

Liberation or Reconstruction
A critical survey on the relevance of Black theology in light of the emergence of
Reconstruction theology

By

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The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building with a pediment and columns.
UNIVERSITY *of the*
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Key Terms

South Africa

Africa

Paradigm Shift

Apartheid

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Black Theology

Reconstruction Theology

African Theology

Black Consciousness

Post-Apartheid

Post-Cold War

Democracy

Liberative Reconstruction



Abstract

Black theology has since its inception placed much emphasis on *liberation* as the root metaphor of its own hermeneutical stance. However, after centuries of colonial and apartheid rule, black liberation, which is associated with the school of Black theology, needs to be examined in the light of the advent of democracy in South Africa. Amongst other things, it has been implied, and in some quarters asserted, that the abolition of apartheid together with the democratisation of South Africa renders Black theology irrelevant. Often these views are taken further by suggesting that it is no longer blacks only who need liberation. The advent of democracy is therefore a significant reason for some scholars seeking to replace liberation with notions such as reconstruction, development, reconciliation and so forth. These innovative trends find expression in the proposal suggesting that theological articulation (referring to African theology and Black theology) in post-apartheid South Africa should shift emphasis from liberation theologies to reconstruction theology. It should be noted however, that the proposal for a shift was not received with great enthusiasm among the practitioners of Black theology and has therefore generated a considerable amount of debate amongst them. Following these debates on emerging theologies such as the one on reconstruction, it appears that the proponents of Black theology have yet to devise a new and clearly defined theological framework for reflection following the dismantling of apartheid. In this way the proposal for reconstruction has once again highlighted some of the past as well as new challenges facing Black theology. Taking this into consideration this study seeks to provide a critical survey regarding the emergence of reconstruction as an approach to African theology as well as to investigate how those using Black theology as a self-description have responded to it. While a central feature of this study is to investigate the relationship between liberation and reconstruction in oppositional terms, it should be pointed out that it will also highlight a more recent development attempting to project these theological motifs as complimentary and not only in oppositional terms. In essence this study aims to highlight that further research regarding the relationship between liberation and reconstruction is necessary in order to stimulate further discussion on this issue.

Declaration

I declare that “Liberation or Reconstruction? A critical survey on the relevance of Black theology in light of the emergence of Reconstruction theology” is my work, and that it has not been submitted before in any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Demaine Jason Solomons

May 2010



Signed.....

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May God Bless you All!

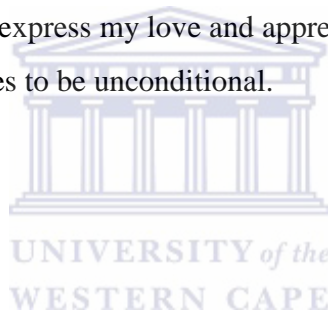


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CHAPTER 1: Introductory Remarks

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this investigation is to discuss the relevance of Black theology in light of the emergence of reconstruction theology. It offers a critical survey of a range of contributions on this issue, questioning whether scholars who have used Black theology as a form of self description should shift emphasis, from the paradigm of *liberation* to *reconstruction*.

1.2 Context and Relevance of Study

The significance of this study has to be understood within the context of the proposal to redirect African theological initiatives from liberation theologies to reconstruction theology. The basis for this call was the end of apartheid in South Africa, which signalled the independence of all countries on the African continent.

a) Black theology has since its inception placed much emphasis on *liberation* as the root metaphor of its own hermeneutical stance. One of the classic ways in which this thought is expressed is through blacks being metaphorically “likened to the people of Israel on their way from the land of bondage in Egypt (referring to the colonial regime) to the Promised Land (referring to the anticipated liberation), which can be interpreted to be the official end of apartheid after the all-race democratic elections on April 27, 1994” (Gathogo 2007: 327).¹ However, after centuries of colonial and apartheid rule, black liberation, which is associated with the school of Black theology, needs to be examined in the light of the advent of democracy in South Africa. Amongst other things, it has been implied, and in some quarters asserted, that the

¹ Phiri (2004: 147) notes that Black theology followed the theme of liberation through to the Exodus metaphor in the Old Testament. According to the Exodus metaphor, God heard the cries of the oppressed children of Israel and liberated them from a situation of oppression. In this sense the Israelites were liberated not because they were righteous, but because it is in the nature of God to side with the oppressed of any society. Here it is important to note that the experience of liberation is not limited to the children of Israel but to all humanity which suffers from oppression. In this context Black theology saw liberation as a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament. Accordingly, God is seen to intervene in human history to liberate the oppressed people. Also, God is seen to be on the side of the oppressed and poor. And, God rejects racism. Salvation in Black theology is therefore associated with the end of racism and the establishment of a new social order that affirms black humanity. The Exodus metaphor thus symbolises the liberation from oppressive and unjust social and political structures of society. On this point Boesak (1979: 173) notes that the Exodus metaphor became the basis of the action of God and the action that God expects from his people, thus having a major bearing on Black theology in South Africa.

abolition of apartheid together with the democratisation of South Africa renders Black theology irrelevant. Often these views are taken further by suggesting that it is no longer blacks only who need liberation. One such attempt to make this point is found in Jacob's thesis (1998). According to Vellem (2007: 16), Jacob and others perceive Black theology as moribund if not harbouring the danger of reversing racism in a situation where blacks have been in political power since 1994. The advent of democracy is therefore a significant reason for some scholars seeking to replace liberation with notions such as reconstruction, development, reconciliation and so forth. These innovative trends find expression in the proposal suggesting that theological articulation (referring to African theology and Black theology) in post-apartheid South Africa should shift emphasis from liberation to reconstruction.

The proposal for a shift has highlighted the challenge facing Black theology following the abolition of apartheid. In this context, scholars who have used Black theology as a form of self description have struggled to come to terms with the proposal of reconstruction as a logical continuation of liberation. In the light of this lack of consensus on accepting reconstruction as a logical continuation from liberation, fundamental questions regarding the validity of reconstruction as a theological root metaphor need to be posed. How have scholars who have used black theology as a form of self description responded to the emergence of this new proposal? Also, how has this proposal affected the way in which Black theology is articulated in the context of post-apartheid South Africa?

b) To be able to grasp the process of the emergence of Black theology in South Africa, one has to understand that it developed within the framework of a new political consciousness called black consciousness.² Living under the scourge of apartheid, blacks became aware, first of all, of their own situations. They developed a new consciousness of themselves, of where they were, of the political, social, and economic dynamics in their own situations. They realised that the racial and ethnic divisions so vital to the successful workings of apartheid were crucial not just for racist

² Boesak (1976: 1) clarifies the link between Black theology and black consciousness by noting that black consciousness may be described as the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people. It means that blacks are determined to be judged no longer by, and to adhere no longer to white values. It is an attitude, a way of life. Black consciousness thus forms an integral part of Black theology because it is the reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation.

reasons, but for reasons of total domination. It was the acknowledgment that under racism, colonialism and apartheid the black person has, in the words of Biko (1996: 29), “become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity”. Black consciousness, in short, became the affirmation of black personhood with the intent of overcoming centuries of mental and cultural domination and indoctrination brought about by white racism. It also became the unifying force amongst the oppressed people of South Africa overcoming ethnic, racial and cultural divisions, with the aim of restoring human dignity and pride.

Also, black consciousness understood that such an affirmation of black human dignity had personal, psychological, theological and political consequences. More importantly, blacks discovered that apartheid was not only a political, economic and social system but that it was also misused on the basis of justifying it theologically. Boesak (1979: 169) argues, that blacks discovered that they are children of God, and, on that basis alone, they have a right to a dignified existence. This new-found pride in the cognisance of “the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black”, to continue Biko’s argument, meant that “liberation, therefore, is of paramount importance in the concept of black consciousness” (Boesak 2005: 9). In this context African theologians appear to be in agreement that black consciousness became the impetus for the development of a liberation theology called Black theology in South Africa (see Boesak 1976; Kretzschmar 1986; Mosala 1989; Motlhabi 2008; Vellem 2005).

c) In South Africa, Black theology gained prominence during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. According to De Gruchy (1979: 154) it is closely associated with, but distinct from, Black theology originating in the United States, of which James Cone (1969; 1975) and his student Dwight Hopkins (1999; 2002), amongst others, are some of the foremost proponents. In South Africa Black theology first found expression in a collection of essays published by Basil Moore (1973). The publication of these essays was synchronised with the rise of black consciousness and the immediate target of Black theology was the Christian church, and especially Christian theology. The point of contention was the perceived consent of the Christian church and the dominant theology in the oppression and exploitation of blacks. “Black theologians argued, justifiably, that not only was the church relatively silent on the question of oppression but that

the thoroughly Western and white outlook of its theology helped to reproduce the basic inequalities of an apartheid society” (Mosala 1989: 1). This view was echoed by various theologians (see Boesak 1976, 1979, 1984; Buthelezi 1973; Goba 1986, 1988). As a consequence, black Christian activists emphasised the need for a Black theology of liberation. Here the tasks of Black theology were to be measured against the background of the liberation of blacks in South Africa.

As mentioned earlier, Black theology drew heavily from Biko’s philosophy of black consciousness. For example, Boesak, in his *Farewell to Innocence* (1976), borrowed some of his concepts from black consciousness to debunk a false consciousness inculcated among the black oppressed by traditional white theology. In fact, under-girding the notion of innocence, Boesak argued in *Farewell to Innocence*, was a pseudo-innocence in South African society from which both blacks and whites had to be liberated. Pseudo-innocence thus captured a particular form of consciousness engendered by Western Christianity from which a departure must be initiated through black consciousness. According to Boesak, traditional Western theology was fundamental to this false consciousness if not the religious cloak of colonialism and oppression in South Africa. Vellem (2007: 33) points out that, “Boesak’s use of expressions such as ‘black man, stand up’, ‘blackness as a state of mind’, and ‘ontological blackness’, points to the theological fusion of Black theology with Biko’s philosophy of black consciousness”. In its defining moments therefore, it is important to note that Black theology harnessed black consciousness philosophy to define a particular consciousness that could be used to liberate blacks from their inferiority complex. According to Vellem (2007: 5), the roots of this inferiority complex among blacks can be traced back to traditional white theology, which, according to Black theologians, was viewed to be in cahoots with the system of oppression.

Black theology, in order to be rooted in the struggle for liberation of the oppressed, sought different epistemological tools from those of traditional Western theology. Epistemologically, the starting point of Black theology indicated a methodological shift in the approach to theology. “Methodologically, it became a ‘theology from below’ *vis a vis* a ‘theology from above’, the latter which describes the general approach of traditional Western theology, at least in so far as it has emphasised philosophy as a starting point” (Vellem 2007: 5). Furthermore, while traditional

Western theology had as its interlocutor a non-believer, Black theology defined its interlocutor as the non-person (Frostin 1988: 87). Whilst politically conservative philosophy was a key ingredient of Western theology, it was substituted by critical social analysis in Black theology. According to Vellem (2007: 5), “Black theology was an ‘epistemological rupture’, a total shift in paradigm”. In essence, it was a complete departure from the traditional Western form of theology and sought to debunk paradigms inspired by the norms and values of the West. From this perspective, traditional theology was viewed to be incapable of liberating the black oppressed; hence the root metaphor of liberation provided meaning to Black theology as an alternative way of doing theology in South Africa. Also, the development of Latin American liberation theology associated with Gutiérrez (1974) and Boff (1987, 1988), amongst others, had a significant impact on Black theological thought in South Africa. In the case of both Latin American liberation theology and South African Black theology, the point of departure was the situation of the poor. The theme of the liberation of the poor and oppressed became a common thread connecting these theologies, thus they have generically been called *liberation theologies*. In this sense, Black theology in South Africa, while specifically reflecting on the situation of blacks, derives its link with other liberation theologies from their common quest for liberation.

d) However, after decades of apartheid rule, liberation and its link with black liberation, and thus with the school of Black theology, is confronted with contextual challenges. These spring from the observations of scholars that suggest either detaching liberation from the black interlocutor on the presumption that blacks are liberated, or jettisoning liberation in the search for alternatives such as reconstruction (see Getui & Obeng 1999; Gous 1993; Villa-Vicencio 1992; Mugambi 1995). Here the advent of democracy in South Africa is a significant feature of innovations seeking to replace liberation with notions such as reconstruction, development, reconciliation and so forth. These innovative trends find expression in the proposal that theological articulation (referring to Black theology) in post-apartheid South Africa should shift the emphasis from liberation to reconstruction.

In South Africa, the notion of *reconstruction* gained theological prominence when Villa-Vicencio (1992) proposed a departure from the liberation paradigm. Villa-Vicencio’s project emerged within the climate of reconstruction and development in South Africa. The central

conviction motivating this proposal was that a new situation has arisen. This was symbolised by the changing socio-political landscape of South Africa and the rest of the world after the Cold War. In *A Theology of Reconstruction* (1992), Villa-Vicencio proposed a departure from the liberation paradigm, emphasising the new situation demanding reconstruction and renovation in post-apartheid South Africa. This was echoed by Pityana (1995) and Farisani (2002) who emphasised the importance of reconstruction in order to deal with this changing socio-political landscape. In this context, the post-Exilic metaphor derived from Ezra-Nehemiah is central to understanding the reconstruction motif. The idea is that liberation, which has been largely associated with the Exodus metaphor, is no longer adequate to deal with the challenges presented by a changing South Africa.

