

CHAPTER 9 The conversation continued

In setting up the model of conversation, I located it in the Christian community, and also in a wider (world) setting. The voices of other conversation partners from these wider settings therefore need to be added to the conversation between me and Cone and the Bible and Novak and the Bible.¹

There are several reasons why this is important. First it will give perspective and depth to my conversation with them. Second it will take that conversation on beyond the boundaries it inevitably has, broadening the critiques I have offered so far, and also indicating possible developments for these political theologies. Third, it will test my strategy for looking at Cone and Novak, (i.e. my questions) by allowing a comparison with other people's critiques of their work. If, for example, my questions fail to elucidate major issues which other conversations, using other methodologies, do show – then it will be clear that my method has some serious weaknesses.

As this exercise is in the nature of eavesdropping, I have organised this chapter around the different loci of the conversations I am surveying rather than impose the structure of my questions upon it. This allows the entirety of the comments and critiques to become clear, and allows these other conversations to offer a critique of my conversation. The loci can be grouped into the following broad headings: Appreciation, The Bible, The Theologians' Own Community, Their Theology and Philosophy, and Their Mission (by which I mean the outworking of their ideas in relation to the world);² of course within these headings there will be differences. In order to assess my conversation, I list the issues I have raised with each theologian under the broad headings relating to my eavesdropping, rather than under my own conversational structure.

¹ There is an element of artificiality about my structuring of the conversation in this way, since these other voices were in fact part of the conversation before I was.

² In fact there is a correspondence between these broad headings and my own 'responsibilities' : Theology and Philosophy relate to responsibility for the conversation; Their Own Community and Mission relate to responsibility to the other participants.

9.1 Cone

Under the heading Appreciation can be put my examination of the creative and analytic achievements of Cone's new Black Theology. Under the heading The Bible, can be put my examination of the breadth and depth of Cone's use of the Bible. Under the heading His own community can be put my examination of Cone's spirituality, of his discussion of the Black Church and its complexity and his use of Black sources, of his (narrow) ecclesiology and thinking on failure and sin within the church, of his view of other theologies of liberation and sexism. Under the heading Theology and Philosophy can be put my examination of his own commitments, of his establishment of norms for theology (the Bible and experience of suffering), of his thinking on contextual theology and its authority and authenticity and validation, of his handling of the symbol of blackness, of the relationship between Black Theology and Black Power, of his Christology (what kind of a liberator is Jesus?) and thinking on suffering, and of his rhetoric. Under the heading Mission can be put my examination of Cone's structuralism and need for a clear opponent, of his thinking on reconciliation and violence and on oppressors and the oppressed, of his 'rainbow coalition,' of his use of 'black' and 'white' as symbols, of his refusal to allow 'white' questions.

9.1.1 Appreciation

Many of those who engage with Cone begin with praise for his achievements and gratitude for his thinking. Typical of these is Brown-Douglass' description of the personal impact of A Black Theology of Liberation: it "plucked a chord that changed [her] life; . . . it empowered [her so that she was] able to fight against White racism with a firm and determined resolve; . . . it compelled [her] to pursue further theological study."³ Hopkins describes it as "ground-breaking,"⁴ and Wilmore as an "historically unprecedented turning point."⁵

3 Kelly Delaine Brown-Douglass "Womanist Theology : What is its relationship to Black Theology?" in eds Cone and Wilmore : Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993)

4 Dwight Hopkins in Dwight Hopkins (editor) : Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 3 (Hopkins points out that Cone was the first to write Liberation Theology.)

Black Faith and Public Talk is an extensive collection of essays edited by Hopkins, and written as a celebration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the publication of Black Theology and Black Power. The twenty distinguished essayists, including Cone himself, offer reflections on a variety of aspects of Black Theology.

5 Wilmore in Dwight Hopkins (editor) : Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 234

Bennett⁶ admitted that before Cone, (white) social gossellers had ignored black oppression,⁷ and Bascio described Black theology as the “conscience of white America.”⁸ Long writes of Black theology’s “extremely gracious act” in stating publicly to a white audience that “white churches are heretical because race, more than baptism, is determinative of their identity.” It is gracious because it shows white churches that they are in error, gracious because of the dangers associated with it: “it is a risk because it means that silence could no longer function as an unspoken form of resistance making possible black survival.”⁹

Tracy¹⁰ sees Cone’s Black Theology as a hopeful way forward for all theology. He suggests that rather than accepting pluralism, which could in fact be an attempt to have some over-arching system, theology should deal with fragments. Black religion “recover[s] these repressed, intense, saturated, and fragmentary religious forms. . . . The God of black religion is a fragmentary, liberating God.” These fragments “become, in African American thought, exactly what the Romantics wanted but could not achieve : a shattering of any totality system and the possibility of positive rediscovery of the intense presence of infinity in religious forms.”

Another recovery in which Cone’s Black Theology played a part is the recovery of Black presence in the Bible. Of course, this recovery has a long history going back to the days of slavery, and gaining ground from the 1960s.¹¹ Recent scholarship has focussed on Ethiopia and Egypt as part of Africa and on images of Black people as important for their wealth and their wisdom.¹² Related to this is the

⁶ John C Bennett was President of Cone’s own Faculty at Union Theological Seminary for a time.

⁷ John C Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1975) pp 119 - 121

⁸ Patrick Bascio : The Failure of White Theology : A Black Theological Perspective (Peter Lang, New York 1994) p 126

⁹ Stephen Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 162

¹⁰ David Tracy in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 29

¹¹ see Ullendorff’s Ethiopia and the Bible (Oxford University Press for the British Academy 1968)

¹² see Cain Hope Felder (editor) : Stony the Road We Trod (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1991) see especially Chapter 6 : Felder : “Race, Racism and the Biblical Narratives” Chapter 7 : Charles Copher : “The Black Presence in the Old Testament” Chapter 8 : Randall C Bailey : “Beyond Identification : The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives” see also Cain Hope Felder: Troubling Biblical Waters (Orbis 1989)

However, Anderson almost mocks what he calls cultural Afrocentricity which he sees as a ridiculous yet logical outcome of ontological blackness. He gives as an example a bizarre Ashanti enstoolment ceremony in Atlanta. Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) pp 151-154 He could have gone further still : one Ashanti custom was the burying of their deceased Asanteheni (Paramount Chief/King) on a bed of freshly slaughtered human skulls.

growth in numbers of Black women and men pursuing Biblical studies – and indeed other theological studies – to doctoral level.¹³

My own critique of Cone touched appreciatively on the cogency of Cone’s analysis of white racism,¹⁴ on his commitment to justice for the oppressed, on his passion for Christian theology,¹⁵ on his readiness to listen and develop,¹⁶ on his re-evaluation of black sources and blackness.¹⁷ It has been helpful to add to that the positive comments of other theologians, and a view of further developments.

9.1.2 The Bible

The Bible is an important locus of the conversation not only for Cone, but also for Black Theology generally,¹⁸ as Wilmore indicates:

“In notable ways White members of the biblical profession have given us the impression that they somehow thought that Black theology had nothing to do with the Bible. . . . We need not go into how they arrived at this incredible conclusion given the importance of both the Old and the New Testaments in the early writings of James H Cone, but almost no Black academic in the biblical field came forward to undergird and improve upon Cone’s exegetical and expository work”¹⁹

13 see Gayraud Wilmore : “Introduction” to “New Directions in Black Biblical Interpretation” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) p 177-183

see also Riggins R Earl Jnr “Black Theology and the year 2000 : Three basic ethical challenges” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 53 – 60 Earl looks at the increase in Black people taking PhDs, and argues the need for Black Theology to function pedagogically.

14 Section 7.3.1.a

15 Section 7.3.1.b

16 Section 7.3.2.b

17 Section 7.3.3.b

18 James Evans Jr : We Have Been Believers : An African American Systematic Theology (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1992) p 9 argues that black theology characteristically makes six basic theological affirmations, all of which are grounded in Scripture and embodied in the Black Church tradition.

19 Gayraud Wilmore : “Introduction” to “New Directions in Black Biblical Interpretation” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) p 178

Segundo, as we saw in Chapter 1, sets up the theoretical tool of the hermeneutic circle,²⁰ and he argues that Cone's methodology fulfils his (Segundo's) four criteria:²¹ Cone's interpretation begins with personal experience; he develops an ideological analysis opposed to colour-blindness; he develops a new experience of theology, which is consistent with the perspective of the Black community; he re-interprets the Bible from the perspective that Christ is today liberating all the oppressed.²²

Thiselton compares the hermeneutics of Cone, Boesak, Mosala and others.²³ He describes the balance for Cone: "the Biblical texts remain *fundamental* but always relational to *concrete experience*."²⁴ Thiselton notices Cone's use of narrative as a method²⁵ which Witvliet sees "not as a tool of pragmatic affirmation but as a critical principle. He declares 'What Cone writes about the black story amounts to the best pages in *God of the Oppressed*. He recognizes that the theologian can speak only as a witness....'"²⁶

20 Segundo : *The Liberation of Theology* (Orbis 1975) p 9 "firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads to ideological suspicion; secondly there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular; thirdly there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads to exegetical suspicion, that is to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account; fourthly we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (ie Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal." see above – Chapter 1, Section 1.1

21 Segundo is more guarded about Cone's actual interpretations: "Hence I have no intention here of disputing Cone's interpretation of the Scriptures. Sometimes I am in agreement with him, sometimes I am not." Segundo : *The Liberation of Theology* (Orbis 1975) p 35 Kee : *Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology* (SCM 1990) p 187 comments: "Did Segundo perhaps take fright at the idea of criticising the leading advocate of black theology? By comparison, the South African theologian Allan Boesak has no such fears...."

22 Segundo : *The Liberation of Theology* (Orbis 1975) pp 25-34 Segundo's other examples, all of whom fail to complete the hermeneutic circle, are Harvey Cox and the Secular City; Marx and his critique of religion; and Weber on Calvinism and Capitalism. Deotis Roberts argues that Segundo's discussion does Black Theology a great disservice. See Deotis Roberts : *Black Theology Today* (Edwin Mellin Press, New York 1983) pp 5-7

23 Anthony Thiselton : *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (HarperCollins 1992) pp 419 ff

24 Anthony Thiselton : *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (HarperCollins 1992) p 420 Thiselton's italics. He cites Cone : *God of the Oppressed* (Seabury 1975) p 8

25 "My reply is quite similar to the testimony of the Fathers and Mothers of the Black Church: let me tell you a story...." Cone: *God of the Oppressed* (Seabury 1975) p 106

26 Anthony Thiselton : *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (HarperCollins 1992) p 421

Witvliet : *The Way of the Black Messiah* (SCM 1987) pp 257, 258 Witvliet continues : "The power of these stories is that they cannot be reduced to a private possession... They are capable of taking people outside their social context.... Through them I am challenged to leave my own subjectivity behind, and enter into another domain of thought and action."

However, Mosala has a more trenchant critique.²⁷ He argues that Cone's perception of the Bible as the Word of God "leads to the only possible response" – obedience.²⁸ Mosala, on the other hand, would like to offer a critique of the Bible itself; his point is that different units in it are the product of different political situations, and different groups within those situations, and must be understood so. That is, some units must be rejected as not the word of God, if the voice of the poor in others is to be heard.

"The only adequate and honest explanation is that not all of the Bible is on the side of human rights or of oppressed and exploited people. Recognition of this is of vital importance for those who would use the Bible in the service of the struggle for the liberation of oppressed and exploited people."²⁹

Cecil Cone³⁰ also offers a critique of James Cone's methodology. Cecil Cone has argued that western theological methods are alien to the Black community because they do not ask the kind of questions the Black community is asking, and cannot yield answers akin to revelation. Therefore, Black religious experience is reduced to secularity or apologetics, so that the substance of Black religion is ignored.³¹ Jones also argues that Cone's understanding of Pauline material as repressive – and therefore his advice to readers to avoid it³² – has been conditioned by white interpretations.³³

At that more detailed level, several writers have offered critiques of Cone's use of the Scriptures. Hoyt is perhaps the least critical, showing that Cone did not confine himself to looking only at the Exodus as a sign of God's liberating activity.³⁴ However he does warn of the dangers of selectivity,

27 Mosala: Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa (Eerdmans, Michigan 1989) pp 15 – 30

28 Mosala: Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa (Eerdmans, Michigan 1989) p 17

29 Mosala: Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa p 30

30 James H Cone's brother

31 Cecil Cone : Identity Crises in Black Theology (American Methodist Episcopal Church, Nashville 1975) p 144

32 Cone : A Black Theology of Liberation (Orbis 1986) p 68

33 Amos Jones : Paul's message of freedom : What does it mean to the Church? (Judson Press, Valley Forge 1984) p 30 Jones offers his own interpretation of I Corinthians ch 7 vv 20-24

Boesak : Black Theology and Black Power (Mowbray 1978) p 94 offers a similar re-interpretation of I Peter ch 2 v 18 : it was a warning to slaves not to discredit the gospel in a situation where they had no realistic hope of ending slavery; as such it cannot be generalised.

34 Thomas Hoyt : "Black Interpreters and Black Theology" in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 198-199

which can produce a spirituality of personal preference: “We must reclaim the whole of the scriptural witness. We must not try to short cut the process by searching out only those passages that seem to hold promises of being specifically relevant for a particular social issue.”³⁵

Gollwitzer writes that “Cone’s use of biblical motifs is selective. That is the case with all of us.”

