

Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white, sans-serif font centered within a solid blue rectangular background.

The Relevance of Body Theology for Development in African Christianity (154)

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository.
More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy
of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	West, Gerald O.
Publisher	Regnum Books International
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-07-06 23:53:58
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166507

(154) THE RELEVANCE OF BODY THEOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Gerald O. West

Introduction

The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (Ujamaa Centre) began doing 'Contextual Bible Study'¹ work on the biblical story of Tamar, the daughter of King David, in 1996.² While King David is a familiar figure in Christian churches and faith-based organisations, his daughter, who was raped within his household by his son is less well known. Tamar has been deliberately marginalised in the formal liturgical life of the church, with her story hardly ever being read on a Sunday within church lectionaries.

The Ujamaa Centre does its Contextual Bible Study (CBS)³ work within community-based organisations that invite the Ujamaa Centre to work with them as they struggle to use their faith resources – like the Bible – for the transformation of their communities. In this sense, our work with the story of Tamar can be considered as a contribution to community development, with a focus on the body.

Our first community-based invitation to work with this text came from a cross-sector of rural and urban African women who asked the Ujamaa Centre to work with them on the pressing issue of gender violence. The work that was done together then has generated a series of CBS on what has become known as the Tamar Campaign, focusing on gender violence, and also a series of CBS focusing on men, in what has become known as a Redemptive Masculinities series.⁴

Since 1996, the Tamar CBS has been taken up all over the world, particularly in contexts where the Bible continues to be a local community-based resource. Major international ecumenical networks like the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the related Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), and significant continental African ecumenical organisations like the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCGLAHA) have adopted the Tamar CBS as part of their own gender programmes. In addition, the Ujamaa Centre has trained trainers from these and many other faith-based organisations, enabling them to use CBS methodology for the construction of their own 'local' CBS and theological resources.⁵

Central to the CBS work of the Ujamaa Centre is a 'theory of change' that draws deeply on the praxis cycle. From the praxis cycle the Ujamaa Centre has come to understand how and why its CBS work enables local faith-based formations to use the Bible for survival, liberation, and fulness of life – to resist the forces of death and to align with the God of life. This essay elaborates on what we in the Ujamaa Centre have so far discerned about our theory of change, using the Tamar CBS as an example.

¹ Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993).

² Gerald O. West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, "The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond)," *Ministerial Formation* 103(2004).

³ 'CBS' is more than an abbreviation; the Ujamaa Centre has been asked by some of the communities we work with not to call what we do 'Bible study', because, they insist, what we do "is not what we do in church".

⁴ <http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/>.

⁵ www.fecclaha.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=57&Itemid=197.

A Theory of Change

The Ujamaa Centre's theory of change is founded on the foundational tenet of liberation theology: the epistemological privilege of the poor.⁶ The knowledge of the poor is vital to any project of social transformation. Development cannot be done without the presence of the poor themselves. They are the agents of their own development and they have assets. And among these assets is religion.⁷ Faith, and faith-based resources like the Bible are potential assets which the poor (and other marginalised sectors) can deploy in projects of social transformation.

So in engaging with gender-based violence, it is the presence and participation and knowledge of the habitual victims of gender-based violence – women – that provide the starting-point of social transformation. Their epistemology is fundamental to an analysis of gender violence and provides the necessary 'logic' for the forms of action that they might choose to take as part of a transformative project.

For these reasons, the Ujamaa Centre favours organised communities of poor and marginalised women in its gender-based work. The use of the term 'organised' is deliberate. The organised poor and marginalised are central to our theory of change. By being 'organised', poor and marginalised sectors have already constructed their own safe and sequestered sites, and have already begun to assemble their own discourse concerning their oppression and marginalisation. They have already forged a vocabulary for talking about their realities (including their bodies), and they are in (partial) control of their own space.

Here the Ujamaa Centre's praxis is informed by the work of James Scott. The organised marginalised have 'a shared interest in jointly creating a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice'. 'They have, in addition,' Scott continues, 'a shared interest in concealing a social site apart from domination where such a hidden transcript can be elaborated in comparative safety.'⁸ As Scott indicates, a safe social site enables an articulation. Put differently, the question posed by Gayatri Spivak, of whether or not the subaltern *can* speak,⁹ should be recast as a question which takes space seriously. A more appropriate question would be: 'Where can the subaltern speak?' For as Scott so eloquently argues, subordinate classes are less constrained at the level of thought and ideology than they are at the level of political action and struggle 'since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety'.¹⁰ Human dignity, even in the most damaged and denigrated subaltern, demands some form of 'speaking'.¹¹ How the subaltern speaks depends almost entirely on local 'sectoral' control of space.

