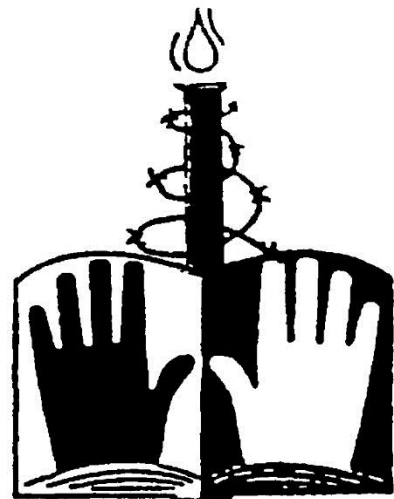


# **CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY: 6 CORE VALUES, 3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCESSES, 1 INTERSECTIONAL STRUGGLE**

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# THE CONTOURS OF CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY (CBS)

- Contextual Bible Study is an orientation with an associated method that has developed in South Africa over the past thirty years
- Integral to CBS are a set of 6 core values, what we call the six C's
  - Community, criticality, collaboration, change, context, contestation
- Integral to CBS are a set of 3 overlapping processes:
  - See-Judge-Act
  - Community Consciousness-Critical Consciousness-Community Consciousness
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- Integral to CBS is an overarching commitment to struggle between the God of life and the idols of death in all its intersectional dimensions

# CORE VALUES

- **1. Community**

- Community is the beginning and goal of CBS;
- Community is the fabric of CBS;
- The communities of the organised poor, working-class, and other marginalised groups are the starting point and the primary 'reality' of CBS, including their religious reality;
- Community is also the primary 'objective' of CBS, as CBS contributes towards the formation of redemptive communities, full of dignity, decent work, and abundant life for all.
- CBS is incarnational, requiring real bodies as its social location.

- **2. Criticality**

- CBS facilitates a 'critical' (structured and systemic) analysis of all aspects of life, including their intersectionality;
- Specifically, CBS critically analyses the self, society, and the biblical text, using a range of structured and systematic questions;
- CBS constructs a critical dialogue between a critical reading of life (the first text) and a critical reading of the Bible (the second text).
- Local critical resources are already present within organised communities of the poor and marginalised, among which the socially engaged biblical scholar brings the particular critical resources of biblical hermeneutics.

- **3. Collaboration**

- CBS is located within collaborative work and collaborative biblical interpretation with organised communities of the poor, working-class, and marginalised;
- Collaboration includes vigilantly foregrounded power relations and identity formations among participating local community sectors, organic intellectuals from within local community sectors, and socially engaged ('converted') biblical scholars and theologians;
- Collaboration begins with actual work in local struggles;
- Collaboration then goes on to include collaborative biblical interpretation and a collaborative 'doing' of theology, moving from embodied theology to people's theology to prophetic theology.

- **4. Change**

- CBS uses the Bible as a substantive and 'subjective' companion to work for transformation;
- Transformation includes transformation of the self and society, including transformation of theology, the church, and the religio-cultural domain in general;
- The primary focus of transformation is the structural and systemic dimensions of life, and the primary terrain for transformation from the perspective of CBS is the ideo-theological.
- CBS is about using -- working with -- the Bible for change; without religious change in contexts like South Africa, there can be no substantive social change.

- **5. Context**

- CBS is embedded in the many 'layers' of context, focussing on the systemic-structural 'dimensions' of reality;
- CBS recognises that the self, society, and the biblical text are products of the intersecting systems of context;
- CBS offers resources to analyse the economic, cultural, political, and religious systems of both biblical text and social context, resourcing each in dialogue with the other;
- CBS recognises that context is dynamic, that it changes;
- CBS recognises that scripture is 'already' present in local contexts.

- **6. Contestation**

- CBS works with 'struggle' as a key socio-theological concept;
- CBS recognises that struggle is a key characteristic of reality, and so CBS takes sides with the God of life against the idols of death;
- For CBS the primary 'terrain' of struggle is the ideological and theological;
- CBS recognises that the Bible is itself inherently contested, including biblical 'voices' that bring life and biblical 'voices' that bring death;
- CBS 'wrestles' with the biblical text to bring forth life.