Gollwitzer has earlier made a wider point about Cone’s views on violence, arguing that struggle and violence should not have the purpose of destruction or revenge – though he seems to be prepared to treat differently violence as a sheer reaction to violence. He links the central Biblical themes (of Exodus, covenant, election and God’s partisanship with the lowly) with the cross and resurrection, commenting that

“what Cone has to say about the cross and resurrection is certainly still inadequate. We will more fully do justice to his reticence in this regard if we do not forget that he functions as the spokesman of a suffering segment of humanity which exactly through the message of the crucified has found comfort and hope in its crucifixions.”³⁶

Kee goes further, questioning Cone’s certainty about what is actually God’s election and writing of succumbing “.... to the rhetoric of Cone and others who use the Exodus as a model for liberation? How does God deal with his people? Is the answer Exodus or is it Diaspora? Does he gather them out of the nations or does he disperse them into the nations?”³⁷

My own critique³⁸ also questioned Cone’s certainty in the face of what I argue is the complexity and ambiguity of, for example, the Exodus material. I demonstrated his narrow use of the Bible and argued that a broader reference – for example to other Biblical voices of protest and resistance –

Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 47 points out in a survey of the European critics of Liberation Theology that the Liberation event was not just escape from oppression in Egypt, but also, for example, covenant worship on Sinai

35 Hoyt : “Interpreting Biblical Scholarship for the Black Church Tradition” in : Cain Hope Felder (editor) : Stony the Road We Trod (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1991) p 22

36 Helmut Gollwitzer : “Why Black Theology?” in Union Seminary Quarterly Review (Fall 1975) quoted in eds Wilmore and Cone : Black Theology : A Documentary History 1966-1979 (Orbis 1979) p 167

However, Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 122 disagrees with Gollwitzer, arguing that Gollwitzer separates the cross and resurrection from the liberation event, and therefore Gollwitzer’s critique of Cone’s selectivity is unfair.

37 Alistair Kee: Domination or Liberation (SCM 1986) p 49

38 Section 7.3.3.c

would strengthen his hand. I pointed out his greater reliance on Tillich and Barth than on the Bible. I looked at Cone's hermeneutic key, showing that in places it led to circularity which, while not necessarily wrong, led to the narrowness on which I commented. At a more detailed level, I considered Cone's thinking on the state, and on servitude in relation to Biblical thinking, arguing that it challenged him to a less absolute position. Mosala³⁹ would perhaps suggest the alternative of rejecting the Bible here, but very few Christian writers would be prepared to go as far as he does in rejecting parts of the Bible on a (non-Biblical) Marxist basis.

9.1.3 His own community

9.1.3.1 *Black Sources, the Black Churches and the Black Community*

Alongside the use of the Bible, Cone (and other Black Theologians) sets the importance of using Black sources: "Black history has arisen to establish an authentic Black past. . . . Black history is recovering a past deliberately destroyed by slave master, an attempt to revive old survival symbols and create new ones."⁴⁰ The importance of recovering their history is stressed by other theologies of liberation – Massey, a Dalit Theologian, comments that "people of James Cone's history of oppressions have just over 500 years, whereas the history of oppression of the Dalits is more than 3,500 years."⁴¹ As we have seen Cone himself makes use of Spirituals and Blues, and to some extent slave sermons, and other Black material.⁴² However Anderson sees a problem here:

"Cone's radically oppositional rhetoric leaves him with this dilemma. He could acknowledge his indebtedness to the west European manuscript tradition, or he could insist on a radical disjunction of Black Theology from European sources and remain a theologian alienated from the theology of the churches and their evangelical roots. Cone chose the latter. . . and attempted to overcome academic alienation from black churches by emphasising the necessity of black sources."⁴³

39 Mosala: Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa pp 30 ff

40 Cone : "Black Theology and Black Liberation" in ed Basil Moore : Black Theology, The South African Voice (London 1973) pp 49, 52

41 James Massey : "History and Dalit Theology" in ed Devashayam : Frontiers of Dalit Theology (ISPCK/ Gurukul 1997) p 171

42 see Chapter 7, Section 7.2. 2) b)

43 Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 90

Anderson's argument demonstrates the links between Black sources and the Black Church. In fact the challenge to use Black sources has been taken up by several Black theologians: Cummings, Hopkins, Shannon, to name but three.⁴⁴ But the links between Black Theology and the Black Churches, and between the Black Churches and the Black community and between Black Theology and the Black community apparently remain challenging.⁴⁵

To quote Anderson again:

“A number of problems plagued Cone's project from the beginning. These centred around the relation of black theology to the black churches. Early critics asked how black theology could be a theology of the black churches if it fundamentally disentangles itself from the creeds and confessions, as well as the liturgical practices, that structure the black churches.”⁴⁶

On the other hand, Wilmore refuted the assertion that the ideas of Black Theology have not affected the Black Churches.⁴⁷ In fact, by arguing that, from the point of view of the Black Churches, Black Theology was potentially a threat to harmonious relationships between blacks and whites in the United States,⁴⁸ Wilmore located the problem within the Black Churches which were, as it were, insufficiently black. It is therefore not surprising that Harris accuses Wilmore too of relegating the Black Church – and of treating it as a subset of Black history.⁴⁹ As a further reflection, Copeland

44 see George Cummings and Dwight Hopkins (editors) : Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives (Orbis 1991)

David T Shannon : “An Ante-bellum Sermon : A resource for an African American Hermeneutic” in Cain Hope Felder (editor) : Stony the Road We Trod (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1991) p 98

45 As does the situation of the Black Church and community within a problematic white community: Patrick Bascio : The Failure of White Theology : A Black Theological Perspective (Peter Lang, New York 1994) p 153 suggests that the way forwards in the face of the corruption rampant in white society is a programme of regrouping of Blacks, characterised by co-operation, unity, study, scholarship,, high morality, self-discipline – a return to the survival techniques of pre-Bellum days.

46 Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 90 Anderson continues: “To some, black theology appeared to posit within itself a revolutionary consciousness that looked more like a mirror, and less like an expression of the evangelical gospel that characterised most black churches. Was it then an academic project rather than an ecclesiastical project?”

In fact after qualifying Cone had been denied a teaching position by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and therefore worked for the United Methodist Church – a white-led Church! A deep rift indeed. See Dennis Wiley “Black Theology, the Black Church, and the African American Community” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 133

47 Wilmore : “Introduction to Part IV Black Theology and the Black Church” in eds Wilmore and Cone Black Theology : A Documentary History 1966-1979 (Orbis 1979) p 248

48 Wilmore : “Introduction to Part IV Black Theology and the Black Church” in eds Wilmore and Cone Black Theology : A Documentary History 1966-1979 (Orbis 1979) p 246

49 James Harris : “Black Church and Black Theology : Theory and Practice” in James Harris : Pastoral Theology : A Black Church Perspective (Fortress Press, 1991)

objects to Cone's analysis of Black Catholics: according to Copeland, Cone neglects the importance of Black Catholic organisations, fails to recognise the fidelity of Black Catholics to their own best interests, overstates the case in saying that Black Catholics are overwhelmed, and misunderstands the larger Catholic context within which Black Catholics work.⁵⁰

Smith affirms that there is no necessary gap between the Black Church and Black Theology, citing examples of 'mega-churches' which have grown because they take Black Theology seriously.⁵¹ However, Wiley points out⁵² that the 'return' of Black Theology to the Black Churches was characterised by Cone as compromised because Black theologians neglected their prophetic criticism of the Black Churches,⁵³ which might suggest that the gap between the aspirations of Black Theology and those of Black Churches is real and substantial.

Part of the problem here is the internal (that is, not directly related to racism) problems of the Black community – including breakdown of families, crime, abuse of drugs, violence, and so on⁵⁴ – which seem to be alien to the Black Churches and their values. It could then be argued that these fragmentations are inevitable for the deeply scarred victims of racism;⁵⁵ however, the

“trap of seeing race as the only issue affecting Black Americans today, which too many people regardless of race or ethnicity have [fallen into], is that Blacks become the 'problem' people who are seen as never being satisfied regardless of what is done for them. Little attention is given to the humanity behind this problem, even less to

50 Shawn Copeland OP : “African American Catholics and Black Theology : An Interpretation” in ed Wilmore : African American Religious Studies An Interdisciplinary Anthology (Duke University Press 1989)

51 J Alfred Smith Jnr : in ed Dwight Hopkins : Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 93

52 Dennis Wiley : “Black Theology, the Black Church, and the African American Community” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 129 ff It should be noted that Wiley sees Black Theology as the key to the survival of the Black Church, and the Black Church as the key to salvation for the African American community, yet also asserts that the Black church is not one with the Black community.

53 Cone in eds Wilmore and Cone Black Theology : A Documentary History 1966-1979 (Orbis 1979) pp 114 f However, Cone did see a pivotal event in the 'return' – the Black Theology Project, Atlanta, Georgia 1977 – as reminiscent of the 1960s when Black Theology had no existence outside the Black Church: Cone : For My People (Orbis 1984) pp 102, 110

54 see Dennis Wiley : “Black Theology, the Black Church, and the African American Community” in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 127
see also Manning Marable who gives a devastating description of the current inequalities facing African Americans and other blacks. He goes on to reflect on change: “Fundamental political change in a democracy almost always comes from the boundaries of society, not from the centre.” Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) pp 79, & 81-83

55 see Wilmore in eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993) pp 120 f

innovative ways of seeking to resolve the problem, by going beyond it to see the harsh reality of a people still trapped by stereo-types and false consciousness.”⁵⁶

The response from Black Theologians has been to emphasise the importance of the pastoral role of the Black Church. Wilmore writes:

“The question today is Black theology’s relevance for the pastoral ministry, its utility as a way of doing theology in the local congregation and the counselling room, its practicality for dealing with the normal everyday needs of our people as we move among them as pastors and priests. Black theology as pastoral theology seeks to read the signs of the times to discover what God is doing with individuals trapped in the misery of personal sins, and communities trapped in worldly structures that oppose ethnic self-determination and encourage cultural suicide. . . . Although James Cone does not define what he does explicitly as a pastoral theology, he has consistently recognised the coherence between spirituality in the sanctuary and the struggle in the streets. For Cone, any study of the history of our pilgrimage from slavery will confirm the inseparability of sanctification and liberation. Thus he stresses the necessary role that worship, preaching and pastoral leadership have played, not only in nurturing the souls of Black folk, but in shaping their churches as agents of liberation in the world.”⁵⁷

As Hayes’ and Wiley’s words⁵⁸ show, the relationship between racism and the problems within the Black community is debatable. In contrast to Wilmore, who argues that the problems are related to the destructive nature of racism, Steele suggests that the situation has deteriorated as racism has receded: “to admit this fully would cause us to lose the innocence we desire from our victimisation.”⁵⁹ Certainly, one part of the agenda for Black Theology must be a more thorough analysis of racism.⁶⁰

56 Diana Hayes : And Still We Rise (Paulist Press, New York 1996) p 189 She continues (p 191) “Black Americans have, like their fellow Americans, become increasingly seduced by the trappings of secular society – losing contact with their sense of themselves as a community, seeing the role of Black faith as passive and irrelevant, with an entire generation lost to the church and the meltdown of the Black family.”

57 Gayraud Wilmore : “Pastoral Ministry in the Origin and Development of Black Theology” : Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center Vol 13 (Spring 1986) quoted in eds Cone and Wilmore : Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol 2 (Orbis 1993) p 124

cf Diana Hayes : And Still We Rise (Paulist Press, New York 1996) p 192/3 : “Black Theology must immerse itself in the life of the Black community, rebuild lives and spirits, and be a sign of contradiction to the complacent and sterile lives so many live today.”

58 see above 251 and footnotes Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found and Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

59 Shelby Steele : Content of our character : A new vision of Race relations in America (Harper, New York 1990) p 15. Steele has been described as a neo-conservative, and his views have been roundly criticised by some in the black community.

60 John Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press, 1975) p 126

Dorrien contrasts the relationship between Black Theology and the Black Churches with Latin American Liberation Theology and the Latin American Churches.⁶¹ He points out that there was no tradition or deeply rooted spirit of protest in the Latin American Churches, but that on the other hand Liberation Theology has been able to create hundreds of thousands of base communities; in contrast black theology remains, says Dorrien, almost entirely a concern of black academics. “For Cone and Wilmore, the failure of black theology as a social movement is symptomatic of black America’s deeper crisis of spirit and cultural disintegration.”⁶² A second reason may be that “the movement’s early momentum was flattened by the reactionary turn in American national politics and the related ascendancy of the fundamentalist Right, which made effective appeals to the conservatism of many black Church leaders.”⁶³

9.1.3.2 *Womanist Theology*

Cone, as we have already seen,⁶⁴ felt keenly his failure to recognise Black women as an oppressed majority, yet “right up to Martin and Malcolm and America, not a single woman is named, quoted or given credit for contributing to the transformations Cone says he has made in his thought and style in the last 20 years.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, womanist⁶⁶ theology has begun to make an impact on Black Theology, as can be seen from the presence of a large section on it in Black Theology : A

61 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 247

62 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 248

63 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 252

Dorrien (p 14) gives some figures for the Reagan administration’s tax changes: poverty increased by 15.2%, and the bottom fifth of the population received barely 4% of the nation’s income. On the other hand, the top 20% received more than 50% of the nation’s income and held 75% of its wealth. The top 1% received income increases of 74%, and the income of the bottom 10% **fell** by 10.5%. At the same time, Institutions such as the American Enterprise Institute (of which Novak was a part – see below) expanded their activities, and the Institute for Religion and Democracy was founded. (Dorrien p 198).

64 Chapter 7 Section 7.2. 2.b

65 Delores Williams : “James Cone’s Liberation Theology 20 years later” in Cone : A Black Theology of Liberation 20th Anniversary Edition (Orbis 1989) p 191

66 This term is preferred by Black women theologians, in distinguishing themselves from white feminist theologians; it was borrowed from African American culture by Alice Walker; see Alice Walker : In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens : Womanist Prose (Harcourt Press, New York 1983)

Grant argues that it is womanist theology alone which can move from the particular to the universal, because black women share the suffering associated with race, the suffering associated with sexism, and the suffering of the poor Jacquelyn Grant “Womanist Theology : Black Women’s experience as a source for doing Theology, with special reference to Christology” : Journal of the Interdenominational Center Vol 13 (Spring 1986)

Documentary History Volume II⁶⁷ and Dorrien has suggested that Cone and Wilmore invest much of their hope for the renewal of Black Theology in the emergence of womanist criticism.⁶⁸

9.1.3.3 *Other Theologies of Liberation*

“Having limited itself as contextual, [Black Theology] then has problems with communities living on the edge of other particular conflictual events”⁶⁹

The relationship between the various theologies of liberation has been of great concern to those theologies. This is not to gloss over differences between them, arising out of their contextual nature, yet offering substantial critiques of each other. So Black Theologians have argued that South American Liberation theology has ignored the dimension of race, and South American theologians have claimed that Black Theology’s critique of capitalism has been weak.