This is why women's faith-based groups are such important sites for dealing with gender-based violence. These are sites that have already been established by women in the face of patriarchy, with particular faith-based symbols and rituals playing a significant role in securing these sites.¹² CBS work only takes place in such sites when and if the Ujamaa Centre is invited by those who control particular sites to enter their site and to collaborate with them.

⁶ Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 6.

⁷ Steve de Gruchy, "Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation: Seeking Some Commonalities between Theology and Development," in *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Reflections by Steve De Gruchy on Theology and Development*, ed. Beverley G. Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2015).

⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 114.

⁹ Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Gary Nelson and L. Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 91.

¹¹ Gerald O. West, "Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS," in *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Cross-cultural Brink*, ed. Jione Havea and Clive Pearson (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011).

¹² Beverley G. Haddad, "The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance," *Agenda* 61(2004).

Such sites are already full of resources, full of assets. The constraint on marginalised African women is not their lack of assets, but how some of these assets, like the Bible, have been used by the dominant patriarchal structures and systems that govern their lives. The Bible is interpreted by institutional patriarchy, including the church, as consisting of a singular voice and conveying a singular message. This is where and why the Ujamaa Centre is invited to work with such women's groups. The resources of biblical scholarship enable the Bible to be read as a text with divergent and even contesting voices. We read unfamiliar biblical texts – those texts excluded from or on the margins of public ecclesiastical practice. And we re-read familiar biblical texts in unfamiliar ways, re-locating well-worn texts within their literary and socio-historical contexts and so rendering them alive in new ways. The resources of biblical scholarship enable the detail of the Bible to be visible, unconstrained by the dominant theological frameworks of institutional religion (or the naive and uncritical notions of religion prevalent in 'secular' development agencies).

The story of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13:1-22 is a good example. This text has little or no presence in the public life of the church anywhere in the world. Most lectionaries do not include this portion of the Bible in their set readings for a formal Sunday service. In our experience with this biblical text among women we regularly find that they are unaware that this story is in the Bible. And though this story is a 'text of terror',¹³ it has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to evoke the voice of a biblical woman and the kindred voices of contemporary women who share her experience of violence and abuse. As the Ujamaa Centre has often been told, 'If this story is in the Bible we will not be silent'. Recovering Tamar's voice – a remarkably articulate voice – has provided additional vocabulary – sacred vocabulary – with which contemporary women can tell their own embodied stories and work together to bring about the transformation of the patriarchal systems that both construct and condone gender-based violence.

The very decision to extract this part of the story from the larger story of David and his male dynasty within Samuel and Kings is significant. This part of the story may well have had an independent existence prior to its co-option by the dominant male narrative and its insertion into the story of great male leaders. The story told in 2 Samuel 13 may well be a part of a hidden, disguised narrative told among women. By identifying Tamar's voice as significant and sacred, we recover a part of the tradition that has struggled to be heard.

In identifying this scriptural voice and offering it to local communities of African women, we offer a potential site for the doing of what James Cochrane has referred to as 'incipient theology'.¹⁴ As organised groups of church women – women of faith – gather together in safe spaces they control, the Tamar CBS offers an articulation of body theology. Tamar breaks the silence of abuse and speaks, both before the abuse and after it. Her words have the potential to set in motion a 'crystallization' whereby the other members of the group recognise 'close relatives' of their own experience, connecting them to a 'single power grid'.¹⁵ James Scott is here describing a common experience among marginalised sectors, as they together construct a vocabulary with which to talk about shared realities. What we recognise within the Ujamaa Centre is that this experience is a form of body theology. What is present but inchoate and incipient within the bodies of individual women is catalysed by the Tamar CBS, and slowly the women forge a way of talking about what is in their bodies. As both James Scott and John Holloway have argued, the dignity of being human demands an attempt to articulate what is held within the body.¹⁶ And as

¹³ Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 37-63.

¹⁴ James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 111.

¹⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 223-24.

¹⁶ <http://libcom.org/library/dignitys-revolt-john-holloway> See also John Holloway, "Dignity's Revolt," in *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, ed. John Holloway and Eliona Peláez (London: Pluto, 1998).

