


## DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Religion and Theology, in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa.


It has not been submitted before for any degree of examination in any other University.



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March 2007

**As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission**



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PROFESSOR ISABEL APAWO PHIRI  
March 2007

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the Most Rev. Dr. David M. Gitari, Retired Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Kenya (1997-2002), in deepest appreciation for your conviction that I could make it in theological education. Your dauntless participation in the theo-social reconstruction of post-independent Kenya of the 1980s deserves the highest compliment. Your gallant struggle over the past two decades in the so-called "second liberation" which has culminated in the current move towards a *laissez faire* society in modern Kenya is clearly evident.

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## ABSTRACT

This study builds on Jesse Mugambi's post-Cold War proposal for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction. Mugambi's line of reasoning is based upon his understanding of the post-Cold War period in Africa, and the need for a shift from the "dominant" paradigm of liberation, in articulating African theology, to reconstruction. The Cold War had divided Africa (and the rest of the world) into two ideological blocks, namely, the East Bloc nations (i.e., Warsaw Pact) vs. the nations in the West (NATO). With the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the end of western colonial rule in Africa, and the demise of apartheid, Mugambi prods that, there is a need to shift the theological emphasis from the Exodus motif to that of a Reconstructive motif. While the former motif was biblically modelled on Moses, and the Exodus from Egypt and the Journey to the Promised Land, the latter is biblically modelled on Nehemiah who led the Jews in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem following their return from Exile after seventy years of Babylonian captivity. Thus Mugambi sets the stage for the debate in this study, by his proposal that the post-Cold War Africa should now shift its paradigm in theo-social discourses.

In this regard, the present study poses one question, namely, how appropriate is J N K Mugambi's call for a shift of theological gears from liberation to a reconstruction paradigm in the development of African theology in the twenty-first century? Following a theo-cultural-historical review, it has been argued, in this study, that even though Mugambi's call for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, is largely appropriate, this does not mean that other paradigms (e.g., inculturation, liberation), which have been utilised in African theology since the 1960s, have necessarily been rendered obsolete. Rather, the diversity and homogeneity of Africa makes it possible for various theologies to be done by using a variety of minor paradigms, at any given time and in various prevailing and/or emerging contexts, while at the same time foregrounding reconstruction as the overriding paradigm within African theology of the twenty-first century. By so doing, this study innovatively introduces the new idea of both *minor* and *dominant* paradigms operating simultaneously within African theology.

In building on its theo-cultural-historical review, as its methodology, the study employed

the Library research as its primary means of data collection. This involved an extensive literature search. Additionally, it also consulted some well-placed individuals who were selected for in-depth interviews in an endeavour to seek clarification in particular areas that were unclear from the existing written literature.

In its research findings, this study has sought to show that Mugambi's idea of change in paradigmatic emphasis in African theological reflection is largely authentic in so far as the African traditional setting has its own form of paradigm shifts, albeit in different formats. In particular, the *Agĩkũyũ* concept of *itwĩka* and African rights of passage contain a strong connotation that paradigm shifts are inevitable from time to time. Similarly, a survey of theo-historico-philosophical dialogues within this study, has pointed out that paradigm shifts are indispensable in all our human endeavours.

*Key Terms: Reconstruction; Liberation, Paradigm shifts; African Theology; Minor and Dominant paradigms; culture; Inculturation; Exodus motif; Reconstructive motif; and Christological paradigms.*

## ACRONYMS

<b>AACC</b>	All Africa Conference of Churches
<b>AAIA</b>	African-American Improvement Association
<b>AC</b>	Anglican Church
<b>ACK</b>	Anglican Church of Kenya
<b>ACT</b>	African Christian Theology
<b>AFER</b>	African Ecclesial Review
<b>AICs</b>	African Independent Churches
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>AMECEA</b>	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>APRM</b>	African Peer Review Mechanism
<b>AR</b>	African Religion
<b>AT</b>	African Theology
<b>ATIEA</b>	Association of Theological Institutes of Eastern Africa
<b>ATR</b>	African Traditional Religion
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>BC</b>	Black Consciousness
<b>BPC</b>	Black Peoples' Convention
<b>CCEA</b>	Christian Churches Educational Association
<b>Circle</b>	Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
<b>CLMC</b>	Christian Learning Materials Centre
<b>CMS</b>	Church Missionary Society
<b>COMECON</b>	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance
<b>CORAT</b>	Christian Organisations Research and Advisory Trust of Africa
<b>CPE</b>	Church Panel of Educators
<b>CPK</b>	Church Province of Kenya
<b>CRE</b>	Christian Religious Education
<b>DO</b>	District Officer
<b>DRC</b>	Dutch Reformed Church
<b>EARM</b>	East African Revival Movement
<b>ECG</b>	Embu Cultural Group
<b>EDC</b>	Embu Dancing Club
<b>ERP</b>	European Recovery Programme
<b>GARIOA</b>	Government and Relief in Occupied Areas
<b>GNS</b>	Good Neighbours' Society
<b>IBEA</b>	Imperial British East Africa Company
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IRM</b>	International Review of Mission
<b>JBL</b>	Journal of Biblical Literature
<b>JIAI</b>	Journal of the International African Institute

<b>KANU</b>	Kenya African National Union
<b>KAU</b>	Kenya African Union
<b>KCA</b>	Kikuyu Central Association
<b>LMS</b>	London Missionary Society
<b>LWF</b>	Lutheran World Federation
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MTTC</b>	Machakos Teachers Training College
<b>NAM</b>	Non-Aligned Movement
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>NEPAD</b>	New Partnership for Africa's Development
<b>NRM</b>	National Resistance Movement
<b>NTS</b>	New Testament Studies
<b>OAU</b>	Organisation of African Unity
<b>OEEC</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>SABT</b>	South African Black Theology
<b>SACC</b>	South African Council of Churches
<b>SASO</b>	South African Student's Organisation
<b>SFD</b>	Strategic Framework Document
<b>TRC</b>	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
<b>TRIPS</b>	Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights
<b>UGCC</b>	United Gold Coast Convention
<b>UMCA</b>	United Methodist Church of Africa
<b>WCC</b>	World Council of Churches
<b>WCCE</b>	World Council of Christian Education
<b>WSCF</b>	World Student Christian Federation
<b>WW1</b>	World War One
<b>WW2</b>	World War Two
<b>ZANU</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union

## **GLOSSARY**

*Gikuyu, Gĩkũyũ, Agĩkũyũ and Kikuyu* means the same and are used interchangeably

*Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka* is the same as *Gikuyu itwika* or *Kikuyu itwika*

*Mũũmbi* is the same as *Muumbi*

*Mũgai*, which literally means 'the Divider of the Universe', can also be written as *Mugai*

*Mũkũyũ*, which means the sacred tree, can also be written as *Mukuyu*



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Framing the problem

On 30<sup>th</sup> March 1990, Jesse Mugambi was invited by the then President of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the then General Secretary, the Rev. Jose B. Chipenda, to reflect on the “Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa,”<sup>1</sup> to the General Committee of the organisation - in the Nairobi Meeting. This was a month after Nelson Mandela had been released on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1990 and Namibia had attained her independence on March 21 of the same year (Chipenda 1991:3). And it is in this meeting that Mugambi suggested that African Christianity must shift her theological gear from the paradigm of liberation to reconstruction. He suggested that,

Reconstruction is the new priority for African nations in the 1990s. The churches and their theologians will need to respond to this new priority in relevant fashion, to facilitate this process of reconstruction. The process will require considerable efforts of reconciliation and confidence-building. It will also require re-orientation and retraining (1991:36).

Mugambi contended that in the new world order,<sup>2</sup> the person of Nehemiah, unlike that of Moses, gives us a mirror through which we are enabled to recognise our mission to remake Africa out of the ruins of the wars – “against racism, colonial domination and ideological branding” (2003: 128; cf. 1991, 1995).

Following the Nairobi meeting (noted above), Jesse Mugambi teamed up with Joe Chipenda, Andrea Karamaga and C K Omari, in order to publish, *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, (1991).<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, Charles Villa-Vicencio, a South African theologian, followed suit and published his book, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, (1992).<sup>4</sup> Mugambi published another

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<sup>1</sup> This article appears in the book, *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, 1991:29-50, which Mugambi edited jointly with J.B Chipenda, A. Karamaga and C.K Omari. It also appears in his book, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the cold war*, 1995:160-180 – as chapter ten.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the world after the end of the Cold War in 1989.

<sup>3</sup> The 1991 publication, *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, is a collection of essays that were originally presented in the Nairobi meeting of March 1990 by Jesse Mugambi, Andrea Karamaga, and Joe Chipenda among others, on the emerging theology of reconstruction.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio also published his article, “Religion, Revolution and Reconstruction: The Significance of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions for the Church in South Africa,” *Journal of Theology*

book on reconstruction theology, now as the sole author, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, (1995). Others soon followed, including Valentin Dedji, 2003; Chris Ukachukwu Manus (2003).<sup>5</sup>

The proposal for a paradigm shift has been received with mixed reactions. Some theologians support the idea for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction. These include the Anglophone theologians, Jesse Mugambi (1991; 1995; 1997; 2003; 2005); Moiseraele Prince Dibeela (2005); Villa-Vicencio (1992), Brigalia Bam (1995); Valentin Dedji (2003); Francophone theologians include, Andrea Karamaga (1991; 1997); Kä Mana (1993; 1994; 2002); Lusophone theologians include, Joe Chipenda (1991). Other theologians such as Tinyiko Sam Maluleke (1994; 1996; 1997), Musa Dube (2004), and Joseph Wandera (2002) view the whole idea as being foreign, inauthentic, immature and above all, suspicious.

In his support, Jesse Mugambi finds a companion in Brigalia Hlophe Bam, who contends that with the February 1990 top-down political reforms, impelled by the maturation of the crisis of legitimacy of the South African white minority regime, the church under the auspices of the South African Council of Churches (*Hereafter*, SACC) has “an opportunity to share in the reconstruction of the nation” (1995a:xi). She articulates the new direction that the SACC ought to take in the “new situation” when she observes that since its inception, the SACC has been involved in resistance. When the decade of the 1980s drew to a dramatic close, the situation in South Africa changed drastically. She continues to say:

The next move came the inevitable question – what now? Resistance was no longer sufficient. We were obliged to ask how we could best share in rebuilding the nation. The new context demanded a new message (1995: xi).

Since liberation, Bam notices the changes that have taken place, which includes the integration of different apartheid-organised educational departments into one single ministry of education. She also acknowledges the work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Hereafter*, TRC), in seeking the “healing of our broken nation.” According to her, “this amounts to reconstruction of our history, social relations and Christian spirituality of people’s edification” (1995b: 45-52). She cautions however that while the theological challenge facing the church is to know when to say “Yes” to

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*for Southern Africa*, December 1990. Similarly, James Cochrane and Gerald West published their article, “War, remembrance and Reconstruction” in the *Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, September 1993.

<sup>5</sup> The list keeps growing! See bibliography for further examples.

meaningful change, it must learn afresh when to say “No” to such acts of commission or omission by the state (1995b: 50).

Similarly, Charles Villa-Vicencio also captures this theme of reconstruction in his book, *Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, (1992). He contends that the changing situation in South Africa and Eastern Europe prompts the investigation of the implications of transforming liberation theology into a theology of reconstruction and nation building (1992:7). With the changing global scenario, he says that the challenge facing the church is now different. He goes on to argue that this new global context is akin to the post-exilic situation within the Hebrew bible, and hence obliges the church to begin the difficult task of saying “Yes” to the unfolding process of what could culminate in a democratic, just and kinder social order.

In reacting to Villa-Vicencio’s proposal for a theology of reconstruction, Maluleke (1994:247) sees “hypocrisy” as inherent in the call for a shift from “a theological no” to a “theological yes” (Villa-Vicencio 1992:1), hence he boldly states:

The hypocrisy obtains from the assumption and impression made by our *inviters* that they too have been involved in the same ‘resistance theology’ in which all have been involved. As already indicated above, both these impressions and/or assumptions are inaccurate and misleading.

Maluleke further notes that the proposal for a shift from “resistance” to “reconstruction” must be understood within the context of a sustained rejection of Black and African theologies of liberation by liberal theologians. For this reason, he argues, that Black and African theologies may understandably view both the “invitation” and the “contextual analysis” inherent in the invitation with suspicion. He cites the case of the early 1970s when Contextual theology became the vogue and says that, “liberal white theologians were the first to embrace it with a view to a local adaptation.” The same (case) applies to “Latin American Liberation Theology...What is significant is that South African liberal theology has, for various reasons, largely ignored or even resisted home-grown black and African theologies” (Maluleke 1994:246-7).

In implying that the theology of reconstruction, like South African liberal theology, is not home-grown hence inauthentic, Maluleke finds a companion in Joseph Wandera’s view when he says:

There is still so much deconstruction to be done before reconstruction can start. There is a saying among the Africans that “we should chase away the wild cat before we begin to warn the chicken against wandering carelessly.” Africa still suffers from marginalisation of all kinds, including its theology.<sup>6</sup>

Musa Dube also pours cold water on Mugambi’s project of reconstruction when she asserts that she disagrees with him as he has “naively responded joyfully to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and sees globalisation as ushering a new time, a fair time, where all can walk, act, see and think freely.”<sup>7</sup> Dube contends that Mugambi needs to study critically in order to understand the phenomenon of globalisation.<sup>8</sup> Dube further explains that Mugambi’s work:

Remain quite blind to the superstructure of patriarchy, which must be deconstructed in order to reconstruct.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise his theology of reconstruction is founded on sand as long as it does not address major oppressive issues of both globalisation and patriarchy.<sup>10</sup>

In evaluating the above contrasting views, one is driven to ask whether Mugambi made a theological blunder by suggesting this proposal before seeking a wider consensus with all concerned African theologians.<sup>11</sup> Was the idea hastily crafted? Was he right or wrong? Was Africa ripe for a paradigm shift? Was it culturally acceptable in Africa to shift paradigms? In short:

How appropriate is Jesse Mugambi’s proposal for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, in the development of African theology in the twenty-first century?

In trying to unveil the above concern(s), further questions soon emerged, namely, How has Jesse Mugambi participated in the African theologies of liberation in particular and African theologies in general? How did he arrive at the idea of a shift of paradigm in African theology? What led him to arrive there? How did his formative factors contribute

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<sup>6</sup> Rev. Joseph Wandera, a lecturer at Church Army’s Carlile College in Nairobi, Kenya, was quoted in *The Voice Magazine* 2002, 23. *The Voice Magazine* is a theological journal of St. Paul’s United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya.

<sup>7</sup> E-mail interview with Musa Dube on August 10, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> E-mail interview with Dube on August 10, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> It is however significant to acknowledge that the deconstruction of patriarchy is one of the fundamental concerns of a theology of reconstruction.

<sup>10</sup> E-mail interview with Musa Dube on August 10, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> By “concerned African theologians” reference is made to those African scholars and church leaders who have a passion for the plight of Africa. They include Maluleke, Dube, Tutu, and Bam. It is however unnecessary and impractical for a theologian to always seek advice from his or her peers whenever he or she wants to propound a new idea.



to his call for a shift of paradigm? These important questions have aided the presentation of this study.

The need to explore the debate on paradigm shifts in African theology is further fuelled by Maluleke, who interestingly refers to Mugambi as “a passionate and committed African Churchman, theologian and continental patriot of our time.” This telling tribute comes in the midst of his critique of Mugambi’s proposal, whereby he claims that the shape of the reconstruction paradigm and its potential for effectively replacing the inculturation-liberation<sup>12</sup> paradigms, for him, remains unclear (1996c: 473). This comment strengthened the present researcher’s motivation to study Mugambi’s proposal within the context of his work, and attempt to unravel the above concerns. Without taking the previous theologies seriously, Maluleke wonders, “How can we tell whether what he is proposing is either new or progressive?” (1996c: 473). He contends that for Mugambi to have authority or right to propound his theology of reconstruction, he has to take seriously that which he wishes to replace, namely, African theologies and their inculturation and liberation paradigms. These thought provoking remarks clearly motivate the need to explore further the call for a shift of paradigms, from liberation to reconstruction, in Mugambi’s works.

### **1.1 Theoretical framework and research design**

This study has been theoretically guided by the reconstructive motif; employing the theology of reconstruction framework, as contextualized in Africa by its chief proponent, Jesse Mugambi (1991, 1995, and 2003). And as noted above, the theological basis of reconstruction theology is postexilic biblical metaphors, as seen in the Ezra-Nehemiah text.

### **1.2. Hypothesis**

This study is constructed on the premise that even though Mugambi’s call for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, is largely appropriate, this does not mean that other paradigms that have been at play in African theology since the 1960s have totally been erased. Rather, African theology would best be done within more than one paradigm

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<sup>12</sup> Mugambi holds that the two concepts of liberation and inculturation should not be seen as two separate paradigms. According to him, they amount to one paradigm, namely the liberation-inculturation paradigm. This study, however, differs with his contention in that it holds that although liberation has been the dominant paradigm in African theology, since the 1960s, inculturation has also been a paradigm on its own though as “minor” or as “subordinate” to liberation paradigm. As “minor” paradigms in the current theological dispensation, they are nevertheless relevant today as reconstruction embraces other paradigms.

despite having only one “dominant” paradigm<sup>13</sup> providing the framework from which other “minor” paradigms are able to effectively articulate their theologies at any given time in the history of Christianity in Africa.

This hypothesis draws its parallel from Stephen Bevans, and his approach to doing contextual theology (1992, 2003). In his book, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, Bevan gives a detailed analysis of six models of doing contextual theology, namely, praxis, translation, anthropological, synthetic, transcendental, and the counter cultural models. Although for Bevans, none better than another, one has to use one dominant model at any given time when doing contextual theology, as the situation or the subject being studied dictates. Despite having settled on one model, this does not prevent the scholar from borrowing from any of the other models, as the situation demands. Similarly, this study is premised on the contention that various paradigms are useful in articulating theology; but at any given period of time, one paradigm will be suitable over others, in propounding Christian theology in Africa. Bevans’ case differs slightly however with the hypothesis of this study in that, while to him all models are equal, this study holds that there are “minor” and “dominant” paradigms, whose distinction can be determined by for instance, factors of history and other environmental matters. This means a paradigm can remain dominant over others for a long time so long as the social environment remains the same.

Although Mugambi has not made this epistemological connection, he has nonetheless done an innovative job by introducing reconstruction as the new paradigm in post-Cold War Africa. As noted above, this does not mean that no other paradigm will be needed, or will emerge in the course of time; for theology operates within changing contexts as new “revelations” define and redefine our theologising (*cf.* Mugambi 1995:19f). This study thus concurs with Mugambi that reconstruction, as a paradigm, is a necessity in African theology of the twenty-first century. However, it disagrees with him when he insists that the paradigm of liberation is now obsolete in the “new” theo-social dispensation in Africa. For it insists that liberation and other “minor” paradigms will have to play a subordinate role to that of the “dominant” paradigm of reconstruction. As David Bosch notes from the perspective of church history, old paradigms “still lives on in parts” of the new:

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<sup>13</sup> The question on which paradigm is minor or dominant will be made clear in the course of this study.

Martin Luther, whose break with the preceding paradigm was exceptionally radical, in many respects still harboured important elements of the paradigm he had abandoned. The same was true of Karl Barth. Likewise, people who, by and large, still operate within the old paradigm may already embody significant elements of the new. An excellent example of this was Luther's contemporary, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), who remained within the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm yet at the same time heralded a new era (1991, 2003:186).

In view of this, this study contends that the old paradigms, such as liberation and inculturation are not irrelevant in Africa today; rather together with the new and dominant paradigm of reconstruction and other "not so common" paradigms such as the market-theology, reconciliation and the charismatic (*cf.* Bosch 1991, 2003:186), they will play a complimentary role in marking the way forward in the articulation of African theology for the twenty-first century.

### **1.3. Methodology**

The approach to this study combines a theo-cultural-historical review of the concepts of liberation and reconstruction. By a theo-cultural-historical review, I mean, theology engaging in a dialogue with cultural and historical events that are compatible with the subject under discussion within the wider framework of contextualisation.

The primary means of data collection involved an extensive literature search. The focus on the concepts of liberation and reconstruction in Mugambi's works required a wide consultation of written sources by African theologians since the 1960s to the present day. This helped foster a rich dialogue between Mugambi's scholarship and other African theologians, (as well as other selected theologians from the rest of the majority-world<sup>14</sup>), who have written on related areas and concepts.

Ten well-placed individuals were selected for in-depth interviews in an endeavour to seek clarification in particular areas that were unclear from the existing written literature. Such interviews were conducted through the face-to-face method of interviewing or conducted through the e-mail interviews amongst people who could not be reached easily (see, appendix 1). The criteria of establishing whom I interviewed were determined by the areas that I encountered in my reading that required clarification from others connected to the particular readings. Examples include, Nyambura Njoroge,<sup>15</sup> Musa Dube and Mugambi

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<sup>14</sup> See the definition of terms below, on the meaning of the "majority-world."

<sup>15</sup> I interviewed her when she visited the University of KwaZulu-Natal in April 2004.

himself. In my field research, where I sought to know about the early upbringing of Jesse Mugambi, I managed to interview prominent people in Mugambi's life, including, the retired Archbishop David Gitari of the Anglican church of Kenya, Nelson Kivuti, a retired Kenyan Government civil servant and Jesse's teacher, Jesse Mugambi's mother, Jemimah Kori Kanyua, his elder sister Eunice Marĩgu Nyaga, and his classmate Peter Muriithi (see Appendix 1).

#### **1.4. Definition of terms**

##### **1.4.1. Praxis**

Praxis is from the Greek word *Prasso*, meaning, "to work." It involves a revolutionary action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed, and out of which theological perceptions will (liberationists believe) continuously emerge. In other words, praxis refers to the discovery and formation of theological "truth" from a given historical situation through personal participation in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Gutiérrez defines praxis as "a transforming activity marked and illuminated by Christian love" (McGovern 1989:32). Praxis however does not simply mean activism; rather it denotes a transforming activity guided by theory and goals. This motivating force for such action according to Gutiérrez is Christian love.

##### **1.4.2. The majority-world theologies**

The phrase the "majority-world theologies" is used in this study, to refer to some selected liberation theologies from non-industrialised sections of the world where the Christian population or the general population can be said to be relatively high as opposed to those from the industrialised countries. This includes some theologies from Asia, Eastern Europe, South America and Africa. Although Black theology in the United States of America is done from an industrialised country, this study, where appropriate, classifies such theology as belonging in the same category with those theologies from the non-industrialised world. Indeed, there are many commonalities between the communities of faith being targeted by these theologies and those elsewhere. Black theology in the United States of America is for example targeted towards marginalised African American minorities, who suffer from various deprivations similar to those in the non-industrialised world, as this study will endeavour to show. Seen from an African perspective, the phrase "majority-world Christianity" would imply, as with Kwame Bediako's contention (1992)

that the centre of Christian gravity has shifted to that of Africa.

#### **1.4.3. Africans in the Diaspora**

The Africans in the Diaspora refers to black peoples around the world and in particular to African-Americans and those black communities from the Caribbean who found themselves in such foreign places after the slave trade was abolished in the eighteenth century. This therefore refers to those individuals who are of African descent.<sup>16</sup>

#### **1.4.4. The *am haaretz***

The term *am haaretz* refer to “adversaries” or “our enemies” (Ezra 4:1,4,15) and “peoples of the lands” (Ezra 3:3; 4:4; 9:1,2,11; 10:2; 6:21; Neh. 9:24,30; 10:29,31,32; 13:3). It refers to those Jews who did not go to Babylonian exile, but remained in Palestine. Interestingly, the whole text of Ezra-Nehemiah portrays these peoples as being “adversaries” who were opposed to the returning exiles, such as Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (Neh. 2:19).

#### **1.4.5. Mugambi’s pre-liberation works**

This refers to Mugambi’s theology before the 1990s when he changed his focus, from liberation to reconstruction. These works are thus collated under the designation pre-liberation works, and cover volumes published for example in 1974; 1988; 1989a; 1989b, and 1989c.

#### **1.4.6. Mugambi’s post-liberation works**

This refers to Mugambi’s theological reflections post 1990, when he changed his theological mind, from liberation to reconstruction. That is, rather than emphasising the concept of liberation, he began to emphasise the concept of reconstruction.

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<sup>16</sup> The phrase “African descent” is however ambiguous in the light of Human Genome Project’s “Out of Africa Thesis.” Indeed, most paleoanthropologists advance an “out of Africa” hypothesis that arose in the late 1980s (stringer 1994). It postulates that modern humans, *homo sapiens*, emerged in Africa 100, 000 – 200, 000 years ago and spread around the world in the last 100, 000 years (Stringer 1990; Wilson and Cann 1992). This view is however contested by Chinese scientists who argue that humanity’s “precursors” were not of the human genus (*homo*) but had some human attributes, such as walking upright. See <http://www.jstor.org/view/00219118/di015158/01p0005q/1?frame=noframe&userID=c40a7902@nu.ac.za/01cc99332700501b90884&dpi=3&config=jstor>

#### **1.4.7. The dominant paradigm**

This refers to the main paradigm in African theology. For example, in the years spanning the 1960s to 1989, the Exodus motif (liberation) was considered as the overriding theological framework in African theology. This will be explained in the course of this study.

#### **1.4.8. Subordinate paradigm or minor paradigm**

Outside the dominant paradigm, other relevant paradigms in African theology are considered as “minor” or “subordinate paradigms.” This study is set on the premise that in every period of the history of African theology, there has always been one dominant paradigm while the emergences of other “relevant” paradigms are considered to be “minor” paradigms.

#### **1.5. The significance of the study**

A study on Mugambi’s proposed paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, as a critical analysis of African theology has several benefits. First, Mugambi’s works serve well as a point of entrance to the study of the theology of reconstruction in particular and African theology in general. More importantly, it is a study of the dominant paradigms in African theology, such as liberation, inculturation and reconstruction. By seeking to unveil the paradigmatic ambiguities in African theologies, this study will seek to provide the “right” framework – a kind of a platform of action – from where Christian theology in contemporary Africa can best be done.

As a person who is an insider in African theological studies, Mugambi’s works help us to penetrate the African theo-philosophical world. As a person who is a participant primarily in the African arena of theo-philosophical reflections, I find his works enriching, providing as they do a starting point from where I can launch vigorous theological enquiry into other unexplored areas in African Christianity of the twenty-first century. This study therefore provides me with an excellent opportunity to thoroughly investigate this arena of African theo-philosophical thinking. Similarly, other readers of Mugambi’s works will benefit greatly as they deal with one of the most significant contributors to African thought world. Hence, it is no surprise that Maluleke refers to Mugambi as a “continental patriot of our time” (1996:473).

Second, with Mugambi's works being largely inter-disciplinary, being reflected across various disciplinary lines such as science, history, economics, sociology, history, philosophy, ethics, anthropology and communication, theology is able to dialogue with other disciplines thereby confirming theology as the true queen of all sciences<sup>17</sup> - who doesn't lose her identity nor matter the dialogues that she encounters in the respective engagements. It will also confirm African theology as a discipline that seeks to empirically address the concerns of Africa. In view of this, this study, at least in some areas, will read as if the candidate is within a disciplinary area other than religion and theology. Thus, the nature of Mugambi's inter-disciplinary approach to theology clearly dictates this final outcome of the study.

Third, the significance of the study is seen in the fact that it confirms that Africa too has theological think tanks who deserves to be listened to, however few they may be. It calls us to eulogize our mother Africa by encouraging the few theological thinkers to continue their "good work." It is no wonder that the Hickian pluralism that Mugambi endorses within his works is ample challenge to the exclusivism that has dominated theological studies in recent times.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it will pay dividends, in Africa today, to listen to other people who have been "excluded." Is it possible that the centre of theo-philosophical articulations is silently shifting from the North Atlantic to Africa? Surely, we cannot doubt God at this period in our history.

Fourth, if we can use geography to determine the authenticity of a person's *Africanness*, then Mugambi has a dependability that makes his scholarly work a special area of study. Indeed, some of his academic certificates were earned in African institutions, including the prestigious<sup>19</sup> University of Nairobi, Kenya. However, his having lived in Africa for almost six decades, with the resultant "provocative" and "enriching" encounters, have greatly shaped his views on African Christianity. As a son of Africa, who has vigorously

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<sup>17</sup> During the time of Thomas Aquinas, theology was regarded as "the Queen of sciences" (Pailin 1989:123), and its major task was speculative. In any case, a speculative "theo + logos" type of definition of theology has been an old time favourite approach and is still in use (Mugambi 1989b: 7).

<sup>18</sup> In his explication on eschatology in African Christian theology, Jesse Mugambi builds on the works of John Hick, a western scholar, who urges for "a critical review of the bigoted missionary attitude." He goes on to suggest that salvation is also accessible through religious traditions other than Christianity, thus further expressing his view that Christians ought to affirm this (1989b: 128).

<sup>19</sup> Since 1971, when Idi Amin took over as the President of Uganda, Makerere University, which was the cradle of education in East Africa, fell apart. It is from there that Nairobi and Dar es Salaam University in Tanzania emerged as revered Universities of East Africa.

researched African studies, Mugambi speaks with authority. As will be shown, throughout the study, Mugambi appears to have a first-hand understanding of the African heritage, past and present, which uniquely positions him in the discussion on the relationship between the Christian faith and the African heritage on one hand and liberation and reconstruction on the other.

Mugambi also studied internationally at the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, United Kingdom and at The Hague, Netherlands. This means that he has not only earned exposures in Africa but has also gained good experience from Europe and North America, both in the course of his studies and at conferences. Thus, despite being an “insider African theologian,” Mugambi clearly has non-African exposures as well. This means that he is not like the proverbial blind and ignorant man in African religiosity, who thought that only his mother knew how to cook, as he had no other idea on how else it could be done, outside of his mother’s hut.

Fifth, Mugambi’s call for a paradigm shift has vital implications, some of which call for a re-reading and re-writing of Africa’s history and a recovery of the African approach to life in a way that will enrich expressions of the Christian faith, not only in Africa and the African Diaspora, but to the rest of the world. Such an ideal venture should reap great bonuses for the world missionary enterprise, an enterprise that has long recognised the crucial need to contextualize the Christian gospel in the African setting, considering that the phenomenal growth of Christianity has been predominantly in Africa.

Interestingly, Mugambi’s theo-philosophical work is not a calculated course set by him. It is rather his response to the needs of the African peoples. He no doubt acknowledges that most of the chapters in his books were first written as papers for presentation on invitation by various groups of people and institutions, especially in Kenya, Africa and other parts of the world (1995:vii-ix). This is in keeping with his conviction that philosophy and theologies are best done in specific social contexts, not necessarily in academic ivory towers (1989b). The lack of theme or themes in his books, which are clearly developed with logical coherence, rather than as anthologies of diverse articles which he edits for publication, nevertheless make his works difficult to review.



In general, the need to hear from Jesse Mugambi is crucial, considering that as early as 1979, John Mbiti had complained that African theology is being misrepresented by some theologians who are not well rooted in it. As Mbiti has cautioned:

Some of us are getting tired of seeing all sorts of articles and references under the big banner: AFRICAN THEOLOGY (or some similar wording). The substance of these articles often turns out to be advice on how African theology should be done, where it should be done, who should do it, what it should say, ad infinitum. Some of these self-made theological advisors, whether they be African or foreign, have little or nothing to produce beyond their generous advice; and others want to play the role of theological engineers who meticulously sabotage spontaneous theological output by African Christians (1979a: 1).

In conclusion, Mugambi has a clear sense of self-identity, as an African and as a Christian who knows his African roots. As will be demonstrated in the study chapter, Mugambi has the right background to expound the concepts of liberation and reconstruction - as he is well-versed in the socio-economic dynamics that he obtained during his upbringing, as well as those acquired during the *Mau Mau* war of liberation, the declaration of the state of emergency and the subsequent declaration of independence in his country of origin, plus his socio-scholarly interactions - as will be noted throughout the entire study. Mugambi's published works reveal his understanding of Africa, which he so passionately addresses in his theological discourses. Thus, as an African theo-philosophical thinker of note, he has primarily written for an African audience. As a result, many of his works are published in Nairobi, Kenya. The idea of publishing in Nairobi is done principally to make it easier for the vast majority of his African readers to gain access to his reflections at affordable prices. This is evidenced by the fact that it is very costly to obtain books, in Africa, from North Atlantic.

#### **1.6. A brief summary of the study**

The study is divided into eight chapters that are all geared towards elucidating the question on the appropriateness of Mugambi's call for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction paradigm, in the development of African theology of the twenty-first century.

The introduction gives the overall structure of the thesis. It will set the mood of the discussion by establishing the problem, hypothesis, methodology, and the significance of the study. It also offers a summary of the study.

Chapter 2 discusses Mugambi's pedigree and his formative years. It investigates Mugambi's family background and other formative factors that were instrumental in the shaping and reshaping of his African theo-philosophical works. The chapter traces his socio-cultural formation, his early struggles, the *Mau Mau* war of liberation as a factor in his life, the influence of tertiary education, his ecumenical appeal, and his socio-scholarly inspiration.

Chapter 3 is concerned with Mugambi's place in African theology. It provides a forum to define the various concepts that frequent Mugambi's theology in particular and in African theological scholarship in general. In particular, it locates the concepts of liberation and reconstruction within the current trends in African theology of the twenty-first century. It builds upon the previous chapters by sustaining the mood that was set from the first chapter. This therefore makes the argument that was set in chapter two clearer.

Chapter 4 discusses Mugambi and African theologies of liberation. It explores Mugambi's works in the light of African theologies of liberation such as South African Black theology, and African Women's theologies. To do this, the study first explores the historical factors behind the paradigm and the concept of liberation. This is geared towards assessing whether such factors are manifested today, and if so, to what extent. In the light of Mugambi's call for a shift of paradigms, is there any logic with regard to these factors? As a result, the chapter strengthens our hypothetical setting by its findings which establish that even before Mugambi brought in the idea of reconstruction into African theology in the early 1990s, African theologians were putting into practice a theology of reconstruction, albeit unconsciously, within the paradigm of liberation, while still maintaining the Exodus event as the dominant motif.

Having explored in depth the concept of liberation and its exodus motif in the previous study, Chapter 5, discusses in depth Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. It critically revisits the theology of reconstruction as Mugambi presents it. By so doing, it takes cognisance of the fact that there are other scholars who have contributed in this area. It is also sensitive to the critiques of reconstruction theology. In its findings, the chapter cautions about the danger of excluding some people, on the grounds of tribe, race, gender or other prejudices, in the task of social reconstruction of Africa, as this would contradict

the noble ideal that Mugambi (1995: xv) gallantly propounds. Such exclusion would not augur well in a continent whose walls have been “broken down and its gates...destroyed by fire” (Neh. 1:2b). It thus points to the danger of living in a divided society.

Chapter 6 attempts a theo-socio-cultural evaluation of Mugambi’s works. It attempts to enquire from both culture and theology in order to expose fully the statement of the problem. The chapter seeks to show how paradigm shifts work in African systems and church history. Within its findings, it sought to show that Mugambi strikes a working chord with other theo-cultural dialogues such as African rites of passage and the paradigm shifts in the history of Christianity. It also sought to strike a chord with philosophical dialogues.

Chapter 7 explores in particular four Christological Paradigms, namely, the charismatic, inculturation,<sup>20</sup> reconciliation and market-theology paradigms, alongside the “more common” paradigms of liberation and reconstruction.

Chapter 8, brings the study to a conclusion, and make some important resolutions. It brings out the insights that have been generated from the entire study. These insights include, revolution precedes reconstruction; reconstruction embraces other paradigms; deconstruction is integrally tied to reconstruction. Because the gains of reconstruction are sometimes lost and people therefore revert to the quest for liberation, the study warns that there is need to prepare for such eventualities. The study ends with a proposal that the parameters of a theology of reconstruction should be clearly spelt out. This means that the similarities and differences between a theology of reconstruction and a developmental theology ought to be worked out by African theologians who are concerned with Africa’s theo-social plight.

Having supplied a comprehensive introduction to the study in general and the problem being investigated in particular, the next chapter attempts to examine Jesse Mugambi’s pedigree and the formative factors that have influenced his theo-philosophical thought.

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<sup>20</sup> Inculturation can be grouped together with liberation and reconstruction as falling into the category of “one of the more common paradigms in Africa.”

## CHAPTER 2

### J N K MUGAMBI'S PEDIGREE AND HIS FORMATIVE FACTORS

#### 2.0 Introduction

The task of this chapter is to investigate the formative factors in the life of J N K Mugambi that helped shape his thinking and enable him to make the enormous contribution towards African theology that he has. This will be done in order to gauge whether he has the right credentials to participate empirically in the reshaping of Christian theology in the Africa of the twenty-first century. In particular, it will drive the study in exploring his early encounters with the concepts of liberation and reconstruction. In other words, several questions will be addressed, namely: How has Mugambi 'lived' with these concepts? How qualified<sup>1</sup> is he to address the African continent on these concepts? Who is he in African theology? What makes us, as Africans, listen to him as he pleads for a shift of paradigms from liberation to reconstruction? This will be done by first seeking to understand his family background; his early encounters and struggles; his socio-scholarly inspiration; and finally, to offer a critical evaluation. By suggesting answers to these questions, it will help us understand the formation of his theo-philosophical perspective, and how these two concepts at the centre of our discussion, were encountered during his earlier days.

#### 2.1. His family background

##### 2.1.1. His naming

Jesse Ndwīga Kanyua Mūgambi is the second child born in his fathers' family. In strict phonetic spelling, his names should be written as *Jesse<sup>2</sup> Ndwega Kanywa Mogambe*.<sup>3</sup> His names can also be written, *Jesse Ndwya Kanywa Mwgambi*. In this study, however, we will refer to him as Jesse Ndwiga Kanyua Mugambi, as he is widely called in his various

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<sup>1</sup> The way to assess Jesse Mugambi's qualification is by studying his contributions in this field plus studying his empirical encounters with the concepts under discussion. This will be clearly demonstrated in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse is the baptism name that Mugambi received from the church, and is taken from the biblical father of King David (see Ruth 4:17-22; 1 Samuel 16; 1Chronicles 2: 12-17).

<sup>3</sup> The source for these names is from the general interviews that were conducted in Embu District of Kenya in June and July 2005. It is also from my experience as a Kikuyu – a neighbouring and a cousin ethnic group from that of Jesse Mugambi's Embu community. Thus some Embu words and names have the same meanings with that of my Kikuyu community. I am however indebted to Jesse Mugambi's mother, Jemimah Kori Kanyua, Mugambi's sister Eunice, Rev. David Mūrīthi Ileri of the Anglican Church – Embu, Mzee Nelson Kĩbuti, Jesse Mūgambi himself, Michael Nyaga Ngarũko, Mrs Elizabeth Mūgambi and Mrs Daina Muthanjĩ.

publications, rather than how his names should accurately be written, *Jesse Ndwīga Kanyua Mūgambi* or *Jesse Ndwega Kanywa Mogambe*.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, African names have intended meanings. In Mugambi's case, his second name *Ndwīga* means giraffe or one who can see beyond contemporaries. Ironically, his third name, *Kanyua* means, "The person who drinks alcohol a lot" referring possibly to a non-diligent person who prides himself in partaking of the local African cultural brew. This is the actual name of Mugambi's father who died in 1996. His fourth and the final name, *Mugambi* refers to a prophet-like character that blows the trumpet of conscience when the need arises. Literally, it means a person who comments and does not keep quiet, even when told. Among the Embu (his ethnic community), the Kamba, the Gikuyu,<sup>5</sup> the Meru and other African communities, it has other meanings. For example, among the Meru, the word *Mwgambi* carries the connotation of social responsibilities, including that of a Statesperson, Counsellor, Advisor, or Arbitrator and Mediator.

Among the Kamba community, *Mugambi* is written as *Muambi* - which refers to *Muvuvi wa nguli* - that is, the person who alerts the community in case of need or danger. According to the researcher's interviews with Bosco M. Maingi, October 11, 2005, *Muvuvi wa nguli* was, in ancient times, the special person who alerted the people when the neighbouring Maasai tribe came to take away their cattle - as the Maasai believed that all cattle belonged to them. With regard to his neighbouring Gikuyu community, the name *Mugambi* can also refer to a person who is assigned the responsibility of blowing the trumpet or beating the drum of caution during an emergency. In Jesse Mugambi's specific case, his name comes more from his Meru genealogy rather than from the Kamba or Gikuyu.

From this interpretation, *Mūgambi*, as a noun, means one who is an extraordinary person. He derived this name from his grandfather. As the culture (of the Embu people and some other Bantu linguistic communities living around the slopes of Mount Kenya) dictates, the first-born son must be named after the paternal grandfather - a trend that continues to this day. Similarly, the first-born daughter is named after the paternal grandmother. Considering the deep religiosity of the African people (*cf.* Mbiti 1969:1-2) and Mugambi's two African names, one wonders whether these names signal prophetic insights into his

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to refer to him by using his commonly used names so as not to confuse readers.

<sup>5</sup> Kikuyu or Gikuyu are used interchangeably in this study and refer to the largest ethnic group in Kenya.

future role as one of Africa's great sage-theologians who courageously calls for theological change in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Could he see something that we today cannot fully comprehend? Does it mean that we should always listen to him at the continental level?

### 2.1.2. His birth

Jesse Mugambi was born February 6, 1947 at Kiangoci, in the Embu district in the Eastern province of Kenya. Kiangoci, his rural home is near Kigari, the famous centre of the Anglican Church in the Embu District, on the southern slopes of Mount Kenya. Kigari Mission Station was established 1909-1910 by missionaries from the Anglican Church Missionary Society (*Hereafter*, CMS). Whilst two Canadian Missionaries from Ontario established the station, another, T W W Crawford, resided at Kigari from 1910-1915, training the first generation of six evangelists. From 1915-1939, John Comely, another English CMS missionary, lived at Kigari, training local evangelists and introducing new ways of living in the area. During Comely's long period of service, the Emmanuel Anglican Church was built at Kigari, which Mugambi's parents attended. Several outstations were also established in the district, and more than twenty evangelists were trained and assigned to train others. In 1937, at the same Kigari campus, the CMS established St. Mark's Normal School for the training of Primary school teachers. This was the forerunner of the present St. Mark's Teachers' College, a public institution sponsored by the Embu Diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya.<sup>7</sup>

Jesse Mugambi was born at a time when there was a strong wish in Timothy Kanyua's family for a new child to be born, preferably that of a boy.<sup>8</sup> According to his eldest sister, Mrs Eunice Marigu Nyaga (5/7/2005), Mugambi's father (Timothy) left for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma, India in 1941, following the birth of their first-born daughter Eunice, to fight alongside the British soldiers in the Second World War (1939-1945). Mugambi's mother, Jemimah Kori, a convert to Christianity, lived without her husband for six years

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<sup>6</sup> In combining his two names, Ndwiga Mugambi, it means a far-sighted person (*Ndwiga*) who announces (*Mugambi* from the word *kugamba* or *kuuga*) the extraordinary "revelations" that s/he has received – and must say to alert the community. This can either be good or bad news.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Jesse Mugambi's mother, Jemimah Kori Kanyua, Mugambi's sister Eunice Marigu Nyaga, Rev. David Mũrĩthi Ireri of the Anglican Church – Embu, Mzee Nelson Kĩbuti, Michael Nyaga Ngarũko, Mrs Daina Muthanjĩ and Jesse Mũgambi himself for this information.

<sup>8</sup> The desire for the family to have a baby boy was probably due to the patriarchal nature of the Embu people (and Africans in general) and partly because the family already had had a baby girl, Eunice.

until his return in 1946. Eunice recalls that during her early childhood days she grew up without any other children to play with in their immediate family.

During Timothy's absence, Jemimah used to hear, through the village gossip, that she would never see her husband, dead or alive, for he had been killed as the war progressed in India and other places.<sup>9</sup> Due to her deep Christian convictions however, she held strongly to the hope that she would one day see her husband – his going to war being not by choice but at the behest of the then colonial authorities. In other words, she had the courage to believe that her husband would return home from war, alive, and continue to build their family. Mugambi was born following his father's return in 1946. It was a joyful moment for the family, the extended family and the local community.

### **2.1.3. Anglican Christianity and his father's influence**

Mugambi's parents, who automatically became Anglicans by virtue of the first Anglican parish in Embu District being established near their home, witnessed not only the early establishment of Christianity, but also the expansion of colonial rule in their locality. Interestingly, both sets of grandparents witnessed the arrival of the first CMS missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mugambi was baptised as a child, being introduced to Sunday school at a young age, which he faithfully attended until adulthood. He maintains this devotion to the church of his birth to this day. Mugambi thus articulates his theology from a "believer-reader" perspective.

As Jesse Mugambi grew, he watched his father Timothy increase in prominence as a pioneer coffee farmer in the locality, and more importantly as a leading Anglican Church lay-leader. In addition, Timothy became the founder and chairperson of many Anglican Church established schools, including, Kĩgaarĩ, Kĩrigi, and Kamviũ. As a committed Anglican believer, Timothy founded many churches, including, Kĩangĩma, Kamviũ, Gatũndũrĩ, and Kathangarĩ. In 1969, he was the founder member of the Kĩrĩrĩbũ Anglican Church, in Meru, which is the mother church of the current Meru Diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya (*Hereafter*, ACK). Timothy was also the chairperson of

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mugambi's mother - Jemimah Kori Kanyua 5/6/2005

Emmanuel Church – Kĩgaarĩ, which is the mother church for the present two ACK Dioceses of Embu and Mbeere.<sup>10</sup>

As a very responsible person in those days, Timothy was a chairperson of the first Coffee Co-operative Society in the locality. Due to the reputation that he gained over the years amongst the colonial administration and other members of the locality, he was not detained or arrested as were most of his contemporaries during the declared state of emergency, 1952-1960, despite some not being members of the *Mau Mau* liberation movement. Instead, Timothy preached to the colonial detainees during these difficulty days.

Timothy was made a member of the Synod of the then ACK Diocese of Mount Kenya, which covered more than half of the physical map of Kenya and whose chairperson was the Bishop. As with his father, Jesse Mugambi was nominated by the Embu Diocesan synod to provide leadership in some departments. Nelson Kĩvuti recalls that as Chairperson of the Diocesan Board of Education, Mugambi made a great impact, especially with regard to improving the church sponsored schools. In particular, as the Chairperson of Kiriari Secondary School, in Embu, funding and academic performance improved greatly. Consequently, Kiriari became one of the eighth-best secondary school in Kenya. It was also voted the best School in the Eastern province of Kenya. As a result, President Daniel Arap Moi visited the school in 2001 as a way of expressing his appreciation for a job well done. In addition, it was ranked as the second-best managed school in Kenya. Similarly, as the chairperson of St. Marks' Teachers' Training College in Kigari, (a position he holds to this day), the college became financially stable under his leadership.<sup>11</sup>

Mugambi's Intermediate School head teacher, Nelson Kĩvuti, sees Jesse Mugambi as assuming the role of his father by providing important leadership to the ACK. Kĩvuti recalls Mugambi advising the Embu Diocesan Synod to budget their finances and thus avoid future financial pitfalls. Kĩvuti, who attributes his being computer literate and having published a book to Mugambi's encouragement, remarks that, "although I was his teacher, he later became my role model." In all this, Kĩvuti sees the hand of Jesse's father

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Nelson Kĩvuti, Eunice Nyaga and Michael Nyaga 5/7/2005 and Josiah Murage 24/8/2005

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with Nelson Kĩvuti 5/7/2005



Timothy, as a heartening Anglican lay leader.<sup>12</sup> In all this encouraging personality that defines Jesse Mugambi plus his insistence on the theme of “hope for Africa,” Nelson sees the influence of his father Timothy.

Kivuti goes on to describe Mugambi’s late father Timothy as, “an intelligent, a decisive, a forthright, an enterprising, an outgoing, a disciplinarian<sup>13</sup> and a generous man.” As an entrepreneur, Kivuti recalls being told by Timothy, “If you want to progress economically, take a bank loan and then use that money responsibly, as you will pay it one day.” He was one of the few parents, in those days, who would ask the head teacher, “How is my child performing in class work?”<sup>14</sup> It is no wonder that in one of Jesse Mugambi’s major works, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, 2003, he dedicates it to his father and therefore agrees with Nelson when he says, “To My Father, Timothy Kanyua Mugambi – Ahead of your time (*far-sighted*), In tune with your Generation, And yet, provoking the present with hopes for a better future. I salute you, Dad!”

Although Timothy was reluctant to participate in the Second World War, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, it being an experience that taught him valuable lessons on Anglican Christianity, namely, brevity, insistence on proper discipline in both private and public matters, management of cash crops such as coffee, farming and more importantly the value of formal education. This, he no doubt passed on to his children. Kivuti therefore recalls with appreciation that Timothy always spoke his mind and yet always unassuming.

This background reveals a well-informed father who, as an Anglican lay leader, as well as a village leader, successfully raised Jesse Mugambi. At the time of his death in August 1996, Timothy had realised his dream of seeing his children excel in academia as well as in Anglican Christianity; his son Jesse having already become an Associate Professor at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. A little over a month later, on September 26, 1996, Jesse was confirmed as a full Professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy, delivering an inaugural Lecture entitled, “Religion and Social Construction of Reality.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, his brother lectures in neighbouring Kenyatta University, and his last-born

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<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Nelson Kivuti 5/7/2005

<sup>13</sup> This disciplinarian attribute in Timothy’s personality was probably influenced by his military service in the British army during the Second World War (1939-1945).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Nelson 5/7/2005

<sup>15</sup> This lecture is now contained in a book published by Nairobi University Press, 1996.

sister, lectures at the ACK-founded, Kĩgaarĩ Teacher's College. Additionally, their firstborn sister, Eunice, is a retired Church minister in the ACK.

Having seen Timothy's role in Jesse's early formation, the study has prepared us to survey the influence of his two sets of grandparents. It has to be asked, did the participation in the First World War (1914-1919) of one of his grandparents have any influence on the young Jesse Mugambi? Were they converts of Christianity, as Timothy? How did they view the colonial oppressors and how did it affect their grandson? What were their positions on African culture vis-à-vis the Christian faith and how did this impact Jesse Mugambi's life?

#### **2.1.4. Mugambi's two sets of grandparents and the impact of WW1**

Apart from witnessing the arrival of the first CMS missionaries, Mugambi's maternal and paternal grandparents also witnessed the brutal invasion of Kenya by the British Colonial soldiers in 1904-1906. The invading soldiers seconded his maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, to serve in the Carrier Corps in Tanganyika<sup>16</sup> during the First World War (*Hereafter*, WW1).

According to Herbert Peacock, by the time WW1 had ended, it had wrought the greatest destruction the world had ever experienced (1987:291-292). It is estimated that 13 million people perished. For every minute of fighting, four soldiers were killed and nine were wounded. In total, the war left about 10 million widows and orphans and one million dependents without any means of survival (1987:291-292). The cost of the war in monetary terms was calculated as being sufficient to provide every family in America, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Germany and Russia with a \$US500 house, \$US200 worth of furniture and \$US100 worth of land, and even then the "remainder" was equivalent to the entire capital value of France and Belgium! Added to this was the vast number of starving people and refugees (1987:291-292).

During WW1, the British enrolled Africans from all their colonial territories to fight the Germans who following the Berlin Conference 1884-5 had occupied Tanganyika.<sup>17</sup> Having lost the war, in terms of the Versailles treaty, the German Government was forced

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<sup>16</sup> Tanganyika, became Tanzania following the dissolution of its union with Zanzibar in 1964.

<sup>17</sup> During the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, Tanganyika, which borders Kenya, was taken over by Germany. After the merger of Tanganyika and the East African Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba in 1964, it was renamed the Union of Tanzania.

to surrender its colonial territories to the other European powers (Peacock 1987:292).<sup>18</sup> During WW1, Mugambi's maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje was able to see the European powers, most of whom claimed to be Christian nations, fighting one another "without any genuine reason."<sup>19</sup>

Jesse Mugambi's paternal grandfather, Mzee Mũgambi wa Nthigai, was a village Chief who rejected Christianity on the grounds that he identified the missionary enterprise with the colonial invasion. Consequently, he did not find any evidence to suggest that the objectives of the CMS were any different from those of the colonial administration. Mugambi's paternal grandparents thus rejected Christianity on "very rational grounds" (Mwase 1993:29). Sadly, they failed to recognise the difference between the CMS and the colonial administrator who forced people into fighting unnecessary wars. Indeed, this was the general feeling in Eastern and Central Kenya of those days. Nthamburi captures this thought well when he states:

It may be remarked that missionary activity, which went concurrently with the expansion of European hegemony in Africa, supplemented the colonial policy. The Gikũyũ have a saying, "*Gũtirĩ mũthũngũ na mũbĩa*," meaning that there was no marked difference between a colonial administrator and a missionary. The missionaries felt more secure within the administration of their own colonial powers. In fact they were happy to create an African middle class, which would fit the world of European. From such a middle class would be found a people who were suitable for a ministry. Such people would emulate the European missionary in every way by even adopting European way of life (1991: 39).

With Mugambi's paternal grandparents viewing the missionary enterprise as similar to the colonial invasion on the one hand, and his parents as Anglican Christians on the other, he found himself at a crossroads. The young Mugambi thus spent most of his weekdays with his paternal grandparents<sup>20</sup> seeking to rationalise the case of his African heritage. These events were clearly of great significance to his formation as a thinker and Christian practitioner.

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<sup>18</sup> Following the end of the Great War (1913-1918), Germany was found guilty of provoking war, and lost all her Colonies. By 1921, her reparation payments to the Allies as determined by a Special Reparations Commission were fixed at \$US6, 500,000,000, to be paid in instalments. Germany had to deliver to the Allies part of this sum in the form of ships (which were built for the Allies over a period of five years), coal, chemicals, dyestuffs, cattle, etc. The Treaty of Versailles was signed, June 28, 1919, in the Hall Mirrors at Versailles (Peacock 1987:289ff).

<sup>19</sup> Mugambi's maternal grandfather died in 1976 while his maternal grandmother had died a few years earlier, also in old age.

<sup>20</sup> His paternal grandfather died in 1958, while his paternal grandmother died in 1970, both at a ripe old age. The latter was baptised shortly before her death.

In spite of the critical stand that Mugambi's grandparent Mzee Mũgambi wa Nthigai took, he did not hate white people. Whilst he saw them as fellow human beings who had different worldviews to his, he nevertheless disagreed with their religious discourse. As an influential Chief in the locality, he gave white Christians land so that they could build their Churches – thereby resulting in the building of the Kĩangĩma ACK and School. His refusal to undergo the rite of Christian baptism and his insistence on maintaining a polygamous life was meant to safeguard the “purity” of his African heritage.<sup>21</sup>

As Eunice observes, Jesse Mugambi grew up in the hands of this paternal grandfather after whom he was named.<sup>22</sup> Through this important experience, he could see firsthand how his grandfather handled the various Elders Council meetings. In turn, this taught Jesse the value of respecting other people's views, building consensus during times of contention, and the need to create confidence in one's ability to chair meetings. His first-born son was therefore called Kyama,<sup>23</sup> which has two meanings among his Waembu people, namely “a miracle from God” and secondly, “a man of meetings/councils or gatherings,” which can also be translated to mean “a debater.”<sup>24</sup>

The study of Mugambi's family background, where his father was a staunch Anglican Christian and his paternal grandfather an African Chief, devoted to the African way of life, prepare us to look at the socio-cultural factors that influenced his later life.

## **2.2 His socio-cultural factors**

The study of his family background does not exhaust other factors that exerted strong influences on Mugambi's development as a leading African theologian. These include, cultural matters, early school life and the influence of tertiary education, Kenya's struggle

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<sup>21</sup> Written interview with Jesse Mugambi, November 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Eunice Nyaga 5/7/2005

<sup>23</sup> Kyama Mugambi was born in 1973. His qualifications include M.A. (Biblical Studies); B.Sc. (Business Management); Certified Musician Theory, Violin and Piano (ABRSM). He has been a Pastor at the Nairobi Chapel in Nairobi, Kenya, a non-denominational church with congregational polity and Baptist liturgical character. It is a church for the youth, most of whom are sons and daughters of senior clergy and laity in other mainstream denominations. Most are graduates or undergraduates of state universities. The church is located in the midst of the Halls of Residence of the University of Nairobi, the largest and oldest state university in Kenya. Most of its members are graduates or undergraduates. The elders of the church are still under forty-five years of age!

<sup>24</sup> Apart from Kyama, Jesse Mugambi's other children include Muriithi, Muriuki, Karimi, Karanja and Mukami who is the last-born. As with their father, they all possess University qualifications. In particular, Muriuki holds a PhD and lectures at Kenyatta University. Jesse Mugambi has dedicated his book, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the Cold War* (1995), to his children.

for political independence, denominational orientation, involvement in Christian education and inspiration gleaned from others. Together, these factors shaped his worldview, as he was able to convert challenges into opportunities.

### 2.2.1. Culture

As with Paul the Apostle, who had an able Jewish teacher in Gamaliel, Mugambi had his maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, who taught him to respect his African identity. Interestingly, although his grandfather had little appreciation for the British due to their seconding him to the war-effort, which to his mind had no relevance to Africa; he was also well informed on the events of his day. In particular, the British had told him that the Germans were cannibals, who, if not defeated, would invade Kenya and capture Africans for meat. This propaganda was meant to encourage Africans to see WW1 as being to their own benefit.<sup>25</sup>

When Mugambi's maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, arrived at the warfront, he discovered that the description of Germans as cannibals was a British propaganda tool meant to garner the support of Africans for what was essentially a European war. In addition, he and his peers found that the Germans were fellow tribesmen with the British, only that they perhaps belonged to a different clan. Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje therefore concluded that the British administrators must have been liars. In view of this, he felt that the British and the Germans ought to have resolved their tribal dispute at home in Europe, and should not have involved Africans (written interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004). He felt that the European powers could have avoided such an unnecessary war if they had paid attention to the African heritage. That is, they would have sat together and sought consensus on their problems and thereby reconcile (Mugambi 1995:132), a phenomenon that is well emphasised in the *Ubuntu* philosophy (see chapter three).

In his discovery that Germans were like other nations or peoples, and therefore did not deserve such gross negativity at the hands of the British. Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje's observation finds agreement with John Mbiti's understanding of authentic human nature:

By nature, Africans are neither Angels nor demons; they possess and exercise the potentialities of both angels and demons. They can be kind as the Germans, but they can be murderous as the Germans; Africans can be as generous as Americans, but they can be as greedy as the Americans; they can be as friendly as the Russians,

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<sup>25</sup> Written interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

but they can be as cruel as the Russians; they can be as honest as English, but they can be equally hypocritical. In their human nature Africans are Germans, Swiss, Chinese, Indians or English – they are men *[sic]* (Mbiti 1969:210).

For Mbiti and Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, Europeans and Africans (or any other race of peoples) are human beings and as such possess such negative human traits as hatred. Furthermore, the human race is divided into various “clans” whose worldviews sometimes differ.

Following his return from WW1, Jesse’s maternal grandfather, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje, reportedly came back with great pride for Africa, its religious heritage and identity. Consequently, he was willing to preach about the goodness of African religion vis-à-vis other religions that had subjected him to “fight their fellow clans.”<sup>26</sup>

Due to such early exposure, Mzee Njeru wa Kanyenje rejected the rite of Christian baptism. He only came finally to accept it shortly before his death in 1976, due to persuasion from his grandchildren whom he did not want to disappoint. His acceptance was on rational grounds, arguing that the persuasion by his grandchildren indicated the cultural and religious success of the Europeans over Africans!<sup>27</sup>

With well opinionated sets of grandparents who were proud of their African cultural heritage, Jesse Mugambi’s interest in African religion vs. the Christian faith of his immediate parents was stirred. This interest made him, as a scholar in later life, seek a correlation between Christianity and African culture, resulting in his, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989a: 188). This early exposure on African heritage probably led him to authoritatively assert that it is not possible for a foreigner to understand Africans in their entirety, just as an African can never be fully assimilated into Euro-American culture to the extent of being totally identified with the European. He therefore stresses that only “Africans can make the best authorities for their own heritage” (Mugambi 1989a: 188). His rich and immediate experience of African culture was thus instrumental in the moulding of the Jesse Mugambi that we know today.

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<sup>26</sup> Written interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Written interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

### 2.2.2. His early school life

As the second born child, Jesse began his Primary school education at Kĩgaarĩ where Eunice, his elder sister, was in standard four (class four). When sitting for the so-called Common Entrance Examination, in 1957 while in standard four, they nevertheless sat together, even though Eunice was six years his senior. Eunice had repeated class four, four times, while Jesse excelled in all classes at each attempt. Hence, even in his early primary school education, Mugambi proved to be a student of promissory character. This fact is demonstrated by the severe beating that he received from his mathematics teacher while he was in class two at Kĩgaarĩ when he failed to give a correct answer for six times nine.<sup>28</sup> The injustice done to the young Mugambi strengthened his resolve never to give that teacher any further excuse to beat him again.

Despite the disappointment in class two, Jesse Mugambi's third grade was full of promise and fulfilment. Here, under a "good teacher" he was introduced to the English language. His teacher proved a good motivator who enabled him to master the language well. As a result, he was one of the five pupils who passed the challenging Common Entrance Examination, from where he proceeded to Intermediate School for grades five to eight. While there, he participated in the production of two Kiswahili plays, namely, *Nakupenda Lakini wewe Maskini* ("I love you but you are poor"), and *Nimerogwa Nisiwe Na Mpenzi* ("I have been bewitched so I have no lover"). He won school awards for his creative presentation in both plays.<sup>29</sup>

While at Intermediate School, Jesse Mugambi was greatly encouraged by Nelson Kivuti, who had recently graduated from Teachers' Training College. In Jesse's assessment, Kivuti was a talented teacher in English, Mathematics and Science. He was a source of motivation for him especially in his desire to proceed to high school to specialise in Chemistry and Biology. Consequently, Mugambi maintains an informed interest in environmental theology, something that traces its origins to Kivuti's inspiring teaching

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Jesse November 2004.

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted to various people for this information. They include Jemimah Kori Kanyua, Mugambi's sister Eunice, Mzee Nelson Kĩbuti, Jesse Mũgambi himself, Michael Nyaga Ngarũko, Jesse's wife, Mrs Elizabeth Mũgambi and Mrs Daina Muthanjĩ.

prowess. Indeed, he has written much on environmental preservation, particularly through Acton Publishers.<sup>30</sup>

The researcher's visit to his Nairobi city home and the Kĩgaarĩ rural home, June 3-5, 2005, confirmed his great interest in environmental matters. In fact, Mugambi has dedicated his rural farm to environmental preservation, the farm having some of the tallest trees in the locality! This helps in providing his home with a cool and habitable atmosphere. His Kĩgaarĩ house, which is a modified version of a typical African building, provides a good environment for leisure and meditation.

Nelson Kivuti recalls that Jesse Mugambi was:

Young, keen, neat, and hardworking. He had a good handwriting and he had a good command of English language. He dressed smartly and was also a keen scout. Academically speaking, he was a prospective candidate for high school; and we all looked forward to him making an academic career in his later life.<sup>31</sup>

Kivuti's opinion of Mugambi is echoed by Michael Nyaga Ngarũko, an old school friend who subsequently married his sister Eunice:

When Jesse and Eunice, my wife, were sitting for the Intermediate Examination at the end of the eight-year primary school education (*Standard Eight*) at Kamama in 1961, Jesse was the smallest boy (*referring to his body size*) in that class. He also appeared the youngest student in that class. But when Mr Nelson Kivuti asked them to spot out a certain place in the Map of West Africa, he was the only one who was able to indicate the specific place where the teacher was asking - while the others didn't know.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the inspiring personality of Nelson Kivuti, another outstanding issue that affected Mugambi was the unfortunate mode and content of teaching, some of which were highly distorted. This compares to the Bantu Education during the apartheid regime in South Africa (1910-1994), when black schoolchildren were taught that South Africa began to have people in 1652 after Jan Van Riebeck<sup>33</sup> from Holland visited the Cape of Good Hope. He says:

I come from the Southern slopes of Mount Kenya, and during the colonial period we were taught that Dr. Krapf (*the first CMS White missionary from Germany*)<sup>34</sup> "discovered" Mount Kenya in 1844. Indeed, he might have been the first European to see the snow-capped peak of this great mountain on the equator. He was a German missionary sponsored by the English Church Missionary Society.

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to acknowledge that Acton Publishers belongs to Jesse Mugambi. His works on the environment can also be found in other publications apart from Acton (see bibliography for further details)

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Nelson Kivuti on 5/7/2005.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Nelson Kivuti on 5/7/2005.

<sup>33</sup> See Alex La Guma, 1981, 1986. *In the Fog of the Season's End* (London: Heinemann)..

<sup>34</sup> Italics added for emphasis by the researcher.



However, he certainly was not the first *human being* to see that mountain – millions of Africans had seen the mountain before him, and almost took it for granted in the same way that human beings everywhere tend to take their immediate environment for granted. He therefore did not discover it (1995:108).