On the other hand, Boesak writes:

“while we acknowledge that all expressions of liberation theology are not identical, we must protest very strongly against the total division (and contrast) some make between Black Theology in South Africa and Black Theology in the United States; and between Black Theology and African Theology; between Black Theology and the Latin American Theology of Liberation...”⁷⁰

He agrees with Cone that “the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of liberation;”⁷¹ however, he also suggests that Cone’s use of ‘black’ as a symbol is unhelpful for other theologies of liberation:

“Moreover, if black is simply determinative for oppression and liberation everywhere and under any circumstances, if the only legitimate expression for liberation theology has to

67 eds Cone and Wilmore Black Theology : A Documentary History Vol II 1980-1992 (Orbis 1993)

68 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 248 Dorrien refers to the Introductions to Womanist Criticism in both Volumes of Black Theology : A Documentary History (Orbis 1979 and 1993)

69 Patrick Bascio : The Failure of White Theology : A Black Theological Perspective (Peter Lang, New York 1994) p 136

Boesak also warns of: “the danger of a contextual theology being overruled by the situational experience and as a result succumbing to absolutist claims is very great. We fear that in this respect Cone’s theology is particularly vulnerable.” Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 143

70 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 7

71 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 17 Later (p 40) he writes : “A black liberation theology shares a common basis with African theology (and Latin American theologies of liberation). The search for true and authentic human identity and liberation is also to acknowledge that one’s African-ness is a God-given blessing to delight in rather than a fate to be lamented. Moreover, African theology wishes to be no more than the reflection of African Christianity, in the light of the Word of God, on the African situation, on African culture and tradition, on Africa past and Africa present.”

be black, does not Cone close the door to other expressions of liberation theology? Can the Latin American theologian concede that the only way to recognise God's actions in history is 'through the most radical deeds of Black Power'? Can for instance American Indian liberation theology (God is Red!) share in this absolute claim of blackness?"⁷²

This tension between the universal and the particular, both of which Cone would like to claim for Black Theology, remains problematic.⁷³ So Lehmann warns that whilst Black Theology is Christian theology, Christian theology is not Black Theology.⁷⁴

Black Theology's nearest relation is perhaps South African Black Theology.⁷⁵ Both deal with experiences of racism and therefore with a white pseudo-innocence,⁷⁶ which closes its eyes to reality and makes a virtue of helplessness, unable to come to terms with the destructiveness within oneself or others.⁷⁷ But Bosch describes an important difference between the two: South African Black Theology says "things which are absent from Cone's writings. Baartman⁷⁸ for instance writes : This is the difficult demand... TO LOVE THE WHITE MAN. We cannot hate our fellow man... It is difficult to love whites. It is costly to love whites yet the black man must."⁷⁹ Boesak agrees:

"We agree with King and Cone that it is impossible to separate love from justice and power. We cannot accept however Cone's contention that 'to love is to make a decision against white people.' We would have thought that to be able to love white people

72 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 143. He agrees with Lehmann (see above 255) that "black theology only works with the framework of liberation." (p 144)

73 Segundo's warning about the choice of commitment is valid, but perhaps does not solve the problem completely: "Every hermeneutic entails conscious and unconscious partisanship.... The possibility of achieving a higher degree of universality ... depends on making a good choice insofar as our commitment and our partial point of view is concerned." Segundo : The Liberation of Theology (Orbis 1976) p 25

74 Lehmann "Black Theology and 'Christian' Theology" in : Union Seminary Quarterly Review (Fall 1975)

75 Hopkins : Black Theology USA and South Africa (Orbis 1989) describes two phases of the relationship between the two – the first, indirect (1971-1977) - Bosch's essay and Boesak : Black Theology and Black Power (Mowbray, Oxford 1978) belong to this – and the second, direct (in 1986, at Union Theological Seminary, New York). However, Hopkin's book predates the end of apartheid.

76 The term comes from psychologist Rollo May : Power and Innocence (Norton, New York 1972)

77 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) pp 3, 4 Boesak continues in much the same terms as Cone: "The question is no longer whether whites are willing to do something for blacks, but whether whites are willing to identify with what the oppressed are doing to secure their liberation and whether whites are aiding that liberation in their own communities?"

78 Ernest Baartman, "Black Consciousness" Pro Veritate March 1971 pp 5,6

79 Daniel Bosch: "Currents and Crosscurrents in South African Black Theology : Journal of Religion in Africa Vol 6 No 1 (1974) quoted in eds Wilmore and Cone : Black Theology : A Documentary History 1966-1979 (Orbis 1979) p 231

would mean precisely to make a decision *for* them. For their humanity, however obscure, against their inhumanity, however blatant. For their liberation, and against their fear; for their human authenticity, against their terrible estrangement.”⁸⁰

My critique of Cone identified these issues, and in some cases went further. For example, I looked not only at his thinking on other theologies of liberation (including the relation between the particular and the universal) but also at the order in which Cone began to consider these which, I argued, arose from his narrow focus.⁸¹ In relation to the Black community I also discussed his inclusion of Black non-Christians, and his exclusion of Black middle class (Cone might say white?) Christians, arguing that this view of these boundaries was flawed.⁸²

9.1.4 Theology and Philosophy

9.1.4.1 *Black Theology and black liberation*

Perhaps one of the lessons of the interaction with other theologies of liberation is the need to avoid being a ‘single issue’ theology. For example, “if the day ever comes when blacks are totally liberated, would the Kingdom of God be at hand?”⁸³ Cone says that Black Theology is not just about racism,⁸⁴ but several scholars have been suspicious about the too easy identification of Black interests with

80 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 146

81 Section 7.3.2.b

82 Section 7.3.3.b

83 Joseph Jackson, President, National Baptist Convention : “The Basic Theological Position of the National Baptist Convention, USA Inc” Sept 3 – 8 1971

84 Cone : For My People (Orbis 1984) p 87

God's will,⁸⁵ of Black Theology with truth,⁸⁶ or with Black Power,⁸⁷ of evil entirely with what others do to us,⁸⁸ of the election of Black people with freedom,⁸⁹ of Jesus with the Black community,⁹⁰ of God's love with our human understanding [of it].⁹¹

Lovin is broadly supportive of Cone's views. He argues that most of us live our lives between the two poles of oppressed and oppressor, victim and victor – and try to be comfortable there. However, “real Christianity is possible only when we can identify ourselves as victims... and then wage everything on the notion that to be a victim is not to be the loser, but to inherit God's promise of liberation and resurrection.”⁹² However this is not the same as asserting claims of certainty:

“Cone's mistake is that he has taken Black Theology out of the framework of liberation, thereby making his own situation (being Black in America) and his own movement (liberation from white racism) the ultimate criterion for all theology.”⁹³

Kirk accepts that Cone begins to correct himself:

“Cone has committed two grave errors in his theological reflections in his first book. First, he identifies evil entirely with what others do to us; second he maintains that because white theology is all wrong, its opposite must be all right. Happily in God of the

85 cf Kee : Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology (SCM 1990) p 187 : Kee is constructing a critique of Segundo's model, which appears to legitimise Cone. See above 246 and 248

cf Preston Williams : “James Cone and the Problem of a Black Ethic” : Harvard Theological Review Vol 65 Oct 1972 pp 483-494
“Cone's identification of God's intention for humanity with the black community is not based on empirical fact; his exclusivist claims invite us to jettison rational debate and argument.” Williams argues that Cone should recover a universal dimension to his theology.

86 Andrew Kirk Theology Encounters Revolution (IVP 1980) p 106

87 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 73 and p 97 where Boesak writes: “Black Power is not the antithesis of the gospel – on this point Cone has our complete agreement. There is however a danger of complete identification with Black Power's political program.” He believes that Cone moves away from this absolute position, making an adequate distinction between divine revelation and human aspirations, referring to Cone : God of the Oppressed (Seabury 1975) pp 84, 85

88 Andrew Kirk Theology Encounters Revolution (IVP 1980) p 106

89 Segundo : The Liberation of Theology (Orbis 1976) p 33

90 Deotis Roberts : A Black Political Theology (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1974) p 125 “We have need for more than a moral example in Jesus. We need a Saviour as well. Not the Lamb of God who pays it all and saves us one by one. We understand him to be one who is able to work in and through us to will and do beyond all that we are able to ask or think on our own”

cf Kee : Domination or Liberation (SCM 1986) p47 : “Cone (and Cleage) reduces theology to Christology and indeed reduces Christology to the dangerously superficial question: What would a black Jesus be doing today?”

91 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 149 Boesak is thinking of issues connected with the question of reconciliation with whites.

92 Robin Lovin : “Response to James Cone” in eds Mahan and Richesin : The Challenge of Liberation Theology : A First World Response (Orbis 1984) p 57

93 Allan Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 143

Oppressed Cone has become more aware of these objections... he begins to take Scripture more seriously as a starting point for truly Christian reflection.”⁹⁴

Witvliet, too, is critical of Cone’s identifications. He asks,

“Has Cone not lost sight of the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between God and humanity when he describes Black Power as a manifestation of God’s every ongoing activity in the liberation of humanity from slavery? Does not Cone run the risk of claiming God’s revelation for a particular group or race – and in so doing make the same mistake as the white theology which he rightly attacks at this point?”⁹⁵

Witvliet also makes a point about Cone’s use of Tillich’s method of correlation – which he (Witvliet) argues is “incapable of doing justice to black theology as contextual theology. It is a direct consequence of the abstract dialectic of the method of correlation that above all in A Black Theology of Liberation the tension between eschatology and history, particularity and universality, which is so vital for liberation theology, does not sufficiently come through.”⁹⁶

9.1.4.2 Black Theology and blackness

The link between Theology and Blackness (and therefore eg Black Power) is questioned by other theologians. Lehmann is perhaps the most relaxed : “Cone is making a chromatic identification of the frontier of truth. . . .”⁹⁷ and John Bennett understands why he made the link : “had Cone been more careful about this use of words, his books might too quickly have provided an ‘out’ for his white readers. . . .”⁹⁸ However, Bennett points out some of the overlooked complexities of tensions between

94 J Andrew Kirk Theology Encounters Revolution (IVP 1980) p 106

Kirk continues : “The way in which Scripture is to be understood is a practical question which cannot be settled by theoretical discussion. Whether or not we have succeeded in allowing the text to speak in an authentic way, one which maintains the supremacy of Jesus Christ over every political ideology and movement for social, cultural and ethical change will have to be decided in retrospect. Biblical hermeneutics demands a certain amount of trial and error.”

95 Witvliet: The Way of the Black Messiah (Eng trans John Bowden SCM 1987) p 167 Cone’s response (p 170) may be that God’s otherness is located today in his blackness – because black people are other.

96 Witvliet: The Way of the Black Messiah (Eng trans John Bowden SCM 1987) p 176

Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1995) p 243 suggests that Cone’s neo-orthodoxy was “chosen by default. When he began to develop Black theology he was only familiar with three basic theological perspectives : Protestant neo-orthodoxy, and liberal and conservative theologies.” He judged that liberal theology’s historical-critical method would not work well with Black Church people, and found conservative theology racist and fundamentalist – only neo-orthodoxy was left. See Cone : My Soul Looks Back (Orbis 1986) pp 82-88

97 Paul Lehmann : The Transfiguration of Politics (SCM 1974) p 168

98 John Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press 1975) p 124

blacks and Jews (seen as landlords, teachers, social workers) and the common identification of blacks with Arabs,⁹⁹ which make the category 'black' problematic. Kee makes the interesting point that Cone's more balanced work is less stimulating; he too criticises the concept of Black Power - because from a Biblical point of view it is God who acts, and Jesus' freedom is the freedom to go to his death; Kee thinks "Cone falls into a Manichaeism of colour so that black becomes good and white evil."¹⁰⁰

Anderson goes further, arguing against the idea of ontological Blackness. Anderson's argument is first that Cone claims that blackness is ontological, corresponding to black experience; black experience is defined as experience of suffering and rebellion – especially against whiteness; black suffering and rebellion are ontologically created by whiteness; whiteness therefore appears to be the ground of black experience, and hence of Black Theology and its new black being. Earlier he has shown how Black Theology is a theology of survival only:

“Black theology constructs its new being on a dialectical structure that categorical racism and white racial ideology bequeathed to African American intellectuals (notwithstanding its claims for privileging black sources). However the new being of black theology remains an alienated being whose mode of existence is determined by crisis, struggle, resistance, and survival – not thriving, flourishing, or fulfilment.”¹⁰¹

He takes up his point about black sources later, claiming that other theologians have tried to “reassure the ecclesiastical and public relevance of black theology” by a hermeneutic of return¹⁰² to black sources but remain under the burden of ontological blackness.¹⁰³

Long argues that because Cone makes blackness an ontological symbol, rather than a tradition with specific practices embodied in a particular history, his incorporation of Black history within Tillich's

⁹⁹ John Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press 1975) p 130

¹⁰⁰ Alistair Kee : Domination or Liberation (SCM 1986) pp 37-39

¹⁰¹ Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 87 Anderson continues: “Its self-identity is always bound by white racism and the culture of survival. The motive of transcendence from this unresolved matrix of struggle and survival recedes into the background as oppression is required for the self-disclosure of the oppressed. I suggest that as long as black theology remains determined by ontological blackness, it remains not only a crisis theology but also a theology in crisis of legitimation.”

