

# **A Voice for the Voiceless: Religious Education in the service of the oppressed and the poor.**

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## **Prologue**

This paper has been adapted from a public lecture I gave a number of months ago in Wakefield, in the U.K. In that original paper I spoke about the importance of religiously inspired education as a vehicle for transforming the existential experiences of those who are considered the 'voiceless' in our present world order. I believe that the notion of building community for the 'New Creation' must have specific contextual locations in order for it to possess an efficacy that has merit for a time such as this one. My approach to building community for the New Creation begins with the marginalized and oppressed, in the context of my own work, that of dispossessed and disenfranchised Diasporan African people, particularly those living in Britain. As a contextual piece of work, I have chosen to focus my attention on the United Kingdom.

This theological polemic seeks to outline the pivotal role of Black theology, which, when allied to liberative models of religious education, gives rise to a transformative pedagogy for the emancipation and transformation of oppressed, poor Black people. This project is undertaken from within a Wesleyan, Methodist framework. The development of a 'New Creation' – building communities of resistance, justice, equity and solidarity, begins with the resultant change within the existential experiences of those who are the 'least of these' – in effect, it is the challenge to give 'a voice to the voiceless'.

## **Introduction**

One of my general maxims with regards to any form of public conversation, whether it is in the form of writing or in speech, is to seek to ascertain some details about the person making the pronouncement. Who are they? Where do they come from? How do they attempt to define or identify themselves? My friend and colleague The Revd. Mark Wakelin, a British Methodist minister, presented the Hartley Fearnley essay at the annual British Methodist Conference last year in Ipswich. His address was entitled *On Becoming, Living and Knowing*.<sup>1</sup> In one of the early sections of the essay, Wakelin addresses the issue of epistemology. He posed the all too infrequently asked question, *How does the subjectivity of the individual affect what he or she knows?* It is one of the most basic of existential questions. Who am I and how does that affect what I know?

In this, the first part of the essay, I want to say a little bit about me, because in order to understand the premise of the essay and the notion of 'giving a voice to those who might be termed voiceless' you need to know something about my subjectivity. This is important, as I am always telling my students at Queen's, because who I am, what I have experienced and the influences that have shaped me, have determined to a greater extent,

the nature of my work and my reasons for wanting to undertake it. In the Caribbean there is a saying which goes ‘Who feels it knows it’. So what have I felt and how has that affected what I know?

### **My Subjective Agency – Who am I?**

I was born in Bradford, West Yorkshire, on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1964, in the Bradford Royal Infirmary. I am the first child of Mr and Mrs Noel and Lucille Reddie, who came from Jamaica to the U.K. in the winter of 1957. I grew up in a relatively poor area of the city called East Bowling. I was christened in a Methodist Church named Prospect Hall, off the A650 or the Wakefield Road. The church was closed in the late 1960s and my family decamped to the central Methodist Mission named Eastbrook Hall. In some of my previous writing, I have spoken about Eastbrook Hall, as a formidable, imposing cradle of Yorkshire Methodism.<sup>2</sup> Eastbrook was indeed a formidable and imposing place, full of formidable and imposing people – and my family, so it seemed.

The journey from East Bowling to a Research Fellowship at Queens, has been an eventful one as is the case with most journeys. You will be pleased to know that I shall spare you the worst excesses of an auto-biographical ‘This is My life’ type journey down memory lane. I want to reflect for a little while, however, about the means by which this journey has been undertaken. For as my Mother, a redoubtable and determined Jamaican woman of Christian faith, is always want to say, ‘We haven’t gotten where we have by accident.’

In order to understand how my journey has been undertaken – the force that has propelled it and the compass that has given it direction, you need to know something of the context in which I was born and was subsequently nurtured. I am instinctively, a narrative theologian, and the use of archetypal stories as a means of distilling and capturing truth is one that has always been close to my heart. One of my favourite writers is Janice Hale. In her book *Unbank the Fire*, Hale describes the journey of her family from rural poverty in the southern states of the U.S. to professional middle-class respectability, over the course of three generations.<sup>3</sup> The framework of that work has so impressed me, that I have chosen to use it for my initial contextual analysis – the substantive background of this paper.

For my own story, you have to go back to the period of late-colonialism in the Caribbean. My parents were born into the endemic poverty of the poor agrarian proletariat of Jamaica. The might of British imperial rule was in the twilight of its political dominance and the visible signs of decline and demise<sup>4</sup> that was to occur two generations on from their birth were already clearly discernible.<sup>5</sup> My parents were part of an underclass that was poor, deprived and disparaged.<sup>6</sup> For them, redemption and amelioration from the ills of being Black, poor and uneducated came from the church and the teachings of Christianity. Anne and Anthony Pinn in their recent book on Black Church history chart the development of the relationship between Black people of the African Diaspora and

the Christian faith that was brought from Europe.<sup>7</sup> My essay, in seeking to outline my ideas around enabling the voiceless to find their voice, is built firmly upon the backdrop of social, political and economic improvement by means of religious teaching and socialisation. It can be argued that the most compelling claim for the efficacy of religious teaching and learning can be found in the deprived and subjugated bodies of the Black slaves whose pitiful existence was affirmed and transformed by the miracle that is faith.<sup>8</sup> I want to use this macro or overarching example from history and juxtapose it with my own experiences of growing up in Bradford, West Yorkshire. My intention in doing this is to provide a context from which we can depart and make further explorations into the complex meanings and issues that are bound up with the process of attempting to give a voice to the voiceless – building community for the new creation. This work is dealt with in much greater depth in my next book, *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation*.<sup>9</sup>

The poverty and frustrations of the Caribbean led my parents, along with hundreds of thousands of their peers, to seek a better life overseas.<sup>10</sup> They came imbued with values and ideas that were inculcated in the course of their own religious and cultural socialisation. The Caribbean in general and Jamaica in particular, is a context in which religious matters are discussed and debated with a ferocity and a fervour that makes English religious sensibilities look distinctly tame and lacking in conviction.<sup>11</sup> In the world-view of my parents and of countless Black and other poor people, religious knowledge was linked, almost inextricably, with personal growth – a growth that was holistic and all encompassing. The religion my parents imbibed was the radical teachings of the holiness movement.

My own growth and development can be attributed to the tripartite influences of my parents, Methodism, along with added doses of socialism thrown in for good measure. So the mixture is: - take liberal doses of all three, mix in a large tumbler, add a dash of class consciousness, shake and stir, and administer on a daily basis for thirty years and ergo, arises an Anthony Reddie.

My formative years were spent in a hot-house of religious fervour and social change. In many respects, my individual story is not unique. Church historians have written extensively about the role of the church in the social and economic improvement of the poor and the underclass.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I do not intend to delay us too long in rehearsing the claims and counter claims of the church and her relationship with the deprived and the underclass from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.

Given the nature of this gathering, I know that you will forgive me for being somewhat partisan in my comments. I am a cradle Methodist, although I will do my utmost not to wear it on my sleeve nor force you to digest an unpalatable diet of Wesleyan triumphalism. Despite my somewhat trenchant comments direct at the Methodist Church

in Britain at periodic moments, I need to acknowledge the debt that I owe to my church. From the earliest memories of being marched to church resplendent in my Sunday best, I was conscious of the dour, dutiful and earnest climate of holiness that stained the atmosphere of the gathered community of faith that was Eastbrook Hall. Rupert Davies' popular book, which charts the historical developments of Methodism, highlights the potency of Wesley's teaching on holiness and its efficacy on the religious sensibilities of his initial 18<sup>th</sup> century followers.<sup>13</sup>

Later generations of Methodists, along with many of her free-church relatives and their 'established' elder sibling were active participants in the development of social and educational programmes for the betterment of the poor and deprived. In the latter arena of education, Cliff's work on the rise and development of the Sunday School Union charts the important contributions made by Christian faith communities to the creation of educational opportunities for those outside the orbit of seeming privilege, comfort and affluence.<sup>14</sup> Education about religion and induction into religion have been identified as being important theological tasks. Writers such as Sedgwick have noted the transformative power and influence of both Religious Education and 'generic' education from within a religious world-view.<sup>15</sup> The work of Douglas Huberry and the former Methodist Division of Education and Youth<sup>16</sup> in more recent times have continued to fly the flag for a Christian inspired view of education, which at its core, carries the often benign stamp of Wesleyan holiness.<sup>17</sup>

My education about and induction into the Christian faith was imbued with an aspirant, self-improvement ethic that lay at the forefront of my heightened consciousness. Eastbrook Hall was a highly competitive arena, whose coercive power for social improvement and progress, as a form of pietistic holiness, became all the more pronounced and effective due to the alleged benign nature of its existence. As I have stated on many occasions when giving talks about my past, 'growing up in Eastbrook, was to live in a world of studious conformity. The rules of belonging were never stated, yet everyone knew what the rules were.' I would submit that in this respect, Eastbrook, although undeniably peculiar and idiosyncratic as only Yorkshire folk can be, nevertheless, is a microcosm of British society.