# VALUING COLLABORATIVE WORK AND INTERPRETATION

- The critical resources of biblical scholarship are brought alongside the array of critical capacities that have already been forged in the sequestered sites of organised communities of the poor and marginalised.
- These additional critical biblical resources, the tools of the biblical studies discipline, derive their usefulness, in part, from their capacity to render the Bible 'other'. They slow down the interpretive process, facilitating re-reading, re-translation, re-interpretation.
- Critical biblical resources also 'expose' the contested nature of scripture itself, enabling us to discern voices of redemption amidst the voices of condemnation.
- There are various ways of describing the Contextual Bible Study praxis, but here we will focus on a series of interconnected 'movements' that shape the collaborative reading process.

# The 3 CBS processes/movements

CBS begins with the  
reality, experience and resources of the community ...  
'community-consciousness' = **people's theology**

**SEE**

In-between we re-read the Bible,  
slowly, carefully and closely  
using the critical resources of biblical scholarship ...  
'critical consciousness'

=

**Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)**  
**Literary (on-text)**  
**Socio-historical (behind-text)**  
**Thematic-semiotic (in-front-of-text)**

**JUDGE**

... and ends with the  
reality, experience and resources of the community ...  
'community-consciousness' = **prophetic theology**

**ACT**

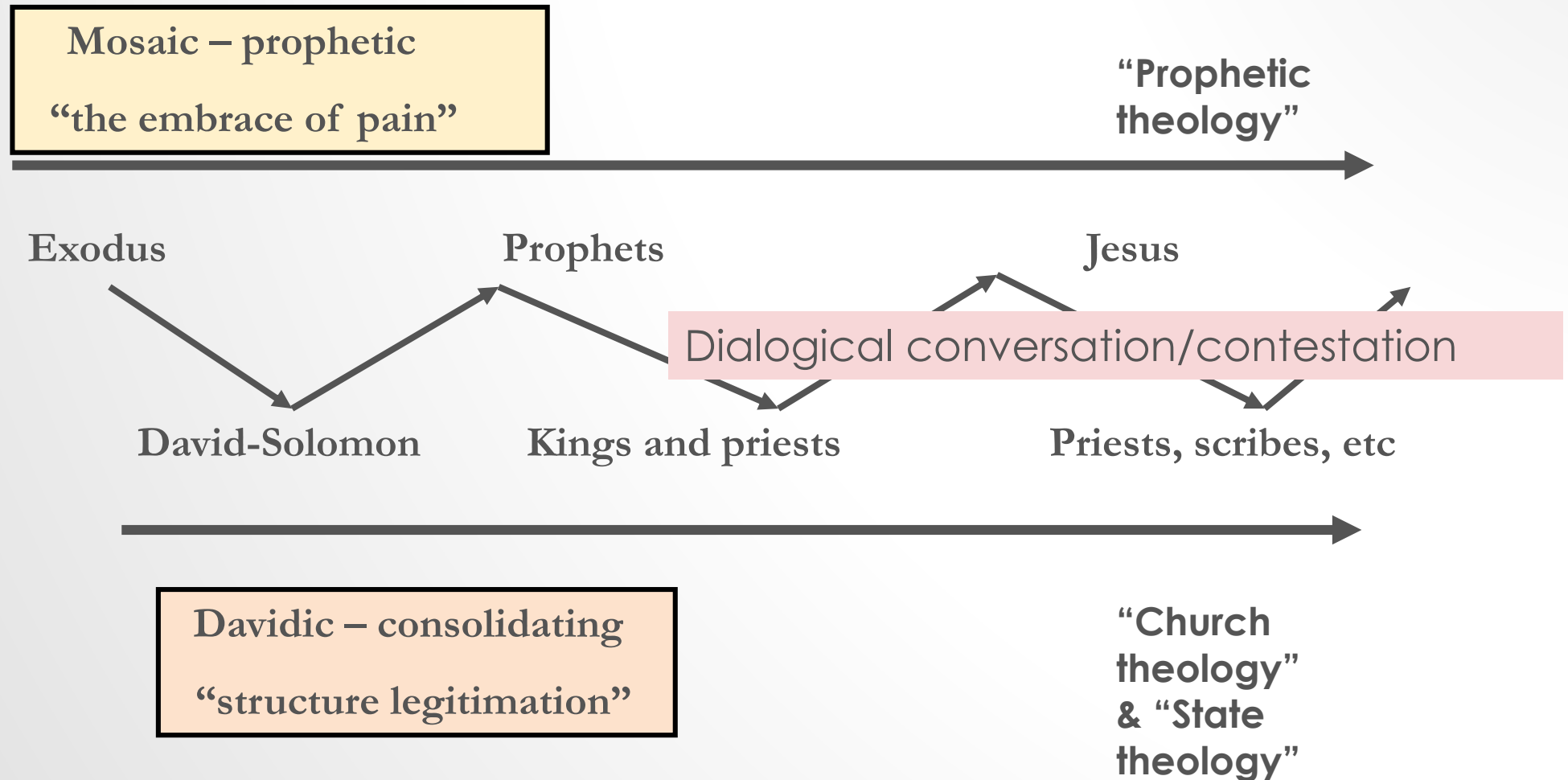
# CBS AMIDST SITES OF STRUGGLE

- The concept 'site of struggle' has been an important socio-theological concept in South African theology
  - The concept refers to the inherently conflicted/contested identity of a particular institution or discourse
- South African 'Contextual Theology'
  - Church as a site of struggle
  - Theology as a site of struggle
- South African 'Feminist/Women's Theology'
  - African theology as a site of struggle
  - African culture as a site of struggle
- South African 'Black Theology'
  - Biblical interpretation as a site of struggle (Phase I)
  - The Bible as a site of struggle (Phase II) (1987)

# BIBLE AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

- The emphasis here is not on 'biblical interpretation' but on the internal/inherent 'nature' of the Bible
- This includes 'intertextual' contestation between biblical books
- But more significantly, this includes the ideological 'layers' of a single text (eg. Isaiah I, II, and III; Job's prose vs poetry)
- Key to this emphasis is the recognition that biblical texts are the products of particular socio-historical struggles
