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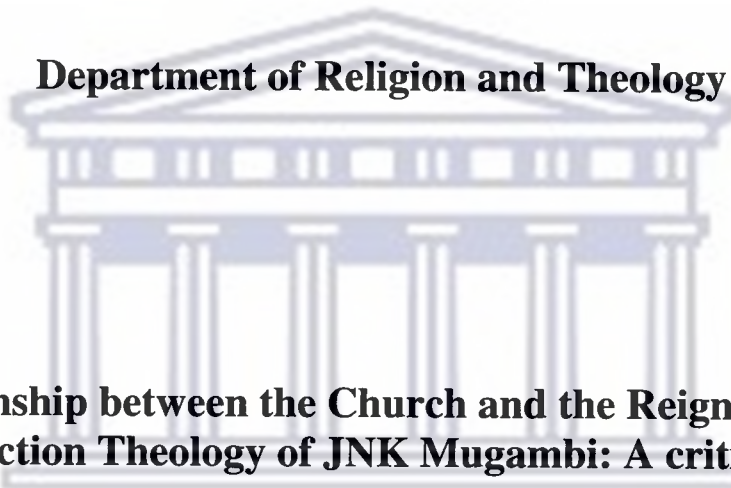
Thesis for PhD. Degree

John Hugo Fischer

Student Number: 2530178

Department of Religion and Theology

The Relationship between the Church and the Reign of God in the Reconstruction Theology of JNK Mugambi: A critical analysis

Supervisor: Prof. Ernst Conradie

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Abstract

Reconstruction theology is widely regarded as one of the most influential approaches to contemporary African Christian theology – alongside others such as inculturation theology, liberation theology, African women's theology, evangelical theology and Pentecostal theology. In this thesis I offer a critical assessment of one of the main exponents of such reconstruction theology, namely the Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi. I explore the question of how his position on the notion of reconstruction should be understood. One point of entry into understanding Mugambi's views on reconstruction is to explore his position on the relationship between the church and the coming reign of God. In the history of Christianity this relationship has been understood in widely divergent ways. The task of this thesis will therefore be to examine, position, analyse and assess Mugambi's particular view in this regard. This will be done on the basis of a close reading of Mugambi's publications such as *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989), *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), and numerous chapters in publications by African theologians.

Declaration

Acknowledgments

A number of people have made it possible for me to produce this thesis. The staff and people of New Life Vineyard (the church of which I am senior pastor) have graciously allowed me to spend much time on this work and I am grateful to them for their generosity. My wife has had to put up with an often absentee husband, sometimes physically and sometimes mentally; she has been an excellent companion. Professor Ernst Conradie has prodded me into doing more than I, in my natural laziness, would have done; I thank him for his patience and friendship. Jesse Mugambi has proved to be a gracious and generous subject; he has given time and personal attention to allow me to get to know him as a person and I thank him for his friendship. I would be remiss if I failed to thank the Lord for giving me physical and mental health and for keeping me inquisitive. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Paul, and my grandson, Joshua, both of whom passed away in tragic circumstances during the time of the writing of this thesis.

I have found it a privilege to be able to study at the University of the Western Cape. The atmosphere has been stimulating and the staff has treated me with kindness and friendliness.

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A critical analysis

1.1 Introduction

Reconstruction theology is widely regarded as one of the most influential approaches to contemporary African Christian theology – alongside others such as inculturation theology, liberation theology, African women's theology, evangelical theology and Pentecostal theology. In this thesis I offer a critical assessment of one of the main exponents of such reconstruction theology, namely the Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi. I explore the question of how his position on the relationship between the church and the reign of God should be understood. One point of entry into understanding Mugambi's views on reconstruction is to explore his position on the relationship between the church and the coming reign of God. In the history of Christianity this relationship has been understood in widely diverging ways. The task of this thesis will therefore be to examine, position, analyse, and assess Mugambi's particular view in this regard. This will be done on the basis of a close reading of Mugambi's publications such as *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), and *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), and numerous chapters in publications by African theologians (see the bibliography).

1.2 Demarcation: Jesse Mugambi's reconstruction theology

a) The wider context within which this research project will be situated is that of the tension between Western and African worldviews that is prevalent in churches throughout Africa. Evidence of this tension may be seen in issues such as church leadership, ecumenical structures, church and state relationships, the stewardship of church land and other possessions as well as various ministries involved in mission endeavours.

The main area of my ministry in Africa has been within the Association of Vineyard Churches in the Southern African region that forms part of the wider African church context. The Association of Vineyard churches has in the last twelve years formed a network in which an attempt has been made to move away from the colonial heritage that left Western churches in control of African churches. The objective of such restructuring is to encourage a more

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representative Vineyard leadership in the continent. The endeavour has culminated in Kenya's release as an autonomous association of Vineyard churches with a Kenyan national director. The network of African leaders, entitled AVLN (African Vineyard Leaders Network) is comprised of predominantly black pastors. With the exception of Kenya, financial control is still exercised mainly by officials based in churches situated in the Western world and in South Africa. This results in a situation of inequity and paternalism. My role in this network is that of Missions Task Force leader for the South African Vineyard churches. In this role I have to work with mission leaders from the different countries involved in the network to facilitate partnerships in the various missions of the Association of Vineyard Churches. In the process I have had the privilege of engaging in dialogue with African scholars in such diverse contexts as Burundi, Namibia, Nigeria, Angola, Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia. In developing such partnerships I have often experienced the tension between African and Western worldviews in a personal way. The obstacles experienced in such work on restructuring church programmes have highlighted the need for reconstruction in all areas of African society.

In response to ministerial problems that I experienced in such work, I explored the theme of the ownership and stewardship of possessions in African Christian theologies in a recently completed Masters thesis (2008). In this thesis I examined the various ways in which a theology of possessions is understood in a number of distinct approaches to African Christian theology, including that of reconstruction theology. In the process I was attracted to reconstruction theology as one of the influential approaches to African Christian theology.

b) Contemporary forms of African Christian theology emerged since the 1960s in the wake of the process of decolonisation on the African continent. The "All Africa Conference of Churches" in 1965 signalled the emergence of an indigenous African Christian theology. A distinction may be made between earlier expressions of incipient and mainly oral forms of theology and the emergence of a corpus of theological publications that are written by African authors for African readers on themes that are pertinent to Christianity in Africa. These publications reflect the daily experiences of African Christians. Increasingly such publications are produced by publishers on the African continent (for instance, Acton and Paulines publishing houses).

Any review of African theology will have to take into consideration the different geographical regions in which theological works are published (West-Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa), the distinction between Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and indigenous

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(AIC) theologies in Africa, and the contributions by senior scholars such as John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (in East Africa); KA Dickson, PK Sarpong, John Pobee, Kwame Bediako, Jean-Marc Ela (West Africa); and Sigqibo Dwane, Tinyiko Maluleke, Gabriel Setiloane and Buti Tlhagale (South Africa). In addition, the contributions by a large number of liberation theologians and black theologians in the Southern African context also have to be taken into account (see Allan Boesak, T S Maluleke, Itumeleng Mosala, and Gerald West). African women's theology has gained increasing prominence over the last decade or two, especially due to the work of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians under the leadership of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, widely regarded as the mother of African women theologians.

Several critical overviews of African theology have recently been published which have assessed the state of the debate in African theology (see the contributions by Bosch 1973, Bediako 1997, Maluleke 1997, Meyer 2004, and Mugambi 1998). In such overviews it has become customary to distinguish between different models of, or approaches to, African theology. Although different classifications are possible in this regard, the following schools of thought may be listed here: Roman Catholic inculturation theology (see Magesa 1997, 2004, and Skhakhane 2000); contributions that focus on "translating" the gospel into an indigenous African idiom (see Kiros 2001, Mbiti 1980, and Mugambi 1998); African liberation theologies that explore the legacy of colonialism (see Boesak 1976, Ela 1986, and Maimela 1992); the quest for African forms of democracy and sustained economic equalities (see Assefa & Wachira 1996, De Gruchy 1995, 2005, and Magesa & Nthamburi 2003); African women's theologies (see Amadiume 2000, Getui 2001, Kretzschmar 1995, and Oduyoye 1986); evangelical theologies (see Adeyemo 1983 and Kato 1975, 1976); Pentecostal theologies (see Anderson 1992, Meyer 2004, and Vähäkangas & Kyomo 2003); and the theological reflections emerging from within the context of African Indigenous Churches (AICs) (see Ford 1996, Magesa 1997, and Mbiti 1975).

c) The notion of reconstruction developed out of liberation theology (see Villa-Vicencio 1999:153-176, 1992:1-17). Theologians who formulated a theology of reconstruction recognised that liberation theology was unable to address all the challenges nascent in African society. The term "reconstruction" draws on the contrast between the Exodus motif (as emphasised by liberation theology) and biblical images from the post-exilic period such as the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem (Villa-Vicencio 1992:7). On this basis, reconstruction theology seeks to build the foundation for a post-colonial society in the

African context. It offers a critique of colonial and neo-colonial economic theory and systems in order to reflect on processes of social transformation in which Africans themselves exercise responsibility and leadership (Villa-Vicencio 1999:159).

In my Masters thesis entitled "*A theology of possessions in the African context*" (2008), I was drawn to the notion of reconstruction put forward by theologians such as Valentin Dedji, Mary Getui, Jesse Mugambi, Emmanuel Obeng, and Charles Villa-Vicencio and, from a slightly different perspective, Bennie van der Walt. Such theologians address problems of inequity in African societies and offer guidance towards restructuring the church and towards the development of a pluralistic society.

In this context I found reconstruction theology attractive. This approach seemed to offer a relevant solution to a wide range of problems affecting the development of the church, society and the economy in Africa so that the oppressed people of Africa can find their rightful place and can exercise their appropriate roles and responsibilities. Within the context of reconstruction theology a very wide range of issues can therefore be addressed. In this thesis I focus primarily on the theological presuppositions underlying the very notion of reconstruction. I will explore these with specific reference to the writings of Jesse Mugambi.

d) Jesse Mugambi is a Kenyan theologian and a professor of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Nairobi. His background is in education and communication and he has wide experience in the areas of teaching, research and publication. It has been my privilege to meet with him on a few occasions and discuss his views on reconstruction.

A number of contexts and schools of thought shaped Mugambi's theology. Mugambi is part of a group of theologians operating in East Africa, including senior scholars such as Mary Getui, John Mbiti, Laurenti Magesa, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Zablon Nthamburi and many more. Contributions by a number of liberation and black theologians in the Southern African context have to be taken into account as being formative to his thinking (including Allan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala, Buti Thlagale and Charles Villa-Vicencio). The impact of Latin American liberation theologians (such as the Boff brothers, Congar, de las Casas and Gutiérrez) on Mugambi's thinking also has to be acknowledged. I will not pursue any examination of this particular influence as this thesis is aimed at reconstruction in the African context. African women's theology may also be seen as influencing, and being influenced by, Mugambi's theology.

e) In his writings, Mugambi moved from liberation theology to a theology of reconstruction. In this process he has been influenced by factors such as the following: his own background and development; the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya; the pro-establishment role of the missionaries he encountered; years in the teaching profession under missionary influence; time spent with the World Council of Churches; time spent with the All Africa Council of Churches; and his academic career in African philosophy and theology. This background forms the context in which he has written. Other factors of negative influence have been the capitalism and consumerism that prevails in post-colonial African society. The processes of economic globalisation form another influence affecting his thoughts on reconstruction.

In order to understand the way in which Mugambi positions himself, it is important to mention his opposition to the way in which Western theology is regarded as the norm for theology in Africa. In response, Mugambi embraces an Afro-centric hermeneutic.[1] Mugambi has previously made a distinction between African Christian theology and Western Christian theology (Mugambi 1989:9). This distinction is illustrated by the different way in which Africans express their religion. In contradistinction to Western theology, Mugambi maintains that Africans emphasise living rather than verbalising their theology (Mugambi 1989:9). Nkurunziza (quoted in Holter 2007:28) defines Western hermeneutics as focused mainly on textual interpretation, that is, to find meaning in the written word. In contrast, he defines African hermeneutics as referring not only to the written text, but also to the 'thought' and 'spoken' word.

Mugambi's concerns over the lack of an established methodology in African theology will also need to be taken into account. He analyses African Christian theology as being in a methodological crisis and expands his argument in a chapter dealing with the different methods used in the African context (see 2003:1-31). In order to understand Mugambi's approach it will be necessary to gain some understanding of his approach to method and the use of the Afro-centric hermeneutic to which I have referred above. Dedji (2003:87) is one scholar who is critical of Mugambi's approach, referring to it as 'just another version of Blackness (negritude) theory'.

f) In approaching Mugambi's theology of reconstruction I will explore one point of entry to analyse his position, namely his understanding of the relationship between the church and the

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[1] A number of African theologians besides Mugambi have made significant contributions in the area of African hermeneutics (see Getui, Holter & Zinkuratire 2001, Maluleke & Ukpong 2001, Holter 2007, Manus 2003, Smit 2004, and West 1991).

reign of God. Because of the vastness of the body of literature available and the tendency Mugambi has to delve into many areas of interest, it will be necessary to restrict the thesis to this one point of entry. However, this needs to be understood in the light of a number of other available points of entry. The following possible points of entry for an examination of his theology, and more specifically his notion of a theology of reconstruction, are mentioned here:

1. Afro-centricity features very strongly in Mugambi's writings. In a section dealing with the "Denial of African Christian Identity", he questions why Christian doctrine should continue to be defined according to Graeco-Roman norms of thought (Mugambi & Smit 2004:7-9). He strongly urges African scholarship to take up the responsibility of affirming both the relevance of the gospel and the validity of the cultural and religious heritage of African people (Mugambi & Smit 2004:9). Gosnell Yorke (2008:4) describes Afro-centricity as:

> "an attempt to re-read Scripture from a premeditatedly Africa-centred perspective and, in doing so, to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that white 'Western' biblical scholars have long enjoyed in relation to the Bible. Early attempts so far have sought to put Africa and blacks back into the Bible by amplifying the voice of the blacks who are already there and by raising their profile and visibility".

This hermeneutical approach developed out of negritude and ethno-philosophy, an approach that emerged mainly in West Africa during Mugambi's formative years (see Makumba 2007:112-120). This approach may be assumed to have had an influence on Mugambi's conclusions regarding the reconstruction of church and society. Mugambi's particular approach to hermeneutics and Afro-centrism might provide an entry point to understanding his notion of reconstruction.

2. The political, economic, cultural and ecclesial legacy of colonialism is given considerable attention in Mugambi's writings. Mugambi repeatedly criticises the crippling impact of neo-liberal capitalism on African economies and highlights the economic inequalities and injustices that exist in this regard. He recognises the pervasive influence of the culture and ideology of consumerism in African societies. He also portrays the missionary enterprise as an agent of Western culture and colonialism. He maintains that African people need to be liberated from the bondage this brought about (1989:12-14). In this case one may argue that an emphasis on African liberation may provide the key to understanding the need for reconstruction.

3. In his publication *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) Mugambi has

much to say on the subject of civil responsibilities in various spheres of society. He devotes a whole chapter to social reconstruction, including political, economic, aesthetic and moral reconstruction (2003:36-58). In *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995:45-50), he deals with the need for a new morality. In *African Christian Theology: an Introduction,* he gives space to dealing with issues such as civil rights, poverty, education, and political power (1989:51, 96, 104, and 113). Civil responsibility could therefore be seen as a possible entry point into Mugambi's notion of reconstruction.

4. A further area that Mugambi pays considerable attention to is that of the relationship between the church and the state. He deals with the issue of the church and Africa's leaders (2003:56), the missionary directed church and the colonial state (2003: 86), the Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of men (1989:75-85). Mugambi's rhetoric here is based on the recognition that churches in Africa play a crucial role in social upliftment and in reconstructing society. The state should therefore acknowledge the role of faith-based organisations in civil society and foster appropriate forms of cooperation. This focus may also be seen as a possible entry point to understanding Mugambi's theology of reconstruction.

5. A further entry point would be the notion of the reign of God. This is a theme which Mugambi has often addressed in his writings. In *African Christian Theology: An introduction* (1989), he deals comprehensively with such topics as the Kingdom of God and the Kingdoms of men (1989:75-85), poverty and the Kingdom of God (1989:96-103), political power and the power of the cross (1989:113-124). In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) he devotes a chapter to "the man of all cultures" (1995:90-105) where he focuses on Jesus Christ as having come to inaugurate the reign of God. Mugambi devotes large sections of *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) to issues relevant to the reign of God: reconstruction as building a new society (2003:74), ecclesiology and economics (2003:178-195), with almost the entire book touching on themes related to the reign of God. One may indeed argue that "reconstruction" for Mugambi is a non-theological term, accessible in various other spheres of society, which describes the coming of God's reign in the here and now.

In this thesis, I explore the relationship between the church and the coming reign of God as a point of entry to understand Mugambi's reconstruction theology. Although the other above-mentioned points of entry will inevitably come into play as well, I focus more on the last of these points of entry than on the others.

In order to demonstrate the feasibility of this point of entry it is necessary to understand Mugambi's position in the light of theological reflection on the theme of the church and the reign of God in the wider history of the Christian tradition. The demarcation of this thesis will therefore have to be done from this aspect as well and not only in terms of positioning reconstruction theology as one school of thought in African Christian theology.

1.3 Demarcation: Theological reflection on the church and the reign of God

In the history of Christianity there is a very long and highly complex tradition of reflecting on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. This complexity is related to different theological interpretations of the nature and mission of the church and to different interpretations of the content and significance of Christian hope, including the reign of God as one dominant eschatological symbol. Theological reflection on the relationship between the church and the reign of God is deeply influenced by denominational differences and diverse theological schools of thought. To make the matter even more complex, theological positions on the relationship between the church and the state and between the church and the various spheres of society, including civil society, interact with such theological reflection on the church and the reign of God in multiple ways.

In the discussion below I offer a number of broad observations to indicate and illustrate the complexity of the theme. I then make use of David Bosch's discussion on the church and the reign of God in *Transforming Mission* (1991) as a guide to come to terms with such complexity.

a) The word "church" may be used in multiple ways and with different intended references. In a very helpful analysis the South African reformed theologian Dirkie Smit (1996:119-129) identifies six social manifestations of the church:

- a community of worship;
- a local congregation (with its own organisational structures);
- a particular denomination;
- as an ecumenical fellowship of different churches at various levels;
- as Christian organisations at work in society, and
- the lives of individual Christians – wherever they live and work.

Smit argues that failure to clarify how the word "church" is used leads to considerable confusion. This would have to be taken into account in discussing Mugambi's writings on the church. However, what is at stake here is not so much the various sociological manifestations

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of the church but theological interpretations of the very nature and mission of the church. Following insights from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John de Gruchy (1995:9) observes that "any theological reflection on the church needs to grapple with this tension between a sociological description of the church and a theological (or eschatological) understanding of the nature and mission of the church".

Avery Dulles' book, *Models of the Church* (1974, 1987, 2002), has been widely used in South Africa to illustrate the diverging ways in which the nature and mission of the church has been understood throughout the history of Christianity. Dulles's models capture, but also transcend, denominational differences on the nature of the church. It would suffice to simply mention the five models of church that he identifies:

- as an institution of salvation;
- as a community of believers;
- as a sacrament;
- as a herald of good news, and
- as a servant in the world.

Dulles explores these models in the second to sixth chapters of his book (1989). At a later stage, Dulles added a sixth model, namely the church as a community of disciples (1998:92-94). Each of these models assumes a particular view on the relationship between the church and the coming reign of God.

b) The content and significance of Christian hope is typically expressed in the form of eschatological symbols. In his work *Faith seeking understanding* (2004:242-246) Daniel Migliore identifies four clusters of such symbol:

- the *parousia* of Jesus Christ;
- the hope for the resurrection of the dead;
- the last judgement, and
- eternal life.

Especially during the twentieth century a wide range of eschatological schools has emerged within which such symbols are interpreted. To list these schools is sufficient to indicate how complex theological reflection on any eschatological symbol has become:

- the "consistent" eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer;
- the "transcendental" eschatology of (the early) Barth, Brunner and Althaus;
- the "existential" eschatology of Bultmann and Tillich;

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- the "salvation history" approach of Cullmann in debate with Dodd and Schweitzer;

- the "futurist" eschatology of Moltmann, Sauter and Pannenberg;

- the "evolutionist" eschatology of Teilhard de Chardin and his followers;

- the contributions of process theologians;

- the prophetic approaches of liberation, black, feminist and ecological theologies;

- the millenialist, dispensationalist and apocalyptic views of popular authors like Hal Lindsay and numerous others (see Conradie 1999:3).

The diversity of eschatological views has induced almost every recent author on eschatology to search for a typology and criteria to guide them through the myriad of schools and approaches. In each typology, different criteria and line(s) of demarcation are identified to classify different approaches to eschatology and the following sample of such lines of demarcation will illustrate the difficulties involved when approaching the subject of eschatology:

- Futurist eschatology as seen in Schweitzer compared to the realised eschatology of C.H. Dodd.

- Existential eschatology as presented by Bultmann compared to the corporate eschatology of Moltmann.

- Modern Western historical eschatology compared to the cosmic eschatology of the Eastern orthodox churches.

- Neo-orthodox eschatology that focuses on God's activity compared to the social Gospel and eschatology focused on human activity (see Migliore 1991:237).

The reign of God may be understood as one of the most important symbols through which Christian hope is expressed. It is therefore not surprising that the reign of God is interpreted in widely divergent ways. It is not possible here to offer even a brief outline of the biblical motif of the reign of God. I refer to the major attempts of New Testament scholars to reconstruct the proclamations of Jesus Christ on the reign of God (see Cullmann 1950, Jeremias: 1971, Ladd 1959, and Ridderbos 1962). In addition, one may also refer to reconstructions and critiques[2] of the use of royal terminology in the Christian Old Testament (see Bright 1953, Bruce 1968, and De Vaux 1974).

c) The history of interpretation of the reign of God in the Christian tradition is equally complex. For the purposes of this thesis I refer to the brief synopsis of this history up to the

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2   Nürnberger (1997:98): The Davidic king and his dynasty act as God's representative and plenipotentiary on earth by virtue of a divine decree and an enduring covenant. The king is, therefore, the source of power and protection of the people.

beginning of the twentieth century offered by Smit:

> When the early church's imminent hope waned, Chiliasm (Tertullian, Irenaeus) and spiritualization (Clement, Origen) helped the church to bear with persecution. After Constantine, it became a political category, almost identical with the earthly rule of the *sacrum imperium*, establishing the peace of God within human history (Eusebius). In Augustine's distinction between *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrene* as ideal types, an identification of the kingdom either with the church's rule over society or with a Christian emperor's political rule was rejected. Soon, however, these ideal types were exchanged for identifications of the earthly state with the *civital terrene* and the institutional church with the *civitas Dei*, with the resulting power struggles of the middle ages between *regnum* and *sacerdotium,* including a loss of the kingdom's eschatological aspect. To settle this struggle, the Western church distinguished between emperor *(potestas)* and pope *(auctoritas),* both instituted by God, to lead the *christianitas*, the society of church-and-state, to the kingdom, but soon the church claimed identity with the kingdom (Gregory VII, Innocent III, Boniface VIII) against the emperor's religious claims. Repeatedly, interpretations were given critical of these identifications of the kingdom of God with church and/or state (e.g. by Joachim of Fiore, the Franciscans, mystics, also philosophers, Dante).

> Luther spoke of two realms to criticize the claims of the papal church and to see earthly governments as autonomous, yet existing according to God's will. Again, implications and variations included diverse attempts to realize the kingdom immediately in either church or society. Well known was Thomas Münzer's radical political interpretation, with the imminent kingdom to be brought about by divinely elected instruments through struggle against oppression from the side of the official church, spurred on by the certainty of God's own final victory. Calvinists sought to erect a theocratic society wherein individuals played an active part under God. Catholic theology often identified church and kingdom.

> After the enlightenment new interpretations became popular: pietism, linking the coming of the kingdom with individual faith and the winning of souls; utopian visions of a secular kingdom (Thomas More, Campanella, but also Marxism), expecting a final state of consummation; religious perversions like Nazi Germany's propaganda; philosophical notions of a realm of ideal human relations on earth, with ideas of development, evolution and material prosperity (Hobbes, Herder, Lessing, Fichte; also Kant, Schleiermacher, Ritschl). Important was the motivation of the kingdom in the social gospel, a practical kingdom theology (Walter Rauschenbusch), and religious socialism (Ragaz, the Blumhardts). (Smit 2002:644-5)

In the twentieth century a number of crucial developments took place that shaped Christian interpretations of the reign of God. The various eschatological schools that emerged during the twentieth century each developed a distinct interpretation of the reign of God. In fact, the differences between these schools may be illustrated by their diverging notions of the reign of God. For the sake of brevity I use the list of eschatological schools listed above in order to outline the distinct view on the reign of God that emerged in the process.

The "consequent" eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer described the reign of God as not present but future, albeit in the immediate future.

In the "transcendental" eschatology of (the early) Barth, Brunner and Althaus, the reign of God became associated with the mere presence of a radically transcendent God. Where God's presence is known, there the reign of God is recognised. This has significant implications for ecclesial praxis in the world.

In the "existentialist" eschatology of Bultmann and his followers, the reign of God is seen in terms of the impact of an encounter between the word of God and the believer. The reign of God is thus established in every act / decision of faith.

In his salvation history approach Cullmann, in debate with Dodd and Schweitzer, refers to the coming of Christ as the "mid-point" of history, with the believer living today, in a real sense, in the new age of the reign of God. However, Cullmann also looks for the final consummation of the reign of God in the second coming of Christ.

In the "futurist" eschatology of Moltmann, Sauter and Pannenberg, eschatology has to do with all of life today and is not reserved for things that will happen at the end time. The present moment is understood in terms of the coming of God's reign, the impact of the future upon the present, the continuous "coming" of Christ. The church is the community of those who wait for the coming reign of God.

In the evolutionist eschatology of Teilhard de Chardin and his followers, the reign of God is understood as progressing toward a utopian society. Christ has a cosmic nature, co-extensive with the material universe and so evolution continues to unfold toward the future Christ and his Kingdom.

In the contributions of process theologians following the philosophy of A.N. Whitehead (1861-1947), the reign of God is regarded as in a process of "movement and becoming" rather than in "being". With a dipolar notion of God's relationship with the world, the participation of God in this process is affirmed (see Ford 1999:753).

The prophetic approaches of liberation, black, feminist and ecological theologies may be seen as viewing the reign of God as the overthrow of all forms of oppression, although feminist theology would not be as radical as the others. This "new world" would include the establishing of equity in all spheres of society. The reign of God would then be a "this worldly" establishment of the characteristics of the reign of God as described in scripture.

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In the millenialist, dispensationalist and apocalyptic views of popular authors such as Hal Lindsay and numerous others, the present creation is regarded as beyond redemption. They therefore look for the reign of God in a new order of creation that will replace the current cosmos and will establish righteousness and peace through a cataclysmic event.

All these (and other!) notions of the reign of God are still present in Christian discourse in the 21st century. Most of these are deeply influential within the African context and therefore shape the theological context within which Mugambi lives and works.

d) In 20th century theological discourse these two themes of the church and of the reign of God moved to the very centre of theological inquiry. This is especially the case in the context of the ecumenical movement with its interest in "Faith and Order" and in "Life and Work". As a result, the church itself came to be understood eschatologically. Various terms such as sign, symbol and sacrament were introduced to indicate that the church is a locus where the coming of God's reign has become visible and is expected. The church is an eschatological, but still tangible, sign of the coming of God's reign. Such terminology suggests that what the church (as a social institution) is, is not what it ought to be (from a theological perspective). There is necessary tension between the ways in which the reign of God has already been established within the sphere of the church and the not-yet of the coming of God's reign.

e) On the basis of the preceding paragraphs it is abundantly clear that the relationship between the church and the reign of God is extraordinarily complex. In order to understand Mugambi's reconstruction theology from this perspective, it is necessary to compare his approach with that of others. However, there are no widely accepted conceptual maps of this relationship available. In fact, there are multiple aspects that have to be mapped in this way, requiring various typologies and different lines of demarcation. It is therefore both necessary and problematic to identify a particular strategy as an aid to come to terms with such complexity.

In this project I make use of the masterly survey of the relationship between the church and the reign of God offered by David Bosch in his magnum opus *Transforming Mission* (1991) in order to position Mugambi's contribution in terms of wider ecumenical discourse on the theme. This strategy calls for some clarification. Such a strategy is necessary since it would simply not be possible to offer my own survey of theological positions on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. Moreover, given the complexity of the subject matter, very few theologians have attempted to offer a typology in this regard (one that would

be comparable with Dulles' typology on models of the church or Niebuhr's typology of the relationship between Christ and culture). Given the immense influence of Bosch's work in the Southern African context, his deep commitment to theological reflection from within the African context and his international reputation as an ecumenical theologian, I will gratefully make use of his analysis as a point of departure.

In his discussion Bosch identifies what he calls a creative tension between two contrasting views of the church. He describes a spectrum of views on the church on this basis.

> At one end of the spectrum the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation in which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration – in word and deed – of God's involvement with the world. Where one chooses the first model, the church is seen as a partial realization of God's reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. Where one opts for the alternative perception, the church is, at best, only a pointer to the way God acts in respect of the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution toward the humanization of society – a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of consciousness-raiser (Bosch 1991:381).

In chapter 6 of this thesis I offer a more detailed critical discussion of Bosch's survey of the relationship between the church and the reign of God in the history of Christianity and in the emerging ecumenical paradigm that he outlines. Given the validity of the spectrum of views on the church that Bosch outlines, the question that has to be addressed in this thesis is: where may Mugambi's position be located within this spectrum?

The mission of the church has to be understood within this tension between the church and the reign of God. Through its mission the church anticipates and works towards the coming of God's reign, "on earth as it is in heaven", within the church as an institution itself (calling for the ongoing transformation of ecclesial structures) and in every sphere of society. Indeed, the reign of God extends to the whole of God's creation.

The mission of the church is not restricted to the building-up and extension of its own institutions; it is directed towards every sphere of society. This implies the need to reflect on the relationship between "church and society" and between "Christ and culture" (Niebuhr 1951). Moreover, there is also a need to gain clarity on the relations between churches and other institutions, most notably the state, but also various institutions in the context of civil society. Such relationships are influenced by the hope of the church for the coming of God's reign, since the sphere where God's coming reign is to be established extends beyond the boundaries of the institutional church.

Each of these themes (society, culture, state, civil society, the various sectors or spheres of society) is clearly crucial in order to understand the reconstruction theology of Jesse Mugambi. These themes reverberate in his writings. However, this makes the matter even more complex as the nature of such relations is subject to much theological controversy and denominational difference.

It will suffice here to illustrate such complexity with reference to different models for understanding church-state relationships. These include:

1. The Constantinian model where the church and the state are closely identified (which still survives in the form of various state churches).

2. Augustine's tension between the earthly city and the city of God.

3. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms that also governs the relationship between church and state.

4. Anabaptist views portraying all secular institutions as irredeemably fallen and tainted.

5. Calvin's vision on the legitimacy but also the provisional nature of the state leading to the diverging reformed positions of Kuyper, Barth and Van Ruler on the tension between church and state,[3] and the church and civil society.[4]

1.4 Statement of the research problem

In this thesis I seek to make a contribution to theological reflection in Africa on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. This thesis may therefore be understood as an African contribution to wider ecumenical discourse on this theme. More specifically, I focus on the reconstruction theology of Jesse Mugambi as one of the most prominent representatives of this influential approach to African theology. On this basis, the research problem that is investigated in this thesis may be formulated in the following way:

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[3] See Durand (1970) on the relationship between church and state; also see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann (2004:155-158).

[4] Civil society refers to the populace of any country, that is, the so-called man in the street. Once again there is a vast complexity of approaches to this topic. A brief summary of such approaches will suffice to demonstrate this complexity. Clowney (1995:168-171) offers a description of the various approaches to society that have been taken by the church: 1) Avoidance, or "Christ against culture". Staying isolated from the society as, for instance, the Amish do. 2) Joining society. This could be viewed as joining the Christian faith to culture as in the African Indigenous Churches. 3) The Thomist approach that allies special and general revelation, much as inculturation theology does. 4) An approach of indifference to society, maintaining that the church should only be concerned with spiritual things, as often occurs in Pentecostal and conservative Evangelical circles. 5) Invading society with the Christian approach in all things such as politics, art, community life etc., such as in the social gospel. 6) The church as an agent of change. Augustine declared that culture was to be transformed by the gospel (Niebuhr 1951:215). I offer these simply to illustrate the complexity of these views.

> How should JNK Mugambi's position on the relationship between the church and
> the reign of God be described, positioned, analysed and assessed?

A few further comments on this formulation of the research problem are necessary:

a) Mugambi's position may be derived mainly from his three publications: *African Christian Theology* (1989), *From Liberation to Reconstruction; African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995) and *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003). I also refer to a number of African publications to which Mugambi has contributed articles,as well as articles and doctoral theses that have been offered assessing Mugambi's work (see bibliography). I do not refer exhaustively to these theses but draw upon the relevant material regarding the relationship between the church and the reign of God in Mugambi's theology.

b) The main task of this thesis is to describe Mugambi's position. I do this by an in-depth reading of those publications in which Mugambi approaches the relationship between the church and the reign of God as he developed his reconstruction theology. I also resort to those publications by African theologians that have been descriptive and/or critical of Mugambi's approach.

c) On the basis of such a description it becomes possible to locate Mugambi's position within the wider context of the various schools of African theology and of ecumenical theology. In order to position Mugambi's contribution I make use of the map of various approaches to the relationship between the church and the reign of God that I sketch in chapter 6 of the thesis, drawing especially on David Bosch's work *Transforming Mission* (1991).

d) Mugambi's position has implications for the way in which he approaches church / state relationships, ecumenical structures (relationships between church groupings), and church and civil society relationships. In this thesis I analyse Mugambi's contributions on such themes in terms of the description of his position with regard to the church and the reign of God.

e) I assess Mugambi's approach to the church and the reign of God in terms of the criteria of coherence, consistency and clarity. The question is whether his approach is able to withstand the critical assessments offered in secondary literature. Such literature is readily available in a number of publications by African theologians as well as a number of doctoral theses produced on Mugambi's contribution to reconstruction theology (see the bibliography).

f) It should be noted that there are many themes in African theology that are ancillary to this research topic such as Mgumabi's views on the issue of land, modernity and post-modernity,

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different worldviews, and the relationship between traditional African culture and the gospel, and others. In this thesis I examine these themes only insofar as they contribute to an understanding of the relationship between the church and the reign of God in Mugambi's theology of reconstruction.

1.5 Research hypothesis

A number of observations may be offered in the form of a provisional hypothesis:

a) The formative years of Mugambi's life played a large role in the development of his theology. In my discussion with him, he emphasised the role played by his non-Christian grandparents in his early development. The years spent on a mission station during the Mau-Mau uprising are also important in this regard (personal discussions and ongoing correspondence with Mugambi and Gathogo's doctoral thesis). One could expect this period of his life to have influenced the way in which he embraced liberation theology. As liberation theology played a role in developing him theologically, and this influence is still to be observed in his writings, it may be assumed that he has not completely left behind liberation theology.

b) Mugambi writes extensively about the church but does not offer a detailed and systematic theological description of the nature of the church. Instead, he focuses more on the church as salt and light, as a role model for developing an equitable society as well as delineating the church from the perspective of different forms of church government. His main interest is not in the church as a local congregation but as it is seen in Christian organisations and in the ecumenical manifestations of the church (see Smit 1996:119-129). According to Dulles' models of the church, I would suggest that Mugambi sees the church primarily as a servant in the world. Although this has to be tested through more detailed analysis, I would suggest that Mugambi tends to view the church in functional terms as an important role-player in civil society (as a faith based organisation) to assist in the reconstruction of African communities and societies. "The role of the church in society is to live according to the way of the Kingdom of God" (Mugambi 1989:79).

c) Although Mugambi often engages in discussions around the notion of the reign of God (see 1989:76-85), his views are not systematically developed and therefore not easy to capture. In chapter 5 I explore this focus of his writings in detail. Provisionally, I would maintain that Mugambi views the reign of God as being evidenced in liberation, maintaining that salvation without liberation is no salvation. He mentions three dimensions as dominant in

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human life: the material, the spatial, and the temporal. He also alludes to a fourth dimension that he calls the attitudinal dimension, as being essential to the reign of God. This dimension is one where God reigns in reality (1989:80). In short, one may say that, for Mugambi, the reign of God comes wherever local communities within the contemporary African context are able to flourish and achieve equity, yet this reign of God is never fully realised in some utopian manner. A contributing factor to his approach may be his educational background, his involvement in the WCC, and his membership of the Anglican Church. All these areas in which Mugambi has been or still is involved, contain a large element of concern for the poor and the liberation of the downtrodden.

d) The model of the reign of God chosen by Mugambi influences the way he approaches church/state relationships, ecumenical structures (relationships between church groupings), and church and civil society relationships. He appears to view the church as a relevant partner in the state's responsibility to restructure society and calls for the state to recognise the church as such a partner. His views on ecumenicity seem to favour the removal of unnecessary barriers in order for the community of the church to be able to play its role properly in society. In this regard he sees the church as a community within the wider society having the responsibility to facilitate reconciliation and reformation (1989:113, 1995:44, and 2003:125).

e) When the relationship of the church to the reign of God is considered, Mugambi offers some statements that indicate his approach:

- The church is the servant of the reign of God (1989:79).
- The church is called upon to suffer and serve in order to see the reign of God established (1989:84).
- The church is challenged to live up to the demands of the reign of God (1989:84).

By this it may be assumed that Mugambi adopts a fairly orthodox approach to the relationship between the church and the reign of God in that he does not equate the church with the reign of God but allows for the manifestation of God's reign within the church in embryonic form. This hypothesis is tested and assessed in the course of this thesis.

f) In his approach to eschatology Mugambi appears to hold some definite views:

- Eschatology must be seen in terms of its historical significance.
- Future liberation must be understood in temporal, rather than spatial, terms.
- African Christians often formulate their understanding of heaven in material categories.

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- Total liberation is an eschatological hope (1989:14&15).

By this it may be assumed that Mugambi holds a view somewhat similar to Moltmann where the reign of God is ever coming without having arrived.

g) A number of theologians have offered critiques of Mugambi's *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), and they will need to be included in any assessment of Mugambi's position (see Valentin Dedji, Tinyiko Maluleke, Isaac Mwase, and CB Peter). Here one may assume that the virtual collapse of liberation theology in the South American context, as well as the end of the cold war and the collapse of communism were instrumental in Mugambi moving from the Exodus motif to the imagery of the post-exilic era. There have also been a number of doctoral theses written examining Mugambi's reconstruction theology and attention will need to be devoted to these (see the bibliography). It may be found that Mugambi is not far from such theologians in his approach to the church and the reign of God.

The research project entails a procedure in which this preliminary hypothesis will be tested and further developed.

1.6 Research procedure

The main task of this research project is to offer a description, analysis and assessment of Jesse Mugambi's views on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. Various steps are required in order to investigate the research problem and test the provisional research hypothesis:

a) In order to explore Jesse Mugambi's position on the relationship between the church and the reign of God and do justice to his position, it is important to explore his personal background as well as the basic (methodological) assumptions employed in his theological writings. In order to sketch his personal background I draw on his *curriculum vitae*, personal communication and occasional biographic references in his theological writings (see e.g. C.V. 2007, e-mail 2008) and secondary material published on Mugambi's work (see Mwase 2006 Dedji 2003, Gathogo 2011). The methodology that Mugambi employs is reconstructed on the basis of a number of research contributions in which Mugambi reflects on his own method and hermeneutics (see Mugambi 1998, 2000, 2004). My aim here is not to offer an exhaustive analysis or critique (see Dedji 2006:45-92 for such a critique) of his methodological assumptions but to capture the main features of his contextual approach to doing theology. These aspects of Mugambi's person and work are documented in chapter 2 of the thesis.

b) Mugambi's approach to reconstruction, while falling within the broad category of reconstruction theology in an African context, ranges across a wide spectrum of topics, offering opinions on everything from ethics to economics to social issues. Any observation on Mugambi's approach to reconstruction needs to begin with *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989). A further analysis of Mugambi's reconstruction theology as it currently stands needs to be made, beginning with *From Liberation to Reconstruction: Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995) to his latest work dealing with the subject, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003). In order to assess Mugambi's position accurately I refer to publications that deal with the subject of reconstruction and use them to assist me in the analysis (see Dedji 2003, Gathogo 2011, Getui & Obeng 2003, Maluleke 1994, Villa Vicencio 1992). Mugambi has produced a large corpus of literature over a prolonged period of time and this literature needs to be analysed as well in order to arrive at a succinct view of his approach to reconstruction. Mugambi's approach to the notion of "reconstruction" is documented as chapter 3 of the thesis.

c) How Mugambi views the church can only be derived from an in-depth examination of his works, particularly those in which he views the relationship between the church and the state (2002); the church and civil society (1998,1999); the church and the reconstruction of society (1996,1997); and the church and democracy (1996). In particular, his contribution to *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology* (Mugambi & Magesa 1998) needs close examination. In pursuing the examination of his view of the church, I necessarily draw on those publications that examine his theology so as to test the position I have plotted for Mugambi's understanding of the nature of the church (see Dedji 2003, Farisani 2002, Gathogo 2004, 2011, Mwase 1993, and Stinton 2004). Mugambi's views of the nature and the mission of the church are documented as chapter 4 of the thesis.

d) Mugambi has made it clear, through personal communication, that he feels that he has not changed his view on the nature of the reign of God since the publication of *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989). However, it is necessary to examine his other publications to see whether they support this statement. None of his many publications carries any clear reference to the reign of God other than *African Christian Theology* (1989); however, it should be possible to glean a clear understanding of his view of the reign of God by analysing various pieces from his publications. There will also be value in drawing on those publications whose authors have examined and criticised his work (see Dedji 2003, Farisani 2002, Gathogo 2004, 2011, Maluleke 1997, 2001, Mwase 1993, and Stinton 2004).

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Mugambi's views on the reign of God are documented as chapter 5 of the thesis.

e) In order to position Mugambi's views on the relationship between the church and the reign of God, it is important to understand something of the wider history of Christian reflection on this relationship, including contemporary discourse in this regard, especially in the context of ecumenical theology and African theology. As indicated above, this is extraordinarily complex. In this thesis I therefore draw on the discussion of this relationship offered by David Bosch in *Transforming Mission* (1991), with specific reference to the theological spectrum that he identifies. This is done on the basis of a close reading of the relevant sections of chapter 12 of this work (especially 1991:368-400). Although I make use of the rest of the work as well, other writings by Bosch, the sources that Bosch refers to (including Dulles 1987, Moltmann 1977, Newbigin 1958) and some supplementary literature, it has been important to restrict the use of such literature in order to keep the map relatively uncomplicated and therefore usable. On the basis of the preceding two chapters, I analyse Mugambi's views on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. I take care to examine statements he has made in the context in which they were written so as not to fall into the trap of *eisegesis*. It has thus been necessary to undertake an in-depth examination of most of what he has published. Mugambi's approach to the relationship between the church and the reign of God is documented as chapter 6 of the thesis.

f) In the final chapter of the thesis I attempt to apply my conclusions to the African church milieu. The church in Africa faces many diverse problems in becoming relevant in society. It is in this area that Mugambi has made a significant contribution (see 1996, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2002, 2004). The objective of this chapter has been to discover whether the conclusions arrived at by Mugambi regarding the role of the church in the wider society as an agent of the reign of God may be supported by the conclusions drawn from this research project. In applying the conclusions I rely upon the many chapters contributed by Mugambi to various publications, my own work and also the secondary literature mentioned above.

2. Mugambi: The Person and His Work

2.1 Introduction

In order to gain an understanding of Mugambi's position on the relationship between the church and the reign of God, this chapter focuses on aspects of Mugambi's life, work and theology that provide some necessary background to the chapters that follow.

I first examine his biographical background from the perspective of his family and education, paying some attention to his early upbringing and his relationship with his grandparents, his education on an Anglican mission station, his early involvement in education, and the influence of the Mau Mau uprising on his attitude toward the Western missionary enterprise (see section 2.2).

I then examine the roots of his theology by referring to the influence Western theologians such as Buber, Jaspers and Tillich had on his thinking, by paying particular attention to his involvement in liberation theology and by noting his participation in ecumenical organizations such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and the World Council of Churches. These factors have clearly shaped the development of his reconstruction theology (see section 2.3).

Finally, I examine a number of crucial factors that shape the contemporary African context in which Mugambi works, with specific reference to the influence of dictatorial rule in some African countries, disparate lifestyles, poverty, and the need for a concerted effort on behalf of government, business and church to reconstruct society (see section 2.4).

In section 2.5 I describe Mugambi's position on the need for an appropriate theological methodology with reference to wider discourse on methodological theory and practice in the context of African Christian theology.

This is followed by a brief discussion on a number of important features of his theological writings in general, for example his sustained criticism of the Western cultural invasion of Africa, the way he has embraced Africanism, his consistent engagement in ecumenical projects and discourse, his appreciation for the role of communal life, and his exploration of biblical analogies, especially from the Old Testament (see section 2:6).

On the basis of a discussion of such aspects of Mugambi's life, work and theology, his understanding of the relationship between the church and the reign of God will be explored in subsequent chapters.

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2.2 Biographical background

The material I offer in this section has been derived from personal correspondence with Jesse Mugambi as well as the incisive work of Julius Gathogo (2011). Mugambi accorded me an interview during his visit to Unisa[5] in 2008 and, when I mentioned the need for biographical material, he responded by sending me a detailed e-mail containing information, which I summarise as follows.

Gathogo goes into much detail about Mugambi's name and the meaning of it in different Kenyan tribes. This may be viewed in his thesis (Gathogo 2011:16-18). Before Mugambi's birth both his parents became committed Anglican Christians during the East African revival and attended the Anglican Church at Kigari. There was a period of six years when Mugambi's father, Timothy, was away as an African conscript to the war in Europe (see Gathogo 2011:18). It was after his father's return that Mugambi was born. Mention needs to be made of the influence of Anglican Christianity on Mugambi's thinking. Mugambi was baptised in the Anglican Communion as a child and attended Sunday school faithfully throughout his childhood. Mugambi is still an active member of the Anglican Communion. A further influence was the expansion of colonial rule which occurred during Mugambi's formative years. (Gathogo 2011:19).

Mugambi's father was a member of the synod of the diocese of Mount Kenya and, in a similar way Mugambi became the Chairperson of the Diocesan Board of Education and was involved in improving church-sponsored schools. His interest in education persists to this day (see Gathogo 2011:19-21). As Gathogo says, "This background reveals a well-informed father who, as an Anglican lay leader as well as a village leader, successfully raised Jesse Mugambi" (Gathogo 2011:21). Mugambi's siblings have mainly entered upon academic careers, evidence of the influence of his father upon the family.

Both sets of grandparents, however, continued to practice African Traditional Religion, and he mentions how much he learnt from them about African Traditional Religion and African culture. Mugambi's paternal grandparents viewed Christianity as part of the colonial invasion of Africa. Mugambi's paternal grandfather could find no evidence to suggest that the objectives of the CMS (Church Missionary Society) were any different from those of the colonial administration. Mugambi's paternal grandparents rejected Christianity on very rational grounds (Mwase 1993:29). It is sad that they could not differentiate between the

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[5]University of South Africa

CMS and the colonial administrator who forced people into fighting unnecessary wars. Mugambi's grandfather had been forced to fight in the First World War (see Gathogo 2011:22). Gathogo points out that Mugambi spent most of his weekdays with his paternal grandparents seeking to rationalise the case of his African heritage. This must have been difficult with, on the one hand, his parents being committed Anglican Christians, and, on the other, his grandparents viewing the missionary enterprise as similar to the colonial invasion. Gathogo analyses this tension as significant to his formation as a thinker and Christian practitioner (see Gathogo 2011: 23). He regards his grandparents as people of great integrity, wisdom and responsibility (2008:1). Mugambi's maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, taught him to respect his African identity (see Gathogo 2011: 24). The anti-colonial and anti-missionary stance of Mugambi's grandparents is reflected in his writings on numerous occasions where he criticises both for the detrimental effect they have had on African society and culture. Mugambi was confirmed in November 1964 at the prompting of his godfather, who asked him to honour the pledge made on his behalf at his baptism and to take responsibility for his own life as a Christian.

Another significant influence on the position he was to take in later life came from the time he spent at the Anglican mission station where he attended school in the 1950s. The mission station was used as a military base during the state of emergency in Kenya (the Mau Mau uprising). His comment with regard to the influence of the missionaries on his thinking is significant, "Among the missionaries there, the Bible and the rifle were apparently interchangeable" (2008:1). These times were critical in Kenya's history and in Gathogo's words, "colonial brutality was at its peak" (Gathogo 2011: 36). The feelings expressed by Mzee Kibago Ngotho, an ex-Mau Mau member are significant for analysing the formative factors in Mugambi's life:

> As an African, I cannot find cause to trust the white man. Through the years, he robbed me, lied to me, tortured me, imprisoned me, killed me, dehumanised me,....the white man who occupies my land tells me to go jump in the sea or swallow a razor blade if I am bitter...The white man who took me to Burma in 1939 to fight for 'democracy'...The white man who ensured that his friends consumed the fruits of our independence...The white man who told me to turn the other cheek until I had no more cheeks (Gathogo 2001:3)

In an e-mail interview with Gathogo, Mugambi expresses the influence all these events had on his own thinking and approach to colonial rule:

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These events greatly shaped my childhood. I started school in the middle of the Emergency (1954), and spent eight years of my childhood in two concentration camps (Kigari and Kirigi in Embu). I have known oppression since my childhood! They confirm what I went through was also experienced by a whole generation of Kenyans. Unfortunately there has not been anything similar to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; so much of the experience of this generation remains unexpressed within the public domain (quoted in Gathogo 2011:38).

The influence of colonialism and the state of emergency in Kenya on Mugambi's views of Western influence in Africa is ably documented by Gathogo (2011: 34-44).

In high school Mugambi studied "Bible knowledge" and was introduced by one of his teachers to biblical criticism. While at teacher training college he took an interest in theology and philosophy as well as music and theatre. He published his first academic research paper in 1969. (I have been unable to trace the title of this paper but I think it had to do with a research project he did on the theology of St. Paul.)

By the age of 21 he had decided that his vocation in life was to be a teacher. He subsequently spent an academic year at Selly Oak College at Birmingham University, reading theology, philosophy and sociology. During this time he spent nearly two months in the CMS (Church Missionary Society) archives in London doing research on the church in East Africa. Beidelman (1982) has done much work on the CMS in East Africa and his book, *Colonial Evangelism,* reflects most of the conclusions drawn by Mugambi. On his return to Kenya Mugambi worked as a tutor for religious education and as lay chaplain at a teacher training college. Later he enrolled as an undergraduate in Philosophy, Religious Studies, History, Literature and Education at the University of Nairobi. At this time he was exposed to Continental European, British, North American, and Asian and African philosophical and religious thought, mainly (according to him) taught by African lecturers. In 1970 he became a founder member of the ecumenical Christian Student Council and a founder member of the Kenya National Association of Religious Education Teachers. He next studied for an MA in Philosophy and Religious Studies. In 1974 he was invited to serve as Theology Project Secretary for the World Student Christian Federation Africa Region (WSCF). By the age of 27 his theological formation was basically complete. He completed his MA in 1977 and his Ph.D. in 1984 at the University of Nairobi. This was on the subject, "Discernment of Meaning in Discourse with reference to Religion". His professional background is in Education and Communication, with long and wide experience in teaching, research and publication.

Mugambi is a frequent publisher. However, from observation, most of his books are compilations of articles he has written for various journals or for inclusion in publications edited by others as well as by him. Mugambi's first published book was in 1974, entitled *Carry it Home* and published by the Kenya Literature Bureau. This book was a revised edition of Mugambi's poems. This was followed by *The African Religious Heritage*, also in 1974. From that time on a plethora of publications followed with the latest I am aware of being, *Contextual Theology across Cultures* (2009) which is a compilation of letters between Mugambi and his son's father-in-law Robert Guy, published by Acton.

Mugambi is currently the chairman of Acton Publishers in Nairobi, Kenya, professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and Director of Starehe Boys' Centre in Nairobi. His contact with the philosophy department at the university and its lecturers, exposed him to the influence of African philosophy. I will refer to this in section 2.4.

Mugambi is a complex character as reflected in his assessment of himself, "It is difficult to link my theological thought to Pan-Africanism, Anglicanism, or anti-capitalist ideology. This is too simplistic"(2008:2).

2.3 The background to Mugambi's theology

A number of Western theologians have exercised an influence on Mugambi's development as a theologian, namely Paul Tillich, Martin Buber and Karl Jaspers. Gathogo maintains that several other theologians, Bultmann, Karl Barth, Brunner, Feuerbach, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Cox, Berger, Taylor, Altizer and van Buren, also influenced Mugambi in one way or another (Gathogo 2011:59).

Tillich was instrumental in developing in Mugambi a love for the use of metaphorical forms in order to make the Christian faith accessible to ordinary people. In his bid to contextualise Christianity in Africa, Paul Tillich, a German Lutheran theologian and philosopher, inspired Mugambi whose main objective was to make Christianity understandable and persuasive to religiously sceptical people, modern in culture and secular in sensitivity (Dedji 2003:45).

Tillich approached things differently and this appealed to Mugambi. Instead of sin being alienation from God, Tillich called sin "the denial of one's courage to be". The metaphor of God in Heaven is replaced with the metaphor, "the ground of our being". Rather than faith as belief in God, Tillich proposed, "faith as the ultimate concern" (Tillich 1951:1-6, 66-68).

Buber instilled in Mugambi a desire to interpret and foster patterns of constructive relationships between human individuals and God as well as a love of discerning new metaphors as creative means to re-cast human experience in both religion and society (see Dedji 2003:45).

Jaspers, as opposed to Bultmann, developed a positive appraisal of mythical thinking which led Mugambi to the position that "myth is indispensable in cultural constructions of reality" (Mugambi 1995:37). Jaspers taught that myth tells a story and expresses intuitive insights rather than universal concepts (Jaspers 1972:37). When a society becomes incapable of making its own myths or re-interpreting its old ones, it becomes extinct (Jaspers 1995:37). Mugambi's conviction that Christian theology should be a contextual response to people's anxieties derives from these influences. (For detail on the above see Dedji 2003:46.) Mugambi describes his theology of reconstruction as a project of "re-mythologisation" in which the engaged theologian discerns new symbols and new metaphors in which to recast the central message of the gospel (Mugambi 1997:75).

Other factors that influenced Mugambi's theology may be found in the theological context in which he studied and developed his theology. The earlier years were spent in the context of the struggle for liberation and this is evident in the way he embraced liberation theology. His involvement in various ecumenical bodies such as EATWOT[6], WSCF[7], WCC[8] and the All Africa Conference of Churches (1991), all contributed to his positive attitude towards the ecumenical movement. An area that Mugambi criticises is the lack of a defined methodology in African theology and he is highly critical of the methodological course African theology has taken thus far. The post-colonial condition of African society motivated him to seek a model other than liberation theology in order to foster the development of an equitable African society. In the following sub-sections I describe these influences in more detail. Beside the above influences, various relatively brief encounters had a lasting effect on Mugambi's thinking. Time spent as an undergraduate with Bishop Stephen Neill persuaded Mugambi to produce good African theology and publish it (see record of personal interviews with Gathogo 2011:61). Mugambi's reading of Kierkegaard enhanced his own desire for clarity of expression. Kierkegaard's disappointment with the lack of clarity in the preachers he listened to found an echo in Mugambi's own experience. Mugambi particularly enjoyed

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[6] Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

[7] World Students Christian Federation

[8] World Council of Churches

Bonhoeffer's three books, *The Cost of Discipleship* (1949), *Ethics* (1955), and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1971). The need to translate beliefs into practical behaviour impressed Mugambi. A meeting with Cees Hamerlink at the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague in Netherlands, and a later meeting at a UNESCO sponsored seminar in Nairobi in July 1984, had an impact on his thinking. Hamerlink made it possible for Mugambi to attend a course in Communication Policy and Planning for Development that he conducted in 1985. Mugambi was awarded a diploma with distinction. It was Hamerlink's way of approaching the issue of cultural harmony in pluralistic situations that was consistent with Mugambi's own approach. Hamerlink's view on cultural synchronisation holds that the peoples of Africa, Asia, and South America should forge their own cultural identities before immersing themselves in the dominant culture of the North Atlantic peoples. This view influenced Mugambi's opinion that African Christians need to synthesise their faith with their own culture before they can contribute to the universal church, an approach that predominates in Mugambi's writings (See Gathogo 2011:62 & 63 for details). Another encounter was with Henrik von Wright on his visit to Kenya in 1986. A further meeting with von Wright, occurring in 1987, was described by Mugambi as "a very fruitful three-hour philosophical discussion". Mugambi credits von Wright with the confidence he possesses today as a philosopher cum theologian. The Dutch Catholic Priest, Joseph Donders succeeded Bishop Neill as chairperson of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, and introduced Mugambi to the history of Western philosophy and influenced him to become a reader of philosophical works. Another individual who influenced Mugambi was the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu whom Mugambi met in 1974. Mugambi had published a paper entitled "The African Experience of God", which impressed Wiredu. A three hour dialogue was focused on the African understanding of reality and the role of religion in morality. This dialogue led Mugambi to broaden his definition of religion, stating that, "if religion is understood as 'ultimate concern' (Tillich) then a deep sense of moral consciousness could not be disassociated with a commitment to the Ultimate Concern, however defined". Mugambi's ecumenical approach was influenced by his association with John Gatu, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the first person to call for a moratorium on western missionaries. He and Mugambi were the only Kenyan members of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order (1974 – 1984). Gatu reminded Mugambi of the necessity to root academic theology in the lives of Christians and churches at home and abroad. (For detail on the above see Gathogo 2011:59-67).

2.3.1 Mugambi's ecumenical background

Mugambi has a deep conviction that the reconstruction of Africa cannot be achieved unless the ecumenical configuration is reshaped (Dedji 2003:62), and he takes every opportunity to express the importance of the ecumenical movement for the reconstruction of African churches and societies. He considers Jesus' teaching on unity in John 17 to be the divine mandate for ecumenism and mentions the contribution African Christians have made to the preservation of the unity of the early church. This is a reference to the contribution made by African theologians to the ecumenical creeds promulgated at the early Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople and Chalcedon (see Dedji 2003:62). Mugambi has been involved in the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern Africa Theologians since it was formed in 1987 (Ndung'u 2005:17). Mugambi points to the urgent need for the church in Africa to participate fully in the modern ecumenical movement as a united ecclesial body whose identity is focused on Jesus rather than on some apostle, saint, or doctrine (see Dedji 2003:63). Mugambi is critical of the different missionary enterprises that maintain their denominational differences instead of demonstrating the unity of the gospel.

> Generally, African converts were expected to adopt the new "Christian" way of life, without necessarily being taught that this new "way" was a product of a particular denominational interpretation and expression, developed in the context of particular Western cultural backgrounds (Mugambi 1989:42).

The ecclesiastical conflicts of the European churches, perpetuated in the mission field, have had a marked impact upon inter-church relationships in Africa with conflicts continuing into the current African church situation. This has been particularly evident in the broken relationships between Protestant and Roman Catholic churches as well as, at a later stage, between Protestant and Pentecostal churches. In *The Church in African Christianity* Mugambi quotes Fr. John O'Donahue's plea for the church in Uganda to so unite that it shame the Christians in the rest of the world into unity (Mugambi & Magesa 1998:18). In a section on ecumenism and charismatic renewal Mugambi states:

> Theologians as teachers of faith within and between their respective churches have a moral duty to educate the Christian community on the necessity of Ecumenism for the successful witness of the church to the world. A divided church will remain scandalous to the gospel. A differentiated church will manifest the riches of human responses to the gospel, provided that the differences in ecclesiology are mutually recognized and respected. Such recognition and respect can best be promoted by theologians (Mugambi 1998:10).

Dedji describes Mugambi's commitment to ecumenism as unmistakable. His concept of the role that theologians and educators should play in promoting an ecumenical spirit that

transcends ethnic and racial barriers within the Christian community is evident in all his writings. In the chapter he has written on "the Ecumenical movement and the future of the church in Africa", Mugambi lays out the historical development of an on-going unity in the African church (see Mugambi & Magesa 1998:5-26). Mugambi does, however, highlight certain shortcomings of the East African ecumenical movement in this chapter and I give a condensed version of these points which developed out of the 1913 Kikuyu conference (details may be found in Mugambi & Magesa 1998:11 & 12).

- The movement in East Africa was aimed at bringing co-operation between the mission societies and not at uniting the churches. Mugambi's understanding of ecumenism is that it has the task of fostering mutual understanding between the churches. As he says, "A fundamental ecclesial dimension was missing" (1998:11).

- African Christians were not involved in any of the proceedings. The missionaries did not think it necessary to involve the Africans as they saw themselves as the authorities on the future of Christianity in Africa. So, "the African dimension was missing" (1998:11).

- The initiatives in East Africa were predominantly Protestant and Mugambi is critical of the exclusion of the Catholic missionary societies. Protestant fear of the Catholics contributed to the Catholics distancing themselves from the Kikuyu conference. The aftermath of the Reformation and Counter Reformation was still very much a factor in producing negative and cold relationships between the Protestants and Catholics. It was only after the Second Vatican Council that the way opened for full Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement (1998:11). "The Catholic dimension was missing".

- Even the Protestant missionary societies had no unanimity of purpose. Within denominational groups there was no agreement. Anglicans fought with Anglicans, high churchmen were excluded by evangelicals, and the Quakers and Seventh Day Adventists withdrew (see 1998:11 & 12).

- The dismay that Mugambi expresses at the lack of unity in this early council is further expressed throughout his life by the way he continues to look for an ecumenism that will take into account as many dimensions and criteria as possible such as the ecclesial and African dimensions, and the need for unanimity of purpose. Mugambi proposes the African sense of community as an ecumenical model that could fulfil the desire for an authentic ecumenism (see Dedji 2003:65 & 66).

In a paper presented at the 1994 Symposium of African Ecumenical theologians, Mugambi expressed concern over the divisions which emerged out of interpretations of the bible in African Christianity. He wonders at the way the scriptures that are common to all the churches have caused so much tension and division. He speaks highly of the ability of AICs to operate with unity in diversity where differences of opinion are resolved by consensus (see Dedji 2003:66). Mugambi speaks of the "new ecumenism" which he identifies as being other-centred, constructive, inclusive, collaborative, amiable, attractive, appreciative, progressive,

and sensitive (Mugambi 1995:204). This is the type of ecumenicity Mugambi unequivocally chooses in order to resolve ecclesial fragmentation as well as other multi-dimensional crises in Africa.

2.3.2 The influence of liberation theology

During his high school days Mugambi was introduced to biblical criticism and, later, to the teachings of the Catholic liberation theologians of South America such as the Boff brothers and Gustavo Gutièrrez. Because of their context of colonial and neo-colonial domination, such South American theologians adopted the Exodus motif of liberation from bondage and assessed Moses to be a model of the exemplary leader who brings his people from bondage to freedom (Mugambi 1995:2). African people are inclined to identify themselves more strongly with the Old Testament and the Israelites than with New Testament models of church. They adopt the Exodus motif as being more relevant to their situation. Because of the failure of development, the Latin American countries were left poorer than when these plans for development were first implemented. Liberation became the slogan for improvement in a movement led mainly by Catholic lay priests whose liberation theology was focused more on class distinctions in the Latin American context than on social and cultural issues. The influence of this movement affected theology in every place where people were oppressed and was instrumental in the development of leaders such as Martin Luther King and theologians such as James Cone in North America. As early as 1989 Mugambi expressed his concern about those who polarised salvation and liberation. He wrote, "In the African context and in the bible, salvation, as a theological concept, cannot be complete without liberation as a socio-political concept...body, mind and spirit must not be dismembered" (1989:12 & 14). At this stage his view was that the objective of African Christian theology needed to be total liberation.

> African Christian theology must deal more with the practical task of interpreting and understanding the relevance of God's revelation for the total liberation of mankind in the African economic, political and social situation (Mugambi 1989:14).

Mugambi has defined liberation as a noun which suggests a process whose goal is the realisation of freedom (1989:108). In his opinion "liberation has been restricted to the process of acquiring freedom, in our contemporary usage, especially in the context of modern nationalism" (Mugambi 1989:108). Mugambi is critical of the term as it is used by what he terms "Evangelical Christian theologians" who are primarily concerned with the salvation of

the soul and not with political or social liberation (see Mugambi 1989:108).[9]

It may be stated that, for Mugambi, economic liberation is as significant as spiritual devotion. If the material is neglected, the spiritual is distorted (Mugambi 1989:14, 1995:5&6). This theme of liberation had become commonplace in Africa at the time of the Fifth Assembly of the WCC held in 1975 in Nairobi. In the next year, 1976, EATWOT was launched in Dar es Salaam and was attended by theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America. At this conference it became clear that there was a difference between the emphases and perspectives of African, Asian and Latin American theologians. African theologians wanted to highlight cultural and racial domination, and liberation was viewed particularly in these terms (Mugambi 1995:4). The goal of African liberation theology was the liberation of African people from racial and cultural domination. Domination by the colonial powers was seen more in this light than as an economic domination. However, during the 1980s the African economic situation deteriorated drastically as the balance of trade between Africa and the West worsened and the foreign debt from loans for development that were given by the World Bank and the IMF[10] needed to be repaid, as well as the interest on such loans having to be paid.

Africa became increasingly marginalised because of the conflict between the Western and Eastern bloc with the focus being diverted to liberated Eastern bloc countries. The situation called for explanation. If most of Africa had been liberated in the 1950s and 1960s, where was that liberation to be observed? The Exodus motif continued to be relevant to Africa because of continued domination in post-colonial countries due mainly to dictatorial leadership in those countries.

In 1990, at the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi, Mugambi presented a paper reflecting on "The Church of the future in Africa". He posed the question, "Is the theme of reconstruction not the most appropriate for the new world order?" (see Mugambi 1995:4, 5).

The era of decolonisation and the birth of a relevant African approach to the freedom of such an era was the context in which Mugambi formed his own theology. In his *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989), he expresses some of the concerns that mark his approach

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[9] I would like to use Gathogo's comment as my own at this point: Although the researcher approaches this study as an evangelical Christian scholar, he does not subscribe to this extremist position where soul and body are separated theologically; or in life situations in general. He strongly holds that the Christian gospel must be seen holistically; otherwise it will become simply irrelevant creedal recitations and empirically lacking (Gathogo 2011:121 footnote).

[10] International Monetary Fund

to theology. He makes some fundamental points in response to the statement, "If liberation is the objective goal of an African Christian theology, certain concepts become fundamental in the construction of such a theology" (Mugambi 1989:13). He then proceeds to give four points that he considers essential, namely:

1. Righteousness

Mugambi views this as an essential ingredient to liberation and the formation of an African Christian theology. In making this point he refers to Knox's article in the New Bible Dictionary (1962) where righteousness is described as "right action and fair dealing between man and man was (that was) insisted upon by the prophets" and "the ground of this insistence is that God requires righteousness in men". Mugambi (1989:13) maintains that where Africans have been exploited, and where African life and culture have been submerged and distorted, either out of prejudice or ignorance, an African theology must recall people to this righteousness. God being the author of righteousness becomes a potent force in the liberation of the total person in Africa. This is the main point in Mugambi's argument for liberation. He takes it a step further when he argues for the ongoing righteous relationship of God and those Africans who are not part of the Christian community. He makes this assertion because, in his view, Africans have no problems with the existence of God and simply take his existence for granted. He concludes this paragraph with the following comment:

> An African Christian theology must deal more with the practical task of interpreting and understanding the relevance of God's revelation for the total liberation of mankind in the African economic, political and social situation. In this sense it should not be an academic concern; rather, it issues out of practical involvement in the meeting of human need and the building of a more humane social order in the African setting (Mugambi 1989:14).

2. Man (humankind).

In this paragraph Mugambi expresses the need for an anthropology that is expressive of and attuned to the African experience. This is what he views as the liberation of the whole person; economically, politically, and materially. In Mugambi's view the ministry of Jesus was concerned with the process of liberating the whole individual and society as a whole. Jesus spent much of his time "alleviating the physical suffering of people and restoring the eroded dignity of the individual" (Mugambi 1989:109).

3. Eschatology

In this section Mugambi emphasises that liberation must be understood in temporal, rather than spatial terms. He maintains. that African Christians, even when they understand

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Christianity to be pointing to a new life in heaven, often understand heaven in material categories.

Heaven becomes one way of expressing material needs and desires which political oppression and economic exploitation has hindered them from enjoying in the present life. Total liberation is obviously an eschatological hope (Mugambi 1989:15).

4. Relevance

African Christian theology needs to adopt a method that is based on the need to interpret the gospel in terms that are relevant to the historical and experiential situation of Africans (Mugambi 1989:15). There will be diversity in different parts of the continent but the main task of liberation needs to be kept in the forefront.

One may infer from the above that Mugambi is steeped in liberation theology and that it has had a profound impact in forming his overall theology. However, events in post-colonial Africa have caused him to question the validity of a purely liberation approach to theology and to begin formulating his concept of reconstruction. This does not mean that Mugambi has abandoned liberation theology completely as will become obvious by observing his approach to liberation over an extended period of time. I explain this by referring to his three publications which cover the time span 1989 to 2003. In his *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989) it is quite clear that Mugambi is fully committed to liberation theology:

Liberation is the objective task of contemporary African Christian theology. It is not just one of the issues, but rather, all issues aimed at liberating the African from all forces that hinder him from living fully as a human being (Mugambi 1989:12).

According to the title of *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi appears to have abandoned the notion of liberation and embraced reconstruction completely. This appears to be borne out by the way he focuses on reconstruction with very little attention being paid to liberation:

> African Christian theology in the twenty-first century will be characterized by these themes of social transformation and reconstruction...the shift (from liberation to reconstruction) involved discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves...(Mugambi 1995:40).

When *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) was published it became clear that Mugambi had revised his earlier (1995) stance on liberation and that he now views liberation and reconstruction as mutually-inclusive concepts:

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> The processes of liberation and reconstruction are not mutually exclusive…in the areas which become liberated, a new society is formed on the ruins of the old society…thus the war of liberation may continue on the front line while the liberated areas embark on reconstruction, providing logistical support to the continuing struggle (Mugambi 2003:61).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi's background in liberation theology has given him a foundation that remains with him today, as may be seen by his recognition that there is constant need for liberation as oppressive systems form, and need to be demolished in order for people to be freed from those oppressive systems. He maintains his earlier (1995) stance on the need for reconstruction to follow liberation in order for a just society to be developed.

2.3.3 Mugambi's socio-political context

In the introductory remarks to *African Christian Theology* (1989) Mugambi describes the state of the African continent during the changes that took place between the 1960s and the 1990s. Major changes had taken place such as

- the end of the cold war;
- the decolonization of most African countries;
- the end of colonialism and the emergence of neo-colonialism;
- the energy crisis, and
- the accumulation of external debt.

The nations of Africa had been united in a call for the end of colonialism and apartheid under the leadership of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). During this period many African nations had changed their names as well as their status within the international family of nations. The OAU was formed in 1963 with thirty two nation members; by 1994 there were fifty two member states. This was also the time of Vatican Two (1962-1965) with far-reaching changes in attitude towards non-Catholics, the Catholic Church accepting them as "separated brethren" instead of viewing them as "heretics". This was also the time of the call for a "moratorium" on missionary funds and personnel in order to encourage the development of local church autonomy (see Mugambi 1995:X & XI). Mugambi describes the ecclesial changes in Africa as being vitally important for social transformation in Africa during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Vatican conference, the Lausanne conference and the All Africa Conference of Churches all focused on the themes of liberation and reconciliation.

But by 1984, many African countries were under military rule and African governments had failed in their management of national economies resulting in a proliferation of NGOs through which the former colonial powers channelled aid (see Mugambi 1995:XI & XII).

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Mugambi is critical of the way both NGOs and Christian organizations prioritized relief assistance above long term development aid. Mugambi voices his conviction that "proactive, long-term commitment is essential if Africa is to avoid the pitfalls of the past generation" (1995:XII). The political context of Mugambi's theological development is expressed in a paper he delivered at the EMW Annual conference in 2002 in Hermannsburg, Germany entitled, "Religion and Social Reconstruction in Post-colonial Africa" (chapter 2 in Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:13-34). In this chapter he refers to the ongoing antagonism between church and politics and the continual attempts by the one to use the other. During the course of this chapter it becomes obvious that Mugambi is not in favour of the separation of church and state but sees the need for them to work in conjunction with each other in order to bring about reconstruction.

> The idea that religion and politics are separate social domains is erroneous, in view of the fact that individuals are *citizens* at the same time as they are *worshippers* (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:14).

