

Bob Marley's Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Agenda

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Abstract

Bob Marley and Steve de Gruchy are presented as two prophets of social change that belonged to two different eras and social locations, who lived their lives in the fast lane and died in the prime of their lives and career development. Through their common love for living life to the fullest their common love for the creative art of reggae music empowered them to create a hermeneutical frame-work through which their God-talk narrated a fundamental connectivity of self, others, and the past, present and future life. Their dialogical and theological conversations gave voices to the voiceless to articulate their dreams, hopes and fears. United in their common resistance to centralised authority and leadership and any attempt to institutionalise the religion they advocated in their writings for radical reinterpretation of Christianity that celebrates human dignity and both refused to compromise with systems or institutions that embraced oppression. This article argues that it was Bob Marley's Redemption Song that embodied the spirituality that undergirded de Gruchy's theology of development and its accompanying Olive Agenda that offered an in-depth critique of the global imperial system that thrives on underdevelopment of the poor. Together they exhibited a revolutionary posture of overcoming all forces of oppression that prevent the realization of freedom. They engaged in transformative education. The ultimate objective of their advocacy is to destabilize and overthrow oppressive life denying systems by working for a fundamental deconstruction of how their disordered world functioned in the interest of powerful global

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political and forces. Whereas Bob used the Marijuana as the symbolic ‘tree of life’ for the ‘healing of the nations’, Steve used the symbolic Olive tree as ‘his tree of life’. But their common agenda was fullness of life for all. The article concludes that Bob and Steve have demonstrated a unique form of integrated and open spirituality. Their ministry and mission were committed ultimately to the service of life.

Keywords: Redemption Olive Agenda, Liberation, Rastafari, Reggae, Babylon System, Metaphorical theology, Dialogical method

We refuse to be what you wanted us to be, we are what we are and that’s the way it’s going to be (Babylon system, Bob Marley 1978).

Though often hidden from Western view, religion is so overwhelmingly significant in the African search for wellbeing, so deeply woven in the rhythms of everyday life, and so deeply entwined in African values, attitudes, perspectives and decision-making frameworks that the inability to understand religion leads to an inability to understand people’s lives (de Gruchy 2006).

Introduction

My relationship with De Gruchy began in the early 1990s when I served on the Staff of the Council for World Mission as an Executive Secretary for Education in Mission. The Council had a programme called ‘Equipping Local Congregations in Mission’ that focused on helping churches to move from out of their maintenance, non-life-giving and clergy centred ministry to a risk taking life-transforming missional mode of identity, vocation and witness. Later in 2008, de Gruchy became a resident scholar at the Council for World Mission (CWM) office in London during the period of his Sabbatical from UKZN. In supporting his sabbatical, he was required to engage in a

missiological critique of the CWM's life and work. During that period I grew to love and respect de Gruchy even more both as a person and scholar. I loved his deep passion, intellect, competence, compassion and respect for humanity. He wrote about thirty-two articles for the CWM Inside Out Magazine in which he reflected on mission and development.

The articles have reappeared in Beverley Haddad's edited text, *Keeping Body and Soul Together, Reflections by Steve de Gruchy on Theology and Development*. This text was launched at the fourth Steve de Gruchy memorial at the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics, UKZN on February 26, 2015. This important text with its poignant title could be classified as Steve's unfinished book that his colleague has now completed. In addition, an editorial team comprising of Steve de Gruchy as chief Editor, Desmond van der Water, Isabel Phiri, Nansoon Kang, Sarojini Nadar and Roderick Hewitt work on the publication, *Postcolonial Mission: Power and Partnership in World Christianity*. The untimely and sad death of Steve in February 2010 led to the text being published in his honour in 2011.

It was during 2009 that de Gruchy, who was also Head of the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN, issued the invitation to me to join him and the staff at the School to lecture in ecumenical theology and missiology within the systematic theology discipline. But this was not to be. I still remember the heart-piercing call that I received on Monday February 11, 2010 informing me of his death. His fast track promising life of 49 years was cut short. From February 2011 until 2014 I had had the honor of organizing the UKZN Steve de Gruchy memorial Lectures. This became for me a way of saying thanks to him for the years of friendship.

