



*M. Laubscher*

---

## INTERVIEW WITH VUYANI S. VELLE

*ML: By way of introduction, please provide us with a short theological biography of yourself.*

VSV: I did my undergraduate studies, a Diploma in Theology with Greek, at the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem) in Pietermaritzburg, proceeded to Fort Hare for a B.Th. Hons. Degree in Systematic Theology, then the University of Cape Town where I did a Master of Social Science in Religion, and lastly the University of Pretoria where I finally completed my PhD *cum laude* in 2007.

I joined the University of Pretoria, where I currently teach Systematic Theology and Ethics from the South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) where I served as Deputy General Secretary for a short period. I am also the Director of the Centre for Public Theology in the Faculty of Theology.



*ML: Throughout your work, I hear the phrase “Black Theology of Liberation” (BTL), but often not without assuming or implying other genitives like “African”, “Public”, “Reformed”, or even “De-colonial”. Thus, on the question of naming our theologies, I would like to know how significant and important it is to discern, prioritize, qualify and carefully articulate the sort of theology we now need to do? Has “global apartheid” and “kairos consciousness” anything to do with it? Stated differently: What is the significance of this trajectory for doing theology in South Africa in the third decade after 1994? In short: Please reflect for a moment on the kind of theology you think we need to do in this particular kairos of ours.*

VSV: Allow me first to pay my respect to Prof. James Hal Cone who departed from this world on 28 April 2018. James Cone is the father of

Black Theology of Liberation. We, as Black theologians in South Africa, elderly and young, remain shattered by this loss – the loss of a great tree on which we have for years climbed to reach the sun. Cone's works, since his first publication, *Black theology and Black power*, illustrate a formidable focus, a deepening and obstinate love for Blackness, finding its zenith in his last one before his passing, *The cross and the lynching tree*. Much of what is discussed here – my responses to the difficult questions Martin has posed to me – is undeniably influenced by, *inter alia*, my commitment to the school and grammar of theology founded by James Cone. May his soul rest in peace.

By the time of his passing, Cone had taught and wrote on Black Theology of Liberation (BTL). It may not be necessary to present an elaborate response to the subject of an assumed crisis of BTL in South Africa. For example, one vividly remembers even one of the exponents of the school at the University of Cape Town in 1999 publicly declaring the death of BTL in one of the biggest international conferences I witnessed as a student then, the Multi-Event 1999. There have both been internal and external attacks on the standing of BTL, even at the earliest times of its development. The critical point we must contend with, nonetheless, is the hypocritical assumption that it is BTL that is in crisis, rather than the whole project of Eurocentric theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Cone's work, *A Black theology of liberation*, is the designation I have preferred in my writings, even though I am not essentially worried by other renditions of the name of the school, such as Black Liberation Theology, but would certainly have a problem with any rendition that omits the term "liberation". I seem to distinguish between "a Black theologian" and "a Black theologian of liberation". "Liberation" is Cone's own coinage and contribution to the lexicon of Christian salvation broadly, specifically for Blacks. Naming is also another aspect of our struggle if one remembers how Black people were named in South Africa.

That Black and African theologians named their theology as such, BTL, since the systematic articulation of the paradigm, is important to remember all the time. Blacks have named themselves as such, as vividly suggested by the relationship between the philosophy of Black Consciousness and BTL. More importantly though is that "Blackness" is not employed as a biological, or anthropological construct without necessarily denying ontological Blackness, but an existential term.<sup>1</sup> There were polemical

---

1 A number of Black exponents have made this point many years ago, such as Allan Boesak in his *Farewell to innocence*. Desmond Tutu makes a similar argument where he posits Blackness as "an intractable ontological surd"

debates between African and Black Theologies, but Desmond Tutu, in my view, harmonised this by coining the phrase “soul mates” to reconcile the analytical differences between the two. The reason for my use of “black African” is more often than not to signify the seamlessness of African and Black Theologies. “Public”, “Reformed”, “Decolonial”, genitives as you say, indeed suggest trajectories and dialogical concepts that emerge and continue to invite further appropriation, intensification and deepening of the strong thought of the BTL paradigm.

