

A reconstructive motif in South African Black Theology in the twenty-first century

Isabel Phiri

Julius Gathogo

School of Religion and Theology,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

Abstract

In this article, Black Theology as a strand of continent-wide African theology is seen through the eyes of African Black Theologians other than South Africans. The article is based on the premise that, whereas up to 1994 Black Theology in South Africa was distinct from other strands of African theology (especially in its emphasis on the urgency of liberation from White racism and its attendant suffering and exploitation), that dividing line is now blurred: Black Theologians in South Africa are moving closer to other theologians from the rest of the continent (Motlhabi 1994). In particular, their present concern with gospel and culture, a phenomenon that did not previously receive much attention, comes to much the same as joining other African theologians in seeking a theology of reconstruction. Certainly, African theologians in the twenty-first century have all united to address the common challenges that the continent is grappling with. These concerns include HIV and AIDS, xenophobia, gender injustice, tribalism, poverty, moral regeneration, corruption, re-emerging forms of dictatorship, and global warming among others. As to methodology, the article starts by tracing the historical background of South African Black Theology and proceeds to survey some of its past concerns as articulated by its proponents. It then addresses some of the current concerns of theology in twenty-first century Africa, a trajectory that points to a reconstructive as opposed to an Exodus motif.

Introduction

From the outset, this article seeks to pay homage to Simon Maimela as one of the founders of the Institute for Contextual Theology, which housed the Black Theology project in the early 1980s. Through his stand as a Black Theologian of the Black Solidarity/materialist trend, he did much to clarify

the theory and praxis of Black Theology (Maimela 1998:116). Of special significance to African women theologians is his affirmation of them by including their writings in the courses he introduced at the University of South Africa (UNISA). At a time when it was not fashionable for male African theologians to collaborate with their female counterparts, many South African women acknowledged their introduction to Feminist Theology through his classes at UNISA. As female African theologians continue to call for collaboration with their male counterparts, the name of Simon Maimela is presented as a beacon of hope (Phiri 2008:78). It is equally important to acknowledge that Maimela did not focus his theological argument solely on the political situation in South Africa and on exposing gender injustice. He also engaged in dialogue with other African theological scholars about Cultural Theology. This is evident in his article on "Salvation in African traditional religions" (1985). Thus, while some Black Theologians only started doing Cultural Theology after 1994, Maimela and Setilone saw the importance of South African Black Theologians getting involved in this strand of African theology. It is this continental perspective on Black Theology as a strand of African Theology which this article sets out to address.

When African theologies are examined from a continental perspective, one discovers that since the 1960s great emphasis has been placed on the Exodus motif (metaphor). In this case, Black people have metaphorically been likened to the people of Israel on their way from the land of bondage (the colonial regime) to the promised land (the anticipated liberation, which we may interpret as the official end of apartheid after the all-race democratic elections on 27 April 1994). Black Liberation Theology has been modelled on the motif of the Exodus event (Exodus 3), where Moses led the Hebrews to freedom from the Egyptian Pharaoh's oppression. Following the demise of apartheid, however, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) under its erstwhile President Desmond Tutu and the then General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Jose B Chipenda, advocated a shift of paradigm from liberation to reconstruction. Various African theologians were invited in February 1990 to take part in theological reflections on the changing global patterns that followed the end of the Cold War in 1989, and the relevance of these changes to Africa. At the subsequent meeting on 30 March 1990, various papers on the reconstruction of Africa were presented. Some of these were published in a book entitled *The Church of Africa: towards a theology of reconstruction* (1991:29-50), co-edited by Mugambi, Chipenda, Karamaga and Omari. Since then the concept of reconstruction has been an important component of the discourse on African Christianity, and African church history in particular.

At the Nairobi meeting (on 30 March 1990), Jesse Mugambi in particular suggested that, in postcolonial Africa, theological articulation (be it South African Black Theology, African Women's Theology, Liberation Theology or Cultural Theology) needs to shift its theological emphasis from

the Exodus motif to the reconstruction motif. He suggested that reconstruction should be the new priority for African nations in the 1990s and beyond (Mugambi 1991:36). He further contended that in the New World Order the figure of Nehemiah, not that of Moses, represents the mirror in which we can see our mission to remake Africa out of the ruins of the wars “against racism, colonial domination and ideological branding” (Mugambi 2003:128). As a result of this call, the theme of the AACC Eighth Assembly in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2003 was “Come let us rise and build – Nehemiah 2:18”. It is in the context of the reconstruction motif that this article aims to revisit the role of Black Theology in **contemporary Africa**.

This will be done in five subsections: Black Theology in South Africa, a historical survey of Black Theology in South Africa, the reconstruction phase, the changed situation of Black Theology in South Africa, and some concerns for Black Theology and other African theologies, followed by a conclusion.