After both Jesse Mugambi and his sister Eunice Marigu completed grades Five to Eight at Kamama Intermediate School in 1962, Mugambi passed with a Grade A, which automatically gave him entrance to the most prestigious Kangaru Boys' High School. Eunice, who did not perform as well, joined the Church Army Theological College of the ACK, now Carlile College, Nairobi (interview with Eunice 5/7/2005). Kangaru Boys' High School provided Mugambi with some fond memories as well as a solid foundation for some of the things that he would be involved with in later life.

Kangaru Boys' High School was adjacent to the then Embu Girls' High School (later renamed, Kangaru Girls' High School). It was strictly forbidden for boys to visit the girls in the neighbouring school and vice versa. For this reason, the boys referred to the girls' school as Mecca while the girls' called the boys school Medina. Being typical adolescents, each flaunted the rules at least once in order to make "pilgrimages" to "Mecca" and "Medina."

From this experience, Mugambi gathered important principles on how adolescents must conduct themselves. As a result, in his call for a theological paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction, Mugambi does not abandon the agenda of the youth and School learners and suggests that any genuine attempt at social reconstruction must address their plight. With regard to the rehabilitation of youth and students, he thus states:

The future of any culture depends largely on the motivation and preparation of the young generation...In future, focus on the Youth and Students will require of Churches to embark on an effective student ministry. This ministry will include, among other responsibilities, adequately trained chaplains, counsellors and youth leaders. But the focus ought to be on students, because it is at schools, Colleges and Universities that our Youth are becoming most extensively exposed to new ways of thinking and acting. A strong student programme in the All Africa Conference of Churches may help the member churches to establish their own responses to this urgent challenge (1995:178).

This clearly shows that his early involvement in youth activities puts him in a position where he can authoritatively express the concerns of the youth of Africa effectively. It also helps us to trace his journey towards his call for the social reconstruction of Africa.

Mugambi, in referencing the East African Revival, addresses the need to focus on the challenges to the Revival Movements, which had lost its influence among the youth due to its overt dogmatism in certain doctrinal issues, therefore characteristically cautions:

There is clearly a big gap between *(the)* older Christians and *(the)* Younger ones. The older Christians tend to think that the Youth is “lukewarm” in faith, whereas the youth considers the older generation to be rigid and conservative. It is important to remember that these attitudes are always present in every culture and every historical period. The older generation always have (sic) a tendency to suppress the energies of the youth, particularly when youth urges for change to reflect *(the)* changed circumstances. Ironically, the older generation, which considers itself knowledgeable about the needs of its youth, will itself have been agitating for change in earlier days. We should therefore recall our attitudes in our own youth before we condemn the demands of our sons and daughters, in matters both religious and secular (1995:129).

While attending Kangaru Boys’ High School, Jesse Mugambi became involved in innovative ventures that were designed to provide opportunities for young people to interact without public condemnation. In so doing, he worked towards breaking the taboo that forbids girl and boy children from interacting in public. With the permission of parents and community leaders alike, he organised debates on relevant issues facing the youth. He also produced plays at the community social hall. He recalls being part of the successful production of “Moliere’s *The Miser*,” “Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*,” and “Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.” The plays were thoroughly entertaining to both urban and rural audiences.<sup>35</sup>

As a counter-poise to the then Embu Dancing Club (*Hereafter*, EDC), Mugambi formed the Embu Cultural Group (*Hereafter*, ECG). The main feature of the EDC was “pop” dancing and all the paraphernalia of “pop” culture, which is mainly western in origin. On the other hand, the ECG was meant to revive African traditional dance, which was slowly being expunged due to the overt influence of western “pop” culture. This shows Mugambi’s deep-rooted love for his African heritage. Interestingly, he remained a good “pop” dancer in spite of the fact that he was a foremost promoter of African cultural dancing. This can be compared with his being well versed in western theology while still being a champion of African theology. Further, he still had time for the Debating Club, Christian Union, and Chess Club, all to which he was an active member. He assesses this

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<sup>35</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

involvement at an early age to have been providential and most satisfying. For him, it became particularly valuable towards later life.<sup>36</sup>

Peter Njirũ Mũrĩithi, Mugambi's classmate at the Kangaru Boys' High School, 1962-1965, recalls that Jesse Ndwĩga, as he was then called, was a quiet, serious and a non-controversial person who was good in both oral and written English. He was particularly good in English literature, a fact that is clearly exemplified by one of his first publications, *Carry it home* (1974), a book of poetry. It is also evidenced by his publication of his *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992). Indeed, he has also written more poetry and fiction than what is already published. Coupled with this, Mugambi was also a good reader, a fact that his girlfriend Elizabeth Nyathira (who later became his wife in 1972) also noted later in 1966 when they met as students of Machakos Teachers' Training College.<sup>37</sup> He was especially good at reading novels. Consequently, he won poetry recitations for two consecutive years. He was however not outstanding in sports, other than scouting, probably because he was always busy reading and with his clubs and other activities.

As Jesse Mugambi rediscovered himself and consequently sought to "reconstruct" himself as a keen scholar, Peter Mũrĩithi and some other former classmates began to call him "a perennial student" because they believed that a person should leave school early enough, in order to go and earn money. In Jesse Mugambi's case, he moved from Kangaru Boys' High School to Machakoes College and subsequently to Kenyatta College. From here he went to Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, United Kingdom, and then to Nairobi University where he acquired his BA (Hons), MA and PhD degrees. Peter, who now lectures in theology at St. Andrews' College of Theology and Development, Kabare, Kenya, sees Mugambi's life as a success story, which teaches that a person can achieve high academic honours through sheer determination and hard work. He thus sees Jesse's journey to Professorship and as a prolific author as being facilitated by his ability to discover his academic area of interest early on, coupled with his determination to excel as an African theologian.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>37</sup> See Section 2:5.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Peter Muriithi 8/7/2005.

At Kangaru Boy's High School, Mugambi had another inspirational teacher in Mr. Martel from England. He introduced Mugambi to biblical criticism, urging his students to study the Bible thoroughly and critically. It was fascinating for Mugambi to learn that there were many ways of interpreting and discerning the bible. This laid a strong foundation of biblical scholarship that would later pay dividends.

One singular experience that greatly influenced Mugambi during his dearly days at Kangaru Boys' High School concerned young volunteer teachers from Britain who wanted to hitchhike from Kenya to South Africa during one of the vacations in 1964. Mugambi and a few other Kenyan students were called upon to join them. While preparing for the trip, they realised it would not materialise due to the racist system of Apartheid in South Africa.<sup>39</sup> When the proposal was made to Mugambi and others that the group should travel together as far as Zambia and then separate upon entering racist countries, their conscience could not allow them to go. As a result, this erstwhile adventurous group had to face the dark reality of institutionalised racism. They refused to subject themselves to such dehumanising and racist terms. As a result, their teachers expressed their solidarity with the students and decided to forego the trip.

Mugambi explains his second encounter with apartheid as practised in South Africa in the early 1960s when he states:

I (*also*) became aware of Apartheid in 1963 - the year of our national independence - when our racist High School Headmaster at Kangaru, Mr. Cheadle, could not bear the prospect of being ruled by Kenyans, so he resigned his position and went to settle in South Africa...Although we had racial discrimination in Kenya, I understood (as early as 1960s) that Apartheid was worse than the Colour Bar - as Kenyan Apartheid was called.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The apartheid regime advocated separate development in socio-economic life. By law, Whites could not mix with Black people. This ideology was also adopted by colonial Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). This meant that the trip could not pass through Zimbabwe, as the hitchhikers would have to contend with the racist laws that were similar to those implemented in South Africa.

<sup>40</sup> E-mail interview with Jesse Mugambi, March 2005. Mugambi's encounter with South African apartheid during the 1960s brings to mind the experiences of retired Archbishop David Gitari who, in July 1976, travelled to the then University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal), Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. As an Anglican Bishop from independent Kenya, he had been invited to an ecumenical gathering. Sadly, the success of this ecumenical gathering was affected by two compounding factors. First, the University of Natal was a "Whites-only University" and therefore did not allow Blacks to study there. Second, the Coloureds who had been invited boycotted the Conference when they were denied permission to sleep in the University Residences. Archbishop Gitari was the only Black delegate invited to speak to a "White Christians" only congregation. He was later to recall how dejected and insulted he felt (interview with retired Archbishop Gitari 4/7/2005).

Such early exposures introduced Mugambi to the quest for human liberation, and to a certain extent, the concept of reconstruction. When he called for African Christianity to shift from the paradigm of liberation to reconstruction, it appears that this difficult yet enriching experience came powerfully into play.

Unlike the Kamama Intermediate School where he graduated with a straight "A" Grade, the young and ambitious Mugambi did not achieve the same at Kangaru Boys' High School. As his sister Eunice notes, he became so involved in various outdoor activities, including music and scouting that his academic work eventually suffered. He was also involved in reading novels and other materials, which were outside the school syllabus. This cost him dearly as he could not get the coveted Division 1 to enable him to join the advanced level, otherwise called the pre-University programme, being a two-year A-Level course. Eunice recalls hearing him murmuring that were it not that "I had over concentrated on the outdoors activities; I would have gotten a higher grade." After overcoming this stressful moment, Jesse Mugambi began to re-examine himself intently. According to Eunice, he decided to further his education via tertiary institutions rather than through the A-Level system, whereby after two years of study, a successful student would automatically join the University. This he did with great success as his published works attest.

In evaluating Mugambi's performance at Kangaru Boys' High School, while being an "A" Grade student who attained the Common Entrance and Intermediate School examinations with ease, at first glance it seems strange that Mugambi could not do the same when he sat for his Ordinary level (O-Levels) examinations. The answer cannot be found merely by citing his sister's version of the story. The answer most probably lies in the socio-political environment within which he did his O-Levels. Mugambi joined Kangaru Boys' High School in 1962, a year before the Declaration of Kenya's independence. This was a euphoric moment for everyone and especially for children from politically enlightened families such as his. Obviously, from all over the country there were promises of free things by the political elites of the day, ranging from promises of job procurements, freedom of association and assembly, and fairness in every sector. To most people, it was as if the Kingdom of God were being manifested after manifestations of hell under colonial rule! Indeed, everyone looked forward to seeing the new African government do miraculous things in correcting the imbalances of the past colonial regime. Together with

other enlightened children of the time, Jesse Mugambi would have been carried away by the euphoric environment, albeit unconsciously.

Second, from the historical background of the struggle for political independence in his home country, consciousness of the *Mau Mau* uprising of the 1940s and 1950s was developing in his young mind as he grew towards maturity. In the researcher's personal interviews with Mugambi in November 2004, he recalled seeing many corpses of Kenyans who were killed during this struggle for Kenya's liberation. These events were later to haunt him, as he wondered how else the struggle for independence could have been achieved. What then of the other children in Mugambi's grade who passed their academic grades? Did they too retain haunting memories? Could it have been that the other children who saw the killings of their relatives and villagers were counselled thus enabling them to cope with the harsh realities of their time, and yet Jesse Mugambi was not?

The study of his "Early School life" has, thus, taken us through Jesse Mugambi's early attempts at innovative works – that can be viewed as a preparation for the unknown task that was ahead of him - in his professional career. Consequently, it has prepared us to study the influence that "The Struggle for constitutional Independence" had upon his later theo-philosophical reflections.

### **2.3. The struggle for Constitutional Independence**

The struggle for independence in Kenya was another climactic moment in Mugambi's life. In particular, four great events had profound impact upon him. First, the *Mau Mau* liberation movement; second, the declaration of the state of emergency on October 20, 1952 by the colonial Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring,<sup>41</sup> in an attempt to contain the liberation war that was already at its peak; third, the introduction of the land tenure system, and fourth, the national declaration of independence. Four events will suffice to provide a contextual appreciation for Mugambi's development as a scholar:

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<sup>41</sup> Sir Patrick Renison, in 1959, replaced Sir Evelyn Baring, as the colonial Governor of Kenya. As Governor, Baring ruled Kenya from 1952-1959. In his maiden speech as Governor of Kenya, Sir Patrick Renison declared Kenyatta to be "the leader to darkness and death." The "time was not right" for his release, said Renison. This turned out to be a dreadful mistake in etiquette. Even the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Iain Macleod thought it pompous and unwise. In the end, Renison would not see the handover of Kenya by Britain. Instead, Malcolm Macdonald would oversee the final chapter of colonial rule prior to constitutional independence in 1963 (Anderson 2005:330; cf. Elkins 2005:87).

### 2.3.1. The *Mau Mau* liberation movement

The *Mau Mau* liberation movement was a guerrilla war of emancipation that was waged mainly by the people of Central and Eastern Kenya, from the early 1940s to the early 1960s, in protest against the injustices of colonial rule. These injustices can be explained in various ways. First, the five million Africans who lived in the British colony of Kenya had failed to gain any meaningful form of political representation; and the suppression and banning in 1940 of emerging political movements such as the Kikuyu Central Association (*Hereafter*, KCA). As David Anderson has noted, political dissent found expression for over three decades prior to the *Mau Mau* uprising; for Africans voiced their “plangent political concerns despite the obstruction of an unsympathetic colonial state” (2005: 9).<sup>42</sup>

Some of the issues that dominated African politics included the low level of African wages, which were kept to a minimum by the European settlers who were eager to remain competitive agricultural producers. Africans were also agitating against the forced carrying of the *Kipande* – that is, an identity card and passbook that were introduced after WW1, without which no African could leave his or her home to seek employment. Frequently, European settlers would punish “errant” African workers by tearing up the *Kipande*, thereby making it impossible for them to get further employment (Anderson 2005:9). In addition, the European settlers punished their labourers with the *kiboko*, that is, a whip made of rhinoceros hide. They would flog their African workers from time to time and justify their cruel actions with trivial excuses. As Anderson notes, “by the early 1920s, the deaths of several African servants from beatings at the hands of their European masters earned Kenya’s white settlers an unenviable reputation for brutality” (2005:78; *cf.* Kanogo 1987; Clough 1998; Kershaw 1997; Likimani 1985; Throup 1987; Wachanga 1975, 1978; Wanjaũ 1988; Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003).

These injustices led Africans to retreat to the forests and form bands of guerrilla fighters. As the war went on, police brutality was experienced in the screening of suspects, the colonial government employing torture as a means of establishing who was an adherent of the *Mau Mau*. As Caroline Elkins (2005:87-8) has noted:

Torture, or fear of it, compelled oath takers to give details about their ceremonies, including names or revealing the locations of the caches of arms or food supplies

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<sup>42</sup> See also, Kanogo 1987; Clough 1998; Kershaw 1997; Likimani 1985; Throup 1987; Wachanga 1975, 1978; Wanjaũ 1988; Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003.

for *Mau Mau* fighting the forest war. Some of this intelligence was accurate and some (was) pure fiction, fabricated on the spot by *Mau Mau* suspects trying to save themselves. The colonial government nevertheless used the information to convict some thirty thousand Kikuyu men and women of *Mau Mau* crimes and sentence them to prison, many for life.

Mzee Mbũũrĩ wa Kĩnyua, of Ndia Division, Kĩrĩnyaga District of Central Kenya, concurs with Elkins assessment when he explains the nature of this screening:

*Ūndũ ūmwe wa maũndũ marĩa nemagwo nĩkũriganĩrwo ona akorwo nĩmanjĩkĩraga ruo ngoro-inĩ yakwa nĩ screening ĩrĩa yekĩrwo rĩrĩa Kenya yageragia kwĩyatha. Ngeretha acio marutaga wĩra na endia a bũrũri matiaiganagĩra, mendaga o tũmahe ũhoru tũtarĩ nague. Magĩtũhũra, magĩtũhũrĩa kũu station-inĩ icio cia thigari, kũu ithamĩrio-inĩ ona kũu ichagi-inĩ. Screening yahanaga ta icua-inĩ.*

(Among the things that I am unable to forget, however much they invoke painful memories, is the screening exercise that was administered to us - during the Kenyan quests for self-rule. Those British, who worked with the sellers of the land (*African traitors*), were never satisfied with us (*we*) who were being screened; they just wanted more information from us but we didn't have more to give. But they just beat us and beat us in the police station, in their detention camps, and (*embarrassingly*) in the villages (*before our wives and children*). Screening was hell).<sup>43</sup>

Jesse Mugambi was born and brought up during these critical moments in Kenya's political history, when the colonial brutality was at its peak. As Nelson Mandela, freedom fighter and first State President of the new democratic state of South Africa (1994), has demonstrated the massacre of the Kenyan people by the colonial authorities caused worldwide indignation. Speaking at an African National Congress (*Hereafter*, ANC) Conference, September 21, 1953, Mandela clearly describes the Kenya of Mugambi's childhood days:

The massacre of the Kenyan people by Britain has aroused worldwide indignation and protest. Children are being burnt alive; women are raped, tortured, whipped and boiling water poured on their breasts to force confessions from them that Jomo Kenyatta had administered the *Mau Mau* oath to them. Men are being castrated and shot dead. In the Kikuyu country there are some villages in which the population has been completely wiped out.

Mandela went on to say:

We are prisoners in our own country because we dared to raise our voices against those horrible atrocities and because we expressed our solidarity with the cause of the Kenyan people. You can see that there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires (1994:42).

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<sup>43</sup> Interview 25/07/2005.



In evaluating the *Mau Mau* Liberation movement as a formative factor in the life of Jesse Mugambi, we realise that his birth (1947) came at a remarkable moment in Kenya's struggle for political independence. This environment had its obvious effects on his entire life. The Kenyan troops having returned from World War 2 (1939-1945) (*Hereafter*, WW2) had been enlightened politically and upon their homecoming began to express their desire for national liberation. In turn, people were keen to learn from the experiences of these returnees. Indeed, and as was noted at the beginning of this section, these returning Troops ended up becoming freedom fighters (the *Mau Mau*) in Kenya. They had discovered many secrets of the coloniser and had experienced the rivalries between the various colonising powers. They had also noted the cunning of (some of) the colonising powers. As one ex-member of the *Mau Mau* who waged guerrilla warfare against the British, Mzee Kibagi Ngotho, could bitterly recall:

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

Such bitterness is striking and shows how the Africans who participated in WW2 felt betrayed for being made to fight amongst rival European armies in the name of "democracy." Mugambi was born following the conclusion of this war, a fact that defines his earlier environment one that introduced him to "liberation" and "democracy" among other concepts.

In relating these events and their influence, Mugambi can state:

These events greatly shaped my childhood. I started school in the middle of the Emergency (1954), and spent eight years of my childhood in two concentration camps (Kigari and Kirigi in Embu). I have known oppression since my childhood! They confirm that what I went through was also experienced by a whole generation of Kenyans. Unfortunately, there has not been anything similar to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; so much of the experience of this generation remains unexpressed within the public domain.<sup>44</sup>

Conversely, Mugambi's experiences with the missionary enterprise in which suppression of African culture in the church were also not positive. He observes:

During that period, 1952 until 1962, the missionary agencies fully supported the colonial regime. In school and at the church they (as citizens of the empire) taught

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<sup>44</sup> E-mail interview 12/10/2004.

us to be docile subjects of Her Majesty the Queen. Yet they expected us to respect them. Rather than winning respect, they instilled fear in us. While accepting the Gospel, we rejected its ideological misappropriation by the missionary establishments. Thus long before I began to study theology I knew and understood the difference between oppression and liberation.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the war of liberation, the young Mugambi was able to reason out the views that were being expressed by the agitators for freedom and dignity. He would listen quietly as they discussed the injustices that were being perpetrated by the local colonial administration. He could read logic in their agitation, especially where they decried the overt racism, denial of full human dignity through torture, and the grabbing of large tracts of land by then colonial authorities. Such changes were occurring in young Mugambi, although his zealous Christian father was not joining in the political agitation; he was busy preaching. Zablun Nthamburi, his contemporary, explains the environment that prevailed during the colonial era:

I remember growing up as a small child in one of the small towns in Kenya. There was a "white only" restaurant in town with the inscription "Africans and dogs are not welcome." From the very beginning you were made to understand that you are not fully human. You were classified with the dogs, and that is the treatment you got (1991:5).

For Mugambi and his contemporaries, colonialism became a stigma that African people could not forget.

### **2.3.2. The State of Emergency**

The second event that had a profound effect on Mugambi's life was the State of Emergency, declared following the arrival of Sir Evelyn Baring as the Crown newly appointed colonial governor of Kenya in early October 1952. The immediate cause for its declaration was the brutal killing, October 9, 1952, of Chief Warũhiũ, a known sympathiser and collaborator of the colonial government. Coupled with this, there was general tension in the country following skirmishes between *Mau Mau* fighters and colonial forces resulting in much bloodshed.

The situation for Kenyan nationals got worse by the day. Between January and April 1953, Governor Baring instituted dozens of extreme and wide-ranging laws, referred to as the

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<sup>45</sup> E-mail interview 12/10/2004.

Emergency Regulations. These included, communal punishment, curfews, influx control, and as Elkins can relate:

The confiscation of property and land, the imposition of special taxes, the issuance of special documentation and passes, the censorship and banning of publications, the disbanding of all African political organisations, the control and disposition of labour, the suspension of due process, and detention without trial (Elkins 2005:55; cf. Wanjaũ 1988; Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003).

It was clearly a state organised reign of terror in a state sanctioned police state. In addition, emergency legislation controlled African markets, shops, hotels, and all public transport, including buses, taxis, and bicycles. In addition, Baring created concentrated villages in the African reserves, and barbed-wire cordons in African towns, including the city of Nairobi. He also established mini-detention camps on Settler farms in the so-called White Highlands. Above all, he sanctioned treatment of *Mau Mau* suspects devoid of any humanity (Elkins 2005:55).

Anderson contends that, “the most punitive measure of all was surely villagisation” for by June 1954, the War Council took the decision to enforce villagisation throughout Kikuyuland. By villagisation, Anderson means “the compulsory resettlement of people from their scattered, ridge-top farms, into centralized, regulated villages, situated at key points along the busier roads” (Anderson 2005: 294). While some villages were principally meant to protect the loyalists, most of the 854 established villages or camps were in reality, mass detention camps intended to punish *Mau Mau* sympathisers.

The speed by which the villages or camps were established was astonishing and suspicious. Between June 1954 and October 1955, a period of just fifteen months, 1, 077, 500 Africans were resettled in 854 villages. Kenyans were forced to abandon their farming projects to settle in overcrowded environments where life was extremely difficult to manage. Upon setting in these villages, punishments and rewards would be applied depending upon one’s willingness to cooperate. Villages that did not cooperate would have curfews imposed, while those that did collaborate received certain benefits, including:

Agricultural services, the reopening of shops, and the lifting of curfews to allow (*some*) night-time activities. More than anything else, villagisation allowed the government to stamp its authority on the countryside, destroying the last elements of passive wing support for the forest fighters (Anderson 2005: 294).

In these concentrated villages women suffered greatly. In a bid to impress their white superiors, the Home Guard (Black patrollers in the village) would do anything to hurt African women especially during the daily forced labour sessions. As one elderly woman (Ruth Ndegwa) who underwent such an ordeal explains:

If you delayed in the hut after the whistle to report outside the village for work had been blown, maybe because you were preparing the porridge to leave for your children, the Home Guards would come kicking doors down, and if you were found inside, they would kick and overturn the porridge and you would be beaten because of being late (Elkins 2005:242).

When digging the long and deep trenches, that prevented *Mau Mau* fighters from gaining entrance to the villages by night in order to source food, Home Guards would be standing on either side, brutally hitting those who lifted their heads or who sought a break from their hard labours, treating them as ancient slaves. It was meant to remind a person that “you should always be working without rest” (see, Elkins 2005: 243 *cf.* Wachanga 1975, 1978). As Elkin contends the forced labourers were prohibited from singing, drinking, talking, eating or any other activities while working in these trenches.

African women, who were brutalised on a daily basis, would compose songs late into the night, in the relative safety of their huts. They would compose stanzas mocking the brutality of the Home Guards and white “Johnnies” (as the British soldiers were generally called). In their songs, they would point out the colonial injustices and beg for humane treatment. When the white colonial District Officer (*Hereafter*, DO), visited Gatung’ang’a village, in the Nyeri District of Central Kenya, the women would compose daring and risky songs in, asking him why he had detained their husbands at Manyani detention camp and left them to die while digging the trenches (Elkins 2005:243). One such song was:

Women tell Kariuki (the headman)  
So that Kariuki may tell Gatoto (the sub chief)  
And Gatoto may tell Karangi (the chief)  
And Karangi may inform the DO  
That this trench digging is going to kill the women (Elkins 2005:243).

This confirms Hilary B P Mijoga’s assertion that such songs form an essential part of African traditional practice and culture (2001:157). It also agrees with Patrick A. Kalilombe’s contention that the role of music and singing in Africa should not be thought of simply as a means of entertainment, for it

Serves to express interior values and reinforce values, to praise or ridicule, to exalt or to debase. In ritual and religion, singing is often used as a means of arousing and communicating appropriate attitudes of mind and soul.... The song is also a vehicle of

information and teaching... Traditional ritual singing was a favourite tool for instruction, for admonition, and for passing on traditional lore: history, customs, or the art of living (1991:397-411).

Songs constitute the rich heritage of the African people, through which they express their inner fears or joys. Mugambi demonstrates the importance of songs in African religiosity in his major works, including, *African Christian Theology: An introduction* (1989); *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989); *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (1995).

Another dimension on the war of liberation is that women who were suspected of continuing to feed the *Mau Mau* guerrillas, were sometimes brought into the village square and shot or hung as a warning to the rest. Sometimes, they would be beaten with clubs and rifle butts and even raped by the military. These soldiers were also called "British savages" including the Kenya Police Reserve, the King's African Rifles, and the Kenyan Regiment (Elkins 2005: 247). Sometimes, captured *Mau Mau* fighters would be roped to the back of the Land Rovers and be driven around the concentrated villages to scare those women whose husbands had been detained in other parts of the country. As a result, various body parts would be left strewn on the roads (Elkins 2005:246).

Both white and black members of the security forces would rape women, together with their daughters in the same hut. They would be asked at gunpoint to choose between death and rape. As one victim, Margaret Nyaruai, could recall:

We felt that we would rather allow them to rape us than get killed, especially those who had small children depending on them (Elkins 2005: 247f).

Women would therefore be raped in full view of their helpless children and family – a serious source of stigma in African society, sometimes leading to the birth of illegitimate children. Women would also be assaulted on their way to or from forced communal labour, while others were assaulted in their working places.

Apart from rape, beatings, forced labour and being striped naked irrespective of the ages of people present, women also had to watch their own children being "slaughtered and their remains skewered on spears and paraded around the village squares by the Home Guards" (see Elkins 2005: 247f; Kanogo 1987; Clough 1998; Kershaw 1997; Likimani1985). In addition, the use of excrement-based torture was also widespread. As one woman who experienced this ordeal relates, "The Johnnies would make us run around

state without such coup d'états that have beset surrounding African nation states. Kenya is not only a stable country politically, but is also stable economically, as was evidenced by the fact that, after forty-two years of constitutional independence, the finance Minister, David Mwiraria, in June 2005, could deliver the national budget without factoring in any "donor" support!

Jesse Mugambi entered the formal education system at Kĩgaarĩ in January 1954, following the Colonial Administration fierce and brutal enforcement of the state of emergency. Consequently, his movement was restricted from dusk-to-dawn, and even during the daytime. This made Mugambi's school overcrowded as Kenyans were forced to move from their ancestral homes. Indeed, this had introspective effects upon his life.

### **2.3.3. Kenya's land tenure system**

The third major event that had great impact on Mugambi's life was that of Kenya's land tenure system. The outcome of the Kenyan state of emergency saw a change in the colonial administration's attitude towards the system of African land tenure and the production of commercial crops. The 1953 reform referred to as "the Swynnerton Plan" proved however unjust towards Africans. Named after R J M Swynnerton Kenya's assistant director of agriculture its original aim, under Baring was to consult an agricultural expert to address the "unsolvable" land problem, and find a way that would "make the reserves more agriculturally productive" (Elkins 2005:125).

In his resultant five-year African land development plan, Swynnerton not only aimed at the reconstruction of Kikuyuland, the central Kikuyu homestead, "but also for the improvement of all African farming and grazing areas throughout the colony" (Elkins 2005:125). With Baring's support, he secured a £5, 000,000 from the Colonial Development Fund, in order that, "intensified agricultural development in all African Areas of Kenya with due emphasis to the loyal tribes" (2005: 126) could be made.

Consequently, the Swynnerton plan described a variety of projects, such as bench terracing, soils conservation, bracken clearing, and paddocking, each presumably designed to increase productivity in the rural reserves. In addition, other numerous agricultural projects were designed to develop the previously uninhabitable areas of Central Kenya for future resettlement (Elkins 2005:126). Unfortunately, the plan was developed under the

flawed premise that Africans were destructive and ineffective stewards of their own land. As a result, the plan envisaged European experts to direct Africans in cultivation and animal husbandry techniques (Elkins 2005:126). This premise failed to take cognisance of the fact that the Africans had managed their land and livestock successfully prior to the arrival of the British in the late 1800s. As expected, it refused to expand the boundaries of the reserves, as the government further demonstrated its intransigence towards *Mau Mau* demands.

Agreement is found with Anderson (2005:294) when he contends that the Swynnerton Plan was crafted with the sole aim of rewarding those Africans who were loyal to the colonial government, and who contributed to the downfall of the *Mau Mau* forces. Under this agricultural developmental programme, commercial agriculture was encouraged in Central Province, alongside that of land consolidation (2005:294; Wachanga 1975, 1978:23f; Wanjaũ 1988:42).

Sadly, the government exploited its villagisation process by securing clan lands (land belongs culturally to various clans) deserted by the people who were incarcerated in the colonial camps. It subdivided and allocated the land to loyalists under the guise of an improved agricultural development programme. Consequently, as the loyalists benefited, the convicted *Mau Mau* rebels were excluded from these illegal land re-allocations (see, Anderson 2005:284; cf. Wachanga 1975, 1978:24; Wanjaũ 1988:47). Unfortunately, the repercussions of the Swynnerton Plan are still felt today, after forty-three years of constitutional independence!

In Mugambi's view, the Swynnerton Plan was aimed at legitimising the alienation of primal land in Kenya by British settlers and force Africans to share the "native reserves" among themselves. Consequently, Kenyans found themselves in overcrowded areas that were infertile and thereby unsuitable for arable farming. Interestingly, land marginalisation was one of the major factors that drove the freedom fighters to the forests to reclaim their inheritance.

#### **2.3.4. The National Declaration of Independence**

The fourth major event that had a major impact on Mugambi's life was the Kenyan National Declaration of Independence, December 12, 1963. For the adolescent Mugambi,

In August 1961, thousands of Kenyans wept a mixture of joy and disbelief as they witnessed Kenyatta's release from detention. As one former detainee, Hunja Njuki, could explain many years later:

I wept, I wept with joy when word got around very quickly when he was released, and we danced and celebrated into the morning. Our leader was free, and he was going to save us from the colonial oppressors. *Ngai* (God) had answered our prayers (Elkins 2005:359).

As he toured triumphally throughout Kenya following his release, Kenyatta delivered a series of reconciliatory and unitary speeches, such that even the remaining white settlers began to hail him as a great African leader and person of state. This went on until 1963 when the declaration of independence was made with Kenyatta as the first leader of a self-governing Kenya.

Two years after his release, Kenyatta was reintroduced to the world. As he stood on the podium of Nairobi's Uhuru gardens, Lang'ata on December 12, 1963 he delivered an electrifying speech to a crowd of around 50,000 ecstatic people, mainly Africans, stating unequivocally that, "This is the greatest day in Kenya's history and the happiest day in my life." With unmatched oratorical prowess, Kenyatta refused to read his prepared address in English and chose to speak extemporaneously to his eagerly awaiting people in Kiswahili (the popular language of the East and Central African countries). Masses of people in the stadium became virtually uncontrollable in their anticipation, to the amazement of dignitaries from around the world who had all come to Kenya to witness Africa's thirty-fourth country achieve its constitutional independence from the European rule (see, Elkins 2005:359f; cf. Likimani 1985: 29; Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003).

This ecstatic moment recalls the inauguration of the third President of Kenya, December 30, 2002. As the former leader of opposition, Mwai Kibaki, took over the instruments of power at the same stadium, 39 years later before a crowd of some 500, 000 people. They could not imagine that the Presidential incumbent, Daniel Arap Moi, would hand over power to his former archrival in the turbulent politics of Kenya. As Kibaki promised to provide innovative leadership (unlike his predecessor), free from misrule, bad governance,



corruption, inertia, nepotism and other vices, the highly charged crowd could not help interpret this as the rebirth of Kenya. To some, Kenya had attained a “second-liberation.”<sup>48</sup>

Midnight, December 12, 1963 after the independence celebrations reached its climax, a spotlight was focused on the British Union Jack being lowered, and Kenya’s new flag was raised for the first time. In this moment of glory, the crowd roared as a new liberated Kenya was born (see, Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003:26ff).

Bethuel Ogot, the Kenyan historian, explains how Kenyatta led the post-independence reconstruction when he adopted the philosophy of “*Harambee*” (meaning ‘let us pull together’) as the national watch-word (Ogot 1981:69). Ogot describes the essential elements of *Harambee* as being participation in self-help efforts towards the generation of a spirit of self-reliance, free from the mentality of the begging bowl (1981:69). Writing in 1969, he could state:

This is done (*to the present day - my emphasis*) both at the national and at the local levels. At the national level, “*harambee*” means a policy, which does not rely for development finance entirely on foreign sources. Domestic resources must be mobilized. For instance, in 1963/64, 82 percent of the total development budget originated in external sources; in 1972/73, this proportion had fallen to 46%. At the local level, *harambee* consists of self-help activities such as educational institutions, water projects, public health schemes, community institutions, etc (1981:69).

Apart from the philosophy of *Harambee*, Kenyatta, would portray his role in post-colonial reconstruction by telling his audience, “*Na tusahau yaliyopita tujenge taifa,*” (‘let us forget the past and build (*read - reconstruct*) the nation!’) His was a reconciliatory approach specifically designed to create a harmonious and enabling atmosphere for development as opposed to merely seeking revenge for the past. As a young man, Mugambi watched Kenyatta, as he encouraged Kenyans to take destiny into their own hands and make a clear break from the colonial past (*read “start reconstructing yourselves – you now have what it takes to do so!”*).

As Kenya’s founding father, Kenyatta led the post-colonial reconstruction of Kenya on a stable course. In particular, Mugambi recalls that the economy and other sectors of the national fabric did well. He observed this unfolding scenario with keenness and

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<sup>48</sup> Jesse Mugambi says that he does not believe in a second liberation. For him, liberation is attained only once. Later developments are just a means of consolidating those gains of a liberation achieved earlier.

appreciation, probably wondering whether the whole of Africa could be similarly engaged in the process of social reconstruction.

#### **2.4. The influence of tertiary education**

In his key address to African church leaders, at the thirtieth anniversary of Christian Organisations Research and Advisory Trust of Africa (*Hereafter*, CORAT Africa)<sup>49</sup> – Nairobi, June 10, 2005, Mugambi explained that he had become a teacher by default. After finishing form four (after sitting for his “O” Levels in 1965 at Kangaru Boys’ High School), he went to teach in a Primary school for six weeks. It is within this period of “experimental teaching” that he “realised” that there was a lot of “bad teaching” amongst his colleagues, where teachers were better at enforcing corporal punishment (whipping learners) than in imparting knowledge. These six weeks therefore changed his life, for he decided from thereon to become a teacher to provide “better teaching.”

Mugambi was not only incensed by the way teachers kept physically abusing the school learners, but also he was irritated by the way teachers kept shouting down young children rather than guiding them towards adulthood. By becoming a teacher under such circumstances, Mugambi explained that he nevertheless, tries in his teaching (as a University lecturer), to counter that bad experience by striving to teach by example and not by default. Mugambi thus pleaded with African Church leaders at the CORAT meetings to provide a similar positive model of leadership. For Mugambi, a leader is a person who is capable of being followed because of the values, norms and virtues that she or he lives by.

Following his work as an untrained teacher, Mugambi joined Machakos Teachers Training College (*Hereafter*, MTTC) in 1966 to undertake a two-year course leading to a certificate in teaching. It is here that he met his wife, Elizabeth Nyathira, who was also a student at the same college. Elizabeth recalls that Jesse Mugambi had already formed a reading culture by the time he joined the college.

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<sup>49</sup> CORAT Africa, whose buildings are situated in Nairobi-Kenya, is a Pan-African non-profit making Christian organisation. It was founded in 1975 by a group of prominent Christian leaders representing several different denominations. Since its inception, it has organised various training courses to meet the management and leadership needs of churches, church related organisations and NGOs in Africa. The courses are flexibly designed to match varied client needs across the African continent. Broadly speaking, the training services are divided into two categories, namely, Pan-African Residential courses and In-Country (local Kenyan) courses.

Before Elizabeth gave her consent to marry Jesse, she says she had to prepare herself psychologically for what he would become, as she had already sensed that he was to become a prolific academic author, travelling overseas for paper presentations among other undertakings. This was a big sacrifice for the young Elizabeth to make but Jesse had many strong attributes that she felt overshadowed her fear of marrying an academic husband whose prospects of being away from home for long periods were quite high. After a long period of courtship (1966-1972), they married in 1972. She concedes that most of Jesse's personal characteristics remain, including being "an aggressive person who gallantly pursues what he believes is right and worthy." This attribute should be seen in the same light as that which the Apostle Paul describes:

Finally, brothers (*and sisters*), whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things ...And the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).

Elizabeth explains further:

In our marriage life, he has (*referring to Jesse Mugambi*) clearly demonstrated himself as a man who values freedom for every one in the family. That's why I didn't attempt to restrict him from pursuing his academic work and other goals because he also did not attempt to restrict me from pursuing my goals.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise, Jesse Mugambi has kind words for his wife Elizabeth:

She has been the silent half of my personality! She has supported me all along. While I pursued philosophy and theology, she pursued fashion design. She retired in 1998, in order to focus on our family matters. We are grateful to God for this family. We have mutually supported each other all along.<sup>51</sup>

As a student at the MTTC, Jesse Mugambi distinguished himself as a civic-minded person and organiser. This is demonstrated by his being the founder of the Good Neighbours' Society (*Hereafter*, GNS) whose agenda was to carry the burden of the needy people living in the neighbourhood bordering the college, especially the children in a nearby orphanage. Mugambi was subsequently joined by eighty fellow students who assisted in mobilising at least ten students to help at the orphanage on any given day of the week. This society proved so successful that on the College Opening Day in 1967, these orphans provided the entertainment, which greatly impressed the parents, guests and lecturers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Interview on 7/7/2005.

<sup>51</sup> Email interview on 24/3/2006.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi June – July 2005.

While at MTTC, Mugambi also formed the Drama Club. He recalls taking the leading role of Halaj, in *The poet Tasters of Isfahan*, a play that was very well received. He went on to win the public speaking competitions at the College in 1966 and 1967 respectively. During this period, some of his tutors who were mainly of British extraction gave him books to read. These books motivated him to write stories and novels. This culminated in his completion of a novel, which he did not submit for publication until 1972. By the time he completed his two-year course, a book by Okot p'Bitek had considerably inspired him. This was after his tutor in philosophy of education had given him p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*, which had just been published. Its literary style and cultural value greatly impressed him. Interestingly, when Mugambi later joined the University of Nairobi in 1971, p'Bitek became his colleague and friend. They would debate a wide range of philosophical, theological, and anthropological issues. At the end of his two-year course at MTTC, Mugambi was declared the best student teacher of 1967.<sup>53</sup> This was a great show of confidence to the young Mugambi and further acted as a morale booster in his quest for excellence.

#### **2.4.1. Studies at Kenyatta College**

Following the success of his studies at MTTC, Mugambi was invited to enrol at Kenyatta College for a one-year up-grading course, leading to a specialised teaching certificate for teachers in Religious Education and English. Here he was under the care of Ronald Dain, an English Mathematician who had become a missionary in the 1940s. As with his intermediate and high school teachers Kivuti and Martel, Ronald Dain became another significant conversation partner in Mugambi's reflective career.<sup>54</sup> It is Dain who almost single headedly campaigned for the introduction of religious education as a special subject at Kenyatta College where he subsequently became the first chairperson of the newly established Department of Religious Studies. Mugambi was able to interact with Dain by virtue of being part of the group that made up the very first class in that Department. Through these interactions, Mugambi came to appreciate Dain's up-to-date knowledge of developments in theological scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi June and July 2005; cf. Mwase 1993.

<sup>54</sup> Dain worked in Sierra Leone and moved to Kenya in 1958. Despite being a mathematician, he was interested in the protestant movement in Kenya. He became the first Secretary-General of the Christian Churches Educational Association (CCEA, an ecumenical organisation whose main goal was the promotion of Christian Religious Education on behalf of the protestant churches in Kenya.

<sup>55</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

At Kenyatta College, another tutor and fellow Kenyan, Daniel Kīhiū, who had recently returned from Biola College in California, was also to influence Mugambi. Kīhiū introduced the critical study of the Gospel of Mark. Mugambi thus came to appreciate the distinctive character of Mark's Gospel. He was particularly impressed in the way Mark sought to present Jesus as the Son of God without dwelling much on the virgin birth and resurrection. This made Mugambi wonder whether Mark met his objective and, if so, what his account implied concerning the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception and resurrection. In this, Mugambi began developing a concern for the problems of biblical scholarship.<sup>56</sup>

Mugambi's student life at Kenyatta further enthused his development in theological reflection. It also nourished his artistic characteristic of his personality. An illustration: In the residence hall, there lived an atheistic physics-biology student who went to great lengths to prove that he was in the wrong place and doing the wrong course (of study) - Religious Studies. Subsequently, they agreed that each would provide level-headed and academic arguments to back their respective positions. This made Mugambi to go to the College Library with the goal of making his arguments philosophically, methodically, and theologically sound. Their differing positions made the rest of the student body to focus their attention on them as they treated others into an evening debate that eventually turned out to be very popular. Some would retire to bed leaving the two duellers wrestling it out. Consequently, Mugambi developed a deep concern for clarity that would help in moulding the man we know today - an eloquent speaker and a prolific writer.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the above duels, which were quite taxing and demanding in terms of library research, Mugambi still found time to form a music band for his personal enjoyment and entertainment. He would play the piano, whilst others would play guitar and other instruments. This band lasted throughout Mugambi's time at Kenyatta and several months afterwards. It disbanded when he left for studies in Britain.

While still at Kenyatta College, Mugambi developed an avid interest in poetry. This interest was greatly influenced by a certain British tutor<sup>58</sup> who did a lot to enhance his

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<sup>56</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>58</sup> Jesse Mugambi does not seem to remember the name of this tutor.

linguistic abilities. As time wore on, he gained the confidence to take a collection of his poems to him for review, something that the tutor accepted with ease.<sup>59</sup>

Following his assessment, the tutor offered valuable comments that further encouraged him. His convictions that meaning in poetry needs to be prioritised over rhyme and that rhythm is more important than rhyme helped Mugambi improve his poetic style. Mugambi evolved into a writer of “blank verse except in cases where rhyme was natural to the piece” (Mwase 1993:36). His tutor had helped him not only to understand why the poetry of the famous p’Bitek was popular and appealing, but also to appreciate twentieth-century poetry, especially that of D H Lawrence and T S Eliot. Interestingly, a revised edition of his poems was published as, *Carry it Home*, (1974).

Whilst a student at Kenyatta College, the chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies invited the Africa Secretary of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), a Kenyan, to deliver an open lecture at the College.<sup>60</sup> In his lecture, he challenged Mugambi and others to become involved in the development of a Christianity that was authentically African.

Between 1974 and 1976, Mugambi worked with the WSCF, charged with the responsibility of promoting African Christian theology in Africa. While with the WSCF, Mugambi published what he considers his most widely cited paper, “Liberation and Theology.”<sup>61</sup> It enabled him to travel widely throughout Africa working in close contacts with the Theology Department of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Nairobi, where he later became Deputy General Secretary.

In 1968, Mugambi’s interest in drama was rekindled. This was during the 1968 lecture by the Africa Secretary of the WSCF after which he and others were introduced to Keith Anderson. Anderson, a film director at the time, wanted to produce a Christian film in Kenya, complete with a Kenyan cast. It was here that Mugambi’s interest was aroused, sufficient to learn how film producers go about their task of selecting a suitable cast. As a result, Mugambi won a role in the film *Between Two Worlds*. Produced in 1969-70, this

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<sup>59</sup> Written interviews with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>60</sup> Jesse Mugambi could not recall his name.

<sup>61</sup> See J.N.K. Mugambi, 1974. “Liberation and Theology,” in *WSCF Dossier 5* (Geneva: n.p.)

film is reportedly still in circulation through the film library of the National Council of Churches, Nairobi, Kenya.

Mugambi's desire to correlate Christianity and the African cultural heritage began to take a definite shape while at Kenyatta College. Here he prepared a research project entitled "Traditional Religion of the Embu people."<sup>62</sup> This project was a response to the challenge by Ronald Dain to articulate the relationship between the African cultural heritage and the Christian faith. John Mbiti, who was then at Makerere University in the Department of Religious Studies was so impressed by the piece that he recommended it for publication in *Dini na Mila*,<sup>63</sup> a publication of the Department to which he belonged. Thus, in Mugambi publishing one of his major works, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989), one can easily trace the background that culminated in this rich piece of work. Mugambi's hard work at Kenyatta College, as that of MTTC previously, began to pay dividends when in 1968, he again was declared the best student teacher.

#### **2.4.2. Studies in the United Kingdom**

In 1968, Mugambi left for further studies at Westhill College of Education in Birmingham, UK. The World Council of Christian Education (*Hereafter*, WCCE) provided a scholarship. His studies in Birmingham and London (1969-70) provided a good opportunity to read widely on contemporary theology and philosophy. It was during this time that Mugambi began to build a modest book collection with the limited funds at his disposal.<sup>64</sup>

Mugambi used this opportunity to strengthen his denominational moorings by devoting several weeks to research on the establishment of Anglicanism in Central Kenya while using the archives of the CMS in London. He was particularly interested in the missionaries' understanding of their mission as documented in the original dispatches. In his research, he sought to correlate the contents of these reports with the attitudes that they displayed while in Africa.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> It is important to note that Mugambi published his first book, *Traditional Religion of the Embu people*, in 1971.

<sup>63</sup> The English meaning for the Kiswahili *Dini Na Mila* is Religion and Culture.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi November 2004.

### **2.5. As a member of the Church Panel of Educators (CPE)**

Upon his return from Britain in 1970, Mugambi was requested to become a member of the Church Panel of Educators (CPE). In addition, he served as tutor at Kagumo Teachers' College, Nyeri District of Kenya, following which he joined the University of Nairobi as an undergraduate student in 1971 (Mugambi 1996:2).

The CPE had been established to provide advice and guidance to the ministry of Education in the teaching of religious education. It had come into existence in 1968 when the government of Kenya initiated a revision process of primary and the secondary school curricula, including the religious education syllabi. To do this, suggestions had been made to those denominations that were interested in the teaching of religious education to advise the Ministry of Education concerning the content of such courses. It is from this background that Mugambi became one of four Kenyans on the CPE of thirty people. The panel was composed mainly of Catholic and Protestant expatriate missionaries from Europe, the United States of America and Canada. As a member of the panel, Mugambi and the other three Kenyans sought gallantry to ensure that the religious education curriculum was "contextually and culturally relevant to the World-view of contemporary Kenyans, most of whom were rural dwellers" (Mwase 1993:38).

Unfortunately, most of the other co-panellists understood schooling as a means of acculturating the people of Africa towards Euro-American life. This meant that Mugambi and his fellow Kenyans, who formed the minority in that panel, struggled to impress their views home to a panel that resisted their standpoint. This situation was reminiscent of an earlier situation where they had to face the challenge posed by some co-panellists who were at first opposed to the teaching of African religion and culture in schools.

As the debate raged, the preponderant white expatriate panellists suggested that they should vote so that a majority view in the panel could carry the day. Before this action was resolved, at a series of meetings held in the halls of the All African Conference of Churches (*Hereafter*, AACC) Nairobi, Mugambi rose to present his protest. Mugambi explained voting would enforce a wrong judgement, and consequently affect a whole generation that would never have the opportunity to understand their African heritage. He therefore begged to be excluded from the list of co-panellists, "for when the history of the religious education in Kenya will come to be written," he would be counted among "those



who had messed it.”<sup>66</sup> This threat of withdrawal created panic amongst the panellists. As a result, they rescinded their earlier plans and all agreed to revisit the issue. As it turned out, Mugambi’s side, which originally composed the minority, carried the day.

From 1968 to 1976, Mugambi and his fellow three Kenyans on the CPE continued to wrestle with their co-panellists, eventually succeeding to integrate the African religious heritage into the Christian religious education syllabus. This breakthrough was clearly evidenced by the textbook, which Mugambi co-authored with Kirima for the “O” Level school certificate course in religious education.<sup>67</sup>

When Mugambi came to take his Masters and Doctoral degrees, his work on the CPE had set the direction of his mission. In other words, he was able to correlate Christianity and the African religious heritage successfully in his postgraduate studies.

## **2.6. Denominational orientation**

Jesse Mugambi’s affiliate church has been given different names throughout the church history of Kenya. In 1898, it was known as the CMS. By 1955, it was referred to simply as the Anglican Church (*Hereafter*, AC). In 1960, it was named the Anglican Province of East Africa (Kenya and Northern Tanganyika). Later, in 1970, it became known as the Church Province of Kenya (CPK). Again in 1998, it was changed to the ACK, the name it is still known by today. It is interesting to note that the church that began with a few scattered members around the coastal region of Kenya has now grown to over 3 million members across the country. Furthermore, in the period spanning 160 years, the church that in 1898 had only one Diocese (Mombasa) (comprising the whole of Kenya and Northern Tanganyika) has by 2006 established 29 dioceses in all. It has several institutions and theological Colleges, which are interlinked through a computer network founded by Trinity Church Wall Street, New York. The ACK is a member of the 70 million strong Anglican Communion.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Mugambi recalled this incident on June 2, 2005 when he launched the book by Stein Villumstad entitled, *Social Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Without and Within*, at the AACC headquarters Nairobi, Kenya.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Mugambi and Kirima (eds). *The African Religious Heritage*. Kirima is the Catholic Archbishop of Nyeri, Kenya.

<sup>68</sup> For further information see, *Church Pocket Book and Diary 2004*, <http://www.ackkenya.org/history.htm/>

The brand of Anglicanism to which Mugambi belongs was introduced to Kenya by the CMS, which in turn was greatly influenced by the East African Revival Movement, which swept into Central and Eastern Kenya in 1937. It is sometimes called the Evangelical wing of the Anglican Church or Low Church tradition within Anglicanism.<sup>69</sup>

### **2.7. Mugambi's ecumenical appeal**

Concerning Jesse Mugambi's denominational orientation, it is important to underline his contentment within the Anglican Church whose ecclesiastical model is Episcopal government. This can be deduced from his statement that he is a member of the Anglican Church and finds no reason to move to another church whose ecclesiastical model is different. He does not however say that the Anglican model is better. He views all models as human inventions with all the shortcomings of human institutions. It is from this background that we must understand Mugambi involvement in the ecumenical movement. His involvement in ecumenism is from the local, national, regional, continental and global.

As a person whose theological formation has largely, although not exclusively, been within the ecumenical movement, Mugambi's credentials can easily be ascertained. Between 1974 and 1976, he was a staff member of the World Student Christian Federation as the Theology Secretary for Africa (Dedji 2003:88). Between 1974 and 1984, he was a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (*Hereafter*, WCC). He later became a member of the WCC Sub-Unit of Church and Society (1984-1994). Since 1994, he has been a member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change. Further, from 1994 to 1997 he was Senior Consultant for Development and Research at the AACC, based in Nairobi (2003: 88). This helps us to understand why Mugambi writes from a convinced ecumenical position, rather than in his private capacity as a committed evangelical member of the ACK. His exposure has been mainly ecumenical, and it appears that he uses this to reach a wider constituency in his scholarly endeavours.

Consequently, Mugambi works jointly with theologians from a cross-section of Christian denominations in his Acton Publishers. According to its website, Acton is "one of the

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<sup>69</sup> The low Anglican Church is mainly evangelical in content and is contrasted with the high Church especially in Europe and South Africa. The high Anglican Church is very close to the Roman Catholic Church in terms of liturgy and practice.

most successful post-Cold War publishing companies in Africa specialising in theological works.”<sup>70</sup> As the Acton website further states:

Acton Publishers was established in 1992 to meet the needs of specialized authors and readers that were not being served adequately by large commercial publishing firms in Africa. The founder, Prof. J N K Mugambi, is himself a prolific author, with extensive and intensive experience in publishing, both in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>71</sup>

Mugambi’s multi-disciplinary appeal in his theo-philosophical reflections compares well with Jacques Ellul, who is a French lay theologian, Christian ethicist, historian of Institutions, sociologist, social critic, lawyer, and prophet.<sup>72</sup> Thus, in Mugambi’s works, various disciplines will find themselves at home. While this may be viewed as his strength, one can argue that it also marks his weakness, as he unconsciously fragments his work and mission to reach a broader readership.

Mugambi’s interdenominational appeal has created a close partnership with scholars from all parts of the world. His literary works further attest to this. His first book, *The African Religious Heritage* (1976),<sup>73</sup> was written jointly with the Roman Catholic priest, and now Archbishop, Kirima. He has subsequently co-authored many other books with Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregationist, Pentecostal and Orthodox Scholars,<sup>74</sup> as can be established from his articles in the African Christianity Series jointly published in Nairobi by Initiatives Ltd and Acton Publishers. As Mugambi has said:

Theologically, it is clear that the ecumenical spirit is integral to the process of evangelisation. If we preach a Christ who is divided, how will the world respond? How can a divided church be faithful to the Gospel? (1990a: 9).

He goes on to make a cautionary note on the danger of antagonism:

A close scrutiny of the obstacles to ecumenical cooperation and consultation reveals that in most cases there are no biblical or theological grounds for antagonism. Such rivalry is often generated by personal interests of secular interference. African Christian theologians have a serious responsibility to elaborate on the intricate inter-relationship between ecumenism and evangelisation (1990a: 9).

As an advocate for the unity of the body of Christ, Mugambi stresses that:

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.acton.co.ke/>.

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.acton.co.ke/>.

<sup>72</sup> See bibliography for some of his works that reflect the above assessment. Mugambi may not fit every description that Ellul has been given but they have a lot in common especially when we consider their different contexts.

<sup>73</sup> This textbook was developed by the education board, a compulsory class text for students sitting O-Level Examinations - Christian Religious Education (CRE) - in East Africa since the 1970s.

<sup>74</sup> Acton publishers, <http://www.acton.co.ke/> will attest to this. For further details, see bibliography.

Unity among all the churches is needed for the sake of the church's mission in the world – a mission of reconciliation and liberation from all forces of greed and selfishness and prejudice that bring hatred and division to the world (that) we live in (1990a: 26).

Who then inspired him? How did he move to his current socio-scholarly position? Who are the individuals he is involved with today? The next section will discuss some of these important questions.

## 2.8. Scholarly inspiration

In this section, the researcher intends to show that Mugambi is one of the most significant living African theologians. As we have seen, many individuals contributed to his growth as a scholar, some whom he met in church forums, while others he met through their published works. In particular, as early as 1968, Ronald Dain of Kenyatta College encouraged Mugambi to sharpen his skills as a researcher. Although he was a mathematician, he was also an Anglican priest, who taught himself Christian theology. He introduced Mugambi to contemporary western Christian theologians “in a very memorable way,” these included, Tillich, Bultmann, Karl Barth, Brunner, Feuerbach, Jaspers, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Cox, Berger, Taylor, Altizer, and van Buren. Mugambi recalls being challenged by Dain to read John Robinson's book, *Honest to God* (London: SCM, 1963). When he finally read it, he was impressed by the courage of the then Bishop of Woolwich, who unlike his peers and other clergy, did not fear censorship by the church, but was willing to discuss issues that they were otherwise reluctant to address.

Another important figure that inspired Mugambi's academic life was Stephen Neill,<sup>75</sup> the founder chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies (1970-73) at Nairobi University. Mugambi later succeeded him as the fourth Chairperson of the Department (1986-1990). Neill taught him as an undergraduate (1971 to 1973). Mugambi, describes his teacher as being an articulate and prolific author who lived for 86 years and published 80 books, thereby writing on average one book per year! Neill challenged him, and others in his class, to do serious work in academics, always responding positively and constructively to their queries. In Mugambi's view, Neill was a high-quality public speaker. He was once quoted as saying that when he was young, he “liked writing and

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<sup>75</sup> According to Isaac Mwase (1993), the on-line computer database of Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary had by 1993 some sixty-eight different items by or about Stephen Neill. Neill is best known for his, *A History of Christian Missions*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

disliked preaching, then had much preaching and little time for writing; now when old, like preaching and dislike writing, but have little preaching to do and endless writing.”<sup>76</sup> He had however a very low opinion of African writers, for as Mugambi recalls, Neill used to say frequently and openly that an African did not make a good scholar. This discouraging remark from his teacher became however a blessing in disguise in that Mugambi sought to one day prove Neill wrong by endeavouring to publish good quality, scholarly works. Fortunately, his resolve was encouraged by the impressive eloquence and wide knowledge of Ali Mazrui who later visited the University of Nairobi. In Mazrui, he saw a true African match for Neill, even though the bishop, in Mugambi's estimate, would not have willingly accepted such.

Even though Mugambi's works, in general, do not appear to build on John Mbiti's work, he nonetheless considers him one of his mentors. Mbiti was to publish his first research paper at Makerere, although he was never one of his students. He sent him a very encouraging and critical comment on the paper before he published it (*Dini na Mila*, vol. 5 no. 3, 1971). Mbiti also encouraged many other African students to conduct research on their cultures and histories, and took the trouble to publish research papers often under severe financial constraints. He issued more than 20 volumes of Occasional Research Papers at Makerere University, and was the prime mover for *Dini na Mila*, the Journal of the Department of Religious Studies at Makerere in which Jesse Mugambi's paper was published in 1971.

Mugambi recalls one morning when Stephen Neill came to deliver a lecture on comparative religion. As the lecture went on, Neill promptly drew a religious map of the world, showing the continents and assigning major religions, one for each region. In his allocations, Protestantism was assigned to Europe and North America; Roman Catholicism was assigned to South America; Islam was assigned to the Middle East; Hinduism was assigned to India; Buddhism was assigned to South East Asia; Confucianism was assigned to China, and Marxism assigned to Eurasia. Neill then went on to explain to his eager students that, the religious map of the world was now complete without Africa!

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<sup>76</sup> See, Christine Nasso, ed., *Contemporary Authors*, New Revision Series, Vol.7 (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1985).

As classmates, they looked at one another and wondered quietly, has the learned professor forgotten something? Interestingly, most of the students had individual copies of Mbiti's book, *African Religions and Philosophy*. By then, many of the African students had already begun to take Mbiti's works seriously. In low voices, they nominated the oldest member of the class to ask Neill to explain the omission. As Mugambi recalls, the conversation went as follows:

'Excuse us, Professor Sir; it seems that your map is incomplete!' 'No! No! This Religious Map of the World is complete! 'Excuse us, Professor Sir; we do not see Africa on your map!' 'That is correct, dear students! There is no African religion! 'But excuse us, Professor (Bishop), Sir, Professor Mbiti has written much about it.' 'Listen to me! There is no African Religion!' they were told.<sup>78</sup>

The students finally listened as they were ordered, but they did not take him seriously. For Mugambi, this experience became one of the turning points of his academic career, for he was convinced that Neill had not bothered to read any of Mbiti's books. Mugambi therefore vowed, "to read more, research more and publish more, so that there could be more scholarly evidence to document the African cultural and religious heritage."<sup>79</sup>

Reading the works of Søren Kierkegaard, (1834-1854), gave Mugambi much pleasure in his early theological formation. Kierkegaard was deeply concerned with clarity of expression. In particular, he was impressed by Kierkegaard's endeavour to clarify for himself the practical meaning of the sermons that he heard on Sundays in Copenhagen. He found himself identifying with Kierkegaard's disappointment with preachers, even the most respectable ones, who were in the habit of introducing complex ideas to their congregations without bothering to explain their practical applicability to daily living.

The work and testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer also inspired Mugambi's scholarship. Interestingly, Bonhoeffer, a German protestant, and son of a prominent professor of psychiatry and neurology had a mother who was one of the few women of her generation to obtain a university degree. Bonhoeffer is widely known as one of the few Christian martyrs in a history otherwise stained by Christian complicity with Nazism. Being consistent with his beliefs and ministry, he had worked against the Nazi regime and paid the price with his life when he was executed at the Flossenbug extermination camp for his

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2006

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Jesse Mugambi in November 2004.

role in “plotting” against Adolf Hitler. Hitler’s extermination camps are comparable to Kenya’s pre-colonial villagisation of the 1950s. Bonhoeffer and Mugambi possess a common denominator in that they both witnessed the so-called “death camps” or “villagisations.” Even though Mugambi does not make these comparisons, it is possible that he was able to draw such parallelisms, which in turn inspired him to appreciate Bonhoeffer’s works.

In general, Bonhoeffer reflected on “religionless Christianity,” and how Christians can continue to live out their faith in the midst of moral collapse. In Bonhoeffer, Mugambi saw a person who managed to translate his strong beliefs into practical behaviour. He was particularly inspired in particular by three books: *The Cost of Discipleship* (1949) (London: Oxford University Press); *Ethics* (1955) (London: SCM); *Letters and Papers From Prison* (1971) (New York: Macmillan).

According to Mugambi, his meeting with Cees Hamelink at the Institute of Social Studies, Hague, Netherlands; and later at a UNESCO-sponsored seminar at Nairobi, in July 1984, while serving as a *Rapporteur*, bore much fruit for his scholarly life. In their encounter, Hamelink was happy with his notes which were included in the seminar report. In their subsequent tête-à-tête, Mugambi expressed his interest in attending a course in Communication Policy and Planning for Development that Hamelink was to conduct in 1985. Even though the course was specially designed for senior officers of the Communication and Information ministries of various African governments, Mugambi felt quite at home in them. To his surprise, at the end of the course he was summarily awarded a diploma with distinction!

Hamelink became an important source of inspiration to Mugambi because he espouses an approach, on the issue of cultural harmony in pluralistic situations that Mugambi deems consistent with his own approach (see his, *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications*, New York: Longman, 1983). His view on cultural synchronisation holds that the peoples of Africa, Asia, and South America should forge their own cultural identities before they immerse themselves in the dominant cultures of the North Atlantic alliance. In view of this, Mugambi’s reformulation is that African Christians have to synthesise the Christian

faith with their own culture, as Europeans have done, and then only can they be in a position to contribute effectively to the universal church. In assessing Mugambi's literary works, one realises that he has been adequately prepared for such a process of synthesis, in line with that of Hamelink.

Another fruitful, yet brief encounter was that with Georg Henrik von Wright, when he was on a visit to Kenya in 1986. Von Wright was the successor of Ludwig Wittgenstein in the Chair of Philosophy at Cambridge University. In their meeting, he was impressed by Mugambi's contribution during a televised discussion. This discussion evolved into a book, *The Rational Path: A Dialogue on Philosophy, Law and Religion* (Nairobi: Standard Textbooks Graphics and Publishing, 1989), which was edited by H Odera Oruka, J N K Mugambi, and J B Ojwang. Von Wright was particularly impressed with Mugambi's input on the philosophy of religion. They met later in 1987 in what Mugambi considers, "a very fruitful three-hour philosophical discussion." Even before this discussion, von Wright had already sent a written comment to Mugambi concerning his doctoral thesis, especially his evaluation of Wittgenstein's approach to language and religion. This proved very encouraging to Mugambi. He thus credits von Wright with the confidence that he today possesses, as a philosopher cum theologian.

The Dutch Catholic Priest, Joseph Donders, who succeeded Neill as the Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in 1973 also inspired Mugambi greatly. According to Mugambi, Donders was an excellent preacher and a good teacher. His impressiveness as a preacher may be explained by considering the fact that for several years (1968-1970) he was in charge of the common preparation of sermons for several Dutch dioceses. In one of his published works, *Risen Life: Healing a Broken World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), he brings together his personal journey with social observations and scriptural reflections.

Donders introduced Mugambi to the history of western philosophy and positively influenced him to become an avid reader of philosophical works. He assisted Mugambi to set up a firm multi-disciplinary academic base. This base was laid in the study of literature, history, and education and was reinforced by his combined majors in religious studies and philosophy. In addition, Donders taught Mugambi the art and skill of critical thinking. In teaching him contemporary philosophy, he showed him how to blend critical



thinking with creative teaching and preaching. Donders however did not teach theology at the University of Nairobi. They nevertheless met at the Washington Theological Consortium, where Mugambi and other members of the consortium began to greatly respect and admire him as a teacher of philosophy and as the Chaplain of St. Paul's Chapel, which served the University of Nairobi community.