¹⁰² for hermeneutics of return, see Edward Said Culture and Imperialism (Knopf, New York 1993) pp xii-xiii

¹⁰³ Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 93

He suggests (p 117) that: “to press beyond ontological blackness, African American theology needs a public theology that is informed by the enlightening and emancipatory aspects of post-modern African American cultural criticism. It also needs the iconoclastic rigor and utopian dimensions of post-modern African American religious criticism.”

See above at footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

theology is an unstable mix. Long goes on to point out that Cone's reasoning seems to be this: I am black; God is black, and shares my suffering; God as creator is ground of my blackness. He concludes: "then whites are black, and history has evaporated."¹⁰⁴

Hill would reject the characterisation of blackness as ontological:

"there is not one way to be black, no single image to hold up as the norm for what it means to be black.... 'Blackness' as described in Black Theology and Black Power is not an essentialised reality.... What is described is not ontological blackness, but ideological blackness in relation to needed social change.... We need to excavate our own sense of blackness in order to resist the categories and false unity we retreat into when we feel threatened."¹⁰⁵

9.1.4.3 Black Theology as public theology

Anderson's point above about public theology has been echoed elsewhere. Hopkins, in the Introduction to Black Faith and Public Talk, looks at Black Theology as public theology¹⁰⁶ – and at the different publics it addresses: the Church, the broader society, and the academy.

Elsewhere, Hopkins has looked at stages in Cone's thinking;¹⁰⁷ in the fourth and final stage, Cone looks at African American sources in order to make Black Theology a more public theology. "This [final] stage finds Cone pressing the claim that Theology is critical public discourse – it is liberation God-talk confronting society, Church and the academy."¹⁰⁸

104 Stephen Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 169

105 Renee Leslie Hill in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 140 She continues (p 142), "because of my hybrid identity/multiple social location, I have always resisted the ranking of oppressions. I still believe that this resistance to ranking is a commitment to freedom...."

Edward Braxton : "Toward a Black Catholic Theology" : Freeing the Spirit Vol 5 No 2 (1977) p 5 makes a similar point : "A key unanswered question for me is this one: What constitutes an authentic Black experience? Who constitutes the accrediting agency for genuine Blackness? Who gives the stamp of approval, if you will, to someone's postures, attitudes, points of view, as being genuinely Black? ... it remains a fact that in most cases the contemporary Black American is a peculiar hybrid of both African and European cultures. While a good case – and an urgent case – may be made that the one must be reappropriated, by what necessity do we argue that the other must be cast off, and by what process is this to be done? These and other questions must be answered if Black theology is to mature."

106 Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 4

107 Dwight Hopkins : "Post-modernity, Black theology of Liberation and the United States of America : Michel Foucault and James H Cone" in Batstone, Medieta, Lorentzen and Hopkins, editors : Liberation Theologies, Postmodernities and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) pp 205-221 See below 265

108 Hopkins : "Post-modernity, Black theology of Liberation and the United States of America : Michel Foucault and James H Cone" in Batstone, Medieta, Lorentzen and Hopkins, editors : Liberation Theologies, Postmodernities and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) p 213

In her essay, Chopp examines this further, pointing out that one defining element of “public” is the exclusion of some other publics. Each public depends on a narrative identity, based on a selective tradition. Cone’s work questions the narrative identity of America by telling of the memory of suffering and oppression. As a type of public discourse, Black Theology and liberation theology (she calls them poetics of testimony) have three characteristics: they seek to tell the truth, they make an ethical summons, and they demand sensitivity and openness to diverse voices.¹⁰⁹ There is a resonance between this view and the hope of Bascio that Black theology will not become just another exclusive theory but by retaining its Christian openness will also retain the moral authority of its critique of white/classical theology.¹¹⁰

Rhetoric

Black theology as public theology relates to Cone’s passionate¹¹¹ rhetoric.

“What deepens my anger today is the appalling silence of white theologians on racism in the United States and in the modern world. . . . They do not write about slavery, colonialism, segregation, and the profound cultural link these horrible crimes created between white supremacy and Christianity. The cultural bond between European values and Christian beliefs is so deeply enmeshed in the American psyche and thought process that their identification is assumed.”¹¹²

However, several theologians have found the strength of Cone’s rhetoric unhelpful.¹¹³ Holmer’s critique is perhaps the strongest, suggesting that it is more style than substance, and implying that this damaged Black Theology¹¹⁴, by attracting the shallow:

“The unfortunate feature of Black Theology, as I have been reading it, is that it shares this passion to override everything else ; and then, besides, it adds a note as if it is not only backed by a restless imperative, but that it ought to do so. Of course, Black Theology, as part of the social movements and the new academic fever, acquired a

109 Rebecca Chopp in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 156

110 Patrick Bascio : The Failure of White Theology (Peter Lang, New York 1994) p 140. He also confesses to finding Cone’s pessimism discouraging.

111 Cornel West in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) pp 11 ff

112 Cone in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 252

113 We have already noted Anderson’s remark about the Molotov cocktails: “Although such a remark seems revolutionary enough, such an act of racial frustration is not likely to transact cultural fulfilment.” Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 89
see Chapter 7, Section 7.2. 1) a)

114 see also Victor Anderson : Beyond Ontological Blackness (Continuum, New York 1995) p 90 : “Cone’s radically oppositional rhetoric leaves him with this dilemma. . . .” See above 249

certain importance simply because it was exclusive, shrill and demanding. It fed the need for drama and histrionics. It gave a kind of religious sanction for those who wanted to prove themselves by attacking something powerful. . . . Insofar as Black Theology gave these voice and discipline, one can probably praise it. For a while it gave rationale to the notion that gladiatorial talk was going to get an equitable moral order finally established.”¹¹⁵

My own contributions under this heading include my identification of the weakness of Cone’s thinking on suffering,¹¹⁶ my questions about Cone’s view of the nature of Jesus as liberator,¹¹⁷ and my interrogation of the nature of racism as heresy or sin. It has been helpful to have Anderson’s critique of ontological blackness as a very clear way of understanding some weaknesses of Cone’s position; even so my own suggestions about structuralism cover some of the same ground.¹¹⁸ Hopkin’s and Chopp’s thinking on public theology seems to be a constructive indication of the way forwards for Black Theology.

9.1.5 Mission

9.1.5.1 Violence/Reconciliation

Cone’s strategy of liberation, while transcending religion as a crutch, “tends to settle for being religion as a gun.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps not surprisingly, almost all theologians engaging with Cone distance themselves from his apparent espousal of violence. Bennett is the most mild: “I think that Cone too easily reduces the tension between violence and the teachings of Jesus.”¹²⁰ Bascio expresses his disappointment, arguing

115 Paul Holmer : “About Black Theology” in Lutheran Quarterly Vol 28 No 3 (1976) p 33

116 Sections 7.3.2.a and 7.3.3.c.iii

117 Section 7.3.3.c

118 Section 7.3.1.b

119 Mary Daly : Beyond God the Father : Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation (Beacon Press, Boston, 1985) p 25 Mary Daly is a radical feminist.

120 John C Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press, 1975) p 123

effectively that violence should be the last resort,¹²¹ and Lehmann contrasts Cone's view with that of Ellul.¹²² Lehmann is not arguing for a dilution of Black Theology's commitment to revolution, but an understanding of violence as destructive of revolution:

“A theology of revolution has a primary responsibility for the nurture of revolutionary faithfulness and for the guardianship of a revolutionary future against a revolutionary fate. As and when revolutions convert violence from risk to policy, they exhibit a lost awareness of violence as an apocalyptic happening, and in this loss are on the way to the abandonment of the patient persistence of revolutionary faithfulness for an abortive implementation of revolutionary hopes.”¹²³

Roberts,¹²⁴ Gollwitzer,¹²⁵ and Boesak¹²⁶ all agree on rejecting Cone's “by any means necessary” ethic.

Roberts rejects the narrowness Cone has imposed on Black theology, and argues for a theology with both liberation and reconciliation as its goal. “There is no short cut to reconciliation that does not pass through liberation and there is no reconciliation that does not include equity.”¹²⁷ Roberts suggests a pastoral insight:

A good reason for not becoming a black racist is to observe what discrimination had done to the souls, minds and spirits of whites who hate blacks. To hate someone at sight without ever getting to know him is a form of sickness.”¹²⁸

Paris makes a contrast here between Cone and Martin Luther King. He sees Cone as confrontational, King as conciliatory, the two as complementary. However, he also argues that Cone's openness and candour with his critics must be set alongside this confrontational view of him.¹²⁹ Others have argued

121 Patrick Bascio : The Failure of White Theology : A Black Theological Perspective (Peter Lang, New York 1994) p 137

122 Ellul : Violence (Seabury 1969) pp 129, 130 says that “the Christian is called to break the vicious circle of necessity occasioned by the fact that violence inevitably breeds violence.”

123 Paul Lehmann : The Transfiguration of Politics (SCM 1974) p 274

124 Deotis Roberts : Liberation and Reconciliation : A Black Theology (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1970) p 13

125 Gollwitzer “Schwarze Theologie” in Evangelsiche Theologie (Jan 1973)

126 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 122

127 Deotis Roberts : Liberation and Reconciliation : A Black Theology (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1970) p 191. see also p 19 On p 13 Roberts also criticises Cone's ethics which he argues confuses ends and means.

128 Deotis Roberts : Liberation and Reconciliation : A Black Theology (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1970) p 101

129 Paris in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 226

that Cone's lack of conciliatory spirit has been unhelpful: Bennett argues that Black liberation needs allies, "but Cone's polemics leave little space for them."¹³⁰ Elshtain and Beem are also uneasy at Cone's divisiveness:

"Cone's rough language sets blacks apart from whites. But Christianity *and*, it must be said, the liberalism Cone spends a good bit of time berating, all turn on the possibility that we might move beyond resentment *even* in situations of oppression. This is, to say the least, an extraordinarily challenging and demanding regimen and Cone really doesn't want any part of it. . . . Now the problem with such a stance is its absolutism, its demand for absolute surrender or total victory. That is not the way of democratic politics, which is always a frustrating business, a series of half-advances half-retreats because one is obliged to deal again and again with people who differ and who dissent. . . . The difficulty with Cone's position is that it leaves 'whitey' very little room in which to make gestures of friendship and solidarity with black Americans. One is, so to speak, condemned for doing nothing or condemned for doing something. . . ."¹³¹

Martin Luther King's thinking about whites and their racism was more pragmatic: the repeal of the Jim Crow laws "may not change the heart. . . but they restrain the heartless."¹³²

I suspect that the underlying problem with Cone's views here is that he does not have a theology which can explain suffering or give it any meaning or purpose or end. As Kirk puts it, "If God liberates the oppressed from human captivity, why does their suffering continue and why do black people still live in such wretched conditions?"¹³³ Many attempts at theodicy – both Christian and non-Christian – have responded to the human need to put suffering in a context, to see it as a part of some divine plan, or as constructive once encompassed by such a plan. Cone's single minded focus on Black liberation, effected by God now, really leaves no place for suffering - neither in "the promised land" nor on the way there.¹³⁴

130 John C Bennett : The Radical Imperative (Westminster Press, 1975) p 126 Bennett accepts that whites are racist, but distinguishes between depths of racism, so that some whites would support Black causes as allies; he further points out that many American whites are only second or first generation American, and have had no hand in slavery.

131 Elshtain and Beem in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 213 Elshtain and Beem also (p 208) criticise the unifying agenda of Americanization, the divisive gaining of "recognition exclusively along race, gender, or sexual preference lines." and the multi-cultural movement - [its] "worst excesses are just as destructive to [the] balance [at the core of democratic life] as the progressive's unbridled call for unity."

132 Martin Luther King, quoted in Hopkins (editor): Black Faith and Public Talk (Orbis 1999) p 215

133 J Andrew Kirk : Theology Encounters Revolution (IVP 1980) p 104

134 see also W R Jones : "Theodicy : The Controlling Category for Black Theology" : Journal of Religious Thought Vol 30 (1973-1974)

9.1.5.2 *Political Agenda*

Three theologians step back a little from Black Theology to look at it in terms of stages of development. They show a developing theology and, interestingly, all three offer perspectives on Cone's (and Black Theology's) political commitments. West identifies five stages:¹³⁵ Black Theology as a critique of slavery; Black Theology as a critique of institutional racism; Black Theology as a critique of white North American theology; Black Theology as a critique of United States capitalism; Black Theology as a critique of capitalist civilisation. He suggests that Black Theology is at present moving from the fourth to the fifth stage, and he offers his own critique of capitalist civilisation. Under this schema, Cone's contribution would be seen as moving Black Theology from the first to the second stage, and beginning to move it on to the third stage.

Hopkins, identifying four stages in Cone's prophetic career¹³⁶ produces a similar schema: in stage one, Cone deconstructs white supremacy in Christian theology, the Church and America; in stage two, Cone turns away from European and Euro-American sources towards Black sources; in stage three, Cone broadens his theology of liberation to the condemnation of monopoly capitalism, sexism and imperialism; in his final stage, Cone delves more deeply into African American sources in order to make Black Theology a more public theology.¹³⁷

Fowler applies his thinking on a structural-developmental view of the stages of faith¹³⁸ to Black Theology.¹³⁹ His stages are : first: Infancy: Undifferentiated Faith - mutuality and trust; second:

135 Cornel West : Black Theology of Liberation as Critique of Capitalist Civilisation. : Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center Vol 10 (Fall 1982 – Spring 1983)

136 Dwight Hopkins : “Post-modernity, Black theology of Liberation and the United States of America : Michel Foucault and James H Cone” in Batstone, Medietz, Lorentzen and Hopkins, editors : Liberation Theologies, Postmodernities and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) pp 205-221. Hopkins compares Foucault and Cone, arguing that Cone is strongest analysing macro-structures of domination (economics etc), but Foucault's strength lies in the analysis of micro-dimensionality of power (pleasure, sexuality etc).

137 see above 260 for Hopkins' concern with the category of public theology.

138 J W Fowler : Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning. (Harper, San Francisco 1976) There have been criticisms of Fowler's views, which are based on Piaget's and Kohlberg's thinking.