Black Theology in South Africa

Moore (1973:5) has defined Black Theology in South Africa as “a situational theology. And the situation is that of the Black man (sic) in South Africa”. He also defines it as a theology searching for new symbols with which to affirm black humanity. He goes on to say, “It is a theology of the oppressed, by the oppressed, for the liberation of the oppressed” (Moore 1973: ix). As a theology of liberation, therefore, it not only speaks to the oppressed black people but hopes that the white oppressors will also hear the good news and be saved (Moore 1973:139). As a situational theology, Black Theology “is the black people’s attempt to come to terms theologically with their black situation. It seeks to interpret the gospel in such a way that the situation of blacks will begin to make sense” (Boesak 1977:13). In *Proclaim freedom to my people*, Maimela (1987:13) agrees that liberation arises out of a particular historical situation or experienced reality. In the case of South Africa this was the crisis of apartheid, the effects of which are still experienced by all South Africans even though, by 2010, sixteen years will have passed since its demise.

Like the Black Theology of North America, South African Black Theology has black experience as one of its major sources. As Wilmore and Cone (1979:446) observe, the resemblance between black experience in South Africa and in North America is very close; hence the need for a dialogue between the two. James Cone explains that the cultural continuity (of African Theology and Black Theology) with black people in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America “should enable us to talk with each other about common hopes and dreams in politics and economics” (Wilmore & Cone

1979:446). Black Theology in South Africa comes out of the experience of “obedience to the Gospel amid the realities of contemporary suffering, racism, oppression and everything that denies the Lordship of Christ” (De Gruchy 1979:160). It comes from reflections on the painful experiences of “the one whom we see in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town trying to make ends meet in the framework of Influx-Control legislation” (Buthelezi 1978:74). Thus Black Theology in South Africa comes from the miserable and extremely oppressive social conditions that were institutionalised during the apartheid regime that ended in 1994. With the demise of apartheid, it may be argued that Black Theology now comes out of the experience of poverty among blacks. It also comes out of the neocolonial experience arising from the racial tensions that are still a part of South Africa even after apartheid. In our view, it may take time for these tensions and/or misunderstandings to be finally erased.

As in the case of African Women’s Theology, “Christ the liberator” is central to the Black Theology of South Africa. As Boesak (1977:95) puts it, “God’s love is an active deed of liberation manifested in divine power.” This concept of liberation is not just a New Testament phenomenon; for, as Boesak (1977:18) says, “this liberation message was the centre and sustenance of the life of Israel”. Thus the theme of liberation is rooted in the Old Testament through the New Testament (Exodus 19:4, 5, Psalms 72, Deuteronomy 7:7, Luke 4:16-21).

In Boesak’s understanding, the theme of Liberation Theology is that the Gospel is not silent on the issue of oppression (Boesak 1978:9-10). He articulates the conviction of many Liberation Theologians when he says,

Black theology is a theology of liberation. By that we mean the following. Black theology believes that liberation is not only “part of” the Gospel, or “consistent with” the Gospel; it is the content and framework of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Born in the community of the black oppressed, it takes seriously the black experience, the black situation. Black theology grapples with suffering and oppression; it is a cry unto God for the sake of the people. It believes that in Jesus Christ the total liberation of all people has come.

A historical survey

The African church historian Zablon Nthamburi (1991, 1995:14) traces the origins and development of Black Theology in South Africa and reinforces some of our previous observations – though he goes further. According to him, it dates back beyond the 1970s. He contends that the consciousness of Black Theology came from leaders who were trained in missionary schools such as Lovedale, Healdtown and Adams College (Natal). These were, in a

fashion, preparatory schools for the leaders who later articulated it (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:14).

As in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, while the early missionaries were busy establishing new churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, other African Independent Churches were also being formed as alternative movements (Nthamburi 1991:14). These breakaways from the mission churches were due in part to racial factors. There was also a desire by Africans to express their Christian faith through cultural mediums. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, Africans in South Africa were members either of mission churches (Catholic, Anglican, etc) or of the mushrooming indigenous churches (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:14).

Sadly, while Africans held senior positions in the indigenous churches, they were by contrast reduced to mere catechists, teachers or interpreters in the White mission churches. To add insult to injury, their customs and cultural heritage were called pagan, fetishist, animistic, pantheistic and all sorts of derogatory names. Their lively spontaneous style of worship was suppressed; rigid liturgies were presented as the only legitimate form of worship (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:15). This background helps in tracing the version of black discontent that is largely suppressed among scholars of Black Theology in South Africa.

Worse still, the South African socio-political set-up had by the beginning of the twentieth century managed to impose itself fully on the church. As John de Gruchy (1979:8) says, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) had ruled, as early as 1857, that the congregation from the heathen had “already founded privileges in a separate building or Institution”. In this case the word “heathen” refers to blacks, whom the mission churches now treated as lesser beings and who were compelled to use “lesser” buildings as the doctrine of apartheid – of separate development – became more deeply embedded. As expected, “this state of affairs predominated over efforts by individuals who were unable to fit in such a situation” (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:15). It is against this background that we can now understand Black Theology in South Africa.