Philippe Denis reminds us, 'the elaboration of the painful experience and its validation through empathetic listening' enables a narrative of the embodied traumatic experience to take shape.¹⁷

The dignity of Tamar, present in her gracious and caring attitude to her brother, present in her analysis and articulation of why her brother should not 'force' her, present in her refusal to be silenced after she has been raped, invokes and kindles the dignity of contemporary women who have come to connect with her story in the Bible. Tamar's 'discourse', evident in both what she says and does, offers additional resources for the articulation of contemporary incipient women's theologies, which, when corporately constructed within a safe and sacred space, offer resources with which to confront the dominant forces of patriarchal control of the Bible, the church, and society at large. Body theology then becomes public theology.

In terms of our theory of change, the participatory CBS 'processes' and 'products' (see below) provide an array of additional assets or resources which organised groups of women can combine with the assets they already have and with which they can work for social transformation.

Social Change

In the late 1980s, the South African biblical scholar Itumeleng Mosala argued that a 'critical' reading of the Bible enabled a critical 'reading' of context.¹⁸ Put negatively, Mosala is concerned that 'unstructural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present'.¹⁹ CBS is a response to this recognition, offering a critical-structural-systemic pedagogical framework with which to re-read the Bible. The dominant framework within which the Bible is read by the church, civil society, and even development agencies, is as a book with a singular voice and a singular message focused on the singular individual. Biblical scholarship knows a quite different 'text'. For biblical scholarship, the Bible is a geographically, historically and ideologically diverse text. Indeed, most biblical texts are constituted by distinct redactional layers, each of which has its own distinctive social location and ideology.²⁰

Contextual Bible Study offers such detail to communities of the poor and marginalised, but in a manner that is pedagogically enabling. There are various ways of describing CBS praxis, but one way of conceptualising our work is to recognise a series of interconnected 'movements' that shape the collaborative interpretative-reading process.

The overarching movement is that of 'See-Judge-Act', a process formed in the worker-priest movement in Europe in the 1930-40s.²¹ This movement begins within the organised formations of the poor and marginalised as they analyse ('See') their context, 'from below'. This analysis of their 'reality' is then brought into dialogue with the 'prophetic' voices of the Bible (and theology), enabling 'the God of life' to address ('Judge') their lived social reality. Through this dialogue with the Bible 'the shape of the gospel'²² – namely, to bring good news – is used to plan a series of actions ('Act') that will bring about

¹⁷ Philippe Denis, "Storytelling and Healing," in *A Journey Towards Healing: Stories of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal*, ed. Philippe Denis, Scott Houser, and Radikobo Ntsimane (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011), 11.

¹⁸ Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

¹⁹ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

²⁰ See for example Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

²¹ James R. Cochrane, "Questioning Contextual Theology," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, ed. McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 76-77; Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second Edition ed. (Maryknoll and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995), 188-93.

²² Albert Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988).

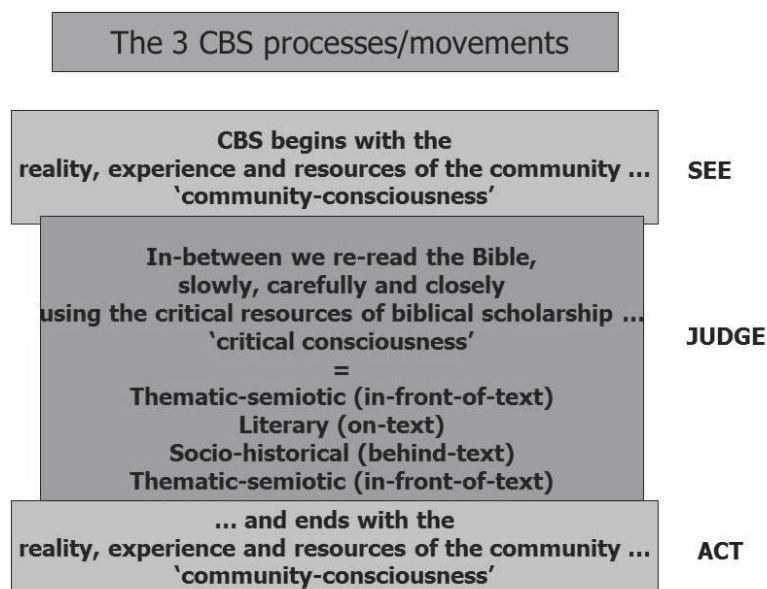
transformation of their social reality, so that all who live in this reality may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