139 J W Fowler in ed Mahan and Richesin : The Challenge of Liberation Theology (Orbis 1984) pp 70-96

Early Childhood : Intuitive, Projective Faith - imagination, images; third: Childhood: Mythic-Literal Faith; - Rise of narrative and stories of faith; fourth: Adolescence: Synthetic-Conventional Faith - Forming of identity and shaping of a personal faith.; fifth: Young Adulthood: Individuative-Reflective Faith - Reflective construction of ideology; sixth: Adulthood: Conjunctive Faith - Paradox, depth and intergenerational responsibility for the world. Fowler suggests there may be a seventh stage: Universality, characterised by a felt sense of the ultimate, which is inclusive of all being. Fowler sees Cone (an ideological theologian whose principal goal is to bring about change) as at stage 5, and Roberts and Jones (theologians of balance – where the line between the oppressed and oppressors goes through people and groups rather than between them) as at stage 6, and suggests that when there is genuine theological passion there will always be both stage 5-focussed and stage 6-focussed theologies, so that it will be important to maintain the positive tensions between the two.

The problem here for Cone, and Black Theologians generally, is that the pressures for a rejection of capitalism are strong, coming not only from other theologies of liberation,¹⁴⁰ and also from their own solidarity with those whom capitalism has failed. Meeks comments on Cone and other Liberation Theologians:

“Liberation theology also denies the liberal theory of knowledge and power. Liberation Theology argues that solidarity with the poor and oppressed is the means of thinking theologically, for it is the only way that does not mask reality with the stubborn blindness and insensitivity of the liberal theory to those who suffer from the market arrangements.”¹⁴¹

Boesak argues that

“Cone wants revolution and liberation to equality, but he lacks, it seems to us, a sound social critique, a critique of ideology, and hence he lacks the sensitivity to define precisely and constructively this equality. In defining the black American situation Cone is undoubtedly brilliant. But if he cannot go beyond that, there is nothing new in the black/white relationship. Because Cone ultimately leaves the American system intact, can black theology really offer America an alternative for the present way of life, rather than justification for a black bourgeoisie?”

¹⁴⁰ eg Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 133 “A solution cannot be sought by imitating the American white capitalist system, or creating a ‘better’ kind of capitalism in the black community.”

Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 245 “Cone’s encounters with Third World Liberationists, and friendship with Cornel West have moved him to explore the possibilities of a democratic socialist alternative to capitalism.”

See James Cone : The Black Church and Marxism : What Do They Have To Say To Each Other? (Institute for Democratic Socialism, New York 1980) pp 9, 10 : “Together black religion and Marxist philosophy may show us the way to build a completely new society.”

¹⁴¹ M Douglas Meeks : God the Economist (Fortress, Minneapolis 1989) p 55

Black Theology, then, must search for a totally new social order, and in this search will have to drink deep from the well of African tradition.”¹⁴²

However, with the growth in a black middle class, and the aspirations of the black working class, many black people – including theologians – do not reject capitalism. At a “Theology In the Americas Conference,” held in Detroit in 1975, most of the black theologians strongly defended the virtues of capitalism.¹⁴³ Given that Black Theology came later to socialism/Marxism, and that socialism/Marxism did not offer a critique of race, Black Theologians may feel it dangerous to alienate their own community, for the sake of what some criticise as an inadequate analysis.¹⁴⁴

Long looks at the relationship between Cone and Marxism.¹⁴⁵ He argues that Cone is cautious about Marxism, because Cone believes that Marxism will impose limitations on theology (because it recognises theology’s socially productive character – that is, it comes out of and produces a social context). The result of Cone’s caution is that traditional Christian themes are subordinated to an overarching metaphysical liberty, and liberation theology fails to offer a significant alternative to the metaphysics¹⁴⁶ of scarcity that capitalism assumes. The subordination of theology to a metaphysics of being (now understood primarily as liberty) is part of Cone’s Tillichian theology.¹⁴⁷ And “once theological language is subordinated to some more metaphysical reality, the result inevitably seems to be that theology becomes fundamentally about ethics, and we lose the enchantment of ritual, the sacred and the eternal.”¹⁴⁸

142 Boesak : Black Theology, Black Power (Mowbrays, London 1978) p 150

143 Cone : For My People (Orbis 1984) p 94

144 Lovin sounds a slightly different note of caution. He is concerned about the relation between Christianity and particular social theories and their proponents – who may be neither theologians nor Christians. He asks whether the social theories become systems of political loyalties in themselves, whether particular social theories should command that kind of allegiance – given that one could not be sure that in the long run a particular social theory would continue to energise and direct action – and whether a social theory does not also need an ethical theory? Robin Lovin : “Response to James Cone” in eds Mahan and Richesin : The Challenge of Liberation Theology : A First World Response (Orbis 1984) p 66

145 Stephen Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) pp 116 ff
Long has earlier (p 84) described Cone as less committed to socialism than Gutierrez or Sobrino.

146 Long argues that scarcity is not just about resources, but also about anthropology itself – where the human person is construed as grounded in finite rationality but with an infinite will – that is a person could choose anything, and in choosing one thing, produces a closure of choice. Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 143

147 Long claims that Tillich might say : I already know God as the ground of my being; liberty is the categorical realisation of that being; then I can bypass theological language and ecclesial production for a more immediate access to God. Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 122

148 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 122 later (p 179) Long writes: “The dominance of the meta-narrative of liberty seems to produce a subordination of the theological to the natural virtues.”

My distinctive contribution to the debate about Cone's rhetoric of violence, and his separatist stance, is the contention that Cone needs a clear opponent (which is related to his structuralism).¹⁴⁹ On the issue of a critique of capitalism I point out Cone's (and others') vagueness:¹⁵⁰ it is relatively easy to point out the imperfections of capitalism; it is much more difficult to suggest something workable in its stead. On the other hand, the analysis of West, Hopkins and Fowler, adds a fascinating perspective on Cone's development and his relationship with others.

¹⁴⁹ Section 7.3.1.b See also sections 7.3.3.b, 7.3.3.c.iii, 7.3.3.d

¹⁵⁰ Section 7.3.2.a

9.2 Novak

Under the heading Appreciation can be put my examination of his celebration of Democratic Capitalism and his description of its Spirit. Under the heading The Bible, can be put my examination of his use of the Bible, and Biblical themes. Under the heading His own community can be put my examination of his relationship with the Catholic Church and the Popes, and of his relationship with America. Under the heading Theology and Philosophy can be put my examination of his commitments and presuppositions, of his pragmatism (both in the sense of what works, and in the sense of realistic limits), of his thinking on ‘markets’ and his economics, of his understanding of theology – especially about God, Creation, Incarnation and the Kingdom, of his separation of realms. Under the heading Mission can be put my examination of his discussion of Marxism and Liberation Theology and of his stereotyping and treatment of racism.

“It is commonplace to argue that ‘there exists no serious disciplined body of theological reflection on the history and foundation of economics.’ ... The myth of the commonplace, as usual, collapses when faced with a survey of the actual Christian responses to market economies. It compelled me to change *my mind*.”¹⁵¹

Atherton is correct in disagreeing with Novak; there is a long history of Christian responses to the market,¹⁵² and the tradition is very much alive, both on the right¹⁵³ and the left.¹⁵⁴ However, the number of those engaging directly with Novak is smaller than that of those engaging with Cone, as we shall see.

151 Atherton: Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 79 The assertion which Atherton attacks is a quotation from Novak ; The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 237

152 Atherton traces it back to the radicals: Frederick D Maurice 1805-1872, John Ludlow, Stewart Headlam, and R H Tawney 1880-1962; the conservatives: John Bird Sumner 1780-1862, Edward Coplestone 1776-1849, Richard Whately 1787-1863, and Thomas Chalmers 1780-1847; and the liberals Wilfrid Richmond, Brooke Foss Westcott 1825-1901, Charles Gore, and Henry Scott Holland. Atherton: Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992)

153 eg Robert Benne, Donald Hay (though Harries : Is there a Gospel for the Rich? (Mowbray 1992) p 7 sees him as very far from the New Right), Brian Griffiths, Richard Neuhaus, Peter Berger, George Gilder

154 eg Philip Wogaman, Ulrich Duchrow, John C Bennett, Kenneth Leech, R H Preston, Timothy Gorringer

9.2.1 Appreciation

Novak's winning of the Templeton Prize is praise enough; its citation states: "No other author has given such sustained attention to economic realities. No other major figure has given such sustained attention to the moral and religious dimension of the free economy. Novak is likely to be regarded as a progenitor of a new discipline, the theology of economics."¹⁵⁵

More generally, Atherton comments:

"what emerges is predominantly the responsible and impressive Christian [neo-conservative] response to market economies which needs to be treated with a discerning judgement lacking in the official churches and their leaders. Wogaman¹⁵⁶ rightly observes that its representatives have tried to be creative, not just reactionary, in their theology and practice. It is a tradition to respect and learn from."¹⁵⁷

What is new about Novak and the other neo-conservatives is not so much their appreciation of capitalism and its achievements, but rather their re-appraisal of its values and spiritual foundations.¹⁵⁸ They also stress the link between capitalism and democracy, though as we shall see below¹⁵⁹ others argue that the link is not a necessary one. A third fresh feature is their approach to Christian thinking in this area: "Modern Christian social thought cannot be based on Christianity alone."¹⁶⁰ Preston makes a similar point:

"Discernment is achieved by putting one's understanding of human life, drawn ultimately from the biblical witness to Jesus Christ, alongside a diagnosis of what is going on today. There is no direct line from a biblical text or passage to a conclusion about

¹⁵⁵ Cross and Anderson : Awakening from Nihilism (Crisis Books 1995) p 31

The assertion that Novak is the first in this field could be disputed: Atherton's survey of the tradition has already been noted.

¹⁵⁶ Philip Wogaman : Christian Perspectives on Politics (SCM 1987)

¹⁵⁷ Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 87

Preston : Church and Society in the late Twentieth Century (SCM 1983) p 48 also remarks on the weaknesses of the Christian socialist critique of the free market. cf Plant : "Challenges to Conservative Capitalism" in ed Harvey : Theology in the City (SPCK 1989) p 68. Plant argues that Faith in the City (Church House, London 1985) failed to understand or take seriously the New Right's critique of its position.

¹⁵⁸ However, Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 17 argues that there is a tension between former descriptions of capitalism as pragmatic and these new ones of it as spiritual.

¹⁵⁹ Section 10.4.5 284

¹⁶⁰ Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 108

the world today. There has to be some evaluation of ‘what is going on’ which cannot be got from the Bible.”¹⁶¹

As well as these points, we should add from my critique his courage in changing his mind, and also in attempting to embrace pluralism.

9.2.2 The Bible

Preston sees Novak as untypical of Catholic teaching, and in Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism refers to his writings only in two footnotes. Preston’s approach is an ethical one, with the Bible and tradition in one hand, and the data of the world in the other.¹⁶² He argues, as we have seen above, that one cannot move from what are contextual decisions in the New Testament to the modern world, but suggests a number of possible approaches. Some theologians look at a single text, or at a catena of texts. Other theologians (he cites Hay¹⁶³) try to establish the intention of the original text, and then look for analogies in the present situation.¹⁶⁴ (The difficulties with this approach take us back to the beginning of this thesis!) Atherton’s view is that there is a tendency for “conservative and radical responses” to the market to “use a more direct method [than liberal responses], moving directly from the scriptures or Christian doctrine to detailed judgements on economic questions.”¹⁶⁵

161 R H Preston : Church and Society in the late Twentieth Century (SCM 1983) p 104

162 Preston : Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism (SCM 1991) p 95. Preston does look in more detail pp 80-82 at Brian Griffiths, who of course, like Preston, is British

163 Donald A Hay : Economics Today : A Christian Critique (Apollos and Intervarsity Press 1989) Hay is a Fellow and Tutor in Economics at Jesus College, Oxford, and a lay Reader in the Church of England

Hay tries to establish Biblical foundations, recognising (p 8) that he is more an economist than a theologian. He makes the important point that the nature of economic problems varies from one period to another, so that (p 12) “each generation of Christian analysts has to bring theological insights to bear on a new set of issues;” the provisional nature of what they say must not be forgotten, nor systems allowed to become autonomous. Hay looks at the Biblical themes of creation, fall and judgement, the people of God, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, seeing them as a series of covenants, with stewardship as an organising concept. From this Hay attempts to derive a Christian ethic which demands an accurate perception of reality, and a consideration of ethical motivation. Hay admits that Preston is unhappy with this approach: Preston, as we have seen, suggests a process of discernment, in which it will be “difficult or impossible to give any prior description of what the Christian ethical input is going to be.” Preston : Explorations in Theology 9 (SCM 1981) chapter 5

see also Preston : Church and Society in the late Twentieth Century (SCM 1983) pp 104-120

164 Preston : Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism (SCM 1991) pp 97 ff

165 Atherton: Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 83

Griffiths, who is judged by Atherton to have “the edge” over Novak in making a clear Christian moral case for the market economy – because unlike Novak, he does recognise the market’s major defects, also tries to use Biblical themes to look at economics. Griffiths’ work “suggests an attempt to hedge the market round with [Christian] governing principles.”¹⁶⁶

In a slightly different formulation, Wogaman suggests that we must struggle first to understand core meanings, then reflect creatively on how those meanings illuminate contemporary issues. We also need theological entry points – such as creation, the priority of grace over works, vocation, stewardship and original sin.¹⁶⁷ Cooper, responding to Wogaman and his idea of entry points, suggests a trinity of virtues: stewardship (corresponding to Creation and God the Father), vocation (corresponding to the Fall and God the Son), charity (corresponding to Redemption and God the Holy Spirit).¹⁶⁸

This range of serious theological consideration of the Bible¹⁶⁹ in relation to economics is something of a contrast to and critique of Novak’s use of the Bible. On the other hand Sedgwick cautions against attempting to set a biblical meta-narrative against secular thought. The reason is that there is a