Therefore, although Gwinyai Muzorewa (1985:102) and Maimela (1998:112) argue that North American black Liberation Theologians such as James Cone and J Deotis Roberts are the brains behind the articulation of Black Theology in South Africa, it is important to acknowledge that South African Black Theology already existed when Cone was still a student.

The quest for a South African Black Theology was further boosted by the formation of an all-black South African Student’s Organization (SASO) in 1968 with the fiery Stephen Bantu Biko as its first president (Kumalo 2005:69). In the same year (1968), Biko formed the Black Peoples’ Convention (BPC) – an umbrella body for groups sharing the ideals of Black Consciousness (BC). Like other organisations that he formed, Biko and his

BPC fought for the oppressed – which led him to suffer surveillance, detentions, arrests, banning and ultimately death at the hands of the security forces on 12 September 1977 (Kumalo 2005:69).

According to Simanga R Kumalo, Biko saw the ultimate goal of Black Consciousness as the “establishment of an egalitarian society, where all people were equal citizens” (2005:69; cf. Biko 1987:89). As a liberationist, Biko held that there was a need to de-educate and re-educate black people so as to undo the damage caused by the Bantu Education enforced by the apartheid government (Pam 1987). Bantu Education was the system introduced by the racist apartheid regime after it had passed the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Its sole aim was to impose an inferior education on black children (Pam 1987). Biko protested against the way the missionaries and the government taught black people to hate themselves and their history:

A long look should be taken at the educational system given to blacks ... Children were taught, under the pretext of hygiene, good manners, etiquette and other such vague concepts, to despise their mode of upbringing at home and to question values and customs prevalent in their society. The result was the expected one, children and parents saw life differently and the former lost respect for the latter.... Yet how can one prevent the loss of respect between child and parent when the child is taught by his know-all white tutors to disregard his family teachings? How can one resist losing respect for his tradition when his school, his whole cultural background is summed up in one word – barbarism? (Motlhabi 1972:23).

On the whole, the philosophy behind the Black Consciousness Movement was to awaken the black people in South Africa “to their value as human beings and their dignity as God’s children and creatures” (Motlhabi 1987:111). In other words, it was a way of life for black people who sought to embrace their blackness and their identity as true images of God. Arguably, the idea of Black Consciousness can be traced to the teachings of Fanon, Nkrumah, Malcolm X, Du and Senghor.

From the continuing discussion, it is clear that the role of black (Christian) leaders who championed the cause of nationalist movements fighting for human rights cannot be ignored in tracing the origins and development of Black Theology, a theology that Simon Maimela fearlessly propounded (1998). Like the “African Theology” that was largely inspired by the pan-Africanism and African nationalism championed by Marcus Garvey, WEB DuBois, Wilmot Blyden, Sylvester Williams, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta and George Padmore among others (Muzorewa 1985:46-56), South African Black Theology too was inspired and influenced by Christian-cum-political leaders who were champions of nationalism, such as Jabavu, Matthews and Albert Luthuli, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961 for his

peaceful campaigns to improve the welfare of the black populace (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:15).

In particular, Chief Albert Luthuli on 9 November 1952 delivered a sermon entitled “Christian life a constant venture” at Adams College, an American Congregationalist school near Amanzimtoti on the south coast of what is now the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The government subsequently fired him from his chieftainship of the *abasemkholweni* (Believers) tribe at the Groutville (Umvoti) Mission Reserve. Six days later, on 14 November 1952, he drafted his famous statement that “The road to freedom is via the Cross” (Couper 2008:76-77). Luthuli, whose chieftaincy was theologically premised by the church, demonstrates that in forfeiting his position out of theo-political conviction, he understood himself to be moving to a larger “adventure” within the “spiritual realm rather than from the spiritual to the secular realm [ANC politics]” (Couper 2008:77).

The African National Congress (ANC), which was formed in 1912 and had a number of names such as South African Native National Congress, African Native Congress and Native Congress, became an important vehicle for liaison with the authorities. It is no wonder that, with committed Christians at the helm of the ANC, the influence of the Christian faith within the party was clearly visible. This, as Nthamburi (1991, 1995:15) says, “was the cradle in which Black theology was born”. For, as in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, the African leaders from both sides of the divide realised that religion cannot be separated from social and political affairs that positively or negatively affect the people. Consequently, the church in South Africa found itself the mouthpiece of the voiceless, the landless, the destitute and the immobilised. We can therefore agree with Maimela, Tutu, Boesak, Buthelezi, Muzorewa and others that South African Black Theology is undoubtedly Liberation Theology (see John Webster 1982).