In a reference to African states where religious leadership has been publicly solicited by the political leadership, Mugambi notes twenty-three states where this has occurred. This intermingling of state and church denotes the context in which Mugambi developed his theology of reconstruction and it will become evident that he has been influenced by this perspective. He offers a short historical background in this chapter beginning with pre-colonial African nation-states and demonstrating how religion and politics were mutually inclusive. He remarks on the destructive notion introduced by the colonial states that African ethnic identity was divisive while his opinion is that Christian missionary denominationalism did much to damage the social harmony of Africa (see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:21 &22). Mugambi is of the opinion that imperialism and colonial rule imposed an asymmetrical relationship between the rulers and the governed:

> The *imperial citizens* were entitled to democracy, while the *colonial subjects* were not. Whereas the imperial *citizens* in the colony could enjoy democratic rights imperial *subjects* could not enjoy *any* rights, freedoms, privileges or prerogatives. Subjects could not vote to choose their leaders; they could not debate on how much to pay in taxes; nor on how the tax revenue could be used (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:22).

This was the background against which neo-colonialism developed and Mugambi observes that many of the circumstances out of which the "new order" developed were perpetuated by the new rulers of Africa. Political power was transferred from the colonial rulers to African elite that perpetuated the abuses of their colonial masters. Democracy was preached but not

practiced with many of the African states governed by military dictatorships. Mugambi (2004:22) observes that the only explanation for this hypocrisy is that then, as now, the national self-interest of African states has taken priority over the interests of African peoples. In his opinion the transfer of power was stage-managed, media-orchestrated, from the colonial rulers to selected rather than elected African elite, and catapulted Africa into a political quagmire, with the consequence that coups and counter-coups became more the rule than the exception in the governance of the continent (Mugambi 2004:22).

Comparatively little has changed from the situation in 1970 when most African countries were ruled by the military and where the democracy claimed to be in place, was illusory. This prompted Mugambi to highlight the need for Africa to evolve its own social institutions consistent with their worldview and sense of belonging.

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi has developed his theology over a period of time that spans the injustices and oppression of the colonial era followed by the neo-colonial era which evidenced much of the same injustice and oppression. It is in this context that he arrived at his theology of reconstruction with the caveat that liberation needs to be a constant factor as long as dictatorial and oppressive leaders are in place. Having examined Mugambi's background in liberation theology, his ecumenical involvement, and his social context I now examine the development of Afro-centric theology which has greatly influenced Mugambi's own theology.

2.4 The African philosophical and theological context

The development of Afro-centric philosophy and theology has had an impact upon Mugambi's own approach to interpreting the Bible. In an earlier publication (1989:IV-XII) he recounts the ongoing relationship he has had with this movement and how it affected his own approach to Christianity. I will not refer to Afro-centricity in the American context as this is a different perspective that concerns African Americans and their roots. In this section I will offer a brief history of the growth of Africanism in the African context and show how the notion of African philosophy had, and still has, proponents and opponents, although its impact on the thinking of African theologians cannot be denied. I examine the emergence of negritude as a philosophical concept in Africa, the development of ethno-philosophy from negritude, the development of Afro-centrism from ethno-philosophy, the historical roots of Afro-centrism, and the current situation regarding Afro-centrism and how these have impacted Mugambi's thinking.

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2.4.1 The emergence of negritude

While it may initially seem that the concept of negritude is irrelevant to understanding how Mugambi accepted Africanism, I will show that there is an essential link between negritude, or ethno-philosophy as it came to be called, and the Afro-centric approach adopted by Mugambi. Dedji (2003:87) makes the following comment, "In my point of view, such a vision (held by Mugambi) is just another version of Blackness (Negritude) theory".

Negritude focused attention on things African as being of worth and beautiful. One of the demands of this movement is that the existence of very old written traditions with regard to philosophy and related subjects in Africa such as the Egyptian and Ethiopian traditions should be acknowledged (for detail on this approach see Oden 2007). Evidence exists of early Greek and Islamic writings being influenced by these traditions. Recent concerns about the destruction of ancient documents in the libraries of Timbuktu highlight the amount of scholarship existent in the period of the eighth to the sixteenth centuries (Abraham 2012:20 – 24). Makumba proposes three stages in the development of African thought, namely:

- ancient literate thought;
- traditional oral thought, and
- what has come to be termed professional philosophy in contemporary Africa (Makumba 2007:34).

An Africanist approach to philosophy developed particularly in francophone West Africa, its earliest exponent being Leopold Senghor[11] (Makumba 2007:116). The word coined to express this movement was "negritude". The essential focus of negritude was on the dignity and personhood of black people. As Makumba expresses it:

> Black people are to defend their identity and affirm their culture against the arrogance of Euro-centricism, made manifest in evils like colonialism, slavery and slave trade, which it perpetrated (2007:116).

Placide Tempels, in *Bantu Philosophy* (1945), endeavoured to describe the African cultural renaissance as a reaction to the way colonialists marginalised African culture. Cultural superiority was claimed by the West, not only by the colonial powers, but by academic rational tradition. This superior attitude held by the North Atlantic countries gave rise to the assertion of cultural nationalism and black consciousness, which culminated in the concept of negritude (see Makumba 2007:117). For Senghor the concept of negritude embraced the total

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[11] I am at a disadvantage regarding Senghor as there do not appear to be any of his writings published in English: I therefore have to rely upon authors such as Makumba and Bá for information.

of African cultural values and sums up the African's distinctive way of relating to the world. This is an important observation as it bears upon the different way Africans and Western people approach reality. Senghor observes that culture is a people's characteristic way of feeling, thinking, expressing and acting and is a symbiosis of geographical, historical, racial and ethnic influences (Senghor 1964:72-73). Senghor establishes the epistemological difference between the white and black races, declaring that emotion is black as much as reason is Greek (Makumba 2007:118). While the expression of these differences could be termed arbitrary there is nevertheless sufficient evidence to state that the "white man" is basically cognitive while the "black man" is basically experiential (sensual). The following quote from Senghor (1964:73) explains this factor:

> In contrast to the classic European, the Negro-African does not draw a line between himself and the object, he does not hold it at a distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it. After holding it at a distance, after scanning it without analysing it, he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill or fix it. He touches it feels it, smells it…Thus the Negro-African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis.

According to this quote Senghor identifies the African as a mystic; the conclusion being that the human approach to reality need not be rationalistic as presented by most Western thinkers. The African option presents a more contextual approach based more on experiential knowledge than on objective knowledge (see Makumba 2007:118-119).

2.4.2 Ethno-philosophy

Negritude developed into ethno-philosophy, which has been identified as a philosophical attempt to define the aspirations of negritude. This form of philosophy developed out of the desire of Africans to define themselves and found expression in the works of Senghor and Tempels, while Kagame (1956), Mbiti (1989) and Mudimbe (1988) have all made significant contributions in this area. Of special significance to this research and to understanding Mugambi's approach is the contention made by ethno-philosophy that there is a single unified African (Bantu) philosophy which finds expression in features of language and culture. My own opinion is that this assertion may be contested in the light of the multiplicity of languages and cultures on the African continent. However, there are commonalities that may be cited in support of this claim for uniformity, namely:

> Both African socialism and more strictly philosophical works of ethno-philosophy celebrate the subordination of the individual to the community that

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they argue is central to African culture and philosophy (Makumba 2007:119).

The common view that the meaning of life is found in the community was offered by these philosophers in support of their claim for African uniformity. However, the diversities of language, social customs, tribal rivalries and religious customs all point to disunity in the African context. What was being sought by these philosophers was an authentic African philosophy, and yet the critique has been levelled that Senghor was influenced by existentialism and Western phenomenology (Western currents of philosophy) more than by his African context. There is doubt over whether any pure form of African philosophy exists (see Makumba 2007:118).

In conclusion, negritude may be understood as a theory of black racial consciousness and African collective identity which ethno-philosophy then tried to give voice to. This expression was seen as a solution to the problem of the denigration of the black race by colonial ideology. Ethno-philosophy was extremely critical of colonial rule and culture on the one hand, while it tended to be non-critical of African traditions and customs on the other. The approach of ethno-philosophy was extremely broad and tended to identify a unity of customs and beliefs among black people which does not exist. What this movement did achieve was to give re-affirmation to black consciousness and black identity (see Makumba 2007:121-123). The ethno-philosophy movement had a profound impact upon African theology and upon African hermeneutics.

2.4.3 The move from ethno-philosophy to Afro-centrism

In using the term Afro-centrism I intend it to mean the philosophical approach that emphasises the importance of African people in culture, philosophy and history. In so doing I am aware of the debate around Afro-centrism in the mainly American context resulting out of the attempt by American theologians to position African culture in opposition to Western culture. Mention also needs to be made of the tortured route taken by many American Africanists to position African culture as previous and superior to Western culture (For more information on this topic see Wilson Moses 1998 and Cain Hope Felder 1994, but also see Oden 2007).

To attempt to trace the whole history of the growth of African Christian philosophy in the context of this thesis would require a research project of its own. However, it is necessary to examine the more current philosophical roots that led to the development of African theology. Tremendous changes have taken place in most traditional societies as they have

encountered other cultures (Makumba 2007:191). Mbiti noted this influence when he stated:

> It needs to be borne in mind that Africa is going through a tremendous and rapid change in every aspect of life. Many individuals are becoming increasingly detached from the corpus of their tribal and traditional beliefs, concepts and practices. On the other hand, these concepts have not all been abandoned, nor are they likely to be wiped out immediately by these modern changes (Mbiti 1970: xiv).

These same changes have given birth to new African thinkers who are expressive of the various philosophies that Christianity encounters in Africa today. Mbiti gives an adequate description of this period and the scholars involved in the second chapter of his book on African religions and philosophy (1969:6-14). Sylvia Bâ also describes the development of negritude in her book (1973:3–180). African Christian philosophy has contributed to the overall body of philosophy precisely in that it has a different end in view. This may be seen in the restricted end envisaged by African philosophy. The happiness of the African person in the specificity of his/her identity is not sufficient but the acquisition of everlasting life is seen as the *telos* (the completion) of the African aspiration as it is enshrined in African philosophy. Makumba portrays the aspiration of African philosophy as "the realisation of the entire human African project in the Absolute" (2007:192). This goes beyond the achievement of emancipation as politically, economically, and socially understood.

> In this sense African philosophy would be considered seriously wanting if it did not seek the partnership of African theology in the realisation of its goal. One would consider this point even more valid given the contribution of Christianity, for example, in the areas of education and economic growth, not to mention its recognised participation in the political, cultural and economic emancipation of certain parts of the continent, especially in post-independence Africa (Makumba 2007:192).

The development of an African theology out of African philosophy is highlighted by the way Mbiti declares that Christianity in Africa must be made relevant to the life and affairs of the continent. "We cannot afford to keep a foreign institution in Africa…Christianity has to lose its foreignness and become relevant, indigenous and deeply involved in the affairs of our continent, as a participant and not as a spectator" (Mbiti 1971:2). In this statement Mbiti calls for the development of a truly African expression of Christianity that takes into account the philosophical and cultural differences between Western and African thinking. Some of these differences will be highlighted in section 5 of this chapter.

One may summarise this sub-section by observing that, given the role played by religion in the life of African people, it was inevitable that the roots found in African philosophy give

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rise to an African theology. The religious factor plays a crucial role in fulfilling the aspirations of African people for self-realisation. This aspiration cannot be satisfied at the social, economic, political, historical, and anthropological levels; there has to be an answer that goes to the root of the desire of African people, an encounter with truth found in the Ultimate. Makumba makes this point:

> The African person today, in the desire for self-fulfilment, must come face to face with the religious truth, the truth of the creator. This is what brings reason to its full freedom since freedom cannot be realised in decisions made against one's own foundation, the Supreme reality. This was the enduring truth of Africa's traditional societies and it is a value that should not be abandoned. The truth is that the deepest yearning of the human person consists in religious truth, which brings reason to the summit of its endeavour (2007:197,198).

One may observe that the roots of African theology lie in a philosophical approach to African culture and the African person. As Africanism was being presented in a positive light there was a spill over into African thought in many disciplines, including African theology. The tendency at that time was to view all that was African as having value and validity. Up to this time, much of what was taught in seminaries and universities was wholly Western in content, as if Africa had nothing to offer that was worthwhile or valid. "Black is beautiful" could be said to be the cry of this movement, beginning with philosophers such as Kwame Appiah (1989), Kwame Nkruma (1978), Julius Nyerere (1970), Leopold Senghor (1964), and Kwasi Wiredu (1980). The roots of African theology may be said to exist in profound African philosophical thinkers who went back to the roots of philosophy in the early centuries in Africa that derived from Egyptian and Ethiopian traditions. Makumba maintains that early Greek and Islamic thought was influenced by these Egyptian and Ethiopian philosophers and their thinking (see 2007:21-36 and Oden 2007). The implications are that the roots of African philosophy and African theology go back into the first centuries and thus African theology cannot be pushed aside as being without relevance. The early writings and oral traditions of Africa are a vital factor in the development of Afro-centrism and I will now examine this historical background.

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2.4.4 The historical development of Afro-centrism

Afro-centrism or, as some have called it, African-ness, resulted from the long history of oppression experienced by African people. This oppression took physical, economical, psychological and spiritual forms. Colonialism typified these forms of oppression. Krog observes the issues that are significant for illustrating Africa's disillusionment with the West:

> European missionaries were very often accepted as nothing more than mere colonial advocates based on their participatory abuse of Scripture and social position for personal gain (land, slaves etc.) (Krog 2005:17).

Although this quotation portrays the Bible being used in a negative way, many Africans would not accept the contorted message from missionaries, but instead sought to interpret scripture for themselves thereby signifying the functional significance of scripture in the many years of oppression as invaluable, resulting in the development of AIC churches (see Krog 2005:18).

It is possible to view the Consultation of African Theologians Conference that met in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1966 as the logical outcome of the negritude movement. Ethno-philosophy gave rise to what was to be the defining moment of modern theological debate in Africa, namely the Conference in Ibadan in 1966. Onwu describes this meeting as follows:

> The consultation was an expression of a deep longing that African theologians should rethink the Christian faith, which had come to them from European missionaries...the implication is that Biblical studies are no longer the exclusive monopoly of Euro-American scholars (1984:36).

Onwu expresses the feeling of many African scholars, namely that, while it was possible to trace African theological scholarship back to Clement of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo, current African Biblical studies were essentially Western in their orientation. The consultation resulted in a surge of African theology with (according to Mbiti 1986:52) more than 300 books and articles being published in the two decades that followed. These publications endeavoured to place the Christian faith in an African context.

Part of the conclusion of Afro-centrism was to assume that approaching knowledge from a Euro-centric perspective had led to injustice and failure to meet the needs of black Africans. The imposition of Western theological concepts was resented by African theologians who sought for a theology that would be conducted in the context of, and with due regard to, African socio-political reality (Mugambi 1989:XI)[12]. From an American perspective,

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[12] For more detail concerning this development see Maluleke in Kalu 2005.

Asante's publication of his paper, "Afro-centricity: The Theory of Social Change" is seen as the beginning of the movement. However, in the previous section I have endeavoured to show that the negritude movement that began in the West African context is the more likely precursor to Afro-centrism on the African continent.

2.4.5 The current situation with regard to Afro-centrism

This situation is described by Maluleke (1997). In his paper he refers to Kwame Bediako's identification of an emphasis in African theology that he terms "the Christianisation of the African past" (1997:12). This emphasis indicates trends in Afro-centrism. Afro-centrism seeks to provide Africans with cultural identity. Because of perceptions with regard to Africans that took root from the days of the slave trade, eighteenth and nineteenth century Europeans developed a superior attitude to African people. Afro-centrism begins with theological exploration into the indigenous cultures of African peoples, with particular stress on their pre-Christian (and also pre-Islamic) religious traditions (Bediako 1999:426). Tutu comments as follows:

> African theologians have sought to demonstrate that the African religious experience and heritage were not illusory, and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the gospel verities to Africa...It was vital for the African's self respect that this kind of rehabilitation of his religious heritage should take place. It is the theological counterpart of what has happened in the study of African history. It has helped to give the lie to the supercilious but tacit assumption that religion and history in Africa date from the advent in that continent of the white man. It is reassuring to know that we had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitators of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God, and new styles of worship consistent with our new faith (quoted in E. Fasholé-Luke 1978:364-369).

These comments were made against the background of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference's statement that Africa's primal religions "contained no preparation for Christianity". Against this backdrop it also became necessary to demonstrate the character of African Christian identity. Bediako calls this trend: "reflecting on the African religious ontological past" (see Ford 1999:428). There is a strong call for conversion to Christianity to be coupled with cultural continuity. The major theological pursuit in African theology may be seen as the pursuit to discover the relationship between Africa's old religions and Christianity, or what it means to be African and Christian. Africans were beginning to answer the questions they themselves were asking (see Ford 1999:430). Bediako comments that the writings of Balaji Idowu represent one perspective of the quest for an African theology,

namely that Christianity, as it was imported to Africa by missionaries, was foreign and had not taken into account the newness of the Christian faith in relation to African religious tradition. Or, to put it differently, the Christian gospel brought little that was essentially new to Africa in religious terms. The question is whether there is value in a specifically Christian theological thought in Africa? (Ford 1999:431).

Mugambi has used his publications in the theological field to comment in various ways about the methodology used in African theology. As this forms part of his background I will now analyse Mugambi's methodology.

2.5 Mugambi's theological method

In this section I first examine Mugambi's approach to method as well as developments in methodology in African theology, and then analyse Mugambi's approach. Mugambi has contributed to a number of publications dealing with the subject of hermeneutics and method such as *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics* (2004), *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (2001), *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa* (2001), *Interpreting Classical Religious Texts in Contemporary Africa* (2007), as well as commenting in different chapters in his three main publications (1989, 1995, 2003). The large amount of literature available makes it a complex task to assess Mugambi's approach to method, yet the task is simplified because there is no lack of material to consult. In this section I examine the general approach to method taken in African theology as Mugambi has adopted a critical stance toward such method, or, as he terms it, lack of method. I then examine Mugambi's own approach to method. In doing this I attempt to do justice to the extent of the literature that he has produced on this subject. I then place Mugambi in the context of current approaches to method and assess his approach.

2.5.1 Methodology in African theology

In *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989) Mugambi comments negatively on the state of methodology in African theology at that time. He describes the need for proper methodology that seeks to interpret the gospel in terms relevant to the historical and experiential situation of Africans (1989:15). He categorises African theology as following a collective and investigative method (1989:15). In this publication he suggests various ways in which African theologians could get together in consultation in order to develop a truly African theology. However, it was not until 2003 that he applied himself definitely to the problem of developing a proper method in African theology. This study is far more current

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and it is to this study that I now resort in order to derive a substantive view of Mugambi's concerns with regard to methodology in African theology:

> African Christian theology is in a methodological crisis, owing to the lack of methodological consciousness. This point became glaringly evident during the 1990s in the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern African theologians (Mugambi 2003:1).

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) Mugambi describes the way in which a number of African theologians at the symposium produced volumes reflecting their choice of research from a list of topics provided to them. There was a resultant lack of cohesion because of no common theological method (2003:1). In his words, "The supposed method was deductive but the approach was contextual" (2003:1).

Mugambi describes the way the two approaches to method have yielded different results. When people's local experience is used as the starting point, deductive data would be provided for reflection. This would include biblical hermeneutics, church tradition as well as the context of violence and peace; democracy and reconciliation; poverty and affluence (Mugambi 2003:2). His position is that in the deductive method theologians discern the relevance of contemporary Christian doctrines formulated in the early church (Mugambi 2003; 2). In using the inductive method, the theologian concentrates on contemporary situations and challenges facing a society. The differences in these approaches are significant:

> The method that one chooses will greatly influence the results that one may derive. Whether one chooses the inductive or the deductive method, the choice is arbitrary, and the decision to choose one or the other, is influenced by factors that are beyond the scope of academic scholarship. This arbitrariness is to be found in all disciplines, including the natural sciences (Mugambi 2003:2).

Mugambi observes that the deductive approach uses the classical doctrines of the church as if they were universally applicable although they themselves were the product of historical circumstances that needed doctrinal corrective action. The result of using this method was to make Euro-American responses to the gospel universal while seeing other responses (such as the responses of African Traditional Churches) as heretical (2003:2). Mugambi observes that this approach subjects African Christianity to evaluation according to the way it conforms to Euro-American norms. Because of this, he assesses the deductive method as being of value only if the gospel is accepted as the universal criterion to challenge all cultures contextually.

Mugambi draws attention to St. Paul whom he considers an example of using the deductive method with the contextual approach in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. The way Paul adapts his message to the cultural context in which he is operating, offers an example of what Mugambi

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considers to be good methodology. Mugambi is critical of the failure of the modern missionary movement to follow St. Paul's example. Combining culture with the gospel has resulted in Western culture being cloned into African Christianity (Mugambi 2003: 3). This process of inculturation has produced African churches that function as if they existed in a Euro-American context. The process is also the exact opposite of the method proposed by Roland Allen in his 1927 publication, to which Mugambi refers (1995:92).

The inductive method, which Mugambi favours, is contextual and experiential, resulting in decision-making out of encounter (Mugambi 2003: 3, 4). Mugambi cites Moses and Paul's encounters with God as examples of this type of encounter. He concludes this section with the following comment:

> The *inductive method* articulates theology from the perspective of the believers –
> the respondents – whereas the *deductive method* portrays the perspective of the
> classical doctrines of the church – the institution (Mugambi 2003: 4).

In spite of the substantial African theological scholarship that has been published in the last quarter of the twentieth century Mugambi feels that little attention has been given to method. His assessment of the situation is that most African Christian theological writing has been concentrated on what he terms, "theological anthropology and ethnography"(2003:4). In making this assessment he makes use of Aylward Shorter's phraseology, 'pastoral anthropology', a phrase that was used as a precursor to the concept of 'inculturation' (Shorter 1973). As the church related to Africa's involvement in socio-political activism it has focused on liberation, inculturation and gender equity, all of which fall within the field of anthropology, hence Mugambi's use of the term theological anthropology to describe the method used by African theologians. Clearly, Mugambi is of the opinion that African philosophy has contributed more to the discourse on method than has been contributed by African theology. Mugambi (2003:5) values theologians such as Jean Marc Ela, Kå Mana, Charles Nyamiti, Kwame Bediako, Tinyiko Maluleke and Gerald West as important contributors to the subject of method in African theology. He expresses concern at the lack of methodological critique in projects undertaken by local mainstream churches and NGOs who uncritically accept capitalism, globalisation and multi-party politics (Mugambi 2003:8). This criticism continues to reflect Mugambi's opposition to the inroads made by Western democracy and capitalism into African culture.

Mugambi focuses on seven methodological changes in the history of Christian thought (2003:9-17). These simply form a background to what he wants to say about method and the

paradigms that are needed. It will be sufficient to list them:

1) The first crisis was the need to adopt a new cross-cultural paradigm for the early church as detailed in Acts 15.

2) The second methodological crisis in theologizing was the result of the schism in the early church between Rome and Constantinople. One group was holding on to the unity of the church and the other holding on to the historical affirmations of the faith culminating in the great ecumenical councils of Nicea and Chalcedon (AD 325 & 451).

3) The third crisis arose because of the confrontation between the Islamic and Christian missions in Europe. This confrontation arose out of the crusades and the expansion of Islam. The development of the "just war" concept came out of this period and was used into the nineteenth century to justify European imperialism in Africa (Mugambi 2003:12). The problem at this time was the blurring of the distinction between theology and ideology.

4) The fourth crisis occurred at the time of the Reformation and evidenced itself in the maintenance of the supremacy of scripture over tradition. A further development from this period was the rise of national churches supported by the kings and queens in various European nations. However, it needs to be noted that this situation already prevailed in Orthodox churches.

5) The fifth crisis was the rise of logical positivism in the nineteenth century with the teaching that empirical experience was the means for obtaining knowledge. This struck at the foundations of revelatory knowledge on which Christianity was based.

6) The sixth crisis was that of Christian liberalism. Technology became the god of the age and was more to be trusted than the God of the Bible. Methodologically the issue at stake was the nature of revelation and the claims of empirical science.

7) The seventh crisis was the missiological and imperial expansion of Europe and North America into Africa, Asia and southern America. Because of the struggle for freedom the issue became the theological distinctions between mission and church.

It may be helpful to end this brief summary by quoting Mugambi as he describes the 1970s and 1980s in Africa:

In Africa there was much debate about liberation and inculturation. This debate was based on the conviction that Christianity had not yet become deeply rooted in the African cultural consciousness. The liberation paradigm highlighted the necessity for the church to become an agent of socio-political liberation, while the inculturation paradigm emphasized the necessity of the African church to become ritually contextualised, even though the ecclesial structure would remain foreign (2003:17).

From here Mugambi goes on to examine the church as a framework for collaborative activity, a term Mugambi derives from Lonergan in the introduction to his book *Method in Theology* (1971).

2.5.2 Mugambi's approach to method

Mugambi's approach focuses extensively on the clash between Western theology and African theology. Because I deal with this in a later section, I simply refer to this approach without elaborating on it in this particular section. However, reference needs to be made to Mugambi's issue with Greco-Roman norms of thought that he sees as predominant in defining Western Christian doctrine (Mugambi 2004:9). He is adamant that these norms of thought are detrimental to the emergence of proper African biblical scholarship:

The European Reformation did not dislodge these norms, although it facilitated the emergence of tribal (national) churches that facilitated the emergence of modern European nationalism. It is the responsibility of African biblical scholarship to affirm both the relevance of the gospel and the validity of the cultural and religious heritage of African peoples. Without affirmation of both, Christianity cannot take root in Africa, or anywhere else in those areas where the modern missionary enterprise has operated (Mugambi 2004:9)

The above quote reflects Mugambi's prejudice against European theology as the norm for other cultures and the influence that has been exercised by the missionary movement on the culture of Africa. In his approach to method Mugambi agrees with H. Richard Niebuhr and the five ways he relates the gospel and culture (for detail of these five ways see Niebuhr 1975:1ff).

When colonial rule was finally ended the church was challenged to review its role in the continent. This is the background against which Mugambi's methodology must be viewed.

Mugambi developed his view of method as a framework for collaborative effort (see Mugambi 2003:17-23). In this section of the first chapter Mugambi makes use of Lonergan (1971) and the eight tasks Lonergan envisages as essential for theologians to deal with: research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics and communications (Mugambi 2003:18). Mugambi makes an observation about theological

hermeneutics in this section:

> A theologian who understands theology as a hermeneutic (interpretative) discipline will almost certainly concentrate on the "texts" that will be the object of analysis. However, another theologian may consider that theological texts are themselves dynamic, in the sense that they are produced by living communities in specific cultural contexts, and received (or rejected) by other communities in other cultural contexts. A dynamic approach to hermeneutics will yield a dynamic theology, while a static approach will yield a "fixed" theology (Mugambi 2003:18).

This quote provides insight into Mugambi's approach to hermeneutics (contextual!) and expresses his conclusion that the way words are used is extremely important. Words should always be used concisely and precisely with avoidance of ambiguity and vagueness. Completing this section Mugambi declares that it is only of late that introspective and self-critical approaches to Christian theology have begun to emerge within African theology. He refers to the way Euro-American interpretations of the gospel have been superimposed on African Christianity. He then makes a plea for Africans to articulate their response to the gospel in their own idioms and insights (see Mugambi 2003:22 & 23). All through this section it is clear that Mugambi's purpose is to challenge African theologians to move away from slavish acceptance of Euro-Western approaches and methods in doing theology. Mugambi has earlier referred to the method used in African theology as being what he terms "theological anthropology". In the next section he calls for a change from anthropological theology to theological introspection. In doing this he issues a challenge to African theologians to begin to interact introspectively among themselves, learning from one another and critically evaluating the North Atlantic intellectual heritage in which they have received their academic formation. This critical evaluation should include a thorough critique of theological method (see Mugambi 2003:23).

I need to draw attention to the liberation theology background which forms the foundation for Mugambi's methodology. All through his writings there is constant reference made to the negative influence of Western theology on the African church. This explains his call for self-assertion: throwing off the "ideology of the oppressor" in order to derive a new frame of reference for both the oppressed and the oppressor (Mugambi 2003:24). This process is expressed in liberation, inculturation and reconstruction, all of which Mugambi views as part of an ongoing process to set the African church and African theology free from the imposition of Western Christianity. It is obvious that Mugambi is moving here towards the acceptance of reconstruction theology as a paradigm in African Christian theology. Dedji

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refers to reconstruction theology as a new form of theological hermeneutic developed by African theologians (Dedji 2003:37 & 38). In his critique of method in African theology Mugambi reveals his method of preference. He describes the "inductive method" as being relevant and expresses it thus:

> The challenge is for African Christians to respond to the cries and struggles of the communities of faith whom they represent, and articulate those cries within the framework of the gospel as a relevant message here and now (Mugambi 2003:25).

Mugambi asks how relevant scriptures such as the ones quoted below are for a continent ravaged by disasters, disease, corrupt governance, famine, and much more:

> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Luke 4:18-19).

The task of the theologian is to articulate and apply the proclamations of Jesus! The inductive method becomes relevant because of the way it moves from the circumstantial to the gospel; by the theologian being informed by the situation in which the church has to live. Once again I quote Mugambi in support of his commitment to the inductive method:

> A theological method which is insensitive to the direct experience of the community of faith, no matter how faithful it may be to Universalist dogma, will inevitably produce a theology with which the local people cannot readily identify. In tropical Africa the metaphor of reconstruction has become appealing because of its possibility to evoke the imagination of all sectors of population, and all sectors of the elite (Mugambi 2003:25).

The inductive method advocated by Mugambi does have a number of facets, or one might say steps, which need to be followed with what Mugambi calls intentionality. These levels are complementary and are all necessary for change to take place in the status quo, the end result that Mugambi looks for in the application of theology. Mugambi lists these as four operations:

- Experiencing one's own experience. In other words, understanding, judging and deciding.

- Understanding the unity and relations of our experienced experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding.

- Affirming the reality of our experienced and understood experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding.

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- Deciding to operate in accord with the norms immanent in the spontaneous relatedness of our experience, understood, affirmed experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding.

The point Mugambi seeks to make is that theologians cannot operate simply on the levels of description, analysis and synthesis, but their theology must lead to constructive action. Or, in Mugambi's theory, it leads to reconstructive action. Theologians need to move from static to dynamic modes of thinking by allowing their work and community environment to change their thinking as well as allowing their thinking to impact and change their environment.

The conclusion I come to on Mugambi's methodology is that he opts for an inductive method within an overall commitment to contextual hermeneutics. Dedji (2003:46) refers to Mugambi's conviction that "Christian theology should be a contextual response to people's anxieties....Mugambi's theological programme is under-girded by the religious, cultural and socio-political realities which shape the daily lives of African peoples".

2.6 Features of Mugambi's theology

There is constant repudiation of the negative influence of Western theology on African theology by most African theologians and the same theme is prevalent in most of Mugambi's works. A random selection of publications gives evidence of this bias being common among such African theologians:

Ndung'u & Mwaura (2005) contains a chapter describing African religion as being the root paradigm for inculturation. In this chapter (chapter two, written by Adam arap Chepkwony) mention is made of twenty-two notable Western scholars who have not involved themselves in the study of African religion yet whose writings are used as reference books in universities. The author comments that most African scholars received their education in the West under Western scholars and were influenced by Western approaches to scholarship (Ndung'u & Mwaura 2005:36).

In Kinoti & Waliggo (1997:3) Laurenti Magesa observes that the vast majority of African scholars have internationalized the "methodology" of the northern hemisphere.

In Healey & Sybertz (2005:28) the comment is made that "if the African local churches are to have authentic African Christianity, African Christians have to challenge a too exclusively Western Church culture".

Manus expresses similar discontent with Western approaches to Christianity in the introduction to *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa* (2003):

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> For much too long, African theological education has been integrated into the mainstream European and North American academic tradition, neglecting the norms, values, principles and insights inherent in African culture. African theological discourse on issues such as eschatology, salvation and ecclesiology has tended to remain perpetually foreign and neo-colonialist in thought, language and expression; and quite often, irrelevant to the contemporary African context. Such alien discourse does not help us to address ourselves to the material, moral and spiritual problems that preoccupy Africans in their cultural settings. Must we still keep on living in the European mindset represented by people like Friedrich von Hegel who stated that "Africans were incapable of self-perception and self-description" and had to be civilized by Europeans who had supposedly attained a "higher" level of cultural consciousness? (Manus 2003:1).

From this brief survey it may be concluded that there is reaction among African theologians against the way Western thought processes and method were imposed on African theology. In the next section I examine Mugambi's antagonism towards Western influence on African theology in order to establish where he stands in relation to other African theologians on this issue. In order to do this I survey his various writings, beginning with his three major publications and then proceeding to chapters he has written in various African theological works.

2.6.1 Mugambi's main publications

In *African Christian Theology, An Introduction* (1989), Mugambi examines the Christian missionary enterprise of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries during which the most successful expansion of the Christian missionary church took place, especially in East Africa. He considers this movement to have been detrimental to African culture and African religious heritage. He, along with the theologians cited above, perceives the missionaries as labelling African people as "primitive, heathen and pagan" (Mugambi 1989:40). In his opinion, Western people saw themselves as further along the evolutionary tree than Africans and thus as possessing unquestioned superiority.

> Early Christian missionaries to East Africa proclaimed the irrelevance of the African cultural and religious heritage to Christianity. Their assumption was that Christianity and Western civilization were inseparable and synonymous and therefore their African converts should abandon their African cultural and religious backgrounds and adopt Western culture as an outward indication of conversion to Christianity (Mugambi 1989:40).

The way that the missionaries presented Western denominational interpretations and expressions of the gospel as the Christian life is offensive to Mugambi. This offence is carried over into his dissatisfaction with the influence of Western theology upon African theologians. He is of the opinion that seminaries have generally shown themselves more

concerned with imparting facts about Christianity (usually those understood in the West) than helping their students relate the Christian faith creatively to the African situation (Mugambi 1989:11). He refers to the way many present and past African theologians have had an overdose of European influence (Mugambi 1989:15).

In various places in *From Liberation to Reconstruction: Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), Mugambi deals with the influence of Western notions of culture and theology on society, culture, and ecclesial affairs and views this influence as being detrimental to the development of an African perspective. He is also critical of the influence of Western missionaries on the African church that hindered it from developing a truly African Christianity. Beginning with the second chapter of this publication, where he deals with the cultural context of Christian theology, Mugambi criticizes the assumption that the issues which are relevant in the North Atlantic part of the world are also relevant in other parts of the world. He then states that theologians in the African context do not need the approval of theologians from other parts of the world (Mugambi 1995:23).

> African Christianity is characteristically African only if it is liberated from the cultural and ritual garb in which it has been trapped through the missionary legacy (Mugambi 1995:24).

He repeatedly calls for the themes of Christian theology to be examined in the African's own cultural context. He is of the opinion that Western Christian theology flows from the Greco-Roman world in which it was developed. For instance, in his view the doctrine of the Trinity is tied to a Neo-Platonic formulation and Africans need to examine it in an African Christian theological context. Mugambi also refers to the differences between the medieval doctrines of community and environment and contemporary African formulations of these doctrines (Mugambi 1995:25). When Mugambi deals with theological reconstruction in Africa he refers to the church as the social institution in Africa which is the most accessible medium of communication because of the way it straddles the past and the future. He then proceeds to criticise the Christian missionary enterprise:

> Unfortunately the Christian missionary enterprise has bequeathed upon the church in Africa a legacy of cultural imperialism, such that every imported denomination has brought with it the trappings of the culture of the people who brought it. However, the ecumenical movement has brought with it a new awareness of the necessity of Christians of every culture to mutually appreciate the heritage of one another without prejudice. It now remains the task of African Christians to assert their own cultural heritage just as Christians of other cultures have done (Mugambi 1995:50).

In the chapter "Between Despair and Hope", Mugambi (1995:80) again refers to the cultural

invasion of Africa by outsiders such as Moslems and Christians. These invaders regarded themselves as inherently superior, or at least, the bearers of a superior culture and religion. The criticism that Mugambi has of the modern missionary enterprise stems from a number of perspectives that he holds such as:

- Western Christianity has an authoritarian spirit dating back to the formation of the Holy Roman Empire.

- He associates the movement with imperialism and oppression.

- The imposition of Western theological norms on the African church.

- The identification of the missionaries with colonial oppression.

- The imposition of Western culture and the denigration of African culture.

- European culture establishing the norms for all cultures (see Mugambi 1995:93-96).

Mugambi is particularly concerned with the way theology is used in the African context as a means of ideological propaganda. When dealing with educational policies he is clear that African theological institutions need to have the African cultural and religious heritage as part of their curriculum.

> If the church in Africa is expected to be the 'salt of the earth' and the 'light of the world' (Matthew 5:13-16), its process of theological education must necessarily be rooted in the African culture and religious heritage, just as all theological education in Europe and North America is rooted in the heritage of the people of Europe and North America (Mugambi 1995:103).

Mugambi often refers to "the new world order" as being important for the African context. In order for Africa to develop within its context he calls for the flow of information to be reversed in order to redress the imbalance existing from the "bombardment" of ideas from the North Atlantic in all forums, including the pulpit. He points out that most of the books used in the curricula of schools, colleges, universities and seminaries in Africa are authored by non-Africans and published outside the continent (see Mugambi 1995:155). Materials used in Africa need to be written and published by Africans and disseminated abroad as well. Commenting on the perspective of converts about the missionaries, Mugambi states:

> Today in Africa, how do foreign missionaries portray themselves? In the past, most of them have presented themselves like agents of Caesar, rather than spokesmen of the subjects of Caesar. More often than not, they have been citizens, addressing themselves to subjects (1995:229).

In this regard, Mugambi is of the opinion that, during the cold war there was some question about the mandate of foreign missionaries in Africa. In this period he finds the line between theology and ideology to be obscured. Where did the dividing line between evangelistic

campaigns and ideological propaganda lie? His view is that the West relied largely on the church and para-church agencies for the propagation of its values, despite the Western claim to the separation of church and state in their political systems (see Mugambi 1995:233). To summarise the approach Mugambi takes in *From Liberation to Reconstruction (*1995) with regard to the influence of the West on Africa, the conclusion may be drawn that he makes little distinction between the struggles of Africa against colonial and neo-colonial domination and the struggles against the North Atlantic Christian missionary enterprise. This view derives from what Mugambi considers a theological error on the part of the missionaries, namely, that they identified the cultural process of acculturation with the theological process of conversion (see Mugambi 1995:235).

This random selection out of *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) serves to highlight the anti-Western cultural and theological stance Mugambi has adopted and reinforces the conclusion derived from *African Christian Theology* (1989). In order to complete this section I examine Mugambi's *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) which contains many instances of Mugambi's criticism of Western culture and theology with regard to the agency of the missionary enterprise.

The practice of the missionaries of training small bands of catechists, evangelists and teachers comes under Mugambi's scrutiny as he considers these trainees to be effective propagandists of Western Christianity and European culture amongst African communities. He criticises the way the missionaries were often used as agents of the colonial governments (see Mugambi 2003:85). In spite of this, his approach to the missionaries is not totally negative as he does concede that there were positive factors resulting from the enterprise:

> There were missionaries who were racial bigots and colonial bullies, but there were also others who were excellent pastors, counsellors and teachers. Some were businessmen and others were diplomats. Thus, both the negative and the positive influences must be acknowledged in a balanced assessment of the missionary impact in tropical Africa. The social transformation of tropical Africa during the colonial era was influenced most significantly by the missionary enterprise (Mugambi 2003:86).

My assessment of Mugambi's attitude to Western theology is that he is concerned that African theologians should develop a theology for the African context and not simply rely upon Western publications. He has clearly stated that "a church without a solid theology has no chance of survival" (Mugambi 2003:103). The point he makes is that such theology can only be developed by local theologians, and not by expatriates. He also criticises the curricula in African theological institutions as generally excluding the humanities and social sciences

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in the training of ministers and advises the introduction of a first degree to precede theological training (see Mugambi 2003:104, 105).

In a subsection entitled "The African Church of the Future" Mugambi asks the question, "How can African churches be authentically African?" In response he refers to the way African churches established by the missionary enterprise have remained under the direction of ecclesial centres in North Atlantic countries. He points out that these structures may be irrelevant for the needs of the local churches but are maintained because they are necessary for the missionaries. He further points out that most local Christian communities are incapable of maintaining such structures and states the need for communities to develop structures that are consistent with the cultural heritage and contemporary needs of the local Christian community. He questions the need of maintaining such missionary-focused structures:

> Those churches spread their influence in Africa and elsewhere during the colonial period. What justification do they have to insist on maintaining their administrative structures worldwide, within their respective confessional families? (Mugambi 2003:108).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi portrays the influence exerted by the missionary enterprise as part of the infiltration of Western culture and lifestyle into the African context. While he does recognise the good done by the missionaries such as schooling, hospitals, establishing of churches, social transformation and much more, he is nevertheless critical of the destructive impact this infiltration has had on African culture and especially on African communalism. He also advocates the formation of a body of theology produced by African theologians for Africa, freed from the cultural influences of Western thought processes. In a number of articles and chapters in other publications Mugambi maintains this same attitude to Western influence and I offer some of them in order to substantiate this conclusion.

2.6.2 Publications that give evidence of Mugambi's anti-Western stance

In order to keep this section as short as possible I list those articles that are particularly descriptive of Mugambi's stance.

In a chapter written for *The Church in African Christianity* (1998:5-26) he deals with the Ecumenical movement and the church in Africa and I offer one quote that deals with the Kikuyu Conference of 1913 to illustrate this:

> African Christians were not involved in any of the proceedings. The missionaries saw themselves as the authorities on the future of Christianity in Africa and they

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did not think it necessary to involve Africans in their discussions. The African dimension was missing (Mugambi & Magesa 1998:11).

In a chapter on "Religion and Social Reconstruction" in *Church-State Relations* (2004), Mugambi expresses his concern over the inability of the African church to stand united on issues of social concern because of what he terms a "highly fragmented and competitive missionary background" from which African Christianity has evolved (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:33).

In a chapter on "Ecumenical Contextual Theological Reflection in Eastern Africa 1989-1999" in *Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa*, Mugambi voices his concerns about the lack of available African theological publications:

> Our experience during the 1990s has confirmed that there is a great need for contextually relevant and affordable theological texts in Africa. Christian bookshops throughout the continent are stocked with books from Europe and North America (Ndung'u & Mwaura 2005:27).

This is expressed in numerous other writings to which Mugambi has made a contribution, where criticism of Western influence is a significant factor. In most of these publications Mugambi has contributed a chapter or an introduction in which he asserts the same criticisms as the examples I have given in 2.6.1 above. This short sub-section serves to emphasise the conclusion drawn there. In order to complete this section dealing with Mugambi's biases I now offer a short examination of the tendency Mugambi has, along with other African theologians, to favour the Old Testament scriptures.

2.6.3 How Mugambi favours the Old Testament scriptures

Mugambi's foray into liberation theology led him to focus on the great motif of liberation portrayed in Exodus. Moses was the deliverer representing the oppressed people of Israel and the one who led them into freedom from bondage in Egypt. This example became the model on which liberation theologians built their theology. Furthermore, this narrative has great appeal for a people who have suffered colonial forms of domination. African people identify easily with the Israelites and identify their leaders with Moses (see Mugambi 1995:2). At the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi in 1990, Mugambi presented a paper entitled "The future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa" in which he called for a shift in paradigms from post-Exodus to post-exilic imagery. At this conference he put forward his notion of reconstruction as an alternate model for the African church's move into the future. In his view, the twenty-first century should be a century of reconstruction in Africa, building on old foundations to bring about constitutional reforms and economic

revitalisation (see Mugambi 1995:5). Mugambi offers a critique of liberation theology and the Exodus motif on pages 13-15 of *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), pointing out five essential differences between the Israelite's experience under Pharaoh and that of the African colonial experience under the North Atlantic powers. He offers the theme of reconstruction as better suited to the African situation. The concept is rooted in the post-exilic books of Haggai and Nehemiah. Mugambi does refer to the teaching of Jesus in the demand for social change in Matthew 23: 1-13 and Luke 12-13 as a model for reconstruction. Mugambi is very focused on the cultural context of theology in Africa:

> The dominant theme in African Christian theology during the past twenty years has been liberation. Inculturation and adaptation have been variations of that theme. Essentially, the primary question in theological circles has been how African Christians can be liberated from domination by the missionary legacy on which they have been nurtured, to enable them to participate as full members of the international Christian community. The dominant biblical motif in African Christian theology has been the Exodus...Thus the Old Testament has occupied a central place in African Christian theological reflection, while the New Testament has tended to take a secondary role (Mugambi 1995:24).

Mugambi points to the need for fresh themes such as reconstruction and restoration as well as renewal and survival. In putting forward these themes he relies heavily on the post-exilic literature for foundational support.

As we enter the twenty-first century the challenge is to discern motifs that would be relevant for a theology of transformation and reconstruction. Such texts might, for example, be the Exilic motif: (Jeremiah), the Deuteronomic motif (Josiah), the Restorative motif (Isaiah 61:4), and the Reconstructive motif (Haggai and Nehemiah) (Mugambi 1995:39).

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi includes a chapter entitled "Text and Context in Applied Christian Theology" in which he follows a progression from Moses as a liberationist through Nehemiah's reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem to portraying Jesus as a reconstructionist (2003:171-174). He points out that the Sermon on the Mount is a concise outline of reconstructive theology and he is adamant that the gospel calls for a new social consciousness in order for the Jewish people to regain their dignity after being subjugated under the Roman Empire. He views Jesus as the founder of a new social movement, inaugurating a new era that transcended the old Mosaic norms. In similar fashion the Christian faith should impact every culture that comes under its influence (see Mugambi 2003:174). In this passage Mugambi mentions the need for converts and their descendants to be free to appropriate the gospel in their own way, without the tutelage of missionary masters

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and instructors.

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi relies heavily on the Old Testament Post-Exilic texts to support his reconstruction theology. When Mugambi does refer to the New Testament it should be noted that his interpretation of the New Testament texts is influenced by the Old Testament background from which many are derived. He is himself aware of the dependence of African theology on the Old Testament and acknowledges the identification of African Christians with the Old Testament people of God. This will become clearer when I pursue his development of reconstruction theology.

2.7 Conclusion

Jesse Mugambi is a complex person and, as may be seen from the above, comes from a complex background. The following is a brief summary of this chapter:

In section two I show that Mugambi's personal and educational history leads one to conclude that the contrast between his home life and schooling and the Mau Mau war context in which he spent his childhood years, was very diverse. Much of his anti-Western, anti-colonial stance was developed in those early years. His antagonism toward the modern missionary enterprise is also understandable in the light of the war years spent on a mission station during which questions were raised about the integrity of the missionaries. During his education he assimilated liberation theology and this may also have been confirmed in the light of his later theological training. These early inputs developed in him a strong ecumenical stance that has remained with him to the present time.

In section three I showed that Mugambi developed his theology over a period of time that spanned the injustices and oppression of the colonial era, followed by the neo-colonial era which evidenced much of the same injustice and oppression. It is in this context that he developed a theology of reconstruction with the caveat that liberation needs to be a constant factor as long as dictatorial and oppressive leaders hold sway. Mugambi is strongly opposed to any form of oppression and champions the underprivileged and poor. He is strongly committed to living out his convictions.[13]

In section four I examined Mugambi's theological background. He developed his theology in

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[13] This may be seen from his involvement with the Starehe Boys Centre and the way he took a year's sabbatical from the University of Nairobi in 2008 in order to function as principal of the boys centre until a new man was appointed (Personal conversation with Mugambi in February 2009 in Nairobi).

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the context of the emerging Afro-centric movement that approached everything from culture to theology from an African perspective. His training in philosophy brought him into contact with West African philosophers such as Kwame Appiah (1989) Kwame Nkruma (1978), Julius Nyerere (1970), Leopold Senghor (1964), and Kwasi Wiredu (1980) who were the fathers of ethno-centrism and Afro-centric theology. His anti-Western theological stance for African Christianity developed during this time as he came to resist the notion that Western theology was the norm for other cultures. In spite of Mugambi having studied Western theologians and been influenced by them, he puts forward a strong call for the development of an African Christian theology that is mentioned in most of his writings.

In section five I examined Mugambi's approach to method and concluded that he favours the inductive method, which is contextual and experiential, resulting in decision-making out of encounter (Mugambi 2003: 3 and 4). Mugambi cites Moses and Paul in their encounters with God as examples of this. He concludes this section with the following comment:

> The *inductive method* articulates theology from the perspective of the believers – the respondents – whereas the *deductive method* portrays the perspective of the classical doctrines of the church – the institution (Mugambi 2003: 4).

Mugambi is concerned that in the African Christian theological context method should take cognisance of the thought patterns of African people and not necessarily follow the method used by Western theologians as such method ignores the more existential culture of African people. In taking up this position Mugambi positions himself in the mainstream of African theological method, although there are some African theologians who take a more Western stance and favour the deductive method.

> Many tools generated and applied by Anglo-European and other scholars can and certainly should be used in Africa, but the quest for a relevant – to Africa – exegesis and hermeneutic of the Bible is ours. And, as Bujo argues, the rereading of the Bible from an African perspective is the appropriate starting point of an African Christian Theology (Mugambi in Mugambi & Smit 2004:84).

In section 6 I referred to Mugambi's reaction to the presumed arrogance of Western theologians who give the impression that Western theology sets the norm for other parts of the world. Mugambi goes to lengths to present Africa as the earlier recipient of Christianity and points to the Fathers of the church who hailed from Africa. He is adamant that a voice be given to African theologians on an equal basis with that of European and North American theology. A further factor I comment on in this section is the bias he has toward Old Testament scriptures in order to substantiate the call for reconstruction. Mention should be made that Mugambi does focus strongly on those aspects of Jesus' teaching that are used by

most liberation theologians.

In summary, the conclusion that may be drawn from the background material I have referred to in this chapter would be that Mugambi is a product of the era that covered the collapse of colonialism and the establishment of African independence in the Kenyan political arena. This period was influenced by the end of the cold war, the collapse of communism, the failure of Western aid schemes, the emergence of a theological and philosophical voice in Africa and the education of many African scholars in Western contexts. Mugambi is a product of these different forces and expresses many of the perspectives found in typically African liberation circles. Mugambi is a man of his time: affected by the neo-colonialist dictators who have ravaged Africa, the brokenness of the church in disunity, the poverty endemic in most African rural areas, the lack of proper educational facilities, and the desire to see Africa emerge in her own right as a recognized player in the world theatre. In the next chapter I will focus on the way Mugambi developed his version of Reconstruction theology.

3. From Liberation to Reconstruction

The development of Mugambi's reconstruction theology

3. 1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I noted that Jesse Mugambi moved from the liberation theology he embraced in his earlier years and developed reconstruction theology as an alternative to liberation and inculturation theologies. Reconstruction theology is a relatively new school of thought within African theology. Charles Villa-Vicencio published his book, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* in 1992, three years before Jesse Mugambi published his 1995 volume, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War.* However, Mugambi first presented the notion of reconstruction in propositional form at the All Africa Conference of Churches in Mombasa in 1991 (Mugambi 1995:5) and then developed his views on reconstruction theology over a number of years. In this chapter I discuss reconstruction theology as one of the keys to understanding Mugambi's theology as a whole and therefore his position on the relationship between the church and the reign of God.

In tracing the development of Mugambi's move from a theology of liberation to a theology of reconstruction I will approach the topic in the following way:

a) African theologies of liberation: Although there have been various theologies of liberation, such as South American liberation theologies, American black theology, Asian liberation theologies, various Eastern liberation theologies, it is primarily African liberation theology that has been a factor in the development of Mugambi's theology. In this section I trace this influence on Mugambi.

b) Influential conferences: From an early age Mugambi became involved in various student and ecumenical conferences. These conferences influenced Mugambi's thinking in various ways. In this section I analyse this influence and comment on the significance for Mugambi's later theological development.

c) Reconstruction theology described: I examine three influential theologians who have been involved in the development of reconstruction theology in Africa, namely Dedji, Getui and Villa Vicencio, followed by an examination of Mugambi as a reconstruction theologian.

d) Mugambi and reconstruction theology: I trace the early years and Mugambi's move from liberation to reconstruction and seek to analyse his present position.

e) The Biblical basis for Mugambi's reconstruction theology: I present the change in focus from the Exodus motif to the post exilic motif and the influence such a change had on Mugambi's development of reconstruction theology.

f) Early notions of reconstruction: I trace Mugambi's early theology of reconstruction and attempt to show the change in emphases as Mugambi has moved from liberation to reconstruction.

g) Developed notions of reconstruction: I show how Mugambi has progressed in his focus in reconstruction theology and how he has returned to a measure of liberation theology because of his understanding of salvation.

h) Conclusion: In the conclusion I draw together the different sections and present a critical analysis of Mugambi's reconstruction theology.

3.2 African theologies of liberation

There have been various players in the field of liberation theology including the Americas, Latin American liberation theology, Black theology in the USA, Asian liberation theologies, Minjung theology, Filipino theology, Waterbuffalo theology, and Burakumin theology. These different liberation theologies may have had some measure of influence on Mugambi's liberation theology. However, it is mainly African liberation theology that influenced Mugambi in the development of his early views on liberation and salvation. Mugambi emphasised the importance of liberation theology in the African context in the following statement, "When the history of Africa in the twentieth century comes to be written, the most dominant theme will have to be liberation" (Mugambi 1995:38). In the same section Mugambi notes the prominence of the slave trade and colonisation in the nineteenth century. An understanding of liberation is essential in understanding Mugambi's call for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction. I will offer a brief overview of African liberation theology.

Various historical factors are behind the concept of liberation: racism, slavery, the slave trade, colonialism and the missionary movement, and Western ethno-centrism. These factors are important for "a study of church history in isolation from secular events distorts such history, because the church functions within the world" (Mugambi 1989:21).

The history of Christianity in Africa has often been presented in isolation from the history of the colonisation of Africa by Europe, although the two processes have been inextricably woven together (Mugambi 1989:21).

As part of this section I will examine the two factors I mentioned earlier, namely, the slave trade and the colonising of Africa.

3.2.1 The slave trade

The devastation wreaked on Africa by the slave trade cannot be grasped unless viewed from a close perspective. In 2005 I had occasion to visit the slavery museum in Benin, the point of no return for slaves being taken to the Americas. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. I came away sickened at what humans can do to others in their greed for money. This visit gave me a fresh understanding and changed my perspective on the slave trade forever.

There have been two particular stages to Africans being subjected to the slave trade, the first across the Indian Ocean and then across the Atlantic Ocean (see Mugambi 2009:15). Mugambi views the Portuguese as the first nation to practice slavery in Africa; however, Wright (2000: 1) points out that slavery was practiced in Africa from prehistoric times to the modern era. In Africa slaves were regarded as property, while others saw them as dependants that might eventually be integrated into the families of slave owners. In earlier times both slave owners and slaves were black, although probably from different ethnic groups. According to Wright the practice changed in the seventh century when two non-African groups of slave traders began operating in Africa: Arab Muslims and Europeans. The Arabs operated mainly on the East coast of the continent and the Europeans mainly on the West coast. I cannot trace the history of slavery in Africa in this section as it is too vast a subject; however, it is the Atlantic slave trade that has had the most powerful impact on Mugambi. Mugambi refers to the way that Western Christians justified the slave trade by viewing the African as an "animated instrument" who was "nothing in himself" (Mugambi 2009:15). African slaves became a cheap "commodity" supplying labour in the Americas, particularly in the Caribbean islands (Wright 2000:6).

> Between AD1500 and 1800, Africa south of the Sahara was related to Europe mainly as a source of cheap labour which was also big business. For three hundred years the church was silent on the evil, and even when individual Christians began to speak out, they could only mobilise public opinion through voluntary societies unrelated to the institutional ecclesiastical structures (Mugambi 2009:15).

Mugambi closes this section on slavery with a comment that he cannot accept that Africans

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themselves collaborated with the slave traders. He also denies that Africans were warlike (see Mugambi 2009:16). Mugambi views the slave trade as linked to racism with Africans being treated as non-humans. This view is corroborated by Bosch:

> In the ancient Roman Empire as well as medieval Europe, slavery had little to do with race. After the "discovery" of the non-western world beyond the Muslim territories this changed; henceforth slaves could only be people of colour. The fact that they were different made it possible for the victorious westerners to regard them as inferior... And all along the (assumed) superiority of westerners over others became more firmly entrenched and regarded as axiomatic (Bosch 1991:227).

The factors concerning the slave trade affected Mugambi in his views of the church and of western people.

3.2.2 Colonialism

The colonising of Africa has influenced Mugambi's views in many areas, such as the missionary endeavour, ownership and control of property, western ethno-superiority, the nature of the church, and liberation and salvation. In *Christianity and African Culture* (2009, first published 1989), Mugambi has a number of sections in the second chapter where he deals with colonisation and the effect it had on Africans. These sections are:

- the modern missionary enterprise and the colonisation of Africa;
- Christianity and anti-colonial struggle;
- Christianity and African nationalism;
- Christianity in post-colonial Africa;
- the Christian missionary enterprise and the ideological battle for Africa, and
- post-colonial relations between church and state in Africa (Mugambi 2009:16-25).

Mugambi quotes Neill to highlight four invading forces in Africa that reinforced one another and had an overwhelming impact that permanently transformed Africa:

> Explorers opened up the way into Africa while satisfying their geographical curiosity. Missionaries followed and established mission stations which were to become the centres of the invading culture and points of contact with the colonial administration. Most missionaries were interested in "saving" the Africans.
>
> Administrators were more interested in the social and political impact of missionary activity. If the missionaries could teach Africans to become obedient subjects, they could be assured of protection and even financial support from the colonial office.

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Settlers and traders could then exploit the resources (both human and natural) for the benefit of the industries in Europe and North America (see Mugambi 2009:16).

Mugambi judges the modern missionary enterprise as having had a positive and negative impact in Africa south of the Sahara. In spite of the association between explorers, missionaries and administrators, the impact of the Bible in local languages gave rise to liberation movements among African Christians (Mugambi 2009:18). Many African Christians broke away from missionary institutions and, as David Barrett (1968) observed, "The schism against missionary institutions was more likely to occur where the Bible had been translated into African languages". Gathogo (2011:138-152) gives a detailed description of the expansion of colonialism that reflects Mugambi's concern over the effects on the self-worth of African people. Gathogo states that, "To Africans, all Europeans coming to Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth century were viewed as forces of imperialism, which had come in order to invade and conquer" (2011:141). Beidelman (1982) has described the link between the colonial authorities and the missionaries from the Church Missionary Society in East Africa. Collusion, whether conscious or not, existed between the colonial authorities and many of the missionaries. This factor has had an on-going effect upon Mugambi's thinking. His movement from liberation to reconstruction was influenced by the link between freedom and a new reconstructed society.

Because of the influence of the slave trade and colonialism on African society, Mugambi avers that this influence has allowed an emphasis on the Exodus paradigm. Moses is viewed as the exemplary leader who leads his people from bondage to freedom. Mugambi therefore states, "The Old Testament has occupied a central place in African Christian theological reflection, while the New Testament has tended to take a secondary role" (Mugambi 1995:24). However, Mugambi rejects the Exodus paradigm as being relevant to Africa's pre-liberation context. He shows that there are too many differences between the experience of the Israelites under Pharaoh and the African colonial experience under the North Atlantic powers (Mugambi 1995:14). Two conferences were instrumental in the change in Mugambi's theological thinking.

3.3 Influential conferences

1) The 1976 EATWOT conference (The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians) and,

2) The 1990 AACC conference (All Africa Council of Churches) in Nairobi.

The 1976 EATWOT conference

Mugambi had consistently emphasised the complementary nature of the socio-political and the spiritual in the life of Africa (see Dedji 2003:50). At this conference Mugambi therefore took exception to the over-emphasis of the Latin American theologians on the class struggle as the core business of Christian theological analysis. Mugambi further took exception to the name of the conference, regarding the name to have negative connotations that marginalised the countries involved (see Mugambi 1989:vi & vii and Dedji 2003:50). Following this conference Mugambi came to the opinion that:

The end of the cold war brought with it the demise of apartheid, and the end of most colonial regimes on the continent. He strongly argues that whereas the project of liberation presupposed an external enemy, the challenge is now to identify a project which would release the energies of Africa's individuals and communities for their own self-fulfillment (Dedji 2003:51 and see Mugambi 1995:38).

The 1990 AACC conference

In February 1990 the President and General Secretary of the AACC invited Mugambi to present a paper at that year's conference reflecting the way ahead for the church in Africa. The paper he presented was entitled, "The future of the church and the church of the future in Africa". This paper represented Mugambi's final departure from the liberation paradigm to a paradigm of reconstruction. He did this by proposing a move from the Exodus imagery to a post-exilic imagery (see Gathogo 2011:116).

> Reconstruction is the new priority for African nations in the 1990s (and beyond). The churches and their theologians will need to respond to this new priority in relevant fashion, to facilitate this process of reconstruction. The process will require considerable efforts of reconciliation and confidence building. It will also require re-orientation and re-training. New frontiers of mission will need to be identified and explored. The various projects of the All Africa Conference of Churches are challenged to become constructive agents in this process (Mugambi 1991:36).

The conclusion may be drawn that these two conferences were seminal in the development of Mugambi's thinking.

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3.4 Reconstruction theology described

As I have pointed out above, reconstruction theology is not a completely new concept but forms part of the developing African theological spectrum along with liberation theology, acculturation and inculturation theology, and neo-Pentecostal theology. In the wider context of Western theology the notion of reconstruction has been called by other names such as transformation theology, the social gospel, moral rearmament and more. Although the objectives of such theologies may not be the same as reconstruction theology in the African context, they nevertheless all seek for radical change in the structures of society in order to bring the reign of God into human affairs. In this section, I will look at the way in which certain theologians have chosen the route of reconstruction in order to find theological solutions to the problems that plague African society in general. I begin with Villa-Vicencio as the author of the earliest published work on reconstruction theology, and then examine Getui, followed by Mugambi and the contribution he has made. I have placed this section at the beginning of the chapter in order to describe their definitions of reconstruction theology as a precursor to examining Mugambi's contribution to the development of reconstruction theology.

3.4.1 Charles Villa-Vicencio

Charles Villa-Vicencio is executive director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in Cape Town, the former National Research Director for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and formally Professor of Religion and Society at the University of Cape Town. In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (1999), Villa-Vicencio contributed a chapter entitled "Liberation and reconstruction: the unfinished agenda" in which he describes the need for a new approach to the problems of a post-apartheid society in South Africa (Rowland 1999:159). However, in *A Theology of Reconstruction* (1992), Villa-Vicencio describes the situation which motivated him to embrace a theology of reconstruction:

> The various contextual theologies that have over the years emerged within the South African struggle have constituted an important part of resistance within this country. This same struggle, now in a decisively new phase, is contributing to further theological turmoil and renewal as the process of political reconstruction and nation-building unfolds (Villa Vicencio 1992:6).

Villa-Vicencio proceeds to describe the way in which the quest for liberation that was formerly grounded almost exclusively in the biblical theme of the Exodus began to draw on different biblical metaphors. He mentions the wilderness experience before the nation of

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Israel entered the Promised Land, the period of the exile that preceded the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the post-exilic return of the Babylonian exiles (Villa-Vicencio 1992:6). He emphasises the need for past realities to inform the creation of a new future. In the context of the South African situation and the new society that needs to develop, Villa-Vicencio (1992:7) points to the need to develop new social structures with which people will be obliged to live for generations to come. He gives the following description of the kind of reconstruction needed:

> The kind of theology of reconstruction demanded by this challenge is in every sense a post-exilic theology. It addresses a situation within which political exiles are quite literally returning home, having left the country in steady streams since the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress in 1960. It involves the important task of breaking down prejudices of race, class and sexism, and the difficult task of creating an all-inclusive (non-racial and democratic) society built on the very values denied the majority of people under apartheid (Villa-Vicencio 1992:8).

His description of reconstruction theology serves as a summary of his approach:

> A theology of reconstruction is pre-eminently a contextual theology. It explicitly addresses the present needs of a particular society (Villa-Vicencio 1992:41).

Over a period of time, Villa-Vicencio has moved from liberation theology to embrace the need for more constructive societal change. It is this societal change that forms much of the content of his book in which he focuses on a wide spectrum of disciplines, including economics, ethics, human rights, politics and theology, as all being necessary to contribute to the reconstruction of liberated nations. His concept of reconstruction involves what he terms "nation building", and he judges the church's past contribution to such reconstruction as lacking. He questions whether the church is in fact capable of making a meaningful contribution to good government, and whether the task would not be better handled by secular forces (Villa-Vicencio 1992:23).

> There can be no healing or sense of completion in the health, purpose and security of the individual without the restoration of entire community (Villa-Vicencio 1992:166).

This quote expresses the breadth of Villa-Vicencio's call for radical change in the structures of African society. His position may be applied in both colonial and post-colonial Africa because many of the injustices of colonialism have been perpetuated in post-colonial Africa. All sectors of African society are in need of being overhauled and the church, in particular, has a formative role to play in setting such an example in those societies that will offer an incentive to change. This sums up Villa-Vicencio's understanding of reconstruction.

3.4.2 Mary Getui

Mary Getui is the Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kenyatta University, and Associate Professor of Religious Studies. She is former Director of Undergraduate Studies and former Chairperson, Department of Religious Studies.

Mary Getui offers some insights into her approach to the reconstruction paradigm in the introduction to the volume of essays edited by her and Emmanuel Obeng, *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays* (2003). She mentions the concerns of Third World Christians with regard to the widening chasm between the affluent and the destitute in the context of the Third World. She also expresses concern over the way Third World theologies are built on old theological models inherited from affluent Western nations. The concern she expresses is whether such old models have the ability to challenge and overthrow the structures of injustice and develop new theological insights which would reinterpret the gospel in ways and concepts that are meaningful for the peoples of the Third World.

> The oppressed and exploited peoples need new theological models and interpretations of the Gospel which can promote their struggles for liberation. In particular, these new models should facilitate a deeper rooting of the Christian message within the cultures of the people in respectful dialogue with individuals and communities in their specific religious heritage and contemporary experience (Getui & Obeng 2003:1).

Getui refers to the meeting of the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians in Dar es Salaam in August, 1976, where the Association of Third World Theologians was formed (EATWOT). In 1993, the Kenya chapter of EATWOT was launched and one of the themes that emerged was "Theology of Reconstruction: Towards a Just Africa". Getui mentions the need of an approach that will understand that a "Theology of Reconstruction relates to ecology, women, children, health, the food crisis, poverty, politics, and the quest for African identity" (Getui and Obeng 2003:2). In concluding the introduction to this publication, Getui expresses the hope that "this volume will assist in reconstruction of thought, ideas, attitudes and strategies, not only in the topics discussed here, but in all aspects of life" (Getui & Obeng 2003:9). The wide variety of topics covered in this volume makes it clear that the authors view reconstruction as the restructuring of every facet of African life, including such diverse subjects as the creation (environment), women and their place and role, children and education and abuse, the AIDS epidemic, the food crisis, poverty, political pluralism and African identity. One may conclude that Getui has as wide-ranging a focus as Villa-Vicencio.

3.4.3 Jesse Mugambi

His volume of essays entitled, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995) may be regarded as one of the most significant texts on a theology of reconstruction in Africa. In this sub-section I focus especially on two essays in this volume, namely, "From liberation to reconstruction" and "Theological reconstruction in Africa". I also refer to an essay entitled "Religion and social reconstruction in post-colonial Africa" (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004). I make further reference to comments in a paper he delivered to the Anglican Church leadership in the Great Lakes region in 2005 entitled, "Applied Ethics and Globalisation: an African Perspective", as well as a comment in *Reconstruction and renewal in African Christian Theology* (Dedji 2003:45-87). In Mugambi's earlier works, leading up to the publication of *African Christian theology: An introduction* (1989), the dominant theological concept that he employed was that of liberation. Liberation was understood by him as political liberation from colonial oppression (the self-determination of nation states) but also liberation from continued forms of economic deprivation and injustice as well as freedom from imposed cultural norms. Liberation was also understood as a theological category, namely as a prerequisite and essential component of salvation, understood as a comprehensive sense of communal health. Such salvation is defined as the ultimate hope of realizing or attaining self-realization and self-fulfilment (Conradie 2006:6).

Liberation may be regarded as the dominant metaphor in Mugambi's earlier writings (Conradie 2006:6). Mugambi's work, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995) signalled a shift to the employment of "reconstruction" as a key theological category. This has to be understood in the context of the end of the cold war, recognising that in the African context, processes of urbanisation and industrialisation are irreversible. Political independence existed in virtually all African countries, yet there are continued forms of economic injustice and neo-colonialism. In addition there are the endemic problems around a democratic culture, and endless civil wars and corruption that plague many African countries.

Three essential features of Mugambi's approach to the category of reconstruction are important:

- The recognition that there is no prospect of returning to pre-colonial Africa signals the need to construct African societies anew in the face of current societal processes.

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- Liberation from political and economic repression remains essential for the very possibility of such reconstruction.

- Africans need to accept responsibility for governance in church and society.

In spite of his admission that there is no prospect of a return to pre-colonial Africa nor a reversal of urbanisation, Mugambi argues that the accepted unit of social life in Africa is the extended household and this notion influences his understanding of reconstruction. In his earlier writings, Mugambi had laid a foundation concerning the reign of God that he remains true to in his later works (his own assertion!). He regards the way in which evangelical theologians are inclined to spiritualise the biblical concept of salvation as an improper exegesis of the biblical text, because it denies the practical aspect of salvation as it is worked out in daily circumstances and focuses mainly on the reign of God in a future life. He concludes that only by understanding salvation as applicable to the material, social, political and psychological needs in the present can the gospel be regarded as relevant to the poor and the exploited in the world (Mugambi 1989:97).

> This earlier publication puts forward a number of thoughts that appear to be foundational to Mugambi's thinking and which are repeated in later publications. In spite of his earlier excursions into liberation theology there is a marked shift from liberation and the redistribution of resources to the understanding that society needs to be reconstructed that is emphasised by him in his later publications. His notion of reconstruction carries connotations derived from the engineering and social sciences and advocates the co-operation of multidisciplinary sources in order to produce the desired reconstruction: Mugambi views the task of reconstruction in Africa in the 21st century as similar to that faced in Europe after the Second World War (Conradie 2006: 7).

Reconstruction is required at a variety of levels touching on individual, cultural, economic, political, ecclesial and theological aspects (Mugambi 1995:17). A comment made regarding Mugambi's linking of liberation and reconstruction throws light on the way in which he fluctuates between the two:

> Mugambi reiterates that liberation and reconstruction are consecutive and complementary processes that may both be valid, depending on the specific context. Where liberation has been achieved, the task of reconstruction begins. Where liberation is only partially achieved, reconstruction is only possible in the liberated zones – which provide a basis to support the struggle for liberation on the frontline (Conradie 2006: 8).

Mugambi establishes a strong link between the biblical texts of Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai, and the teachings of Jesus. In his writings he draws the relevance of the biblical texts for reconstruction in African society to an obvious conclusion. The rebuilding of Jerusalem is put forward as the model for the reconstruction of African societies that have been devastated by

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colonial rule and exploitation.

In order to confirm the view I have offered of Mugambi's description of reconstruction, I give brief quotes from the five essays referred to above:

a) *From liberation to reconstruction* (1995:1-18):

> Reconstruction is a new paradigm for African Christian theology in the "New World Order". The task of reconstruction cannot be restricted to any religious or denominational confines. Reconstruction is a concept within the social sciences which should be of interest to sociologists, economists, and political scientists. The multi-disciplinary appeal of reconstruction makes the concept functionally useful as a new thematic focus for reflection in Africa during the coming decades (Mugambi 1995:2).

This quote highlights three factors with regard to Mugambi's notion of reconstruction. The first is that reconstruction needs to be an ecumenical function, the second that it is a multi-disciplinary function, and the third that it is an ongoing function.

b) Theological reconstruction in Africa (1995:33-51):

> If we were to opt for the exile motif, the logical follow-up would still be social transformation and reconstruction: The shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves (Mugambi 1995:40).

The quote refers to a multi-disciplinary function that seeks to establish reconstruction across a broad spectrum of society.

c) Religion and social reconstruction in post-colonial Africa (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:13-33):

> African Christianity will come of age when its churches become the 'social conscience' of African peoples and nations. The theology of reconstruction has begun to explore the conceptual and practical implications of this insight (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:32).

The quote demonstrates the wide spectrum covered by Mugambi when he deals with reconstruction.

d) Applied ethics and globalization: an African perspective (Mugambi: 2005):

> Churches have political, economic, social, ethical, aesthetic and religious aspects. If a church has difficulties or shortcomings in any of these aspects, they will definitely have an adverse impact on the society in which that church functions. Conversely, a church which is a strong integrative agent can profoundly enhance social cohesion within the society (Mugambi 2005:67).

As in previously quoted documents, Mugambi's wide-ranging perspective may be observed.

e) The reconstruction paradigm in Mugambi's theology (in Dedji 2003):

> Mugambi expresses his conviction that 'the 21st century should be a century of reconstruction in Africa, building on old foundations which though strong, may have to be renovated. Considering the multi-dimensional levels of the long-term tasks to be achieved, the reconstruction paradigm requires multi-disciplinary and ecumenical dimensions (Mugambi quoted in Dedji 2003:59).

It may be noted that Mugambi's concept of reconstruction is wide ranging and not limited to theological or ecclesial applications.

In order to gain greater insight into the notion of reconstruction as posited by Mugambi, I will now examine the way in which he developed a theology of reconstruction.