Last, kairos consciousness is quintessentially BTL, much as Kairos Theology is a direct product of BTL. To delink kairos consciousness from BTL is rather an expression of what I have termed innovative haste, which, *inter alia*, amounts to the detachment of concepts and ideas from their roots. Allan Boesak’s work, *Kairos consciousness*, among others, argues against innovations that seek to delink Kairos theology from BTL.

*ML: In one of your most recent articles you described the above trajectory as a process and ambition to “Un-think the West”.<sup>2</sup> This very critical stance toward the Western canon is indeed one of the main tenets in numerous articles of the past decade. My question is whether such a radical position, which seems to demonize the one side and idealize the other, is not also trapped in colonial paradigm? Is our knowledge and theological heritage not way more complex and entangled with each other than working with these binaries of either-or? Stated differently: Please help me with the navigation between “the disentanglement of BTL from the parasitic, life-killing antics of the West” and “provincializing Europe”, on the other hand.*

*VSV: This question is extremely important; it requires a response with some measure of precision to clarify what Un-thinking the West means.*

Allow me an autobiographical response first. For the first time when I heard about the problem of dualism, I was a student at Fedsem, almost three decades ago. I have since understood this as a problem associated with Greek thought and central to the critique that BTL has for years offered against Western, Eurocentric theology. There is sense in which one could simply dismiss this question as one example of the embeddedness of Hellenistic categories, *ipso facto*, a continuous ethnocentric view of a paradigm that is rooted and committed to a different and alternative cosmo-vision. The lived experiences of a civilization – a Eurocentric modernity – whose central feature of dualistic thought, the bifurcation of

---

in his engagement with John Mbiti in the 1970s. Itumeleng Mosala, in the memorial for James Cone at Unisa on 10 May 2018, made a distinction between anthropological Blackness and existential Blackness.

2 HTS 2017.

life and society, is illustrated in the history of South Africa, expressed in terms that have become known such as *Amaqaba* versus *Amaqghoboka*, the symbolic use of the river Leshoane in Limpopo by E'skia Mphahlele in his *Down Second Avenue* to mark this dualism of Black African lives created by missionary Christianity and, more recently, Zakes Mda's work titled *Little suns*, whose story is woven within the bifurcation of Black African lives, all indicate one thing: the application of dualism to classify Blacks and its terror to Black lives. Cecil Ngcokovane in 1989 published a book titled, *Demons of apartheid*, a work that reflects on apartheid binaries. Without first examining what the dualism of Eurocentric cannons of knowledge did to us as Blacks and the global South, in general, the standing of BTL in relation to the West is often completely misunderstood.

Two decades ago, Dwight Hopkins also dealt with this matter by arguing that binary oppositions in our experience as Blacks collapse for example of the separation between church and state in the West, as their unity in maintaining the enslavement of black people became a historical fact, just as the Union of South Africa did in collapsing the binaries that separated the English and the Afrikaner to unite against Black people as cheap and migrant labourers. Let us briefly cite Enrique Dussel (2006:498) in this regard:

To sum up, capitalism, liberalism, dualism (disembodied), instrumentalism (the technologies of instrumental reason,) are the *effects* of the idea which assumed Europe to be the 'Centre' of the world. Such effects slowly constitute themselves as systems which end by becoming total.

Dualism, a thought effect caused by superiority, which has become a total system, excluding the world and the views of those regarded as inferior, is the first thing to grasp. BTL unmasks the obverse side of Western Eurocentric violent and exclusive totality to expose difference as existence rather than classification – Blackness as existing alterity – not a binary.

Flowing from this is our second point, an important paradox with which we must contend whenever we speak of “binaries”. Blackness is a creation of Whiteness. It is the colonial wound, “wretchedness” according to Fanon resulting from coloniality. Anníbal Quijano argues that race is a mental category of modernity. He says that race is something that was not known before colonization:

As time went by, the colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color, and they assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of racial category. That category was probably first established in the area of Anglo-America. There, so-called blacks

were not only the most important exploited group, since the principal part of the economy rested on them; they were also, above all, the most important colonized race since Indians were not part of that colonial society (Quijano 2008:182-183).