All this makes it clear that, contrary to popular thinking, South African Black Liberation Theology was not initially influenced either by Latin American or by North American Black Liberation theology: during the early development of Black Theology in South Africa, there was very limited contact (if any) with either of the two. In any case South African Black Theology, unlike Latin American Liberation Theology, does not advocate an ideological alliance with Marxism (see de Gruchy 1979:159). However, later influence from Black Theologians in North America (not Latin America) is evident, especially James Cone (see Wilmore & Cone 1979:446; Maimela 1998).

While Black Theology in South Africa is not a replica of Black Theology in North America, they are closely related because of the resemblance between the South African situation and that of blacks in the USA.

For this reason, their praxis¹ understandably calls for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed black people. For both South African and North American Black theologies, the Bible (which is a major source) is read with the Exodus motif in mind. As Allan Boesak says, speaking from the South African angle, “Liberation theology by beginning with the Exodus ... places the Gospel in its authentic perspective, namely that of liberation” (Boesak 1977a:39). Here Boesak clearly shows that black experience (as earlier discussed) is what provides the framework within which biblical revelation is understood. In this case, liberation (as in Exodus) is taken as the hermeneutical motif in terms of which scriptural texts are interpreted.

The reconstruction phase

Accepting that Black Theology in South Africa is a liberation theology which accepts liberation as the hermeneutical motif through which the Scriptures can be understood (Maimela 1998:111), we realise that it is not obsolete, though some of its concerns in post-apartheid South Africa are not clearly addressed. At the same time, new concerns have emerged: the land question, HIV and AIDS, poverty, racism, xenophobia, the environmental challenge, and gender injustices, among other issues facing the predominantly black majority.² This, however, raises the question: can’t these concerns be addressed within the Theology of Reconstruction paradigm, while accepting liberation as a paradigm of continuing importance?

A matter of interest in the context of this article is Maimela’s argument that the history of Black Theology can be divided into four periods organised around three watershed years. The first period ended in 1977 with the banning of all Black Consciousness organisations and the Christian Institute. These years marked the heyday of both Black Consciousness and Black Theology. The second period ended in 1983, the year in which resistance politics came to life again with the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Democratic Forum. During this second period there was a hiatus in Black resistance politics; Black Theology all but faded from sight. These were the years also during which the ICT was formed. The third period ended in 1990, the year in which President de Klerk signalled an official acceptance of the end of apartheid and unbanned the major liberation movements, the ANC and PAC. Charterist politics triumphed over Black

¹ Praxis is from a Greek word *Prasso* that means, “to work.” Praxis involves revolutionary action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. Out of this, theological perceptions will (liberationists believe) continually emerge. In other words, praxis refers to the discovery and formation of theological “truth” out of a given historical situation through personal participation in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed.

² Curiously, South Africa has one of the best national constitutions in the world, effectively catering for human rights among other issues.

Consciousness politics, and Black Theology split from the ICT and re-emerged as an independent movement. The final period, 1990-1992, marks the beginning of the reconstruction phase in the theo-social life of South Africa. Prior to this, Maimela argued, Black Theology was seen to have become an exclusive club of black intellectuals with little or no organic connection to grassroots Christian groups (see Moore 2010; Maimela 1998).

In Basil Moore's view, the beginning of the 1990s marks the commencement of a reconstruction phase. Indubitably this period was dominated by the official abandonment of apartheid and the government's repudiation of racism in the unexpected policy speech of President FW de Klerk on 2 February 1990 – the unbanning of all the liberation movements, the freeing of Nelson Mandela, the return of the exiles, the reorganisation of the ANC and its rapid rise to political dominance, the start of a negotiation and reconstruction process, and the escalating violence in which all parties are involved and which they seem powerless to stop. It is also a period in which the aftermath of the '80s decade of struggle began to emerge in what Buti Tlhagale has described as "the collapse of social infrastructures, the collapse of a working system of values as evidenced in the wanton killings, the education crisis, the collapse of family structures and the abuse of women and children" (Moore 2010). All the problems that confronted Black Theology during the previous periods continue – with the addition of the problem which Arnold Stofile has identified as its essence:

... a resistance theology with no clear idea of what or who is being resisted. De Klerk's announcement in 1990 and the crisis that erupted with it came on us so unexpectedly that we were unprepared for it. Suddenly the most urgent need is for reconstruction and development. But we have not had enough time to develop a popular groundswell of commitment to it. That is made worse by the fact that the government still sits there in power (Stofile, quoted in Basil Moore 2010).

For this reason, Basil Moore (2010) contends that South Africans are caught between struggle and reconstruction and do not necessarily know how to handle it. He regrets the lack of a richly developed Theology of Development organically connected to any grassroots movement – raising the fear that what theologians say might not be heeded, since Black Theologians have not helped to link resistance and development by presenting development as a form of resistance. And even if it were heeded, Stofile regrets that "it is so weak as a movement that I can't see how it would be able to mobilise anything" (Stofile, quoted in Moore 2010).