Academically, I began to engage in more serious reflections on Steve's olive theology when I first examined the Masters' thesis of a UKZN student Brian E. Konkol. (*Mission Possible? Power, Truth-Telling, and the Pursuit of Mission as Accompaniment*, (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2011). Later in 2012, I became his main supervisor for his PhD research along with Professor Gerald West (*From Anaesthetic to Advocate through Mission as Accompaniment: Towards a More Effective Response from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Global Mission to Mechanistic Dehumanization*).

In both works he gave in depth critique of de Gruchy's 'Olive Theology'. I am also indebted to Professor Bev Haddad a Research Associate of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics UKZN. She worked

alongside Steve for many years in the Theology and Development Discipline and succeeded him as Director of the programme. Another text dedicated to the memory of Steve was published in 2012 when Cochraine, J.R, Bongmba, E, Phiri, I, and van der Water, D. served as editors of the acclaimed Cluster publication: *Living on the Edge (Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy: Activist & Theologian)*. That text offered me the first opportunity to reflect on Steve's theology as I offered some insights on 'Re-interpreting Development through Mission Praxis'.

Songs that United de Gruchy and Bob Marley

This conversation begins with first linking de Gruchy's theology with my religio-cultural world. I thought of our common love of liberation theology framed within reformed theological discourse, our mutual commitment to missiological formation and our love of reggae music², especially that of Bob Marley. On the surface, it appears that de Gruchy and Bob are two of the most unlikely 'bed fellow' to engage in theological conversation. However, close examination of their background and philosophy of life offer some telling signposts of their common 'groundings' and intentional commitment to fashion a theology that takes into account one's social location.

Of the many songs done by Marley, I am of the opinion that his rendition of 'Rebel' best summed up the hidden transcript' of Rastafari ideology³ in de

² The term word 'reggae'(reggay) has evolved in meaning from its Yoruba rege-rege meaning 'rough' to symbolise in Jamaica how the 'rough' poor people in the ghettos of Kingston, Jamaica use their musical resources to renew and reinvent themselves. Senior, O. 2003, *Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage*, Twin Guinep Publishers, Jamaica. P.412

³ The foundations of Rastafari religion were laid by the Jamaican Pan-Africanist philosopher, Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940). For more on Garvey's teachings see: Martin, T, 1986. *Marcus Garvey, message to the People, the Course of African Philosophy*, Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press. Garvey himself was not a Rastafari but his African philosophical discourse led him to embrace a strong Afro-centric reinterpretation of Christianity in which he saw God as Black.

Gruchy's worldview 'Babylon System'⁴ In this revolutionary anti-imperialist anthem Marley declared his core ideological position on the 'Babylon System' that controls world order: *'We refuse to be what you wanted us to be; We are what we are: That's the way it's going to be. You don't know!'* In this statement is the embodiment of resistance as a life style orientation. The quest for personal and the people's freedom and liberty will not be compromised and in order to ensure this, eternal vigilance will be given to critical thinking to ensure that the system does not (mis)educate into the deceptiveness of *equal opportunity*. An urgent call is made to all sufferers within the Babylon System to rise up and Rebel! Rebel! People have been *'trodding on the winepress much too long'* and as a result they have *been 'taken for granted much too long'*. Trodding on the wine press is figurative of doing, engaging in difficult manual labour over and over again without reaping any tangible benefits from work. It is for this reason Marley described the Babylon imperial system as a vampire because it is *'Suckin' the children day by day'* and it is also *'suckin' the blood of the sufferers'*. Such a corrupt system cannot last because it lacks moral and ethical foundation. Therefore, it must be viewed as a *'fallen empire'* that thrives illegitimately by *building church and university* and *'graduatin' thieves and murderers'*. Convinced about the soundness of his argument he issued a rallying cry to the people to join with him and *'Tell the children the truth; Tell the children the truth; Tell the children the truth right now! 'Cause - 'cause we've been trodding on ya winepress much too long; Rebel, rebel!*