The relationship of binary thought with racism is the creation of the West. In addition, the concept of coevalness, or the coexistence of Blackness with colonialism is helpful to deepen our understanding of what binaries suggest to BTL. Colonialism with its zenith, apartheid in South Africa, is a two-headed creature with one body. Coevalness implies that resistance synchronizes with colonial conquest and occurs at the very first instance with colonization. The logic of colonization and imperial power is, however, cunning; it hides its violence through its pretence of universality, while this universality is specifically related to one race whose assumed superiority it manages. The logic of coloniality is “violence always carried out at the same time always denied” (Dussel 2006:497). Resistance is the energy produced by the violence of colonial conquest, *genocidal*, *epistemicidal* and *spiritualicidal*, which, in the case of our South African experience, emerges ultimately as Black Consciousness and BTL, opening itself to an alternative liberation elsewhere, outside the colonial matrix of power and epistemic, total arrogance.<sup>3</sup>

One has to grasp that the comprehensive vision of BTL is thus a move beyond critique – beyond the critical theories that recycle contending alternative systems of knowledge in one ideological system of knowledge assuming superiority, while at the same time experienced as killing, but also continuing to kill while denying always. De-linking from the West is already happening; another point we need to contend with.

Last, as argued in the article you are referring to, #FeesMustFall, or the decolonial turn should be viewed as the context that led to this self-critical engagement with my own paradigm, BTL, to move beyond rearticulating and re-affirming its strong thought. The time now is to move to its vision and energy provided by its decades of resistance beyond the critique of Eurocentric content to a world that is not a monologue, but one of many worlds, pluriversal one – “towards a world that would fit many worlds (e.g., pluriversality), that would reaffirm the conviction that another world is possible ...” (Mignolo 2011:50-51).

*ML: In light of the above question and response, what about The Confession of Belhar? Its location, theological influences and proposed audience is no particular “Black or White” matter. You are indeed appreciative of Belhar in numerous of your writings, but this theological gift out of southern Africa*

---

3 Cf. the argument by Mignolo (2011:46-52).

*is not without roots and ties to theology we learned from elsewhere. In short, can you briefly explain how The Belhar Confession fits into the kind of trajectory and spirit revealed thus far in the answers?*

VSV: Indeed, this question is related to the previous one. Could we ever succeed to argue that *The Belhar Confession* is not a product of BTL, without hiding the violence of apartheid theology?

*The Belhar Confession* is a product of BTL! It cannot be delinked from the question posed by Black clergy and theologians in the Reformed churches about the question of Blackness and its relationship with Christian faith after the Sharpeville Massacre, followed by the Cottesloe Consultation, the formation of the South African Council of Churches and many other landmarks of our history in South Africa. This historical perspective of the development of *The Belhar Confession* is important to keep in mind, especially the 1978 Dutch Reformed Mission Church's (DRMC's) rejection of apartheid theology and a walk away from the DRC.

Later on, and importantly so, one has to remember that the expulsion of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) especially by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), after apartheid was declared a "heresy" – let alone the declaration of this evil as a crime against humanity by the United Nations – significantly meant that, for years, the DRC and its family existed, since its expulsion from WARC, by largely resisting against the resistance of apartheid theology. The differentiation of models of theology elaborated in the Kairos Document eloquently illustrates this point; the climax of colonization and apartheid thus led to a theological and ecclesiological rupture in South Africa. Stated otherwise, the Belhar Confession, a product of the rupture that took place since the Sharpeville Massacre at least, is an opening to an alternative existence of faith through the energy and spaces of the victims. It is not merely a critique of some confession, but a call to an embodiment of an alternative, life-affirming Christianity. Such an embodiment of Christian faith collapses the binaries that existed and arose as effects of one superior race whose logic is not inside the previous one that divided, ruined and ruled South Africa and one could add, the whole Eurocentric world of Christianity. The question among others is: Does the resistance against the resistance of bigotry enunciated by Belhar not exist today?

Let us also use a few illustrations of this point. James Cone was a student of Karl Barth, but he, in his own words, turned Barth's theology "inside out", developing a distinct grammar of theology, intentionally, a rupture from Western theology.