¹⁶⁶ Atherton: Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 91

¹⁶⁷ Wogaman : Economics and Ethics : A Christian Enquiry (SCM 1986) pp 34 ff

¹⁶⁸ John Cooper in ed Block, Brennan, Elzinga : Morality of the Market : Religious and Economic Perspectives : Proceedings of an International Symposium Vancouver 1982 (pbl The Fraser Institute 1985) pp 61-65 Interestingly, in the light of Novak’s pluralism, Cooper also alludes to a Muslim Theology of Economics: Muhammad Abdul Rauf The Islamic doctrine of economics and contemporary economic thought : highlight of a Conference on a Theological Inquiry into Capitalism and Socialism (AEI Washington 1979)

¹⁶⁹ Other attempts to relate the Bible to economics include Jack Stotts, (looking at Acts ch 2 vv 44-45 and ch 4 vv 32-35) and Marvin Chaney, (looking at the Eighth century prophets) both in ed Robert L Strivers : Reformed Faith and Economics (University Press of America, Lanham 1989); and quite a number of contributors to ed Charles R Strain : Prophetic Visions and Economic Realities : Protestants Jews and Catholics confront the Bishops’ Letter on the Economy. (Eerdmans 1989) a book of essays on the United States Catholic Bishops’ Letter on the Economy: notably, Mouw (who examines the complexities of biblical visions of economic life and justice, arguing that God does not want poverty, but rather that we should enjoy the blessings of wealth), Wolf (looking at the Sabbath and Jubilee), Sedgwick (who argues that there is a need for perpetual conversion, rather than a socially optimistic moral idealism) and Furman (who argues that theologians cannot simply resort to the rhetoric of prophetic criticism). Other writings in this area include:

ed Robert K Johnston : The Use of the Bible in Theology : Evangelical Options (John Knox Press, Atlanta 1985)

John Eidsmoe : God and Caesar : Biblical Faith and Political Action (Crossway, Westchester, Illinois 1984)

Douglas Vickers : Economics and Ethics (Praeger, (Greenwood), Westport, Connecticut 1997)

contradiction between the Church living by its own doctrines and the Church wanting “to engage in [...] democratic collaboration with other bodies.”¹⁷⁰

It is fair to say that not one of the writers I have looked at engages with Novak over the way he relates to the Bible. As we shall see, they engage with him either on ethical or doctrinal grounds. Yet I have shown that he does use the Bible,¹⁷¹ and that other political theologians and theologians of economics do too, so that a biblical approach in this area is not *prima facie* inappropriate. However, Sedgwick’s comment implying that the Church tends to retreat behind its doctrines when democratic collaboration becomes too challenging, is a helpful warning tending to support parts of Novak’s view.

9.2.3 His own community

The Roman Catholic Church

Dorrien writes that Novak (and Neuhaus) “believe that modern American Catholicism is suited to the project of the culture forming task of constructing a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty because Catholicism is unique in its size, its power, its deep historical rootage and its capacity to generate a Christian social philosophy.”¹⁷²

That project has been considerably contested. Although Novak attempted to claim that Pope John Paul II was moving in his (Novak’s) direction over the Catholic attitude to free markets, many writers perceived a rift between Novak and his Church. Sedgwick points out that Archbishop Rembert

¹⁷⁰ Sedgwick : The Market Economy and Christian Ethics (CUP 1999) p 10 Sedgwick cites Raymond Plant’s Gore Lecture, Westminster Abbey.

¹⁷¹ Section 8.3.3.c

¹⁷² Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 218

Weakland finds problematic Novak's methods for reclaiming the Enlightenment within a Catholic framework;¹⁷³ Rourke argues that Novak has parted company with Catholicism in such areas as the Thomist notion of the common good;¹⁷⁴ Clague distances Catholic teaching from Novak's views on law, which Novak argues should be geared towards individual freedom, rather than imposing a moral outlook;¹⁷⁵ Longley argues, against Novak, that Catholic teaching on the market could never allow it to be sovereign.¹⁷⁶

A further demonstration of the rift is that although the United States Roman Catholic Bishops had a working group to help them prepare their pastoral Letter on the Economy,¹⁷⁷ Novak was a member of an (unofficial) 'Lay Commission On Catholic Social Teaching and The U S Economy,' which published – just before the Catholic Bishops' letter¹⁷⁸ – a separate report: Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and The U S Economy.¹⁷⁹ The material in Toward the Future also makes it clear that Novak's views are not entirely in line with the views of the United States Bishops.¹⁸⁰ In Toward the Future, a distinction is argued between welfare rights and economic rights: welfare rights might include a right to life; economic rights are there to protect citizens "in their activism and active contributions to society." Toward the Future fears that a union or confusion of these two concepts

173 Sedgwick : The Market Economy and Christian Ethics (CUP 1999) p 228

174 Rourke : A conscience as large as the world (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1996) p xii

175 Julie Clague : "The Gospel of Life : John Paul II on spiritual malaise and its social aftermath" : in ed Paul Valley : The New Politics : Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century (SCM 1998) p 127

176 Clifford Longley : "Structures of Sin and the Free Market : John Paul II on Capitalism" : in ed Paul Valley : The New Politics : Catholic Social Teaching for the Twenty-First Century (SCM 1998) p 111

see also R H Preston : Religion and the Ambiguities of Capitalism (SCM 1991) Preston also sees Novak as at variance with Catholic teaching.

177 Their work was published in ed John W Houck and Oliver F Williams : Catholic Social Teaching and the U S Economy : Working Papers for a Bishops' Pastoral (University Press of America, Washington 1984)

178 at the request of the Chairman of the Bishops' drafting committee Archbishop Rembert Weakland: see Novak Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (2nd edn, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick 1989) p xvii

179 Lay Commission On Catholic Social Teaching & The U. S. Economy : Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy: a Lay Letter (University Press of America 1985)

180 "The report stands in stark contrast to a soon-to-be-released American Bishops' first draft (of three) criticising the American economy." Cross and Anderson : Awakening from Nihilism (Crisis Books 1995) p 73

cf Daniel Rush Finn : "Ethical Dimensions of the Debate on Economic Planning" : in ed Houck and Williams : Catholic Social Teaching and the U S Economy (University Press of America 1984) p 400 Rush describes Novak as arguing contra the Bishops that the interest of Catholic Theologians in economic planning springs from an attraction to authoritarian and unitary systems.

will lead to paternalism by the state and a retreat from economic activism by individuals; that is, it thinks that economic rights are valid, welfare rights rather less so.

Ironically, Novak's project of linking Capitalism and Catholicism fails from the other end too: "Novak never successfully shows how Christianity or Catholicism is necessary for capitalism. In fact he often shows the opposite."¹⁸¹

My survey of other conversations shows clearly the disagreements between Novak and his Church, but it does not show what my own critique does – that Novak is an apologist for Christianity, and an enthusiast for Catholicism.¹⁸² His pluralism and his Church's suspicion of post-Enlightenment thinking and capitalism have made difficult his attempt to bridge the gap between the Church and Western world from both ends. My critique also highlighted Novak's important thinking on the role of the laity.

9.2.4 Theology and Philosophy

9.2.4.1 Individualism

Rourke argues, in opposition to the neo-conservatives, that "there are fundamental and inherent dimensions of concepts such as the common good, authority and freedom that render them incompatible with liberalism, even the nuanced version the neo-conservatives advance."¹⁸³ He goes further :

"the new concept of common good promoted by Novak is to a considerable degree an abandonment of any properly common good as [Yves] Simon, St Thomas or the Catholic tradition defined it. . . . As the waves of economic neo-liberalism that hit in the 1980s continue to strike, particularly in the Third world, there is reason for serious ethical concern with respect to the success of the neo-conservative project."¹⁸⁴

181 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 45

182 Section 8.3.2.a Roman Catholicism

183 Rourke : A conscience as large as the world (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1996) p xi

184 Rourke : A conscience as large as the world (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1996) p 3

Rourke believes that the state is the result of the social nature of the human person, and is the agent responsible for the common good, by which he means good in which all members of society participate; the common good concerns society as a whole, and therefore transcends the state. Novak's formulation reduces the common good to no more than a partnership wherein people cooperate to attain individual goods. "Bereft of a sense of common intentions, Novak's new concept of common good demands primarily that people support the system, regardless of its outcomes."¹⁸⁵ Finn makes a similar criticism: that Novak's view of the communitarian individual is just a voluntary association, with no allowance for claims on others by the poor.¹⁸⁶

9.2.4.2 *Separation of spheres*

Finn also argues that when Novak says "to run an economy by the highest Christian principles is certainly to destroy both the economy and the reputation of Christianity,"¹⁸⁷ he is not distinguishing between highest and basic principles. We can put limits on behaviour, and guarantee the basic elements for a life of dignity and hope.¹⁸⁸ This absolute separation of Christian principles and the economy, (or, as Novak would put it, the moral-cultural and economic spheres) is also opposed by Rourke, because it prevents anyone from criticising capitalism for its amoral manner of operation. Rourke recognises that Novak might respond that the criteria being used for such a critique derive from views of the economy formed when it was static (with resulting problems of just distribution); but now, democratic capitalism is dynamic, and wealth-creating. Rourke's rejoinder, like Finn's, would be that politics and the ethical imperatives of the moral-cultural system can reform democratic capitalism: for example the political system has been used to guarantee equal opportunities and workers' rights.¹⁸⁹ Wogaman too criticises Novak's separation of three spheres – the economic, the

¹⁸⁵ Rourke : *A conscience as large as the world* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1996) p 255

Similarly, (pp 253, 254) "the neo-conservatives are right to press for a reconsideration of practical reason, but in their discussion it becomes a servant of desire..... resulting in the inability of any public moral rationality to impinge upon the individual pursuit of desire. This ignores the decisive role that power and force play in determining outcomes."

¹⁸⁶ Daniel Rush Finn : "Ethical Dimensions of the Debate on Economic Planning" : in ed Houck and Williams : *Catholic Social Teaching and the U S Economy* (University Press of America 1984) p 424. Finn also offers a critique of the neo-conservative opposition to economic planning. Neo-conservatives say that planning violates rights of ownership: Finn responds that given subsidies etc, ownership is wider than they allow. Neo-conservatives claim that planning will be dominated by special interest groups: Finn responds that lobbyists already do this. Neo-conservatives claim that planning will be too bureaucratic: Finn responds that this problem is overstated. Gorringer adds that large successful firms plan all the time. Gorringer : *Capital and the Kingdom* (Orbis / SPCK 1994) p 193 note 20

¹⁸⁷ Novak : *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Madison 1991) p 352

¹⁸⁸ Daniel Rush Finn : "Ethical Dimensions of the Debate on Economic Planning" : in ed Houck and Williams : *Catholic Social Teaching and the U S Economy* (University Press of America 1984) p 437

¹⁸⁹ Rourke : *A conscience as large as the world* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1996) pp 9 ff

political and the moral-cultural. If capitalism is to be democratic, “the economic order must be finally accountable to the political order, because democracy includes the protection of minority rights.”¹⁹⁰ Long argues that this separation is dangerous for theology:¹⁹¹ first, it is a separation of facts (provided by the free market?) and values (provided by theology); second, it means that moral opposition can be labelled resentment. He also thinks that behind Novak’s arguments for an “autonomous economics, supported by easily dispensed with theological doctrines” lies a theology “seeking to maintain its own legitimacy and substantiality. This apologetic strategy is bound to fail.”¹⁹²

Harries, looking particularly at Morality, Capitalism and Democracy, also attacks Novak’s separation of powers: Novak “consistently fails to take into account the way in which the economically powerful can gain control of every other sphere of human existence.”¹⁹³ Harries discusses this under the category of sin, which has a certain irony, given that Novak claims that democratic capitalism allows for sin as no other system does. Harries also offers a critique of Novak’s thinking on creativity, which Harries welcomes, but points out that Novak (and capitalist societies generally) undervalues the creativity of teachers, nurses and mothers, because it is not commercial. Harries’ final comment is damning: “The American dream is destructive because it fails to recognise that there are other values in human society besides success and we all have to relate to one another as mutual failures not just potential victors.”¹⁹⁴ Gollwitzer also accuses white theology of being built on success.¹⁹⁵

Neuhaus also criticises Novak’s separation of these different spheres, and especially what he sees as Novak’s complicity in the removal of religion from politics. Neuhaus has described “the naked public square” as “the result of political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religiously

190 Philip Wogaman : Economics and Ethics : A Christian Enquiry (SCM 1986) p 29

191 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 19

192 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 78. Long continues (p79) “The language of pluralism, inclusivity, individual freedom, growth and heterogeneity is the language of the market. This has particularly infected the Protestant Churches but now it appears that Catholicism, with its longstanding anti-modern tradition is succumbing as well. Theology does not matter to the economy and this results not from the lack of theological work in this area, but because of it.” Long thinks Novak is promoting a species of atheism.

193 Richard Harries : Is there a Gospel for the rich? (Mowbray 1992) p 98

194 Harries : Is there a Gospel for the rich? (Mowbray 1992) p 101

Wogaman too warns of the dangers of idolatry of materialism : Philip Wogaman : Economics and Ethics : A Christian Enquiry (SCM 1986) pp 38 ff

195 Helmut Gollwitzer : “Why Black Theology?” in Union Seminary Quarterly Review (Fall 1975)

grounded values from the conduct of business.”¹⁹⁶ Neuhaus therefore rejects as “very close to the idea of the naked public square” Novak’s view that “respect for the transcendence of God and for full freedom of conscience – respect for the common human wandering in darkness – is better served, even in Christian and Jewish terms, by the reverential emptiness at the heart of pluralism than by a socially imposed vision of the good.”¹⁹⁷ Neuhaus argues that the presence of religion in the public square does not amount to coercion, and that

“the sense of transcendence that in its beginning and to this day marks the American experiment in democracy is not contentless. Both historically and in present sociological fact, it is religiously specific, it refers to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The acknowledgement of this reality is in the most particular interest of the considerable number of Americans who do not subscribe to that tradition in any conscious manner. And that is because it is precisely by the authority of that tradition that the rights to dissent are protected.”¹⁹⁸

9.2.4.3 *God*

Long is suspicious of Novak’s thinking on doctrine: he argues that Novak’s privileging of creation is at the expense of his Christology – Jesus does not bring the Kingdom, it is already here.¹⁹⁹ In fact he goes so far as to claim that Novak is not Trinitarian.²⁰⁰

Gorringer, in examining Novak’s metaphysics, looks²⁰¹ at his concept of pluralism with its “empty shrine” at the heart of its “spiritual core.” Gorringer argues that the correlate of this view is what he describes as Novak’s absolute individualism: “though humans are social, they are also ultimately alone.”²⁰² Gorringer argues that “this vision of a non-defined transcendence which each person must

196 Neuhaus: The Naked Public Square (Eerdmans 1984) p ix

197 Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 68

198 Neuhaus: The Naked Public Square (Eerdmans 1984) p 121

199 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 47 see also p 44

Long continues “Once this doctrine of creation gains priority over Christology then ecclesiology loses its pre-eminence.”