Within this overarching movement, there is another movement, from ‘community-consciousness’ to ‘critical-consciousness’ to ‘community-consciousness’. The ‘See’ moment of social analysis generates a particular contextual concern that becomes the ‘theme’ for the Bible study – a theme such as sexual gender-based violence. The engagement with the Bible (the Judge component) begins with a community’s ‘thematic’ interaction with the biblical text being used (‘community-consciousness’), allowing every participant to share their particular understanding of the chosen text. This moment not only makes it clear to the participants that the Bible study belongs to them, but also offers a reception history of that text’s presence in a particular community, their own community. The Bible study then moves into a series of re-readings of the text, slowing down the process of interpretation, using the resources of socially-engaged biblical scholarship (‘critical-consciousness’). The particular sets of ‘critical’ tools that are used by biblical scholarship are offered to the participants as additional resources with which to engage the biblical text, through a series of questions related to the biblical text. After a series of ‘critical-consciousness’ questions, the Bible study moves back into ‘community-consciousness’, as the participants appropriate (en-Act) the biblical text for the particular social project of transformation identified in the ‘See’ moment.

With respect to the particular critical resources of biblical scholarship, there is another layer of movement. The movement begins within the ‘See’ moment with an initial thematic ‘in-front-of-the-text’ engagement with the text (‘community-consciousness’), bringing the generative contextual theme of the community workshop into dialogue with a particular biblical text. The interpretative process then slows down, entering the ‘critical-consciousness’ moment via a literary engagement with the text. Though a form of ‘critical’ engagement, the choice to begin critical engagement ‘on-the-text’ is deliberate because it offers an egalitarian entry point to ‘critical-consciousness’, enabling all participants to engage with the detail of the text. In most cases, literary engagement leads ‘behind-the-text’ to a socio-historical engagement with the text, as participants probe the world that produced the text, seeking for lines of connection between both the literary dimensions and the socio-historical dimensions of the text and their contextual realities, seeking lines of connection between contemporary communities of faith and struggle and ‘biblical’ communities of faith and struggle. While these dimensions of the biblical *text* are the focus of these second and third moments, the process moves in the fourth moment back ‘in-front-of-the-text’ (into ‘community-consciousness’), as the participants now appropriate this critically re-read and reconstituted text for their particular project of social transformation (‘Act’). Together, as the Tamar CBS examples that follow in the next section illustrate, these concentric and intersecting movements constitute ‘the Contextual Bible Study process’.

Implicit within these CBS processes, facilitation ‘practices’ are vital to CBS community-based work, enabling both ‘group process’ – the active participation of each participant – and the CBS process – the slow but steady procession through the three movements of CBS process.²³ Part of the ‘conversion’ of the socially engaged biblical scholar is becoming ‘re-schooled’ as a facilitator, collaborating with other community-based facilitators so as to enable participatory transformation. CBS begins and ends under the control of a particular local community, who use the resources of the CBS, along with a range of their own resources (and the resources of other agencies who may be invited to participate in the community-based initiative), to plan for and implement community-based action.

²³ Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, 4 vols., vol. Book 1 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984).



CBS processes are focused on generating a critical-structural-systemic interpretation of the Bible, reinforcing and providing additional critical tools to the capacities already present in an organised community-based group. As Mosala made clear, such structural interpretative resources are crucial, not only to a reading of the Bible, but also to a reading of reality. The unstructural-individual focus of the dominant forms of Christianity are the default orientation within the church, civil society, and development agencies. And yet religion and the Bible are far more complex, requiring a more critical engagement. CBS offers a more critical engagement with the Bible, and in so doing provides an array of additional tools for a particular community-based group to engage both with a significant faith resource – the Bible – as well as with the structural-systemic dimensions of their realities, and so too, of the potential areas of social change with these realities.

Religious Change

What Mosala is saying, in other words, is that social change requires religious change. This is a central tenet of the Ujamaa Centre’s theory of change. Religion cannot be left ‘as is’ while development work is done. In order for development work to be done, religion, which is part of the very fabric and scaffolding of life for millions of Africans, must be transformed, otherwise it gets in the way of social transformation. CBS is about religious change.