Another character that inspired Mugambi's socio-scholarly formation is that of the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, whom Mugambi met in 1974. While at the University of Ghana. Their relationship had been established when Wiredu expressed, indirectly, his appreciation for the insights that Mugambi articulated in a paper entitled, "The African Experience of God." When finally they met, they talked on some philosophical ideas for about three hours. Their dialogue focused on the African understanding of reality and the role of religion in morality. In his paper, Mugambi had suggested that "relation" be considered the most fundamental concept in African thought, thereby deviating from Mbiti's argument on time. Wiredu's suggestion was for Mugambi to develop this argument further.

With regard to the role of religion in morality, Mugambi expressed the view that since morality is a relational concept; it has to be essential to African self-understanding. Wiredu argued against the observation that morality should always be considered with reference to religion. In his view, moral sensitivity should be part of one's orientation without necessarily being religious. This made Mugambi broaden his definition of religion. In his analysis, he held that if religion was understood as "ultimate concern" (Paul Tillich), then a deep sense of moral consciousness could not be disassociated with a commitment to the Ultimate Concern, however defined. This observation led Wiredu to raise the question of God.

Wiredu wondered whether God should be regarded as a fundamental part of reality, or as separate. Two questions expressed this issue, namely, "If God is considered to be part of reality, how can God be simultaneously the originator of reality?" On the other hand, "if God is considered as separate from reality, then how is it possible for creatures to have access to God?" This raised an ontological dilemma, which in Wiredu's approximation removed the option of theistic religion. Mugambi's response was that the root of the problem was "meaning in discourse." From such a thought-provoking debate, it is no

wonder that the initial struggle with the issues (as raised by Wiredu) were to play a critical role in directing the nature of Mugambi's Master's and Doctoral studies.<sup>80</sup>

In his bid to contextualise Christianity in Africa, Paul Tillich, a German-born Lutheran theologian and philosopher, inspired Mugambi "whose major objective was to make Christianity understandable and persuasive to religiously sceptical people, modern in culture and secular in sensitivity" (Dedji 2003:45). In particular, Tillich's use of metaphorical forms to make the logic of Christian faith accessible to his contemporaries, in both Christian and academic circles, inspired his work greatly. Dedji (2003:45) cites a few examples when he says that, instead of sin as being alienation from God, Tillich proposed the metaphor of 'sin as the denial of one's courage-to-be.' Tillich replaces the metaphor of "God-in-heaven" with the metaphor of "God-the-Ground-of Being"; and rather than, "Faith as belief in God," Tillich proposed "Faith as Ultimate Concern" (Tillich 1951:1-6, 66-8; *cf.* Dedji 2003:46).

In his theology of reconstruction, Mugambi was greatly influenced by Karl Jaspers' positive appraisal of mythical thinking. According to Jaspers, "the myth tells a story and expresses intuitive insights, rather than universal concepts" (Jaspers 1972:144). This prompted him to argue that, "a society which is incapable of making its own myths or re-interpreting its old ones, becomes extinct" (Jaspers 1995:37). In view of this redefinition, Mugambi defines the vision of the theology of reconstruction in Africa, as a project of "re-mythologisation, in which the engaged theologian "discerns new symbols and new metaphors in which to recast the central Message of the Gospel" (Mugambi 1997a: 75).

Mugambi differs strongly with Rudolf Bultmann whose theory of "demythologisation" is contrasted with his "re-mythologisation." He says, of Bultmann, "in (his) attempt to satisfy scientific positivism by denouncing myth (he) ends up destroying the reality of religion as a pillar of culture" (1995:37). For Mugambi, as with Jaspers, "myth is indispensable in cultural constructions of reality" (1995:37). Reconstruction in Africa is therefore tantamount to making new myths, and re-interpreting the old ones, for the survival of the African peoples. He thus posits that:

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<sup>80</sup> See J NK Mugambi, "Discernment of Meaning in Discourse with Reference to Religion" (PhD Thesis: University of Nairobi, 1983).

A vanishing people must be replaced by the myth of a resurgent, or resilient people, while the myth of a desperate people must be replaced by the myth of a people (*who are*) full of hope. The myth of a hungry people must be replaced by the myth of a people capable of feeding themselves, and so on (Mugambi 1995: 38).

In his early encounters with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mugambi found a man who was full of wisdom and encouragement. As they later became better acquainted, Tutu was to launch Mugambi's book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: Africa after the Cold War*, in Nairobi, March 5, 1995. In fact, the earliest paper on the Theology of Reconstruction had been written and delivered after Tutu invited Mugambi to the AACC General Committee Meeting, March 30, 1990.

With regard to Mugambi's ecumenical tutelage, John Gatu, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and the first person to call for a moratorium on western missionaries, became his mentor when they served as the only Kenyan members of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, 1974-1984. At the Mission Festival in Milwaukee in 1971, Gatu argued, "the continuation of the present Missionary Movement is a hindrance to the selfhood of the Church" (Gathogo 2001: 74). During his time at the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, he reminded Mugambi of the necessity to root academic theology in the lives of Christians and churches at home and abroad.

## **2.9. A critical evaluation**

Clearly, Jesse Mugambi's socio-scholarly background made him have an early encounter with most of the themes that his general works addresses. An illustration on this: On the Gospel and culture, his father and his maternal grandfather clearly provided this. From his father, who was a committed Christian, Jesse who is not only a scholar but also a preacher had something to inherit; and from his grandfather, who strictly adhered to the African religion, he learnt a lot about the African culture – which he propounds, in his work, with clarity of thought (see 1989a; 1989b, 1995). On liberation and reconstruction, he scores highly, as he has lived with these concepts through his experience of the *Mau Mau* liberation movements and post-independence period of Kenya's reconstruction. Sadly, he appears to have learnt very little from women, in particular his mother<sup>81</sup> and

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<sup>81</sup> However, I do remember, in June 2005, that he confided to me that when he was young he agreed with his mother, who advised against his father planting a large cash crop of coffee, as the prices were determined by the buyer from the Western world. She advised that it would be better for him to "plant food crops like

grandmother(s). Neither in his e-mail correspondence, or oral interviews does he reflect on the role of women in his journey to his present position as a scholar. Even though Elizabeth his wife “has been the silent half of my personality! She has supported me all along,” little of this however appears in his published works. Obviously, Mugambi’s generation still bore a heavy patriarchal inclination! Conversely, could Mugambi be simply overvaluing privacy to the extent that exposing his grandmother, mother and wife, would go against the very culture that his grandfather taught him?

Further, the theologians and teachers that inspired his theo-philosophical outlook were all men! Were there no women who could inspire him? What about Mother Theresa of Calcutta, or Corretta Scott King (widow of the late Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.)? What about the Kenyan women who struggled for Constitutional Independence? What about his favourite teachers’ wives, such as Daina Muthanji Kivuti? Because of this, Musa Dube strongly characterises Mugambi’s theology of reconstruction as remaining:

Quite blind to the superstructure of patriarchy, which must be deconstructed in order to reconstruct. Otherwise his theology of reconstruction is founded on sand as long as it does not address major oppressive issues of both globalisation and patriarchy.<sup>82</sup>

Second, although Mugambi claims to have been inspired by John Mbiti, he appears to be critical (sometimes over critical?), of Mbiti’s work. For example, he is critical of Mbiti’s contention that Africans are notoriously religious, yet most would agree with Mbiti. For Mugambi, Africans “are not notoriously religious,” but rather are reputedly religious (see for example Mugambi 1995). Is this critique similar to the case of Aristotle who differed with his teacher, Plato, on the “theory of forms”?

*His background however, puts him in a position of strength when handling the twin concepts of liberation and reconstruction in African theology. Mugambi has literally lived alongside events that buttress these twin concepts, as has been shown above (see also Appendix #3 and #5, and his various roles among para-church groups such as the NCKK, AACC and WSCF. In particular, his earlier background, and especially his interaction with his father and his grandfather, helped him to see the crucial role of culture in*

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maize and beans as we can eat it within the family if it lacks a buyer.” In other words, he traces his basic knowledge of economics from his mother.

<sup>82</sup> Email interview with Prof. Musa Dube on August 10, 2004.

theological discourse. It also positively exposed him to critical thinking at an early age thereby providing fertile ground for his theo-philosophical articulations that have dominated his subsequent work.

### **2.10. Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explored the roots and formative factors that shaped the Mugambi who makes such an innovative call for African theology to focus its energies by shifting from a liberative paradigm to that of a reconstruction paradigm. We have noted that his background provided him with early engagements with the concepts of liberation and salvation. This was shown through his contrasting parentage, where one (father) was a staunch Anglican lay Christian, while the other (grandfather) was a staunch defender of African religion and culture. With a father and maternal grandfather, having participated in the two world wars, thereby earning some early exposure, Mugambi no doubt grew from an informed position coupled with the fact that he was an inquisitive child.

This chapter has described the background from which he was later to participate in the rebuilding of post-colonial Kenya, one that he propounds with great passion. His strength, when calling for a shift of theological gears following the end of the Cold War can clearly be seen. In viewing the liberation of Southern Africa, the unfolding scenario was like history repeating itself in a disguised form. This gives us a reason to take his work more seriously.

Having viewed his upbringing and early struggles that formed him into who he is today, we shall in the next chapter, attempt to explore his understanding of African theology. This will further strengthen our research by focussing on questions such as: Who is Mugambi in African theology? Does he agree with other scholars in this field? Does he have strong credentials in African theology that warrant his being listened to in this area? Does he deserve our attention? Is he right to call for a shift of theological paradigm in African theology? Do his works fit in the development trends of African theology? What is his contribution in this area?

## CHAPTER 3

### J N K MUGAMBI'S UNDERSTANDING OF AFRICAN THEOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

Having seen the roots and formative factors that influenced the thinking of J N K Mugambi, this chapter will attempt to locate his place in African theology. This will be done by attempting an exploration of his understanding of African theology. It will drive us to assess whether his understanding of African theology is in league with other scholars in this field. This process will lead to the study of the meaning, genesis, development and sources of African theology. We shall also attempt to continue the argument that was begun in chapter 1, by seeking to understand how Mugambi's concepts of liberation and reconstruction fit in with the development trends of African theology. The study will finally attempt to offer a critical evaluation on the above, in our quest for an authentic Christian theology in Africa that revolves around Mugambi's works.

In seeking to understand African theology, it is imperative to understand who is an African and what is African. This will drive the study to survey the factors that speak for African homogeneity and diversity.

#### 3.1. What is Africa (n)?

According to Jesse Mugambi, an explanation on "what Africa (n) is" can best be done by addressing both the African diversity and the homogeneity (1989b, 2003). In view of this, it is critical to first underline Takatso Mofokeng's (1990:169) contention that Africa cannot be identified as a single geo-cultural context. Indeed, Mofokeng's view which, as we shall see is in line with Mugambi's perspective, has serious implications for African theology: First, it is wrong to deal with Africa as a monolithic entity. Second, theological articulation is influenced by various "cultures" of Africa. These cultures include African Traditional culture, European (as one of the most dominant), Arabic, and Asiatic. Third, it implies that although Africa is culturally pluralistic, there are strong presences of other cultures as well. Fourth, it implies that Africa's theological articulation has been influenced by other cultures, which were not originally African, but have now shifted to Africa as their new home. Thus, in addressing the question, "What is African?" there is need to address both the diversity and the homogeneity of the Africa of the twenty-first

century. J N K Mugambi's theology cannot ignore the changing scenarios that are continually redefining Africa.

### 3.1.1. Diversity

Mugambi (1989b: 3f; 2003:112) acknowledges that African theology is done within the context of theo-social pluralism. Africa has indeed a number of faith traditions, including, African Traditional Religion (*Hereafter*, ATR),<sup>1</sup> Christianity and Islam. With respect to these traditional religions,<sup>2</sup> Mugambi (1989b: 4) approvingly quotes Mbiti, who says:

Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. One traditional religion cannot be propagated in another tribal group. This does not rule out the fact that religious ideas may spread from one people to another. But such ideas, spread spontaneously, especially through migrations, intermarriage, conquest, or expert knowledge being sought by individuals of one tribal group from another. Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his (or her) religion to another (1969:4).

Even within the Christian churches, African diversity is also experienced. As Mugambi says, African Christianity is too often described in terms of Catholicism, Protestantism and African Instituted churches. He goes on to say:

However, it is important to appreciate that the first "African Independent Church"<sup>3</sup> was the Coptic Church, which traces its origin to the apostolic period. The

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase African Traditional Religion (ATR) is a contested description of African religiosity. To some, the term "traditional" reveals Christian bias and is intended to portray African religiosity as being outdated and irrelevant. Some have advanced the view that it should simply be referred to as "African Religion" (*Hereafter*, AR) as for instance, the Muslim or Hindu Religion. Whatever description is preferred, it refers to an indigenous system of beliefs and practices that are integrated into the culture and worldviews of the African peoples (see, Mwakabana 1997:21-24; cf. Mbiti 1969:1ff). As in other primal religions, a person is born into it as a way of life with all its associated cultural manifestations and religious implications. AR is thus an integral part of the African ethos and culture. The debate however goes beyond these explanations. Some may argue that with the centre of Christian gravity having shifted to Africa, it is imprecise to talk of AR, as Christianity has itself become an African Religion (cf. Bediako 1992). How do we differentiate between Christianity and pre-Christian or pre-Muslim religious discourse in Africa?

<sup>2</sup> John Mbiti explains that, "we speak of African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribe), and each has its own religious system" (1969:1). This thought however can be contested on the basis that we have, in Africa and beyond, various Christian denominations although we do not refer to them as "Christianities." Africa may have one religion that is expressed in diversity since it possesses common elements among the various African tribal groupings.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase African Independent Churches, like African Traditional Religion, is a contested description, and as such is somewhat confusing. Nthamburi (1991, 1995) rejects it totally and sees it as being misleading. From whom are AICs independent? God or God's creation? To some, it has a negative connotation, as it gives the impression that these churches are necessarily independent from scriptural dictates and are therefore heretical. John Pobee, as with Nthamburi, prefers to call them African Instituted Churches (AIC) and sees the initials AIC as the designation of a genre of a number and variety of African expressions of the Christian faith (2002:12). He says that the description "African *Independent* Churches" signals that they are independent in their origin and organisation, "though since the historic churches founded by missionaries in Africa are at least juridically independent from their mother churches, this description is somewhat confusing" (2002:12). It would thus seem best that the abbreviation AIC stand for either the African Initiated Churches or the African Instituted Churches or even the African Indigenous Churches.

Ethiopian Orthodox Church also traces its history to Old Testament times. Both its ecclesiology and its liturgy are characteristically African, manifesting many affinities with the African Instituted Churches despite its very long history (2003:113).

For Mugambi, the terms “Africa” and “African” should be interpreted ideologically, rather than racially (2003:113). This is however a revision of his earlier works (before 1990) where in his book, *African Christian Theology*, 1989; he almost excludes the non-black Africans from articulating African theology. In so doing, Mugambi appears to be saying “in adopting the new paradigm of reconstruction, we in Africa and beyond must redefine ourselves in the new dispensation, as we must now see our diversity as strength rather than as a weakness.” He thus states:

At the beginning of the third millennium, it is important to strongly affirm that (the) African identity transcends race and religion. While it is true that the continent is the native home of one large community with numerous representatives in the Diaspora scattered throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas, it is also true that there are cultural minorities who have made their home in the continent and interacted with their voluntary and involuntary hosts. The rich diversity of African culture and identity may become the salvation of the human race in the third millennium (2003:112f).

Mugambi is alluding to a situation as in South Africa following the demise of Apartheid where there are Black-Africans, Indo-Africans, Euro-Africans and so on. Some South Africans would refer to this as the “rainbow nation,” that is, a nation where all colours of Africa and beyond have congregated. In such scenarios, there are Africans who are coloureds, Dutch in origin, British in origin, Indian in origin and of course, the vast majority being Black South Africans. In such circumstances, the “cultural minorities who have made their home in the continent and interacted with their voluntary and involuntary hosts” are also Africans in the sense that they have made Africa their new home.

This is reminiscent of the situation in North America where former African slaves remained after the demise of slave trade. They are today referred to as African-Americans. Here, Mugambi is following in the footsteps of the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwame Appiah, who scoffs at such notions of a united, homogeneous Africa and African identity and what he calls racist Pan Africanism, declaring that Africa is like “my father’s house in which there are many mansions” – which simply means that there are many ways of being an African (Appiah 1992). Likewise, the South African theologian Tinyiko Maluleke seems to build on this viewpoint when he “maintains that you are an African if you so claim”



(West 2005:3). Sipho Mtetwa partially agrees with Maluleke and Mugambi but insists that in addition to this self-claim, there is need for “your black neighbours, who own the place where you have settled to proclaim it” (: 3).

The post-liberation paradigmatic definition of who constitutes an African complicates the question. For does one become an African by simply deciding to make Africa his or her new home? What then makes a person authentically African? Suppose an alien army attacks the continent and eliminates all the people of Africa (as colonialism invaded Africa) and then occupies Africa. Would we call them Africans even if they came from China? In making his post liberation definition, Mugambi appears to avoid the hard question as to who is an African in the light of ever-changing continental and global scenarios.

Apart from cultural factors, geographical factors also contribute to the diversity of Africa. As Mugambi (2003:112) says, “Africa” was the name of province covering the present-day Tunisia, and sometimes referred to the entire region adjoining the Southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. In our current context, Africa, which is constituted by fifty four Nation States, “has an area of about eleven and a half million square miles,” a population of more than seven hundred million and “ethnic identity comprising more than one thousand groups”<sup>4</sup> (Mugambi 1989b: 3). As Mugambi further states, it would be idealistic to suppose that in such an outsized continent, with so many people, there are no differences. The fact is that there are “many distinguishing differences between the ethnic groups” (: 3).

The diversity of the African people is further compounded by the history of the colonial experience in each particular African Nation State. Hence we have Lusophone Africa, Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, and Arabphone Africa. Added to this, we have South Africa and Namibia who have been under Afrikaans control from 1948-1994. This creates a diversity of peoples within continental Africa as different powers had different ways of orienting their subjects (see Mugambi 1989b: 4). The Arab slave traders, for

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<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the population of African peoples has increased measurably to about 800 million by 2006.

example, in the East Coast of Africa intermarried with the local inhabitants and produced the Swahili people.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from colonial history, the emigrational patterns of the people of Africa from one region to another also contribute to the diversity of Africa. For example, while colonialists partitioned Africa following the Berlin Conference of 1884/5, dividing the continent in various Nation States under European control, the internal rivalries and warfare amongst African people also contributed to the current diversity that defines the Africa of today. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in the Maasai who were in Kenya and Tanzania; the Luo in Uganda, Kenya and Sudan; the Chewa in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia and so forth (see Nthamburi 1991:39). On the other hand, following the Zulu wars of the nineteenth century saw the Nguni peoples migrate from South Africa to Malawi, Zambia, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania.<sup>6</sup>

The above analysis shows that even within one particular African State, there is cultural plurality due to the migrations and interactions of various communities. Mbiti in his book, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), contends that within African religiosity, there are various religions, which are expressed differently despite sharing some commonalities. His view of "African religions" has however been contested on the grounds that Africa traditionally has only one religious faith, namely ATR which is expressed diversely by various communities living in Africa just as Christianity is expressed differently by various practitioners of the Christian faith.

Mugambi (1989b: 4) recognises another facet of African diversity through the existence of linguistic groups. He borrows from language analysts, contending that Africa's population may be grouped into clusters according to similarities in the linguistic structures of their mother tongue. From the above discussion, it is apparent that Africa is dissimilar in terms of ideas, backgrounds, customs, languages, environment, and in its histories. Mugambi laments that the invention and propagation of the myth of African homogeneity by, "European and North American propagandists – is partly responsible for the stagnation in African thought, in social innovation, in technological inventiveness" and for the religious

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<sup>5</sup> This is reminiscent of the situation in South Africa where the sexual engagements between Blacks and Whites produced the so-called Coloured race of peoples.

<sup>6</sup> King Shaka was a military genius of the nineteenth century who believed in conquering the whole of Africa he would ensure that the whole of Africa spoke the Zulu language.

imitation of European and American missionaries "by African converts, leading to a degradation of African cultural and religious values" (1989b: 5).

In today's Africa, influenced as it is by globalisation, scientific advancements and political ideologies it is important to ask, How African is African? How indigenous is indigenous? How traditional is traditional? Africa has to acknowledge the changing scenarios within the framework of its continental plurality. It is within this debate that Mugambi's proposal for a change of theological paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, can best be assessed.

African theology is done within a plural context; and in view of this, if it (African theology) is to serve towards the coherence and peace of African society, then it has to become dialectical and dialogical. In view of this, the question of developing the exact contours of the dialectic and the dialogue remains an important task. According to Gabriel Setiloane, the task of African theology is to grapple seriously with the central question of Christology, namely, who is Jesus in the context of pluralism? How did he become the supreme human manifestation of divinity, the Messiah of Judaism, and the Christos of Hellenistic faith? (Setiloane 1991:12). The question of the divinity of Christ is clearly a contentious issue, and in particular the terminologies of the "finality" and "absoluteness" of Christ. I believe African theology has yet to address the uniqueness or centrality of Christ, even though Mugambi appears keen to draw his concepts from the Hebrew bible.

John Pobee appreciates African diversity as a positive factor in African theology when he states:

This fact of pluralism in society, not least in African society, appears to be part of the divine economy. First, the historical nature of revelation implies a pluralistic situation. Second, the whole theology of love operating through human life implies pluralism, because love can be accepted only freely and not by imposition. Freedom and the possibility of choice and variety go together. Third, the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 2:1-9) affirms pluralism as part of God's economy for the World (Pobee 1997:24).

Pobee notes the distinctive marks that make a black African appear different from a Euro-African (referring to a non-black African who has made Africa his or her new home). Hence, he can state:

Nevertheless, one would still maintain there is a sense in which an African (*read a black person*)<sup>7</sup> is marked off from the Asian or the European or the American. There is a certain Africanness about the culture and religious beliefs and practices which can be so recognised. Only let us consciously find out how and to what extent African countries and African people have changed, lest we waste time preparing to evangelise the Africa of 1800, which no longer exists (Pobee 1997:24).

Even within the field of theology, one expects to find a plurality of African theologies rather than one modality of African theology that purports to address all conditions of *homo Africanus*.<sup>8</sup> It is for this reason that we have addressed the African theologies of liberation as African theology, African Women's theology and Black theology of South Africa (see, Chapter 4).

This diversity makes the task of doing theology more difficult. It calls for careful correlations and assessments in the quest for an authentic theology that will speak to the particular conditions of *homo Africanus* effectively. It is for that reason that this study wishes to assess Mugambi's call for a change of paradigm in African theology, from liberation to reconstruction. The study is cautious with the difficulty or complexity that has been caused by the presence of diversity in Africa. This point is clearly spelt out by Musimbi Kanyoro with regard to African women's theology when she delivered her keynote speech to the Pan-African Conference of The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (*Hereafter, Circle*) when she said:

From the beginning, The Circle's Concerns have been multi-religious, reflective of the religious plurality of our continent. Thus, The Circle also seeks to promote a dialogical approach to religious and cultural tensions in Africa by practically working together with all women who are deeply concerned for peace, justice, equality and development of our continent ...we are professors, lecturers, students, pastors, church workers, medical and legal experts. We come from all walks of life, but we are united by being concerned with theology on this continent (Kanyoro 1997:10f).

### 3.1.2. Homogeneity

Another aspect that helps to address the question on, what is African, is that of African homogeneity. Even though Africa possesses a rich diversity, it must not be used to

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<sup>7</sup> The italicised words in brackets are my own words for the purpose of emphasis.

<sup>8</sup> John Pobee (1977:23) explains *Homo Africanus* as a multi-headed hydra, in much the same way that *Homo sapiens* are a multi-headed hydra. Hydra refers to a mythological sea-monster with many heads which grew again if cut off ('hydra-headed' thus means self-perpetuating or difficult to destroy). Thus, *homo Africanus* of 2006 is different from *homo Africanus* of 1895, as the scientific revolution over the last 100 years has changed the world.

overlook the reality of, and aspiration for, homogeneity in the African experience (Mugambi 1989b: 5).

The homogeneity of Africa has been identified through various sociological and cultural factors, which are peculiar to Africa. This is what Pobee (1997:24) refers to when he says that there are certain Africaness about the culture and religious beliefs and practices, which can be clearly recognised. In other words, there are certain traits that make an African distinct from an American, a European, or an Asian. Mugambi, (1989b: 5) points out the idea of family and kinship as social institutions that have continued to hold an important place in Africa. He further details the concept of the family in Africa, including relationships, which extend far beyond the "nuclear family" of father, mother and their children. Unlike European singularity, the clan "is the family and most Africans still think of themselves in the context of this extended relationship" (Mugambi 1989b: 5). Mugambi however fails to see the importance of the concept of hospitality, which is unique to Africa, especially when a comparative study of the concept is done.

Mugambi (1989b: 6) quotes Walter Rodney who emphasizes that what has commonly characterized Africa in "recent history is its political and economic exploitation." Writing in 1972, during the Cold War, Rodney was alluding to how Europe was "continuously under developing Africa." Curiously, Africa is still marginalised in the New World Order, as research has shown. For example, Neo-colonialism, which the New Oxford Dictionary defines as "the use of economic, political, cultural or other pressures to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies," remains a strong feature of the New World Order. Whereas Britain, France, Spain and Portugal were the main perpetrators of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the United States of America has emerged as probably the largest neo-colonisers through the wholesale export of Western culture, technological trends and trans-national corporations, the threat of social reconstruction remains. This, ironically, unites Africa in defeat, in its quest for identity and empowerment within socio-cultural domains.

Maluleke describes the mix that constitutes the New World Order as including:

The disintegration of the USSR, with its numerous direct and indirect consequences, the demise of apartheid, the reunification of Germany, the moves to create a 'unitary' Europe, and the multiplication of 'democratic' governments in several Third World Countries (1996a: 38).

Similarly, Laurent Magesa (2000:158) captures the main feature of globalisation, which is commonly used to capture the essence of the New World Order, as being Western domination, characterised by “Euro-American ethnocentrism and dominance,” a phenomenon which has a huge impact upon Africa. With regard to globalisation, Oduyoye (2001:19) laments “the replacement of cross-continent slavery with keeping Africans in Africa to slave for the building of European economies.” She says, “with globalisation, Africa’s economic marginalisation seems complete.” For the “only way of survival offered to the people of the continent is to continue to use their natural resources to benefit Europe.” Oduyoye’s analysis is echoed by Magesa (2000:152) when he illustrates this view by drawing from Africa’s enormous debt crisis, which forces African countries to submit to the will of its mainly Western creditors. The result, says Magesa (2000:152), “are chains of poverty and dependency reminiscent of slavery and colonialism.” These views parallel Mbiti’s observation on the “rapid revolution” that is changing the rhythm of Africa:

Without warning and without physical or psychological preparation, Africa has been invaded by a world revolution. Now a new and rapid rhythm is beating from the drums of science and technology, modern communications and mass media, schools and universities, cities and towns. Nothing can halt this rhythm or slow down its rapid tempo. The man (sic) of Africa must get up and dance, for better or for worse, on the arena of world drama. His (sic) image of himself (sic) and of the universe is disrupted and must make room for the changing ‘universal’ and not simply ‘tribal’ man (sic) (1969: 216).

With regard to the “return” of Christianity to Africa in the light of this “revolution,” Mbiti can state:

Christianity from western Europe and north America has come to Africa, not simply carrying the Gospel of the New Testament, but as a complex phenomenon made up of western culture, politics, science, technology, medicine, schools and new methods of conquering nature. The Gospel by its very nature is revolutionary; but Christianity in its modern return to Africa is the main carrier of all the elements of this world revolution (1969: 217).

Within these analyses, we realise that African homogeneity is, to a certain extent, a product of wrong purposes and wrong motives. In this view, one may feel duty bound to question whether there is a genuine homogeneity after all. In other words, is there any genuine theo-social homogeneity within Africa? If the forces of neo-colonialism were completely erased, would we still talk of African homogeneity? What is the “Africannes” that Pobee (1997:24) talks about? Do we have African homogeneity without foreign attachment? Is Africa united in defeat?

Mugambi's (2003:113) contention that Africa's cultural diversity has been exaggerated at the expense of its cultural unity can be explained by addressing the *Ubuntu* philosophy, which, in my considered opinion, best describes African homogeneity. Augustine Shutte (2001:9) observes that the concept of *Ubuntu*, (which is a Zulu word for humanness), was developed over many centuries within traditional African culture, a culture which was pre-literate, pre-scientific and pre-industrial. *Ubuntu* was thus originally expressed in the songs, stories, customs and institutions of the African people. As will be demonstrated, in this section, *Ubuntu* is an expression that shows the essence of African culture, a culture which is initially perceived as in pure unadulterated form, untarnished by Western cultural "corruption" or market economical drives and so on.

*Ubuntu* is a Zulu and Xhosa word for humanness and encompasses all that makes one human; in Setswana it is *botho*; in Shona *unhu*, in Ndebele *ubuntu*; Venda *vhuthu*; Kikuyu *umundu*; and in Kiswahili *utu*, to name a few other African language variations. A related Swahili concept *Ujamaa* (familiness) was translated into a political philosophy by Julius Nyerere during his presidency (1961-1985) (Olson 1991: 275). Often, *Ubuntu* is described in a broad way that embraces human life in an existential way. In particular,

*Ubuntu* includes all the qualities and traits which go into making a person fully human and include the willingness and ability to respond positively to the Creator (Baartman 1980: 77).

As an African philosophy, *Ubuntu* expresses the African sense of community. That is, instead of, "I think, therefore, I exist" (*cogito ergo sum*) of the French Philosopher Rene Descartes, the African asserts "I am because we are," or "I am related, therefore, I am" (*cognatus ergo sum*) (cf. Gathogo 2001:21). This compares with Mbiti's summary of the philosophy underlying the African way of life thus: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (1969: 108). The Akan of Ghana would say, "I belong by blood relationship; therefore I am" (Healey and Sybertz 1996: 62). Indeed, this parallels with the concretisation of the Being (*Sein*) as Being-with in the "*Dasein*" Analytic in Martin Heidegger's Philosophy of Being (Heidegger 1993:117-125).

Mbiti appears to be building on the *Ubuntu* philosophy when he writes:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his (or her) own being, his (or her) own duties, his (or her) privileges and responsibilities towards himself (or herself) and towards other people. When he (or she) suffers, he (or she) does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he (or she) rejoices, he (or she) rejoices not alone but with his (or her) kinsmen (or

kinswomen), his (or her) neighbours and his (or her) relatives whether dead or living. When he (or she) married, he (or she) is not alone; neither does the wife (or husband) 'belong' to him (or her) alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen (or kinswomen), even if they bear only their father's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual (1969: 108).

The strength of *Ubuntu*, as an African philosophy, in our modern African society, is seen in Shutte's contention that since some "of the old customs would be a betrayal" (Shutte 2001:10) to the spirit of *Ubuntu* in our contemporary society, it is important for us (in Africa) to find a way of living *Ubuntu* in a society where the dominant cultures are both European and African; and where many other cultures from other parts of the world exist together. And in view of this, it is worthwhile to consider that some of the customs that can be a betrayal today includes the saying that "we are the people and others (referring to other communities) are not." It would amount to adding an insult to an injury if black Africans target one another alongside ethnic lines. Similarly, there is a need to acknowledge that Africa is like "my father's house in which there are many mansions" (*cf.* John 14) – which simply means that Africa is a home for various categories of God's children who ought to appreciate one another. Failure to acknowledge this reality would encourage unnecessary and uncalled-for tensions. By acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of the racial or the ethnic realities of Africa, Africa would prove to be the shining star of the world as it would set good examples of peaceful co-existence, especially in the era of globalisation.

As a spiritual foundation of African societies, *Ubuntu* creates a unifying vision or worldview enshrined in the Zulu Maxim *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte 1993:46). This *Ubuntu* concept is also found in other African communities, even though there are different vocabularies and phrases that are used to describe it. It will suffice to illustrate through a few examples. The Kikuyu idiom, which says, *Mũndũ nĩ mũndũ nĩ ũndũ wa andũ*, means that, "a human being is a person because of the other people." The Swahili have: *Mtu ni watu* which means that: "a person is a person because of other persons." The same can be said of the Sotho idiom, which says, *Mothe ke motho ka batho* with a similar translation to those of other African communities.<sup>9</sup> This African aphorism articulates a basic respect and compassion for

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<sup>9</sup> John Mbiti (1969: 108) builds on this theme when he contends that, "to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community."



others. It can be interpreted both as a factual description and as a rule of conduct or social ethic. It describes human beings as “being-with-others” and prescribes what “being-with-others” should be all about. As such, *Ubuntu* has a certain African-ness and religious commitment in the welfare of fellow human beings that is manifestly African in essence. Indeed, while Western humanisms tend to underestimate or even deny the importance of religious beliefs, *Ubuntu* or African humanism is resiliently religious (Prinsloo 1995:4).

To the Westerner, the maxim “a person is a person through other persons” has no obvious religious connotation. It can simply be interpreted as a general appeal to treat others with respect and decency. The maxim, however, has a deep religious meaning within the African tradition (Shutte 2001:10). When Julius Nyerere coined his *Ujamaa* concept (from *Jamii* - meaning family), he was talking from the perspective of *Ubuntu*. He saw Africa as one family and the whole world as an extended family. In this same spirit, the entire clan is seen as a family. As Mugambi writes, “most Africans still think of themselves in the context of this extended relationship” (1989b: 5).

Another distinctive quality of the *Ubuntu* philosophy is the African emphasis on consensus. In other words, *Ubuntu* underscores the importance of agreement or consensus. Indeed, African traditional culture has, seemingly, an almost infinite capacity for the pursuit of consensus and reconciliation (Teffo 1994:4). Democracy in the African sense does not simply refer to majority rule, since it operates in the form of discussions geared towards reaching consensus (*cf.* Busia 1967:28). This view is clearly captured by Mugambi when he writes that, “the traditional court would appreciate the views of every participant, and weigh the opinions of everyone irrespective of social status” (1995:132). This agrees with admonition of Jesus, to treat one another equally regardless of social standing (*cf.* Matt. 23, Matt. 6:1-4). Equally, decisions are reached through consensus, as there is no voting. Whenever there are “irreconcilable difference, decision is postponed until a consensus emerges” (Mugambi 1995:132). Consensus building rather than dividing the people along the lines of “winners vs. losers” is expressed well in Kikuyu, *twĩ hamwe* (‘we are together’); Swahili, *tuko pamoja* (‘we are together’); *Simunye* (‘we are one’) and slogans such as “an injury to one is an injury to all” (see Broodryk 1997:5 - 9).

Despite *Ubuntu*'s articulation of important values such as respect, human dignity and compassion, it can however be exploited to enforce group solidarity and therefore fail to

safeguard the rights and opinions of individuals and the minority (although this is a Western concept). True *Ubuntu* requires an authentic respect for individual rights and values and an honest appreciation of diversities amongst people. Whatever the argument, *Ubuntu*, best illustrates the African homogeneity which can be exploited for the good of the African church in the twenty-first century.

*Ubuntu*, as Teffo (1994a) rightly argues, pervasively serves as a cohesive moral value in the face of adversity. For although the policy of apartheid greatly damaged the overwhelming majority of black South Africans:

There is no lust for vengeance, no apocalyptic retribution...A yearning for justice, yes, and for release from poverty and oppression, but no dream of themselves becoming the persecutors, of turning the tables of apartheid on White South Africans...The ethos of *Ubuntu*...is one single gift that African philosophy can bequeath on other philosophies of the world (Teffo 1994a: 5).

Maphisa agrees with Teffo when he states that South Africans are slowly re-discovering their common humanity:

Gone are the days when people were stripped of their dignity (*ubuntu*) through harsh laws: Gone are the days when people had to use *ubulwane* (that is, animal like behaviour) to uphold or reinforce those laws. I suggest that the transformation of an apartheid South Africa into a democracy is a re-discovery of *ubuntu* (Maphisa 1994:8).

As part of Africa's essential cultural heritage, *Ubuntu* is clearly in need of revitalisation in the hearts and minds of African people generally, so that its ethos can be truly the "one single gift that African philosophy can bequeath on other philosophies of the world" (Teffo 1994:5). An acknowledgement that every culture has its dark and dangerous side as well helps the *Ubuntu* philosophy today to absorb the strength of the European cultural emphasis on freedom in the individual idea of choice; while at the same time build on the strength of the African cultural emphasis on the idea of communality – that is, "persons depend on other persons to be persons." In turn, both African and European cultural emphasis should seek to learn from Christ's ideal hospitality which goes beyond race, ethnic, status, gender, area of origin or any prejudice (Luke 10:29; 10; 27; Mark 12:31). This acknowledgement helps in producing a synthesis that is true to the ideal way of modern living.

On the other hand, it is critical to underline the fact that in our modern times, *Ubuntu* is undermined by the violent ethnic and political conflicts that have plagued tropical Africa.

In view of this, application of the philosophy of *Ubuntu* to the South African situation may look too abstract or rather idealistic in the sense that it may be seen as if it has portrayed a heaven-on-earth kind of situation. For if such philosophy is applicable, how can one explain the cases of rape, robbery and insecurity in South Africa? How can one explain the re-emerging negative effect of ethnic nationalisms (as was, at one time, propounded by Mongosuthu Buthelezi of Inkatha Freedom Party in the 1990s and its consequent fundamentalist attitude) in the political domain even after it had died with the demise of apartheid? And even within the rest of Africa, how can one explain the spirit of *Ubuntu* amidst the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the religious clashes between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria, the current Somalia conflict, the Liberian genocide, the political assassinations in the post-colonial Africa and tribalism which is the single major ideological threat facing Africa following the demise of apartheid? In a continent, plagued by war, hunger, genocide and disease, can *Ubuntu* be seen as the panacea for all these challenges? Conversely, it can be argued that these concerns can be addressed effectively by first adhering, strictly, to the ancient ideals of African hospitality, which portrays every "neighbour" as part of the extended family, and hence treats him or her with compassion and understanding - a phenomenon that is compatible with Christ's hospitality, as can be demonstrated in the Christian Testament. .

Nevertheless, from Mugambi's post-liberation works, it is clear that the new definition of what constitutes Africa and/or an African goes beyond race, creed, gender, ethnicity or nationality and possesses a commonality of spirit for all the peoples in Africa. It works towards the noble goal of building and rebuilding Africa for the present generation, and those to come. It is therefore a continent where theo-social prejudice is denied room to define Africa, a continent where people of all walks of life are called upon to rebuild the wall, as was in the case of Nehemiah (2:18).

### **3.2. What is theology?**

Mugambi (1989b: 7) traces the meaning of theology from its two Greek nouns, *Theos* and *logos*. He argues that the link between these two nouns may be easily noticed in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning was the WORD (*logos*), and the Word was with GOD (*Theos*), and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Mugambi defines theology as a systematic discourse about God, a discourse which can be expressed contextually in Europe, Africa or elsewhere. Mugambi's definition finds its parallelism in Fashole-Luke's

definition that theology is a discourse about God, “a study of God, sometimes referred to as a science.” He goes on to say, “Any ‘God-talk,’ any effort to speak about our understanding of God is theology” (Fashole-Luke 1974a: 100).

Mugambi contrasts theology and philosophy by arguing that theology presupposes revelation and “belief in absolute truth as the last justification for all explanations” while philosophy presupposes human reason as the “fundamental court of appeal in the explanation of mysteries and paradoxes” (1989b: 7). He goes on to argue that reason may be used in theology to explain some aspects of religious belief, but when reason fails to offer a convincing explanation, a theologian may conclude that God knows or “it is the will of God.” In a similar situation, Mugambi argues, a philosopher would simply conclude that he or she does not know or simply admits that no answer is available now. For him, theology implies that we “start from a given truth” towards theological articulation which will serve to interpret, elucidate or unveil. On the other hand, philosophy starts with presuppositions and thereby seeks to “help us to find out what truth is, so that truth is not the starting point, but the aim” (Mugambi 1989b:8). Mugambi’s views agree with Roubiczek, who, in his analysis of existentialism argues that reason is not absolute but limited and that belief in absolute reason is unreasonable (1966: 1-17). This calls us to find ways of thinking that can assist with day-to-day problems.

Mugambi offers a classic definition of theology as the “systematic articulation of human response to revelation within a particular situation and context” (1995: 19). He explains that each part of the definition, “is loaded and can be expanded in a whole book” as it contains several important implications (1995:19). Among these are that, theology must not be associated with literacy or high academic learning “even though such skills may greatly enhance theological expression.” Rather, Mugambi associates theology with systematic reflection and articulation. Hence, as he says, there are good theologians who have never published. Among them, he explains, is Socrates, Jesus of Nazareth, Siddharta the Buddha and Muhammad. He goes on to “reconstruct” the traditional understanding of theology by stressing that in Africa, “there are numerous excellent theologians who cannot read and write” (1995:20). By this, he means that theology is done in every religion. In other words, every religious group has its own theology.

Mugambi's views, above, which appear in his post-liberation works, however, put us into problem especially when he talks of "excellent theologians" in Africa. While this may be true, one wonders what constitutes excellence. Is Mugambi trying to equate Jesus with Siddharta the Buddha and Muhammad? What of Christian evangelicals<sup>10</sup> to which the present researcher belongs? Would they find it theologically correct to make a comparison between Jesus with other religious leaders, and how would they tackle the problem about the divinity of Jesus? If reconstruction involves making all religions and their leaders equal, then a further revision on the concept of reconstruction may be needed – as some African evangelicals may find it hard to subscribe to such a view. On the other hand, the Christian doctrinal affirmation that Jesus is truly human and truly divine (see Macquarrie 1966; 1979) may help us to see Jesus' relationship with Socrates, Siddharta the Buddha and Muhammad among other religious leaders.

Mugambi's classical definition (on theology) also implies that theology cannot be done in a cultural vacuum. Rather, it is always done in a cultural context. The work of a theologian, therefore, becomes that of responding to questions, which are (always) culturally conditioned. Mugambi cautions that, "when a theologian tries to answer questions which are not relevant to the people amongst whom he [*sic*] lives, the theology thus articulated is deemed irrelevant, and no one bothers or cares about the concerns of such a theologian" (Mugambi 1995:20). He goes on to cite the case of the Acoli language Bible translation that was done by white missionaries, which was evidently done with little or no regard to Acoli cultural conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Mugambi's definition implies that there is no possibility of a universal theologian, as theology is the "systematic articulation of human response to revelation within a particular situation and context" (1995:19-20). This view is shared by Kwesi Dickson (1984:4-5)

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony Balcomb explains that Evangelicalism is "broadly understood as that brand of Christianity, emerging from the Pietist stream of the Reformed tradition"; and whose emphasis is on "salvation through personal encounter with the risen Christ" (2004:146). As Balcomb further explains, this is intended to include "both Pentecostal/Charismatic movements" as well as those who do not identify with these movements but those "who believe in the need for personal salvation and Christian discipleship through adherence to scripture" (2004:146). It may also include a number of people in the "mainline" or ecumenical churches such as the Anglican Church, the Lutheran, the Methodist, the Roman Catholics and so forth (2004:146). As has been admitted elsewhere, the researcher has approached the entire study from an Evangelical theological perspective.

<sup>11</sup> According to the writings of the Acoli writer, Okot p'Bitek, the missionaries asked the Acoli people irrelevant questions, and thus the Acoli gave inappropriate answers to inappropriate questions. This is what makes p'Bitek state that the Bible in Acoli is at many vital points, meaningless (Mugambi 1995:20).

who rejects the idea of the “catholicity” of theology. In Mugambi’s view, a theologian must always be parochial in the sense that he or she must reflect from his or her own parochial experience. Mugambi does not however deny that there are theologians who are more conscious of the universality of theology than others are. Such theologians, Mugambi argues, may result from their encounter with other cultures. In this view, Mugambi encourages cross-cultural interactions amongst theologians as a way of creating theological consciousness amongst various theologians. By so doing, this will save theologians from “cultural arrogance” (Mugambi 1995:20). Unfortunately, this appears to undermine his view on “excellent theologians who have never written.” For how can such theologians be classified as excellent without making contact with outsiders from their localities, let alone having an exposure through literacy?

Mugambi’s definition also implies that it is inappropriate to associate theology exclusively with Christianity; hence, in his view there are theologians who belong to other religious traditions apart from Christianity (1995:20). Mugambi thus calls upon the Christian academy to avoid the arrogance of thinking that only Christians can theologise. Seen from this perspective, theologians ought to recognise the gifts of one another and appreciate one another’s contribution for the glory of God’s kingdom. As Paul the Apostle writes in Rom. 8: 1, those who are in Christ Jesus (regardless of their denominational orientation) need no condemnation.

Mugambi’s definition of theology has an ecumenical appeal in that it implies that theologians from the different Christian denominations and persuasions need not compete. Rather, they ought to strengthen one another as they appreciate the different gifts of the Holy Spirit that God has bestowed upon each of them (see, 1 Corinthians 12). In their denominational arrogance and pride, theologians often scandalize and fragment the body of Christ making it impossible for it to be referred to as the true body of Christ. Failure to have an ecumenical appeal in theologising is to go against Christ’s caution that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Matt. 12:25). It is important to note that Mugambi’s “inclusive” definition of theology appears in his post-liberation works.

Mugambi’s understanding of theology, therefore, helps to open our minds as we address his understanding of African theology. This sub-section is crucial to understanding the stress that Mugambi places on the process of reconstruction, where he posits moving from

old frontiers (characterised by quests such as, the need to spread the Christian faith from one geographical region to another, the agenda of replacing “primitive” cultures with the “higher” or “civilized” cultures of the foreign missionaries, and the missionary introduction of new rituals to replace the rituals of the converts) to that of new ones (Mugambi 1991:39-40). For Mugambi, such new frontiers require fresh definitions of theology, dialogue and co-operation between theologians and scientists, and the church taking science and technology seriously.

This section, has therefore prepared us to address his thoughts upon what African theology is. As in the previous section, the discussion will further help us locate Mugambi’s place in African theology. In other words, does he have any unique contribution in African theology? Does he fit in the developmental trends in African theology?

### **3.3. What is African theology (AT)?**

Mugambi offers two dimensions of meaning to the phrase “African Theology.” To an extent, he cautions on the need for clarity. He feels that the phrase “African theology” is too general and therefore needs thorough analysis. This subsection therefore will attempt to analyse African theology as both a theology of ATR and as an ACT.

#### **3.3.1. African theology as African Traditional Religion (ATR)**

According to Mugambi, African theology refers to “the discourse, which Africans conducted among themselves before their contact with and influence, by Christians and Muslims” (Mugambi 1989b: 9). This view agrees with Nthamburi (1991:3) who stresses that in strict terms, “African theology means the theology of African traditional religion.” Theology therefore comes from traditional reflection on the existence of African peoples and their beliefs.

J K Agbeti, finds agreement with Nthamburi and Mugambi, when he writes that African theology is, “the expression of what African religions have been saying” (Agbeti quoted in Kato 1975:54). He further argues that it presupposes the validity of God’s direct revelation to the worshipper within African religions. Agbeti goes on to suggest that the material for African theology is not the bible, as in African Christian theology, but rather:

Materials about African religion are being collected and collated regionally. From these regional sources could grow a religion, which could be truly called African Religion. It will be from this source that an “African Theology” may be developed,

a theology which will critically systematize the traditional African experience of God and His [*sic*] relation with man [*sic*], of man [*sic*] and his [*sic*] relation with God, of the spiritual Universe of sin etc. (Kato 1975:54).

From this explanation, concerns may be raised to the effect that ATR cannot amount to African theology, whatever its elucidation, as it is not written, well analysed, or collated and is therefore not formally systematised.

Agbeti's contention creates further problems especially in relation to Mugambi's view on the excellence of non-Christian theologians; can there be any excellent theology or theologian outside Christianity? Are all religions equal?<sup>12</sup> Is Christianity a religion?<sup>13</sup> Religion, in the view of the present researcher, refers to ritual practices and beliefs in divinity or divinities without necessarily claiming special revelation, which only comes through the God of Christendom. In view of this, therefore, Christianity may not fit the description of "one among the various religious groups that we have in Africa," as Mugambi appears to point out, as it is a product of special revelation through Jesus Christ.

In the researcher's discussion with Douglass Wanjohi Waruta, the chairperson of the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, during the Association of Theological Institutes of Eastern Africa (*Hereafter*, ATIEA)

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<sup>12</sup> Again note that the researcher has approached this study from an Evangelical theological perspective, which holds that Christianity is not a religion but a way of life (*cf.* Gehman 1991; Adeyemo 1997; Parratt 1995).

<sup>13</sup> According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English, religion refers to "the belief and worship of a god or gods, or any such system of belief and worship." E B Taylor in his book, *Primitive Culture* (1871), gives a basic definition of religion as the "belief in spirit beings." Taylor held that "primitive" people considered every object to have its own soul, thus giving rise to countless spirits in the universe (Mbiti 1969:7). African religion can be described as an indigenous system of beliefs and practices integrated into the culture and worldviews of the African peoples (Mwakabana 1997:21-46). In spite of being diverse in its manifestations, it possesses common elements, which testify to its unity at continental level (1997:21-46). Mbiti builds on this strength when he states that it, "is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned" (1969:1). Mbiti's view on the influence of African religion on society agrees with Hans Küng when he refers to religion in general. He thus states, "There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions. And no peace among religions without greater dialogue among religions" (1991:xv). As Paul Knitter has said, nothing comes before people's religious identity and convictions. Hence, "if this identity is threatened, everything must be sacrificed or ventured in order to preserve it" (2005:30). This finds agreement with Paul Tillich when he asserts that, "Religion is our Ultimate Concern. Nothing is more ultimate" (2005:30). Every religion, according to many anthropologists and comparative scholars, makes the claim of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* 'outside one's own church or religion, there is no salvation' (: 30). With regard to Africa, the contention that religion is the axis around which life in Africa revolves gains credence in the work of the doyen of African theology, J S Mbiti, when he asserts that "Africans are notoriously religious" (Mbiti 1969:1). As Ezra Chitando has noted, this statement has become something of a truism in the study of religion in Africa (2005:271). Most African Christian theologians contend that *homo Africanus* is *homo religiosus*, an emphasis seen in the work of Mircea Eliade, when he says that the ideal human being operates within a religious framework and is thus essentially religious, hence the label *homo religiosus*.



Conference in April 1995, Waruta opposed the “western” critical view that the theology of ATR is not systematic. For him, African theology is systematic for it begins from the first rite of passage to the last, namely, birth, initiation, marriage and finally, death. He further argued that like in the prophesy of Jeremiah (31:31), on the new covenant, African theology does not necessarily need to be written in any scroll so as to qualify to be called theology. For Waruta, it is “written” in the hearts of men and women, upon trees, mountains, and in the entire general created cosmos that God lovingly made. No one therefore has an excuse to deny the existence of God in Africa as one can see the works of God through the general revelation through creation.<sup>14</sup> Waruta went on to stress that such a view is *theocentric* (centred on God) as opposed to the ACT, which is *christocentric* (centred on Christ). Its sources include oral narratives as found in animal stories narrated with the aim of counselling, challenging, rebuking, guiding or educating in the same way as the Christian sermon. Viewed in this light, a story about the greedy hyena in African theology, teaches the ethics of avoiding greed, corruption and other similar vices. Similarly, an oral narrative on the cunning hare teaches about the need to avoid insincerity. It is for this reason that animals or other objects are personified to communicate a particular message. Even though Mugambi is not explicit in this aspect, Waruta nevertheless finds acceptance in Mugambi’s works where he rightly acknowledges the theology of ATR as deserving serious attention (seen above in his two definitions).

Samuel Gakuhi Kibicho, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, takes this thought further when he says that African theology, which to him is the theology of ATR, did not have to await the God of the Christian Testament (or Hebrew bible) for fulfilment<sup>15</sup> (see, Kibicho 1978:370-88). That can be interpreted to mean that ATR was (or is) a fulfilled entity, similar to Christianity. For Kibicho, it did not have to await the God of Christianity for fulfilment, as it was not a preparation for Christianity (*praeparatio evangelica*).<sup>16</sup> In other words, Kibicho attempts to show the characteristic nature of a religion which makes the claim that *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, (‘outside one’s

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<sup>14</sup> Most African writers have advanced the view that God’s creation has been deemed sacred by the majority of African peoples from time immemorial, as it is believed to manifest God. For example, when the wind blows, an African will strengthen his or her faith in God in that, the very presence of wind demonstrates that the creation has an owner who makes it rejoice and praise the creator in various ways.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Kibicho confirmed this to me, June 6, 2005, when I met him in his campus office at the University of Nairobi.

<sup>16</sup> Prof. S Kibicho’s view agrees with Nokuzola Mndende’s assertion when she states, “I am writing from the perspective of a believer in and practitioner of African Religion. I am not a Christian. Christianity constitutes one but not the only way to God; there are many ways and African Religion is one of them” (2005:13).

own religion,' or even church), there is no salvation (Knitter 2005:30) - a view that differs sharply with the Protestant Reformation thesis of *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone) and *sola gratia* (salvation is by grace alone) or *sola fide* (salvation is by faith alone). Various African theologians hold the view that "the God of Africa is as good as the God of Christendom if not better" (Maluleke 2000b: 25). They include "John Gatu (who inaugurated the moratorium debate)... (Christian R.) Gabba<sup>17</sup> and (Gabriel) Setiloane" (Maluleke 2000b: 25). Interestingly, Mbiti has a different view from that of Kibicho. He holds that just as the Hebrew Bible had to await the Christian Testament; African Traditional Religion lacks completeness and salvation, and on its own can be seen only as "raw materials that prepared the ground for planting Christianity" (*cf.* Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2001:80). This discussion points to the difficulty of adequately defining the parameters of African theology. It also shows that Mugambi's contribution, in his quest for reconstruction of theology in Africa today, is crucial, especially against other African theologians who hold divergent views.

In his book, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, Mbiti identifies three areas of African theology today, namely, written theology, oral theology and symbolic theology (1986:46). Mbiti observes that, written theology is the privilege of a few persons who possess a substantial education and who commonly articulate their ideas in foreign languages. Concerning oral theology, Mbiti argues that it is produced by the masses through song, sermons, prayers, and conversation. For Mbiti, symbolic theology is that which is expressed in art, drama, symbol, ritual and dance.

Although Mbiti does not subscribe to the view that ATR amounts to African theology, his analysis can be interpreted by the proponents of African theology (as ATR), to mean that the ideal African theology is mainly oral and symbolic in nature, while African Christian theology consists mainly of written theology.

This section has therefore prepared us to look at other dimensions of understanding of African theology through the works of Jesse Mugambi. That is, African theology as Christian theology done by African Christians or as Christian theology done in Africa.

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<sup>17</sup> See also, Christian Gabba. "Man's Salvation: Its Nature and Meaning in African Traditional Religion" in Fashole-Luke et al. (eds.) *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings) 1978, 389-401.

### 3.3.2. African theology as African Christian theology (ACT)

The second dimension in Mugambi's understanding of African theology is that of viewing African theology as synonymous with African Christian theology. It is also the view of other theologians in African Christianity such as Kurewa, Mbiti, and Turner. Kurewa (1975:36) defines African theology as "the study that seeks to reflect upon and express the Christian faith in African thought forms and idioms as it is experienced in African Christian communities and always in dialogue with the rest of the Christendom." Seen in this light, African theology is Christian theology done by African Christians to make it relevant to the African context. It is an attempt at Africanising or contextualizing Christianity in Africa thereby giving it authenticity in the continent of Africa where Christianity is growing rapidly. By so doing, we take Mbiti's challenge:

Christianity has made a real claim on Africa...the question is: Has Africa made a real claim on Christianity? Christianity has Christianised Africa, but Africa has not Africanised Christianity (Mbiti quoted in Gehman 1987: ii).

In its liberating task, Mugambi (1989b: 10) explains that the Christian gospel ought to assist African Christians to live more abundantly as Africans (*cf.* John 10:10). In particular, they do not have to ascribe to the norms set by European and North American missionaries. He adds that Africans need not believe they are inferior to Europeans, North Americans or any other race. Rather, they should be able to testify as Charlotte Elliot sang:

Just as I am, without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou bidst me come to thee  
O Lamb of God, I come.

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Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind-  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yee, all I need, in Thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

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Just as I am, Thou wilt receive  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:  
Because thy promise I believe  
O Lamb of God, I come.<sup>18</sup>

Borrowing from the thought of James Cone (1971; 1970), Mugambi (1989b: 11), in his pre-liberation works, points out that the norm of African Christian theology cannot and should not be determined or defined by anyone else but Africans who have experienced the power of the Christian gospel. He goes on to argue that foreign missionaries and

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<sup>18</sup> C. Elliot, *Christian Praise* (London: Tyndale Press, 1957)

theologians cannot articulate African theology, as only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches. He therefore states:

Africans are the only people who can in the end define and articulate their priorities and experiences with regard to the Gospel of Jesus and to the other aspects of life. As Cone has passionately complained against the eagerness of White American theologians to define and articulate the religious experience of Black Americans, and has strongly underscored the fact that only Blacks can realistically and effectively define and articulate their religious experience (Mugambi 1989b: 111).

This introduces African theology as a theology of liberation. It should however be noted that Mugambi's contention that "foreign missionaries and theologians cannot articulate African theology as only the wearer of the shoe (who) knows where it pinches" was done before he began his reconstruction project where he now appears to invite everyone living in Africa to participate in theo-social reconstruction.

As we move towards the end of this sub-section, we take Mbiti's words seriously when he says, "there is no central point of reference to formulate an agreed definition of African theology" (2003:4). This view agrees with Mugambi's two-fold understanding of the phrase "African theology."

Significantly, Mbiti explains the development of African theology since its "inauguration" at Ibadan, Nigeria in 1966:

For a while, people spent more time and energy defining it than contributing to its content. Names used for it included: Adaptation Theology, African Christian Theology, African Narrative Theology, Black Theology, Christian Theology in Africa, Contextual Theology, cultural Theology, Incarnation Theology, Inculturation Theology, Indigenous Theology, Relevant Theology, Theologia Africana and many others. With time, more and more consensus settled on "African Theology" but the multiplication of names for it is far from over. Some people accepted it happily, while others did so reluctantly. Nevertheless, it became a "new" reality that had come to stay (Mbiti 2003:4).

In this study, the phrase "African theology" will be used to refer to that theological reflection and expression by African Christians that arises out of the philosophy of the African people and speaks to their relevant needs. The study considers the meanings of "African theology" and "African Christian theology" as congruent. As Samson Gitau describes:

African Christian theology (*read African theology*) should therefore be considered as a theology of selfhood. This position is grounded on two grounds. Firstly, it is in the recognition of the changed status of much of Africa, from colonial to the post-colonial era, and secondly, as a symbol of the desire of the church, in Africa to be in a position to present Christ as one who knows and understands the hopes, fears and aspirations of Africans (2000:142).

By "African theology," this present study considers it theology constructed in an African context based on the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as opposed to a theology based on the Islamic tradition. African hyphenated Christianity describes more accurately our self-identity (*cf.* Duraisingh 1979:97).

### **3.4. The genesis and development of African theology**

Mugambi does not appear to trace the genesis and development of African theology. Hence, a major concern of this study is to try to locate Mugambi's place within African theology. This will in turn provide us with a rich background that will help us to locate the concept of liberation and reconstruction in the current developmental trends of African theology.

Various schools of thought have been explored with regard to the genesis of African theology. Mugambi seems to favour the idea that African theology was born in 1958 following the Ibadan meeting of the All Africa Church Conference, which followed on from the Accra meeting of 1958 of the All Africa People's Conference:

In this continent, the All Africa People's Conference was hosted by Ghana at Accra in 1958, to formulate a strategy for enhancing African Unity. That secular conference paved the way for the Organization of African Unity, launched in 1963 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Likewise, in 1958, church leaders convened at Ibadan, Nigeria for the all Africa church conference. This meeting paved the way for the All Africa Conference of Churches, which was also launched in 1963 at Kampala, Uganda (1995:45).

Mugambi wonders, "What is the relationship between the secular Organization of African Unity, and the All Africa Conference of Churches?" (Mugambi 1995:45). The answer, he argues, is found in the fact that both are continental organisations that had a common purpose in enhancing unity amongst the people of Africa. African theology can be traced from these organisations as African Christians began to respond to African consciousness. However, it is important to note that the formation of these bodies had also been inspired by earlier bodies and conferences such as the Pan-Africanism and the African Nationalism<sup>19</sup> - as Nkrumah - the architect of the Accra meeting of 1958 had been greatly involved in earlier attempts. For Mugambi, the official launch in 1963 in Kampala, Uganda, of the All Africa Conference of Churches seems to be the ideal landmark from where we should base the modern developmental trends of African theology.

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<sup>19</sup> This will be discussed further in the section on the sources of African theology.

Nthamburi (1991:1) is explicit when he says that the emergency of the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) in 1963 “gave impetus to the quest for African theology.” He says that the first meeting, which was held in Kampala, clearly marked the historic beginnings of African theology. He goes on to explain that the first theological consultation in Africa, which was organised by the AACC, was convened in 1966. Its objective was to provide a platform to “African theologians to map out Christian theology for African people by drawing from the grassroots movements, African traditional beliefs and African cosmologies” (: 1). The result of this unique meeting was the publication of a book, edited by K A Dickson, and Paul Ellingworth, entitled *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (London: Lutterworth Press). The book highlights African traditional beliefs as the source of African theology (1991:2).

Mbiti, who contends that “African theology” is both Christian and African since it emanates from African Christians, argues that theology began in Africa during Apostolic times. It reaped bountiful harvests along the historical way (2003:1). He contends that it was launched in January 1966 at Immanuel College in Ibadan, Nigeria. Mbiti, whose views seem to strike a chord with both Nthamburi and Mugambi, emphasizes that he was one of the delegates in that meeting:

It was organised under the auspices of the All Africa Conference of Churches, and we were an ecumenical gathering – Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and Coptic Church. We came from all regions of our continent except the south, which was still under the unrelenting shackles of apartheid. Official participants were African and male,<sup>20</sup> plus a few guests from Britain, Europe and America with interpreters (into English and French). It was a great significance that we met for the first time on our own soil, with our own hoes, our own seeds and our own agenda. The theme of the consultation was “Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs” (2003:2).

Mbiti, who says the guns they heard in the early hours were from the first military *coup d'état* in Nigeria, explains that the Ibadan conference should be regarded as the first formal acknowledgment of African theology in modern times (2003:2), although the conference did not speak in such terms “nor did it actually use that terminology.” After the Ibadan meetings of 1966, the debate about African theology gained momentum, as critical and sceptical voices reacted against “African theology.” According to Mbiti (2003:3), the assault came mainly from international male delegates (no women spoke in those days!)

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<sup>20</sup> These included, E A Adeolu Adegbola (Nigeria), Samuel A Amissah (Ghana), Kwesi A. Dickson (Ghana), S N Ezeanya (Nigeria), E Bolaji Idowu (Nigeria), R Buana Kibongi (Congo-Brazzaville), John S Mbiti (Kenya), Vincent Mulago (Congo DR), Harry Sawyerr (Sierra Leone) and Swailem Sidhom (Egypt).

from North America and Europe, as well as expatriates working in church institutions in tropical Africa. Questions posed were sometimes ridden with scepticism or ridicule, "What is African theology? Can there be such a thing as African theology? Are there scholars producing such a theology?" (2003:3). Some Evangelical delegates attacked even the mention of African theology as being a heresy or anti-Christian. Overall, its advocates were seen as misleading Christians and hence dangerous to the Christian faith.

By the late 1960's and 1970's, there was a need to elaborate upon African theology. Consequently, articles addressing the issue appeared in periodicals and edited books. For example, Harry Sawyerr from Sierra Leone, a participant at the Ibadan consultation, wrote an article entitled, "What is African Theology?" in, *Africa Theological Journal*, Makumira, Usa River, Tanzania, Number 4, 1971, 7-24. Later, J K Agbeti wrote, "African Theology: What is it?" in, *Presence*, Nairobi, Kenya, No. 2, 1972, 5-8 in which he argued that the phrase "African Theology" should be confined to the theology of African Religion.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, Charles Nyamiti of Tanzania wrote his, *The Scope of African Theology* (Kampala: Gaba Publications, 1973) where he called for a broad conception of African theology and went on to point out the relevance of culture.

The explication of African theology by these theologians and others has shaped and reshaped African Theology, as we know it today. Hence, in Mbiti's book, *Concepts of God in Africa*, he endeavours to show that contrary to the Western misrepresentation of African beliefs, African peoples have a profound and explicit belief in God who is a supreme being and who controls their destiny. Similarly, his other book, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), Mbiti demonstrates how African people are notoriously religious, and shows how religion permeates all areas of their being.<sup>22</sup> These writings were an important development considering they appeared immediately following the Ibadan Conference of 1966. Soon after the Ibadan Conference, a few Universities cautiously introduced courses entitled, "African Theology" or something similar. These Universities include, the University of Ghana, Legon, at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, at

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<sup>21</sup> J K Agbeti's quest for an African theology has been dealt with in our earlier discussion.