De Gruchy listened to Bob's key songs: *'Exodus- Movement of Jah people'*; This song used the Jewish Exodus and Babylonian exile narratives as representing the experiences of oppressed peoples and mixed them with and highlighted the need for all oppressed people to use intentional community engagement constructing life-giving economics and education rooted in values of upliftment. In the song he pleaded *'Open your eyes and look within; are you satisfied with the life you're living? We know where we're going; we know where we're from we're leaving Babylon we're going to our fatherland'* (Bob Marley 'Exodus' 1977). This methodology of engagement was to repair and regain dignity and respect that 'Babylon

⁴ Bob Marley - Babylon System Lyrics | MetroLyrics <http://www.metrolyrics.com/babylon-system-lyrics-bob-marley.html>. 'Babylon' is the world system... of inequality, injustice and constitutes a destructive way of life

system' sought to destroy. 'I shot the Sheriff' that is usually interpreted by the public as a song advocating violence against police office is to misunderstand Bob's ideology. Here he argued for confrontation against all systems that are organised against the poor and that people of goodwill must not opt for neutrality but to get involved and change the system to benefit the poor. *Buffalo Soldier* and *No woman no Cry*, I would dare say, 'Blackened' de Gruchy's theology, meaning it energised him to embrace a theological discourse that opted for solidarity with victims, people that were deprived fullness of life, those that lived on the margins.

Marley's song '*Babylon System*' seems to be better aligned ideologically with Steve's theology of development that he articulated in his 'Olive Agenda' because of its in-depth critique of the global imperial system that thrives on underdevelopment of the poor. However, this article argues that it is *Redemption Song* that embodied the spirituality that undergirded de Gruchy's theology of development and its accompanying Olive Agenda. They ideologically found common ground in the olive tree as a defining metaphor for the struggles thrown up by the modern economy. Together they exhibited a revolutionary posture of overcoming all forces of oppression that prevent the realization of freedom. This was the song that students remembered him playing the most and that which was used by staff and student to say goodbye when news of his death came. It was a paradox that close to the time of his death de Gruchy used this song that Marley sang as his last public testament.

Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Theology

Both de Bob and de Gruchy were dialogical theologians that used a dialogical method of discourse in their passion for social change. This was much more obvious in Steve's theological formation. This activist/scholar was unequivocal in his argument that *his metaphorical theology seeks to engage with poets, artists, musicians and actors in the stuff of life*. Steve was an accomplished musician in his own right. According to his Mother Isobel de Gruchy (unpublished document, Hermanus: South Africa 2014) learnt to play the guitar at age 14 and he also learnt to write his own music. Indeed by age 20 he had composed over 150 songs. His songs embodied his commitment to

the struggle for justice as he articulated the pains and hopes of those that lived on the margins of society. His songs of protest gave deep insights into the reality of life during the 1980s. His Christian faith embodied the radical politics of Jesus that treated the need of people as sacred. Steve may not have received the acclaim as a great singer but, he would never miss an opportunity to sing those songs that articulated his vision and commitment to see the coming into being of a new world order that values equal rights, justice and peace. These embedded values and audacious vision that shaped his worldview led him to embrace the religio-political music of Bob Marley.

This competent, passionate, committed and consistent UCCSA minister and University Professor who, to the day he took his last breath, offered prophetic critique of any institutional practice that failed to treat the felt needs of ordinary people as central to their identity and vocation. His theological formulation has been forged on the treating people's need as sacred and using those needs to set the agenda for theological reflection. From his anti-Apartheid experience of resistance of State oppression to his struggles against the poverty of rural South African communities within the new structures of democratic governance, de Gruchy knew oppressive systems of governance can deceptively mutate to become new forms of oppression against the poor.