In a sense, Villa-Vicencio (1992) echoed what had already been proposed by Mugambi, who was the first among African theologians to establish the need for a move from liberation to reconstruction (Gathogo 2007: 328; Getui & Obeng 1999: foreword; Farisani 2002: 63). Within the broader African context this notion gained momentum in 1987, at the Fifth General Assembly of All Africa Conference of Churches where Mugambi highlighted reconstruction as the way forward. Gathogo (2007: 328) notes, that it was at this meeting that Mugambi suggested that theology (referring to both African and Black theology) must shift its emphasis in post-cold war Africa from the Exodus motif, associated with liberation, to that of reconstruction. Furthermore, it was suggested that reconstruction ought to be the new priority for African nations in the 1990s and beyond (Mugambi 1995: 36). He further contended that in the New World Order³, the figure of Nehemiah, unlike that of Moses, provides the mirror in which we are enabled to perceive our mission to remake Africa out of the ruins of wars – “against racism, colonial domination and ideological branding” (Mugambi 2003: 128).

e) It should be pointed out that the proposal for a shift was not received with great enthusiasm among some of the practitioners of Black theology (Gathogo 2007: 327). One such example is found in Maluleke’s (1994) article.⁴ As mentioned earlier, these proposals spring from the notion that suggests either detaching liberation from the black interlocutor on the presumption that

³ New World Order in this context refers to post-colonial Africa and post-apartheid South Africa.

⁴ Also see Vellem (2007).

blacks are liberated, or jettisoning the liberation motif in favour of alternatives such as reconstruction (Mugambi 1995; Villa-Vicencio 1992). In this context, scholars who have used Black theology as a form of self description have not denied that some degree of liberation has been attained, arguing instead that we are in one of the contours of liberation, or “liberated areas” (Mugambi 2003: 61).

Firstly, and in agreement with Maluleke (1997: 4-3) and Cochrane *et al* (1999: 73), it is important to assess the gains or losses in the struggle for liberation. Doing so will give an indication of the ground that has been covered by Black theology. Maluleke (1995, 1997, 2000) maintains that there is much that this tradition can still offer, even in our current democratic context. Most importantly, liberation theology, and by implication Black theology, is scientific in its analysis. According to Vellem (2007: 9), “its cardinal principles cannot be simply abandoned without being qualitatively contrasted and engaged with newly proposed guiding principles of knowledge such as reconstruction”. Secondly, there are suggestions that the tradition of a Black theology of liberation is broad, having different notions of liberation (Ntintili 1996: 1-17). Clearly, in the development of Black theology, there is evidence that various notions of liberation, if not various contours of liberation, could be used, as evidenced by the various strands of Black theology extrapolated by Ntintili. In seeking to establish which of the strands is more liberative, Ntintili contrasts three strands of Black theology. The first he calls Black Solidarity, the second, Black Solidarity-Materialist and the third, Non-Racialist. As will be explained later in this study, these liberative strands give clarification to a broad understanding of Black theology, with the Black Solidarity-Materialist strand projecting liberation in broad comprehensive terms.

Taking the abovementioned aspects into consideration, it becomes important to critically evaluate the proposal for a theology of reconstruction in relation to Black theology and its relevance in post-apartheid South Africa. As mentioned earlier, the crux of the argument centres on the notion that reconstruction is proposed as a means to discount liberation. On the other hand, it also allows for the possibility to redefine reconstruction as a heuristic device of liberation. In doing so, it is argued that it is not liberation but its expression through the notion of reconstruction that must be redefined. Here reconstruction is interpreted as an addendum and not

as a replacement of liberation in Black theology (Vellem 2007: 128). From this perspective it is argued that it is not the liberation motif in Black theology that needs to be redefined; rather, it is the mode of doing Black theology that must shift to a less-embittered approach with a kind of “constructive impatience” (Vellem 2007: 128).

f) Given the changes in South Africa’s socio-political context it is important to concede that Black theology does indeed face contextual challenges (see Motlhabi 2008; Maluleke 2000). The debates on the emerging post-Exilic theologies make it clear that practitioners of Black theology have not yet devised a new and clearly defined theological framework for reflection following the dismantling of apartheid (Motlhabi 2008: 13-14). Maluleke appears to acknowledge this when he says that after the euphoria of the end of apartheid, it “would be accurate to say that South African theology and South African Ecumenism are in some kind of recess if not a kind of disarray” (2000: 194). From a Black theological perspective, Motlhabi (2008: 13) notes that there have been no major seminars or conferences on Black theology in South Africa since 1996. Nor have there been any significant or groundbreaking publications since then. In this context he concurs with Maluleke (2000: 194) by stating that the practitioners of Black theology have been paralysed by the new circumstances with their new sets of problems. According to this view, it appears that the practitioners of Black theology have not yet been able to develop a new strategy or new paradigm to deal with the new circumstances presented by post-apartheid South Africa.

One may therefore contend that the new set of problems does not mean that the old ones have been entirely solved or done away with. Apart from poverty, the race factor, according to Gerald West (1993), remains a defining feature of identity politics in South Africa, even after the advent of democracy.⁵ These are some of the issues that continue to manifest and mutate themselves in various ways in post-apartheid South Africa. During the apartheid era these contemporary concerns formed part of the long list of issues that the proponents of Black theology were attempting to address. As a consequence, the proposal for a shift from liberation to reconstruction appears almost remote and utopian. In this study, it is therefore maintained that the proposal for a theology of reconstruction does not alter the relevance of Black theology, but

⁵ In the publication, *To the Brink: The State of Democracy in South Africa*, Mangcu (2008: xiv) highlights some of the emerging dangers of racism and identity politics in the democratic South Africa.

provides an opportunity for its redefinition as a constructively impatient and insurgent discourse in a less-embittered mode (Vellem 2007: 128). In light of the contributions made in this regard, it is argued that the notion of reconstruction remains an important objective within the democratic context. The aim is thus not to discredit notions presented by reconstruction but rather to point to its emergence as a theological motif, and to show how it has been received by those using Black theology as a form of self description. In doing so the challenges facing Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa are also explored.

1.3 Statement of the research problem and delimitation

In terms of these observations, one may conclude that the proposal to shift from liberation to reconstruction clearly challenges the relevance of Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa. As mentioned earlier, the contrasting view presented by a theology of reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa is represented through the figure of Nehemiah which, unlike that of Moses, gives South Africans the mirror in which they are able to perceive their mission to remake South Africa out of the ruins caused by colonial domination and apartheid. From an African perspective this raises a number of interesting questions, especially in the context of Black theology in South Africa. What is the state of Black theology of liberation given the dawning of South African democracy? *In relation to the proposal for a shift from liberation to reconstruction, how is the relevance of Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa understood in recent publications in the field of African Christian theology?* Should the emphasis continue to be on liberation or reconstruction in response to rebuilding South Africa after apartheid? This study will thus focus on the way in which the relationship between liberation and reconstruction is understood within recent Christian theologies in the African context.

On the basis of the discussion thus far, the problem that will be investigated in this study may be formulated as follows:

How is the relationship between the schools of postcolonial Christian theology, based on the root metaphors of “liberation” and “reconstruction”, understood in recent literature by those using Black theology as a form of self description? This requires an exercise in

identification, classification and description of the different ways in which this relationship is understood.

This formulation calls for further conceptual clarification and the demarcation of the scope of the study:

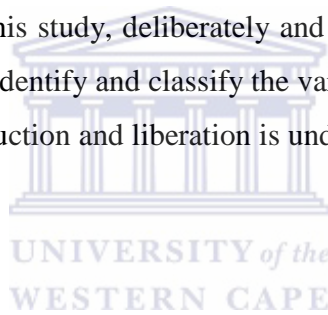
There are a number of publications in the field of African Christian theology that discuss the proposal to move from liberation to reconstruction at the conceptual level and in relatively abstract terms. The contributions by Mugambi (1995, 2003), Villa Vicencio (1992, 1999), Vellem (2007) and Maluleke (1994, 1995, 1997, 2000) in this regard will clearly be of major significance to this study. Others will be consulted, but these theologians, as primary sources, provide some of the most relevant material emanating from the proposal of reconstruction in relation to liberation. However, the relationship between liberation and reconstruction is often discussed more implicitly in the contributions of Gathogo (2005, 2007), Martey (1994, 2005), and Mothlabi (2008). The way in which the relationship between liberation and reconstruction is understood in these contributions will therefore be taken into account.

The problem stated above suggests that there may be various ways in which the relationship between reconstruction and liberation is understood in the context of recent African Christian theologies. On this basis I will identify, classify and describe different ways in which the relationship between the approaches of reconstruction and liberation is understood in relevant literature.

I will focus on the way in which the relationship between the paradigms of reconstruction and liberation is expressed in theological publications, including books, journal articles, essays in edited volumes and postgraduate theses. An investigation of the ways in which the relationship between these two approaches is understood outside Africa may be highly fascinating, but it will require research that goes beyond the scope of this study. This excludes a number of potentially important contributions emanating from the post Cold War discourses in other parts of the world. It should thus be noted that it is not the aim of this study to give a full account of reconstruction as an emerging proposal beyond the scope of Africa, but rather to investigate its emergence in

relation to the relevance Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa. Here the contributions of African scholars outside South Africa are therefore to be taken into consideration.

I will focus on recent publications of this nature, i.e. publications from the post-colonial period, with specific reference to the four decades, between 1960 and 2000, in which liberation theology started to flourish. It will have a predominant focus on the role of Black theology in South Africa during this period. It will investigate deliberate attempts to relate Christianity to the South African context. It will focus on contributions within the context of the Protestant tradition whilst also noting some Catholic contributions. This investigation will not focus on contributions in the field of African traditional religion or on theological reflections in the context of other religious traditions, such as the Baha'i faith, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. For the purposes of this study, the contributions of theologians (including white authors – to use racial categories) who discuss aspects within the framework of this study, deliberately and self consciously, will be taken into account. This study will therefore identify and classify the various ways in which the relationship between the paradigms of reconstruction and liberation is understood within the context of recent African contextual theologies.



1.4 Procedure

In this thesis I will show that an examination of literature on the themes of liberation in relation to reconstruction has much bearing on the challenges facing Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that there are two dominant approaches through which one can understand how this issue is understood in African Christian theology. The first approach is to employ reconstruction, as a theological approach, as a means of rebuilding post Cold War Africa and post-apartheid South Africa. Here it is proposed that African theological initiatives should shift from liberation to reconstruction since the entire African continent is, so to speak, independent. In this context reconstruction is argued to be better positioned to address the current religious, cultural, political and socio-economic problems facing the African continent. The second approach is linked to liberation still being considered as the most appropriate metaphor for doing theology in the post-apartheid context. Here it is argued that, within the context of constitutional democracy, Black theology can still offer relevant tools which can be employed to engage with

the new situation that has arisen, thereby providing grounds for its continued relevance. Following from these positions, the notion of reconstruction as an addendum to Black theology will be highlighted in order to clarify a possible relationship between liberation and the proposal for reconstruction.

This study covers five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of liberation as the root metaphor that galvanises the norms and principles in Black theology. The emphasis here is on South African contributions where the work of Boesak (1976, 1979, 1984, 2005), Biko (1996) and Moore (1973) will be of significance. This approach is based on the study of literature in search of a classic understanding of liberation in Black theology. The framework of analysis will be shaped by the heritage of Black theology, particularly its link with the rise of black consciousness. Chapter 3 offers a brief survey of the emergence of reconstruction as a new theological method on the African continent. Here the work of Villa-Vicencio (1992, 1999) and Mugambi (1995, 2003) will be of particular importance. The approach is to highlight this proposal as emerging within the climate of reconstruction and development in South Africa. Chapter 4 will be main focus of this study. This chapter provides a critical survey on how those using Black theology as a form of self description have responded to the emergence of reconstruction. This will be done by providing a critique of the reconstruction motifs presented in Villa-Vicencio as well as Mugambi. This will then be followed by an overview on how the proponents of Black theology, in light of the proposal for reconstruction, have struggled to articulate a relevant theological framework following the dismantling of apartheid. That will take us to more recent contributions highlighting liberation and reconstruction as complementary and not as oppositional motifs. Here, the notion of reconstruction as an addendum of Black theology will be explored in more detail. In a brief concluding chapter, a few perspectives will be offered on the significance of better understanding the role of Black theology in light of the emergence of reconstruction.

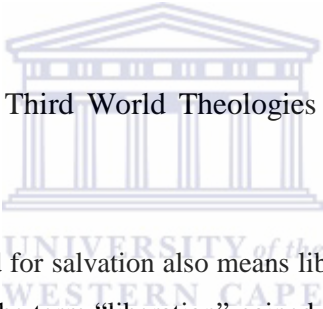
CHAPTER 2: Liberation as the root metaphor in Black theology

2.1 Introduction

The view assumed in this chapter is that *liberation* is the root metaphor that galvanises the norms and principles of Black theology. This chapter will explore liberation as the metaphor which highlights the emergence of the Black theological project. This chapter sets the scene for a response to the problem of whether liberation is still the most appropriate root metaphor to describe the major goal of Black theology in South Africa. My aim is not to present a history of Black theology, but rather to point to liberation as the root metaphor of its own hermeneutical stance.