In the same manner, the development of *The Belhar Confession* with sources from “elsewhere” does not imply commitment to the ideological systems undergirding Western theology, a mere critique or reformulation of some of the sources of confession in the West. Rather, *Belhar* points beyond these ideological systems and their world to an alternative embodiment of Christian faith. It goes without saying that the embodiment of *The Belhar Confession* remains an ecclesiological challenge even today, a demonstration of how the interpretation of *The Belhar Confession* within the terms of Western theology simply continues to undermine its enunciation of a new humanity and ecclesiological understanding for the affirmation of life, new terms of Christian existence, never to be subsumed under the myth of the superiority of one race and Eurocentric Christianity.

*ML: I do not want to labour the point endlessly, but some other key terminology in your theology are indeed the references to “Black experience”, “Black inferiority”, “the Black non-person”, “White experience”, and “White supremacy and superiority”. You are often at pains to indicate that it is not about (abstract) humanity, in general, but from this or that particular and concrete vestige point (at the margin or underside). For instance, the concern is not “racism” per se, but “White supremacy”. Why is this angle in the articulation so important, and what is precisely assumed and implied with this, and what is not necessarily, though often assumed by others? Does it entail “pigmentocracy”, or is it not (simply) that? Is it a particular sort of “consciousness”, a specific kind of “power” which is at work here, or not? In short, what is the framework and criteria when working with these key terms, and who may identify and work with them?*

*VSV: We have dealt with this matter already, you are right. One indeed has been at pains for years to explain that BTL is not a pigmentocratic discourse, but a state of mind, a consciousness and an existential project of Blackness. So the following remarks are a continuation of what has been said above already.*

Some Black theologians might even be uncomfortable with my formulation, namely that the issue is not “racism per se, but White supremacy or superiority”. That formulation is, however, intentional. The resurgence of racism in our public discourse more than two decades after the demise of apartheid is directly related to the dominant view, also propelled by some hasty innovations in theological circles, that racism is no longer an issue in South Africa post-1994. So, one indeed sarcastically “concedes”, but with a question: What about superiority? In doing this, one would immediately understand that racism is impossible without superiority. While supremacy might be understood as physical antics of racism, superiority is much deeper than that, it is spiritual! One way of looking at it, therefore, is to

grasp that racism is based on the spirit of doubt, the doubt of the humanity of Black people in particular. Ever doubted, Black humanity is subjected to a cunning spirit that changes face and language, forever creating systems and an ethos to manage this spirit.

Pigmentocracy is lock, stock and barrel a product of colonization and conquest with its marking of Black bodies as dispensable, vividly shown by the Trans-Atlantic history of slavery, and this is a repetition to emphasize the point. The Elmina Castle in Ghana encapsulates this colonial matrix of power with the Dutch Reformed Church on top of the dungeons that kept Black bodies with an inscription of Psalm 132 on top of its main door. Blackness reveals coloniality, meaning the existence of the effects of colonization long after the end of colonization and conquest, its residues. The doubt of the humanity of Black people religiously, theologically, philosophically and scientifically justified, does not cease to exist, even if religion, theology, philosophy and science are reviewed. This is what sustains and maintains racism, for as long as its core, the spirit of superiority, the doubt of the humanity of others, remains unchanged. It is probably only a different consciousness that can change this spirit, a different mindset, indeed a different spirit which, in the terms and grammar of BTL, is opened up by spaces and experiences of Blackness, woundedness or the wretched of this world. Racism is a spirit that worships an idol – superiority – not the God of the oppressed, a Christianity that ruptures from a religion of the powerless.

*ML: Another key characteristic of your work is the use of indigenous concepts like Ukunyuka, makuku, lekgotla, Ubuntu, vuvuzela, Umsebenzi, etc. and how to (or not!) use and theologize with them. I sense that there is indeed a deeper motivation and pedagogy at work for doing it in this particular way. Please elaborate on this unique and very creative way of voicing and embodying your theology.*

VSV: I use indigenous concepts in almost all my writings. In this sense, one could say the grammar, syntax and language of our approach in BTL valorizes Black African experience, concepts or symbols of knowledge that have been excluded for decades in the construction of the knowledge of faith and beliefs, theologically speaking. Second, the critical element in this approach is to debunk the co-optation of these concepts, as they are often used without consideration of their roots, thus false semantic affinities often forged alien to the comso-vision of their origin.