Bob Marley (1945-1981) was born to a Scottish father and a poor African-Jamaican mother during the period of British colonialism in Jamaica in a rural and poor community of Nine Miles. His mixed race identity forced him from day one to wrestle with issues about his identity. His experience of having a loving, poor and young black woman that also fathered him pushed him to ask questions about his identity in a racially stratified colonial society. Who really are you? What is your purpose in life? What is it that you are called to be and do? His life journey went through different phases for which his different songs are narratives that help to tell his story of recovering his lost self (Erskine 2004: 172). His journey from the rural community of Nine Miles to the depressed inner-city area of Kingston transported him to embracing the religion of Rastafari and its accompanying communication tool – reggae music. The evolution of Bob's music over the years became an articulation and proclamation of Rastafari theology, a radical form of Black Theology of liberation for all oppressed peoples⁵. He drew upon themes from

⁵ For more details on Rastafari Theology see Erskine (1998).

the bible, people's everyday struggles of life, Jamaican proverbs and folklore to become musical message of judgement and hope in his quest for social change which according to Allan Smith (2005: 3),

Bob Marley's religion, his increasingly militant commitment to freedom and justice, his bi-racial family background, his combination of 'in your face', challenging lyrics with easy, almost happy melodies, his blending of African, biblically based, and Rastafarian themes, were all devices employed in service of transformative education and creating a musical 'hybrid third space' where freedom might be experienced.

Redefining the Boundaries of the Permissible

It was reggae music that brought de Gruchy and Bob into theological conversation. The evolutionary foundation of reggae music was created primarily for people to dance and be happy but the embracement by Rastafari musicians, transformed the music as a tool (a means and method) to engage in educating the masses in putting up resistance against systems of oppression. Although there are many unsung artists who have contributed to the development of this indigenous Jamaican music, Bob Marley has transcended this group of contributors to become the undisputed father of the music. He created the standard for the music to become the premier communication tool for social change in the society and the world. It gave voices to the voiceless to articulate their dreams, hopes and fears. Thirty four years after his death his music continues to receive global acclaim as a catalyst for social change. I therefore wish to postulate that Bob and Steve embodied what Carolyn Cooper's (1993: 15) describes as being unique to literature within the Jamaican popular culture as:

a transgressive ideological position that redefines the boundaries of the permissible'.

Mutual Rejection of the status quo of Economics, Politics and Social Relations

Both Bob and de Gruchy are also (in my reading of their life and work), Narrative Theologians and their God-talk narrates a fundamental connectivity of self, others, and past, present and future life. They called for radical reinterpretation of Christianity that celebrates human dignity and both refused to compromise with systems or institutions that embraced oppression. De Gruchy was a product of Congregational ecclesiological and theological formation. In this community according to historian Philip Denis, the model of governance gives priority to local democracy and fellowship of believers and 'it values sharing of ministerial authority between office holders and church members, relation of mutuality between the churches, ecumenical commitment and aversion to state religion' (Denis. P in Cochraine, Bongmba, Phiri & van der Water 2012. *Living on the Edge (Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy: Activist & Theologian)*, 305). However, consistent with de Gruchy's hybrid theological identity, he was also a fierce critic of the very congregational ecclesiological theological formation that informed his identity and vocation.

The Rastafari creed that Marley embraced also resisted centralised authority and leadership and any attempt to institutionalise the religion. No one person within the community can speak as the only or final source of authority (Erskine 2004: 123). Both experienced untimely death in the prime of their lives Steve at 49 and Bob at 36years. Yet, both had accomplished so much in such a short timeframe. They loved and celebrated life and therefore embraced a spirituality that embodied bodily experiences. Ironically, both lived middle class lives but their message took inspiration from the experiences of people who live on the margins. It could therefore be argued that they functioned as a catalyst that merely instrumentalized the experiences of people living on the margins of society whilst they remained recipients of the privileged class. However their message reached and was embraced by diverse classes of people. They were visionary who were ahead of their time with a Universalist world view tied to contextual rootedness. They both expounded radical ideas of social transformation that embraced incarnational theology and used music as an instrument for social change. Social and economic justice and overcoming inequality became their passionate agenda. Bob's music and Steve's theology dealt with the struggles of the poor and the

powerless. Also, although they had radically different outlook on human sexuality they both advocated for total respect for human dignity through their unflinching refusal to become co-opted by imperial forces of oppression that Bob called Babylon that must be chanted down (overthrown). Cooper (1993: 121) claims that Babylon symbolises *the oppressive State, the formal social and political institution of Anglo/American imperialism*.