3.5 Mugambi and reconstruction theology

In this section I will examine Mugambi's journey from liberation theology, which has a strong notion of salvation as a paradigm for African theology, to reconstruction as a more acceptable paradigm for the post-colonial African context. I next examine Mugambi's notion of reconstruction theology and then analyse his present position as presented in *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) and various other later articles.

3.5.1 The early years

Dedji (2003:45) gives an overview of Mugambi's focus on the need to revitalise African traditional cultural values, myths and symbols in order to reconstruct them in symbiosis with the biblical message and recast them to meet the needs of African churches and societies. One may assume that in his earlier years Mugambi was influenced by Paul Tillich, whose theological approach was to mediate between contemporary culture and historical Christianity in order to show that faith need not be unacceptable to contemporary culture and that contemporary culture need not be unacceptable to faith (see Kelsey in Ford 1997:88). The correlation between faith and culture posited in Tillich's works influenced, and still appears to influence, Mugambi (Dedji 2003:57). In his earlier work, *African Christian Theology: an Introduction,* Mugambi comes to conclusions regarding liberation and salvation that are seminal to his transition from liberation to reconstruction and afford some understanding of the way he thinks. The way he defines liberation and salvation is significant for understanding his approach:

Liberation may be defined as a socio-political concern which is the penultimate process of eliminating dependence (which is dehumanizing) and enhancing integrity and independence (which are humanizing) in every aspect of socio-political life both for individuals and for

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society as a whole.

> Salvation may be defined as the *ultimate hope* of realizing or attaining total self-realization and self-fulfilment, which transcends the finitude of natural and historic processes (Mugambi 1989: x, xi).

Mugambi views salvation as an eschatological goal which tends to be utopian but he also reminds people that total liberation is not attainable in the historical dimension of human existence (Mugambi 1989: xi). Total liberation is a term often used by Mugambi in the earlier years and this notion of liberation may be seen in the way African Christians formulate their understanding of heaven in material categories (Mugambi 1989:15).

> Heaven becomes a way of expressing material needs and desires which political oppression and economic exploitation has hindered them from enjoying in the present life. Total liberation is obviously an eschatological hope (Mugambi 1989:15).

Mugambi draws a distinction between constitutional independence and economic freedom and points to the way constitutional settlements, on the contrary, tended to ensure continued economic ties between the former colonial masters and the new republics. The result of these ties has been that as the independent countries have grown poorer and the developed ones richer, the level of dependence has continued to increase. Raw materials are exported and processed goods are imported, all to the detriment of Africans and the benefit of the former Western colonial powers (see Mugambi 1989:35). A further clue to Mugambi's thinking is the way he views the reign of God and the rule of men. "The Christian notion of the 'kingdom' of God is a theological critique of the kingdoms of men and women" (Mugambi 1989:78). He follows this statement up with a reference to the new order inaugurated by Jesus' announcement of the coming of the reign of God. This "new way" calls for establishing the norms of the reign of God in society so as to bring about equity between human beings.

When he refers to the theological statement that God is always 'on the side of' the poor who suffer from exploitation and oppression, Mugambi mentions a number of theologians, namely Gustavo Gutierrez, Kosuke Koyama, Jurgen Moltmann, and Desmond Tutu. He points out that all of them assume a correlation between poverty, exploitation and oppression. Mugambi asserts that in both the Old and New Testaments there is no clear distinction made between liberation as a socio-political concept and salvation as a theological concept.

> Spiritualization of the concept of liberation has been a distortion of the gospel by Christian theologians who, consciously or otherwise, have made the good news of Jesus irrelevant to the material, social, political and psychological needs of those

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for whom Jesus came to the world – the poor and exploited; the captives; the physically disabled and the mentally depressed (Mugambi 1989:97).

One may conclude that it was out of the conviction that Jesus proclaims a new social order where a person's worth is not determined by material possessions but by virtue of them being God's children, that Mugambi was inevitably moved towards the reconstruction of society. He comments on the way some readers of his publication may protest that the "kingdom of God is to be realized beyond history" (Mugambi 1989:99), but his view is that Jesus issued an explicit challenge for his listeners to live here and now according to the demands of the new creation, the reign of God. To the question, "Is this a utopian dream, or a realistic hope?" Mugambi replies, "I think it is a realistic hope which the human race is capable of realizing, if only we could suppress our own temptations towards greed, power and apathy" (Mugambi 1989:100, 101).

The seeds of a new order are already there in this earlier publication and it is as Mugambi worked out these early convictions that reconstruction theology emerged. The launch of reconstruction as a theology for Africa was at the 1991 All Africa Conference of Churches in Mombasa (Kenya) where Mugambi appealed to African theologians to shift their emphasis from current "inculturation-liberation" theology to a theology of reconstruction. This was produced in response to an invitation from the organizers for Mugambi to reflect upon the theme, "The future of the church and the church of the future in Africa" (Mugambi 1995:5). From this point on Mugambi devoted himself to producing a theology of reconstruction and in the next section I examine his view of a theology of reconstruction.

3.5.2 From liberation to reconstruction

I have deliberately headed this subsection with the title, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), as it is in this work that Mugambi traces his own journey from liberation to reconstruction and offers insights into the relationship between his notions of liberation and reconstruction. In this work Mugambi devotes the first chapter to mapping the route he has taken from liberation to reconstruction (Mugambi 1995:1-17) and it is to this chapter that I will refer.

In the introduction to this chapter Mugambi reflects on the need for a church to develop its own theologians in order to deal adequately with the issues peculiar to that church and its context. He refers to the way African churches have depended on theological mentors from parent denominations in Europe and North America and questions whether African churches should continue to rely on theological packages designed for other cultures and historical

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contexts (see Mugambi 1995:1). The direction Mugambi's thinking takes is important for understanding his attempt to produce a theology that is peculiarly African. His motivation is that this publication should offer some suggestions on new directions for theological reflection in Africa in order for it to move beyond the concepts of liberation and inculturation.

> This book introduces *reconstruction* as a new paradigm for African Christian theology in the 'New World Order'...The multi-disciplinary appeal of reconstruction makes the concept functionally useful as a new thematic focus for reflection in Africa during the coming decades (Mugambi 1995:2).

Mugambi offers a historical background to the move from liberation to reconstruction and this may be found on pages 2-5 of *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995). The final paragraph of this sub-section is relevant as it records the beginning of Mugambi's journey to reconstruction. The invitation from the Executive Committee of the All Africa Council of Churches meeting in 1990 for Mugambi to present a paper on the "Future of the church and the church of the future in Africa" resulted in the theme of reconstruction being presented by Mugambi with the proposal that African theologians shift paradigms from post-Exodus to exilic and post-exilic imagery. Mugambi analyses the 1990s as a decade of reconstruction, with calls for national conventions, constitutional reforms and economic revitalisation. In his view the twenty-first century should be one of building on old foundations, but revitalising them through reconstruction. He also draws parallels between the Renaissance in Europe and the current situation in Africa (see Mugambi 1995:5).

Mugambi then offers sub-sections on liberation and salvation, acculturation and inculturation, and reactive and proactive stances in theology, details of which may be viewed in pages 5-12. I will not go into detail regarding these concepts as they are not relevant for understanding Mugambi's journey from liberation to reconstruction. The subsections on "reconstruction as a theological paradigm" and "levels of reconstruction" are, however, informative and I offer some comment on these subsections.

Mugambi begins the subsection on "reconstruction as a theological paradigm" with a paragraph that describes his view of reconstruction:

> The terms *construction* and *reconstruction* belong to engineering vocabulary. An engineer constructs a complex according to specifications in the available designs. Sometimes modifications are made to the designs, in order to ensure that the complex will perform the function for which it is intended. Reconstruction is done when an existing complex becomes dysfunctional, for whatever reason, and

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the user still requires to use it. New specifications may be made in the new designs, while some aspects of the old complex are retained in the new (Mugambi 1995:12).

When referring to social change, Mugambi quotes Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), who give a valuable description of the reorganization of aspects of society. Leaders should be measured by the degree to which they are able to direct such reconstruction without causing the destabilisation of the society. Mugambi contends that Africa has been undergoing reconstruction during the past five hundred years, sometimes from external, and sometimes from internal pressures. He then proceeds to give various illustrations from the history of the Arabian Peninsula: from the encounter between Egypt and Israel, as well as the entry into Canaan through to the restoration under Josiah. Finally, there are references to Ezra and Nehemiah, and the Maccabbean resistance movement. The arrival of Jesus of Nazareth on the scene of history is epitomised by the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), which is viewed by Mugambi as the most basic of all reconstructive theological texts in the Synoptic gospels (for the above see Mugambi 1995:12,13).

In the following subsection Mugambi offers three levels of reconstruction thereby indicating the breadth of the content of his reconstruction theology, namely personal reconstruction, cultural reconstruction, and ecclesial reconstruction (Mugambi 1995:13–17). I offer a brief summary of these levels as they are informative with regard to Mugambi's approach to reconstruction:

Personal reconstruction has traditionally been seen as the starting point for social reconstruction, beginning with the motives and intentions of the individual as demonstrated in various scriptures such as Luke 18:9-14 (the Pharisee and the Publican), Matthew 23:1-13 (the warning against following the example of the Pharisees), Luke 12-13 (the need for the individual to reconstruct oneself in readiness for future tasks).

Cultural reconstruction includes politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics and religion; in fact, all aspects of life. These various aspects of cultural life are all components that need to be finely-tuned to the needs of people. Economics is involved with the reconstruction of the way resources are managed, politics with the reconstruction of the way social influence is managed, and ethics with the reconstruction of value systems. Aesthetics is concerned with the sense of proportion and symmetry of all aspects of life, and religion provides the world-view which synthesizes everything. Mugambi regards the reconstruction of religion as the most vital project amongst people undergoing rapid social change.

With regard to ecclesial reconstruction Mugambi considers the church to be the most effective instrument for portraying a people's world-view. Ecclesial reconstruction should include management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resources development, research, family education, service and witness.

> Theology is the means by which the church rationalizes its process of ecclesial reconstruction. The theologian, at best, should be a catalyst – a facilitator – who makes it possible for the church to adjust itself to the new social demands of the society to which its members belong (Mugambi 1995:17).

From the above it may be deduced that Mugambi began with a definite view of the need for change in various aspects of African society. He adopted liberation theology as a relevant tool to facilitate such change. Over a period of time he became disillusioned with liberation theology as a sufficiently versatile tool to bring about the changes required and began to develop reconstruction as an effective paradigm for facilitating such changes. The overall objective that Mugambi had in mind did not change, but the tool to bring about such an objective did. In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi spells out what he understands the role and character of reconstruction theology to be. I will deal with the wider description of reconstruction in sections five and six of this chapter. The publication that I have examined up to now offers various aspects of reconstruction and in the next sub-section I endeavour to plot Mugambi's present position with regard to reconstruction.

3.5.3 Mugambi's present position

In order to plot Mugambi's present position with regard to reconstruction theology I will make my points of reference *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), a number of later publications to which he has contributed articles, and a paper he delivered to the Anglican Church Leadership in the Great Lakes region of Uganda in 2005.

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) Mugambi has a subsection entitled "Reconstruction as a Paradigm in African Christian Theology" where he describes his notion of reconstruction. After mentioning the preference of Protestant theology for liberation, and Catholic theology for inculturation, Mugambi refers to the way liberation theology was associated with communism and terrorism by the capitalist bloc. When the cold war ended there was a move from liberation to reconstruction (see Mugambi 2003:28 & 29).

> The method of liberation had presupposed fighting, struggling, opposing, blaming, scape-goating, and so on. In the new situation, African nations had to turn to themselves...The continent was in ruins, as is common after every war. Reconstruction was essential (Mugambi 2003:30).

The question arises as to what form this reconstruction should take. Mugambi again refers to the multi-disciplinary and ecumenical nature of reconstruction. His opinion is that Africa needs to become self-critical and rely on its own resources before turning to others for loans and grants. Mugambi (2003:30) is obviously against the whole IMF and World Bank funding aid system and sees reconstruction as able to make a contribution towards freeing Africa from the control exercised through these financial links. He calls for African theologians to break with their epistemological dependence on ecclesiological packages from the North Atlantic and challenges African Christian theologians to constructively discern the needs of African communities and to help in shaping ecclesial structures that respond to the needs of African communities (Mugambi 2003:31). The conclusion may be drawn that in this later publication Mugambi continues to hold to the wide-ranging nature of his earlier approach to reconstruction.

In "Religion in the Social Transformation of Africa" in *Democracy and Reconciliation: a Challenge for African Christianity* (Magesa & Nthamburi 2003: 73-96) Mugambi views religion as responsible to spearhead the social reconstruction of Africa. This social reconstruction should be based on self-evaluation and self-criticism of the conduct of churches and missionary agencies (Magesa & Nthamburi 2003:90). Mugambi is critical of the increased affluence of the North Atlantic countries while Africa is increasingly destitute, mainly, in his opinion, due to exploitation and globalization (Magesa & Nthamburi 2003:92). Unless this situation changes, the future for Africa looks grim. Mugambi is clear that campaigning for human rights in Africa must be related directly to the affirmation of "human responsibilities". Mugambi is critical of the churches in Africa and judges them to have failed as agents of social change and cohesion because of denominational competition and rivalry (Magesa & Nthamburi 2003:94). In this contribution, Mugambi once again exhibits a wide ranging approach to reconstruction, calling for social reconstruction and ecumenical action.

In "Between Past and Future in African Christian Theology", in *African Christian Theologies in Transformation* (Conradie (ed.) 2004:150-160) Mugambi focuses on economic and political structures that need to be reconstructed. He refers to the 1992 All Africa Conference of Churches assembly in Harare that had the theme "Abundant Life in Christ". The conference was critical of the pauperisation of Africa and the opulence enjoyed in North Atlantic countries. Mugambi's presentation of reconstruction was accorded a high profile at this conference (Mugambi 159 & 160). In this contribution Mugambi is concerned with the reconstruction of economic systems.

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"Applied Ethics and Globalization: an African Perspective" (Mugambi 2005) was a paper delivered to the Anglican Church Leadership in the Great Lakes region of Uganda and in it Mugambi makes reference to the need for change in the economic structure existent between the Western nations and the nations of Africa. Mugambi calls for "an entirely new configuration of the global economy in which there will be a deliberate effort to facilitate equity through proportional corrective measures" (Mugambi 2005:64). In this later paper Mugambi repeats his call for cultural stability that has six pillars, namely politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion (Mugambi 2005:66 & 67). As a good ecumenist, Mugambi is consistent in the way he promotes cooperation and collaboration between churches. His concern is that denominationalism and factionalism risk tearing the church apart and he refers to Jesus' statement in John 17:10 concerning the essential role unity plays in evangelism (Mugambi 2005:68).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi is as far-ranging in the application of reconstruction theology today as he was when he first proposed this paradigm in 1991 at the All Africa Conference of Churches in Mombasa, Kenya. He still holds a strongly ecumenical approach to the church in Africa and continues to view the whole of society, in all its facets, as in need of reconstruction.

3.6 The Biblical texts on which Mugambi bases reconstruction theology

The background to reconstruction theology is mainly Old Testament with some reference to the New Testament, particularly the gospels. In this section I trace the foundations of liberation theology in the Exodus motif and how Mugambi has questioned the legitimacy of using this motif in the African context. I will then examine his use of Post-Exilic literature in order to build a foundation for reconstruction theology (Nehemiah, Jeremiah and Haggai). Mugambi uses various New Testament texts as a foundation to his theology and I examine those, analysing the social implications of the gospels and the new alternate society portrayed in them.

3.6.1 Liberation theology and the Exodus motif

Mugambi observes that the liberation paradigm was attractive to many African theologians because of Africa's historical experience of colonial and neo-colonial domination. Liberation was described as an Exodus from the bondage that many third world countries experienced. Moses was the great leader bringing his people out of bondage into freedom. Mugambi points out that some African leaders, in the time of transition from colonial domination, have been likened to Moses (Mugambi 1995:24). African theologians' lack of interest in the New Testament is attributed by Mugambi to a resistance to the way St. Paul accommodates the Roman imperial regime, and they see Paul as the antithesis of Moses. His assessment is that Jesus was more radical in his criticism of the status quo in Israel than Paul was of the Empire's oppression of colonial peoples. One of the reasons why Mugambi questions the way the Exodus is equated with the African experience is because it has led to distortions of the Exodus message.

> There are remarkable differences between Israelite experience under the Pharaohs and African colonial experience under the North Atlantic powers more than four millennia later, given the historical, cultural, ideological and religious distances that separate them. Consequently, the parallels drawn between the Exodus and the process of decolonisation have been far-fetched (Mugambi 1995:14).

Mugambi (1995:15) regards the parallels that have been drawn as "rather contrived and far-fetched". The difference between the Israelites as a roving people, moving from Egypt across Sinai to Canaan is in contrast to the way African people remain in the same geographical space. Because of these discrepancies, Mugambi rejected the Exodus motif as relevant for post-colonial Africa, and offered a different paradigm at the All Africa Council of Churches in 1991, where he called for reconstruction to be accepted as a theological axiom that was more relevant for the African situation (Mugambi 1995:5).

Dedji (2003:52-55) summarises Mugambi's opposition to the Exodus motif in three points:

- The parallels that have been drawn between the Exodus and the process of decolonization have been contrived and far-fetched.

- Mugambi is concerned about the extensive use of the biblical story of the Exodus (Exodus 3:7-10)

- He is in total disagreement with the selective and naïve use of that narrative.

Dedji (2003:53-55) offers an extensive argument from Michael Prior's book, *The Bible and Colonialism,* in which Prior deals with the misuse of the Exodus motif and in which he criticises the exegesis employed by Cone and Gutierrez. Mugambi is particularly unhappy

about the selective way certain portions of the Exodus account are left out and others emphasised. The conclusion drawn by Dedji is that oppressed peoples should find themselves more naturally on the side of the Canaanites, who were subjected to a colonial invasion, than on the side of the invading Israelites (Dedji 2003:55).

This approach links closely with Mugambi's concerns about the misuse of the Exodus motif:

> A time has come for African Christians to discern themes other than liberation and Exodus to stimulate their own involvement in history...Why should liberation and Exodus continue to dominate African theological thinking while Africa is longing for other relevant paradigms and metaphors (Mugambi 1995:24)?

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi devotes a whole chapter to Africa and the Old Testament with sub-sections dealing with African approaches to the Old Testament and reconstruction as a paradigm in African Christian theology. In this latter subsection Mugambi points out that a theology of liberation encouraged *praxis* as its method of theologizing.

With the end of the cold war, theologians shifted their focus from liberation to poverty, then to spirituality. Was liberation achieved in Latin America? Theologically, the Exodus story is followed by settlement and consolidation of social structures in the Promised Land. In Africa, the theme of Exodus made much sense as long as people viewed their oppression in terms of external pharaohs enslaving their subjects (Mugambi 2003:29).

When Mugambi refers to Africa's leaders as likened to Moses, whose role was to deliver their people, he views three historical events that coincided in 1990, as marking the end of this "Exodus" era:

1) The establishment of the Republic of Namibia.

2) The release of Nelson Mandela from prison.

3) The collapse of the Soviet Union marking the end of the cold war (Mugambi 2003:29).

He believes the time has come for African nations to take responsibility and put their houses in order.

Such issues prompted Mugambi to offer the reconstruction paradigm, articulated around post-exilic motifs such as restoration and rehabilitation. In the next subsection I examine Mugambi's use of such motifs as a foundation for reconstruction theology.

3.6.2 Reconstruction theology and the post-exilic motif

In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi simply mentions the post-exilic motif without going into detail about how the books of Ezra, Haggai and Nehemiah are to be interpreted. He refers to the social transformation and reconstruction achieved under those leaders, again without going into detail (Mugambi 1995:40). According to Mugambi the themes of social transformation and reconstruction will be the dominant themes in the twenty-first century. His view is that the shift from liberation to these themes began in the 1990s and involves the discernment of alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths, and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves, irrespective of what others have to say about the continent and its peoples (Mugambi 1995:40). However, it is in *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), that Mugambi maps out the biblical foundation on which he has built a theology of reconstruction and I examine four perspectives of his approach, namely:

- the theology of reconstruction in the Old Testament;

- Nehemiah and reconstruction;

- Jesus and reconstruction, and

- Paul and the theology of reconstruction.

These are aspects that Mugambi offers in his own dealings with the biblical roots of reconstruction.

In a section on "Theology of reconstruction and the Old Testament", Mugambi illustrates how a theology of reconstruction can be applied to biblical hermeneutics, with particular reference to the Old Testament. He draws the distinction between liberation theology that is focused on the Exodus and Moses, and reconstruction theology that focuses on Ezra and Nehemiah in their leadership roles in a post-exilic context. Mugambi contrasts the leadership style of Moses, the indispensable heroic leader, with the style of Nehemiah, the pious, well trained civil servant who held a place of importance in the court of the Babylonian king. He makes reference to Nehemiah's excellent leadership qualities that caused him to be promoted to his position in the court of King Artaxerxes. Mugambi then describes the strategy Nehemiah used to mobilize the community in Jerusalem: encouragement rather than commandment. In contrast to the style of Nehemiah he cites the way the first post-colonial generation of African leaders produced a Mosaic style of leadership that was not to be

questioned (Mugambi 2003:146 & 147). In a section of almost two pages (147 & 148), Mugambi analyses the failure of liberation theology in the African and Latin American contexts, concluding that, because the roots of liberation theology were in Hegel and the logic Aristotelian, it failed to take root in the culture of peoples of a different culture and philosophical pedigree (see Mugambi 2003:148). When describing the premise behind the theology of reconstruction, Mugambi cites certain factors:

1) God has created each of us in divine image and we are individually capable of contributing constructively towards the improvement of our social conditions.

2) We do not have to catch up with anyone except God.

3) We are endowed differently and variously and our contributions cannot be uniform.

He draws on Luke 21:1-4 as an encouragement to Africans to make their contribution (Mugambi 2003:148).

> As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4 NIV)

Mugambi cites the Harambee movement in post-colonial Kenya as being based on this principle. The state sought to guarantee the abolition of poverty, disease and ignorance without having the resources to provide for "free" education, "free" medical care and "free" social security (see Mugambi 2003:149). The Harambee movement's focus, which was based on African communality (like the ubuntu proposed by Tutu,) became the strategy for social mobilization in Kenyan African society. Kenya benefited from this movement because of the many institutions that were developed through it. The system used by Nehemiah was similar, and, as Mugambi notes, was open to abuse in a similar way that abuses crept into the Harambee movement. Mugambi notes the way that nepotism crept into the system Nehemiah created tempting him to appoint his own relatives and friends as leaders. Ezra-Nehemiah is relevant as a paradigmatic text for the theology of reconstruction because of its applicability today, not because Nehemiah was a perfect leader (Mugambi 2003:149). In order to conclude this subsection I quote the following as a summary of his perception of this theology:

> African Christian theology in the twenty-first century will be characterized by these themes of social transformation and reconstruction. The shift from liberation to reconstruction involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves, irrespective of what others have to say about the continent and its

peoples. The resources for this re-interpretation are multi-disciplinary analyses involving social scientists, philosophers, creative writers, and biological and physical scientists. Theology, as the systematic articulation of human response to revelation in particular situations and contexts, will be most effective in the Africa of the Twenty-first century if, and only if, the social and physical reality of the continent and its peoples is accurately and comprehensively understood and re-interpreted (Mugambi 1995:40).

In the same way that Nehemiah mobilized the resources available in Jerusalem for the reconstruction of the wall, Mugambi envisages Africa having to mobilize its human resources, both within and outside the continent (the Diaspora), for the reconstruction of its ruined infrastructure. The brain drain of the last three centuries as well as the brawn drain of the slave trade has left the continent depleted of expertise and infrastructure. Mugambi is critical of the continuing brain drain that occurs through the enticement of highly qualified personnel from Africa to compensate for the aging population of the North Atlantic (see Mugambi 2003:149 & 150). In his view there is a need for new Ezras and Nehemiahs to emerge out of the African diaspora to assist those on the African continent to reconstruct African society (Mugambi 203:150).

Nehemiah and reconstruction

Mugambi begins this section by stating, "The narrative in the book of Nehemiah is a moving account of the mobilization of a desperate community by one man, Nehemiah, through what today would be called participatory management" (Mugambi 2003:172). Mugambi repeats the distinction he draws between Moses and Nehemiah and between Egypt and Babylon. Nehemiah, as a trustworthy servant of King Artaxerxes, is given permission to go to Jerusalem to attend to the situation there, which involved the broken down walls of the city and the discouragement of the people. Mugambi draws parallels between the situation in Jerusalem and the plight of many of the people of Africa. In Jerusalem the people were under the rule of governors appointed by the king, but those governors took advantage of the suffering people. The local leaders, Tobias and Sanballat, had no interest in the welfare of the people, and, when Nehemiah comes, view him as a threat to their exploitation of the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding area. The book of Nehemiah lays out the strategy Nehemiah adopted to complete the task of rebuilding the walls of the city and restoring its past glory. What is significant is the way Nehemiah pursues his task in a way that differs from Moses' approach in that he encourages the people and facilitates their work. He motivates them without supervising them. Nehemiah's approach shows his confidence in the people's ability to carry out the work without supervision because of the level of their

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motivation. Mugambi maintains that Africa, in the twenty-first century, is in a very similar situation to Judah in the days of Nehemiah. He suggests that "there are many Sanballats and Tobiases in politics, in churches, in the media, in diplomatic circles and also in business" (Mugambi 2003:173). Mugambi has a jaundiced view of the Western world and portrays the World Bank, the IMF, universities and non-governmental organisations as containing Sanballats and Tobiases. However, he acknowledges that there are also Nehemiahs who are able to train and motivate the African people. He also refers to Jeremiahs who are prophets of doom and sorrow. But, for Mugambi, the figure of Nehemiah is the most encouraging and inspiring for Africa today (Mugambi 2003:173).

Nehemiah was not perfect. Nor were there any perfect mortals at any time in human history. But in contemporary Africa we can learn more from Nehemiah about the demands and challenges of leadership than from Moses (Mugambi 2003:173).

Mugambi makes reference to the strained relationships between the local populace and the returnees, most of whom were privileged and advantaged, having higher social status. This position would have allowed them to benefit from the acquisition of land. Through their status they could have become wealthy. The clash between the elite in both groups is noted in Nehemiah chapters eleven to thirteen. Those who were wealthy dominated those who were poor (see Mugambi 2003:173).

> According to the prophetic tradition, the test of righteousness was whether a leader empathised with, and worked for the welfare of the poor and the powerless. Nehemiah's stance was more in sympathy with the downtrodden than with the elite on either side of the social divide. This is the attribute that qualifies him to belong to reconstructive leadership. We are challenged to emulate this attribute, without imitating his weakness (Mugambi 2003:173).

In an analysis of Mugambi's position, Dedji (2003:60) describes Mugambi's point of view with regard to Moses and his generation; they did not enter the Promised Land. This fact is filled with theological meaning. Because they relied on Egypt as their point of reference they remained in ideological bondage and, because of unbelief, failed to take possession of the Promised Land. Mugambi views the Exodus as symbolical of only the beginning of a process of human fulfilment. This is why Mugambi offers Nehemiah as the model for African leaders to follow in directing reconstruction in African society. This motif is vital to the future of Africa because the example of Europe and North America in rebuilding social structures after two devastating wars has not been followed in Africa in spite of the devastation in African countries where wars of liberation have been waged (see Dedji 2003:62).

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Jesus and reconstruction

Mugambi's starting point in this subsection is the Sermon on the Mount which he views as a concise outline of reconstructive theology (Mugambi 2003:174). Throughout the sermon Jesus contrasts his teaching with that of Moses, portraying a new social consciousness that was needed in order for the Jewish community to regain the dignity it lost under the Roman Empire. What Mugambi refers to as "this reconstructive theology" was not opposed by the Roman authorities but by the Jewish elite. In this teaching Jesus declared:

> Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come, not to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the Kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20 NIV)

In line with a number of theologians who have commented on the Sermon on the Mount (such as Hauerwas 2006, Morrison 1978, and Stott 1978), Mugambi views Jesus as the founder of a new social movement, designed to bring in a new era where the old Mosaic norms were transcended. Mugambi asserts that the Christian faith should have a similar impact on any culture with which it comes into contact, which happens when converts are free to appropriate the gospel in their own way and within their own context.

> Contextualization of theology empowers the local church to articulate its responses to the gospel without looking over the shoulder for approval from missionary mentors. At the same time, contextualization demands of the local church to budget for its needs according to its available resources. A church which is dependent on foreign revenue for its recurrent expenditure is unsustainable (Mugambi 2003:174).

St. Paul and a theology of reconstruction

Mugambi's view is that, all his life after his conversion, Paul endeavoured to reconstruct the Jewish faith so that it became much more inclusive. He views Paul as cooperating with the Roman authorities by not challenging their systems but by challenging the way Christians operated within such systems (see Mugambi 2003:175). He comments on the way Paul handled the issue of slavery: without challenging slavery as such, he called on masters to treat their slaves as equals, and the slaves to behave as if they were equals with their masters. Mugambi (2003:176) calls this "social reconstruction at its best". The principle voiced is that attitudes need to be changed before institutions can be reformed (see Romans 12:1, 2).

Christian mission, according to St. Paul, is reconstructive, heralding a new society that is built on the foundations of the old one. The qualification for the task of mission is renewal of mind and refusal to be conformed to this world (Mugambi 2003:176).

In Mugambi's view, Paul is concerned that the church should avoid being conformed to the norms of this world and so render itself incapable of transforming the world. The tragedy of the modern missionary enterprise is that it became so conformed to imperial norms that it could not support the struggle for liberation.

The same conformism may render contemporary Christianity incapable of facilitating social reconstruction. Fortunately, there are, and always have been, visionary Christians who as individuals set the pace for future generations to emulate. Such is the challenge of St. Paul for us today (Mugambi 2003:176).

This section would not be complete without an examination of Mugambi's earlier works to ascertain his approach to the Beatitudes and the way he applies them to a theology of reconstruction.

3.6.3 Mugambi's approach to the Beatitudes

Mugambi offers a chapter in *African Christian Theology* (1989), entitled "Poverty and the Kingdom of God", in which he examines the beatitudes as found in Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:17-26. In private conversation Mugambi has commented on the way Western theologians mostly refer to Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount rather than to that of Luke where the social implications of Jesus' words are more plainly set out. His opinion is that the beatitudes are best understood when viewed as a whole, and in relation to the passage Jesus read from the prophecy of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Isaiah 62:1-2).

Mugambi (1989:97) explains that the practical implications of this passage from Isaiah, when viewed with the Beatitudes, can best be discerned in the public ministry of Jesus, because he endeavoured to live up to those Beatitudes. Mugambi points out that the "Kingdom of heaven" is the inheritance of those mentioned in the first and last of the Beatitudes: the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for righteousness sake are the recipients. For Mugambi James 1:9-12 is a paraphrase of the Beatitudes:

Let the lowly boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flowers of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls and its beauty perishes. So will the rich

man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

The question raised by Mugambi is: "What is the relationship between poverty, persecution, and righteousness?" (Mugambi 1989:98) He proceeds to examine the corruption and exploitation at the root of prosperity in Africa and how this exacerbates poverty. "Perhaps this is a problem in all human society, past and present. "The vision of the Kingdom of God is a vision of a society in which this problem has been overcome" (Mugambi 1989:98). Mugambi puts forward the teaching of the Beatitudes as the basis for a new social order "in which a person's worth is not determined by the material property he possesses" (Mugambi 1989:99).

> In this new social order, for which Jesus applies the code "the Kingdom of God", those people who are endowed with material wealth share it freely and willingly with those less wealthy; and those with other non-material endowments also share what they have with their fellow men and women. In this way a new harmonious society is created in which economic, social, cultural, religious and racial distinctions exist but are rendered insignificant by the strong bond of universal brotherhood. This new society – the Kingdom of God – is beyond the parochialism and pettiness of ideologies which serve the selfish interests of only some segments of the human race (Mugambi 1989:99).

Mugambi does not view this notion of a new social order as a utopian dream; rather he sees this new society as one which the human race is capable of realizing. The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi views the African context through idealistic spectacles, given the ongoing corruption and oppression that continues to exist in most African countries. Jean-Marc Ela, when referring to the praise heaped on "Blackness" theologians, uses a phrase that may be applied to Mugambi's dream of a "perfect" society in Africa: "we really need to wonder whether they have not taken an overdose of utopianism" (Ela 2005:123).

3.7 Mugambi's earlier notion of reconstruction (1995)

In section two I presented a general description of reconstruction theology followed, in section three, by a historical examination of Mugambi's journey from liberation theology to a theology of reconstruction. In section four I traced the biblical base on which Mugambi has built his notion of reconstruction and in section seven I describe the width of Mugambi's approach to reconstruction, tracing the way he draws in every facet of society. In order to do this I refer to *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) and offer brief references to the following aspects of society, namely church, personal development, economics, religion and culture. I do not place these in any order of importance but offer them simply to illustrate

how broadly Mugambi's view of reconstruction is presented.

3.7.1 Church

Mugambi's view is that the church forms the place where people's world-view is portrayed and celebrated. He includes the following areas in the church's sphere of influence: mythological reformulation, doctrinal teaching, social rehabilitation, ethical direction, ritual celebration, and experiential (personal) response. In the light of this broad based influence he describes ecclesial reconstruction as having to encompass management structures, financial policies, pastoral-care, human resources development, research, family education, service, and witness (see Mugambi 1995:17). The church needs theologians who will assist it in adjusting itself to the new social demands of the society to which its members belong.

3.7.2 Personal

The change of the individual has traditionally been viewed as the starting point for social reconstruction and Mugambi emphasizes that the constant reconstruction of the individual is necessary in order to face the challenges that lie ahead. Mugambi quotes Matthew 23:1-13 and the hymn "Amazing grace" as reminders of this truth (Mugambi 1995:15 & 16). The need for leaders especially to be renewed and reconstructed in their leadership, is paramount.

3.7.3 Economics, politics and ethics

Mugambi views these three aspects of society as requiring reconstruction in order for society to be changed. Economics is concerned with the reconstruction of the management of resources, politics is concerned with the reconstruction of the management of social influence, and ethics is concerned with the reconstruction of value systems (see Mugambi 1995:17). Value systems have to be adjusted in order for them to apply to changed priorities, either as a reminder of forgotten priorities or as a reconstruction of the order of priorities.

3.7.4 Religion and culture

World-views are the product of religion. Cultural reconstruction needs to be consciously directed in order to maintain the integrity and identity of the community. Mugambi (1995:17) maintains that "reconstruction of religion is perhaps the most vital project amongst a people undergoing rapid social change". In post-colonial Africa the indicator of fundamental change in outlook is the transformation of the religious order.

The conclusion may be drawn that in this earlier publication Mugambi has adopted a wide-ranging approach to reconstruction in which he focuses on every facet of society that is

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needed as a contributor to the reconstruction required to change the lives of African people. Mugambi's ecumenical approach indicates his view of the church and is reflected in the way he views society as a whole. With this conclusion as a background, I now turn to *Christian Theology and Socila Reconstruction* (2003) in which Mugambi expands the view that the whole of society needs to be involved in reconstruction in order for reconstruction to be effective.

3.8 A developed theology of reconstruction (2003)

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi presents a chapter on the "Social Reconstruction of Africa" in which he deals with the need for African society as a whole to be reconstructed. He finds support for this endeavour by drawing on a number of historic occurrences such as the aftermath of the war of independence where the United States embarked on a program of reconstruction. This program involved reconstructing destroyed infrastructures and reorganizing society to bring about greater unity between the North and the South. Another historic occurrence referred to by Mugambi is the reconstruction of destroyed cities and the rehabilitation of displaced persons that followed the Second World War. A further occurrence was the rebuilding of the civil structure of Bosnia after the war there. The theme of reconstruction may therefore be seen to cover a wide area of restructuring ranging from the rebuilding of civil works to the renewing of civil society and the church (see Mugambi 2003:36). The end of the colonial and the introduction of the neo-colonial experience did not usher in a better life for all but, on the contrary, the destruction of African social and physical infrastructures and the amassing of wealth by Europe and North America. In real terms squatters and peasants have become poorer; no matter how hard they have worked (Mugambi 2003:37).

> There is evidence to suggest that the reconstruction of social structures, helping Africans to reaffirm their cultural identity and consciousness, can provide a springboard for the revitalization of Africa's economy, politics and social life (Mugambi 2003:37).

Mugambi maintains that the foundation on which African social reconstruction can take place is the African cultural and religious heritage. Of these, religion is the most basic stratum. In mentioning this stratum Mugambi includes all religions: Christian, Islamic, and traditional African religions. In Mugambi's opinion, all aspects of African life have been eroded by foreign invasion: the language of instruction is foreign, the economic and managerial systems are imported, processes of production are geared towards export, and communalism is

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replaced by capitalistic individualism (Mugambi 2003:38). Mugambi's suggestion of a remedy for this problem is for African nations to embark on the reconstruction of social structures, making the African cultural and religious heritage the basis of economics, politics, ethics, aesthetics and ontology (see Mugambi 2003:38).

The areas he concentrates on are political reconstruction, economic reconstruction, aesthetic reconstruction, moral reconstruction, and theological reconstruction. His approach in this publication is more detailed than in *From Liberation to Reconstruction* and my objective is to assess the development of his approach to reconstruction and whether it has changed from that presented in this publication. In order to do this I examine each facet focused on in his *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* and then place his approach alongside the description of such facets of society in *From Liberation to Reconstruction*. I conclude by examining Mugambi's notion on reconstruction as it pertains to building a new society and then draw an overall conclusion on Mugambi's developed notion of reconstruction theology.

3.8.1 Political reconstruction

When reviewing the political landscape in Africa, Mugambi draws heavily on Kwame Nkrumah and his notion of a "United States of Africa". Nkrumah was one of the architects of the OAU[14] and was committed to Pan-Africanism, stating that African countries would best sustain their sovereignty through mutual cooperation and mutual support (see Mugambi 2003:39). Nkrumah was a socialist with definite anti-capitalist biases which may be seen to have influenced Mugambi in his approach to capitalism. Nkrumah also believed it was possible to transcend language, immigration and tariff barriers imposed by the former colonial powers, and establish one economic and political community covering the whole continent. This dream of a united Africa finds resonance in Mugambi's dream of an economic, aesthetic, moral and theological reconstruction of Africa that would result in a united Africa from a cultural and religious perspective (see Mugambi 2003:39).

Mugambi does progress from the concept offered by Nkrumah to what he terms an *African Ideology* which he views as being distinct from the dominant ideologies in Africa, namely capitalism and socialism. He lists African countries where such an African ideology was developed: Tanzania (Ujamaa), Kenya (African socialism), Zambia (African humanism), Senegal (African personality), and Zaire (Authenticité). These were all social systems that attempted to provide a system that was founded on the African cultural and religious heritage

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[14] The Organization of African Unity.

(see Mugambi 2003:40). The reason why these systems foundered was the cold war and interference by the colonial powers.

> The external pressures against the evolution of a continental African identity were very strong, because such an identity was likely to undermine the commonwealth which colonialism had established, and also because the African elite had become accustomed to associating with their metropolitan cultural and intellectual centres in Europe and North America (Mugambi 2003:41).

Mugambi believes that the goal of a united Africa is not impossible when viewed in the light of the emergence of the European Union. The diversity of the nations united in the European Union is far greater than that of the nations of Africa, in spite of the after-effects of the colonial national boundaries because those boundaries did not reflect the people groupings of Africa. Yet, Europe has united!

> It makes political sense for Africa to affirm its unity as a political, economic and cultural entity, which can evolve internal markets for goods and services. Such an internal market would help Africa to grow out of its current marginalization in international fora, technology and world trade (Mugambi 2003:41).

In answer to the question, "What would political reconstruction in Africa entail?" Mugambi points to Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda as examples of what may be accomplished through the reconstructive process. Regarding South Africa, he refers to the reconstruction of the political face of the country and how it has been transformed to reflect non-racialism and representation of all in the political sphere. The "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" was an example of political process that followed the traditional African belief that confession is therapeutic, even when the damage done by the offender is irreparable (see Mugambi 2003:42). In Mozambique, another African innovation led to the resolution of conflict. Mugambi (2003:42) quotes the traditional African political thought that the loser is as important as the winner, and prevents a "winner takes all" approach, an attitude which Mugambi attributes to that of Western democracy. In the case of Uganda, the movement system was adopted instead of the party system. This system means that the individual seeking election must appeal to the electorate and cannot simply be elected on a party ticket. The innovation here is that democracy does not have to involve political parties. Responding to the question of how campaigns for democratization in contemporary Africa should be evaluated Mugambi offers the following:

> It appears that many of these campaigns are following the Westminster model of 'democracy', in which adversarial politics through political parties is the norm of political relations. Such politics, no matter how refined, cannot resonate with the African cultural and religious heritage. Consequently, in many African countries

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the electorate has returned to power the same leaders whom the opposition has portrayed as negatively as language could allow. Wherever the opposition has come to power, stability has not been assured, largely because this mode of political engineering, in which "winner takes all" and "loser breaks all" is culturally unrealistic (Mugambi 2003:43).

Mugambi describes the role of the churches in this scenario as parallel to that of the diviner in traditional African culture, where the diviner serves as the mediator between adversaries. In order for this role to be effective, the churches need to take ecumenism seriously. In Mugambi's opinion, religious division contributes to social and political fragmentation. He therefore posits ecumenical cooperation as being requisite to the church playing an effective role in political reconstruction.

3.8.2 Economic reconstruction

African economics have largely been formed by the demands of Western economies that have used Africa as a source of raw materials and a dumping ground for out-of-date or inferior products. The result is that Africa "produces what it does not consume and consumes what it does not produce" (Mugambi 2003:43). Mugambi views sustainable trade as comprising the export of surpluses and the import of deficits. If this principle is not adhered to, poverty will arise resulting in the eventual pauperization of whole nations. In this sub-section Mugambi goes into detail about the flawed economic systems of Africa, part of which includes Africans not being able to establish prices for their raw materials, nor to set prices for finished products. He points out that, although most of Africa is comprised of arable, fertile soil, there is a food deficit every year. "In fact, the agricultural sector in most of tropical Africa has collapsed, as far as the aspect of production management is concerned" (Mugambi 2003:44). Because the majority of Africans in tropical Africa are still rural dwellers, it seems obvious that this sector of the economy is the first that needs reconstruction in order to encourage the production of food for local consumption so as to avoid the necessity for importing food from other nations. As long as most of these farmers spend their time in producing cash crops, they do not have the time to produce their own basic foods. It is the churches who have most contact with the peasants and are in the best place to influence change through the introduction of better farming methods and concentration on consumable food products (see Mugambi 2003:45). Mugambi feels that a better way of influencing the rural farmers would be through the use of extension officers who would live with the farmers and help them to improve their farming, processing and marketing practices. This type of approach (through extension officers) is applicable to other areas of production such as

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housing, water, health, fuel, and so on. By improving these areas of the economy through reconstructing the rural farming sector, basic requirements would be met and surpluses marketed, resulting in income for financing areas of deficit in other sectors of the local economy (see Mugambi 2003:45 & 46).

> The development of internal markets is essential for the growth of competitiveness in the international market. The weakness of Africa is that its internal markets are fragile or non-existent, with the consequence that it has no surpluses to export, and has no concept of using its export income to finance the import of deficits (Mugambi 2003:46).

The next area of focus is aesthetic reconstruction in which Mugambi deals with various aspects of African society such as language, culture, and art in its many forms as an expression of African self image and the values on which African society is built.

3.8.3 Aesthetic reconstruction

This is an extremely complex area in which Mugambi examines the influence of acculturation on African culture through colonial education, administration and economy and the subsequent need for reconstructing these areas to restore them to where they reflect African cultural and religious values (see Mugambi 2003:46). He concludes that the African sense of beauty has been distorted by these influences in the same way that the Roman occupation of western Europe caused the Angles and Saxons to adopt a great deal of Roman culture. Western colonial values and influences have been superimposed on the African cultural heritage through colonial and neo-colonial domination. "Acculturation gradually alienates subject people from their own heritage, while drawing them closer to the culture of their masters" (Mugambi 2003:46). Mugambi refers to two articles in the book *Black Aesthetics* published in 1973 because of a Colloquium convened at the University College of Nairobi in 1971. The two articles were authored by Ogot and Mazrui and contained a challenge for attention to be focused on African peoples own limitations and capabilities rather than on the misdeeds of others. "We should convert our disappointments and negative experiences into assets for future rejuvenation and reconstruction" (Mugambi 2003:47). They refer to black writers and their preoccupation with outside enemies, beginning with the missionary, the settler, and the colonial administrator, and now include the trans-national corporations and the World Bank. Mugambi maintains that the dominance of capitalism in the world since 1990 has altered the rhetoric of a significant sector of the African elite from blaming the colonizers to blaming the post-colonialists.

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The challenge posed by the theme of reconstruction, is that progressive activism need not always entail apportioning blame on others; it should, as a priority, focus on self-criticism, self-evaluation and re-dedication. Rights are meaningful only in the context of the social contact from which they are derived. That social contact contains two aspects – the *duties* and *obligations* on the one hand, and the *rights* and *freedoms* on the other. Campaigns for human rights after the cold war have tended to concentrate almost exclusively and negatively on the 'abuse' of rights and freedoms by those who currently wield power (Mugambi 2003:48).

Mugambi calls this approach an imbalance and comments that these authors have alienated the "masses" for whom they claim to speak. Human societies are inherently conservative and when the left wing activists seem to be moving into activism that threatens the status quo, Mugambi maintains that the majority will tend to flock with the 'devils' they know rather than with the 'angels' they do not know (see Mugambi 2003:48).

The point made by Mugambi is that people are people wherever they may be found and are capable of good and evil. Any attempt to always portray African people as victims will defeat attempts at reconstructing national and continental identity. Values are the foundation on which society needs to be founded and such values are inevitably conservative. Mazrui (quoted in Mugambi 2003:49) comments on the way African people have easily accepted the ethics of the West but have not so easily accepted the aesthetic values. He gives examples of the way Africans find it easy to accept Western Christianity but struggle with Western classical music; how monogamy will be accepted, but not the opera or the ballet. Agreement on what is right and wrong, good and bad is simple; agreement on what is beautiful and what is ugly is not easy (see Mugambi 2003:49). This difference may be seen at political rallies where the dignitaries on the platform are impeccably dressed in European garb while the audience will be dressed in traditional garb. The aesthetics of Africa are extremely complex; what tourists purchase as representative of African culture bears no resemblance to the appliances used in urban and peri-urban African homes. Language is another area where reform is needed. Nkrumah sought to inculcate a single language for Africa and Mugambi makes reference to Kiswahili which is used in Tanzania, as an example of language being a uniting factor.

Aesthetic reconstruction will inevitably include a reformulation of language policy, so that Africa evolves a lingua franca through which the peoples of the continent can affirm a common identity, culture and future. If there is political will, this challenge is within easy reach (Mugambi 2003:50).

3.8.4 Moral reconstruction

In this subsection Mugambi concerns himself with the conflict (or tension) between Western

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forensic morals and indigenous African morals. He uses the issues of monogamy and polygamy, and customary law marriage against statutory law marriage, in order to illustrate the tensions that arise in implementing one or the other, especially when two parties use different approaches. The point he is concerned to make regards the level to which missionary and colonial enterprises have inculcated in African peoples the attitude that their moral traditions are 'primitive' and 'barbaric' in contrast with those of the West (see Mugambi 2003:50). As a philosopher, Mugambi has a good grasp of the evolution of morals:

> Morals evolve as ways and means of regulating behaviour within specific cultural contexts. From a phenomenological perspective, the number of solutions to moral problems is infinite. Likewise, moral relations can be configured in an infinite number of ways. The variables are determined by the creativity and imagination of opinion leaders in a community, and also by the dominant religious beliefs of the community (Mugambi 2003:51).

Colonialism embarked on a deliberate project to impose its moral values on those it had subordinated. The way in which socialization occurs ensures that the conquered internalize the values of the conquerors. However, Mugambi shows that this internalization is relatively shallow because of the strength of the ingrained value system of African peoples. In order to emphasise this, he refers to, first of all, teachings and practices about conjugal morals in tropical Africa. Western people insist on monogamy as being the moral norm; African people refer to the serial polygamy practiced in the Western nations through divorce and question why simultaneous polygamy should be a problem. Mugambi points out that not all African men make a practice of polygamy. This debate continued in the Anglican Church throughout the 1970s and has not been resolved yet. This is one area where traditional values have tended to take precedence over Western values. Another area is that of marriage. African marriage concerns the uniting of families and the establishing of relationships which last for many years. In African marriage there are four steps:

1) The courting couple make a commitment to life-time cohabitation and companionship.

2) The partners involve the respective parents who, in turn, establish a bond between the respective families.

3) Once these two sets of relationships have been consolidated, the couple and the two families solemnize the marriage in church.

4) The marriage is certified through a government document—the marriage certificate. African customary marriage can take place without 3 and 4 being implemented. Mugambi refers to the way legal regimes work to the disadvantage of the African cultural and religious

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heritage (Mugambi 2003:52). He cites examples where African customary law has been ignored in legal decisions, giving the order of importance as inevitably placing African customary law at the bottom of the hierarchy of legal regimes, with statutory law accorded the highest place. However, in Kenya there has of late been support in the courts for the acceptance of customary marriage and Mugambi asserts that this trend will continue. For Mugambi, the issue is, "How can Africans maintain the African ethic while embracing modernity?" (Mugambi 2003:52). He cites Japan, South Korea and India as examples of nations that have largely become modernized and have at the same time maintained their cultural and religious heritage; therefore it should be possible for Africa to do the same!

> For that to happen, Africans have to regain their lost self-confidence, and stop using European and North American cultures as the standards for measuring the level of cultural and religious advancement (Mugambi 2003:53).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi's notion of moral reconstruction advocates that African cultural mores be taken seriously and a moral system be constructed that recognizes the veracity of much African morality for the African context. In the final subsection in this chapter on the Social Reconstruction of Africa, Mugambi calls for theological reconstruction and, as this is arguably the most important aspect of reconstruction for this research, I will now examine this in the following subsection.

3.8.5 Theological reconstruction

Karl Marx's criticism of organised religion is the starting point for Mugambi to launch this subsection by first of all agreeing with Marx that "more often than not, religion serves a conservative function in society" (Mugambi 2003:53) and then disagreeing with Marx by stating that religion, as a social factor, is not always an obstacle to social change. In contemporary Africa, religion has served both a conservative and transformational function and, Mugambi maintains, "The modern Christian missionary enterprise has helped Africa to cope with the forces of colonial domination and European imperialism" (Mugambi 2003:53). This was almost inadvertently achieved as the missionaries taught obedience to colonial rule but also equipped their pupils with the knowledge and skills that were to become essential in the struggles for self-determination across the continent. Bible knowledge contributed to the social consciousness of the elite and populace of Africa.

> On the basis of this widened knowledge the pioneer nationalist leaders throughout tropical Africa were analogically identified with Moses, who challenged almighty Pharaoh and led his people out of bondage...throughout the colonial and post-

colonial period, until 1990, African Christian theological reflection was shaped and coloured by this analogy (Mugambi 2003:54).

Mugambi proceeds to map the route followed in the acceptance of a new analogy, namely the Exile. I have already traced this journey in section 4.4 and will not retrace the steps here. However, Mugambi completes this analogical change by stating, "This theology of reconstruction presupposes that the social foundations of the old culture are essential for the sustenance of the new society" (Mugambi 2003:54). This is an interesting statement as there is often criticism of reconstruction as not being reconstruction proper, but that its aim is to produce something that has not existed before. In the statement it is clear that Mugambi seeks to build a new society based on the culture and religion of pre-colonial Africa.

Mugambi views reinterpreting outdated and irrelevant metaphors and idioms as an aspect of the task of theological reconstruction in Africa. In adopting this view, he shows the influence of Paul Tillich's works: "Paul Tillich, perhaps more than any other 20th century theologian, succeeded in the task of discerning new symbols and metaphors in which to recast the central message of the gospel" (Mugambi in Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:75). Kelsey (in Ford 1997:88) maintains that "the theological approach of Tillich's works was to mediate between contemporary culture and historical Christianity, to show that faith need not be unacceptable to contemporary culture and that contemporary culture need not be unacceptable to faith". Dedji (2003:57) maintains that:

> Tillich exhibits a correlation between religion and culture. Tillich suggests that the human condition always raises fundamental questions which human cultures express in various ways, and to which religious traditions offer answers expressed in religious symbols. Though Tillich's method of correlation has been a very controversial feature of his work, it continues to influence many theologians.

Mugambi is one of those theologians, precisely because the concept of reinterpreting religious symbols and metaphors is one Mugambi finds appropriate for theological reconstruction in Africa.

A philosopher who has influenced Mugambi is Karl Jaspers because Mugambi finds value in the prospect of developing new myths as an aspect of theological reconstruction. Jaspers regards mythical thinking as something that characterises man in any epoch (see Denji 2003:58). This is stated by Mugambi:

> As the 20th century nears its end, Africa must begin to make new myths, and reinterpret old ones for the survival of its own peoples. The myth of a vanishing people must be replaced by the myth of a resurgent, or resilient people. The myth

of a desperate people must be replaced by the myth of a people capable of feeding itself, and so on (Mugambi 1995:37-38).

The issue for Mugambi is that Africa's image needs to be remodelled; the colonial image replaced with a new one of Africa as the waking answer. Such a remodelling would form part of the systematization of the reconstruction paradigm. At this point the role of the church becomes crucial as it is the bridge between the past and the future, stirring up people's minds and giving fresh meaning to "faith, hope and love".

Considering all the crises that the continent (Africa) is undergoing, it is tempting to give up and surrender one's birthright to the principalities and powers of this world. But God, who is the ultimate author of history, encourages us all to refuse to despair, and empowers us to discern new creative ways to resiliently ensure our integrity and revival (Mugambi 1995:50).

By the way he views the inclusiveness of the relationship between the church and the state, it is clear that Mugambi foresees the development of a new society where the relationship between the wizard and the king in African traditional society could be the model for church/ state relationships. His notion of the role of the church is for it to be an instrument of transformation. Mugambi feels that if the church fails to provide the lead in matters of change it will become irrelevant to the majority of people who expect religion to be at the forefront of social change (Mugambi 2003:54). In making these statements Mugambi places the church at the fulcrum point of transformational change in society and points to the influence exerted by the founding fathers of the American constitution in the change from dependence and subordination to England to freedom as an example of religious influence. Mugambi is critical of viewing secularism as the driver of technological advancement and devaluing sacralism as resulting in technological backwardness. He points to the religious heritage of the North Atlantic which still persists in the face of vast technological advances and to the fact that the majority still consider themselves Christians. One cannot thus attribute Africa's technological backwardness to its deep religiousness (see Mugambi 2003:55). Those factors that will exercise the greatest influence over Africa's Christianity in the future will be largely external, rather than the home and the church; such factors as rapid privatization, urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, and synchronization will be the major influences (Mugambi 2003:55). The role of Christianity needs to be redefined in a context where it has lost the social role it had and is no longer the most visible dispenser of alms.

> Theological reconstruction in this context will demand reorientation of African Christian church leaders, so that they take more seriously the African cultural and religious heritage (Mugambi 2003:56).

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This reorientation is already taking place as may be observed in the wider role played by the local pastor as he/she is involved in more than preaching and the administration of the sacraments. Spiritual matters now include that which was previously regarded as secular involvement such as dealing with poverty, social inequalities, education and training. It seems clear that there is a gradual return to the church becoming a lead agency in transformative social action, similar to that initiated by the church in the time of the Industrial Revolution.

> It appears that, as the twenty-first century opens, the African church will have to become the 'lead agency' again, rescuing those who are dying as a consequence of an economic order concerned only with maximization of profits and globalization of markets. Theological reconstruction has to do with this reorientation (Mugambi 2003:56).

While this concludes Mugambi's drawing of the borders of reconstruction in *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), his concluding remarks in a "Message of Churches to Africa's Leaders" carries significant pointers for understanding his notion of reconstruction.

3.8.6 Message of the churches to Africa's leaders

This subsection is a summary of the meetings of various African church and societal bodies where Mugambi refers to their importance for the social reconstruction of Africa and draws conclusions that bear upon the way this should be done. I summarise this development in order to substantiate the conclusion drawn by Mugambi at the end of this subsection.

There is an important factor that gives insight into Mugambi's approach to the notion of church: in this subsection he refers to ecumenical bodies as "the church" and views their conclusions as the voice of the church to Africa's leaders. Another factor that should be noted is the way he views the AACC and the OAU as parallel bodies engaged in the social reconstruction of Africa. "Both these Pan-African organizations are indispensable institutions for the social reconstruction of this continent" (Mugambi 2003:56). The consolidation of the continent in all its many facets is a primary factor in Mugambi's thinking. In his view, the message of the Churches to Africa's heads of state is clear and concise:

> The people of Africa yearn for peace, economic prosperity and socio-political stability. The introduction of multi-party politics after the cold war has not yielded peace and harmony; instead, civil strife is the order of the day in most countries. Economic liberalization has not improved the standard of living for the majority of Africa's citizens; instead the gap between the affluent and the destitute has increased to alarming proportions…The AACC urges Africa's heads

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of state to do everything in their power to restore peace and harmony in their respective countries through the strengthening of participatory democracy (Mugambi 2003:57).

Mugambi is concerned that the necessary integration will not be achieved as long as it is orchestrated by the commonwealths who design things to suit the former colonial powers; anglophone, francophone, lusophone and Arabic. "Africa needs a continental integration which will facilitate the emergence of the Africa Common Market" (Mugambi 2003:57). Mugambi has the European Union in view when he uses this language and is positive about the possibility of forming a similar African Union, because, in his view, there is less diversity in Africa than exists in Europe. He believes the OAU should be working towards a "borderless Africa" which will bring an end to the problem of refugees and uprooted people. Further positive results would be economic development, the easing of population pressure and the resettling of less densely populated areas. All this is declared against the background of Mugambi's criticism of the arbitrary boundaries drawn by the colonial powers which divide people groups in numerous situations in Africa.

> The churches, whose members are united in faith across national and ethnic identities, are a valuable asset in the process of Pan-African integration. The ecumenical movement, affirming the unity of the church and unity of humankind provides the theological frame of reference within which Europe and North America can support the process of Pan-African integration (Mugambi 2003:58).

Having personally served on a number of ecumenical bodies (TEASA, GDOP, and CCC)[15] my view is that Mugambi is optimistic about unity in both the AACC and the OAU. Much work has yet to be done before the African Union he envisages becomes a possibility. The reality is that many of the proposed mergers of churches have floundered or are struggling (Uniting church, United Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian Church unity endeavours, talks between Catholic and Anglican leaders). The struggles within the South African Development Community (SADEC) group of nations are also indicative that all is not well.

3.8.7 Conclusion

On many occasions Mugambi refers to the need to return to African culture and religion as a foundation from which to develop social reconstruction in Africa. He also leans heavily on the notion of a unified church (the influence of his ecumenical experience and position) and a

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[15] TEASA The Evangelical Association of South Africa

GDOP Global Day of Prayer

CCC Consultation of Christian Churches (A Western Cape body representing some 35 denominations and para-church organizations)

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united continent. In order for this to be achieved, he recognises the need for multi-disciplinary cooperation requiring collaboration, consultation and cooperation between specialists in all professions (see Mugambi 2003:58). Nehemiah is the role model he uses as an example of how African communities may be mobilized in order for the continent to become productive and effective in the world market. African people's confidence in themselves needs to be restored in order for this change to occur:

> Such reorientation is an educational task, which can be undertaken by churches more effectively than by any other social institution. Churches have direct contact with individuals and communities at all levels of the social fabric. They have permanent presence which outlives particular individual leaders within their leadership hierarchies. Such characteristics are rare amongst secular social agencies, both within and outside government structures (Mugambi 2003:59).

From the above quote it may be seen that Mugambi views the church as the most effective agent to bring about change in Africa. His ecumenical approach is related to this view and explains the way he emphasises the need for the church in Africa to form a united front. He is optimistic about this unity becoming a reality and reconstruction being achieved; "There is hope that social reconstruction will be achieved in the 21st century" (Mugambi 2003:59). I close this conclusion with a quote that expresses this hope.

> Theologically, we need to reaffirm the unity of the Church and unity of Humankind; the indispensability of the spiritual dimension of reality; the essential contribution of Africa's peoples to the heritage of mankind (Mugambi 2003:59).

3.9 A comparison of reconstruction as presented by Getui, Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio

In order to compare the three theologians mentioned above, I first offer a brief description of various Western forms of reconstruction in order to emphasise the difference between such forms and African notions of reconstruction.

There is great divergence in Western notions of reconstruction whereas African reconstruction is mainly limited to ecclesial and societal change. The following is a summary of such Western notions of reconstruction:

3.9.1 Christian reconstruction, theonomy, and dominion theology

The main proponents of this theology were Rousas John Rushdoony, Gary North and Cornelius von Til (see bibliography). I offer a brief summary of their teachings:

- The law still applies today.

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- Old Testament law is to govern society. Since we are called to subdue the earth i.e. take dominion over it, dominion theology teaches that God's law should rule (or dominate) all aspects of society.

- The law was divided into three sections: civil, moral and ceremonial. The ceremonial law has been fulfilled by Christ and is no longer incumbent upon the believer, but not so the moral and civil parts of the law. Therefore we are to live under the moral law and seek to establish, in our society, the civil system of Israel.

- Reconstructionists teach that the mission of the church goes beyond the spiritual transformation of individuals, i.e. preaching the gospel and making disciples, to a mandate to change society.

- It is post-millennial, seeing the victory of the gospel on earth before Christ returns. It is therefore optimistic about the future rather than pessimistic like the pre-millennial and amillennial eschatological views.

- Home schooling is one of the methods for implementing change in society.

3.9.2 Reconstruction in theology

Another field of reconstruction is that represented by Henry Churchill King, past President of Oberlin College and Professor of Theology and Philosophy (1907). He makes a case for the ongoing reconstruction of theology as, in his view, theology can never be static or complete since it always needs to take new developments into account.

In the first place, it would help both the theologian and his critic if there were clear recognition of the temporary task of any given theologian or system. The days of great theological systems are doubtless past, not because the great truths do not abide, but simply because the task is differently conceived. What has happened here has happened in philosophy. No person who really understands them self aims to produce the final philosophy or the final theology. Workers in both these fields are coming gradually to see that they are related to one another similar to workers in natural science. Theology must grow as science grows. The task is endless. Each worker may hope to contribute something to the developing system of theological truth, and he welcomes every contribution of another, but he does not hope to reach the final system (King 1907:1).

While Mugambi would agree with this viewpoint, it does not reflect his notion of reconstruction.

3.9.3 Latin American reconstruction

As with Latin American liberation theology, the basic focus of reconstruction in Latin America is on political and financial inequity, and the simple struggle to survive. Very often

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the context is where civil war has ended and the crushing burdens of building a more humane society continue – in a new world order with less and less compassion or creative insight for the plight of the poor (see Matthew Ashley 1999:3). The major objective of this form of reconstruction is governmental change with consequent care for the poor and downtrodden.

3.9.4 African reconstruction

In the book edited by Getui and Obeng (*Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays* 2003) there is a list of those issues pertinent to reconstruction in Africa:

- Healing the groaning creation in Africa
- Formulation of an African environmental theology
- Liberation of the African woman
- Child abuse and neglect in Kenya
- Churches and AIDS in Kenya
- The food crisis in Kenya
- Poverty in Africa
- Recovery of African identity in Africa

The above list of some chapter headings points to the way African reconstruction theologians approach pertinent issues within society such as the food crisis, child abuse, the AIDS pandemic, and poverty. For Mugambi, reconstruction includes regaining self-esteem and integrity, restoring lost cultural identity, re-examining traditional African religion and building a new society that expresses the values of the reign of God (see Getui and Obeng 2003: Introduction). In order to conclude this chapter, I will compare Getui, Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio and their notions of reconstruction.

3.9.5 Comparing Getui, Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio

a) Mary Getui

From the above list drawn from Getui's contribution to *Theology of Reconstruction* (2003), it may be concluded that the whole volume presents a broad approach to reconstruction. The 16 contributors to this volume represent a wide range of African theologians from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, and they offer comment on the integrated nature of African society. This is further defined by the extent of the application of reconstruction. In his foreword to this collection of articles, Mugambi refers to Mary Getui's contribution in the following way:

> Mary N Getui's chapter is also centred on the food crisis. Her premise is that theology is about everyday issues. She uses the food crisis in Africa to articulate

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the need for churches to promote justice; cultural integrity; collective effort; contextualisation; friendly adaptation; foresight; vision; simplicity and self reliance (see Getui 2003:8).

In this foreword Mugambi summarises the intent of the publication by stating that the intention of the contributors is that it will assist in reconstruction of thought, ideas, attitudes and strategies on all aspects of life. The challenge posed is not only to the church but to the whole of society, one that will be "more functional, more meaningful, more integrated and more inclusive" (see Getui 2003:9).

b) Charles Villa-Vicencio

When one turns to Villa-Vicencio and *A Theology of Reconstruction* (1992), the same inclusiveness is evident. He views part of the task of reconstruction to include breaking down prejudices of race, class and sexism and the creation of an all-inclusive society (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:8).

> The immediate task of an ethic of reconstruction involves placing certain values and structures in position to begin the process of social renewal (Villa-Vicencio 1992:9).

In this publication Villa-Vicencio refers to a number of issues that require reconstruction thereby showing the breadth of his approach. Included in the list are the following:

- Nation building
- The rule of law
- Human rights
- Political economy
- Economic justice
- The right to believe

Villa-Vicencio believes that the church faces the task of restoring justice and affirming human dignity within the context of the coming reign of God which demands that there will always be criticism of the status quo with a search for renewal that results in a qualitative improvement on the old (see Villa-Vicencio 1992:2).

c) Jesse Mugambi

Viewed in the light of the above, one may compare Mugambi's contribution in the various publications I have examined as being similar to the approach taken by both Getui and Villa-Vicencio. His contribution is viewed as establishing a point of reference in the development of African theology (see Dedji 2003:86). Mugambi's moving from liberation to

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reconstruction theology is an indicator that African Christian theology is maturing and can make a contribution to world-wide Christianity. While it may appear that Mugambi undervalues the work of African liberation theologians, my observation is that in his *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), he pays adequate tribute to the members of EATWOT as well as asserting the need for liberation to be an ongoing factor in reconstructing African society.

> Mugambi's theological reflections point to the necessity of building a solid foundation for the "new ecumenism" that would give priority to cooperation, collaboration, inclusivity and amiability over the old antagonism that has hitherto prevailed among African ecclesial communities (Denji 2003:87).

Mugambi calls for new patterns or models of social transformation and community renewal in Africa. His warning in the 1995 publication (page viii) is pertinent to understanding his passion for reconstruction: "Either mutual reconstruction, or mutual destruction. The winner-loser dichotomy is unrealistic and inappropriate in the African situation". He follows the emphasis of both Getui and Villa-Vicencio that all of society needs the assistance of all of society in order to restructure African society.

I must mention that reconstruction theology has not received an unqualified acceptance. There have been numerous voices critical of Mugambi's supposed move away from liberation theology and his critical stance regarding inculturation. As Vellem (2010:547) states, "To maintain that liberation should be a starting point of reconstruction is substantially different from arguing for the shift from liberation to reconstruction". As I have pointed out previously, Mugambi agrees that liberation and reconstruction follow each other depending upon the measure of freedom experienced. Farisani (2002), Maluleke (1994a & 1994b), and Pityana (1995) have voiced criticism of both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio and their approach to reconstruction. Vellem, in a paper presented to the University of Pretoria in 2010 entitled "Ideology and Spirituality: a Critique of Villa-Vicencio's Project of Reconstruction", delivers a constructive critique of reconstruction theology, referring to Mugambi as well.

4. The Church in the Writings of Jesse Mugambi

4.1 Introduction

I have analysed Mugambi's personal and theological background and derived some understanding of his approach to reconstruction theology. I will now seek to derive his notion of the church. In the next chapter (five), I will explore his understanding of the reign of God in order to investigate the relationship between the church and the reign of God in chapter six – which constitutes the core of this study.

The history of the church is fraught with splits and breakaways. The earliest of these occurred in 451 when several Oriental Orthodox churches (e.g. Syriac) disagreed with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches on adherence to the council of Chalcedon. There was a further split between the Roman Catholic (Western) Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches over the *filioque* clause (sixth century). In the sixteenth century a split occurred between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Luther and others (Zwingli, Calvin and the English reformer Cranmer) began with no intention of splitting the church; however, after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the schism became definite. In seventeenth century England the Baptist movement arose, giving emphasis to the agenda first proposed by the Anabaptists (Mennonites etc.). The emergence of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century challenged all the established churches to be more receptive to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. However, splits have continued and the church today is divided as never before. From this brief overview of the tendency of the church through the ages to fail in maintaining the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3), the conclusion may be drawn that expressions of the church are many and diverse. This diversity affects the views held of the nature of the church.

For the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, the ecclesiology of the church is based on the sacraments legitimately ministered under the authority of the bishop. Protestant churches regard church structures as optional as long as the ministering of the sacraments (baptism and communion) and the preaching of the "word" are present. The church is seen as a voluntary organisation. Those churches that are "post-denominational" or independent place the emphasis on the gathering of believers as essential for the existence of "church". (For more detail on the above see Kärkkäinen 2010: 226-7).

Mugambi analyses the church in terms of church government and I list the five types of

churches he portrays (See Mugambi 2010: 228-9):

- Episcopalian (based on the rule of a bishop or lead elder)

- Presbyterian (based on the rule of elders)

- Congregational (based on rule by consensus of the members)

- Charismatic (based on rule by a charismatic leader)

- Charismatic/ Pentecostal (based on rule by the Holy Spirit through charismatic gifts)

In personal discussions with Mugambi (March 2013), he proposed a sixth model or type of church government: hybrid leadership. He has observed that a number of churches have emerged that are governed by a mix of, for instance, Pentecostal and Presbyterian, or Presbyterian and Congregational. Mugambi is adamant that the word *ekklesia* is not necessarily a theological or religious word but refers to any form of gathering. His view is that the notion of "church" is a cultural / historical matter. For instance, a hierarchical society will transpose church into a hierarchical church structure with all the resultant chaos. For him the gospel is planted in a society and the church is what emerges. He makes the point that the gospel is like the pith in a tree or plant; the church is like the trunk and the branches. For him, the life is what matters, not necessarily the structure.

Much of what Dulles and others have produced refers to the role of the church. Mugambi insists on retaining his approach of analysing the governmental style of the church. Mugambi contrasts the church represented by the monasteries with that represented by the Crusades. His point is that the church is often structured according to societal needs and demands (personal conversations March 2013).

Mugambi does not offer any systematic analysis of the doctrine of the church and I will therefore need to examine his primary writings in order to develop some understanding of the way he views the church and its praxis. In order to achieve this I have purposely excluded those publications dealing with subjects such as hermeneutics, methodology, ecology, ethics and African family. In my reading of the various publications to which Mugambi has made a contribution, I have concluded that there is much repetition, with a number of papers being reformatted to contribute to similar topics. This is normal practice in theological circles and I mention this only to explain why I have excluded certain publications. During my reading I have noted certain trends in Mugambi's approach to aspects of the church's relationship to sections of civil society which have assisted me in arriving at conclusions concerning his

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approach to the church. The selection of publications I have chosen focuses on those relevant to the topic researched in this chapter. By analysing the contribution Mugambi has made in these publications with regard to various approaches to the church, I will develop a collage from which I will be able to describe the position Mugambi holds on issues that affect the church. Through this exercise I will seek to arrive at some understanding of the model of the church that would accord best with his theological writings.

The areas that are of concern to Mugambi are the disunity (fragmentation) of the African church, the focus and hope of the ecumenical movement, the need for structural reconstruction of the African church, and the proposed impact of the church on civil society. This chapter is therefore offered as an in-depth examination of Mugambi's writings and focuses on the references he makes to the church with regard to the above topics.

In this chapter I seek to derive methodological clarification on the following: Where does Mugambi write and what does he write about the following aspects of the church:

- The social agenda or "missions" of the church.

- The governance of the church.

- African churches in social transformation.

- The sociological manifestations of the church.

- The theological nature of the church.

- The characteristics and marks of a true church.

- How sociological manifestations of the church and the theological nature of the church are related, with reference to Bosch's notion of creative tension and Dulles' models of the church.

I have shown (chapter two, section five) that Mugambi's methodology is influenced by the clash between Western and African theology. He takes issue with the Greco-Roman norms of thinking that predominate Western Christian theology (see Mugambi 2004:9). Because of this Western influence, he believes that African biblical scholarship is hampered in its attempt to produce a truly African theology.

> The European Union did not dislodge these norms, although it facilitated the emergence of tribal (national) churches that, in turn, facilitated the emergence of modern European nationalism. It is the responsibility of African biblical scholarship to affirm both the relevance of the gospel and the validity of the

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cultural and religious heritage of African peoples. Without affirmation of both, Christianity cannot take root in Africa, or anywhere else in those areas where the modern missionary enterprise has operated (Mugambi 2004:9).