Certainly, as mentioned above, some of the critical concerns of post-apartheid South African Black Theology in the twenty-first century include

HIV and AIDS, violence, spirituality, racism, tribalism, patriarchy and xenophobia. Sister Bernard Ncube adds sexism as a critical concern when she says:

Black theology will take us nowhere until it begins to incorporate into itself and work with some of the foundational principles and methodologies of feminist theology and feminist hermeneutics. That means that it also needs to be very careful that when it talks about “blacks” it is self-evident that it really does include black women. And when it talks about black resistance it takes very seriously the realities of the resistance struggles of black women ... We don't need papers on black women. We need a black theology which is also a feminist theology (Ncube, quoted in Moore 2010).

In addition to these items from the early agenda of Black Theology, other theologians believed that a Black Theology was needed which could also respond meaningfully and creatively to

violence (Buti Tlhagale, Frank Chikane, Beyers Naude, David Mosoma, Klippies Kritzinger) *the education crisis* (Buti Tlhagale, Simon Maimela, David Mosoma, Willem Saayman) *the crisis in black family life* (Lindy Myeza, Sr Bernard Ncube, Jo Seoka, Willem Saayman, David Mosoma, Klippies Kritzinger) *the struggles between the predominantly black political formations* (Buti Tlhagale, Beyers Naude) *development* (Beyers Naude, Arnold Stofile, David Bosch) *the issue of 'culture' and 'ethnicity'* (Bonganjalo Goba, Frank Chikane) *democracy* (Mcebisi Xundu, Buti Tlhagale) *land* (Simon Maimela, Takatso Mofokeng) *the economy* (Mcebisi Xundu, Takatso Mofokeng, Buti Tlhagale) *hermeneutics* (Simon Maimela, David Mosoma) (see also Mosala, 1989 & West, 1991) *the hegemony of fundamentalist evangelicalism* (Albert Nolan) (Moore 2010).

Pondering Maimela's well-considered four stages of Black Theology (as noted above) and addressing the above concerns, we realise that Black Theology's agenda in the twenty-first century is reconstructive – since its concerns, like those of other African theologies, are geared to a rebuilding of the various broken walls of our times (cf. Nehemiah 2:18). This being so, Africa in the twenty-first century appears to be theologically singing out of one hymn book despite the varied melodies. With similar concerns for all African theologies (African Women's Theology, African Theology, Black

Theology, Theology of Reconstruction), Africa is set to rebuild its many walls without further theological balkanisation or fragmentation. Indeed, “let’s start rebuilding!” (Nehemiah 2:18). Like Judah in the time of Nehemiah, after the Babylonian captivity, Africa appears to have a well-defined agenda – reconstruction! For this reason, the agenda of liberation in Black Theology is carried out within the reconstruction paradigm. In any case, the concept of reconstruction embraces other motifs. As one of its chief proponents, Jesse Mugambi (1995:xv), puts it:

This theology should be reconstructive rather than destructive; inclusive rather than exclusive; proactive rather than reactive; complementary rather than competitive; integrative rather than disintegrative; programme-driven rather than project-driven; people-centred rather than institution-centred; deed-oriented rather than word-oriented; participatory rather than autocratic; regenerative rather than degenerative; future-sensitive rather than past-sensitive; co-operative rather than confrontational; consultative rather than impositional.

This view is given further support in Kä Mana’s works when he asserts that the theology of reconstruction integrates the motifs of identity, as in inculturation theology and liberation, but moves them to reconstruct Africa as well as the world in accordance with humane requirements (Mana 2002:91). Seen in this light, the paradigm of reconstruction integrates other theological motifs. The question, however, is: where are our Nehemiahs to lead us in the all-important tasks of reconstructing the walls of our African Jerusalems, cities and ghettos? Are they equal to the task? Do our leaders still want to play the role of Moses even when we are in the land of our foremothers/fathers? After years in Mesopotamian captivity and other places, aren’t we ripe to adjust our theological gears accordingly? Africa cannot procrastinate any longer. This drives us to address ourselves to another fundamental issue, namely: to what extent has the situation of Black Theology in South Africa really changed for the better?

The changed situation of Black theology in South Africa

In addressing ourselves to the above questions, it is critical to acknowledge that it is unfair to view the proponents of a South African Black Theology of Liberation as theological orphans, even if they have not yet devised a new and a clearly defined theological framework for reflection after the dismantling of apartheid. Certainly some of their concerns, such as poverty eradication (as noted above) have not yet been dealt with. And apart from poverty, Gerald West (2005:3) notes that race remains a “defining feature of identity

politics in South Africa, even after liberation, and so remaining in this frame is not always comfortable, nor should it be, for a white South African". This is, however, problematic: does it mean that the dismantling of apartheid has no theological implication for Black Theology? On the other hand, situational theologies will always have to devise new strategies from time to time to adjust themselves to unfolding scenarios, since theology, like culture, cannot be said to be static. If they do not, any theology that is situation-insensitive risks getting out of tune with the reality (see Moore 1991).