200 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 245

201 Gorringer: Capital and the Kingdom (Orbis / SPCK 1984) p 163

202 Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) pp 53-55

define for himself is radically at odds with the biblical vision of God who is fullness of life and makes blazingly clear demands on God's people. The metaphysical heart of Novak's theology is the void so sharply analysed by Bonhoeffer:"²⁰³

"It is a rebellious and outrageous void, and one which is the enemy of both God and man. . . . It is the supreme manifestation of all the powers which are opposed to God. It is the void made god. No one knows its goal or measure. Its dominion is absolute. . . . The void engulfs life, history, family, nation, language, faith. The list can be prolonged indefinitely, for the void spares nothing."²⁰⁴

Gorringe continues: "from a biblical standpoint what is involved in these systems is very clearly idolatry."²⁰⁵ Hinkelammert – to whom Gorringe refers – takes a very similar line:

"Knowing that the idea of a God who is fullness leads to the demand of as full a life as possible here, Novak infers the idea of God as emptiness, since he can then infer also an empty life. The suffering of emptiness is then present as a necessary sacrifice. The totalisation of the total market leads quite logically in this direction. In reality God becomes a nihilistic God, hiding and revealing – at the same time – the nihilism which undergirds the political position of the total market."²⁰⁶

Meeks, who also refers to Hinkelammert, comments,

"This way of conceiving God clears the decks for assumptions about the human being, society and nature that are radically different from the biblical and traditional metaphysical conceptions of these realities. Within the market economy and increasingly within market society God became merely the condition of human freedom, the ensemble of 'invisible forces' that ground liberty.²⁰⁷ God is present by guaranteeing God's absence or God is absent in order to assure the presence of divine attributes in the human being. This is the culmination of the modern assumption that God is known merely in terms of God's effect on the world and the human being. God is not thought to have a life of God's own or to be affected by or suffer from the world."²⁰⁸

203 Gorringe: Capital and the Kingdom (Orbis / SPCK 1984) p 163

204 Bonhoeffer : Ethics (Eng trans N H Smith SCM, London 1955) p 85

205 Gorringe: Capital and the Kingdom (Orbis / SPCK 1984) p 163

206 Franz J Hinkelammert : "The Politics of the Total Market: Its Theology and Our Response" : in North-South Dialogue Vol 1 (Fall 1985) p 7 see also Franz J Hinkelammert : The Ideological Weapons of Death : A Theological Critique of Capitalism (Orbis, Maryknoll 1986)

207 Meeks' point here challenges Neuhaus' view (Neuhaus: The Naked Public Square (Eerdmans 1984) p 121) noted above 278 of what is or should be present in the naked public square.

208 Meeks : God the Economist (Fortress, Minneapolis 1989) p 69

Meeks is a Trinitarian theologian: see p80 "We have attempted to understand God as the community of righteousness united in self-giving love, and we have argued that the Economist is a proper and necessary metaphor for the triune God."

On the other hand, Roberts views Novak's pluralism and the concomitant emptiness at its heart not as a flaw but as an attempt by Novak to deal with the challenges of post-modernism, a challenge which Weber,²⁰⁹ for example, failed because of his "inability to discern the necessity of cultural pluralism to democratic capitalism."²¹⁰ Roberts hints that religion may find this difficult:

"How well equipped are religions (especially traditional and 'established') to meet such requirements? It is interesting to note the ambiguities in the Jewish Marxist Ernst Bloch's treatment of the 'American Dream' which is embedded in a formal a-theology as pervasive as Novak's own theology. As regards the United States, the practical, rather than credal 'sacred canopy' allows for 'unity in practice, diversity in belief.' Novak's account comes perilously close to lending substance to the views of those who regard the social and moral order of capitalism as irretrievably nihilistic. . . . The elaboration of a 'theology of economics' later in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism is decorative in contrast with the author's initial and unflinching recognition of a vital nihilism at the core of capitalism and the consequent overwhelming need for the constant re-creation of human identity and legitimation."²¹¹

9.2.4.4 *The Market*

One of the more challenging critiques of free market theologies comes from Hinkelammert:

"Certainly theological orthodoxy reproached liberation theology as having a false utopia. But they did not reproach the utopia itself. As Christian orthodoxy, it maintained its own vision of the coming kingdom of God and of the heavens. Critics could not reproach liberation theology for its hope in a kingdom of God. Therefore this theological orthodoxy reproached it for interpreting it in material, bodily and earthly terms – a false concept of the kingdom. The orthodox kingdom of God understands itself as a kingdom of pure souls. The imperial theology of the 70s and first half of the 80s is different. It is clearly anti-utopic, setting a world without hope against the utopic vision of a world with hope. Although it continues to utopianise the market, understanding the market as a place of providence tending towards equilibrium, it does not establish relations between market-based utopia and the kingdom of God. Therefore [as Novak claims] solidarity appears as human perversion and atavism."²¹²

209 Max Weber : The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Eng trans Talcott Parsons Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1958)

210 Richard Roberts : "The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : A Critique of Michael Novak" in ed Jon Davies : God and the Marketplace (IEA 1993) p 72

211 Richard Roberts : "The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : A Critique of Michael Novak" in ed Jon Davies : God and the Marketplace (IEA 1993) pp 74, 75 Roberts has earlier quoted Novak: "The Churches did not understand the new economics. Officially and through the theologians, they often regarded the new spirit of capitalism as materialistic, secular and dangerous to religion, as in many respects – being in and out of the world – it was." Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 17

We have seen that some theologians (Finn, Rourke, Wogaman) attack the moral autonomy of the economic system and the market. Duchrow also takes the line that no secular area can be independent of God's sovereignty, but he goes further, attacking the claim that the global market works, on the grounds that it does not fulfil the God-given mandate to meet basic human needs.²¹³ Duchrow rejects classical economics, firstly because it views people as economic abstractions, rather than as – the Christian view – concrete humans; secondly because it narrows its field of enquiry and ignores the reality of lack of choice for people in the Third World; thirdly because it is committed to exchange value rather than the meeting of human needs. Atherton comments that this is a static “household” view of the economy – dating (as Duchrow admits) from Aristotle and the Middle Ages.²¹⁴

Atherton rejects the accusation that the free market is idolatrous. With Novak, he argues that it is the best available, least harmful, economy, providing a contribution to human well-being. He suggests that the market complements Christian values, both needing them, and contributing its own civic virtues: self-interest (which Atherton relates to benevolence), efficiency (which Atherton relates to justice), freedom in competition closely connected with liberal democracy, the importance of the

212 Hinkelammert : “Liberation Theology in the Economic and Social Context of Latin America : Economy and Theology, or the Irrationality of the Rationalised” (trans Elizabeth Wing) in ed Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen and Hopkins : Liberation Theology, Postmodernity and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) p 37 A note refers to Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : “Atavistic memories besiege every free man.”

Hinkelammert refers to the claim of Stockman The Triumph of Politics (Bodley Head, London 1986) and Camdessus (Secretary General of the IMF) that neo-liberalism is the way to achieve the kingdom of God on earth. Hinkelammert's critique is damning: the claim is that not to have neo-liberalism, and the IMF will lead to chaos, poverty, hyperinflation and the end of freedom. He goes on to quote Hannah Arendt : The Origins of Totalitarianism (Taurus, Madrid 1974) p 435 “It is the total declaration of the empire without any escape, neither on earth nor in the heavens. When the punishment is greater than what can be achieved in the search for an alternative it is better not to search. In such a situation, power dictates what reality will be like. In between power and reality a circuit is established in which reality tautologically confirms the theses of those in power.”

213 Duchrow : Global Economy (WCC 1987) p 141 Duchrow accuses (p 92) the global market (including things like transnational corporations, Western governments, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – GATT – and other trade agreements, the International Monetary Fund – IMF – and the banks) of being responsible for 40 million deaths a year from starvation, and the Christians and Churches of the West as being complicit in this failure, because they condone the exploitation of the Third World. This complicity is idolatry and heresy because for Duchrow the matter is one of faith itself – placed alongside the Holocaust, apartheid, and weapons of mass destruction.

214 Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 131 Atherton continues (p 133), commenting on Duchrow's positive proposals for a “new independent, decentralised, ecologically sympathetic system of self-provision (subsistence economy)” which would satisfy basic needs, that : “facing the question of feasibility reduces the clarity of Duchrow's vision, if not its practicality. For he still talks in places of the reform of the market economy through institutional economics (following Galbraith, who clearly accepts the price mechanism and basic market economy), and he recognises occasionally the value of the market mechanism.”

individual and self-reliance.²¹⁵ However, Atherton does criticise Benne,²¹⁶ Novak and Griffiths for an undue reliance on justice and democracy to retrieve the moral case for the market, and reform it – through modest internal adjustments – in the face of the disturbing consequences of the challenges of, for example, poverty and the environment. “The comprehensive challenge of the relatively autonomous questions, both individually and collectively, cannot be dispensed with by such insufficient means.”²¹⁷

Wogaman also offers a practical critique of the market, citing Polanyi.²¹⁸ The argument here is that the free market does provide a stimulus, but that “societies have found it absolutely necessary to intervene for the sake of people and social objectives that were not being served by those [free market] principles.”²¹⁹ He mentions the environment as an example of the need for Government intervention, and also points out the “awkward way” in which Governments have tried to create markets (for example, education vouchers).²²⁰

Roberts, for all his support of Novak’s empty shrine,²²¹ finds Novak basically naïve about the market. To write that “the economic activist is simultaneously a citizen of the polity and a seeker after truth, beauty, virtue and meaning”²²² is to

“strain credulity in the face of social facts. The sin that [Novak] regards as central to the self-understanding of democratic capitalism is far more pervasive and deep-rooted than he allows. A more sensitive and nuanced sociology and anthropology of contextual factors is required. An effective contextual theology of capitalism would not merely rehabilitate something of the order of Niebuhr’s ‘Christian realism’ alone, but also recognise in fuller theoretical terms that the basis of sin is both individual and structural.”²²³

215 Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) pp 218 – 220. Atherton goes on (p226) to argue that the market is not simply the least bad choice, but has positive features which include a recognition of the positive value of the untidiness of reality, and a rejection of commitments to blue-prints, both of which are related to a rejection of authoritarianism.

216 Benne : The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism : A Moral Reassessment (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1981)

217 Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 195

218 Karl Polanyi : The Great Transformation : The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time (Beacon Press – 2nd edn 2001)

219 Wogaman : Economics and Ethics (SCM, London 1986) pp 19, 20

220 Wogaman : Economics and Ethics (SCM, London 1986) pp 22, 23

221 see above 280

222 Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madosn 1991) p 58

One of the casualties of capitalism which Novak ignores is the creation of an underclass which,

“facing the apparent prospect of its social redundancy in the likely future labour markets of advanced industrial society, does not (indeed cannot) necessarily appropriate to itself that economically-beneficial striving towards transcendence central to Novak’s conception of democratic capitalism. In such a setting, religious hope *may* operate as absolute resistance to absolute despair; but hope as reasonable expectation is based on the discernment and appropriation of life chances as something other than the former. Below a certain level of participation the effort/outcomes equation is such as to defeat hope..... There is such a thing as a no-start situation.”²²⁴

Sedgwick takes a moderate view of the market. He can see positive aspects of enterprise, particularly “in urban areas, where it can offer a concrete example of hope, innovation, and self-reliance.” At the same time enterprise can produce individualism, which “can also be a very destructive force.”²²⁵ He suggests that it must embody values of civic and social worth.²²⁶ In The Market Economy and Christian Ethics he makes an appeal not to take a clear cut position against the (global) market: there are great benefits in it, and although in not taking such a stand, the Church is possibly apparently compromised, it may also be immensely worthwhile.²²⁷

Benne, like Novak, argues that “the combination of democracy and market economy peculiar to the United States is morally defensible, and further, has a good deal of promise in dealing with its many challenges.”²²⁸ Socialism’s track record has not been “obviously superior to that of Western democratic capitalism in key categories – liberty, democracy, equality, quality of life, productivity, peaceful intentions and actions, cultural creativity and others.”²²⁹ Benne, like Novak, regrets the

223 Richard Roberts : “The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : A Critique of Michael Novak” in ed Jon Davies : God and the Marketplace (IEA 1993) p 76

224 Richard Roberts : “The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : A Critique of Michael Novak” in ed Jon Davies : God and the Marketplace (IEA 1993) p 79

225 Peter Sedgwick : “Enterprise and Estrangement” in ed Sedgwick : God in the City : Essay and Reflections from the Archbishop’s Urban Theology Group (Mowbray 1995) p 163

226 Peter Sedgwick : “Enterprise and Estrangement” in ed Sedgwick : God in the City : Essay and Reflections from the Archbishop’s Urban Theology Group (Mowbray 1995) p 176

227 Sedgwick : The Market Economy and Christian Ethics (CUP 1999) p 273 Sedgwick also comments (p 271) that the involvement of the Churches in thinking about the economy deserves to be better known. A Christian account could deepen the shallowness of consumerism.