2.2 Setting the Scene

Fabella in the 2000 Dictionary of Third World Theologies defines liberation in the following manner:



In the Hebrew Bible, the word for salvation also means liberation, as well as deliverance, rescue, and freedom from bondage. The term “liberation” gained additional prominence in theology and biblical studies since it was first used by two Third World theologians: *James H. Cone in A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1970, and Gustavo Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation* in 1973 (which initially appeared in English in 1970 in an abridged form on Theological Studies entitled “Notes for a Theology of Liberation”). Gutiérrez explains that “the historical process in which Latin America has been involved, and the experience of many Christians in this process, led liberation theology to speak of salvation in Christ in terms of liberation”. It better expresses the longing that arises from the innermost hearts of the poor and oppressed, and opens them to receive the saving love of God. Gutiérrez gives different dimensions of liberation: liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization; liberation from all forms of servitude; and liberation from sin, which breaks our friendship with God and other human beings. In short, Gutiérrez equates “to liberate” to “to give life”. In his writings Cone speaks of liberation as sanctification. To be sanctified is to be liberated, that is, politically engaged in the struggle for freedom. Sanctified does not mean substituting inward piety for social justice. Liberation, however, is not exclusively a political event but also an eschatological happening. If the

oppressed, while living in history, can see beyond it, salvation or liberation is not simply freedom in history, it is freedom to affirm that future which is beyond history – God’s own eschatological future (2000: 122-123).

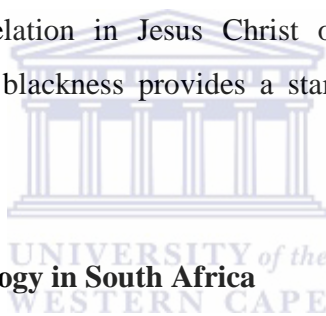
Given theological prominence by the exponents of Black theology and Latin American liberation theology, liberation as a theological metaphor represents an expression of the deepest longings of the poor and oppressed. According to Boff (1987: 90-91) liberation presents the “powerful and irresistible aspiration of the poor” thus it is a word that describes programmes of a theology that thinks as awakened faith, that has shaken off the burden of “religious opium of the people” and seeks a faith free from alienation, the catalyst of a new history.

Liberation is described above as a theological programme which adheres to the fact that at its core there is something positive about the Christian message. In fact, the exponents of liberation theology argue that liberation adheres to something supremely good about the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Positive terms which express this reality include: love, kindness, justice, salvation and liberation. These terms provide essence to the Christian faith not just as goodness, but as goodness coming from God. In this context it is important that goodness not be viewed in abstract terms only. Vellem (2007: 30), points out that goodness coming from God breaks into our time, meaning that the good and the positive of liberation happen as something real and not only in abstract terms. Liberation is therefore a powerful metaphor which is full of resonance, fusing together the political, the historical and the ultra-historical, and thus symbolising the relevance of the Christian faith. Considering the fusion of the spiritual and the real, Sobrino (1988: 3) states that in order to have spiritual life we first need to have life, thus capturing the evocative dimension of liberation as a theological metaphor behind a particular spirituality and consciousness. It is this gestation of the irresistible aspirations of the poor and oppressed that is evoked by liberation to connote a faith that fuses and integrates the real and the spiritual. Liberation therefore becomes an evocation of a message that resonates with the spiritual and real needs of the poor and oppressed, hence constructing a concrete programme for their emancipation to be realised in history.

If liberation is going to be the lens through which we view Black theology, it is at this point that the connection between liberation, blackness and poverty needs to be made. According to Boesak (1976: 19-20), liberation is the context of Black theology. He goes on to state that it was James Cone (1969, 1975) who first focussed on liberation as the central message of the gospel and therefore Christian theology. This point has already been made, but it is important to note that liberation is at the heart of the Black theological project. For Boesak (1976), this means that the central message of Black theology is liberation deigned to be consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He qualifies this assertion by stating that “liberation is not merely part of the gospel”, nor merely “one of the key words” of the gospel, it is the content and framework of the whole biblical message (1976: 20). From this it can be concluded that liberation is not only the context of Black theology but also its framework, thus its paradigm.

I now turn to the meaning of term ‘blackness’ in relation to liberation. According to Kee (1986: 30-57), the origins of blackness as a construct of self-affirmation can be traced back to the Caribbean. Vellem (2007: 34) notes that the use of the term blackness goes as far back as Aimé Césaire who struggled against the French cultural domination and colonization, followed by the likes of Frantz Fanon (1986, 2001), who is known for his work on decolonizing the mind. Vellem (2007: 34) goes on to state that the contribution of Edward Blyden (1990), a Presbyterian minister who viewed Christianity as a religion that deprived blacks of their history and identity, is also important in this regard. These and other themes were later extrapolated by people like Marcus Garvey (2005) who gave content to negritude and thus the development of black power and black consciousness. From a South African perspective this tradition was continued notably by scholars such as Biko (1996) and Boesak (1976; 1979; 1984), but the manner in which “blackness” has been used in relation to liberation is usually described as ontological. In their writings ontological blackness is understood to imply a state of mind, meaning that anyone assimilating his or her experience with that of the experiences of the black oppressed is understood to be black. In this sense, for both Biko (1996) and Boesak (1976), the term blackness indeed signifies more than skin colour. So, even though blackness is a symbol that arises from the historic meaning attached to black skin in western civilization, it points beyond mere skin colour to the solidarity in suffering and struggle of the descendents of all enslaved and colonized people (Boesak 1976: 27).

Having briefly explored the link between liberation in relation to blackness this study now turns to its symbolic link to poverty. From a Black theological perspective *black* connotes *poor*. In this context there is a sense that black is an ontological and symbolic expression of suffering and poverty. The poverty referred to here goes beyond material poverty: it also includes cultural and psychological poverty. Therefore, from a Black theological perspective, poverty is understood as a condition which is inflicted on blacks as non-whites or non-persons. Vellem (2007: 36) notes that the symbolic link between liberation, black and poverty emanates from the factual ontological exclusion and deprivation of blacks from all spheres of life historically and in the present. In South Africa, while political liberation has been achieved, large numbers of blacks continue to live in abject poverty, hence the vestiges of the legacy of apartheid occur along the fault lines of race in public spheres. However, it is important to note that the black experience of impoverishment is not a universal criterion for Christian theology or liberation, but provides a framework in which God's revelation in Jesus Christ occurs. From a Black theological perspective one could argue that blackness provides a starting point for the interlocation of liberation as a root metaphor.



2.3 The origins of Black theology in South Africa

2.3.1 The framework of Black theology

The historical origins of Black theology must be viewed within a broader theological context. According to Motlhabi (2008: 17) there is a dialectical relationship between American Black theology and South African Black theology. In looking at the foundations of Black theology it would be fair suggest that Black theology stands with one leg in Africa with another in America. Motlhabi (2008: 17-18) notes that two main approaches have often been cited in the quest for its origins:

The first approach grounds itself in the historical past of black people in the United States (hereafter US) and South Africa. What is taken into account and interpreted here is black people's cultural heritage, religion and philosophy, as well as the impact made by Western culture on it, particularly through Christianity and the general historical and contemporary experience of blacks in oppressive, white dominated societies. From a Black theological

perspective this approach involves the sometimes different, but often identical emphasis on the historical past and experiences of blacks in the US and South Africa. From a South African perspective there was a period when Black theology was mediated as an oral tradition with little being produced in writing. According to Motlhabi (2008) African Traditional religion and thus African Initiated Churches (hereafter AIC's) and Ethiopianism constitute the roots of this tradition. The second approach considers what may be called the "literary origins" of Black theology, that is, Black theology as an intellectual discipline. There is a general consensus that Black theology originated in the US when Cone produced *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969).

Generally the second approach is the most accepted view, but it is important to note that these two approaches have not been treated independently of each other, but rather as related. So, if according to Motlhabi (2008: 18), the second approach is the most accepted view, it makes Cone's (who is generally referred to as the father of this discipline) understanding of liberation and definition of the origins of Black theology very important for the South African context. As a pioneering work on Black theology, Cone's work characteristically has three main sources; namely, Western theology, Scripture, as well as past and contemporary African American writings. According to Cone (1969), Black theology derives its inspiration from scripture, and Luke 4: 18 may be said to be its liberatory creed. He also states that Black theology derives inspiration from the Old Testament story of the Exodus, which is often cited as proof that God, as the liberator of the oppressed who freed the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, would surely hear the cry of blacks in the US (and apartheid South Africa) and deliver them from the anguish of white oppression.

It is important to note that the effort of introducing Black theology to the South African scene was made by the University Christian Movement (hereafter UCM) in 1971. Through the UCM's director of Theological Concerns, Basil Moore, Black theology as a method of theological reflection was imported from the US and placed under a separate project bearing that name. Motlhabi (2008: 22) notes that although the name and method were imported, it was made clear that in content and outlook Black theology in South Africa was situational, that is, South African and not American. Needless to say, just as black power had an immense influence on Black

theology in the US, black consciousness was the inspiration behind Black theology in South Africa. Black theology in South Africa thus is a logical result and religious counterpart of black consciousness. It is therefore natural that Black theology followed shortly after black consciousness had made its appearance in South Africa.

2.3.2 Liberation and Black Consciousness

From a Black theological perspective, the black consciousness philosophies propounded by student organisations such as the South African Student's Organisation (hereafter SASO) created a new theological climate in South Africa (Maimela 1987: 70). Frostin (1988: 91) concurs when he notes that the emergence of Black theology cannot be properly understood if one neglects the context and influence of black consciousness⁶. The idea to conscientise blacks and urges them to affirm their personhood by rejecting the white value system and creating their own was at the core of the philosophy of black consciousness. Black theology thus became a response to white theology and related the black experience to the Christian faith. Black theology through black consciousness sought to demonstrate that God was not sectarian and that black existence was a legitimate form of existence, with God actively involved in the struggle for liberation. In the 2000 *Dictionary of Third World theologies*, Hopkins defines Black consciousness in the following manner:

Black Consciousness, in its theological context, arose in the mid-to late 1960s both in the United States and in South Africa. As a movement, it defined how one gained consciousness of being black. In the United States prior to becoming "black," African Americans had accepted the name of "Negro," even though this rubric suggested that blacks were defined, controlled, and, thereby, oppressed by whites. South African blacks struggled against comparable derogatory descriptions given to them by white Christian. Instead of *kaffir*, "coloured" or "Bantu," Africans, like their black American counterparts, accepted "black" as an overarching designation of self-definition. The question "How does one be black and Christian?" challenged both sides of the Atlantic. In

⁶ Tutu (1975), Boesak A (1976), Goba (1986), Maimela (1987), Mosala (1986), Maluleke (2008), all drew from the insights of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Tutu (1996: ix) says, "Constantly in the difficult days of our struggle against apartheid, I used to say that the Black Consciousness movement was surely of God," in the preface of Biko's *I write what I like*.

response, a black theology of liberation arose, between 1966 and 1969, as the theological arm of larger liberation struggles (2000a: 32).

It should be noted that Biko, who is widely regarded as the father of black consciousness, was also committed to the project of Black theology (Frostin 1988: 91). For Biko the black consciousness thesis arose out of the problem of a “strong white racism” in an apartheid society. According to him, the problem of white racism has over time created the “white power structure”. This meant that white racism, whilst based on the historical dispossession and oppression of blacks, has come to assume a position of relative autonomy, where whiteness normalises itself i.e. where the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks establishes itself as natural. In essence, the actual existing circumstances of blacks historically and systematically created and reinforced the psychologically ignored⁷ conception of white superiority and black denigration. This proposition should be understood not in terms of a mental state only, but also in terms of material attainment, which ultimately determines life chances and privileges.

Thus, for Biko, the link between liberation and Black consciousness is clear: namely, the thesis of a “strong white racism” whose antithesis is the liberation of blacks for the liberation of humanity. On this point Vellem (2007: 51) explains that the affirmation of blackness and black emancipation from racism is the means to the goal of human freedom for both blacks and whites. Boesak’s notion of “pseudo- innocence” should be understood from this point of view. He argues that it is no longer possible to innocently accept history as it happens, silently hoping that God would take responsibility for human failure (Boesak 1976: 10). For Boesak the word innocence represents a kind of guilelessness in actions, and pseudo-innocence is childishness, almost demonic as opposed to child-likeness. To maintain the *status quo*, as Boesak has maintained, it becomes necessary to create an aura of innocence, hence his call to bid farewell to innocence as stated in *Farewell to Innocence. A Socio-Ethical Study of Black Theology and Black Power* (1976). Therefore, for Boesak the message of Black theology is essentially about liberation, to set at liberty both the oppressed and the oppressor. Its *telos*, as alluded to earlier, is the liberation of both blacks and whites. Under these circumstances Black theology through black

⁷ Here it is suggested that prior to the rise of such movements as Black Consciousness, the ideology of white supremacy was tactically accepted by all (unquestionably maintained as the status quo), and not subject to criticism.

consciousness wanted to serve as a challenge to the consciousness of South Africans for the benefit of genuine Christian love and its implications for the struggle for justice.

To conclude, Black consciousness first and foremost rejects white societal standards as the norm because it is based on a racist premise. In this context it rejects black fear of whiteness. Central to its philosophy is the call for the unity of blacks. Furthermore, it is non-violent in its approach (Biko 1996, Boesak 1976). It highlights white racism as a means to promote black human dignity. In its relationship with Black theology, black consciousness suggests that being black is a decisive faith category in the appropriation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2.3.3 The development of liberation as root metaphor in Black theology

The development of the liberation metaphor has gained prominence since the emergence of Black theology in South Africa during the late 1960's. It became a category for a new theological self-understanding that challenged Africans to discover themselves as human beings created in the *Imago Dei*. As a new theological acquisition, liberation was harnessed as a tool to respond to white racism and capitalist imperialism and, indeed, also to oppression by Africans against Africans, or blacks against blacks and African men against African women (Vellem 2007: 56). With this in mind, liberation theologies have developed variations in approach and emphasis regarding methodology, definition and content. In essence, the issue of race, poverty, culture and spirituality serve as points of departure for the root metaphor of liberation in Black theology.