In the early 2000s, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke acknowledged this view when he said 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" (2000b:20). This being so, Maluleke acknowledged the need for a creative post-apartheid paradigm in African theology. Maluleke (2000b:31) has affirmed African Women Theologians as the one strand of African theology that is "engaging in the most passionate, the most vibrant and the most prophetic forms of praxis (theory and practice)". He goes on to say that "African women's theology has been by far the most prolific and challenging in the past decade and a half – at least in Anglophone Protestant Africa" (Maluleke 2000b:31). This does not mean that it has replaced Black Theology. In any case, the proponents of Black Theology or of African Theology have not devised it – though it is part of the wider African theology. Rather, Maluleke sees the "rediscovery of the agency of Africans" as the one factor that cuts across the various dialogues that have been explored in African theology in post-Cold War Africa. He explains that all the new proposals in African theology foreground the notion of Africans as agents – though the protagonists are not always aware of it (Maluleke 2000b:32). He contends that we need a careful analysis of what we shall call contemporary strands in African theology. He argues that:

From the work of Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, through Oduyoye and her sisters in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio's reconstruction theology, Mosala and Mofokeng's quest to understand how black Christians may and do intend to "use the Bible to get the land back and get the land back without losing the Bible", Tutu's theology of forgiveness, Gerald West's quest for creating dialogue between Africa's trained and Africa's ordinary readers to Robin Petersen's riveting attempt to understand "what really goes on" in African Independent Churches (AICs) – reveal a rediscovery of the agency of African Christians in the face of great odds (Maluleke 2000b:32).

Despite failing to state explicitly that the reconstruction motif is the one that cuts across all the contemporary strands of African theologies (African Women's Theology, African Theology, Black Theology in South Africa), Maluleke (1997c:99-100) perceptively notes that:

With the changing ideological map of the world and the sweeping changes on the African continent itself, the agendas of what has been termed "African theologies of inculturation" as opposed to "African theologies of liberation" plus South African Black theology are moving closer together (Motlhabi 1994). Having been cautious to speak about "African culture" – due probably to the apartheid state's manipulation of African culture into the Bantustan system – South African Black theologians are now beginning to speak more freely about culture. This is illustrated by the increasing references being made to the concept of *ubuntu* (African personhood) in numerous South African intellectual debates.

He cautions, however (Maluleke 1997c:100), that the convergence of agendas in African theologies does not, and should not, be interpreted to mean that some forms of these theologies are becoming irrelevant or are about to die out. To him, this feeling is a premature assumption which is often made in the "zeal to construct newer and more definitive African theologies or theological paradigms".

On the socio-economic level, the emergence of a "black middle class" – in post-apartheid South Africa – raises a theological issue as to whether Black Theology is right in emphasising the concept of liberation or reconstruction of our social consciousness. With black people constituting about 75% of South Africa's 46.6 million population, statistics from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) show that the black middle class, which stood at 3.3% of the total population in 1994, had by 2006 swelled to 7.8%. This growth of the black middle class has been attributed to better education and government affirmative action policies. As Nyanto (2006:28) says:

They drive the latest flashy cars and don designer clothes. They have "invaded" white suburbia and private schools where they learn about Francis Bacon and Napoleon. In South Africa's trendy shopping malls, they are increasingly making their presence felt ... What is worrying, say economists, is that the new black middle class tend to concentrate their incomes on buying durable consumer goods such as cars or real estate, rather than contribute to investments and creation of wealth.

In other words, the black middle class are not keen to invest in building factories in their townships or to undertake economic programmes that will pay in the long run; they would rather spend their money on luxurious lives – going on holidays, joining White-run schemes to build golf estates, being fashion-conscious, being big spenders, among others, yet without focusing on economic reconstruction from their personal economic levels. Certainly, this massive spending boom may not be sustained. On the other hand, this is not just a South African phenomenon but a global trend that has drawn the ire of the US-based Nigerian scholar, Chika Onyeani – author of the increasingly popular book, *Capitalist Nigger* (Nyanto 2006:28). In a lecture in Johannesburg on the Black Management Forum, he warned against the trend that has been the root cause of the dismal state of blacks everywhere – rapacious consumption instead of capital accumulation through savings and investments, followed by manufacturing and creating value for a black economy and export; and subsequently retaining and circulating the fruits of such investments within the black community (Nyanto 2006:28-29). Onyeani laments: “The difference between the black middle class and the white middle class is simple: If the black middle class does not get a month’s pay cheque, they would revert to the poverty class immediately” (Onyeani, quoted in Nyanto 2006:28). Any contextual theology in South Africa and in the rest of tropical Africa will have to address such concerns. Undoubtedly it points to the urgency of reconstruction in South Africa and in the rest of tropical Africa as the norm of our time.

