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# Envisioning the Black perspective: Formulating unique subject descriptors to index the "Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center"

Joseph E Troutman

*Interdenominational Theological Center*

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PREVIEW

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**ENVISIONING THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE:  
FORMULATING UNIQUE SUBJECT DESCRIPTORS TO INDEX  
THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER**

**By**

**Joseph E. Troutman  
Bachelor of Arts, Lenoir-Rhyne College, 1960  
Master of Arts, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1963  
Master of Religious Education, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1964  
Master of Science in Library Science, Atlanta University, 1980**

**A Doctoral Dissertation  
submitted to the faculties of the schools of the  
Atlanta Theological Association  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Ministry  
at  
Interdenominational Theological Center  
1992**

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## ABSTRACT

### **ENVISIONING THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE: FORMULATING UNIQUE SUBJECT DESCRIPTORS TO INDEX THE JOURNAL OF THE INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER**

by  
Joseph E. Troutman  
May 1992  
148 pages

Subject access to the Journal of the Interdenominational Center (JITC) is presently restricted due to the lack of an index that reflects the new and emerging vocabulary of the Theologies of Liberation from the Black perspective. The purpose of this research project, therefore, is to provide a thorough analysis of the system of categories engaged in the preparation of a subject approach to indexing the JITC. These categories include inquiry into the "Theologies of Liberation," "Indexing Principles," "Descriptors," and "Computer-Assisted Indexing." All of these parameters provide insight and impact the ultimate purpose of the study, i.e., to provide subject access to the JITC that is reflective of the emerging vocabulary of the Christian faith expressed in the Theologies of Liberation.

Analysis of the Theologies of Liberation (Chapter II) from the Black perspective, along with other perspectives, indicates that these are new and major movements in systematic theology and demonstrates that the usual subject examination employed by the religious scholarly community to index this body of literature is inappropriate. These findings are also verified through an analysis of indexing principles (Chapter III) and descriptor formulation (Chapter IV). Current indexing principles support the utilization of an alternative

or "hybrid" approach to subject indexing where controlled vocabulary and free-text techniques are combined. The traditional mode of subject access, on the other hand, has an inherent weakness: the inability to integrate "new and emerging concepts" to various contexts. As a result, traditional descriptors do not and, perhaps, cannot carry the "weight" of liberation themes and must be rejected or "infused" with new linguistic signification. The alternative techniques adopted with respect to Vol. XIV of the JITC, the "control variable," thus, observes the theoretical underpinnings of indexing construction and also determines the "backdrop" for identifying descriptors for subject access.

Further, two aspects of optical media technology (image scanning and OCR) (Chapter V) impact the "control variable" in this research project. Scanning techniques produce textual data in digital form, and OCR enables data to be machine readable and searchable, using full-text retrieval software. Factors to be considered in utilizing optical media are cost, accuracy and size of file, indexing software (indexing software designed for word processing systems or stand alone indexing programs) and computer awareness.

Having completed the analysis of the system of categories necessary for producing subject access to the JITC, these findings are summarized in a concluding chapter (Chapter VI) and applied directly to the "control variable" in the production of a subject index of Vol. XIV of the JITC (see Appendix). This analysis, thus, allows the "new vocabulary" developed in the investigation to come into prominence and suggests that the literature of the JITC may assist the liberation movement in constructing the nucleus of a new theological consensus.

## **DEDICATION**

**This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Ross A. Troutman who departed this life in December 1990. Ross encouraged the writer to enter the Doctor of Ministry program at the Interdenominational Theological Center and provided support for the completion of this research project.**

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The guest editor of Vol. XIV of the Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center (JITC), Dr. Melva Costen. She provided invaluable insight as the writer attempted to create access to the JITC which reflected the liberation concept in the context of the Black perspective, necessitating subject investigation free as far as possible from racial and cultural insensitivities.

The research assistants: Mr. Marshall Howell who provided assistance in computer-assisted indexing and Mr. Trenton Lewis who provided assistance in the verification of bibliographic data.