Therefore, sin in Bob's Rastafari theology and de Gruchy Christian theology 'is not simply an individual problem but also has political and social (*and economic*) dimensions (Barnett 2012: 252). Their common and central ideological concern is to facilitate radical change in society. Finally they were very disruptive and transgressive with their use of language. Who but Steve could create 'Poo theology' after the citizens who were demonstrating against poor municipal service delivery pour excrement on the public buildings! Bob Marley on the other hand would use new Rastafari coined words like 'downpressor' for oppressor, and 'understand', that connotes submission to another, was replaced by 'overstand'; and 'shituation' as an alternative to 'situation' and 'head-decay-shun' for education' to describe the oppressive conditions in which the poor lived.

Redemption Song

Bob Marley died May 11, 1981 at age 36 after a few years fighting cancer. Redemption Song was the last song on his final album 'Uprising' in 1980 with the Wailers. *Redemption song* therefore summed up his life story that could be described as a journey from spiritual enslavement to emancipation. It would be fair to argue that since Bob must have known in 1980 that the cancer that he had was terminal, one can therefore, assume that the words that were put together to construct Redemption song emerged out of deep contemplation on his life's journey. Indeed, the music that was put to the words was inconsistent with the deep bass rhythm of reggae music. Rather, this was more of a ballad, a goodbye song to the people that he loved dearly and he sang it alone using only an acoustic guitar for his accompaniment. In many different ways this song represented his spiritual metamorphosis and identity formation. He became fully aware of his mortality and that he 'Got no time to lose'. In the closing months of life the medical personnel made it known that nothing more could be done because the cancer was all over his

body however, he kept on working feeling his pain. This is confirmed in the words of one of his early songs written in 1960's and rehearsed for his final stage show in 1980: 'I'm hurting inside':

*When I was just a little child (little child) Happiness was there
awhile (there awhile) and from me it... It slipped one day Happiness
come back I say cause if you don't come, I've got to go looking For
happiness.*

*Well if you don't come I've got to go looking, God, for happiness,
happiness.*

Bob's life was rooted in contradiction. He is known globally as a Rastafari but there is more to his identity than this. It would be more correct to describe him at the end of his life as a Rastafari Ethiopian Orthodox Church believer. The church to which the former Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie belonged and was its Patron. A priest from the Church offered pastoral care of Bob up to the time of his death and it was claimed that Bob' requested the Christian rite of baptism before he died and it was duly performed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Priest. This was the reason his official funeral was conducted by Priests belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This surprising ideological shift in Bob spiritual journey was further complicated in the use of an orthodox funeral liturgy that did not accommodate any of the traditional Rastafari religious rite being practiced. This act was to the dismay of many local Rastafarians.

According to Dawes 'Redemption Song' would confirm Marley's commitment to the task of teaching and leading his people out of a world marked by oppression and hopelessness and into a world of survival' (2002: 311). The term *redemption* is pregnant with deep meanings. It carries both religious and commercial symbolism. The Greek word *agorazo* means 'to purchase in the marketplace' and this is done in the context of buying an enslaved human being. It is also linked to another Greek work, *lutroo* that emphasises 'to obtain release by the payment of a price'. However, Marley usage is rooted in not so much in what others have done to set him free, but a celebration of liberation of good over evil. Carolyn Cooper (1999: 124) argues that Bob's usage embodied,

Liberation becomes much more than freeing from physical chains, for true freedom cannot be given; it has to be appropriated. Authenticity comes with the slaves' reassertion of the right to self-determination.

The true understanding of *Redemption song* must be experienced through words and music because, '*reggae songwriter's art is a dynamic process in which words, music and dance are organically integrated within an afro-centric aesthetic*' (1999: 117).

The Song

'Old pirates, yes, they rob I, sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.
But my hand was made strong by the hand of the Almighty.
We forward in this generation triumphantly.
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have, Redemption songs, Redemption songs.