Some concerns for Black Theology and other African theologies

By “other theologies” we mean African Theology as done by African women and men North of the Limpopo; and by concerns we mean that all theologies in Africa, though not necessarily proclaiming it, are attempting to carry out the important task of reconstructing the broken walls of Africa (cf. Nehemiah 2:18). Reconstruction may have become the dominant motif, but liberation, inculturation, reconciliation and other paradigms have remained important motifs in twenty-first-century Africa. Seen in this way, Liberation Theology fits into the paradigm of reconstruction. Some of the themes that need to be addressed by the various African theologies that propose to adopt reconstruction as a paradigm include the following:

HIV and AIDS

HIV and AIDS form one of the major concerns that theologians in tropical Africa are grappling with, since it challenges every form of theology – Cultural Theology, Black Theology, African Women’s Theology, Liberation Theology and so forth. Early responses focused on the silence of the churches

on the subject of HIV and AIDS. An examination of the literature generated since the 1990s shows that African theological reflection in the area of HIV and AIDS has advanced since then. It is no longer a “new kairós”. African women’s theologies have taken a lead in this area. This is confirmed by the vast literature that has been generated in this area, such as the recent outstanding work by the Circle and by Ezra Chitando in the area of African Theology and HIV and AIDS (2009). Chitando (2009:128) asserts that all the strands of African Theology need to respond more systematically to HIV and AIDS.

Concern for the environment

Concern for the environment is fundamental to Black Theology and other African theologies in the twenty-first century. Daneel (1991) has rightly argued that we cannot put the liberation of humanity above the liberation of nature. Political, cultural, socio-economic and gender liberation should go hand in hand with the liberation of nature. Karungi (1989:231) has emphasised that Africa is more vulnerable to environmental degradation than any other continent. In particular, African Christians experience the harsh reality of deforestation and the deterioration of agricultural soil (Daneel 1996:215ff). In Africa there is a general increase in the use of pollutants in the environment, such as biodegradable and radioactive substances (Karungi 1989:230f). On this continent, general destruction, effluents and pollutants, poor air quality, congestion, noise, dirt and grime are all too common. That calls for African Christians to wake up, be informed, and take a front seat in working towards the creation of a better environment. We agree with Daneel that the biggest contribution of African religion to African Theology is in the area of the ecological salvation or liberation of all creation. This is a starting point for a reflection on the development of an African ecological theology of reconstruction.

Deconstruction of patriarchy

The deconstruction of patriarchy is another fundamental concern for all African theologies. It is critical to appreciate that patriarchy is socially constructed and not biologically determined (cf. Phiri 2004). Patriarchy is evident in cultural, political, religious, social, and economic systems and structures. It consists in the domination of women by men, thereby hindering authentic growth in society. Patriarchy is dominant in most churches in Africa. It does not facilitate social or individual progress because it is based on a lack of gender sensitivity (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:30). With Brigalia Bam (1991:367), we stand amazed at the way men rediscover their African tradition only when it comes to women; they are quite willing to allow the

old ways to be superseded on almost every other issue. Since culture can be reformed, we as Christians have to lead others in transcending traditions such as patriarchy, as we have done elsewhere with other issues. Patriarchy is a concern because Africa cannot reconstruct adequately while a patriarchal ideology continues to inform and influence the fabric of society. Phiri and Nadar (2009) have demonstrated that indigenous resources exist which need to be harnessed in order to critique patriarchy.

Violence

Another major concern for Black Theology and other African theologies in the twenty-first century is violence in general and domestic violence in particular (Shisanya 2003:151-169). For lack of space, we are addressing only two forms of violence which we consider to be common in Africa today. First, domestic violence is a common occurrence, especially in patriarchal African societies; some cultures simply tolerate it. Some African traditional cultures, for example, allowed a husband to “discipline” his wife or wives as he pleased, this being expected of every “real man” (see Phiri 2000, Gathogo 2008a). Unfortunately this form of violence continues to the present day albeit in different forms, including physical assault, rape and, in some extreme cases, men or women murdering their spouses during domestic disagreements. The current work on the reconstruction of dangerous masculinities and the reclamation of positive masculinities needs to be embraced by all African theologians (Nadar 2009; Chitando, 2009.)