According to Martey (2005: 2), Black theology was the first liberation orientated theology to appear on the African scene in the early 1970's. As stated earlier, Black theology in South Africa attributes much of its influence to Cone (1969, 1975) with its key preoccupation being racism before the collapse of apartheid. Therefore, one could argue that Black theology arose in opposition to apartheid, highlighting the need to demolish this socio-political system. In the development of liberation as root metaphor of Black theology in South Africa, two distinct phases need to be highlighted.

2.3.3.1 Phase One of Black theology

This phase began in the 1970's and is closely related to the black consciousness movement. It focussed almost exclusively on race analysis. Inspired by the black consciousness philosophy of Biko, this phase saw its task as the "conscientization" of blacks, enabling them to become the vehicles of their own liberation. Prominent theologians in this phase were figures such as Boesak (1976; 1979, 1984), Goba (1986; 1988) and Buthelezi (1973), amongst others. However, it was Basil Moore's collection of essays published in 1973 that actually stimulated Black theology's intellectual development. Parallel to these developments, African theology was also beginning to crystallise. Here the prominent figures were Mbiti (1969; 1975), Dickson (1984) and Setiloane (1979; 1986), all of whom sought to find a space for African culture in Christian theology. Vellem (2007: 58) notes that African theology was an intellectual exercise aimed at interpreting Christian theology within the framework of the world of African cultural meaning. He further adds that methodological formulations of African and Black theologies led to fierce debates, among them the debate between Tutu and Mbiti, documented in Cone & Wilmore (1979). Tutu (483-491) and Mbiti (477-482) engaged in a debate regarding the general apprehension many African theologians felt about the use of predominantly foreign tools, rather than those drawn from the culture of the African people.

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Conversely, Black theologians were also critical of the apparent absence of liberation in the African theological discourse. Labelling African and Black theologies as "soul mates", Tutu's argument gained wide support in establishing a sense of harmony between the liberation trajectory and culture (Vellem 2007: 58). In this context, Tutu argued that as "soul mates" Black theology and African theology were not mutually exclusive but interrelated theological categories or methods. Later, Mosala (1989) asserted that black hermeneutics should be rooted in the history and culture of the black oppressed, in some way illustrating this interrelatedness.

2.3.3.2 Phase Two of Black theology

According to Vellem (2007: 59), it was the 1986 publication *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black theology from South Africa* that ushered in the second distinctive phase in Black theology. In this phase a Marxist analysis of society was taken into consideration. The emphasis

on a Marxist analysis of society arose as a result of a growing view that perceived race as an inadequate tool of analysis for Black liberation. In this context Latin American theologians pointed to the narrow emphasis on racism as an analytical tool characteristic of Black theology. They argued that Black theology ignored the issue of class and that their system and strategy of liberation was flawed without a class analysis of society. What became apparent in this phase, especially through the work of Mosala in *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (1989), was that an analysis based on race was inadequate without a class analysis. Mosala appropriated a materialist reading of the Bible and debunked the theoretical tools employed by most Black theologians. For Mosala the appropriation of Marxist tools meant that the grammar of Black theology in South Africa was expanded to be more comprehensive in its analysis of the situation in the country. Categories borrowed from Marx, such as alienation, class, labour or historical materialism and orthopraxis, thus became prisms in Black theological discourse through which to deconstruct domination. However, it should be noted that these Marxist tools were not simply adopted uncritically by Black theologians. Vellem (2007: 64) notes that Latin American theologians who prominently used Marxist tools were challenged by other Third World theologians who saw the danger of overlooking the religio-cultural realities, particularly with regards to the African and Asian contexts. Notwithstanding their weaknesses, the two phases of Black theology thus far discussed, which include, race, culture and class, represent some of the gains of Black theology of liberation prior to the dawn of democracy in South Africa.

2.3.3.3 Strands of liberation in Black Theology

Some of the most notable work identifying different strands of Black theology of liberation in South Africa is presented in Ntintili's article called "Notions of liberation in Black Theology: Which is more Liberative?" (1996) which appeared in the *Journal of Black theology*. Inspired by some of the difficulties identified by the race, class and cultural debate discussed above, Ntintili's use of the metaphor of strands in Black theology is quite significant because it makes room for mutual flows into one another instead of the temptation to make a rigid demarcation between race, class and culture in the analysis of Black theology. Ntintili identifies three strands in the development of Black theology of liberation in South Africa. Key to his approach is the

view that Black theology does not entertain a single notion of liberation. Instead, “it espouses divergent notions and some of them are more liberating than others” (Ntintili 1996: 1).

As mentioned in the first chapter of this study, there are three strands that Ntintili contrasts. They are as follows:

- The first he calls the *Black Solidarity strand*;
- The second he calls the *Black Solidarity- Materialist strand*; and,
- The third is called the *Non-Racialist strand*.

According to Ntintili, the Black Solidarity Strand focussed its conceptualisation of oppression on racism. Here it is emphasised that racism has subjective and objective dimensions. The focus is therefore on the socio-psychological dimensions of racism. The Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand highlighted the class, race and gender analysis. The third strand, the Non-Racialist Strand focussed on apartheid. Ntintili maintains that, of all the strands, the Non-Racialist Strand was the most popular. It focussed on the legal dimensions of apartheid with specific reference to policy making. Particularly through the Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand, the organic relatedness of oppression was demonstrated. From this an integrated and holistic approach of liberation was emphasised with the essential element of taking a preferential option for the poor. Ntintili (1996: 15) notes that his analysis of the three strands of Black theology has led him to the conclusion that the Black Solidarity-Materialist strand is one that takes into account the four criteria of comprehensiveness, interrogation, identification and planned involvement. Thus, for him, the Black Solidarity-Materialist strand’s notions of oppression and liberation are the most liberative.

What can be concluded from Ntintili’s assertion is that there are at least four criteria that need to be satisfied in order to analyse oppression and liberation. Firstly, the comprehensiveness of analysis is essential because oppression has many dimensions. The dimensions of race, class, gender and marginalisation is at the heart of the Black theological analysis. Secondly, integration implies the need to take the organic relatedness of these dimensions of oppression into consideration. Thirdly, identification summons us to take sides. When engaging with theology

there cannot be any neutrality. In line with this argument Maluleke (2006: 304) notes that the message of Black theology, in order to assist in the liberation of the oppressed, should choose the side of the oppressed and must do so in solidarity not with the powerful and wealthy, but with the poor and the oppressed. Last of all is the planned engagement of those who commit to the transformation of the oppressive structures to *praxis*. According to Ntintili (1996) it is not right thinking, but right doing in the service of justice and transformation that characterises those engaged in the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. In this context planning involves the consideration of the outcomes of critical analysis and their interpretation of which action and transformation will emanate from them.

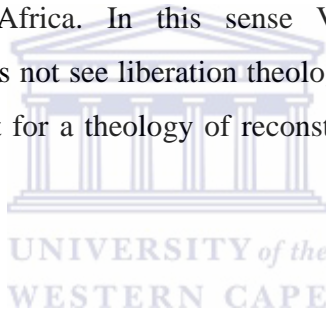
2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the manner in which the root metaphor of liberation shapes the norms and principles of Black theology of liberation. In the introduction, an assertion that liberation is the root metaphor that galvanises the norms and principles of Black theology was made, which was then followed by an explication of the appropriation of this programme into the Black theological project. This chapter also attempted to highlight the broader framework of Black theology, especially with regards to its early links to the oral tradition in African Traditional Religion and its academic roots, which can be traced back to its development in the US. Following the framework of Black theology, I attempted to establish various notions of liberation. I have asserted that comprehensiveness, integration, identification and planned involvement constitute the important dimensions of liberation as attested by the various strands in Black theology in South Africa. This holistic dimension of liberation and its link with Black theology therefore emphasises its centrality as a theological root metaphor. In essence, what could be drawn from the various scholarly contributions highlighted in this chapter is that liberation in Black theology developed into a comprehensive root metaphor. It is however not the only root metaphor that has been suggested in recent theological discourses. The next chapter will highlight and discuss one such theological metaphor which has emerged and gained considerable prominence in post Cold War and post-apartheid discourses.

CHAPTER 3: Reconstruction as an Emerging Proposal

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the emergence of reconstruction as an approach to African theology, especially during the 1990's. In this chapter I will investigate the work of mainly two authors who may be regarded as representative of such a theology of reconstruction, namely Charles Villa-Vicencio (1992, 1993, 1999) and Jesse Mugambi (1989, 1995, 1997, 2003). I will demonstrate that a theology of reconstruction is a form of postcolonial discourse that recognises the need for theological articulation (referring to both African and Black theology) to move from liberation to reconstruction. Building on the insights of liberation theology, reconstruction theology is argued to more effectively address the challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa and the broader post-colonial Africa. In this sense Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi are representative of the view that does not see liberation theology as a solution to the issues facing church and society but instead opt for a theology of reconstruction as a more effective way of addressing these challenges.



3.2 Setting the Scene

The proposal for reconstruction theology emerged as an approach to African theology in the late 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's (Martey 2005: 5). In 1987 at the Fifth General Assembly of the All African Conference of Churches, reconstruction was proposed by Jesse Mugambi as a way forward. He began advocating it especially when it became clear that apartheid was coming to an end and a new theological motif apart from liberation might therefore be necessary (Gathogo 2007: 328)⁸. In the book *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) it was suggested that this new phase in Africa's history should be an era in which theological articulation (referring to both African and Black theology) must shift theological emphasis from the Exodus motif to that of reconstruction (Gathogo 2007: 328). Comparing the decade to the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe and the respective awakenings of the Renaissance and the Reformation,

⁸ Described as the "undisputed founder of theology of reconstruction in Africa" by Gathogo (2007: 328), there is general consensus that Mugambi was the first among African theologians to propose a departure from liberation to a reconstruction paradigm (Getui and Obeng 2003: foreword, Martey 2005: 5, Farisani 2002: 63).

Mugambi declared the 1990's to be the beginning of Africa's Renaissance and Reformation and therefore the commencement of a process of reconstruction (Mugambi 1995; 1997; 2003).

In South Africa, Charles Villa-Vicencio in his book *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* (1992) developed the same theme⁹. Here it is important to note that Villa-Vicencio's project emerged within the climate of reconstruction and development in South Africa. According to Maluleke (1994: 245), the notion of reconstruction became prevalent especially in South Africa's period of transition. Within the political sphere the African National congress (hereafter ANC) had already in the early 1990's begun to discuss the Reconstruction and Development Programme (hereafter RDP) published as the ANC's election manifesto before the 1994 national elections. Later, in a modified form, the RDP was published as a government White Paper in 1994. According to Hirsch (2005: 59) the RDP document "was a blue print for a productive social democratic haven". Later theologians such as Boesak in his book *The Tenderness of Conscience. African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics* (2005) offered a critical contribution inspired by the theological developments around the RDP.

It is important to note that both Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi perceive the necessary shift within the context of the Old Testament post-Exilic period. In this context these post-Exilic texts become the basis for reconstruction in African Christian theology. More specifically, the post-Exilic metaphor derived from Ezra-Nehemiah is central to this proposed shift. The idea is that liberation, which has largely been associated with the Exodus theme, is no longer adequate to deal with some of the emerging challenges. In this sense, their proposals for a shift highlight the many socio-political developments in South Africa and the rest of the African continent. This important factor, according Villa-Vicencio (1992) and Mugambi (1995), demands the reconstruction and renovation of Africa in the 21st century.

⁹ In this sense, Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio may be regarded as leaders of this movement, as suggested by Maluleke (1997: 22; 2005: 491).

3.3 Reconstruction

Having briefly mentioned the most notable contributions for reconstruction as an alternative to liberation, in the next section of this study I will explore the reconstruction tenets presented by Villa-Vicencio (1992) in more detail. This will then be followed by the reconstruction tenets presented by Mugambi (1995), who has perhaps made the most significant contribution with regards to the promotion of reconstruction as a theological metaphor. The aim is thus to establish what the tenets of the proposed reconstructive motif are about before establishing how those using Black theology as a form of self description responded to this new proposal, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.3.1 From Liberation to Reconstruction in Villa-Vicencio

Charles Villa-Vicencio was the Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation based in Cape Town, South Africa. He was formerly the National Research Director in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC). A regular contributor to debate in South Africa, his present work is largely in the area of transitional justice. Villa-Vicencio's work *A Theology of Reconstruction: National Building and Human Rights* (1992), published at the beginning of the new democracy in South Africa, was written about the struggle of the new government to develop an equitable social structure where the needs of all South Africans are addressed is the basis for his proposal for a theology of reconstruction. In this work Villa-Vicencio presented his most comprehensive contribution regarding the need for African and Black theology to move from liberation to reconstruction.