<sup>22</sup> Mugambi cautions that Mbiti's insistence on Africans being notoriously religious needs further review (1995:141). For him, Mbiti should have rather said, "Africans are reputedly religious because there is nothing notorious about the religiosity of Africans."

Makerere University in Uganda and at the University of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (Mbiti 2003:5).<sup>23</sup>

In the 1971 Dar-es-Salaam Conference, issues on African theology were articulated particularly concerning its sources in black identity, cultural heritage and solidarity in liberation (Nthamburi 1991:2). The 1972 Makerere University in Uganda Conference is another important African theological meeting. Here efforts were made to articulate and define African theology. As a meeting of the academy, it ushered in African theology as an academic discipline to be studied in African Universities and theological institutions (1991:2).

In 1976, the Ecumenical Dialogue of majority-world theologians convened its meetings in Dar-es-Salaam. At this meeting, African theology was again discussed and articulated together with other majority-world theologies (see Nthamburi 1991:2). In 1977, African theology received a further impetus when, at the Ghana theological consultation, African theology was discussed in depth. From this consultation, a book edited by Appiah-Kubi and Torres appeared with the title, *African Theology en Route* (Mbiti 1986:46).<sup>24</sup> This book endeavours to show how African Christian theology must grow out of both the Christian heritage of Africa and African traditional heritage. Since then, there has been a wide range of published books and articles on African theology.

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<sup>23</sup> It is crucial to acknowledge that this list is according to John Mbiti. It may be limiting considering no survey was carried out.

<sup>24</sup> Other works, which have been published on African theology by African Christians, include John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (1979); Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Theology*, (1977); Aylward Shorter, *African Christian Spirituality* (1980). Others include, Gwinyai Muzorewa, *The Origins and Developments of African Theology* (1985). Other books that have contributed to the growth of African Theology are the works of John Mbiti, including his important, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (1986); Boulaga Eboussi, *Christianity without Fetishes* (1985) and Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (1986). Others include, J N K Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989); J N K Mugambi, *The Biblical basis for Evangelization* (1989); J N K Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989); J N K Mugambi, *Critiques of Christianity in African Literature* (1992); J N K Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), *Christianity and African Culture* and his more recent book, J N K Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003). In reading the above books, one realises that the motive of the authors was to develop an adequate theology, which reflects a genuine African understanding of the Christian faith. In other words, this is an ongoing process among African theologians, which seeks to demonstrate that a common theological thread connects African traditional religion and the Christian faith. African culture, thus, becomes crucial in the formulation of African theology. As Mugambi (1995:20) says, theology cannot be done in a cultural vacuum. It must respond to questions, which are always culturally conditioned.



As noted in our introduction, in 1989, at the end of the Cold War, Mugambi brought a new dimension to African theology by advocating a shift of theological emphasis from the liberation motif, modelled, as it was on Moses' statement to Pharaoh, "let my people go." Mugambi posited a move to the reconstructive motif, as modelled on Nehemiah in his rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. In other words, Mugambi felt that time had come for African theology to do away with its overemphasis on liberation and focus on the "Gospel of accommodation" considering that most African countries were now moving towards political freedom with South Africa in particular have disposed of the shackles of apartheid. This call for a new development in African theology appeared to divide practitioners of African theology down the middle<sup>25</sup> with some embracing the new suggestion as timely and brilliant; while others treating Mugambi's call with suspicion.<sup>26</sup> From the early 1990s, Mugambi has pushed the reconstruction agenda with great passion, culminating in various publications on a theology of reconstruction (see bibliography). This clearly shows that the quest for a shift of theological emphasis, from liberation to reconstruction, in African theology is a serious move. In view of this, it is important to address this proposal critically. Only then can we know the way forward with regard to the study of the African theology in the twenty-first century.

Having studied the meaning of African theology, its meanings and its developmental inclination, in the next sub-section we must address the question of the sources of African theology. Do the sources of African theology assist the study in locating Mugambi's place as a leading theologian in African theology? Do the sources of African theology agree with Mugambi's thinking in general?

### **3.5. Sources of African theology**

As mentioned above, Mugambi does not attempt a systematic analysis of the sources of African theology, although he implicitly refers to them. In order to locate his two concepts of liberation and reconstruction, it is important to dialogue with some of the sources of African theology especially as utilised in his work. This will further help us to locate him in African theology and to address the following questions: Who is Mugambi in African theology? Does he have any authority to recommend a change of theological framework in

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<sup>25</sup> This has been noted throughout study and especially in the first chapter.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that John Mbiti, the so-called father of African theology, has deliberately absented himself from this debate. As a result, Mbiti has seemingly refrained from publishing on the subject—at least so far! Alternatively, could it be that he is doing theological reconstruction quietly?

African theology? Does his theology agree with other African theologians on the sources of African theology? Is Mugambi's theology within the established understanding of the sources of African theology?

### **3.5.1. The Bible**

For Mugambi (1995:22), all Christian theology starts from the bible. As with Christian theology, African theology derives its understanding of the Christian message from "the experiences of those who have responded to revelation as expressed in the various books of the bible" (Mugambi 1995:22). This means theologians respond to the revelations that come through such biblical characters as Moses, Nehemiah, Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Paul. The various revelations to different people, at different times in history reveal that the Bible has a word for every occasion, situation and context in the history of the people of God (see, Mugambi 1989a: 92).

Mugambi is right when he places emphasis on the Bible being a library of books and not a single book. His caution on the danger of reading the Bible as a novel, "from Genesis to Revelation, or as a history textbook," is appropriate considering the facts of authorship, readership, dating and themes of the particular texts (see Mugambi 1989a: 92).

The bible's centrality in African theology is revealed in its wide translation, being "the most widely read book in tropical Africa" (Mugambi 1995:142). As Mugambi can state:

*The Bible is the most widely available book in both rural and urban areas. It can be regarded as the most influential book in Africa. The Bible is read at primary and secondary schools, in colleges and Universities, in Seminaries, during Worship Services, in fellowship meetings and in private devotion and meditation (1995:142).*

Borrowing heavily from Mbiti (1986), Mugambi explains that:

*Most Christians carry copies of the bible, or parts of it, everywhere they go, and read it when they have a little time to spare. Even when they do not have the Bible in their hands, they will refer to it as they talk and pray (1995:143).*

Mugambi's view on the centrality of the Bible in Christian theology agrees with other proponents of African theology such as Mbiti, Bediako, Turner, and Nthamburi among others. Turner (1965:14-77) gives a synopsis of the content of Bible preaching from the Aladura Independent Church of Nigeria. He contends that the most favourite Bible texts touch the life of the people. Themes include: deliverance, salvation, health, divine support,

endurance, self-denial loving one another and personal suffering. This confirmation of the centrality of the Bible in doing African theology shows how the Bible is seen to address every aspect of life, as it is seen as “the word of the Creator.”

The strength of Mugambi’s concern for the centrality of the Bible in African Christianity is enhanced by the fact that every effort is being made by the United Bible Societies and various national Bible Societies (Nthamburi 1991:34), to translate the scriptures into all 2100 African languages and dialects (Barrett 1982:12).

With regard to the Kikuyu of Kenya, and other African communities, the availability of the Bible in mother tongue languages provides for a rewarding interpretation of the Bible by local communities. As Karanja observes:

Kikuyu Christians showed considerable latitude in interpreting and applying the Bible from the time the scripture was available in their vernacular. Although the text of the Bible was fixed, its interpretation was not. The *athomi* (readers) used the Bible creatively to serve their pastoral, political and cultural needs. Pastors used it to promote morality and giving in the church. Politicians used it to create tribal consciousness; apologist for Kikuyu culture used it to affirm their own religion and culture. Indeed, Kikuyu creative use of the scripture demonstrates their ability to adopt and exploit western innovations (1999: 129).

The Conference of African Theologians held in Accra, Ghana in December 1977 underlined the pivotal role that the Bible plays as a source of African theology. In its final communiqué, the conference unequivocally stated that:

The Bible is the basic source of African theology, because it is the primary witness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture. The Bible is not simply an historical book about the people of Israel; through a re-reading of this Scripture in the social context of our struggle for our humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation. This divine word is not an abstract proposition but an advent in our lives, empowering us to continue in the fight for our full humanity (Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres 1985:192f).

With African theology essentially being a theology of emancipation, the Bible has been interpreted (in the African context) from the paradigm of liberation since the 1960s. That is, the Bible has been seen as proclaiming the Gospel of liberation to Africans. One can critically argue that the Bible in the African theological context has been interpreted to enable liberation from the numerous bondages that have plagued Africa. These bondages, as Turner suggests, include sickness, oppression, poverty, disease and general suffering. This contextual approach towards biblical hermeneutics calls for caution as the Bible can sometimes be misused to suit the interests of those opposed to others. This can sometimes

lead to poor (or wrong) interpretations of scriptures. For example, before the end of apartheid in 1994, many Afrikaans churches read and discerned in the Bible that God sanctioned separate development in the South African context.

On the other hand, the liberal churches in South Africa read the Bible in the same context and concluded that apartheid could not be justified biblically. Rather, it was a heresy and an evil that needed immediate eradication. The reason for their differing theological view points despite using the Bible as their shared source is due to the fact of approaching the Bible from its own hermeneutical point of departure. This calls for vigilance in hermeneutics. In a similar way, the Bible has been used to justify slavery, oppose the ordination of women, and justify the inferior status of women. Thus, when interpreting the Bible other than from its own context, many problems can result. Which is the correct context? What are the parameters of judging?

### **3.5.2. The African cultural and religious heritage**

Mugambi (1989a: 128) elucidates the reason for preferring the term “African Cultural and Religious Heritage” rather than, “African Religion and Culture.” The reason, he argues, is that religion and culture are normally inseparable in traditional African thought and practice. He explains the term “heritage” as suggesting a dynamic phenomenon that continues from the past through the present into the future (1989a: 128).

Mugambi explains the six pillars of culture,<sup>27</sup> as follows:

- *Politics*, which is the gadget of decision-making and patterns of exerting societal control in any given society. As the distribution of social influence, politics is also what one does with his sociability at the personal level;
- *Economics*, which is the device or blueprint of distributing wherewithal in the general public. As the distribution of resources and opportunities, economics is what one does with his or her resources at the personal level;
- *Ethics*, which deals with the tree of values in the society. As the regulation of conduct and values, ethics is what one does with his or her moral values and judgements;
- *Aesthetics*, which deals with sense of splendour in the social order. As the regulation of beauty, proportion and symmetry, aesthetics is what one does with his or her sense of beauty;
- *Kinship*, which is the regulation of marital and family relationships within the community (1989a: 128, cf.1996: 32);

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<sup>27</sup> This is a revision of his earlier work where he mixed the various aspects of the six pillars of culture with their many aspects. Thus, he indicated the pillars of culture and their various aspects as also including Symmetric, Sonics, Chromatics, Graphics, Metaphysics, Theoretical Tools (logics) and Practical Tools (see 1989a: 129-131). By so doing, he fails to make a clear-cut distinction between the pillars of culture and the various aspects of the pillars of culture.

- *Religion*, which is the synthesis of perspectives to produce a plausible world-view, binding on and relevant to the whole community. At the personal level, religion is how one sums up his or her being in the world – that is, how one accounts for his or her being in the world (see 1996:32).<sup>28</sup>

In attempting to justify his contention that there are only six pillars of culture,<sup>29</sup> Mugambi explains that each contain many aspects. He goes on to explain that philosophy is a tool that enables “us to see more clearly the interrelated and multi-disciplinary character of culture” (1996:32). For Mugambi, philosophy is like a magnifying glass that enables us to see more clearly how a “particular perspective relates with other approaches to reality” (1996:32).

Mugambi’s understanding of culture points to the total expression of people’s perception of actuality (1995:30). It implies that African cultural and religious heritage is a rich source of African theology as it addresses the totality of African identity. He rightly suggests that there are resilient<sup>30</sup> values and changing practices within African heritage and culture, which is never static. This helps us to understand the theo-cultural factors that are contained in Mugambi’s proposal for a change of paradigm in African theology, from liberation to reconstruction. In other words, Mugambi appears to point to the dynamism of African religio-cultural heritage, whose dynamism gives us reason to revise our theological paradigms as the situation demands.

Acknowledging African cultural and religious heritage as a major source of African theology implies that the Christian gospel has to combine with some cultural practices without yielding itself to syncretism. It therefore means that African Christianity appreciates the richness of African cultural practices, including proverbs (Pobee 1979:21),

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<sup>28</sup> In his open lecture, “Reconstructive hermeneutics,” given at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, September 15, 2005, Mugambi cautioned that a theologian who does his or her theology by working with only one pillar of culture becomes irrelevant. He thus said, “Since religion is one of the pillars of culture, one must not operate solely on it as one will become irrelevant.”

<sup>29</sup> The term culture refers to an indigenous heritage of norms, values, beliefs and doctrines that determine the sum total of people’s achievements in different realms of human endeavour. In its popular sense, it finds expression in the artefacts, including language, physical structures as well as the social institutions put in place within a community of men and women. Thus, just like technology, culture can be developed, but cannot be transferred but it can be developed to suit the times.

<sup>30</sup> Resilience, in this section, is used to refer to the quality of quickly recovering the original shape or condition after something has been pulled, pressed or crushed. Rubber, for instance has the quality of resilience, hence when it is stretched it has the tendency to return to its original shape and size. Culture, as Mugambi shows, is highly resilient.

myths, riddles, African experiences,<sup>31</sup> songs, dance, and prayers (Mbiti 1975:71, 77; Agbeti 1972:7). This appreciation of the African cultural and religious heritage is a move nearer towards making the Christian gospel authentically African, responding as it does to Mbiti's challenging question, "Has Africa made a real claim on Christianity?" (Gehman 1991:20).

In his, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity* (1989a), Mugambi clearly appears to rise to the challenge of Mbiti when he argues that the African cultural and religious heritage can contribute immensely to the growth of Christianity in Africa (1989a: 88). Like Mbiti (1978:275), Mugambi feels that no single culture should attempt to imprison the Christian gospel. He notes that Christianity began with the Jewish culture, although eventually that religious culture became incapable of sustaining the Christian faith because the leaders of Judaism believed that the Christian faith was a threat to Jewish culture and identity:

They tried to contain it within Judaism, but Christianity broke off from Judaism and Jewish culture to become one of the most dynamic religions of the world. Then it was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, without being swallowed by it (1989a: 88).

Mugambi's approach agrees with Mbiti who states:

The Gospel was first revealed and proclaimed in the Jewish culture, but soon it was proclaimed in the Greek and Roman cultures. So it went on, until eventually it reached our African culture – and it must go on, from culture to culture. We have no right to imagine that we can monopolise the Gospel or keep it only to ourselves. The Gospel is not the property of European or American culture: neither should we make it the property of our African culture. The Gospel belongs to Jesus Christ, and it refuses to be made the exclusive property of any one culture, or nation, or region, or generation. So then each culture must count it a privilege, to have the Gospel as its guest. African culture must extend its hospitality to the Gospel as an honoured guest that, hopefully, may stay for many centuries and millennia as the case may be (1978:275).

Charles Kraft agrees with both Mugambi and Mbiti when he posits the need for African theology to contextualise the Christian gospel by letting it interact with African culture:

The early Greek churches were dominated by Hebrew theology, just as African churches are now dominated by European theology. Their theology was "made in Jerusalem" just as Africa's is "made in Europe." God, however, led the Apostle Paul and others to struggle against the Hebrew Christians to develop a contextualized Christian theology for Greeks. Paul had to free himself from the domination of the Jewish teachers to do this. I believe that the future of the African church depends on Africans demanding the kind of freedom from European domination that Paul demanded from the Hebrew domination (1978:288).

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<sup>31</sup> African experiences may be cultural, historical, political, social, economic or religious.

The above dialogue clearly shows that for Christian theology to be meaningful to African Christians it must be translated into traditional African categories and thought forms. Unless Christianity takes root at the survival level of the believer, Christian theology cannot be relevant to the African. This is probably what Mugambi means when he writes:

Theology, at best, must respond to the joys, sorrows, hopes and fears of the community of faith, which the theologian represents. The theologian's primary audience, therefore, must be the community of faith on whose behalf he or she engages in the theological quest (1995:11).

In other words, the dialogue of Christian theology with the African cultural and religious heritage will produce a truly effective tool of communication for the Christian gospel in Africa.

### **3.5.3. The Coming of Christianity in the nineteenth century**

Mugambi (1989b: 21f) contends that the first European missionaries in Africa (and in particular, East Africa) were the Portuguese. Arriving in the fifteenth century, they brought Christianity to Africa under the auspices of the Papal see at Rome. This agrees with T. A. Beetham who states that Priests generally accompanied the expeditions. They "served as Chaplains to the new trading settlements and as missionaries to neighbouring African peoples" (1967:7-8).

Mugambi further acknowledges that the Portuguese mission to bring Christianity to Africa failed because they were not interested in spreading Christianity. They were not even primarily interested in Africa – "their main interest was trading with Asia, and Africa happened to have been 'discovered' while the new sea route via Southern Africa was being explored" (1989b: 22).

The modern brand of Christianity in Africa today is an offshoot of that presented by the Missionary expansion of the nineteenth century. Curiously, the planting of Christianity in the nineteenth century occurred simultaneously with colonisation. Consequently, there is a very thin line between the missionary intention and the intention of the colonisers (Mugambi 1989b: 33). One may argue that the missionaries only wanted to take the advantage of the health and transportation facilities made available by the colonising powers after the Berlin Conference of 1884/5, and not to facilitate the colonisation project of the European powers. The researcher's assessment is built on the Kenyan colonial experience where the missionaries represented the Africans even in the Legislative

Council, and thereby acted as the unofficial opposition party against the colonial government (Githiga 2001:28). Archdeacon Walter Edwin Owen for example, earned the derogatory title “Arch-demon” by his fellow white colleagues because he fought for African rights and was deeply concerned about justice (Githiga 2001:217). This does not however rule out Idowu’s report that some missionaries served as “liaison officers between the colonial Government and the people. Some of them became part-time civil servants. And some even fought in a war of supremacy between tribes” (Baeta 1968:424).

The legacy of nineteenth century missionary expansionism within Africa and the covert support it gave towards the colonial project cannot therefore be denied, yet most African theologians would agree that there would have been no written African theology if white missionaries had not brought the Bible into Africa. As Gwinyai Muzorewa notes, most African theologians see the presence of Christianity in Africa in three stages:

- The infant Jesus as a refugee in Egypt;
- Christianity in Africa under the Portuguese prowess of the fifteenth to the seventeenth century;
- The dramatic nineteenth century awakening (1985:22).

Perhaps, what Muzorewa fails to identify is the brand of Christianity that was propagated by the likes of Augustine, Tertullian and Cyprian among others, as the real second stage of Christianity in Africa. His *third stage*, however, is our concern in this study because it is the one, which made real impact to Africa. It is from there that African theologians such as Jesse Mugambi and Kwame Bediako are working out an authentic Christian theology in Africa.

Evidently, the nineteenth and twentieth-century missionaries to Africa brought the Christian gospel despite being clothed in Western attire. African theologians have grappled with this issue since the early 1960s.<sup>32</sup> It is not an overstatement to observe that the white missionaries “exercised exclusive authority on matters of faith. They alone had the full access to the word of God, and their interpretation was final” (Karanja 1999: 153). However, this trend underwent a paradigm shift when the Bible was translated into the indigenous languages of the various African communities. Consequently, a yardstick of reference emerged which was outside of missionary control. By loosening the missionary

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<sup>32</sup> This has been addressed in our previous discussion on “What is African Theology?” and in the discussion, “Genesis of African Theology.”



interpretive control of the bible, some African Christians adopted a new hermeneutical technique to exegete the biblical texts within their notion of authenticity.

Apart from the white missionaries, the contribution of African freed slaves needs also to be highlighted. Freed slaves settling in Freetown, Sierra Leone spread the message of Christianity throughout West Africa. Because of their efforts, "Christian congregations were to be found in many coastal towns in the Gambia, the Gold Coast, Dahomey and Nigeria" (Beetham 1967:10). The exemplary contribution of freed African slaves in the nineteenth century greatly inspired other Africans (some of whom were now able to read the Bible in the vernacular) to see their self-worth in church leadership. A few examples will suffice. In Nigeria, in 1888, the American Baptist Church suffered a heavy blow, following the defection of a group of Africans to form the Native Baptist Church under the leadership of the African writer Majola Agbedi (Baur 1994:127). In a pamphlet entitled, "Africa and the Gospel" Agbedi defended the creation of African churches with the words:

To render Christianity indigenous to Africa it must be watered with native earth....  
It is a curse if we intend forever to hold on to the apron strings of foreign teachers,  
doing the baby for aye.

Despite these shortcomings, we can argue that the coming of the nineteenth century European missionaries and the contribution of the free African slaves clearly gave birth to African Theology. Indeed, it brought a new and positive dimension to Christian mission, whereby Africans began to locate their identity as African Christians. Thus, as Muzorewa (1985:27) can state, "the origin of African theology can be traced back to those early days when the Christian message was first received by the first generation Christians."

This brief study on the coming of Christianity to Africa in the nineteenth century as a source of African theology leads us to study the African Independent Churches (*Hereafter*, AICs) as another source of African theology. This will help us to shed more light on the tension between Western missionaries and their African converts, a phenomenon, which was partly responsible for the formation of these Churches. In turn, the theology of the AICs tends to emerge from the synthesis of African traditional religion and Christianity, as we shall see in the following section, thereby providing an important source of African theology.

### 3.5.4. African Independent<sup>33</sup> Churches (AICs)

Mugambi (1989b: 16) acknowledges the “ever-increasing rise of ‘Independent’ Christian Sects in Africa.” His reference to them as “Independent Christian Sects” reveals a certain note of displeasure, probably due to the methods that these groups employed in articulating Christianity. Some groups were to deny the divinity of Jesus, similar to that of Arianism, and as a result could be classified as Christian sects or even cults.<sup>34</sup> Mugambi may be alluding to the Nomiya Luo Church, which split from the ACK in 1912. As Archbishop Benjamin Oundo their leader was to admit, they do not recognise the essential divinity of Jesus. For them, Jesus is seen in the perspective of the Hebrew Bible as a prophet who reminded men and women of the covenant given to the Jews (Baur (1994:381)).<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, for Mugambi, the AIC movement (1989b: 12) was fundamentally driven by the need to express the Christian faith as “practical living,” and as such may be regarded as one of the major sources of African theology. As Muzorewa (1985:35) notes, their tendency to indigenise the Christian faith is what draws the attention and interest of African theologians. Nthamburi (1995:58) cites the case of the Kimbanguist church (referring to followers of Kimbangu) and argues that, as with other AICs, the Kimbanguist church was a protagonist for indigenisation. He goes on to explain that the church has endeavoured to capture the African ethos of wholeness; for sickness is seen as a test of personal faith, it being not only physical but also spiritual. Africans look to religion for the solution to every situation of life, including, health. Nthamburi (1995:58) stresses that the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus encouraged the Kimbanguists to stress the biblical basis of wholeness (Mark 16:17ff, Luke 10).

The African Indigenous Church movement which dates from 1819 in Sierra Leone and 1862 in Ghana was an African Christian reaction to colonisation, racism, missionary domination in leadership; and was driven by the need to “spiritualise” Christianity, and the need to preserve culture among other factors (cf. Nthamburi 1995:54f; Mugambi 1989a: 90f; Muzorewa 1985:35f). Hence, as colonialism swept the continent and as Christianity

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<sup>33</sup> This study treats the phrase, African Independent Churches as being the same as, African Initiated Churches, African Indigenous Churches or, African Instituted Churches.

<sup>34</sup> The term cult has many definitions, some pejorative. They include, any form of worship or ritual observance, heresy, act of taking capture, that which is chosen, sect or party, unorthodox or spurious, esoteric, or has devotion to a person, object, or a sect of new ideas.

<sup>35</sup> See also, *Kenya Churches' Handbook* (1973).

gained momentum in Africa, many AICs were founded. By 1988, there were more than 6,000 AICs on the African continent<sup>36</sup> (Mugambi 1989b: 12) and by 2006, the figures are expected to rise to about 10,000 independent Christian denominations.<sup>37</sup> Nthamburi cites a few examples:

Chilembwe of Nyasaland (*read Malawi*) who founded the Providence Industrial Mission in 1914 became a symbol of political and religious liberation. The movement of Wade Harris in Ivory Coast in 1913 and 1914 gave the African indigenous movement a much-needed impetus during the time when Africans were invisible in church leadership. During the same period Moses Orimolade founded the praying societies of Cherubim and Seraphim in Nigeria. In Kenya, the Gikuyu Independent Church arose out of the need to preserve African traditions such as female circumcision in the wake of missionary's attack on such customs as barbaric. In South Africa, Ignatius Lekhanyane founded Zionism, which spread into Botswana and Zimbabwe. Zionism emphasized holistic healing and the early coming of Christ (Nthamburi 1995:55).

The strength of the AICs as a major source of African theology is their incorporation of an authentic African religious ethos into their faith and practice, including, faith healing, spontaneity in worship, freedom of expression in the church, and the veneration of ancestors. A few groups have tolerated polygamy, which may not yet have acceptance in African theology (see, Nthamburi 1991, 1995:55). Even the idea of the veneration of ancestors has been embraced by African theologians, following extensive revision. Notable contributions on the ancestorship of Christ include, John Pobee (1979:38), J. Mutiso-Mbinda (1979), Charles Nyamiti (1978; 1984; 1990; 1993) and Nthamburi (1991; 1995:61f). Mugambi's (1995:43) challenge to the African Christianity of the twenty-first century is to reconstruct African Christianity by manifesting a characteristically African outlook through ritual, symbol, vestments, music, liturgy, architecture, metaphors and cultural theological emphases as partly found in some of the AICs.

Inus Daneel builds on the importance of the AICs, as a source of African theology, when he says that the origins and their growth "is extremely important for missiology" (1987, 1991:68). He thus writes:

It shows what mistakes were committed by historical missioning churches in the past and provides valuable insights into the type of reactions that could be expected to a particular policy or circumstance. Such an analysis moreover promotes understanding of the African's interpretation of Scripture and the "theological" emphasis he (sic) places in terms of his existential situation" (: 68).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> For further detail, see Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African initiated Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Trenton: African World Press, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/missionalia/index.html>

<sup>38</sup> Inus Daneel quotes various scholars who have looked at the various factors that have been instrumental in their formation. These scholars include, Harold Turner, G. C. Oosthuizen, and Adrian Hastings. In particular,

The brief study of the AICs has shown that they emerged after the mission churches of the nineteenth and twentieth century in Africa failed to meet Africa's basic spiritual needs. For many theologians, (*cf.* Hastings 1979:9; Appiah-Kubi 1979:117; Muzorewa 1985:42), these churches were essentially religious movements, which have provided much-needed spiritual solace for countless Africans. Appiah-Kubi's article (1979:117) argues that, "spiritual hunger is the main cause of the emergence of the indigenous African Christian Churches, and not political, social, economic and racial factors." He however does not explain how he arrived at that conclusion. His view can be contested after surveying various churches, as different groups had different reasons for setting up their respective independent churches. Parrinder, for example, argues that the AICs of East Africa are neither solely spiritual nor political. For him, they tend to combine the two ingredients but lack the extremism of both Aladuraism (of Nigeria) and Ethiopianism<sup>39</sup> (Parrinder 1969a: 155).

Finding agreement with Appiah-Kubi's (1979:117) view is complicated by the discovery that even some white people founded Indigenous Churches. For example, in 1929, an Englishman by the name Dr. Church and an African, Simeon Nsibambi co-founded a movement that many would refer to as "a church within the churches." At first, this movement was concerned with the development of the spiritual life, and yet, "beneath the superficiality of much official Christianity, and it challenged European superiority and made room for African leadership" (Parrinder 1969a: 155). Although it began within the corridors of the Anglican Church, this East African revival movement spread to other denominations. Today, it operates within the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and African Independent Pentecostal Church of Africa (AIPCA) thereby becoming an

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Adrian Hastings, in his book, *Mission and Ministry*, suggests ten main causes for the rise of these movements. These include the "missionary attitude and missionary theology which, (in) one way or another, justifies schism" (Daneel 1987; 1991:72), the multiplication of Protestant missions in one area; a lack (in some churches) of ritual and an opportunity to concretise the sacral; the need for small local congregations, where a feeling of security and fellowship can develop; a tribal structure which stresses decentralisation; certain needs which the historical churches ignored; limited promotion of indigenous ministers; a colour bar in the community reflected in the church; rapid social change, leading to instability and a sense of insecurity; lack of opportunity for Black leadership in the political civic and industrial spheres (:73). Hastings finds in all ten factors operative in South Africa, a large number of them in Kenya and Zambia, but hardly any in Rwanda and Tanzania (Daneel 1991:73).

<sup>39</sup> Ethiopianism was the brainchild of Edward Blyden and was seconded by James Johnson and Majola Agbedi (all of Nigeria). They demanded involvement in church government and the cultivation of African civilisation in the mission church (Baur 1994:132). The biblical source of Ethiopianism was Psalm 68:31, "Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands to God." This prophecy nurtured the hope of the conversion of all Africa and of a Christian theocracy embracing the whole of Africa.

ecumenical church within other churches, nevertheless with distinct characteristics (see, Mugambi 1995:126ff).

In concluding this subsection, it is important to underline the fact that the AICs form a very important source of African theology, as they constitute a Christian movement that sought to authenticate African identity. As has been noted, this identity was sought from the socio-religious perspective. Some of these early concerns are still relevant today. While African theology cannot be expected to accept all theologies in the AICs, it cannot however ignore their theological articulations, which seeks to make Christianity authentic in Africa despite their various weaknesses. It is within this environment that Mugambi (1989b: 15f) proposes the need to consult with the leadership of AICs so that African theologians may share and reflect their concerns about interpreting the Christian gospel in terms relevant to the African context. This in turn means acknowledging them as a major source of African theology that cannot be wished away. Indeed, some of their concerns are relevant and much needed within mainline African churches, such as the need to make the liturgy more spontaneous, thereby indigenising it to better reflect the African context.

The study of the African Instituted churches has prepared us to study Pan-Africanism and African Nationalism as two other sources of African theology. Together, they share one common ideology, namely the need to preserve African identity within African social life.

### **3.5.5. The Pan-Africanist movement**

Pan-Africanism is another source of African theology. It is derived from the Greek word *Pan* meaning *all*. Pan-African therefore means, "all-African." Interestingly, the first form of Pan-Africanism was concerned with the black communities of African ancestry, most of who lived in North America and the Caribbean (West Indies) (See Davidson 1994:32). This implies that Pan-Africanism can be traced back to the period of African slavery and the European slave trade, when ships shuttled between Africa, Europe, America and the West Indies, carrying human cargo for over 200 years (Gathogo 2001:37).

The founders of Pan-Africanism had lost their languages and cultures as Africans during the time of African slavery, probably because they had originally come from different parts of Africa and that the environment under which they lived in Diaspora did not allow them to maintain their cultural heritage. The Pan-Africanist movement in turn inspired African Nationalism among Africans in their quest to reclaim their African identity. This

pursuit for identity is found in Mugambi's call for African Renaissance in theo-socio-cultural terms as this present study has sought to show. The quest for African identity has generally been experienced within Christianity through the AICs, and in the moratorium debate. Pan-Africanists inspired the growth of African theology, as their concerns for cultural appreciation, acknowledgement of the contribution of Africa globally, the reconstruction of the past-history of the African people, became the rallying call in their movement. These cries were heard in the quest of African theologians for an authentic *Theologia Africana*. These quests for identity in African theology focuses on issues of culture, race, gender and class, all of which are areas in which the marginalization of the people of Africa has been strongly felt both before and after the advent of the New World Order (see, Mugambi 1995:207-209, 210-225; cf. Bediako's 1992).

The Pan-Africanist movement can also be referred to as the "Back to Africa" movement that sprung up in the United States of America, Brazil and the Caribbean during the early nineteenth Century (Abdul-Raheem 1996:1). This movement conceived Africa as one "nation" whose socio-cultural problems needed to be addressed in terms of Pan-Africanist thinking (Abdul-Raheem 1969:2; Davidson 1994:32; Thompson 1969: xxi). Apart from slavery, the "Back to Africa" movement called for the removal of colonialism in Africa.

Thompson best summarises the three factors that led to the emergence of Pan-Africanism, namely, the slave trade, colonialism and racism when he says that, "Resistance to enslavement...created the basis for the formation of organisations and concepts out of which was born the idea of Pan-Africanism" (1969:19). This agrees with Mugambi's thinking in that "one significant insight has been that the total liberation of Black people cannot be realised until all Blacks everywhere restore their dignity in the world" (1989b: 59). He goes on to explain that this insight inspired such leaders as Edward Blyden, W E B DuBois and others to promote Pan-Africanism:

The same insight inspires Black leaders today to identify themselves with the struggles of the people of Africa for total liberation from cultural, economic and political imperialism. This same insight inspires many Africans in Africa and elsewhere to identify themselves with the struggles of all oppressed peoples of the world. The formation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 1976 is one indication of this identification (1989b: 59).

By identifying a theological movement with the Pan-Africanism of politicians such as Marcus Gurvey, Henry Sylvester Williams, W E B. DuBois, Blyden and others, Mugambi clearly sees it as a unity movement which sought to bring the people of Africa together

and identify them as one people of God, regardless of their status, background, religion, gender, and political affiliation:

Since 1970 there has been a significant effort to strengthen the bond between Africans in the mother continent and those in the Diaspora. There have been several consultations, seminars, festivals, workshops, and conferences involving the two groups, focusing on various aspects of the struggle of African peoples for civil rights - history, theology, culture, communication and so on. The struggle continues (: 59).

Mugambi strengthens the argument for Pan-Africanism as a major source of African theology when he underscores the important role of religion:

In this struggle, religion continues to have a significant role, a role which is indispensable. Since a people's religious orientation greatly colours their ideological orientation, no African can afford to leave his (or her) religious and cultural orientation to be defined by others (: 60).

This agrees with Mbiti's contention that religion permeates all aspects of life (1969:1-2). Pan-Africanists are therefore informed by African cultural and religious heritage on one hand, and the quest for African identity on the other.

Mugambi's underscoring of religion as an important factor in Pan-Africanism gains prominence in the fact that, among the outstanding figures was Wilmot Blyden of West Africa. Blyden "extolled African culture and urged educated Africans to give up European values and return to their own culture" (Akintoye 1976:98). He advocated, radically, for an all-African church without European attachment. Herein lie some of the ideas that led to the formation of the All Africa Conference of Churches.

Muzorewa expands on the cultural-religious factors within Pan-Africanism and later African Nationalism, which led to the growth of African theology when he writes that, "African Theology may develop along a pluriform structure as African theologies, the differences depending on the particular social context" (1985: 51). He goes on to say:

I contend that African nationalism provides a general context within which theology is being done, for the central theme of nationalism gave rise to the spirit of African theology in the 1950s. African nationalism has also provided a framework within which the church in Africa has developed not only structurally but also politically. The All Africa Church Conference is a good example. It is not sheer coincidence that its first meeting in Ibadan was held in 1958; the same year that Nkrumah called a conference of all Independent African States (1985:51).

It is important to note that both the Organisation of African Unity (*Hereafter*, OAU) and the AACC were both formed in 1963. Furthermore, the theme of political liberation

struggle has been dominant in both bodies (see, Mugambi 1995:x-xi). According to Muzorewa (1985:52), the unity of spirit among the AACC can be traced back to utterances made by the African nationalists who declared that unless all African nations were free, the freedom of a few meant nothing, a view that is rooted in African communalism. Nkrumah aptly captured this thought when he wrote, "Our task is not done and our own safety is not assured until the last vestiges of colonialism have been swept from Africa" (1975:240).

The commitment of the AACC to become involved in the liberation of continental African comes directly from Pan-Africanist and African nationalist thought. It is logically possible to argue that African liberation theology has developed from within this nationalistic framework. Indeed, the examples of the inter-relationship between African nationalism and African theology can be seen in the roles of Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa before the attainment of Constitutional Independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. Sithole was a nationalist leader of one of the factions in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and an ordained Minister of the Church of Christ, while Bishop Muzorewa was the President of a political faction in Zimbabwe and Prime Minister in 1979. He was also a Bishop of the United Methodist Church of Zimbabwe, a post he attained in 1968 (see, Muzorewa 1985:53,119).

The role that the Pan-Africanist Movement played in inspiring African Nationalism cannot be underestimated, in that it was mainly responsible for the independence in the 1960s of most African Nation States. Similarly, the role of African Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in inspiring black consciousness within church leadership culminated in the call for a moratorium on Western mission in the early 1970s cannot be taken lightly. Most of the concerns of the African Nationalists and Pan-Africanists agree with those of the African theologians that we have noted in this study. Pan-Africanism and African Nationalism are major sources of African theology as they help in tracing the historical contexts of African people. The study on Pan-Africanism as a source of African theology leads us to study the AACC as another vital source for African theology.

### **3.5.6. The All Africa Conference of Churches**

Mugambi (1995: x-xi) traces the formation of the AACC in 1963 by addressing the political events of the time. He says, from the close of WW2 until 1964, the nationalist



struggles against colonial regimes were accelerated. Mugambi explains that by 1965, most African countries had become republics, except the Portuguese ruled colonies (Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde); Spanish Colonies (Spanish Equatorial Guinea and Spanish Sahara), Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and South West Africa. Most African states had changed their names. For example, Southern Rhodesia is today Zimbabwe, while South-West Africa is today Namibia.

Mugambi contends that the founding of the OAU in 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by 32 new sovereign states was a momentous occasion. Africa had emerged from the fetters of colonialism (1995: x). Other emerging free African states were to join the OAU as they attained their independence from western powers. Hence, whereas the signatories of the OAU Charter in May 1963 had only 32 member countries, by 1994 there were 52 member states (1995: x). The new members included South Africa (following the first democratic elections held April 27, 1994), Eritrea and Namibia.

At the ecclesiastical level, 1963 saw the birth of AACC. During this period the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) of the Roman Catholic Church was in session in Vatican City, Rome. In its *Decree of Ecumenism*, it lifted the ban against Roman Catholic interaction with Protestants, who were no longer regarded as “heretics,” but as “separated brethren” (1995:xi).

As noted in the previous sub-section, the spirit of unity among the AACC can be traced back to the politics of African nationalism, whereby its leaders stressed that all Africans must be free from the colonial yoke. The freedom of a few selected states remained insignificant. When the AACC conducted theological discourse around the framework of liberation, it was as a direct result of Pan-Africanist and African nationalist background thinking. Against the newly inspired nationalist fervour, there was a desire for unity amongst the African Churches. Previously, each had more in common with its western mission Church than with neighbouring African Churches of other denominations (see, Muzorewa 1985:58).

By the 1970s, the AACC leadership had raised the moratorium question. This was from a sense of responsibility rather than hostility (Mugambi 2003; Muzorewa 1985:65). Their argument was based on a quest for identity as African Christians. For them, as long as

missionaries and foreign funds were sent to Africa, the level of stewardship and the sense of African identity among those in positions of leadership would remain low (Muzorewa 1985:66; Mugambi 2003). The moratorium debate was started by one of the key leaders of the AACC, John Gatu, the erstwhile Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. At the Mission Festival in Milwaukee, USA in 1971 Gatu courageously made the contention that, "the continuation of the present missionary movement is a hindrance to the selfhood of the church" (Baur 1994:452). Interestingly, the Third General Assembly of the AACC in Lusaka, May 1974, unanimously accepted a corresponding "option" that was strongly supported by its Secretary General, Canon Burgess Carr. This "option" called for a temporary Moratorium, "On external assistance in money and personnel...as the only potent means of becoming truly and authentically ourselves, while remaining a respected and responsible part of the Universal Church" (1994:433).

With the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church (1962-1965) lifting the ban against interaction with non-Roman Catholic Christians (Mugambi 1995:xi), Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians (read AACC) moved together on convergent lines towards acknowledging the need for an African theology. Moreover, their ecumenical cooperation was within the larger framework of a communion of Third World theologians. Seen from this perspective, moratorium was a radical step proposed for the realization of African identity and by implication also for formulation of its own theology (see Baur 1994:433).

In the African Bishop's Declaration at the Episcopal Synod in Rome, 1974, the "so-called" theology of adaptation (of the missionaries) was rejected as being out-of-date, and "in its stead adopting the (genuinely African) theology of incarnation," that should "help Christianity to become incarnate in the life of the people." In order, "to achieve this, the young churches should take over more responsibility for their own evangelisation" (Baur 1994:433). The African Bishop's Declaration shows that lifting of the ban against interaction with the non-Roman Catholic Christians (Mugambi 1995: xi) assisted both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches to move together towards the formation of an

African theology, as the Catholic Bishops' views agreed with the resolutions of AACC Lusaka Conference of 1974.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of the AACC as a source of African theology is critical because "it deals with crucial concepts such as African Nationalism in such a way that freedom acquires a spiritual dimension" (Muzorewa 1985:73). Furthermore, its broad influence and provision of definitive norms make it an important source of African theology. It should however be pointed out, that the danger of AACC being seen as one organisation that "secularises" Christianity by "spiritualising" politics was strong, hence the need to ask the question, "Is this the right interpretation on what Christ meant by saying that he has come to give abundant and fulfilling life?" (See, Matt. 5: 17; John 10: 10).

As Nelson Mandela was released from Pollsmore Prison, South Africa, February 11, 1990, the AACC President, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the then General Secretary, Rev. Jose B. Chipenda, invited Jesse Mugambi to reflect with African Church leaders on the theological implications of the historical events which Africa was then undergoing (Mugambi 2003a: i). In his paper entitled, "Future of the Church and the Church of the Future in Africa," Mugambi was expected by the General Committee of the AACC to ponder on the way forward with regard to the post Cold War articulation of African theology.

It is in this AACC meeting, March 30, 1990 where Mugambi saw, "the theme of reconstruction appeared most appropriate in the New World Order" (Mugambi 1995:5). His presentation proposed that, "we need to shift paradigms from the post-Exodus to post-Exile imagery, with reconstruction as the resultant theological axiom" (1995:5). He explained:

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<sup>40</sup> In spite of the constant increase in the number of African Archbishops and Bishops, even after the Protestant churches became constitutionally autonomous their dependency on western missionaries was felt more and more. This was especially evident with respect to the Roman Catholic Church, where in most dioceses the missionary body still constitutes the majority of church personnel, and where not only finances but also pastoral policy-making remains in expatriate hands. This state of affairs created a sense of unease in the African Church that resulted in the Moratorium Declaration of the All African Conference of Churches at Lusaka and statements of the African Episcopate at the fourth Roman Synod of Bishops, both held in 1974. Their common concern - marking the second phase of the new age - was the selfhood of African Christianity, the emphasis on the local church in finding its own identity in order to become a valuable member of the communion of churches that constitute the universal church. The keywords were, African Theology, African liturgical rites, and African church structures. This was caused by the feeling that the independence of the African churches was continually being maligned by structures imported during the missionary age (Baur 1994:447-448).

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

In concluding this subsection, it is essential to concede that the AACC is an important source of African theology even though its first General Assembly in Kampala, 1963 did not make a definitive statement on "What is African Theology" (Shorter 1977:23). Idowu, a key member of the AACC only hinted at the definition of African theology when he said that for the African Christian, "Knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of him [*sic*]" (Dickson and Ellingworth 1971:16). Since the Kampala Mandate, the major sources used in African theology have mainly been the Bible and African traditional religion (Muzorewa 1985:63). As Muzorewa explains:

The implication here is that the real concern of the AACC is to establish a way to indigenise the Christian faith and Christianise certain African traditional religious beliefs with the hope of discovering something uniquely relevant to Africans (Muzorewa 1985:63).

Thus the AACC works towards a definite African identity. This makes the study of Mugambi's concepts of liberation and reconstruction important, for what Bediako calls "the hermeneutic of identity" (1996:427).

The study of the AACC as a major source of African theology prepares us to study another source of African theology, the Christian Tradition. As in the previous case, the study of the Christian tradition as a source of African theology helps us locate Mugambi's place in African theology. In other words, do his concepts of liberation and reconstruction fit in the developmental trends in African theology? Is he an authentic scholar in this field?

### **3.5.7. The Christian tradition**

As Christian theology done in an African context by African theologians, African theology has the Christian tradition as its background for the present theological enterprise. Seen in this light, church fathers such as Augustine, Cyprian, and Tertullian are the actual founders of African theology.

Mugambi builds on the Christian tradition as a source of African theology when he talks of the triune God. He says that the doctrine of the Trinity, which was “formulated and established in the Great Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, is central to the fundamental beliefs of Christianity” (1989b: 65). In citing the “Great Councils,” Mugambi refers to the Council’s of Chalcedon and Nicaea, which affirmed the true Christian doctrine as opposed to heretical groups such as Arianism, Donatism and Plagianism, some of which denied the divinity to Christ. As Mugambi further states, “God is confessed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three persons and yet he [*sic*] is only one God” (1989b: 65). This central belief in the triune God is clearly expressed in the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds. Around this central belief, “there are other beliefs which are largely an attempt to make the cardinal affirmations of the creeds clearer” (1989b: 65). This implies that African theology subscribes to the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds as formulated in the Christian tradition. This also shows that apart from seeking to reflect upon the Christian faith with regard to the African context by spicing Christianity with the richness of African culture, it addresses the social realities facing Africa. African theology is no different from other Christian theologies such as Western theology; in that, commonalities far outweigh any points of departures.

Mugambi (1989b: 54) builds further on the Christian tradition as a source of African theology when he discusses the fourth century Christianity when Constantine used the Christian faith to stabilise the Roman Empire. He writes, “before AD 311, Christians were a persecuted minority; the rulers had considered conversion to the Christian faith as a disgrace” (1989b: 54). Following Constantine’s conversion, “it became fashionable to be a nominal Christian.” Mugambi goes on to explain that after the conversion of Emperor Constantine, Bishops in both the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire began to collaborate with the political rulers:

In Rome, the bishops and Popes became the most influential leaders, and managed to maintain the dominant influence on Europe until the Renaissance and Reformation. During the so-called Dark-Ages and the Middle Ages in Europe, anyone who publicly challenged the doctrines of the Catholic Church as maintained by the pope and his henchmen was branded a heretic and was persecuted. Heretics were viewed as enemies of God, the church and the so-called “Holy Roman Empire” (: 54).

Mugambi further notes that after the Lutheran Reformation of 1517, the new protestant denominations did not effectively change this role of the church as the defender of the status quo thereby championing the interests of the ruling groups (1989b: 54). Rather,

those denominations, which sprung up after the Reformation, became agencies for popularising nationalism in Europe. In offering this as a critique of the Christian tradition as a source of African theology, Mugambi appears to be returning to his evangelical Christian roots. He adds a note of caution not to follow the popularist African trend of championing for “home” nationalisms, as they may turn out to be a diversion from the channel of the Gospel.

With regard to the cross, Mugambi acknowledges that it was not originally a Christian symbol. He says that it is older than Christianity as it was used in various designs before Christianity to represent a variety of things:

Only since the seventh century AD (*CE*) has the cross-become increasingly the Christian symbol representing the suffering of Jesus for the forgiveness of sinners, and also the persecution of Christians for the sake of their faith in God through Jesus Christ. Thus the cross has continually been used to symbolize the link between the crucifixion of Jesus, and the suffering of innocent Christians under anti-Christian rulers (1989b: 114).

For Christian theology (including African theology), Mugambi sees the cross as both the symbol of death and of new life. It is also a symbol of new creation for Christians:

The cross may be seen to declare: even though death has been imposed on the innocent in his (or her) struggle for salvation, this death is the proclamation of new life, of a new creation. God will raise life out of death, and the powerless will become powerful again through God’s will (: 115).

Interestingly, Mugambi does not refer to other symbols of religiosity in Africa such as water, which is a symbol of Kikuyu hospitality that is given to a visitor as a sign of welcome and acceptance. Nor does he cite other symbols of acceptance such as the coffee bean among the Baganda of Uganda and the Haya of Tanzania (Healey and Sybertz 1996:169). Nor does he refer to religious symbols such as Mount Kilimanjaro or Mount Kenya, which are religious symbols among the Chagga of Tanzania and Kikuyu of Kenya respectively (Olikenyi 2001:117). For Mugambi, the cross is common within Christian architecture, ritual and costume as an identifying symbol of Christian communities throughout the Christian era. In this regard, a good dialogue between African cultural symbols and the cross would have been beneficial (1989b: 86).

The symbol of the cross, which was virtually unknown during the first three centuries of the Christian era, became a central Christian symbol after the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 312 CE. Constantine is reported to have seen a vision in which he was

“commanded by God” to paint the sign of the cross on the shields of his soldiers on the evening of the October 26, 312 CE (Mugambi 1989b: 86). After his soldiers defeated the forces of Maxentius for the control of the capital of the Roman Empire, Constantine and the respective Roman Emperors respected the Christian God just as King Darius had respected the God of Daniel after he emerged from the lion’s den unhurt (Dan. 6). Since then, the cross as a Christian symbol has remained the dominant and distinguishing symbol of Christianity—although it is true that different denominations place different emphases on other aspects of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles (1989b: 115).

Despite the critical stance taken by most African theologians on the difficulties created by the importation of Western theology and liturgy, they nevertheless, want to be sure that the *Theologia Africana* remains in the “mainstream of the tradition of the Church” (Sawyer 1971: 21). Indeed, as Mbiti (1971:189) notes, many African theologians, in their belief that the Christian tradition should be an integral part of African theology, do not wish to be “isolated from the Catholicity of the church.” As Mbiti writes

Christian Theology from the major traditions of Christendom will put us in the mainstream of ecumenical and apostolic heritage if we have to constitute an authentic *Theologia Africana* which is both African and Christian at the same time (1971:189).

This dual approach to theology in Africa opens an important question, namely, if the existing Christian theology as “imported” by the Western missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth century is important for African theology, why go to the trouble of formulating new theological concepts for the church in Africa? Why not simply follow Western theology, as seen in the Christian tradition, without going to the trouble of Africanising the Christian gospel? Further, if the existing Christian concepts are relevant to African Christianity, why has it remained more or less alien to the African context? Finally, how can we work out an African theology without moving towards syncretism? This dual approach to doing African theology begs for clarification. It is noteworthy to consider that faith based on the Bible can bring new insights to the various parts of Christendom. This calls for theologians in African Christianity to do theology from a “believer-reader” perspective, as is the case with Mugambi’s theology.

The study on the sources of African theology has helped us to locate Mugambi’s theology in the current development trends of African theology. Consequently, the study has prepared us to survey the dual concepts of liberation and reconstruction. Accordingly, we

shall treat reconstruction paradigm as the climax of this developmental trend in African theology. This sub-section will not go into depth regarding the two concepts; rather it will seek to introduce them within Mugambi's thought, as well as enabling us to understand his overall work clearer.

### **3.6. Liberation and reconstruction: An overview**

These two concepts form the vertebrae of this study. In this section, we intend to provide an overview of how Mugambi understands these two concepts. It will provide us with direction as we assess the appropriateness of his call for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology.

#### **3.6.1. Liberation**

Liberation is a noun "which suggests a process whose goal is the realisation of freedom" (Mugambi 1989b: 108). It has been "restricted to the process of acquiring freedom, in our contemporary usage, especially in the context of modern nationalism" (: 108). Among Evangelical Christian theologians (read conservative theologians),<sup>41</sup> the term has become problematic due to the contention that Christianity is primarily concerned with salvation of the human soul and not with political or social liberation (see, Mugambi 1989b: 108). This conservative view, held amongst the members of East African Revival Movement has as its main aim the "winning of souls for Christ" without concerning other "matters of the world."

Mugambi notes that liberation should not be viewed in violent terms, for salvation should be non-violent in nature. He cites the valuable contributions of the great protagonists of non-violence such as M K Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr, and wonders whether they were involved in the process of liberation or the quest for salvation. He says that, "If the answer is that they were concerned in both, then the distinction cannot be logically defined on the basis of means" (1989b: 109).

Mugambi contends that the ministry and teaching of Jesus was not exclusively concerned with the "salvation of the soul" but with the process of liberation of the individual and of

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<sup>41</sup> Although the researcher approaches this study as an evangelical Christian scholar, he does not subscribe to this extremist position, where soul and the body are separated theologically, or in life situations in general. He strongly holds that the Christian gospel must be seen holistically, otherwise it will become simply irrelevant creedal recitations (*cf.* John 10:10) and empirically lacking.



society as a whole. If Jesus had been concerned only for the salvation of the soul, he would not have spent as much time “alleviating the physical suffering of people and restoring the eroded dignity of individuals” (1989b: 109). Mugambi goes on to cite the Hebrew Bible where he says that there is no clear distinction between “liberation as a socio-political process and salvation as a spiritual or metaphysical concern”; for him, the dimensions were considered complementary in the prophetic tradition, which Jesus endorsed (Matt. 5:17).

Mugambi decries the polarized distinction between liberation and salvation held in some Christian circles, whereby the impression is created that Christians are citizens of a heavenly kingdom and therefore should not concern themselves with the present world. Such withdrawal is intellectual dishonesty:

For we know that, physically, we belong to this world. Jesus did not ignore this fact, and if Christians are the followers of Jesus, then faithful discipleship demands that they also acknowledge the fact and live up to its practical implications (1989b: 109).

Mugambi cites the words of Jesus in Matthew 4:4 when he says, “Man shall not live by bread alone” to explain that bread is not the only ingredient for life. He also cites Matthew 22:21 where Jesus says: “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” In using such quotations, Jesus emphasises that the temporal order is important even though it is not an end in itself.

#### **3.6.1.1. Liberation and salvation**

For Mugambi, liberation and salvation are complementary, for salvation without liberation is incomplete because it drives a person from his or her earthly responsibilities, while liberation without salvation is incomplete because it lacks inner drive (1989b: 109). Mugambi’s emphasis upon inner drive is important (1995:15) for social reconstruction (as with liberation) has to possess an inner drive (*cf.* Luke 18:9-14) as its starting point. He augments his argument by quoting the words of Jesus when he said, “Be not anxious about your life, what you shall eat, nor about your body, what you shall put on. For life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” (Luke 12:22-34). Mugambi seeks further to justify his position by contending that, Jesus did not condemn material and temporal concerns as impediments to inheriting the kingdom of God by arguing that “they are judged incomplete without proper attitudes by which to approach them” (1989b: 82).

### 3.6.1.2. Historical background of the concept of liberation

Mugambi traces the historical background of the concept of liberation from the Exodus narrative in the Hebrew bible, to a paradigm in African theology. As noted earlier, this theme is derived from Exodus 3:7ff when God told Moses:

I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So have I come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey – the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now go. I am sending you to pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.

In this text, the people of Israel are portrayed as having been “delivered from bondage in Egypt through the divinely inspired leadership of Moses” whom God spoke to and commanded “let my people go” (Mugambi 1995:2). Accordingly, this story appeals to the victims of colonialism and other forms of domination such as cultural supremacy (1995:2). It makes it easy for such victims of oppression to identify themselves with the Israelites, and their leaders with Moses, the hero who confronts the oppressor (Exodus 10:1-6). Mugambi’s outlook agrees with Nthamburi who goes a step further and says that, in this Exodus event, “God took the side of the exploited ones, the downtrodden, the marginalised and the powerless” (1991:35).

Nthamburi wrote before the dismantling of apartheid. His close analysis of the Exodus event agrees with that of Mugambi:

African Christians identified with such a theme quite naturally. They had seen oppression on their people through the political struggles that led to independence. The struggle was seen as a necessary midwife that would give birth to freedom; this is still the feeling of the people in South Africa. They see the exodus as a paradigm, a departure from inflexible position of oppression to freedom. They recognise that “pharaoh” must struggle and through his reactions many people may suffer and die. But this is not the end of the story. In the end the will of the people will triumph because God will deliver them from oppression and lead them to freedom (Nthamburi 1991:36).

With regard to people who find themselves victims of oppression, the Exodus event becomes a liberating and inspiring experience. Nthamburi adds that when the oppressed people find obstacles in their way, the exodus event brings reassurance that God will act (Nthamburi 1991:37). He goes on to say that, the oppressed always see themselves as people on the journey to the Promised Land:

African Theology finds the exodus event a powerful paradigm for the oppressed people. Not only does it give them hope of victory, it encourages them to continue

struggling for justice. They are confident that somehow God will intervene to save them from the sin of oppression (: 37).

Mugambi traces the historical background of the concept of liberation, by citing the case of Latin American liberation theology. He refers to the dictatorial regimes of the 1960s and 1970s, and the important role of Catholic theologians and social scientists in mobilising the people in the quest for human liberation (1995:2). He goes on to refer to the Exodus motif as an effective clarion call. By so doing, he introduces Gustavo Gutierrez in this study. Gutierrez, a leading Peruvian theologian articulated his liberative approach within the context of an oppressive and brutal regime. Mugambi also cites the civil rights movement in North America where Martin Luther King Jnr was likened to Moses for championing the rights of oppressed African-Americans in the 1950's and 1960's (1995:3). He explains that by the time the World Council of Churches held its Fifth Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1975, the theme of liberation had become a household phrase in Africa. This concept remained in spite of the fact that "Portugal had abandoned her colonies of Angola and Mozambique, and the struggle for majority rule in Zimbabwe had accelerated" (1995: 4).

As noted above, it was at the Nairobi meeting, March 30, 1990, where the concept of reconstruction was officially<sup>42</sup> introduced for the first time in African theological studies as a paradigm. It is here that Mugambi explained that the "the twenty-first century should be a century of reconstruction in Africa, building on old foundations which though strong, may have to be renovated" (1995:5). Since then, the debate on whether to shift the theological paradigm to reconstruction has been with us in African theology. Was his call timely and appropriate for African theology in the twenty-first century?

Mugambi, thus, became the pioneer or father of reconstruction theology in Africa. Together with J B Chipenda, A Karamaga and C K Omari, they published, *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, (1991). Afterwards, Charles Villa-Vicencio, a White South African, published his, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, (1992). Later, Mugambi published a second book on reconstruction theology entitled, *From liberation to Reconstruction*, (1995). And two years later Mugambi edited the book, *The*

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<sup>42</sup> This study insists on utilising the word "officially" as it considers that the theology of reconstruction or the paradigm of reconstruction has always been a part of Africa, therefore before Jesse Mugambi re-launched it on March 30, 1990. Liberation has been the dominant paradigm, while reconstruction has been a minor paradigm together with other minor paradigms such as inculturation.

*Church and Reconstruction of Africa* (1997); Other important theological contributions to the debate include, Ukuchukwu Chris Manus, *Intercultural hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches* (2003); Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction & Renewal in African Christian Theology*, (2003); Stein Villumstad, *Social Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Within and Without* (2005); Aquiline Tarimo's *Applied Ethics And Africa's Social Reconstruction* (2005).

Similarly, various theses, at postgraduate level, have been completed on this subject, in various Universities across the world. These include, Isaac M. T. Mwase, "A Critical Evaluation of J N K Mugambi's Correlation of Christianity with the African Heritage," Ph.D. Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, 1993; Valentin Dedji, "Reconstruction and renewal in African Christian theology," PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, England, (1999); Claudia Nolte, "The efficacy of a contextual theology of the cross for reconciliation and reconstruction in South Africa," MA Thesis, Graduate Theological Union, (2000); Elelwani Bethuel Farisani, "The use of Ezra-Nehemiah in a quest for a theology of renewal, transformation and reconstruction in the (South) African context," PhD Thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (2002); Tyro Tyni, "Theology of Reconstruction," MTh Thesis, University of Helsinki, (2002-4); George Fihavango, "Theology of Reconstruction," ThD Thesis, University of Erlangen, (2002-5), and Julius Mutugi Gathogo's "Liberation and Reconstruction in the Works of J. N. K Mugambi: A critical analysis in African theology," PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004-2006.<sup>43</sup>

### **3.6.2. Reconstruction**

As Mugambi observes, the terms construction and reconstruction are terminologies from engineering. In practice, an engineer "constructs and reconstructs when the existing complex becomes dysfunctional" (1995:12). Consequently, new specifications may be engineered in the new designs, "while some aspects of the old complex are retained in the new" (: 12). In African Christianity, Mugambi feels that new specifications need to be made to redesign African theology for the twenty-first century.

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<sup>43</sup> It is no wonder that these researches are becoming part of the sources of theology of reconstruction in Africa. Other "new" sources include the published journal articles where different ideas are being published every now and then (see bibliography).

Sociologically, Mugambi sees the notion of social reconstruction as belonging to the social sciences. Consequently, he borrows from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann who describe social reconstruction as “the reorganisation of some aspects of a society in order to make it more responsive to changed circumstances” (Ngugi 2002:73). Mugambi, like Berger and Luckmann (1967), is convinced that religion has an important role in the social reconstruction of a society. As both object and agent of social reconstruction, he feels that, “religion provides the world view which synthesises everything cherished by the individuals as corporate members of the community” (Mugambi 1995: 17). Hence, for Mugambi, religion is the single most vital project for people who are undergoing rapid change, such as that in post-colonial Africa. Mugambi however fails to acknowledge that as much as religion can be a tool of social transformation, it can also be used as an agent of de-construction.

In turning to the inter-relationship between African social history and biblical tradition in his quest to locate the process of social reconstruction, Mugambi highlights various biblical motifs such as the exilic motif in Jeremiah, the Deuteronomic motif associated with King Josiah, the restorative motif expressed in Isaiah 61:4, and the reconstructive motif exemplified by Ezra, Haggai and Nehemiah (1995: 13). He contrasts these motifs with the exodus, existentialist and utopian motifs (1996:33-36). He thus states:

After the Babylonian exile, a new nation was reconstructed under the direction of Ezra and Nehemiah. The role of Nehemiah as the director of the reconstruction project is lucidly explained in the book bearing his name. Nehemiah becomes the central text of the new theological paradigm in African Christian Theology, as a logical development from the Exodus motif (2003:40).

As noted earlier, at the March 30, 1990 meeting in Nairobi, Mugambi reminded his audience that the future of the church in Africa would require a new Christian theological emphasis. He recalled that the theologians of the 1970's and 1980's had highlighted the Exodus metaphor and emphasised the theme of liberation. In so doing, African people were metaphorically likened to the people of Israel on their way from bondage in Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan. In utilising this powerful metaphor, the Egyptian regime was equated with the colonial regime whereas the Promised Land was seen as the liberated nation. Mugambi further notes that most African countries became independent in the 1960's and further explains that after Zimbabwe received its independence in 1980, Namibia in 1990, and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 paving the way for the last

non-independent African nation to move towards freedom, the liberation motif should not remain as if nothing had happened to Africa (1991:34).

For Mugambi, Mandela was the most prominent symbol of the Exodus metaphor in African Christian theology (Mugambi 1991:35). This however hardens the debate; for after the demise of apartheid, what biblical images do we use to view Mandela? Will he still represent Moses the liberator or Nehemiah the re-constructor? Following his release, did he lose his status as the symbol of liberation or did he shift from being the symbol of liberation to the symbol of reconstruction? How different is Mandela from the African leaders of the 1960s such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kenyatta, Kaunda, and Banda? Does the contribution of African leaders in post-independence Africa of the 1960s translate to the reconstruction of newly independent countries?

In directing his attention to theological reconstruction, Mugambi calls for African Christians to focus their energies on the "new frontiers of mission," including, theological reconstruction, epistemological reconstruction, placing more emphasis on technological advancement, and placing greater emphasis upon pastoral care (1991:40-43). Additionally, Mugambi puts greater emphasis upon the need for renewed commitment towards healing, ecumenism and proper management in all sectors of society and business. These new frontiers of mission, he argues, will mean the rehabilitation of the neediest cases that Africa is grappling with, including, the refugee crisis, gender discrimination, youth and students, the disabled and the hungry (1991:46-50) and the debt crisis (1991:31).

In summary, Mugambi describes the theology of reconstruction in the following terms:

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 (1995:xv).

Mugambi argues that the shift from liberation to reconstruction, begun in the 1990s, involves discerning alternative social structures, symbols, rituals, myths and interpretations of Africa's social reality by Africans themselves, "irrespective of what others have to say about the continent and its people" (1991:40). The resources for this re-

interpretation “are multi-disciplinary, analyses involving social scientists, philosophers, creative writers and artists, biological and physical scientists” (1991:40).

In Mugambi’s view, African theology cannot be over concerned with the theme of liberation, that has dominated Africa since the Cold War of the 1960s, when Africa was divided into two ideological blocks (East *vis-à-vis* West). In the absence of “outsiders” maintaining the so-called dictators in Africa; and encouraging African patriots to languish in prison (as was the case of Nelson Mandela) or face death and torture (as was the case with Patrice Lumumba of DRC), depending on which side of the ideological block that one stands. With political pluralism being encouraged throughout Africa, thereby opening socio-religious space for everyone including the propagators of the Christian gospel, African theology should not fail to take cognisance of the new scenario, for theology is never done in a vacuum. African theology has to play a renewed role of being the beacon of God’s stewardship of creation amongst the people of tropical Africa and the Continent as a whole.