My progress through the church had distinct 'knock-on' effects for the other areas of my life. The pressure to conform to the perceived exacting standards of belonging to a respectable and influential city centre mission, instilled in me a determination to traverse the disparate worlds of urban poverty on the one hand and religious and social acceptance on the other.<sup>18</sup> This phenomenon is certainly not a new one. The pressure to be the 'best I could be', engendered through an environment of self conscious holiness, added to my parent's determination, saw me through my 'O' levels, 'A' levels and on to university. The necessary skills of applied learning and examination technique were learnt through the rigours of scripture exams set by the Methodist Youth Department. The good habits of

reading and ‘thinking things through’ came principally from my parents, but also courtesy of a number of willing and patient Sunday school teachers. In terms of the latter, I remain deeply indebted to a certain Mr. Salter. I cannot remember much about him, and we sadly lost touch when Eastbrook closed in the mid 1980s. Mr. Salter, if memory serves correct, was a physicist at Sheffield University, but he wore his considerable learning not on his sleeve, but buried deep in one of his saggy pockets of a seemingly ill fitting suit. This man took a natural interest in my studies and offered weekly encouragement to my parents, insisting that I possessed the necessary skills and ability to go to University.

When I left Bradford for the University of Birmingham in the autumn of 1984, I went as a fully paid up and inducted member of the Methodist church, imbued with and socialised into the whole world view and the accompanying values of Methodism, which manifested themselves in the studious search for holiness and Christian perfection. I have now lived in Birmingham almost longer than I have in Yorkshire, yet the stain and influence of those early years remain. It is indeed true, as the legion of ‘professional Yorkshire men’ in the public eye can testify. You can take the man out of Yorkshire, but you cannot take Yorkshire out of the man. Or in my case, Yorkshire Methodism. The importance of these formative influences has been noted in a previous piece of writing.<sup>19</sup>

### **Who are the Voiceless?**

The relative success of my formative years is, in many respects, readily apparent. I would not describe myself as unique in the development and progress I have experienced in the intervening times, from my early years in Bradford, to where I am now. Many others have made that journey. The education and religious nurture I received was more than adequate in many respects, for it allowed me to move beyond the social and cultural limitations that were placed upon me, due to circumstances of my birth, such as my ethnicity and social class. But my progress should not disguise the underlying failures and weakness of that movement. While it was perfectly adequate in some respects, it was woefully ignorant, naïve and lacking in many others. My progress was relatively sure footed and I indeed move into new pastures, far removed from the limitations and frustrations of my origins – into areas of which my parents could barely conceive. This move gave me enhanced opportunities, but it did not give me a voice. I had a modicum of success and social improvement, but still no voice. The nature of my belonging – to the socially aspirant world of the middle-class, or in the relatively comfortable climate of Methodism, was achieved at the expense of my cultural and ethnic identity.

To belong to British society and that of the church, for a Black person, necessitates a denial of one’s self. To be voiceless, is to have one’s experiences, history and ongoing reality ignored, disparaged and ridiculed. It is to be rendered an insignificant presence, amongst the many who are deemed one’s betters and superiors.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting upon that Caribbean aphorism I mentioned at an earlier point in the essay – ‘Who feels it knows it’ - to be voiceless in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain and the wider world is to find that what I know

or have felt is of no consequence to the nation or world as a whole. What I know and have felt is dismissed as untrue and without any social, political, cultural or theological consequence.

Despite these ongoing pressures, I made it out of East Bowling. It should be noted, however, that there are many who cannot point to any sense of improvement, social or otherwise. These often forgotten, faceless and voiceless figures inhabited the often unchanged world of the inner city. Writers such as Kenneth Leech have written extensively about the marginalisation of the urban poor and their estrangement from the wider society and the church.<sup>21</sup>

One of the central arguments of this essay is that there are additional burdens and pressures that are placed upon people who are not white, living in this country or across the wider contours of the 'new world order'. Feminist and Womanist<sup>22</sup> theologians have long spoken about multi-dimensional oppression. That is, the diverse ways in which social, political, cultural and economic pressures are played out on poor, dispossessed and marginalized objects, coalescing around issues of 'race', ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and geographic and social location.<sup>23</sup> It is the uniqueness of these challenges that have stymied the voice of the urban, disaffected poor.

In making a claim to identify with the 'voiceless' I want to suggest that British society and the so-called first world have found convenient ways of ignoring the claims of those who have been pushed to the margins, and whose presence the corporate whole has identified as being undesirable or subversive.<sup>24</sup> The noted sociologist, Paul Gilroy has been an ardent campaigner and chronicler of the subtle and not so oblique pressures that have been exerted upon minority ethnic people in their attempts to find an accommodating space and place within this island.<sup>25</sup> It is not my intention to claim a privileged role for Black people, as the recipients of the dubious honour of being the 'most oppressed of the oppressed'. This would be a fatuous and inane form of discourse. What I want to assert, however, is that due to a unique set of circumstances, many dating back several hundred years to the birth of slavery, Black people have been the recipients of a pernicious, psychological attack that threatened their very existence as human subjects created in the image of a Supreme being.

African American scholars such as Asante, estimate that upwards of 50 million African people were transported between Africa, Europe and the Americas over a three hundred year period.<sup>26</sup> Inherent within that Black transatlantic movement of forced migration, was a form of biased racialised teaching that asserted the inferiority and sub-human nature of the Black self.<sup>27</sup> The effects of such biased, self-serving instruction are still being felt - the continuing tendency of Black people to internalise their feelings of inferiority, coupled with an accompanying lack of self-esteem. The internalisation of this demonised instruction has led to Black people directing the fire of their repressed and disparaged selves onto their own psyche and that of their peers with whom they share a common

ancestry and ethnic identity.<sup>28</sup> This can be seen in the growing incidences of lateral violence, more popularly known as ‘Black on Black crime’ in inner city areas in Britain and in the United States.

The popular debate surrounding the socialisation and educational attainment of Black children and young people Britain, although a seemingly contemporaneous issue, has its roots in the prolonged attack upon the African self during the era of slavery.

One of the enduring legacies of slavery, argues Ella P. Mitchell, was the inextricable link between the role of the matriarch in Black corporate life and the development of a Black conception of Christianity, which reflected that maternal dominance. The forced removal of the Black male as part of the machinery of slavery ensured that the role of Black women continued to be all pervasive in the socialisation of the Black child.<sup>29</sup>

The dominant role of Black women, in comparative terms, coupled with the most pernicious effects of racism has made the struggle of Black males, particularly in western societies, an acute one. A number of writers and educationalists have asserted that Black males exhibit disproportionately higher levels of disaffection and marginalisation in White dominated societies in the west than their female counterparts. This differentiation can be attributed to the disparity between the codified forms of behaviour displayed by Black males and the values and norms of White power.<sup>30</sup> In effect, there is a greater variance between the behavioural patterns of Black males and the standardised and accepted norms designed and policed by White male authority. This argument is given apparent validity by the number of studies undertaken by researchers that have placed the Black male as the central subject in the research enterprise.<sup>31</sup> This discussion is one that resonates with a growing number of parents of Black children who are struggling in various State school systems.<sup>32</sup>

### **Black Theology as a means of giving a voice to the voiceless**

Robert Beckford is one of the most important new voices in the theological and cultural landscape in this country. He has written extensively about the muting and denial of the voice attributed to Black and minority ethnic people in Britain.<sup>33</sup> I want to talk about the work of my colleague Robert Beckford and that of the ‘Black Theology in Britain’ forum.