Fisher (2007: 136) notes that Villa-Vicencio has, over a period of time, moved from a position of liberation theology to embrace the need for a more constructive societal change. What becomes clear from Villa-Vicencio's proposal for reconstruction is that some new kind of liberation theology is being pursued (1992: 13). Because reconstruction theology, according to him, is a new kind of liberatory theology, he recognises the concern by some theologians to move beyond what they regard as legitimate forms of liberation theology, this in spite of the need to engage constructively in nation building. For Villa-Vicencio the challenge now is to translate that hope and promise articulated in liberation theology into concrete theological programs for home-

coming and nation building (Vellem 2007: 139). Villa-Vicencio further maintains that as a liberatory theology, reconstruction stands for radical transformation (1992: 39). Therefore, because liberation theology has not produced the strategies of reconstruction, he asserts that a new metaphor of reconstruction must be explored in order to shift from saying “No” to saying “Yes”.

3.3.1.1 Reconstruction Tenets in Villa-Vicencio

The context which informs Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for reconstruction as a new theological motif is characterised by major socio-political shifts occurring in South Africa and in the rest of the world. The most important shifts in this regard include the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany and the dawn of democracy in South Africa. In the general sense, these events symbolise what is now generally referred to as the dawn of the “New World Order”¹⁰. This notion of the New World Order connotes the disintegration of Union of Soviet States of Russia (hereafter USSR), the demise of apartheid in South Africa, the reunification of Germany, initiatives to create a unitary Europe, the emergence of Third World countries and globalization (Maluleke 1996: 38; Mc Grew 1990: 13).

According to Villa-Vicencio (1992: 2), reconstruction is a response to the challenge faced by the church, which, according to its theological task is to restore justice and to affirm human dignity ensuring that in the process of reconstruction, nations are able to turn away from greed, domination and exploitation and embrace communal sharing and personal fulfilment. In this sense reconstruction is a process that entails the transformation of social ills in order to usher in communal sharing and personal efficacy. With the political void having been filled since the unbanning of political organizations in South Africa, the need to move from saying “No” to saying “Yes” has arisen, he asserts. Villa-Vicencio (1992: 2) also points out that the type of theology of reconstruction demanded by this challenge to move from saying “No” to saying “Yes” is in every sense a post-Exilic theology. In this context reconstruction addresses a situation in which political exiles are quite literally returning home, having left South Africa

¹⁰ Even though the notion of “New World Order” has taken on new meaning since the era of George W. Bush it should be noted that here this notion refers specifically to the end of the Cold War and the abolition of apartheid in South Africa.

following the banning of the African National Congress (hereafter ANC) and the Pan African Congress (hereafter PAC) in the 1960s. For Villa-Vicencio (1992), one may argue, reconstruction involves the difficult tasks of breaking down prejudices of race, class and sexism and the difficult challenge of creating an all inclusive society built on the very values denied to the majority of South Africans under apartheid. If this challenge is met, Villa-Vicencio (1992: 7-9) maintains, it could mean that reconstruction could be the birth of a different kind of liberatory theology.

Villa-Vicencio (1992) asserts that reconstruction is in a biblical sense considered to be a post-Exilic theology. In this context, he argues that the central biblical motif for reconstruction theology is the “post-Exilic” experience rather than the “Exodus” as it was with various contextual theologies, including Black theology, which formed part of the “struggle” of resistance. According to Villa-Vicencio (in Maluleke 1994: 250), there are resources in the biblical literature of the post-Exilic times that give credence to the appropriation of the post-Exilic metaphor as a prophetic theology of reconstruction. Here the main interlocutors of the reconstruction are the political exiles who have returned to South Africa since the unbanning of the liberation movements. Reconstruction is therefore a call for the transformation of social prejudices and the creation of a new society.

Another factor highlighted by Villa-Vicencio is the need for reconstruction theology to have an interdisciplinary approach. For Villa-Vicencio, as pointed out by Maluleke (1994: 251), reconstruction should emerge as a link between theology and law, economics, political science and related disciplines. This new theological challenge, according to Villa-Vicencio’s notion of reconstruction is the need to involve other disciplines and faculties. This is marked by a commitment to “enthusiastic participation in the constitutional debate, the establishment of a society governed by the rule of law, the affirmation of human rights and the creation of laws designed to produce justice now” (Villa Vicencio 1992: 13). Maluleke (1994: 250) also states that the issues of law making, human rights, economic justice and freedom of conscience become vital sources of Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for reconstruction theology. In this context reconstruction theology should involve the theological wisdom passed on ‘from age to age’ as the church cannot abandon its responsibility to participate in public life, which would include the

need to involve and cooperate with other disciplines and faculties. In this proposal Villa-Vicencio also demonstrates the immense difficulties that accompany theologising in times of reconstruction. With this he holds the opinion that church and theology have a significant role to play in the light of dealing with the consequences of an apartheid society. Here reconstruction theology should function as the inspiration for a renewal of social vision aimed at rebuilding South Africa from the ruins of apartheid.

Vellem (2007: 135) states that Villa-Vicencio's notion of reconstruction is one of "middle axioms"; meaning the provisional values and structures, which begin the process of renewal within the limitations and context of one generation. In this regard Villa-Vicencio (1992: 9) mentions that middle axioms are ethical principles "not binding for all time" but that which "begin" the process of social renewal. Therefore, according to him, middle axioms are evolving principles in the process of social reconstruction, "seeking to define the next logical step society needs to take at a given time" (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 280). Here the next "logical step" would be to move from liberation to reconstruction, as Villa-Vicencio (1992) asserts. Additionally, it is implied that middle axioms should be perceived as the "anchors and compasses" of a utopia of reconstruction. In other words, they are ethical principles that state what the gospel's demands are at a given time and space. Vellem (2009: 135) notes that Villa-Vicencio employs the notion of middle axioms as a contextual device to locate reconstruction theology within theory and practice. In essence, middle axioms could be described as the application of certain ethical principles in any given time and space (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 283). Accordingly, a theology of reconstruction facilitates and promotes such principles that sustain human life in the best possible manner.

In essence, Villa-Vicencio's definition of reconstruction essentially becomes the manner in which he articulates the notion of *perestroika*¹¹. For him *perestroika* entails "building within the shell of an old society step by step" (Villa-Vicencio 1992: 241). Accordingly, reconstruction theology is an attempt to be "in critical solidarity with a democratically elected government"

¹¹ *Perestroika* is the Russian term now commonly used in the English language for the political and economic reforms introduced in by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Its literal meaning is "restructuring" referring to the reconstruction of the Soviet political and economic system. *Perestroika* is often argued to be one reason for the fall of communist political forces in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and for the end of the Cold War.

(Villa- Vicencio 1993: 25). Therefore, “while prophetic theology must continue to say ‘No’ to all forms of exploitation”, theology must “at the same time be concerned about how to share in the process of nation building, by saying ‘Yes’ to meaningful socio-economic and cultural change” (Villa-Vicencio 1993).

Based on the insights discussed thus far, the following key features of Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for reconstruction can be summarised. Firstly, reconstruction theology is a critical reflection that entails a transformation of society from social ills based on an oppressive history. From a South African perspective this would apply to the transformation of South Africa after apartheid. Secondly, the key metaphor of reconstruction theology refers to the post-Exilic corpus of Ezra-Nehemiah. With this there is an inherent prophetic dimension to the metaphor as well. Thirdly, reconstruction encourages informed theological participation in public life and policy formulation. To achieve this objective of participation in public life, a strategy of an “unambiguously interdisciplinary” theological enterprise expressing its faith ideals and vision must be assumed. Fourthly, its ethical character is expressed through the notion of “middle axioms” i.e. contextual devices applicable in a given time hence its praxiological orientation is informed by the notion of transitional ethical principles. Lastly, it is ideologically a theology of *perestroika*, a theological approach aimed at the processes of renewal, transformation and nation building.

3.3.2 From Liberation to Reconstruction in Mugambi

Jesse Mugambi is one of the foremost contemporary African theologians. In his writings he addresses a wide range of issues, including African culture and religion, economic relationships, economic justice and environmental concerns. His volume of essays entitled *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995) may be regarded as one of the most significant texts on a theology of reconstruction in Africa. In this respect Mugambi may be regarded to be the “undisputed founder of theology of reconstruction in Africa” as stated by Gathogo (2007: 328).

According to Fisher (2007: 127), in Mugambi’s earlier works leading up to the publication of *Africa Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989) the dominant theological concept that

Mugambi employed was that of liberation. Liberation according to Mugambi was understood as political liberation from colonial oppression (the self determination of nation states) but also from continued forms of economic deprivation and injustice as well as freedom from imposed cultural norms. More importantly, liberation was also understood as a theological category, namely, in terms of a prerequisite and essential component of salvation. In this sense liberation may be regarded as the dominant metaphor in Mugambi's earlier writings (Conradie 2006: 6). However, after his earlier excursions into liberation theology there is a marked shift from liberation to the understanding that society needs to be reconstructed which is emphasised by Mugambi in his later publications.

It is important to note however, that Mugambi does not present liberation and reconstruction as two competing themes but actually as themes complementary in the sense that liberation should 'naturally' be followed by reconstruction. However, Mugambi is of the opinion that the liberation motif, within which African theologies have thus far been undertaken, is no longer an adequate framework for doing African theology. According to him the liberation motif has been ineffective in responding to the multi-faceted challenges posed by Africa's post-colonial context. Instead of liberation theology, which is mainly "reactive", a "pro-active" theology of reconstruction should be developed, Mugambi argues (1995: 11-13). In this context the post-Exilic motif exemplified in Ezra-Nehemiah is proposed as a means to confront the new theological challenge and replace the Exodus motif which inspired liberation. Mugambi's shift from liberation to reconstruction is thus based on the conviction of the importance of Africans reviewing afresh the reading of the Bible, which is replete with illustrations of personal renewal and social reconstruction. Consequently, Mugambi (1995) states the argument that religious metaphors need to be reinterpreted when they become obsolete or perhaps even irrelevant.

3.3.2.1 Reconstruction tenets in Mugambi

As alluded to earlier, Mugambi, together with Villa-Vicencio, is regarded as the foremost African scholar of this theological movement (Maluleke 1997: 22). The framework which informs his proposal has to be understood in the context of the end of the Cold War; the recognition that processes of urbanisation and industrialisation are irreversible in the African

context; political independence existing in virtually all African countries; continued forms of economic injustice and neo-colonialism and also the endemic problems around a democratic culture and conflict on the African continent (Fisher 2008: 128). In this context Mugambi (1995) sees Nehemiah as “the director of the reconstruction project” after the Babylonian exile. In this new theological approach, Jesus’ mission is seen to be “reconstructive rather than destructive” and the Sermon on the Mount is regarded as “the most basic of all reconstructive theological texts in the Synoptic Gospels (Mugambi 1995: 13).

In his proposal Mugambi identifies three levels of reconstruction covering all areas of social life. First, there is the *personal* which deals with the reconstruction of individual motives and intentions. The second is *ecclesial* reconstruction, dealing with all areas of the church’s life including “management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resource development, research, family, education, service and witness”. He then sees theology as “the means by which the church rationalizes its process of ecclesial reconstruction (Mugambi 1995: 17). The third is *cultural* reconstruction, which has five components: (i) *politics* dealing with the management of social influence; (ii) *economics* dealing in matters of values; (iii) ethics dealing with the reconstruction of the system of values; (iv) aesthetics dealing with the sense of proportion and symmetry in all aspects of life; and (v) religion which provides the worldview synthesising “everything that it cherished by individuals as corporate members of community” (Mugambi 1995: 16-17). Reconstruction in Africa, according to Mugambi (1995), therefore refers to actions taken in all the different dimensions of societal life and not just in one particular sector of human existence. It is thus praxis embracing many practices within the social realm (Libanio 2000: 172).

According to Fisher (2007: 128), Mugambi’s proposal for reconstruction carries connotations derived from engineering and social sciences. Mugambi (1995) notes that reconstruction takes place where there is dysfunctionality. Moreover, in the process of reconstruction the old aspects become part of the new. Accordingly, social reconstruction belongs to social sciences and involves the re-organisation of some aspects in a given society in order to be more responsive to changed circumstances. Mugambi borrows this idea from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (see Berger & Luckmann 1967). Like Berger & Luckmann, Mugambi is convinced that religion

has an important role in the social reconstruction of a society. As both object and agent of social reconstruction, he is convinced that “religion provides the worldview which synthesises everything cherished by the individual” as corporate members of the community (Mugambi 1995: 17). Through his notion of reconstruction he notes that religion is the most vital project to people who are undergoing rapid changes, as experienced in post-colonial Africa and South Africa more specifically.

Taking these aforementioned changes into consideration, Mugambi (1995: 13) argues that “Nehemiah becomes the central text of the new theological paradigm in African Christian theology as a logical development from the Exodus motif”. In relation to this, he regards the way in which theologians are inclined to spiritualise the biblical concept of liberation as problematic since it is based on improper exegesis and thus leads to distortions of the theological message contained therein. He maintains that there are differences between Africa and Israel which makes it more problematic to engage the Exodus motif. The realities of historical and cultural distance, the difference in religious heritage and ideology, and moreover, the plurality of religions that Africans need to contend with are all factors that need to be taken into consideration. In this context, he argues that the parallels drawn between the Exodus and the process of decolonization have been rather contrived and far-fetched. Moreover, the analogy between the Exodus and the struggle against colonisation does not fit very well, considering that in the Old Testament, the Israelites move physically over time and space, from Egypt across the Sinai to Canaan, whereas Africans remain in the same geographical space. Thus, Exodus, when transposed in the African situation, is over time without any geographical movement (Mugambi 1995: 14-15).