- So, while literary analysis of the biblical text as we have it can detect such contestation, socio-historical analysis is required to identify the ideological and theological contestations of the text's formation

# TWO TRAJECTORIES: PROPHETIC AND CONSOLIDATING, WALTER BRUEGGEMANN



# LAYERS OF IDEOLOGY: ITUMELENG MOSALA

Dominant ideology layer, with hegemonic aspirations, representing the ruling classes: the Israelite and Judahite royal houses, temple-city aligned priests, and temple-city-based land-owners and merchants; incorporates other voices



Scribal, economically 'middle layer', accommodating its representation to the ruling classes it serves and subsists on



Prophet as organic intellectual re-presents the voices of the poor and marginalised, those excluded from the discourses of the city-temple state and the surrounding empires



Exploited classes, whose 'text' is oral rather than written, and whose voices, therefore, are always re-presented in the various layers above them

# GENDER AND ECONOMIC EXAMPLES USED IN CBS

- The story of the rape of Tamar, David's daughter, is embedded in a larger narrative about monarchic male consolidation (2 Samuel 6-1 Kings 2)
- A story of monarchic economic exploitation is embedded in a larger narrative that attempts to give a moral-religious explanation for the division of the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel
  - {1 Kings 11 [1 Kings 12:1-18] 1 Kings 12:19-13:34}
- Matthew coopts an economic parable of Jesus' to make a religious point (Matthew 19:30-20:16)

# CLASS CO-OPTATION AND RESISTING COLLABORATION

- The tendency is for ruling-class elites to co-opt other more marginal voices, reconfiguring them to fit within their own ideological-theological frameworks
- The final form of the Bible is dominated by the ideo-theological formulations of ruling-class elites of particular socio-historical periods
- Socially engaged biblical and theological scholars are called to work with a 'contested' Bible, a Bible is that itself a site of struggle
- But because of their own class location, socially engaged biblical and theological scholars are required to 'read with' actual poor and marginalised communities, for they are better able to identify marginalised voices in the text
- Recognising the Bible as a site of struggle – intersecting struggles – requires this collaboration



# TRANSLATION AS A SITE OF STRUGGLE

- Contextual Bible Study is always done in the language of the community with which we work, so translation is always a feature of CBS.
- There are particular CBS in which translation is overtly a site of struggle
  - Eg. How to translate 'love' in the story of the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1)
  - Eg. Reading Genesis 2 as a scriptural resource advocating for human agency in the choice of a sexual partner

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