The translatability (Bediako), or vernacularisation (Sanneh) of Black African concepts or symbols is quite an involved subject and scholars such as Judith Butler in conversation with Charles Taylor, demonstrate

that “translation” is a challenge.<sup>4</sup> Translation has an import of the whole body moving from one place to the other, Taylor suggests. Still, something remains behind after translation. As something of the origin remains behind in the process of translation, it is also true that that which is plunged and used in foreignness does so, having lost its wholeness on the ground of a foreign host. Translation occurs badly when the foreign host is not shifted by a concept or symbol originating outside. Reciprocation of the losses and gains incurred from translations is an important criterion. The emergence of an African word or concept in a text written in English, for example, is from my point of view prophetic; it points to an alternative vision of the “cohabitation” of strangers to follow, a cohabitation of strange worlds rather than one world playing host to other worlds.

*ML: I fully agree with the strong emphasis and focus on the economic situation and need for liberation as of utmost importance in our context, as well as that it inevitably implies a racial lens through which we need to view the situation. Against this background of our racialized history, which manifests itself in the unbearable and unjust economic situation, there are, however, two matters that I miss in the current BTL trajectory and am quite concerned about. First, I may be wrong, but this particular discourse cannot continue as if patriarchy and other gender and sexual injustices in our society are not also part of the problem and agenda. Stated differently: How concerned is BTL with gender and sexual injustices in our society? Is it one of its current blind spots or not? Is this not another and very timely intersection for BTL to consider in the current situation?*

**VSV:** Possibly and arguably correct, albeit a bit nuanced. In my recent reflection on Cone, as we still mourn his death, I explicitly said this about Cone:

[I]n his own words, he wrote, spoke, taught and waged the struggle for the [B]lack, women degraded by patriarchal bigotry and violence, the LGBTIQ communities, the differently abled people, the uprooted in Iraq and Afghanistan, Syria, *minjung* in Korea and the Dalit in India, yes, the marginalized and victims of the colonial matrix of power in our world today (Vellem 2018:2).

Our humble submission is that one has to understand that BTL is a project of liberation on the underside of modernity. In this regard, Eurocentric modernity is not only racist, but sexist and patriarchal, among others. The woundedness arising out of colonization is thus many-faceted with “complex images of European/Euro-North American/capitalist/patriarchal/modern/colonial world-system” (Cormie 2018:57). One cannot simply abstract one aspect in responding to coloniality. In the struggle against this

---

4 Cf. *The power of religion in the public sphere*.

colonial matrix of power, vividly racist, sexist, patriarchal and tyrannical, we need to remember that, at its very inception of the systematisation of this struggle, BTL equally identified patriarchy as a challenge against liberation.<sup>5</sup> Itumeleng Mosala's well-known work makes this point clearly as he places this matter equally as a methodological aspect and part of the liberation vision of the school. In addition, most of the womanists would perceive themselves as part of BTL, not necessarily uncritically so. Mercy Oduyoye is a famous example. Conversations between male and female liberation theologians have thus been there since the irruption of the school.

Having said this, could one then argue that patriarchy is not a challenge for BTL? By no means! There could be reasons for some tardiness which saw emphasis rather on other aspects of liberation. However, BTL espouses a comprehensive notion of liberation and one would fully accept that this intensity is not only needed for our times, but urgently so.

What is even more important is that the struggle for liberation continues to be waged against an astronomical and colossal power that has continued to violently scatter and fragment Black resistance. Whenever this question is posed, one has to ask if it is not part of the violent, scattering and fragmenting coloniality to sanitize the Black struggle and BTL without denying the challenge and venom of patriarchy.

*ML: Secondly, this kind of prophetic theology, with its very particular specific rhetoric, is often criticized when one engages with economists in an interdisciplinary discussion. A recurring theme is that we need less rhetoric and more technical analysis. (Cf. Piet Naudé who says in this regard: "The core weaknesses of prophetic discourse are its incomplete moral argument, weak moral analyses, silence on transition measures, and its ability to take a positive stance on reforms in the systems from which it benefits itself.") In short, the critique is that prophetic discourses such as BTL does not have it within themselves to address these concrete matters of (economic) justice. What does this mean for doing this kind of theology concerned about these specific matters?*