Taking the previous passage into consideration what is gathered from Mugambi (1995) is that there should be a movement away from the Exodus motif. As mentioned, Mugambi sees a strong link between the biblical texts of Ezra-Nehemiah and the teachings of Jesus. Accordingly, 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 colonial rule and exploitation. For him, therefore, the role of reconstruction theology in post apartheid South Africa or in post Cold War Africa is tantamount to beginning to make a new history and reinterpreting old ones for the survival of

African people. Mugambi (1995) argues that the theme of reconstruction is made attractive by the fact that it highlights the necessity of creating a new society with the same geographical space, but across different historical moments. Accordingly, he then proceeds to apply the notion of reconstruction as theological metaphor in this manner.

3.4 Conclusion

The two theologians; Villa-Vicencio (1992) and Mugambi (1995), that I have examined in this chapter have clear convictions and come to similar conclusions. Both Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi see the need for theological articulation (referring to both African and Black theology) to move from liberation to the more “pro-active” theology of reconstruction. They call for the church to fulfil the role of conscience and to demonstrate biblical norms and values in the quest to rebuild South Africa and the broader African continent. Their approach recognises that all people and their dealings are inter-related, hence the call for reconstruction theology to be interdisciplinary in its approach. The role of the church in all of this could be categorised as that of having a prophetic voice bringing critique as well as offering God’s concerns and directives for the changed context. According to Maluleke (1997: 22), liberation theology responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage that no longer pertains to most African nations, and this has caused both Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi to call for a “pro-active” theology of reconstruction to be pursued. Those using Black theology as a self-description have been fairly critical of both these theologians, especially of what is seen as their tendency to disparage liberation theologies. The following chapter will provide a critique based on the inputs of various prominent African theologians. These contributions all point to the notion that reconstruction, in order to be effective, must begin with liberation or an oscillation between these motifs must be pursued. Be that as it may, the emergence of post-Exilic metaphors has had an impact on how Black theology is perceived in post-apartheid South Africa. These issues will be investigated in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: Liberation and Reconstruction: A Critical Survey

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical survey of how those theologians using Black theology as a form of self description have responded to the emergence of reconstruction as a theological method. This will then be followed by a critique of the reconstruction motif presented in Villa-Vicencio (1992) as well as Mugambi (1995). As a logical outflow from these discussions I will look at a more recent attempt to highlight liberation and reconstruction as complementary and not as oppositional motifs. Following this, I will look at contributions regarding some of the contextual challenges facing Black theology. In doing this, I will explore the theological implications the proposal for reconstruction may have for the continued relevance of Black theology in the post-apartheid era.

4.2 Reconstruction: A Critical Survey

As may have been expected, the proposal for a shift, from liberation to reconstruction, in post-apartheid South Africa and post-Cold war Africa was not received with great enthusiasm among the practitioners of Black theology (Gathogo 2007: 327). Among the various concerns highlighted is the uncritical response regarding Africa's independence by the proponents of the reconstruction motif. Gunda (2009: 86) notes that one cannot help but sense a false hope that Africa became independent with the fall from grace of apartheid-South Africa, hence in the foreword of *Theology of Reconstruction. Exploratory Essays* (2003) Mugambi writes:

Theology of Reconstruction is a recent phase in contemporary African theological vocabulary. Coined in 1990, when Africa entered a new historical period ushered in by the end of three vicious systems of oppression- institutionalised racism, formal colonialism and cold-war tutelage (Getui & Obeng 1999: foreword).

Gunda (2009) argues that, "It is apparent that Mugambi assumes that oppression ended with these 'systems of oppression' yet the common man in Africa may see things differently because more than a decade after these systems collapsed in Africa, the viciousness of oppression has outlived these systems!". Taking Mugambi's enthusiasm for this new period in Africa's history

into consideration, it is not surprising that he calls for “the shift from liberation to social transformation and reconstruction” (Mugambi 1995: 40). According to Gunda (2009: 86) however, it is not clear whether Mugambi’s proposal for reconstruction is a continuation of liberation or if it is different from liberation. Villa-Vicencio (1992: 275) on the other hand seems to regard reconstruction as “standing within the methodological designs of liberation theologies”.¹² Yet it is the case that Villa-Vicencio mostly seems to regard reconstruction theology as a “shift” from liberation theologies, which he characterises as theologies of resistance (Maluleke 1994: 252). In this context Villa-Vicencio (1993: 24) in his evaluation also goes on to discount the role of liberation theology, as stated in the following:

Liberation theology in South Africa has been essentially a theology of saying “No”. It required us to say a simple and firm “No” to apartheid, racism, sexism, exploitation and all phoney forms of reform. We did not have to be very thoughtful or intelligent to get this right. A little guts was all that was required of most of us – although some of us, paid dearly for daring to say “No”.

According to Maluleke (1994: 252) and Gunda (2009: 86) this characterisation of liberation, apart from it being too one-sided and general, is also a serious underestimation of liberation theology in suggesting that doing it needed little creativity and intelligence. Because of this it also becomes much more difficult to postulate any positive relationship between liberation and reconstruction in such an evaluation. This, according to Dedji (2003: 55), is strengthened by Mugambi’s evaluation of the Exodus motif. For Mugambi the Exodus-Eisodus¹³ is not a paradigm for liberation but for colonial plunder. In this sense it is not surprising that the proponents of liberation theology, especially those using Black theology as a form of self description, have not been enthusiastic about this new proposal.¹⁴ According to Gunda (2009: 87) this reality is exacerbated because the proposal for reconstruction had begun to do exactly the opposite of what it seeks to do, that is, bringing people together!

¹² Maluleke (1993: 23) struggles to locate the proposal for reconstruction, as postulated by Villa-Vicencio (1992), within the genre of liberation theology.

¹³ For Mugambi the Exodus-Eisodus motif encompasses the twin quest for freedom and land. It is in this paradigm that many colonisers justified the occupation of some of the African countries.

¹⁴ It is important to note that Maluleke (1994) and Velle (2007) are among those who have sharply criticised the project of reconstruction on the basis that it takes very little account of the progress made by liberation theologies in South Africa.

4.2.1 A Critique of the Reconstruction motif in Villa-Vicencio

In offering a response on Villa-Vicencio's proposal for reconstruction, Farisani (2002) engages Maluleke (1994) and Pityana (1995) in dialogue. As alluded to earlier, Maluleke (1994: 252) is among those who have sharply criticised the project of reconstruction on the basis that it takes very little account of the heritage of liberation theologies in South Africa. Maluleke is also of the view that reconstruction needs to begin with liberation. On the other hand, Pityana argues that Villa-Vicencio's project is not hostile to the liberation project as it is couched within the genre of liberation theology. Pityana's point is that something new has happened, a new situation has arisen which should thus be taken into consideration. Here, reconstruction, according to Pityana, is one such attempt where the new context is being addressed. Furthermore, in considering Villa-Vicencio's commitment to liberation, Pityana (1995) argues that his past contribution to the tradition of liberation must be taken into account. In essence, Farisani (2002) arrives, in his analysis, at the conclusion that reconstruction is not hostile to liberation, at least not as proposed or postulated by Villa-Vicencio.

As a biblical scholar, however, Farisani highlighted some concerns linked to Villa-Vicencio's appropriation of the post-Exilic metaphor of Ezra-Nehemiah, especially with regards to the question of the ideology between the *am haaretz* (the people of the land) and the exiles which he finds to be inadequately addressed by Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi (Farisani 2002: 66; 2003: 30). Farisani thus argues:

My main critique is that Villa-Vicencio's use of Ezra-Nehemiah does not examine critically the ideology behind the conflict between the returned exiles and the *am haaretz*. A careful reading of the text of Ezra-Nehemiah demonstrates that there is a contestation between at least two groups, namely the returned exiles and the *am haaretz*. It follows therefore that if Ezra-Nehemiah is to be used in the theology of reconstruction, it should not be read as representing the voice of only one group i.e. that of the returned exiles (2002: 30).

Vellem's (2007: 141) reading of Farisani indicates Farisani's commitment to a theology of reconstruction, albeit with a clear ideological bias for the *am haaretz*. For Farisani (2002: 19) liberation theology's focus would be to make the word of God address the plight of the poor in

the context of oppression. On the other hand, reconstruction theology suggests pro-active actions that would not only denounce oppression and poverty, but would also remove it from society. In this context Farisani (2002; 2003) argues that a complete break from liberation is not possible and suggests that an “oscillation” between liberation and reconstruction is the way forward. On this point, Vellem (2007: 142) argues that such an oscillation, in order to be effective, should take into account the ideological constraints that exist between liberation and reconstruction. In essence, Farisani’s contribution is characterised by his refusal to jettison liberation and contributes to reconstruction theology the dimension of sensitivity to ideology which was perhaps overlooked by both Villa-Vicencio and Mugambi. So, whilst Maluleke (1994) has been very critical of Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for reconstruction, Pityana (1995) does not see Villa-Vicencio’s endeavour to be hostile to liberation theology, while Farisani cautions against the uncritical use of the post-Exilic metaphor.

4.2.2 A Critique of the Reconstruction motif in Mugambi

In Vellem’s (2007: 166) critique of Mugambi’s proposal he highlights the fact that Mugambi appears to discount the Exodus motif which is usually associated with liberation on the basis of its geographical and cultural distance from Africa. In response to Mugambi’s proposed use of Nehemiah as associated with reconstruction, Vellem (2007: 166) poses the following question:

“How close is Nehemiah to Africa in distance, ideology, religion, salvation and culture?”

In this context Vellem (2007: 167) cautions that the Bible is not only a book whose writing was inspired by God, but that it is also a book that must be read with inspiration so that it becomes the living word of God. According to Vellem, Mugambi’s discounting of the associated Exodus motif sounds Biblicist in favour of Nehemiah, which in essence makes it problematic. Vellem (2007 167) argues thus:

The choice of Nehemiah is not enough. There needs to be a clearly stated hermeneutical reading of Nehemiah that is liberative. The development of a hermeneutic of reconstruction is indispensable for the call to depart from a hermeneutic of liberation. It is hard to accept Mugambi’s hermeneutical approach to scripture as it remains undisclosed.

Another aspect which makes Nehemiah problematic is what Vellem (2007: 167) refers to as talk about the 'wilderness' motif in the South African Council of Churches associated with Maluleke. For Vellem (2007: 167) the search for the vision of reconstruction in the wilderness motif could easily follow logically from the Exodus motif. He continues by adding that it is not a question of reconstruction *per se* that is being questioned, but Mugambi's prescriptive dispensation of Biblical motifs to the reconstruction motif that is being challenged. "To go back to Mugambi's own question, if there is no physical land traversed in Exodus, to which land are Africans returning in the reconstruction paradigm? Yet in crossing the Red sea, we should also remember that some arrived on the other side before the others" (Vellem 2007: 167). What could be concluded from Vellem's analysis is that other dimensions of the Exodus motif could be applicable when the question "have we all crossed the Red sea?" is posed. Dedji (2003: 50) charges that Mugambi seems to perceive his views in a dogmatic manner and according to Vellem this accounts for the inadequate manner in which Mugambi presents the arguments for reconstruction.

Another point alluded to earlier, and now highlighted by Vellem (2007: 169), is Mugambi's use of redemption and emancipation within the ambit of freedom by asserting the Protestant, European Reformation and the Renaissance as an inspiration of the project of reconstruction. Accordingly, Dedji (2003: 45) makes the point by tracing Mugambi's theological roots to Paul Tillich, Martin Baber and Karl Jaspers. For example, Dedji (2003: 56) asserts that "the idea of re-interpreting obsolescent and irrelevant metaphors and idioms as an aspect of the task of theological reconstruction" is rooted in Mugambi's reading of Tillich. The invention of new myths on the other hand is an influence that is traced to Jaspers (Dedji 2003: 58; Gathogo 2005: 253). Here, Vellem points out that the issue is not the use of Western scholars or their influence on Mugambi, but the inadequate engagement of these perspectives with the tools of liberation, even though Dedji (2003: 87) argues that "they have not had a good influence on Mugambi". Using Antonio (1999: 67) as a point of reference, Vellem (2007: 169) argues that the contextualising of theological discourse in the understanding of Black theology requires inspiration from the context of the interlocutor; in this case the African context must be the starting point. Therefore, if reconstruction is to appeal to the African context it should be inspired by the conditions and context of the people it is applied to. Vellem (200: 171) further

notes that the ideological contestations of the post-Exilic paradigm needs greater attention, something Mugambi fails to address. In this context, Vellem alludes to the notion that while Mugambi is quite sceptical about the ideological underpinnings of liberation theology, at the same time he fails to address the ideological underpinnings of the New World Order and its effects on Africa, let alone the uncritical references he makes to Europe and Reformation.

4.2.3 Reconstruction as an Addendum to Black theology

In the discussion on reconstruction as an emerging proposal on the continent, two events have taken place within the theological community of the African church which are worth mentioning. In 2000 in Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya, in a Theological Conference which brought together representatives of the Conference of Africa Theological Institutions (hereafter CATI); the All Africa Conference of Churches (hereafter AACC); EATWOT; The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter THE CIRCLE); and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (hereafter OAIC) the first pronouncement on reconstruction *vis-a-vis* liberation was made. According to Vellem (2007: 80) the tension between liberation and reconstruction became clear when South African theologians, Mofokeng and Maluleke, expressed their critique of the reconstruction motif. The major concern, according to them, was that reconstruction as a new motif was downplaying the role of liberation for Africa's social transformation and development. Vellem (2007: 80) also states that for EATWOT members, the movement to the paradigm of reconstruction was not an internal consensus of EATWOT and thus not a "communal product of the Association". The point therefore is that while there have been proposals for reconstruction it is currently a debated move which needs further elaboration and reflection, particularly on the relationship with liberation.