How suitable is Mugambi’s call for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology of the twenty-first century? How timely is this call? These problem issues still remain to be answered.

### **3.7. A critical evaluation**

An issue that Mugambi does not appear to tackle is what Mbiti (2003:5) calls “theological engineers.” According to Mbiti, these “engineers” are largely expatriate theologians who, “seeing that the phenomenon of African theology is here to stay,” “advise” or “dictate” as to how the theological enterprise ought to be conducted. The danger with such engineering is that it can muffle and retard the development of genuine African theology. These engineers pose the “danger of twisting African theology into something different from what and how it was intended to in the Ibadan conference” of 1966 or before (2003:5). This is an important observation, considering that Mugambi sees the theology of reconstruction as an “inclusive theology” that acknowledges the diversity of the African people and therefore everyone living in Africa as an African regardless of his or her background. The redefinition of who is an African in post-liberation Africa may complicate the question, thereby asking who should do African theology, and secondly, who qualifies as an authentic African theologian?

Mbiti (2003: 5-6) is at pains when he cites a few examples of these theological engineers/expatriates who can easily divert the course and cause of African theology. For example, Vincent J. Donovan who provides what he calls "An African Creed" at the end of his book, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Fides/Claretian, Notre Dame, Indiana 1979, P. 200). This states, among other things, that,

We believe in the one High God... We have known this High God in the darkness, and now we know him ((sic) in the light.... We believe that God made good his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village.... He was rejected by his people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, he rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.... He is alive. He lives.

When such a "theological engineer" formulates a new "creed" and designates it as "African," no wonder Mbiti and others are concerned. Who gave them the authority to speak on behalf of African theology and misrepresent it to the point of subjecting it to ridicule? Fearing such misrepresentation, Mugambi says that, "foreign missionaries and theologians cannot articulate African theology. As only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches" (1989b: 11). Creeds by their very nature are public property and not created by individuals, however astute they may be. Again, in African vernacular languages, terms such as "High God" are not applicable (Mbiti 1969). Furthermore, African traditional knowledge of God is not "in darkness." It is erroneous to refer to Jews as a tribe just as it is ludicrous to mention hyenas in connection with the burial and resurrection of Jesus. To refer to heaven as the "skies" is a serious distortion and poor reflection on African theology and African Christianity in general.

Another example of engineered works in African theology is the works of Joseph Healey who has published a book entitled, *A Fifth Gospel* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis books, 1981). In this book, he describes what he calls "Black Christian Values" in Eastern Africa. While it is good that he fully acknowledges the traditional values of the people of Eastern Africa, he does not have to project it as the "fifth Gospel" as there are only four Gospels in Canonical scriptures.

Another example of theologically "engineered" works is that of Aylward Shorter. In his book, *African Christian Theology – Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books 1977), he clearly wants to suggest that African theology has to be engineered towards either of these two alternatives – which is misleading! Curiously, he concludes



that, “an African Christian Theology...has to be a dialogical theology” (1989b: 160). One wonders: Is that all there is, in order to be African theology? Does African theology need to be considered reductionist in nature in order for it to be declared reasonable? Why denigrate African theology, and make it appear as though it does not require critical academic engagements? Why disparage the sincere theological efforts of others in such an ignorant and pretentious way? Finally, why provide such a misleading and yet capturing title?

Another case in point is that of J Richard Gehman, in his book entitled, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Nairobi: Evangel Press, 1987), Gehman clearly wants to navigate the articulation of African theology towards western evangelicalism, to which he subscribes (Mbiti 2003:6). Gehman’s concern that African theology must follow western frameworks is both presumptuous and arrogant.

With such poignant examples, one can easily conclude that African theology is under attack by scholars who claiming to know much about Africa and its theological task, yet, have either never studied or lived in Africa.<sup>44</sup> From the above analysis and in the light of Mugambi’s works, it is important to ask the question: how do we project our theology – from liberation to reconstruction – when Africa faces such serious misrepresentations in all fronts? Second, in the face of such deliberate obscurantism, wither too African theology, where do we go from there? Is Mugambi, to use the words of Tinyiko Maluleke, truly the “passionate and committed African Churchman, theologian and continental patriot of our time” (1996:473)? Is he aware that such belligerent misrepresentations can frustrate his efforts at theo-social reconstruction? In the light of the many publications on African theology by scholars unqualified to make such judgments, yet being privileged in terms of their ability to disseminate information through publishing, how can the project of theological reconstruction be successfully carried out by African scholars in their terms?

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<sup>44</sup> The works of Kwame Bediako will attest to this. In particular, Edward Taylor never visited Africa yet he wrote on African anthropology and claimed to have first hand information on Africa. As a result, he misinterpreted Africa. He referred to African religiosity as animism (See also, Mbiti 1969:7).

### 3.8. Conclusion

This chapter has unveiled both the diversity and the homogeneity of African theology. It has also explored Mugambi's understanding of African theology, its genesis, development and essential sources, as well as outlining the key concepts of liberation and reconstruction. By so doing, this chapter has made two major contributions to the study in general. First, it has sought to place the concepts of liberation and reconstruction within the current development trends present in African theology. This has helped assess whether African theology is responding to Mbiti's<sup>45</sup> challenge, and is growing as a discipline, or are African theologians merely pre-occupied with (working on its) definitions?

Second, the chapter has assessed Mugambi's contribution as an African theologian in the light of other practitioners and scholars in this field. Mugambi's socio-academic standing among other African scholars has been carefully evaluated, particularly about his call for a paradigm shift in African Christianity, from liberation to reconstruction.

In the following chapter, we intend to explore the concept of liberation in the African theologies of liberation. This will be done by revisiting two samples of theology that are done in Africa, as we trace the concept of liberation in Mugambi's works. This is an important concern due to the scholarly leadership that Mugambi has given to African theology over the past three decades. Is Mugambi telling African theologies of liberation to switch paradigms or die?

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<sup>45</sup> Mbiti complains that some "people spent more time and energy defining" African theology rather than contributing to its content. This was after it was launched in 1966, although some continue to spend a lot of time criticising the works of other scholars rather than making a positive contribution. With time, he says, there will be more consensus among scholars as to "African Theology" but the "multiplication of names for it is far from over. Some people accepted it happily, while others did so reluctantly. Nevertheless, it became a 'new' reality that had come to stay" (2003:4).

## CHAPTER 4

### J N K MUGAMBI AND AFRICAN THEOLOGIES OF LIBERATION

#### 4.0 Introduction

Having examined Mugambi's concept of liberation and reconstruction and its location within the current development trends of African theology in the twenty-first century, this chapter will attempt to scrutinise the concept of liberation as seen in the African theologies of liberation, such as African Women's theologies and the Black theology of South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

In demonstrating the concept of liberation, as utilised in African theologies of liberation, Mugambi's observation is important when he states that, "when the history of Africa in the twentieth century comes to be written, the most dominant theme will have to be liberation" (1995:38). Indeed, many books have been published on this subject, as this study will reveal. Similarly, the dominant themes in Africa of the nineteenth century were the slave trade and colonisation (: 38).

It is, therefore of vital importance to study the various notions held within African theologies in view of the dominant subject matter of human liberation. Mugambi's call for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, requires that a study on the concept of liberation as seen within African theologies will be of enormous benefit in understanding the thinking of Mugambi. How otherwise can we shift from a concept whose usage has not been fully understood?

This chapter is set on the premise that it is only by first understanding the concept of liberation, by studying the various explanations by African theologians, can we be able to effectively participate, constructively, in this debate that Mugambi has *invited* us.

#### 4.1. Historical factors behind liberation

Throughout our study, we will strive to treat liberation theology as one movement, and liberation theologians as one group. This is a common approach among liberation

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<sup>1</sup> This study considers African theologies of liberation as "African" theology, African Women's theology and South African Black theology.

theologians, as exemplified in the book, *Introducing Liberation Theology* by Boff and Boff (1987). Yet, as the study will show, differences certainly do exist. However, the similarities between the various theologies of liberation far exceed the differences, hence the need to provide a brief overview of African theologies.

For us to understand the concept of liberation, we will need to revisit the historical factors behind the concept of liberation. These factors include racism, slavery and slave trade, colonialism and the missionary involvement, and Western ethno-centricism. This will shed light on the topic under discussion, for as Mugambi has said, a study of church history in isolation from secular events distorts such history, because the church functions within the world (1989b: 21). Similarly, a study of Israelite history apart from the historical context of the peoples with whom they interacted would lead inextricably to a distortion in both. In any case, as Mugambi further states, “the history of Christianity in Africa has often been presented in isolation from the history of the colonisation of Africa by Europe, although the two processes have been inextricably woven together” (1989b: 21).

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike and Douglass Waruta are correct when they describe Africa as being a “historically disadvantaged continent” (2000:10). That is, the history of Africa’s dealings with the West, have largely had negative implications for Africa, as the forces of domination sought to dehumanise its peoples. This explains the numerous calls for liberation. One of the first glaring illustrations of such domination and dehumanisation is the slave trade, to which we now turn.

#### **4.1.1. The slave trade**

Mugambi regrets that in the period between the rise of Islam in the seventh century and the re-consolidation of Europe in the twentieth century, Africans were subjected to the slave trade. First, they were subjected to it across the Indian Ocean and then across the Atlantic Ocean (1989c: 80). Mugambi explains that during the Middle Ages, the institution of slavery was justified upon Aristotelian philosophical grounds than Christian. Interestingly, as Aristotle approved of slavery, the Christian theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1224-74) also followed his mentor in giving his support (Russell 1946:196-205, 444-54). In Aristotle’s view, a slave was an “animated instrument” who was “nothing in himself” (or herself) (Muller 1957:114-120). Slave traders and slave owners alike unfortunately

applied this definition across the Atlantic until the industrial revolution replaced slave labour with automated production (Mugambi 1989c: 80).<sup>2</sup>

Mugambi traces the institutionalisation of the slave trade in Africa (particularly in East Africa) and argues it began with the Portuguese in 1400 CE (1989b: 21ff). He goes on to suggest that the four centuries (1400-1800 CE) described as the “age of discovery, expansion and empire,” the European nations extended their influence all over the then known world (1989b: 21ff). That is, from Europe to America, Africa and Asia. During this time, the Roman Pontiff wielded so much power that he stood as arbitrator settling disputes between the influential nations of his day. As a result, many papal bulls were issued legitimising the interests of Portugal and Spain (1400-1600 CE). However, when England and France emerged in the 1800s as new powers, they began to command much wealth, power and influence in America, Africa and Asia (1989b: 26).

The Portuguese, Mugambi explains, were not much interested in spreading Christianity, but rather in trading gold, diamonds, spices and other commodities, including the human commodity of slaves. Africa became the source of this new commodity in which all European nations traded (1989b: 27). Slaves were transported from Africa’s West Coast to the European colonies in America. Similarly, Africans were transported in European slave ships from the Coast of East Africa to the European colonies in Asia. Consequently, as the trade in slaves proved increasingly lucrative, Spain, England, France, Holland, Denmark and the American colonies all entered the trade at various periods.

Paris, an African-American and a descendant of slave parents, talks of this trade in human “cargo” as the “European crime against humanity” in which:

Approximately 25 million Africans were stolen from their homeland, packed like sardines into the bellies of slave ships and after suffering the hell of the so-called “middle passage,” were sold on auction blocks to the highest bidder (2001:24).

Apart from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, slavery is perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall the African people. In this trade, Arabs and Europeans first befriended African leaders. Later, they enticed them to participate in the trade, thus inflicting enormous brutality and suffering upon their peoples. For three and a half centuries (Paris 2001:24), slave ships

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<sup>2</sup> This fact shows that Christian abolitionism had more to do with economics and politics, than with Christian ethics.

shuttled between Africa and Europe, America and the West Indies, carrying human cargo. While it was witnessed in other parts of the world, it differed in scale and brutality, Africa, being the worst hit (Gathogo 2001:37). Africans were transported in such inhumane conditions that many failed to survive the sea journey. Some died from starvation and infestation, while others from beatings. Those who were found to be too sick to deliver economically were thrown to the sharks. Those who survived worked under extreme conditions in the sugar colonial plantations of the Americas and Caribbean Islands. Additionally, many Black women were raped and gave birth to coloured children.

Because of the slave trade, a large number of Africans live in the Diaspora. Following the eighteenth century industrial revolution in Europe, and its emphasis upon skilled workers, emancipation proclamations were made outlawing slavery throughout the European colonies and Southern States of America. The sons and daughters of former slaves settled in their respective places of work and raised their families, as in a foreign land, similar to the Israelites in Babylon under the instruction of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29). As a result, large African communities exist in the West Indies, Europe and America, most of which have lost touch with traditional African cultural practices.

Although this was not the first time that slavery was practised, it was the first time that slavery was associated with race. As David Bosch (1991:227) has observed:

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

Bosch's analysis reveals the inhumane way in which Africans were treated by the western world despite the fact that they claimed to profess Christianity, where the emphasis on love is of paramount importance (*cf.* I Corinthians 13).

Tokunboh Adeyemo, in his book, *Is Africa Cursed?* feels that the Portuguese and the Spanish slave traders, whom he considers to be the first Europeans to deal in the African slave trade, believed that Africans were cursed (1997:14). Commenting on this point, William Banks (1972:9) has written:

Rationalising that it was God's will to bring Black heathens into contact with Christianity, even if it meant a lifetime of enforced servitude, their ships carried slaves to labour in the Caribbean colonies as early as 1517. With the approval of their governments and the Roman Catholic Church, the sellers of flesh maintained that "Christianised" slaves were better of than free heathen.

The capture of Africans was often done in the name of Christianising them, and thereby releasing them from the curse. It is unfortunate that the Christian Testament passages legitimate slavery, imploring slaves to submit to their masters as a symbol of their obedience to Christ (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22) have been used by past Evangelical leaders such as George Whitefield, John Davenport and Jonathan Edwards, to support the *status quo* (Adeyemo 1997:14).

Whatever other consequences, the slave trade led to an unprecedented dispersal of the African peoples around the world and in particular to the Americas and the Caribbean. Indeed, even though there were primordial dynamics of race distribution and cultural evolution that has shaped the global population, existent at the advent of Christendom, innumerable other forces have caused the redistribution of races, peoples and cultures. Among these forces is slave trade. This has had an enormous negative affect upon the peoples of Africa. Whereas by CE 800, Africans were largely confined to tropical Africa, Melanesia and the Pacific Islands, as Daniel Moi shows, through a slow, yet spontaneous dispersions and redistributions, "an entirely new situation developed between CE 1000 and 1200" (Moi 1986:155).<sup>3</sup> This history is significant for the conceptual framework of the Pan-Africanist movement, which managed to bring Africans from the African continent and the Diaspora together, despite being a meeting in conferences for some leading black elites.

The export of slaves from the beginning of the second millennia to the late fifteenth century was "a mere trickle compared to the outward flood that followed the discovery of the New World." From the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, the movement intensified as "black ivory" was transported to Arabia and the rest of Asia (Moi 1986:155).

Slavery and the slave trade is thus a major factor behind the concept of liberation. In North America, its development was against theo-social oppression, resultant of a racial

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lamin Sanneh's *Abolitionists Abroad*.

construct of history. Liberation from such racial oppression is still an ongoing project in North America, as indeed elsewhere in the world (see, James Cone 1970).

#### **4.1.2. The Colonial expansion**

Following the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Africa was forcibly partitioned by several European powers. As Mugambi explains, African “territories were first allocated, like plots, to chartered companies of the participating European powers, for this purpose” (1995:38). Only later, did the colonial governments take over and sought to establish and reinforce colonial laws. Mugambi cites Kenya as an example, being allocated to the chartered, Imperial British East Africa Company (*Hereafter*, IBEAC) in 1895, and only becoming a crown colony in 1920 (1995:38). Following the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania with the exclusion of Zanzibar) came under German control and was named German East Africa. Kenya and Uganda fell under the British despite being originally delegated to the IBEAC (Mugambi 1989b: 31).

In terms of the Berlin Treaty, Africa was partitioned among the European powers, namely, Britain, Belgium, Portugal, Spain and German, each creating spheres of influence and power (Gathogo 2001:34). As much as it negatively affected African culture, it also affected the spread of Christianity to Africa. As Mugambi (1995:38) has pointed out, Christian missionary expansion to Africa was subordinated to the secular forces despite provisions being made in the Berlin treaty to free missionary activity from secular control. Before this time, missionary societies were free to establish their missions wherever they felt regardless of their nationality and denominational allegiance. Hence, Ludwig Krapf, a German national and a Lutheran priest served with the CMS, an Anglican Missionary Society from England (Mugambi 1989b: 30).

With time, ecumenical co-operation became affected by the spirit of nationalism that followed colonial expansionism. Hence, while the Berlin Treaty provided for the free movement of missionary societies across territorial boundaries, irrespective of colonial powers who ruled the territories in question, in practice it did not take place. Each colonial power tended to accord preferential treatment to those missionary societies that originated from their respective countries (Mugambi 1989b: 32). As a result, those territories that fell under British control received mostly British protestant missionaries, while territories under French control received mainly French Catholic missionaries. In the case of



Tanganyika, controlled by Germany before the WW1, German Lutheran missionaries predominated until the beginning of the war. After Germany's defeat, culminating in the Treaty of Versailles June 28, 1919, Germany lost all her colonial territories, in terms of war reparations (Peacock 1987:292). With regard to East Africa, Tanganyika was entrusted to Britain by the League of Nations.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, after the British took over Tanganyika, British Protestant missionaries increased, again there under the auspices of the CMS and the United Methodist Church of Africa (*Hereafter*, UMCA) (Mugambi 1989 b: 32).

As Mugambi explains, the twentieth Century was characterised by anti-colonial struggles both nationally and internationally (1995:38). Nationalism and Pan-Africanism as a quest for African identity came as a reaction to the imperialistic and colonialist domination of Western powers. It is the great paradox of African history that external domination, whose strategy included the "colonisation of consciousness" at the psychological level (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) and "divide and rule" on the organisational level (Mazrui 1986), became the catalyst for African identity and African unity. Mazrui points out that colonialism, which was "closely linked to that process of fragmentation which created conflicting identities" also "inadvertently fostered Pan-Africanism as a consequence" (1986:107). Nyerere used to argue in the same way, hence suggesting that, if the imperialists divided (as a policy) in order to rule, they would also unite (in effect) by the same act of ruling (Mazrui 1986:108). It was this external rule that created among Africans the "sentiment of oneness." Mazrui therefore concludes that, "Europe's supreme gift to Africa is neither Christianity nor Western civilisation" but "African identity" (read the quest for liberation) (1986:109). This quest for identity, in turn, empowered the

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<sup>4</sup> The League of Nations was formed in 1919 as an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles. Leading political leaders during its formation included, President Woodrow Wilson (USA.); David Lloyd George (British Prime Minister) and Georges Clemenceau (Prime Minister of France). For the first time in history, an international organisation was deliberately created whose avowed purpose was the protection of independent nations from aggression and the preservation of peace. The headquarters of the League were set up in Geneva, Switzerland. It consisted of council comprising representatives from the five "great powers" and four lesser ones. Accordingly, the so-called "great powers" were to have permanent seats or permanent membership. The council was to meet at least once a year and more often if serious international disputes arose which required action. In addition to the council, there was the Assembly, consisting of representatives of all member states. The main officer of the League was its Secretary-General, a post first held by an Englishman, Sir Eric Drummond. Interestingly, the Covenant of the League (like the present Charter of the United Nations which replaced the Old League after the Second War (1939-1945) bound all member states to certain principles of international conduct, especially the "acceptance of obligations not to resort to war," the adoption of the rules of International Law, and respect for all treaties entered into (Peacock 1987:292-302). In all these treaties, Africa was excluded!

Africans to fight successfully against colonialism. Beginning in Ghana in March 1957,<sup>5</sup> one African Nation State after another achieved Constitutional Independence from their colonial rulers.

The anti-colonial struggles through the Pan-Africanist movement culminated in the launching of the OAU in 1963 (Mugambi 1995:38). Mugambi explains that the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England in 1945 declared that no African country should consider itself free until all the countries in the continent were liberated from colonialism (1995:38). He goes on to explain that:

African leaders, both religious and secular, were preoccupied with this theme of liberation, and it is difficult to find any leader who did not use this word. Even clergymen, (*as there were no ordained women*), who were critical of anti-colonial nationalist movement, still used the word, but insisted that the role of the church was exclusively for proclaiming spiritual liberation. They did not seem to appreciate that liberation from sin necessarily implied rectification of the adverse social and economic consequences of sin. Secular leaders, on the other hand, viewed religion as a hindrance to anti-colonial struggle, and considered their own movements as the sole agents of liberation. Consequently, a dichotomy emerged between the religious advocates of salvation and the secular advocates of liberation (: 39).

Thus, colonialism, with its history of humiliating policies and imperialist dispossessions, made its rude entry into Africa. This led many Africans to begin seeking a permanent solution to the endemic plague of western colonialism. Pan-Africanists such as, William Dubois of the United States, George Padmore and Marcus Garvey of the West Indies, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya (Abdul-Raheem 1996:1ff; cf. Mugambi 1989c: 84), tirelessly struggled for the liberation of Africa, often at great personal cost, and the return of African land to its original owners. In turn, the modern generation of scholars constantly revisits this theme, showing how Africa's still recent colonial past is responsible for many of the disparities from which Africa still suffers.

#### **4.1.3. The Missionary involvement and Western ethno-centricism**

To Africans, all Europeans coming to Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth century were viewed as forces of imperialism, which had come in order to invade and conquer. Mugambi builds on this view when he writes:

To Africans there was no obvious distinction between missionaries, administrators, settlers, merchants, soldiers and specialised professionals such as doctors,

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<sup>5</sup> The first country to achieve constitutional nationhood in tropical Africa was Ghana, formerly called Gold Coast (to emphasise its value for Europe). Under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana became a republic within the British Commonwealth in March 1957 (Mugambi 1989c:84).

engineers and architects – they were all Europeans. After all, despite the provision in the Berlin Treaty (which was reaffirmed in 1919), a missionary society was not expected to undermine the commercial and political interests of the colonial power controlling the territory where their society operated. Conversely, any society which facilitated effective colonisation was more likely to receive reciprocal co-operation from the colonial administration. It was therefore in the interests of most missionaries not to antagonize the colonial administrators by appearing to take sides with the colonial subjects who were their prospective converts. Many Africans viewed this missionary attitude as hypocrisy, much to the discredit of the modern missionary enterprise (1989b: 23).

Mugambi's explanation holds several important implications for missionary expansionism in Africa and western ethno-centricism. First, for many, missionary expansionism and ethno-centricity are inseparable from the colonial project. Second, the motives of Christian missionary societies were at best questionable. Third, some of the methods employed by Christian missionary societies were at best questionable. Fourth, missionary societies carried with them negative images of Africa. These factors led Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the renowned Kenyan novelist, to refer to western Christian missionaries as "the colonial spiritual police" (1972: xvii). As the study progresses, it will examine each of these factors in seeking to unveil the historical factors behind the need for liberation.

Several writers from non-Christian as well as Christian traditions have attempted to articulate the link between missionary work and colonialism. They represent various interrelated disciplines including, historical anthropology (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), post-colonial biblical criticism (Dube 2000), African theology (Bediako 1992) and Christian Missiology (Bosch 1991). With regard to the colonisation of the Tswana of South Africa, Comaroff and Comaroff classify the London Missionary Society (*Hereafter*, LMS) among the "earliest foot soldiers of British colonialism" (1991: xi). The same can be applied to other colonial situations in Africa; as David Bosch explains:

As it became customary for British missionaries to labour in British colonies, French missionaries in French colonies to be regarded as both vanguard and rearguard for the colonial powers... Whether they liked it or not, the missionaries became pioneers of Western imperialistic expansion (1991:304).

This perception was strengthened by the missionaries themselves who, at times, petitioned the governments of their home countries to extend protectorates to the areas where they were operating, "often with the argument that unless this happened, a rival colonial power might annex the territory" (Bosch 1991:305). As Mugambi has implied, western missionary societies understood that to colonise meant to missionize and vice versa. This meant that the ideals of propagating the Christian faith and pursuing colonial rule became

so intertwined that it was often hard to distinguish between them. Second, the images that the missionaries brought with them to Africa were misleading and often had long lasting psychological effects on the African. In particular, it made them serve the African society with ethno-centrism.<sup>6</sup> These images affected both their motives and their methods. As Bediako explains, the missionaries who came to Africa were already conditioned by the fact that until the nineteenth and twentieth century missionary era the West's experience of Africa had been in the context of the slave trade (1992:225-228). This in itself had fixed, in the missionary mind, an inferior image of the African. The belief in the Great Chain of Being had placed Africans in the lowest category of human beings following the "White," "Red" and "Yellow" races (: 227). Hence, their "racial, social and cultural inferiority to European peoples" (: 226) was clearly taken as a matter of divine design.

In terms of religious orientation, Bediako explains, a fourfold division placed Africans in the lowest category, thereby providing a good historical foundation for the quest for liberation. As Bediako can further state:

In the fourfold division of "Christian, Jewish, Mahometan (sic), Pagan" the fourth category was in a class of its own for being devoid of monotheism, a major consideration in the test of religion. From what was known of the peoples of Asia and Africa, they came within the category of pagan. However, whilst the Indians and the Chinese could be accounted "civilised" pagans by virtue of being literate, Africans were believed to be without literature, arts, sciences, government, laws, and also cannibalistic and naked, and so were reckoned to be savage and barbarous pagans, "... as destitute of civilization as they are of true religion." These ideas formed part of the stock of knowledge and persisted in the intellectual climate of Europe well into the nineteenth century, when they became fused with evolutionary and racial theories of human achievement, civilisation, history and progress (: 229-230).

In other words, the image of Africa that western missionaries brought was one of uncivilised heathens, with no culture and with religion that lacked a monotheistic conception of God. Contemplation of pre-Christian Africa was therefore regarded as "either harmful or at best valueless," and Africans who were to be converted from paganism would be taken as a "*tabula rasa* on which a wholly new religious psychology was somehow to be imprinted" (: 226).

Another consideration is that of missionary motive. Mugambi is right to assert that it was in the "interests of most missionaries not to antagonise the colonial administration" and

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<sup>6</sup> Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view people unconsciously by using ones own group and ones own customs as the standard for all judgements. It places the human self, ones racial, ethnic or social group at the centre of the Universe and rates all others accordingly.

that the Africans viewed this missionary attitude as being hypocritical (1989b: 33). Mugambi shares this view with Bosch who says that their motives included some that can be contested today, such as imparting to Africans a “superior culture” as a means of “civilising” them. As Bosch explains:

Small wonder that, particularly in the nineteenth century, the adjective “poor” was increasingly used to qualify the noun “heathen”...The patent needs of the “poor heathen” became one of the strongest arguments in favour of mission. The glory of God as missionary motive had first been superseded by the emphasis on his love. Now there was yet another shift in motivation – from the depth of God’s love to the depth of fallen humanity’s pitiable state. Love has deteriorated into patronizing charity (1991:290).

According to Bediako, the motives of “Christianising” and “civilising” became inseparable:

Since the technical and cultural achievements in Europe were now generally and confidentially identified as the fruits of Christianity, it seemed appropriate that to effect the salvation of Africa, Africans must be given the total package of Christianity and (European) civilisation (1992:228).

This further agrees with Bosch when he stresses that the project of “civilising” heathen Africans was considered part of the “manifest destiny” of Europeans, they being convinced that:

God, in his [*sic*] providence, had chosen the Western nations, because of their unique qualities, to be the standard-bearers of his [*sic*] cause even to the uttermost ends of the world (1991:298).

This reveals how the “cultural superiority” of Europeans became intermingled with western missionary notions of religious superiority. Consequently, the missionaries remained, “blind to their own ethnocentrism” (Bosch 1991:294) as they sought to reshape “the entire world in the image of the west” (: 292).

The above discussion shows that the missionary project of the west included the desire to create docile subjects for the colonising powers for whom they worked hand in hand. Furthermore, the colonial state enforced “physical obedience with the aid of punishment and laws” while the western missionaries secured, “the inward servility and devotion of the natives” (Bosch 1991:306). It is no wonder that the Zimbabwean theologian, Ambrose Moyo, sees the role of African theology as liberating the church from the foreign structures that it has unwittingly acquired, a view that is shared by other African theologians such as Mbiti, Idowu, Bediako, Nthamburi, and Mugambi. As Moyo confirms:

African Theology should work towards the decolonisation of the local church in Africa and rid it of its neo-colonial structures most of which were designed from

racist perspective... African theology... can only be born in the context of freedom, in a situation where people are allowed to express themselves through local available instruments, where people respect themselves, their culture and entertain no inferiority complexes (1983:100).

Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:6) have referred to the LMS as “the most active cultural agents of empire, being driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the ‘native’ world in the name of God and European civilisation” and good at “colonising the consciousness” of the African people for whom they purportedly worked for. Waruta contributes to this idea when he describes how western missionaries approached the task of educating Africans from their own cultural perspective:

The missionaries developed an education system according to their own cultural, theological and philosophical backgrounds. Their educational systems were actually meant to create a new African in the missionary’s own cultural, theological and philosophical image. Culturally, the missionaries believed that they represented a superior culture to be swallowed by their students in total. Everything African was regarded primitive, dirty or barbaric. Everything European was to be imitated as superior, progressive and noble (2000: 129).

Musa Dube is therefore correct when she states that “mission understood as a westernisation process in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was inseparable from European cultural imperialism” (2000:14), a view shared by Mugambi, as we have seen previously.

Although British indirect rule, or French assimilation policies were aimed at converting Africans into Europeans in terms of their manners, dress codes, language usage, eating habits, education and the general mode of life, it is important to note that western missionaries did an excellent job in creating a sense of oneness among Africans, even though they each possessed distinct languages. By emphasising western languages, that is, the language of the oppressor, they equipped the diversity of African peoples with languages that united them as their “new tool” in their quest for identity. Hence, it was later used as a means of agitating for freedom, human dignity and liberation. It is no wonder that Christian missionary project was one, calling for equality before God (although this was not practised as we have noted above) while the western values (which the missionaries brought with them) included prosperity through (the new) advancements in education. As Comaroff and Comaroff can rightly remark:

It is a process in which the “savages” of colonialism are ushered, by earnest protestant evangelists, into the revelation of their own misery, are promised salvation through self-discovery and civilization, and are drawn into a conversation with the culture of modern capitalism – only to find themselves enmeshed,

willingly or not, in its order of signs and values, interests and passions, wants and needs. Even the established modes of protest open to them in ringing Christian terms – terms like civil rights, civilized liberties, freedom of conscience (1991: xii).

It is therefore ironic that while Africans were being westernised, they were also given the tools to fight against western domination. It is no wonder that the first generation of African leaders, who assumed the leadership of their respective countries in the 1960s, were products of mission schools and churches (see Nthamburi 1991:1). These leaders included, Kenyatta of Kenya, Nkrumah of Ghana, Kaunda of Zambia, Nyerere of Tanzania and Senghor of Senegal, Banda of Malawi, and Mugabe of Zimbabwe. Nthamburi builds on this thought when he states that:

Kenyatta had gone through missionary schools and Institutions. Senghor and Nkrumah were even seminarians. Kaunda's father was a clergyman while Nyerere was a very devout catholic. It seems, therefore, correct to say that there is a close affinity between African theology and the movement towards freedom in Africa (1991:1).

The view that these African leaders were ironically given the Bible and education as tools to fight against western domination is easily seen in the case of Kenyatta, who preferred to use Hebrews 11: 24-7, which reads:

By faith, Moses when he had grown up refused to be known as the son of pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated a long with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the King's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible.

Kenyatta would also use the same text to argue that, as Moses refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter in order to serve his nation, the Kikuyu (*read Africans*) who were working or staying away from their homes, needed to emulate Moses and return home to uplift their people (*cf. Mũiguithania*,<sup>7</sup> a Kikuyu newspaper, Kenya National Archives file, No. DC/MKS. 10B/13/1). Kenyatta's usage of the Bible for the purposes of political liberation clearly emulates other pre-independence nationalist leaders of the 1960's such as Nyerere, Kaunda, Senghor and Nkrumah.

While western missionaries appeared to be working for their oppressive colonial rulers, they also provided Africans with weapons and tools through which they could channel

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<sup>7</sup> *Mũiguithania* was a political journal, edited by Kenyatta from as early as 1928. *Mũiguithania* is a Kikuyu word, which means "the unifier."

their quests for political liberation. As noted these tools included the bible<sup>8</sup> and western education. This observation is clearly noted by Mugambi when he writes:

If education is the process of positive character-formation and liberation is the process towards the realization of total freedom, it is clear that there is an intimate connection between the two processes. Sometimes the realization of human dignity, which is an important aspect of liberation, may depend entirely on the kind of education one has received. For if, as in the colonial period, one is taught to think of oneself as a subject, one will continue so to regard oneself until a new process of re-education arises (1989b: 111).

Mugambi holds that the Christian faith only maintains total liberation “when people take seriously their dependence on God” (*read – abiding by biblical teachings*). He further notes that not only should education extend beyond the classroom, but that “all education should be for liberation” (1989b: 111). Western missionaries thus gave some Africans an important tool of liberation through the Bible and Western education.

In concluding this sub-section on the missionary involvement and their western ethnocentrism as a historical factor behind the quest for human liberation, we have discovered that the theology of liberation in Africa is deeply rooted in the conduct and teachings of the early nineteenth century missionary societies who came together with the colonial rulers. Their importance in Christianising Africa cannot be underestimated, as they were responsible for the brand of Christianity that we practice today. While the Portuguese missionaries of the fifteenth century failed to make a lasting positive impact in the spread of Christianity in Africa, the nineteenth century Christian missionaries left a lasting legacy that, despite obvious shortcomings, can still be felt today. Finally, western mission provided fertile ground for the African quest for liberation especially where their behaviours were deemed ethnocentric.

#### 4.1.4. Racism

Racism is the belief that people’s qualities are prejudiced by their race and that the members of other races are not as good as the members of our own, resulting in the other races being treated unfairly.<sup>9</sup> An example is that of Adolf Hitler’s book: *Mein Kampf* (My struggle), which is an articulation of Hitler’s racist beliefs. Published eight years before he came to power in the 1930s, it extols the splendour of the Aryan race as superior over others:

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<sup>8</sup> This empowerment through the Bible reveals it a powerful tool that can reshape and reorder the status quo. The bible’s role as a tool of liberation cannot therefore be underestimated.

<sup>9</sup> See, Cambridge International Dictionary of English (Cambridge University Press, 1995).



Every manifestation of human culture, every product of art, science and technical skill, which we see before our eyes today, is almost exclusively the product of the Aryan creative power...it was the Aryan alone who founded a superior type of humanity...he is the Prometheus of mankind (sic) from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth (Hitler 1925:150).

Hitler went on to borrow ideas from Wagner's dream of Germanic greatness; Nietzsche's notion of a "daring ruler race," and Darwin's concept of the ruthless struggle needed for survival. He developed his illusions of Aryan destiny and his hatred of the Jews, who he maintained were economically, politically, culturally, religiously and morally destroying civilization (Stott 1990:212). He used insulting and irrational language against the Jews, claiming that he would be acting on behalf of the Almighty Creator in dealing with them. He went on to quote Christian scholars to justify racism (Stott 1990:213).

Interestingly, this negative attitude hence hatred against the Jews had earlier been expressed before in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Martin Luther the father of reformation theology rebuffed them – on religious and social grounds. Describing the Jews as unwanted and ungrateful guests of the German people, Luther urged their removal from the Land. He portrayed them as plundering their hosts' goods and blaspheming their hosts' God. He complained:

We suffer more from them (the Jews) than the Italians do from the Spaniards, who plunder the hosts' kitchen, cellar, chest, and purse, and, in addition, curse him and threaten him with death. Thus the Jews, our guests, also treat us: for we are their hosts. They rob and fleece us and hang about our necks, these lazy weaklings and indolent bellies; they swill and feast, enjoy good times in our homes, and by way of reward they curse our Lord Christ, our churches, our princes, and all of us, threatening us and unceasingly wishing us death and every evil.<sup>10</sup>

To rid Germany of the "unbearable, devilish burden of the Jews," Luther recommended that their homes, schools, and synagogues be razed, and that they be forced to live in barns and to do manual work, if not expelled or "cut off like a gangrenous limb."<sup>11</sup> This shows that even though Luther did not hate the Jews on racial grounds, he helped devise, albeit unconsciously, the negative connotation that Hitler later came to perfect.

With regard to South Africa, before apartheid was dismantled and the first democratic elections conducted on the April 27, 1994, the origins of the Afrikaners' sense of divine destiny are bound up with their history. When the Dutch first arrived at the Cape of Good

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<sup>10</sup> Luther's Works, Vol.47: *The Christian and Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), "On the Jews and Their Lies", pp.275-276.

<sup>11</sup>Luther's Works, Vol.47: *The Christian and Society IV* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 269-75, 285-92.

Hope in 1652, they saw themselves as the heirs and the bearers of European Christian civilisation. As Stott (1990:213) has shown, when the Great Trek began in 1835, whereby, “they travelled in ox wagons North and East” to escape British rule, their conviction that they were a superior race increased. They paralleled themselves with the Israelites of the Hebrew Bible seeing their journey as a new Exodus – a divine deliverance from oppression under Pharaoh – and the British! During what was a gruelling passage, they felt they were being tested like Israel in the wilderness; the hostile black nations they had to overcome being equivalent to the Amalekites and the Philistines (Stott 1990:213).

Faced with hostile Zulu forces they “entered into a covenant with God” and thereby won the Battle of Blood River with what they deemed was divine help. Henceforth, the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State were considered as the Promised Land to which God had brought them. Since that time, this sense of divine apportionment has had a deep impact on their self-perception; they thus judged themselves a superior race, a chosen people, and an elect nation. As a result, the Nationalist leader, D F Malan, who became Prime Minister in 1948, asserted that “Afrikanerdom is not the work of men [*sic*] but the creation of God” (Montagu 1974:50).

With regard to East Africa, Mugambi was born during the institutionalisation of white racism in 1947. He thus experienced the brunt of racism. He remembers seeing it in his church and in the rest of the society where promotion in public service or amongst the ecclesiastical hierarchy was based solely on racial considerations. This fact of racism is well captured by his contemporary, Nthamburi:

I remember growing up as a small child in one of the small towns in Kenya. There was a “white only” restaurant in town with the inscription “Africans and dogs are not welcome.” From the very beginning you were made to understand that you are not fully human. You were classified with the dogs and that is the treatment you got (Nthamburi 1991:5).

With regard to Black theology in the United States of America, James Cone, a leading North American black theologian, explains its sources and cites black experience of white racism as one of its main sources:

The black person knows that a ghetto is the white way of saying that blacks are subhuman and fit only to live with rats. The black experience is police departments adding more recruits and buying more guns to provide “law and order,” which means making a city safe for its white population. It is politicians telling blacks to cool it or else...It is the church bodies compromising on whether blacks are human (1990:24).

Cone goes on to cite the source of black history, as another significant factor behind the call for liberation. He draws examples from history of the slave trade and its institutionalisation, as a factor that was informed by racism (1990:25). He argues cogently and forcefully that whites attempted to define blacks as non-persons:

In other countries, slaves were allowed community, and there were slave rights. Slaves were human beings, and their humanity was protected (to some extent) by certain civil laws. Black history in North America meant that whites used every conceivable method to destroy black humanity. As late as 1857 the highest court of this land decreed that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.".... And the fact that this country still, in many blatant ways, perpetuates the idea of the inferiority of blacks poignantly illustrates the capabilities of human evil. If the black theology is going to speak to the condition of black persons, it cannot ignore the history of white inhumanity committed against them (1990:26).

Cone holds that black theology came into existence "when the black clergy realised that killing slave masters was doing the work of God" (1990:26). This "realisation" is however inconsistent with African theology or Christian theology in that racism had inflicted the African populace to the extent that it abandoned the doctrine of the sanctity of human life. That is, only God has a right to take any persons' life, for all are created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*), whether woman or man, slave or slave master. The Bible advises Christians to conquer evil with good and to bless those who persecute them (See, Romans 12:21; cf. Luke 7: 36f).

Cone further explains that black theology began when black clergy refused to accept the racist white church as consistent with the Christian gospel of God. He argues that the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Church, the Baptist churches and many other black churches was a visible manifestation of black theology (1990:26). Cone's view evidently demonstrates that black experience of white racism in North America almost compels them to break the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) even though the commandment not to commit murder is paramount to Christian ethics, even if involved murdering a slave master or oppressor.

In comparing North America and South Africa during the time of apartheid Rosemary Radford Ruether (1990), says that in both countries, racism had to do with the subjugation of black men by white men. She goes on to say that, racism is built on dividing and conquering the members of the black family as much as possible so that the white racist system can exploit blacks for their labour. She notes however, that the experience of

racism in America and of apartheid in South Africa cannot be equated, as the situation of discrimination against black South Africans was much deeper (Ruether cited in Cone 1990:177). Ruether therefore writes:

The basic assumption of apartheid is that blacks should remain in these "reserves" and are to be allowed into the white areas only as needed as labour by whites. Moreover, they are to enter these white areas only as individual workers, not as family units. Pass laws and labour registration regulate the entrance of blacks into the white areas as workers. Even though the carrying of passes has been abolished, the basic structure of regulation of black residence in white areas remains. Blacks are allowed to live in white areas only as long as they are employed. If they are not employed, they are deported back to the black reserves (Ruether cited in Cones 1990:178)

John Stott explains two kinds of racism in his book, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (1990). The first is based on a pseudo-scientific myth and the second on personal prejudice. He explains that UNESCO defined in 1967, the myth that was foundational to Hitler's Anti-Semitism, South Africa's apartheid and Britain's pro-Nazi party, the National Front, as a "false claim that there is a scientific basis for arranging groups hierarchically<sup>12</sup> in terms of psychological and cultural characteristics that are immutable and innate" (1990: 220). According to Stott, popular prejudice is not based on any particular theory, "but is a psychological reaction to people of other ethnic groups arising usually from resentment, fear or pride" (1990:220).

#### 4.2. African Women's Theologies

African women's theologies were officially recognised in 1989 in Accra, Ghana when Mercy Amba Oduyoye gave the keynote address that inaugurated the Circle of Concerned African Women's Theologians (Phiri 1997:68). In her inaugural address, attended by seventy African women theologians, Oduyoye urged African Christianity to do a "two-winged" theology through which both women and men could communicate with God<sup>13</sup> (Njoroge 1997:77).

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Linnaeus and the taxonomy of race.

<sup>13</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a Methodist, originally from Ghana but married to a Nigerian, has been the leading African woman pursuing feminist theology that is distinctly African. She is the founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (*Hereafter, the Circle*) which came into existence in 1989. It is a body for African women in Africa and the Diaspora. Musimbi Kanyoro from Kenya co-ordinated the Circle from 1996 to 2002. From 2002, Isabel Apawo Phiri, from Malawi, has succeeded her. Besides Oduyoye there are many others including, Bette Ekeya, Mary Getui, Teresa Hinga, Musimbi Kanyoro, Hannah Kinoti, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, and Nyambura Njoroge of Kenya, Teresa Okure of Nigeria, Elisabeth Amoah of Ghana, Rose Zoe, Louise Tappa and Grace Eneme in Cameroon, Bernadette Mbuy Beya and Justine Kahungu in Zaire, and Brigalia Bam and Denise Ackerman in South Africa, Musa Dube of Botswana among others. At present, its membership is around 600. Since 1989, when the Circle of Concerned African women theologians was launched under Mercy Oduyoye's leadership, they have participated in oral theology,

Isabel Phiri in explaining that it is “theologies” and not “theology,” says that, “African women theologians want to acknowledge that even within Africa, there is diversity of women’s experiences due to (*the*) differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religion” (2004:16). She goes on to explain that despite differences in terminology, “all women would like to see the end of sexism and the establishment of a more just society of men and women who seek the well-being of the other” (2004:16).

Apart from Oduyoye, other pioneers of the Circle include Betty Ekeya, Anne Nasimiyu - Wasike, Musimbi Kanyoro, Rosemary Edet and Rachel Tetteh (Kanyoro 1997:9). The Circle, which is Pan-African in extent, consists of various regional chapters, such as the Anglophone, West African chapter, which was formed in 1993-1994 in Abokobi, Accra under the facilitation of the late Rachel Tetteh and Elizabeth Amoah. Around the same time, the Francophone, West African chapter met in Douala in 1993, co-ordinated by Louise Tappa and Rose Obianga (Kanyoro 1997:10). Since then, other chapters of the Circle have been formed throughout Africa.

African Women’s theologies, as with other feminist theologies, such as the *Theologia Mujerista* of American Latino origin, Womanist theology of African-American origin, and Feminist theology from white American women, all are essentially substrates of liberation theology. Together they seek to liberate women from the socio-cultural forces that dehumanise and oppress, hence barring them from living as true images of God (*Imago Dei*) (*cf.* Phiri 1997; Kanyoro 1997; Njoroge 1997). As Phiri observes, studies conducted in the Majority-World feminist theologies have wrongly combined African-American Womanist theology with African Women’s theology. While African Women’s theology and African-American Women’s theologies may share the same skin colour, the contexts within which they each do theology are very different (1997:68). An example can be seen from the context of Womanist theology, which is the history of oppression from slavery and sexism in the Americas. This is not necessarily the case in culturally oppressive Africa.

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through song, music, story telling, Bible reading and in particular, through written theologies that are evident in many emerging publications in recent times. See <http://www.thecirclecawt.org/>

African Women's theology, as with other liberation theologies, covers a wide area of concern, such as the history of slavery and colonisation, cultural and spiritual imperialism, struggle against racism, female circumcision, cultural identity, poverty engendered by globalisation, neo-colonial structures, widowhood, childlessness, inheritance, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic among many others (Phiri 1997a: 68ff; *cf.* Phiri 2004c). Its sources include, oral sources, Circle theologians, anthologies of papers from Circle conferences and consultations, Bible studies, workshops, informal interviews, anonymous personal letters, unpublished dissertations and research papers (Phiri 1997a: 68ff; *cf.* Phiri 2004c).

According to Phiri, African women's theologies are:

A critical, academic study of the causes of women oppression: particularly a struggle against societal, cultural and religious patriarchy. They are committed to the eradication of all forms of oppression against women through a critique of the social and religious dimensions both in African culture and Christianity. African women's theologies take women's experiences as its starting point, focusing on the oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, globalisation and sexism (Phiri 2004a: 156).

With regard to methodology in doing African women's theologies, Phiri acknowledges that it sees the need to include the voices of women, both theologians and non-theologians, because it recognises that most women in Africa are engaging in oral theologies. She says:

Story telling is one of the powerful methodologies that African women have revived. Musa Dube has developed a unique methodology of reading a biblical story in the context of globalisation through story telling technique. Through story telling, African women are bringing to the attention of the world their spiritual, emotional and physical suffering and the potential they have to transform their situation of oppression. It includes men in its vision and struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression (Phiri 2004a: 156).

Story telling as a methodology in doing African Women's theologies is an essential approach for doing theology in post cold war Africa. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, it is a tool of healing and reconciliation. In a continent that is recovering from foreign and locally instigated conflicts, story telling as an avenue of confessing our sins of commission and omission will be crucial. In Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Mozambique are just but a few examples that can be cited in a continent that is in dire need of psycho-social reconstruction. James Cone captures this view when he says:

Every people have a story to tell, something to say to themselves, their children, and to the world about how they think and live, as they determine their reason for being... When people can no longer listen to the other people's stories, they become enclosed within their own social context... And then they feel they must destroy other people's stories (1975: 102-3; *cf.* Dedji 2003:84-85).

Of great concern in African Women's theologies is the HIV/AIDS crisis. They have gallantly pushed this agenda since 2002. In view of this, Isabel Phiri rightly develops the view that HIV/AIDS is an urgent issue for theology of mission in Africa. She rejects some *conventional wisdom* that "HIV/AIDS is a punishment from God" and explains that such retrogressive views would make it difficult for the church to successfully confront the pandemic (Phiri 2004b: 423-4). Rather, it should be confronted as a challenge that affects all people in tropical Africa with its catastrophic consequences that needs to be addressed with urgency. With marriage in tropical Africa being at great risk, she contends that HIV/AIDS ought to be treated as a gender issue (: 425). This, she argues, will guarantee the safety of the African society considering that "marriage is at the centre of the African community" (: 425).

Presently, African women theologians who are responsible for theological formation and religious training, include, Mercy Oduyoye, Denise Ackermann, Isabel Phiri, Elizabeth Amoah, Nyambura Njoroge, Musimbi Kanyoro, Teresa Hinga, Esther Mombo, and Musa Dube among many others (see, Landman 1998:138). Some of these women teach and work in the Diaspora, and yet this does not hinder them from influencing theological formation in Africa through their publications. Such would be Nyambura Njoroge, who works for the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

As Isabel Phiri notes, the Circle originally defined "African women" as daughters of Africa, living south of the Sahara, whose lives are influenced by Christianity and African culture. In practice, however, the group includes African women representing all the major religions of Africa (1997:69). It now embraces all women of Africa regardless of status, creed, colour and educational background. An example is the Ghanaian, Rabiatu Ammah, who has written an article entitled "Paradise lies at the feet of Muslim women" (1997:69). This Circle therefore illustrates the plurality of faiths that is Africa. It also points to the homogeneity and diversity in defining an African. The danger may lie, in the fact that Evangelical Christians within The Circle find it hard to accept other faiths as equal to their own, believing that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and not equal to any other religious figure.

African women's theologies address issues such as initiation rituals, such as birthing and naming, whereby they show that such rituals favour men, thus placing women in

oppressive situations that call for liberation (Phiri 1997:71). Other concerns include the understanding of God in Africa, spirituality, eschatology, Christology, ecclesiology and African women's hospitality.

With regard to the future of African women's theologies, Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (2006:37) optimistically predicts the transformation of the African society towards an inclusive society of men and women. Consequently, she sees the way forward as something to do with dialoguing amongst women (whose voices were previously unheard) with their male counterparts. She cites the case of the "dialogue" between Jesse Mugambi and Musa Dube as a case in point. In this dialogue, "Jesse Mugambi Is Calling Us to Move from Liberation to Reconstruction: A Postcolonial Feminist Response," Unpublished paper, 2001, Dube critiqued Mugambi's theology of reconstruction as that which needed to address the superstructure of patriarchy keenly. In the coming section, we intend to discuss the African women's view of Christ as both the liberator and as the reconstructor.

#### **4.2.1. Jesus as liberator?**

African women theologians view Jesus as the liberator of women from patriarchal structures. Hinga emphasises that Jesus is the liberator who liberates women from poor handling of some cultural practices, such as polygamy,<sup>14</sup> female circumcision, and spiritual imperialism (1992:91). Oduyoye appreciates Jesus as the liberator who suffered that humanity might have the fullness of life intended for them by God (2001:54).

Jesus is further seen as one who liberates from the burden of disease and taboos that restrict women's participation within their communities. He liberates them from the triple burdens of racism, poverty and marginalisation (Oduyoye 2001:55). As liberator, Nasimiyu-Wasike contends that, Jesus invites African women not to accept their hardships and pain fatalistically but to work at eliminating the source of suffering and thus create a better place for all (Oduyoye 2001:62). As liberator, Jesus does not think of himself as the "last of God," but points beyond himself to "one who will come" (Ruether 1983:121).

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<sup>14</sup> In treating the issue of polygamy, the western missionaries asked the polygamist to abandon all but one of his wives as a condition of accepting the Christian gospel, undoubtedly bringing untold pain to the women and children who were thus discarded (Hinga 1992:188).



As a liberator of women, Jesus is the iconoclastic prophet. In other words, he stands out in the texts of Christian testament as a critic of the status quo particularly when it engenders the social injustices and marginalisation of women in society (Hinga 1992:91). He is thus the good shepherd who will not neglect his sheep at the hour of their need (John 10:11).

Jesus is also the liberator who lightens women's burdens (Matthew 11:28). As Oduyoye (2001:56) has shown, women identify with a Jesus who does not lay unnecessary burdens on their already burdened lives, but one whose power and victory over the powers of darkness they can experience and testify about. In Jesus, they find resources to transform the obstacles and suffering they meet.

African women theologians also see Jesus as the liberator who satisfies any circumstance. As Oduyoye (2001:63) observes, Christ holds all things together by his power, giving back to women their humanity. This is also the view of the East African Revival Movement (Kinoti 1998:60). It is more of an affirmation of Pauline theology when he says, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:19). Similarly in Romans 8:28, and Philippians 4: 19, Paul can write, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This is seen clearly in the writings of the Ghanaian theologian, Efua Kuma, when she states:

We depend on you as the tongue depends on the jaw...You are the rock. We hide under you, the great bush with cooling shades, the giant tree that enables the climbers to see the heavens (Oduyoye 2001:60).

Oduyoye quotes approvingly, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, who sees the functional role of Jesus the liberator as:

One who today would have insisted on women being also theological teachers, catechists, biblical interpreters, counsellors...(and as persons) called to restore the church and humanity to the initial inclusive, holistic and mutual relationship between women and men (2001:62).

African women theologians have thus highlighted that Jesus gave particular attention to women (Luke 8:40-56, Luke 10:38-42, Luke 13:10-17, Luke 15:8-10, Luke 18:1-8, Luke 21:1-4, 24:9-11, 23:27-31) and in so doing, he brought liberation by challenging the taboos of his world.

Oduyoye is as critical of Euro-American feminism as she is of African patriarchy. This is probably because, North American and European feminism has focused too narrowly on

gender analysis alone, living issues of class and race aside. Thus, in the publications of African women's theologians, the African man is not viewed as the enemy of African women, but rather as a victim of first world imperialism and neo-colonialism. Rather than understanding his maleness as an obstacle, they see Jesus as a liberator (see, Abbey 2001:151-155). Jesus therefore means freedom and equality for women as well as men. In other words, Jesus teaches another way of being human other than that, which is inculcated within African patriarchal society. Hence, Oduyoye, in pointing to Jesus as saviour, the *Agyenkwa*, 'the Rescuer' (Oduyoye 1986: 98), she depicts his role as being liberating to the extent of being a risk-taker at the expense of his love towards humanity.

As a liberator, Jesus becomes the personal saviour and friend of individuals. He desires to accept both men and women as they are and desires to meet their needs at the personal level (Hinga 1992:190). In turn, people come to accept Jesus as the friend of the lonely and the healer of those who are sick, whether spiritually or physically. He is thus, the one who helps his friends (people) to bear their grief, their loneliness and their suffering (see, Hinga 1992:183). It is in focussing on the resurrected Christ that we have hope for eternal life, which is an act of liberation.

#### **4.2.2. Jesus as Reconstructionist?**

Apart from looking at Jesus as the model of liberation, African Women theologians also see Jesus as the model of reconstruction that the African church of the 21st century has to seek to learn from. This is, the church that is referred by Mugambi (1995:160ff) as the church that must be tasty (salt) and enlightener of the world (Matthew 5:13-17). To be the salt and light, the African church must imitate Christ.

Jesus as Reconstructionist has been widely contested by white American radical feminist theologians, such as Mary Daly. Daly holds the view that Jesus cannot be a model for women and society in general, as society is irredeemably patriarchal, and therefore, cannot be reconstructed. She advocates the rejection of dogmas concerning Christ, whose formulation has largely been responsible for the religious oppression of women. With regard to the way Jesus has been presented, she suggests that imitating Christ as a model would only lead women to becoming more entrenched in the dilemma of defeat (Daly 1973:69). Emulating Jesus as a role model would therefore lead women to take on the role of the oppressed, a role which they are already playing. Hence, Jesus cannot be a model

for reconstructing the oppressive situations that women face today within African patriarchal societies.

This view is sharply contested by reformist western feminist theologians who contend that social institutions (society) are not distorted beyond repair. For them, meaningful aspects of culture and religion are salvageable. Furthermore, feminist theology can assist women in their struggle for emancipation and justice (Hinga 1992:185). Advocates of this position are feminist theologians such as Ruether, Moltmann, Tribble, and Schüssler Fiorenza. This reformist western feminist view is in working relationship with the view of African women theologians. Hence, Abbey (2001:151-155) strongly argues that both men and women should emulate Jesus as the role model of great distinction. To demonstrate her point, she quotes Nasimiyu-Wasike who rightly states that the term *logos* can denote the whole of humanity, and not men alone. She therefore contends that the term (*logos*) was overshadowed by the cultural realities of the time (Abbey 2001:151). Abbey and Nasimiyu-Wasike thus agree that Jesus can be a model for both genders. For Abbey, God did not become incarnate in male form to show that God is male, but rather to change society's attitude towards the oppressed, the poor, the sick and women.

This position finds agreement with Nick Cuthbert, and his views about the "maleness" of Christ. Cuthbert contends that God was incarnated as a male to challenge the traditions of the time, namely, patriarchy (Abbey 2001:151-152). Abbey cautions that to over-emphasise the maleness of Christ is to miss the point. For her, Jesus' life on earth was to present a model of ideal humanity; his maleness shows us that he was real and that all human beings are either male or female. She goes on to conclude her argument, by asserting that the divinity of Jesus "obviously embodies both the male and the female and even transcends them both" (Abbey 2001:152).

Mercy Oduyoye also differs with the radical view of western feminist theologians when she asserts that Jesus Christ is a model for every Christian man or woman. For her and other African women theologians, Jesus is seen as the one who voluntarily lived "a life that was life giving for others and even died for the same." In following Jesus, African women approve of costly sacrifice but they insist it must be voluntary and it must be the duty of both men and women (Oduyoye 2001:55).

In acknowledging that the church has always been discriminating against women in areas such as ordination and exclusion from decision-making thereby showing surliness rather than being kind, Oduyoye explains that women's solidarity with the church will continue despite all that; for their solidarity is "through the eyes of Jesus" (2001:83) for they know the real church and its shortcomings as well as its strengths. They therefore understand that the mess in the African church today is man-made and not God-made, and therefore it can be corrected anytime when the attitude changes or whenever Christians allow the truth (Christ) to set them free (John 8:32). In so doing, Oduyoye recognizes Christ as the one who is capable of reconstructing the mess that has befogged the African church.

While appreciating that African Women, in this "reconstructive age" will not have to play subordinate roles, rather they will need to play complimentary roles with their male counterparts, it is however critical to acknowledge that they will not have to abandon their looking forward to Christ the reconstructor for inspiration and guidance. They will also continue to be the majority in the church, as they currently are; participate in all reconstructive and complimentary Church activities, including doing acts of hospitality such as visiting the sick amongst them, consoling the bereaved, tending to the children and guiding them to adopt the way of Christ as they grow, whenever an opportunity comes their way; while at the same time, they will continue seeking and calling for the Kingdom of God to come in the church "as it is done in heaven" (Matthew 6:1ff). They will therefore remain in the church as part of their "Journey to Golgotha"<sup>15</sup> because they know they are called by Christ the reconstructor to do so.<sup>16</sup> Hence their loyalty is directly to God rather than to human beings.<sup>17</sup> Further, women seem to agree with the old dictum that says that if your shirt or blouse is dirty, the best thing to do is to wash it clean rather than throwing it away.

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<sup>15</sup> Journey to Golgotha is a coinage by Nyambura Njoroge when she extols the virtue of working under pressure. See Nyambura Njoroge (1996:9).

<sup>16</sup>This contrasts with Potgieter (1996:20) who when she realized that the minister who was preparing her for ordination was only interested in sexual advances from her, then withdrew from the church totally. This shows that despite women solidarity with the church, there are few pockets of disillusioned women here and there who have left the church once and for all after failing to contain their emotional pain. Who knows? Some could have joined other religions or forced to move from this church to another in the hope of finding an accommodative church in terms of the issues raised in African women's ecclesiology.

<sup>17</sup>See Acts 5:29 where Peter declared, "we must obey God rather than man," when the enemies of the Gospel of Christ threatened their ministry.

In so doing, they hope to experience ecclesial reconstruction, for how can one desert what rightly belongs to him or her? For the church is to be served by both men and women. This hope is energized by positive factors such as the fact that the Church provides some forums for meetings, for example, as Mother's Union, as Women's Guild and other organizations. In such forums, women can take the opportunity to address some of the issues with the view to improving their lot, and the Church at large, now that there is a reconstructor - who came to reconstruct matriarchy and patriarchy to give the society a better life (John 10:10).

In assessing African Women's theologies, we realise that despite Jesse Mugambi's contention that the theology of reconstruction must concern itself about women issues as part of rehabilitating the entire society (see 1995:176), he has not however made a systematic study on African Women's theologies. All the same, his two concepts of reconstruction and liberation, as noted above, easily find homes in African Women's theologies. Overall, African Women's theologies have clearly helped to build on the hypothesis that the concept of liberation remains, even though it has become a minor paradigm and despite the touting of Reconstructionism as the dominant paradigm in African theologies of the twenty-first century. African Women's theologies will therefore continue to inform and influence the theological perception of the modern day African church. As a theology that entered the African theological scene following the close of the Cold War, it will be the theology to watch, as it succeeds in actualising the paradigm of reconstruction in Africa.

#### **4.3. Black theology of South Africa**

Of the various articles and books written on Black theology in South Africa, the most important are, Basil Moore (ed.),<sup>18</sup> *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (1974); Allan Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence: A Socio-ethical Study on Black Theology and Power* (1977). Finally, the history of the church struggle against apartheid is well told in, John de Gruchy, *The Church struggle in South Africa* (1979).

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<sup>18</sup> Basil Moore explains that while the phrase, Black theology originated in the United States of America, the content of South African Black theology is unique to that situation (Moore 1974:1).

With regard to articles on Black theology, the following remain important, Desmond Tutu, "Black Theology" (1974b); Desmond Tutu, "The Theology of Liberation in Africa" (1979) and Desmond Tutu, "Black Theology/African Theology: Soul mates or Antagonists?" (1975); Manas Buthelezi "African theology or Black theology?" (1974b); Manas Buthelezi "Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa" (1978); Allan Boesak. "Liberation Theology in South Africa" (1979). More recent contributions include, Tinyiko Maluleke, "Black Theology lives! – on a permanent crisis" (1995); Tinyiko Maluleke in the following publications: "Black and African theologies in the New World Order: A Time to Drink from our Own Wells" (1996), and "Black and African Theology after Apartheid and after the Cold War – An Emerging Paradigm" (2000).

Basil Moore has defined South African Black theology as "a situational theology. And the situation is that of the Black man [*sic*] in South Africa" (1973:5). For him, Black theology is a theology that is 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, it does not only direct its voice towards oppressed black people, but rather 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).

As with North American Black theology, South African Black theology has Black Experience as its major source. As Wilmore and Cone have observed, black experience in South Africa and in North America come very close to being the same; hence the need for a dialogue between the two (1979:446).<sup>19</sup> James Cone explains that the cultural continuity with black people in Africa, the Caribbean and the Latin America "should enable us to talk with each other about common hopes and dreams in politics and economics" (Wilmore and Cone 1979:446). Black theology in South Africa came 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 came out of the painful experience of "the one whom we see in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town

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<sup>19</sup> See the section on the dialogue between the SABT and African theology.

trying to make ends meet in the framework of Influx-Control legislation” (Buthelezi 1978:74). The Black theology of South Africa arose from the experience of social misery and oppressive policies that were institutionalised under apartheid. With the demise of the apartheid regime in 1994, one may argue that it comes from the experience of poverty and neo-colonialism that resulted in racial tensions that still may take sometime before it disappears entirely from South Africa.

As with African Women’s theologies, Jesus the liberator is central to South African Black theology. As Boesak can state, “God’s love is an active deed of liberation manifested in divine power” (1977:95). This concept of liberation is not simply a phenomenon of the Christian Testament, for as Boesak right states, “this liberation message was the centre and sustenance of the life of Israel” (1977:18). Hence, the theme of liberation is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Testament (*cf.* Exod. 19:4,5, Ps. 72, Deut. 7:7, Luke 4:16-21).

According to Boesak, the conviction of Liberation theology is that the Christian gospel is not silent on the issue of oppression. He articulates well the conviction of many liberation theologians when he writes:

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 (1978:9-10).

Nthamburi traces the origin and development of South African Black theology, and reinforces some of our previous observations (1991; 1995:14). For Nthamburi, South African Black Theology dates back earlier than the 1970’s. He contends that the consciousness of Black theology came from leaders who were trained in missionary schools such as Lovedale, Adams College (KwaZulu-Natal) and Healdtown. These were preparatory schools for the future articulation of South African Black theology (1991; 1995:14).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while the western missionaries were busy establishing new churches in tropical Africa, there were AICs being formed as alternative movements (Nthamburi 1991:14; *cf.* chapter 3 on AICs as source of theology).