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.
Have no fear for atomic energy, 'Cause none of them can stop the time.
How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book.
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have, Redemption songs, Redemption songs, Redemption songs.

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind.
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How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill the book.

Won't you help to sing, these songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever had, Redemption songs. All I ever had, Redemption songs.
These songs of freedom songs of freedom⁶.

An Interpretation: Those who Struggle for Fullness of Life become Overcomers

Bob located his journey not with the impending of death but with historical identity and legacy with the ancestors of his mother and all other African-Jamaicans who were forcibly removed from their African homeland by human traffickers and sold as commodities to Europeans who enslaved them into forced labour. Consistent in his transgressive use of language, Marley demythologised the so-called heroes of Empire, along with the African collaborators that benefited, as mercenary that thrived on human suffering and identified them as 'pirates' or criminals that rob the innocent.

Rather than denying this African heritage Bob affirmed it and used it as his reference of where he wanted to go in life:

*Old pirates, yes, they rob I, sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.
But my hand was made strong by the hand of the Almighty.
We forward in this generation triumphantly.*

Even though the ancestors' journey from the African mainland was done in the most inhumane way as they were packed like sardines in a tin and placed into the ship hold, they did not surrender their human dignity. Their resilience came from self-awareness and faith in God who held their hands and gave them strength to cope and eventually to become overcomers. Their faith in God did not allow the life-destroying pirates to defeat the African people who were forced to leave their homelands in bondage. For Marley there will be no going forward into the future without knowing and appropriating the past

⁶ Songwriters: Hawkins, Edwin / Marley, Bob 1979. 'Redemption Song' lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

African heritage. Consistent with Bob's dialogical discourse he ends his critique of the past with Positive Vibrations. The negativities of the past and the system of the oppression will never win! The task of claiming our contemporary inheritances requires that '*we forward in this generation... triumphantly and singing songs of freedom*'.

Emancipate Yourself from Mental Slavery

If the first verse of the song had set the stage and context then the second verse articulates the message. Bob proceeded to advocate a transformative educational framework for transformative and liberative education:

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds. Have no fear for atomic energy, 'Cause none of them can stop the time. How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look? Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book.

In his context where neo-colonial and imperial forces were still at work enslaving people through transnational corporation in partnership with oppressive government policies that favoured the rich, Marley connected them on a continuum with the same dehumanising, force labour and human trafficking strategies employed by 17th 18th century enslaving colonial forces. The quality of resistance needed to overcome such forces in the contemporary era necessitates liberation of the enslaved minds that are addicted to the ideological formulations of the old world disorder. This call for '*emancipation of the mind*' implies that the form of enslavement is more psychologically entrenched and deeply rooted into the DNA of the victims. Therefore deep counter measures are needed to liberate such an enslaved person. Carolyn Cooper (1999: 124) argues that,

Emancipation from mental slavery thus means liberation from passivity-the instinctive posture of automatic subservience that continues to cripple the neo-colonised.

Marley's Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Agenda

This recurring call to, '*emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind*' constitutes the recurring message of this song. The aftermath of colonialism and slavery has left unhealed wounds of human development that have not been attended. Under the scars are psychologically damaged persons who are still experiencing mental forms of enslavement through socio-economic underdevelopment that breeds hopelessness. The call emancipate is an invitation for intentional proactive resistance that is rooted in taking full responsibility for one's own liberative development because it will not come as a gift from others. Bob's call to 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery', according to Noel Erskine (178),

... points to the need not only for emancipation from the external oppression found in Babylon but also for liberation from internal bondage and the positing of an alternative consciousness.

Marley's world from birth until death was influenced by Cold War tensions between The USA and the USSR. The scepter of nuclear war was real but for Marley not even the power of atomic energy could prevent the people's quest for freedom. His message is very emphatic: '*Have no fear for atomic energy / Cause none a them can stop the time*'.