### **The Contribution of Robert Beckford**

Robert Beckford is currently a lecturer in Theology at the University of Birmingham. He was born in Northampton and spent some of his early years in Coventry, before the family moved to Birmingham. His formative years were spent in the high profile area of Handsworth in North Birmingham, scene of two significant urban rebellions in the early and mid 1980s. Robert acknowledges the importance of these formative experiences in the shaping of his social and political consciousness and the subsequent development of his theological and cultural outlook.

His appointment to the staff at Queens meant that he was the first lecturer and tutor appointed to teach Black Theology at a theological college in Britain. Robert taught Black theology at the then Queen's College, in Birmingham from 1992 until 1999.<sup>34</sup> Robert's work has been an inspiration to a generation of Black theological and educational scholars in the United Kingdom. I would not be doing the work for which I am recognised, were it not for the encouragement and inspiration of Robert Beckford's challenging and committed stance to undertaking theological and cultural thinking in the service of Black empowerment – attempting to give a voice to the voiceless.

In his first book *Jesus Is Dread*<sup>35</sup>, Beckford challenged many of the accepted notions of how and to what purpose human beings have attempted to articulate the relationship between the contingency of humanity and the ultimate reality that is God. Beckford's work in this respect, in seeking to locate the experiences of the flawed, distorted and humiliated reality of those who are poor, oppressed and without a voice, as the central point in his theological and educational schema, draws upon the insights of such luminaries as James Cone,<sup>36</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez,<sup>37</sup> and the brothers Boff<sup>38</sup> and in some respects, the 'Father' of Black Academic theological work in Britain, Emmanuel Lartey.<sup>39</sup>

In *Jesus is Dread* Beckford began the bold experiment of seeking to fuse Black approaches to talking about God and God's agency in solidarity with human kind alongside a penetrating analysis of various Black cultural forms and aesthetics in Britain. Beckford argues that the voiceless, in this case, the muted and submerged voices of the disenfranchised Black urban proletariat are the authentic material for an exploration into the sources and locations by which God's liberating presence and actions might be located. This work was an iconoclastic and disturbing text for pre-millennium Britain. It was a disturber of many commonly held assumptions. Indeed, even his title is a biting critique on the neo-colonial, conservative mores of Caribbean societies and the Christians who have been shaped in these socio-cultural and political contexts. Beckford argues that the word 'dread' is often taken to mean 'an awful calamity' or that which is 'terrible and to be avoided'.<sup>40</sup> This term, often invoked at times of fear and foreboding, was subsequently inverted and given new meaning by the Rastafarian movement, that became a potent religious and cultural group in Jamaica.<sup>41</sup>

Time constraints prevent any serious analysis of the Rasta movement in Britain, suffice it to say, that this religious and cultural movement it became one of the most expressive and significant repositories for Black self expression, and for social and political dissent.<sup>42</sup> In effect, it was an early progenitor for a process that attempted to give a voice to those who are voiceless. *Jesus Is Dread* is notable for the creative methodology Beckford employs in his approach to articulating the Black experience in Britain through the prism of Black religion. Using a variety of sources, such as Black expressive cultures and social and literary analysis, he reflects upon the meaning of Black Christianity in Britain and across the African Diaspora, identifying the liberational themes and concepts that are inherent

within Black religiosity.<sup>43</sup> Beckford even suggests that the notable reggae singer and ‘Third World’ icon, the late great Bob Marley can be understood within the framework of Black Diasporan hermeneutics, as a Black Liberation Theologian. Commenting on the inspirational work of Bob Marley, a hero to continuing generations of dispossessed and disenfranchised people, Beckford states that

‘Naturally, Marley does not use the traditional theological methods found in your average systematic theological text-book...For Marley experience is the basis for exploring the social world. Consequently, he rejects the knowledge-validation processes used in the classroom of traditional education...The second aspect of Marley’s method is commitment to radical social change. There are two areas of concern in his music: first, the destruction of Babylon, and second, the liberation of the poor.’<sup>44</sup>

Beckford’s radical identification with Bob Marley, as a liberation theologian, can be interpreted as a commitment to utilising the seemingly egalitarian resources of popular, expressive cultures, such as music, with a view to enabling Black, marginalized and oppressed people to locate a voice for their authentic experiences of struggle.

Perhaps the most striking and challenging part of *Jesus Is Dread* can be found in an early section of this text, where the author analyses the relationship between the major historic-mainline churches<sup>45</sup> in Britain and Black people of African descent.<sup>46</sup> Beckford asks a number of pertinent and challenging questions about the efficacy of Black people seeking to find a voice and a conducive and therapeutic space in which to work out their liberation, from within what have traditionally been seen as oppressive and exclusive bastions of White hegemony.<sup>47</sup> In this provocative chapter of the book, entitled ‘What kind of freed slaves worship in the slave master’s church? Black Resistance in White churches in Britain’, the author challenges the strategies employed by Black people, such as myself, to locate an appropriate space, and as a corollary, to find their authentic voice, from within historically oppressive and discriminatory churches.<sup>48</sup> It seems almost superfluous to remark that Beckford, a Black Pentecostalist, is not overly taken with the rhetoric, doctrinal assertions and amended practice of historic-mainline churches, in their attempts to engage with issues of racial injustice and social exclusion.

While I have found Beckford’s contentions illuminating and helpful, in terms of alerting us to the struggle for an expressive and authentic voice for the poor and the oppressed, his blanket assertions that the ‘slave masters’ house has not delivered any meaningful or tangible results in this struggle, is both unfair and inaccurate.<sup>49</sup> My previous research with the ‘Birmingham Initiative’,<sup>50</sup> and the publication of my first two books, *Growing into Hope*,<sup>51</sup> were sponsored by the Methodist church, along with additional support from the Anglican, Baptist and U.R.C. traditions. The now widely accepted recognition of the annual ‘Racial Justice Sunday’ celebration on the second Sunday in September was largely a Methodist inspired development arising from the landmark report to the British

Methodist Conference entitled 'Faithful and Equal'.<sup>52</sup>

My current publication, entitled *Faith, Stories and the Experiences of Black Elders*<sup>53</sup>, which seeks to highlight the spirituality and wisdom of the 'Windrush Generation,'<sup>54</sup> was sponsored by 'Methodist Homes for the Aged' the elder care agency of the Methodist Church. This book is the first such text that attempts to reflect upon the spirituality and legacy of these pioneering Black people, whose presence underpins the burgeoning strength of Black Christian expression in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.<sup>55</sup> The development and support for these groundbreaking initiatives has come from within the auspices of the historic-mainline churches in Britain.