The reason for the break a-ways from the western mission churches was partly due to some racial factors, there also being a desire by Africans to express their Christian faith through the medium of African culture. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, Africans in South Africa were either members of western mission churches, or burgeoning African independent churches (1991; 1995:14).

While Africans held senior leadership positions within the AICs, they were reduced to being mere catechists, teachers or interpreters within the white mission churches. To add insult to an injury, their customs and cultural heritage were called pagan. Their lively, spontaneous way of worship was suppressed as rigid western liturgies were presented as the norm in the mission churches (Nthamburi 1991; 1995:15).

By the beginning of the twentieth Century, the South African socio-political setting managed to impose itself fully upon the church. As de Gruchy points out, as early as 1857, the Dutch Reformed Church (*Hereafter*, DRC) ruled that the congregations from the heathen had “already founded privileges in a separate building or Institution” (1979:8). The “heathens” referred to Africans who were treated as sub-humans by the white mission churches, and who were told to use “lesser” buildings as the colonial reality of separate development began to take hold. As Nthamburi relates, “this state of affairs predominated over efforts by individuals who were unable to fit in such a situation” (1991; 1995:15).

Gwinyai Muzorewa, in his book, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (1985:102), argues that North American Black liberation theologians such as James Cone and J. Deotis Roberts provided the theological and ideological foundations for the articulation of Black theology in South Africa. It is important to acknowledge that Black theology in South Africa was present before Cone, yet it was only when the North American Black theology was born in the late 1960's, that academics and practitioners from both North America and South Africa compared notes thereby making it possible for both groups to reason together. Social Anthropologists would refer its development as a cultural diffusion where cultures borrow from one another. This makes a case, not only for the authenticity of Black theology, but also as being part of the wider “African theology,” being opposed to the negative image that came with such theology imported from North America.



The quest for a South African Black Theology (*Hereafter*, SABT) was further energised by the formation of the all-black, South African Student's Organisation (*Hereafter*, SASO) in 1968, with the late Steve Bantu Biko as its first president (Kumalo 2005:69). In the same year, Biko formed the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC) – an umbrella body for groups sharing the ideals of Black Consciousness (BC). Biko and his BPC fought for the oppressed, which eventually led him to him being arrested and killed at the hands of security forces on September 12, 1977 (Kumalo 2005:69).

According to Simanga Kumalo, Biko saw the ultimate goal of education for black consciousness as the “establishment of an egalitarian society, where all people were equal citizens” (2005:69; *cf.* Biko 1987:89). As a liberation fighter Biko's approach to education was to de-educate and re-educate Black people in order to curb the damage caused through Bantu Education that was offered under apartheid<sup>20</sup> (Pam 1987). He protested against the way the western missionaries and government education taught the 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).

The philosophy behind the BC 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 deemed a way of life, by Black people who sought to embrace their blackness as being an essential part of who they were, created in the image of God.<sup>21</sup>

In tracing the origins and the development of Black theology, it is clear that the role of Black (Christian) leaders, who championed the cause of the nationalist movements in fighting for human liberation, cannot be ignored. As in the case of “African theology,” which was greatly inspired by pan-Africanism and African Nationalism, South African

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<sup>20</sup> Bantu Education was the system of education that was introduced by the racist apartheid regime after it passed the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Its sole aim was to offer an inferior education for black children (Pam 1987).

<sup>21</sup> The idea of Black consciousness can be traced to the teachings of Fanon, Nkrumah, Malcolm X and F. Du and Senghor.

Black theology<sup>22</sup> was inspired and influenced by the leadership of such champions of nationalism as Jabavu, Matthews and Luthuli<sup>23</sup> (Nthamburi 1991, 1995:15).

The African National Congress (*Hereafter*, ANC), formed in 1912, became an important vehicle for its rapport with the colonial authorities. With committed Christians at its helm, the influence of the Christian faith within the movement was clearly visible. As Nthamburi has remarked, Christianity, “was the cradle in which Black theology was born” (1991; 1995:15). As elsewhere in tropical Africa, African leaders from both sides of the divide realised that religion cannot be separated from the social and political affairs that positively or negatively affect the people. Consequently, the church in South Africa found itself as the mouthpiece of the so-called the voiceless – the landless, the destitute and the immobilised. We can agree with Tutu, Boesak, Buthelezi, Muzorewa and others that there can be no doubt that SABT was a liberation theology (see, Webster 1982).

Contrary to popular thought, SABT was not initially influenced by Latin American liberation theology or North American Black theology. During the early stages of the development of SABT, there was very limited contact (if any) with either Latin American theology or North American Black theology. Unlike Latin American liberation theology, SABT does not advocate an ideological alliance with Marxism (See, de Gruchy 1979:159). However, later influence from North America (and not Latin America) is evident especially from James Cone (see, Wilmore and Cone 1979:446).

Although SABT is not a replica of North American Black theology, their similarity is due to the close approximation between the context of oppression of Blacks in South Africa and African-Americans in the United States of America. From this, we realise that their praxis<sup>24</sup> calls for the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. In both South African and North American Black theology, the Bible is a major source, being read with the Exodus motif in mind. Speaking for the South African case, Boesak can remark, “Liberation theology by beginning with the Exodus...places the Gospel in its authentic perspective,

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<sup>22</sup> South African Black theology is part of African theology, as we shall see.

<sup>23</sup> Chief Albert Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961 for his peaceful campaigns to improve the welfare of South African Blacks.

<sup>24</sup> Praxis is from a Greek word *Prasso* that means, “to work.” Praxis involves revolutionary action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. From this action, theological perceptions (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.

namely that of liberation” (Boesak 1977a: 39). Here Boesak clearly shows that Black experience provides the framework within which biblical revelation is understood. In this case, liberation (as in the Exodus event) is taken as the hermeneutical motif through which biblical texts are understood.

Although having seen that SABB is a liberation theology which accepts liberation as its hermeneutical motif through which biblical texts are understood, the debate is far from over. Other concerns in South Africa that need to be addressed include the land question, HIV/Aids, and poverty eradication, and many other issues facing the predominantly black majority.<sup>25</sup> This raises an important question concerning how these issues can be addressed, now that the reconstruction paradigm has taken precedence over that of the liberation paradigm. Furthermore, the question needs to be asked as to what sense of immediacy exists for a shift in paradigms. Where does African theology go once all the issues have been addressed? How will all the issues be comprehensively addressed?

Viewed in this light, it is not fair, following Mugambi’s analysis of post-exilic theology, to view the practitioners of SABB as theological orphans even though they have not yet devised a new and a clearly defined theological framework of reflection,<sup>26</sup> following the dismantling of apartheid,<sup>27</sup> as some of their concerns, such as poverty eradication, remain

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<sup>25</sup> South Africa has one of the best national constitutions in the world that effectively caters for human rights among other areas covered.

<sup>26</sup> Maluleke has expressed the view that African women are arguably the one section of African society that “is engaging in the most passionate, the most vibrant and the most prophetic forms of praxis (theory and practice)” (2000b:31). 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” (2000b:31). This does not however mean that it has replaced black theology or has taken the place of liberation theology. In any case, the proponents of black theology or the proponents of African theology have not devised it, although it is part of 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 elucidates that all of the new proposals in African theology foreground the notion of Africans as agents, although the protagonists are not always conscious of it (2000b:32). He contends that a careful analysis of the newest offerings in African theology, that is, “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 loosing 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” (2000b:32).

<sup>27</sup> Maluleke acknowledges this view when he says that after the euphoria that came with 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).

unconquered.<sup>28</sup> Apart from poverty eradication, Gerald West 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” (2005:3). This is problematic, for it means that the dismantling of apartheid has had no theological implication upon Black theology. On the other hand, situational theologies will always have to devise new strategies to adjust themselves to ever changing contexts, such as culture, which never remains static. Theology that is situationally insensitive, risks falling out of tune with reality (*cf.* Mugambi 1995: 19f).

Maluleke acknowledges the need for a creative post-apartheid paradigm in African theology when he states that SABB is in “some kind of recess if not a kind of disarray.”

He thus states:

Without being too presumptuous, it is fair to say that up 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 suddenly silenced by the shouts of the joyful minority? (2000b: 20).

He goes on to assert:

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 a 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,<sup>29</sup> Kwame Bediako of Ghana,<sup>30</sup> Kä Mana of the

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<sup>28</sup> Maluleke asserts that HIV/AIDS is a new *kairos* that challenges every form of theology – inculturation, black theology, African women’s theology, etc. – to integrate HIV/AIDS into their theological frameworks (2001:125). He says that the church should overcome its theological impotence in the face of HIV/AIDS and learn from African theology how to develop a contextually relevant theology to meet this “new *kairos*.” Maluleke thus sees the task of theology as reflecting on the silence about HIV/AIDS “and develop an advocacy theology in continuity with earlier ‘third world’ theologies that takes women’s concerns seriously and highlights personal ethics” (2001:125ff).

<sup>29</sup> J N K Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995).

Democratic republic of Congo, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana,<sup>31</sup> Lamin Sanneh of the Gambia,<sup>32</sup> Dwight Hopkins<sup>33</sup> and others. I am encouraged by these voices. Within South Africa itself, such bold, innovative post-apartheid studies as those by Villa-Vicencio,<sup>34</sup> Landman,<sup>35</sup> Naudé,<sup>36</sup> Petersen,<sup>37</sup> West,<sup>38</sup> Cochrane<sup>39</sup> and Tutu<sup>40</sup> 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 African theology that inspires me (2000b: 21).

Maluleke contends that the only way beyond the inadequacy of “inherited frameworks, theological methods and metaphors” is to rediscover the agency of Africans (2000b: 19ff). Around the central rediscovery of the agency of Africans, he argues, “African theologians are attempting to construct a less embittered and less schizophrenic relationship between Africa and Christianity on the one hand, and between Africans and their painful Christian past on the other” (2000b: 19). He goes on to argue that although many of the basic assumptions of the past continue to be influential, there is a need for a new search for theoretical tools and perspectives. These will, “enable (*us*) to understand and account for the mythical, the socio-cultural and the popular in religion and society, highlighting the socio-political importance of popular religious movements and the need to develop adequate and relevant theoretical tools for understanding them” (2000b: 19). This search, he says, “is related to the criticism of the fraudulent project of the postcolonial nationalist bourgeoisie and the grand narratives of Africa, African culture and the political liberation projects with its worn-out metaphors” (2000b: 19).

The study of SABB has helped us see the paradigmatic wilderness that is Africa. It has also challenged us to wonder how different or similar is SABB with that of African theology, considering that both are African theologies of liberation. Is Africa, south of the

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<sup>30</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992) and *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: University Press / Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black Faith and Public Talk* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Black theology of liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Down, Up and Over: Slave Religion and Black Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> Christina Landman, *The Piety of Afrikaans Women: Diaries of Guilt* (Pretoria: University Press, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Piet Naudé, *The Zionist Christian Church in South Africa: A Case Study in Oral Theology* (Queenston: Edwin Mellen, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Robin M. Petersen, “Time, Resistance and Reconstruction: Re-thinking Kairos Theology,” PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Interventions #2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (Johannesburg: Rider, 1999).

River Limpopo any different from Africa, north of the Limpopo? Is there any credible justification for Africa to have both Black and African theology at the same time? Does this enrich the Christian gospel in Africa? This has driven us to engage ourselves in dialogue between African theology and SABT. It will help us appreciate their commonalities and points of departure. It will further assist our assessment, on the appropriateness of the call for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology as Mugambi proposes.

#### **4.3.1. A dialogue between African theology and South African Black theology**

African theology and SABT are both theologies of tropical Africa. Other theologies of tropical Africa include the theology of African traditional religion (Muzorewa 1985:75-114), and African Women's theologies. Their common sources include the bible; African cultural heritage; the introduction of Christianity into Africa; the oral history of the African people;<sup>41</sup> the AIC movement; African Nationalism and Pan-Africanism; and the AACC (Muzorewa 1985: 5-73).

Despite a close affinity, Emmanuel Martey, has observed that both SABT and African Theology have considerable differences. Consequently, he sees African theology as synonymous with inculturation theology, whereas SABT is synonymous with liberation theology (1993:63-95). He centres his argument on the "final communiqué" of the Pan African Conference of the Majority-world theologians, which stated:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African people to shape a new future that is different from the colonial past and the neo-colonial present...African theology must reject, therefore, the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology by defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people (Appiah-Kubi and Torres 1979:193).

Muzorewa seems to agree with Martey when he argues that the distinction between SABT (done in Africa, south of Limpopo) and African theology (done in Africa, north of Limpopo) is its emphasis upon liberation (1985:107). In Mugambi's view, this seems to

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that in chapter 3, we did not deal adequately with the question of oral history as a major source of African theology. This is partly because of the general assumption that African history or African theology in general naturally relies on oral sources. Thus, it is implied throughout the study, and even mentioned among African Women's theologies. Second, Mugambi's works do not give it much prominence. Third, the sources of African theology cannot be wholly discussed as we are limited by space. Nonetheless, it is a crucial source of African theology as the "Market-theology" and "Rural-ministry" paradigms will attempt to demonstrate in the latter part of this study.

draw an inaccurate distinction, as African theology is also concerned with liberation (1989b: 12). In his pre-liberation works, Mugambi says that the fundamental concern of African theology is liberation/salvation, which is manifested by the quest for liberation that resulted in many Africans forming their own independent churches (: 12). Nthamburi goes a step further when he says, "Without liberation paradigm, African theology would degenerate into useless anachronism" (1991:17).

Byang Kato sees the similarity between African and Black theologies as being the emphasis upon "African personality, authentic existence, and humane concern almost to the neglect of the spiritual needs of man [*sic*]" (1975:49). Kato's main problem with the similarities of SABB and African theology is that he sees them as placing, "politico-economic-sociological liberation on par or above spiritual freedom" (1975:55). By so doing, he sees both SABB and African theology as possessing theological pitfalls, which for him, "negate" the Gospel of Christ (1975).

Boesak feels that both theologies are essentially the same for they share a common basis in their "search for authentic human identity and liberation" (1977:40). Boesak thus introduces SABB and African theology as inculturation (as connoted by the idea of identity) and liberation theologies. For Tutu, there are close similarities between the two in that their respective articulations have arisen as reactions against an unacceptable state of affairs (1979:486-8). In particular, he points to the fact that "Christianity came swathed in western garb" (1979:486), as "most western missionaries in the early days found it difficult if not virtually impossible to distinguish between the Christian faith and western civilisation" (1979:486-8). He contends that both "African and Black theology provide a sharp critique of the way in which theology has been done mostly in the North Atlantic World" (: 488). Tutu's view, thus, introduces both SABB and African theology as theologies of inculturation.

Nthamburi notes the similarity between the African and Black theologies when he contends that their commonalities are derived from the fact that "the majority of South Africans are descendants of Africa over a thousand years ago" (1991:17). They thus share a kinship relationship with the rest of tropical Africa. He goes on to suggest that African and Black theologies are twins (although he does not call them identical twins – meaning that he also sees some points of departure) because they share the same heritage, that is the

history of colonialism and repression (1991:17). He further points out that both share the Bible as the hermeneutical axis through which theology is articulated (1991:17). For him therefore, they are both theologies of liberation.

Tutu notes that there are a few differences between SABB and African theology. For him, the two theologies arise, in a sense, from different contexts; for the kind of oppression in countries outside South Africa was different (1979:489). From that context of the South Africa's struggle against institutionalised racism arose Black theology. Tutu goes on to explain that Black theology is more political than African theology for it has an "existential urgency, which African theology has so far appeared to lack" (: 489). This can be understood, from the historical backgrounds of South Africa *vis-à-vis* the other "independent" countries of tropical Africa whose socio-political context is clearly different from that of South Africa which took longer to acquire liberation. Tutu thus contends that African theology has tended to be calmer in appearance thereby concentrating on the quest for the indigenisation of Christianity within the African continent. He further contends that as an African, he is an exponent of African theology, and as a South African, he is an exponent of Black theology (: 489).

From the above discussion, it would appear that John Mbiti was mistaken when he warned that Black theology was an American phenomenon and not representative of Black Africa (Wilmore and Cone 1979:176). For him, Black theology "was forced into existence by the particularities of American history" (Cone 1979:176) although he does not say who forced it and how it was done. Furthermore, SABB has been in existence since the entrance of western missionaries to South Africa who evangelised with a racist intent thereby driving some Africans to form their own independent churches with different theological outlooks from those of the western mission churches.

Mbiti makes another controversial statement when he says that African theology "grows out of our joy in the experience of the Christian faith, whereas Black theology emerges from the pains of oppression" (Cone 1979:177). This view can be contested on the basis that there has been both oppression and general intolerance even among black governments of tropical Africa, especially before political pluralism swept across Africa in the early 1990s thereby liberalising political discourse. The despotic regimes of the likes of Idi Amin of Uganda, Bokassa of Central Africa and Mobutu Seseke of former Zaire



(now the Democratic Republic of Congo) are still fresh in our minds, yet African theology was done within this prevailing situation. In this respect, African theologians did not wait for the “joyful moment” in order to do theology.

Mbiti differs with many African theologians due to his hard-line stance against the commonalities of Black theology and African theology. As he remarks:

Black theology cannot and will not become African theology. Black theology in USA and African theology emerge from quite different historical and contemporary situations. To a limited extent the situation in Southern Africa is similar to that which produced Black theology in America. African peoples in Southern Africa are oppressed, exploited and unjustly governed by minority regimes; they have been robbed of their land and dignity and are denied even a minimum of human rights (1979: 481).

He goes on to say:

For them Theology of USA strikes a responsive chord and perhaps offers some hope, if that be any consolation... In South Africa, people want and need liberation, not a theology of liberation. America can afford to talk loud about liberation, for people are free enough to do that in America. But in Southern Africa people are not (even) free enough to talk about the theology of liberation. Thus when *Essays on Black Theology* (edited by Mokgethi and Motlabi) was published in Johannesburg in 1972, the government banned it before it reached the bookstores. (The same work has since been republished, edited by B. Moore, in London under the Title *Black Theology: The South African Voice*). This book however is no more than an echo of American Black theology; it even includes a contribution by James Cone (1979:481).

Overall, SABB and African theology have stressed the Exodus motif, which Mugambi contends, should now be revised now that the Cold War, which had such serious effects upon Africa, has now ended (1995:19). For Mugambi, these two theologies did not operate in a vacuum, but were both affected. Hence, Mugambi seems to have avoided the debate altogether, appearing to steer away from any semblance of theological balkanisation that might threaten African theological thought. He rather advocates an African theology that can embrace all theologies done in Africa. Maluleke's description of him as “a passionate and committed African Churchman, theologian and continental patriot of our time” (1996:473) is apt, in that he sees Africa as one Nation that needs to be united under one umbrella. In other words, Mugambi appears to want to stand beyond the parochialisms of our time. This however seems to contradict his stated view that a theologian must always be parochial, always theologising from a specific context that is relevant to his or her environment (1995:19-20). In his defence, Mugambi could however contend that his specific context is Africa and not Europe or North America.

The dialogue between SABB and African theology has thus driven us to the understanding that other theologies such as North American Black theology have had their share of influence in the theological articulation of Africa, north and south of the Limpopo. The debate has also enlightened the study of the difficulty with the call for a paradigm shift in African theology, from liberation to reconstruction.

#### **4.4. A critical evaluation**

This chapter has surveyed the historical factors behind the concept of liberation, including slavery and slave trade, colonial expansionism and the missionary value setting and western ethno-centricism that accompanied it. By digging too much into a bitter past – a trend that is commonly seen among various theologies of liberation, this can drive us into what Kä Mana calls “the dictatorship of the past” (1991:79). In other words, will Africa develop by focussing continuously upon the past? Alternatively, should we as Africans deny history its rightful place in our lives, thus avoiding the “dictatorships of the past”?

If the modern generation of scholars constantly revisit the bitter past of Africa’s history in order to understand the present disparities, wouldn’t we be unfair to ourselves considering that the neo-colonial forces are constantly at work in post-independent Africa are set on undermining Africa’s progress? As has been noted above, cases have been reported where African elites and leaders have colluded with foreign nationals to loot the wealth of post-independent Africa (see, Nthamburi 1991:40). Furthermore, political assassinations are rampant where political leadership has felt threatened by the charismatic qualities of some of their competitors.<sup>42</sup> In other words, can post independent-Africa be exonerated from messing up its own economy through immoral practices such as tribalism, nepotism, dishonesty, corruption, greed for power, bad politics, providing a bad climate that encourages idleness, incompetent governments, and wrong prioritisation?

Mugambi’s contention that “all education should be for liberation” (1989b: 111) raises several concerns. First, should education also be geared towards intellectual enlightenment and reconstructing people’s lives? Second, which type of education liberates? The formal (western), or the informal (African traditional education)? If the former is the one that is

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<sup>42</sup> In Kenya, the deaths of Tom Mboya, Robert Ouko, and J M Kariuki have been seen as politically motivated. Similarly, the deaths of Ben Kiwanuka, Andrew Kayiira and Joseph Mubiru have also been regarded as political (see, Gathogo 2001:133). This trend is observed throughout post-independent Africa.

responsible for liberating its learners, what then is the relevance of the latter in the light of the changing theo-social circumstances in the Africa of the twenty-first century? If on the other hand both are liberating, was the latter incapable of liberating its subjects before the coming of the former?

In the section on African women's theologies, the present study attempted to test the appropriateness of Mugambi's call for a theological paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction by looking at Jesus, not only as liberator, but also as Re-creator. As we have noted above, it is difficult to see Jesus Christ as simply a Re-creator without seeing him also as a liberator. The findings of this section have shown that African women theologians are working towards a total deconstruction of patriarchy that has oppressed women in Africa for generations. Consequently, by looking at Jesus as liberator, who will bring creation back to perfection, where there is no strife or degradation (Genesis 1; 2)? African women theologians are deconstructing and ultimately reconstructing – with reconstruction as the dominant motif – yet in this context the call for liberation is meant to reconstruct gender relations. This is evidenced by the fact that their quests for liberation are not sought from the framework of the Exodus motif.

Mary Grey introduces feminist theology as “a critical theology of liberation engaged in the reconstruction of theology and religion in the service of the transformation process, in the specificity of many contexts in which women live” (1999:89). Likewise, the South African theologian, Denise Ackerman, views feminist theology as “the liberation of all women and all men and the transforming (*read reconstruction*) of religious structures” (quoted in Dedji 2003:26). This holistic vision for change in African women's theologies, in Ackerman's view, “means that women and men together will be able to contribute to naming and shaping their realities in such a way that all people's humanity is affirmed in just, loving, liberating and healing praxis” (Dedji 2003:26).

Although they may not have been conscious of it, since the 1960s, African theologians, while working on a theology of liberation whose Exodus motif was the dominant paradigm, have also been working on a theology of reconstruction, especially with regard to inculturation. This involved the deconstruction of the cultural bias and ethnocentrism of the western missionaries. Viewed in this light, inculturation, liberation and reconstruction paradigms are intertwined paradigms within African theology.

If African theologians agree with Mugambi's proposal to shift from liberation to reconstruction, they will have to retain some elements of liberation and inculturation paradigms (or retain the two as back-up paradigms) while reconstruction will have to replace liberation as the dominant paradigm in African theology. Yet, where do we place the paradigm of inculturation? Does it have to fit in the other two paradigms (liberation and reconstruction) or does it have to be developed on its own? Does it have to continue as a subordinate paradigm – as it has been since the 1960s? The latter appears to be more appropriate (see Chapter 7 in this study).

Basil Moore's contention that SABT is "a situational theology," where the situation is that of "the Black man (*and woman*) in South Africa" (1973:5), raises various concerns. First, as Mugambi rightly acknowledges, theology is always articulated with a certain level of parochialism, as the theologian must target a particular context and situation. Failure to apply this rule will inevitably cause the resultant theology to be irrelevant (1995:20). The use however of "situational theology" also connotes that SABT, or any theology for that matter, is for a particular season or time. What then if the season changes, would it then be necessary for that theology to move with the new realities to avoid becoming irrelevant or redundant? – Would it be conforming to the patterns of the world to do so (*cf.* Rom. 12:1-2)? It seems logical to acknowledge that a change in circumstances or context also means a change in methodology. It is therefore meaningful to ask whether anything changed in the context of South Africa to warrant a genuine shift of theological framework.

This situational dimension puts Black theology in a difficult position. Hence, in relation to the first democratically held elections in South Africa, April 27, 1994 and the establishment of a new Constitutional democracy based upon a Universal Bill of Rights, one wonders what "situation" are we now in, in terms of articulating Black theology? With legislated apartheid and white supremacy consigned to the history books, what is left for SABT to achieve? The answers to these concerns can best be answered by Moore, Boesak, Tutu, Buthelezi, de Gruchy and others who have actively participated in this theology – as the wearer of the shoe is the best person to tell where it actually pinches.

Conversely, it is important to concede that even though Dube refers to the "Samaritan woman" as "Mr. Globalisation as the sixth husband" (quoted in Phiri 2004c:20; *cf.* John

4), who should be “fought” in the same way that colonialism and apartheid were fought, it remains unclear how the Exodus motif can effectively handle the negative effects of globalisation in a manner that corresponds to the way it was used to “fight” apartheid and colonialism. (See, Dube 2001:59-61). The reconstructive motif, as a theological paradigm, appears best set to tackle it, by its insistence that “Africa must engage herself in rebuilding her broken walls” (*cf.* Mugambi 1995:15ff). Hence, through its understanding that African predicaments can be addressed locally, a reconstructive motif as paradigm, rather than the Exodus motif, appears better placed due to its all-inclusive approach to address the concerns raised by globalisation in Africa today (*cf.* Mugambi 1991; 1995; 1996; 2003).

The critical analysis presented in this chapter has helped us assess the difficulty with regard to the debate on the paradigm shifts in African Christianity. It has sought to describe the dilemma that faces African theologians in articulating theology effectively.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has surveyed the concept of liberation in African theologies of liberation. Consequently, it has surveyed the historical factors behind the quests for liberation, including slavery, colonialism, missionary ethnocentric views of evangelism and race relations,

The chapter has analysed the three major subsets of African theologies, namely, African theology, African women’s theology and South African Black theology. Throughout these theologies, the concept of liberation was clearly the common denominator. The chapter however did not address the theology of African traditional religion as the fourth subset of African theologies of liberation, in spite of being constructed on the premise that every theology is liberative in nature. This said, it is important to acknowledge that the theology of African traditional religion does not have the Bible as one of its sources unlike the other three. In the context of this study, this renders it of lesser importance, especially when considered against the primary concern of the study, namely the question of paradigm shifts in the Christian theologies done in Africa by African Christians.

With regard to the African women’s theologies, the study has revealed various critical concerns, including the possibility that the paradigms of liberation and reconstruction are sometimes intertwined. Viewed as theological twins, both paradigms are embraced by

African women's theologies as theologians particularly within the Circle, grapple with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The fourth chapter has thus prepared us to survey the next chapter on "J.N.K Mugambi's theology of reconstruction" which will attempt to critically revisit it as he propounds. In so doing, it will take cognisance of the fact that there are other scholars who have also trod in this area. It will also be conscious of the critiques of reconstruction theology. This will guide it in refocusing on the problem statement of the entire study.

## CHAPTER 5

### J N K MUGAMBI'S THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION

#### 5.0 Introduction

Having discussed and described in detail African theologies of liberation in Chapter 4, we shall in this chapter focus on the emerging theology of reconstruction. Mugambi has been championing the need for African theology to shift from liberation to reconstruction since his presentation at an AACC meeting in Nairobi, Kenya March 30, 1990 (see, Mugambi 1991; 1995). In particular, we shall attempt to trace the historical background of the Babylonian exile of 587/6 BCE, which in Mugambi's view is the major inspiration and source behind his theology of reconstruction, as evidenced by the role of the new leadership under Nehemiah who emerged as the leader of the Israelites following their return from exile in 539/8 BCE.

In addition, this chapter will seek to assess the critique that scholars have made on Mugambi's concept of reconstruction; and thereby bring us closer to our statement of the problem, which is the appropriateness of the call for a theological paradigm shift in African theology in the twenty first Century. Finally, we shall attempt a conclusion based on the findings of the entire chapter.

#### 5.1. Meaning and the biblical background of reconstruction

Mugambi compares Africa after the Cold War (which began in 1917 and ended in 1989) with the members of the Jewish community following the fall of Babylonian empire in 538 BCE and their removal into exile, 605 to 538 BCE.

The Babylonian captivity had been foreseen by the prophet Jeremiah who was cautioned by God, during his call, that God was unhappy with the people of Israel because of their disobedience and rebellion. This led him to declare, 'The Lord said to me, 'From the north, disaster will be poured out on all who live in the Land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,' declares the Lord"' (Jer. 1:14-15).

Jeremiah was further told:

Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem;<sup>1</sup> they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah. I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and worshiping what their hands have made (Jer. 1:15-16).

The Israelites were thus taken into captivity after God “allowed” their enemy to conquer them as punishment for their disobedience. Interestingly, the same God released them from this captivity seventy years later.

In Jeremiah 4:5-31, a warning is issued that invaders from the north will bring God’s judgment against the “unrepentant people.” Jeremiah 4:27f thus states, “This is what the LORD says. The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back.”

Jeremiah is commanded to go up and down the streets of Jerusalem and consider, “If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city (Jer. 5:1). Jeremiah however finds that their faces were, “Harder than stone and refused to repent “(Jer. 5:3b). The people therefore continued to doubt the prophecy saying God will do nothing, and no harm would come upon them, “We will never see sword of famine. The prophets are but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them” (Jer. 5:12-13).

Jeremiah began prophesying in Judah halfway through the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BCE), continued throughout the reigns of Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609-598) and Zedekiah (597-586). He went through a period of storm and stress when the fate of entire nations, including Judah itself, was being sealed (see, Wood 1970:366). The smaller nation states of Western Asia were often pawns in the power plays of such imperial giants as Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, thus Jeremiah’s period of prophecy was no exception. In 627 BCE Ashurbanipal, the last of the great Assyrian rulers died. Interestingly, his successors were no match for Nabopolassar who was the founder of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Nabopolassar began his rule in 626 BCE, which is also the year of Jeremiah’s

<sup>1</sup> Since the gateway of a city was the place where its ruling council sat (Gen. 19:1; Ruth 4:1), the Babylonians replaced Judah’s royal authority with their own (cf. Jer. 43:10, 49:38).



calling to be a prophet (Jer. 1:1ff). This shows that Jeremiah began his ministry during the rise to power of the Babylonian empire.

With the fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon, the shift of power came at the close of Josiah's 31-year reign (Wood 1970: 366). Soon after Assyria's capital city Nineveh fell under the onslaught of a coalition of Babylonians and Medes in 612 BCE, Egypt (who was a rival to Babylon) marched northward in an attempt to rescue Assyria, which was near destruction. King Josiah of Judah erred by trying to stop the Egyptian advance and he was killed near Megiddo in 609 at the hands of pharaoh Neco II (2 Chronicles 35:20-24) (see Boadt 1984:364).

Jeremiah had found a kindred spirit in the godly King Josiah and had perhaps proclaimed the messages recorded in Jeremiah 11:1-8; 17:19-27 during the reformation movement that Josiah initiated. Jeremiah lamented Josiah's death (2 Chron. 35:25). His son Jehoahaz succeeded him. He was however removed three months later by the Egyptians who controlled Palestine, being accused of favouring their rivals the Babylonians. They named his elder brother Jehoiakim, King in his place (Boadt 1984:364). Sadly, Jehoiakim was relentlessly hostile toward Jeremiah. Hence, on one occasion when an early draft of the prophet's writings was being read to Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:21), the king used a scribe's knife to cut the scroll apart, three or four columns at a time, and threw it piece by piece into the fire pot in his winter apartment (Jer. 36:22-23). At the Lord's command, however, Jeremiah simply dictated his prophecies to Baruch a second time, adding "many similar words" to them (Jer. 36:32). Curiously, Jehoiakim, who was expected to obey the Egyptians who had placed him in power, changed his heart and pledged his loyalty to the Babylonians after they drove the Egyptians out of Asia in 605 BCE. Later on, he began to plot against the Babylonians as he flirted with the idea of freeing his country from foreign control (Boadt 1984:364).

Prior to this episode in Jeremiah's life, an event of extraordinary importance took place that changed the course of ancient near-eastern history. In 605 BCE, the Egyptians, who had placed Jehoiakim in power, were finally crushed at Carchemish on the Euphrates by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 46:2). As a leader, Nebuchadnezzar was a gifted general who

succeeded his equally militarily capable father Nabopolassar as the new ruler of Babylon that same year (605 BCE). The Egyptian King Neco II returned home with heavy losses thereby giving Babylon a free hand to assume power in the region for the next seventy years when King Cyrus of Persia replaced him.<sup>2</sup> This confirms Jeremiah's prophecy that he delivered from the LORD,

With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him. If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the LORD, until I destroy it by his hand (Jer. 27:5-8).

With the Babylonian victory over the Egyptians complete in 605 BCE, the entire region of Western Asia became the domain of the Babylonians and thus Judah automatically came under Babylonian rule. Jehoiachin was taken into captivity in Babylon in 597 BCE, together with the queen mother, princes, servants, spoils (Wood 1970:374), including the prophet Ezekiel (2 Ki. 24:14; Jer. 52:28), 10,000 leading citizens, and 1000 smiths and crafts-persons (2 Ki. 24:11-16; Wood 1970:374). During the second Babylonian attack, Nebuchadnezzar installed Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, on the throne in 597 BCE. Mattaniah who was renamed Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar, was the third son of King Josiah. He was a weak and vacillating ruler who sometimes befriended Jeremiah the prophet and sought his advice, but at other times, allowed the prophet's enemies to mistreat and imprison him (Wood 1970:374ff).

The period of Zedekiah's leadership was characterized by continual agitation and unrest (Wood 1970:374-375). Curiously, an anti-Babylonian group in Jerusalem pressurised for a revolt and urged Zedekiah to look again to Egypt for assistance (Wood 1970:375). This in itself was sinful as God's elect were not supposed to seek any military alliance; rather they were to rely on God alone as their divine warrior. Zedekiah and his people therefore must

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<sup>2</sup> This attack was accomplished in two phases. During the first attack, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem (as we have noted above) in 605 BCE and humiliated Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1-2). He also carried off Daniel and his three companions to Babylon (Daniel 1:3-6). In the second attack in 598-597 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem and the rebellious Jehoiakim was heard no more. His son Jehoiachin who succeeded him ruled Judah for only three months (2 Chron. 36:9). This captivity of Jehoiachin and his followers had been foretold by Jeremiah (22:24-30) and was later fulfilled (Jer. 24:1; 29:1-2; See also, Boadt 1984:364; Wood 1970:374).

have ignored Jeremiah's advice that they should surrender to the Babylonians as they (Jews) were undergoing a divine punishment for rebelling against God. As the Prophet Isaiah states:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD. Yet, he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words. He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers. But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, he who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together (Isa. 31:1-3).

By seeking a military alliance with the Egyptian Pharaoh Hophra, thus, Zedekiah rebelled against his captors in spite of the many warnings given by Jeremiah (Jer. 27:5-8; cf. Wittenberg 1993:96). Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar decided to punish him and marched against Judah. In January 588 BCE, his army placed Jerusalem under siege after taking all the strong fortresses of the land (Wittenberg 1993:97; Wood 1970:375). The Babylonian victory was not outright because an Egyptian army advanced in support of Zedekiah, and the people in Jerusalem rejoiced as they thought the Babylonians would soon be defeated (Wittenberg 1993:96-7). Jeremiah however cautioned Zedekiah that the removal of the siege by the Babylonians did not mean the war was over; rather the Babylonians would soon be back to continue their assault against the city (Jer. 37:6-8). Ultimately, this took place as Jeremiah had told them. Nebuchadnezzar captured all the cities of Judah, placing Jerusalem under siege for a period of two years and thereby starving its occupants into defeat (Boadt 1984:365; Wood 1970:376). In this third attack, the city fell to the Babylonians in July 586 BCE (Wood 1970:376).<sup>3</sup> A month after its fall Nebuzaradan, who was the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard, arrived to break down the city. He levelled the city walls and set on fires the houses and public buildings of the city (Boadt 1984:365; Wittenberg 1993:97). It is in this third and most comprehensive attack, the temple, which was built by King Solomon, and had stood for four centuries, was destroyed (Wood 1970: 376; Wittenberg 1993: 97). Nehemiah was to come in 539/8 BCE, seventy years later, to lead in the reconstruction of the wall of the city of Jerusalem within which the temple had been situated.

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<sup>3</sup> While trying to flee the city, Zedekiah was overtaken by the pursuing Babylonians. His sons were executed in his presence after which he himself was blinded by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 39:1-7) and later died at the hands of his tormentors (Wood 1970:376).

With the success of the Babylonian conquest, the remaining members of Judah were deported into exile, where they remained for almost a century. While in exile, Jeremiah, who was with the exiles in Babylon, implored them to ignore false prophets such as Hananiah (Jer. 28:1-17) who were misleading them into thinking that they would “soon” be liberated from their captivity and would return back to Jerusalem and resume their worship in the Temple. In his letter, Jeremiah advised them to settle in the foreign land of their exile, until the seventy years were over (Jer. 29).

In his research, Farisani (2002:187) notes that following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the Babylonians created two communities within the Jewish population, namely the *am haaretz* (עַמְהָאֲרֵץ), the Israelites, who did not go into captivity in Babylon, but remained in Palestine. They are also referred to as the “adversaries” or “enemies” (Ezra 4:1; Neh. 4:11) and “the people of the land” (Ezra 3; Neh. 4:4) among other labels.<sup>4</sup> The other community that the Babylonians created was that of the “returned exiles” – *golah* (גִּילְיָה) (Ezra 1: 11; Neh. 7:6). Even though the exiles could not maintain their social positions as in Judah, some were later incorporated into the leadership class in Mesopotamia, the capital city of Babylon. This however did not prevent tensions from mounting as doubts with respect to their loyalty were voiced (Farisani 2002:207). They had to work for the Babylonians on public works projects such as agricultural irrigation channels in or on building sites (Wittenberg 1993:103).

Even though the leaders introduced religious practices, which the people could observe even though they were far away from the Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews in exile remained downhearted whenever they thought of the city of Jerusalem and its revered Temple, now destroyed. Some doubted God’s care for them as God’s people, which culminated in the loss of hope among some (Isa. 40:27). It was as if Marduk the god of the Babylonians was more powerful than that of Yahweh (Isa. 42:17; Hinson 1973:153).

Upon their return, they could still recall their bitter memories as captives. Their hopelessness is well captured in Psalms 137 when the Psalmist says: “By the rivers of Babylon (*there*) we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion...our captors asked us (*read “mocked us”*)...’sing us one of the songs of Zion!’” But in turn, they wondered,

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<sup>4</sup> The first governor of the *am haaretz* (עַמְהָאֲרֵץ) community was Gedaliah who was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar’s commander of the bodyguard, Nebuzaradan, as the governor of Judah (Jer. 40-41).

“How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” (: 1-4). The youth in particular were greatly affected. A quotation from Ezekiel 18:2 shows this clearly, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The youth therefore felt that they were paying the price for what their parents had done. They felt hopeless, like the dry bones of Ezekiel’s (37:1-14) vision, a lost generation, without direction (see, Wittenberg 1993:105).

In this context, God sent the prophets with a new message of hope that the “dry bones will come back to life” (Ezek. 37:1-14). Both Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah preached that even in the valley of despair and death there would be hope. They urged them against despair and hopelessness (Wittenberg 1993:105f). Isaiah emphasised the principle of “fear not,” (e.g., Isa. 41:10), for even though the power of the Babylonians was still unbroken, God would intervene in history and liberate them from captivity (Wittenberg 1993:110). Isaiah went on to call on mountains, forests and nature to rejoice with him (Isa. 44:23).

#### **5.1.1. The return of the Babylonian exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple**

The fall of Babylon and the return of the Jews from exile are best captured in the book of Isaiah when the LORD says:

Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you be called Queen of Kingdoms. I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke. You said, “I will continue forever – the eternal queen!” But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now, then listen, your wanton creature, lounging in your security...Disaster will come upon you, and will not know how to conjure it away (Isa. 47:5-11).

The return of Babylonian exiles was preceded by the fall of Babylon and the rise of Persia. For in 559 BCE, Cyrus the great became the King of the Persian tribes. Later, Cyrus replaced the empire of the Medes with that of the Persians (See Farisani 2002:216). For by 550 BCE, Cyrus had captured Ecbatana, which was the capital city of the Medes. Medes themselves had been fierce enemies of the Babylonians (Wittenberg 1993:111). By 546 BCE Cyrus had conquered the Kingdom of Lydiah (Turkey today) and the balance of power now had been affected with the most powerful nation – Babylon clearly getting threatened. This turn of events caught the last king of the Babylon – Nabonidus, pants

down as he had already annoyed a sensible proportion of the population for deposing the powerful priestly class in Mesopotamia in favour of a local god, sin, the moon-god (Lemche 1988:187). Thus, the people were ready for change of leadership considering that they had been influenced by the disgruntled priests of Marduk (Wood 1970:388). Eventually, Cyrus managed to conquer the Babylonians in 539 BCE (Wood 1970:388; Lemche 1988:187). Interestingly, when he personally entered Babylon a few weeks after the victory, he was welcomed as a liberator by the Marduk priests and the entire populace (Wood 1970:389). Thus by 539 BCE, the whole of Babylonian empire which included Judah had passed under the Persian control (Blenkinsopp 1988:61).

Prior to the emergence of Persia as the dominant world power, displacing the Medes and Babylon, prophet Isaiah (45:1-7) had proclaimed that the Persian conqueror had been given the task by Yahweh of setting the Israelite captives free. Following the conquest of Babylon, King Cyrus allowed the first group of exiles to return in 538 BCE, being led by Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:1; Wood 1970:392). The second group returned eight years later, in the seventh year (458 BCE) of Artaxerxes Longimanus (Ezra 7:7), being led by Ezra (Wood 1970:392). The third group, returned thirteen years after the second, in the twentieth year (444 BCE) of Artaxerxes Longimanus (Neh. 2:1); and was led by Nehemiah (Wood 1970:392).

Cyrus gave permission to those who wished to return to Palestine to begin the process of reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. He did this in the form of a decree (between 538 or 537 BCE). Recorded in Ezra 1:1-4, it states:

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you – May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'"

Through this edict, Cyrus authorised the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Hinson 1973:155). He also decreed that the sacred vessels of gold, silver cups and plates, which

the Babylonians had taken during the time of conquest be returned to Jerusalem (Blenkinsopp 1988:62; Boadt 1984:435-436; Hinson 1973:155).<sup>5</sup> Of the three groups of returnees, the third and final group under Nehemiah forms the basis of this study, as he led the reconstruction project following his survey of the city and confirmation that it was in ruins.

Thus, the return of the first Jewish exiles was characterised by the task of rebuilding the Solomonic temple that had been destroyed seventy years ago. From this background, Mugambi sees Africa before the end of the Cold War as that which shared similar concerns with the people of Judah when they were in the Babylonian captivity. It is from there that he draws his reconstructive motif – which is modelled on Nehemiah's reconstruction task.

Mugambi's viewpoint receives strong backing from Moiserale Prince Dibeela who sees the demise of Cold War as having marked the end of the ideological struggle between the East and Western nations, coincidentally ending the "new scramble for Africa" (2005:18). He contends that the "scramble" was characterised by the two world systems, "a so-called communist rebel would be sponsored by an overseas communist government to fight against a capitalist government sponsored by a Western government, or the other way round" (2005:18). As a result, many African countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, and Democratic Republic of Congo endured political conflicts that went on for decades, in order to prevail ideologically over Africa. As Dibeela has remarked, "Since the demise of the Soviet Union, interest in Africa changed, at least from that of political control" (2005:19). Thus, Dibeela is of the view that most of the damage to African economies and resources that we experience today took place during the Cold War. He therefore sees the demise of the Cold War as having opened an avenue through which reconstruction can be done (2005:19).

Mugambi does not, however, explain how people of Judah, who were under punishment for their rebellion against God, could be compared effectively with the people of Africa whose history of disobeying God is not documented. Or could he be seeing something that

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<sup>5</sup> This call was however, not received positively by the Jews (Hinson 1973:155).

we are unable to see – on the sins of our ancestors? In other words, while the penalty that was given to the people of Judah, of seventy years in exile, can be easily explained, how can we account for the seventy years of Cold War and its negative effects on Africa which Dibeela says was “the main victim”? (: 18). Why should the Cold War that was “fought” by the Eastern and the Western ideological blocs affect Africa negatively more than it affected the main players? Can it be viewed merely as a theological issue?

Mugambi also does not account for those in Judah who remained behind and were opposed to the returning exiles. They are variously referred to as the people of the land (Wood 1970:394). Ezra explains their conflict thus:

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubabel and to the heads of the families and said, “Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon King of Assyria, who brought us here.” But Zerubbabel, Jeshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia commanded us.” Then the people around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They hired counsellors to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus King of Persia (Ezra 4:1-5).

Farisani contends that the *am haaretz* (Ezra 4:1) were called adversaries because they protested and opposed their exclusion by the returned exiles from the reconstruction process (2003:41). He further contends that their opposition was the only legitimate means for them to protest against their exclusion in this important task. For him therefore, the term “adversaries” reflects the “ideological interest of the author of Ezra-Nehemiah” (2003:41). He says that Nehemiah (4:7-8) makes Sanballat and Tobiah’s protest to appear as if “all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem” (2003:41). His views are in line with Carroll (1993:90) who says that the Ezra-Nehemiah texts effectively silences Nodiah (the prophetess) who is not allowed to talk. Instead, Nehemiah is made to talk on her behalf. She further contends that the different sets of prophets were variously characterised as pro-building and anti-building figures.

The fact that both groups were interested in the reconstruction of the wall and temple agrees with Mugambi’s ideal understanding of the theology of reconstruction when he



says that it should be “inclusive rather than exclusive... participatory rather than autocratic ... consultative rather than impositional” (: xv). The fact remains that those who were excluded contradicts that noble ideal, as the division between the two groups of Jews did not augur well for a city whose walls had been “broken down and its gates...destroyed by fire” (Neh. 1:2b). This division, which was as a result of mistrust, points to the need of addressing the diversity of the African context in the task of working out a theology of reconstruction. Africa must be rebuilt based on a united front and not as diverse groups competing ideologically on how best to reconstruct Africa. These groups may include former freedom fighters versus former colonisers.<sup>6</sup> In the Africa of the twenty first century, tribalism, sexism, racism, social status and other prejudices may divide the people and thereby derail any attempt at meaningful social reconstruction.

As noted above, Nehemiah led the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem amidst strong opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (Neh. 1-6). The *am haaretz* felt excluded in the task of reconstruction, but as pointed out earlier, we ought to treat this as mistrust, as we have experienced in other situations in Africa such as after apartheid. Hence, after the dismantling of apartheid in 1994, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party – who is said to have co-operated with the apartheid regime – did not trust working with Nelson Mandela, a fellow African and President of the ANC. Similarly, the ANC did not trust him.<sup>7</sup> In Kenya, following constitutional independence in 1963, those who took over the government could not trust those who were employed by the former colonial regime. Likewise, the *am haaretz* and the incoming exiles were not expected to behave any differently from the people whom we have mentioned. We can treat it as mere human weakness. Such, ought however to be addressed in future ventures so that reconstruction is not delayed or disrupted indefinitely.<sup>8</sup> It is for that reason that Mugambi stresses that reconstruction ought to be “inclusive rather than exclusive” (1995: xv). (KALIB OF THE JET ETHNIC GROUP)

<sup>6</sup> This problem is still a stigma that haunts Kenya even after over forty years of constitutional independence. That is, there are those who fought for freedom and those who did not.

<sup>7</sup> This information was gathered from my interaction with Dr. Musabiyela, a lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in June 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Desmond Tutu in his lament on the failure of white South Africans to participate enthusiastically in the Truth and Reconciliation Committee shows the level of mistrust between the two groups of South Africans. He says that the whites “refused to embrace the new dispensation wholeheartedly” and instead spent a lot of time “whining, being quick to find fault and gloating short-sightedly at the imagined and real shortcomings of those at the helm” (1999:184) instead of “throwing their lot in to build this country that is as much theirs as it is anybody’s” (Maluleke 2005b: 120).

Nehemiah, a deeply pious man, who had risen to become a high official in the King's court, namely "a royal cupbearer" to king Artaxerxes (Boadt 1984:455), heard through a letter from his brother in Palestine that the conditions were intolerable. He therefore asked the King to allow him to go to "Judah, in order to rebuild the city" (Nehemiah 2:5). Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he surveyed the ruins and was able to evaluate what needed to be done in order to restore the city to its past glory. After confirming that the city was seriously in need of reconstruction, he applied his managerial skills, probably learnt as a high official in the King's court. In particular, he prepared a survey of quantities and the time needed to effect the repairs (see, Mugambi 1995:172). He then called a meeting where he expressed his findings thus:

You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace... They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

In evaluating the role of Cyrus, we realise that he was a Zoroastrian and not a believer in the Abrahamic faith, as Christians and Jews claim to be. This shows that God can use even the most unlikely person in the process of reconstruction. As Mugambi (2003:62) observes, the process of liberation and reconstruction within the same community involves all sectors of the population, regardless of their religious, political and other social backgrounds. Furthermore, "the tensions and conflicts that occur within these processes are normal, in view of the destructive impact of oppression" (Mugambi 2003: 62-63).

In comparing Moses, who is associated with the Exodus motif, and Nehemiah whom Mugambi (2003:146) associates with the reconstructive motif in African theology, we realise that Moses was more of a commander rather than a leader. Moses can thus be likened to the first generation of post-colonial African leaders of the 1960s (2003:146). Their leadership, Mugambi argues, could not be questioned and whose public profile was more "quasi-religious than socio-political" (2003:146). In contrast, Nehemiah's leadership was more of encouragement. His style of leadership was such that he did not have to do the work himself, rather, as a good manager, he encouraged and mobilised every member of the community to make his or her own contribution for the reconstruction of the city and society at large (Neh. 1-6; Mugambi 2003:146). As Mugambi explains:

The role of Nehemiah is very different from that of Moses. He encourages the

people and facilitates their work. He motivates them to work, but he does not even supervise them. He has confidence that they do the work, as long as they are highly motivated. Africa in the twenty first century CE is in a very similar situation as Judah in the days of Nehemiah. There are many Sanballats and Tobias in politics, in churches, in the media, in diplomatic circles and also in business. They are there in the World Bank and in the IMF, in Universities and in non-governmental organizations. But there are Nehemiahs also; who are well trained and can motivate their people. There are Jeremiahs also, prophets of doom and prophets of sorrow. You can choose which profile to highlight (2003:173).

Mugambi goes on to say:

It seems to me that (*at*) this time in history, the figure of Nehemiah is the most encouraging and most inspiring for Africa today. Nehemiah was not perfect. Nor were there any perfect mortals at any time in human history. But in (*our*) contemporary Africa we can learn more from Nehemiah about the demands and (*the*) challenges of leadership than from Moses (2003:173).

Mugambi therefore sees the Africa of the twenty first Century as being in dire need of learning from Nehemiah's example of leadership, rather than from the Exodus metaphor of Moses. For him, the end of the Cold War ushered in a new post-exilic Africa that can be compared to Judah under Nehemiah's stewardship. And in the fourteen chapters of his book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, 1995, Isaac Mwase notes five themes that emerge as key considerations for a reconstructionist African Christian Theology in a post-world war period:

1. The theology should preserve, not deprecate, the African heritage.
2. It should critique the missionary enterprise so that the message delivered to the African is truly "Good News."
3. Ecumenical analyses and solutions ought to supersede scandalous and competitive denominational posturing.
4. Assessments of Africa's place in the New World Order make evident the need for a rethinking of Pan-Africanism and the role of the Organization of African Unity.
5. Reconstructive visions should highlight agricultural policies that stress production of consumables rather than the growing of cash crops.<sup>9</sup>

In view of this, it is readily evident that Mugambi's vision for Africa moves beyond reflection on "who the chosen ones are." In this regard, Mugambi appears to be expressing his optimism that "Africa is full of hope" as they too (its people) are part of the "chosen ones of God." By engaging in the process of reconstruction, however long it may take, Africa too can be a beacon of hope.

## 5.2. The levels of reconstruction

Mugambi holds that the project of reconstruction involves various levels of consciousness

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Reli/ReliMwas.htm>

“from the individual to the family, congregation, local community, nation, region, continent and *(the)* global society” (2003:128). These “concentric levels of social engineering correspond with the concentric levels of ecclesial reality” (2003:129). He goes on to cite the ecumenical movement as one that should provide a model on the basis of which the society can be rejuvenated.

Mugambi (1995:15) describes the three major levels of reconstruction as being, personal, cultural and ecclesial. He does not however rule out the possibility of other levels of reconstruction, for reconstruction is an all-inclusive concept whose parameters are difficult to define. As Mugambi can assert, “this theme (*of reconstruction*) needs further development as a paradigm of Christian theological reflection in Africa” (2003:15). Nor does he claim to be the final authority on the emerging theology of reconstruction. Hence, in responding to his earlier critics, Mugambi can state,

Professor Tinyiko Maluleke was among my earliest critics, long before we became acquainted. I am grateful to him for cautioning all theologians to avoid any pretentious claims to final theories or systems. Though *my book did not make such a claim* to finality, I have always appreciated his insistence that all theological and philosophical systems are tentative and subject to revision. In the same way that Theology of Liberation needed revision, so does the Theology of Reconstruction. Otherwise it will become obsolete and redundant (Mugambi 2003: ii).

As denoted above, Mugambi’s comment that “my book did not make such a claim” refers to his publication, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: Africa after the Cold War*, (1995), which gave a detailed analysis of the three levels of reconstruction. This large work comprised of fourteen chapters, each of which built relevantly on the theme of reconstruction, and in a language that appeals to everyone. As Mugambi explains:

The book will be useful to theologians and Pastors of all denominational persuasions, considering that the task of social reconstruction ought not to be restricted to particular religious or denominational confines. It will also be relevant to trainers and trainees in theology, humanities and social sciences. Its inclusive and integrative thrust is derived from my deep involvement, during the past twenty-six years, with Christian scholars and church leaders of Catholic, ecumenical and evangelical orientations (Mugambi 1995:vii).

In the coming subsection, we will seek to analyse the three major levels of reconstruction as per Mugambi’s proposal (1995; 2003). This will strengthen the argument of this present study and the research problem on the appropriateness (or the inappropriateness) of the call for a paradigm shift in African theology of the twenty first Century. It will also assist us in reinterpreting Mugambi’s critics.

### **5.2.1. The individual level**

In Mugambi's view, reconstruction begins at the individual level. Consequently, he equates the human heart, which Jeremiah (17:9) holds is deceitful and beyond cure, to a motor vehicle engine which must be well serviced before one sets out on a long journey. He therefore means that people must change their attitude - from within their inner being - before they can set out on a journey to rejuvenate that, which is wrong within society. Consequently, it will be ineffective if we seek it (individual reconstruction) from a pharisaic perspective - where what we say is not rooted from our inner persons (the psyche) (see Matthew 6); hence it does not match with our doings.

In quoting the rebuke by Jesus of the scribes and the Pharisees for their insincerity in the socio-religious domain (Matt. 23:1-13), Mugambi (1995:15) sends a strong message to Pharisaic reconstructions, which because they are not rooted in the heart will fail. That also means that the beacons of social reconstruction in Africa, should not be like the Pharisees who, "love to pray as they stand in the synagogues and on the street corners" in their hypocritical bid to be seen and praised by the people, rather than by God (Matt. 6:5). In contrast, social reconstruction in Africa, will call for the strengthening of virtues such as sincerity, justice, truth, love and care, hence the desire to do the best that we can, to make Africa a better place to live in.

In view of this, Mugambi (1995:15f) cites four cases of Christian revival hymns that guide us to see the shape of individual reconstruction. These include, "Amazing grace," "Teach me thy way O Lord," "Take my life and let it be," and "Just as I am without one plea." In assessing these songs, one realises that they describe the inner plea, or expression of praise to God at the personal level, as opposed to the communal level. In a sense, they consist of prayers and thanksgivings to God, which directly affects the individual who wants to enjoy fellowship with God on a personal level. For example, in the well-known revival hymn "Amazing Grace," the speaker describes himself or herself as a former wretch; one who was previously and spiritually lost and blind. S/he had no vision and no hope. Yet, after receiving God's "amazing grace" whose sound was sweet, s/he encountered peace in God who reconstructed his or her life. It is from here that the individual must now move to reconstruct the rest of society, now that the plank in his or her eye has been removed. For

as Jesus asked:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Matthew 7:3-5).

Interestingly, Farisani is critical of Mugambi's use of the above hymns. He says, "It seems to me that Mugambi uses these hymns in the same way he uses the biblical texts above, namely in a literal way, without addressing the context out of which they emerges (sic)" (2002:100). This argument, fails however to acknowledge that Mugambi appropriately uses both the sacred text and hymnology with regard to his methodology. He approaches theology from the perspective of systematic theology and philosophy, while Farisani approaches theology from the perspective of Biblical scholarship, hence their differing points of departure. Indeed, even Farisani's analysis does not rule out the applicability of hymns building upon a theology of reconstruction, nor does he suggest an alternative hymn whose context would agree or disagree with Mugambi's contention.

Farisani's caution however is worthwhile considering there are some Christian fundamentalists who refuse to analyse the message and text of the bible, and thus pose a real risk of diluting the meaning of Christianity, in Africa and beyond. This is the danger of "Biblicism," a phenomenon that in taking the Bible literally discards exegesis in favour of receiving "the word of God accessed to us directly" (Draper 2001:153-158). Obviously, Mugambi, as an African theologian of high standing, does not fall into that category, and I believe Farisani is conscious of that. Equally, an over-emphasis on biblical exegesis and the surveying of its historical contexts may, at times, undermine the meaning of the Bible as "scripture" (Grenholm and Patte 2000) or as "sacred text" (Draper 2001: 153-158). Indeed, Mugambi, in my considered opinion, approaches the Bible from a "believer reader" perspective (Grenholm and Patte 2000: *passim*), which is also the preferred approach in this study.

Mugambi's use of hymns and biblical texts also finds agreement with Bediako (2001:2), when he states, "Scripture...is the authoritative, normative deposit given to us of the divine-human encounter that lies at the heart of our faith." It is "our road map" (Bediako

2001:2) and “our story” (2001:3). The concept of reconstruction in African theology can thus be best understood in dialogue with sacred texts and hymns,<sup>10</sup> as Bolaji Idowu’s well-considered assertion makes clear:

Songs constitute a rich heritage for the whole of Africa. For Africans are always singing and in their singing and poetry, they express themselves. In this way, all their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears about the future, find an outlet. Singing is always a vehicle conveying certain sentiments or truths. When songs are connected with rituals they convey the faith of worshippers from the heart-faith in the Deity, belief in and about divinities, assurance and hopes about the present and with regard to the hereafter (Idowu 1973:84).

At this stage, it is important to acknowledge that the use of sacred hymns to drive home his theme of reconstruction is more of a continuation from his earlier works. Hence, in his book, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989b: 10-11), Mugambi uses the same Hymn-biblical text methodology to drive home the theme of liberation.

Mugambi’s innovative approach is within the framework of the African ethos where important issues (or sometimes people who are considered as dignified members of the society) must be “escorted” with a memorable and/or relevant song, gives authenticity to his work, considering that his primary audience is African. Neither in the church, politics, education, nor in social life, have spiritual songs and sacred hymns lost their value in Africa (Gathogo 2001:81-82). Chima stresses this point when he asserts:

Whether songs are used in rites of passage (birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, etc) or in the various human activities (work, hunting, harvesting etc) and whether their contents refer to birds, animals, seasons or humans, songs have human life, behaviour and relationships as their main interest” (1994:60).

This reveals that songs (or sacred hymns) in Africa are not just a concordance of notes and voices, but each expresses the general mood and meaning of a given situation.

Thorpe introduces another element of singing in Africa where drama and dance accompany the art of music (1991:116). This builds on the importance of Mugambi’s use of sacred hymns in developing a theology of reconstruction in African theology. For Thorpe, Africans dance to celebrate every, “imaginable situation – joy, grief, love, hate, to bring prosperity, to avert calamity. In addition, singing and joyful conversation enable African people to minimise tensions within enclosed community (1991:116).

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<sup>10</sup> Songs and sacred hymns in African theology constitute what is commonly referred to as oral theology in Africa. Although it was not discussed in depth in this study as a source of African theology, its importance cannot be downplayed.

While we acknowledge Mugambi's idea of introducing sacred hymns as a vehicle for communicating the theology of reconstruction, we cannot fail to be critical in his apparent failure to appropriate African traditional songs in his method. Indeed, all four samples of hymns that he outlines were composed by European revivalists prior to the twentieth century. A reference to the well-known revivalist hymn of Charlotte Elliot does not assist matters:

Just as I am without one plea,  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou biddst me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.  
(*Christian Praise* (London: Tyndale Press 1957, Hymn #204),

This reveals the danger of getting into the theology of reconstruction without considering other elements within African theology such as the role of dance, songs, drama, musical instruments, oral narratives, myths, proverbs, sayings and riddles. These elements are crucial in any emerging theology in African Christianity. Surprisingly, proponents of the theology of reconstruction such as Karamaga, Chipenda, Villa-Vicencio and Manus have each failed to be culturally sensitive to the above elements. Even those who are critical of the theology of reconstruction have failed to understand the importance of such contextual elements, which are pivotal to the successful construction of any emerging theological trajectory in Africa.

### 5.2.2. The cultural level

Mugambi defines culture as "the cumulative product of people's activities in all aspects of life, in their endeavour to cope with their social and natural environment" (1995:16). He argues that since culture "is a social product, dependent upon a people's understanding and interpretation of themselves and their environment," every generation ends up reconstructing the culture, which it inherits from the previous generations (1996:30). Mugambi thus asserts, "This reconstruction is conducted under the direction of the opinion leaders. (*For*) the majority in every society are followers" (1996:30).

These opinion leaders are found in various categories, such as conservatives, reformers, iconoclasts, cynics and prophets (1996:31). Mugambi goes on to explain that culture is



founded on six pillars, namely, politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion (1996:32). In each of these pillars, reconstruction is necessary, to ensure that the social structures are finely tuned to the needs of the people (1995:16-17). Mugambi contends that when such components of culture are not finely adjusted, there is an uneasiness that can erupt into unrest (1995:17).

In addressing the second level of reconstruction, namely the cultural, Mugambi (1995:21) speaks as a missiologist, interested in an effective missionary enterprise within Africa which he rightly claims has failed due to the African cultural and religious heritage being dismissed as heathenism and paganism. For when you “dismiss the cultural and religious heritage of a people, you have no right to convert the community” (1995:21). Mugambi therefore seeks to reconstruct this error when he writes:

We may ask ourselves: what is the role of theology in mission? If I decide to go out to convert other people to my way of thinking and believing, I must first convince myself that I have a message worth *to communicate*<sup>11</sup> [*sic*] to others. Having made clear to myself that I have a message to which I am committed, I must also try to understand those people whom I intend to convince. Without an understanding of their way of thinking and believing, it is impossible for me to reach them. The third stage is for me to know the various methods which could be used to convey the message most effectively. Some of the ways will be more effective than others. Without such an understanding, it is possible to use ineffective methods of communication and fail to convey the message (1995:21).

Mugambi cites the case of arrogant and ignorant western-trained anthropologists who describe the African religious heritage as animism.<sup>12</sup> As he rightly states, animism is regarded as “an elementary belief system, which comes before pantheism, polytheism and monotheism” (1995:21). Western anthropological theory holds that an animist is not yet civilised enough to have arrived at the concept of God. For Mugambi this raises an important question:

How, then, can animists be converted to Christianity? How can the Bible be translated into the language of a people whose religion is animism? These are serious questions. The fact that there is a word for God in most African languages, [*sic*] confirms that it is a serious error to describe Africans as animists (1995:21).

Mugambi regrets that Christians in Africa are not expected to publicly declare their faithfulness to their culture, “although in other regions the Christian faith is grounded in the respective cultures of the people” (1995:144). As a church leader in the ACK, I can affirm Mugambi’s observation; for indeed, this is what we inherited from the so-called

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<sup>11</sup> The italicised words are my own words for emphasis in order to show that Mugambi has used the two English words wrongly. In other words, he should have said, “have a message worth communicating.”

<sup>12</sup> Animism is the belief that numerous spirits inhabit the universe, and that everything is animated by spirits.