Mugambi is in agreement with Lonergan (1971) that theologians need to deal with eight areas in formulating their research, namely research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics and communications (Mugambi 2003:18). Mugambi's comment on this is informative with regard to the methodology he adopts:

> A theologian who understands theology as a hermeneutic (interpretative) discipline will almost certainly concentrate on the "texts" that will be the object of analysis. However, another theologian may consider that theological texts are themselves dynamic, in the sense that they are produced by living communities in specific cultural contexts, and received (or rejected) by other communities in other cultural contexts. A dynamic approach to hermeneutics will yield a dynamic theology, while a static approach will yield a "fixed" theology (Mugambi 2003:18).

The above quote provides an insight into Mugambi's approach to research. His purpose is to see Africans articulating their response to the gospel in their own idioms and insights. His criticism of what he terms the "theological anthropology" used in African theology also gives insight into his approach (see Mugambi 2003:23). Mugambi prefers the inductive method as the most relevant method for doing theology in Africa (see Mugambi 2003:25).

With these brief insights into Mugambi's methodology as a guide, I will approach his various works and endeavour to arrive at an understanding of his notion of the church.

In section two, I offer a theological discourse on the church: this will cover various aspects of the nature of the church as reflected in manifestations of church life, images, models, characteristics, and marks.

In section three, I focus on Mugambi's understanding of expressions of the church's life such as *leitourgia, kerugma, diakonia, koinonia,* and mission. By this I hope to understand Mugambi's view of the place of the church in God's mission in the world as well as discerning his view of the role of the church in society.

In section four, I examine Mugambi's description of the theological and sociological nature of the church.

In section five, I describe Dulles "models of the church" and compare how Mugambi views the church.

In section six, I endeavour to place Mugambi on the map derived from the various approaches to the nature of the church that I have drawn upon.

4.2 A theological discourse on the church

Various ways of organising material related to the church present themselves. I need to decide which is most pertinent to help me develop a map on which Mugambi's notion of the church may be plotted. Such approaches to the church may be divided into four basic categories: different expressions of the church, models of the church, church governance, the functions of the church, and the nature of the church.

4.2.1 Expressions of the church

One way would be to approach the church from a structural perspective. Theologically, the church may be described in images, characteristics and marks. For instance, Calvin and the Reformers would look for the marks of the preached word of God, the right ministering of the sacraments, and the exercise of Godly discipline. From a visible perspective the church may be described in terms of expressions. As mentioned in the first chapter Smit (2002) offers the following expressions:

- A worshipping community

- A local congregation

- A denomination

- An ecumenical gathering

- Christian organisations

- Christian groups.

Included in this section would be the variety of denominational expressions of the church, the different forms of church governance already referred to in Mugambi's description of different types of churches, and the roles of tradition in the life of the church.

4.2.2 Models of the church

A further way of describing the church may be by way of models. Dulles describes six models by which the church may be distinguished in *Models of the Church* (2002):

- The institutional model

- The sacramental model

- The mystical communion model

- The herald model

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- The servant model

- The community of disciples model

Some would describe the church by the titles given to Jesus Christ and posit the function of these titles in the church. Such titles would be: Prophet, Priest, and King.

4.2.3 The governance of the church

Another way of viewing the church would be from the perspective of church governance. Two main forms of church governance prevail: the Episcopal and the Congregational. This is the way Mugambi tends to describe the church.

4.2.4 The functions of the church

A final approach may be to describe the church by its functions. A number of Greek words are expressive of the functions of the church. These functions are all used by Mugambi in his writings when referring to the role of the church in African society. I offer each word with a brief description:

Leitourgia: This word has reference to the ministry of the priests and officers of the church with regard to the prayers and sacrifices offered to God. The nature of the church may be expressed in its public worship. Significant to this section would be the issue of imported or local expressions of worship.

Kerygma: This is any proclamation by a herald. For the purposes of this study one may assume that it refers to the public proclamation of the message of the church: the good news of the reign of God.

Diakonia: This word is used for any form of service or ministering: those who render a service to others, e.g. those who prepare food. The reference for us would be to the church as servant, both within its structures and without.

Koinonia: This word can refer to any form of association in a joint participation. For our purposes, it is the meaning of fellowship and community that is relevant. The important thing here is the churches governance, ministry and existence, all of which fall under the broader heading of community.

Marturia: A martyr, in the Greek understanding, is one who gives testimony to the truth. In a Christian context it refers to one who gives testimony to the truth of Christ, i.e. to all aspects of his teaching and work. This word describes the missionary nature of the church as a

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witness to the truth of the gospel through its life and teaching[16].

4.2.5 The nature of church

The church, by its very nature is both sociological and theological. Furthermore, the church needs to be viewed eschatologically in order to understand these two aspects. A number of descriptive words may be applied to the nature of the church. Depending on the traditional perspective from which the church is viewed, inception may be thought of as through conversion or incorporation. For some this is climactic and for others a process. This process may be termed the formation of the church and here factors such as the preaching of the word, the sacraments, teaching, and the functioning of the liturgy are involved. The ministry of the church comprises various ministry gifts used for building up the church. Church governance may be either hierarchical or democratic with the objective of growing the church. The goal in this view is to foster the church's mission in society.

This section serves as a limited introduction to different ways of describing the church. In the next section, I first trace Mugambi's approach to the functions of the church. I then examine Mugambi's description of the theological and social nature of the church. Following this, I use Dulles' models of the church to establish a map. Dulles is used by various theologians such as Bosch and Migliore. I am not able to establish a map of my own on which to plot Mugambi, hence my use of Dulles' map as one that is already established and on which Bosch also draws extensively.

4.3 Mugambi on the functions of the church

In this section I examine Mugambi's views on the five functions of the church defined in 4.2.4. Mugambi has definite views on all of these and it is pertinent to examine these as an aid to understanding his notion of church.

4.3.1 Mugambi and *Leitourgia*

In all his approaches to the subject of the church in Africa, Mugambi draws a distinction between Western "missionary" types of Christianity and African Christianity. His view of the first is inevitably negative and critical. With regard to the worship of the church Mugambi shows how:

There is large lay participation in African liturgy. He points out that this may be because there is a shortage of priests because of the rapid growth of the church in Africa. This factor

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[16] For the above descriptions see Thayer's Lexicon of the Greek New Testament.

is particularly true in Protestant and independent churches which are mostly sustained by lay leaders.

There is also considerable participation of women in African church life. This is, to a large extent, contrary to the norms introduced by North Atlantic churches. In the independent churches, the leadership of women is even more pronounced with several of the independent churches founded by women.

Another characteristic of the liturgy in African churches is spontaneity in prayer, preaching, and ritual. Western Christianity relies heavily on written liturgies, written prayers, and even written hymnals. These are only occasionally referred to in African forms of worship where the focus is more on spontaneous response.

Mugambi (1995:149) asks the question, "What kind of Christianity are Africans embracing?" In Mugambi's view, Africans are becoming increasingly europeanised through Christian missionary efforts. This conclusion may have been made because inculturation has endeavoured to allow Christianity to evolve in African soil and yet has retained much that is Western as essential. Mugambi also sees the freedom of worship that prevails across much of Africa as producing a consumerist type of Christianity which he sees as resulting in Africans abandoning Christianity after they have tried all the different brands on offer (for all the above see Mugambi 1995:146-152).

4.3.2 Mugambi and *Kerygma*

Proclamation is seen by Mugambi as a vital function of the church. He would apply proclamation not only to the preaching of the word of God, but also to all teaching in the church and from the church that results in the liberation of the hearer. Mugambi views the kerygmatic role of the church as promoting the teachings of Jesus Christ in order to foster conditions that are conducive to national stability and social harmony (Mugambi 1995:164). I have chosen to view *kerygma* and *didache* as parts of the same whole. Viewed from this perspective Mugambi regards education as a major tool in bringing about change in society.

> Education, organised and controlled by people who want to change a situation, can become a very effective means of making society aware of their undesirable situation (Mugambi 1989:104).

When viewed from an African perspective, the oral transmission of truth is often more effective than literacy transmission. Mugambi sees the kerygmatic role of the church as involving the moral education and character formation of children, the ultimate development of a virtuous personality, and maintaining social cohesion (see Mugambi 1989:106-108).

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Mugambi is aware of the difficulties facing the African church as it seeks to fulfil this kerygmatic role: "The challenge we have to face, is making the church of the future an agent for the proclamation of faith, hope, and love in a realistic way on every part of this continent (Mugambi 1995:176).

4.3.3 Mugambi and *diakonia*

This aspect of the church's function may be divided up into the prophetic role of the church, its service, its co-operation with other churches and society, and its relationship to government and civil society. I will examine each of them as they relate to Mugambi's teaching.

The prophetic role of the church

There is no doubt that Mugambi regards the church as the servant of society. Part of that role is to be a voice of conscience by highlighting wrongs in the society. The enemy of the prophetic is conservatism which will prevent the church from voicing any challenge to wrongdoing.

There will be times when society is in dire need of social transformation. If religion fails to provide leadership at that time, it will become irrelevant to the majority of people who would wish to see organised religion at the forefront of social change (Mugambi 2003:54).

Mugambi also views the prophetic role of the church as greater than the concern with preaching and church administration. The role should include involvement in material poverty and injustice (see Mugambi 2003:55, 56).

The service of the church

One may assume that Mugambi's notion of the church as servant is founded in his strong view of the communality of the church as the people of God.

> Mugambi's wholehearted preference for the word "community" is due to its hermeneutical implications for a strong sense of identity (Dedji 2003:67).

The context in which Mugambi places the service of the church is not a Western one, but the communal nature of African society which, according to Maranz, is the "African social security system" (2001:7). Mugambi states that the church has an obligation to help its members live more abundantly, as members of the society to which the church renders service (see Mugambi 1995:133). His view is that the church exists to serve the community in which it is placed. If the church isolates itself from the community, then it will find the community cutting the church off.

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The challenge is for the local church to identify itself with the needs and aspirations of the local community, without being swallowed by or entangled in the frustrations from which it should lift its members (Mugambi 1995:134). The influence of the WCC's emphasis on the church as the servant to the world comes through in most of Mugambi's writings.

Mugambi believes in the possible unity of the African church as the ecumenical movement helps the church to rise above denominationalism without abolishing or denigrating denominations. In his view it is possible for the whole spectrum of the church, from orthodoxy through Catholicism to Pentecostalism and congregationalism, to accept one another in spite of doctrinal differences. He believes that all Christians, because they affirm Jesus of Nazareth to be the Saviour of mankind, can recognise that they belong to the same family of believers. Because this approach fits in with the African cultural and religious heritage, Mugambi urges the local church to foster the unity of the whole church (see Mugambi 1995:203-206).

4.3.4 Mugambi and *koinonia*

Mugambi has been vitally involved in the WCC over a number of years and is an advocate of ecumenism in the African church. The background to Mugambi's view is the disintegration of the African church through breakaways, schisms, new churches starting and the on-going disputes between African churches and the mother bodies in the northern hemisphere. Mugambi has followed Nkrumah's call for a united Africa with a call for a united church in Africa. In this he recognises the differences, but believes they may be overcome if the right approach is adopted by the church generally. Mugambi applies the African notion of "Ubuntu" to the church in Africa and calls for the church to recognise the humanity of all peoples in the continent. His view may be summed up in the following quote:

> Undoubtedly, if African Christians had the freedom to choose, most would prefer a Christian identity, rather than a denominational one. The cultural unity of African peoples is consistent with Christian unity, whereas the denominational fragmentation of Euro-American Christianity is analogous to "tribalism" in Africa (Mugambi 1995:203).

Koinonia refers to fellowship and partnership. In this subsection I will use the breakdown of government, ministry, and community and examine how Mugambi views these aspects of *koinonia*.

Church government

Wherever Mugambi describes the church he uses the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, the

Congregational, the Pentecostal, and the Charismatic models. These models are essentially differentiated by styles of governance. However, Mugambi does not evaluate these differences as irreconcilable. In his writings, Mugambi fluctuates from one to the other and my assessment is that his approach to church government is really pragmatic. Mugambi is more concerned that unity and effectiveness be restored (see Mugambi 1995:116-122).

The ministry of the church

Mugambi's acceptance of the universal nature of the church influences the way he perceives the ministry of the church. Mugambi maintains that the pulpit can become a central oral medium for transmission of new ideas and changing attitudes (Mugambi 1995:225). In Mugambi's view during the colonial period the missionaries used the pulpit to undermine the cultural values of African peoples. In a similar way, he believes that in the future the same medium could be used to restore people's confidence (see Mugambi 1995:225). In order for this to become possible, the ministries of the church would need to undergo retraining in new ways of ministry and new approaches to ministerial formation. Throughout his writings Mugambi reiterates the need for the ministries of the church to form partnerships with civil society, business, and government in order to develop a society that evidences the characteristics of the reign of God.

> Jesus worked with a community of disciples drawn from among the rural people. Likewise, the church in its ministry should work in full collaboration with local leaders in the society where it implements the call to Christian discipleship. If it renders its service while involving the local leaders, it will prevent the development of a situation in which the church might appear to be a foreign institution imposing itself among various sections of the African society (Mugambi 1989:95).

The church community

Mugambi understands the term community to include the meaning "nation" or people. This influences the way Mugambi understands the church community. In his view it is always more than local and, ideally, includes the whole *oikumene*. Mugambi writes against the individualism of much Western Christianity, considering it damaging to the African sense of community (see Mugambi 1995:198-200).

> It is important to appreciate that Christians are, simultaneously, members of the church and of society. However, Christians ought to make a difference in the society by setting an example which other people can emulate (Mugambi 1995:134).

Dedji maintains that Mugambi has a hidden agenda in promoting the African cultural and

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religious heritage. He believes Mugambi is exercised to promote African traditional societies' virtue of enabling unity amid diversity (see Dedji 2003:66). Mugambi promotes the revitalising of the African sense of community by reminding us that African social engineering has developed a system in which the individual is defined by their relationship with others. Mugambi objects to the use of the word "tribe" which has no mention in African language. He prefers the words, "community" and "people" which, he believes, better describe African reality. It is the use of the word "community" that forms a sense of identity (see Mugambi 1995:198-199). Mugambi's thinking is largely in line with that of Mbiti who argues that the church is by nature a corporate body and should operate within the context of the African corporate community life.

> We must seek to make the church the centre of existence from which African peoples may derive the fulfilment of their life's aspiration whether in times of need or in times of feasting, and where they may experience a communal life which has a vaster scope and meaning than tribal life without Christ could ever provide...The church will become for them a community in which their corporate aspirations are not destroyed but fulfilled and satisfied, in which traditional foundations are not simply shaken and replaced with a vacuum but are made more secure in Christ (Mbiti in Baëta 1968:341-342).

The conclusion may be drawn that, for Mugambi, the African ecclesial community is an inclusive corporate body.

The church's mission

The question needs to be asked, "What is the place of the Church in God's mission?" Bosch provides an initial answer to this question: "Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission...there is mission because God loves people" (Bosch 1991:392). Bosch shows that the church is missionary by its very nature (Bosch 1991:389). Mugambi echoes this sentiment:

> The Christian faith demands of all its adherents, as individuals, communities and organisations, continuous involvement in missionary work; the work of evangelisation. No movement can merit the title "church" unless it is a missionary community (Mugambi 1995:167).

However, Mugambi has a broad approach to the "mission" of the church. In his view, the church must be involved in the broader society and not just in spiritual affairs. The good of the entire community in which the church exists, becomes the focus of the church's mission. Mugambi refers to the possibility of a utopian community (Mugambi 2003:107). In Mugambi's view, the church has an essential role in society, working in partnership with civil society, business, and government in a partnership to achieve an equitable society which

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approximates to the reign of God (see *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* 2003).

In the next section I examine Mugambi's view on the theological and social nature of the church.

4.4 Aspects of the church's life in Mugambi's writings

In this section I analyse Mugambi's approach to three aspects of the church's life, namely:

- The social agenda or "missions" of the church.

- The governance of the church.

- African churches in social transformation.

I will focus particularly on Mugambi's contribution to publications that highlight such aspects of the church's life in order to derive an understanding of Mugambi's view on these various aspects of the church's life.

In order to assess Mugambi's position it is necessary to refer to the way he approaches various aspects of the church's responsibilities in Africa, such as the relationship between civil and ecclesial authorities, whether the separation between church and state is viable in an African context, the role of the church as moral custodian; and the church's responsibility to effect change in society. These questions have a bearing on how Mugambi views the church and contribute to establishing Mugambi's view of the church relative to the three aspects of the church's life I examine in this section. In each case I use the various comments made by Mugambi in different publications in order to arrive at conclusions which may be used to establish Mugambi's model of the church.

4.4.1 The social agenda of the church

In this subsection I examine Mugambi's description of the societal role of the church, noting that the social agenda refers to a particular area concerned with "society and its constitution and the mutual relations between people" (Oxford Dictionary 1978:1602). Such an approach will include those missions of the church that make a contribution to society and its right functioning. It should be noted that almost all Mugambi's contributions reflect his criticism of the modern missionary endeavour and his positive acceptance of the ecumenical and Pan-African movements. He has been heavily influenced by Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, John Mbiti, and the South American liberation theologians. It is difficult to separate his opinions on other subjects from the above emphases as they form a substantive part of his

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thinking.

In *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), Mugambi has a section dealing with church history where he points out the folly of studying church history in isolation from secular events because "the church functions within the world" (Mugambi 1989:21). Mugambi's dislike for the separation of church and state as taught mainly by Western church theologians will become obvious as this chapter progresses. Mugambi, at the end of this chapter (1989:36), calls for the link between churches in Africa, Asia and South America to be more adequately explored. He favours links between Third World countries as he is suspicious of Western countries and Western theologians. He questions their presumed superiority over theology produced in the Third World. He is critical of the establishment of the missionary church in Africa as the new household of faith (Galatians 6:10), or the household of God (Eph. 2:19: 1 Tim. 3:15: 1 Peter 4:17),

> (This establishing) did not abolish the traditional household, the extended family and the clan and ethnic community, although the social change that resulted from the coming of Christianity and other factors weakened these traditional social institutions (Mugambi 1989:43).

The communal aspect of the church's life is prominent in Mugambi's writings and the above quote expresses his misgivings about the loss of communality due to the influence of individualistic Christianity brought in by missionaries from the West. The fact is that much of the communal life of African peoples continues to exist because African people simply include Christian individualism into their clan living (see Mugambi 1989:43 & 44) without losing the strong life-links of the family.

Mugambi makes further reference to the role of the church as it faces the challenges of the society in which it lives. He lists the following themes: biblical studies; pastoral responsibility; clarifying the relationship between Christianity and the African cultural and religious heritage; Christianity and other religions in a multi-religious continent; furthering missionary effort; and ecumenism, for the promotion of mutual understanding, consultation and co-operation between various Christian denominations (1989:48). He also makes reference to the "world church" at the end of this chapter (1989:49) which gives further definition to Mugambi's broad understanding of what he views as the nature and role of the church.

Mugambi's view of the unity of the church is influenced by his understanding of the unity of humankind. This view ties in with the way he favours the quest for secular unity and unity in

the church. Mugambi questions whether there can be such a thing as societal harmony when disunity exists in the church. The need for ecclesial harmony and unity is repeatedly voiced by Mugambi as a necessary prerequisite for harmony in African society. He cites the action Constantine took in the early fourth century, out of his concern for the bishops to sort out their differences, by calling the Council of Nicea in 325. His order was that they needed to sort out their differences in the interest of the unity of the Empire. Mugambi's comment is of interest: "Why did Christians, of all people, have to be compelled by secular authorities to convene for the purpose of discussing unity" (Mugambi 1995:45)? As may be seen from the above, Mugambi repeats his concern with regard to the need for an ecumenical approach to the church on every occasion that he deals with the relationship between the church and civil society.

In some final comments to this chapter of his book, Mugambi highlights the church as the social institution that constitutes the most accessible medium of communication because it serves as a bridge between the past and the future. Once again he comments on the negative impact of the "cultural imperialism" imposed by the Christian missionary enterprise and the denominational diversity that accompanied this enterprise. Mugambi regards the ecumenical movement as the harbinger of a new awareness of the need for Christians of every culture to mutually appreciate each other's heritage without prejudice (see Mugambi 1995:50). The ecumenical aspect of the church is repeatedly highlighted and the need for a non-parochial approach encouraged. Africa has experienced many disasters such as natural disasters, the collapse of social institutions, dictatorial leadership, poverty, and pandemics, but, in spite of these, there is the hope of a better future emerging where the resources for the potential welfare of the people of the continent are correctly utilized.

> The church has the responsibility to prepare the people for this immense task, and proclaim that with faith, hope and love, God makes possible what to human beings appears an impossibility (Mugambi 1995:51).

Mugambi continues to criticise the enmity between the ecumenical and evangelical sections of the church in Africa. The factions in African Christianity militate against the church being an agent of reconciliation in fulfilment of Jesus' mandate in John 17. If the church purposes to serve as an example of harmony then Mugambi views it as having failed in most aspects. His view of the universality of the church makes him an avid supporter of the ecumenical movement. With reference to new missionary movements today, Mugambi questions the extent to which they serve the purpose of unity, viewing them as harbingers of cultural stereotypes, racial prejudices and social conditions foreign to Africa. His question is, "What

community models are they establishing in Africa? Do they integrate with African communities, or do they introduce new 'ghettos' within African communities" (Mugambi 1995:98).

When he deals with "The Revival Movement and the Church" (1995:126-140) Mugambi makes a number of comments that help to illustrate his understanding of the nature and function of the church. Mugambi offers the following comment on the goal of the church:

> A church ought to help its members live more abundantly, as members of the society to which that church renders service. Too often, however, many a church has tended to isolate itself from the community it ought to serve, with the consequence that the community cuts itself off from that church (Mugambi 1995:133).

At the end of this chapter Mugambi makes a strong case for the church to be accepted as the best agent for the development of moral values. Along with the home, these two exercise the strongest influence on the growing child. Therefore, as the church exercises its influence in the local context, influencing the society it exists in, so the strength of such influence will reflect in the strength of the church universal (see Mugambi 1995:139).

In a chapter dealing with "African Christian Spirituality" (1995:141-159) Mugambi approaches the subject of the separation of church and state and ventures the opinion that this concept is foreign to African culture, calling it "contrived and unrealistic" (Mugambi 1995:141). The invitation to attend a meeting of a group of scholars in 1992 to discuss Afro-Asian Spirituality contained the following comment by Tissa Balasuriya, quoted by Mugambi:

> The word "spirituality" itself was felt to be inadequate to cover our common quest, which has to include current Afro-Asian concerns such as for life, food, community, human rights, land, peace, culture as well as the dimension of search for a path for realizing the reign of righteousness within ourselves and in our societies. Some would call this "Kingdom praxis". Churches are only means for this quest (Mugambi 1995:141).

The all-embracing nature of Afro-Asian concepts of transformation may be perceived in the above quote. Such approaches to transformation have no place for a spirituality that does not include all of life, and therefore no concept of church praxis that does not include involvement in all of life. When he describes African church liturgical praxis Mugambi points out the difference between the fixed liturgical praxis of the form of Christianity introduced by the missionaries and the spontaneity of African church liturgical praxis. "Africanized forms tend to refer to written liturgies only peripherally, and rely heavily on

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spontaneous response" (Mugambi 1995:147). In order to emphasize the way Mugambi views the integral nature of the relationship between the church and society, one may point to the way he denies the separation of church and state, or, one might say, the sacred from the secular. The following quote refers:

> Whereas in the North Atlantic countries there is a clear institutional separation between church and state, in post-colonial Africa such separation, if it exists at all, is only in theory (Mugambi 1995:148).

Chapter 10 of *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) comprises Mugambi's 1990 address to the All Africa Conference of Churches in Nairobi and contains a number of references to the African church. I have selected some of these in order to highlight aspects of Mugambi's view of the social agenda of the church. The first of these quotes expresses the Scriptural challenge for the church to act as God's witnesses on earth, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Mugambi 1995:161). Mugambi maintains that national stability is dependent upon social welfare among citizens and churches, and that Christian organisations can promote conditions that are conducive to national stability and social harmony:

> Are Christian churches and organizations, in specific countries and regions, agents of reconciliation, or promoters of social strife? If churches are competitive and antagonistic social agents in a particular country, how can social harmony be achieved at the national level? It is clear that churches, by failing to promote practical ecumenism, have both directly and indirectly contributed to civil strife in Africa. Conversely, the ecumenical co-operation of churches in some countries has contributed greatly to the process of mediation and reconciliation, leading to the achievement of lasting peace. This has been the case, for example, in Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique (Mugambi 1995:164).

Mugambi's focus on the role of the church in the social order is evident in the above quote. He does regard evangelism to be the essential task of the church but views this task as being adversely affected by the disunity of the church. In addition, continuous involvement in missionary work is evidence of true church life. "No movement can merit the title 'church' unless it is a missionary community" (Mugambi 1995:167). On the same page Mugambi refers to the building of Christian community, another of the models he uses to refer to the church. But this community (church) needs to develop without outside influence so that a truly indigenous church may be formed.

> At the theological level, the problem of the church in Africa till now has been that all structures have been inspired by theological rationalisations from the denominational and cultural tradition of the foreign missionary societies which introduced Christianity in Africa. Thus, there have not yet emerged some distinctly African contributions to Christology, ecclesiology, missiology,

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eschatology, homiletics, musicology and pastorology (Mugambi 1995:170 &171).

In a chapter entitled "Ecumenism and African community", Mugambi voices his disapproval of the way in which the African church has been marked by denominations, each marketing themselves as "the Church" without clarifying that they represent only an "ecclesial brand", type or model (see Mugambi 1995:19). The way in which different missionary agencies demand entrance to countries without restriction and propagate their brand of religion without responsibility, causing sectarianism, is offensive to Mugambi. Para-church agencies also attract his criticism in that, in his view, they alienate Africans from the church in favour of them supporting their respective agencies. Mugambi questions whether there is any difference between the work of the church and para-church agencies and that of secular relief agencies. If there is no difference, is the church really needed for social transformation? (see Mugambi 1995:196). He calls for the African church to be relevant in its society where material needs are overwhelming, by adopting an approach that is different to that of secular agencies.

Whatever answer one formulates, it ought to be checked for resonance with the African understanding of ecumenism and community (Mugambi 1995:197).

When Mugambi refers to community he refers to nations and people in the widest sense. He is scathing of the way in which the North Atlantic nations divided Africa into nations according to geographic boundaries without taking cognisance of the family groupings of nations. Even at the formation of the OAU the charter demands that all member states respect the colonial borders laid down by the colonial powers. Mugambi uses the word "state" to refer to these nations and sees Africa as a continent of states without nations. He prefers to use the word community as being more descriptive of African social reality. The African sense of community plays a large role in Mugambi's understanding of the nature of the church (see Mugambi 1995:198-200).

I will examine the influence of ecumenicity on Mugambi's approach to the church when I deal with the characteristics and marks of a true church in section 4 of this chapter and will therefore not delve into the dimensions of ecumenism offered in this part of his publication.

In the conclusion to a chapter on "Africa in the New World Order", Mugambi refers to the role of the Church in social reconstruction. His view is that, in Africa, the church remains the most influential and sustainable institution, especially in rural areas (Mugambi 1995:225). He views all other institutions of change (political parties, trade unions, etc.) as transient because

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of the changes that take place in such institutions from time to time through elections and various other instruments of change. By contrast, churches have a permanence that transcends national and political boundaries. Mugambi's further point is that churches derive their mandate from the Bible and are therefore accountable to, and should be assessed by, biblical principles. Whether this proves to be true in the reality of church life has yet to be proved as the contrary appears to be the case, with biblical principles seldom featuring in decision-making. The pulpit has been used by various agencies to disseminate their thoughts and propaganda in the past (i.e. the use by missionaries for undermining the cultural values of African peoples), but can become a major medium for the transmission of new ideas and for changing people's attitudes (see Mugambi 1995:225).

Mugambi views the eschatological project of bringing in the reign of God as a continuous challenge for the church. The physical outcomes of Jesus ministry are a challenge to improve the physical and social conditions of people. In this holistic approach, incorporating healing, teaching, counselling, feeding, and encouraging, are to be found the integral components of the inauguration of the reign of God. The local church is called to be an expression of the universal church as it is involved in this inauguration.

While there are many denominational models, Mugambi's view is that the church needs to function as the body of Christ, bringing reconciliation between differing factions, between man and God and between denominational expressions of the church. The church therefore needs to be local, yet at the same time part of the universal church, expressing the gospel in a way that is comprehensible in its local context. The church is set to function as salt and light, as a preservative and missionary force, in every society in which it lives. In order to achieve this influence, Mugambi describes the way he believes the church ought to be governed.

4.4.2 The governance of the church in Mugambi's writings

In this subsection, I will examine the various references to the church's governance in Mugambi's writings. I will endeavour to derive an understanding of his view of the church from such writings. It emerges that Mugambi does not favour any one form of church governance but adopts a pragmatic approach in which the form of governance that produces the best result is preferred.

In a criticism of liberation theology, his main reservation against liberation as a central theme of Christian theology is that the process of liberation is historical, whereas he views the gospel's ultimate promise as eschatological. It is this approach that leads to Mugambi's

notion of reconstruction. He asks the question:

> What is the meaning of Church in our context? Should we maintain the ecclesiastical structures we have inherited from other cultures? If so, with what justification? How do we relate the teaching of Jesus about God to the African religious heritage (Mugambi 1995:25)?

If the Christians of Europe and North America appropriated the ecclesial structures of the apostolic period to suit their own cultures, why should African Christians not make similar appropriation to their own cultural contexts (Mugambi 1995:25)?

From time to time Mugambi makes further statements that shed light on his understanding of the governance of the church. He makes such a comment in the chapter on "Urbanization and Secularization" (1995:67), where he describes the church in the following way: "Every local community of faith has its unique character, even though all local communities are united as members of the Church Universal". Mugambi frequently quotes Henry Venn as an authority whom he respects. Venn advocates the establishment of churches that are self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, a model that Mugambi favours. This position fits with Mugambi's support of the call for a moratorium on missionary placements and funding (see the moratorium debate Mugambi 1995:19). The above comments clearly favour an autonomous local church structure that still maintains its links with and recognises the international church.

When he offers examples of African Christianity, Mugambi comments on the expectation missionaries had that their converts would adopt ecclesial structures identical to those of the missionaries' home church. This adoption of another cultural ecclesial structure created a situation that was difficult to change as any changes were viewed with suspicion and condemned. "Any church that breaks the norms set by the 'parent church' risks being declared an outcast and thrown out of the confessional fold" (see Mugambi 1995:99). One way of achieving this move to selfhood would be to participate in the ecumenical movement more actively and adopt the consensus reached by such bodies as the commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. Another way would be to look for models of church in the New Testament and use them to modify the form of governance that has been received from the missionary movement.

If the authority of the bible is accepted as the foundation of all ecclesial structures, it will be the responsibility of African Christians to choose the biblical model that is most appropriate for their own needs and situations. The distinction between independent and established

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churches will then be superfluous (Mugambi 1995:100). Mugambi views division in the African church as a hindrance to the reconstruction of African society as well as detrimental to the emergence of a true model of the church. "There can be no unity in a country if churches remain divided, even if other sectors of the society were to be reconciled" (Mugambi 1995:105). In concluding this chapter of his book Mugambi commends the modern ecumenical movement as offering hope of unity with people of all cultures being able to proclaim their identity in worship. He further comments on the negatives of Christian missions in Africa and calls for Christian mission "to be truly liberating by proclaiming the truth which sets all human beings free in their own cultural and religious context" (Mugambi 1995:106).

In the chapter dealing with "Renewal and Reform", Mugambi offers five models of the church (actually, five different ecclesial structures!), which he assesses may be used to classify the various denominations and groups in the African church context (Mugambi 1995:116–121). The following is a brief summary of these models:

a) The Episcopal model: In this model, which applies to the Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican communities, power and authority are vested in the bishop who is supported and assisted by priests. Each flock is a separate identity operating under the authority of the bishop who functions in the line of apostolic succession. There is a centralized structure that makes it difficult for local cultures to contribute. Liturgy and theology are uniform.

b) The Presbyterian model: In this model, authority is vested in the council of elders who are elected periodically. The denomination is organized through a hierarchy of representative councils. Several congregations are grouped together to form a presbytery. There is no uniform structure in the Presbyterian world and there is much more lay participation in decision making. Lay people may participate in the Eucharist and more spontaneity and flexibility are allowed. Lutheran churches follow the Presbyterian structure although they have bishops in their administrative structure.

c) The Congregational model: In this model, power and authority are vested in the whole congregation. Each congregation is a worshipping and legislative body as far as doctrine, discipline and administration is concerned. In addition to those churches called Congregational, Baptist churches are also congregational in structure. There are many of these models of church in Africa, established by missionaries from North

Atlantic home churches.

d) The Pentecostal model: In this model, power and authority are vested in the Holy Spirit rather than in individuals or councils. (This is an idealistic view of Pentecostal churches as my personal experience has been that power and authority is claimed by leaders who consider themselves to be God-appointed and led by the Spirit, but operate in a dictatorial fashion. Elders exercising dictatorial power has also manifested on numerous occasions).

e) The Charismatic model: These churches rely upon a charismatic leader as the power and authority in the church. (Once again this may be a distortion of the charismatic church governance as my personal experience is that these churches operate with a team of elders, the pastor being the lead elder).

Mugambi reasons that there is great affinity between congregational, Pentecostal and charismatic churches (for the above see Mugambi 1995:116–121). However, I find it interesting that Mugambi appears not to favour the non-democratic model of the Episcopal churches, he himself being a member of the Anglican Communion.

In *Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge to African Christianity* (Vähäkangas & Kyomo eds. 2003), Mugambi has contributed a chapter entitled "Evangelistic and Charismatic Initiatives in Post-colonial Africa" in which he makes certain references to the church. Particularly in a section on forms of ecclesial structure, he repeats his notion of the structures on which Christian churches are organised: Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, Charismatic and Pentecostal. In the list he offers in "Jesus in African Christianity" he does not include Pentecostalism, perhaps because in this contribution he is concerned with the expansion of the church and, in his words, "The initiatives discussed in this paper tend to fit within the Charismatic and Pentecostal structures" (Vähäkangas & Kyomo eds. 2003:133). Mugambi sees these five forms as an expression of the whole spectrum of the church.

> It would be erroneous to suggest that one ecclesial form is the entire church. Rather, each form manifests an aspect of the universal church (Vähäkangas & Kyomo eds. 2003:133).

From this brief reference it may be concluded that Mugambi's notion of the church seems to follow the structures existent in various denominational bodies, which refer more to church government, and do not follow Bosch, Dulles and Migliore's models of the church.

The chapter, "Between Past and Future in African Christian Theology", is a fascinating one

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in which one would expect to find some mention by Mugambi of structural ecclesiology. On the contrary, he skirts the issue, as I will show. However, some comments deserve attention. Mugambi's constant plea is for an ecclesial structure that is relevant to the context of the African church and will meaningfully express the gospel. In this chapter, his concern appears to be more about Western theological influences and the need for African theology to throw off the restrictions brought by such influences. He refers to the dissolution of the International Missionary Council at the third assembly of the World Council of Churches with approval. The Council was incorporated into the WCC as the Division of World Mission and Evangelism, because the theological decision was taken that mission is an integral part of the definition of the church (see Mugambi 2003:206). In a section entitled "Missionary Ecclesiology in Africa", Mugambi refers to those African ecclesial communities that resulted from missionary tutelage and views them as carriers of the badges of their respective missionary societies. He then proceeds to list them. After independence most of them changed those labels but did not change their ecclesial structures or their self understanding.

> Though local congregations continued to support their clerical and lay leaders, the national administrative offices and structures of most denominations remained largely unchanged and dependent on funds and personnel from the North Atlantic Metropolis (Mugambi 2003:212).

The moratorium debate developed out of the dependence of African churches on "home churches". African leaders clashed with their Western counterparts who voted to continue with the status quo. Mugambi's opinion is that the denominational structures inherited by the African leadership were designed for the "cultural comfort and convenience of the missionaries that headed them" (Mugambi 2003:212). These structures were culturally irrelevant to the African context and also too expensive for the African church to sustain. Mugambi points out that these weaknesses did not occur in the African independent churches whose ecclesial structure was based on African forms of leadership. One may wonder whether Mugambi would prefer to see the ecclesial structure utilised by the African independent churches adopted by the majority of the church in Africa. My opinion would be that he would concur with the proviso that contextual needs take priority over form, with the emphasis being on the gospel being communicated in a meaningful way through liturgy and structure. Mugambi quotes a 1965 publication by Bolaji Idowu entitled *Towards an Indigenous Church* in which Idowu urged for a cultural overhaul of missionary directed churches in Africa in order to give them an African perspective (see Mugambi 2003:213 & 214).

At that time such a message sounded heretical to missionary leaders, who presupposed that the only way of being "church in Africa" was through replication of imported and transplanted ecclesial structures and norms from the North Atlantic. The quest for ecclesial selfhood was echoed throughout tropical Africa (Mugambi 2003:214).

Such ecclesial structures have found expression within the missionary-directed churches, many of which are a far cry from the "home churches", as well as in churches started by African leaders who have broken away from the missionary-led churches for various reasons. These churches are documented in *Schism and Renewal in Africa* (Barret 1968), and in a more recent publication by Allan Anderson entitled, *African Reformation* (2001). Mugambi comments that, "African Christians have been uncomfortable with imported models of ecclesial structure and liturgy" (2003:214). Mugambi's view is that this has resulted from the failure of the modern missionary movement to take African religion and culture seriously.[17]

The issue of skirting the problem may be explained in Mugambi's own words:

If I do not become precise and concise in my reflections about the future, it is because we must together formulate that future. If we can map out exactly where we have come from and where we happen to be now, it will be relatively easy to know our direction, even though we might not know in precise terms, our destination (Mugambi 2003:216).

With reference to the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document 1982, Mugambi states that it presupposes the existence of six confessional families within the modern ecumenical movement with different governmental structures: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and Independent.[18] In the light of the fierce competition for converts among the different missionary societies, the approval of the ecumenical movement by the symposium was puzzling to African Christians who had been taught to despise Christians of other denominations (see Mchami & Simon 2006:190).

One of the results of the growing Pentecostal movement is a growth in spontaneous liturgy in mainline denominations. Mugambi again refers to five forms of ecclesial identity that he sees existing in the New Testament period, namely Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational, Charismatic and Pentecostal. In making these references he is referring mainly to the form of

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[17] The Vineyard Churches have a department of worship at St. Stephens University, New Brunswick where worship is studied and the basis for typical Vineyard worship is taught. However, what is taught at the University is basically Western and would not fit into a rural African congregation. In fact, most of the African Vineyard churches bear little resemblance to Western Vineyard churches.

[18] This is astounding as it ignores the fastest growing segment of the church in Africa, namely the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches.

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church government and not necessarily to the liturgical form.

> Each of these ecclesiastical forms has scriptural basis for being, since there were Christian communities which functioned under these forms. The question as to which text takes precedence over another is a matter of biblical hermeneutics. The admission of those texts into the Canon suggests that the venerated leaders of the early church considered each of these texts worthy to edify the church (Mchami & Simon 2006:190).

The above quote is vital for understanding Mugambi's approach to church governance. The language he uses indicates that he has no preference for any form of church governance but views all the different forms as legitimate and applicable according to circumstance and cultural need. Mugambi is disapproving of the way in which different authorities today despise others over questions as to which ecclesial form is more biblical than another and which form of ministry is more Christian than another.

A much more ecumenical approach would be to listen to one another and share with one another at the congregational level, and then derive from that 'listening' and 'sharing' those insights which can be mutually affirmed together (Mchami & Simon 2006:190 & 191).

Mugambi lists the different forms again but now describes the forms of church government that distinguish between them. After describing the different forms he refers to the two distinct world bodies that claim to represent the church universal, the World Council of Churches and the World Christian Communion. His question is, "Is the modern ecumenical movement a fellowship of churches or a fellowship of Christians" (Mchami & Simon 2006:191). If the ecumenical movement is a fellowship of churches he wants to know just what constitutes a church. At this point the different denominational understandings are important.

> In the Anglican Communion, a diocese can thus qualify. In a Congregational church, a congregation would qualify, whereas in the Presbyterian churches the General Assembly will determine (Mchami & Simon 2006:192).

Mugambi makes the point that all religions refer to some or other culture. He maintains that African religion is associated with the culture of tropical Africa. He refers to the way in which lay young people have broken away from the denominations in which they grew up to form non-denominational churches in which they are able to express themselves meaningfully in liturgical practice, especially in the Eucharist and Baptism. There are many such non-denominational congregations in tropical Africa who do not take their starting point from the WCC or the BEM document, but take the bible as their starting point.

They take their cue from the initiatives of the early Christian communities, which struggled to evolve their own ecclesiastical identities against many odds (Mchami & Simon 2006:195).

Mugambi is clear that, in his view, circumstances are far more influential in formulating church structural and liturgical praxis than imposed forms of structure. He points to the way in which Christians, who find themselves in refugee camps across the continent, either adopt whatever ecclesial structure already exists in the context in which they find themselves, or tend to develop structures that are compatible with their context. He maintains that Charismatic and Pentecostal church structures lend themselves more readily to such circumstances (see Mchami & Simon 2006: 196-198). He is critical of the B-E-M document because it seeks to impose Western traditional norms at the expense of social transformation. "Unfortunately, liturgical relevance suffers when theological reflection focuses too much on the past (tradition) while the worshipping community hungers for solutions to current challenges" (Mchami & Simon 2006:198). Mugambi envisages the church in Africa taking the example offered by Jesus as he applied the Torah in a way that was relevant to the problems faced by ordinary peasants. The gospel will appeal to communities and individuals when it affirms life in abundance, even in the face of adverse experiences that threaten the dignity and survival of such communities and individuals (see Mchami & Simon 2006:198).

All of the above brings Mugambi's approach to church governance to the fore, emphasising his concern for the church to be effective above an emphasis on any particular structure. In spite of this, it would seem that he is more comfortable with more structured liturgical and governmental structures, probably due to his Anglican background. Against this must be balanced his acceptance of the independent African churches as being more African in their approach to church life. The conclusion may then be drawn that Mugambi has an affinity for the African Independent Church praxis while still accepting the structures of the historical denominations. He recognises the effectiveness of the Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal segments of the church in reaching African people, even though he is unhappy about the North Atlantic influence they bring into African church life and culture. Mugambi's concern is that the church in Africa needs to derive forms of governance that enable it to be effective in the African context. New forms of governance are necessary to arrive at an effective dissemination of the message of the gospel of the reign of God. This emphasis on being effective leads to an examination of the ministries of the church in society and it is this topic that I will examine next, analysing Mugambi's various publications in order to arrive at an understanding of what he considers the ministries of the church to be.

4.4.3 An analysis of how Mugambi understands African churches in social transformation

Mugambi has little place in his thinking for the church to operate as a separate entity from the society it seeks to serve. He postulates various areas where the church should be actively engaged in the life of society. In chapter ten of *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), entitled "The Church in Education and Liberation", Mugambi focuses on the role of the church in achieving liberation, particularly in the area of education. For him, a pertinent question is, "to what extent are the activities of churches agents or hindrances towards the achievement of liberation?" (1989:104). He gives the necessary criteria requisite for the church to play a positive role:

> The practical implication of these insights is that the church cannot achieve a comprehensive ministry following the footsteps of Jesus, unless it combines both spiritual and temporal concerns for the restoration of broken humanity (Mugambi 1989:110).

Mugambi emphasises the dual role of the church as an agent for change but expresses caution that the church should retain its theological basis for ministry. In pointing this out he is drawing a distinction between purely social organisations and the church, which must not cease to be the church. However, he also cautions against the church becoming so occupied with heavenly concerns that it fails to help in alleviating physical suffering here on earth (see Mugambi 1989:110). He emphasises the need for both physical and metaphysical dimensions to be applied by the church to humanity's quest for ultimate happiness.

When dealing with liberation and reconstruction Mugambi decries the way the church is often regarded as a Sunday affair, which a Christian could undertake for two or three hours on one day a week at the church compound (that was also often a mission station), then remain free to do as one liked the rest of the time (see Mugambi 1995:39). In this section Mugambi criticizes the separation between the transformation of social structures and the transformation of the liberated individual. Religious codes of conduct and social mores should not be separated as they impinge upon each other. It is clear that Mugambi is concerned to see civil and ecclesial authorities to work together in order to bring societal change. Further in this chapter Mugambi repeats his emphasis on the need for the unity of all Christians in their witness to the world (John 14–17; 1 Corinthians 12), thus reinforcing his approach to the role of the church (Mugambi 1995:43).

In *Peace-making and Democratisation in Africa* (Assefa & Wachira 2003), Mugambi has

contributed a chapter entitled "Churches and the Reconstruction of Society for Democracy" in which he comments on the communal nature of the church.

> The communitarian emphasis in traditional African social engineering, for instance, has a different intellectual pedigree, which, in its cultural habitat, has been effective in ensuring the participation of individuals and groups in decisions dear to them (Assefa & Wachira 2003:35).

In this brief chapter (6 pages) it is clear that Mugambi has a concern for the church's responsibility to act as a catalyst in order to bridge the gap between two different world-views that seem irreconcilable: the Westminster type of democracy and African democracy. In his view, the church should represent more of a communal structure allowing for decision-making to follow the traditional African pattern modelled in the indaba (a gathering of the tribe where matters are discussed and decided upon).

In the chapter on "Social Reconstruction of Africa", Mugambi has a section on Theological Reconstruction in which he calls for African church leaders to undergo reconstruction in order to take their African cultural and religious heritage more seriously. Because of the changes taking place in post-colonial Africa, churches are no longer the major dispensers of aid (alms givers) as governments and NGOs have superseded them. The role of the church needs to be redefined, and Mugambi maintains that there are indications that this is already taking place.

> The local pastor, for example, will have a wider role than that of a Sunday preacher and administrator of the sacraments. The parish council will have to concern itself not only with 'spiritual' matters, but also with the material poverty which is accompanying Structural Adjustment programmes (Mugambi 2003:56).

Churches need to become agents that mobilise individuals and communities in order for Africa to become productive and be able to participate meaningfully in the global economy. This is an educational task and can be better undertaken by churches than by other social institutions. In order for this change in productivity to take place, the continent needs to regain a sense of unity regarding both the church and humanity.

> Theologically we need to reaffirm the unity of the Church and the unity of Humankind; the indispensability of the spiritual dimension of reality; and the essential contribution of Africa's peoples to the heritage of mankind (Mugambi 2003:59).

In the chapter, "African Churches in Social Transformation", Mugambi finishes with a section on the African church of the future in which he makes a number of comments regarding the church and its role in society. He differentiates between "church" and "Christianity" and the term "churches" because his view of the church is of a universal

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church comprised of individual churches which evidence some particular denominational expression of church (see Mugambi 2003:81). The link between the Roman church and the Empire is again mentioned with a comment that:

> Political realists of that time acknowledged the truth that their empire could not remain united if the church was divided. Catholicity was thus imposed at the expense of orthodoxy. Unity of the church (catholicity) was considered more important than truth of belief (orthodoxy) (Mugambi 2003:82).

Mugambi never loses sight of the fact that Christians, both lay and clerical, can become effective catalysts in democratisation if they were more apt at linking with others outside their own denomination. If they were enabled, "churches will remain influential instruments of social transformation for many decades to come" (Mugambi 2003:104). Further in this chapter Mugambi comments on the relevancy of the church of the future in Africa and maintains that it will have to take cultural and religious pluralism seriously. "It will have to respond to the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation without being lost into secularism" (Mugambi 2003:107). He then makes a statement that is clear and unambiguous as a reflection of his view of the social relevance of the church:

> The Church, as a utopian community, is not of the world; but as a social reality, it is in the world. Therefore Christians as citizens cannot avoid involvement in the political, economic and moral changes facing their communities. At best, they aught to provide exemplary leadership. They should be to their communities as salt in food and light in the world. In order to fulfil this role the church itself will require internal restructuring (Mugambi 2003:107).

Mugambi then offers four questions he feels the church needs to wrestle with in order to fulfil the obligation to restructure internally:

- How can African churches be authentically African and at the same time authentically Christian?

- How can the churches of Africa affirm their affinity with the Universal Church and at the same time respond efficiently and effectively to the spiritual and material needs of local believers?

- How can African Christian churches serve their local communities with relevance and not be engulfed in local partisan politics?

- How can African Christian churches become more sensitive to the insights arising from professional and academic circles within Africa's higher institutions of learning? (Mugambi 2003:107-109).

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For Mugambi the role of the church is inextricably woven into the structure of the church. Mugambi is an intensely practical theologian, who always brings the issue back to the local community and the way in which the church impacts that community.

Mugambi's section on "Ecclesiology and Economics" in which he examines the role of the church in the economy of Africa as well as the global economy, begins with a criticism of the church's lack of influence in the economy of Africa. Mugambi refers to the role of the church as salt and light and points out that instead of playing this role the churches tended to become conformed to the politics and economics of their respective nations so that it became virtually impossible for them to fulfil this influential role (see Mugambi 2003:198). In a similar way that reform is needed in the world economic and political systems, Mugambi is of the opinion that the modern ecumenical movement needs to undergo comparable reform so that the universal nature of Christianity can be reflected in the actual ecclesial structures through which Christians express their commitment to the gospel (see Mugambi 2003:198&199). It is significant that Mugambi also calls for the administrative centres of the world Christian communions to move from the North Atlantic to Africa. His reasoning is that such a move would have an economic as well as an ecclesial impact. It would also strengthen the ecumenical partners in Africa:

> Churches ought to lead the way for the secular and social structures. Churches aught to become torch-bearers into the future, rather than follow the models designed by secular leadership (Mugambi 2003:199).

In *Church-State Relations* (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004), Mugambi contributed a chapter entitled, "Religion and Social Reconstruction in Post-Colonial Africa". He spends considerable space criticising the separation of church and state, placing blame for this notion at the door of Augustine and Luther (see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2003:13, 14 & 26). He takes an opposite view, derived from African styles of leadership:

> Traditionally, an African leader worthy of such a title, wields both political and religious influence irrespective of whether he or she is invested to a specifically 'religious' or 'political' position (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2003:13).

Luther's proposition that the church should operate as a social institution parallel to the state is criticised by Mugambi as he views this approach to be an excuse for political leadership to remain unaccountable to religious authority. This lack of accountability was the route taken by African nationalism and resulted in political leaders practicing two sets of norms, one in their religious life and another in their political life. Mugambi holds that there should be no contradiction between politics and religion (see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2003:27).

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This view has implications as far as Mugambi's notion of the church's involvement in society is concerned as it would appear that he tends to make civil society responsible to the church and vice versa. Such a view indicates the possibility of some influence from the "Reconstructionist" school of theology. A further view Mugambi has of the church is that it is the custodian of moral propriety, although, in his opinion, the churches themselves are not exemplary social institutions.

Most of the dominant African churches have difficulty in affirming the formulation of a national ethos in their respective countries, owing to their dual identity as Africans and as members of the wider denominational fellowships whose history can be traced to the European Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. African Christianity will come of age when its churches become the 'social conscience' of African peoples and nations (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:32).

In the conclusion to this contribution Mugambi points out that religion has failed as an integrating factor in the social structure of African nations because of its lack of integration and the disunity existing between the African churches. This failure has hampered and crippled the capacity of the African church to be a facilitator of peace and harmony. Mugambi believes that ecumenism, if instituted properly, could have enhanced the potential for African churches to promote such harmony and peace, but this potential has been undermined by churches practicing a greater commitment to the World Christian Communions they belong to which exert a direct and indirect influence on African church leaders. Consequently, Mugambi's opinion is that African Christian churches will need to deal with their colonial and missionary past in order to become effective agents of social cohesion (see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2004:33). In Mugambi's view, Christianity has often been received as an appendage to culture rather than as a foundation for the cultural expression of church life. This concludes section 5.2. I will offer conclusions at a later stage when I bring the different strands together. The next section deals with the way in which Mugambi portrays the sociological manifestations of the church.

4.4.4 Mugambi's view of the sociological manifestations of the church

To consider the sociological manifestations of the church is to venture into an extremely wide field of concern. Some sociologists are concerned with issues of the family: marriage and divorce, child rearing, and domestic abuse. Others focus on the way things are defined in different cultures and the way they affect individuals and institutions such as businesses and

hierarchies. To an extent Mugambi is interested in this aspect. Still others focus on social movements involving political unrest. Mugambi, however, focuses more on issues of division and inequality such as race, gender and class, and how they affect people's choices and opportunities. I will show that this is an area of major concern to him and endeavour to use his views on the sociological relevance of the church to formulate notions of the church's role in society as a contribution to making a conclusion at the end of this chapter.

In chapter ten of *African Christian Theology: An Introduction,* Mugambi (1989:111) refers to the church as a "school" where people realize fuller human dignity. The context of this reference is the section where he categorises the pastor as a shepherd and teacher.

> The pastor needs to be a facilitator – a leader who is a follower, a master who is a servant, a teacher who is a learner. The realization of total liberation means the elimination of all domination. The Christian faith maintains that total liberation on earth is possible only if people take seriously their dependence on God (Mugambi 1989:111).

From Liberation to Reconstruction (1995) contains Mugambi's views on a number of issues in the African church that are pertinent to his field of reconstruction theology and gives insights into his approach to the sociological manifestations of the church. As early as the preface to this book, Mugambi offers an evaluation: "the plague of Christianity in Africa is its internal division and rivalry, not external threat" (1995:viii). Any form of disunity is a problem to Mugambi; whether racial, national, ecclesial or tribal. He focuses on the essential unity of all humankind and expresses his gratitude to Dr. Konrad Raiser, the WCC General Secretary, for counselling him on the issues facing the ecumenical movement at the dawn of the twenty-first century; "The world has changed, and the Church has also to change structurally and theologically, in order to become relevant under changed circumstances" (Mugambi 1995:viii). This early emphasis introduces one of Mugambi's strongest notions regarding the church, namely its unity, and he constantly calls for the church to express that unity in practical ways[19]. In his view, the unity expressed by the ecumenical movement in its endeavour to present the church as one Church represents what he believes should persist in all society. This emphasis is further expressed in the way Mugambi draws attention to dates he considers of importance for the church in Africa: the formation of the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963 and the *Decree on Ecumenism* at the Second Vatican

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[19] He draws on John chapter 17 in many of his publications and makes a point of promoting the ecumenical movement.

Council in 1965. In his introductory remarks he focuses on such dates as being significant indicators of progress in church unity, but continues to view them as insufficient (see Mugambi 1995:xi–xv).

In a section where he deals with reactive and proactive stances in theology, Mugambi (1995:11) declares the need for theology to respond to the joys, sorrows, hopes and fears of the community of faith. He continues, in this section, to refer to the church as "the community of faith". He speaks of the need for the non-Caucasian church to be appreciated as an integral part of the theological *Oikumene* as declared by EATWOT[20] (1976). This statement was made in the context of Mugambi's expressed dissatisfaction with the differentiation between North Atlantic, Eurasian and Third World theology and his call for recognition that these ideological classifications were no longer relevant (see Mugambi 1995: 11, 12).

The issue for Mugambi is the structure of church that was imposed by Western missionaries onto the African church and the need for African theologians to develop ecclesial structures that are pertinent to African culture. Mugambi points out that the major part of the African church evidences the same ecclesial structures as the home churches of the missionaries. He compares the emphases on community and environment in medieval formulations of community and environment with contemporary African formulations (see Mugambi 1995:25). I cannot stress enough the importance of the communal aspect of the church in Mugambi's understanding of the church and its role in society. The major influence in educating African people is the cultural and religious environment, and Mugambi emphasises the need for a homogeneous social environment where established norms and beliefs are pre-determined by the community (see Mugambi 1995:26). The pluralistic social and religious environment introduced by the missionaries and colonialists is detrimental to the communal environment needed to develop a proper sense of belonging and education in African society. The church's educational function is needed to "provide continuing education through sermons, seminars, fellowships and communication through the mass media" (Mugambi 1995:27).

When Mugambi focuses on the church and society (1995:44-47), he provides a clearer insight into his notion of the church's sociological role.

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20. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

> The church is a community within a wider society. It is important to always remember that the world is religiously pluralistic, and that those who do not belong to the church are also children of God. When the church conducts itself as if it were identical with the wider society, those who are not members of the church tend to react negatively to the Christian community. In the New Testament we read of the concern of the Pharisees that the disciples of Jesus were not observing the norms of the wider society (Mugambi 1995:44).

Mugambi's concern is for the church to recognize that it does not have the right to impose its norms on the rest of society. This is in contradiction to the path taken by Reconstructionism (Rushdoony etc) that calls for all society to be subject to the law of God. Mugambi is critical of the tendency the church has to impose its norms on society when it becomes a majority in a pluralistic setting or enjoys the backing of the state. The result of the church's imposition of its norms may be seen in the European Dark Ages and later with the establishment of national Protestant churches. Mugambi's view is that when the gospel is imposed on anyone, it no longer remains good news (see Mugambi 1995:44).

> The gospel has reached many people in Africa as very bad news, because of the way in which it was introduced to them. An assertive Christian community can be very irritating to the society. In colonial Africa, the Christian community tended to be identified with the ruling elite, and this identification gave the church a particular social profile in each African country. That profile defines the relationship between church and state in the post-colonial era....if churches worked together in co-operation rather than competition, they would make a stronger impression on society than they do today as competitive denominations (Mugambi 1995:44).

Mugambi's criticism reflects his abhorrence of the disunity in African societal settings and his support of the ecumenical movement which promotes unity and which suffered criticism and opposition from evangelical church circles, especially from mission societies of that persuasion. Mugambi is clear about the duty of the church and views disunity as a hindrance to the performance of that duty.

> Whereas the church has a duty to foster reconciliation, African denominations have a tendency to be drawn into conflicts whose background can be traced to artificial colonial borders (both internal and external), post colonial interests and social structures enshrined in the constitutional dispensations bargained for at independence (Mugambi 1995:97 & 98).

The above quote expresses Mugambi's criticism of the role the church has played in fostering social disintegration in the past. The following quote expresses Mugambi's view of what he sees as the role the church is called upon to play:

> The ecumenical movement both at the local and international levels is extremely important in contemporary Africa owing to the principle on which it is based: that

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Jesus Christ challenges all Christians to collaborate in the urgent project of inaugurating the Kingdom of God. If the church facilitates the fragmentation of African societies, its missionary influence cannot be considered to be consistent with the gospel (Mugambi 1995:98).

There is a further possibility that Mugambi regards as not fully exploited: the need for all ecclesial and societal structures to be subject to change according to accurate application of biblical truth and social conventions. Structural differences between African and Western churches should be accepted as normal, corresponding to cultural differences between African and North Atlantic peoples; so too should societal differences be accepted as similar reflections. Mugambi is clear that these differences ought not to be accentuated in such a way as to damage ecclesial and societal harmony. This emphasis on societal harmony occurs frequently in Mugambi's writings.

There is, or ought to be, substantial theological harmony between African Christians and those of the North Atlantic region, with regard to the essentials of the gospel. On the basis of this harmony, it should be possible for ecclesial structures to emerge which are theologically synchronised across both cultures, but culturally distinct. This is a creative way of dealing with the tension between the universal appeal of the gospel and the particular cultural expressions of responses to its message (Mugambi 1995:100).

Mugambi's optimism with regard to the possible unity of the African church is commendable, even if, from a human perspective, it appears impossible. Mugambi follows on from the above quote to expand on what he terms the three major sociological aspects of African Christianity that he perceives throughout Africa.

a) The first of these are those churches imported from Europe and North America through the contemporary missionary enterprise such as Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Quakers. He points out that the African branches of these denominations are not straight replicas of the Western 'home churches'. While they have a superficial conformity to the norms of the parent denomination, the African branches have their own distinctive flavour. Most of the African Christians in these denominational structures find it easy to communicate with each other and have less denominational disunity than the parent churches.

b) Secondly, there are those Christians who belong to churches established by Africans, primarily in reaction to certain aspects of the Christianity expressed by the

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missionaries, such as theology, ecclesiology, eschatology, missiology, and ritual. The labels given to such churches are normally disparaging (Zionist, Ethiopic, Separatist, Sectarian, Schismatic, Independent, Native, etc). These are the "Independent Churches of Africa". Mugambi maintains that these churches should be recognized within the ecumenical movement as a denominational family and viewed as an aspect of the African Reformation. These churches have a distinctly African flavour and culture that places them outside the normal Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox churches. (see Mugambi 1995:100, 101).

c) Thirdly, there are African Christians who belong to churches that Mugambi views as recent imports from North America including Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of God, the Disciples of Christ, the United Church of Christ, and many other small churches. Mugambi is of the opinion that these churches tend to operate where Christianity has already been established, and attempt to reconvert African Christians (Mugambi 1995:100 & 101). Mugambi is also critical of the neo-Pentecostal churches which, he believes, bring in a capitalist form of Christianity and delude poverty stricken African Christians (see Mugambi 1995:126– 140).

Mugambi is clear that Christians are simultaneously members of the church and of society. He views the role of the church to be that of a preserver of good and healer of evil in the society, giving the church a salvific role. When he turns to the subject of the church and state he puts forward a call for the church not to view itself as a separate entity (alternative to the state), but to recognize that its members are included in being citizens of the state and should not view allegiance to one as at variance with allegiance to the other (see Mugambi 1995:134). The state is greater than the church as it is inclusive of all citizens, not all of whom are members of the church, yet the church must carry the responsibility of providing counsel through its members without becoming embroiled in political entanglement. If politics is the distribution of social influence, then Mugambi views the church as a political body. The limitations of social institutions apply, although the church's mandate has divine sanction and needs to be seen as above human achievement. The church cannot therefore become embroiled in the day-to-day affairs of politics, neither can it hold itself aloof from the political arena (see Mugambi 1995:134, 135). Mugambi makes an interesting statement regarding the church's involvement in affairs of state: "History teaches us to condemn religious imperialism, even when it is promoted in the name of the gospel" (Mugambi 1995:135).

In the last chapter of this publication dealing with "Light of the World and Salt of the Earth", Mugambi asks the question, "What does it mean for the Church to be like salt and light in the social environment?" (Mugambi 1995:228) He then launches into a criticism of what he calls the "bad news" propagated by the missionaries because, basically, they were citizens of the sending countries while the African people they ministered to were subjects of those countries who did not enjoy the same privileges as the missionaries. He quotes David Bosch in support of this conclusion by referring to Bosch's outlines of the meaning of mission which are summarised in four headings:

- Propagation of the faith

- Expansion of the reign of God

- Conversion of the heathen

- The founding of new churches (see Mugambi 1995: 228-233).

In the introduction to the new edition of John Taylor's book, *Christian Presence amid African Religion* (John V Taylor 2001), Mugambi makes a number of references to the role of the church. He quotes Thomas Beetham:

> The West African Church, is it African or European? The major direction of policy and influence in theological thinking and so of expression in social relationships and church discipline has been missionary and therefore European; yet at the other end the village Christian community is unmistakably African (Taylor 2001:xxiii).

In *Jesus in African Christianity,* (Mugambi & Magesa Eds. 2003) Mugambi has contributed a chapter on "Christological Paradigms in African Christianity". In a subsection, entitled "Family paradigms", Mugambi expresses concern with the breakdown of African family unity caused by denominationalism. He blames this on the overtly individualistic type of Christianity introduced into Africa from the West. This Western approach considers the notion of the extended family, which is a vital part of African culture, to be a hindrance to progress and civilization. Mugambi also refers to the danger of over-emphasising the immediate ecclesial family to the detriment of the universal community of faith as, in his understanding, the church needs to be managed as a social institution (see Mugambi and Magesa 2003:138, 139). In his opinion:

> The definition of *family* as the nuclear social unit of husband, wife and children (if any) is not strictly biblical. It is a social product of industrialisation and urbanisation. The question African Christians have to ask themselves is whether they must adopt the Euro-American norm of the family in their own self-

understanding as Christians. Clearly, in the New Testament there are family paradigms in support of the extended family and the universal community, and therefore individualistic conversion ought not to be popularised as the only possibility (Mugambi & Magesa 2003:139).

In another subsection entitled "Ecclesiological paradigms", Mugambi makes a number of comments that help us to derive some understanding of his view of the church from a sociological perspective:

- He comments on Paul's notion of the church as a social institution modelled on the ideals for which Jesus lived.

- He refers to the church as a fellowship of those who have committed themselves to follow Jesus.

- This church is a community of service, responding to the needs of those who are helpless in various ways.

- The church is a missionary community, charged with responsibility to proclaim the good news of God's reign.

- This church community comes in a wide variety of ecclesiastical forms: Episcopal, Presbyterian, Congregational and Charismatic.

In referring to these forms Mugambi is more focused on forms of church government than on denominational differences.

The conclusion may be made that Mugambi accepts the variety of church governmental forms found in the bible while he tends to focus more strictly on the functions of the church in society.

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi develops a notion of reconstruction and throughout he makes comments that are pertinent to assessing his notion of the church. It will emerge that Mugambi has a penchant for de-Westernising the African church and offers constant criticism of the development of church structures in Africa that do not reflect African culture but are clones of Western church structures. In the chapters of this publication Mugambi makes reference to the church in a way that enables one to gain some understanding of his notion of the church and its sociological manifestation. I will offer insights derived from this publication that are relevant to the subject of this section of the chapter.

Mugambi includes a chapter in this publication entitled "A Critique of Method in Christian

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Theology with Reference to Africa". I have already examined Mugambi's approach to method in African theology in chapter 3 section 5, and will therefore only refer to those sections of this chapter that assist in understanding his notion of the church in society. Mugambi voices a constant criticism of the "domestication of missionary brands of Christianity in Africa" (2003:6). He firmly believes that if the church is to grow it needs to be more than inculturated. The church needs to be fully grounded in the culture of a community in order to be relevant.

> For the church to become fully blended with the culture of a community, the Gospel has to so transform that culture that Christianity becomes an integral part of the identity of that community. In Africa, this stage has been reached only in the Coptic Church and in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Mugambi 2003:6).

All other communions are, in his opinion, syncretistic models resulting from Western churches trying to clone African churches in their image. He is concerned that the dismissal of the African traditional churches as part of the church in Africa, as well as part of the universal church, has impoverished the African Christian church (see Mugambi 2003:8). Mugambi draws attention to the need for the African church to grow in ecclesial ways that culturally reflect the context in which it has been planted.

> African theologians can constructively discern the needs of African communities, and help in the shaping of ecclesial structures which inductively respond to these needs with efficacy (Mugambi 2003:31).

Another chapter in this work entitled "Liberation and Reconstruction as Consecutive Processes", focuses on the need for liberation and reconstruction to be accepted as processes, following each other, almost in a circular motion. I have dealt with this topic in chapter four and will therefore focus only on those excerpts that are relevant to the subject of this chapter. In this section, Mugambi (2003:65) refers to the way the apostles were persecuted because the gospel they were proclaiming resulted in the establishing of Christian communities which disrupted and challenged the socio-political status quo. This threat became largely neutralised when Christianity became the nominal religion of the Roman Empire with the Imperial and sacerdotal authorities working hand in hand throughout the dark ages. After the Reformation there was a divergence between the Roman and Protestant segments of the church which reached into Africa and is perpetuated in the ongoing chasm between Catholic and Protestant, liberal and conservative, modernist and fundamentalist, evangelical and Pentecostal. "In Africa this chasm was manifested in the divergence between the ecumenical movement and its evangelical critics" (Mugambi 2003:66).

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Once more Mugambi focuses on the church as a community:

> Paul declares that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. Thus those who accept the Christian faith are challenged to establish a new community in which the socio-political barriers are abolished…one's full commitment to the Christian faith demands a re-ordering of community, so that one ceases to be conformed to the norms of this world and becomes continually transformed by the renewal of one's mind and life-style (Mugambi 2003:67).

In Mugambi's view the Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican churches all bring their national cultural heritage with them and plant churches which are culturally conditioned. He points out that because the Catholic Church already has a given model, that model has to be inculturated in the mission field. His assessment is that the ecclesial structure of the Catholic Church is set in the Roman Imperial sacerdotal mould.

Whereas the Catholic tradition cherishes the Church as an institution immutably established under the Episcopal model with apostolic succession, in the Protestant heritage there is openness with regard to possible ecclesial forms in response to the gospel (Mugambi 2003:73).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi favours the communal notion of the church with a liturgical format developed within the local culture in order to meet the needs of the particular community in which the church is located.

In *Church Ministry in African Christianity* (Mchami & Simon Eds. 2006), Mugambi has contributed a chapter entitled "The BEM Document: Some Problems of its Authority and Credibility". While this is an interesting topic, I will comment only on those sections relevant to gaining some insight into Mugambi's notion of the church and society. When referring to six aspects of religion Mugambi comments on the divisions between denominations that emphasise the ritual aspects of the denominations more than the experiential, while others emphasise the social aspect more than the doctrinal. He then refers to the way mainstream African churches have functioned in a way that is culturally alienating, hence the Africanisation of the sacraments in the African Independent Churches. In his view the BEM document approaches Christianity from the ritual and not the practical aspect. My understanding of Mugambi's point would be that African peoples tend more toward the experiential and social aspects of Christianity and this puts them at variance with Western church structures. In his view, this may be one of the reasons for the proliferation of neo-Pentecostal churches (see Mchami & Simon 2006:184, 185).

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Mugambi makes frequent references to the disunity existent in African society, between African nations as well as in the African church. It may be said that Mugambi is an ardent Pan-Africanist as well as a committed ecumenist. Any occasion of disunity is therefore subject to disapproval. In this section I will attempt to show how widespread Mugambi's criticism of disunity in the church in Africa is. In order to do this I will refer to Mugambi's three major publications (1989, 1995, and 2003).

In *African Christian Theology* (1989), Mugambi makes critical comments about the legacy of disunity left by the introduction of Western denominational interpretations and expressions of the gospel into African culture and society through the missionary movement.

> Each denomination was convinced that it had the most correct interpretation of the gospel and was unwilling to accept as valid the interpretations of other denominations. It was not until 1910 that Protestant Missionary societies met in conference in Edinburgh to consider together their mission work, and it was not until 1948 that the World Council of Churches was formed in acknowledgement of the divided nature of the universal church (Mugambi 1989:41).

Mugambi also criticises the way the introduction of Western Christianity to East Africa produced a confrontation between the gospel and the African cultural and religious heritage. African converts were converted to the denominationalism of the missionaries with a resultant fragmentation of the church and communities (see Mugambi 1989:42). Mugambi repeats the characterisation of African missionary Christianity that resulted in denominational disunity (see Mugambi 1989:45). Mugambi voices approval of the efforts of institutions such as the Association of Theological Institutions in East Africa to reverse the missionary attitudes of competition and antagonism.

> Hopefully, churches in East Africa will in future realise more consultation and co-operation, to achieve a common witness for the one Jesus Christ in whom they all believe, and in whose name they respond to the great commission (Mugambi 1989:47).

In Mugambi's opinion one of the main features of political power is alienation. Contrary to this, the power of the cross is that which overcomes estrangement. It brings reconciliation between God and man and between fellow human beings. This reconciliation brings freedom (see Mugambi 1989:114). The point Mugambi makes is that, where the efforts of humans bring division, the introduction of the cross brings reconciliation. Mugambi describes the third phase in the Christian missionary process as a period of consolidation and crisis where local Christians become involved in self-evaluation regarding the presence, nature and role of the church in the context of its circumstances as well as its relationship to the universal

church. This is partly the process currently taking place in the African church, fostered by the ecumenical movement and the effort being made to throw off Western cultural and theological norms (see Mugambi 1989:47-49).

In *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), there are various references to the detrimental effect of disunity on the African church and African society. I will refer to some of them in order to emphasise Mugambi's critical reaction to disunity in the church. In the preface and acknowledgment section he writes, "The plague of Christianity in Africa is its internal division and rivalry, not external threat" (Mugambi 1995:viii). In chapter three Mugambi offers an illustration of the disunity he disparages:

> In one village of about two thousand inhabitants in Eastern Kenya, a journalist recently reported that there were twenty seven Christian denominations, each with a group of followers. None of these twenty seven had been historically associated with that area. They all had been introduced from outside. On Sundays the place was almost like a rural market for Christian worship services (Mugambi 1995:47).

A ban on certain churches that existed under colonialism was lifted in the post-colonial era and resulted in a proliferation of denominations, raising the question of which churches would set the norm for African Christianity. The new churches were administratively wanting and lacked the influence of the more established churches, resulting in further differentiation.

Mugambi concludes this section (1995:124, 125) by describing the proliferation of churches through the failure of the missionaries to heed calls for church renewal resulting in more schism with the breakaway of the African Independent churches. He views these breakaways as ecclesiastically and theologically an addition to what he terms "the brands made in Europe and North America" (Mugambi 1995:125). A final word on the disunity of the African church will suffice:

> Are Christian churches and organisations, in specific countries and regions, agents of reconciliation, or promoters of social strife? If churches are competitive and antagonistic social agents in a particular country, how can social harmony be achieved at the national level? It is clear that churches, by failing to promote practical ecumenism, have both directly and indirectly contributed to civil strife in Africa (Mugambi 1995:164).

It may thus be said that, for Mugambi, ecumenism and pan-Africanism are parallel concerns that impinge positively upon the development of both society and the reign of God.