However, at the second meeting in 2002 in South Africa at the Conference on Theological Education and Ecumenical Formation liberation and reconstruction were seen as complementary "for Africa's *liberative reconstruction* and sustainable development" [Emphasis mine] (Martey 2005: 7). According to Vellem (2007: 205) the term "liberative reconstruction" is a product developed at the 2002 conference. One of the tenets of liberative reconstruction is that of acknowledged change and thus the responsibility to discern the signs of the times. That the

situation in the world changed was long acknowledged by Black theologians, even though very little was demonstrated in this regard. Moore's (1994) unpublished paper is an example of the internal discourse on the evaluation of change and its implications for Black theology in South Africa. However, Maluleke (1995) appears to have been most cautious by warning against an uncritical response to the changed situation. According to him Black theology is an eschatological theology which should not be governed solely by shifts in the socio-political landscape. It is therefore with good reason that Black theologians responded with little enthusiasm regarding the emergence of reconstruction.

Arising out of critical dialogue between the proponents of Black theology and Reconstruction theology, Vellem (2007: 205) was able to delineate broad strokes for the proposal for the liberative reconstruction motif. In his proposal reconstruction is designated as an addendum of Black theology. First, the notion reconstruction implies transformation and not *perestroika* as defined by Villa-Vicencio. Secondly, the programme of reconstruction must belong to all and not only to some. The fact that exiles are the key interlocutors in Villa-Vicencio is highly problematic. Building or reconstruction is communal; it is a programme of the *koinonia*. Third, the liberation paradigm itself should shape the framework and content of reconstruction. Reconstruction must take the preferential option for the poor as a point of departure. In this regard, it must demonstrate and create the necessary conditions for the optimizing of agency. Reconstruction must take sides and place the black African *ecclesio-political* symbols in its centre because inculturation is both liberation and a strategy of liberation. It must also recognise the difference between those who are sinned against by destructive structures as opposed to the sinfulness of humanity that must be reconstructed. In other words, justice should be an important component of reconstruction. Fourth, reconstruction in its liberative roots is a protest against fragmentation and *Gestell*¹⁵ in favour of a *gestalt*¹⁶ view of theological reconstruction. In essence Vellem's proposal for liberative reconstruction provides this study with a deliberate attempt to look at liberation and reconstruction as complimentary and not only in oppositional terms. With

¹⁵ *Gestell* is a German word popularised by Martin Heidegger basically meaning the use of technical knowledge that does not reveal the whole.

¹⁶ *Gestalt* on the other hand refers to the concept 'wholeness' which would be central to the notion of liberative reconstruction.

regards to the sections which will now follow it may also be seen as an attempt to respond to some of the many challenges facing Black theology.

4.3 Black theology in post-apartheid South Africa: A Critical Survey

Following the discussions on emerging post-Exilic theologies such as reconstruction it appears that the proponents of Black theology have yet to devise a new and clearly defined theological framework for reflection in the wake of the dismantling of apartheid (Gathogo 2007: 339; Motlhabi 2008: 20). Maluleke (2000: 20) acknowledges this when he notes that after the euphoria of the end of apartheid it “would be accurate to say that South African theology and South African ecumenism are in some kind of recess if not a kind of disarray”. From a Black theological perspective this is indicative of the fact that there have been no major seminars or conferences on Black theology in South Africa since 1996. Nor have there been any significant or groundbreaking publications since then (Motlhabi 2008: 13). So while the proponents of Black theology have expressed dismay over the proposal for reconstruction, it appears that they themselves have not succeeded in articulating a theological framework following the dismantling of apartheid.

Contrary to the challenges facing Black theology, Maluleke (2000: 31) highlights the notion that African women’s theology is the one section of most African societies that “is engaging in the most passionate, the most vibrant and the most prophetic forms of praxis (theory and practice)”. According to him “African women’s theology has been by far the most prolific and challenging in the past decade and a half – at least in the Anglophone Protestant Africa”. However, according to Gathogo (2007: 339) this does not mean that African women’s theology has replaced Black theology or has taken the place of Black theology. Rather, in expressing the vibrancy of African women’s theology Maluleke (2000) and Gathogo (2007) point to the many challenges linked to the future prospects of Black theology. In a sense the proposal for a shift from liberation to reconstruction has once again heightened the need for Black theology to respond to past as well as present challenges. It is for this reason that Maluleke (1995, 2000) emphasises the need for a creative post-apartheid paradigm in African theology when he suggests that South African theology is in “some kind of recess if not a kind of disarray”. He goes on to say:

Without being too presumptuous, it is fair to say that until the early 1990s South Africa has been one of the most theologically prolific places in the world, producing some of the best, as well as the worst, packages of Christian theology this side of the Second World War, outside of Germany. Perhaps the apex of this creativity was the publication of *The Kairos Document* in 1985. But even *The Kairos Document* dismally fails to capture all of the theological creativity that emanated out of this country. It is therefore not difficult to observe the fatigue in ecumenical South African theology. The silence has been sudden and deafening. How have the cries of the poor majority been silenced by the shouts of the joyful minority?

He continues by saying:

As a young theologian in post-apartheid South Africa and post-Cold War Africa, I suddenly experience intense and acute spiritual and intellectual loneliness. This is both bad and good. Bad, because I miss the defiant, passionate and humorous “image of God” *ubuntu* theology of Desmond Tutu. There is huge gaping hole that has been left by my esteemed mentors and colleagues, Itumeleng Mosala, Takatso Mofokeng, Simon Maimela, Smangalis Mkhatswa, Frank Chikane and others – all of whom have “gone secular” by becoming all manner of administrators and state functionaries. But my “loneliness” may yet be a cause for joy. Perhaps my esteemed colleagues have responded to a “higher” calling...Perhaps the South African Christian community must wake up from its dependency on the Tutus and Mosalas of this world and take up its prophetic calling with or without them...Fortunately, my “loneliness” as a theologian and committed academic is not total, I hear encouraging voices from other parts of Africa and other parts of the world. I am speaking here of the voices of the likes of Jesse Mugambi of Kenya,¹⁷ Kwame Bediako of Ghana,¹⁸ Kã Mana of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana,¹⁹ Lamin Sanneh of Gambia,²⁰ Dwight Hopkins²¹ and others. I am encouraged by these voices. Within South Africa itself, such bold, innovative post-apartheid studies as those by Villa-Vicencio,²² Landman,²³ Naude,²⁴ Petersen,²⁵ West,²⁶

¹⁷ Mugambi (1995).

¹⁸ Bediako (1992, 1995).

¹⁹ Oduyoye (1995).

²⁰ Sanneh (1998).

²¹ Hopkins (1999a, 1999b, 2000b).

²² Villa-Vicencio (1992).

²³ Landman (1992).

²⁴ Naudé (1995).

Cochrane²⁷ and Tutu²⁸ have kept me hopeful. But more than these particular works, it is the continued relevance of much of what has been done in cold-war era Africa theology that inspires me. (Gathogo 342)

Maluleke thus contends that there have been strides towards revitalising Africa's theological landscape, at the same time he also identifies the need to develop adequate and relevant theoretical tools to be applied in the contemporary context. In mentioning the work of Villa-Vicencio (1992) and Mugambi (1995), one may argue that Maluleke regards reconstruction as one such attempt towards establishing the relevant theoretical tools to be applied. However, as pointed out earlier, Maluleke is amongst those who have sharply criticised reconstruction with regards to its relationship with liberation. Be that as it may, as a proponent of Black theology, Maluleke's main concerns are an indication of the apparent impotence that characterises Black theology and South African theology in general. For him it appears as if the proponents of Black theology have succumbed to the dominant theological climate in South Africa, thereby also being thrown into confusion of what the next step or plan of action should be. In this respect it appears the proponents of Black theology have been paralysed and overwhelmed by the new set of circumstances with its new problems (Motlhabi 2008: 13). Following from this, the notion of Black theology as being in 'crisis' has received considerable attention in past as well as present discussions.

4.3.1 The 'crisis' in Black theology²⁹

In the opening address of the conference entitled *Black Theology and the Black Struggle*, Govender (1984: 6) metaphorically describes the state of Black theology in the following manner:

²⁵ Petersen (1995).

²⁶ West (1999).

²⁷ Cochrane (1999).

²⁸ Tutu (1999)

²⁹ In this section on "The 'crisis' in Black theology" I have drawn heavily on an essay by Maluleke (1995) written with respect to the present and past challenges facing Black theology.

Doctor, doctor, our dark maiden, Black Theology is seriously ill. Please diagnose for us the nature of the ailment, interpret the symptoms. Work out a prognosis. Is it a case of death for want of food or is surgery necessary? Oh God, doctor, don't tell me that she's been ravaged, raped and spat upon. Her body, once so pregnant with promise, now bears the wounds and scars of those up and coming theologians looking for one-night stands, and she was the willing and innocent wench. Her crown once raised up high on the sure and confident pillars of black consciousness and black power, now droops to the ground. ...Will she yet walk tall, and this time embrace her priestly lovers with big and full breasts, smacking them on their buttocks and sending them out to sing with the township people, the township songs of a sure freedom and of God's nearness in all of this?

Govender's assertion captures the mood of the 'crisis' into which Black theology was propelled during the 1980s. In a sense it also signifies a crisis which continued to be relevant even after the fall of apartheid, as stated by Maluleke (1995: 10) in the following.

If Black Theology was in crisis since the early eighties, the nineties are a further 'complication' to the crisis. The eighties – especially the late eighties – have initiated a period of 'crisis' for Black theology. An essential if unspoken consensus amongst both theologians and students of Black theology about this 'crisis' has (gradually) developed to the point of becoming palpable during our own times. Naturally this 'crisis' has created a fundamental disturbance in the entire project of Black theology in South Africa.

The appropriateness of this quotation stems first and foremost from the fact that it is a crisis centred on the future prospects of Black theology. Central to this, is the issue of scholars who had begun to postulate the need to jettison liberation in favour of reconstruction. The following aspects regarding the 'crisis' in Black theology need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, the notion regarding the vulnerability of Black theology to the moods of the oppressed is often highlighted. The shifts in political praxis and ideological positions will more often than not have an impact on Black theology. Secondly, a factor which is quite dominant in our current context is the assumption that Black theology would have to retire as the white racist scenario of oppression is over. What this implies is that Black theology is too preoccupied with racism and whiteness, which no longer matter in the South African context as South Africa is now led by

blacks. The third point is the often suggested foreignness of Black theology as a tradition that has been influenced by the American version of Black theology. According to this view, Black theology in South Africa is too reliant on the foreign tools presented in the American version. The fourth point is the state of desperation and disillusionment expressed by many Black theologians regarding the relevance of Black theology. These challenges and their implications will now be discussed in more detail

4.3.2 The Moods of the Oppressed

According to Maluleke (1995) the socio-political context was and perhaps remains the most important variable in the crises. The shift in the South African socio-political landscape is an example of the change of mood among the oppressed that impacts on the nature of Black theology. In this sense it would be fair to suggest that the relevance of Black theology would be 'vulnerable' to the 'moods' of the oppressed. Chikane (1986: xv) notes that "shifts in political praxis ... ideological divisions and conflicts" always affected Black theology, perhaps more than they would affect other theologies. This may be the case for most if not all liberation theologies. In the case of Black theology in South Africa, "what happens in the black struggle affects the process of theologising" (Chikane & Tsele 1984: 1). In this context the fall of apartheid would therefore be an important variable in the process of theologising. However, according to Maluleke (1995: 11) this must not and does not mean that Black theology is at the "mercy of the slippery and swinging moods of the community, even the oppressed community". According to him the oppressed do not always speak and act the way they would like to. Their moods, aspirations and opinions are equally vulnerable to distortion and manipulation. For this reason, shifts in South Africa's socio-political context must be viewed much more critically.

Taking these socio-political shifts into consideration, Balcomb (1993: 205) uses the example of South African political reforms leading up to 1994 having thrust liberalism of all kinds onto the political and ecclesiastical centre stage. On this point, Maluleke (1994: 247) states that the "liberal tradition in church and theology has received a mighty shot in the arm. Its symbols and programmes have [now] even been adopted by the state. Or is it (conversely) the liberal tradition that has adopted the programmes and symbols of the state?". Based on this, notions such as

reconciliation, reconstruction and negotiation have thus increasingly entered Church conferences and theological consultations to the point of proposing to replace some theological metaphors with others. Here the proposal for a shift from liberation to reconstruction may be used as an example. However, being a Christian theology, Black theology is an eschatological theology (Vellem 2007). On this point, Maluleke (1995: 12) argues that the hopes, resources and resourcefulness of Black theology cannot be exhausted by the demands of ‘the world’,³⁰ including its liberalisms. According to him, there is an ideal – a utopia beyond the manipulable moods, aspirations, material things and ever-changing human opinions. However, because of its nature, the most fundamental challenge that has faced Black theology originates in the socio-political atmosphere of South Africa. It is because of this reason that attempted responses have been pitched at that general level, as illustrated in the proposal for a shift from liberation to reconstruction.