The emphasis on the concept ‘contextual’ within ‘Contextual Bible Study’ is a recognition that religion must serve context. ‘True service submits itself to the cause which it serves, deeming that cause holy.’²⁴ This is why the notion of the ‘shape’ of the gospel was so important to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Albert Nolan argued that what was determinant of the Christian faith (and indeed any faith)

²⁴ Stephen Donaldson, *The Last Dark* (London: Gollancz, 2013), 444.

was that its 'shape' ought to be 'good news for the poor' (Luke 4:18).²⁵ The significance of faith for social change is that it should offer a particular shape or trajectory to social change that is good news for the poor and marginalised. And just as CBS offers a set of tools for a structural-systemic interpretation of the shape of scripture, so it offers a set of tools for a structural-systemic analysis of South African reality and a set of tools for a structural-systemic trajectory for social change. Method, not content, is the crucial concern here; CBS does not offer fixed biblical content, it offers a set of methods that are useful for biblical interpretation, social analysis, and social change.

Among the contextual realities that demand social transformation is the ongoing problem of violence against women and children. Colonialism, apartheid, and patriarchy have wreaked a vortex of havoc on African women and children. And while the Bible has voices that collude with and even inspire these destructive forces, the Ujamaa Centre has been working with 2 Samuel 13:1-22, an unfamiliar text in the liturgies and lectionaries of almost every Christian church, but a text that has demonstrated its capacity through CBS processes to empower women in their struggle against gender violence. The CBS we use has the following shape:

2 Samuel 13:1-22 is read aloud, preferably dramatically. After the text has been read a series of questions follow.

1. *Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22 together again in small groups. Share with each other what you think the text is about.* Each small group is then asked to report back to the larger group. Each and every response to question one is summarized on newsprint. After the report-back, the participants return to their small groups to discuss the following questions.

2. *Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?*

3. *What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?*

4. *What does Tamar say and what does Tamar do? Focus carefully on each element of what Tamar says and does.*

When the small groups have finished their discussion, each group is invited to present a summary of their discussion. After this report-back the smaller groups reconvene and discuss the following questions.

5. *Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.*

6. *What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?*

Once again, the small groups present their report-back to the plenary group. Creativity is particularly vital here, as often women find it difficult or are unable to articulate their responses. A drama or a drawing may be the only way in which some groups can report.

Finally, each small group comes together to formulate an action plan.

7. *What will you now do in response to this Bible study?*

The action plan is either reported to the plenary or presented on newsprint for other participants to study after the Bible study.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 are 'critical-consciousness' questions, slowing down the reading process by inviting a re-reading of the literary features of the text (and through them opening up space to explore behind-the-text). On either side of these questions that explore the detail of the text are questions that embed the CBS in 'community-consciousness'. Among these questions each does its own critical work. Question 2 moves the CBS from the spontaneous and varied responses of the participants to a more considered focus on the detail of the text. A focus on character is one form of analysis that anyone can do, and yet it is a form of critical analysis, enabling a recognition of the literary dimensions of the text. Question 3 builds on this preliminary literary analysis, using the theme of gender violence to give shape to how the characters are analysed. Participants are enabled, via this question, to recognise the relational

²⁵ Nolan, *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel*, 17. For what this would look like in terms of inter-faith relations see Matthew C. Palombo, "Interfaith Praxis in South African Struggle for Liberation: Toward a Liberation-Political Framework for Muslim-Christian Relations" (University of Johannesburg, 2014).

dimensions of patriarchy. Patriarchy is not about individual ‘bad men’; it is about the structural-systemic systems that support male power. Question 3 probes this matrix of male power. Question 4 then shifts the focus from male power to female agency. Tamar is a ‘victim’ of rape; but she is much more than this, she is an articulate agent who talks back to power and acts against power. Through her speech and action male power is both delineated and resisted.