In his approach to ecumenical unity, Mugambi (1995:172) repeats the challenge Jesus made to his followers (John 17:11, 21 & 22) "that they all may be one". His concern is that the

church in Africa should come to terms with the theological insight that both evangelical and ecumenical unity is a necessary and complementary aspect of the same challenge of Jesus to his followers. African Christians need to revive the process "of promoting visible expressions of united Christian witness, fellowship and service" (Mugambi 1995:172). In the light of this desire on Mugambi's part, his comment on the denominational disunity on the African continent is pertinent: "On this continent, each denomination markets itself as 'the church', without emphasizing that it is an ecclesiastical 'brand', 'type' or 'model'" (Mugambi 1995:196). Mugambi is caustic about the deliberate program that he sees in place to divide African people and shows how he considers this to have been done:

> The principle of divide and rule has been operational since the Roman Empire polished it. In the context of 'free enterprise' this principle has been used to keep African peoples divided, through Christian denominationalism, ethnic stereotyping and ideological propaganda. By emphasizing differences rather than similarities among African individuals, NGOs have served to promote civil strife rather than minimizing it (Mugambi 1995:198).

It has been seen that Mugambi is vociferous in his criticism of any division in the African context. Because he sets a high value on communalism, he holds to an ecumenical notion of the church, particularly in Africa, and views attempts to differentiate the church as detrimental to a right understanding of the church.

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi is focused on a number of issues such as methodology, liberation and reconstruction, African Churches in social transformation, biblical hermeneutics, text and context, etc. There are some comments worth noting. Mugambi makes a comment on humankind's God-given unity:

> God created one world. Human beings have fragmented it into segments for their own interests, to their own peril. Theologically we need to reaffirm the unity of the church and unity of humankind; the indispensability of the spiritual dimension of reality; and the essential contribution of Africa's peoples to the heritage of humankind (Mugambi 2003:59).

Mugambi begins a section on African Churches and the Cold War in which he comments on the way churches became entangled in the web of ideological propaganda during this period (see Mugambi 2003:93). A negative attitude developed towards the ecumenical movement and it was accused of supporting communism and terrorism and was found in contradistinction to the evangelical movement. Mugambi characterises the different segments of the African church as follows: Roman Catholics were guided from Rome; mainstream Protestant churches were coordinated in the ecumenical movement; Evangelical churches were loosely associated through the Evangelical Alliance; and African instituted churches

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were organised through the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (see Mugambi 2003:94). The resultant polarisation of the churches was accentuated by the Lausanne conference (1974) which presented itself as a counterpoise to Geneva. At this conference the first Pan-African Christian Leadership Assembly was planned and subsequently took place in Nairobi in 1976. The All African Conference of Churches was located in Nairobi as well as the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar. Mugambi's comment on this is pertinent, "The main emphasis of these initiatives was that the ecumenical movement appeared to be identified with the communist bloc, and therefore needed to be challenged through efforts to restore spirituality to African Christianity" (Mugambi 2003:95). There was a period of petty sniping exemplified by the way an evangelistic campaign was organised at the same venue as the fifth assembly of The World Council of Churches in Nairobi in 1975. The end of the Cold War saw these tactics largely diminish with greater contact between the Association of Evangelicals and the All Africa Conference of Churches than ever before (see Mugambi 2003:96). The point of this is to highlight Mugambi's anti-sectarian and pro-ecumenical stance. There appears to be very little place for church or national differentiation in Mugambi's thinking.

In a section dealing with the Four Waves of North Atlantic Missionary Outreach in Africa, Mugambi comments on the results of the endeavours of the missionaries who called themselves "Evangelical", "Pentecostal", or "Charismatic". He mentions several points they had in common. He touches on their anti-ecumenical stance, their anti-Catholic approach, the emphasis of the individual over the community, the literalist approach to biblical texts, a negative stance regarding African culture and religion, and the inferior label upon everything African when measured against North Atlantic norms of Christianity (see Mugambi 2003:161).

> The attitude has generally been negative towards anything African. The consequence has been cultural alienation at a time when Christianity should have been a channel for cultural affirmation.....this culturally alienating, consumerist, quick fix ecclesiology is in complete contrast with that of the African Independent Churches (Mugambi 2003:162).

My objective in this fairly short section of the chapter has been to highlight Mugambi's commitment to one church in Africa as shown in his involvement in the ecumenical movement, and his criticism of the diversity in the church brought about by denominationalism and rivalry in the missionary movement. Mugambi is not averse to denominations, only to the way in which denominations have adopted a sectarian position

towards other denominations. His ecumenicity moves him to work towards the different denominations maintaining their identity while recognising each other and working together with each other.

In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi devotes two paragraphs to ecclesial reconstruction (page 17). In this subsection he describes the church as an organisation within which people's worldview is portrayed as well as celebrated. He gives a list of the dimensions of the church's functions that includes mythological reformulation, doctrinal teaching, social rehabilitation, ethical direction, ritual celebration, and experiential (personal) response. He then lists those areas of the churches life that need to be included in ecclesial reconstruction: management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resources development, research, family education, service and witness. Clearly, Mugambi views the church from a very wide perspective and sees it as relevant to all spheres of life. The influence exercised by the church penetrates every facet of societal life. Mugambi therefore sees theology as the means by which the church rationalises the process of ecclesial reconstruction. He views theology as a catalyst that enables the church to adjust to the new social demands of a changing society. One may conclude that Mugambi views the church as an essential influence in the wider task of reconstructing society in the African context.

Mugambi also emphasises the importance of small communities in the African context and mentions particularly the Catholic Church's endeavours to cultivate community spirit within the school and community context. He recommends the situation where the priest applies his ministry to the local parish as well as to the students in the academic institution. This view is significant as Protestant churches generally have tended to emphasise the individual rather than community development (Mugambi 1995:191, 1912). In his view the small Christian communities in the Catholic Church help to maintain group identity.

> It is interesting to compare and contrast the Protestant Christian Unions and the associations of Catholic students in high schools and colleges. Whereas the Catholic associations are always attached to the local parish, the Christian unions tend to function autonomously even where there may be Protestant ordained ministers within the institution....Why, one may ask, have African churches abandoned their students to fend for themselves religiously (Mugambi 1995:192).

The relevance of this quote lies in the emphasis it places on Mugambi's communal view of the church and the need for it to impact society more widely than just within the church's structures. This emphasis fits into the conclusion drawn before, namely that Mugambi favours a universal notion of the church, particularly when it comes to the church in Africa.

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In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi has a chapter entitled "African Churches in Social Transformation" (pages 78-109), where one of the sections is relevant for this subject of Ecclesial Reconstruction. After referring to the negative experience of African churches and Christian councils regarding change, Mugambi makes a significant statement:

> In view of the foregoing reasons, African churches have to face the challenge of equipping themselves for relevant ministry in a rapidly changing continent. They need new forms of ministerial formation, including strategic tertiary training, to produce a cadre of leadership that will help the African church consolidate its disintegrating centre (Mugambi 2003:103).

Later in this work Mugambi (2003:197) asks the question, "Where have the Christian churches been in this process of deterioration?" He criticises both African and North Atlantic segments of the church and calls them to review their role in accepting the economic and political policies imposed on the continent. In Mugambi's view, the church is a role model that should be setting the example for creative and reconstructive initiatives in Africa (see Mugambi 2003:198). His concern for the lack of a model expressing the universal character of Christianity focuses on the need he sees for reform in the structure of the church in Africa.

In both these publications Mugambi's emphasis on the universal communal nature of the church is apparent. The relevance of the church as an instrument of change in its members and in society is highlighted in these passages and emphasises Mugambi's commitment to the church as the one institution capable of changing African social life towards a more African expression of community and mutual responsibility.

Mugambi has much to say on the relationship between the church and the state but, for the sake of brevity, I will restrict this study to three sections, one in each of his three major publications, dealing with religion and civil rights in Africa (1989:51), church and state (1995:134), and churches and social reconstruction of Africa (2003:195). It will emerge that Mugambi favours a far closer working relationship between church and state than would be acceptable in most Western Capitalist countries. His understanding of the dual role of the chief in an African communal context impinges on his understanding of the relationship between church and state.

With regard to the topic of "religion and civil rights", Mugambi concludes that the role of religion in the struggle for civil rights has been ambiguous as some have used religion as a tool to maintain suppression and others to enhance the struggle for human rights (see Mugambi 1989:60). He draws the conclusion that those who use religion as the basis for their

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struggle, derive faith, hope and courage to continue in their struggles. What he does not conclude is that religion can allow a political position to develop into an ideology (*a la* apartheid as per the article by Johann Kinghorn 1990:21-36). Mugambi does, however, insist that religion and thus the church cannot be ideologically neutral.

> If justice is not negotiable, if liberation and self-determination are basic rights for all people, then no religion worthy of the name can afford to be neutral with regard to these rights. To be neutral is tantamount to supporting the oppressors, whoever they might be (Mugambi 1989:60).

In this earlier publication, Mugambi is still influenced heavily by liberation theology and the South American liberation theologians. In this publication, he views the role of the church as more than yeast in society, and calls for the church's active involvement in the struggle for freedom. This model of the church derives from the understanding held by the South American theologians of liberation, namely that the church has the right to hold the state to account and make demands upon it, a blurring of the distinction between church and state. One could conclude that, in this publication, Mugambi tends towards the Christian state, although that would be taking it too far as he clearly accepts the multi-faith dimension of African society.

In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi offers a short two paragraph comment on the church and state and I will focus on this subsection to derive some understanding of his notion of the relationship between the church and the state.

In Mugambi's view, the church has tended to portray itself as a state, or as an alternative to the state, especially because of European history since the fourth century. However, Christians hold dual citizenship of both church and nation (state), with their primary allegiance to the church without conflicting with allegiance to the state (see Mugambi 1995:134). History has given us more than sufficient evidence to show that allegiance to the church is often challenged by the workings of the state when it claims primary allegiance.

> The state is greater than the church, in the sense that it includes citizens who may not be Christians. Nevertheless, the church cannot avoid the immense responsibility to provide counsel through its members, without becoming enmeshed in the tangles of politics (Mugambi 1995:134).

Mugambi views the church as a social institution, a political body subject to all the limitations of social institutions. Nevertheless, the church holds ideals that are derived from divine sanction and are higher than human ideals and achievements. If the church falls into the trap of involvement in the forces and lobbies of secular politics it runs the risk of losing

its prophetic witness. The opposite of this happening is when the church remains aloof from any contact with the political arena resulting in a loss of veracity in the society, especially among the oppressed. Both these extremes are to be avoided (Mugambi 1995:135). From the above comments it may be seen that Mugambi appears to have moved away from the earlier position he held where he expected the church to be involved in the political arena. His caution is highlighted in the way he expects the church to be a place where people in any culture can be at home.

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi has a section dealing with churches and the social reconstruction of Africa where he criticises the African church for following leadership and management models designed by secular leaders, rather than developing contextually relevant leadership models derived from scripture. In his view, the churches should be the vanguard in economic reform in Africa.

> I venture to suggest that in the context of systematic pauperisation as Africa is now suffering, churches may not only become the sustainers of hope; they should also help African individuals and communities to cope with the adverse impact of the exploitative economic system which has been given the label, "globalisation" (Mugambi 2003:199).

In this publication Mugambi draws closer to the early church model where society was influenced by the example of good citizenship and creative leadership expressed in the church to develop more equitable models of economics and social living. One may thus conclude this section on church/state relationships as portrayed by Mugambi with the comment that, currently, he views the model of the church needed in African society to be that of a herald and servant, bringing about change through example and influence.

4.4.5 The theological nature of the church in Mugambi's writings

The theological nature of the church is a subject that has been researched by many systematic theologians (see Barth, Clowney, Dulles, Grenz, Küng, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Ratzinger, Volf, Wright and many more) and this attempt to arrive at Mugambi's notion of the church is done with much of this research as background. The task is fraught with the pitfalls highlighted by the previously mentioned theologians and must be undertaken with caution, especially as Mugambi appears to favour quite a few different models of the church without seeming to favour any one in particular. It will appear that those theologians who favour the more communal notions of the church will be the most helpful in mapping Mugambi. However it will need to be acknowledged that Mugambi strongly favours the model of the church as servant as well.

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In *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), commenting on the church's response to the sufferings of the contemporary world, Mugambi refers to the church as "the body of Jesus" (1989:ix). On the following page (1989:x) he refers to the church's calling to alleviate the suffering of those whom it evangelises. This gives some indication of his view of the role the church is called upon to play in the context of salvation.

Mugambi (1989:5) stresses the communal nature of African society and the role communality plays in decision making in such a society and mentions that this notion of community stretches far beyond the "nuclear family" to include the clan. Throughout his writings Mugambi makes a strong case for the church to return to communality and thus recover the ethos of the early church community. (One wonders at the seemingly idyllic view Mugambi holds regarding the early church when the bible is full of the imperfections of those churches, clearly apparent in the letters to the churches). Mugambi is critical of the Western church's current understanding of community, especially from the point of view of the modern missionary enterprise and the way the mission societies perpetuated the divisions of Western Christianity in their own denominational insularity.

In traditional African society, a family was a corporate group which included a whole household, with grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, uncles, brothers, sisters and so on. The family was an extended kinship group, whose network of relations spread wider and wider, to include the clan and, subsequently, the whole ethnic community. Furthermore, the church was introduced as a new fellowship of believers, which could also be regarded as a family in a different sense. Thus the distinction came to be made between believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians – a distinction which was not possible in African society, since the ethnic identity of an individual incorporated his religious and cultural heritage (Mugambi 1989:42).In the above quote three vital pointers become clear:

- Mugambi insists on a more all-embracing notion of community in the African church, basically inclusive of the universal church (see Zizioulas and Ratzinger in Volf 1998).

- His notion of family does not depend upon the religious, natural and ethnic differences in the community.

- Religious and cultural factors have to be taken into account in any notion of the church (family).

Because of the vast differences between the various expressions of "church" introduced by Western missionaries (the many denominational and, later, neo-Pentecostal bodies), confusion exists in African circles and, to quote Mugambi (1989:45), "Christianity among African converts was characterised by wide denominational variety". The result of this

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variety is a number of different notions of the church in Africa that Mugambi categorises as:

- The Catholic Church's emphasis on the importance of the church as a universal and centralized institution.

- The emphasis of various Protestant denominations on the importance of the local church.

- Independent church emphasis on charismatic leadership.

- Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movements with their emphasis on the spiritual make-up of the true church (the church visible and invisible).

- Many small churches emphasizing the autonomy of the local church (geographical) (see Mugambi 1989:45).

One may analyse these categories in order to compare them with Dulles' models of the church but that would be premature, and more investigation into Mugambi's writings is needed before coming to any conclusion.

In a chapter dealing with "Jesus and rural society", Mugambi (1989:95) refers to the church as a gathering of disciples and, a "community of disciples". Clearly, Mugambi views the church as a community within the local community, called to work in collaboration with local leaders in that society within which it is called to live out its discipleship. The approach Mugambi adopts may be termed incarnational, and would mean that the church must not appear to be a foreign institution imposing itself on the local community, but must be seen to be a part of that community.

This assessment of Mugambi's communal view of the true church is confirmed by Dedji:

> As a logical development of his argument, Mugambi, who is very keen on re-interpreting old cultural myths, promotes the revitalising of the African sense of community by recalling that African social engineering has evolved a system in which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationship with others (Dedji 2003:67).

The influence exerted by John Mbiti on Mugambi's thinking in this regard is significant and descriptive of the type of church Mugambi would like to see in Africa. Because of his interest in the restoration of social life in Africa, Mugambi engages in a socio-political interpretation of traditional African communal life. Mbiti also maintains that the nature of the church is corporate and the church needs to act corporately in the life of the corporate community. The following quote from Mbiti will describe his view of the applied communality of the church:

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We must seek to make the church the centre of existence from which African peoples may derive the fulfilment of their life's aspiration whether in time of need or in time of feasting, and where they may experience communal life which has a vaster scope and meaning than tribal life without Christ could ever provide...The church will become for them a community in which their corporate aspirations are not destroyed but fulfilled and intensified, in which traditional foundations are not simply shaken and replaced with a vacuum but are made more secure in Christ. The God who made human beings and provides them with children, life and rain, will now become human beings' light, and they have fellowship with their creator. In this way...Jesus Christ will so confront the peoples of Africa, that in Him and through Him they will find access to God whom they already acknowledge in their traditional ideas to be the creator of all things, as the One who strengthens kinship between human beings, and the One who established kinship between human beings and God (quoted in Dedji 2003:68).

Mugambi makes many references to the nature of the church in the chapter on "The Man of All Cultures" (1995:90-106) where he deals with the way the universality of Jesus transcends culture. The main emphasis in this chapter is on community. For Mugambi, the good news proclaimed by Jesus is that God has freed us from the confines of our identities and enables us to live and establish a community where all can feel at home (see Mugambi 1995:90). The church Jesus founded emphasises the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers.

By urging his followers to acknowledge the dignity and cultural integrity of other people he (Jesus) established a new community and gave it a new identity – which grew to become the nucleus of the Church. Within this new community there was to evolve a fuller sense of self and an awareness of the universality of humankind (Mugambi 1995:90).

The new community was to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. This is the raison d'être of the church. Mugambi quotes Newbigin to conclude comments made by Roland Allen (1927) and Walbert Buhlmann (1980) with regard to the nature of the church, and I offer Newbigin's quote as it is informative to this section:

We are in the presence of a tension in the very nature of the church which has not been sufficiently recognized. It is expressed in classic form once and for all in the fact that St. Paul devoted much of his immense spiritual resources in the early stages of his apostolate to fighting for the independence of the Gentile churches over against the church in Judea, and finally gave his life for their unity with the church in Judea. He would not have the mission to the Gentiles interpreted as mere Judean church extension. The corn of wheat who is Christ himself must fall into the Gentile soil in Corinth or in Antioch and bring forth its own fruit, a kind of Christian life which will not be a simple reproduction of Judean Christianity, but will be a fresh showing forth of the infinite riches of Christ. But, this battle having been won, he gives the closing years of his ministry to the knitting up of mutual bonds of love and service between the gentile and the Jewish

congregations, and finally gives his life for the fulfilment of that mission of reconciliation (Mugambi 1995:93).

Mugambi favours the model of the church as community and refers positively to the introduction by the Catholic Church of small communities led by lay leaders (1995:146). A further area that Mugambi views positively is the impact of the ecumenical movement, especially in the African context. He writes favourably of the 1913 and 1918 Kikuyu conferences where the emphasis was on the need to evangelize in unity and to work towards a united African church. He is aware that unity cannot be forced but views the post-Vatican Two church milieu with hope. Even though much of the decision making and implied goals of the ecumenical movement is vague and ambiguous, Mugambi is hopeful of Jesus' goals for unity (John 17) being realised in the African church. "African Christians and churches must come to terms with the theological insight that evangelical unity and ecumenical unity are necessary and complementary aspects of the same challenge of Jesus to his followers" (Mugambi 1995:172) Without a visible expression of united Christian witness, fellowship and service, the message of the ecumenical movement remains so much talk! Mugambi is concerned to develop a profile for the church of the future in Africa. His view is that there will need to be radical transformation in the African church before it will be relevant for the twenty-first century (see 1995:173). The challenges of taking up the cross and following Jesus (John 12:24) hold not only for the individual Christian, but also for the church. The question is how the church may do this in its own life. Mugambi points out that the church may have to change its outward character in order to maintain its essential identity. Mugambi's view is that the ecumenical movement holds the key to this change:

> We need to appreciate and emphasize always that a different opinion does not mean a wrong opinion. Diversity and experimentation are characteristic of human existence, and are socially healthy where love (*agape*) is evident. The church is called upon to be an agent of reconciliation and will serve that role effectively if it is itself a reconciled and harmonious community. This is the reason why the ecumenical movement is indispensable in contemporary and future Africa (Mugambi 1995:175).

Mugambi completes this chapter with a section on "The Future of Christian Mission in Africa", in which he makes certain statements pertinent to defining the nature of the church.

- Mission is part of the definition (of the very essence) of the Church. It is not theologically possible to call oneself a Christian missionary and not identify oneself with the church.

- Conversely, the Church is a missionary community. No community deserves to call

itself a "church" if it has no missionary vocation.

- The maturity of a Christian community manifests itself as soon as its first generation of converts begin to take decisions about their own priorities as a church (Congregational or "Free Church" structure).

- The universality of the Christian faith is manifested when all Christian communities mutually acknowledge and respect one another. (For the above see Mugambi 1995:240-242).

In order to conclude this section, I summarise the references Mugambi makes regarding the nature of the church.

Mugambi holds a true ecumenical notion of the church, which is evidenced in the statements below:

- The church is communal: a community of faith.

- The local church exercises autonomy in relationship.

- There are church structures pertinent to African culture that will differ from Western church structures.

- Unity in the church derives from a homogenous social / cultural, religious environment.

- The church exists as a community within the wider social community.

- The church is a vehicle for communicating mores and ethical standards.

- The church inaugurates the reign of God.

- The church is called to be an agent of reconciliation.

- A number of models are offered in the bible and a choice needs to be made from these models in order to derive a structure that is relevant.

- The models Mugambi offers have more to do with forms of church government than with theological description.

This can be further summarized as follows:

The church is made up of the whole Christian community comprising smaller autonomous communities living in relationship with other church communities. The structure of the local

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church will facilitate or hinder its relevance for the social structure in which it exists and its communication of the norms and values of the coming reign of God. A form of church government that facilitates the church being an agent of reconciliation and of the reign of God needs to be chosen.

On the same page Mugambi refers to the notion held by certain theologians of the church as the "vehicle through which each individual convert could be transported to heaven" (Taylor 2001:xxiii). Mugambi views this negatively as a reflection of a Hellenistic world-view with the notion of many heavens, and also reflecting the world-view of the missionaries. On the contrary the African world-view is complex but essentially monistic. The notion of the church is vitally affected by this difference in world-view. The individualistic ontology of the European enlightenment is vastly different from the communalistic and cosmic ontology of Africa. African communalism results in a communal notion of church.[21] Mugambi makes a clear statement regarding the nature of the church (Taylor 2001:xxviii): "Theologically, mission is part of the definition of the church". In making this statement Mugambi is echoing the opinion of many eminent theologians such as Bosch, Dulles, and Migliore.

In a subsection dealing with liturgical paradigms, Mugambi continually berates the influence of Western culture in the breakdown of African culture. In this section he makes the point that the church needs to take root in the culture where it is located and this can only take place when the liturgy is allowed to creatively evolve within that culture. He calls for African Christian theology to assist African churches in the task of liturgical renewal. From previous comments the conclusion may be made that Mugambi views the church as a local expression of the Christian faith that reflects the culture of the context within which it is located (see Mugambi & Magesa 2003:148).

In a further subsection on "Foundations for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics", there are two quotes that are helpful and contribute to understanding Mugambi's notion of the church. One of these quotes concerns Augustine and the contrast he drew between the city of Rome and the city of God, which eventually led to the two-kingdom theory in Protestant churches. This notion has dominated Protestant understandings of the church since the time of the Reformation and became part of African ecclesiology through the influence of the missionary enterprise. This approach to the understanding of the church resulted in the notion

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[21] This approach to understanding the nature of the church as communal is adequately described in Volf (1998:128-154).

of the "church visible and invisible", with far-reaching repercussions on the way the reign of God is viewed (see Mugambi 2003:124). The other reference has to do with the relationship between African Independent Churches and Western missionary societies and where such independent churches should be placed:

> In the European context, the churches of the Reformation were in the same analogical relationship with the Roman Catholic Church as the African independent churches to the missionary societies from Europe and North America (Mugambi 2003:130).

These African independent churches should be accepted as indicative of an African Reformation in its embryonic stages. Reconstructive ecclesiology will have a critical function in both the ecumenical and evangelical sectors of Christian thought in Africa and ought to consist of far more proactive initiatives than previous reactive responses (see Mugambi 2003:130).

From these references it may be seen that Mugambi expects an ecclesial structure to develop in Africa that is unique and vastly different from the imported models brought in by the missionary movement.

In concluding this section I will attempt to draw together the different references to the church made by Mugambi and form some comment on how he views the church. A summary of his references may be listed as follows:

- The church is a utopian community of the faithful existing within the wider community of the nation and humankind (that is, reflective of the reign of God).

- The structure of the church needs to be relevant culturally and socially so as to communicate the Gospel in a meaningful way.

- The church has a role in educating and informing the society within which it exists.

- There is only one universal church made up of local churches that together comprise the global church. This follows from his ecumenical stance. He is critical of the two kingdom model followed by some protestant churches.

- The church forms an alternative society: an illustration of the reign of God.

- The liturgy of the church needs to be local and reflect the culture of the society in which it operates.

Clearly, Mugambi views the African Independent Churches favourably as expressions of a

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typical African liturgy and church structure.

In *Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa* (2005), Mugambi has contributed a chapter entitled "Ecumenical Contextual Theological Reflection in Eastern Africa 1989 – 1999". This chapter is an outline of the establishment of the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern Africa Theologians that was formed in June 1987 when Father Carrol Houle, a Catholic priest, arrived in Kenya. In this chapter Mugambi makes a few remarks which substantiate his commitment to ecumenism. The objective of the symposium was the production and publication of theological texts which would show African theological thinking and thereby make a contribution to the theology of the church universal, so moving toward consensus. "In my view, African Christian theology ought to be an ecumenical and Pan-African endeavour, rather than a denominational, sectarian and parochial one" (Mugambi in Ndung'u & Mwaura 2005:19).

One is impressed at the number of times Mugambi stresses the need for the church to act in unity, (even, as above, when doing theology) by emphasising the ecumenical movement. He is adamant that the differences in the African church would not be as vast if they had not been accentuated by the missionary endeavour.

In summarising the notions put forward in this section the following observations may be made:

- The church must be contextual and experiential in its liturgy in order to be a social phenomenon in the community.

- Denominational fractioning of the church is to be condemned.

- A spontaneous liturgy is more typically African.

- A church model should meet the needs of a community and so selection of a relevant model is legitimate and necessary.

- The African church should reflect African culture (be indigenous).

- Liturgical practice must be meaningful to the participants.

The next most frequent reference is for the church to be a community or family of God's people. He sometimes refers to this community as being a utopian community, existing within the larger community as an illustration of the reign of God.

The church is universal. There is only one church and all denominations and local churches

make up that one church. There is a special plea made for denominations and groupings to recognise each other and the practice of the sacraments, even though they may differ in praxis.

In view of the above it may be concluded that Mugambi has very definite views of what the church should be and how it should function. In his mind, therefore, there exists a notion of the true church and it is this subject that I will examine next.

4.4.6 Mugambi and the characteristics of a true church

In his exposition on the church as a family in *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989), Mugambi describes the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as customs for socialisation and initiation (see Mugambi 1989:43). However, the Christian church brought these customs to Africa with the demand that traditional rituals should be abandoned (for an exposition of the customs of the church inculturated into African culture see Bujo 1992). Myths and rituals are of great importance to Mugambi and he strongly advocates the formation of indigenous practices that offer meaningful "myths" to the people to whom the church ministers.

In the second chapter of *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi refers to the universality and particularity of the church (1995:19). He makes this reference in the context of the development of Christian theology and the question of African churches being able to express themselves theologically and contribute their cultural and historical experience to the universal church. He finds his reference point in Paul's letters to Rome, Corinth, Galatia, and Ephesus and the way Paul maintains that the local church should be free to express itself without censorship as soon as it had elected elders to take responsibility for the church.

> He preferred that each church should evolve its own identity, in communion with other churches, provided that they all proclaimed the unity of the universal church, whose founder and head was Christ (Mugambi 1995:19).

What is significant in this quote is that it seems to identify Mugambi as being in favour of the autonomy of the local church, although what he means by local churches has yet to be clarified bearing in mind his strongly ecumenical approach to the universal nature of the church.

The main feature of this short section focuses on the kerygmatic role of the church and the need for it to grow within the local culture while still maintaining its universal character. Sadly, much of the experience of Africans has been of a Christianity associated with imperialism and oppression, rather than with freedom and salvation. In Mugambi's own

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words, "the world has yet to witness and experience the emergence of forms of Christianity in which the people of all cultures bring their rich heritage into the church universal" (Mugambi 1995:94). Mugambi views the negative contribution of the Western missionaries as negating the teaching of Galatians 3:28, with the result that cultural, ethnic and class barriers have been maintained. These barriers not only prevented unity but presented disunity to the African world with no discernible difference between civil society and the church. Clearly, what exists bears no real resemblance to Mugambi's view of the church as it should be. I will offer some comment in this regard at the end of this section (For more regarding this dichotomy see Mugambi 1995:94, 95).

That Mugambi views the church as the inaugurator of the reign of God becomes evident in his criticism of the nominal quality of church life in the status quo and the lack of evidence of the life of the kingdom. "The ministry of Jesus focused on social change that would facilitate the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The urgency with which Jesus proclaimed his message was subverted when the church conformed to the status quo" (Mugambi 1995:95). In the context of criticism of the missionary enterprise as contributors to the status quo in the African church, Mugambi questions the ability of the missionary enterprise to offer exemplary application of the gospel in all cases and the influence this has on the ability of future converts to model Christian communities in their own local environment (see Mugambi 1995:96). His criticism of the missionary enterprise is a constant in his writings:

> The scandal of the contemporary missionary enterprise was aggravated by disunity, competition and rivalry among European and North American missionary groups working in Africa (Mugambi 1995:97).

In summary I list the notions expressed by Mugambi thus far in point form:

- The church is the body of Jesus.

- The church has a liberating saving role.

- The church is a community (of disciples).

- The church is a family.

- The church has a preservative function.

- The church is one, but needs to seek greater expression of that unity.

- Different denominations express different notions of the church, e.g. Catholic-sacramental; Protestant - governmental; Independent - charismatic leadership (spirit

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led); Pentecostal - true church (visible and invisible); Small churches - insular and parochial.

- The church is a "world church".

- The church has a pastoral and didactic role.

This summary indicates the breadth of Mugambi's approach to the church and its role in society.

Some further insight into Mugambi's view of the perfect church may be derived from two comments he makes in his introduction to Taylor's *Christian Presence amid African Religion* (2001 edition). Firstly, Mugambi refers to the type of African Christian ecclesiology presented by Taylor in chapter nine where Taylor pleads for an African Christian ecclesiology which takes seriously the communal understanding of human identity. In the next paragraph Taylor describes the kind of church he envisages in an African context: localised, involved in the community, growing by many responses to Christ. This description partly expresses Mugambi's own notion of the perfect church (see Taylor 2001:xxx).

Mugambi's unreserved acceptance of the ecumenical movement as having a major role to play in bringing in a relevant church in the African context merits a more detailed examination of his ecumenical stance.

4.4.7 Mugambi's ecumenical view of the church

In providing a more in-depth examination of Mugambi's positive approach to ecumenism, I will focus on two of his major publications in order to derive his position on ecumenism and form some opinion especially on how this reflects his notion of what form the true church should take.

In *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War"*(1995:196–209), Mugambi presents a whole chapter dealing with "Ecumenism and African Community", in which he makes several pertinent comments, which I will refer to in this section. Ecumenism is a significant factor in the way Mugambi understands the nature of the true church.

In the introduction to this chapter, Mugambi stresses the conflict, confusion and tension often brought to African families through denominationalism. His contention is that African communality has suffered through this disunity, often breaking the communalism within a family, village or tribe (see Mugambi 1995: 198, 199). Because of his own strong sense of

community Mugambi is supportive of the ecumenical movement and finds the approach towards the universal church and unity taken by the movement to be more expressive of what he would consider to be a truly African church. With regard to the approach taken by modern ecumenicity, Mugambi notes that this movement has extended the meaning of ecumenism to include all continents. This is a definition with which Mugambi concurs. With reference to the words "Catholic" and "ecumenical", Mugambi uses them according to their original Greek and Latin meanings:

> In their broad secular meanings, the words 'ecumenism' and 'Catholicism' make it possible for exploration of those characteristics which human beings have in common among themselves as a species, and with other creatures (Mugambi 1995:202).

He continues to comment on the way humans have the ability to derive an infinite variety of ways and cultures none of which may be judged as right or wrong by another. The clashes of cultures are inevitable because of differing values in those cultures. However, Mugambi posits the need for the mutual recognition of cultures that differ in order to promote understanding and unity (see Mugambi 1995:202, 203). He declares the historical polarity between Catholicism and Protestantism to be harmful to African Christianity in the twenty-first century. "The church of the future in Africa needs the collaborative thrust between Catholicism and ecumenism" (Mugambi 1995:203). If this took place most of the tension, conflicts and confusion that negatively impacts the African church would be resolved.

> Undoubtedly, if African Christians had the freedom to choose, most would prefer a *Christian* identity, rather than a denominational one. The cultural unity of African peoples is consistent with Christian unity, whereas the denominational fragmentation of Euro-American Christianity is analogous to 'tribalism' in Africa. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Euro-American missionary enterprise in Africa has endeavoured to 'de-tribalise' and 'civilize' African converts, while denominationalising them into new 'denominational tribes' (Mugambi 1995:203 & 204).

I would personally hesitate to see this process as deliberate. However, it would appear to be real in the effect it has had upon the African church. Mugambi strongly recommends that African Catholics and Protestants forge ecumenical bonds of mutual sharing and fellowship (see Mugambi 1995:204). Mugambi sees huge potential for the ecumenical movement to help African Christianity rise above denominationalism without abolishing or denigrating denominations (see Mugambi 1995:205). In his thinking, all Christians, whether Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, or Congregational, belong to the same family of believers. He views this inclusive perspective as being consistent with the inclusiveness of the African cultural

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and religious heritage. This approach is very significant for developing an understanding of Mugambi's notion of the true church. From the above it may be concluded that Mugambi views the church from a universal perspective and favours the unity of the whole family of God. In support of this conclusion Mugambi's comment applies:

> The universality of the Christian faith is manifested when all Christian communities mutually acknowledge and respect one another...How can Christians avoid the scandal of division, when they cannot witness together to their Divine Master (Mugambi 1995:241, 242)?

Mugambi's *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), adds very little to the material already presented in this section other than some brief references to the church's need to participate in the formation of an African Common Market (Mugambi 2003:57), and the need for the OAU to work for a "borderless Africa" (2003:58).

> The ecumenical movement, affirming the unity of the church and unity of humankind provides the theological frame of reference within which Europe and North America can support the process of Pan-African integration (Mugambi 2003:58).

In concluding this section it may be said that Mugambi's notion of a true church would incorporate the following characteristics:

- A church that expresses the communal aspects of African life.

- A church with a non-hierarchical governmental structure (incorporating the aspects of indaba in decision making).

- A church integrated into the social and cultural life of its context; a church that recognises and is accepted as part of the ecumenical body of Christ.

- A church that is vitally involved in the process of educating its community into growth in all aspects of life; a church that exercises a prophetic role within the civil and governmental structures of its context.

- A church that exercises restraint and understanding towards other groupings and denominations.

This may appear idealistic, but it is obvious that Mugambi's approach represents the variety found in the biblical approach to church structure and role. However, it is influenced by his African environment as well as the impact colonialism and the missionary movement has had on that church environment. His understanding of the church would also be in agreement with the view of Moltmann and Pannenberg who both arrive at a communal notion of the

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church and who favour the universal church as inclusive of all believers who are alive and all those who have gone before (see Volf 1998:4, 268). This notion is compatible with an African understanding of a single reality of existence comprising both the seen and the unseen. I deal with such a worldview in my Masters thesis (Fischer 2007:41-48).

4.5 A spectrum of models of the church as identified by Bosch and Dulles

A number of different ways of looking at the church have over the centuries produced models that describe the church. Currently there are still a number of images, such as Migliore's four clusters: the people of God, a servant people, the body of Christ, and the community of the Spirit (Migliore 2004:252-254). Saucy also give five definitions of the church (1997:220, 221) in which he focuses on the church's role in the world. Bosch identifies with five of Dulles' six models of the church (1991:368). Dulles' models of the church are definitive and descriptive. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on Dulles' six models of the church, in order to develop a map on which to plot Mugambi's notion of the church, namely the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, as servant, and as a community of disciples (Dulles 2002).

Drawing on Dulles' study (1976, 1987) Bosch presents a spectrum of five major ecclesial types, namely the church as an institution, as the mystical body of Christ, as a sacrament, as a herald, or as a servant (1991:368). Each of these is indicative of a different understanding of the nature of the church. I offer a brief explanation of each of these models and then delve more deeply into three main approaches to the church in subsequent subsections.

a) The first two models (the church as institution and mystical communion) have always found a place in the Catholic Church's ecclesiology because of the high view of ecclesiology held by that church. Bosch quotes Neill (1968:74) in support of this:

> "From the counter-reformation until the second half of the nineteenth century, the prevailing emphasis was on the external, the legal and the institutional" (1991:368). This developed until in the twentieth century the Empirical Roman Catholic Church was identified with the mystical body of Christ. The church was thus seen as the perfect society (1991:369). The Eastern Orthodox Church as well as the high Anglican Church adopted a very similar position as I show later. There has been a significant tension within the Catholic Church over which of these two models should be emphasised and Dulles opts for what could be seen as the currently accepted position of the Catholic Church, namely a correlation of the communal and

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institutional notions of the church (Dulles 1987:35-62). Much influence in the acceptance of a more communal understanding of the church has been exercised by African Catholic theologians such as Benezet Bujo, Jean-Marc Ela, Laurenti Magesa, and Jesse Mugambi (Anglican) with a subsequent change in emphasis in the nature of the church (see the bibliography). It is significant that Pope John Paul II viewed the church as the "communion of God" as his preferred category for ecclesiology (see Dulles 2002:221-224).

b) The third model, where the church is regarded as a sacrament, finds favour with some Catholics but very little response among Protestants. It is of significance that the Anglican articles of religion state clearly that the means by which Christ is partaken of in the Eucharist is faith (Article 28 of the Articles of Religion, 1662), indicating a move away from an institutional sacramental view of the church and the sacraments. The model of the church being a sacrament regards the church as the vehicle through which all that is available to the Christian is channelled by means of the sacraments (Dulles 1987:67).

> Protestants tended to have a "low" view of the church. Bosch speaks of the distinction made between the "true church" – the *ecclesiola,* and little church within the *ecclesia,* the large and nominal church; this *ecclesiola,* not the official church, was viewed as the true church (1991:369). In this model the church is viewed as a herald (*kyrux*), most likely because of the emphasis upon the "word of God" in Protestant circles along with a de-emphasis on the sacraments. This was the emphasis in Karl Barth's biblical theology (Dulles 1987:77).

c) The last model cited by Dulles is that of the church as a servant. Here the church is seen as the body of Christ, synonymous with the suffering servant and so as the "servant church" (Dulles 1987:77). In this model a sharp distinction is made between the church in its terrestrial form and the Kingdom of God (see Dulles 1987:79). Hans Küng comments on this approach to the church:

> It is the reign of God which the church hopes for, bears witness to, and proclaims.
> It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God which is to come and is at
> the same time already present, but its voice, its announcer, its herald. God alone
> can bring his reign; the church is devoted entirely to its service" (Küng 1968:96).

In this model, the church is seen as complete in any local congregation or gathering of believers. There does not have to be any larger ecclesiastical organisation. Even house church groups are viewed as being valid expressions of the church. There are a number of dangers inherent in this model, as there are in any of the previous models. I allude to them in the expansion of these models that follows.

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My purpose is to focus particularly on the notions of the church as an institution of salvation, and the other extreme of the church as a servant and herald. I then focus on the church as sacrament (*mysterion*) and endeavour to find a middle ground between the church as the real presence of God and the church as a mere sign of God's activity in the world.

4.5.1 The church as an institution of salvation

Bosch deals with the individualization of salvation in a short passage (1991:215 - 217) and comes to the conclusion that Augustine's theology gave rise to a dualistic view of reality which became second nature in Western Christianity - the tendency to regard salvation as a private matter and to ignore the world (see Bosch 1991:216). Heaven became the focus and the church the instrument by which the goal of heaven could be obtained. This tendency paved the way for what Bosch calls, "large scale externalization" (1991:217). The church became the definer of sins and the agent sanctioning of the various penitential practices, as well as the purveyor of absolution. "In this process soteriology tended to get divorced from Christology and to be subordinated to ecclesiology" (Bosch 1991:217). Grace now became an ecclesiological sacrament, dispersed solely by the church.

Bosch moves on to consider the ecclesiasticization of salvation. Augustine taught that what separated those who were Christians and those who were not, was that the former were members of the church and the latter were not. He saw authority and holiness as adhering to the institutional church, sometimes in spite of the qualities of holiness possibly not being evident (Bosch 1991:218).

> Since the worldwide church, founded by the apostles, was the only true church, whoever left it was self-evidently wrong; those who severed their links with the Catholic Church also severed their relationship with God (Bosch 1991:218).

This model places a major emphasis on a unity that was visible in the established church with its hierarchical structure. The church and salvation become so linked to one another that there could be no thought of salvation outside the visible church; which resulted in the claims by the Catholic Church to be the only true church. It seems pertinent to include a comment from Dulles at this point as he is one of Bosch's major sources:

> From the point of view of this author, institutionalism is a deformation of the true nature of the church – a deformation that has unfortunately affected the Church at certain periods of its history, and one that remains in every age a real danger to the institutional church (Dulles 1987:35).

Bosch asks the question, followed by a statement, "Is it fair to expect a movement to survive only as a movement? The movement disintegrates or it becomes an institution – this is simply

a sociological law" (1991:52). A look at history shows that every movement eventually became an institution if it were to survive. Even the so-called charismatic movements such as the Waldensians, the Moravians, and the Pentecostals all eventually became institutionalised. The issue is not so much the institutionalising but the loss of zeal and convictions that caused the development of codes, solidification of the institution and dogmas that were cast in stone. The prophet gave way to the priest and charisma declined into office. The institution became of first importance and submission to dogma the sign of obedience to God. Membership of the church was achieved through sacramental means and personal faith became secondary (see Bosch 1991:53). In pages 190-236 of *Transforming Mission* (1991), Bosch deals with developing notions of the church as it relates to mission. He traces the changes in the Orthodox and Catholic churches and the development of their ecclesiology. In the next subsections I deal separately with the Orthodox and Catholic approaches to the notion of the church.

Orthodox notions of the church

Due to the delay in the *Parousia*, the emphasis in the Orthodox churches shifted from the immediate to a longer term approach to the coming reign of God. Bosch denotes this shift as the Christian message being in the process of being transformed from the announcement of God's imminent reign to the proclamation of the only true and universal religion of humankind (see 1991:196). So, in Orthodox thinking, faith in God's promises yet to be fulfilled was replaced by faith in the already consummated eternal kingdom of Christ, seen in the church (1991:196). Bosch, in a comment about Paul's teaching and the Orthodox churches, says that where Paul is accepted, he is thoroughly domesticated. The Old Testament allegorically interpreted, became the dominant hermeneutic of the Orthodox Churches (1991:197). The essentially Jewish understanding of the historical Jesus gradually gave way to a preoccupation with the exalted Christ. This led to the whole of the Christ event being spiritualized. The influence of Gnosticism resulted in a focus on the soul eventually becoming part of the angelic order (1991:197). Christianity was seen to save humankind from this earth (Bosch 1991:198). This occurs in various degrees and stages of spiritual life until the soul achieves perfect union with God. This notion essentially expresses Neo-Platonism with its emphasis on reunion with the world mind (*nous*). In a sense, parallels may be drawn with some of the apocalyptic teachings of our own time and the position taken by the Orthodox Church regarding the importance of escape from the material world. This is not the place to delve into the inroads made by Gnosticism in the early church but it will suffice to

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comment that such inroads were serious and the influence is still with us today (see Morphew Kindle 2010).

In Eastern Orthodoxy, the eventual understanding was that the church embraced all of life. Ecclesiology became primary, subsuming both eschatology and pneumatology (Bosch 1991:201). Bosch quotes Beker as commenting:

> A mystical doctrine of the church catholic displaces the idea of the church as proleptic reality… (It) is now regarded as the company of the spiritual elite, who with their endowment of the Spirit already actualize the Kingdom of God in their soul…In this setting, the pre-existent status of the church, its ontological character, and its status as an imperishable body become the focal concerns (Beker quoted in Bosch 1991:201).

From an Orthodox Church perspective, paganism and the absence of civilization were synonymous and one can see that such a notion carried over into later church missions where culture and Christianity became synonymous. An observation may be made that there is evidence in the various councils of the church of a movement to establish the church as an empire and Christ as the emperor. For instance, at the Council of Nicaea (325) Christ was clothed with the attributes and titles of the emperor:

> Christ became a majestic King who granted an audience in the liturgy, in a monumental basilica, the architecture and decorations of which gave expression to his glory (Bosch 1991:202).

Bosch concludes that the end result was a compromise where the emperor was to rule in "time" and Christ in "eternity". Bosch summarises the developments in the Orthodox Church's ecclesiology so well that I quote his summary as a conclusion to this subsection on the Orthodox Church:

> The church established itself in the world as an institute of almost exclusively other-worldly salvation. Faith in the promises of Christ still to be fulfilled tended to make room for faith in Christ's already accomplished eternal reign, which could henceforth be experienced and manifested only in the cultic-sacramental context of the liturgy. The apocalyptic gospel, which had fervently anticipated God's intervention in history, was replaced by a timeless gospel according to which the delay of the parousia made no vital difference (Bosch 1991:213).

Catholic notions of the church

The Catholic Church has undergone a number of modifications to its understanding of the nature of the church. The clash between the Donatists and Augustine resulted in Augustine emphasising the visible church because of the Donatists' strict insistence on the separation between church and state and their insistence on strict moral discipline. In response to the Donatists' insistence that any office bearer in the church should be free from moral failure,

Augustine declared that the church is bound to consist of "drunkards, misers, tricksters, gamblers, adulterers, fornicators, people wearing amulets, assiduous clients of sorcerers, astrologers....the same crowds that press into the churches on Christian festivals also fill the theatres on pagan holidays" (quoted by Bosch 1991:218, 219). Augustine maintained that the difference between Christians and non-Christians was mainly in that Christians belonged to the church, and not in evidence of morality. He maintained that the worldwide church was the only true church because it was founded by the Apostles. This understanding was further strengthened by Cyprian's dictum, "There is no salvation outside the Catholic Church" (Stevenson 1968:251). Pope Boniface VIII made the same point in a papal bull (1302) when he declared the necessity of submission to the Roman pontiff as essential for salvation (Bosch 1991:218). In 1441 at the Council of Florence, the statement was made that people will go to hell unless they become aggregated to the Catholic Church before the end of their lives. Similarly Pope Pius XI1, in 1958, declared that the church of Christ is one flock under one supreme shepherd (see Bosch 1991:218).

A further factor influencing the institutionalizing of the church was the change that occurred in the understanding of baptism. Augustine still called for spiritual formation of converts and for careful preparation to precede baptism. Subsequently, the actual performance of the baptismal rite took precedence over the spiritual preparation of the individual. Even reluctant baptismal candidates were regarded as part of the church, emphasizing the efficacy of the sacrament as administered by the church. A major factor in bringing change to the Catholic Church's view of ecclesiology was the second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Dulles calls Pope John Paul II pre-eminently a pope of the second Vatican Council, and it is helpful to assess the Catholic Church's approach to ecclesiology by examining some of his statements. In his opinion, the institutional structures of the church are secondary as they are intended to preserve and promote communion, yet it needs the structures of the institution. John Paul II finds institution being introduced in Jesus' appointment of the twelve along with forms of prayer and rituals of worship (see Dulles 2002:224). Vatican II emphasised the necessity of the offices of the church, particularly the papacy, as means of maintaining the unity of the church.

> In the church as a structured community the hierarchical leaders, succeeding to the office of the apostles, have the responsibility of maintaining unity and discerning the authenticity of the initiatives proposed or undertaken by the faithful Charismatic gifts, which the Holy Spirit freely bestows upon all the members, are a benefit to the whole church (John Paul II quoted in Dulles 2002:226).

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This approach to the nature of the church as an institution is confirmed by Dulles in his portrayal of the church as institution. (1987:35-46). After having dealt with the terms applicable to the ecclesiology of institution, namely clericalism, juridicism, and triumphalism, Dulles goes on to describe the results of this approach in a quote, "He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother" (1987:41). Dulles maintains that this view prevailed from 1550 – 1950 (1987:42). Dulles gives further weight to Bosch's findings as to the weaknesses of this model of the church in a detailed critique, finally concluding that "in every generation the Church has to face anew the problem of how to maintain its institutional strength and societal stability without falling into the defects of exaggerated institutionalism" (1987:45).

Dulles (1987:42) lists the main benefits of this model of the church as:

- This model lines up with the official church documents of the last few centuries. The Catholic Church, especially, repeatedly affirms its doctrinal, sacramental, and governmental structures as having divine origin.

- There is stability in the identification with the origins of the church and it offers a place where there is little change in the midst of a constantly changing world.

- This model gives a strong sense of corporate identity. Catholics, especially, know who they are and what they stand for. It also develops a strong sense of institutional loyalty.

There are, however, also a number of liabilities in this model:

- There is very little basis in scripture or in the early church tradition to support this model. Special interpretation of a few New Testament texts has to be undertaken in order to garner any support. In fact, Paul's models of the church are more organic, more communitarian, and more mystical.

- This model emphasises such virtues as obedience to church structures and leaders. The three terms I used previously of clericalism, juridicism, and triumphalism will help in defining this point. Clericalism reduces the laity to passivity. Juridicism exaggerates the role of human authority and the fulfilling of ecclesiastical obligations. Triumphalism gives the church the monopoly on salvation.

- This model does not really allow for development in the thinking of theologians and lay people. Theology is called to the defence of currently-held theological positions.

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Critical thinking is not welcomed.[22]

- Scholars are expected to find support for dogmas in the scriptures and church history that can scarcely be found, such as the papal-episcopal form of government, the seven sacraments, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

The opposite view of the church from the one described above, is to see the church as a servant or herald and I will describe this view in the next section.

I draw mainly on the views of Bosch but also refer to those held by Bonhoeffer (see Kelly & Nelson 1990), Dulles (1987), Hoekendijk (1964) and Migliore (2004). In the institutional model, the church teaches, sanctifies and rules with the authority of Christ. In this model, the church is the active subject and ventures into the world in order to influence the world and draw it into the confines of the church (see Dulles 1987:89). The models I look at next are the church as a servant of the world and the church as a herald of the word of God. Because the church as herald still carries notions of the church operating towards the world in order to draw it into the church, I deal with this notion first.

4.5.2 The church as herald

This model of the church makes the word primary and the sacraments secondary. In Reformed and Protestant circles, the church is gathered and formed by the word of God. Migliore (2004:259) maintains that this model of the church has been primary in Protestant traditions. Those who choose this model are convinced that the primary task of the church is to proclaim God's word in order to call the nations to repentance and life in Christ. The institution takes second place to the proclamation of the gospel. In a reference to Barth (1956:725), Bosch states that the church exists in being sent. So, God is a missionary, God and his people are a missionary people (Bosch 1991:372), and the missionary activity of the church is to proclaim the word of God. Dulles (1987:77) describes Karl Barth as the chief proponent of the church as a kerygmatic community. The church must be the place where the word of God is heard but not the place where the word is curtailed. Barth and Dulles use the terminology of the word of God being an event that takes place as often as God addresses his people. Barth and Küng agree in the church as the herald of the lordship of Christ and of the future kingdom. The very term *ekklesia* refers to those who are called out, summonsed by

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[22] For detail on the above see Dulles 1987:44 & 45 and for a full explanation of the differences between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches see Volf 1998.

means of a herald (see Dulles 1987:78).

In this model, a sharp distinction is made between the church existent on earth and the reign of God as an eschatological reality. Küng clearly states that the church is not the kingdom of God, nor do its activities extend the kingdom or bring its realization.

It is the reign of God which the church hopes for, bears witness to, and proclaims. It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God, which is to come and is at the same time already present, but its voice, its announcer, its herald. God alone can bring his reign; the church is devoted entirely to its service (Küng 1968:96).

In this model of the church the gospel is understood as an event of proclamation and not as a system of propositional truths, nor as a written document. The goal of the church is thus to herald the message resulting in a strong missionary thrust. This type of ecclesiology is radically centred upon Jesus Christ, and the Bible as the primary witness to him. Dulles regards Richard Mc Brien as offering the best summary of this ecclesiology and I quote:

> This mission of the church is one of proclamation of the Word of God to the whole world. The church cannot hold itself responsible for the failure of man to accept it as God's Word; it has only to proclaim it with integrity and persistence. All else is secondary. The church is essentially a kerygmatic community which holds aloft, through the preached Word, the wonderful deeds of God in past history, particularly his mighty act in Jesus Christ. The community itself happens wherever the Spirit breathes, wherever the Word is proclaimed and accepted in faith. The Church is event, a point of encounter with God (Dulles 2002:69).

For this examination of the tensions between different models of the church, this model is secondary to that of the church as servant. I now proceed to a more detailed analysis of the church as servant.

4.5.3. The church as servant

Bosch quotes Hoekendijk frequently, and refers to Dulles and Bonhoeffer, all three being major sources in the way Bosch understands the servant nature of the church. However, I would like to begin this subsection by referring to Migliore. Migliore describes this as the "diaconal model".

According to this view, the church is not primarily an institution whose purpose is survival and expansion, nor an intimate community designed to foster the personal growth of individuals who feel neglected and depersonalized by modern society, nor merely the herald of a message. The church is a servant community called to minister in God's name on behalf of fullness of life for all of God's creatures (Migliore 2004:259).

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In early treatises on the church, there was almost no understanding of the world as of any significance. According to Bosch, the impression was that there was only church, and no world. Outside the church there was only the false church. The practice of Christianity had to do mainly with attending church. There was much development in the understanding of the church but, in order to bridge a large gap for the sake of brevity, suffice to say that after the Second World War, Protestantism began to embrace an orientation toward the world (see Bosch 1991:377). The church began to be perceived primarily in terms of its relationship to the world. A new emphasis appeared: just as the mention of church without including mission was seen as a misnomer, so the mention of the church without mention of the world came to be seen as a misnomer. "It was discovered that the ekklesia was, from the very beginning a Theo-political category" (Hoekendijk quoted in Bosch 1991:377). In other models, the church is given a primary place and, in some way, God comes to the world through the church, but in this model there is very little need for the organised or established church.

From here on, there is a convergence of Catholic and Protestant thinking on the connection between the church and the world as well as recognition that God's activities should not be confined to the church. Bosch gives six points on how this new view is to be understood:

- The church cannot be viewed as the ground or goal of mission. The character of the church is provisional; the final word is not the church but the glory of the Father, and the Son in the Spirit's liberty (Moltmann1977:19).

- The church is not the kingdom of God. The church displays glimmers of the imminent reign of God, of coming reconciliation, peace, and new life. Yet, wherever Christ overcomes the power of evil, that reign comes. This should be most visible in the church, but also in society.

- Mission is more than calling people into the church to await the hereafter. Those whom the church approaches in mission are subject to social, economic, and political conditions in this world. So, liberation includes the bringing of people into life in Christ, as well as delivering people from the bondages of history.

- The church must be understood as a "dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22), but the Spirit is moving the church en route to the future reign of God (see John V Taylor 1972b).

- If the church attempts to sever itself from involvement in the world and if its structures are such that they thwart the possibility of rendering any relevant service to

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the world, such structures have to be recognised as heretical. Any of the church's structures should be arranged in such a way that they render a service to society. Snyder states it as follows:

> We are called to be kingdom people, not church people. Kingdom people seek first the kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns for justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; kingdom people work to see the church change the world (Snyder 1983:11).

- Lastly, because of this relatedness to the world, the church may never function as a fearful border guard, but always as one who brings good tidings[23].

Hoekendijk gives a more radical view of the church as servant. He sees the model for the church to be in the messianic self-sacrifice of Jesus and that the model of sacrificial serving is the only relevant one for the church to adopt. He uses three directional words in describing the church: self-emptying, service, solidarity with the people (Hoekendijk 1967b:69).

If someone asks where the church is, then we ought to be able to answer: there, where people are emptying themselves, making themselves as nothing; where people serve, not just a little, but in total service which has been imitated from the Messiah-Servant and in which the cross comes into view; and there, where the solidarity with fellow human beings is not merely preached but is actually demonstrated (Hoekendijk 1967b:69).

My reading of Hoekendijk as an exponent of the servant model of the church leads me to the conclusion that, for him, the institutional structures are relatively unimportant and that what matters is the degree to which the church identifies with and serves the world. It would not be too extreme to view Hoekendijk as calling for the church to die in order for the world to experience the reign of God. The conclusion may be drawn that the church serves God as it is engaged in serving the world in its struggle for emancipation and justice. This model of "the church for others" is prevalent in modern ecclesiologies. The same emphasis may be found in the Presbyterian Confession of 1966, the Uppsala Report of the World Council of Churches in 1968, the Conclusions of the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellin in 1968, and the document on Justice in the World issued by the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops in 1971 (see Dulles 1987:93). According to Dulles, two of the influential theologians who were involved in what he calls a "secular thrust" were Teilhard de Chardin

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[23] For detail of the above layout see Bosch 1991:377 & 378.

and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. De Chardin attempted to reconcile science and religion because of his anthropological background, and Bonhoeffer, in *Letters and Papers from Prison*, calls for a humble and servant church, both men being motivated by the fear that the world was passing the church by.

In this ecclesiological model, the role of the church is not so much to gain new converts for its own ranks, but rather to be of help to all men wherever they are, and to point people to the hope of a new existence in the reign of God with a new set of values. The end result of this thinking may be compared to the social gospel and the Moral Rearmament movement.

The *Kairos Document*, which expresses the approach of liberation theology, gives new meaning to the notion of the church as servant. In this document, the proper service of the church is to participate in God's liberating activity in the world, exposing conditions of bondage, calling for the conversion of people and corporate structures, prompting prophetic action on behalf of justice and freedom, and sustaining believers in their solidarity with the poor and their struggle against the powers of evil and injustice (see Migliore 2004:259 & 260).

Some of the strengths of the servant model include the following:

- It gives a different emphasis to a church that is largely turned in on itself. The church has almost become an anachronism with the way it holds on to outdated structures and dogmas that are irrelevant for the current world. In forcing it to look out and become involved in the life of society, this model has had a salutary effect upon church life.

- This model of the church seeks to give the church a new relevance, a new vitality, a new modernity, and a new sense of mission. An outward focus on mission will undoubtedly have positive spiritual repercussions in the life of the church.

- This model takes the ancient faith of the church out into a fulfilment of that faith in practical ways.

However, this model also carries a number of negative factors:

- There is a lack of any direct biblical foundation for this model (contrary to the many scriptures that speak of the servant-hood of the believer and of the need to serve one another, as well as the servant nature of church leadership).

Dulles goes to great lengths to call this model into question because of the wrong connotation that could be attached to it. The church is not called to be the world's servant but to serve the

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Father, as Jesus did.

Closely connected to the notion of the servant church is the problem of how the church is related to the kingdom of God. Is the church to strive to bring about the perfect society (utopia) in an attempt to bring in the reign of God? Dulles maintains that he cannot find the scriptures suggesting that the church's task is to make the world a better place to live in.

(See Dulles 1987:98102 for a more detailed exposition of these points).

Since the early sixties, prominence has been given to this form of ecclesiology. Protestant and Anglican proponents of this view are Gibson Winter, Harvey Cox, and John AT Robinson. Winter calls for a "servant church: one that is no longer an institutional structure of salvation alongside the worldly structures of restraint but one that is a community within the worldly structures of historical responsibility which recognizes and acknowledges God's gracious work for all mankind" (see Dulles 2002:87). There was a parallel development in the Catholic Church in the publication of Robert Adolfs. He calls for the church to renounce all claims to power and dignity and to simply love.

The models of the church as institution and as servant both have major flaws in expressing the nature of the church in a way that is consistent with scriptural expressions of the church. I therefore examine the model of the church as a sacrament in the next section in an endeavour to find a model for expressing a more "middle ground" notion of the church.

4.5.4 The church as sacrament

In presenting the section of his study dealing with the church as sacrament, sign and instrument Bosch refers to Paul's emphasis on the church presenting itself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). He also mentions that the New Testament books list many gifts bestowed on individuals for the good of the Body, but never include priesthood as a gift. Instead, this gift of priesthood is entrusted to the whole community (1 Peter 2:9). In time these notions of the church disappeared and a hierarchical notion of service developed into the priesthood. In more modern times there has been a reversion to the idea of the church as a sacrament (see Bosch 1991:374). Migliore agrees with Bosch that this model tends to be more prominent in Roman Catholic theology, especially post-Vatican II. He expresses it as follows, "In its worship, witness and service, the church is the sign of the continuing presence of God in Jesus Christ" (Migliore 2004:258, cf. Bosch 1991:374). According to Dulles (2002:55), the model of church as sacrament was anticipated by Cyprian, Augustine, Aquinas and Scheeben, and offers an intelligible synthesis of the

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institutional and mystical models of the church.

The terminology of the church as sacrament is increasingly being used in Protestant circles since the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC in 1968. Bosch describes the formulation, "The church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind", as a key formulation (Bosch 1991:374). He quotes Gassmann in support of this conclusion:

> The remarkably wide reception of the ecclesiological use of the terms sacrament, sign and instrument in ecumenical debate suggests that this terminology is found to be helpful in describing the place and vocation of the church and its unity in God's plan of salvation (Gassmann 1986:13).

The concept of the church as sacrament gives expression to the idea of the "church for others" that was the view of William Temple (see Neill 1968:76); that the church is the only organisation in the world that exists for non-members. Bonhoeffer also spoke of the "church for others". All these give expression to a concept that was widely embraced in both Catholic and Protestant circles, because it so clearly expressed the teaching of Jesus on the occasion of his washing the disciple's feet (John 13:1-17).

The emergence of this model fills a gap between the two models dealt with previously in 4.5.1. and 4.5.2. The institutional model appears to deny salvation to anyone who is not an initiated member of the organised church (particularly the established Episcopal churches), while the servant (communion) model begs the question of why anyone should be required to join any institution at all. This appeal to see the church as sacrament was an attempt by, initially, Catholic theologians to bring these two concepts together (see Dulles 1987:63). One could describe this as an attempt to bring together the divine and human in the church. Because of the Catholic notion of the sacraments, this notion of the church as sacrament could be seen to harmoniously combine both aspects. Dulles quotes Henri de Lubac:

> If Christ is the sacrament of God, the church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation, in a sense far more real than that in which it can be said that any human institution is its founders continuation (quoted by Dulles 1987:63).

This model has the tendency to draw attention to the church's own sacramental life, and particularly to participation in the Eucharist. The notion is that through the community, strengthened and nourished by participation in the Eucharistic action, the redemptive work of Christ is extended to all humankind. So, this model represents the extension of the divine into the material which tends to become separated in the two previous models (see Migliore 2004:258).

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Bosch has much to say about the problems inherent in this model of the church. He mentions that Bonhoeffer came from a typically liberal-humanist bourgeois climate, where the idea was that Western Christians knew what was best for others and portrayed themselves as the guardians of what was right. Bonhoeffer's approach might be classified as the church for others but many felt that it should rather be "the church with others" (see Bosch 1991:375).

Ernst Käsemann described the application of the term sacrament to the church as "almost frivolous" because of the absence of intercommunion among Christians. He was also concerned that this terminology would blur the difference between Christ and the church. If the church took over the sacramental role of Christ as the divine in the world, then it became very easy to take the next step of saying that the church was Christ in the world. Käsemann also calls into question the use of "sign" to describe the church, as he maintains the only legitimate sign of the church is the cross of Christ (referred to in Bosch 1991:375). These objections need to be given serious consideration in order to avoid confusing the church with Christ, and the role of the church with the role of Christ. Bosch goes on to explain that the three expressions, sacrament, sign and instrument, clearly point beyond themselves and help to avoid the total identification of the church with Christ. The question then arises, "What correspondence is there between Christ and those who declare themselves his followers?" All attempts to identify the church with Christ result in the church opening itself to questioning and criticism. Bosch quotes John Baker in support of this statement:

> The more we emphasize, in our description of the essential nature of the church, the divine sacramental and sanctifying life within the community, the more legitimate it becomes for the world to demand discernible results. It is no use composing in-house descriptions of the church, however faithful they may be to scripture and tradition, if within the church they have the fatal effect of giving believers a warm illusion that all is well, and when read by humankind outside the church they seem to have parted company with reality (Baker 1986:155,158 quoted in Bosch 1991:376).

Dulles views the sacramental model as having many assets and one that has proved to be especially attractive to professional theologians (especially in the Roman Catholic Church). I list a summary of Dulles' comments as they are helpful in assessing this model of the church:

- This model is helpful in integrating the idea of the church as institution with that of the church as a mystical communion of grace.

- This model also enables the church to be an expression of the workings of divine grace beyond the limits of the institutional church without neglecting the importance of the visible church.

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- This model integrates ecclesiology with other traditional theological themes such as Christology and sacramentology.

- Finally, this model encourages strong loyalty to the visible church and adherence to its discipline while allowing room for criticism. Symbolic expressions of grace can never be equated to the life of grace itself.

There are, however, also a number of deficiencies in this model and I will summarise the points made by Dulles (These same points are made by Bosch and Migliore).

- Once again the criticism might be made that there is comparatively little warrant in scripture or in the early church for this understanding of the church.

- Some Catholic theologians (such as Hamer) find an excessive concern with the external, and a corresponding neglect of the inwardness of the mystery of the church as expressed in the church as a communion.

- Others view this model as expressing a narrow sacramentalism that gives insufficient space to service in the church's mission to the world[24].

This type of ecclesiology has not been well received in Protestant theology, as may be seen by the criticisms found in Bosch (1991:375 & 376) and Migliore (1987:258). A growing acceptance of the view of the church as the community of God is found in Protestant circles especially, and I offer a brief description of this model because it is relevant to Mugambi's African approach to the notion of the church.

4.5.5 The church as the interim eschatological community

Bosch derives his understanding of the church as community mainly from Paul's writings. Referring to the communities Paul left behind as being relatively unorganized, fraught with distress, with only rudimentary instruction in the faith, and in tension with the larger society, Bosch comments that these relatively small communities assumed the name *ekklesia*. Bosch offers a conclusion that in spite of the church bearing similarities to other groups such as the household, voluntary associations, the Jewish synagogue, and schools in the Greek culture, there was no doubt that the church was a community *sui generis* (Bosch 1991:163 & 164). Bosch then turns to Paul's emphasis on the church as community and refers to the many

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[24] For more detail on these positive and negative points regarding the church as sacrament see Dulles (1987:73-75).

metaphors Paul used that express the communal nature of the church and take the weight off the individual (see 1991:166). The individual believer does not exist in isolation. "When any individual experiences justification by faith, he or she is moved into the community of believers. *Members* of the community of the last days do not live solitary lives" (Malherbe quoted in Bosch 1991:166). This means that the *ekklesia* becomes the primary group for its members.

> What is peculiar to the New Testament is that God is nearer and one's fellow men are nearer than they are to the Jews and Greeks, the conception of community has quite another importance, the valuations are more intense, and for that reason the emotionally tinged adjectives too are more frequent (Bosch 1991:166).

This model portrays the church as a community of the Spirit whose members share a common experience of God's life-giving Spirit. Migliore (2004:256) portrays the typical spiritual community as being small, personal and loosely organised. The objective is to develop a strong sense of belonging and mutual support among the members. The focal point in this model is on the experience of God and one another in contrast to the organizational model (institution) where the focus is on competent authority and institutionalized office. Catholicism developed an ecclesiology of mystical community where the importance of the gifts of the Spirit was recognised as a reaction to the rigidity of institutional and hierarchical structures. Protestantism produced a variety of understandings of the church as a spiritual community such as the charismatic movement and the house church movement. The result of these developments has been the formation of close, mutually-supportive groups (for more on this development see Migliore 2004:257).

Of further interest with regard to this model is the way in which Dulles states that the principal paradigm of the church in the documents of Vatican II is that of the People of God. The documents further refer to the church as a "spirit filled community, a fellowship of life, charity and truth" (chapter two of the constitution on the church). Significantly, the People of God are not identified with any societal organization, not even the Catholic Church, but with the Body of Christ (see Dulles 2002:45).

This community model addresses very real human needs: loneliness and security, belonging, personal significance, and meaning to life. These needs are met in the communal church with its emphasis on prayer, meditation, spiritual exercises, exchange of personal experiences, and the experience of life in community. However, it has some very real weaknesses:

- The emphasis on relating can cause such groups to become no more than sensitivity

groups and therapeutic meetings.

- The emphasis on bonding does not necessarily have any Christian content.

- The emphasis on the individual can detract from larger social responsibilities in the community.

As Migliore (2004:257) comments, "A church that copies such patterns of spirituality and intimate community becomes simply a haven from an insensitive and bureaucratic society and its depersonalizing effects". There is much debate on the relationship between the two models of the "Body of Christ" and the "People of God", because they approach the notion of the church as community from different perspectives (for further comment see Dulles 2002:45-47). In conclusion, seen from this perspective, the church is not an institution or visibly organized society, but a communion of people, primarily interior but also expressed by external bonds of creed, worship, and ecclesiastical fellowship (Dulles 2002:48).

Pope John Paul II describes the church as rising out of the Trinitarian communion, bringing its members to participate in that communion. The essential nature of the church's purpose therefore needs to be understood in terms of its vertical relationship with God.

> The church is animated and held together by the Holy Spirit, so the Spirit gathers the members of the Christian family into a mysterious fellowship with one another and with Christ in the unity of the church (John Paul II quoted in Dulles 2002:223).

As this model of the church has given rise to a number of sectarian movements and does not give sufficient attention to the structural facets of the church I now turn to what Bosch has termed a "creative tension".

4.5.6 Bosch's notion of creative tension

There are two totally opposite views of the church which may be held in creative tension. On the one hand, the church presents itself as the sole bearer of the message of salvation. This is a monopolistic notion, held in the most extreme way in Catholic models of the church.

On the other hand, there is the view that the church is simply an illustration of God's work in the world.

The first model emphasises the church as the partial realisation of God's rule on earth, whereas in the alternate version the church is, at best, only an indicator of the way God acts in respect of the world. Bosch's question is whether these two views need to by mutually exclusive. He maintains that they may be integrated and quotes various scholars who have

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attempted this integration, such as Dunn (1980:58-64), Glazik (1984:54-56), Kramm (1979:36ff), van Engelen (1975:299-30), and Weber (1978:87) (see Bosch 1991:381). Bosch's conclusion is that in much contemporary Catholicism and Protestantism, many of the old images of the church live on almost unchallenged.

> Traditional sending agencies, whether societies or denominational structures, are being absolutised and seduced into serving as agents or legitimisers of the status quo (Bosch 1991:381).

Bosch offers a very discerning analysis of the development of models of the church as presented by Dulles (see Bosch 1991:368 &369). He points out (1991:374) that contemporary ecclesiology is increasingly perceived as sacrament, sign and instrument. It may be that this view is descriptive of Mugambi's ecclesiology. Burrows (1981:38), points out that all the models of the church presented by Dulles (the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant), actually understand the church almost exclusively as a means of communicating grace and thus reinforce the sacerdotal picture of the church. Bosch also comes to this conclusion concerning much of the church as it is:

> The Church is a community mainly concerned with mediating eternal salvation to individuals. The ordained ministry is the primary vehicle for that work, so the shape of the church is built around it (Bosch 1991:469).

For the purpose of evaluating Mugambi I have constructed a diagram indicating the different models of the church as described by Dulles.