4.3.3 The Dependency of Black theology

Another point linked to the challenges facing Black theology, which is quite dominant in our current context, is the assumption that Black theology would have to retire as the white racist scenario of oppression is over. On this point Setiloane (1980: 49) argues that Black theology is too preoccupied with racism and whiteness and by implication “... as soon as the Black vs White scenario is over, there will be no need for Black theology any more. ... as soon as the Black man has attained his liberation, Black Theology will go out of business ...” . Accordingly he also states that he has never understood Black theology in its South African or United States context as seeking to verbalise the Black man’s experience of Divinity outside his contract with the White man, or even being able to do so, even if it wanted to (1980: 50). Obsession with the “contract with the White man”, according to him, has caused the proponents of Black theology, such as Buthelezi, to be negative about the African past and African culture. Maluleke (1995: 16) notes that Setiloane concedes and accepts the accusation levelled against African theology, namely that “it is not sufficiently sensitive to, and has not made a strong enough witness to equity and righteous dealing in socio-political affairs. However, Setiloane (1980: 49) remains

³⁰ According to Maluleke (1995: 12), herein lies the weakness of the historical materialist approach which has been adopted by several theologians: it tends to reduce everything to the economic and the material. See also Cornel West’s (1981) critique of Marxism as a tool for social analysis.

unshakable in his belief that “Black theology is passing/past” as evidenced by the growing scarcity of its publications. In essence his argument is that African scholarship shall be moving more towards doing African instead of Black theology.

What Setiloane implies is that Black theology is too pre-occupied with racism and whiteness, which in our current post-apartheid context no longer matter because South Africa is led by blacks. However, according to Velleem (2007: 72), this is a misreading of Black theology which is not based on racial reasoning but the political experience and ethical responses that should arise out of the black experience to validate humane relations and Christian faith. On this point, Maluleke (1995: 16) notes that Black theology could not ignore the “Whiteness of the White man” whilst this whiteness *is* made *the* standard against which everything is measured. Accordingly this Whiteness, many would argue, is the single most significant contributor to the historical oppression of Black people in South Africa. Maluleke (1995: 17) thus states that it would be inaccurate to see Black theology in South Africa as having a pre-occupation with Whites, Whiteness and even Apartheid. He goes on to state that:

One suspects that behind some current proposals for Black Theology and other liberation theologies to effect a ‘shift’ (e.g. Villa-Vicencio 1992) is the supposition that Black Theology ‘needed’ Apartheid and “whiteness of Whites” to exist [Emphasis mine]. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ‘agenda’ of Black Theology, even its ‘internal controversies’ have mostly been first and foremost, issues of blackness and the black experience.³¹

4.3.4 The Foreignness of Black Theology

Another challenge facing Black theology in the past and quite possibly in the present is the often suggested foreignness of this tradition. Here, it is argued that Black theology in South Africa has been largely influenced by the American version of Black theology. The contributions of the likes of prominent African scholars such as Setilone (1979, 1980, 1986) and Mbiti (1974) are amongst those that should be taken into consideration. On this point it is important to note that Setilone (1971) is amongst those who once supported and differentiated Black theology in South

³¹ On this point Tlhagale (1985: 126) states that “black theology is an exercise in self-criticism” in the light of the “need to validate the legitimacy of faith” amongst the oppressed Black people.

Africa from Black theology in the US. However, some years later, as pointed out by Maluleke (1995: 13), Setilone (1980: 48) had shifted to the point that he regarded it as “unfortunate” that;

“Manas Buthelezi and others in this land were seized by Black Theology... because it is my sincere belief that Black Theology in South Africa cannot escape the scathing criticism of John Mbiti: “A ready-made Western theology turned into a consumption commodity for Africans. For it does not at all seek to move away from the conceptualisation and methodology of Western theology. Instead it exploits these. Therefore Black Theology is still doing theology within the field of Western European, Graeco-Roman-rooted thought-forms and *Weltanschauung*.”

It is important to note that the extremity of the charge that Black theology is a “ready-made Western Theology” should be viewed within the context of Mbiti’s reservation regarding what he perceived to be the uncritical reliance on “foreign tools” in Black theology.³² Taking this into consideration it comes as little surprise that Mbiti had differences of opinion with people such as Tutu and other African scholars who use Black theology as a form of self description, as well as with black American theologians (Motlhabi 2008: 8). In essence, scholars such as Mbiti (1969, 1974, 1975), Setiloane (1979, 1980, 1986) and Dickson (1984) sought to find a space for African culture in Christian theology. Their purpose was for African theology to be acknowledged as an intellectual exercise aimed at interpreting Christian theology within the framework of the African cultural meaning. According to Mbiti, Black theology because of its apparent uncritical reliance on foreign tools was unable to offer that which African theology could.³³

Logically, the methodological formulations of African and Black theology led to fierce debates regarding the use of foreign tools in Black theology rather than the culture of the African people. Black theologians on the other hand found Black theology to be more relevant to the needs of their struggle than African theology. The expressed concern of Black theology was liberation – not only spiritual liberation in the form of traditional, other-worldly ‘salvation’ preached by the church, but also liberation from physical, psychological, socio-political, economic and cultural

³² According to Motlhabi (2008: 8) Mbiti’s hostility to Black Theology is by now a well-known fact. Cone also refers to this in his essay in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (1993).

³³ According to Mbiti (1974: 42), “The concerns of Black Theology differ considerably from those of African Theology. The latter grows out of our joy in the experience of the Christian faith, whereas Black Theology emerges from the pains of oppression. African Theology is not so restricted in its concerns, nor does it have an ideology to propagate. Black Theology hardly knows the situation of Christian living in Africa, and therefore, its direct relevance for Africa is either non-existent or only accidental.”

oppression (Motlhabi 2008: 8). In other words, Black theology was understood to address the whole person and all his or her human needs. On the other hand African theology at the time focussed on indigenisation/adaptation, or what is better known as inculturation. It was perhaps partly for this reason that Buthelezi (1973) wrote an article entitled, “A Black Theology or An African Theology?” in which he explained the different departures and situational circumstances of these theologies.³⁴

More recently scholars like Martey (1993: 55) have attempted to bring these theologies together by highlighting that both the inculturation and liberation strands in Africa have developed in response to different needs. In sub-Saharan Africa, struggles for independence from colonisers resulted in inculturation theology, and the defining aspect of this theology is that it pushes its roots firmly into African culture and traditions. In South Africa, Black Africans struggling against the oppressive system of apartheid turned to liberation theology. For Martey, therefore, liberation and inculturation are not contradictory, but complement each other.³⁵ He describes inculturation and liberation as “hermeneutic procedures that seek both understanding of the African cultural-political reality and interpretation of this reality in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so as to bring about transformation of the oppressive *status quo*”. The real hope for African theology, Martey concludes, lies in the dialectical encounter between indigenisation and liberation theologies and in their potential for convergence.

4.3.5 Post-apartheid Black theological voices

According to Moore (1994), many Black theologians have expressed desperation and even disillusionment with the state of Black theology in South Africa. Central to the crisis in Black theology is the sense of being no longer constructively connected to the ‘black oppressed

³⁴ According to Motlhabi (2008: 9), black South Africans had another reason for treating African theology with some caution. The apartheid policy at the time was justified on the grounds of cultural differences. White cultures in South Africa were regarded as one, in spite of the many white cultural groups that existed; while not only were the differences between white and African cultures stressed, but perceived cultural differences among the African ethnic and linguistic groups were also capitalised upon and identified as proof of the existence of not only different, but also irreconcilable cultures. It was on this basis that the apartheid government established Bantustans, referred to as ‘homelands’, for the different African ethnic and language groups. Thus for black theologians to have preached indigenisation at the time would have been to play into the hands of the authors of apartheid and help justify their racist argument, even of the former could have affirmed a single African culture based on their commonalities rather than focussing on artificial differences.

³⁵ Also see Tutu’s 1975 article entitled *Black Theology/African Theology - Soulmates or Antagonists?*

community'. Current Black theology is said to be "generated by the job descriptions of the academic institutions which require the Black theologians to teach Black theology" (Tlhagale in Moore 1994). Another Black theologian accuses Black theologians of having "betrayed the revolution" by withdrawing from "direct involvement in the struggles on the street' and thus marginalising themselves (Pityana in Moore 1994).

Perhaps the most consistent critique of Black theology amongst Black theologians themselves is the suggestion that it is "locked in yesterday's politics" having "slept through the revolution which swept through the country" (Tlhagale in Moore 1994). In this it is suggested that Black theology is "still trapped in that period of resistance and refuses to engage with reconstruction" (Villa-Vicencio in Moore 1994). According to Moore (1994) scholars like Tlhagale now seriously question the need for Black theology. For Tlhagale there is no way that Black theology is able to move out of the oppositional mode in which it is trapped, to come down from its academic ivory tower and make real contact (as distinct from analytical contact) with ordinary black people, to become a vital part of a larger movement and so become organic with it, or to deal with the whole range of crises within the black community without turning that into an attack on the racist system.

Moore's (1994) concluding remarks after conducting interviews with prominent Black theologians quoted above characterise Black theology as having "a sound head and needy feet...[with] nothing in the middle connecting the two'. In this context Moore (1994) projects three possibilities for Black theology:

- (a) Becoming locked in internal debates about whether it is relevant or not
- (b) Becoming and accepting itself as an intellectual think-shop
- (c) Becoming through vision and organisational skills, once more connected to groups in the Black community

Maluleke (1995: 21) notes that Moore's contribution grants the reader an extra-ordinary and valid insight into current feelings, frustrations and hopes of many Black theologians. However, Maluleke (1995: 21) also points out that it may be case that the sense of gloom Moore (1994)

and others radiate may be based on emotive considerations rather than a ‘historical’ review of what has been going on both inside and outside Black theology in the past ten to fifteen years. Be that as it may, the observations mentioned above represent some of the discussions regarding the future prospects of Black theology in South Africa and the wider African continent.



CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

5.1 Concluding Summary

Now that we have come to the end of our discussion on the relevance of Black theology and how the relationship between the root metaphors of liberation and reconstruction is understood in African Christian theology, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary.

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that liberation is the root metaphor of the Black theological project in South Africa. This assertion has however come under increased scrutiny given the end of colonial and apartheid rule. Amongst other things, it has been implied that the abolition of apartheid, leading to the democratisation of South Africa renders Black theology irrelevant. Often these views are taken further by suggesting that it is no longer blacks only who need liberation. The advent of democracy therefore is a significant reason for some scholars seeking to replace liberation with notions such as reconstruction, development, reconciliation and so forth. These innovative trends find expression in the proposal suggesting that theological articulation (referring to African theology and Black theology) in post-apartheid South Africa should shift theological emphasis from liberation to reconstruction. This study demonstrated that the emergence of the proposal for reconstruction has directed many scholars to pose critical questions regarding the future prospects of Black theology, as well as challenge the assertion of reconstruction as a logical continuation of liberation.

In Chapter 1, I noted that this study has to be understood within the context of the proposal to redirect African theological initiatives from liberation theologies to reconstruction theology. I argued that there are significant similarities and differences in these two approaches to African Christian theology and that these inputs shape the discussions regarding the future prospects of Black theology. In Chapter 2, I investigated the role of liberation as the metaphor which highlights the emergence of the Black theological project. The aim here was not to present a history of Black theology, but rather to point to liberation as its root metaphor. In Chapter 3, I investigated the emergence of reconstruction as an approach in African theology. The proposals of two key proponents of reconstruction, Charles Villa-Vicencio and Jesse Mugambi, were taken

into consideration. I demonstrated that a theology of reconstruction is proposed as a theological metaphor that recognises the need for theological articulation (referring to both African and Black theology) to move away from liberation. The main argument of this thesis is found in Chapter 4, where I offered a critical survey of how those using Black theology as a form of self description responded to the emergence of reconstruction. I did this by offering a critique of the reconstruction motifs presented in Villa-Vicencio as well as Mugambi. This was followed by a recent contribution highlighting liberation and reconstruction as complementary and not as oppositional motifs. Here, the notion of reconstruction as an addendum of Black theology was explored in more detail. I also presented aspects linked to the relevance of Black theology as well as how its proponents have struggled to articulate a relevant theological framework following the dismantling of apartheid. This was followed by a critical survey of the crisis facing Black theology. It was demonstrated that some of these challenges predate the fall of apartheid but have continued relevance regarding the future prospects of Black theology. In essence this study aims to provide a critical survey regarding the state of Black theology in the light of the emergence of the proposal for reconstruction. From this investigation it becomes evident that African Christian theologies are only beginning to grapple with the relationship between these concepts in a systematic way. In this context further research regarding the relationship between liberation and reconstruction, from the perspective of Black theology is indeed necessary in order to stimulate further discussion on this issue.

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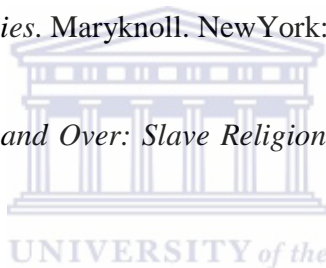
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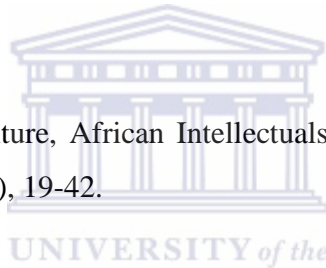
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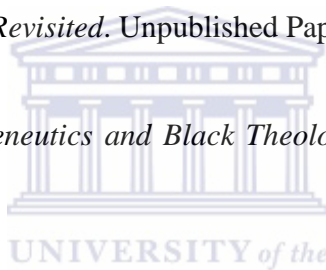
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