Beckford's most recent work, *God of the Rahtid*<sup>56</sup> continues many of the nascent themes of his earlier publications. In it, he highlights the means by which Black rage destabilises and deforms the selfhood and humanity of Black people in Britain.<sup>57</sup> Beckford advocates a concept he terms 'Redemptive Vengeance'<sup>58</sup> as a means of countering the worst excesses of what he describes as 'low level rage'. The latter is manifested in the seemingly casual incidences of racism that inhabit the Black psyche and are submerged and internalised within the Black self, leading to long term psychological damage, manifested in such conditions as schizophrenia.<sup>59</sup> 'Redemptive Vengeance' for Beckford, is a process where angry and marginalized Black people call upon the radical and prophetic resources of a 'realised' ideal that is the 'Kingdom Of God', as depicted in the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Here, Jesus' decisive declaration for and positioning alongside the marginalized and the poor ushers in a new reality, where the destructive forces that distort Black humanity which, in turn, give rise to Black rage can be challenged and overturned.<sup>60</sup>

Beckford is an outspoken and seemingly fearless champion for the dignity and humanity of Black people, who I will submit, represent the voiceless objects in post-colonial Britain. Beckford's work has been instrumental in highlighting the negative effects of racial injustice and institutionalised racism on the Black human subject – an ongoing de-humanising process that has rendered such individuals a voiceless presence. Beckford's work is complimented by my friend and mentor, the Revd Dr. Emmanuel Lartey. Dr. Lartey is a Methodist minister from Ghana, who until very recently taught Pastoral theology and counselling at the University of Birmingham. He has been a pioneer in the area of inter-cultural pastoral care and counselling. His commitment to Black theology in Britain has been pivotal in the development of this discipline. Emmanuel Lartey was my immediate predecessor as editor of the journal *Black Theology in Britain*.<sup>61</sup> Lartey pioneered the first MA course in Black Theology in Britain, within the Graduate Institute for Religion and Theology at the University of Birmingham. His most significant text is *In Living Colour*.<sup>62</sup> In this book, Lartey outlines an approach to Pastoral care and counselling that is informed by the cultural contexts in which human existence is located. His method seeks to analyse the overarching situational dilemmas that impinge upon the

autonomy of human subjects in their daily struggles to be their true selves.<sup>63</sup>

Lartey's approach to pastoral care and counselling is earthed within his firm commitment to the liberation of poor and oppressed people. This commitment and focus, which is the central concern of this essay, finds its most eloquent expression in a later chapter entitled 'Liberation as Pastoral Praxis'.<sup>64</sup> Lartey, reflecting on this pastoral approach to empowering those who are denied a voice, states

'The theologian begins from a position of being immersed in the experiences of poverty, marginalisation and oppression. It is from this position that he or she tries to understand and articulate the faith.'<sup>65</sup>

Lartey subsequently analyses the work of such luminaries as the Uruguayan Liberation theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff,<sup>66</sup> seeking to reflect upon their method for working in solidarity with those who are the 'least of these.'<sup>67</sup> Reflecting upon the method employed by the Boff's in their liberation work alongside those who are denied a voice, he writes

'This basic framework (for their approach) has been extended and adapted by attempts to answer questions like: 'Who are the poor? Who speaks for the poor? Who has the power and control in the articulation of the experiences of the poor? Who selects what is relevant? Who benefits from the way things are done? Who is excluded? Who is marginalized?...At this level it is the poor, the marginalized or the oppressed who speak for themselves, on their own terms and in their chosen manner.'<sup>68</sup>

The final phrase of Lartey's concerning the act of enabling the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed, to be given a voice in order to articulate their authentic experiences of being, leads me into the next section of this essay. I remind you that in the context of my own work and for the purposes of this essay, I am concerned primarily with Black people living in Britain.

At this juncture, I want to reflect upon my own work as a Black Christian Educator and a Practical, Black Liberation theologian, working from a Methodist base, across predominantly inner city contexts in Britain. But firstly, I must pay due recognition to my many colleagues within the Black Theology in Britain Forum, who are actively pursuing a variety of concomitant issues, using a plethora of approaches from within the British context. Writers such as Bishop Joe Aldred in his 'With Power' trilogy<sup>69</sup> have addressed concerns regarding the destructive power of White hegemonic structures that silence the claims of the poor and the oppressed, particularly if these individuals are Black people of African descent. His books have offered principally Black men and women an opportunity to express their hopes, fear and aspirations as people of faith.

Alternatively, the development of the journal *Black Theology in Britain* has provided a repository in which questions of faith and the accompanying experience of Black people in Britain can be expressed.<sup>70</sup>

### **Religious Education in the service of the oppressed and the poor**

In this, the final section of this essay, I want to argue that most appropriate means of giving a voice to the voiceless, is located in the important discipline of Religious Education. I want to argue that while Black theology has proved a crucial resource in enabling marginalized, disaffected, poor Black people to begin to articulate their experiences or struggle and non-being, it has failed to provide a sustained programme that might engage the voiceless themselves in the process of gaining their voice. In effect, its strident polemics have been strong on rhetoric but weak on praxis or action. I want to suggest a means by which the voiceless might be given a voice. Or perhaps, despite the danger of being rather too pedantic or obtuse, enabling the voiceless to discover their own voice, rather than be given one. This section will be followed by a brief conclusion in which I discuss the implications for this form of educational approach for the self-esteem, affirmation and development of Black people in Britain. Given the present interest of this Government in the concept of 'citizenship', I want to argue that this approach has implications both for that ongoing debate, in addition to the wider theological concerns for building community for the new creation.

You will no doubt have noticed the obvious assumption I have made right from the outset of this essay. Namely, that religion in general and Christianity in particular are 'good things' and offer the most appropriate framework in which poor and oppressed people can be affirmed and empowered. Naturally, I am aware of the main fault lines in this assumption. I am conscious of the deeply problematic role religion has played in human affairs throughout the course of history. In the context of this essay, however, I want to argue for the primacy of religion, particularly Christianity, for the development and affirmation of poor and oppressed Black people. As I have stated in my current book,

'Black people are incurably religious. A belief in powers higher than the temporal, mortal realm of humankind, lies at the very heart of our understanding and relationship to the created world order.'<sup>71</sup>

### **Assessing the work and 'ministry' of Paulo Freire**

The name Paulo Freire is one that has exerted a profound hold on the imagination of educators the world over. Freire's groundbreaking work in devising appropriate pedagogies or strategies of teaching for poor, marginalized and oppressed peoples is legendary.<sup>72</sup> Constraints of time prevent a detailed explication of the work and legacy of Paulo Freire,<sup>73</sup> but I do want to look briefly at some of his thinking, particularly in the context of Religious Education, and the empowerment and affirmation of those who are without a voice.

Let me first offer some brief bibliographical details on Paulo Freire. My apologies to

those for whom this is more than familiar territory. Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in Recife, in North Eastern Brazil, into a situation of extreme poverty. It was this experience that led Freire to dedicate his life to the struggle against poverty and hunger, so that other children would not have to know the agony he had experienced. Freire developed a philosophy of education that challenged poor and oppressed people to reflect upon their individual and corporate experiences and begin to ask critical questions about the nature of their existence. Why were they poor? What structures or people had control over their lives?

The radical nature of this critical approach to the task of teaching and learning brought Freire to the attention of the military government in Brazil in 1964. He was subsequently imprisoned and then exiled. In exile, he began to refine further his educational philosophy and method. He came to international attention with the publication of his first book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,<sup>74</sup> which laid the foundations for a seismic shift in the whole conception of how poor, oppressed and marginalized people might be educated. In the realms of theological thought and Religious Education, Freire's ideas are credited with being an invaluable source for Gustavo Gutierrez's groundbreaking text *A Theology of Liberation*,<sup>75</sup> and the basis for a committed and ideologically driven theology of and for the poor. Freire's later work with the World Council of Churches throughout the 1970s and 80s as an international consultant, led to his work becoming hugely significant in many parts of the world, especially amongst poor and oppressed peoples. Paulo Freire died in Rio de Janeiro on May 2, 1997, at the age of 75. He has bequeathed a legacy of commitment, love and hope for oppressed peoples throughout the world.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of Paulo Freire cannot be overstated. In developing a rigorous and critical approach to the task of educating those who are poor and oppressed, Freire created an essential template by which Religious Educators might re-conceptualise their task. One of Freire's central concepts was that of 'conscientization'. This is a process where poor and oppressed people are enabled to become critically aware of the circumstances in which they live and the ways in which their humanity is infringed upon and blighted by the often dehumanising contexts that surround them.<sup>77</sup> Allen J. Moore commenting on this aspect of Freire's work says

'Conscientization in Freire's work is apparently both an individual experience and a shared experience of a people who are acting together in history. A way of life is not determined from thinking about the world but is formed from the shared praxis. In this critical approach to the world, basic attitudes, values, and beliefs are formed and a people are humanized or liberated. Conscientization, therefore, leads to a life lived with consciousness of history, a life lived that denounces and transforms this history in order to form a new way of life for those who are oppressed.'<sup>78</sup>