The second form of violence is ethnic or internal warfare. In this respect, independent African states cannot be exonerated from their share in the suffering of their peoples. The Kenyan case is a special concern, considering that this country was for so long viewed as an island of peace in a sea of chaos. Following the announcement on 30 December 2007 by the Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), Mr Samuel Kivuitu, that President Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU) had won the hotly contested general elections conducted on 27 December, the country experienced unprecedented and massive violence. Characteristically, this violence took on an ethnophobic dimension. Certain tribal groups massacred one another – looting, raping, maiming, and burning one another’s houses and properties. This left over one thousand people dead. It also left over 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Gathogo 2008b:3). Wherever there is war or violence, women and children are exposed to all kinds of abuse, including sexual abuse.

Xenophobic (best described as Afrophobic) attacks, such as those that happened in South Africa in May 2008, are another form of violence and hence a concern for Black Theology and other African theologies. During this period, black South Africans launched vicious attacks on roughly five million foreign nationals from Malawi, Mozambique, Pakistan and Zimbabwe, the majority

of whom “are economic refugees” (Misimanga 2008:4). Unfortunately, the nations of origin of these foreign nationals supported black South Africans during the fight against apartheid. Frontline states like Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe provided military bases for black South African fighters (Warigi 2008:11), for which they were regularly attacked by the apartheid regime with its superior military might. At this juncture it is critical to consider constructively the factors that drive this violence, this *Unyama* or *Ubulwane* (animal-like behaviour), which must be contained. In short, any theology that fails to address violence fails the test of time and may be deemed irrelevant.

Corruption

Corruption – referring to the impairment of integrity or moral principle and an inducement to do wrong by bribery or other unethical and unlawful means (Okulu 1974:43) – is another major abuse of African hospitality that has been a dominant problem since the 1960s. Speaking from the Kenyan context, Bishop Githiga (2001:58) says that corruption is centred on “giving and receiving money where money has been considered as a means to attain any material benefits”.³ In traditional Africa, he contends, the giving of tokens or gifts to religious and community leaders such as kings, chiefs and medicine men or women was accepted as normal and correct practice (Githiga 2001:58): it was considered fair to give these office-bearers something, since they were not officially salaried. In the case of corruption, as practised in some African countries, it contradicts African hospitality “that was freely extended to religious and community leaders according to one’s ability” (Githiga 2001:58).

As Olusegun Obasanjo (quoted in Bray 1999:15), former president of Nigeria, pointed out, there are many differences between gifts and bribes:

In the African concept of appreciation and hospitality, a gift is a token; it is not demanded. The value is in the spirit of giving, not the material worth. The gift is made openly, never in secret. Where a gift is excessive it becomes an embarrassment and is returned.

Thus Obasanjo rightly rules out any justification of corruption as a way of conducting business in Africa. In the main, the corruption practised by some African governments since the 1960s has always aggravated crime, negatively affected investment, hindered growth in society, and drained the national

³ However, it must be appreciated that Kenyan democracy has been reborn after the successful democratic elections on December 30, 2002.

budget. It also undermines our sovereignty as a nation when leaders ignore merit, practise tribalism or nepotism and embezzle public funds (Githiga 2001:40–117). Such theft from the nation “is always theft from the weakest in the nation: the poor, the old, the disabled, the sick, the children, and the newborn” (Gathogo 2008c:51). Overall, corruption does not provide a net profit; rather, it distorts economic development, rewarding the dishonest rather than the competent (Githiga 2001:40–117).

Conclusion

The article set out from the premise that Black Theology as a strand of African theology is a theology of reconstruction from the common challenges that the continent is facing. These challenges include gender disparities, xenophobia, racism, poverty, and environmental crisis among others. We began by defining what Black Theology is. The paper went on to attempt a historical survey – countering the mistaken notion that the Black Theology of South Africa is a copycat of Black theology in North America. After surveying the concerns of theology in twenty-first century Africa, the paper affirmed our hypothesis that while up to 1994 South African Black Theology was distinct from other strands of African theology (especially in its emphasis on the urgency of liberation from white racism and its attendant suffering and exploitation), the dividing line is now blurred, as South African Black Theologians are moving closer to other theologians from the rest of the continent (Motlhabi 1994).

The article also pointed out that while South African Black Theology survives even after European colonialism and the end of the Cold War, the Exodus motif becomes part of the reconstructive motif. Certainly, since the early 1990s – when the reconstruction motif was mooted and subsequently endorsed as the theme of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in their Eighth Assembly at Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 2003 (Mugambi 2003:210) – the theology of reconstruction has clearly become a developmental trend in African Christianity that cannot be ignored in the Africa of the twenty-first century. Since then the challenge has been: how and when to develop well-documented publications with clear, discernible and logically coherent descriptions of the “Theology of Reconstruction”. Such works ought to document the history, definitions, limitations, sources, approaches and methodologies, the future and the fundamental concerns of the “Theology of Reconstruction”, as a discipline that has emerged from African Christian theology. Furthermore, biblical doctrines such as Christology, soteriology (salvation) and ecclesiology will need to be worked out in the light of such theologies of reconstruction, so as to place it on a par with other systematic theologies.

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