DULLES' SPECTRUM OF THE
FIVE MAJOR ECCLESIAL TYPES
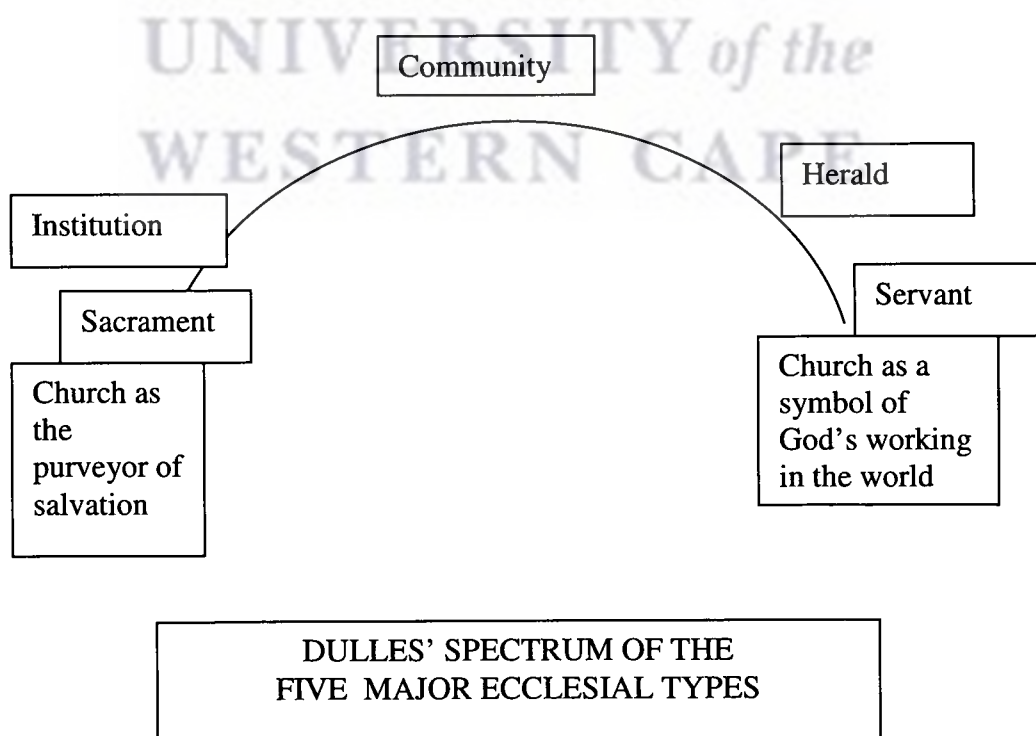
With reference to the left side of the diagram, the church may be identified as the sole source of salvation. The right side of the diagram portrays the church as an indicator to the way God works in the world. My objective in this section of the chapter will be to position Mugambi on this spectrum in order to identify which model(s) of the church he favours. To do this, I will derive what he has written on each of Dulles' models of the church as portrayed by Bosch, namely the church as a sacrament, the church as an institution, the church as a community, the church as a herald, and the church as a servant. I will refer to what Mugambi has written on the relationship between the church and the state, the church and civil society, the church as community, the church and moral education, and the church and the economy.

a) Church and State (Bosch 1991:274)

Bosch refers to the symbiotic relationship that has existed between the church and state since the time of Constantine. This continued through the Middle Ages as seen in the interdependence between the pope and the emperor, resulting in the empire being termed "Christendom". The Reformation caused this relationship damage as there was no longer a single church. Different countries, however, continued to have "established" churches: Anglican in England, Presbyterian in Scotland, Reformed in the Netherlands, Lutheran in Scandinavia and some German territories, Roman Catholic in most Southern European countries. All of these established churches had some measure of connection between the church and the reigning monarch, even if such a monarch was titular only (see Bosch 1991:274, 275). The link between church and state is of significance as Mugambi adopts a similar approach in his understanding of the relationship between the church and the state. The following quote applies:

> Traditionally, an African leader worthy of such a title, wields both political and religious influence irrespective of whether he or she is invested to a specifically 'religious' or 'political' position (Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2003:13).

Luther's proposition that the church should operate as a social institution parallel to the state comes in for criticism by Mugambi as he views this approach to be an excuse for political leadership to remain unaccountable to religious authority. This lack of accountability was the route taken by African nationalism resulting in political leaders practicing two sets of norms, one in their religious life and another in their political life. Mugambi maintains that there should be no dichotomy between politics and religion (see Mugambi & Küschner-Pelkmann 2003:27).

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi writes on political

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reconstruction (39-43) and refers to Kwame Nkruma's concept of a United States of Africa (2003:39). For the purpose of this section of the chapter, I will refer only to those sections that are relevant to understanding Mugambi's approach to the relationship between the church and the state. From a political perspective, it is interesting to note that the churches in Africa were invited by newly-established political parties to act as mediators where there was conflict. Mugambi points out that the diviner was traditionally seen as the mediator between adversaries (Mugambi 2003:43). This occurs because the concept of justice in traditional African thought covers both the social and the religious sector. Mugambi points out that the church was accorded a high profile in the mediation process in Mozambique, South Africa and Uganda.

The challenge is to appropriate the religious domain in such a way that church leaders do not become partisan, and the winner-take-all option is avoided. Instead, an option which is closer to the African political ethic is preferred, where the winners willingly share power with the losers as partners, and the losers accept the magnanimity of winners in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration (Mugambi 2003:43).

Mugambi comes to the conclusion that the churches will not be able to fulfil the task of mediating unless the religious divisions in the church are dealt with, as they tend to contribute to the fragmentation within the political and social fields. More cooperation is needed for the church to be effective in political mediation.

From the above, it may be concluded that Mugambi favours close working between church and state and appears to adopt a position similar to that which existed pre-reformation. The role of the church with regard to the political/state arena needs to be that of mediator while still functioning as a prophetic voice to the state.

This notion of the relationship between the church and the state would place the church as a herald and servant on the spectrum outlined above.

b) Church and civil society

Mugambi positions the church in society by pointing out that the world is religiously pluralistic and that the people who do not belong to the church are also "children of God". When the church operates as if the whole society is identical with the church, then those members of the society who do not belong to the church react negatively.

In the early church, the Christian community was a persecuted minority which was very conscious of its vulnerability. Thus, the Christians conducted themselves very discreetly and

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scrupulously, to avoid unleashing the wrath of the non-Christian majority (Mugambi 1995:44).

Mugambi's view is that when the church becomes a majority in a pluralistic setting and has the backing of the state, it is tempted to impose its norms on the entire society. He then refers to what happened in the European Dark Ages and in various European nations where national churches were established. Christianity became the official religion and was imposed on civil society. Mugambi's point is that the gospel, when imposed, is no longer good news. He maintains that the gospel reached many people in Africa as very bad news because of its links to the colonial powers. The following quote identifies a recurring criticism made by Mugambi and I offer it as an indicator of his position on church and society:

> In colonial Africa, the Christian community tended to be identified with the ruling elite, and this identification gave the church a particular social profile in each African country. That profile defined the relationship between church and state in the post-colonial era. In post-colonial Africa the pattern has been varied from country to country, but generally the trend has been for each denomination to seek a stronger impact in the society, for national attention (Mugambi 1995:44).

Such dominance aligned the church with civil power and identified it with the ruling party of the day. Mugambi points out that this type of influence placed one segment of the church at variance with the rest of the church, thereby hindering the church generally from influencing civil society.

Mugambi posits the need for the unity of the church to be a precursor to the unity of humanity. He uses the way the Emperor Constantine called the council of Nicea to bring unity in the church in order to facilitate unity in the empire as an example. He also links the 1958 All Africa Conference of Churches to the Organisation of African Unity, and comments that the church has failed to evidence unity and is thus a hindrance to African unity (see Mugambi 1995:45). He further links the United Nations (League of Nations 1920) to the formation of the World Council of Churches (1948) and comments on the challenge for the church in the twenty-first century to discern new ways to enhance the reconciliatory role of these secular organisations. He is concerned about the differences between Christians and non-Christians and the need for reconciliation rather than aggression. Mugambi judges Christian church disunity as contributing to civil strife in society (see Mugambi 1995:46).

Mugambi emphasises the dual role of the church as an agent for the gospel as well as an agent for change, but expresses caution that the church should retain its theological basis for

ministry. In pointing this out he is drawing a distinction between purely social organisations and the church, which must not cease to be the church. However, he also cautions against the church becoming so occupied with heavenly concerns that it fails to assist in alleviating physical suffering here on earth (see Mugambi 1989:110). He emphasises the need for both physical and metaphysical dimensions to be applied by the church to humanity's quest for ultimate happiness.

Mugambi criticises the separation between the transformation of social structures and the transformation of the liberated individual. Religious codes of conduct and social mores should not be separated as they impinge upon each other. It is clear that Mugambi is concerned to bring civil and ecclesial authorities to work together in order to bring societal change. Further in this chapter (Mugambi 1995:43), Mugambi repeats his emphasis on the need for the unity of all Christians in their witness to the world (John 14–17; 1 Corinthians 12), thus reinforcing his approach to the nature of the church.

One might say that Mugambi's view of the church and civil society places the church in the role of serving civil society by being salt and light in society. While the church should not be so absorbed by civil society that it loses its identity, it should nevertheless be so involved as to facilitate change.

c) The church and the local community

There is indeed no place in the church for the isolated self or for the selfish (Beker 1984:37). When any individual experiences "justification by faith", he or she is moved into the community of believers. Members of the community of the last days do not live solitary lives. Indeed, Christians are a "community of a special kind" (Beker 1984:94). They are called "saints", the "elect", those "called", "loved", and "known by God" (see Bosch 1991:166).

The above quote indicates Bosch's approach to the church as a community and will be seen to describe Mugambi's stance as well. The communal aspect of the church's life is one that is prominent in Mugambi's writings.

> The establishment of the church as the new 'household of faith' (Gal.6:10), or 'household of God' (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17), did not abolish the traditional household, the extended family, and the clan and ethnic community, although the social change that resulted from the coming of Christianity and other factors weakened these traditional social institutions (Mugambi 1989:43).

The above quote echoes some of his misgivings about the loss of communality due to the influence of Western individualistic Christianity brought in by missionaries from the West.

The fact is that much of the continued communal life of African peoples exists because African people simply include Christian individualism in their clan living without losing the strong life-links of the family (see Mugambi 1989:43 & 44).

The African sense of community is emphasised in *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), and the following quote gives further insight into Mugambi's understanding of the nature of the church (see Mugambi 1995:198-200):

> The church is a community within a wider society. It is important to always remember that the world is religiously pluralistic, and that those who do not belong to the church are also children of God. When the church conducts itself as if it were identical with the wider society, those who are not members of the church tend to react negatively to the Christian community. In the New Testament we read of the concern of the Pharisees that the disciples of Jesus were not observing the norms of the wider society (Mugambi 1995:44).

The above indicates that Mugambi and Bosch are of one mind concerning the community of Christ and that both place emphasis on the communal nature of the church. Both take the focus off the individual and place it on the gathered body. Mugambi does refer to the church as a utopian community but views it as an example to the wider community of how community should look as it continues to fulfil a heraldic role.

Because Mugambi views the church as a utopian community he insists that Christian citizens have to be involved in the total life of the community in which they live. Leadership should emerge from among the Christians. They must fulfil the biblical role of being salt and light in the world (see Mugambi 2003:107)

There is, however, an aspect of Mugambi's approach to the church as a community that will assist in placing him on Bosch's spectrum, and that is his definition of the role the church must play as a community within the wider societal community.

Mugambi maintains that the church should play a role in helping its members to live abundant lives as members of the community to whom the church renders service (1995:133). He criticizes the way the church often isolates itself from the community in which it is situated thus isolating the community from the church.

Christian witness ought to be conducted in such a way that the local community identifies the local church as a source of love, encouragement, guidance, counsel, hope and reconciliation (Mugambi 1995:133).

When the church loses contact with the community, Mugambi likens it to salt that has lost its saltiness and light that is put under a bowl (Matt. 5:13-16). Mugambi expresses the need for

the local church to identify with the needs and aspirations of the local community without losing its own identity as a challenge. The danger is that the church could become swallowed up in the frustrations of such a community instead of lifting its members above such frustrations (see Mugambi 1995:134).

> It is important to appreciate that Christians are, simultaneously, members of the church and of society. However, Christians ought to make a difference in the society, by setting an example which other people can emulate (Mugambi 1995:134).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi definitely views the church as a community, but emphasises that the church is a community within a community, the local society! However, in the light of Bosch's spectrum, it is clear that the church is to be of service in leading and serving the local community, aligning this aspect of the church's being with the servant model on the spectrum.

d) The church and moral education

* In *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Mugambi names three agents of education: schools, polytechnics and universities;

* the home, and

* the church (1995:138 & 139).

It is the latter which will occupy my attention, as Mugambi places great store on the need for the church to function as an agent of education. While the home is a unifying factor for those who are of the same family, and schools bring together students from different home backgrounds and educate them intellectually, the home is a unifying factor for those who are of the same family. Mugambi names the church as the cement of the community and as the religious agent in the community. The church binds people in a community together (see Mugambi 1995:139). Mugambi views the church as the primary agent in developing character and strengthening values. For him, the church is essential and indispensible (Mugambi 1995:139).

Mugambi clearly sees the home and the church as the agents best suited for the development of moral values and character.

In order to develop the moral values of young people, teachers, parents and pastors need to co-operate in the creation of a social environment which will enable young people to develop a positive character (Mugambi 1995:139).

The church's educational function is needed to "provide continuing education through sermons, seminars, fellowships and communication through the mass media" (Mugambi 1995:27).

A church ought to help its members live more abundantly as members of the society to which that church renders service. Too often, however, many a church has tended to isolate itself from the community it ought to serve, with the consequence that the community cuts itself off from that church (Mugambi 1995:133).

It should be remembered that Mugambi's roots are in an education system run largely by the church in Kenya. He is adamant that the church needs to fulfil an ongoing role in this area:

The church has been the most influential agent for education in the past. It has to maintain its lead in the future, if it is to continue enjoying a respectable position in African societies (Mugambi 1995:224).

Mugambi is critical of the role played by missionary societies in breaking down the moral values of traditional African society and refers particularly to the way the church has handled the issue of polygamy. His view is that the church has failed to deal with some of the thorny issues raised by these conflicting notions of morality (see Mugambi 2003:50-53). However, he still maintains that the church has a major role to play in educating African society for moral change.

"If religion fails to provide leadership it will become irrelevant to the majority of people who would wish to see organised religion at the forefront of social change (Mugambi 2003:55).

From the above it may be noted that Mugambi views the church as a herald and agent for change in African society. In his view, the local pastor needs to be more than just a religious leader; he needs to be an ongoing agent for change and education in the community, through training and example. There is once more an element of service in this view, although it does entail a measure of the church holding the forefront in education.

e) The church and the economy

In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), Mugambi has a section on economic reconstruction (2003:43-46) in which he outlines the prevailing economic reality in Africa. His comment that "Africa is a continent which produces what it does not consume, and consumes what it does not produce" offers an insight into his opinion. Such an economy cannot produce stability and needs to change to where surpluses are exported and deficiencies imported, thus producing a sustainable trading situation. In Mugambi's view, the poverty and pauperisation of African nations is a result of the failure to abide by these principles of trade.

African nations speak of the need to earn foreign exchange as the reason for the current imbalance in trade. Mugambi is scathing in his condemnation of such a system:

> This foreign exchange is used to purchase manufactured goods from affluent nations. Thus African nations produce raw materials and cash crops for export, whose prices are set by the consumers abroad. The earnings are used to purchase manufactured goods from the same countries where the raw materials are exported, at prices which are set by the producers. Thus, in the economic domain, Africans are double losers; being unable to set prices neither for their raw materials nor for the manufactured goods they import (Mugambi 2003:44).

Having given some indication of Mugambi's basic feelings on economics in Africa, the question to be asked is, "What does Mugambi see as the church's role in the economy of Africa"? The answer is that Mugambi is quite specific as to the role the church should play in bringing change in the economic situation in Africa, and I give some insights into his approach.

Mugambi points out that there has been a shift from churches concentrating on sacramental duties, to some churches in the 1960s and 1970s establishing rural training centres where peasant farmers were taught better methods of farming (see Mugambi 2003:45). However, he views this approach as being project-oriented with farmers expected to attend training at a training centre. In addition the methods taught at the training centres were not always relevant and effective in the farmers' contexts. These efforts were also dependent upon the level of expertise of the trainers and the ongoing availability of donor funding. Mugambi then describes a different approach:

> A different approach is one where within the parish, an extension officer will live with the farmers and help them to improve their farming, processing and marketing practices. Such a person may be a volunteer or an employee of the church (Mugambi 2003:45).

Mugambi refers to the need for parishes to form committees to facilitate similar ongoing education. He sees this as different from the normal mission station situation where peasants were expected to come to the mission station to learn from the missionary. The approach Mugambi advocates is where parishioners become mutual learners and mutual teachers. This approach could be extended to other aspects of economic production such as housing, water, health, fuel, etc.

When commenting on "Ecclesiology and Economics" (2003:178-199), Mugambi views the systematic exploitation of Africa first of all by the slave trade, and then by the ongoing dependence of Africa on post-colonial countries. He poses the question, "Do Christian

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churches condone this exploitative arrangement or do they condemn it? Are they interested in the economic plight of Africa, or are they indifferent?" (2003:181). He answers that question himself by stating:

> Looking at the relationship between the 'mother churches' and their 'daughter churches', it appears that in general, the status quo is not only condoned, but enjoyed. As institutions, most churches in Europe and North America remain committed to the policies of their Metropolitan governments (Mugambi 2003:181).

After commenting on the ethical and theological nature of Africa's indebtedness, on the Jubilee campaign and the Bretton Woods Institutions, Mugambi focuses on the churches and their role in the reconstruction of society in Africa. My interest is particularly on the economic aspects of such reconstruction. Mugambi is critical of the role the churches have so far played as, in his view, they have not served as role models (salt and light) but have conformed to the politics and economics of their respective nations to the extent that it has been difficult for them to provide insights for creative and reconstructive initiatives in Africa (see Mugambi 2003:198). In Mugambi's view, much of the funding that has been channelled into Africa, has been dissipated through misuse, misapplication, and misappropriation by untrained or unscrupulous personnel as well as being allocated to projects that Africans neither asked for nor wanted. The end result of such funding was the accumulation of huge debts that Africa is in no position to repay. He refers to David Korten's book *"When Corporations Rule the World"*, where the call is made for constructive changes to the world economic and political system, through a reform of the United Nations and its specialised agencies. In Mugambi's view the modern ecumenical movement should undergo similar reform so that the universal character of Christianity is reflected through its ecclesial structures (see Mugambi 2003:198 & 199). Mugambi points out that, in order to reflect the change in the demographics of Christianity (North to South), the administrative centres of the world's Christian communities should move from the North Atlantic to Africa. His view is that such a move would have both ecclesial and economic impact. "Churches could lead the way for secular social structures" (Mugambi 2003:199).

> What would it mean for churches to become the economic vanguard in Africa? This question poses a challenge that should be widely debated in ecclesial forums. I venture to suggest that in the context of systematic pauperization as Africa is now suffering, churches may not only become the sustainers of hope; they should also help African individuals and communities to cope with the adverse impact of the exploitative economic system which has been given the label 'globalization' (Mugambi 2003:199).

In the light of the above comments on the church and economics, it may be said that Mugambi views the relationship of the church to the economy as that of a prophetic voice (herald) as well as that of a servant to the indigenous population where it assumes the role of educator and exemplar.

The task of positioning Mugambi on the spectrum developed by Bosch will entail producing a summary of the various notions expressed in this chapter thus far and then using such a summary to position Mugambi. I will attempt this in the next section of this chapter.

4.6 A summary of Mugambi's approach to the models of the church

In the previous section I highlighted Mugambi's view on certain areas where the church was active in various aspects of the life of society. In this section I take the conclusions in the subsections above and compare them with the spectrum Bosch derived from Dulles' models of the church. I then plot Mugambi on the spectrum in order to identify his main understanding of the church.

The common thread in the sections above is that the model of the church descriptive of Mugambi's view of the church is that of servant.

When he refers to the church and the state, Mugambi favours a close work relationship between church and state and appears to adopt a position similar to that which existed pre-reformation. The role of the church with regard to the political/ state arena needs to be that of mediator while still fulfilling the role of a prophetic voice to the state. This notion of the relationship between the church and the state would place the church as a herald and servant.

When he refers to the church and civil society Mugambi maintains that religious codes of conduct and social mores should not be separated as they impinge upon each other. Mugambi is concerned that civil and ecclesial authorities should work together in order to bring societal change. Mugambi emphasises the need for the unity of all Christians in their witness to the world (John 14–17; 1 Corinthians 12), thus reinforcing his approach to the nature of the church.

Mugambi's view of the church and civil society places the church in the role of a servant to civil society by being salt and light in such a society. While the church should not be so absorbed by civil society as to lose its identity it should nevertheless be involved in society so as to facilitate change.

When referring to the church and the community Mugambi is adamant that he views the

church to be essentially part of the local community:

> It is important to appreciate that Christians are, simultaneously, members of the church and of society. However, Christians ought to make a difference in the society, by setting an example which other people can emulate (Mugambi 1995:134).

The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi definitely views the church as a community, but a community within a community, integral to the life of the wider community. However, in the light of Bosch's spectrum, Mugambi views the role of the church to be one of service in leading and serving the local community, bringing this aspect of the church's being into the servant model on the spectrum.

When he refers to the church's role as moral educator Mugambi maintains that the church's educational function is needed to "provide continuing education through sermons, seminars, fellowships and communication through the mass media" (Mugambi 1995:27).

> A church ought to help its members live more abundantly, as members of the society to which that church renders service. Too often, however, many a church has tended to isolate itself from the community it ought to serve, with the consequence that the community cuts itself off from that church (Mugambi 1995:133).

This notion of the church adopts the view that the church is a herald and an agent for change in African society. In Mugambi's view the local pastor needs to be more than just a religious leader but needs to be an ongoing agent for change and education in the community through training and example. There is once more an element of service evident in this view, although it does involve a measure of the church performing an educational function, which may also be seen as a servant role.

When he views the church's role in the economy Mugambi points out that there has been a shift from churches concentrating on sacramental duties to some churches in the 1960's and 1970's establishing rural training centres where peasant farmers were taught better methods of farming (see Mugambi 2003:45). He favours these developments as positive moves on the church's behalf. Mugambi's views on the church and economics may be said to express the role of the church in the economy as that of a prophetic voice (herald) as well as that of a servant to the indigenous population where it fulfils the role of educator and exemplar.

By plotting Mugambi on the spectrum offered by Bosch it will become clear which model is mainly favoured by him. The following diagram establishes Mugambi's position:

DULLES' SPECTRUM OF THE CHURCH
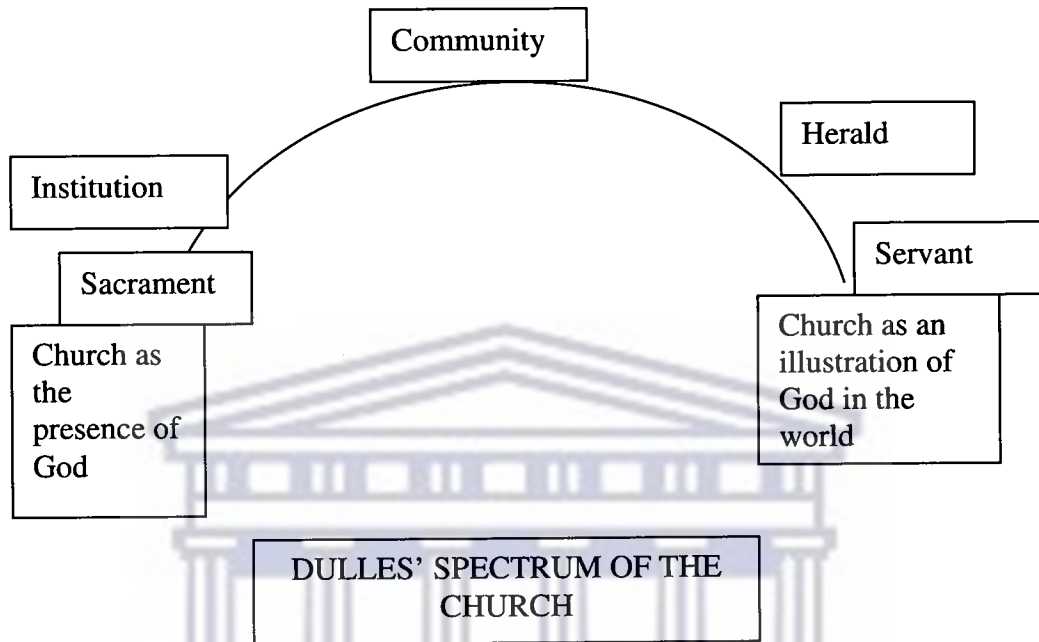
On the above diagram we may place Mugambi to the right, somewhat closer to the servant model than to the model of herald. While there appear to be elements of the church as sacrament, institution and community in most of Mugambi's writings, the role he favours most for the church focuses more on serving than anything else. We may conclude that the main model used by Mugambi is that of the church as servant. A quote from Bosch will assist in highlighting Mugambi's position:

> Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world (Snyder quoted in Bosch 1991:378).

Mugambi is clearly in the group that seeks first the reign of God. Some quotes from Mugambi may confirm this conclusion:

Mugambi regards the essential task of the church to be evangelism and this is adversely affected by the disunity of the church. Continuous involvement in missionary work is evidence of true church life. "No movement can merit the title 'church' unless it is a missionary community" (Mugambi 1995:167).

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No area of the role and nature of the church could be described that is closer to Mugambi's view than the above. The following quotes bear out this conclusion:

> A church ought to help its members live more abundantly, as members of the society to which that church renders service. Too often, however, many a church has tended to isolate itself from the community it ought to serve, with the consequence that the community cuts itself off from that church Mugambi 1995:133).

The church cannot achieve a comprehensive ministry following the footsteps of Jesus, unless it combines both spiritual and temporal concerns for the restoration of broken humanity (Mugambi 1989:110). In *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction (2003)*, Mugambi explores the extent of reconstruction in society that he is committed to. Reconstruction covers the areas of civil, social, religious and governmental agencies. His view is that the Christian church is the most effective agent for bringing about such change as it operates within the life of the society as salt and light.

The above quotes focus on service and affirm the location of Mugambi's position on the right side of the spectrum, although he does not preclude the idea of the church containing elements of the other four models used by Dulles.

By positioning Mugambi on the diagram of Dulles's spectrum, the diagram would then look as follows:

A DIAGRAM OF DULLES' SPECTRUM OF THE CHURCH SHOWING MUGAMBI'S POSITION
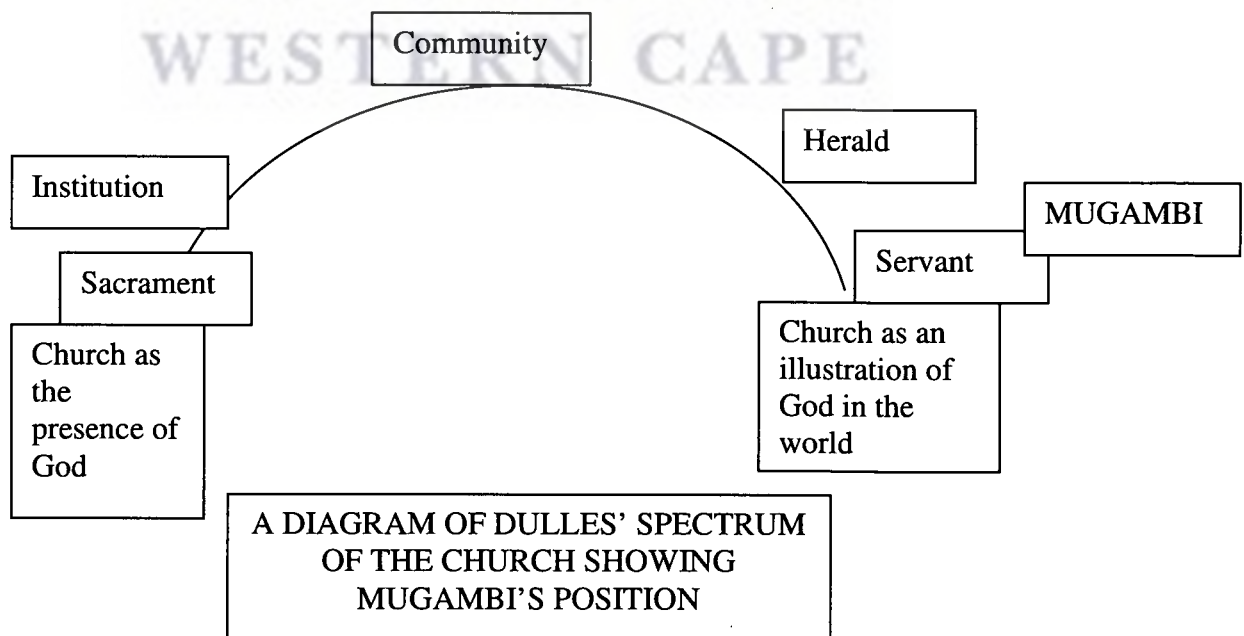
In this chapter, I have shown that Mugambi does not hold to any one model of the church but, in a similar way to Bosch and Dulles, he holds a number of models (mentioned above) in tension. The models Mugambi would give no credence to are those that portray

- the church as the sole dispenser of salvation;

- any one denomination as the church;

- a church that is bound to any one culture; and

- the church as hierarchical with clergy being superior to laity.

By this it may be seen that Mugambi's view is tied to a model of the church that is culturally relevant, communicates the gospel effectively, accepts and is united to all other churches, and is missionary and prophetic in its function. Such a church will impact the society in a way that transformation occurs through its efforts, bringing an influence on civil and business sectors of society. In holding this position Mugambi is in agreement with those theologians who favour the local church as being fully representative of the whole church, fully representing the body of Christ, yet needing to maintain its links with the whole church across the world. However, there is a very definite leaning towards the servant model, as I have shown in the above summary and diagrammatic presentation. The congregational aspect of Mugambi's view of the church is rather surprising, considering that he is an Anglican. However, the immense influence of traditional African tribal structure and the decision-making process it uses (indaba), has probably influenced him in this regard. One may also say that Mugambi is influenced by the African measurement of worth, namely it is by the contribution made to the community. My final comment would be that Mugambi appears to be a good churchman as well as a good African. The two at times appear to be in conflict, yet Mugambi seems able to hold them in tension.

This conclusion leads on to an examination of Mugambi's views of the reign of God and I will approach this subject in the next chapter.

5. The Reign of God in the Theology of Jesse Mugambi

5.1 Introduction

The reign of God has been a major theme in the discussions and publications of the WCC, and Mugambi has been influenced through his involvement with that body. Mugambi's focus throughout his writings has been on the development of a society that is established on equality and where the values of the reign of God are being implemented. One of the reasons I have chosen to focus on Mugambi's publications is that reconstruction theologians focus on the changes required, either inadvertently or deliberately, for conditions relating to the coming reign of God to prevail (see Mugambi 2003:106, 36-50, Villa-Vicencio 1992: 197-251). While Mugambi has denied utopianism, he nevertheless holds an optimistic view of the future (see Mugambi's comment in 2003:107).

In personal communication, Mugambi has made it clear he has not changed his view on the nature of the reign of God since the publication of his book, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989). However, it will be necessary to examine some of his other publications to ascertain whether they support this statement. None of his many publications carry any clear reference to the reign of God other than the one referred to above, yet it should be possible to glean an understanding of his view of the reign of God by analysing several of his publications and tracing the themes in them. There will also be value in drawing on those publications that have examined and criticised his work (see Dedji 2003, Farisani 2002, Gathogo 2004, 2011, Katongole 2005, 2011, Maluleke 1997, 2001, Mwase 1993, and Stinton 2004).

Mugambi has much to say on the comparison between "the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men" (1989: 75-86) and how they relate to each other.

In order to provide some context for examining Mugambi's views on the reign of God, I first use Smit's description of the development of symbols of the reign of God to set a background for this chapter. Hope is a major factor in eschatology and as part of this section of the chapter I describe the notion of Christian hope. This forms section two of the chapter.

I next give a summary of different approaches to eschatology. I examine the four major eschatological schools Bosch lists (drawing on Wiedenmann 1965:26-49; 55-91; 131-178) which have had a profound impact on the church's thinking with regard to eschatology.

These views representing more recent trends in eschatology are:

- The dialectical eschatology of Barth (in his early days).

- The existential eschatology of Bultmann.

- The actualised eschatology of Althaus.

- The salvation-historical eschatology of Cullmann (see Bosch 1991:502).

This forms section three of the chapter.

My next step will be to analyse Mugambi's *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), as well as *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), and *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), in order to analyse his views on the reign of God by following the themes in these publications. *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989) particularly has a number of sections where he deals with the reign of God. This forms section four of the chapter.

Following this examination of the reign of God, I analyse Mugambi's views on the reign of God by offering a chronological overview of his writings. Subsequently, there is a thematic analysis of his writings with special regard to his cosmological assumptions, the various eschatological symbols he uses, and his notion of the reign of God. An understanding of Mugambi's cosmological assumptions is vital for gaining insight into his approach to many aspects of existence such as time, the origins of humankind, identity, and worldview. In *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995), Mugambi makes brief references to eschatology and also comments on "The New World Order". I refer to these comments as well as to various sections of *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003) in order to derive his approach to the reign of God. This forms section five of the chapter.

Mugambi has made comments in some of his more recent publications as well as in contributions to a number of edited volumes, and I examine these contributions in order to ascertain whether Mugambi continues to hold his earlier views on the reign of God.

This forms section six of the chapter.

I then offer some conclusions on where Mugambi may be placed on the map of eschatological tensions and where his view of the reign of God ought to be plotted. This forms section seven of the chapter.

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5.2 An outline of the development of symbols of the reign of God

The reign of God, as I have commented above, is one of the symbols which express the content of Christian hope. Different schools of eschatology have influenced notions of the reign of God and resulted in a complex picture which is beyond the scope of this study. Rather than endeavouring to derive my own overview, I resort to Smit's comprehensive description of the way symbols of the reign of God have developed.

Over the centuries many conflicting understandings of the reign of God existed. When the early church lost the notion of an imminent return of Christ two different views emerged: on the one hand, Tertullian and Irenaeus believed that Christ would return to earth in visible form and reign for 1000 years, after which the world would come to an end (Chiliasm); on the other, Clement and Origen spiritualised the second coming. After the conversion of Constantine, the reign of God became almost synonymous with the imperial reign, thus bringing the reign of God into human history (Eusebius). Augustine revived the concept of the reign of God as separate from the imperial reign. The rule of the church over civil society as well as the rule of a Christian emperor (so-called) was rejected. This did not last long and there was soon an identification of the earthly state with the civil reign of God on earth, and of the church with the kingdom of God. The result of this confusion was the power struggles evidenced between the emperor and the pope over a prolonged period of time with a subsequent loss of the eschatological aspect of the reign of God in the church.

> To settle this struggle, the Western church distinguished between the emperor (*potestas*) and pope (*auctoritas*), both instituted by God, to lead the *christianitas*, the society of church-and-state, to the kingdom, but soon the church claimed identity with the kingdom (Gregory VII, Innocent III, Boniface VIII) against the Emperor's religious claims (Smit 2002:567).

According to Smit there was much criticism of the tendency to identify the reign of God with the church and/or the state (Smit 2002:567). One of the issues Luther had with the papal church was the claim that the papal church had authority over all structures, and, because of his rejection of the papal claims, Luther developed the notion of two realms. This was done in order to emphasise earthly government as autonomous from the church (separation of church and state). From the ranks of Calvinism emerged a leaning towards a theocratic society with human beings cooperating with God to bring about the reign of God. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Catholics often identified the church with the reign of God (as did Greek Orthodoxy: see Volf 1998: 100, 101).

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Smit lists those expressions of understanding the reign of God that emerged after the Enlightenment:

- Pietism which viewed the reign of God from the perspective of individual faith and the "winning of souls".

- Utopian visions of a secular utopian kingdom.

- Those who expected a final state of consummation.

- Perversions such as the notion of a super race (Nazism) and notions of a realm of ideal human relations on earth linked to ideas of development, evolution and material prosperity (Hobbes, Herder, Lessing, Fichte, Kant, Schleiermacher and Ritschl) (see Smit 2002:567).

- The social gospel which expected a form of utopia through social action and moral influence.

Smit lists the following tensions existent in eschatological debate between:

- present and future aspects of the reign of God

- different concepts of power or rule

- the reign of God and the church

- socio-political and individual interpretations

- views that the reign of God is completely a work of grace and that human beings participate in its coming

- gift and responsibility or between hope and action

- salvation history and world history

All these tensions played a part in understanding the reign of God. Gradually, the notion of the reign of God being established in an ideal society, evidenced by equality, justice, and freedom, came to be accepted as the true understanding of the reign of God. This often resulted in criticism of the church and its structures, life, and worship. Henry Sloan Coffin, a liberal Presbyterian theologian, speaking at the 1910 missionary conference in Edinburgh, stated:

> Christianity's ethical ideal is the kingdom of God, a redeemed social order under
> a Christ-like God in which every relationship is Christ-like, and each individual

and social group - the family, the trade organisation, the state - comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister, is perfect - and the whole human society incarnates the love of God once embodied in Jesus of Nazareth (www.archive.org 2011).

The above statement portrays a utopian view in that the focus is on a perfect social order.

The differences between Anglo-Saxon (evolutionary, ethical) and the European (eschatological, a-political) views on the reign of God continued through the history of the ecumenical movement (see Smit 2002:568). Smit highlights this tendency towards a social understanding of the reign of God as it is expressed in the WCC *Humanum Studies* from 1969-1975. Smit quotes from the documents as well as from the 1954 Evanston meetings as follows:

> Without definition, it (the notion of the reign of God) is used to criticize the present state of affairs in church and society, in that full community between human beings is not practiced and that 'churches are in open and hidden alliance with various exploitative kingdoms of men' – Similar use of the concept is made in other places: 'Christ – the hope of the world' (Evanston 1954): studies on the community of men and women; several discussions of the Eucharist as "paradigm of the kingdom"; etc. (Smit 2002:568).

In his article, Smit comments on the view expressed by liberation theologians, where the reign of God serves as the central paradigm for the human condition, where all people will participate in God's total salvation (Smit 2002: 568). The characteristics of the reign of God in liberation theology relate to "freedom, equality and justice" of which the church is provisionally expected to be an active sign and promise. The definition of discipleship in this context could be stated as following the example of Jesus' caring for the poor and criticising the status quo. Smit is useful for analysing the position that the majority of theologians seem to have arrived at concerning the notion of the reign of God:

> Although the final realisation of the kingdom remains God's gift, so that the "eschatological proviso" must remain as a critical instance against all partial realisations, human beings are nevertheless liberated to participate actively in establishing at least signs of the kingdom (Smit 2002:568).

The reign of God is, therefore, a symbol of Christian hope.

5.2.1 The notion of hope in the broader map of eschatology

Conradie (1999) has offered a roadmap for eschatology which, together with Küng, Macquarrie and Nürnberger, has assisted me greatly in understanding the aspect of hope as part of the eschatological picture. Conradie was writing in the context of the end of the twentieth century, in the midst of all the hype around fears of the new millennium and what it

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would mean. However, the basic points he makes are relevant and important for this chapter. Conradie points to the daunting social agenda lying ahead involving increasing poverty, ethnic and religious conflict, environmental degradation and AIDS, and then describes the need for an intelligible vision of hope (Conradie 1999:1).

There are three aspects of the human predicament that Conradie points to in this article before he proceeds to develop a road map for Christian eschatology in the twenty-first century:

- the effects of sin;

- the problem of limited human life, and

- the problem of limited human knowledge and power.

Although eschatology became an almost forgotten aspect of Christian theology from the time of the Renaissance, there was a resurgence of interest in eschatology in the twentieth century evidenced in a plethora of publications dealing with aspects of the topic. Bosch refers to this development (1991:498-500) and Conradie quotes Von Balthasar, "Eschatology became the storm centre of theology" (1999:2). Theologians such as Braaten, Bultmann, Moltmann, Orr, Pannenberg and numerous others have contributed to the debate, as may be seen from the list of numerous schools of eschatology listed by Conradie, and which I offer in the next section.

Eschatology has become "a disparate and often confusing discipline" (Conradie 1999:2), and it is sufficient to give a list of the numerous schools of eschatology that emerged in the twentieth century:

- the "consistent" eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer.;

- the "transcendental" eschatology of (the early) Barth, Brunner and Althaus;

- the "existential" eschatology of Bultmann and Tillich;

- the "salvation history" approach of Cullmann in debate with Dodd and Schweitzer;

- the "futurist" eschatology of Moltmann, Sauter and Pannenberg;

- the "evolutionist" eschatology of Teilhard de Chardin and his followers;

- the contributions of process theologians;

- the prophetic approaches of liberation, black, feminist and ecological theologies, and

- the millenialist, dispensationalist and apocalyptic views of popular authors like Hal

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Lindsay and numerous others[25].

In a different analysis Macquarrie (1978: 86 & 87) lists four tensions in interpretations of Christian hope:

- The contrast between individual and social conceptions of eschatological hope. This tension contrasts individual salvation with hope for a new heaven and a new earth.

- The contrast between this-worldly and other-worldly expectations. This tension is between the reign of God on earth and the reign of God in another world.

- The tension between evolutionary and revolutionary understandings of Christian hope. The first visualises a slow process of growth and the other visualises the reign of God coming in an overthrow of the existing order. The first stresses the need for human effort while the second expresses hostility towards the existing order.[26]

- The tension between those who appeal to the present and those who look only to the future. The first would embrace realised eschatology or inaugurated eschatology, and the other would embrace future eschatology.[27]

These various schools of eschatology have given rise to a variety of points of emphasis in Christian hope, e.g.:

- eschatological / apocalyptic forms of hope;

- this-worldly (world-affirming) / other-worldly (world-denying) forms of hope;

- the continuity / discontinuity between earth and heaven, this life and the next;

- realised / futurist eschatology;

- evolutionary / revolutionary hope;

- vertical / horizontal dimensions of hope;

- the doctrine of "the last things" (*eschata*) / of Jesus as the Eschatos;

- escapist / liberating forms of hope;

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[25] For more detail see Conradie 1999:3.

[26] Attention may be drawn to the approach of African theologians who resort to a more evolutionary understanding of change in contrast to the South American Liberation theologians who sought a more revolutionary change.

[27] The proponents of a cataclysmic invasion of the reign of God such as Le Haye and Lindsay are representative of this approach.

- personal, historical or cosmic dimensions of hope;

- an emphasis on the things that are hoped for (physics) / on the phenomenon of hope itself (anthropology), and

- an emphasis on the cross / on the resurrection of Christ[28].

Because this thesis entails a systematic examination of Mugambi's theology, the area of biblical theology falls outside its scope; however, in summary of the above I offer Macquarrie's conclusion to his chapter on Christian hope (1978: 87-104):

> The various theological interpretations of Christian hope, some individual, some social, some cosmic, some this-worldly, some other-worldly, some evolutionary, some revolutionary, some looking to the present, others to the future, are not so much rivals to each other as rather fragments of an inclusive vision that escapes us. We cannot synthesize all these theologies, but neither can we choose one of them and reject all the others. We have got to let them confront one another, correct one another, even conflict with one another, and in this dialectical procedure, both the strengths and the weaknesses of the different positions will come to light and we may hope to come closer to the total vision (Macquarrie 1978 103-104, see also Conradie 1999:8).

5.3 To summarise

Eschatology is the doctrine of the "last things" or, as Migliore states it, "the completion of God's works of creation and redemption" (Migliore 2004:409). The second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, the reign of God, and heaven and hell, has traditionally formed the core symbols of Christian hope.

The following is an incomplete list of different approaches to eschatology but will cover most of the views currently held in Christian theological circles. I offer brief descriptions of each approach (see also Conradie 1999).

a) The "consistent" (totally future) eschatology of Weiss and Schweitzer, sometimes called apocalyptic eschatology

Johannes Weiss (1892) demonstrated that, according to Jesus, the reign of God will come from God alone without human assistance, not as a result of moral evolution, but as a catastrophic event that will change the cosmic order and be accompanied by the judgment of the living and the dead. Schweitzer joined Weiss in support of this view. The result was an

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[28] see Conradie 1999:3; also Macquarrie 1978:87-89.

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awareness of the degree to which modern eschatology was different from the teaching of Jesus on the reign of God as also from the expectations of the early church (see Walls 2008:497).

b) The "transcendental" eschatology of (the early) Barth, Brunner and Althaus

As Bosch mentions, this school is significant for modern understandings of eschatology (Bosch 1991: 502). The basic notion proposed is that God is present but totally other, and that eschatology does not refer to the end of time.

c) The "existential" eschatology of Bultmann and Tillich

A basic definition would be that eschatology has to do, not with certain events that will take place in the future, but with the coming of Christ into the world and the decision each person must make in light of their encounter with Christ.

d) The "salvation history" approach of Cullmann in debate with Dodd and Schweitzer

These theologians taught that Jesus has a dialectical relationship with the reign of God view of eschatology: God's reign was both a present reality in Jesus' ministry but also contained a future expectation.

e) The "futurist" eschatology of Moltmann, Sauter and Pannenberg

This approach to eschatology may be best expressed in Moltmann's own words: "Christian eschatology speaks of Christ and his future; since it understands history as the reality instituted by divine promise, its language is the language of promises. Eschatological thinking is expectation thinking, a looking forward to God's reign breaking in, which corresponds to the Christian hope" (Moltmann 1967:224).

f) The "evolutionist" eschatology of Teilhard de Chardin and his followers

Utopianism may be said to feature strongly in this view of eschatology. What separated de Chardin from the Marxist sociology of communism was his belief in the Trinitarian God who gives meaning to individual worth. One may comment that there appears to be a measure of selectional breeding in de Chardin's thinking. He concluded that "the mandates of progress and Christian charity would require society to give priority to those who demonstrate a capacity for development rather than to life's rejects" (de Chardin 1969: 132-133).

g) The contributions of process theologians

Process-relational thought describes as "the ultimate physical principle" the creative advance,

whereby ceaselessly "the many become one and are increased by one". In other words, process eschatology describes the world simply as it is - open-ended becoming - and the questions of beginning and ending, "Alpha" and "Omega," would seem to be out of bounds (see Wheeler 2011).

h) The prophetic approaches of liberation, black, feminist and ecological theologies

The basic feature of this eschatology is that the central message of Jesus lies in the love commandment - love of neighbour as well as love of God—and this calls his followers to earnest and unremitting effort for the increase of love with justice throughout all humanity. The idea of Jesus' coming on the clouds of heaven with dramatic cataclysm, thus putting an end to earthly society, is questioned by the proponents of this eschatology.

i) The millenialist, dispensationalist and apocalyptic views of popular authors like Hal Lindsay and numerous others

A major feature of Dispensationalism is its interpretation of history or the prophetic clock. Dispensationalism fits in well with premillennialism with the exception that it holds that at the resurrection of Jesus, God stopped his prophetic clock and postponed the kingdom because the Jews rejected Jesus as Messiah and king. This prophetic clock will be started again at the rapture, when the saved will be removed from the earth leaving only the lost (see Fair 2010:22).

5.4 Mugambi's views on the reign of God: A chronological overview

In this section, I present a chronological account of Mugambi's various publications with respect to the theme of the reign of God, highlighting those areas where he is critical of the status quo and where he offers what he would consider more viable alternatives. Mugambi is critical of current leadership in Africa as well as of the structures that have been established. He also criticises all distinctions relating to class, gender, status, wealth and position – anything that fosters inequality among people. He points to human sinfulness that gives rise to self-centredness and destroys the traditional communal nature of African society. In Mugambi's view, the reign of God is the antidote to these societal ills. Certain of his major works are relevant and I examine them in chronological order of publication.

5.4.1 *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989)

This publication may be deemed to be definitive of Mugambi's position on the reign of God, both because of its content and also because he has stated that he has not changed his view on

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the reign of God since writing this book.

Mugambi makes a number of comments with regard to the reign of God and I offer an analysis of these comments. Mugambi's view is that the reign of God needs to be understood in terms of its historical significance, especially from an African-Christian theological perspective (1989:14).

> Future liberation must be understood in temporal, rather than spatial, terms. It must not mean being placed in another world (1989:15).

This quote reflects how the African notion of the continuity of all things within one whole has had an influence on Mugambi's thinking. An African approach to the reign of God, by this definition, needs to be expressed in material terms. Heaven is not an environment that is opposed to the temporal world but, for Africans, "one way of expressing material needs and desires which political oppression and economic exploitation have hindered them from enjoying in the present life" (Mugambi 1989:15). It would appear that, from Mugambi's perspective, "total liberation" is the eschatological hope of African peoples (Mugambi 1989:15). Commenting on the impression created on African people by Christian funerals Mugambi states:

> A new theological understanding of the destiny of man was articulated, expressing the conviction that after physical death a faithful Christian would enter the Kingdom of God to live with him eternally while the unfaithful would be condemned to eternal suffering in hell (quoted in Kalu 2005:536).

Mugambi has included a subsection on the political and eschatological implications of the ministry of Christ in *African Christian theology* (Mugambi 1989:89, 90). The view that Jesus was uninterested in the political and economic situations of society is dismissed and Mugambi states that Jesus was very concerned about the social, political and economic welfare of those who were downtrodden and exploited. The preaching of Jesus was a call to both the oppressed and the oppressor to repent and return to the reign of God where love, justice and true peace could be found.

The zealots thought he was against political liberation, and the Roman authorities thought he was likely to disrupt the status quo and therefore undermine their administrative responsibilities and chances of promotion (Mugambi 1989:89).

With reference to Mark 1:14, 15, Mugambi comments:

> Here and now the kingdom of God is within reach of all those who individually and collectively live according to the ideal demands of the kingdom of God. At the same time, however, the kingdom of God is always ahead of us human

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beings, because God is always ahead of our most earnest endeavours. The ultimate realisation of the kingdom of God rests with God alone (Mugambi 1989:89).

The above statements are helpful as they clearly set out Mugambi's view of the reign of God. Although he has said that the ultimate realisation of the reign of God rests with God alone, he clearly makes the point that those who accept the good news and believe in the reign of God will be liberated from all that is dehumanising, looking for the total fulfilment of the promised reign of God. His expectation is that when people have experienced this liberation in full, a new heaven and a new earth, an entirely new order, will have arrived. This may be taken to mean that humans bring in the reign of God, but Mugambi clearly states that no one but God knows when that will be.

> Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, illustrating with his own life what it demands here and now on earth. But the total fulfilment of that kingdom will come at a time when man does not know, a time chosen by God himself (Mugambi 1989:90).

When Mugambi comments on the concept of "destiny" in African culture, he comments on the way the introduction of Christian eschatology into African thought has forced African Christians to accept a new worldview and abandon the old traditional one. He mentions the way the geocentric worldview, taken for granted by the biblical writers, was forced onto African converts at the same time as modern empirical science was taught in schools, with the presupposition of a heliocentric world in which the sun is a small star in a vast universe (see Mugambi 1989:143). Mugambi points out that the worldview of the missionaries is at variance with both African and scientific worldviews. All of this creates confusion among African Christians when it comes to understanding the reign of God.

In *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989) Mugambi offers further comments on eschatology and contrasts those whom he terms "milleniarists" with those who teach a "social gospel" (1989:129–131). The term milleniarists refers to those who view the reign of God as a heavenly and eschatological realm. In the milleniarist's view the emphasis is almost exclusively on the future while the present is viewed with suspicion. The soul is more important than the body and earthly welfare is of secondary importance. Mugambi states that, according to this view, the purpose of existence is to prepare the soul for eternal salvation (Mugambi 1989:129). Mugambi is critical of this approach because it shuns involvement in social, economic and political concerns and has influenced the church in Kenya greatly. In this view, the state is seen as evil and part of the transient order.

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> There is a strong tendency among milleniarists to uphold a passive and sometimes negative attitude towards socio-economic and political activities. This tendency often brings milleniarists into conflict with people who believe that man has an obligation to make this world a better place to live in (Mugambi 1989:129).

Mugambi's view is that the theological methods of milleniarists are based on a literal interpretation of those sections of the New Testament which refer to the reign of God. Milleniarist theologians view the church as comprised of those people who have pledged themselves to await heavenly salvation (Mugambi 1989:130).

Mugambi is critical of the other extreme (the social gospel) which maintains that Jesus was mainly concerned with the transformation of human society here on earth, "a transformation which would bring about free reconciliation between rich and poor, slaves and masters, Jews and Gentiles, old and young, rulers and ruled" (Mugambi 1989:130). People who adopt this approach view the reign of God as the inauguration of a new social order here on earth which will be an earthly alternative to human regimes where human life is oppressed and undermined.

Mugambi maintains that the traditional aspects of Christian destiny: resurrection, eschatology, the second coming of Christ, and the final judgment, find no place in the traditional African approach to destiny since they are not integral to the African religious heritage.

It would seem that at this stage of his life (1989) Mugambi was still carrying a number of notions derived from liberation theology such as universalism, the influence of ATR through his grandparents, and a strong need to integrate Christianity with African religion and culture. My assessment is that, although he insists that he has not changed in his understanding of the reign of God, he may have developed his notion of eschatology in later publications, although there is still a large measure of his earlier stance against the invasion of African culture by Western Christianity.

5.4.2 *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War (1995)*

There is little material on eschatology or the reign of God in this book. However, Mugambi does criticise Barth's notion of God's reign in heaven sometime in the future as being an extreme, and then declares what he understands concerning the teachings of Jesus:

> However, it is quite clear that Jesus, in His public ministry, was actively and simultaneously involved in both personal and social reconstruction. He mobilized His followers to become involved in social change, having convinced them of the

necessity and urgency to change their attitudes towards themselves and the world (Mugambi 1995:6).

Mugambi makes a statement of significance when he claims that the ministry of Jesus was focused on social change which would facilitate the inauguration of the reign of God. His view is that this urgency was subverted when the church conformed to the *status quo* (the conversion of Constantine). For this reason Mugambi views the reign of God as still before us and that it depends upon the Christians "mending their ways" (see Mugambi 1995:95).

Mugambi views the reign of God more from a social perspective than from any other.

5.4.3 Christianity and African Culture (2002)

In this work Mugambi refers to the three tier worldview adopted by the early Church fathers and points out that this view of reality clashes with the traditional African worldview which is unitary (see Mugambi 2002:50, 51). Mugambi maintains that the African worldview is also contrary to modern science in which the world is viewed as one planet among many in a solar system.

> In traditional African thought there is only one world – this world in which we live, consisting in the earth, the sky and all therein. When a person dies, he does not go to another world, whether below or above the earth. Rather, he changes his physical mode of existence to a spiritual (ghostly) one (Mugambi 2002:51).

According to traditional African thought, man continues to live in this world in another dimension. He continues to visit his friends and relatives, as well as his enemies. His relationship with these people depends upon the moral relationships that existed before he died. One may conclude that the heavenly expectation of the Christian faith is different to an African worldview, which has mainly temporal expectations.

The coming of the Kingdom of God becomes the anticipated perfection of the present age and order (in which human relations are discordant with the will of God) (Mugambi 2002:52).

Mugambi makes a reference to Negro spirituals from North America, stating that they are not a desire for a voyage to another planet, but are a prayer that God would bring an end to the suffering and humiliation they were experiencing in this world (see Mugambi 2002:52). He refers to the yearning of the African Independent Churches for freedom in the spiritual and social spheres as a similar desire. Mugambi clearly states that the African traditional worldview is not supplanted by the worldview presented by the missionaries and by Western church teaching on the other life. He is adamant that the mono-sectional worldview is

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entrenched in African traditional thought. In his view this worldview does not change when an African converts to Christianity.

> The convert may talk of hell and heaven, of death and resurrection, of Satan and God, as he has been taught in the church. But the cosmological context in which these concepts were originally codified into Christian doctrine differs greatly from the cosmological assumptions of the African convert (Mugambi 2002:52).

Mugambi maintains that Hebrew ontology resonates with African ontology as both are neither otherworldly nor futuristic. He also states that African ontology is neither trinitarian nor salvific but communally pragmatic and existentialistic (Mugambi in Mwase and Kamaara 2012:374, 375).

In this book (2002), Mugambi devotes a chapter to "Trinity and Eschatology in Relation to African Thought". In this chapter he deals with the differences between African concepts of time and Western concepts of time. This is helpful for understanding the points he makes in the above paragraph regarding the expectations of African Christians as well as the difference in the worldview taught by missionaries and the worldview of modern science seen in comparison to an African worldview.

In this chapter Mugambi quotes Mbiti's comment that Africans have a strong emphasis on a "long past, a present, and virtually no future" (Mugambi 2002:78). Mbiti also pronounces the Western concept of linear time with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, as foreign to African thought. Mugambi is concerned about the African sense of "duration", and he maintains that any analysis of this sense of duration has to be done in the context of the African understanding of matter and space (see Mugambi 2002:78). Mugambi then deals with the African's "one world" view as expressed in the following quote:

> Since in African thought there is only one world, this worldview conceptually excludes the notion of human individuals (or any other human beings) going to or coming from another world. The spatial idea of heaven as a place or as another planet is foreign to the African worldview. The same applies to the idea of hell. Another idea which is new to traditional African thought, and arising mainly from Christian teaching, is that this world will come to an end, only to be replaced by an entirely new order. According to this teaching those who are obedient to God in this world will be rewarded with everlasting life and happiness in the new order, whereas those who are disobedient to God now will be condemned to everlasting suffering when this world comes to an end. Such teaching is completely foreign to traditional African thought. On this point Professor J.S. Mbiti is correct. It is worthwhile to add that this futuristic emphasis in Christian eschatology represents just one view of the future in Christian theology. There have been Christian theologians who have maintained that New Testament

eschatology should be viewed as having two integral parts – fulfilment and consummation (Mugambi 2002:79).

Mugambi here refers to Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* volume 3, part 5 where Tillich gives a number of different views on eschatology.[29]

Mugambi maintains that in traditional African thought there is a concept of future, but that it must be viewed in a way that is consistent with the traditional African worldview. In this view all matter consists in one world in an interrelated and harmonious way. Africans understand time as something that is made, produced or created (Mugambi 2002:79). "In traditional African life, time is subordinate to human relationships" (Mugambi 2002:79). Mugambi states that African culture is not concerned with the duration of an event (whatever event it may be!) but with the measure to which the event contributes to the improvement or detriment of the balance of relationships in the community. In concluding this thought Mugambi comments that, because of this approach to time, "It may appear as if the notion of a distant future is lacking in traditional African philosophy" (Mugambi 2002:80). Mugambi believes that the case put forward by Mbiti is too strongly stated, namely that Africans place more emphasis on the past than on the future.

What may be affirmed without contradiction is that the traditional African understanding of the concepts of duration and future is different from the understanding of the same concepts in classical Christian theology on the one hand, and in modern empirical science on the other. These differences in understanding duration and future are rooted in fundamental differences of the nature of reality – of the relationship between matter, duration and space (Mugambi 2002:80).

Mugambi expands on the way Africans understand the past, present and future in the next three paragraphs (2002:80, 81) and concludes with the statement, "Africans are obsessed neither by the past nor by the future" (Mugambi 2002:81). In traditional African thought the focus is primarily on the present because of the effect the present may have on the future and because the present will become the past for future generations. This becomes evident in the notion that an individual who belongs to a community is part of that same community past, present and future. Mugambi then makes a telling statement, "The future concerns the African individual only as a continuation of the present" (Mugambi 2002:81). The past is of concern because it helps to explain the present.

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[29] I have alluded to Tillich's influence on Mugambi in Chapter 3.1.

Obviously this notion of the continuum of life will radically affect the notion of the reign of God when it is viewed from an African perspective. The significant question, is, "To what extent is Mugambi's eschatology affected by his African-ness?" Mugambi (2002:82-85) offers some insights into the implications African notions of time may have on Christian eschatology and this will help me to arrive at some understanding of Mugambi's own views regarding the reign of God. Mugambi understands the future (in traditional African terms) as potentially present because present actions will have repercussions which will act as condemnation of the individual without the individual awaiting future judgment. This approach is highlighted by the following quote: "Since what is done now will be a part of the past in the next generation, every individual is challenged to leave a positive impact for future generations to remember" (Mugambi 2002:83). The implication of this African view of time is that judgment does not need to be at some future day "in a far off moment in the future outside the world" (see Mugambi 2002:81). Mugambi holds to a combination of future and present eschatology with his view that entrance into the future kingdom of God is impossible if relationships that adhere to the will of God for humankind and the world are not maintained in the present. Mugambi criticises the view that there will be discontinuity between the future reign of God and present earthly existence. The influence of "other worldly" notions of the future, in Mugambi's view, has been detrimental to the traditional focus on the present in African culture which states that there can be no future without a healthy present. I conclude this subsection with a quote from Mugambi:

> Christian mission today should endeavour to restore the balance between the past and the future with regard to Christian eschatology, a balance which tends to be upset in favour of the future and at the expense of the present among many African Christians. Traditional African insights on this matter can help to show that the Christian faith ought to be concerned as much with the present in this world as with the future. The difficult eschatological paradox expressed in the ministry of Jesus Christ is a remarkable reminder to contemporary Christians of the importance of maintaining this balance. The church (as an earthly sign of the kingdom of God) is *in this world*, although it is *not of this world*. (John 18:33-40) (Mugambi 2002:85).

It may be assumed that part of Mugambi's criticism is directed toward neo-Pentecostalism with its strong emphasis on the future and an avoidance of involvement in social activities. This sweeping statement is not designed to categorise neo-Pentecostal churches as there are many that are involved in social action, but to show that there is a segment of the church that has a strong emphasis on the coming reign of God and preaches Christian triumphalism.

5.4.4 Jesus in African Christianity (2003)

Mugambi has a subsection entitled "Eschatological paradigms" (2003:144). I offer some comment on that subsection.

Mugambi offers an interesting comment with regard to the people associated with Jesus (Matthew 16:13, 14), Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, or one of the prophets: "they were all eschatological optimists" (Mugambi & Magesa 2003:144). Mugambi points out that all these people believed and proclaimed that, in spite of social decadence and moral decay, God would one day raise up a new virtuous generation through a remnant. Mugambi points out the difference between the proclamations of Jesus and the "intimidating and exploitative instructions" of the scribes and rabbis.

As a herald of hope, Jesus made a very strong impact in rural Palestine. Multitudes of poor peasants followed him for days on end to hear him, in anticipation of the new era which he inaugurated. His crucifixion may have made some of them disillusioned, but the Pentecost gave many of them a new mandate to help in the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Mugambi & Magesa 2003:144).

In conclusion, it may be assumed that Mugambi offers a view of the *eschaton* that is consistent with the African notion that the future will not occur in another place but will be a better now (1989:15). It is difficult to ascertain how much Mugambi holds to the traditional African view of time and how much he is influenced by this view in his understanding of eschatology. Time, and the way it is understood, does however have a critical impact on Mugambi's thinking. Mugambi does not agree with Mbiti's notion of duration in African thought and states that there is a definite concept of future in African thinking. However, it is true that the focus of African thought is on the present as the quality of the present will have an impact on the quality of the future as it is the present that ultimately becomes the future.

When one considers Mugambi's notion of the reign of God it would appear that, thus far, it is focused on the realisation of the social and material well being of people. This focus clouds Mugambi's approach to the reign of God and causes him to identify the coming reign of God with a perfected present earthly existence (Mugambi 2002:85).

5.4.5 Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction (2003)

In this volume Mugambi is more concerned with the role of the church and society in reconstructing Africa after the departure of colonialism. He has something to say about the nature of the church but, eschatologically, I have not discovered anything of significance.

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5.4.6 Christianity and African Culture (2009)

This volume was first published in 1989 under the title *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*. In the seventh chapter Mugambi offers comments on eschatology which may assist in defining his view of the reign of God.

Mugambi criticises the dominant notion of a spatial heaven; a place in some other place or another planet, as foreign to African thinking. He then reiterates the African notion of "one reality" and refers to theologians who hold a view that is consistent with the African view, such as Tillich (Mugambi 2009:79).

Mugambi also implies that the view of a coming judgment day is unnecessary in the light of the African understanding that the future is potentially present, with the notion that judgment accompanies any violation of the harmony of the existing order of things. He understands Jesus' teaching that we should not worry about the future (Matt. 6:25-34) as consistent with the thinking of African peoples (Mugambi 2009:83).

In completing this chapter Mugambi points to the missionary emphasis on not accumulating treasures on earth as a concept foreign to African thinking. He also shows that the emphasis on the reign of God being fully realised in heaven and discontinuous with present earthly existence was a novelty in relation to traditional African notions of duration and future. His view is that present eschatological teaching in African mission circles favours the future at the expense of the present and upsets the balance of biblical teaching (Mugambi 2009:84, 85).

The difficult eschatological paradox expressed in the ministry of Jesus Christ is a remarkable reminder to contemporary Christians of the importance of maintaining this balance. The Church (as an earthly sign of the Kingdom of God) is *in this world,* although it is *not of this world* (John 18:33-40) (Mugambi 2009:85).

Mugambi chooses to focus on the African notion of reality and contrast it with what he calls the Western missionary notion of reality, maintaining that the teachings of Jesus favour the traditional African approach to the present and the future.

5.4.7 Challenges and Prospects of the Church in Africa (2005)

In this publication there is one point that is significant for this thesis: Mugambi gives a list of the topics to be investigated by the theologians engaged in the Ecumenical Symposium of East African Theologians (established in 1967). The list consists of: Christology,

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Ecclesiology, Missiology, Moral Theology, Pastoral Theology, Biblical Theology and Liturgy. The notable exception is Eschatology! One may speculate that the subject was of little importance in African theological reflection, in spite of the major impact being made by Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches with the strong teaching on eschatology in their rendering of the "end times" and the coming of the reign of God. (See Ndung'u & Mwaura. 2005:20).

5.4.8 Responsible Leadership in Marriage and Family (2008)

In this book Mugambi contributes a chapter on "Ethics and Social Responsibility" in which there is a subsection dealing with death. He posits the view that, in African belief, death is a transitory step to the next life, which continues in disembodied existence (quoted in Getui 2008:149). Mugambi points out that living a virtuous life does not enable one to attain paradise, but enables one to enjoy communion with those left behind after one has passed on. In Mugambi's view, even among African Christians there is no abandonment of traditional beliefs after becoming Christians, but they carry on the worldview held before they became Christians.

> Thus their understanding of Christian doctrine is influenced by the African world-view that they take for granted as they read the bible and other devotional and other doctrinal manuals (quoted in Getui 2008:150).

A further comment is informative: Mugambi states that a person enters the community of the ancestors when they die and that moral propriety is essential for anyone to be accorded respect after death. "Christian missionary teaching has interfered with this social order in those areas where Christianity is established" (quoted in Getui 2008:151). The observation may be made that, when reading these comments concerning the destructive impact of missionary teaching on traditional African thought and practices, it appears that Mugambi identifies with traditional African thought although sometimes it appears that he is simply describing such thought and worldview. Life has no completion in a future realm but continues in the way the person lived while in the material realm.

5.4.9 Contextual Theology across Cultures (2009)

This publication is a compendium of letters between Mugambi and Michael R. Guy, the father of his daughter in law, a retired chartered engineer who is also a Methodist lay preacher and who holds a degree in theology.

The letters contained in this publication offer interesting insights into the position Mugambi adopts on many issues, particularly the questions of marriage and polygamy. There are one or

two comments that are of value in determining Mugambi's position on the reign of God.

Commenting on Christian theism, Mugambi contrasts the Christian and African notions of God. He maintains that in African ontology, God is part of reality. Transcendence is qualitative rather than spatial with, consequently, no spatial heaven and hell, because in African cosmology there is only one world. This precludes any idea of movement from one world to another and impacts upon how the end is understood. Mugambi appears to favour African cosmology with the notion of one reality (see Mugambi and Guy 2009:41).

In a further comment Mugambi expresses the following view concerning the being of God that is informative as to his position:

> There is no 'Christian God' and 'Muslim God'. Either God is the Creator of all of us, or an idol! The 'God' Muslims worship and the 'God' whom Christians and Jews worship cannot be different divine realities. The difference is in the various interpretations of, and responses to, that One Reality. From an African ontological perspective, I would take this insight for granted! In the Embu language we say: 'There is no form that God does not embody'. Expressed positively, this is to say that Divine Reality can be discerned in all forms of embodiment (Mugambi & Guy 2009:316).

Further on in this letter Mugambi refers to African Existentialism and how, in African ontology, "the past is present that has already been experienced", and the future is "present waiting to be experienced" (Mugambi & Guy 2009:317, 318). This is an interesting insight because it means that, whereas the Christian view of time is a tension between the past and the future (creation and consummation), in African religious thinking, the present is the funnel or lens through which the past and the future should be viewed. The dichotomy is huge! Christian hope is focused on the reign of God breaking into the present and the future consummation of all things and the emergence of the "new"; whilst African hope is contained in the present and not some future event. This has profound implications for understanding the reign of God.

These excerpts from the letters give insight into Mugambi's own approach to questions of time and destiny. In my opinion, at this point I assume that Mugambi holds a more African view of time than a traditionally Old Testament view of time.

5.5 Mugambi's views: A systematic analysis

Various factors combine to inform Mugambi's eschatology. The issue of disunity with God through the fall is a major contributor to his view. Mugambi refers to the Christian notion of the ultimate destiny of humankind which is to be re-united with the creator (Mugambi

1989:125). The process through which this destiny is obtained is history under God's guidance (Mugambi 1989:125). Various facets of this historical process may be observed through examining Mugambi's cosmology and the different eschatological influences on his thinking: the African view of cosmology; time; destiny; and duration all inform his approach to eschatology and the reign of God.

5.5.1 Mugambi's cosmological assumptions

A few introductory remarks regarding cosmology will help in understanding Mugambi's approach to the subject. Mugambi's cosmological assumptions will also need to be tested against the wider views held by theologians in the area of cosmology. The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary has the following description for cosmology: "Study, philosophy, of the universe as an ordered whole" (1978:376). This definition is extremely broad and the content will vary according to the religious tradition that is referred to. From a religious perspective a more expanded definition would state that cosmology is a way of explaining the origin, history and evolution of the cosmos or universe based on the religious mythology of a specific tradition. Religious cosmology will normally include the process of creation as well as so-called proofs of the existence of God. The various arguments for the existence of God cover the Ontological Argument, the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments, and the Moral Argument. The history of the debate is covered by Grenz and falls beyond the scope of this research (Grenz 1994:36-52). For the purpose of this study I opted to restrict the concept of cosmology to the different worldviews that are dealt with in Mugambi's writings, particularly the Western worldview, the scientific worldview, and the African worldview.

I will refer to the worldview of modernity and contrast this to an African worldview. A Western worldview, while incorporating the understanding of individualism, has as its dominant element a secular outlook on life.

Anyone approaching life from the perspective of modernity would be extremely suspicious of anything not susceptible to empirical examination, especially a worldview that incorporates the unseen. According to Balcomb (see 2005:7), modernity displays a dualistic approach to reality that has brought huge levels of control over the environment and at the same time resulted in alienation from the environment.

By the nineteenth century materialism was entrenched in the Western worldview. Materialism assumes that nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications. Materialism developed into what Bate calls the gradual erosion of the power of the

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supernatural and the emergence of the human as the most important category (Bate 2002:120).

Nürnberger expresses the materialistic approach of capitalism thus:

> Its view of reality became mechanistic and optimistic, evolutionary and progress oriented, its ethic required the active subjugation and transformation of all aspects of reality to the advantage of the human being" (Nürnberger 1988:348).

The African worldview stands in direct opposition to the Western worldview (see Magesa, Mbiti, Taylor etc.). Communality is particularly predominant in African traditional culture. This means that existence is always seen in relation to the tribe / clan or community. According to African philosophy a person is a person through, with and for the community. Individualism is something new to Africa (Kasenene 1994:141). This view of the individual may be observed in the meaning of the created order in African culture. African traditional culture understands all of life to be linked. Even the ancestors are in the circle that needs to be kept in harmony. An African worldview is thus a primal worldview; the following quote from Balcomb offers a good starting point:

> Every scholar observing primal thought, from Levy-Bruhl in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to Placide Tempels in the mid twentieth century to Alexis Kagame, to V.Y. Mudimbe, and John Mbiti have commented on the oneness of the universe in primal thinking that Taylor so graphically describes (see Balcomb 2005:6).

What Balcomb is referring to is the statement by Taylor that defines his analysis of primal thinking. Taylor expounds on the unity of all life in the following manner:

> Not only is there less separation between subject and object, between self and non-self, but fundamentally all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another, rocks and forest trees, beasts and serpents, the power of the wind and waves upon a ship, the power of a drum over a dancers body, the power in the mysterious caves of Kokola, the living, the dead and the first ancestors, from the stone to the divinities and hierarchy of power but not of being, for all are one, all are here, all are now (Taylor 1975:64).

The essence of this thinking is that all things are related, everything interacts upon everything, without any existence in isolation. As I have stated before, the concept of separate beings that find themselves together yet entirely independent of one another, is foreign to African thought. Thus the interconnectedness of all things filters down into the African understanding of being authentically human; it is connectedness and not isolation!

Bediako maintains that there are six features of the African worldview:

- A sense of kinship with nature. This includes viewing all things as being

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interdependent parts of the whole.

- A definite acceptance of the weakness and finiteness of humankind and the need for supernatural intervention.

- The existence of a spiritual world that means that humankind is not alone in the universe. The influence of this spiritual world results in the question being, not what causes things to happen, but who causes things to happen.

- Human beings can enter into relationship with that spirit world.

- A belief in the after-life expressed in reverence for the ancestors.

- No dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual with the possibility of the physical being a vehicle for the spiritual (quoted in Balcomb 2005:12).

When one examines illness and healing in a primal culture the understanding of relatedness becomes clearer. In a more scientifically based culture the causes of illness will be sought in physical, chemical or environmental factors. The cure would then involve medical, surgical or counselling intervention (see Bate 2002:109). The focus in this case would be on the individual. However, in a primal situation the emphasis is on restoring the circle of life. This combines physical health, spiritual and inter-relational harmony. A variety of remedies would be used, usually focusing on inter-relational causes such as ancestors, spirits, other people or witchcraft (Bate 2002:110). This is further evidence of the inter-relatedness of life expressed in a primal approach, as all things are assumed to contain life. In his paper on worldviews (2005:7) Balcomb quotes Mudimbe giving a summary of Kagame's analysis of *ntu* or "being". In sum, the *ntu* is a sign of universal similitude. Its presence in beings brings them to life and attests to both their individual value and to the measure of their integration in the dialectic of vital energy. *Ntu* is both a uniting and a differentiating vital norm that explains the powers of vital inequality in terms of difference between beings. It is a sign that God, father of all beings, has put a stamp on the universe, thus making it transparent in a hierarchy of sympathy. Upwards one would read the vitality that, from mineral through vegetable, animal and human, links stones to the departed and God himself. Downwards, it is a genealogical filiation of forms of beings, engendering or relating to one another, all of them witnessing to the original source that made them possible (see Balcomb 2005:7). As Balcomb states in relation to the above:

> The interconnectedness of the universe, beginning with the creator and going all
> the way down to rocks, can surely not be more strongly stated (Balcomb 2005:7).