Missionary Christianity of the nineteenth century – as it was presented by the western missionaries to Africa. Hence, in the rite of Christian baptism, most African Christians were expected by the missionaries to give the child a Western and not an African cultural name. Indeed the researcher once witnessed a couple, in the year 2000, who gave their child the full names of a former President of the United States of America – William Jefferson Clinton! This cultural inheritance has proved difficult to change especially with regard to East Africa (unlike South Africa), as many do not regard Christian baptism “complete” if the child is not given a biblical or Western name. Indeed, some see Christian baptism as a change of names where Western or biblical names replace or add to the already existing cultural names. The reason for this is the “past damage” that was unleashed by early western missionaries who being ethnocentric in their missionary work made the cultures of their subjects appear inferior over those of the West.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the question of Christ and Culture, Mugambi stresses that because we are engaged in a new theology of reconstruction, we ought not only pay allegiance to our own cultures but appreciate the cultures of others as well (1995:90 ff). Jesus, whom Mugambi refers to as “the man of all cultures,” identified himself with people of all cultural backgrounds in Palestine, and in a wider sense with all people on earth (1995:90).

In moving towards cultural reconstruction, the people of Africa need to break out of their cultural moulds and “become citizens of the world.” They need to model their lives on the uniqueness and freshness of Jesus’ teaching concerning the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers. Jesus did not discriminate culturally towards those whom he met during his ministry on earth, including, Samaritans, Roman soldiers, the Syro-phoenician woman, tax collectors, peasants, fisherman, scribes, the powerful, destitute, women and children. Mugambi urges his readers to acknowledge the dignity and cultural integrity of others. For him, Jesus established a new reconstructed community and gave it a new identity, which grew to become the nucleus of the church (1995:90).

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<sup>13</sup> This has been mentioned in Chapters 3 and 4 on African theology as a theology of liberation. This includes liberation from manners. Since the current brand of Christianity came with Western imperialism, Christians were made visible by the way they dressed, ate or interacted. Converts to Christianity were supposed to discard their traditional dress and put on Western clothes. Sometimes these second-hand clothes (*mitumba*) were donated from overseas and before long, they would be torn or worn out. The new convert was under obligation to wear them; otherwise, s/he would be identified with the “*shenzi*” (pagans) who were dressed in traditional robes. To be a Christian was tantamount to copying western civilisation in every detail (see, Nthamburi 1991:9).

Mugambi goes on to say that the uniqueness of the Christian faith is rooted in its universal appeal, which ideally ensures that “no culture has ascendancy over any other, but rather that the equal validity of all is affirmed” (1995:90).

Thus, Christ’s disciples were not expected to denounce their cultural and religious heritage. Rather, they were to learn to assert their heritage with caution lest they undermine the cultures and religions of those to whom they evangelised (1995:91). Mugambi thus quotes Jesus in Matthew 17-20 to demonstrate that his mission was not to degrade cultures, but rather make them more meaningful (1995:91).

In urging for a new theological paradigm of reconstruction, Mugambi (1995:91-106) thus revisits the theme of Christian missionary activities of the nineteenth century who evangelised Africa in their western clothing, when he states:

Henry Venn (1854) stressed the need for Christian Missionary activities to be focussed on the establishment of churches with their own government, mode of development and resources. According to him, missionaries’ tasks would end when these objectives were achieved for a particular Christian community, the missionary – whether man or woman should return home or go off to another region to start another mission station. This would continue until the entire world had received the word of God. Paul had received the word of God. Paul... would be physically present in a new community until his presence became superfluous or redundant, whereupon he moved to a new locality and started preaching the Gospel all over again. In his way he became one of the greatest missionaries in the history of Christianity (: 91).

By reverting to the old themes of unmasking or removing the swaddling bands of Christian thought, that is, de-westernising African Christianity, Mugambi risks riding on the leftovers of liberation and inculturation paradigms which were the defining characteristics of his pre-liberation works. By so doing, his personal shift to the new theological dispensation is unclear. Could he be expressing the theory that old paradigms seldom die? By re-using the old themes of liberation and inculturation in his theological articulation, Mugambi reveals that liberation, inculturation and reconstruction are indeed theological siblings. This inevitably points to the difficulty of doing away with inculturation and liberation paradigms in African theology (see chapter seven).

Mugambi (1995:105-106) concludes the sixth chapter of his book, *From Liberation to*

*Reconstruction* by stressing the need for Africa to defend its own culture. This is as important now, as it was during the European Renaissance when Europe was threatened with the loss of its own culture due to the attacks by Islamic “moors” that entered the European continent from North Africa through the Iberian Peninsula and Black Sea (1995:106). He stresses that African Christianity will only survive if it paves the way for an African Renaissance and Reformation. It will vanish if it squanders such an opportunity of renewal.

It is from that background that Mugambi sets the cultural agenda for African Christianity of the twenty first century. For him, the intent of the cultural reconstruction of African Christianity should be characterised by African outlooks upon “ritual, symbols, vestments, music, liturgy, architecture, metaphors and theological emphases” (Mugambi 1995:43). While he appears well versed with what ought to be reconstructed to give African Christianity authenticity, he does not attempt to explain how this can be done practically. For example, how can the clergy change their vestments and put on ones that have an African outlook? Do Kikuyu priests and pastors have to wear animal skins as did our fore-parents? Alternatively, do we adopt the Nigerian *agbada* or Ghanaian dresses? Which vestments have an African outlook? Furthermore, which rituals in African Traditional (indigenous) Religion do we discard and which ones do we utilise within a reconstructed African Christianity? What criteria do we use to determine this?

From our discussion, it is clear that further clarification and explanation will be needed in order to address the above concerns. This will become more evident as we study the various levels of reconstruction.

#### **5.2.2.1. Economic reconstruction**

Economics, as one of the six pillars of culture, concentrates upon the management of resources (Mugambi 1995:17). Hence, in addressing economic reconstruction, we need to explore the wider context of cultural reconstruction.

In tracing the historical background of Africa’s economic crisis, Mugambi contends that it has been in crisis for the past five hundred years, ever since Europeans started penetrating

its hills and valleys, mountains and plains, deserts and forests (1995:220). On a continental level, the crisis reached its peak at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, when Africa was parcelled out between the powerful nations of Europe without any regard for the cultural, religious and political institutions evolved for millennia by African peoples.

Mugambi refers to the Berlin Conference as a “crisis operation” which was occasioned by Germany’s interest in having a niche in the power structure of a rapidly industrialising Europe. Chancellor Otto Von Bismark was pivotal in this German strategy (1995:220). Consequently, England and France conceded to Germany’s demands for African territories, “even though they could have rejected them without serious adverse consequences” (1995:220). As has been shown earlier, Germany’s sovereignty over its African colonies was taken away as war reparations following their defeat in WW1.

Mugambi shows that the economic crisis in Africa has not been easy because of these past backgrounds. The constitutional settlements signed at independence in London, Paris and Lisbon, respectively, tied the newly independent African nations to their former colonial masters in special relationships, such that Africa remains divided into the four commonwealths, as was the case during the colonial period. These were:

- 1) The British Commonwealth (Anglophone);
- 2) The French Commonwealth (Francophone);
- 3) The Portuguese Commonwealth (Lusophone);
- 4) The Arab Commonwealth (Arabophone) (1995:214)

Mugambi shows that these colonial legacies are maintained and sustained through preferential trade and cultural agreements, which discourage African countries from opting out of their respective clubs (1995:214). He writes:

Thus, the link with the metropolitan centre is considered more beneficial than the development of markets within the African continent, and sometimes, outside the respective commonwealths. The emergence of Japan, China, South Korea, India and other Asian countries as competitive trading partners in some African countries is a welcome relief, but in the long term, Africa will have to develop its internal markets for raw products, manufactured goods and service industries (1995:214).

Mugambi quotes René Dumont (1970:114-128), who observed that decolonisation will not restore dignity to Africans unless the structures of dependence are dismantled and replaced by ones which are more egalitarian. Mugambi holds that Dumont’s thesis remains true

even though several decades have passed since his ideas were first published (1995:214). He cautions that Africa will degenerate into dependency syndrome if she continues to depend on handouts while its peoples continue to grow cash crops which she does not require as necessities or luxury (1995:214). This point has been given a lot of weight in his two volumes of 1995 and 2003 (1995:44). He holds that African countries have the misfortune of producing what they do not consume, that is tourism, coffee, tea, sisal, raw materials etc. They also have a burden of consuming what they do not produce, such as machinery, electronic goods, imported foods, books, films, popular music, etc (1995:158). He thus advises that self-sufficiency in staple foods is the first step towards the restoration of the dignity of Africa. In his words, "a hungry person is an angry person. An angry person thinks more of his anger than his happiness" (1995:214). His point is further given weight by Nthamburi, when he writes:

I once witnessed a situation where the price of coffee went down drastically. It happened that the same year there had been drought and there was not enough food. Since the peasant farmers could not afford to buy food with the little money they got from the depressed prices, they had to depend on charitable handouts otherwise they would have starved to death. The most painful thing was that they had planted their smallholdings with coffee and could not grow enough food crops for their families. Some would have wanted to uproot their coffee plants but because of government control they could not do so. The peasant farmers have no control over how their produce is marketed or the price they should receive for it (1991:41).

Concerning trade, Mugambi points to the danger of economic isolation of Africa in terms of world trade. He proposes that every country must formulate and implement policies that enhance, rather than erode, the dignity of its citizens (1995:221). He notes that a country that is capable of feeding its people should not be so careless as to depend on food relief year after year. It is therefore prudent for each individual country to formulate and implement policies that ensure production and national distribution of adequate staple food for both current needs and strategic reserves. It also makes "good sense to shift from luxury cash crops to essential foods which may be locally consumed and also marketed" (1995:21).

With regard to economic reconstruction among the churches, Mugambi stresses that the churches, as institutions, will have to identify and develop means of income generation that are consistent with the Christian gospel (1995:179). In this regard, Mugambi proposes

that the churches ought to undertake cost-reduction measures, so that their expenditure is in line with their income. In this, Mugambi is trying to assist the church in Africa to overcome the syndrome of dependency by avoiding making budgets that are beyond their reach, thereby necessitating the begging bowl attitude towards international (western) donors in their bid to cover their deficits. To some extent, Mugambi is also trying to remind the church of its calling, to be good stewards and managers of God's resources (*cf.* Luke 12: 41-48).

Mugambi also associates economic reconstruction with a well-qualified labour force. He says that serving Church personnel need to be retrained, and “the training of new Personnel will need review” (1995:179). In particular, he contends that African churches ought to ensure that their lay and ordained workers are at least as well trained as their counterparts in the public and private sectors. To ensure this, minimum standards with regard to “recruitment and training requirements will need to be brought to parity with those of the public and private sectors” in each country. Mugambi concludes that this will be “an important step towards the restoration of declining confidence in church leadership” (1995:179).

With regard to the “declining confidence in church leadership,” Mugambi does not qualify his thinking clearly, particularly with regard to how he arrived at the conclusion that it was on the decline. Quoting David Barrett, Africa is the most Christian continent in the twenty-first century. Barrett (1982) tells us that Africa records on average of 4,000 new converts every day and this puts the Christian population in Africa at more than 50% of the overall population of about 750 million people (Gathogo 2001:v). Does this mean that the growth is not due to the exemplary leadership that is displayed by African church leaders? This observation is serious considering that at the conclusion of his analysis on personal reconstruction, Mugambi says that the key to social transformation “is appropriate disposition of the individual members of the community concerned, especially its leaders” (1995:16). In view of this, one wonders, does Mugambi have something that he knows about church leadership in Africa today, but which is not known to us?

On the other hand, Mugambi could be pointing to the need to re-address the question of

leadership in our communalistic African society, where the value of a leader is seen in the fact that he or she almost single-handedly determines the socio-political destiny of the community. Stories illustrative of this are told of how mass conversions to Christianity were done by some early western missionaries to Africa by converting the king or the chief first. Subsequently, the entire population of that particular kingdom or chiefdom would follow suit and convert to Christianity through accepting the Christian rite of baptism. Mugambi could therefore be alluding to the communal nature of the people of the tropical Africa. That is, African leaders are very significant actors in the social reconstruction of Africa. As Mugambi has stated, If church leaders and churches are not “exemplary social institutions, they lose the moral power to guide others” (Mugambi 1995:180).

Mugambi recalls the 1960s and 1970s when some Christian churches established rural training centre where peasants were expected to acquire better farming methods (2003:45). In this, international donor funds were used, but when they dwindled, the demonstration centres began to deteriorate. Mugambi proposes an approach that does not rely upon donor funds (2003:45). He says that within the Christian parish, an extension officer can live with the farmers and help them to improve their farming, processing and marketing practices. He says that such a person may be a volunteer or an employee of the church (2003:45). This approach differs from the old concept of a “mission station” in that the peasants are no longer expected to come to the station to learn from the missionary. Rather, the extension officer travels to the farmlands and homesteads. The strength of this approach is seen in that “the parishioners become mutual learners and mutual teachers” (2003:45). He goes on to say that the same “approach can be extended to other aspects of production such as housing, water, health, fuel, and so on.” Meeting peasants basic requirements may result in the exploration of ways and means of marketing their surplus, while the income will be used in financing the importation deficits of other sectors of the local economy (Mugambi 2003:46).

A study of economic reconstruction thus helps us to understand the socio-ecclesial needs of the African continent. It also helps us to build confidence in the fact that African Christianity can empirically wrestle with the socio-economic concerns of Africa.



### 5.2.2.2. Aesthetic reconstruction

Aesthetics is the formal study of art, especially with relation to the idea of beauty. It has to do with relating to (the enjoyment or study of) beauty, or (of an object or work of art) showing great beauty.<sup>14</sup>

Mugambi defines acculturation as the process through which a subject people assimilates the values of a dominating culture through the means of colonial education, administration and economy. He contends that the African sense of beauty has been distorted and deformed by values and influences that were imposed upon the African cultural heritage (2003:46). This was done through colonial and neo-colonial domination.

Mugambi traces this distortion of African beauty from the fourth century Roman occupation of Western Europe when the Angles and Saxons assimilated a great deal of Roman culture. He adds that they internalised it to such an extent that neither the Renaissance, nor the Reformation could wipe it out. Roman imperialism, he says, distorted and deformed Anglo-Saxon culture so intensely that the Graeco-Roman "classics" became the foundation and rationale of European "Civilization" (2003:46). It is from here that Europeans brought their cultures to Africa and thereby imposed them on the African people through the process of acculturation.

Acculturation alienates subject peoples from their own heritage. It conditions them to follow the culture of their masters. Franz Fanon in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1978, has discussed this process in detail. It has further been addressed by Placide Tempels in his book, *Bantu Philosophy*, 1959. Mugambi recommends a book entitled, *Black Aesthetics* (1973), which is a collection of essays presented at a colloquium convened at the University College, Nairobi, in June 1971 (2003:46). Mugambi considers the articles of Ali Mazrui and Bethuel Ogot of particular value. Ogot's chapter challenges the people of Africa to pay more attention to their own limitations and capabilities rather than the misdeeds and impositions of others upon the people of Africa (2003:46). In other words, Ogot suggests that Africans should learn to convert their challenges into

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<sup>14</sup> See Paul Procter ed. *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 21.

opportunities or to convert their disappointments into assets for future rejuvenation and reconstruction. He thus states:

Most of the African writers, themselves ex-mission boys and girls, show a concern with the pervasive influence of the missionaries whom they blame for many of the evils of modern Africa. All these themes emphasise the point that the innocent African has been sinned against by the slave traders has been sinned against by the slave traders and the European imperialists. On the other hand, the African writers, in spite of differing social backgrounds, remain favourably disposed towards their heritage. Songs in praise of the heroic pre-colonial past are sung from Cape Town to Dakar (Zirimu and Gurr 1973:20-21).

Mugambi observes that throughout the post-colonial period, African aesthetics has not shifted from the preoccupations and concerns listed by Ogot (2003:47).<sup>15</sup> He sees the external “enemy” to Black aesthetics as extending beyond the western missionary, settler, and colonialist and includes of late, multinational corporations and the World Bank (2003:47). In view of this, he notes the challenge posed by the theme of reconstruction - as that progressive activism that need not always apportion blames on others. Rather, it should focus on self-criticism, self-evaluation and re-dedication (: 48). Additionally, it also means appreciating the values upon which a society is founded; and a commitment to build on the existing foundation (: 49).

Mugambi regrets that the African elite (referring in the main to African politicians) on political platforms are often impeccably dressed in formal Euro-American garb, while the hired entertainers, during political celebrations in the arena, are often attired in “traditional” garb (2003:50). Sadly, those who are supposed to uphold the value of Black aesthetics are failing in their duty. Who will save us by asserting our dignity as a people created in God’s image?

As early as 1917, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), a Jamaican black son of a former slave and a Pan-African of no mean repute, captured this theme, perhaps, quite early. Upon arrival in the United States of America to promote the work of the African-American Improvement Association (*Hereafter*, AAIA), a body tasked with the welfare of Blacks, Garvey moved around the country to promote the Association’s work. He cautioned Blacks that: “No longer must our race look to whites for guidance and leadership; who best can interpret the anguish and the needs of our people but an African?” (Gathogo 2001:109). In a direct

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<sup>15</sup> These pre-occupations include irresponsible behaviours and other immoral practices.

challenge to the African-American men, he continued:

Take down the pictures of white women from your walls. Elevate your own women to the place of honour. They are for the most part the burden-bearers of the race. Mothers! Give your children dolls that look like them to play with and cuddle. They will learn, as they grow older to love and care for their own children and not neglect them.

Garvey concluded by saying:

Men and women, God made us as his [*sic*] perfect creation. He made no mistake when he made us African with kinky hair. It was a divine purpose for us to live in our natural habitat - the tropical zones of the earth. Forget the white man's banter that God made us in the night and forgot to paint us white. That we were brought here against our will is just a natural process of the strong enslaving the weak...you are capable of all that is common to men [*sic*] of other races. So let us start now to build big business, commerce, industry and eventually a nation of our own to protect us wherever we choose to live (Garvey quoted in Gathogo 2001:109).

Although many of his critics found his speeches to be racist, Garvey assisted Blacks to regain a sense of self-love and self-confidence. He appealed to the "black is beauty" concept as opposed to "anything black is devilish." His views agree with the contention of Ali Mazrui, when he calls the people of Africa to break from the conservativeness of values in their response to foreign values (Zirimu and Gurr 1973:20-21). That is, to break away from the attitude that holds anything foreign is better than that which is local and African.

Mugambi contends that aesthetic reconstruction will inevitably include a "reformulation of language policy, so that Africa evolves a *lingua franca* through which the peoples of the continent can affirm a common identity, culture, and future" (2003:50). He borrows from the work of Mazrui who in turn cites Tanzania as a country that has deliberately formulated and implemented an indigenous language policy to unite its people. Hence, Kiswahili is used as the language of instruction, administration and socialisation. He goes on to explain that Kiswahili is taught in Ghanaian Universities, and concludes that it is possible to have Kiswahili as the *lingua franca* of the whole continent (2003:50).

In proposing Kiswahili as a language for Africa, Mugambi contends that more than 100, 000, 000 people in East and Central Africa already speak it (2003:40). He stresses that it is now time to work on Nkrumah's call to evolve one language for uniting the peoples of the

whole continent (2003:40). He goes on to explain that Kiswahili is a strong candidate because of its affinity with Arabic, and the Arabic related languages of tropical West Africa, such as Hausa and Fulani (2003:40). It is no wonder that Nkrumah went ahead and introduced Kiswahili as a discipline at the State University of Ghana (2003:40). Consequently, the University has trained some Ghanaians in the Kiswahili language.

In countering the critics of a continental (African) language, Mugambi reminds us that, “if Africans can learn European and Asian languages, why should they find it difficult to learn African languages?” (2003:41). He goes on to cite the example of African refugees who are able to adjust to the countries of their asylum. For Mugambi, this demonstrates that it is possible for Africans to learn African languages other than that of their mother tongue if circumstances so dictate (2003:41). With the demise of the Cold War, Mugambi feels that it is now possible for such initiatives to succeed owing to the fact that there is less foreign induced suspicion and suppression (2003:41). Mugambi however fails to point out the problems associated with regional languages in the face of globalisation. Equally, Mugambi does not point out the risks of pursuing a Black aesthetic *revolution* and reconstruction. For example, Kwame Nkrumah’s promotion of Black aesthetics went overboard when he found himself almost blaspheming God by subverting the Apostle’s Creed:

I believe in the Convention People’s Party (CPP), the opportune saviour of Ghana and in Kwame Nkrumah, its founder and leader, who is endowed with the Ghanaian spirit, born as a true Ghanaian for Ghana; suffering under victimisation, was vilified, threatened with deportation; he disentangled himself from the clutches of the UGCC<sup>16</sup>; and the same day he rose victorious with the “Veranda Boys”; ascended the political heights, and sitteth as the supreme head of the CPP (Nkrumah quoted in Abban 2004:80).

The pursuit of black aesthetics must occur with caution, as failures here can be cataclysmic in nature. Hence, it is important to learn from Nkrumah,<sup>17</sup> who thought himself to be the Black Messiah to both Ghana and Continental Africa as whole. Indeed,

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<sup>16</sup> UGCC refers to the United Gold Coast Convention, a political party that Nkrumah defected from before he formed his CPP.

<sup>17</sup> According to Apollo Milton Obote, first Prime Minister of independent Uganda (1962-66), and later President (1966-1971); and following the coups and then after the 1980 elections, he was President again from 1980-1986, Nkrumah had ideas about Africa, which were good. He was however impatient, thereby impeding implementation. He nevertheless was an illustrious leader. Africa has not had such a great man again. Nkrumah was frustrated by the western powers through the manipulation of the price of cocoa on the international market. They pushed the price downwards in order to undermine him, and thereby cause him foreign exchange problems, after which he was overthrown in 1966, having been in power from 1957. Nkrumah thought African, governed African, lived African and died African. (See, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/specialincludes/ugprsd/obote/ob040710.php/>).

he went overboard when he remarked that Ghana and Africa must “first seek the political kingdom and all other things will be added unto” them (Abban 2004:79f). On another note, aesthetic reconstruction is an undertaking whose time is now, and as with Garvey had pursued its theme in the early 1900s, it is equally important to put it as a significant item on the agenda of post Cold War Africa.

### 5.2.2.3. Political reconstruction

Mugambi traces the background of cold war, which had negative effects on Africa as it partitioned Africa ideologically (1995: 206). For Mugambi, the failure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (*Hereafter*, NATO) to bring the Soviet Union into its fold following WW2, led to severe competition between Western Bloc (NATO Alliance)<sup>17</sup> and Eastern Bloc (Warsaw pact) countries (1995:206). Mugambi dates this struggle for ideological supremacy back to October 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia<sup>18</sup> where feudalism was replaced by communism (1995:206). As Mugambi notes, the basis of the Bolshevik Revolution was Karl Marx’s theory that the ideal state was one in which the

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<sup>17</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in March 1949. It included the United States, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Italy, Portugal and the members of the Brussels Pact (Peacock 1987:372). The Brussels pact was a product of the treaty of Brussels of March 1948 that took place following the close of WW2. After the war, Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg formed a defensive alliance against any form of aggression. The Brussels treaty was not only aimed at the revived Germany but was also aimed against the military presence of the Soviet Union in Europe. Greece and Turkey became members of NATO in 1952. It had a permanent headquarters in Paris and its Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) was at Versailles initially commanded by General Eisenhower. It was seen by some as an essential defensive organisation against Communist aggression and as a successful step towards European co-operation. On the other hand, the Soviet Union denounced it as an aggressive American dominated pact, the formation of which was a breach of the United Nations Charter. They also criticised the redevelopment of Germany military strength less than ten years after the war (Peacock 1987:372). The real strength of NATO was the United States of America and its atomic weaponry, apart from which NATO was at no time an equal match for the forces of Russia and her satellites.

<sup>18</sup> Bolsheviks literally means the “majority.” It was led by Vladimir Ulianov who was also known under the pseudonym of Lenin. He began to work towards the overthrow of the Russian Tsar through inciting workers as the editor of the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* (the Spark) that he published in England and distributed through underground channels in Russia. Together with Leon Trotsky and Stalin, they steered the Russian Social Democratic Labour party, which was formed in 1898 during the reign of Nicholas II (1894-1917). They adopted the revolutionary theories of Karl Marx. Upon the formation of the Social Democratic Party, the Russian police began the arrest of its leaders. Consequently, it was decided that they would carry on its main propaganda from abroad. Even though they adopted Marxist theory, differences arose among the leadership as to the exact way in which the communist revolution could be brought about in Russia and in Europe (Peacock 1987:254). At a meeting of the party held in 1903 a split occurred between the Bolsheviks (literally the “Majority”) led by Lenin and the Mensheviks (the “minority”). Lenin and the Bolsheviks wanted a closely disciplined party comprising of active workers in the movement, whereas the Mensheviks wanted a mass party consisting of both active and non-active or sympathising members on the lines of the western socialist parties. Following the formation of Social Democratic Labour Party, strikes among important sections of the Russian workers became frequent. They were not only meant to improve the wages and living conditions but were also the means of educating the workers in the true meaning of the Class struggle in the approved Marxist manner (Peacock 1987:255). In the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin took over the government.

proletariat should own the means of production and establish a classless society. This appealing political philosophy was met with dread in Western Europe as it was seen to have the potential of severely destabilising their capitalist economies and class-based societies (1995:206).

With the emergence of the Soviet Union as one of the victors of WW2, NATO felt duty bound to campaign for the downfall of communism at whatever cost (Mugambi 1995:206). Africa was thus bombarded with propaganda from both ideological blocs, especially in the 1950s and 1960s when most African nation states were struggling for their independence. To do this effectively, the ideological rivals pitted nationalist struggles against colonial struggles. An example is seen in Nelson Mandela's visits after post-1994 to communist countries such as Cuba to thank them for supporting their armed struggle against apartheid.<sup>18</sup> It follows that if South Africa pursued her liberation within the framework of NATO, then the reverse could have been expected.

Post-colonial Africa thus became divided along ideological lines. Some nation states became ideologically closer to the Eastern Bloc while others became closer to the Western Bloc. The Non-Aligned Movement (*Hereafter*, NAM), which was formed as a response to this dialectical fragmentation of the world, hardly did anything to prevent the superpowers from classifying other world countries as either friends or enemies (Mugambi 1995:206). Thus, international politics was characterised by this dichotomy until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. This unprecedented collapse ushered in a new world order. It brought in new nations in Eastern and Central Europe, and witnessed the re-establishment of Russia as a dominant, mono-ethnic nation, while the other members of USSR reverted to their original nation-states, and were re-admitted by the United Nations (1995:206).

With the fall of the Eastern bloc (Warsaw Pact Countries), those African Countries that were overtly aligned to the Eastern Bloc (Warsaw Pact Countries) found themselves unable to fit in with the new world order, as they now suffered political and economic upheavals thereby encouraging them to move towards the Western Bloc and pursue Western (capitalist) policies (1995:207). This turn of events brought ideological confusion, as the task of repositioning became a heavy task.

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<sup>18</sup> Nelson Mandela's visits to the former Eastern countries after his release in 1990 were well highlighted by the media.

Mugambi further observed that the new world order ushered in multiparty politics, promoted in the name of "democracy" (1995:207; *cf.* Maluleke 1996a). By the early 1990s, Africa saw for the first time an end to life presidencies and the deposing from power of sitting presidents through the ballot box. An example is Kenneth Kaunda who was voted out of power and replaced by Frederick Chiluba in Zambia in 1991. Another is Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi who was deposed from power and replaced by Bakili Muluzi in 1994. In Kenya Daniel arap Moi who had resisted change by detaining his political rivals finally accepted multiparty politics in 1991. His party lost to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), in the December 30, 2002 elections. Such political freedom could not have been imagined before the end of the Cold War.

In Africa, the end of Cold War can be said to have brought mixed fortunes. For although political space has been opened up in some African countries, political upheavals, ironically, still take place in others. Some nation states have receded through ethnic fragmentation and others through economic disintegration. For instance, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is still fresh in the memories of many Africans. The Somalia and Darfur (in Sudan) crisis are of present concern. This said, Mugambi sees the possibility of political reconstruction creating further democratic space in Africa.

In this regard, Mugambi revisits Kwame Nkrumah's dream of a United States of Africa and thereby sees Africa as one whole country partitioned into big plots through colonial boundaries drawn after the Berlin conference of 1885-1886 (2003:39). From this, he appears to agree with Nkrumah's belief that it is possible to transcend language, immigration and tariff barriers that were imposed by the former colonial powers, and establish one economic and political community covering the entire continent. Thus, language centres such as French, English, Portuguese and Arabic communities can view each other as mutual partners rather than competitors and rivals (2003:39).

In general, Mugambi's emphasis on post Cold War reconstruction in Africa receives constructive support from Thabo Mbeki, the President of South Africa, who sees the possibility of an African renaissance sweeping the Continent. Mbeki has thus said:

Surely, the historic victory of our continent over colonialism and apartheid has

something to do with this. Without that victory, an African Renaissance was impossible. Having achieved that success we created the possibility to confront the challenge of the reconstruction and development of our continent anew (Mbeki 1999: xix).

While acknowledging that the idea of an African Renaissance was nothing new, it having been proposed as early as 1900 by the Pan-Africanist movement, Mugambi concedes that before the close of Cold War, such an idea for Africa's rebirth would never have succeeded, being received as both suspicious and utopian (2003:40).

Emmanuel M. Katongole agrees with Mugambi that, indeed, there are winds of change that are blowing over the continent. He says:

Many countries find themselves faced with immense challenges of national identity as well as social, political, and economic reconstruction – *after* apartheid (in South Africa), *after* genocide (in Rwanda), *after* civil war (in Uganda and Eritrea), *after* dictatorship (in the former Zaire), and after so many other *afters*. Whereas these challenges are formidable, there seem to be significant signs of hope in the political, economic, and social infrastructures of many countries (Katongole 2002: 208).

He goes on to say:

No one has better expressed these signs of hope than Yoweri Museveni and Thabo Mbeki – two of the most respectable among the “new breed” of African leaders – when they announced an “African reawakening” (Museveni) and “African Renaissance” (Mbeki). To be sure, both Mbeki and Museveni see this “reawakening” primarily in terms of industrialization, regional trade, and the building of a strong African economic block (Katongole 2002: 208).

Katongole goes on and quotes Museveni who says:

Trade is the best tool of development, and African countries should develop their joint markets rather than aspire to become associate members of the European Union. Industrialization as a basis for the continent's renewal would succeed only if markets were integrated and enlarged through regional cooperation (Katongole 2002: 208).

This “integrated and vibrant market” is geared towards economic and political prosperity on the continent of Africa. This proposed African Renaissance, which is seen in terms of trade and economics, is an acceptance of the vision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This may therefore drive its critics to wonder: Is Africa's problems due to underdevelopment and poverty only? Will this proposed African Renaissance give rise to a radically new and positive African image and identity? Is it the long awaited magic that will catapult Africa from the periphery? And above all, is it an authentically African initiative?



Nevertheless, Katongole's analysis of both Mbeki and Museveni has helped the study to see the connection between "African Renaissance" and "Theology of Reconstruction" as the two sides of one coin; and as both Elelwani Farisani (2004: 56ff) and Stein Villumstad (2005:6) contends, they are both renewal concepts with the latter being "invented" by African theologians while the former being "invented" by African politicians. In spite of the differences in their respective emphasis and focus, their philosophical roots are nevertheless the same.

In general, the calls for renewal, rebirth and reconstruction of Africa, among the politicians, lead to the development of a new economic policy for the Continent, called, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (*Hereafter*, NEPAD). As one of its prime architects, Mbeki has positioned NEPAD as a major tool in Africa's rejuvenation.

#### **5.2.2.4. Moral/Ethical reconstruction**

In his moral/ethical reconstruction, Mugambi rightly notes that economic and political renewal alone without moral values will not bring any genuine reconstruction for Africa (2003:51). Without a moral conscience, African society will become soul-less. Mugambi develops this thought by first defining morals as "ways and means of regulating behaviour within specific cultural contexts" (2003:51). He expresses the hope that Africans can maintain their African ethic while embracing modernity (2003:52). Mugambi cites Japan, South Korea and India as examples, which although modernised, have maintained their cultural and religious heritage (2003:52). In order for this to take place, Mugambi asserts that:

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

Mugambi's call for a moral/ethical reconstruction is in agreement with Barney Pityana, who says that South Africa ought to ponder why crime is so high, especially against the defenceless and vulnerable, such as children, women and refugees:

Crimes against women have reached epidemic proportions. Why is there still such prevalence of mindless and gratuitous violence? Why is corruption so rife, especially against the vulnerable? Old-age pensioners have their pay packets robbed at times by the officials who are supposed to assist; (girl) children are raped by men whom they should trust; workers and teachers do not put in an honest day's work to earn their living; those who are supposed to prepare food for the hungry

and homeless end up robbing them of their daily bread. None of this behaviour can be attributed to culture or tradition or any form of morality (Pityana 1999:47).

Likewise, R J Khoza's view on moral/ethical reconstruction strikes a chord with Mugambi when he says that African worries are not only about personal morality, but, perhaps more importantly about public morality. Thus, Khoza can state:

We have reached a point where we have institutionalised public immorality as reflected in the political and economic policies and *(the)* decisions made by many - leaderships which are obscene not only because their consequences are unjust but because those consequences are fully intended by a corrupt and *(a)* cynical leadership (1999:285).

This call for moral/ethical reconstruction returns us to personal reconstruction where Mugambi holds that "the key to social transformation is appropriate disposition of the individual members of the community concerned, especially the leaders" (1995:16). In his view, if leaders can be morally upright in post-Cold War Africa, regardless whether they are church leaders or political leaders, then the theft of public resources and other forms of corruption would be a matter of history. And as a result, the vices cited by Mbeki in his proposal for African Renaissance, such as, autocracy, a muzzled media, censored creativity, intimidated citizens and other African predicaments would be a matter of history, enabling Africa to be truly reborn in the twenty-first century (1988:206-207).

Mugambi errs however in his moral/ethical reconstruction, when he revisits the issue of marriage in Africa whereby he explains that simultaneous polygamy has been an established form of marriage for centuries amongst Africans, even though not every married man was a husband of two or more wives (2003:51). By making the remark that, "this moral issue (of polygamy) is still unresolved" (2003:51) Mugambi risks appearing to justify an outdated element of African culture. In fact, the Africa of today is enjoying an emergent trend towards monogamous marriage; and whether it originated from Euro-America or not is no longer an issue. In such cases, cultural diffusion allows cultures to learn from one another, an entirely appropriate response to the dynamics of culture.

The study of moral/ethical reconstruction has appealed to our consciences and thereby calls us to re-examine our moral-ethical attitudes at the personal level as well as within the public sphere. This ultimately calls for good stewardship amongst the people of Africa, as

we are all answerable to God. This can be clearly manifested in our individual lives and the institutions that God has called us to serve. These include the church in Africa and beyond.

### **5.2.3. The ecclesial level**

The ecclesial level is Mugambi's third level of reconstruction. For him, such reconstruction should begin at the lowest level of the ecclesiastical ladder (1995:140). That is, from the parochial level of congregations and parishes. In order to propound his view, Mugambi uses the symbolism of a tree, the strength of a tree depends on the depth of its roots. Likewise, "the strength of the Church Universal depends on the strength of local congregations and parishes" (1995:139).

In seeking to strengthen the church, Mugambi cautions about succumbing to the temptation of maintaining central administrative structures at the expense of local congregations and parishes (1995:139). He also points out the temptation at the international level, where the needs of the local church are often overshadowed by bigger projects at the national and regional levels. Mugambi however does not explain how at the international level, the temptation of supporting the national projects and not supporting the smaller projects at the local level can be avoided owing to the fact that it is difficult at the international level to reach the local level without passing through the regional/national level. In any case, how can the international level initiate projects at the local level? Clearly, this concern is a relevant challenge considering that the church, as a social organisation cannot be strong if it is not well grounded right from the grassroots.

With regard to his proposal for the retraining of church leaders, Mugambi (1995:150) feels that Africans ought to be given scholarships to train and improve their skills. Again, he does not explain where these scholarships will come from, especially with regard to the fact that the moratorium debate of the 1970s called for the suspension of missionary funds and personnel so that African churches could attain their selfhood and integrity which was otherwise stifled by missionary tutelage and patronage (2003:213). While propounding the view that ecclesial reconstruction will require the church to raise the skills level of its workers and especially its clergy; Mugambi cautions about the danger of acquiring an

education abroad, which is not relevant to the needs at home. He does not rule out however the thought of giving opportunities to those who are already trained in Africa to travel abroad for the purpose of international exposure.

With regard to modern technology, Mugambi sees the priority of the African churches to establish what he calls "the electronic church" (1995:154). He recalls during the Cold War, many radio programmes were beamed to Africa from Europe and North America replete with ideological propaganda, portraying the impression that communism was synonymous with godlessness, whereas capitalism was of God. Mugambi holds that such propaganda scandalises the church and repulses critically minded Africans away from Christianity (1995:154). He sees the modern church as the best placed to use electronic technology for its edification, without insulting the intelligence of Africans. The electronic media, through the radio and television, Mugambi argues, should be used not to amuse, as it had been used in the past, but to educate without losing its ecumenical edge (1995:154).

Valentin Dedji sees Mugambi's "deep conviction that reconstruction task cannot be achieved in Africa unless the ecumenical configuration is reshaped" as the most impressive aspect of Mugambi's endeavour as a theologian, that certainly explains why Mugambi seizes every opportunity "to clarify his point of view in regard to the importance of ecumenism in the process of reconstruction of African Churches and societies" (2003:62).

Dedji (2003:62) goes on to say that Mugambi's theological concept of the *raison d'être* and divine purpose of Ecumenism is founded on the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17: 6-11:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father protect them by the power of your name - the name you gave me - so that they may be one as we are one.

Mugambi's enthusiasm about ecumenical co-operation, geared as it is towards ecclesial reconstruction, and within the framework of the need to preserve the unity of the early church, is as Dedji clearly recognises "a contribution which is memorably embedded in the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Chalcedon" (Dedji 2003:62).

Mugambi bases his proposal on the historical evidence of North African scholars such as Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. For him, these theologians "were intellectually and culturally close to the Hellenistic tradition, North Africa had its own significance in the shaping of basic Christian doctrines" (2003:63). This evidences the urgency of his call to the African Church to engage in ecumenical dialogue as a united front rather than as scattered and weakened entities.

Overall, the dimensions of Mugambi's views on ecclesial reconstruction include mythological reformation, doctrinal teaching, social rehabilitation, ethical direction, ritual celebration and personal response (1995:17). Broadly speaking, it should also include "management structures, financial policies, pastoral care, human resources development, research, family education, service and witness" (1995:17). He sees theology as the means by which the church rationalises its ideas of ecclesial reconstruction, where the role of a theologian is that of a facilitator who assists the church to adjust itself to the new social demands of society (1995:17).

#### **5.2.4. The levels of social reconstruction: An overview**

As noted earlier, Mugambi understands the term reconstruction to belong to the vocabulary of engineering. He explains that reconstruction is done when an existing complex becomes dysfunctional (1995:12). Seen from a theological perspective, the "complex" in need of reconstruction may include the individual at the personal (*psyche*) level. It can also refer to the entire society of men and women whose attitudes, perceptions and world-views may need revision. On the other hand, reconstruction as a concept is a broadened terminology, whose boundaries are still not clearly set.

Social reconstruction, as the phrase suggests, belongs to the social sciences and denotes a primary object in society and not necessarily of the individual. Mugambi sees social

reconstruction as implying “the endeavour to enhance life at *personal*, social and institutional and ecological levels” (1996:40). His view gains credence in Kwame Nkrumah’s definition of social reconstruction as the mission to buttress “freedom from poverty and economic conditions of the people (*and not necessarily the individual*) so that they will be able to find better means of achieving livelihood and asserting their right to human life and happiness” (Nkrumah 1962:43; *cf.* Mugambi 1996:40).

Mugambi understands the three levels of social reconstruction as being, biological survival, social survival and self-fulfilment (1996:40-42), each of which does not necessarily connote individual reconstruction unlike in the former.

#### **5.2.4.1. Biological survival**

Mugambi concedes that biological survival is the most basic level of human existence. In his view, all living things, “from unicellular organisms to the most complex primates, are involved in the struggle for those necessities which make life possible” (1996:40). This includes food, shelter, clothing and health. The starving men and women of Africa are in this category. Likewise, ecological concerns share the same classification hence the need to address such issues.

#### **5.2.4.2. Social survival**

This strictly applies to human beings as social beings, and not all living organisms. However, “human beings supersede their natural state by designing social systems to systems to suit their own interests” (1996:41). The fact that the future is not directly accessible to us makes some to be conservatives who merely maintain the *status quo* rather than take the risk of “travelling to the unknown other.”

#### **5.2.4.3. Self-fulfilment**

In Mugambi’s view, self-fulfilment is the climax of human existence (: 41). For having satisfied the primary biological and social needs, “an individual feels the need to be accepted, appreciated and self-perpetuated” (: 41).

Overall, the three levels of social reconstruction, as with the three levels of reconstruction,

express relatively the same concerns, albeit in different ways. In Mugambi's view, Africa needs all the above levels of reconstruction, only then will it experience a foretaste of the kingdom of God (Matt. 6).

### **5.3. Sources and methods**

In considering the sources and the methods of doing a theology of reconstruction, it is important to acknowledge that as Christian theology done in Africa, it is also part of African theology. In particular, the sources of theology of reconstruction include the Bible as primary source, the African cultural and religious heritage, the African renaissance movement and the Pan-Africanist movement, the AACC, the Christian tradition, science and technology, and NEPAD. On the section on sources of a theology of reconstruction, only NEPAD will be addressed, as it is one of the sources that were not covered in chapter three.

#### **5.3.1. New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)**

NEPAD is an initiative originally devised by five African Heads of State, namely, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal (Akumu, Gathaka, Mwamodo 2003:1). In view of this, the NEPAD Strategic Framework Document (*Hereafter*, SFD) arises from a mandate given to the above five initiating Heads of State (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa) by the OAU to develop an integrated socio-economic development framework for Africa, geared towards the reconstruction of the vast continent of Africa. At the thirty-seventh Summit of the OAU held in July 2001, the SFD was formally adopted.<sup>19</sup>

NEPAD can be described as dream about Africa's future, a plan on how to reconstruct Africa, achieve economic growth and overcome poverty. It is, "a strategic framework for the socio-economic development of Africa" (Akumu, Gathaka, Mwamodo 2003: 5). In other words, it provides "a statement for the problems facing Africa and a programme of action on how to resolve them" (2003:5).

NEPAD traces its ideological-moral roots to the calls for an African Renaissance. As established earlier in this study, African Renaissance is an ideological outlook that argues

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/inbrief.php/>

for and affirms the dignity of the African, whose socio-economic condition and political circumstances has been undermined by an ideology premised on racism (*cf.* Mbeki 1999). As an ideological outlook, the African Renaissance idealises a future where the African continent would take charge of its own destiny and improve the livelihood of its entire people. It is within this context that NEPAD as a programme for the comprehensive socio-economic and political transformation of Africa emerged (see, Mbeki 1999). Its fundamental concerns, which clearly inform the theology of reconstruction, include, poverty eradication, social transformation, sustainable development, resource mobilisation, gender equity and partnership in the light of globalisation (see NEPAD 2001:1ff).

The NEPAD document provides a clear vision, goals and a comprehensive strategy for Africa's sustainable development. Hence some of its long-term objectives are, to eradicate poverty and promote the role of women in all activities. Elsewhere within the policy document, seven important goals are enumerated, including the enrolment of all school going age in primary schools by 2015 (see, NEPAD document 2001).

NEPAD calls for debt relief and promotion of the role of women in social and economic development.<sup>20</sup> We wait to see how women at the grassroots level will be reached by NEPAD's treatment of feminised poverty.

As Akumu, Gathaka and Mwamodo have observed, if NEPAD meets its priority areas,<sup>21</sup> it can lead to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations, which are:

1. To reduce the proportion of people living in extreme hunger and poverty by half between 1990 and 2015;
2. To enrol all children of school age in primary schools by 2015;
3. To make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in the enrolment in primary and secondary education by 2005;
4. To reduce infant and child mortality ratios by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015;
5. To reduce maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015;
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. To implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015;

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<sup>20</sup> NEPAD, The New Partnership for Africa's Development. [www.un.org/events/nepad.pdf](http://www.un.org/events/nepad.pdf) (October, 2001), 11, 15, 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Priority areas for NEPAD include, energy, transport, water and sanitation, shelter and housing, health (inclusive of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis), agriculture and rural development, education, environment and culture (see, NEPAD document 2001; *cf.* Akumu, Gathaka and Mwamodo 2003)



8. To develop a global partnership for development which will expand market access and encourage debt sustainability (2003: 5-6).

For the first time, NEPAD is a bold acknowledgement by African leaders that “our house is on fire!” So “let us team up and extinguish it now!” Through its own African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an assessment of the socio-economic growth of each individual country can be made. NEPAD is a call to everyone, and to African leaders first, to dialogue and help reshape Africa. It is a call for Africans to unite to revive the fortunes of the world’s poorest continent. In this, it agrees with Mbeki’s earlier call for African Renaissance (rebirth) where he called on the people of Africa to resolve to work together in order to lift the continent out of war, corruption and poverty which have weighed it down for decades.<sup>22</sup>

Cornel du Toit notes that NEPAD can be considered a symbol of Africa’s “coming of age.” It represents “the African spirit and focuses on the plight of Africa, African identity and African culture” (2005:71). As du Toit says:

At the core of the NEPAD process, is its African ownership, Africa taking responsibility in order to meet the legitimate aspirations of its people...It is firmly committed to the democratic model. It is also aware of the constraints put on Africa by economic globalisation...(article 94). It recognizes the need for African countries to pool their resources in order to promote regional development and economic integration on the continent, both of which enterprises will definitely improve Africa’s international competitiveness. The basic tenet of the NEPAD document is the realization of the ideal of African unity and regionalism (see articles 45, 69, 84, 95). This would give Africa greater economic leverage in the global marketplace (2005:71).

Du Toit’s view, finds agreement with Moody Awori, the Kenyan Vice-President, when he states that:

The rebirth of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is a renewed hope for Africa. It lays clear objectives and action plans for the rejuvenation of the socio-economic programme and governance of our continent. Its ideals and vision requires all governments to work in partnership with one another, and more so with our development partners, the private sectors, civil society and religious organisations. It presents us with a golden opportunity for the African leadership to break away from the civil strife, poverty and other factors that impede development. It provides a platform to advocate, in unity, for improved market accessibility for our exports (Awori 2005:9).

NEPAD has however its shortcomings. In reading the document, it feels as if it were written in Europe and not in Africa, as it clearly does not allow for the important role that

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<sup>22</sup> Thabo Mbeki, Speech, October 11, 1999. Daily Nation October 27, 1999.

religion could play in its implementation. For a continent, that Mbiti (1969) describes as notoriously religious, and where the phenomenal growth of Christianity is one of the highest in the world, it seems strange that the framers of NEPAD could have attempted to re-define the role of religion or Christianity in social transformation within the new post-Cold War Africa. Again, the document is silent on religious intolerance especially in countries such as Nigeria where there are constant clashes between Muslims and Christians. Further, its blind acceptance of neo-liberal development raises doubts over its authenticity for Africa. Du Toit therefore acknowledges these shortcomings when he states:

The NEPAD plan has evoked some criticism. It is accused of selling Africa out to multinational corporations; of being conceptualized by a few individuals without consulting the African people; of initiating a top-down process, not owned by the African people (2005:72)

He however acknowledges some positive signs:

There are, however, promising signs that NEPAD is gaining support. Mbeki's recent initiative to salvage the 13<sup>th</sup> Century literary documents of Timbuktu in Mali, the peace initiatives in the DRC, and the new constitutive act of the AU are all examples of the implementation of the values expressed in the NEPAD document (2005:72).

The strength of NEPAD, as one of the sources of theology of reconstruction is seen in its call for a new dispensation; that it is possible to reconstruct Africa; that some African leaders who were previously seen as "untouchables" can now be called to account for their deeds while in office, by their fellow leaders and their respective citizens. By addressing these various concerns, NEPAD puts the theo-social agenda of the people of Africa as the agenda of the whole world. And due to its reconstructive motif, NEPAD is clearly a major source of theology of reconstruction.

### **5.3.2. Methods on doing a theology of reconstruction**

First, the method in doing a theology of reconstruction will require **an all-inclusive approach**. This means that theology will need to recognise the ecumenical movement in Africa as "an indispensable institution whose existence is not only necessary due to the problems posed by denominationalism, but whose presence certainly would consolidate the theological resources of the different translations of the same message of Jesus Christ to Africa" (Kobia 1993:232). According to Kobia, this will help in safeguarding against

religious exploitation “by politicians who take advantage of the fragmentation within the church” (1993:232). His view thus is in line with Mugambi’s quests for an “all inclusive theology” (1991; 1995; 2003).

It is crucial to acknowledge that an all-inclusive approach calls upon the practitioners of theology (of reconstruction) to put more emphasis on developmental issues that concern the society of faith where it is being articulated. This means that theology in Africa will have to put more emphasis on environmental degradation (see Kobia 1993:234), reconciliation, domestic violence, gender disparities, and the power of love (1993:236), and a sustainable society (1993:241).

Second, the methodology will require a **multi-disciplinary approach**. This means that a theology of reconstruction will have to borrow heavily from other related disciplines especially on matters that concern the development of the people of Africa. Theology will have to dialogue with the social sciences such as sociology, engineering, medicine, anthropology, environmental sciences among others. As Mugambi says, reconstruction:

Is a concept within the social sciences, which should be of interest to sociologists, economists and political scientists. The multi-disciplinary appeal of reconstruction makes the concept functionally useful as a thematic focus for reflection in Africa during the coming decades (1995:2).

As an integrative enterprise, a theology of reconstruction will draw its resources from multi-disciplinary expertises “involving social scientists, theologians, philosophers, creative writers and artists, biological and physical scientists, builders and architects” (Dedji 2003:4). In view of this, Valentin Dedji sees a theology of reconstruction as “an inter-faith and inter-denominational enterprise” (2003:5). In a continent where wars, drought, famine, land mines and other destructive effects of political instability chaotically affect men, women and children, the reconstruction assignment cannot be accomplished in seclusion (2003:5). This reconstruction paradigm thus implies “enabling theologians as well as Christians in places of public responsibility to contribute to the urgent reconstruction task, from perspectives informed by Christian faith and critique” (2003:5). Third, the methodology in doing theology of reconstruction will involve a **critical re-evaluation of biblical themes of liberation and salvation**, especially that of the Exodus

story. By so doing, we must realise that our “actual historical experience of liberation from colonial dominance is being called to question.” Hence, what do we mean when we speak of “liberation from oppression” in the context of Africa? (Kobia 1993:233). Who is Pharaoh (the coloniser) in our respective situations, and who are the people in need of being “let to go” and where would they be expected to go?

The need to re-evaluate the biblical paradigms of liberation-salvation has to be done from a conscious realisation that “those who claim to have liberated us from the yoke of colonialism are today our oppressors” (Kobia 1993:233). They have simply taken over the yoke of oppression from their colonial master and “are using the same apparatus of divide and rule to manipulate and exploit our people” (1993:233). They used popular themes of liberation to arouse our people against the colonial master, “but today they are using the same tactics of shrewd politics to destroy our people” (1993:233).

Admittedly, the concepts of liberation and reconstruction are highly complex. They are complex because, the word “liberation,” is a noun, which suggests a process whose goal is the realisation of freedom (Mugambi 1989b: 108). Further, the word “reconstruction,” belongs to the vocabulary of engineering which implies that some elements in liberation theology will have to be retained in a new theology of reconstruction. As in the case of an engineer, new specifications must be engineered in the new designs, “while some aspects of the old complex are retained in the new” (Mugambi 1995:12). This means that on its own, a theological analysis will not do justice to its complexity. Doing a theology of reconstruction will require the supplementary methodologies of a **cultural-anthropological and philosophical enquiry**, with the express intention that the work be done in Africa by Africans.<sup>23</sup>

Fifth, a **historical enquiry** is an important methodology in doing a theology of reconstruction. The context of liberation is rooted in slavery, colonialism, racism and other forms of marginalisation. Similarly, the call for reconstruction has a historical connotation especially when we consider the pre and post-exilic history among the Jews. It should also

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<sup>23</sup> This does not mean that those who have dialogued with the concepts of liberation and reconstruction have all been Africans living or born in Africa as the study has sought to demonstrate. There are some issues that arise in African theology that can best be dialogued using materials that were written from an African anthropological perspective. An example is the place of inculturation as one of the minor paradigms *vis-à-vis* reconstruction as the dominant paradigm.

be rooted in historical factors, such as the end of apartheid and of the Cold War. It should also be informed by the historical events that followed the end of WW2. These concepts did not emerge from a vacuum. This makes historical enquiry a necessary and inevitable part of the methodology for a theology of reconstruction. As one of the major approaches in doing a theology of reconstruction, the historical method seeks to correct the imbalances of the present by borrowing from the past and learning from past “errors” without necessarily confining itself to what Kä Mana (1991:79) has called “the dictatorship of the past.”

Sixth, **storytelling** as a method of doing a theology of reconstruction is essential, especially when considering that it forms an African indigenous means of communication that links the history of a people from their origins to the present (Gathogo 2001:84; cf. Mugambi 1995: 132). Story telling is also one of the major forms of informal education in Africa, and is indispensable as a means of illustrating an important message in the context of Africa (2001:84). Storytelling as a traditional art creates above all, a deep sense of friendship and community. This finds a parallel in the bible, which is a collection of stories told about a people, namely, the Israelites and the disciples of Jesus (2001:85). As a Reconstructionist, Jesus illustrated his sermons with relevant stories such as the parables of the sower (Luke 8:1ff), and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25f).

Story-telling as a methodology in doing a theology of reconstruction gains credence in Anthony Balcomb’s categorisation of stories and especially in what he calls “utopian stories” (Balcomb 2002: 50). He says,

We construct them in our minds as possible ideal ways of existence in society. They act as dreams to inspire us, maps to guide us, horizons that we head towards. These are stories like democracy, liberation, freedom, prosperity, reconciliation, civilisation and African Renaissance. Sometimes these stories compete for our allegiance – like capitalism and communism. Some of them fail to inspire certain people as they inspire others. Sometimes they are imposed on us at enormous cost. Sometimes we buy into them because we see no other way of building (*read reconstructing*) our societies. But we are always constructing them. They are always there (Balcomb 2002: 50-1).

He goes on to say:

So stories are not just the domain of skilled or professional storytellers who brighten our lives with their gift of storytelling. Stories are the domain of all human beings who want not only to make sense of life but (*also*) to open up all sorts of possibilities in life. This is because we do not only tell stories about what does

happen but also about what could happen. We challenge ourselves to greater possibilities, unknown in practice but known in the imagination by asking ourselves the question "What if"? What if we could all live together in peace? What if everyone could have a say in government? What if we could find a cure for AIDS? What if we could solve the crime question? Without narrative we could not only not do history but we could not do law, we could not do science, we could not do politics and we could not do theology (Balcomb 2002: 51).

Through storytelling, Africans can confess their experiences in order to obtain healing for the individual and society. Hence, storytelling can aide in the reconstruction of a community. A good example of this can be found in Isabel Apawo Phiri publishing her life history. She explains that her intention was to document her experiences in her journey of faith as lived in different settings among African societies. It was aimed at, "empowering myself and my African sisters" (2000:145). Phiri goes on to say that she realises that given the odds faced by women in Africa, her life might serve "as a model for other African women who are grappling with issues of their identity, spirituality and theological education in the context of Africa" (2000:145). Thus, in storytelling, we confess our "sins" of commission and omission for both our individual misdeeds and those of our ancestors, and thereby seek a genuine healing of our society.

In, *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (2002), African Women theologians narrate their own stories and contacts with patriarchal society. By so doing, they seek to deconstruct the patriarchal system that continues to define African society. To use a biblical metaphor, they call upon the entire society of men and women to "come now, (*and*) let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18) and consequently reconstruct our common heritage, for the betterment of all.

With regard to post-apartheid South Africa, and post Cold War Africa, Hantie Kotzé demonstrates the importance of storytelling, as a methodology in doing a theology of reconstruction. She confesses that she needs "to listen to all the stories of the different cultures" and then ensure that her identity integrates with her own "specific culture in the face of the bigger diverse picture" (2000:42). Hence she says:

It is in brokenness and vulnerability that I take the time to tell my story and to wait for the water of forgiveness and healing to come to me. I start receiving water by dealing with my identity, spirituality and context, thus slowly discovering the secret well of humanness. As an Afrikaner, I start this lifelong process by embracing my own roots and critically dealing with the structures and securities of my upbringing. This means that I appreciate the value of the community which

forms part of my identity as an Afrikaner, but since the past has given me new insights, I am dedicated to breaking down the ethnic walls in which I found my identity. The breaking of these walls means that I acknowledge the horror of isolation and the heresies that it gave birth to. In both my Afrikaner culture and Dutch Reformed Church tradition, I want to value my interdependence on and connectedness to all South Africans and to all people of faith. This then leads to my own humility in realizing that I can only journey the road to inclusion through the hands of those to whom I grew up feeling superior. This means that I as an Afrikaner should learn anew that it is in relating to others that the seeds of the Gospel will grow and bear fruits of love, grace and healing (2000:42).

Kotzé goes on to say:

In taking part in rebuilding and reshaping this country (*referring to the reconstruction of post apartheid South Africa*), people will be empowered to find new meaning for our co-existence in a pluralistic South Africa. It is finally Christ's words of comfort in the Bible that urges me to stop fearing and to trust that the Holy Spirit will be my guide in realizing the love and grace of my confession (2000:43).

It is clear therefore that storytelling can be an important method in doing a theology of reconstruction. Men, women and children, naturally love stories; scarcely does a person grow so old as not to enjoy a story. The confessional stories of our life experiences will no doubt help in the social reconstruction of Africa in the twenty-first century. This methodology was used successfully during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), led by Desmond Tutu.

Seventh, **contextual theologising** as a method in doing a theology of reconstruction ought to be employed under the premise that the social, ecclesiastical, historical or geographical contexts or the environment consciously or unconsciously influences theological articulation. The motive of emphasising the context is "the fundamental understanding that there is no neutral or absolute meaning of a text or, for that matter, of any human communication" (Draper 2001:149). This naturally calls for us to seek an understanding of the historical settings of a given situation in history. Similarly, we will "need to be aware of the way in which our common assumptions about society distort our ability to hear a message from another society" (Draper 2001:151). This will form an important part of our understanding, which consciously utilises context in the process of theologising. A study of a theology of reconstruction ought to utilise the hermeneutical keys of liberation and reconstruction. These can be refined by a reading of African theology from the point of view of what Bediako (1996:427) calls "the hermeneutic of identity."

A study of these sources and the methods has revealed that a theology of reconstruction is a form of African theology, as evidenced by the similarity in sources despite the new emphasis being placed upon the reconstructive motif. This shows that a theology of reconstruction is a homegrown theology that seeks to re-interpret Christianity for Africa of the twenty-first century and beyond. On the whole, the sub-section has shown that its methodologies include approaches that are, all-inclusive and multi-disciplinary, and which promote a critical re-evaluation of the biblical themes of liberation and salvation, cultural-anthropological-philosophical inquiry, historical inquiry, storytelling, and contextual theologising. These approaches respect the diversity and the homogeneity of Africa and hence point to its authenticity as a theology of reconstruction. As a growing theology, various methods will begin to emerge.

#### **5.4. Some fundamental concerns of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction**

The **deconstruction of patriarchy** is one of the fundamental concerns of a theology of reconstruction (see, Mugambi 1995:177). In view of this, I agree with Olivia Harris and Maureen Mackintosh when they show that patriarchy is socially constructed and not biologically determined (Reddock 2000:37; cf. Ogundipe-Leslie 1994; Oduyoye 1986; 1992; 1995; 2001; Njoroge 1996; 1997; Phiri 1997; 2004). Patriarchy is evident within cultural, political, religious, social and economic systems and structures. Patriarchal tendencies are characterised by men dominating women and thereby hindering authentic growth within society. Surprisingly, these tendencies are dominant in most churches in Africa. It does not facilitate social or individual progress<sup>24</sup> because it is based on a lack of gender sensitivity (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:30).<sup>25</sup> It amounts to rewarding or judging a person because of his or her gender as opposed to reward being given because of the content and character of the individual.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Molara, Ogundipe-Leslie further adds that, "man does not want to abandon" patriarchal attitudes and feelings of male superiority because "male domination is advantageous to him" (1994:35).

<sup>25</sup> Maria-Christina Ventura observes that the exercise of deconstruction involves questioning and confronting theology, which has traditionally been defined, in terms of one culture, as reflection on God, who is not only masculine but also hierarchical and absolute. It therefore involves breaking down the elements of traditional theological thinking in order to analyse, destabilise and disqualify them from speaking for all people and all cultures. Ventura further adds that, deconstructing or breaking down offers an opportunity for reconstruction, working out new models that "can subvert the racist dynamic present in traditional theology and the culture to which it belongs, so that hierarchies cease to exist" See, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ipc/echoes/echoes-17-06.html/>

<sup>26</sup> These words are attributed to the late African American Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King Jnr (1929-1968) when he expressed his dream that his four little children will be judged by the content of their character and not by any prejudice.



I agree with Brigalia Bam when she expresses her amazement at the way men re-discover their African tradition only when it comes to women, even though they are quite willing to allow the old ways to be transcended on almost every other issue (Bam 1991:367). Since culture can be reformed, as Christians we have to lead others in transcending traditions such as patriarchy, as we have done elsewhere with other issues. Deconstruction of patriarchy is a major concern, in doing a theology of reconstruction, because Africa cannot reconstruct adequately while patriarchy continues to inform and influence the fabric of society.

**Concern for the environment** is another fundamental area that a theology of reconstruction must address (Mugambi 2004a; 2005b). African Christians are affected by environmental degradation more than other parts of the world, and the situation is becoming worse. From the Kenyan perspective, on April 1, 2003, the Kenyan Deputy Minister for environment, Wangari Maathai<sup>27</sup> appeared in the Kenyan media and decried the wanton destruction of certain indigenous tree species such as the Muiiri (*Pinus Africana*). She said that because the tree has medicinal value, it had become extinct in the Kirinyaga District because its bark had been harvested and exported by unscrupulous business people.<sup>28</sup>

Thus there is need for the African Christians to get concerned with the environment because they are badly affected when selfish people interfere with it. In any case, Africa is more vulnerable to environmental degradation than any other continent (Karungi 1989: 231).<sup>29</sup> The fact that African Christians live in a context, which is more vulnerable to environmental degradation, shows that the concern is the therapy to the problem. In particular, African Christians experience the pinch of deforestation and the deterioration of agricultural soil is most forcibly felt (Daneel 1996:215ff). It is in Africa where there is an increase of pollutants in the environment e.g. Biodegradable, Radioactive etc. is common (Karungi 1989:230f). In Africa, general destruction, bad smells, poor quality of life,

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<sup>27</sup>See, <http://www.eastandard.net/national/nat01042003005.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Prof. Wangari Maathai is said to have wondered, "If there were no trees how would Jesus have been crucified? Would he have been crucified on stones?"

<sup>29</sup> Karungi, T.A Byaruhanga in "The church's role in environment protection" p.231, cites a case where West African Countries were blackmailed with money and accepted to have toxic-active waste from Europe dumped in their territorial waters. Such dumping of radio-active waste in developing countries need to be watched closely because ordinary people know little or nothing about it hence the need for African Christians to watch out hence get concerned!

congestion, noise, dirt and grime are all too common. That calls the African Christians to wake up, take a front seat and work towards creating a better environment and avoid being ignorant of what is happening.

In the African church today, we baptise with water that is polluted. We live on a planet where most people have abdicated their ethical responsibilities to the rest of creation. As an African Church, we should be agents of change and social transformation. African Christians must intervene with regard to the environment before as human beings we kill our world. Unless we take action to reverse the current trend where environmental degradation is the order of the day, we (African Christians) shall suffer together with the rest of the creation.<sup>30</sup>

Another fundamental concern of a theology of reconstruction, as seen in Mugambi's works, is **violence and domestic violence in particular** 1995:176ff; cf. Shisanya 2003:151-169). Violence can be addressed in two ways. First, domestic violence is a common occurrence, especially within patriarchal Africa societies, whereby some cultures simply tolerate it. Hence, traditional Kikuyu culture allows a husband to "discipline" his wife or wives as he pleases, this being expected from every "real man." Unfortunately, this form of violence continues to the present day albeit in different forms,<sup>31</sup> including, physical assault, rape of a girl child by a relative (Sometimes leading to STIs such as HIV/AIDS), and in some extreme cases, men murdering their wives during domestic disagreements (although this can occur in both genders). Such violence can be linked to alcoholism, drugs, and cultural expectations.

The second form of violence is that of war. Independent African states cannot be exonerated from their contribution to the suffering of their peoples. Uganda, from the days of Idi Amin, has been stained with blood. The civil war between Biafra and Nigeria in 1967 left at least a million people dead (see, Nthamburi 1991). Likewise, the conflict in the great lakes region has its own share of brutality. Civil wars in Chad and Rwanda claimed thousands and millions respectively. Whenever there is war, women and children

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<sup>30</sup> See for example Andrew Warmback, "The earth is God's and all that is in it." In, *The Journal of Theology of Southern Africa*, 77-88.