More recently, we have constructed a variation on this CBS where we take up the challenge of the many women we have worked with, to do work with ‘their men’ around notions of masculinity. The advent of HIV and AIDS and the more recent roll-out of ARVs (antiretroviral drugs) has enabled men to take responsibility for their sexuality and their masculinity. The Ujamaa Centre has been invited into this space, where we have worked with local communities in a quest for redemptive forms of masculinity. At the moment its form is somewhat flexible, but a relatively stable version of it is as follows:²⁶

1. *Have you heard this text (2 Sam. 13:1-22) read publically... on a Sunday? Share with each other if and when and where you have heard this text read.*
2. *Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?*
3. *What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?*
4. *How would you characterize Amnon’s masculinity in this text? Consider:*
What prevents Amnon initially from acting on his love for Tamar (v. 2)?
What is it that changes Amnon’s love (v. 1) to sickness/lust (v. 2), and then enables him to act on his sickness/lust (vv. 4-6)?
How does he react to Tamar’s arguments (v. 14)?
How does he behave after he has raped Tamar (vv. 15-17)?
5. *What kind of man does Tamar expect or hope Amnon to be? What kind of man could Amnon be according to Tamar? What kind of man does Tamar want? Consider:*
What does she say (vv. 12-13,16), and what do each of the things she says tell us about her understanding of what it means to be ‘a man’?
What does she do (v. 19), and what do each of things she does tell us about her understanding of what it means to be ‘a man’?
6. *What are the dominant forms of masculinity in our contexts (in various age groups), and what alternative forms of masculinity can we draw on from our cultural and religious traditions?*
7. *How can we raise the issue of masculinity in our various gender and age-groups?*

Questions 2 and 3 are the same as in the Tamar CBS and accomplish similar critical capacity building. Question 4 in what we have called the Redemptive Masculinity version is another critical question, probing notions of ‘masculinity’ in this biblical story (and providing resources for an analysis of masculinity in contemporary South African society). Question 4 also juxtaposes Amnon and Tamar, deconstructing the dominant stereotypes about male self-control and rationality. In this biblical story it is Tamar who is self-controlled and rational and Amnon who is emotional. Question 5 too is a critical question, allowing each of the elements of Tamar’s argument to deconstruct dominant notions of masculinity and to reconstruct alternative masculinities.

These two Contextual Bible Studies inhabit the dialogical space between the epistemology of our primary dialogue partners – women who have experienced abuse – and the detail of the text made apparent through the critical capacities of biblical scholarship. Each CBS has the capacity to explore the personal-psychological and the social-structural dimensions of each of their respective areas of focus, namely, gender violence and masculinity. In both cases the sets of critical-consciousness questions are followed by a set of community-consciousness questions, where participants are able to apply and practise the critical

²⁶ In this case I have not included the facilitator guidelines as I have done in the previous case. Here I include the questions only.

tools they have acquired through the critical consciousness questions. If the CBS site is a safe and sacred space, the resources of the CBS processes combine with the resources that the community-based group already has, to plan for and implement forms of action for social change.

CBS is not about knowing one's Bible better. CBS is about changing an unjust world, using the Bible as a potential 'weapon'²⁷ of struggle. CBS is also uniquely placed to recognise and participate in the intersections between the related struggles of the poor and marginalised.

Intersecting Struggles

The Bible is already a significant resource in many African communities. CBS comes alongside this community-based resource and 'redeploys' it for social transformation, liberating it from the dominant and normative theological paradigm, a paradigm that emphasises the personal and individual dimensions of faith. The poor and marginalised already know the God of life, but their Bibles are more ambiguous. The dominant theologies of our time tend to draw on those trajectories within the Bible that blame the poor for being poor, blame the unemployed for being unemployed, blame the HIV-positive for being HIV-positive, blame the abused for being abused, blame the disabled for being disabled, etc.²⁸ CBS recovers other biblical trajectories, those that situate the poor, the unemployed,²⁹ the HIV-positive,³⁰ the abused, the disabled, etc. within particular social and theological structures and systems, enabling these 'blamed' sectors to understand the structures and systems that marginalise them. And by so doing, CBS releases the blamed/stigmatised, both theologically and socially, enabling them to reassert their dignity and to work for structural and systemic change.

The theological system that is used to individualise and blame the woman abused by gender violence is the same theological system that is used to individualise and blame the unemployed person and the HIV-positive person. CBS 'reveals' this theological system, exposing it as just one theological system, not 'the' theological system. CBS deconstructs the dominant theological systems of our churches and offers other more redemptive theological systems, following other trajectories in the Bible.

The very act of interpreting the Bible in other ways develops social and interpretative resilience among the poor and marginalised. Social resilience resides in the recognition that individuals are not to blame for the social ills that confront them, enabling them to resist the systems that underlie the social ills. Interpretative resilience resides in the capacity CBS offers to the poor and marginalised to re-read the Bible for themselves, enabling them to resist dominant interpretations. CBS builds capacity for faith-based resilience.