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This view of life was referred to as animism in the past and the description is still applicable today. The understanding that everything is being interpenetrated by spiritual forces and under their control aptly describes a primal worldview.

Within the ambit of Mugambi's theology the normal usage of the Greek term *kosmos* may be accepted. The term was used of "ordering" and could be applied to the earth as well as to the broader cosmos, including the heavenly bodies. TeSelle describes it as "God's good ordering, as the field of providence, and as the basis of a natural theology that discovers not only God's existence but also God's goodness" (in Patte 2010:1331). From the perspective of eschatology, the early church answered to the negative aspects of the world around them by anticipating that the present evil age would soon be superseded by a new age.

In *Christianity and African Culture* (2002) Mugambi has a chapter entitled "African Cosmology and Christian Mission" in which he examines various cosmologies and contrasts especially African cosmology with Western and Scientific cosmology. As an introduction to the chapter Mugambi states the following, "It is true that the traditional beliefs of a people form the basis on which new ideas or innovations are accepted or rejected" (Mugambi 2002:50). Although this chapter is devoted to the influence of cosmology on mission work, Mugambi nevertheless describes the different worldviews and contrasts them. He is clear that the traditional African worldview is taken for granted by any prospective African convert to Christianity.

Mugambi's eschatology is affected by his worldview (cosmology) and it has a significant bearing on the way he views the reign of God. Mugambi is critical of the worldview of Western Christians as, in his opinion, their view has moved from the two tier view of the Old Testament to the three-sectional worldview of the Greek philosophers. In his view the mono-sectional view of traditional African thought is closer to what he considers to be a biblical worldview (see Mugambi 2005:51, 52). When it comes to Western empirical science Mugambi is critical as he regards such a view as contrary to the African worldview. Mugambi is concerned about the tension caused in African people's minds when they have to juggle all three worldviews in their thinking.

> At home they presuppose the traditional African view, in the church they are
> expected to believe in the biblical view, in geography and physics they are taught
> the Copernican worldview, and in biology they have to accept Darwin's theory of
> evolution (Mugambi 1989:143).

The mono-sectional worldview clashes with Christian notions of the afterlife because of the

African view that a person continues to live in this present life after death, albeit in an invisible form; the person maintains their life, visits their friends, etc., the person relates to people according to the relationship they enjoyed with them before they died. From an African perspective there is no cessation of life. This view is very different to the "heavenly expectation" of the Christian life.

The interesting conclusion Mugambi comes to is that this mono-sectional worldview is not supplanted by the worldview introduced and taught by the missionaries, nor by empirical science. This conclusion is supported by Moore and Sanders (2001:206-225):

> The commonly cited figure for consultation with a traditional healer countrywide is 80% of black South Africans (Select Committee on Social Services 1998). My experience in Soweto would confirm at least this rate. I would also estimate that the number of such healers in Soweto is approximately 10,000. In addition, a similar number of Independent Church 'prophets' are probably active in healing work in Soweto (Moore and Sanders quoted in Balcomb 2005a).

The above quote supports Mugambi's contention that African people (even Christian converts) will revert to the traditional African worldview in times of crisis (see Mugambi 2002:52). This worldview embraces reality as a whole, with the understanding that the universe is one and that all reality consists in only two parts: the visible and the invisible. Life continues almost "as usual" after the person has died. "Duration, in this worldview, is continuous, with no break in actual events here and now" (Mugambi 1989:143). Everything is integrated as part of this one unity. Mugambi is correct when he states that Christian eschatology would be meaningless and irrelevant from the perspective of such a worldview. The question is whether Mugambi holds this view or whether he has adopted the Christian worldview or, whether he holds to a combination of the two views. When Mugambi states that the introduction of a Western Christian worldview has created an epistemological crisis among Africans, one must ask how far he thinks like an African or to what extent he has left the African worldview and accepted a Western worldview. This is a rather difficult exercise but I think that Mugambi states his position most clearly in the reply he offers to Michael Guy in a letter concerning poverty in Africa which I have quoted previously. In his reply (Mugambi and Guy 2009:316) he states that there is only one God and denies the existence of a different "Christian" or "Muslim" God. His view is that we all worship the same God and that the differences arise out of interpretation and responses. Reasoning from an African perspective, Mugambi maintains that he takes this insight for granted.

In this letter to Guy, Mugambi refers to the African notion of a single reality as an approach

he would take. One may therefore conclude that, to an extent, Mugambi thinks there is only one underlying worldview, the traditional one. In fairness to Mugambi I need to refer to a conversation I had with him on 3 March 2013 where he once more emphasised that the Western approach that derived from a Greek philosophical approach to reality was further from the biblical view than was an African view. He emphasised the need to recognise the difference between the Hebraic worldview and the Greco-Roman worldview. He pointed out that the Chalcedonian formula was formulated from a political perspective and has since formed the core statement on a Christian worldview. My perspective would be that both the Western and African worldviews need to be examined and corrected from a biblical perspective and changes made where necessary.

It should be seen by now, that the various aspects of Mugambi's views I have been examining are related, with blurred lines separating them from each other. This conclusion is arrived at in spite of the lack of a systematic presentation of any of these themes in Mugambi's various publications. When it comes to Mugambi's views on cosmology there is little difference between these and his views on ontology, worldview, and destiny. Mbiti has described what he considers a typical African view of reality:

According to traditional (African) concepts, time is a two dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present, and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realised and cannot, therefore, constitute time (Mbiti 2006:16 & 17).

Mugambi has stated that, in his opinion, Mbiti is wrong in maintaining that there is no concept of future in African thinking (Mugambi 1989:137) and offers the following notion:

> In the context of their own cosmological assumptions, African peoples do have notions of past, present and future. Eternity is also understood, though it is not viewed metaphysically in terms of an infinite time scale (Mugambi 1989:137).

Mugambi is critical of the creeds which, in his view, take for granted the three-dimensional worldview of the church fathers: heaven above, earth in the middle, and hell below (see Mugambi 2009:50). He views the three aspects of the universe portrayed in the creeds as distinct from each other and as descriptive of three modes of existence. This is very different from traditional African cosmology which is mono-sectional, not holding different modes of spatial existence. There are only two dimensions; visible and invisible, both part of the one cosmos. In my view Mugambi fluctuates between a Western and an African worldview,

which must place his thinking in tension as he tries to Africanise the Western theology he has imbibed through the theologians who have had an impact on his thinking and who have mainly been trained in Western theology, although his own main theological training was through African theologians in the University of Nairobi. Mugambi's contention that, in traditional African thought, the Christian emphasis on salvation as a heavenly anticipation changes to a temporal expectation rather than a spiritual one, confirms my assessment that, from Mugambi's perspective, the reign of God is not to be some future existence in a different mode.

> The coming of "The Kingdom of God" becomes the anticipated perfection of the present age and order (in which human relations are discordant with the will of God) (Mugambi 2002:52).

Mugambi further states that it makes no sense, in a modern setting, to refer to heaven as a spatial location. He is clear that African Christians operate in one of three contexts, the traditional African worldview, the classical Christian worldview, and the modern scientific worldview. There is thus a need for effective communication in each of these three categories (Mugambi 2002: 53). From the perspective of duration Mugambi is of the opinion that the reign of God should not be viewed as being spatial or historical. In his view, creation and salvation are both categories that must be viewed outside time (Discussions in Nairobi March 2013). He is of the opinion that apocalyptic texts in the Old and New Testaments, Jesus references to the end times, should not be taken as references or statements of facts or as analyses of history but as statements criticizing the present order (Discussion in Nairobi, March 2013). He illustrates this by referring to the way a person who has dreamed must use the language available to them to describe the dream, albeit inadequately. In Mugambi's view to use symbolical, metaphorical, or analogical language as if it was historical language is confusing.

5.5.2 The Content of Mugambi's cosmology

Within the bounds of cosmology it is necessary to refer to Mugambi's approach to different notions such as time, origins, destiny and the place of humans in the cosmos. In the following section I examine these concepts inasmuch as they make up part of Mugambi's worldview.

Time is a concept that highlights the difference between African ways of viewing reality and a Western notion of reality. Mugambi points out that, in traditional African life, time is subordinate to human relationships.

Mugambi quotes Mbiti with regard to his understanding of time:

> In Western or technological society, time is a commodity which must be utilised, sold and bought; but in traditional African life, time has to be created or produced. Man is not a slave of time; instead, he makes as much time as he wants (Mbiti 2006:19).

Time is not measured in hours, minutes, seconds, or similar segments. The duration of any event is not significant; what is significant is the event itself, which is judged by the contribution or violation it makes to the balance of relationships in the community. As Mugambi comments, "the chronometer is a recent innovation in African culture" (Mugambi 2006:79). The African approach to time leads into the African approach to destiny and duration.

Duration, according to Mugambi, needs to be evaluated in the context of a peoples understanding of matter, duration and space – within the framework of their understanding of reality as a whole (Mugambi 2006:78). For Mugambi, matter duration and space are interrelated concepts, so vitally linked that one cannot be understood without the others.

> Matter occupies space and exists in one form for a certain duration after which it changes into another form. Space would be difficult to conceptualise without considering it in relation to matter. Even a vacuum is defined within the context of this relation as a space in which there is no matter in any form. Duration would also be difficult to conceptualise without considering it in relation to matter and space (Mugambi 2006:78).

This means that any analysis of the African sense of duration should be done in the context of the African understanding of matter and space. Duration needs to be assessed within the mono-sectional reality of African thought concerning the cosmos. All of existence, both past, present and future occurs within the framework of that one reality. The notion of another world; or of this world coming to an end is foreign to African notions of reality. Any notion of the future in African thought would be expected to occur within the context of one existent reality. The future will be practical and relational and different from a Western individualistic notion of heaven. There is a notion of a distant future in traditional African philosophy. Mugambi captures it as follows:

> What may be affirmed without contradiction is that the traditional African understanding of the concepts of duration and future is different from the understanding of the same concepts in classical Christian theology on the one hand, and in modern empirical science on the other. These differences in understanding duration and future are rooted in fundamental differences in the understanding of the nature of reality – of the relationship between matter, duration and space (Mugambi 2006:80).

The observation may be made that Africans are not obsessed with either the past or the future. The present is of great concern as it has vital consequences in the future and comes out of either good or bad relationships in the past. The present will vitally effect future generations and so the future is, in effect, present in the present. Placed within the context of reality in African thought, this notion has vital consequences for understanding eschatology and, particularly, the reign of God. Reality comprises the whole community, past, present, and even future generations and it is within this reality that African people must work out their concepts of salvation and the future breaking in of the reign of God. It is therefore logical that the emphasis is on the present. While futurist eschatology has been embraced by many African Christians, especially in Pentecostal churches, it is not in harmony with traditional African thinking. Mugambi makes the following plea:

> Christian mission today should endeavour to restore the balance between the past and the future with regard to Christian eschatology, a balance which tends to be upset in favour of the future and at the expense of the present among many African Christians. Traditional African insights on this matter can help to show that the Christian faith ought to be concerned as much with the present in this world as with the future (Mugambi 2006:85).

The observations I have made above have implications for understanding time, the origins of the cosmos, destiny and the content of reality. The conclusion may be made that African notions of cosmology are extremely different to Western and scientific notions of reality. The contrast holds for understanding eschatology, and especially for understanding the reign of God. Within the context of African thought, the reign of God must occur within the one reality and cannot be conceived of as some reality outside the current reality.

Mugambi points out that most Africans adopt a literalist approach to the bible. Mugambi's position is that the best method of biblical interpretation is to approach it contextually (see Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:78-82). This approach will entail following a realistic approach to the metaphorical and symbolical language of the bible. Mugambi points out that "most traditional African stories and myths begin with the expression, 'A long time ago....', and end with the expression, 'and that is how the situation continues to be until this day'" (Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:123). The reference alludes to the continuity of life where changes may occur, but an end is inconceivable.

Further questions that need answers are;

- What is the origin of life?

- Where is life leading to?

- What is the place of humans in the cosmos?

Magesa (1997:205) expresses Mugambi's viewpoint in a concise way. "Created reality, including humanity, exists on account of the will of God". The origin of man lies in God, and the purpose of humankind's creation is to maintain the harmony God placed in the cosmos. The goal of human life is to maintain harmony and human's place in the cosmos in relationship with God and the family of the community.

5.5.3 The way Mugambi understands eschatological symbols

The use of symbolism in eschatological discourse is widespread, particularly in the apocalyptic literature of the bible. Mugambi often refers to Ninian Smart who combines two categories which are important to Mugambi, namely myth and symbol (see Smart 1996:52). Throughout his writings Mugambi tries to revitalise African traditional cultural values, norms, myths and symbols. He endeavours to recast them in an African format that will meet the needs of African churches and still faithfully convey the biblical message (see Dedji 2003:45). Contrary to Bultmann's demythologizing, Mugambi calls for remythologizing in which the theologian gauges and develops new symbols and metaphors and represents old myth in such a way as to express the central message of the gospel (Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:73-78).

In this regard three scholars, Tillich, Buber and Jaspers, have influenced Mugambi, particularly in the area of metaphorical form, new metaphors and a positive appraisal of mythical thinking and he has carried this appreciation into his reconstruction theology (see Kinoti and Waliggo 1997: 73-78).

It is reasonable to suggest that remythologization would be a more effective response when metaphors and idioms become obsolescent, irrelevant or out of context. Theological reconstruction is a project of remythologization, in which the theologian thus engaged, discerns new symbols and new metaphors in which to recast the central message of the gospel (Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:75).

The different symbols used in eschatology are basically the traditional (past orientation), the prophetic (present orientation) and the apocalyptic (future orientation). In Mugambi's writings, other symbols predominate such as origins, purpose, destiny, the second coming of Christ, judgment, and the reign of God.

5.5.4 General eschatological influences on Mugambi's thinking

A number of influences have informed Mugambi's views of the reign of God. While these views derive mainly from different approaches to eschatology, it should be noted that the field is so broad that it is beyond the scope of this research to offer an in-depth analysis of these different views. I have simplified the task by dividing the influences on Mugambi's thinking into four basic categories.

These are:

- The influence of Buber, Cone and Tillich.

- Liberation theologians in Africa and, secondarily, those in South America.

- The development of notions of the reign of God in the WCC.

- Currently-popular views on the reign of God.

1. Three scholars who have influenced Mugambi's thinking

I have already referred to the three scholars, Buber, Jaspers and Tillich, in 5.2.3. However, in this section I apply their teachings to the views held by Mugambi in order to highlight their influence on his thinking. Dedji (2003: 45 & 46) has drawn attention to the influence exerted by these scholars on Mugambi's thinking. Dedji points out that Mugambi has endeavoured to revitalise African traditional cultural values, myths and symbols in order to reconstruct them and apply them to the biblical message in order to meet the needs of African churches and societies. Mugambi has searched for new symbols and metaphors in which to cast the central message of the gospel (see Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:75). This search for meaning has been influenced by the three scholars mentioned.

a)   Martin Buber

Mugambi has appropriated the reflections of Buber. Buber's attempt at defining relationships between humans and each other and with God is expressed in the I-it, I-you, and I-Thou relationships in which humans engage. Buber views the I-Thou relationship as the most intimate bond between human beings, demanding the most intense commitment. Buber also seeks to discern new metaphors in order to recast human experience in both religion and society. These two emphases impressed Mugambi and are formative in his own writings and his endeavours to recast African myths in symbiosis with biblical perspectives.

b)   Paul Tillich

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If there is a major influence in Mugambi's thinking, then Tillich would be such an influence. Dedji comments on the influence Tillich wielded in Mugambi's thinking thus:

> Mugambi is fascinated by the German-born theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich whose major theological objective was to make Christianity understandable and persuasive to religiously sceptical people, modern in culture and secular in sensitivity (Dedji 2003:45).

Tillich's use of metaphorical forms attracted Mugambi in his own quest to express the logic of Christianity and make it accessible to both Christian and academic circles. Three of Tillich's metaphors are significant for understanding Mugambi's approach:

- sin as the denial of the courage to be;

- God as the ground of being, and

- faith as ultimate concern.

Mugambi declares, "Paul Tillich, perhaps more than any other 20th century theologian, succeeded in the task of discerning new symbols and metaphors in which to recast the central message of the gospel" (Kinoti & Waliggo 1997:75).

c)   James Cone

Mention needs to be made particularly of the influence of James Cone on Mugambi's thought. While there are points of disagreement between them, especially on Cone's use of the Exodus motif (see Mugambi 1995:24), there are nevertheless aspects of Cone's approach that have influenced Mugambi. Cone's theology is located in the experience of African Americans. Cone could not accept that theologians from outside the African American experience could provide meaningful answers to his questions. In much the same way, Mugambi seeks to develop contextual theology (also indicating the influence of Tillich who stresses that theology is tied to specific contexts). Cone's theology of liberation was formulated in the context of the black experience of oppression. So Mugambi also theologises within the context of, firstly, the oppression of colonialism and racism, later refocusing on neo-colonialism and corruption, always with the emphasis on the poor and oppressed. Like Cone, Mugambi's method is to start from the situation and work towards biblical applications to that situation.

Cone's influence leads me to focus more generally on the following influences on Mugambi.

2. South American and African liberation scholars

As previously stated, the emphasis in South American liberation theology was on cataclysmic

change with the reign of God breaking in violently. However, those liberation theologians that had the greatest impact on Mugambi were the North American Black theologians and the African Black liberation theologians.[30] Mugambi's own emphasis is on the notion of evolutionary change in society. However, such change must be assisted by various inputs as laid out in his reconstruction theology. Proof of this impact may be found in the number of times Mugambi quotes James Cone (Mugambi 1989:55-60, 1995:2, 26). A quote from Mugambi's earlier writings may elucidate the point:

> While liberation both as a concept and as a historical struggle in Africa today takes on different emphases in different parts of Africa, it must be the over-arching goal...out of which and for which an African Christian theology must emerge (Mugambi 1989:13).

In the same context as the above, Mugambi states that, "Liberation is the objective task of contemporary African Christian theology" (Mugambi 1989:12). He then quotes Cone's emphasis against the degradation of prejudice against a race or the colour of the skin as forming the experience out of which a theology of liberation emerges. The emphasis on circumstances that prevail in situations of inequality surfaces constantly in Mugambi's approach to the reign of God. The impact of those theologians seeking an overthrow of the status quo is obvious in Mugambi's description of an African Christian theology (see 1989:13-16). When he refers to righteousness he comments that right action might mean armed struggle for the liberation of Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe and South Africa. He refers to the need for total liberation (Mugambi 1989:14). This total liberation includes the African economic, political and social situation.

> It is not and should not be an academic concern; rather, it issues out of practical involvement in the meeting of human need and the building of a more humane social order in the African setting (Mugambi 1989:14).

It would, however, be a mistake to see Mugambi as focused only on material change. His brief is simply that an overemphasis on spiritual devotion has been detrimental to the church being involved in social activism. For Mugambi, economic liberation and political liberation

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[30] A short list of liberation theologians who are significant in this regard would include:

Boesak H.H. 1977. *Farewell to Innocence*. New York. Orbis; Boff L. 1979. *Liberating Grace*.New York. Orbis; Cone J.H. 1975. *God of the Oppressed*. New York. Seabury Press; Cone J.H. 1990. *Black Theology of Liberation*. New York. Orbis; Gutierrez G. 1983. *The Power of the Poor in History*. London. SCM; Miranda J.P. 1977. *Marx and the Bible*.London. SCM; Mofokeng T. 1983. *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Towards a Black Christology*. Kok-Kempen. Uitgewersmaatskappy; Tutu D. 1979. Black Theology and African Theology. In Cone and Wilmore; Wilmore G.S. 1983. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*. New York. Orbis.

is as significant as spiritual devotion, and political liberation is as important as eternal salvation in African Christian theology (see Mugambi 1989:14).

Even when dealing with eschatology, Mugambi's roots in liberation theology influence his conclusions: future liberation must be understood in temporal, rather than spatial, terms (Mugambi 1989:15). Mugambi is clear that African Christians formulate their understanding of heaven in material categories: the enjoyment of that from which they have been deprived of in the past! When one examines the American liberation theologians (Boff, Cone, Gutierrez, and Wilmore, etc.), the primary focus is on material blessings in contrast to the focus of the Evangelical movement which is on spiritual blessings. Similarly, the African proponents of liberation and black theology focused on the discrepancies in society relating to race, social status, economic position and political deprivation. This focus determined their view of the reign of God, amply demonstrated in the views of the more radical members of the WCC (see Saucy 1997:280-294).

One may conclude that all forms of inequality, human sinfulness and self-centeredness come in for criticism by Mugambi as lacking evidence of the presence of the reign of God. In his works he attacks the corruption in current leaders and structures and is against the distinctions caused through class, gender, status and wealth and position: the status quo in all of Africa!

3. Various positions held by the WCC on the reign of God

The topic under consideration in this subsection is so vast that it would require a separate study. Therefore, all I offer here is a summary of the positions held in the WCC by highlighting those that are prevalent in Mugambi's thinking. A word of caution is pertinent here as the WCC is essentially a gathering of different denominational leaders for consultation, meaning that a whole spectrum of opinions is offered by the members, ranging from conservative to the most radical. However, one might contend that the doctrinal and missiological commissions of the WCC[31] provide important insights into the WCC's view on the reign of God. Long before the founding of the WCC there existed conflict over the definition of the reign of God. The social-evolutionary side of the church in the West tended to think of the reign of God as a just and ethical society while this view was opposed by the German church (influenced by Schweitzer and Weiss) with the view that the reign of God had little to do with this world. By 1968, to all appearances the social-evolutionary side had won and the reign of God was accepted as present and progressively being manifested in the

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[31] The commission on Faith and Order (CFO) and the commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWM)

ethical work of the people of God (see Saucy 1997:280-282). Gassman (1993:294) states, "Jesus Christ is the supreme historical revelation of the God who will consummate the creation with a display of glorious work in history". The position taken that the church's present actions may be taken as "signs of the Kingdom" is a fairly common theme in the WCC's publications and appears to be agreeable to most of the theological positions represented at the WCC. One might conclude that the spectre of utopianism is fairly pervasive in the WCC's understanding of the reign of God. Smit concludes:

> Generalizing, one could say that the notion of the kingdom as an ideal society, characterized by equality, justice, and freedom, has gradually been accepted (Smit 2002:567).

The above comments precluded the more moderate voices at the WCC such as Lochman (1986). However, the prevailing trend seems to favour a utopian understanding with the reign of God giving rise to a transformed society. I conclude this section with a quote from Kobia:

> Recent emphases of the WCC include initiatives in common prayer, mission and evangelism; a spirituality of resistance to injustice; the solidarity of churches with women; the overcoming of violence; interfaith dialogue; advocacy concerning persons living with HIV/AIDS; the welcoming of youth leadership; and the broadening and deepening of ecumenical fellowship (quoted in Patte 2010:1333).

The above quote from Kobia reflects the general view of the WCC, but it also reflects Mugambi's general approach to reconstruction in Africa and to the reign of God.

4. More recent views on the reign of God

The issues surrounding the nature of the reign of God preached by Jesus dominated the debate for the first sixty years of the twentieth century. The debate on eschatology swung from the extreme of a purely eschatological reign of God to that of a totally realised reign of God, with many positions held in between the extremes. Since World War II, the views of theologians such as Cullmann, Jeremias, Kümmel, and Ladd began to dominate and a scholarly consensus developed about an Already-but-Not-Yet reign of God. Ladd refers to a list of more than thirty scholars who held this view from the early 1950s to 1968 (see Ladd 1974: 38, 39). Saucy maintains that what was only in the ascent at the time Ladd and others were writing, has over the last thirty years become more solidly entrenched (Saucy 1997:21). In 1985 Howard-Marshall noted no change in the consensus in the "present or fulfilled and future or consummated" position on the reign of God (see Howard Marshall 1985:5). Two influences in this regard were the hermeneutic debate and the quest for the historical Jesus.

5.6 Mugambi and the reign of God

There are three questions which will assist me in determining Mugambi's view of the reign of God:

1. What is the nature of the reign of God?

2. What are the instruments that will bring in the reign of God?

3. What will signal the advent of the reign of God?

I will seek to answer these questions by referring to Mugambi's works as well as to the previous sections of this chapter.

5.6.1 A description of how Mugambi views the reign of God

In order to arrive at a conclusion on Mugambi's notion of the reign of God I refer to the chapter, "The kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men" in *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989:75-85). In this chapter Mugambi contrasts the two reigns, that of God and that of humans, and gives insight into the perspective he favours. Mugambi points to biblical metaphors of the reign of God, the centrality of freedom, liberation and salvation, and the paradox of the reign of God. I examine each of these concepts in order to analyse the understanding of the reign of God held by Mugambi.

a) Biblical metaphors of the reign of God:

Mugambi states that the New Testament contrasts the reign of God with the reigns of men. Mugambi highlights the way in which Jesus uses metaphors, parables and analogies to refer to the reign of God as descriptive of the way Jesus viewed the reign of God. Mugambi refers to Luke 1:33 and the truth that human kingdoms may fall but God's reign lasts forever (Mugambi 1989:75). The following quote refers to Mugambi's reconstruction theology and the desire to change society (see Mugambi 2003).

> A human king tends to oppress his subjects and a human lord tends to exploit his servants. A human father tends to dominate his children. In all these relationships at the human level, those in the inferior position often suffer under those in the superior position. The superiors tend to assume absolute power over those who are inferior (Mugambi 1989:76, 77).

b) The issue of freedom:

In this section Mugambi draws attention to the disparity between the superior and the inferior and states that the reign of God will give all human beings equal status. For Mugambi, the coming of the reign of God will be the inauguration of an entirely new order, free from the imperfections of current kingdoms and their dominations, oppressions and

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exploitations (see Mugambi 1989:78, 79).

c) Liberation and salvation:

Mugambi does not differentiate between liberation and salvation but sees them as complementary aspects of the reign of God.

In the kingdom of God the material, temporal and spatial concerns are not rejected, but they are judged as incomplete without the proper attitudes by which to approach them. Without the guidance of the kingdom of God which is at hand, these concerns become idols which suffocate man when he pursues his quest for fulfilment through them alone (Mugambi 1989:82).

d) The paradox of the reign of God:

This is seen in the way Jesus described a good master - one who is servant of those for whom one is Lord. To be a good shepherd, one must be prepared to risk one's life for the sheep; to be a faithful lover, one must be prepared to risk one's life for the welfare of the beloved; to conquer ultimately, one must be prepared to be conquered penultimately; to live, one must die. These are some of the paradoxes Mugambi mentions as attitudes towards life that are necessary for the reign of God to prevail (see Mugambi 1989:84, 85).

In a further chapter on "Poverty and the Kingdom of God" (1989:96-103), Mugambi describes the new social order of the reign of God. In this new social order, wealth will not determine worth, but respect and acceptance of all individuals will prevail.

Mugambi's view of the reign of God, as he understands it to have been taught by Jesus, points to a new social order emerging (Mugambi 1989:99). He argues that there is a demand in the teachings of Jesus contained in the gospels for society to be reconstructed, where the innate selfishness of people, compounded by capitalistic individualism and consumerism, is changed by the gospel so that:

> Those people who are endowed with material wealth share it freely and willingly with those less wealthy; and those with other non-material endowments also share whatever they have with their fellow men and women. A new harmonious society is created in which economic, social, cultural, religious and racial distinctions exist but are rendered insignificant by the strong bond of universal brotherhood. This new society – the Kingdom of God – is beyond the parochialism and pettiness of ideologies which serve the selfish interests of only some segments of the human race (Mugambi 1989:99).

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5.6.2 The instruments that bring in the reign of God

In the light of this projection of the reign of God, Mugambi sees a special need for leaders, as instruments of the reign of God, to manage private and public resources responsibly. In this context he categorises private and public resources as follows:

> Private resources include the time, knowledge, skill and the experience at the disposal of every individual. Public resources include the totality of all natural, cultural, social and human possessions of a people (Mugambi 2005:62).

Mugambi calls for a working arrangement between church, state and commerce in order to facilitate the responsible use of public resources in order to ensure the well- being of all (see Mugambi 2003:36-60). Mugambi is particularly concerned with the way resources are irresponsibly used and how the selfish use and the mismanagement of such resources results in the social inequalities that resulted from colonialism being perpetuated. All these are evidence of the sinfulness of humans and a denial of the values of the reign of God.

Mugambi's perspective is that those theologians who insist that the reign of God is to be regarded as a future event are perpetuating the acceptance of ungodly structures by oppressed people. He maintains that the teachings of Jesus call for us to live here and now as part of a new creation in accordance with the precepts of the reign of God.

> Is this a utopian dream or a realistic hope? I think it is a realistic hope that the human race is capable of realizing, if only we could suppress our own temptations towards greed, power and apathy; if only we could replace the law of the jungle with the law of God, imbued with righteousness (Mugambi 1989:100).

I have offered the above summary to establish that Mugambi calls for all areas of African society to be restructured in order to bring them into conformity with the reign of God. He refers to the church, and social and economic structures, as suffering from the imposition of Western cultural norms, which norms have not helped to hasten the coming of the reign of God. The Western focus on individualism assists in perpetuating the inequality. His notion of stewardship calls for available resources to be more responsibly shared in order to bring about a measure of equity that would result in no one having to experience extreme lack. Behind Mugambi's perspective of the desired future for African society lies a desire to see the introduction of the Jubilee with its subsequent restoration of goods and resources. This will result in poverty being eradicated and all people enabled to live with dignity, having sufficient to meet their needs. One might see this as the advent of the reign of God established through the agency of different religions, civil society, the state and business.

The anomaly in all of this is that Mugambi still states that only God can bring in his reign:

> Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God illustrating with his own life what it demands here and now on earth. But the total fulfilment of that kingdom will come at a time when man does not know, a time chosen by God himself (Mugambi 1989:90).

The conclusion may possibly be drawn that Mugambi's views on the cooperation of church, state and civil society to bring change into society as a whole, while still maintaining a critical attitude to any status quo, is a fair reflection of his approach to society and the coming of the reign of God.

In his theology of reconstruction, Mugambi constantly refers to a communal model of society that is typically African in orientation (see Mugambi 1997:78). One may identify the following features of his work that are relevant for understanding local Christian communities:

1. Firstly, the reconstruction of society is only possible through the redistribution of resources. The role of the church in this regard is to advocate for processes of societal transformation. There is some ambivalence in Mugambi's own writings on whether transformation should imply communal ownership of resources or not. In his earlier work (Mugambi 1989), he expresses much appreciation for traditional African societies and their ways of allocating resources (the means of economic production) on the basis of communal ownership. Mugambi seems to suggest that, while this is not equally possible in an urban context, such communality remains a strong possibility in rural communities.

2. Secondly, Mugambi concludes that in African society the family should be the basic unit. Nevertheless, in his recognition of the irreversible processes of industrialisation and urbanisation he acknowledges the breakdown in communal living. He sees the individualism that derives from the influence of consumerism in urban society as constituting a moral plague in Africa. A cohesive society cannot be built on individualism.

3. Thirdly, Mugambi is torn between the realities of a partly-industrialised Africa with its concomitant problems and the communality of traditional African culture, and how these two very different approaches may be reconciled. Individualism causes him to seek ways in which a responsible communal understanding of life can be introduced, even though he realises the reality of capitalistic consumerism that prevails in much

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of African society (see Mugambi 2005:55).

The dichotomy between those who live in urban industrialised communities in a Western capitalist context, and the many in rural communities who live in dependence upon their neighbours, lies at the root of the struggle Mugambi has in arriving at a workable model for reconstruction. This typically African situation (although many would say it prevails in most Third World countries), makes some measure of compromise necessary in order for those who have accumulated much to be drawn into a relevant way of sharing in order to redress the inequity in African society. It is this relevant way of sharing that Mugambi struggles with, and one can only admire his attempts to reconcile the dichotomy.

In summarising the above points, it may be concluded that Mugambi favours African communality with the need for people to be responsible for all of life as it ultimately belongs to God. This brings a concomitant responsibility for the individual to hold all things as if belonging to another. Along with this, Mugambi displays a healthy realism about African life that accepts the invasion of consumerism and the breakup of communal life that results from that invasion.

The conclusion may be drawn that any projected view of the reign of God would, in Mugambi's view, be decidedly communal with limited emphasis on the individual.

A further factor in Mugambi's view of the reign of God would be the question, "When will the reign of God be established?"

5.6.3 The advent of the reign of God

In this section of the chapter I seek to position Mugambi in terms of a broad spectrum of either futurist or realised eschatology. My intention is not to delve into the various approaches to eschatology and apply them to Mugambi's theology, as this would complicate the research project. I will approach the questions:

1. Is Mugambi's approach utopian (the reign of God now)?

2. Does Mugambi understand the reign of God as still to come?

Firstly, is Mugambi's approach utopian? Where Mugambi may be positioned in the broader spectrum of realised eschatology?

In order to answer this question the further question needs to be asked: What does Mugambi mean when he refers to the church as a utopian community? (Mugambi 2003:107). Mugambi categorises the church as "not of the world; but as a social reality, in the world" (Mugambi

2003:107). By this statement he refers to the need for Christians, as citizens, to be involved in the political, economic, and moral challenges facing their communities. These statements may be seen as descriptive of the way Mugambi views the reign of God, that is, as a temporal reality. This conclusion confirms the way Mugambi describes eschatology from an African perspective: "Future liberation must be understood in temporal, rather than spatial, terms" (Mugambi 1989:14). This quote comes from a context where Mugambi is questioning the Western view of the reign of God which he views as "heaven as another place", and where he describes heaven as "the presence of met material needs and desires" (Mugambi 1989:15). In this context Mugambi regards the church as an illustration of the reign of God without equating the life of the church with the reign of God. Rather, in Mugambi's view, the reign of God will see the emergence of a utopian society where equity is established in all areas of life. Therefore, in answer to the question, "Where should Mugambi be positioned in the broader context of realised eschatology?" the answer would be that Mugambi does not expect this world order to produce the reign of God, although he views the characteristics of the reign of God as goals to be strived for by the whole of society. "The ultimate realization of the kingdom of God rests with God alone" (Mugambi 1989:89).

Is Mugambi's approach futurist? By this I mean, does Mugambi view the reign of God as comprising a spiritual entity (outside of the material world)? Does Mugambi see the reign of God as yet to be established, either in an evolutionary fashion or as some cataclysmic event?

To the first of these questions, the answer may be given that Mugambi, as an African, does not accept the view that the *eschaton* will bring in a spiritual existence devoid of material aspects. In his view, reality will continue from an African perspective, in its present mode of, a visible and an invisible reality. Mugambi lays this out in detail in a section on traditional African religious thought (Mugambi 1989: 135-139). For Mugambi a person's interpretation of history is greatly influenced by his total worldview (Mugambi 1989:142). From this approach of Mugambi's it may be deduced that he, with an African worldview, would expect the reign of God to evidence material characteristics. My understanding of his view leads me to conclude that he does not favour a change in reality produced by a "new heaven and new earth".

The second question involves the final establishment of the reign of God. Mugambi has clearly indicated that the final manifestation of the reign of God is yet to come (see Mugambi 1989:89-90)

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Here and now, the kingdom of God is within the reach of all those who individually and collectively live according to the ideal demands of the kingdom of God. At the same time, however, the kingdom of God is always ahead of us human beings, because God is always ahead of our most earnest endeavours. The ultimate realisation of the kingdom of God rests with God alone (Mugambi 1989:89).

The following quote from Mugambi agrees with the above points:

Today, as in the early church, there are several interpretations of the proclamation that "the kingdom of God is at hand". One view is that the kingdom of God will come at an unknown and unannounced moment in the future. Another view is that the kingdom of God is progressively dawning on human society, and will be fully realised when Jesus returns to earth in his "second coming". Eschatology cannot fully explain the proclamation that the kingdom of God is "at hand", although Jesus talked of its full realization being a future event, e.g. Mark 13. The view that the kingdom is now fully here cannot also be an adequate interpretation of that remarkable proclamation. Both "realized" and "futurist" eschatology have scriptural references in the New Testament (Mugambi 1989:76).

5.6.3 How does Mugambi understand the consummation of the ages?

The issue of consummation is tied into the concept of time which for Mugambi is tied into one's view of history.

"Eschatology, in an African Christian theology, must be seen in terms of its historical significance" (Mugambi 1989:14).

"A person's interpretation of history is greatly influenced by his total worldview" (Mugambi 1989:142).

Because Mugambi, from my observations, has adopted the African notion of one reality with a visible and invisible aspect, any notion of a consummation that sees the present reality as ending would be foreign to Mugambi and he has stated so in direct terms:

If the problem of destiny were approached from the traditional African perspective as outlined earlier, the outcome would be considerably different: resurrection, eschatology, the second coming of Jesus, the final judgment and other notions would have no place in the traditional African approach, since they are not integral to the African religious heritage" (Mugambi 1989: 131).

Mugambi offers an interesting observation on the way African people do not visit the graves of family members. This is because the person is not the body; the body is simply a manifestation of the person. A human being is not a human body; the life manifested in that body continues in an unseen form (Conversations in Nairobi, March 2013).

Mugambi does not expect a future judgment day that needs to be waited for in a far off moment in a far-off future outside this world. For Mugambi, judgment is a continual factor, contingent upon the keeping or breaking of community norms. Mugambi contrasts what he

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calls the Western obsession with the future, with the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34:

> Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes (see Mugambi 2002:83)?

Mugambi disagrees with what he considers to be the way missionary teaching emphasised the coming of the reign of God. This was portrayed by the missionaries as a state that would be fully realised in heaven and would be absolutely discontinuous with present earthly existence. Mugambi's comment regarding this teaching points to the need for the balance to be restored between past and future with regard to Christian eschatology: "a balance which tends to be upset in favour of the future and at the expense of the present among many African Christians" (Mugambi 2002:84, 85). Mugambi states that the disciples placed Jesus in the company of Old Testament prophets whom Mugambi considers to be eschatological optimists (Elijah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist), who believed that, in spite of current social decadence and moral depravity, God would raise a new virtuous generation through the remnants of the dying society they lived in (see Mugambi and Magesa 2003:144). Mugambi questions the tendency in contemporary Africa to draw a sharp distinction between history and eschatology: "Theologically, it is important to emphasize that the *eschaton* is the culmination of history" (Mugambi and Magesa 2003:144). Mugambi maintains that there can be no eschatology without history. Mugambi therefore questions the traditional doctrines of heaven and hell expressed in spatial categories, regarding them as Hellenistic and not compatible with the bible and certainly not compatible with traditional African cosmology, which is monistic.

It is difficult to analyse Mugambi's view of the consummation as, at some points, he appears to favour a purely African view with a singular reality, while at others he seems to favour the consummation of all things when Christ returns. What is at issue here is not so much whether there is a consummation or not, but what form it will take. I would conclude that, for Mugambi, the consummation will see the introduction of the reign of God in the form of social, economic, religious and racial equality.

5.7 Conclusion

Mugambi has particular views on various aspects of eschatology. I will analyse those that pertain to the reign of God as I have dealt with them in this chapter. This conclusion draws on the chronological and schematic analysis of Mugambi's works.

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For Mugambi the reign of God is viewed as an antidote for the ills of society. I have pointed out that Mugambi describes the reign of God as opposing all forms of inequality, human selfishness and self-centredness In this, Mugambi holds fairly closely to the views expressed by the ecumenical movement and the WCC: that the reign of God will be an ideal society characterised by equality, justice and freedom (Smit 2002:567). Mugambi concurs with this by stating that the reign of God will see the emergence of a new society (Mugambi 1989:99). I have also shown that for Mugambi, the reign of God will be a perfection of the present age and order (5.4.3.). Mugambi also states that the future reign of God will not be in another place, but will be a better now (Mugambi 1989:15).

Mugambi's description of the reign of God points to a new social order where the wealthy share their finances, those who have goods share, a new harmonious society results, and all distinctions are rendered insignificant (see Mugambi 1989:99).

Mugambi's understanding of the reign of God is influenced by his background in liberation theology and the need to integrate Christianity into African religion and culture (see 5.4.1). This causes him to be suspicious of Western notions of eschatology because he views them as influenced by Greek philosophy which, in his view, has polluted Western Christianity and drawn it away from Hebrew approaches to reality. His problems lie with the three tier worldview adopted by the early church (5.4.3). This criticism is partly because of the way he favours an African view of reality where there is only one reality: the visible and the invisible. This view contrasts with the traditional Western Christian view of a three-tiered reality which, Mugambi feels, contrasts with the teachings of Jesus which favour the traditional African approach to the present and the future. Mugambi views the reign of God, in this context, as having no discontinuity between future and present earthly existence (Mugambi 2002:185). In his view, death is a transitory step to the next life where life continues in a disembodied form of existence (quoted in Getui 2008:149). The continuation of life in this reality is further emphasised by Mugambi (quoted in Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:123) where he states that life continues even though changes may occur, but an end is inconceivable. One may therefore conclude that Mugambi accepts the African notion of reality, i.e. there is one reality consisting of a visible and an invisible component.

When it comes to time, duration and destiny, Mugambi comments favourably about the African notion of time, stating that time is not measured as Westerners do by minutes and hours, but in terms of the contribution or violation done to the balance of relationships in the community (Mugambi 2006:179). This is difficult for Western people to conceive as we have

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always measured time in chronological terms.

Duration must be viewed in the context of African notions of matter and space (see Mugambi 2002:78). Thus, it must be understood in the framework of all reality (Mugambi 2006:78). Mugambi therefore allocates duration within the framework of African mono-sectional reality. This view precludes any place for another world or even for this world to come to an end (see Mugambi 2006:80). The reign of God must occur within the context of the one reality as there is no other reality (5.5.2.). There is therefore no future judgment in African thought, as judgment and the consequences of actions are received now (Mugambi 2002:83).

Mugambi's description of the reign of God is influenced by the Ecumenical movement and the WCC. He focuses on the societal and material well-being of people: a perfected present earthly existence (Mugambi 2002:85). The view of the reign of God held by the WCC is described by Smit as "an ideal society characterised by equality, justice, and freedom (Smit 2002:567). Mugambi's understanding of the reign of God encompasses freedom, liberation, and salvation (see 5.6.1.).

The reign of God in Mugambi's view will form a contrast to the form of rule exercised by human rulers who lord it over their subjects, dominate inferiors and exercise power rather than to demonstrate servanthood. Mugambi understands the reign of God to bring equal status to all and to inaugurate a new order of liberation and salvation. He refers to a number of paradoxes pertaining to the reign of God: to lead is to serve; a good shepherd risks his life for the sheep; to love others is to be prepared to die for them; conquering is to be conquered. To complete this description of Mugambi's view of the reign of God it may be noted that he speaks of a new social order where people have been freed from the selfish results of capitalistic individualism and consumerism with a resultant universal brotherhood.

How this reign of God will be brought about is significant. Mugambi views all leaders as instruments of the reign of God with responsibility to manage private and public resources well. Church, state and commerce must work together to manage the use of public resources. Leadership in every sphere of society is charged with taking responsibility. Mugambi views such a goal as a possible achievement (1989:100). Many aspects of Mugambi's view of the reign of God reflect aspects of the Jubilee. The agents of the reign of God will therefore be different religions, civil society, the state, and business. Yet, Mugambi states that only God can bring all this about. I view this as an anomaly!

I have shown in section 5.6.3 that Mugambi's notion of the reign of God is neither utopian nor futurist. Although Mugambi refers to the church as a utopian community (2003:107), I feel he is referring to the role the church should play in seeing the reign of God exhibited in politics, economics and morals (see Mugambi 1989:14). The reign of God will see the emergence of a utopian society, but that will ultimately occur in God's time (Mugambi 1989:89). The conclusion may be drawn that Mugambi holds a combination of realised and futurist notions concerning the reign of God although, when viewed from an African perspective, traditional views of the reign of God held by Western theologians will not fit into Mugambi's view as he approaches the reign of God from a more traditional African perspective.

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6. Mugambi on the Church and the Reign of God

6.1 Introduction

In *Transforming Mission* (1991), David Bosch focuses on mission and the way notions of mission have developed in the history of Christianity. Bosch begins by dealing with a number of subjects related to Jesus such as: Jesus and Israel, Jesus and the reign of God, Jesus and the law (Torah), and Jesus and his disciples. It is in the section on Jesus and the reign of God that he first mentions the notion of creative tension which I refer to later in this chapter (Bosch 1991:25-39). Bosch traces the development in the approach to missions in various branches of the church such as the Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal churches, and members of the WCC. He comments on how these developments affect the notion of the church and mission. In tracing the development of different models of the church, Bosch touches on different approaches to ecclesiology as well as covering a number of the relationships between the church and different doctrines which are of vital importance to the life of the church such as mission, the reign of God, salvation, and eschatology in general. In the process of dealing with the way the different models affect an understanding of mission he deals extensively with various approaches to understanding the nature of the church. In this description of the different approaches to the church, Bosch draws heavily upon the work of Avery Dulles (1974). Mugambi also deals with doctrines and notions of the church in his various writings, especially with regard to the church and the reign of God. It is in these areas that I will use Bosch's analysis as a tool to read, describe and assess Mugambi's views on the relationship between the church and the reign of God. As my intention in this study is to focus on the relationship between the church and the reign of God in Mugambi's theology, I have restricted myself in my examination of Bosch's major work (1991) to those portions that deal more succinctly with the subject of the church and the reign of God. I also draw upon three theologians Bosch uses as sources for informing his approach to understanding the nature of the church, namely Bonhoeffer, Dulles and Hoekendijk (see the bibliography). I also refer to Migliore and Grenz as more modern sources for understanding notions of the church as it relates to the reign of God. Dulles' book (New edition 2002), has an appendix on the ecclesiology of John Paul II, in which he describes the current approach of the Catholic Church to the nature of the church. I refer to this in order to describe the latest position taken by the Catholic Church.

The relationship between the people of God and the reign of God has been much discussed

throughout history. From the different views of the relationship between the people of God and the reign of God in the Old Testament (see Christopher Wright 1990: 3-44), to different notions of the people of God and the reign of God in contemporary times, there have been various opinions. These opinions cover such topics as the church as an institution of salvation, the church as the people of God (community); the church as a sacrament (*mysterion*); the church variously as a herald, a sign, a servant and, as a sociological impossibility.

My summary of the various views is based on Bosch's contribution to the discussion of the tension between different views of the church and the reign of God (1991: 368-400 and elsewhere). This summary of Bosch's work will enable me to arrive at a consensual view which I will use in order to position Mugambi in the way he views the relationship between the church and the reign of God. In a previous chapter, I examined the various views of the church offered by Dulles, such as institution, community, sacrament, sign and herald, and as servant, commenting on the development of these views within the church and making observations on their strengths and weaknesses. Dulles also offers a helpful description of the eschatological impact of the various models he refers to and I will first examine this description (2002:95-103). Completing this survey allows me to arrive at a description of those understandings of a creative tension between the church and the reign of God that say that the reign is already established and that the church is a living proof of that – and those who say the reign of God is not yet, that the church is merely a countersign of that and that the reign will be established primarily outside the church. This is the tension of whether, where and when the reign is supposedly established. As Bosch first introduces the notion of creative tension when discussing Jesus and the reign of God, I follow his order by examining the view adopted by him, regarding Jesus and the reign of God, as an aid to understanding his notion of this creative tension. In the second part of this chapter I focus on Mugambi's understanding of the relationship between the reign of God and the church as indicated in his writings, firstly in a chronological approach and then in a thematic approach. I follow this by positioning Mugambi on the quadrant drawn from Bosch's description of the "where and when" of the reign of God, enhanced by Dulles' spectrum on eschatology, reflecting the tension between different approaches to the church and the reign of God. I then position Mugambi on the map of different notions of the relationship between the church and the reign of God. I conclude by analysing Mugambi's position within the context of African theology.

6.2 Models of the relationship between the church and the reign of God

The issue of the relationship between the church and the reign of God is essentially one of salvation. Is the church just an instrument of the message of salvation or is the church already an embodiment of salvation? Dulles' portrayal of models of the church can help in establishing an answer to this question. In his theology Dulles develops the models of the church into different views of eschatology and in this next section I examine his conclusions.

6.2.1 Dulles on the models and the relationship between church and the reign of God

a) The first two models, sacrament and institution, have always found a place in the Catholic Church's ecclesiology because of the high view of ecclesiology held by that church. In the institutional model, attention is focused on the deposit Christ is believed to have left behind when he ascended. The three-fold deposit of doctrine, ministry and the sacraments is seen as an eschatological gift which can bring people to salvation until the end of the world has come. As the church administers this eschatological gift, it is seen as eschatological.

> The church is a kind of cable car or sacred chariot that takes men to their destination, lifting them over the abyss. If men stay aboard and avoid serious misconduct unbecoming a passenger, they may be confident of reaching their destination (Dulles 2002:102).

The problem with this model is that the church ceases to exist once it has completed the task of bringing people to the consummation. The social life of humans is terminated at the consummation; therefore there is no need for the social institution once the end has arrived (see Dulles 2002:102).

Neill (1968:74) describes this view: "From the counter-reformation until the second half of the nineteenth century, the prevailing emphasis was on the external, the legal and the institutional". This definition of the church developed until, in the twentieth century, the empirical Roman Catholic Church was identified with the mystical body of Christ. The church was thus seen as the perfect society (Bosch 1991:369). The Eastern Orthodox Church as well as the high Anglican Church adopted a very similar position. There has, however, been a significant tension within the Catholic Church over which of these two models should be emphasised, and Dulles opts for what could be seen as the currently-accepted position of the Catholic Church, namely a combination of the communal and institutional notions of the church (Dulles 1987:35-62). Much influence on the acceptance of a more communal understanding of the church has been exercised by African Catholic theologians such as

Benezet Bujo, Jean-Marc Ela, Laurenti Magesa, and Jesse Mugambi (Anglican), with a subsequent change of emphasis regarding the nature of the church (see the bibliography).

b) It is significant that Pope John Paul II chooses the description of the church as the "communion of God" as his preferred category for ecclesiology (see Dulles 2002:221-224). I will examine this model of the church next.

Dulles maintains that the church as a mystical communion is radically different from the institutional model described above. This is particularly true when viewed from the perspective of the *eschaton*. This mystical communion that is enjoyed by people with one another begins on earth and will be consummated in heaven. "This implies that the Church, which exists inchoately in this life, reaches its fullness in the life beyond" (Dulles 2002:102).

> The Church on earth, according to this ecclesiology, is not merely a promise or pledge of the heavenly Church, but is an anticipation of it. The Holy Spirit, the eschatological gift, has already been poured forth on the Christian community (Dulles 2002:102).

Much modern theology holds to the idea of the church as the earthly preview of the joys of heaven. Dulles describes this as based on the "inaugurated eschatology" of John's gospel (2002:104). A strong emphasis on identifying the life of the church on earth as being essentially the same as the life hereafter can lead to the path taken by Tillich. Tillich entertains a certain de-eschatologizing (Dulles' word) where heaven can be conceived of as the depth dimension of what is already given in history (see Dulles 2002:104). In the words of Ephesians 2:20-22, Christians are the living stones of a temple that is still being constructed. The next model that I will examine is that of the church as sacrament.

c) The church as sacrament is located in some way between the model of the church as institution and as mystical communion. Dulles says this model recognises both the distance of the church from heaven and the hidden presence within the church of the heavenly gift (Dulles 2002:106). *Lumen gentium* (Article 3) describes the church as the reign of God now present in mystery.

> The church is seen as eschatological insofar as it is a sacrament of the eschatological Kingdom. The sacrament is in the first place a sign. By its visible presence the Church reminds men of God's Kingdom and keeps alive their hope for the blessings of eternal life. But it is more than a sign. It betokens the actual presence, in a hidden way, of that to which it points (Dulles 2002:106).

We may therefore conclude that the sacramental model correctly portrays the church as a symbolic embodiment of the reign of God.

The three models I have examined thus far all deal with that which intrinsically comprises the church. The next two models are concerned more with the function of the church.

d) The fourth model views the church as a herald, a proclaimer of the reign of God. Dulles gives three reasons for this model being eschatological:

- The church, as herald, announces the arrival of the last times.

- The *kerygma* is eschatological because it announces that the final consummation is at hand.

- The *kerygma* is eschatological because it helps to prepare for the final consummation (For the above three points see Dulles 2002:107, 108).

Cullmann views the missionary activity of the church as an eschatological sign. We now live in the time between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus to judge all men. This is a time of grace (Cullmann 1950:150-152). This view of mission as being eschatological is common to both Catholic and Protestant persuasions of the church (see Dulles 2002:108).

A further aspect of the function of the church is the church as servant.

e) In the model of the church as servant, the focus is on the church serving the total human family by becoming engaged in improving the quality of life. One might conclude that it is possible to engage in serving without any possibility of an eschatological future. Some "secular theologians" such as Robinson, Winter and Cox portray the *eschaton* as almost negligible. Theirs is a minority view and other theologies of the church as servant take a strongly eschatological standpoint (see Dulles 2002:110). The Pastoral Constitution (Article 39) stresses the continuity between the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom that should be realised in history with their fulfilment in the final reign of God.

> The world is seen as the arena where these values are to be realized, and the hope of the Kingdom brought to bear as a motive for seeking justice and peace on earth (Dulles 2002:111).

In this model of the church, recognition is given to the generally-recognised tension (in both Catholic and Protestant theology) between the "already" and the "not yet" of the reign of God. In this model the church is seen as the Body of Christ, synonymous with the suffering servant, and therefore as the "servant church" (Dulles 1987:77). In this model, a sharp distinction is made between the church in its terrestrial form and the reign of God (see Dulles 1987:79).

Hans Küng comments on this approach to the church:

> It is the reign of God which the church hopes for, bears witness to, and proclaims. It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God which is to come and is at the same time already present, but its voice, its announcer, its herald. God alone can bring his reign; the church is devoted entirely to its service" (Küng 1968:96).

In this model, the church is seen as complete in any local congregation or gathering of believers. There does not have to be any larger ecclesiastical organization. Even house church groups are viewed as being valid expressions of the church. There are a number of dangers inherent in this model, as there are in any of the previous models, and Dulles deals with them (cf. Dulles 2002:181-194). An explanation of the above models from a biblical point of view may be found in Bosch.

6.2.2 Bosch on the biblical approach to the reign of God as portrayed by Jesus

In this section I trace the way in which Bosch deals with the tension between the present and future dimensions of God's reign and the way in which Christians have endeavoured to resolve this tension, particularly as it affects the understanding of the nature of the church. In particular I focus on the way Bosch portrays Jesus' own understanding of the reign of God. This will assist me in developing a foundation for understanding what Bosch means by a "creative tension".

Bosch points out certain factors regarding the concept of the reign of God:

a)   Firstly, the expression "reign of God" (*malkuth Yahweh*) does not appear in the Old Testament (There is a reference to God reigning in Exodus 15:18 but the term is not *malkuth Yahweh*). In this Bosch is in agreement with Bright's comment, "Outside the gospels the expression 'kingdom of God' is not very common in the New Testament, while in the Old Testament it does not occur at all" (1953:18). Bosch traces the development of various approaches to eschatology from late Judaism to the days of Jesus' ministry (see Bosch 1991:31). The views held were expressed as progressively:

- the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel,

- the rule of God extending worldwide from the temple, and

- to the oppressors becoming the oppressed.

This last view may be observed in the words of the disciples, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

Theologians today are agreed that the reign of God was the central focus of Jesus' preaching

and ministry. His own understanding of his work on earth focused on the reign of God coming in his person and culminating in the restoration of God's reign over all creation. Bosch maintains that it is not easy to define Jesus' view of the *basileia tou Theou* (1991:32) because of Jesus' use of parables that were designed to veil the mystery of the reign of God, but make it understandable to those with eyes to see. Yet Bosch is clear that the reign of God cannot be understood simply as exclusively future but must be understood as both future and already present (1991:32). He sees this as evident in the preaching of Jesus as recorded in various passages (Luke17:21, Mark1:15, Matt.4:17).

Bosch introduces the unresolved tension between the present and future dimensions of God's reign (1991:32). This tension has been the subject of much attention during the history of the church with that tension still remaining largely unresolved in our day. Various proponents of different views on this tension may be found in contemporary theology. If one traces the different approaches to eschatology as they developed in the history of the church, it is possible to observe that in the middle ages, because of the influence of Augustine and Origen, the emphasis fell on the reign of God being in the present, either in the individual believer or in the church as the reign of God on earth. This resulted in future eschatology being gradually pushed out of the mainstream of the church's teaching and being relegated to those who were considered heretics (Bosch 1991:32). During the nineteenth century, with the rise of liberal theology, the reign of God became equated more or less with a reflection of Western values and culture. Weiss and Schweitzer went in the opposite direction and denied any present reign of God. They understood Jesus to proclaim only a future kingdom.

> Today, however, most scholars agree that the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's reign in Jesus' ministry belongs to the essence of his person and consciousness and should not be resolved; it is precisely in this creative tension that the reality of God's reign has significance for our contemporary mission (Bosch 1991:32).

One can thus see that the pendulum has swung from the church as the reign of God to the church having no resemblance to the future reign of God. These developments had far-reaching effects upon the way the church was viewed. This was clarified in the section where I dealt with different views of the church (see chapter four).

b)   A second fundamental characteristic of Jesus' kingdom ministry is introduced by Bosch. This is to be observed in the indirect attack made by Jesus in his teachings on evil in all its forms. Jesus overcomes the power of evil (1 John 3:8). Then, as now, evil took many forms: pain, sickness, death, demonization, personal sin and immorality, the loveless self-

righteousness of those who claim to know God, the maintaining of special class privileges, the brokenness of human relationships (see Bosch 1991:33). This broad approach to the notion of sin has impacted the way in which theologians view the role of the church and I referred to this particular approach to the notion of sin when I dealt with Mugambi's understanding of the role of the church.

c)   Bosch next describes Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God. Jesus' focus is on the proclamation of the possibility of new life to those on the periphery of society, on the basis of the love of God. The self-understanding of being children of God and citizens of the kingdom means that such people can hold their heads high despite their low estate. Jesus mission ministry is seen in the inauguration of the long expected reign of God among the lowly and despised (see Bosch 1991:33). The object of this reign is the widows and orphans, the tax collectors and the sinners. The reign of God is therefore particularly manifested in Jesus' miracles of healing and his exorcisms. It was in the deprived context of the demonized, the sick, the poor, and places of chaotic manifestation such as storms and desert places that Satan's lordship was believed to be revealed (Hunter 1965:55). Jesus' ability to drive out demons, give food in the desert, and calm the storm, were evidence that the reign of God had come upon them (Luke 11:20 and Matthew12:28). Bosch focuses on the use the evangelists make of what he terms "religious words" to describe what Jesus did in the face of sickness, demonization, and poverty. One of these is "to save" (*sozein*) which the church mainly today tends to use as an exclusively religious term. Bosch notes eighteen times that the term is used for healing the sick. We must take note that there is no tension between saving from sin and saving from spiritual ailment, between the spiritual and the social (see Bosch 1991:33). Another word used widely is the term for "forgiveness" (*aphesis*) that includes the freeing of bonded slaves, the cancellation of monetary debt, eschatological liberation and forgiveness of sins. This application points to the all-embracing nature of God's reign that aims to break down walls of hostility and exclusion in whatever form they may appear (see Bosch 1991:33). Bosch asks the question, "Does this mean that God's reign is political?" He points out that a distinction needs to be made between our modern understanding of what is political and the context in which Jesus' ministry took place. Jesus' ministry does not easily lead us to a correct political order, or an economic system, or correct labour policies and relations with foreign powers. His ministry was not addressed to the political powers of his day but rather to the relatively small world of Palestine and to the Jewish rather than the Roman establishment. Attempts to make Jesus out to be a Zealot are discounted by Bosch as flying in the face of the

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biblical record (1991:34), yet there can be no doubt that the manifestation of Jesus ministry was eminently political. His declaration of lepers, tax-collectors, sinners and the poor to be "children of God's kingdom" had very definite political connotations. The Jewish establishment saw it as such! His implied criticism of the status quo in the establishment of the day expresses a profound discontent with the way things were, and a desire to see them change. This criticism is expressed in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7 and Luke chapter 6). In commenting on the teaching of Jesus, Bosch describes it thus:

> It assures the victims of society that they are no longer prisoners of an omnipotent fate. Faith in the reality and presence of God's reign takes the form of a resistance movement against fate and against being manipulated and exploited by others (Bosch 1991:34).

The well-established order of society was being challenged and overturned by Jesus and his disciples. The statement that Jesus was the embodiment of God's presence among people was almost beyond belief. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray "your kingdom come", it was a challenge defying the status quo. This was how the authorities understood the ministry of Jesus. The way in which his charges were drawn up reflected their understanding that his teachings were seditious. So his crucifixion was as a result of his perceived "political" claims. (Bosch 1991:34).

These observations place us in a position to apply truth from the teachings of Jesus to our own time. Because of the fundamental difference between our world and his, we cannot simply apply his words and ministry to our time or simply deduce principles from his ministry. What may be used is the way in which he advocated the cause of the poor, served those on the periphery, raised up the oppressed and broken and, above all, proclaimed the Jubilee (the year of the Lord's favour). One may say that the reign of God may be interpreted as the expression of God's caring authority over the whole of life. However, opposition to the establishment of this reign of God is a reality, so we need to remain impatient and yet patient. We know that we cannot usher in God's reign, even as Jesus did not. His was an inauguration and not a consummation. We, too, are called to point the way to God's ultimate reign. Bosch comments that, "As we pray, 'your kingdom come', we also commit ourselves to initiate, here and now, approximations and anticipations of God's reign"."God's reign will come since it has already come" (Bosch 1991:35). His kingdom (reign) will come! It will be seen that Bosch's analysis of Jesus ministry and the tension in understanding the reign of God is of particular significance for understanding reconstruction theology and also for understanding

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Mugambi's approach to the relationship between the church and the reign of God.

6.2.3 Bosch's use of Dulles to describe the tension between the church and the reign of God

Drawing on Dulles' study (1976, 1987), Bosch presents a spectrum of five major ecclesial types, namely the church as an institution, as the mystical body of Christ, as a sacrament, as a herald, or as a servant (1991:368). Each of these is indicative of a different understanding of the nature of the *eschaton*. I offer a brief explanation of each of these models and then delve more deeply into three main approaches to the church in subsequent subsections. The following diagram illustrates where these different approaches to the church fit into the spectrum presented by Bosch. I will further examine the relationship between models of the church and eschatology as followed by Bosch using Dulles.
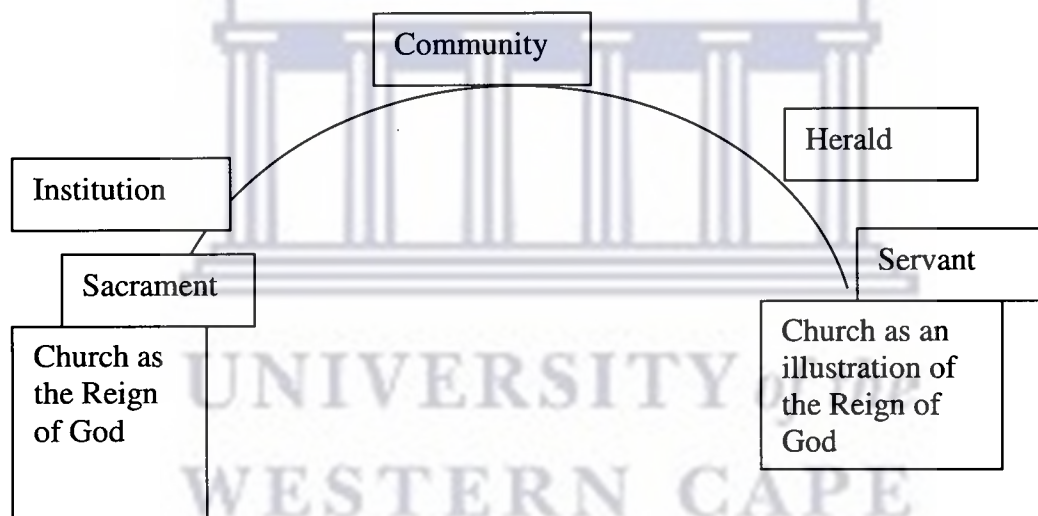
In *Lumen Gentium* (9) the church is called the "visible sacrament of saving unity". The church is also called "the universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen Gentium* 48). So, in 1975 the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (59) asserts, "While the church is proclaiming the kingdom of God and building it up, it is establishing itself in the midst of the world as the sign and instrument of this kingdom" (cf. Bosch 1991:374). Bosch shows how there was a development from understanding the church as the reign of God to an acceptance of the church being a sacrament and sign of the unity of God's reign (Bosch 1991:368-376). Details of this development may be found there as well as in Dulles (2002:181-194). The main

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expressions of the church and the reign of God are to be found in Orthodox theology and Western theology, which comprises Catholic and Protestant theology.

6.3 Orthodox notions of the church and its relationship to the reign of God

I have referred to the Orthodox teachings on the nature of the church in 4.5.1 (pages 183 and 184), in this section my concern is more with the church's relationship to the reign of God.

In Orthodox thinking, faith in God's promises yet to be fulfilled changed to an understanding that the reign of God was already consummated in the church. Bosch comments on the Orthodox Church as having a domesticated version of Paul's teachings in the New Testament letters (1991:197). The essentially Jewish understanding of the historical Jesus gradually gave way to a preoccupation with the exalted Christ. This led to the whole of the Christ event being spiritualized. The influence of Gnosticism resulted in a focus on the soul eventually becoming part of the angelic order (1991:197). A neo-Platonistic otherworldliness bagan to predominate in the Orthodox churches with salvation being viewed as an escape from this world (Bosch 1991:198). This occurs in various degrees and stages of spiritual life until the soul achieves perfect union with God. Such inroads were serious and their influence is still with us today (see Morphew 2001).

In Eastern Orthodoxy the eventual understanding was that the church embraced all of life. Ecclesiology became primary, subsuming both eschatology and pneumatology (Bosch 1991:201).

> The church is the great sacrament of salvation that Christ has instituted in the world. It is the ark of salvation and the inaugurated kingdom of God (Maximos 1996)

This statement by the Metropolitan of Pittsburgh shows how the identification of the church with the reign of God is almost total. A further comment from an Orthodox theologian emphasises this identification of the church and the reign of God.

> The manifestation of the Kingdom of God is inaugurated in the Church and through the Church, as the historic Body of Christ into which all of the faithful are incorporated as members, and as such constitute the people of God (Papademetriou 1996:38).

Bosch comments on the way the Orthodox Church became inward looking thus becoming almost totally focussed on ecclesiology that eschatology became almost forgotten (see Bosch 1991:201).

Irenaeus viewed the church as the true bastion against heretics; Cyprian held that the only way to obtain salvation was through membership of the church; the early church fathers

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viewed the church as an institution for salvation. As I have stated above (p185) the church became synonomous with civilisation. The concerns voiced by Mugambi and many others about the imposition of culture as part of early Christian mission reflect the attitude of the Orthodox church with regard to the church and civilisation. A further impact came through the high Christology of the Orthodox Church in which Christ was increasingly depicted in terms reminiscent of the emperor (see Bosch 1991:202).

In conclusion, the Greek Orthodox Churches may be seen to have a developed inaugurated eschatology in which the focus is on the church as the fulfilment of the promised reign of God.

6.4 Catholic and Protestant notions of the church and its relationship to the reign of God

Augustine has had a major impact on the understanding of the nature of the church and salvation which continues to influence Catholic and Western churches to this day. According to Bosch (1991:216) Augustine's theology resulted in a dualistic view of reality which became predominant in Western Christianity. In this view salvation became a private matter in which the world was of no importance.

> The hope of the kingdom of God was transformed into a hope of "heaven", the place or state of life in which those who have done good will be rewarded and which was to be won as a prize for endurance (Bosch 1991:217, 218).

It should be noted that Augustine did not identify the empirical church with the reign of God. In later centuries this fusion did take place and the Catholic Church began to be identified with the "city of God". Augustine, however, was convinced that the ideal state would never be attained in this present reality, but only in the coming reign of Christ (see Bosch 1991:220, 221).

Bosch has a large section dealing with the missionary paradigm of the Catholic and Protestant churches (see Bosch 1991: 214-261). This section is mainly focused on changes in understanding mission. It does, however, highlight some approaches to the church and the reign of God, as I have alluded to above. In finishing this section, Bosch returns to the eschatology of the Protestant Reformation. Bosch refers to the way Calvin understood the connection between mission and eschatology. There was no distinction between premillenialism and postmillennialism as developed in later Protestant theology. Bosch quotes De Jong in support of this conclusion:

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Millennial hopes oscillated between a highly complex chiliasm or premillenialism with Adventist tendencies and a low-keyed postmillenialism with its belief in the gradual improvement of human conditions through Christian benevolent and educational programs (De Jong 1970:22, also quoted in Bosch 1991:259).

Bosch comments that eschatology has always been an area where fantasies have the opportunity of running free. This resulted in diverse opinions, yet with a large degree of agreement in certain areas. Bosch refers to four common ingredients in Puritan eschatology:

- the anticipation of the downfall of Rome;

- the influx of Jews and Gentiles into the true church;

- the evolution of an era of true faith and material blessing among all people,

- and the firm conviction that England was divinely mandated to guide history to its appointed end (Bosch 1991:260).

The first three elements of the Puritan notion of eschatology still hold sway in much Western Protestant eschatology today, especially in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. Bosch refers to the changes in eschatological thinking as he develops the ongoing change in views of mission in the sections contained in pages 214–377. He summarises the elements that express the Catholic and Protestant approaches to mission as follows:

The church cannot be viewed as the ground or goal of mission. The character of the church is provisional; the final word is not the church but the glory of the Father, and the Son in the Spirit's liberty (Moltmann 1977:19).

The church is not the reign of God. The church displays glimmers of the imminent reign of God, of coming reconciliation, peace and new life. Yet, wherever Christ overcomes the power of evil, that reign comes. This should be most visible in the church, but also in society.

Mission is more than calling people into the church to await the hereafter. Those whom the church approaches in mission are subject to social, economic, and political conditions in this world. So, liberation includes bringing people into life in Christ as well as delivering people from the bondages of history.

The church must be understood as a "dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22)

However, it is the work of the Spirit to bring the church into the consummated reign of God (see Taylor 1972:22)

Whenever the church avoids involvement in the world and developes a laager attitude it becomes irrelevant to the world in which it is situated. In light of the dictum that "the church

that is not involved in mission cannot be called church", isolationism becomes a seedbed for heresy. Snyder (1983:11) has written a devastating critique of the evangelical church's denial of the social aspects of the gospel. The Fundamentalist controversy created a dichotomy that should not have been there.

The structures of the church should be arranged in such a way that they render a service to society.

Because of this relatedness to the world, the church must always operate as the bearer of good tidings.[32]

Recent developments in different views of the church have led to an abiding tension between two views of the church and the reign of God that appear to be irreconcilable.

At one end of the spectrum, the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of the message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration, in word and deed, of God's involvement with the world. Where one chooses the first model, the church is seen as a partial realization of God's reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. Where one opts for the alternative perception, the church is, at best, only a pointer to the way God acts in respect of the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution towards the humanization of society – a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of conscience raiser (Bosch 1991:381).

In conclusion, one may agree with Bosch's description of the church as not yet the reign of God, but that the church is the anticipation of that reign in history (cf. Bosch 1991:387, 388).

A question that needs to be answered in the light of these different approaches is: If the church is both an instrument and the embodiment of the message of salvation, where is the reign of God to be established? Will it be established in the world or in the church? The other question is: When will the reign of God be established? Will it be in the future or is it already present?

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[32] For detail on these points see Bosch 1991:377, 378.

I will use a quadrant to illustrate diagrammatically the possible answers to these questions:

WORLD

ALREADY ———————|——————— NOT YET
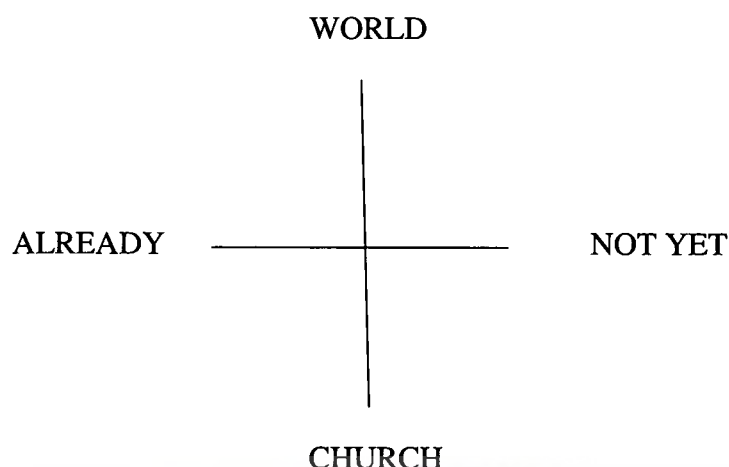
CHURCH

Various positions may be plotted on the above quadrant. In the following section I will endeavour to analyse Mugambi's place on the quadrant by using both Dulles' spectrum of the church and eschatology and Bosch's analysis of the development of notions of the church and mission as guides.