Freire's approach to education has opened up new vistas for Religious Educators, along with Pastoral and Practical theologians. His work contains a profound humanising spirit

that draws extensively upon his Roman Catholic upbringing and catechesis. The religious teaching he would have received was one that emphasised not only the inherent sinful nature of human kind, but also identified God as being in an ongoing redemptive relationship with those whom God's very own self had willed into being. This perspective is expressed in powerful terms by John Westerhoff III, one of the most influential Religious Educators in recent times, who writes

'God is that power within human life and history which calls, inspires and aids us, but will not take away our freedom to even destroy ourselves; however, God acts within human life and history to redeem and transform our deaths into life.'<sup>79</sup>

For one who would not consider himself a theologian or a religious educator, Freire's work has always been marked by a firm, implicit theistic content. This became increasingly visible as his writings matured and he advanced in years. John Elias, in his assessment of Freire as a religious educator states

'The religious element in Freire's social philosophy has become increasingly more explicit in later writings and speeches. He sees the Christian Gospel as proclaiming the radical re-ordering of society in which men [sic] are oppressed...Christians who involve themselves in revolutionary action against oppression involve themselves in a new Passover, a new Easter.'<sup>80</sup>

In a moving letter to a group of theological students, Freire speaks of his own Christian commitment and theological understanding.

'His words (Christ's) are not a sound that simply blows in the air: it is a whole way of knowing...I cannot know the Gospels if I take them simply as words that come to rest in me or if, seeing myself as empty, I try to fill myself with these words. This would be the way to bureaucratise the word, to empty it, to deny it, to rob it of its eternal coming to be... On the contrary, I understand the Gospels, well or badly, to the degree that, well or badly, I live them.'<sup>81</sup>

Freire's words lead naturally into the final section of the essay. For Freire, the liberation of the poor and the oppressed, the way that they might be enabled to discover their voice, is by means of them becoming critically aware of themselves and the situation in which they exist.<sup>82</sup> This process does not invite the poor and the oppressed to reflect benignly upon their situation rather it calls for action, or praxis, in the language of Freire.<sup>83</sup>

Religious Education in the service of the poor and the oppressed for Black people living in Britain, is one that invites subjugated human subjects into action, in order to re-make their existence and so transform their experiences. In the context of my own work, this approach operates within a Christian framework, influenced by the tradition and methods consistent with Black and Liberation theologies. I make no apologies for seeking to use

the basic concepts of Christianity and a radical interpretation of Christ's teaching and example for my work, for these have provided fertile ground for Black resistance to oppression for the past five hundred years.<sup>84</sup> The commitment to building community for the new creation has been a central illuminating motif in Black Christianity since the epoch of slavery.

Freire reminds us that the transformational effect of being incorporated into Christ,<sup>85</sup> through the power of the Holy Spirit, leads to a whole new way of being and knowing. In effect, we are new creations in Christ. Cheryl Bridges has developed an approach to Christian Religious Education that is influenced by her Pentecostal background. Bridges has created an educational schema she describes as 'Pentecostal formation'.<sup>86</sup> Drawing upon the influence of the nineteenth century holiness movement in the United States, alongside the Pentecostal assertion in the primacy of the Holy Spirit, Bridges has created an approach that seeks to empower and affirm the poor and the oppressed. i.e., to give them a voice by which they might articulate their experiences.<sup>87</sup> The importance of the Holy Spirit to her educational approach can be discerned when she says

'In sanctification, the believer learns to walk in perfect love and to exist in harmony with the will and nature of Christ...God will one day be all in all, and for the Pentecostal believer, this holy consummation can occur in believers' lives as a sign of the age to come. Therefore, issues of racism, sexism, oppression and violence are issues of sanctification.'<sup>88</sup>

Whilst it would be wrong to describe John Wesley or the movement he founded as being 'Pentecostal' there is no doubt that recognition of the Holy Spirit as a transforming agent in the striving for holiness and Christian perfection is an important aspect of Wesleyan discipleship. It was a crucial ingredient in my own religious socialisation and nurture.

### **Religious Education in the service of the oppressed and the poor – Suitable models for the British Context**

Over the course of my four year involvement with the *Birmingham Initiative*,<sup>89</sup> I worked amongst 26 inner city churches of the Anglican, Methodist, URC and Baptist traditions in Birmingham, undertaking research in order to develop a theory and a method for a culturally appropriate model for the teaching and learning of the Christian faith. My research efforts and the accompanying curriculum writings were conscious attempts to absorb the myriad influences and concerns to which I have drawn attention in this essay. One of the most significant outcomes of that work was *Growing into Hope*.<sup>90</sup> I do not intend to speak specifically about *Growing into Hope* as there will be other occasions for a more in depth analysis of the significance of these texts. Rather, I want to reflect upon the necessity of both *Growing into Hope* and my most recent publication *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders*.<sup>91</sup>

As far back as the early 1970s, writers such as Coard spoke about the danger of White dominated British society and the corrosive effects it was exerting upon African

Caribbean children.<sup>92</sup> More recent work by the likes of Gillborn<sup>93</sup> and Sewell<sup>94</sup> has charted the turbulent relationship between schooling and Black children of African descent in Britain. The literature pertaining to the overarching experiences of Black people in Britain is too numerous to cite at this juncture. It will come as no surprise, that in response to the seemingly ever expanding acreage of column inches detailing the problematic nature of these ‘ethnic minorities,’ often in the most lurid and vituperative of terms, a counter deluge of anti-racist texts have emerged in opposition to this prevailing tide of racialised negativity.<sup>95</sup>

My work has been a committed attempt to create models of learning and theological reflection that enable poor and oppressed Black people to find hope beyond the immediacy of the circumstances in which they find themselves. I remain grateful to the Methodist Church for enabling me to have the space and the necessary time in which to undertake this work. And if you will be so gracious as to look beyond my obvious bias, I believe this work to be vital for the health and harmony of 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

Tony Campollo, the popular American sociologist and Baptist preacher, once remarked that people who have no hope and nothing to lose are dangerous people.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the distinguished African American philosopher, Cornel West, has written extensively on the rampant nihilism at the core of contemporary American life. West writes

‘In January 1998, President Bill Clinton informed the nation that it was good times for America...Perhaps good times should be gauged by the depth of spirituality needed to keep keeping on in the midst of material poverty, and also in the spiritual poverty of brothers and sisters disproportionately White in vanilla suburbs. These sisters and brothers are dealing with existential emptiness and spiritual malnutrition...Furthermore, what kind of good times can this be when suicide rates are increasing among young people?’<sup>97</sup>

The sense of hopelessness and the vacuum at the heart of contemporary youth experience represents one of the most serious challenges facing Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For many Black young people, the promises of material progress, societal belonging and affirmation have proved to be illusory. Some have managed to prosper, but others have not been so lucky.<sup>98</sup> For every Anthony Reddie, there are countless Black young people, and those not so young anymore, who have not found their way through the maze of entrapment that is poverty, marginalisation, disaffection and disillusionment.

For many, this ongoing malaise begins in early childhood. The seeds of dissatisfaction and displacement begin to emerge from the moment they perceive that the wider environment beyond their immediate confines is one that is not to be trusted.<sup>99</sup> Let me share with you, a story that goes back to the period of my initial research with the *Birmingham Initiative* in the late 1990s. I was working with a group of Black children, all of whom attended an

inner city Anglican church in north Birmingham. I was in the midst of piloting some of the draft Christian education materials that would later become *Growing into Hope*. The theme for this section of the curriculum was ‘Heroes,’ which corresponded to the third week in Advent, looking at the role and the importance of prophets, both within the Hebrew scriptures and in the life and death of John the Baptist.