The staff of the Division of Collection Management and Development of the AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library was most helpful in providing access to needed resources. Also, the Interlibrary Loan Office in the Division of Public Services was untiring in assisting the writer in locating materials.



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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**Purpose**

A need exists for subject access to the Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center (JITC) that is reflective of the Black perspective and designed with intentionality to meet the informational needs of the religious scholarly community. Entry into this corpus of literature is presently restricted due to the lack of an index expressing the uniqueness of Liberation Theologies in particular. Recognizing that the literature contained in the JITC represents, for the most part, Liberation Theology in the context of the Black perspective, the subject matter of the Journal itself demands that careful attention be directed to meeting this need.

The purpose of this research project, therefore, is to provide a thorough analysis of the system of categories engaged in the preparation of a subject approach to the JITC. These categories include an inquiry into the "Theologies of Liberation," (Chapter II), "Indexing Principles," (Chapter III), "Descriptors," (Chapter IV), and "Computer-Assisted Indexing" (Chapter V). All of these parameters provide insight and impact the ultimate purpose of this study, i.e., to provide subject access to the JITC that is sensitive to the Theologies of Liberation.

In addition, the usual subject examination employed by the religious scholarly community to index a corpus of literature is inappropriate and restric-

tive when applied to the JITC. This corpus of literature, reflecting the liberation concept in the context of the Black perspective, reflects a new and emerging vocabulary of the Christian faith and demands subject investigation that is free as far as possible from racial and cultural insensitivities. The Theologies of Liberation mark the beginning of a major movement in systematic theology and create their own cultural norms. Consequently, this "paradigm shift"<sup>1</sup> recognizes its own worth in the systematization of theological thought. Sensitivity to this "paradigm shift," however, is not yet completely "in place" and must be "captured" for the JITC by subject access relating to the themes of liberation—the experience of oppressed people in their struggle with political and economic systems.

Some oppressed people, marginalized by the dominant society, embrace Christianity as a religion especially geared to the exploited and view Christianity from the perspective of those below.<sup>2</sup> Here, to fulfill her mission the church understands herself not only to be poor but that she acts from the poor, i.e., the whole people of God are involved in a process which **evaluates** social reality from the viewpoint of the poor and **reflects** theologically from the cause of the poor. Within this contextualization, the liberation movement may emerge as a new model of theological reflection with a "deliberate ordering

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<sup>1</sup>The term "paradigm" is from Thomas Kuhn's work on the history of science, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See Chapter 2, "The Route to Normal Science," for Kuhn's definition of this term.

<sup>2</sup>See Cornel West's Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1982) for a fuller treatment of this concept.

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of ideas [and] the self-conscious articulation of a theological position"<sup>3</sup> that may "recover a sense of the wholeness, the unity and integrity of the Christian witness."<sup>4</sup>

### Scope

In discussing the purpose of this research problem, the writer has identified a system of categories which assists the subject access to the JITC. Noting a relationship among the categories (Theologies of Liberation, indexing principles, descriptors and computer-assisted indexing) which helps to formulate the problem, defines the parameters of the research process, and demonstrates the comprehensiveness of the task to be accomplished, the scope becomes discernible. The scope of the research charge engages vision while determining intention. The writer's research project is the development of the subject descriptors for the JITC and their relationship to the Black perspective, indexing principles and computer-assisted indexing.

On the one hand, the system of categories that enables the scope of the research problem to emerge comes together: the subject access (development of descriptors), the Theologies of Liberation and computer-assisted indexing merge when applied to that corpus of theological literature represented in the JITC. On the other hand, the notable absence of subject access free as far as possible from bias becomes problematic; the scope enables a new necessary approach, helping to envision the Black perspective in the JITC.

