existential and eschatological. The crucified experienced both the existential and eschatological at Golgotha, and similarly the lynched bodies in the US and Africa (and global institutions) experience both. Thus, time became fluid or a quantum moment, blurring the veils of unfolding history through both the body of Jesus and the enslaved person experiencing concrete pain, humiliation, and dehumanization.

But both bodies would survive the permanent seal of non-being because of death. Camus[49] and Hanna[50] have argued that Christianity is the religion of the unjust, as Christians worship and celebrate the death of an innocent man brutally murdered, yet this is the symbol Christianity seeks to use for its faith. However, Jesus' resurrection was the response to the silence of the absurdity of the world, which knows of suffering but is silent about it. Black people, though having bodies that are not immune to suffering and death, somehow were able to continue to appear throughout existence despite the aim of Western "civilisation" and "Christianisation" to build modernity as a site of Black burial. Boesak[51] links blackness as a new creation of a

[46] *Stokely Carmichael Address the Black Panthers (1968)* [video], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-mliqVTrLM.

[47] James Cone, *Cross and Suffering: A Black American Perspective* (Black Theology Project, 1993), 6.

[48] James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 30.

[49] Albert Camus, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 48.

[50] Thomas Hanna, "Albert Camus and the Christian Faith," *Journal of Religion* 36:4 (1956), 225.

[51] Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-Ethical Study on Black Theology and Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977), 27.

new humanity; thus, blackness is an ontological, existential, and eschatological moment. Mdingi[52] has pointed out that Christ's resurrected body, wounded and pierced, which ascends to heaven depicts the deep solidarity that God has with the oppressed of the world until his coming. Even in Revelation (1:13-20), the 24 elders insist he was to be slain. Thus, these wounds do not heal, despite the passing of time and metaphysical geographical location because of persisting suffering in the world that warrants the view that the God of the oppressed has chosen sides on earth and in heaven.

There is another side of blackness. This is the mystical side, beginning with the hovering Spirit of God on the face of the deep, according to Genesis (1:1). There is communion between God, the Spirit, the darkness of the face of the deep, wisdom (as a pre-existent force with God), and the Word (pre-existent Logos) that brought forth light and creation. A radical Christology, weaving creation and soteriology together, warrants the mysticism of blackness/darkness as a literal and symbolic representation that shrouds Golgotha and the Black body upon the tree. Perhaps that mystical and sudden darkness in Golgotha exposed the frenzy of the lynch mobs, and initially that darkness would hopefully accentuate the lynchers' guise to behold he who was hung on the tree – a pigmented body that is the true light of the world. However, they refused to see in the same way that the lynchers refused to harken to the victims' cries, the brutality acted out on others, and the fragility of other people's humanity because of a similar fanatical frenzy in meting out injustice to others, then and today.

Henry Turner offers another dimension of blackness in "God Is a Negro," presenting a rejection of whiteness as a symbolic representation of a divinity vis-à-vis negative colour symbolism linked to blackness and God. Turner outright rejects whiteness as divinity, in a move to reclaim blackness. Turner asserts, "we certainly protest against God being a white man or against God being white at all; abstract as this theme must forever remain while we are in the flesh."[53] Cone argued that in Jesus and the Black experience, "blackness and divinity are dialectically bound together as one reality."[54]

[52] Mdingi, "The Irrevocable Pedagogical Value," 80, 116, 133–34.

[53] Henry McNeal Turner, "God Is a Negro," *Voice of Missions* (February 1898).

[54] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 33.

Turner argues,

> Blackness is much older than whiteness, for black was here before white, if the Hebrew word, *coshach*, or *chasack*, has any meaning. We do not believe in the eternity of matter, but we do believe that chaos floated in infinite darkness or blackness, millions, billions, quintillions and eons of years before God said, "Let there be light," and that during that time God had no material light Himself and was shrouded in darkness, so far as human comprehension is able to grasp the situation. Yet we are no stickler as to God's color, anyway, but if He has any we should prefer to believe that it is nearer symbolised in the blue sky above us and the blue water of the seas and oceans; but we certainly protest against God being a white man or against God being white at all; abstract as this theme must forever remain while we are in the flesh.[55]

Turner can also be read within the framework of apophatic theology that redeems blackness and darkness from Western Shakespearean colour dualism, as the apophatic ascribes mysticism to darkness/blackness. Apophatics speak of divine darkness, which is the denial of the qualities of God, silencing speech, and is an entrance to darkness.[56] Darkness here also refers to transcendence, which is incomprehensible and beyond all knowledge. Of course, such a quality may not define Black people but reveals the fallacy of colour symbolism used in racial engineering and the physiological portrayal of the deity. Again, this darkness speaks to God in the darkness of the unknowing.[57] Vogel asserts, "Apophasis is the ascent of the mind into this darkness through the garrulous strategy of saying and unsaying"; he further argues, "The darkness of God is not a discovery once and for all, a bewilderment achieved as the result of a successfully executed strategy, but a constant feature of living with a God whose plenitude is beyond every concept, an essentially personal God."[58]

Turner, on the other hand, has argued that we behold the eucharist dynamism eschatologically and through the apophatic trajectory – dialectics of affirmation and negation, presence, and absence – that presents us with the darkness of God and the light of Christ category.[59] Perhaps the God of the oppressed is incomprehensible to the privileged givers but is known in the state of unknowability by those who are dehumanized,

[55] Turner, "God Is a Negro."

[56] Jeffrey Vogel, "Growing into the Darkness of God: The Inseparability between Apophatic Theology and Ascetic Practice," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 15:2 (2015), 214.

[57] Ibid., 218.

[58] Ibid., 218, 226.

[59] Denys Turner, "The Darkness of God and the Light of Christ: Negative Theology and Eucharistic Presence," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 158.

marginalized, and oppressed. Thus, when God is said to be Black, it is not merely colour presentation but an ontological quality, which is also necessary for the oppressed, who must be Black with regard not merely to visibility but also to their ontological standing in the struggle.[60]

The rejection of a white deity is not only a physical rejection but also an ontological one, serving both historical and existential realities of the oppressed, who were also part of the faith and were in bondage because of whiteness being a representation of the deity.[61] The rejection of whiteness as divinity is not a rejection of white personhood but a rejection of the language of oppression that is read into the text; blackness is not an aesthetical value but, in fact, agency. Biko associates descriptions of blackness with agency. Blackness is not essentialism or purely *pigmento* politics, as Black consciousness's definition of blackness anticipates the sell-out of the non-whites.[62] Baltazar notes that Western colour dualism is responsible for white Christianity and white theology.[63]

Conclusion

There is no contradiction between the blackness of God, the blackness of Black people, and the meaning of the Black experience in the world. Western technology will have to contend with the ethical meaning of blackness, which empowers the oppressed and the church by negating the Western God complex. Thus, "*Quo vadis* technology?" is both an actual question and a rhetorical one, considering persistent systematic racism.

[60] Ron Rhodes, "Black Theology, Black Power and the Black Experience (Part Two)," *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1991), 4.

[61] Turner, "God is a Negro.

[62] Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 52.

[63] Eulalio Baltazar, *The Dark Center: A Process Theology of Blackness* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1973), 8.