In order to assist these children to make the necessary link between biblical characters and more contemporary figures, I devised an exercise or game that offered them an opportunity to explore some of these issues in a humorous and participatory way.<sup>100</sup> In the initial draft, I had juxtaposed Black ‘heroes’ or ‘heroines’ with a number of their White counterparts. Some of these people were sporting heroes or icons from popular culture, such as music or the entertainment industry. Others were more traditional authority figures such as politicians or journalists. In this initial piloting, I was struck by the reactions of these Black children. In a mixed list of Black and White people, these Black children assumed that while all the people on the list could be seen as representative heroes, the minority White figures, however, were naturally more important. When I subsequently interviewed a cross section of this group, I was informed that these White people must be the most important, or why else would I have included them in a Black Christian Education text?

Notionally, I had wanted to stress the blindingly obvious maxim that in the sight of God, we are all heroes and have the potential to do seemingly unbelievable things. The reality, however, was somewhat different. In a world governed by White hegemony, the claims of Black people and their achievements are rarely accorded parity with those who hold power, and control the media. The insertion of ‘great’ figures such as Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela only serve to reinforce this disparity rather than dissipate it – in effect, to be noticed as a Black person, you have to be almost superhuman. Hence, ordinariness in some contexts, is not a virtue but a curse. It is the curse of those who do not possess special talents or qualities to move them beyond the nameless, faceless mass of the many who are considered at best, an unfortunate cross a White dominated society has to bear, and at worst, a demonic presence that should be exorcised.

It was this desire to redress the unwieldy balance towards those who are special or extraordinary,<sup>101</sup> that led me to undertake my research on Black elders, detailed in my present book.<sup>102</sup> In *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* I was anxious to find a means of both recording and reflecting upon the narratives of my parents’ generation. The people who have made my progress possible. The people whose faith and the vibrant lived expression of it, challenged and guided me into a faithful relationship with Christ. There is nothing extra-ordinary about my parents or the countless thousands like them, yet this country would be immeasurably poorer without them.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the greater majority of inner city churches in Britain would not and could not exist without them.

This work is one that seeks to affirm those whose voice has rarely been heard outside of a

few select situations where, such individuals experience a sense of being valued and feel 'safe'. I wanted also to link the experiences of the old with those who are young. To enable voiceless people who are poor and oppressed, from different generations, to speak to one another.<sup>104</sup> The extracts from this process, which are detailed in the book, represented one of the first occasions when fragments<sup>105</sup> of the experiences of the poor and the oppressed in post colonial Britain became the public, visible property of the whole church and the wider society.

My work over the past seven years, supported and affirmed by the critical thinking of fellow Black scholars in a number of disciplines, some of which I have detailed in this essay, has been an attempt to harness the emotive power of the Christian faith in order that those who have traditionally been without a voice, might be enabled to gain one for the purposes of their ongoing liberation. Aldred, Beckford and Lartey, plus those further afield, have directed their research and writing energies to enable poor and oppressed peoples to become fuller human subjects. My work differs from the aforementioned, chiefly in terms of method. As an educator in addition to being a theologian, I have been intent upon creating schemes of teaching and learning that reflect, inform and affirm the existence and experience of Black people on the margins. To invoke the statement 'Who feels it, knows it', is to make recourse to the ways of knowing, or the epistemological foundations of Black people of African descent. These are bound up in their ongoing experiences of struggle. Giving a voice to the voiceless – Religious Education in the service of the poor and the oppressed - is a process of critical advocacy. It is a way of assisting marginalized people to learn more about themselves and the world, through the framework of religion. It is a process of being nurtured and educated into such a world-view and being enabled to understand more about the kind of faith that can sustain and empower.

In the context of my own work as a Christian educator and theologian, I have unashamedly used the Christian faith as my vehicle for attempting to liberate those who are poor and oppressed. But just in case any of you are thinking that I am a Christian imperialist, I acknowledge that aside from the substantive questions around relative and absolute truth claims of the various religious codes, I believe all the major religions to possess an essential ethical and moral underscoring that is efficacious for human flourishing. This commitment to human flourishing assumes even greater import when it is linked to issues of human identity and survival, particularly for minority ethnic people living in Britain. Stephen Carter writes

'One of the understandings I share with many liberation theologians is the understanding of the tremendous importance of preserving religious communities not only as centers of difference, that is, places where one grasps the meaning of the world as different from what you find in the dominant culture, but even more so as centers of resistance.'<sup>106</sup>

Carter has eloquently summarised the basic premise behind my essay. Religious Education in the service of the poor and the oppressed, in this context, relating to Black people living in Britain, is to be committed to a project that seeks to enable individuals and larger corporate bodies to recognise their innate uniqueness and to build communities of resistance. The justification for using the phenomenon of religion in this process can be found in a subsequent comment from Carter who states

‘Nobody ever was persuaded to go out and risk life and limb because they read a smart article on philosophy and public affairs. No one ever said they were going to organize a march and be beaten up by the police because of something they read in the *New York Times* op-ed page. It is only religion that still has the power, at its best, to encourage sacrifice and resistance.’<sup>107</sup>

In a world that is still reeling from the cataclysmic effects of September 11<sup>th</sup>, it would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge the dangers of religiously inspired action for political and social change. Clearly, the emotive and motivating force that is religion can be a force for ill. And yet, despite such necessary caveats, I still want to argue the case for a form of religious nurture and learning, in this case, into and through the Christian faith, as the most powerful force for giving a voice to the voiceless.

In asserting this position, I am aware of the potential fault lines and dangers. The threat of nationalism and fundamentalism are real concerns for all citizens living within what we might broadly term the liberal democratic tradition. Writers such as Parekh have attempted to analyse the tensions between liberal democratic traditions and the religious and cultural plurality that is a common feature in many of the countries that adhere to the philosophic conventions of the former.<sup>108</sup> The pioneering work of John Hull in contributing to the drafting of such seminal reports as ‘The Child in the Church’<sup>109</sup> and ‘Understanding Christian Nurture’<sup>110</sup> has done much to promote a liberal, critical perspective on the teaching and learning of the Christian faith that is responsive to the challenges and realities of late modernity. In ‘Understanding Christian Nurture,’ Hull challenges (Christian) faith communities in Britain/the West to engage in a process he terms ‘critical openness’.<sup>111</sup> In using this term, Hull is talking of a form of nurture and education in which individuals are encouraged and supported into and within their respective faith traditions, but are simultaneously critical of their limitations, and open to the challenges and opportunities provided by alternative ways of knowing and being.<sup>112</sup> The importance of ‘critical openness’ can be found in the following comments of Hull,

‘Without the practice of critical openness there is no way whereby Christian adults can be formed so as to live freely and creatively in plural societies.’<sup>113</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By way of a very brief summary, in addressing my energies to enable the voiceless to be given a voice, I am calling for a form of Religious Education that is attuned to the life experiences and struggles of Black people who are poor and oppressed in Britain. This is not to suggest that other groups within British society could not claim such a nomenclature as their own. I am not suggesting that Black people exclusively hold this position, but recourse to history and the attempted genocide of the African self, and their objectified, non-status, non-person like existence demonstrates the unique features of Black subjugation.<sup>114</sup>

My work, and the work of many others, represents the attempt to document the struggles of Black people, and to enable them to articulate their experiences and problems within what remains an often un-caring and deeply discriminating context. That work has been informed by the central tenets of the Christian faith and the emancipatory teachings of the Jesus who is Christ. The Christian faith remains, for the greater majority of Diasporan Black people, the essential lens through which our gaze into the future for a more complete and affirmed humanity has been undertaken.