The new approach is the formulation of descriptors representing a different linguistic analysis, and until this occurs the writer's system of cate-

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<sup>3</sup>Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King, Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 26.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

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gories cannot work in conjunction with each other. Here we see the scope not only enabling vision but also determining intention, i.e., new descriptors. Note, however, that the system of categories designed to provide subject access to the JITC does not inform the approach to the problem until the new linguistic analysis is "in place." Once this has occurred, enabling sensitive subject access to the literature of the JITC, it becomes evident that the system of categories has pointed the direction by which the approach to the research problem is informed.

### **Limitations**

Just as the scope of a research problem engages vision and determines intention, it also imposes limitations. The writer feels that the most effective way to discuss limitations in this research effort is to identify restrictions prescribed by the system of categories utilized to provide subject access to the JITC. That which follows presents broad limitations in the categories, and, in certain instances, poses additional research problems outside the parameters of this study.

### **Theologies of Liberation**

In the "Historical Development (1968-1991)" section of Chapter II the writer does not attempt to identify all of the groups/conferences/symposia that impact this evolution. The Black Theology Project, for instance, deserves an in-depth analysis by a researcher because of its signal contribution to the development of Black theological thought. The attempt, rather, is to weave the offerings of the various organizations throughout this discussion in order to delineate nuances of the "rich tapestry of the liberation movement."

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The writer must point out that the discussion on Black Theology in the United States is severely truncated in order to place this motif of the Theologies of Liberation within the scope of this study. Consequently, the immeasurable contribution of the following organizations is considered outside the scope:

Southern Christian Leadership Conference

National Conference of Black Churchmen

Congress of National Black Churches

National Black Evangelical Association

Likewise, the controversial response to Detroit II, the second annual conference of Theology of the Americas, picked up in the media by Peter Steinfelds in the September 12, 1980 issue of Commonweal; and the critical replies in the November 21, 1980 issues of the same journal is outside the scope of this research.

Similarly, in the "Main Tenets" section of Chapter II, the writer chose contextualization, biblical studies, Jesus Christ Liberator, ecclesiology and evangelism because they are representative of the literature of the JITC and also **generally** representative of the components of the Theologies of Liberation: Latin American, Black/Womanist, African and Asian. This corpus of literature evidences broader coverage than that suggested by these five tenets. The writer considers a discussion of additional tenets, however important, to be outside the scope of the research.

Continuing in the same manner, in the "Components" section of Chapter II, readers may quarrel with the writer in his selection of one or two foci

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for a synopsis of the elements of the liberation movement. The components and foci are as follows:

Latin American -	class struggle
	relationship to Marxism
Black Theology -	racism
	blackness
Womanist Theology -	sexism
African -	"theology of adaptation"
	"theology of incarnation"
Asian -	fuller humanity in the socio-political arena
	"a servant theology"

The writer is vulnerable to criticism in his selection of these basic foci since not all of the components themselves are included in the literature of the JITC. They are, however, considered necessary for an overview of this movement by the writer.

### **Indexing Principles**

That which is discussed in this category is limited to a thorough discussion of indexing language—vocabulary control vs. free-text. It is necessary to make a clear distinction between these two concepts since indexing language may be controlled, uncontrolled or a "hybrid" of both. The writer intends to use an alternative approach to indexing systems: assigning indexing terms taken freely from the document, and, as feasible, employing a controlled vocabulary sensitive to the Black experience to relate synonymous terms. Consequently, this category is devoted solely to developing justification for the writer's in-

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tended approach to provide subject access to the JITC, and other motifs of indexing principles, e.g., history, semantics and pragmatics are outside the scope of this study.

### **Descriptors**

This category is devoted exclusively to developing the writer's rationale for the employment of an alternative approach to indexing and the subsequent determination of descriptors for the "control variable" (Vol. XIV of the JITC). Since this category is original with the writer, limitations, in this instance, are a minimal concern.