Psycho-social resilience has been recognised as a substantive resource in trauma theory. The work of the Ujamaa Centre indicates that building the capacity of marginalised sectors to interpret the Bible from and for their own experience, recognising that there are contending biblical theological trajectories or voices, nurtures the 'interpretative resilience' of those struggling to live abundant lives in the context of gender violence (and other forms of oppression) in a context like South Africa.

²⁷ Takatso Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," *Journal of Black Theology* 2(1988): 40.

²⁸ Gunther H. Wittenberg, *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007), 61-79.

²⁹ Gerald O. West and Sithembiso Zwane, "'Why Are You Sitting There?'" Reading Matthew 20:1-16 in the Context of Casual Workers in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa," in *Matthew: Texts@Contexts*, ed. Nicole Duran Wilkinson and James Grimshaw (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013).

³⁰ Gerald O. West, "The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and Aids in South Africa," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

Conclusion

CBS is a resource for recognising and reading the neglected dimensions of the Bible, those that focus on the structural and systemic dimensions of life. While social activists and development agencies are adept at analysing society in structural and systemic terms, they tend to revert to a default one-sided and individualistic understanding of the Bible. CBS confronts those who would do development among the 'faith-ful' to analyse faith more fully, and in particular to understand the Bible as a complex and contested text.

But CBS is not simply another tool for development practitioners to wield in their work. CBS requires the presence of the poor and marginalised to activate and authenticate it. Their bodies are integral to the process of social transformation, and this includes their embodied faith. Tamar tells her story of gender violence in 2 Samuel 13:1-22. CBS offers a safe and sacred framework for millions of contemporary Tamars to tell their stories and to work together for social transformation. Others, including development practitioners, are welcome to participate, but only if they are willing to reconsider their one-sided and individualistic notions of religion.

Bibliography

- Cochrane, James R. *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.
- Cochrane, James R. 'Questioning Contextual Theology.' In *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, edited by McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann, 67-86. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001.
- de Gruchy, Steve. 'Of Agency, Assets and Appreciation: Seeking Some Commonalities between Theology and Development.' In *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Reflections by Steve De Gruchy on Theology and Development*, edited by Beverley G. Haddad, 66-86. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2015.
- Denis, Philippe. 'Storytelling and Healing.' In *A Journey Towards Healing: Stories of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal*, edited by Philippe Denis, Scott Houser and Radikobo Ntsimane, 5-17. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011.
- Donaldson, Stephen. *The Last Dark*. London: Gollancz, 2013.
- Frostin, Per. *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1988.
- Gottwald, Norman K. *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985.
- Haddad, Beverley G. 'The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance.' *Agenda* 61 (2004): 4-13.
- Holloway, John. 'Dignity's Revolt.' In *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico*, edited by John Holloway and Eliona Peláez, 159-98. London: Pluto, 1998.
- Hope, Anne, and Sally Timmel. *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*. 4 vols. Vol. Book 1. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984.
- Mofokeng, Takatso. 'Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation.' *Journal of Black Theology* 2 (1988): 34-42.
- Mosala, Itumeleng J. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Nolan, Albert. *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1988.
- Palombo, Matthew C. 'Interfaith Praxis in South African Struggle for Liberation: Toward a Liberation-Political Framework for Muslim-Christian Relations.' University of Johannesburg, 2014.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.

- Spivak, Gayatri C. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Gary Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271-313. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984.
- West, Gerald O. *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*. Second Edition ed. Maryknoll and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995.
- West, Gerald O. *Contextual Bible Study*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993.
- West, Gerald O. 'Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS.' In *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Cross-cultural Brink*, edited by Jione Havea and Clive Pearson, 161-86. London: Equinox Publishing, 2011.
- West, Gerald O. 'The Poetry of Job as a Resource for the Articulation of Embodied Lament in the Context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa.' In *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, edited by Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo, 195-214. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008.
- West, Gerald O., and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela. 'The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond).' *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004): 4-12.
- West, Gerald O., and Sithembiso Zwane. "'Why Are You Sitting There?'" Reading Matthew 20:1-16 in the Context of Casual Workers in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.' In *Matthew: Texts@Contexts*, edited by Nicole Duran Wilkinson and James Grimshaw, 175-88. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Wittenberg, Gunther H. *Resistance Theology in the Old Testament: Collected Essays*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2007.