I conclude with the words that adorn the front covers of *Growing into Hope*, which incorporate the substantive content of my essay. A voice for the voiceless, Religious Education in the service of the poor and the oppressed, is an exercise in 'Believing and Expecting', leading to 'Liberation and Change'. By the grace of God, may that prophetic journey continue.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Mark Wakelin *On Becoming, living and knowing* The Hartley Fearnley Essay, The Methodist Conference, Ipswich, 2001. (See The Methodist Church Website [www.methodistchurch.org.uk](http://www.methodistchurch.org.uk)- Epworth Review Conference essays.
- <sup>2</sup> See Anthony G. Reddie *Growing into Hope* - in two volumes. (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998. pp.1). See also Anthony G. Reddie 'An Unbroken Thread of Experience'. Joan King (Ed.) *Family and all that stuff* (Birmingham: National Christian Education Council [NCEC], 1998. pp.153-160).
- <sup>3</sup> Janice E. Hale *Unbank The Fire: Visions of the education of African American children* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994. pp.25-131).
- <sup>4</sup> Robert Beckford *Dread and Pentecostal* (London: SPCK, 2000. pp.106-112).
- <sup>5</sup> See Barry Chevannes *Rastafari: Roots, and Ideology* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).
- <sup>6</sup> See Kortright Davis *Emancipation Still Comin': Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology* (New York: Orbis books, 1990. pp.12-49).
- <sup>7</sup> See Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn *Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
- <sup>8</sup> See Dwight N. Hopkins *Down, Up, and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2000).
- <sup>9</sup> Anthony G. Reddie *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003)
- <sup>10</sup> See Dilip Hiro *Black British, White British: A history of Race Relations in Britain* (London: Paladin) and Ron Ramdin *The Making of the Black Working-class in Britain* (London: Gower, 1987).
- <sup>11</sup> See my most recent book *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001), for a more detailed exploration of the religious convictions and spirituality of Black elders.
- <sup>12</sup> See John Munsey Turner *Methodism, revolution and social change* Wesley Historical Society: West Midlands Branch, 1973, Ted Jennings *Good News to the poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1990). See also David Hempton *The Religion of the people: Methodism and popular religion* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- <sup>13</sup> Rupert E. Davies *Methodism* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1985. pp.56-104).
- <sup>14</sup> See Philip Cliff *The Rise and Development of the Sunday School Movement in England 1780-1980* (Birmingham: National Christian Education Council – NCEC, 1986).
- <sup>15</sup> Peter Sedgwick 'The Sectarian Future of the Church and Ecumenical Schools'. Jeff Astley and David Day (Ed.) *The Contours of Christian Education* (Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmons, 1992. pp.245-265).

<sup>16</sup> Douglas S. Hubery *Teaching the Christian Faith Today* (Surrey: Denholm House Press, 1965), Douglas S. Hubery *Christian Education and the Bible* (Birmingham: R.E.P. 1967) and Douglas S. Hubery *The Teaching Methods of Jesus* (London: Chester House Publications, 1970). The influence of MDEY can be seen in the creation of *Partners in Learning*, a comprehensive programme for Christian worship and learning based upon principles of experiential education since the late 1960s. More recently, the division was actively involved in the development of *Kaleidoscope and Spectrum* (training programmes for lay volunteers working with children and young people) and *Unfinished Business* (a report published by the Churches Consultative Group on Ministry among Children [CGMC] concerned with issues of Christian nurture and the place of children in the church).

<sup>17</sup> See the Report to the Methodist Conference of 2001 in Ipswich *Learning and Developing as the Whole People of God* – Conference Agenda, Volume One (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> I deal with this issue in *Growing into Hope: Christian Education in multi-ethnic churches Vol.2 – Liberation and Change* (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998. pp. 9 -10). Here, I describe the pressures of being a Black person in a white dominated society, trying to live in two different worlds.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony G. Reddie ‘An Unbroken Thread of Experience’. Joan King (Ed.) *Family and all that stuff* (Birmingham: National Christian Education Council [NCEC] 1998. pp. 153-160).

<sup>20</sup> See Volume One of *Growing Into Hope: Believing and Expecting*, p. 8. This training exercise was constructed (using data from the 1991 census) to assist predominantly White leaders who work with Black children to understand both the context in which Black people live in Britain, and the psychological and emotional affects of being a minority in a White dominated country. Black people who predominantly live in inner city areas have divided their existence in this country into areas of familiarity. Black children move interchangeably, from areas of great familiarity (where Black people although a minority are suddenly in the majority) to other situations where they become seemingly insignificant. This pattern has not changed appreciably since the post war wave of mass African Caribbean migration to this country. This interchangeability of African Caribbean life, which is centred on differing contexts has given rise to issues of cultural dissonance. This issue is dealt with in greater detail in my forthcoming book. See Anthony G. Reddie *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Ken Leech *Through Our Long Exile* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001. pp.87-135). See also his very influential *Struggle in Babylon* (London: Sheldon Press, 1988) and *The Eye of the Storm: Spiritual Resources for the pursuit of Justice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Womanist Theology can be seen as a related branch of Black Theology. It is an approach to theology that begins with the experience of Black women and women of colour. Womanist theology utilises the experience of Black women to challenge the tripartite ills of racism, sexism and classism. This discipline is influenced by (Black) feminist thought.

<sup>23</sup> See Delores Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Winston James ‘Migration, Racism and Identity’. Winston James and Clive Harris (Eds.) *Inside Babylon* (London: Verso, 1993). Also Ron Ramdin *Reimagining Britain: 500 Hundred Years of Black and Asian History* (London: Pluto Press, 1999. pp.141-190 & 258-305).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Gilroy *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). See also *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

- 26 See Molefi Kete Asante 'Afrocentricity and Culture.' In Molefi Kete Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Eds.) *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity* (New Jersey: First Africa World Press. 1990).
- 27 See Eric Williams *Capitalism and Slavery* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983).
- 28 Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. pp.11 – 15).
- 29 Ella P. Mitchell 'Oral Tradition: Legacy of faith for the Black Church' *Religious Education* (Vol. 81 No.1 Winter 1986. pp.99-102).
- 30 Virginia Young 'Family and childhood in a southern Georgia community'. *American Anthropologist* (1970 72: pp.269-288). Thomas Kochman 'Rapping in the ghetto'. Lee Rainwater, Lee (Ed.) *Black Experience: Soul*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1973. pp.51-76). Janice Hale *A comparative study of the racial attitudes of children who attend a pan-African and a non-pan-African preschool* (Ph.D. dissertation. Georgia State University, 1974.)
- 31 See Jawanza Kunjufu *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* (Chicago: Afro-Am, 1982) *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys Vol.2* (Chicago: Afro-Am, 1986). *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys Vol.3* (Chicago: Afro-Am, 1990). Tony Sewell *Black Masculinities and Schooling* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1997).
- 32 Tony Sewell *Black Masculinities and Schooling* (Stoke-On-Trent: Trentham Books, 1997). See also Cecile Wright, Debbie Weekes and Alex McGlaughan (Eds.) '*Race*', *Class and Gender in Exclusion from School* (London: Falmer Press, 2000).
- 34 The college has been renamed The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education. It comprises of (a) the College, where men and women are trained for authorized, ordained public ministry in the Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Traditions. This training takes place on a full time, residential basis. (b) The West Midlands course that trains people for ordained ministry by means of a non-residential course. (c) The Research Centre for Applied Theology. The centre is the newest component of the Queen's Foundation.
- 35 Robert Beckford *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998)
- 36 See James H. Cone *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Orbis, 1986). *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper, 1975), and *A Black Theology of Liberation*. (New York: Orbis, 1986).
- 37 Gustavo Gutierrez *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1973).
- 38 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1987)
- 39 Emmanuel Y. Lartey *In Living Colour* (London: Cassells, 1997).
- 40 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp. 25-41.
- 41 See Horace Campbell *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* (London: Hansib, 1985).
- 42 See William David Spencer *Dread Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1999).