VSV: I wonder if there is anything moral or ethical about capitalism or neoliberal capitalism. First, the relationship between Prophetic Theology and Black theology of liberation is one matter that I attempted to give attention to some years ago.<sup>6</sup> Let us reiterate some of the key points which are still important for this conversation. As a response to the internal contradictions of Christianity, BTL in its relationship with Prophetic Theology does not baptize any allegiance to the status quo, in this case,

---

5 Cf. Moore 1972.

6 Cf. Vellem 2010.

neoliberal capitalism. It is also important to discern the streams of prophetic theology in South Africa. A delicate examination of these streams or models of prophetic theology will indicate that confessional theology in BTL goes beyond the traditional contours of Western confession by locating itself within the ethos and matrix of Black Consciousness philosophy; in other words, a different epistemology all together.

The validity of Piet Naudé's (2016:133-148) argument might mislead us if it stems from a critique of the inadequacies of Prophetic Theology through undisclosed hermeneutical lenses. First, his outline of prophetic discourse, ostensibly reliant on Gustafson, does not clearly indicate the hermeneutical assumptions behind "interpreting and systematizing" the Old Testament message of the prophets. Naudé says:

Uncovering unjust structures, making strong moral denouncements, calling for repentance and bringing a utopian alternative are aimed at nothing less than articulating God's will in reaction to very specific circumstances (Naudé 2016:134).

It is these traits he employs to evaluate economic justice. Biblical hermeneutics is such an important aspect in South Africa. After all, the role of Reformed faith itself is the colonization of the authority of Black African people, since the Trans-Atlantic slave trade is not separable from the colonization of their economy, the appropriation of their land and natural resources to benefit one assumed superior race. To critique Prophetic Theology from within this history, in order to "reform" the same system, is probably one way of looking at it.

Naudé, for example, about the strength of prophetic discourse on economic justice, says that "the extension of justice understood as the 'preferential option for the poor' will be analysed" (Naudé 2016:135). The notion of the preferential option for the poor is "used by Naudé to illustrate the legitimacy and strengths of the prophetic discourse" (Naudé 2016:141). He then says that it is not adequate without being supplemented by other narratives or ethical arguments. Perhaps our difference occurs at this point, the manner in which he "extends" or supplements the "preferential option for the poor" or the Latin American Liberation discourse on its failure to provide full moral argument, weakness on moral analysis and silence on transitional measures.

It will be fair to briefly present our approach in BTL, in order to illustrate our few differences with Naudé. In its relationship with Prophetic Theology, BTL does not "supplement" nor "extend," only, but does so, if it does, by going beyond critique, even the reform of a status quo. Among other things, the combination of Prophetic Theology and BTL seeks but the restoration of the

authority of a colonized people. “The preferential option for the poor” is not Prophetic Theology, but a liberation discourse that combines with Prophetic Theology, if we follow Naudé’s argument. It is exactly a “supplement” of Prophetic Theology with which it combines with the “identity-narratives” of the impoverished victims of a system with “rigorous logical, coherent ethical arguments and historical projects”. Naudé seems to subsume Liberation Theology under what he defines as Prophetic Theology rather than its supplement, following his own argument.

The restoration of the authority of the people means the restoration of identity-sustaining narratives and their compatible logically coherent ethical arguments with the feasibility of the planning of courses of action. It means that the victims of colonization and apartheid become in charge of the *terms* of economics, not just the critique of the *content* of economic justice. The preferential option for the poor implies knowledge derived and opened through the struggles of the victims to existential alternative spaces. These alternative spaces exist already among the victims who are not beneficiaries of the current system and more importantly, if Asia is but one example, China, Japan and India are examples of these alternatives in so far as they have regained their authority and are in control of the terms of the game. Let us harvest some insights from Walter Mignolo:

None of those who defended the indigenous peoples in the sixteenth century, nor those who protested against slavery in the eighteenth century initiated a mode of thinking from the space and the experiences of the colonial wound infringed upon the Indians and the Blacks, such as the imperial epistemology that classified the diversity of the New World ... (Mignolo 2011:48).

To suggest that a mode of thinking from the space and experience of the colonial wound does not have within it to address economic justice is to suggest that the experience and memory of the beneficiaries of colonization is the norm and truth, for all. In Naudé’s argument, the implications are enormous as the mode of thinking from the space and experience of the colonial and apartheid wound may not qualify as supplementing prophetic discourse as identity sustaining narratives! Space does now allow us to move to the Accra Confession, however, the insights by Mignolo cited above will be our starting point.