228 Robert Benne : The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism : A Moral Re-assessment (Fortress Press, Philidelphia 1981) p vii

229 R Benne : The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism : A Moral Re-assessment (Fortress Press, Philidelphia 1981) p 9

numerous attacks on capitalism, and follows Schumpeter in arguing that the attackers' "highly dubious economic analysis is accepted primarily because [they] exhibit persuasive and coherent value systems."²³⁰

9.2.4.5 *Democracy*

The "combination of democracy and capitalism peculiar to the United States" has occasioned some debate about the link between them. Since Tawney's Religion and the Rise of Capitalism²³¹ political economists have wondered about the necessary conditions for capitalism and for democracy. Benne²³² suggests that capitalism raises the standards of the masses, and then democracy becomes possible, sustainable and eminently desirable. This is more or less Novak's and Berger's²³³ view. However, Wogaman doubts Novak's (and Neuhaus') claim that capitalism may be a necessary condition for democracy. He suggests a counter argument that some primitive (sic) tribes and nomadic peoples have produced democratic structures. Wogaman believes the (theological) case for a democratic social order surpasses in importance the case for any particular economic system: realistically, some countries are going to be socialist, and the real question is how to persuade them that democracy is also important.²³⁴ Roberts also questions Novak's argument, pointing out that in order to sustain it, Novak has to be selective about what he calls real democracy, and excludes Brazil.²³⁵

230 R Benne : The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism : A Moral Re-assessment (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1981) p 10

231 R H Tawney : Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (The Holland Memorial Lectures 1922) (first edn J Murray 1926)

232 Robert Benne : in ed Williams and Houck : The Making of an Economic Vision (University Press of America, Maryland 1991) p 123

233 Peter Berger : The Capitalist Revolution (Basic Books, New York 1986) argues that it is most likely that capitalism is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy.

234 Wogaman in ed Block, Brennan, Elzinga : Morality of the Market : Religious and Economic Perspectives : Proceedings of an International Symposium Vancouver 1982 (pbl The Fraser Institute 1985) pp 54, 56

235 Richard Roberts : "The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism : A Critique of Michael Novak" in ed Jon Davies : God and the Marketplace (IEA 1993) p 76

“In the West the great debate is now over who can best manage democratic capitalism,”²³⁶ and it is “difficult to distinguish modern democratic socialism from democratic capitalism,”²³⁷ as even Novak comes close to admitting.²³⁸

In this area, my own critique is complemented by the critiques I have reviewed. Whilst, for example, I do mention briefly theological problems with Novak’s separation of realms,²³⁹ Rourke, Wogaman, Long and Neuhaus add weight and depth to this thinking. Their critique of Novak’s individualism (which I also identify²⁴⁰) would, I suspect, be rejected by him; he would argue that a modern complex democratic society has a built-in sense of interdependence, and that it rather needs a fresh emphasis on individuality, which is also part of Christian thinking. My critique identifies, again with a different stress and from a different angle, some questions about his theological ideas, especially with reference to Jesus and the Incarnation. His view of the Church, and its relation to a pluralist society, perhaps merits the sympathetic discussion of Roberts, alongside the strong critiques of Gorringer, Hinkelammert, and Meeks. My critique raised questions about issues central to economics – for example property, self-interest, and competition – which only Atherton looked at. It also allowed a deeper look at Novak’s spirituality and personal agendas, and at how these have driven his project of linking America and Catholicism.

9.2.5 Mission

9.2.5.1 *Liberation Theology*

²³⁶ Robert Benne : in ed Williams and Houck : The Making of an Economic Vision (University Press of America, Maryland 1991) p 123

²³⁷ John C Bennett in ed Block, Brennan, Elzinga : Morality of the Market : Religious and Economic Perspectives : Proceedings of an International Symposium Vancouver 1982 (pbl The Fraser Institute 1985) pp 549

²³⁸ see Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) pp 251-252

²³⁹ Section 8.3.3.c.iii

²⁴⁰ Section 8.3.3.c.i

McGovern describes Will it Liberate? “as the most extensive United States critique of liberation theology’s socio-economic analysis. . . . Novak raises legitimate and challenging questions.”²⁴¹

McGovern accepts the critique of Liberation Theology’s (and Latin America’s) economics by Novak and the modernisation theorists that Latin America failed to develop a broad system of free enterprise and the attitudes needed for successful business ventures (and a middle class).²⁴² McGovern also accepts that “some liberation theologians have . . . drawn inferences from Scripture that do not cohere with the whole message of the Bible,” although they have been coming to a better balance in recent years.²⁴³

McGovern argues however, that first Novak does not put his critique in a manner likely to win him support (because although he appeals for dialogue, he is arguing against the liberation theologians); second, the battle lines he draws between capitalism and socialism are unhelpful, and Novak has too idealised an idea of capitalism, and “too little recognition of the injustices it creates in practice;”²⁴⁴ third, Novak suggests that Latin Americans could achieve development if they would simply choose to move in new directions; changes and reforms have not occurred because power elites have resisted them, often with the active support of the United States.

Against Novak’s critique McGovern sets Liberation Theology’s successes – its longevity, and the way it has changed the church and perceptions of it,²⁴⁵ and :

“drawn the attention of the Church and of many persons in various parts of the world to the sufferings of the poor in Latin America. It has challenged us to rethink the ways in which we understand and live out our faith. It has brought pride to the Church in Latin America and made theology a subject of vital interest.”²⁴⁶

“Both supporters and critics have tended to over-estimate its political influence. . . . But the message of liberation theology and the development of base communities have made

241 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 152

242 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 117

243 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p xx

244 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 154

245 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 227 McGovern points out that in the 1960s two thirds of university students in Brazil considered themselves non-believers, with the Church on the side of injustice but by 1978, after nearly twenty years of Brazilian church people (including Bishops) actively fighting on behalf of human rights and in defence of the poor, three quarters of university students were believers and favourable to the church.

246 Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 233

it possible for many poor people to experience a new sense of dignity, a new awareness of God's special love for them, and an ability to work in solidarity to achieve significant goals at community levels."²⁴⁷

This has been done in the face of opposition from Latin American governments, and indifference from the United States, which has been interested only in making sure that communism does not spread. McGovern goes on to suggest that the way forward for Latin American Theologies of Liberation is to develop specific analyses and concrete strategies to make the poor themselves more effective agents of social change. This will involve looking at the values and specific aspirations of the poor, and reflecting theologically on "the sources of strength that enable the poor to survive and even celebrate, despite the odds they face."²⁴⁸

9.2.5.2 *Racism and Sexism*

In a country where millions of blacks (claim to) suffer because of their race, Novak's performance on the issue of racism, as I have already commented,²⁴⁹ seems poor. Atherton offers "... a timely reminder to the Novaks of this world that a majority of the black citizens of the USA and a minority of citizens in Northern Ireland were not able to exercise their democratic rights effectively until the late 1960s."²⁵⁰ Benne, unlike Novak, accepts that although we are "much closer to equality than ever before, inequality is a problem, and we cannot relax, thinking that two or three decades will eliminate all the handicaps that have been the legacy of racism and discrimination."²⁵¹ The neo-conservatives

²⁴⁷ Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 231

²⁴⁸ Arthur McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 233

Another view is offered by Fitzgerald, who suggests that the specific contribution from Liberation Theology is "a concern for life itself as the criterion for judging economic institutions." Cf Valpy Fitzgerald : "The Economics of Liberation Theology" in ed Rowland : The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology (CUP 1999) p 218 : Fitzgerald accepts that some central issues of economic development theory (for example, the balance between industry and agriculture, the best way to finance social expenditure, the improvement of international trade relationships, incentives for private producers to create jobs, the trade off between the incomes of this generation and the next) have not yet been addressed by liberation theology. He considers that this agenda may well seem too much to demand of theologians, but there are practical consequences for neglect – for example, (p 227) "the orthodox prescriptions of macro-economic theory have gone largely uncontested so far, except for general denunciations of capitalism." Fitzgerald goes on (pp 228, 229) to offer two suggestions for a welfare economics: social citizenship (which speaks of duty and entitlement) rather than compassion (which thinks in terms of donor and recipient); and the contractarian idea of fairness as characteristic of a just economy (where any citizen would be prepared to accept any position in that economy which they might be allocated at random. He cites John Rawls : Theory of Justice (Oxford University Press 1973))

²⁴⁹ see Chapter 8 Sections 8.2.1) a) and 8.2.3) d)

²⁵⁰ Atherton : Christianity and the Market (SPCK 1992) p 72

²⁵¹ R Benne : The Ethic of Democratic Capitalism : A Moral Re-assessment (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1981) p 171, quoting Elliot Zashin in Daedalus Vol 107 No 1 (Winter 1978).

would be philosophically unhappy with affirmative action (positive discrimination) as an unwarranted interference by Government in the free market, but it does seem surprising that Cone's challenge does not reach Novak. That my critique has put the question of racism to Novak is therefore important. Dorrien points out that Novak is equally weak on the issue of sexism: for Novak feminism is a declaration of total war against nature, experience and tradition.²⁵²

9.3 Cone and Novak

Only two authors, Dorrien²⁵³ and Long²⁵⁴ look at both Cone and Novak. Dorrien writes:

“In the past generation as American society has become increasingly fragmented, secular and individualistic, as well as increasingly dominated by the interests and ethics of commercial society, the difficulties of relating Christian social teaching to the prevailing social order have greatly magnified. The triumph of a globalised and arguably uncontrollable market system militates against the realisation of any form of progressive Christianity's social vision.”²⁵⁵

He does not directly compare Cone and Novak, but he makes one comment which is suggestive:

“Neo-conservative religion seeks to regenerate American society by waging a struggle for America's soul against the knowledge class of liberal academics, clergy and media stars.”²⁵⁶ This resonates with a comment Cone makes about Martin and Malcolm: “They needed each other, for they represented - and continue to represent - the 'yin' and 'yang' deep in the soul of black America.”²⁵⁷ Given Black Theology's concern for its relationship with the Black community, and perhaps especially with young blacks disaffected not only from America but from the Black Church, and given what some have described as the disintegration of parts of the Black community, there is a sense in which the pastoral

252 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress, Minneapolis 1995) p 203 Dorrien refers to Novak : Confessions of a Catholic (Harper and Row, San Francisco 1983) pp 193-198 Dorrien compares Neuhaus' view with Novak's (Neuhaus claims that feminism claims to be cognitively privileged, which enables them to critique everyone, without being critiqued by anyone; this makes them not an academic discipline, but a religion “and a bad one at that.”)

253 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress, Minneapolis 1995)

254 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000)

255 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p vii
Dorrien explains that his “purpose in writing about modern social Christianity is to offer an interpretation of its historical and theological development and to present a normative contribution to its post-modern future.”

256 Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 201

257 Cone: Martin and Malcolm and America: pp 270 f See Chapter 7 Section 7.3.1.b

mission of Black Theology could be described as a struggle for the soul of black America. Indeed, my critique shows that Cone and Novak both offer apologies for Christianity to their indifferent or even dismissive communities.

Long²⁵⁸ does more directly compare them:

“Novak found capitalism to be identical with Catholic social teaching; Stackhouse found it grounded in Protestant covenant theology, while Ruether, Sobrino and Gutierrez condemned it as idolatrous. MacIntyre found it to render virtue nearly impossible and Dempsey argued that although Capitalism technically doesn’t exist, modern economics institutionalises usury. John Millbank like James Cone regards capitalism as a Christian heresy [but] unlike Cone, Millbank is willing to insist on a normative Christian orthodoxy against which capitalism fails.”²⁵⁹

My own critique as well as bringing Cone and Novak together so that they do not, as it were, avoid each other’s criticisms, contributes a sense of their similarities. We have already noted that they are both concerned to advance Christianity; if we assume that they are sincere, they are both concerned to promote the welfare of the poor. In addition, they both have a great commitment to America; their relationships with their own communities are somewhat problematic; their enthusiasm for their new theologies has possibly made them over-narrow. Cone’s dismissal of white Christianity, Novak’s disregard for the flaws of the markets – these, it seems to me, weaken their claims to be authoritatively Christian. And, as I began by saying, they oppose liberty and liberation.

Perhaps we should allow Long the last word:

“Theological language is primarily protest²⁶⁰ – against the market and against the church. . . . The market tempts us to view the world in terms of values. It produces a critical frame of mind that reduces everything good true and beautiful to a formal value based on usefulness and substitutability. In contrast to this the Church holds forth the possibility of an infallibly true good and beautiful presentation of human action, incapable of reduction to the usefulness of its formal value. A good theological

258 Long : *Divine Economy* (Routledge, London 2000)

Long wishes to use theology to evaluate the ends of all other discourses, believing that the true end of creation is friendship with God. (Preface). He believes that a theological rendering of economics is possible, and argues that (p 79) “what we have forgotten in the Christian tradition may have much to teach us. . . I am convinced that ancient theological terms can stand in their own right as reasonable criticisms of economic relations.”

259 Long : *Divine Economy* (Routledge, London 2000) p 242

260 Long (p268) cites the Roman Catholic Catechism which notes that honouring the Sabbath is a protest against the servitude of work..

performance²⁶¹ of the relation between theology and economy will give the church and the market their appropriate roles.....

Novak's theology is a poor performance, not because he misunderstands Marxism or capitalism but because his theology too easily leads to heresy, to the substitution of the corporation for the ecclesia. This is readily disclosed when he equates the multinational corporation with the Suffering Servant.

Cone and Ruether each contribute a crucial voice to the development of a complex ecclesiology – because each forces the Church to take into account marginalisation of persons in particular historical circumstances.....

A theological economics cannot assume its task is to rule the world. A single univocal catholic economy cannot be put forward without subordinating truth, goodness and beauty to power.”²⁶²

261 Long has earlier suggested (p 262) that a sense of the entirety of the performance should be taken into account.

262 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) pp 265-268