- 43 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp.61-129.
- 44 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp.117-119.
- 45 By Historic-mainline, I mean those established denominations of the Protestant tradition which account for the greater majority of the population that can be described and identified as church attendees and practising Christians. The churches in question are Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed.
- 46 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp.42-58.
- 47 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp.47-58.
- 48 Robert Beckford, 1998. pp.42-58.
- 49 Anne and Anthony Pinn's book *Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), clearly highlights the important role Methodism (particularly the AME, AMEZ and the CME) has played in the ongoing struggle for Black liberation within the United States of America. My comments are clearly directed at the White majority British Methodist Church.
- 50 The research project on which this study is based was given the title of the *Birmingham Initiative*. The Revd Christopher Hughes Smith, the then General Secretary of the Division of Education and Youth, having formerly been a minister and District Chairman in Birmingham, was aware of the deficiencies in the existing Christian Education work sponsored by the Methodist church amongst Black children and young people. The project ran from May 1995 to August 1999.
- 51 Anthony G. Reddie *Growing into Hope: Believing and Expecting (Vol.1)*. (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998) and *Growing into Hope: Liberation and Change (Vol.2)*. (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998).
- 52 *Faithful and Equal*. The Methodist Church. London, 1987.
- 53 Anthony G. Reddie *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders: Singing The Lord's Song in a Strange Land* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001).
- 54 This term refers to the mass migratory movement of African and African Caribbean people from the New Commonwealth to Britain. This movement began on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1948 with the arrival of 492 Jamaicans on the 'S.S. Empire Windrush' at Tilbury docks. Over the next twenty years, approximately 500,000 people made this journey to Britain. This movement was effectively ended in the early late 1960s/early 70s by a succession of punitive immigration bills that were passed by Conservative and Labour administrations, with the specific intention of halting Black immigration, which was seen as a threat to the body politic of the country. See Peter Fryer *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1992. pp.372-386).
- 55 Anthony G. Reddie, 2001. pp.13-46.
- 56 Robert Beckford *God of the Rahtid* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001).
- 57 Robert Beckford, 2001. pp.1-29.
- 59 Robert Beckford, 2001. pp.8-10.

- 60 Robert Beckford, 2001. pp.38-65.
- 61 The Revd Dr. Emmanuel Lartey was the founding editor of *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* (Sheffield Academic Press), which is the first and to date, only Black Theological journal in Britain. The journal came into existence in October 1998. Emmanuel is credited with being one of the instigators of the 'Black Theology in Britain Forum' that first met in 1992. Along with the Revd Dr. George Mulrain , Robert Beckford and others, the forum met in order to establish a conducive space in which the development of Black Theology in Britain could be undertaken. The forum has met monthly since that time.
- 62 Emmanuel Y. Lartey *In Living Colour: An inter-cultural approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: Cassell, 1997).
- 63 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, 1997. pp.9-14.
- 64 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, 1997. pp.85-111.
- 65 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, 1997. pp.87.
- 66 Leonardo and Clodovis Boff *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1987)
- 67 Matthew 25: vv.31-46. The attributed words of Jesus 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' in verse 40 has been seen by many Liberation theologians as an essential proof-text and a key theological motif for their commitment and solidarity with the poor.
- 68 Emmanuel Y. Lartey, 1997. pp.87-88.
- 69 See Joe Aldred *Preaching With Power* (London: Cassells, 1998). Joe Aldred *Sisters with Power* (London: Continuum, 2000), and Joe Aldred *Praying With Power* (London: Continuum, 2000).
- 70 *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* is published twice a year by Sheffield Academic Press/Continuum.
- 71 Anthony G. Reddie *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001. pp.15.)
- 72 See Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, [1970] 1993). Also *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, [1973] 1990) and *A Pedagogy of Hope: Relieving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1999).
- 73 A more detailed assessment of the work and legacy of Paulo Freire is contained in my forthcoming *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003).
- 74 See endnote 63 for the location and publisher of this and other texts by Freire.
- 75 Gustavo Gutierrez *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1973).
- 76 [www.vms.utexas.edu/~possible/freire](http://www.vms.utexas.edu/~possible/freire)
- 77 Paulo Freire *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, [1973] 1990. pp.18-20).

- 78 Allen J. Moore 'A Social Theory of Religious Education'. Allen J. Moore (Ed.) *Religious Education As Social Transformation* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1989. pp.27).
- 79 John Westerhoff III 'Formation, Education, Instruction'. *Religious Education* (Vol.82, No.4. Fall, 1987. pp.578-591).
- 80 John L. Elias 'Paulo Freire: Religious Educator'. *Religious Education* (Vol.71, No.4. Jan-Feb, 1976. pp40-56).
- 81 Paulo Freire 'Know, Practice and Teach the Gospels'. *Religious Education* (Vol.79, No.4. Fall, 1984. pp.547-548).
- 82 Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, [1970] 1993 p.33).
- 83 Paulo Freire *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Continuum, 1973. pp.3-58).
- 84 See Robert Beckford *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (London: SPCK, 2000. pp.95-121).
- 85 John Westerhoff III 'Formation, Education, Instruction'. *Religious Education* (Vol.82, No.4. Fall, 1987. pp.583-584).
- 86 Cheryl Bridges Johns *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. pp. 111-140).
- 87 Cheryl Bridges Johns, 1998. pp.62-110.
- 89 See endnote 41.
- 90 *Growing into Hope* was written in five parts. ADVENT (first issued in Dec. 1995. Material for 4 weeks), PENTECOST (May 1996. Material for 2 weeks), HARVEST (October 1996 material for 1 week), COVENANT (Jan. 1997. Material for 1 week) and LENT AND EASTER (March/April 1997. Material for 4 weeks). After extensive piloting and amendment, the curriculum was made available through a creative partnership between the 'Birmingham Initiative' and The Birmingham District of the Methodist Church in conjunction with the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church. The books were launched in Birmingham on the 17<sup>th</sup> June 1998. They are the first Black theological, African-centred Christian education texts in Europe.
- 91 See endnote 9 for details on this text.
- 92 Edward Coard *How The West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School system: The Scandal of the Black Child in Britain* ( London: New Beacon Books, 1971).
- 93 David Gillborn 'Race', Ethnicity and Education: Teaching and Learning in Multi-Ethnic Schools (London: Allen and Unwin, 1990).
- 94 Tony Sewell *Black Masculinities and Schooling* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1997).

- 95 Trentham Books, a radical anti-racist publisher based in Stoke-On-Trent, and headed by Gillian Klein and Barbara Wiggins, has done more than most to articulate a plausible and committed apologetic for the presence of minority ethnic people in Britain. One of their most important publications is the journal *Multicultural Teaching* published three times a year by Trentham.
- 96 An address given at the annual Greenbelt festival, Castle Ashby, Northamptonshire, 1988.
- 97 Cornel West 'Black Theology and Human Identity'. Dwight N. Hopkins (Ed.) *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1999. pp.11-19).
- 98 See Anthony G. Reddie 'Pentecost – Dreams and Visions (A Black theological reading).' Maureen Edwards (Ed.) *Discovering Christ: Ascension and Pentecost* (Birmingham: IBRA, 2001. pp. 27-42).
- 99 See Erik H. Erikson *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton 1984). This book remains the classic text that details the development of human identity throughout the course of the human life span. In particular, Erikson analyses how childhood exerts a disproportionate influence upon the development of the self.
- 100 Anthony G. Reddie *Growing into Hope: Believing and Expecting* (Peterborough: The Methodist Publishing House, 1998. pp.76-78).
- 101 See Victor Anderson *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995). Anderson is critical of the heroism that pervades Black religious and cultural thought, which constantly highlights seemingly extra-ordinary characters at the expense of the countless nameless and faceless individuals who are a more accurate representation of any community or ethnic grouping.
- 102 See endnote 9 for fuller details.
- 103 Anthony G. Reddie, 2001. pp. 13-15.
- 104 Anthony G. Reddie, 2001. pp.54-61.
- 105 The theme of fragments comes from David Tracy. See David Tracy 'African American Thought: The Discovery of Fragments'. Dwight N. Hopkins (Ed.) *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1999. pp.29-40).
- 106 Stephen Carter 'The Black Church and Religious Freedom'. Dwight N. Hopkins (Ed.), 1999. pp.20-28.
- 107 Stephen Carter, 1999. pp.26.
- 108 Bhikhu Parekh *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 2000).
- 109 *The Child in the Church* (London: British Council of Churches, 1976).
- 110 *Understanding Christian Nurture* (London: British Council of Churches, 1981).
- 111 *Understanding Christian Nurture* (London: British Council of Churches, 1981. pp.4-31).
- 112 *Understanding...*, 1981. pp.4-10.