6.5 Mugambi's views on the relationship between the church and the reign of God

I have already established that Mugambi has not produced a systematic theology with regard to the church and to the reign of God. His view on the relationship between the church and the reign of God is similarly without specific reference. The method I will use to establish Mugambi's views is the same as I used to establish his views on the church and on the reign of God. I first examine Mugambi's view on the relationship between the church and the reign of God using a chronological approach to his writings. I then follow with a thematic approach. I then attempt to define his view and place it on the quadrant drawn from Bosch's detailed description of tension between the church and the reign of God.

6.6 A chronological examination of the relationship between the church and the reign of God in Mugambi's writings

6.6.1 *African Christian theology: An Introduction* (1989)

In this publication Mugambi refers to different approaches to the reign of God and comments on them. A section dealing with "Human regimes and the kingdom of God" contains many references to the church and the reign of God. Mugambi begins by criticising those views which focus predominantly on the future where the reign of God means a "heavenly and eschatological realm", thus giving justification for a milleniarist approach to Christianity

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which ignores the earthly welfare of people (see Mugambi 1989:129).

> The ultimate purpose of existence, according to this view, is to prepare the soul for eternal salvation, because the alternative to salvation is believed to be damnation in hell (Mugambi 1989:129).

Mugambi then criticises any milleniarist approach to the reign of God and concludes that such teaching causes conflict with those who believe that humans have an obligation to make this world a better place to live in. Milleniarists choose to adopt a literalist approach to those sections of the bible which refer to "the reign of God", "the reign of heaven", "the resurrection" and "the second coming of Christ".

Contrasted to milleniarists are those who maintain that Jesus was concerned to change society into an equitable format where all were reconciled and the reign of God inaugurated a new social order in this world. The reign of God then becomes an earthly alternative to human regimes that undermine proper human relationships. In this view, the church models the reign of God in order for secular society to emulate its functions, as it gives direction for proper transformation towards an ideal human society within history. Mugambi is critical of both these approaches, viewing the first as irrelevant and the second as isolating the church from the rest of society (see Mugambi 1989:129 & 130).

Mugambi then asks the question, "To what extent can the church be identified with the reign of God in the midst of human regimes" (Mugambi 1989:131)? He then answers the question in the following way:

> However the concept of the 'kingdom of God' is defined, it seems that identifying the church with that concept would lead to misunderstanding. If Christians regard themselves as representatives of the 'kingdom of God' on earth, they necessarily imply that non-Christians cannot share in God's realm unless they are converted to Christianity. Yet there are numerous brands of Christianity, many of which are antagonistic to one another, overtly or covertly. Moreover, the Christian faith maintains that God is the author and director of all history. It would be contradictory to insist that God has doomed most human beings – his special creatures – to hell, merely because they have not become Christians for whatever reason (Mugambi 1989:131).

Mugambi expresses the view that, because the concept of the reign of God is specifically Judaeo-Christian, it may be argued that human destiny does not have to be viewed from this perspective, along with all the theological and historical assumptions joined to it. He then introduces the concept of destiny from an African traditional perspective and states that traditional Christian aspects of destiny are meaningless when viewed from this perspective: "(Such) notions have no place in the traditional African approach, since they are not integral

to the African religious heritage" (Mugambi 1989:131).

Mugambi defines the responsibility of the church in society as the call to live according to the way of the reign of God. "Christians have no greater vocation in society than to live up to this way of the kingdom of God" (Mugambi 1989:79). In doing this the church offers a critique of the status quo as well as making a contribution to people's self-fulfilment.

The church is therefore the servant of the kingdom of God, in the sense of being subjected to the way of that kingdom. With his whole life Jesus illustrated what it means to live practically under the compulsion of the kingdom of God (Mugambi 1989:79).

6.6.2 *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War (1995).*

In the first chapter of this publication, Mugambi criticises the Roman Catholic Church for the way it identifies the church with the reign of God. Because the church evolves within history, it is subject to human limitations and failures. The church cannot fully emulate the ideals of Christ as it is subject to a historical legacy, especially in having to perpetuate that legacy (see Mugambi 1995:8). Mugambi's contention is that the ministry of Jesus focused on social change that would facilitate the emergence of the reign of God. The church is unable to do this, especially since the time of Constantine when the church became conformed to the status quo. Mugambi states that the reign of God is still before us and constantly calls for humans, the church included, to mend their ways. This dichotomy results in a tension between the desire to conform and a desire to transform society (see Mugambi 1995:95). Mugambi expresses the view that the church and the reign of God cannot be equated and that the best efforts of humankind cannot result in the reign of God being established.

6.6.3 *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology (2003).*

Mugambi has a subsection dealing with "Eschatological Paradigms" and refers to the prophets of the Old Testament, including John the Baptist, whom he describes as eschatological optimists. He proceeds to link the teaching of Jesus with theirs, associating Jesus with them.

> As a herald of hope Jesus made a very strong impact in rural Palestine. Multitudes of poor peasants followed him for days on end to hear him, in anticipation of the new era which he inaugurated. His crucifixion may have made some of them disillusioned, but the Pentecost gave many of them a new mandate to help in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The universal church is the

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visible outcome of that mandate. It lives to facilitate this project (Mugambi 2003:144).

Mugambi then expands his view on eschatology and history, that is, that the *eschaton* is the culmination of history. He points out that, from his perspective, improved physical and social conditions were integral components of the inauguration of the reign of God. For Mugambi, the role of the church (in Africa) is to follow this holistic approach in obedience to what he terms Jesus' call to bring life in abundance. From this it may be concluded that Mugambi has a fairly materialistic view of the reign of God. His notion of the abundant life Jesus promised is that humans can bring this about, but incompletely. While humans obviously have a part to play, it cannot be concluded that it is their responsibility to bring in life in abundance. Whatever Mugambi has said here, needs to be balanced against his repeated assertion that only God can bring in the reign of God.

6.6.4 *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003)

In a chapter dealing with "Ecclesiology and Economics", Mugambi decries the way Africa has become an importer of food and a dumping ground for outdated goods. He then asks the question, "Where have the Christian churches been in this process of deterioration?" The question is asked because Mugambi views the call for the Christians to be "salt and light" as applying to the church generally. He concludes that the churches have become so conformed to the political and economic realities of the day that they fail to provide insights for creative and reconstructive initiatives in Africa (see Mugambi 2003:198). At issue here is the way Mugambi seems to equate the end results of positive reconstruction with the reign of God.

> Churches could lead the way for secular and social structures; churches ought to become torch bearers into the future, rather than follow the models designed by secular leadership (Mugambi 2003:199).

Earlier in the chapter under review Mugambi refers to the Lord's Prayer and shows how the prayer emphasises the following aspects:

> Revere God for providence; beseech God to bring the reign of God to humankind so that divine will prevail in society; pray for daily food and shelter; pray for forgiveness of debts, just as the disciples should forgive; pray for protection from hardships; pray for deliverance from adversities (Mugambi 2003:186).

From my observations in Chapter 3 it is clear that the above quote closely resembles what Mugambi defines as the goal of reconstruction theology.

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6.6.5 *Christianity and African Culture* (2009) (First published as *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* in 1989).

In the concluding comments to this book, Mugambi focuses on birth, marriage and death in African traditional thought. He presents a traditional African understanding of death as being a transition into another mode of existence and not as the end of human life. Mugambi holds this position despite Christian teaching that the deceased will join the kingdom of God (Mugambi 2009:202). Mugambi also refers to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection as giving people hope that they will see their deceased relatives again in heaven (Mugambi 2009:203). Mugambi refers to this as an "eschatological hope". In line with this approach, Mugambi states that the focus of the Eucharist is that Jesus conquered death once and for all, and that the church – the Christian community – is the new community which Jesus inaugurated (Mugambi 2009:205). Mugambi finishes this section with the declaration that, "the universal and unchangeable mission of the Christian church is to proclaim, in word and deed, the 'Kingdom of God'which Jesus has inaugurated" (see Mugambi 2009:206). He asks the question, "What does it mean to announce, as Jesus did almost two thousand years ago, that 'the Kingdom of God' is at hand?" Mugambi believes that the church has the task of working out the meaning of this statement as it applies to the church's functions within the culture in which it exists. One may conclude that, according to this volume, the church and the reign of God may not be equated, but the church is complementary to the reign of God.

6.6.6 *Contextual Theology across Cultures* (Mugambi and Guy 2009)

This book is comprised of letters between Mugambi and his son's father-in-law, Michael Guy. Many of Mugambi's statements and responses in these letters are relevant for analysing his views on the church and the reign of God. Although Mugambi does not refer directly to the reign of God he does allude to criteria that have a bearing on the subject of the relationship between the church and the reign of God. Mugambi is critical of Roman Catholic ecclesiology which, as I have shown in chapter four (and section 6.4.2.), tends to equate the church with the reign of God (see Mugambi and Guy 2009:60).

In terms of understanding reality and the makeup of the cosmos, Mugambi states that, at the level of theological principles, early Christianity is much closer to the African cultural and religious heritage than to Anglo-Saxon tradition (Mugambi and Guy 2009:82). He asks the question, "Whose reality counts?" He points out that most Africans feel that the bible condones and supports African culture (Mugambi and Guy 2009:83). Mugambi maintains

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that Jesus wanted to change history, beginning with individuals such as his twelve disciples and every other individual whom he encountered (Mugambi and Guy 2009:320). These few comments emphasise the way Mugambi views things from an African perspective with the resultant negation of Western theological approaches to much that comprises eschatology. In his view of cosmology he puts forward the mono-sectional reality of African traditional religion which logically precludes the traditional Western (biblical?) notion of new heavens and a new earth.

6.7 A thematic view of Mugambi's approach to the relationship between the church and the reign of God

In this section I examine some aspects of Mugambi's writings that I consider may be important for understanding his view of the relationship between the church and the reign of God. These aspects include his views on cosmology, his approach to ATR (African Traditional Religion), his view on the influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity, social reconstruction, his views on eschatology, his ecclesiology, his views on destiny, and his views on the role of the church in relation to the coming reign of God.

Mugambi states how the bible should be approached, which is significant for analysing the themes Mugambi utilises in developing reconstruction theology in an African context.

> African Christianity needs an ecumenically inclusive, critically consistent and contextually tuned approach to the Bible, utilizing the latest tools of biblical analysis. Obsolescence and contextual irrelevance will make many young Africans indifferent or even antagonistic to a faith which, at this time in history, is constructively appropriate on our troubled continent (Mugambi in Kinoti and Waliggo 1997:84).

The interpretation of themes in Mugambi's theology calls for an understanding of his background in liberation theology, his inclusive ecumenism, his contextual approach to the bible, and the influence of scholars favouring the remythologizing of Christianity, not only in an African context, but generally (see chapter 5 of this study).

I can now approach the relationship between the reign of God and the church in the themes which Mugambi uses.

6.7.1 Cosmology

Mugambi draws a distinction between the worldview of the early church and what he considers the worldview applied during the formulation of early Christian creeds, which he considers to be based on Greco-Roman cosmology. He quotes the apostle's creed as an

example:

> Spatially, a three-sectional worldview was taken for granted by the early Church Fathers and theologians when they formulated their doctrinal theological statements of the Christian faith (Mugambi 2009:50).

The statements concerning Jesus life, death and resurrection in the creeds point to a three tiered reality which Mugambi views critically. He does not accept the reality that views heaven as the abode of God, earth the abode of humans, and hell the abode of Satan and the dead.

The three sections of the universe, according to that worldview, were believed to be absolutely different from each other, as were the three modes of existence associated with those sections (Mugambi 2009:50).

Mugambi then describes the traditional Christian teaching with regard to the fallen state of humankind, the gift of salvation through Christ's death on the cross, the hope of eternal life, an existence with God in heaven and the destruction of Satan. Those who are thus rescued from Satan will be saved from eternal damnation in hell, to live in heaven eternally. Mugambi sees this traditional approach as emanating from Paul and not necessarily being the original teaching of the early church as presented in the gospels. He attempts to show that the original view of the cosmos was Jewish and that it lined up more with African cosmology (see Mugambi 2009:50-52). Mugambi completes this section with the following two statements:

> [For the majority of the African population] the traditional African worldview is the only one with which they are acquainted. According to modern understanding it does not make sense to talk of heaven as a spatial location (Mugambi 2009:52).

Mugambi expands on the need to resolve the apparent conflict between three different approaches to the cosmos. He believes they can be reconciled and the Christian faith communicated intelligibly to those who hold a traditional African worldview. For this to happen, many of the concepts of the bible that have been taken from Greek philosophy would have to be reinterpreted in terms that are meaningful to Africans. One instance of this would be the use of the term, *"logos"* as in "the word became flesh" (John 1:14). Mugambi is intrigued by the way Mark, in his gospel, has omitted the nativity. He takes this to mean that the relationship between Jesus and God was manifested most clearly in his ministry, rather than in the account of the nativity (for relevant comment on the African roots of Mark see Oden 2011).

> The relationship which Jesus developed with the people among whom he lived is instructive of his relationship to God and of the nature of the "Kingdom of God" which he inaugurated (Mugambi 2009:54).

The conclusion that may be drawn from the above is that the reign of God is found in the actions of Jesus as well as in the actions of the Christian church. Mugambi would not draw a straight parallel between the two, but would view the actions of the church as making a contribution to the reign of God, especially when they line up with the purposes of God.

Mugambi's cosmology causes him to have an understanding of the reign of God that is closer to a material than a spiritual view and yet, having said that, when Mugambi approaches the issue of salvation, he does focus on the spiritual aspect of life (see Mugambi 1989:108–111).

6.7.2 Mugambi's view of ATR (African Traditional Religion)

There is an undeniable influence of ATR on Mugambi's thinking that derives from the influence of his grandparents, especially his paternal grandfather, Mzee Mugambi wa Nthigai, who early in his life rejected Christianity, viewing it as a tool of colonialism. As a young person Mugambi spent most of his weekdays with his paternal grandparents, struggling to rationalise his African heritage (see Gathogo 2011:23).

With well-opinionated sets of grandparents who were proud of their African cultural heritage, Jesse Mugambi's interest in African religion versus the Christian faith of his immediate parents was stirred. As a scholar in later life, this interest made him seek a correlation between Christianity and African culture, resulting in his book, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989) (Gathogo 2011:26).

The cultural heritage Mugambi absorbed, along with the way he embraced liberation theology, shows itself in a ready acceptance of aspects of ATR that would not find acceptance in evangelical circles. Such aspects may be highlighted as: the way he embraces a monistic worldview; the way he equates the gods of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism; his tendency towards universalism, and his materialistic approach to eschatology. Because of these influences Mugambi views the Christian church as only one among a number of players bringing in the reign of God, such as other religions, civil society, governments, educational establishments, and economic institutions. Yet, in spite of the multitude of players involved in Mugambi's notion of the coming reign of God, he still insists that only God will finally bring in that reign. This should be viewed from the perspective of his opinion that there is only one God who is worshipped by all different religions in different forms.

6.7.3 Worldview and the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy

A recurring theme throughout Mugambi's writings is the dichotomy he finds between a Western worldview and the traditional African worldview. This is significant as Mugambi views the creedal statements of the church as having emerged through a departure from the biblical worldview, which he views as closer to the African worldview. His view is that the notion of a three-dimensional worldview entered the church through Greek philosophy and is at variance with a biblical view of reality. In his opinion, one cannot view one worldview as superior to another, only different. Mugambi's approach is in agreement with the African worldview in which there is only one reality. Mugambi views many of the teachings of the Christian church as being later aberrations brought in through non-Christian influences. All of this has influenced his notion of the church and the reign of God in such a way that he tends towards a combination of ATR and liberation theology in his understanding of salvation. The result is that he views the reign of God as mainly social reconstruction.

6.7.4 Social reconstruction

In my view, Mugambi's notion of the reign of God is more sociological than theological. The coming of a new order when the reign of God is inaugurated will mean a number of changes, mainly to do with social order and improvement, such as material and social wellbeing; political and psychological health; liberation for the poor and exploited, the captives, the physically disabled, and the mentally depressed (see Mugambi 1989: 75-97). Mugambi refers to Luke 4:16-21 as the basis for his conclusion that the reign of God will consist of a "new social order":

> In this new social order, for which Jesus applies the code "the Kingdom of God".....a new harmonious society is created in which economic, social, cultural, religious and racial distinctions exist but are rendered insignificant by the strong bond of universal brotherhood (Mugambi 1989:99).

The point to be made is that Mugambi offers an understanding of the reign of God which is within history or else, in his view, it would have no relevance for the present. This notion of the reign of God being within current history, influences the way he understands the relationship between the church and the reign of God. As all aspects of society need to be involved in helping the reign of God emerge into a utopian society, the church becomes only one agent aiding the emergence of God's reign (see Mugambi 1995:225, 2003:74). In Mugambi's view, the church must play an instructional role, helping society to move towards the reign of God.

6.7.5 Mugambi's view of eschatology

Throughout his writings Mugambi offers an understanding of eschatology which is historical and temporal. "Future liberation must be understood in temporal rather than spatial terms" (Mugambi 1989:14). The notion of eschatology involving another world is unacceptable to Mugambi. Eschatological hope is viewed in terms of total liberation. In holding this view Mugambi follows the views held by James Cone (see Mugambi 1989:18).

> African Christians, even when they conceive of Christianity in terms of a new life in heaven, often formulate their understanding of heaven in material categories, i.e. not as an alternative to or as something that is posed over against the material. Heaven becomes one way of expressing material needs and desires which political oppression and economic exploitation has hindered them from enjoying in the present life (Mugambi 1989:15).

According to Mugambi, in the light of the above understanding of hope for the future in African culture, Christian eschatology is not only meaningless, but irrelevant (see Mugambi 1989:143). In Mugambi's view of eschatology, the church has a role to play in educating the various components of society on the need to follow the way laid down by Jesus in order for an equitable society to emerge.

6.7.6 Ecclesiology

Mugambi uses different models of the church at various times. However, Mugambi does appear to favour the models of the church as community and the church as servant.

In *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989), commenting on the church's response to the sufferings of the contemporary world, Mugambi refers to the church as "the body of Jesus" (1989:ix). On the following page (x) he refers to the church's responsibility to alleviate the suffering of those whom it evangelises. This in some measure indicates his view of the role of the church.

Mugambi (1989:5) stresses the view that the notion of community stretches far beyond the "nuclear family" to include the clan. Throughout his writings Mugambi makes a strong case for the church to return to communality and thus recover the ethos of the early Christian community. Mugambi is critical of the church's current understanding of community, especially from the perspective of the modern missionary enterprise. He also criticises the way the mission societies perpetuated the divisions of Western Christianity in their own denominational insularity.

In traditional African society, a family was a corporate group which included a whole

household, with grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, uncles, brothers, sisters and so on. The family was an extended kinship group, whose network of relations spread wider and wider, to include the clan and, subsequently, the whole ethnic community. Furthermore, the church was introduced as a new fellowship of believers, which could also be regarded as a family in a different sense. Thus the distinction came to be made between believers and non-believers, Christians and non-Christians – a distinction which was not possible in African society, since the ethnic identity of an individual incorporated his religious and cultural heritage (Mugambi 1989:42)

In the above quote three vital points become clear:

1. Mugambi insists on an all-embracing notion of community in the African church, basically including the universal church (see Zizioulas and Ratzinger in Volf 1998 for argument in this regard).

2. His notion of family is not influenced by the religious, natural and ethnic differences in the community, which he views as inconsequential since the whole is more important than the individual.

3. Religious and cultural factors have to be taken into account in any notion of the church (family) without them being definitive.

In a chapter dealing with "Jesus and rural society" Mugambi (1989:95) refers to the church as a "community of disciples". Mugambi understands the church as a community within the local community, but very much part of that local community. The approach Mugambi adopts may be termed incarnational: the church must demonstrate that it is a part of that community.

This assessment of Mugambi's communal view of the true church is confirmed by Dedji:

As a logical development of his argument, Mugambi, who is very keen on re-interpreting old cultural myths, promotes the revitalising of the African sense of community by recalling that African social engineering has evolved a system in which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationship with others (Dedji 2003:67).

Mugambi's approach reflects the influence exerted by John Mbiti on his thinking. This influence is significant in the way Mugambi has developed his understanding of church. Mbiti describes the type of church which Mugambi would like to see in Africa. Mbiti maintains that the nature of the church is corporate and the church needs to act corporately in the life of the corporate community.

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> By urging his followers to acknowledge the dignity and cultural integrity of other people he (Jesus) established a new community and gave it a new identity – which grew to become the nucleus of the Church. Within this new community there was to evolve a fuller sense of self and an awareness of the universality of humankind (Mugambi 1995:90).

The new community was mandated to proclaim the good news of the reign of God. Mugambi describes this as the *raison d'être* of the church. Mugambi quotes Newbigin to illustrate the nature of the church:

> We are in the presence of a tension in the very nature of the church which has not been sufficiently recognized. It is expressed in classic form once and for all in the fact that St. Paul devoted much of his immense spiritual resources in the early stages of his apostolate to fighting for the independence of the gentile churches over against the church in Judea, and finally gave his life for their unity with the church in Judea (quoted in Mugambi 1995: 93).

Mugambi's involvement in the WCC and the influence of liberation theology on his thinking dictate that, for him, the notion of "church" cannot be individualistic but needs to be inclusive of the whole worldwide church. A recurring theme in his writings is the need for unity in the church in order for the church's impact on the world to be effective.

> We need to appreciate and emphasize always that a different opinion does not mean a wrong opinion. Diversity and experimentation are characteristic of human existence, and are socially healthy where love *(agape)* is evident. The church is called upon to be an agent of reconciliation and will serve that role effectively if it is itself a reconciled and harmonious community. This is the reason why the ecumenical movement is indispensable in contemporary and future Africa (Mugambi 1995:175).

The conclusion may therefore be drawn that, from the perspective of ecclesiology, Mugambi holds a view of the church which requires unity among the various groupings of the church in order for the reign of God to emerge. It may be further concluded that Mugambi seeks for the unification of Africa in all aspects of its life as part of the reign of God emerging.

6.7.8 Destiny

Mugambi's views on cosmology, eschatology and ecclesiology all influence his notion of destiny. Mugambi describes destiny in the following way: "The ultimate goal of human existence is a matter of ultimate concern here, now and always, but not a matter of eschatological expectation" (Mugambi 1989:127). Mugambi writes favourably about Hicks' call for all religions to be embraced as having equal value for salvation. This view of salvation has implications for missionary enterprises, for the claims of Christ, and for Christian eschatology. As an evangelical I find myself at variance with Mugambi's views on destiny. The relationship between the church and the reign of God, when viewed from

Mugambi's perspective, cannot be anything but tenuous.

6.8 Positioning Mugambi on the church/reign of God map

In order to position Mugambi on the map of eschatological tensions, I return to the summary of Bosch's conclusions with regard to the church and the reign of God.

According to Bosch (1991:388), the Melbourne meeting of CWME[33] distinguished carefully between the church and the kingdom of God. One of the themes was "The Church witnesses to the Kingdom". The section report (III.1) states, "The whole church of God, in every place and time, is a sacrament of the kingdom which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when he returns in glory". At this conference the emphasis was on the church as sacrament, sign, and instrument of the kingdom as it continued Christ's mission to the world.

The church should thus be seen, not as the servant of the world, but as the servant of the reign of God. The church is viewed as an instrument of the reign of God (though not the sole agent). The reign of God may be seen as being imperfectly portrayed in the church with a view to the reign of God coming in its fullness in the future. The tension lies in the imperfection of the present as measured against the perfection of the future. The status quo may thus never be accepted as the full expression of the reign of God.

This focus on the dual role, in tension, of the church as it relates to the world and the reign of God, presents a good yardstick against which to measure Mugambi's approach to the relationship between the church and the reign of God. As I have already observed, there is a marked similarity between the views held by the WCC and those held by Mugambi. The latest views presented by the WCC regard the church as a witness to the reign of God, as well as being a sacrament, sign and instrument of the reign of God. This approach to the reign of God may be seen as fairly representative of the view held by Mugambi. Where there may be a difference between the WCC and Mugambi, is in his understanding of the *eschaton*.
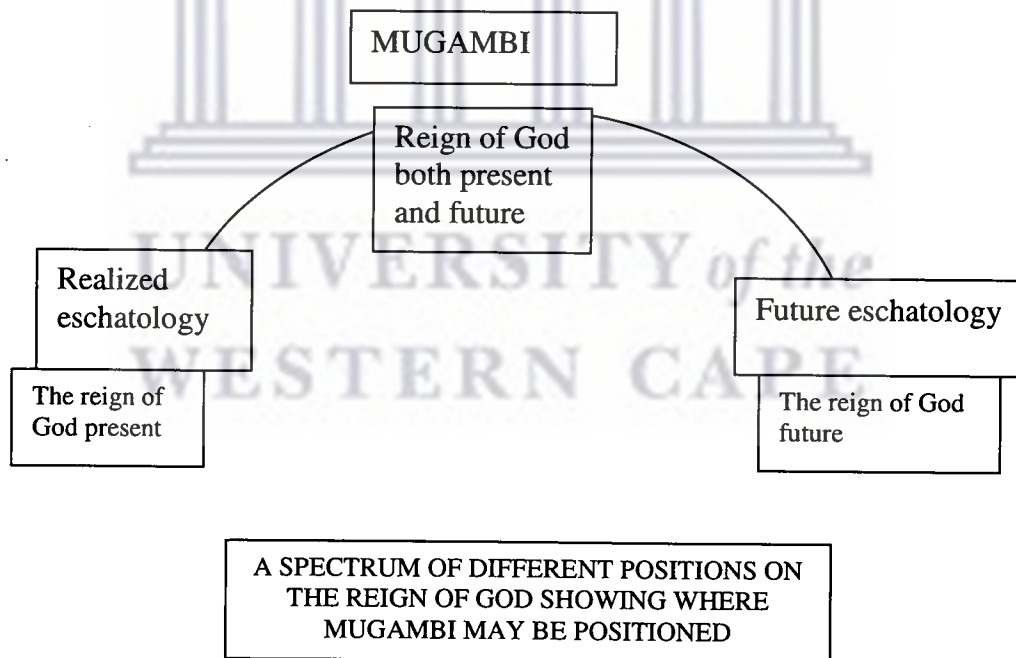
> It has been pointed out that, according to traditional African understanding, the universe is one, and reality consists of two aspects – the visible and the invisible. Duration in this worldview is continuous, with no break in actual events. Logically, this worldview is wholly integrated and consistent. Conceptually, it entertains no possibility of other planets or other worlds. Therefore, God and all other ontological entities exist in this one universe, without end. There may be a change in the mode of existence but both the visible and the invisible continue to

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[33]Commission for World Mission and Evangelization 1980.

exist in this one universe. In such a view Christian eschatology is therefore not only meaningless, but irrelevant (Mugambi 1989:143)
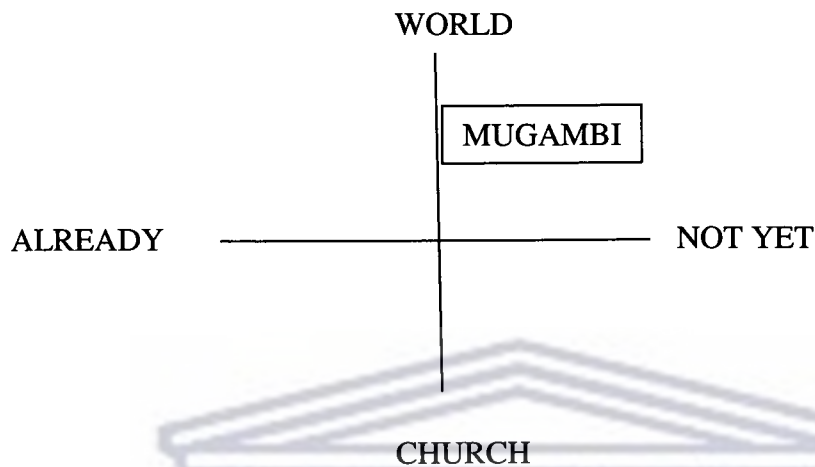
It follows that, as Mugambi has opted to follow this cosmology (see Mugambi & Guy 2009:316), his view of the *eschaton* will vary from accepted Christian views as portrayed in 2 Peter 3:10 and Revelation 21:1, two of many scriptures.

Bosch's notion of creative tension will be easier to use as a map against which to plot Mugambi, as Bosch portrays all the views of the reign of God. The following chart represents the two extremes of realised eschatology and future eschatology. In the one, (realized), the reign of God is seen to be present. Mugambi does not agree with this position as, in his view, the present order falls short of the characteristics of the reign of God (see chapter 5). In the other, (futurist), the reign of God is seen to be totally in the future. Mugambi does not agree with this view either (see chapter 5). I have placed Mugambi in the centre of the chart, reflecting the position adopted by most theologians today, i.e. that the reign of God is both present and future.

	MUGAMBI
	Reign of God both present and future
Realized eschatology	Future eschatology
The reign of God present	The reign of God future

A SPECTRUM OF DIFFERENT POSITIONS ON THE REIGN OF GOD SHOWING WHERE MUGAMBI MAY BE POSITIONED

Mugambi's position with regard to models of the church is mainly favourable toward the church as servant and community (see chapter 4) although he is not well disposed to Dulles' defined models of the church. Mugambi (in conversation in March this year, 2013) stated his disagreement with what he described as historical presentations of the church. He still holds to a view of the church which focuses on governmental and administrative models.

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The grid reflecting the "where and when" of the reign of God may be used as a further help in plotting Mugambi:

WORLD

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │  MUGAMBI    │
                    └─────────────┘
                          │
ALREADY  ─────────────────┼───────────── NOT YET
                          │
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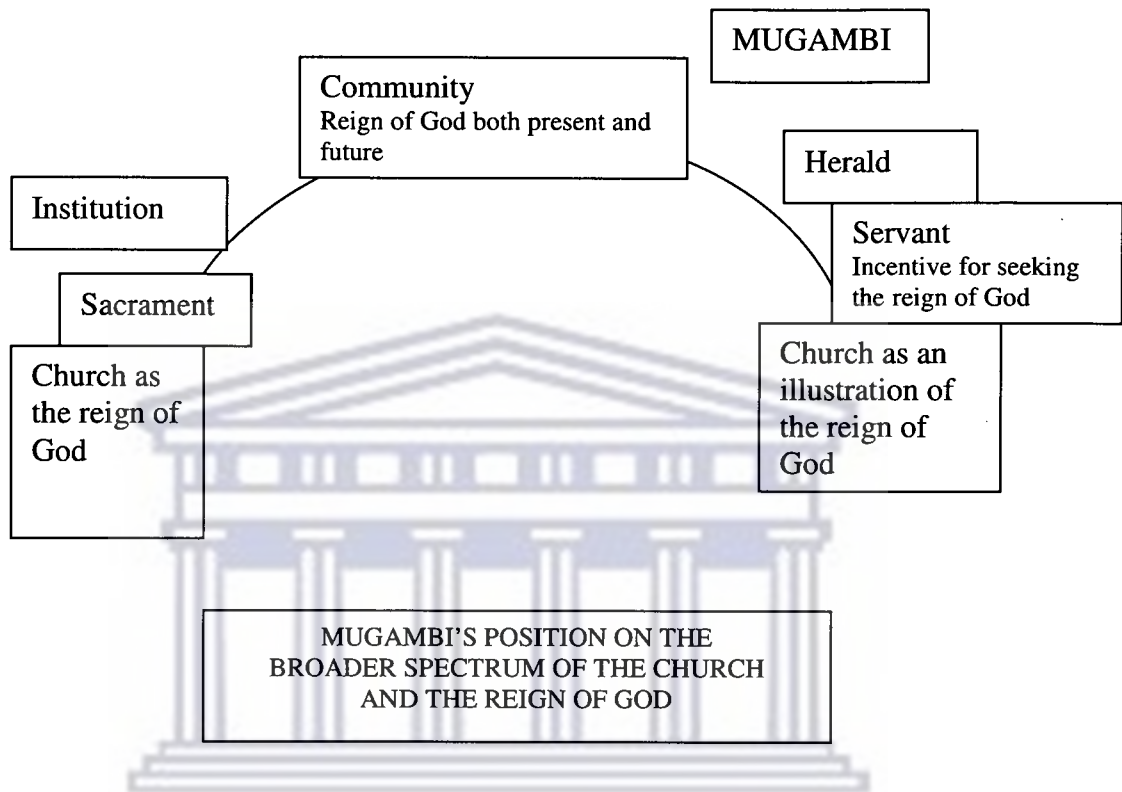
CHURCH

As may be seen, Mugambi may be positioned in the upper right hand quadrant of the grid. Although he does place the reign of God in the church, he gives greater value to the overall operation of the reign of God in wider society. Likewise, although he understands the reign of God to be operating in the current world situation, he is unhappy with the current state of the world and the church. He may therefore be placed more in the reign of God not yet.

If one were to superimpose the chart from chapter 4 onto the above chart it could be concluded that Mugambi may be plotted somewhere between the church as servant and as community. The conclusion may be made that, although Mugambi refers to all aspects of the church, he favours the servant and community models, which Dulles describes as follows:

> From an eschatological perspective the concept of the church as servant means, "The world is seen as the arena where the values (of the reign of God) are to be realised, and the hope of the Kingdom is brought to bear as a motive for seeking justice and peace on earth" (Dulles 2002:110).

The concept of the church as community is described by Dulles: "In much modern theology the idea persists that the community of believers in the church should be an earthly preview of the joys of heaven" (Dulles 2002:104). This view is supported by the last three Assemblies of the WCC (Evanston, 1954; New Delhi, 1961; and Uppsala, 1968), where the emphasis was on the idea of the church as the pilgrim people of God still on the way to its completion (see Dulles 2002:104).

These two charts may be combined, resulting in the following:

MUGAMBI'S POSITION ON THE BROADER SPECTRUM OF THE CHURCH AND THE REIGN OF GOD

6.8 Conclusion

When viewed from the perspective of the church as a sacrament, sign and instrument of the reign of God, Mugambi agrees with this as a relevant role for the church. His view of the relationship between the church and the reign of God contains all the elements of sacrament, sign, instrument, and community. However, Mugambi does portray other social categories as also fulfilling these roles. For instance, he views other religions, civil societies, economic entities, educational institutions etc., as fulfilling the function of being sacrament, sign, instrument and communities of the reign of God. Mugambi's theology of reconstruction contains an overview of the different elements he regards as contributors to the development of an equitable society. The way he has stated that a utopian end is possible if all areas of society contribute to the development of a selfless society, lends itself to the conclusions that, for Mugambi, the church is but one agent of the reign of God (Mugambi 1989:80). Further, Mugambi's favourable attitude toward African traditional religion causes him to have a monistic approach to reality with a resultant materialistic understanding of the reign of God (see Mugambi & Guy 2009:41).

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Added to this is the number of times Mugambi has stated that only God can ultimately bring in the reign of God (Mugambi 1989:80).

These three notions result in a tension:

- The church is but one among many agents of the reign of God.

- Reality is single with visible and invisible parts.

- Only God can bring the ultimate expression of the reign of God.

When viewed from an evangelical perspective, Mugambi's approach leaves out elements of biblical teaching that cannot be ignored. The church for centuries has held to the teachings of the scriptures and creeds as being the canon of orthodoxy. The tripartite view of reality that Mugambi is so critical of, has formed the foundation of orthodox teaching on reality (see the "apostle's creed") (see Mugambi & Magesa 2003:1`49). The description of salvation contained in the creeds does not agree with Mugambi's views on salvation which are radically materialistic (Mugambi 1989:12, 80, 108). Perhaps it is fitting to conclude this section by referring to the introduction to *African Christian Theology: an Introduction* (1989) where Mugambi describes his view of liberation and salvation:

> My study of the bible leads me to the conclusion that *liberation* as a socio-political concern and *salvation* as a theological concern are two sides of one coin – two aspects of the aspiration of all people, as individuals and as groups, towards self-realization and self-fulfilment (Mugambi 1989:x).

Mugambi defines liberation as concerned with the elimination of dependence and developing independence in every aspect of socio-political life. He then defines salvation as the "ultimate hope of attaining total self-realization and self-fulfilment" (Mugambi 1989:x). Mugambi expresses salvation as an eschatological goal which, in the final analysis, is utopian. This goal is there as a corrective check to the status quo and as a reminder that total liberation cannot be obtained in the historical dimension. As Mugambi has personally informed me that his eschatology, including his notion of the reign of God, has not changed since the writing of this book (1989), I find myself in a quandary when trying to reconcile these comments with the conclusions I have arrived at in previous sections of this chapter.

A superficial assessment of Mugambi's approach to eschatology could arrive at the conclusion that he should be grouped with those theologians whose notion of the reign of God is that the reign is now and yet to come. A further conclusion could be that Mugambi's view of the reign of God is utopian with a final consummation instituted by God. Yet a

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further conclusion could be that Mugambi holds to a view of the *eschaton* that aligns with the accepted description of the "city of God, the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven" (Revelation 21:2). All these positions may be viewed as accepted approaches to eschatology.

However, a closer examination reveals that Mugambi's concept of destiny and reality cannot be reconciled with many accepted approaches to eschatology. Gathogo[34] (2011:296-300) finds many points of difference with Mugambi. Mugambi's cosmology, from my perspective, leans more toward an African view of the ordered universe. My evaluation of Mugambi's focus on "one reality", visible and invisible, is that he cannot leave space for any existence outside that one reality (Mugambi and Guy 2009: 41). There is a strong sense of monism in Mugambi's theology. His criticism of the church for adopting a Hellenistic approach (as he views it) to reality is a consequence of his monistic approach to reality. The consequence of Mugambi's approach is to deny a place for God outside creation resulting in no place for the *eschaton* to break into this world (Mugambi 2009:4-5). Another area of dispute is the nature of the reign of God. Mugambi clearly presents a description of the reign of God that is focused on socio-political wellbeing and civic equity (Mugambi 2009:52). This view of the reign of God places it firmly in a historical context, leaving no place for another dimension, as referred to in scripture, e.g. Luke 22:30, 1 Corinthians 15:50, Romans 14:17. These scriptures, and many others, speak of the "other-worldliness" of the reign of God. Mugambi places the reign of God firmly in this present reality. A further area of dispute is Mugambi's view of God (Mugambi and Guy 2009:316). In much of his writing, he comments negatively on the exclusive claims of Christianity. Mugambi clearly adopts a position taken by many in the WCC, i.e. that all facets of God portrayed in different religions carry legitimacy, thereby denying the claims of Jesus that "no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Because Mugambi posits one reality he ends with a monistic view of God, who is portrayed as part of the one reality. This approach to God denies the transcendence of God and makes God so immanent that God becomes part of his own creation. The result is that the reign of God cannot be found outside the one reality. This means that the reign of God is simply an ongoing advance of principles that produce a sought-after utopia (Mugambi 2003:107). The dichotomy Mugambi has developed between African theology (Christianity) and Western theology (Christianity) emphasises differences. I accept that Mugambi has legitimate reasons for attacking the missionary movement for the way it has combined culture with the gospel. I also accept that Mugambi has a legitimate point with regard to the implied superiority of

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[34] Gathogo is an Evangelical scholar whose doctoral thesis was on Mugambi's reconstruction theology.

Western theology over African theology. The way the missionaries tended to partner with the colonial powers is open to condemnation. However, much good was done by the mission societies; many societal changes were brought about. My conclusion is that Mugambi has made the difference between Western and African theology too wide. This has been pointed out by Farisani (2002), Gathogo (2011), and Maluleke (1997).

Mugambi is very careful in his use of language; yet, I would aver that he uses theological language that sounds similar to Western theological language but with a different content. When Mugambi speaks of God, he understands there to be one God: the god of Christians, the god of Muslims, the god of Buddhists, the god of Africans are all the same one God, revealed in different forms. Some liberal Western theologians may have the same view but, from my perspective, this would be totally unacceptable. Another example would be in the way Mugambi uses the word "heaven". For Mugambi, heaven is not another reality but part of the present reality and people who leave the visible world do not "go to another place". Wright (2007:183-187) makes a strong case for heaven being equivalent to paradise (Luke 23:43). Paradise could be another place or another dimension, but it appears that Jesus was referring to somewhere other than here! In many instances African meaning is given to Western words and concepts.

My concern is not with the view that Christian destiny has material content. Wright (2007) and Wittmer (2004) have adequately demonstrated that the ultimate destiny of the Christian is not heaven but a recreated heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:13). Much evangelical theology in the present time draws the conclusion that heaven is the final destination of the Christian and in this regard I must agree with Mugambi. However, the almost total neglect in Mugambi's writings of the notion of a bodily resurrection, which will affect the whole cosmos (see Wright 2007), causes me to find myself at variance with him. Mugambi rejects the neo-Platonic dualism he finds in the creeds, but in doing so he appears to reject the biblical eschatological dualism held by the early church and found in the gospels, which is very Hebrew. This biblical dualism is described in those passages, particularly in John, where the coming of Jesus is viewed as an invasion of earth by heaven (John 3:13, 6:28, 33, 41, 50, 58, and 62). In my view, this stems from Mugambi's monistic cosmology. Because he views one reality which comprises a visible and an invisible dimension, he has no place for God invading this present reality from outside it. In my view, a proper understanding of theism would have kept him from his present approach to destiny. A simplistic explanation of theism would be: in theism God is seen as separate from the cosmos, but actively engaged in it. My

own view would be in line with NT Wright and numerous other respected New Testament scholars (Dunn, Ladd, Meyer), and may be presented thus: reality consists of the created order with God outside yet involved in his creation. The destiny of the believer is, at death, to leave this reality and be present with the Lord, which I would view as heaven. I do not, however view this as the finish of salvation, but accept that Christian faith looks for the resurrection of the body and the creation of new heavens and a new earth. My understanding is that this is the destiny of the believer. I do not, therefore, differ greatly from Mugambi, but the difference in the way we view things is essential: the resurrection of the created order is the vital factor missing in Mugambi's eschatology. This means that Mugambi's view may best be described as panentheism. I have been drawn to this conclusion by Mugambi's statement (during a conversation in Nairobi in February 2013) that "You are not this body".

Mugambi may therefore be regarded as holding an orthodox view of the reign of God by the way he portrays the reign of God as present and yet to come. He may also be included in the view that the reign of God is in the church and also in the world. It is in the nuances offered by these positions that Mugambi appears to stray from generally-accepted positions on the church and the reign of God. Many theologians hold the view that the reign of God is being established in the world, the church being part of the world (see Purves 2007: 47-73). However, for Mugambi it is the present social and political order that is the focus of the reign of God.

While I have placed Mugambi in the position of the reign of God yet to come, his dissatisfaction with almost everything of the current order makes it easy to view him as denying much of the reign of God being existent. My contention, again, would be that the current status of the reign of God depends upon people who surrender themselves and their wherewithal to the reign of God

7. Applying Mugambi in an African Church context

7.1 Introduction

Mugambi fits into the broader picture of African Christian theology. There have been numerous contributors to this broader picture, such as Roman Catholic inculturation theology, conservative evangelical theology, liberation theology, Black theology, Pentecostal/charismatic theology, reconstruction theology, and Reformed theology. All these have made significant contributions to the overall picture of Christian theology in Africa. African Christian theology falls within the wider picture of Christian theology, both Western and Eastern. In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that Mugambi's theology of reconstruction could be approached from a number of perspectives, such as Afro-centricity, the widespread legacy of colonialism, civil society and its responsibilities in the wider society, the relationship between the church and the state, and the reign of God. My choice of the title, "The relationship between the church and the reign of God" was influenced by previous studies in the field of systematic theology as well as finding Mugambi's theology having merit for providing some answers to the problem of inequity in African society. Having described and assessed Mugambi's reconstruction theology and positioned him with regard to his view of the relationship between the church and the reign of God, I will now summarise my argument and assess his views.

I have traced Mugambi's development from his early years in a rural setting, his training on a mission station, the encouragement he received from both paternal and maternal grand-parents, and the various influences in his development as an educator and a theologian.

I have analysed the development of reconstruction theology as it emerged from Mugambi's involvement with liberation theology and the WCC. I then traced Mugambi's views on the nature of the church and the reign of God. I did this by doing a chronological and thematic analysis of his theology in order to arrive at the conclusion that Mugambi is, to a large extent, within generally accepted theological norms with regard to the views he holds on the church and the reign of God. I have questioned the way Mugambi gives content to certain concepts that varies from accepted descriptions. Some of these differences have to do with the notion of time, reality (cosmology), destiny, and salvation. I found Mugambi difficult to categorise as he has not produced any systematic theological work covering ecclesiology and eschatology. My conclusions have been reached by gleaning bits and pieces from his writings. These conclusions have been confirmed through discussions I have been privileged

to have with Mugambi both in Pretoria and Nairobi (For detail see chapter 2 of this thesis, Gathogo in Mwase & Kamaara 2012: 59-73, and Gathogo 2011).

In the second section of this chapter, I will offer an assessment of Mugambi's views on the church and the reign of God.

In the third section, I will show how my assessment helps to analyse Mugambi's theology in general. I will also show how my contribution highlights the significance of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction.

In section four, I will attempt to analyse reconstruction theology (strengths and weaknesses) by using my own material as well as referring to other's criticisms of the weaknesses and strengths in reconstruction theology.

In section five, I will offer some thoughts on the kind of theology that is needed for Africa. I will particularly do so with reference to the Association of Vineyard Churches (AVC) where I work and show how this can assist in better communication of truth and better understanding between different cultures.

In section six, I will conclude by showing how my examination of Mugambi's works has impacted me and helped me to understand African culture and myself, as someone operating within that culture.

7.2 An assessment of Mugambi's views on the church and the reign of God

In the previous chapter, I came to the conclusion that Mugambi could be assessed as falling within the broader ambit of Christian theology. However, when assessed more critically there appear to be flaws in his thinking. I will examine the two areas of ecclesiology and eschatology separately.

7.2.1 Mugambi's views on ecclesiology

I have examined Mugambi's views on the church in chapter four of this thesis. I concluded that Mugambi does not hold to any one model of the church; rather that he holds a number of models in tension. The models Mugambi rejects are those that portray the church as the sole dispenser of salvation, that portray any one denomination as the church, that portray a church that is bound to any one culture, or that portray the church as hierarchical with clergy being superior to laity. On the contrary, Mugambi's view is tied to a model of the church that is culturally relevant, communicates the gospel effectively, accepts and is united to all other churches, and is missionary and prophetic in its function. Mugambi believes that

transformation occurs in the civil and business sectors of society through the church's actions having an influence. In holding this position, Mugambi is in agreement with those theologians who favour the local church as being fully representative of the whole church, fully representing the body of Christ, yet needing to maintain its links with the whole church across the world. However, there is a very definite leaning towards the servant model. The congregational aspect of Mugambi's view of the church is rather surprising, considering that he is an Anglican (Episcopal type of church government). However, the immense influence of traditional African tribal structure and the decision-making process it uses (indaba), has probably influenced him in this regard. One may also say that Mugambi is influenced by the African measurement of worth, namely the contribution made to the community. My final comment would be that Mugambi appears to be a good churchman as well as a good African. At times, the two appear to be in conflict, yet Mugambi seems able to hold them in tension.

The communal nature of traditional African society is vitally important to Mugambi, and he points to the need for the church in the city to fulfil the role of the extended family for migrants (see Mwase and Kamaara 2012:350). Hazel Ayanga describes African religion and Christianity as ritualistic, and quotes Mugambi as suggesting that true African Christianity should incorporate various ritualistic aspects of both religions as a response to the ever-changing religious and social landscape (in Mwase and Kamaara 2012:350).

Christianity is also a ritualistic religion and incorporates new cultures as it takes root in one cultural context after another. The main Christian festivals of Western Christianity are not Jewish. Yet the first disciples and apostles were all Jews. How did Christianity come to incorporate pre-Christian rituals in its annual calendar? Eastern Orthodox Christianity is intimately blended with the cultures of eastern and central Europe. Ethiopian and Egyptian Orthodox Christianity portray the cultures and rituals of the peoples of those countries (Mugambi & Magesa 2003: 148, 149).

That non-Christian rituals have been imported into Christianity over the centuries is a well-documented fact (see Parker in Patte 2010:1202-1203). This practice of the church is referred to by Mugambi as supportive of incorporating African Traditional Religion (ATR) into African Christianity. The question this approach raises would be: How far could this practice be taken before syncretism progresses into heresy? Because Mugambi places the Christian

faith on equal footing with Islam and African Traditional Religion[35], I have to question how far he would go in introducing such ATR into the practices of the Christian church.

7.2.2 Mugambi's eschatology

Mugambi's eschatology is mainly informed by a number of issues related to African Christian theology. He is negative about what he terms the "neo-Platonic notions encrypted in the Nicene and Chalcedonian formulations of Christian doctrine" (in Mwase & Kamaara 2012:374). In his view the creeds express a worldview that is not Hebrew. Mugambi also regards the Trinitarian formulae of the early church as being formed out of neo-Platonism and not being a true reflection of Hebrew notions of God. Oden (2011) makes a strong case in the opposite direction when he examines the early church in Lybia. The point Mugambi makes is that there is an almost total absence of neo-Platonic doctrinal formulations in the creeds of African Instituted Churches.

> Hebrew ontology resonates with African ontology. Both are neither other-worldly nor futuristic (Mwase & Kamaara 2012 374).

> African ontology is neither Trinitarian nor Salvationist. It is communally pragmatic and existentialistic (Mwase & Kamaara 2012:375).

One may derive certain conclusions from the above quotes by Mugambi:

When Mugambi denies the "other-worldliness" of Western eschatology, he refers to the commonly held notion of "heaven". He expresses his belief in the single reality of African Traditional culture. This reality is found in both a visible and an invisible entity. Mugambi definitely rejects the three tier reality expressed in the creeds. Thus, in his eschatology there is no place for anyone leaving this reality for another (heaven).

In denying a futuristic ontology, Mugambi is expressing his view that there is no future existence in "another" place. Everything that takes and will take place, is in this present reality. Taking this position leaves no room in his eschatology for the "coming reign of God" in a form that differs from the reality that presently exists. I have referred to the teachings of Wright and Wittmer in the previous chapter and the way in which the redemption of the earth and the resurrection of humans coincide in the new heavens and new earth.

When Mugambi uses the term, "communally pragmatic", he refers to the way he understands the make-up of the church in African Christianity. By this expression he posits the view that

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[35] Numerous quotes have been given that express his view in this regard, the strongest being in his correspondence with Michael Guy where he explicitly states that the god of Buddhists, Christians, Jews Moslems, and Hindus is the same god.

African Christianity is neither transcendalist nor futuristic (see Mwase & Kamaara 2012: 375).

> African Christians are excited about "Salvation" because they see in Jesus of Nazareth the possibility of overcoming the constraints and limitations imposed by imperial and local politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion (Mugambi in Mwase & Kamaara 2012:375).

By applying the term "existentialist" to African Christianity, Mugambi emphasises the experiential nature of African Christianity against the mainly cerebral Christianity of the West. Mugambi refers to the "existentialist urgency" with which African Christians associate the gospel. "African Christians find it easy to identify themselves with Jesus, the Rabbi from Nazareth, whose teaching resonates with their worldview" (Mugambi in Mwase & Kamaara 20120:375).

Mugambi's radical stance against anything that resembles Western missionary theology or has vestiges of imperialism, leads him to a position that differs from a typical Western approach to eschatology. I have referred to various such Western theologians in chapter 5. I must concede that Mugambi is not far from the orthodox view of the *telos* when he looks for a perfect earth (utopia) which he clearly states will only come about with God's intervention. The difference I have concerns about are whether the utopia Mugambi looks for will be a perfected present world or a "resurrected" world, as spoken of in Revelation 21:1-5. To this extent I find myself at variance with both Mugambi and most Western "escapist" eschatology. Destiny is not simply an overhauled current cosmos nor an escape into some cosmic cloud. The Christian hope is that God will finally establish a reign where righteousness prevails and the evils of this current existence are eradicated, not simply changed.

7.3 Mugambi's theology in a general African context

African Christian theology comprises a number of different facets, not least of which is the Christianising of North Africa (see Oden 2007), and the modern missionary movement (see Beidelman 1982). Both of these facets have a large influence on Mugambi's thinking as he is concerned to show that there is continuity in African Christianity with the early church fathers. He is also vociferous in his denunciation of the negative aspects of the missionary movement, its denial of African Traditional culture and its influence on African Christianity. However, the post-colonial period is where I have chosen to focus. In the period following the withdrawal of the colonial nations from Africa, a number of streams emerged in African

Christian theology, namely the argument for radical continuity of ATR; a less radical continuity which held to the ancient traditions passed down within the Christian tradition while incorporating ancient African traditions; and the argument for a radical discontinuity of Christianity with ATR.

A brief explanation of the different streams will suffice:

a) A radical continuity of ATR. Bolaji Idowu was an early proponent of this view. In *Towards an Indigenous African Church* (1965), Idowu makes a case for the radical indigenisation of the church. In his view, the influence of Western culture through the missionary movement had caused the church in Africa to fail in developing its own theology, churchmanship, liturgy, or even discipline. He calls for the African church to build its bridges to the revelation given to Africans in their pre-Christian and pre-missionary religious traditions of the past. Other theologians such as Christian Gaba, Samuel Kibicho, and Gabriel Setiloane held a similar position.

b) Catholic theologians such as Ela, Mulago, and Magesa hold a more middle-of-the road view. This position is expressed in inculturation theology, where the attempt is made to allow the Christian message to develop within African soil, resulting in an African liturgy and an African approach to doctrine. In its more extreme forms, this view tends to express some of the approach favoured by Idowu. However, this position does affirm the relevance of the Christian message for Africa.

c) At the other end of the spectrum is the view that there needs to be a radical discontinuity between Christianity and ATR. One of the proponents of this view is Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1980). Kato stressed the distinctiveness of the Christian gospel to the extent that he rejected anything positive in any pre-Christian traditions. Another proponent of this view is Lenard Nyirongo (1997). This view represents an extreme conservative evangelical approach. The centrality of the bible in Kato's thinking has made a positive contribution to African Christian theology, but his rejection of anything African as having relevance for African Christian theology needs to be questioned.

These different views are examined by Bediako, so it is unnecessary for me to offer further expansion on these streams (in Ford 1996:430-439).

Bediako maintains that most African theology has been developed in the middle ground between radical extremes.

As well as a widespread consensus that there is an African pre-Christian religious heritage does exist and needs to be taken seriously, there has also been the realisation that it is important to recognise the integrity of African Christian experience as a religious reality in its own right. The view is that Christianity as a religious faith is not intrinsically foreign to Africa. On the contrary, it has deep roots in the long histories of the peoples of the continent, while it has proved to be capable of apprehension by Africans in African terms, as is demonstrated by the vast, massive and diverse presence of the faith in African life (Bediako in Ford 1996:432).[36]

My initial assessment of Mugambi's theology in an African context would be to align him with the less extreme form of Africanisation represented by Ela, Getui, Magesa and many others (see bibliography).

7.4 A critique of Mugambi's reconstruction theology

I have previously examined the different streams of theology in African Christianity, such as African liberation theology, evangelical theology, Roman Catholic inculturation theology, the theology of the missionaries, neo-Pentecostal church theology, reconstruction theology, and Reformed theology (Fischer 2007). Within this extremely varied theological context, Mugambi's theology has received plaudits as well as criticisms. The main thrust in African theology before 1994 was based on the Exodus motif. Mugambi (as well as Villa-Vicencio 1992) saw the weakness in this analogy and introduced a new motif based on the return from exile, represented in Ezra and Nehemiah. The reconstruction of the city was used as a theological motivation to bring the church on board for the rebuilding of Africa in all its aspects. One of the negative responses to Mugambi's theology is listed by Farisani. He questions the use of Nehemiah as a model, as reconstruction refers to building what had once existed. The new Africa Mugambi is portraying is simply that, a new society, not the reconstructing of what existed before (Farisani 2003:41). Gathogo has listed and expanded the different responses to Mugambi's reconstruction theology (Gathogo 2011:288-296). A number of the concerns expressed need to be highlighted:

- Mugambi is not clear on the difference between African culture that may be appreciated and African culture that becomes a liability in the context of the transmission of the gospel.

- Mugambi's universalistic approach to salvation detracts from the uniqueness of the

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[36] A relatively new field of study has emerged and is currently analysing the impact of Christianity extant in North Africa in the first five centuries. This is being done by the Center for Early African Christianity at Eastern University, St. Davids, Pennsylvania, headed up by Thomas Oden (see bibliography).

Christian gospel. One cannot simply reject the exclusive claims of Christ. My opinion is that there is need for a generous orthodoxy that accepts the genuineness of other faiths but maintains the differences in doctrine (see Grenz 2000). I accept Mugambi's plea for us not to become arrogant in thinking that only Christians can theologise. However, Galatians 1:6-9 applies. I am concerned about the dangers of syncretism resulting from sentimentalism! There is such strong pressure for us to please everybody and not to cause offence that the temptation is to play down our differences because of the fear of being labelled dogmatic. Theologians of other faiths have great ability,[37] but it is not ability that I am calling in question but content and the claims of Christ.

- Mugambi refers to Africa as a single entity, as if the divisions were not there. He is influenced by Kwame Nkrumah and the dream of one Africa. But, tribalism is a disintegrating factor in the African continent as is seen by the constant ethnic violence that occurs in many areas. Reconstruction in the political and social areas is negatively impacted through tribal rivalry. It is precisely at this point that the communalism Mugambi supports becomes problematic from the perspective of the overall unity he views as necessary for reconstruction.

Mugambi's notion of reconstruction appears to favour the social and material aspects of life. Although he does refer to "personal reconstruction" there is no doubt that his theology is more focused on the community. Gathogo states:

> Understanding social reconstruction as the panacea for all the ills of Africa without tackling the issue of personal responsibility and radical change of the individual, may, if unchecked, lead to the weakening of the Christian gospel (Gathogo 2011: 299).

These are some of the weaknesses in Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. Others may be found in Gathogo (2011:296-300)[38].

In my examination and analysis of Mugambi's reconstruction theology, I have shown that Mugambi has drawn criticism from other African theologians. My conclusion is that Mugambi has made a significant contribution in highlighting the weaknesses, both from a

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[37] My interaction with some Moslems has given me great respect for their ability to research and debate

[38] Mention may be made of Mugambi's failure to emphasise hospitality; insufficient emphasis on the detribalisation of Africa; the failure to address issues of family and the skyrocketing divorce rate (Gathogo 2011:298,299).

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sociological and biblical perspective, of much current African Christian theology. While both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio have come in for a fair amount of criticism, Mugambi has answered most of his detractors in *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003). He has further answered criticism in the contribution he has made to *Theologies of Liberation and Christian Reconstruction* (Mwase and Kamaara 2012:17–30, 369-383).

The positive aspect of Mugambi's theology is his emphasis on reconciliation. Yet, in Dedji's opinion: "(Mugambi's) concept of reconciliation is apparently restricted to religious pluralism and the building of a new ecumenism" (Dedji in Mwase & Kamaara 2012: 131). I cannot agree with the way Dedji analyses this aspect of Mugambi's reconstruction theology as, in my research, I have found his theology to be all-embracing, calling for the reconstruction of all aspects of African society.

Mugambi makes the assertion that "in Africa, the church remains the most influential and the most sustainable social institution" (Mugambi 2003:185). An area that does not appear to have clear lines of demarcation in Mugambi's theology is the relationship between church, state, and society. What is the difference between the public church and civil society? The issue of Christian social ethics needs to be addressed. In Mugambi's work there does not seem to be a clear line between Christian convictions and behaviour and public life in a modern democracy (see Dedji 2003:77 & 78).

> To be efficient and genuine, the reconstruction enterprise in Africa has to embrace the situation of millions of Africans who have borne for too long the burden of Christian denominationalism, political atrocities, economic and social injustice. Therefore the question is: How can black South Africans who still live today in those ghettos of death and misery ironically named 'townships' be eager to participate in the 'nation building' enterprise, if not even symbolic reparation is not assured to them for having been treated as sub-humans? How can younger generations in Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Sierra-Leone, etc. join hands together for the reconstruction of their national heritage while their inner wounds are still bleeding? (Dedji 2003:78).

While this sentiment is expressed by Dedji, it nevertheless remains true that reconstruction of African society is needed desperately. Mugambi has made a major contribution to the development of African Christian theology. Mugambi's use of words such as cooperation, collaboration, inclusivity, and amiability highlights his understanding of the need for a generous approach to the old antagonisms that exist among established African Christian communities. Mugambi's work in the fields of methodology and hermeneutics has influenced African theologians to widen their approach to the bible. His call for new patterns and models of social transformation, as developed in especially *Christian Theology and Social*

Reconstruction (2003), has challenged the African church to seek beyond the status quo for new models of church that are consistent with the cultural and traditional life of Africa. I end this section with a quote from Mugambi:

> It is clear that in this spaceship-earth, we ought not to behave as if any of us could jump out and survive alone. In this lifeboat-earth cruising on a perilous ocean of space, none of us ought to puncture the bottom or try to jump out – we have all to sail together, or perish together. The, *us – them* syndrome is self- destructive, because there is only one side for us to join – either mutual reconstruction, or mutual destruction. The *winner – loser* dichotomy is unrealistic and inappropriate in the African situation. Africa needs *winner – winner* configurations, in which all contestants participate for future reconstruction, having learnt from the errors of their past involvements (Mugambi 1995:viii & ix)

7.5 The kind of theology needed in Africa

My intention is not to give the impression that this section will deliver a complete theology that will meet the needs of the African church. Someone may one day venture on what could be a lifetime project! What I will attempt to do in this section is to highlight some of the theological needs that I see in African Christian theology, and endeavour to offer some suggestions that may be pertinent to the problem. I will first offer a very brief overview of the church scene in Africa, followed by a brief overview of the theological stances prevalent in Africa. I will then endeavour to posit the kind of theology I think will be helpful, particularly relating to the movement I am involved in, namely the Association of Vineyard Churches.

7.5.1 An overview of the church in Africa

As I have already indicated, this subject requires intense analysis and lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, my own experience in different denominational streams and my involvement in mission work in Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria and Zambia will provide the backdrop for this assessment. I began my ministry in the Anglican Church in 1971 where I was involved in both urban and rural communities, particularly with the farm labourers and fishermen in the Western Cape. I moved to the Assemblies of God from 1976 to 1987. I then worked in an independent group before finally joining the Vineyard Movement in 1993, where I am currently serving. My experience has given me a broad overview of the church which will assist me, along with my reading and involvement, to offer an opinion on the state of theology in the African church. This opinion will reflect my own biases and observations.

There exists in the African church a broad spectrum running from the African Independent

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churches through to the Old Catholic church. Mugambi has placed his finger on a major problem in the church in Africa: disunity and rivalry.

> During the era of "developmentalism", National councils of churches were used as means for channelling "development" funds and personnel to Africa. At the same time, Confessional organisations were structured to keep African churches within their respective denominational camps. The cold war exacerbated the rift between the "evangelical" and the "ecumenical" lobbies in Europe and North America with the resultant confusion in Africa (Mugambi 2003: 198).

My observation is that there is less suspicion between Catholic and Pentecostal churches in Africa than there is between these churches in the West. Even still, the growth and numbers rivalry is still prevalent. This disunity is borne out in a South African context where some of the groupings that exist are the SACC (South African Council of Churches), the CCC (the Consultation of Christian Churches), the IFCC (the International Fellowship of Christian Churches), the Baptist Union, three groupings of Anglicans (the Anglican church of Southern Africa, the Church of England in South Africa, and a number of independent Anglican Churches), a number of varieties of Reformed churches, TEASA (the Evangelical Association of South Africa), a host of AIC groupings, and many more. This proliferation of groupings is duplicated in every African country. The theological spectrum runs from liberal to conservative, from Arminian to extreme Calvinism.

7.5.2 A relevant theology for Africa

My approach in this section will be from the perspective of the Association of Vineyard churches (AVC). The foundation from which AVC theology is approached is the reign of God. John Wimber (the founder of AVC) was a staff member at Fuller Theological Seminary, where G.E. Ladd was lecturing. Without going into detail, this implies that the theological perspective of AVC for approaching any aspect of theology is that of the reign of God. I will now offer a brief background to current African theology and then offer what I consider to be a relevant approach to theology in Africa, within the context of AVC.

The major factor that has influenced theological opinion among ordinary church-goers in Africa, is the Trinity Broadcasting Network and "God TV", which have brought the influence of American tele-evangelists and the prosperity gospel to the fore in Africa. This influence has been propagated by the New Pentecostal churches , and has made them the fastest growing segment of the church in Africa (see Anderson 2006, 2007). There are many reasons why this is so: the promise of freedom from poverty; an effective answer to problems of the spirit world; worship that appeals to young people; a prosperous lifestyle modelled by the

preachers, and the use of multi-media. These and other reasons have been highlighted by Mugambi (in Vähäkangas & Kyomo 2003: 111-145) and Simojoki (2002: 269-287). By all accounts there is a decline in membership in the "mainline" churches with corresponding growth in the New Pentecostal churches. One may say that the church in Africa is in flux with much movement from mainly historic churches to new churches. That would not be to say there is no new growth in the form of new converts. There seems to be a dearth of theological training in the new churches, with leadership being based more on charisma than on teaching ability or message content.

Having spent much time working in rural African communities in churches where some members of the congregation are illiterate, I have had to convert theological content into an efficient form of communication. From the perspective of the Association of Vineyard Churches (AVC), we have endeavoured to produce a more inductive and contextual form of communicating biblical truth. Oral transmission and narrative form are seen as more efficient ways of communication. The "indaba" has been introduced rather than a classroom form of teaching. Numerous theological subjects have been introduced starting from African culture rather than historical tradition. These subjects deal with issues such as land, inheritance rights, salvation, women's rights, communality as a basis for ecclesiology, eschatology beginning with concepts of reality, and much more.

In my view Mugambi has put his finger on the need for African Christianity to be alerted to its historical heritage. Much has been said about the presence of Christianity in Africa before the Jesuit missionaries came in the sixteenth century. Tom Oden has published a series of books on the North African church of the first five centuries (2007, 2011, 2011b), where he demonstrates the influence of African Christianity on the European church and the extent of Christian presence in North Africa. The richness of this theological heritage needs to be explored. This sentiment is echoed by numerous African Christian scholars of various persuasions, including Mugambi. The negative obsession with Western Christianity brought through the missionary agencies and the constant vilification of "missionary Christianity", whilst having merit, is not conducive to producing a viable, truly African Christian theology. Much that is written as "African" is merely a regurgitation of Western theology (e.g. Gathogo 2011, Light 2012, Nyirongo 1997, O'Donovan 1996). Theologians who have made relevant contributions include; Bediako 1995; Bujo 1992, 2003; Ela 1986; Magesa 2004; Makumba 2007; Mugambi, various; Orobator 2008; Stinton 2004, 2010; and many others.

In order for a theology to be relevant for Africa a number of factors need to be taken into

account. These factors are mentioned in many theological publications by African theologians and I therefore am not bringing anything new to the debate. I merely rehearse them and comment on them from a personal perspective.

1. Methodology: In the past theology has been introduced as an established body of truth formulated in another context (deductive). This approach presupposes a universal context and a body of truth that may be applied in any situation. While the gospel must remain the same it would be true to say that various forms of media, of style, of "wrapping" may be used to portray the gospel. Two factors may be indicated as necessary for a relevant African Christian theology: 1) such a theology would need to be contextual and 2) it would need to be mainly inductive. Contextual, in that account is taken of African culture and traditional religion as the soil into which the gospel is planted. Inductive in that the circumstances of the believers and their perspective should inform the formation of theology.

2. The cultural context: many African Christians live under the influence of Western capitalist models of church. This is the model portrayed by American tele-evangelists and the prosperity gospel. Because there is huge diversity in African culture, any theology in Africa needs to build an African model that reflects African culture and values.

3. The social context: African society is still fraught with division, discrimination, discrepancy between the rich and the poor, poverty, violence, and tribalism. In order to be relevant theology would need to take into account these social phenomena and develop theological truth that is applicable into a world that is very different from a Western world. Any theology that seeks to perpetuate division, offer a false prosperity, favours the rich and entrenched, and fails to take the communal nature of African society into account, will simply perpetuate a Western style of theology.

4. African Traditional Religion: As I have pointed out above there are two extreme views about ATR. The view that is prevalent in many in the AVC would approximate to the conservative Evangelical view that there is nothing in ATR that may be relevant to the Christian gospel. To deny any relevance is tantamount to rejecting any presence of God in Africa before the missionaries came. Mugambi has contributed significantly to the debate on whether ATR has relevance for Christian theology. His views are highlighted in *Contextual Theology across Cultures* (2009). Others who have

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contributed are a number of Roman Catholic theologians writing on Inculturation (Ela 1986; Kiaziku 2009; Magesa 1997, 2004). As listed above there have been numerous theologians who have contributed to the task of marrying ATR with Christianity in a way that does not compromise the truths of the gospel (Bediako 1995 Makumba 2007; Mugambi, various; Orobator 2008; and Stinton 2004, 2010).

5. Africa's religious heritage: it is my contention that too many African theologians are apologetic when it comes to Western theology. Mugambi has the need to constantly attack the impact of Western culture upon African culture and his reactionary stance against the supposed superiority of Western theology is a constant theme in his writings. In most of the articles he has written there is a negative comment about the effect of the theology of the missionaries on African Christian theology. In my view the focus needs to change to take account of the rich heritage of the African church, beginning with the church fathers of the first five centuries. Moving from an apologetic to an informative stance will change the perspective of African theology held by many in the West. Africa has produced many able and distinguished scholars who are involved in producing theology in institutions around the world. Slavish following of Western theological methods and doctrinal norms is not necessary. Africa needs to produce theology that is contextual and applicable to the needs of this continent.

7.6 Mugambi and his impact on my life and thought

I have now been involved either directly or indirectly with Jesse Mugambi for eight years. Firstly, in the development of a Master's thesis, in which I examined reconstruction theology and how it related to a theology of possessions in the African church. Now in this thesis which is directly connected to reconstruction theology. During this time numerous factors had an impact on me and I will list them as they occurred.

When I was considering the thesis I had the opportunity to meet with Mugambi during one of his visits to UNISA. I was impressed by the gracious way he received me and afforded me a significant amount of his time, even though his wife and family were with him at the time. This generosity of spirit has been confirmed to me on each occasion we have met. Each time I was given not less than two hours of his time. There was never any sense of urgency.

When we have differed on issues Mugambi was never abrupt or irritated by me. He always listened and reasoned. His attitude was always gracious.

Mugambi has been generous in finding books that I had difficulty obtaining. He has recommended various publications for me to consult and given me the occasional volume. His provision of books published by ACTON at a reasonable price has been most generous.

I have appreciated his friendship and concerns over losses in my family, especially when my grandson and son both died during the course of writing this thesis. I appreciate his prayers for me and my family.

From a theological perspective, Mugambi has stretched me in my thinking and attitude towards African Christian theology, particularly in my prejudice towards ATR. I have had to revise my total rejection of anything to do with ATR as having any relevance for African Christian theology. His strong views on methodology and hermeneutics have caused me to reconsider what I had been taught as a Conservative Evangelical. The broad sweep of Mugambi's interests and his theological application to all facets of society has stretched me in my views on the answers to the inequities in African society. He has made me think!

It has been my privilege to be able to study, not only the theology, but the person, of Jesse Mugambi. I have found him stimulating, a gracious person, a challenging theologian, and a caring human being.
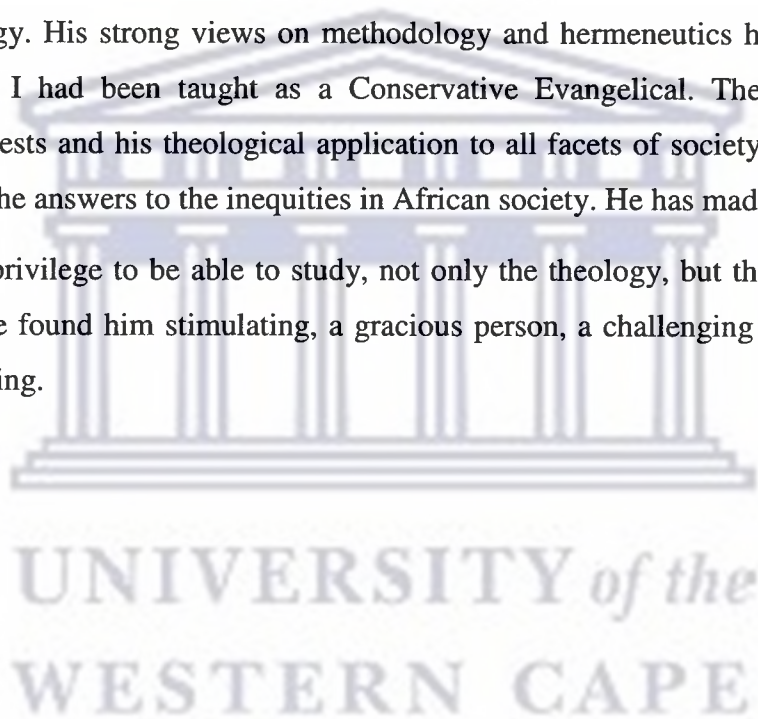
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