Marley's Rastafari ideology has been deeply influenced by the philosophy and teachings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1884-1940), the Pan-African use of prophetic biblical motif to articulate another perspective of his emancipation paradigm:

*How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book –*

There is a cost to participate in the struggle of liberation. The committed participants must be ready for sacrificial service that may result in the ultimate price of death being paid. Bob was conscious that when Garvey addressed the issues of oppression of Black people around the world by the Western colonial and imperial forces they laid plans for his demise and ultimate death (Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane 1998: 145-158). His message called for an Afro-centric ideology to counter Western enslaving philosophical construct, serious inculturation of Christianity and the Bible in

which God as incarnated in Christ is seen as Black for the people of African descent, a reordering of the economic order to empower victims to develop economic independence through enterprise and self-love to overcome self-hate as a method to psychologically repair the personhood of damaged victims of oppression (1998: 145-158). This revolutionary posture recognised that there will be detractors and onlookers whose cynicism and fatalistic worldview that is undergirded by fundamentalist religious views will support the maintenance of the dominant world order that rejects redistribution of power that empowers the poor. Therefore, the call to emancipation must be embraced as a cooperative venture. To defeat the entrenched the globally controlled power systems there is need for a united team of resisters. The songs of freedom need a strong global choir that can ‘Chant down Babylon one by one’. These songs can never be privatised. The invitation is open to all who can join and participate *‘to sing these songs of freedom’*.

The dialogical narrative model of engagement in the quest for fullness of life that permeates Bob’s Rastafari worldview therefore correlates with Steve’s dialogical theology that informs his olive agenda which I now explore. This metaphorical theological method done through community engagement that cultivates an environment that de Gruchy argue *‘should make us want to smile, to laugh, to sing, to write poetry, to dance’*⁷. This was theology for life!

De Gruchy’s Olive Agenda

De Gruchy’s perspectives on the Olive agenda were first shared his article, *An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development*⁷. He used this metaphorical concept to bridge the duality gap and unite ‘the ‘green’ environmental agenda and the ‘brown’ poverty agenda’⁸ that he posited has restricted the world’s development to favour the agenda of powerful global commercial and financial institutions that put profits ahead of all other human and environmental considerations. It is this mixture of green and brown that he argues, create an ‘olive agenda’ which

⁷ Steve de Gruchy, *An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development* p.6 http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy_An_Olive_Agenda.pdf) accessed 12/04/2015.

⁸ Ibid.

'holds together that which religious and political discourse rends apart: earth, land, climate, labour, time, family, food, nutrition, health, hunger, poverty, power and violence'⁹. De Gruchy's 'Olive theology opted for a different epistemological' trajectory. He was not afraid to be a lonely voice in the wilderness calling for a different path to be created that facilitates life for vulnerable people. His metaphorical theology of social development is derived from reading of Biblical texts that suggest that a metaphorical theology that draws upon the allegorical method but he is not restricted by it and is prepared to speak a language that goes beyond specifically Biblical metaphors because of his ideology of inclusiveness that is oriented towards the *oikou-mene*, the whole inhabited earth.

De Gruchy's use of Olive goes beyond its obvious colour identity. Within this context of conversing with Bob's Redemption Song, the Olive tree is at its core a symbol of life and serves as a life-giving and support plant. Also its metaphorical usage has missiological intentions. Olive then becomes more than a colour, and becomes the defining metaphor of a missiological agenda. De Gruchy's Olive agenda gives expression to the World Council of Churches AGAPE process – Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth¹⁰ that states:

Any viable alternative for the future must fulfil the criteria of social and ecological justice, enabling life in dignity in just and sustainable communities for generations to come.

De Gruchy's universalism, is however, rooted in the contextual reality of Africa and its Southern expression of life for the majority poor that faces perennial struggles around food sovereignty. He also locates the Olive Agenda with the 'olive branch' as a symbol of peace. His embrace of the Old Testament motif found in (Gen 8:11) in which,

the dove returning to Noah with the olive branch is symbolic of the way in which human evil and injustice (Gen 6:5, 12, 13) are held

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Justice, Peace and Creation Team, Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE) A Background Document. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 42.

together with the ecological crisis of the flood (Gen 6:17); and of course it is the Noahic covenant that is so explicitly an ecological covenant – one that is not just with humans, but with all living things (9:10,12,15)¹¹.