Finally, it is ultimately disturbing to claim that victims are beneficiaries of the system in question. The hypocrisy of this claim is its failure to recognize one simple truth, namely that the benefits of capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment paradigm are for the few as the colonised world, bigger than Europe on the planet is much larger. More than 60% of the global population shares only 11% of the global wealth, according

to the Accra Confession. What does the Oxfam Report say nonetheless? I leave this as a question.

*ML: As I have read through your work, it seems to me that the development and change in your mind has occurred via a clear continuity and intensification of focus. The deeper commitments of previous decades and colleagues continues in your work, as you have not forgotten or exchanged them for others. Would such a "clear continuity, consistency and intensification in your work", which one sees through the superficial and cosmetic change elsewhere, be a fair and honest summary of your work? (And, if I may: Are there any specific source/book/person/incident which you would like to highlight as we summarize and reflect upon your work of the last decade?)*

VSV: I am humbled by this remark, Martin; yes that is true. I have been cautious about what I designate as innovative haste in theological thought and chose to be rather slow in discontinuing with BTL by consistently engaging its strong thought with some of its intensification in the process. There is a chapter that intensifies my reflection and thoughts on racism coming up in a book published by Lexington this year and one on Hermeneutics, too.

I began our conversation by paying tribute to James Cone, and his immense influence in South Africa did not leave me untouched. I will be hesitant for now singling out Black and womanist theologians in South Africa who continue to inspire my work and rather acknowledge them collectively as a fountain from which I will continue to draw and now, in dialogue with the Coloniality School of the Latin American Decolonial Thinking (LADT) as some of the works cited in this conversation indicate.

*ML: Related to the above question on the development and focus within your own work, how would you reflect upon the development and focus of systematic theology in South Africa the past two decades? How would you describe and evaluate the transformation of our discipline after 1994?*

VSV: Briefly, one would say that epistemological transformation on the construction of knowledge of faith and beliefs has not taken place, and it is now urgent. Epistemological transformation does not mean one epistemology as a norm, but a pluriversal, trans-modern approach to faith and beliefs knowledge. Eurocentric epistemologies, as I argue tentatively in the work: Unthinking the West must be decentred.

*ML: In conclusion, what are you currently working on and planning to do in the next few years?*

VSV: I am working on a project with the title *When God is evicted ...* and I hope to get it done before the end of this year, as it started a few years ago. I am fascinated by LADT and am already planning to move in that direction, its dialogue with BTL. Thanks.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

CORMIE, L.

2018. Expanding decolonial horizons: Implications for the renewal of theology. In: J.-F. Roussel (ed.), *Decoloniality and justice: Theological perspectives* (Sao Leopoldo: Oikos), p. 57.

DUSSEL, E.

2006. Globalization, organization and the ethics of liberation. *Organization* 13(2):498.

HOPKINS, D.

1977. Postmodernity, Black theology of liberation and the U.S.A.: Michel Foucault and James H. Cone. In: D. Batstone, E. Mendieta, L.A. Lorentzen & D.N. Hopkins (eds), *Liberation theologies, postmodernity and the Americas* (London: Routledge), pp. 205-222.

MIGNOLO, W.

2011. Epistemic disobedience and the decolonial option: A manifesto. *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1(2):46-52.

MOORE, B. (ED.)

1972. *The challenge of Black theology in South Africa*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox.

MOSALA, I.

1989. *Biblical hermeneutics and Black theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans.

NAUDÉ, P.

2016. *Pathways in ethics: Justice, interpretation, discourse, economics*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357162>

QUIJANO, A.

2008. Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism, and social classification. In: M. Morafía, E. Dussel & C.A. Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at large* (Durham: Duke University Press), pp. 182-183.

VELLEM, V.

2010 Prophetic theology in Black theology, with special reference to the Kairos Document. HTS Art#800. 6pages. DOI:10.4102/hts.v66i.800, 3-4 of 6.

2018. The memory of James Hal Cone: The father of Black theology of liberation, Charles Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union. Unpublished paper:2.