### **Computer-Assisted Indexing**

The writer does not intend for this category to be a comprehensive analysis of indexing capabilities with computers. The design is basically to explain how this research project's "control variable" evolved into a subject index employing Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for analyzing scanned images of textual data (the full text) and indexing software for entering and editing predetermined descriptors, sorting and cumulations, formatting and printing. Because of this intentional focus, a discussion of other concerns such as an involved examination of CD-ROMs, computational linguistics and artificial intelligence, even as related to OCR software, is outside the scope of this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided as an aid in understanding terminology used in the system of categories in this research project, especially the language in Chapter V ("Computer-Assisted Indexing"):

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1. **Artificial Intelligence** - The simulation of human attainment in data recognition and analysis.
2. **Black Perspective** - The writer understands the Black perspective to encompass liberation as a concept which articulates both the hope and goal of oppressed peoples in their struggle with political, religious and economic systems. The Theologies of Liberation include women, Blacks and Third World persons who are challenging many traditional assumptions. These theologies mark a "paradigm" within the Black perspective—a new model of theological reflection.
3. **CD-ROM (compact disk-read only memory)** - An optical media that stores information as minute pits and bumps which can be read by lasers. Numerical, textual and image data can be stored in exceptionally compact form and accessed and processed by a computer.
4. **Component** - One of the parts of which a theory is composed. Employed by the writer to describe the various aspects of the Theologies of Liberation: Latin American, Black Theology/Womanist Theology, African and Asian.
5. **Controlled Vocabulary** - A consistent list of words to be followed when indexing. These words usually are derived from an authority source such as a thesaurus.
6. **Cross-Reference** - An entry in a work that points to another word.
7. **Descriptor (Entry)** - The basic unit of an index consisting of the heading and locator. The heading identifies a concept and the locator leads directly to information related to a concept.

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8. **Disc or Disk** - The literature suggests that when speaking of circular devices used for recording data in general, use "disk"; and when speaking of magnetic media for recording data, use "disk." When speaking of optical media, whether CD-ROM or videodiscs, use "disc."

9. **False Drops** - Nonrelevant documents retrieved as a result of semantic breakdown.

10. **Foci** - A center of activity or interest. Employed by the writer to identify specific interests which exemplify the components of the Theologies of Liberation, e.g., Latin American: class struggle and relationship to Marxism; Black Theology: racism and blackness; Womanist Theology: sexism; African: "theology of adaptation," "theology of incarnation"; Asian: fuller humanity in the socio-political arena, "a servant theology."

11. **Free-Text Indexing (Natural-Language Indexing)** - Terms selected directly from the text being indexed. In automated systems the terms are selected by the computer.

12. **Full Text Database** - A database of the full original text of the literature included. At this point, such databases are textual material only.

13. **Homographs** - Words spelled alike but having different meanings.

14. **Image Scanning** - The technology for converting source image data to digitized form for facsimile transmission and for storage in computers.

15. **Index** - An orderly guide to the intellectual content and physical location of knowledge records. Employs descriptors which identify information for which the user is searching.

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16. **Indexing Language** - All the words permitted either to describe a specific document or to construct a query to search a document file, along with the rules describing how the terms are to be used and in what relation to each other.

17. **Information Retrieval** - The selective, systematic recall of logically stored information.

18. **Optical Character Recognition** - The process for analyzing scanned images of textual data and identifying printed characters for conversion to coded form.

19. **Precision Measure** - A ratio of relevant documents retrieved to the total number of documents retrieved.

20. **Recall Measure** - A ratio of relevant documents retrieved to the total number of relevant documents in a system.

21. **Synonyms** - Equivalent terms gathered together under one term with the consensus that that term represents all the other terms.

22. **Tenet** - A firm belief or principle of a person or group. Employed by the writer to identify five major thrusts of the Theologies of Liberation: contextualization, biblical studies, Jesus Christ Liberator, ecclesiology and evangelism.

23. **Thesaurus** - A device to control vocabulary, based on the premise that such control is a fundamental problem in indexing.

24. **Unique Subject Descriptors for This Research Problem** - Subject analysis usually employed by the religious scholarly community to index a corpus of literature is restricted and often inappropriate for determining descriptors for indexing the JITC. Due to the unique racial, cultural base of

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