This integration of ecology with economy is consistent with the ecumenical agenda of the WCC programme on Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation in which peace/shalom is an intrinsic component of the eco/nomic construct. The Olive agenda calls for justice in the economy that fundamentally alters the design of this dominant ‘Big economy’ with its insatiable appetite built on greed and violence to ensure that it becomes accountable to ‘the Great economy’ that is accountable to the common good of all. This commitment of de Gruchy’s Olive Agenda to peace building is not restricted to an ecclesio-centric world view. God’s oikoumene necessitates the involvement of all cultures and religions and the Olive plant has traditionally grown in soil dominated by plurality of cultures and religions. This inclusive movement comes with a preferential bias for those who are committed to engage in people’s struggles acts against all imperial forces of oppression. De Gruchy’s passion for justice in the economy is rooted in an understanding that:

... the earth sustains human life, and that human life perspectives the sustaining power of the earth (Haddad 2015:220).

The olive agenda therefore advocates for policies that integrate economy with ecology to ensure environmental sustainability of that human use. It calls for a healthy relationship between leisure, rest and work through appropriation of Sabbath lifestyles that value the building healthy human relationship. De Gruchy called into question the wrong use of words that can lead to enslavement. For example he challenged the use of the word ‘land’ in the context of ownership and usage and felt that ‘earth’ is a better use of language to emphasise our interconnectedness. The Olive agenda therefore opposes the neoliberal economic order that deal with unjust trade policies that

¹¹ Steve de Gruchy, An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development p.8 http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy_An_Olive_Agenda.pdf) accessed 12/04/2015.

promotes over consumption and greed of the global financial institutions. De Gruchy recognised that the implementation of the Olive Agenda would require a transformative community that has become conscientized through a liberative educational programme. He therefore saw the worshipping community of churches as constituting a strong agent for change (2012: 222-226).

Conclusion: A Redemptive and Olive Song of liberation

Although Bob and de Gruchy served people in different contexts and era, the message communicated through their songs and writings have united them in a common mission of liberative justice, a 'theology from the margins', for all but especially those that live on the margins of life. De Gruchy's Public theology was heavily influenced by the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) on whom he modeled his integration of the academy with societal issues such as racism, health issues, sexuality, ecological, environmental and economic issues (2012: 51). Bob's Rastafari worldview came from the philosophy and opinions of the Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey that influenced his message in song. A synthesis of Bob's song of redemption and de Gruchy's Olive agenda seems to suggest that both discourses have called into question the contemporary socio-political and economic 'disorder' that thrive on greed and corruption and supported by well-equipped security forces to maintain the privileges of the wealthy. Their theological arguments are still valid and potent frameworks to unmask the deceptive and entrenched power systems at work within many African societies.

They both had a unique capacity of combining issues of development that impact on the wellbeing of the poor and especially those that live on the margins of life. Both were able to fuse these issues of development (such as health care, access to clean and affordable water) with their direct relationship to ecology, economic justice and key theological theme within scripture. Steve's use of religious health assets (RHA) to promote health care within the African context identified the assets of spiritual encouragement, compassionate care, knowledge giving, material support, moral formation and creative interventions as key elements (Gunderson in Cochrane, Bongmba, Phiri & van der Water 2012: 35). Marley's spirituality also embraced these values as expressed in his songs.

Marley and de Gruchy intentionally opposed to ‘the dehumanizing use of religion, politics and intellectual institutions’, not to worship or intellectual growth. They engaged in transformative education. The ultimate objective of their advocacy is to destabilize and overthrow oppressive life denying systems by working for a fundamental deconstruction of how their disordered world. Whereas Bob used the Marijuana as the symbolic ‘tree of life’ for the healing of the nations, de Gruchy used the symbolic Olive tree. But the common agenda was fullness of life for all. Both Bob and de Gruchy’s have demonstrated a unique form of integrated and open spirituality. Their ministry and mission were committed ultimately to the service of life.

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