<sup>31</sup> In the Church, violence is seen in the form of oppressing women by way of denying them equal rights with their male counterparts. These rights may include denial of ordination and promotion, disciplining only the female offenders and being subjected to endless conditions.

are exposed to all kinds of violence including sexual abuse.<sup>32</sup> The challenge that Africa is facing now is that it must find an alternative to war and bloodshed. Where there is war, women and the innocent are the most affected.<sup>33</sup>

The above three issues constitute what, in my researched opinion, amount to some of the fundamental concerns of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. In the book entitled, *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, (2003), edited by Mary Getui and Emmanuel Obeng, various themes are explored with the intention of revealing the shape of theology of reconstruction in Africa. They include: healing creation, creative stewardship, church and HIV/AIDS, liberation of African women, food security in Africa, poverty alleviation in Africa, political pluralism and the recovery of an African identity. While some of these themes have featured in the course of this present study, because of the limitations of space and time, only a few of the fundamental concerns have been discussed. We are now prepared to address some of the reflections by the other proponents of a theology of reconstruction besides that of Mugambi.

### **5.5. Some reflections by other proponents of a theology of reconstruction**

A number of leading theologians across the continent of Africa have fervently embraced the idea of a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction, in post Cold-War Africa. These include, Anglophone theologians such as, Moiserale Prince Dibeela (2005); Isaac Mwase (1993, 1997), Chris Ukachukwu Manus (2003); Charles Villa-Vicencio (1992); Brigalia Bam (1995); Valentin Dedji (2003); Robin Petersen (1991; 1995); Wilson Niwagila (1997); Hannah Kinoti (1997); Wilson Mande (1997), and Hans Dieter Betz<sup>34</sup> (2002). Francophone theologians include, Jean-Emmanuel Pondi (1997); Andrea Karamaga (1991; 1997); Kä Mana (1993; 1994; 2002). Lusophone theologians include, Joe Chipenda (1991). Due to the limitation of time and space, this section will only deal

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<sup>32</sup> We need to consider the Second Gulf war where innocent people were bombed.

<sup>33</sup> We must never forget what President Kennedy, of USA, said that humanity "must put an end to war or war will put an end" to humanity. Today, with nuclear proliferation again threatening the world, the pacifists are realists whereas their opponents are the idealists in hoping to save the world with a method that is now outdated.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Dieter Betz who remarkably sees the entire Christian Testament as a theology of reconstruction is however not an African. He teaches at Emory University in the United States of America. His views strike a chord with Kä Mana who sees Christ as the catalyst of reconstruction. For him, Christ is the breadth of radical renovation. Kä Mana's theology of reconstruction integrates the motifs of identity and liberation but moves then to the need to reconstruct Africa as well as the world in accord with humane requirements (2002:91).

with a few Reconstructionists who have made exceptional contributions in articulating a new theology of reconstruction.

In attempting a definition, Hannah Wangeci Kinoti explains that the idea of reconstruction assumes that there is a framework which was previously there. She goes on to say that “a cluster of words associated with the verb reconstruct should quicken our vision of asking the Church in Africa to rise up and do more purposefully and decisively” (Kinoti 1997:115). She suggests that the concept of reconstruction implies a process of “review and then move” - to create something more suitable to the prevailing environment (: 115). Other terminological parallels are: rebuild, reassemble, re-establish, recreate, reform, renovate, regenerate, remake, remodel, restore, or re-organise (: 115). In turn, it can also be compared with: rethink, re-examine, re-do, or rebirth (*cf.* Nicodemus in John 3). Kinoti attempts to explain the urgency of reconstruction in the Africa of the twenty-first century when she says:

We may be inspired by the Biblical narrative of Nehemiah’s reconstruction of the wall of Jerusalem. We may be motivated by the urgent need to pick up pieces of our individual lives. We may be desirous to restore the image of the corporate life of our communities as we visualize that image to be. Some may even be literally in the middle of reconstructing their houses recently or currently burnt down by arsonists for political reasons. Whatever our individual circumstances here and now in Africa, the cry is...*restore!*” (: 115).

In arguing that the cry for the modern day Africa is “reconstruction,” perhaps Kinoti is probably drawing a comparison between the pre-Cold War Africa and the post Cold War Africa. As a result, she discovered that there is an open possibility of not only doing a theology of reconstruction but more importantly to reconstruct the entire continent, for now and for future of its people. And as Stein Villumstad wonders: “Do we see major conceptual and fundamental dynamics in current Africa that indicate a shift into a new era?” As he further says:

The main watershed was the end of colonialism. The next major shift started with the downfall of Communist Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar strategic politics in Africa. The second shift facilitated the end of Apartheid and the wars in Mozambique and Angola (Villumstad 2005:4).

Villumstad’s concerns agree with Moiseraele Prince Dibeela when he says:

The post cold war Africa has seen steady democratisation, with the continent generally embracing the multi-party political system. Prior to that, Africa was characterized by military dictatorships, life presidents, one party system, coup

d'états and assassinations of political leaders, corruption, ravaged economies and wars. The fall of the century long ideological strangle between the West and the East coincidentally ended the 'new scramble for Africa' (Dibeela 2005:18).

Dibeela goes on to say that:

During the intensity of the cold war in the 1970s and 1960s the main victim was the continent of Africa as the then Soviet Union and Western countries scrambled for the domination of Africa over and against each other. Consequently, some of the longest wars that raged in Africa were fuelled by the ideological polarity that was at the heart of the cold war. Often a so-called communist rebel would be sponsored by an overseas communist government to fight against a capitalist government sponsored by a Western government, or the other way round. Countries like Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo had political conflicts that went into decades, because of this stranglehold over Africa. However, since the demise of the Soviet Union interest in Africa changed, at least from that of political control. Meanwhile many progressive forces have pushed for political change across many African countries, and the climax of this has been the democratisation of South Africa in 1994. It is my contention that what stood on the way of Africa's political and economic freedom was the interface of external forces that had no interest in the development of the continent. Much of the damage to our economies and resources took place during the successive periods of formal and informal colonization. However, the demise of the cold war opened doors for the possibility of reconstruction (Dibeela 2005:18-19).

Kä Mana (2002:90-91) best sums up the developmental trend in African theology that climaxes with the theology of reconstruction. In particular, he sees the quest for a theology of reconstruction as the fourth developmental stage of African theology. In the first stage of African theology, Kä Mana notes the missionary theologies of *tabula rasa*. Interestingly, these theologies were instrumental in the founding or planting of the church in Africa. In the second stage of African theology, Kä Mana notes the theologies of adaptation, indigenisation or inculturation. In this stage, the missionary theologies were challenged by the firm desire to develop an African Christianity, as experienced by Africans themselves. In the third stage of African theology, Kä Mana notes those theologies, which laid the foundations for Africa to tackle the major economic and socio-political challenges of today, towards establishing a future marked by dignity, freedom and prosperity. In the fourth stage of African theology, Kä Mana notes the emerging theologies of reconstruction. These theologies advocate the end of colonialism and neo-colonialism and the advent of a free post-colonial African worldview, devoid of all the problems of pessimism and defeatism, oriented towards the construction of a free and democratic society, and nurtured by dreams of returning to an historic initiative propelled by vigorous energies of responsibility and resourcefulness.

With regard to Christology and the African motifs of integrity, Kä Mana makes a substantial contribution. In particular, his works see a theology of reconstruction as integrating the motifs of identity and reconstruction thereby reconstructing Africa as well as the world, in accord with humane requirements (Kä Mana 1993:10ff). His political ethics has its starting point in the Christian gospel. Christ the reconstructor is a key moment in the conscience of humanity - the ethical impulse. Kä Mana nevertheless remains aware of the pluralistic nature of our world and the need for a dialogical approach. He thus calls upon Christians to articulate Jesus in the public forum as the horizon before whom humanity is re-constructed (1993:10ff). The world must therefore turn to Christ the re-constructor, for as the embodiment of the logic of love; he is essential to the construction of a humane future.

In attempting to answer the question, "who is Christ today?" Kä Mana argues that Christ is the catalyst of reconstruction, ethical and political energy, the force of our spirit, and the power of conscience (1994:103-105). In so doing, he rightly goes beyond the concept of Christ as simply liberator. Christ is the very breath of radical renovation, "Christ our breath and Christ our life" (1994:106). Kä Mana goes on to argue that to do Christology is to do ethics, and to do ethics with Christ as the centre is to reconstruct Africa from within and thereby to reconstruct the world. The African Christ is our brother who was put to death by the idols of the western world, but who is coming back to life in the process of reconstruction. He is the Egyptian who reconstructs after pharaonic Christologies (1994:74-79).

While acknowledging that Mugambi has "correctly observed that an epiphany of a new scenario has emerged, ushered in by the demise of three horrendous systems of oppression; namely institutionalised *racism*, brutal *colonialism* and the *cold war tutelage*," Ukachukwu Chris Manus (2003:2) however sees Mugambi as having failed to recognise the central figure in the New Testament. That is, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ himself as the *Master Reconstructor* of both the spiritual and the social well-being of the *bnaiya Israel*, the simple folk of his day in the first century Palestine" (: 4).

Manus quotes Hans Dieter Betz, the President of Society for New Testament Studies

(*Hereafter*, SNTS) for 1999, who “aptly articulated the notion of reconstruction in the New Testament Studies” by arguing that:

Reconstruction is what the New Testament scholarship is all about. Indeed, the New Testament itself is the result of *reconstruction*. The text of the Greek New Testament has been reconstructed from thousands of manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts, a process that still continues. The same is true of the Old Testament/Hebrew bible. The history of early Christianity must be reconstructed from widely scattered pieces of information and tradition found in the sources. The theologies of Paul and the authors of the Gospels and Acts must be reconstructed by critical analysis of the sources. Much of their meaning has been obscured by thick layers of later traditionalism and needs to be excavated to bring the original contours into focus (Betz 2001:6; cf. Manus 2003:5).<sup>35</sup>

Manus explains that the term reconstruction made a deep impression on him as a “meta-language” that challenges African theologians to discern and promote new insights and new movements that help galvanise Africans in the continent and elsewhere in the Diaspora, to regain their integrity. For him, the goal of reconstruction ought to be pursued in order to re-capture Africa’s self-esteem, dignity and integrity, “in the context of the new Information and Communication Technology” (2003:6).

Another proponent of reconstruction theology, Valentin Dedji (2003:7), argues for African theology to urgently shift its emphasis from the previous prevailing “oppressed/oppressor” or “winner/loser” dichotomies to the more inclusive configuration of “winner/winner”. With historical circumstances making some “victimisers” and others “victims,” Dedji

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<sup>35</sup> As with the proponents of a theology of reconstruction, Rudolf Bultmann uses the concept of reconstruction as an important tool in articulating his contextual theology. In his book, *Theology of the New Testament*, (1965), Bultmann uses the concept of reconstruction and interpretation. The concepts themselves are useful and basic for an understanding of his theological standpoint. He asserts, “the presentation of the New Testament theology offered in this book stands, on the one hand, within the tradition of the historical-critical and the history-of-religions schools and seeks, on the other hand, to avoid their mistake which consists of the tearing apart of the act of thinking from the act of living and hence a failure to recognize the intent of theological utterances” (1965:250). For him, reconstruction of the writings of the New Testament means reconstruction by following or using the historical-critical method. He goes on to say that, the task is “not to reconstruct a picture of Early Christianity as a phenomenon of the historical past,” but to seek the mistakes made by the history-of-religions schools. Bultmann thus says, “reconstruction stands in the service of the interpretation of the New Testament writings under the presupposition that they have something to say to us” (1965:251). Bultmann sees the task as “to explicate the theological thoughts of the New Testament in their connection with the act of living i.e. as explication of believing self-understanding” (Hazel 1990:85). This means that the task of a presentation of New Testament Theology is “to make clear this believing self-understanding in its reference to the Kerygma” (Bultmann 1965:257). Here Bultmann’s explanation is that the relationship between reconstruction and interpretation, or their coordination, is the key for understanding his New Testament Theology. Bultmann’s New Testament Theology is existentialist only because his motive is to make the Christian gospel (Kerygma) accessible to modern humanity. His means of doing so is existential interpretation (demythologisation). His theological thoughts are conditioned by a particular philosophical system, namely the existentialism of the early Heidegger. As an existentialist, Heidegger defines existence in terms of its connection with aspects of time, especially the future. To exist is to decide. Human beings are shaped by the past and the future and somehow they are stuck in between. Authentic life is thus defined by the decision taken for the future.

argues, “the musical harmony of God’s self-giving communion is transmuted into a cacophony of voices competing with one another for access to power, to material resources, and to a self-validating identity” (2003:7).

#### **5.6. Scholars critique of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction**

Mugambi clearly cuts a Nehemiah-like image in confidence and determination to see the reconstruction of theology in Africa. Indeed, he is committed to the quest for a new form of theologising in the African Christianity of the twenty-first century. He is comparable to the biblical Esther, who was told by Mordecai: “Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:146).

Mugambi is one of the major beacons in African theology who clearly wrestles with the way forward with respect to the post-Cold War theological paradigms. Like Esther, he has a unique mission of replacing obsolescent theological paradigms with new ones suitable to answer the challenges that African theology faces in the twenty-first century. As the traditional Kikuyu saying goes, “Old oil skins do not go to the dancing room.” The task of providing new oilskins is clearly a difficult one, as this study strives to show. As with Nehemiah, Mugambi has to wrestle with the theological, ideological, sociological, psychological and physical ruins of the “city” that requires rebuilding. He has to cope with the hopelessness and criticisms of people who do not share his vision. Above all, like Nehemiah, who was accused of not having paid enough attention to the *am haaretz*, Mugambi’s weakness, like any other human being can be readily recognized in his articulations. In this sub-section, therefore, we intend to point out some of the weaknesses in his theology of reconstruction that have been noted by various scholars and theologians.

Despite acknowledging Mugambi’s “pioneering efforts,” Valentin Dedji (2003: 74) contends that his concept of ecumenism in Africa lacks originality. For Dedji, “it shows that the road to authenticity is not only exciting but also constructive.” This said, Dedji notes that Mugambi’s ecumenical vision is entirely in harmony with continental efforts towards peace and reconciliation, and so is his “appeal for the reconstruction of theological reflection in Africa, in the context of an interdisciplinary nexus” (: 74).



Interestingly, Dedji sees Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio as prophets of our time who are able to read the signs of our times to accomplish the task of preparing the African Churches to cope positively with the aftermath of the Cold War (2003:75). He however poses the question which is in line with our statement of the problem: "Was such a reading of the 'signs of the time' accurate?" He thus remarks:

My main critique of both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio is in their assumption that the end of the 'cold war' has immediate significance for ordinary Africans and that the so-called 'New World Order' is truly 'new' and truly 'orderly' for Africans. Yet, as Mugambi himself points out, Africa's problems of poverty, war, dictatorships and the perverse effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme are unlikely to decrease because of the 'New World Order.' Moreover, the 'New World Order' is not only likely to relegate Africa into a 'fourth world' but it will also impose its own prescriptions on African countries (2003:75).

Dedji sees Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio as having minimised the value of the previous African theologies of both inculturation and liberation (2003:75). He cites the example of an article published in *Challenge Magazine* (1993), where Villa-Vicencio describes South African Black liberation theology as being essentially a theology that says "No". Hence for Villa-Vicencio:

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* (sic) all that was required of most of us (Dedji 2003:75; cf. Villa-Vicencio 1993:24-25).

Dedji supports Maluleke in disqualifying Villa-Vicencio's characterisation of South African Black liberation theology as "a trifle simplistic and one-sided" (Dedji 2003:75). Indeed, it would seem that Villa-Vicencio has over stepped the mark by oversimplifying the theological works of Tutu, Boesak and Buthelezi. He also oversimplifies the theology of reconstruction by implying that it is a theology of saying "Yes." Any theology that says either "Yes" or "No" is faulty if it lacks a critical appreciation of the issues.

Villa-Vicencio also errs by balkanising South Africa and thereby "separating" it from the rest of Africa by implying that the theology of reconstruction is only meant for South Africa after apartheid. He blunders greatly when he refuses to draw his experience from the rest of Africa when working out his theology of reconstruction. Perhaps his view amounts to cultural arrogance by thinking that some African countries are more important than others. By making African countries appear to be doing unique theologies that are

supposedly separate from the rest, one may treat it as a post apartheid hangover being sneaked into post-Cold War Africa. This temptation must be resisted in order to save the true image of Africa. In any case, it can be a new form of propaganda aimed at deceiving some people to feel different about others, yet Africans were one people who knew no boundaries before the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. This danger needs to be addressed well in advance, as it can be used to fragment Africa even further.<sup>36</sup>

Dedji, who appears to be interested in comparing Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio as opposed to comparing the views of other Reconstructionist theologians such as Karamaga and Kä Mama, goes on to shower praises on them both. He says that both Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio respond positively to the heart-rending question posed by Bonhoeffer at a critical moment in Germany's history, namely, "Are we still of any use?" Dedji goes on to say, that such a soul-searching question was the climax of the sad portrait of a entire nation (2003:76). As Bonhoeffer went on to say:

We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds; we have been drenched by many storms; we have learnt the art of equivocation and pretence; experience has made us suspicious of others and kept us from being truthful and open; intolerable conflicts have worn us down and even made us cynical. Are we still in use? (1971:16-17).

Dedji points pessimistically to the difficulty of reconciling the "post-exiles" and "the non-exiled" of Africa today. By so doing, he implies that Mugambi's works do not reveal how the tension between the two groups will be resolved. For him therefore, the question remains:

How can Black South Africans who still live today in those ghettos of death and misery ironically named 'townships' be eager to participate in the 'nation building' (that Villa-Vicencio talks about) enterprise, if not even symbolic reparation is not assured to them for having been treated as sub-humans? How can younger generations in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, etc, join hands together for the reconstruction of their national heritage while their inner wounds are still bleeding? (2003:78).

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<sup>36</sup> I remember when I was an assistant lecturer in the African theology department, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa when I went to teach a third year Bachelor of Theology class on September 28, 2003. We had a heated debate with the class on African Christology. My students were from across Africa, although the majority were from South Africa. What shocked me was the insistence by South African students that J S Mbiti's concepts of culture are different from those of South Africans as he comes from Africa, North of Limpopo. In their view, Africa and South Africa are radically different. I pleaded with them to see that notion as a divide and rule policy of our time that should be avoided like apartheid. It was a struggle.

In view of this, Jurgen Moltmann's contention that the dignity of men and women takes precedence over the "many rights and duties, which are bound up with being human," (1981:16) cannot be trashed. Nor can his view, that the dignity of a human being is the one, "indivisible, inalienable and shared quality of the human being" (1981:16), be ignored. As he further states, different human rights portray wholeness because a human being in his or her dignity is a totality. Thus, the dignity of humanity "is not itself a human right but a ground for all human rights and all human rights promote respect for the singular worth" of humanity (1981:16). This does not however mean that Dedji's concerns are beyond solution. If both sides recognise each other's human dignity, then a breakthrough is bound to be found.

Maluleke's critique of Mugambi's reconstruction theology is based on his contention that his biblical and socio-political justifications are not fully worked out. He contends that Mugambi's socio-political argumentation is much stronger than his theological justification of it (Maluleke 1996:473). Second, he is equally surprised that Mugambi does not engage the biblical hermeneutic developed in the liberation paradigm (Maluleke 1996:473). Third, he sees Mugambi's proposals being severely weakened by his drawing from only two main sources, namely, the Bible and the new state of Africa as requisitioned in the new world order (1996:473). Fourth, he sees Mugambi as not engaging the actual theologies produced by the inculturation and liberation paradigms (Maluleke 1996:473). Finally, Maluleke feels that Mugambi does not demonstrate credible and logical connections between many of the issues and themes that he touches on in his reconstruction paradigm. This, Maluleke feels, undermines the delivery of his core idea (1996:473).

It is difficult to agree with every aspect of Maluleke's critique, especially where he says that Mugambi does not engage seriously the actual theologies that are produced by the inculturation and liberation paradigms (1996:473). Even though Mugambi does not dwell much on the theology of liberation in his book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), he does so in his pre-liberation works, especially his books, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, *The Biblical basis for Evangelization: Theological Reflections based on an African experience* and *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1989).

This makes the latter to be a continuation of the former. Even though the central thesis of this study does not agree with how he treats liberation and inculturation as one paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that he has dealt with the theology (ies) of inculturation in his book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, almost to the exclusion of other important themes.

In his critique, Farisani (2002:112) feels that Mugambi, like Villa-Vicencio, while calling for a paradigm shift from liberation to reconstruction, does not discuss in a detailed way what liberation theology is all about. Instead, he advances reasons why a shift of paradigms should be undertaken. Second, Farisani (2002:113) sees Mugambi's immediate context as being the whole of Africa. In this, he sees a contradiction in his works with regard to inculturation. While he advocates for a paradigm shift from inculturation and liberation to reconstruction, he also includes cultural reconstruction alongside personal and ecclesial reconstruction. Consequently, Farisani logically wonders: "Does he see cultural reconstruction as something totally different from inculturation?" (Farisani 2002: 113).

Mugambi's latest book, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (2003), has addressed some of the concerns that the scholarly critiques of his earlier book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), have raised. First, he devotes his first chapter on the method of doing theology in Africa and ends the chapter by reaffirming reconstruction as the new paradigm in African theology in the twenty first century, a move which is clearly gaining ground across Africa as the new publications will attest.

In re-affirming his conviction that reconstruction is the new paradigm in African theology, Mugambi can state:

I concur with Prof. Hans Dieter Betz as he remarked in his statement at Hammanskraal that the New Testament in its entirety is a monument of reconstruction. Consistent with this very strong affirmation, I resonate with the words of St. Paul in Romans 12: 2-4. According to my own reconstructive paraphrase, St. Paul challenges us: Please do not be conformed to the norms of this world. Rather, through the renewal of your minds, transform the world. The theology of reconstruction is rooted not in the Old Testament, but in the New. Old Testament texts may reinforce the commitment of Christians to social reconstruction, but the Gospel and *(the)* Epistles are the sources from which the Church has drawn its insights and encouragement across the centuries and from culture to culture (2003:v).

With regard to those critiques, which argue that, Mugambi's proposal for a paradigm shift, from the previous inculturation and liberation, while still calling for cultural reconstruction, is an indication that both reconstruction and cultural theology should complement each other rather than work exclusively from each other, which he finds inaccurate. He says:

As an aspect of liberation, inculturation is indispensable. This is because the process of liberation is incomplete without cultural liberation. The converse, however, is not true. Inculturation will not necessarily lead to liberation. Why should one be shy about liberation? In Latin America, the Church was inculturated, but not liberated. The theology of liberation sought to liberate not only the people, but the Church as well. In Africa, it seems that the project of inculturation pushes for inculturation without liberation (2003:72).

While the findings of this study agree with Mugambi's idea of the indispensability of inculturation in doing African theologies of all kinds, it however disagrees that inculturation is "an aspect of liberation" (2003: 72). Such disagreement is easily justified by his own confession that "inculturation will not necessarily lead to liberation" for even in "Latin America, the Church was inculturated, but not liberated" and that in "Africa, it seems that the project of inculturation pushes for inculturation without liberation" (2003:72) appears to contradict his contention that inculturation is an "aspect of liberation" (2003:72). I however agree that inculturation "deals with the emancipation of culture under the inspiration from the Gospel" but insist that this does not bar it from being a paradigm on its own. After all, is there any paradigm that is not in dialogue with others? (See chapter seven).

With respect to those critics who see the call for a shift of paradigms as immature, untimely and invalid, as Africa is not yet free, Mugambi (2003:169) appears to be responding to their concerns by telling about his encounter in 1995. He says that he had an opportunity to conduct a course based on his book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction*, in a Jesuit Seminary in Nairobi. Upon entering the names in the register on the first day, the students said that they had an important message for him before his first lecture. They explained to him that they had enrolled for the course because they did not agree with his call for a shift of theological gear from liberation to reconstruction. For how can we shift to reconstruction when Africa is not free? They argued that the metaphor of the Exodus was still valid. On his part, Mugambi replied that the point they were raising was very

exciting for him as a starting point. He then challenged them to “locate” their bearings as Africans in the Exodus narrative. “Where are we? Are we still in Egypt? Crossing the Red Sea? On the banks of the Jordan?” (2003:169). Interestingly, none of the thirteen students, who were in that class, could agree with one another as to their location in the Exodus narrative. This experience led Mugambi to advise them that when a social metaphor loses its cohesive value, it also loses its efficacy and usefulness as an ideological tool for social mobilisation (2003:169).

In dealing with the critics of a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, some of whom have dismissed it as unacceptable (Maluleke 1996; Dube 2004; Wandera 2002), Mugambi and other proponents of paradigm change have to take the words of Thomas Kuhn, the father of the paradigm shifts to heart when he states that:

The invention of other new theories regularly, and appropriately, evokes the same response (i.e., resistance) from some of the specialists on whose area of special competence they impinge. For these men (sic) the new theory implies a change in the rules governing the prior practice of normal science (1962; 1970: 7).

Mugambi’s theology of reconstruction can be compared to that of Thomas Aquinas. In fact, Aquinas was criticised as a modernist by traditionalist (Augustinian) theologians but was later ‘understood’ whereby his theology became universally acceptable. As Hans Küng remarks:

(He was) recalled from Paris by his own Dominican Order, eventually subjected to a formal condemnation as a representative of a ‘new theology’ by the competent ecclesiastical authorities in Paris and Oxford, but then given protection by his Order. It was only just before the outbreak of the Reformation that his *Summa Theologiae* won acceptance outside his Order: the first commentary on the whole *Summa* was that of Cardinal Cajetan, classical interpreter of Aquinas and opponent of Luther; and it was only Francisco de Vittoria, Father of Spanish scholasticism, who in 1526 introduced the Thomistic *Summa* as a textbook at the University of Salamanca; Louvain followed later with two professorships in Aquinas’ theology and seven-year courses on the *Summa theologiae*. Up to the present century (1924) 90 commentaries on the whole *Summa* had been published and 218 on its first part (Küng and Tracy 1989:12).

Again, Mugambi’s ground-breaking idea of shift of paradigm in African theology of the twenty-first century needs to be encouraged by considering that in every pioneering assignment, only a few disciples will emerge to cheer it along! As time goes by however, and as the ideology sinks in the minds of the people being targeted, the idea will subsequently be absorbed. Again, as Hans Küng can remark:

Not only in theology, but in natural science, a new model at first has only a few

and generally younger advocates: Copernicus was 34 when he worked out the heliocentric system. Newton, the founder of classical physics, formulated the law of gravity when he was 23. Lavoisier, founder of modern chemistry, was 26 when he deposited with the secretary of the Académie Française his famous sealed testimony expressing his doubts about the dominant phlogiston theory. Einstein presented the special theory of relativity at the age of 26. Among theologians: Origen, the first scholar in Christendom to undertake methodical research, at the age of 18 took over successfully the Christian education work among intellectuals in Alexandria, which had been neglected after Clement's departure. Augustine was 32 at the time of his 'last' conversion and Aquinas was not yet 30 when he began in Paris his commentary on the sentences in the spirit of Aristotle. Luther was 34 when he published his theses on indulgences (Küng and Tracy 1989: 26).

Even though Mugambi's pioneering efforts have not come about during his early years as a theologian (although he published his first book, *Carry it home* in 1974), the fact remains that every pioneering effort done by either an elderly or a young person has, to use Küng's words, "only a few advocates" as a starting point (Küng and Tracy 1989:26). In time, more "advocates" will emerge and more insights will be developed, explored and re-generated. The future of a theology of reconstruction in Africa is therefore assured.

Having reviewed the scholarly critiques on Mugambi's theology of reconstruction, the section has helped us to think through the possible strengths and weakness of the new paradigm of reconstruction. It has also helped us to think through those areas that may need improvement. This shows that the paradigm of reconstruction is not perfect as far as scholars can pinpoint some defects in its articulation.

### **5.7. The researcher's concerns on Mugambi's theology of reconstruction**

First, a general overview of Mugambi's works will show that he does not appear to draw a clear line of demarcation between cultural reconstruction and sensitive issues within African cultures. In particular, he does not say exactly where African Christians ought to appreciate African culture and where African culture can be a liability. In particular, there are patriarchal structures that have oppressed women. The case of domestic violence against women is well known in some African societies as one of the "legal" ways of imparting "discipline" to an "in-disciplined" wife. Even though Mugambi does not appear to support such an element in traditional cultures (1995:177), his silence on such sensitive areas does not do his works any justice. Is it possible that he still clings to some of the despicable cultural orientations such as polygamy and injustices with regards to the issue

of wife inheritance upon the death of a spouse amidst HIV/AIDS pandemic?<sup>37</sup>

Second, from an Evangelical perspective, Mugambi's concept of reconstruction can be seen as being undermined by his failure to be explicit in understanding that Christianity is superior over other religious faith groups that he mentions. As a person whose background is in religion and philosophy, he risks being seen as a non-committed Christian who is not willing to draw a clear-cut difference between various religions. This is clearly noted when he says that there are "excellent theologians" who have never written a word, going on to name Socrates, Siddhartha the Buddha and Muhammad as examples (1991:20). By so doing, Mugambi risks being guilty of belittling Jesus, for according to the Evangelical Christian faith,<sup>38</sup> Jesus Christ has no equal in any other religion, he being God, the second person of the Trinity. Again, how can theologians of other faiths be excellent? His conclusion that they are excellent is not convincing especially with regard to believers who may see "excellency" as a preserve for Christ.

This said, Mugambi cautions against Christians becoming arrogant in thinking only they can theologise. We must nevertheless insist that theologians from other religious traditions cannot be "excellent" while at the same time Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14). We also need to be clear concerning which theology other religious traditions espouse. If they are excellent, then we as Christians ought to join them, a fact, which may appear to, contradict Christ's appeal for personal reconstruction. This also contradicts the Apostle Paul's appeal to the believers in Romans 12:1-2. Again, as the Apostle Paul tells the Churches of Galatia:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel – which is really no Gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a Gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a Gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! (Gal. 1:6-9).

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<sup>37</sup> In the fourteenth century, a bubonic plague killed half of the population of Europe. An infectious disease that was spread by rats, it caused swelling, fever and usually death.

<sup>38</sup> Here I am referring to the Evangelical Christian faith that strongly holds that as Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14), no religious leader or group can claim to be equal to Jesus or to God. In other words, Christianity is not just "like any other religion" but the revealed way to God through salvation in Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Evangelical faith holds that there is no theology except in Christianity and that Christianity is thus not a religion (see also, Balcomb 2004). It is essential however to acknowledge that not all Christians subscribe to that view. The existence of the World Council of Churches attests to this.



In this epistle, which many say was written by an angry and bitter person (as evidenced by the exclamation marks!) the apostle Paul sends a very strong signal to the practitioners of contextual theology anywhere in the world. While it is entirely appropriate to make the Christian gospel relevant, there is a danger of appearing to deviate from the original stand of the Christian gospel. In my opinion Mugambi's theology does not put him in the category of espousing heretical views that deserve condemnation, as in the case of Galatians 1:6-9. However, when some parts of his work are viewed from an Evangelical perspective, it calls for some revision. As theologians who are interested in building a meaningful theology, we need to clothe his reflections further by building upon from where he has reached. In any case, Christian theology, in general, is a theology of reconstruction.

Third, Mugambi errs greatly by failing to encourage African cultural concepts, which are clearly compatible with the Christian gospel such as hospitality. This contrasts with Mbiti who sees the concept of hospitality as too dear to be ignored in any emerging theology in Africa. In Mbiti's view of Africa, hospitality and tender care are shown:

To visitors, strangers and guests...This means that when a visitor comes to someone's home, family quarrels stop, the sick cheer up, peace is restored and the home is restored to new strength. Visitors are, therefore, social healers - they are family doctors in a sense (1976:23).

It is a serious omission for Mugambi not to include hospitality into his theological schema of reconstruction. In a continent, plagued by war, hunger, genocide and disease, religion and hospitality must permeate all aspects of life (see, Mbiti 1969). Indeed, the concept of hospitality goes beyond catering in the African context, just as reconstruction goes beyond engineering sciences.

Fourth, Mugambi's theology of reconstruction fails to lay sufficient emphasis on the detribalisation of Africa; as tribalism, in my considered opinion, is the single major ideological threat facing Africa following the demise of apartheid. Drawing an example from Kenyan politics, it can be realised that multi-party politics has failed to unite the country. Instead, it appears to have succeeded in balkanising the country into tribal alliances in the name of party political alliances. That is, particular tribes join certain

political parties, while their leaders bargain over the sharing of posts with the leaders of the other tribal based parties. This amounts to tribal organisations hiding beneath the name of national political parties, all of whom are supposed to be for the common good of the people. This sectional leaning towards tribal organizations goes against the ideology of Nehemiah's reconstruction policy. For had he not encouraged the Jews to stand as one "tribe" before God, as opposed to being twelve individual tribes of Israel, reconstruction of the wall of the great city, Jerusalem, where the revered Temple was situated, would not have been done smoothly.

Fifth, while reconstruction has a strong spiritual dimension, especially when considered against Nehemiah's pietistic stand<sup>39</sup>; from an Evangelical perspective, Mugambi appears to overemphasise "social reconstruction" over that of "individual reconstruction." And this may drive one to wonder: "Doesn't real development start from the heart?" Yes, he has personal reconstruction as a starting point, but one feels that he should have prod further. In any case, understanding social reconstruction as the panacea for all the ills of Africa without tackling the issue of personal responsibility and radical change of the individual, may, if unchecked, lead to the weakening of the Christian gospel.

Sixth, Mugambi, as with the other proponents of a theology of reconstruction discussed in this study, has failed to grasp the political motivations behind Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was driven by the need to protect his "own people" who would have been vulnerable to attack by their enemies without the protection of the wall (*cf.* Neh. 7:1-5; Williamson 1987:15). Likewise, African leaders have, in several cases, found themselves trying to "protect their people," their tribes, clans and Nation States from marginalisation or oppression. However, the motivation to "protect my people" has mixed fortunes in Africa. For example, in some countries, it has led to the ideology of "my people versus others." This results in a bigoted philosophy that breeds tribalism, racism, suspicion, divisions and even death. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 could have had such an unfortunate motivational setting. Thus, the failure by the proponents of post-exilic theology to identify Nehemiah's political ideology behind his rebuilding project builds the case for a new hermeneutical approach to the text of Ezra-Nehemiah.

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<sup>39</sup> Nehemiah's pietistic stand is seen in his being a prayerful man. Further, his encouraging statements to the builders such as, "The God of heaven will give us success..." Neh. 2:20, attests to this.

Seventh, Mugambi errs greatly by failing to address himself to the reconstruction of family within the paradigm of reconstruction. In particular, there is great need to address the skyrocketing divorce rate, especially in South Africa, as well as the increasing number of single mothers in Africa today. Mugambi in his book, *Social reconstruction and Theology* (2003), has talked of the need for moral reconstruction but family reconstruction is a different area altogether. It is the backbone to a strong church, a strong nation and a strong faith in the God of Christendom.

### **5.8. Conclusion**

The chapter was intended to survey Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. This led us to study its biblical background, three levels of reconstruction, sources and the methods, fundamental concerns, some reflections by other proponents of theology of reconstruction and the critique from other African scholars. In revisiting Mugambi's theology of reconstruction, the chapter has taken cognisance of other scholars who have traversed this area. Hence, in particular, the chapter has been sensitive to the critiques of reconstruction theology.

In its findings, the chapter has cautioned on the danger of excluding some people in the task of the social reconstruction of Africa, on the grounds of tribal affiliation, race, gender or other prejudices. For by so doing, the noble ideals of Mugambi would be contradicted (1995: xv). The division between the two groups of Jews (that is, the non-exiled and the returned exiles) which did not augur well for a city whose walls had been "broken down and its gates...destroyed by fire" (Neh. 1:2b) has serious lessons for the reconstruction project in Africa. The divisions, which are the result of suspicions between the two players, point to the need of addressing the diversity of the African context. As we work out a theology of reconstruction and reconstruct Africa, various groups may compete as to how to reconstruct Africa or undermine one another rather than compliment one another, thereby making it difficult to rebuild the broken African walls as a united front.

This chapter, on the contents of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction, has shown how Africa is in need of various levels of reconstruction. It has also built on the various themes in Mugambi's works. In particular, it has exuded Mugambi's confidence in the conviction

that Africa has hope, which is capable of reconstructing itself without necessarily relying on outside help. This has therefore prepared us to survey the theo-socio-cultural evaluations of Mugambi's theology of reconstruction.

## CHAPTER 6

### A THEO-CULTURAL-PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION OF J N K MUGAMBI'S WORKS

#### 6.0 Introduction

Having studied Mugambi's concept of reconstruction in the previous chapter, this chapter will attempt to see whether social reconstruction can be justified in the African context. This will be achieved by drawing from a number of theo-cultural dialogues, including the *Agĩkũyũ* shift from matriarchy to patriarchy, the *Agĩkũyũ Itwika*, African rites of passage in general, and examples of paradigm shifts in church history, theology and mission. It will also attempt to see whether there is any justification for a paradigm shift through examining a dialogue with philosophy and in assessing the concept of reconstruction in the Christian testament through an examination of Paul's theology. Finally, a critical assessment will be offered based on the findings of the chapter.

This chapter is set on the premise that the theo-socio-cultural events, which will be case studied in this chapter, have something to offer towards Mugambi's proposal for a social reconstruction of Africa in the twenty-first century.

#### 6.1. Examining a theo-cultural dialogue

Mugambi's definition of culture refers to the total manifestation of a people's way of life and self-understanding (Mugambi 1995:30). This definition agrees with Paul Tillich who states:

Every human act (*as always*) is culturally conditioned. Not only our external behaviour, but also our every judgment, even our inner most thoughts and emotional response are formed and shaped and coloured by our own particular cultural experience and historical vantage point (quoted in Hillman 1975:59).

This means that every culture needs to be recognised because each culture represents, conserves and communicates something of the total human experience in its own limited but unique fashion.

Mugambi's definition of culture finds agreement with Mbiti, when he sees culture as a human pattern of life in response to people's environment (1978:273). People's pattern of life is expressed in physical forms (such as agriculture, the arts, technology), in inter-

human relations (such as institutions, laws, customs etc), and in forms of reflection upon the total reality of life (such as language, philosophy, religion, spiritual values, world-view, the riddle of life-birth-death).

In this section, we will look at culture from the perspective of human institutions, (such as marriage and initiation), laws and customs. By so doing, we shall borrow heavily from cultural-anthropological dialogues, in order to establish whether African cultural dialogues can indeed justify the call for a shift in theological paradigms. In other words, how does a cultural-anthropological dialogue accommodate the idea of paradigm shifts?

### **6.1.1. The case of the *Agĩkũyũ* shift from matriarchy to patriarchy: A paradigm<sup>1</sup> shift?**

Why choose Kikuyu cultural life in this section? First, I come from this community, which is related to the Embu, to whom Jesse Mugambi belongs. Second, due to limitations of time and space, it was impossible to survey the more than 1,000 African communities. Because African communities share many similarities in culture, the cultural patterns taken from the Kikuyu community will suffice.

The *Agĩkũyũ* or the Kikuyu, as most publications refer, reside around the slopes of Mount Kenya in the Central Province of Kenya. They are the largest community in Kenya today<sup>2</sup> (see, Wanjohi 1997; Wachege 1992). The earliest pre-historic version of their social lives establishes that they were initially monogamous before embracing polygamy at a later stage. A well-documented creation myth of the *Agĩkũyũ*, (see, Kenyatta 1938; Wanjohi 1997; Wachege 1992 *inter alia*), describes that *Mũgai* (which literary means ‘the Divider of the Universe’) created a man called Gikũyũ and his wife called Mũmbi (Kenyatta

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<sup>1</sup> Matriarchy to patriarchy among the *Agĩkũyũ* community can be viewed as a paradigm shift if we take Thomas Kuhn’s definition of a paradigm as “what the members of a scientific community, and they alone, share” (1977: 294). As Hans Küng has said, “Not only in theology, but (*also*) in natural science, when there is a paradigm change, apart from scientific factors, non-scientific factors also are important. A mixture of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, individual and sociological factors: origins, careers and personalities of those involved play a part, but often also the nationality, the reputation and the teachers especially of the innovator and – not least – the perhaps aesthetically conditioned attractiveness of the solution; the consistency, transparency, effectiveness, and the elegance, simplicity and universality of the proposed paradigm” (Küng and Tracy 1989:24).

<sup>2</sup> By 2007, out of Kenya’s population of 34,707,817, some 10 million are Kikuyu. See [http://www.intute.ac.uk/sciences/worldguide/html/931\\_people.html](http://www.intute.ac.uk/sciences/worldguide/html/931_people.html)

1938:1-9; Wa Thiong'o 1965:17).<sup>3</sup> The woman, Mũũmbi, is described as having been a "beautiful wife" who lived happily with Gĩkũyũ, and together, they had nine daughters and yet no sons (Kenya 1938:4). As a result, Gĩkũyũ "was very disturbed at not having a male heir." When his daughters reached marriageable age, in despair Gĩkũyũ called upon the god, *Mũgai* (the 'Lord of nature') "to advise him on the situation" (1938:4), praying that *Mũgai* would soon provide men to marry them.<sup>4</sup> As a result of his supplications:

God (*Mũgai*) responded quickly and told Gĩkũyũ not to be perturbed, but to have patience and everything would be done according to his wish. He (sic) then commanded him, saying: 'Go and take one lamb and one kid from your flock, kill them under the fig tree (*mũkũyũ*) near your homestead. Pour the blood and the fat of the two animals on the trunk of the tree. Then you and your family make a big fire under the tree and burn the meat as a sacrifice to me, your benefactor. When you have done this, take home your wife and daughters. After that go back to the sacred tree (*mũkũyũ*), and there you will find nine handsome young men who are willing to marry your daughters under any condition that will please you and your family' (Kenya 1938:4).

As fate would have it, Gĩkũyũ was not disappointed after obeying *Mũgai* or *Ngai*. When he returned to the sacred tree (*Mũkũyũ*), he found the promised nine young men who greeted him affectionately. After recovering from his excitement, with much jubilation he took the nine young men to his homestead and introduced them to his family. Following much African hospitality, "the question of marriage was discussed" (1938:5). During the marriage negotiations, Gĩkũyũ gave "tough" conditions to the young men who were willing to marry his daughters, stating, "If they wished to marry his daughters, he could give his consent only if they agreed to live in his homestead under a matriarchal system" (1938:5). Due to the overwhelming beauty of Gĩkũyũ's daughters, the young men readily accepted. This myth, held amongst the *Agĩkũyũ* provides some understanding into the establishment of matriarchy among the members of the community. It also hints at the first major shift that took place from within the *Agĩkũyũ*, from Gĩkũyũ's patriarchy where he dominated his wife Mũũmbi (even in these marriage negotiations, her voice is conspicuously missing), to matriarchy, where women enjoy greater input. This shift towards matriarchy was short lived, the *Agĩkũyũ* returning to patriarchy, as we shall see

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<sup>3</sup> There is no satisfactory explanation given as to why the first ancestors were called *Gĩkũyũ* and *Mũũmbi*. The only plausible information offered is that a man met a woman who was making pots (*kũmba*), and that this woman discovered that the man was sheltering under a wild fig tree, *Mũkũyũ*. On marrying, they called each other by nicknames, a usual Kikuyu custom, associated with the circumstances of their initial meeting. Thus the man called the woman *Mũũmbi* (which means potter), while the woman called him *Gĩkũyũ* ('of the fig tree') (cf. Kenya 1938:3-6; Muriuki 1974:1ff).

<sup>4</sup> This confirms the Gĩkũyũ community's deep sense of religiosity, whereby prayer is the means of finding answers to delicate and fundamental issues. Cf. Mbiti 1969:1 who provides an explanation of the deep religiosity of the African people.

later in this chapter. This said, it is important to acknowledge that the consequence of polygamy was a digression from the original path of a monogamous family. It also shows that among the members of the Gĩkũyũ community, every person is expected to obtain a spouse and live in a monogamous relationship. The question as how it would be achieved in an unequal society where men hold the ascendancy, is seemingly unimportant.

Having conformed to the matriarchal system as Gĩkũyũ had advised, the *Agĩkũyũ* settled in “houses” (composed of father, mother and children). To consolidate the gains of this shift, Gĩkũyũ divided his land between them for the purposes of cultivation (Wanjohi 1997: 25 - 28). In these farmsteads, they were to grow crops for their families – and have something to be hospitable with – as they interact with their “neighbours.” From these original nine families, the *Agĩkũyũ* are currently composed of nine clans, each corresponding to the nine daughters (1997:25-28).

As a result, each of the nine clan names that are found among the *Agĩkũyũ* community are said to trace their origins from the names of each of the nine daughters of Gĩkũyũ and his wife Mũũmbi. (Kenyatta 1938:4-5). This shows that the *Agĩkũyũ* were primarily a matriarchal society, whereby women were heads of their families before the *Agĩkũyũ* changed to a patriarchal system where men hold sway.<sup>5</sup>

Under matriarchal paradigmatic governance, the women allegedly became authoritarian and tough fighters. Coupled with this, they also practised polyandry, where they were free to keep more than one spouse. This was obviously a digression from what the first parents set as an ideal for the whole community to follow. Could this have been mere propaganda aimed at discrediting the *Agĩkũyũ* women by men who favoured a shift towards patriarchy?

The dictatorial nature of the women who allegedly added insult to injury by practising polyandry can be seen in the latter history of the *Agĩkũyũ* community, when the colonial government appointed Madam Wangũ wa Makeri (1865-1936) as the first woman chief from the community. Chief Makeri was allegedly accused in various patriarchalised and

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<sup>5</sup> Despite this patriarchal-anthropological socialisation, members of the Kikuyu community refer to one another as *andũ a nyũmba ya mũmbi*, meaning “people of the house of Mũmbi.” Mũmbi, the name of the “first” Kikuyu woman literary means “the creator” or “the moulder.” This implies that there is a “silent” admiration of women participation.



published works of being dictatorial and brutal. As time went by schoolchildren were taught incorrectly that she governed the community by sitting on men's backs rather than on a chair.<sup>6</sup> Wanjikū Kabira and K wa Mutahi rightly points that this story about her was told in order to perpetuate the idea of male domination (1988:7). Indeed the story is told that she was "lured into dancing naked in a public place something that women were never supposed to do," (1988:7), thereby making her to bow out of power in shame. Eventually, "the story becomes even more mythical and the truth or untruth of what historically happened becomes irrelevant" (1988:7), its desired function being primarily to block women's ascendance to power.

Later research has revealed that Makeri did not literally "sit on men," as it is widely reported, rather, as a colonial chief, she worked with determination to implement colonial government policies to the grassroots. As a result, she obeyed strictly "the law" that her seniors had set. Further research has shown, she was a successful judge, military warrior and a decisive leader – something never before experienced in the locality (Gathogo 2001:16).

With regard to the prehistoric matriarchal society, men would not allow women to rule. Consequently, they allegedly decided to overthrow their rulers in order to create the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy. To carry out a successful *coup d'état*, they mischievously agreed to impregnate all the women of the tribe, including the leadership. This was done by first planning a date when they would resist women's leadership while they were pregnant and thereby weak physically (Kenyatta 1938:4). As soon as men came to power, the constitution was changed enabling the shift from a matriarchal to patriarchal system to be put in place. In effect, men took over the leadership of the family and the community at large (1938:4). Men became the owners of property and the protectors of their families. Because of their actions, women became owned by the men who were now seen as fathers for the unmarried women and as husbands after marriage (1938:3).

The shift from matriarchy to patriarchy did not totally expunge the influence of women from among the members of the *Agĩkũyũ* community. They continue today to proudly

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<sup>6</sup> I must submit here that I am one of those who were taught in the primary school system during the 1970s and early 1980s about Chief Makeri. Indeed, it was part of the curriculum from the government of Kenya, where every child, boy or girl, was socialised to see women as dangerous when they are given the instruments of power.

refer to one another as *andũ a nyũmba ya mũmbi*, meaning “people of the house of Mũmbi,” or “children of the first mother of the Nation,” thereby pointing to the resilience<sup>7</sup> of culture amidst changing practices. In turn, it points to the fact that the religio-cultural dynamism of African heritage gives room for a revision (or shifts) of paradigms - as situations demand. Second, the twin shifts from monogamy to polygamy and the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy, create the strong impression that even within the African cultural heritage the idea of “minor” and “dominant” paradigms is a characteristic and common feature. That is, some paradigms are more established than others are, at differing times in the history of a community. Third, paradigm shifts do not necessarily shift radically, rather an element of continuity subsists, whereby the “incoming” does not totally usurp the “outgoing” paradigm, but rather remains as a guarantee of harmony in a particular society that is undergoing change. And as Hans Küng helpfully states:

We must remember that in *natural science* also – in all scientific ‘revolutions’ – there is never any question of a total break. In every paradigm change, despite all discontinuity, there is a *fundamental continuity*. Kuhn stresses the fact that in natural science also it is a question of ‘the’ same bundle of data as before which however are placed ‘in a new system of relations with one another’ (Kuhn 1962:85). The transition – for example – of Newtonian to Einsteinian mechanics does not ‘involve the introduction of additional objects or concepts’, but only ‘a displacement of the conceptual network through which scientists view the world’ (p.102). ‘Whatever he may then see, the scientist after a revolution is still looking at the same world. Furthermore, though he may previously have employed them differently, much of his language and most of his laboratory instruments are still the same as they were before’ (pp.129-30) (1989:29).

The paradigmatic shift, from patriarchy to matriarchy, and then (back) to patriarchy points to the idea of a contextual “dominant” paradigm shift in the governance of the *Agĩkũyũ* community. The “minor” paradigmatic shift from monogamy to polygamy<sup>8</sup> confirms the characteristic nature of culture, which on the one hand, is dynamic, and on the other, gender specific, a fact that further points to the need of deconstructing patriarchy in Africa today. These paradigmatic changes also reveal the possibility that the next shift can go either way, that is, from the rule of men (patriarchy) to that of matriarchy (rule by women). Alternatively, a new hybrid system may emerge where both genders are mutual partners in the existential journey of life, each being viewed as authentically made in the Image of God (*Imago Dei*).

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<sup>7</sup> Resilience, in this study, refers to the cultural characteristic of being able to recover quickly the original shape or condition following a shift. Culture, as Mugambi (1989b) shows, is highly resilient.

<sup>8</sup> From “monogamy to polygamy,” is treated in this study as a “minor” paradigmatic shift because some, but not all members of the society undertook it, in the traditional African society.

This leads naturally to the question of generational shifts within a community, which occur from time to time as society deems fit. Is this another form of paradigm shift in cultural milieu?

### 6.1.2. The case of the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka*:<sup>9</sup> A paradigm shift?

Mugambi's call for a shift of paradigm from liberation to reconstruction receives its cultural parallelism in the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka*,<sup>10</sup> which is also the same as the *Ameru Ntuiko*.<sup>11</sup> In turn, both the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka* and the *Ameru Ntuiko* have a significant parallel with their Maasai counterparts who have "the *eunoto* ceremony"<sup>12</sup> (Muriuki 1974:100).

Jomo Kenyatta, in his book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, introduces *Itwĩka* as the climax of the revolution that takes place from time to time (1938:186ff). *Itwĩka*, is derived from the word *twĩka*, which means, "to break away from" signifying a break from a particular paradigm within a socio-cultural framework of society. It can for example mean a break from autocracy to democracy (Kenyatta 1938:187), or a paradigm shift (to borrow the words of David Bosch 1991; 2003) from one way of conducting cultural affairs to another, including a change from one age-set to another.<sup>13</sup>

Nyambura Njoroge explains that *Itwĩka* was "a ceremony that was held after every twenty-five years to mark the handing over of power from one generation to another before colonialism" (2000:142). It was at the same time "a communal renewal of people's commitment to a struggle against tyrants," following the footsteps of their foreparents, the *Iregi* generation (2004:142). This however raises several concerns. First, Njoroge does not

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<sup>9</sup> A literal translation of *Itwĩka* means 'a sudden severance' or 'to cut loose'.

<sup>10</sup> John Middleton, in his book, *The Central tribes of the North-Eastern Bantu*, (1953), writes that there is no evidence that the groupings that constitute the Kikuyu (as most publications describe the *Agĩkũyũ* community) have ever united in war, even against neighbouring tribes (1953:30). He quotes C. Dundas who suggests that the *Itwĩka* ceremony probably provides an occasion for the most extensive combination known among the Kikuyu; in the district "now known as Nyeri there seem to have been only three areas having separate *Itwĩkas*: these are the sections (now Government Divisions) of Tetu, Ndia and Mazera" (1953:30). However, "these Divisions are clearly recognised by the Kikuyu as part of the Kikuyu proper, as opposed to Embu and Meru, the inhabitants of which are not claimed as Kikuyu and cannot be admitted as tenants on Kikuyu land" (1953:30).

<sup>11</sup> It means the shifting of existing patterns especially with regard to authority, in order to create room for the incoming group (see, Fadiman 1982:127).

<sup>12</sup> This *eunoto* ceremony by the Maasai, like the Kikuyu *Itwĩka* and the Meru *ntuiko*, had, "the junior warriors taking over" from the previous ones (Muriuki 1974:100).

<sup>13</sup> According to Gakuũ Mathenge, *Itwĩka* goes beyond the mere idea of leadership succession. That is, from one group to another. It specifically refers to generational succession, in which case, a generation is usually defined by the age-set, handing over leadership to the next age-set. (See, Gakuũ Mathenge, "Central Kenya MPs battle fluid political situation," Sunday Nation, January 22, 2006, 13. <http://www.nationmedia.com/>

explain how she arrived at the figure of twenty-five years, considering that paradigm shifts are need or situation-driven rather than calendar-driven. Her contention differs from that of Godfrey Muriuki who says that it “took place every thirty to forty years, during which one generation (*riika*) handed over to its successor the reins of power to conduct the political, judicial and religious functions” (1974:117). Second, for a community that did not use the “modern” mode of calculation how did the figure of twenty-five (or forty as Muriuki reports), come about? Third, as our research in this section will show, *Itwĩka*, as a generational (*riika*) shift, means that a society is shifted holistically and given a new conversion in all sectors of life, economically, socially and politically.

The argument that *Itwĩka* was “to mark the handing over of power from one generation to another” (Njoroge 2000:142) mistakenly gives the impression that it was simply a political event where the society inaugurated a new King and the story ended there. As this study will show, *Itwĩka* was an all-embracing socio-historical landmark as far as the society was concerned, a phenomenon that was experienced from the perspective of societal continuity rather than from the perspective of a sudden and radical shift within society. Fourth, it was not simply a “people’s commitment to a struggle against tyrants” (2000:142), although the most publicised *Itwĩka* ceremony was political. *Itwĩka*, as a concept or philosophy existed even before the *Itwĩka* revolution that brought about good governance within the community, as this study will seek to demonstrate.

Ngũgi Wa Thiong’o argues that it was the *Iregi*, who as “a generation of revolutionary rebels, who had overthrown the corrupt dictatorial regime of King Gĩkũyũ, established ruling councils and established the procedure for handing over power, an event commemorated in the *Itwĩka* festival of music, dance, poetry and theatre” (1983:65). This marked the first political grouping of *Itwĩka* among the members of Kikuyu community. The fact that the *Itwĩka* revolution brought down the rulership of Gĩkũyũ is given much prominence in most published works does not however mean that this was the first time that the concept or the philosophy behind *Itwĩka* was experienced. Indeed, the first such incident was experienced in the shift from patriarchy to matriarchy and later from matriarchy to patriarchy (as discussed above), although the word *Itwĩka* was not original to it, nor were there ritual ceremonies held to commemorate the event.

After the *Iregi* ('the revoltors') carried out the liberation, the next generation began cultivating the land (read reconstruction), after one group was given the name *ndemi* ('cutters' or 'cultivators of land') (Thiong'o 1983:65; cf. Kenyatta 1938:186; Kabetũ 1947, 1997:89-93; Njoroge 2000:142). The word *ndemi* ('cutters') was given in remembrance of the period when the *Agĩkũyũ* began to cut down the forests after shifting from the previous socio-cultural paradigm thereby establishing themselves as agriculturalists. Although Thiong'o (1983); Kenyatta (1938); Kabetũ (1947; 1997); Njoroge (2000) and Middleton and Kershaw (1972) do not say exactly how the *Agĩkũyũ* people lived before their shift to agriculture, one may argue that there were various ways in which they led their lives, including, pastoralism, hunting and gathering, and barter trading (cf. Kenyatta 1938:67-68).

John Middleton and Greet Kershaw in their book, *The Kikuyu and Kamba of Kenya*, agree with Kenyatta (1938) Thiong'o (1983), Kabetũ (1947; 1997) and Njoroge (2000) that the process of change among the *Agĩkũyũ* took place through the *Itwĩka*. They cite the change of leadership, when the younger generation took over the "rulership" of the community, and the older generation withdrew from its religious and public duties (Middleton and Kershaw 1972:37; Kabetũ 1947, 1997:89-93). As in Mugambi's idea of an all-inclusive approach in social reconstruction, persons of all ages and gender, (except children), took part in the *Itwĩka* (Middleton and Kershaw 1972: 37; cf. Kabetũ 1947, 1997:89ff).

Kenyatta explains that the spirit of the *Itwĩka*, namely, the changing of socio-political structures in rotation through a peaceful and constitutional revolution, is still ingrained in the minds of the *Agĩkũyũ* people (1938:196). He cites the period 1925-28, when the *Itwĩka* ceremony was to take place corresponding to the last great *Itwĩka* ceremony, celebrated circa 1890-1898. During that time:

The Irũngũ or Maina generation, whose turn it is (*was*) to take over the government from the Mwangi generation, organised in 1925 and began singing and dancing *Itwĩka* ceremonial songs and dances to mark the termination of rule by the Mwangi generation. But after a short time the *Itwĩka* ceremonial dances and songs were declared illegal, or in other words, "seditious," by the British (*Colonial*) Government (1938:196; cf. Kabetũ 1947; 1997:90).

Kenyatta explains that with the cancellation of *Itwĩka* festivities,<sup>14</sup> by the British colonial government who ruled Kenya, the *Irũngũ* generation were denied their birthright of perpetuating their “national pride and enjoyment in the peaceful institution which afforded their forebears the most harmonious participation in the social, political, economic and religious organisations of the tribe” (1938:197; Kabetũ 1947; 1997:89-93).

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o notes that apart from the *Itwĩka* ceremonies that were suppressed, the colonial government limited all open-air performances within their territorial space:

After the 1922 Harry Thuku massacre, women devised a song and dance sequence called *Kanyegenyũri*. It needed no permanently defined ground on which it could be performed. The song-poem-dance was banned by the colonial regime: it could not be sung or danced or recited anywhere on Kenyan soil. The colonial state treated another dance sequence *Mũthĩrĩgu*, developed after the Second World War, in the same manner. And in 1952 the colonial regime once again acted against the nation-wide upsurge of anti-colonial dances and songs, banning all open-air performances in any part of the country, whatever the performance at a particular moment. Every performance, even a simple gathering for prayers, had to be authorized. Communication between one space and the next had to be authorized. The entire territory was one vast performance space full of threatening motions of innumerable magic spheres. Similarly, in the era of apartheid in South Africa, an elaborate pass system regulated the entire territory as a space for daily performance (1998:64-65).<sup>15</sup>

In view of this, the socio-cultural reconstruction of the *Agĩkũyũ* community was not possible as long as the nation remained a British colony. Equally, a social reconstruction of Africa was not possible as long as African countries were not politically free from

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<sup>14</sup> These festivities were stopped by the colonial regime from taking place thirty years after the British colonial state was established in 1895. Around 1925, the *Agĩkũyũ* community was involved in a flurry of activities to celebrate the *Itwĩka* ceremony that was also disappointingly stopped. The performance of the *Itwĩka* was taken as a challenge by the Colonial government. Consequently, the annual parade of the British military at the opening of the new sessions of the legislative assembly might have replaced the *Itwĩka*-type performances (Thiong’o 1998:39).

<sup>15</sup> Under the colonialism state, the fear of the uncontrolled space – a fear dramatised long ago by Euripides in a disagreement with Maenads and the state in the play *The Bacchae*. Pentheus, King of the Theban state, could not understand how women were out in the woods and mountains, beyond the control of the city, even though all they were doing was honouring Dionysus, the god of wine, whose gifts are joy and the union of the soul with dancing. Interestingly, King Pentheus claims that darkness in open space is dangerous to women, and he vows to use force to bring them back to “convenient” space within the city. To do this, he orders the arrest of Dionysus, and his imprisonment in a dark stable, where he will have “all the darkness that he wants. You can dance in there! As for these women whom you have brought to aid and abet you, I shall either send them into the slave market, or retain them in my household to work at the looms; that will keep their hands from drumming on the tambourines” (Euripides 1961:197). In his contempt of women, Pentheus used force against the Bacchantes (his own people, the people for whom he should have cared). The parallels with the authoritarian colonial and post-colonial Africa, before the end of Cold War, are striking. This may have prompted Wole Soyinka to write an adaptation of it, with a post-colonial African setting, under the title *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Thus, both the colonial and the post-colonial African states acted as if they were under the tutelage of Pentheus. They limited the open space for their citizens by their uncalled-for controls.

colonialism or from the shackles of the Cold War. Largely, this implies that there is need to be cautious with regard to the external or internal environmental factors that oppress the people of Africa, as they can weigh down the process of theo-cultural growth, however well intentioned they may be. In view of these analyses, it is clear that there were various types of *Itwika* ceremonies, ranging from leadership transfer, generational change, and cultural reorientation.

As noted above, the most celebrated ceremony of *Itwika*, as the charter of the *Agikũyũ* society (Kenya 1938:187) was the democratic revolution against poor governance. This does not however mean no other *Itwika* had taken place; rather, the political dimensions of this particular *Itwika* were remarkably different from all previous ones. From this, a new political paradigm emerged among the *Agikũyũ* community, where the wishes of the majority were, from that time, given prominence over the despotism of the *Agikũyũ* Kings or leaders in general (1938:187). After the revolution, the Kikuyu did not use the title of King as their leadership preferred other less “dominating” titles, including, *Mũnene* (‘the one who is senior’), *Mũtongoria* (‘the one who is leading’) (see, Kenya 1938; Thiong’o 1983).

Kenya explains that after the first politically inclined *Itwika* revolution that rejected the dictatorship of King Gĩkũyũ in favour of democracy, there were widespread celebrations held throughout the Kikuyu lands (1938:187). This was expressed through dancing, feasting and singing. Following the festivities, which took place over a period of six months, a revolutionary council, *njama ya Itwika*, was formed to draft a constitution (1938:187). The purpose of drafting a new constitution was to enable the new government, which had come to power after the overthrow of the tyrannical King Gĩkũyũ, to run successful. Constitution writing is one of the first steps towards the social reconstruction of any new society. History is replete with examples, including, South Africa after apartheid; post-Independent African countries in the 1960s; following the French revolution of 1789 (Peacock 1987); after the American war of independence (1776), the constitutional amendments following the American Civil War (1865-1877) (see, Voegeli 1967; McPherson 1965). This shows that the process of constitutional making after a war of liberation becomes one of the basis (or the process) by which actual reconstruction is done.

With Kenyatta having noted that the “first” *Itwĩka* revolution was received with great jubilation, 1938:187), the succeeding *Itwĩka* ceremonies, which were mainly cultural continuities were less euphoric. According to the researches of Middleton and Kershaw (1972:37), the handing over of office from one group to another occurred at a solemn ceremony, named the *Itwĩka* ceremony. The process of national reconstruction, that Mugambi proposes parallels the *Itwĩka* ceremony which took years to complete throughout the *Agĩkũyũ* country, with the last complete ceremony probably taking place sometime between 1890-1903 (1972:37; Kabetũ 1947, 1997:89-93).

As noted earlier, the Meru equivalent of the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka* is *Ntuiko*. The word *Ntuiko* implies the cutting or breaking of existing patterns of authority in order to create a vacuum of power into which subsequent age-sets can move (Fadiman 1982:127; cf. Middleton 1953:40-41). As in the case of the Kikuyu community, the Meru’s *Ntuiko* was characterised by rituals, ceremonies and other rites (Fadiman 1982:127; cf. Middleton 1953:40-41). This can be traced from the Meru system of age-sets that are based on circumcision. Accordingly, these age-sets are grouped into generation-sets, *nthuki*, which lasts for a period ranging from ten to fifteen years. Each of these generations has a name, given at the time of entry to the “warriors’ dormitory”<sup>16</sup> (Middleton 1953:40).

According to Middleton, there are always five generation-sets in existence among the Meru community at any one time (compare this with our contention in this study that paradigms still live on in part while other paradigms take precedence, and that they tend to compliment rather than compete with one another).<sup>17</sup> These five generation-sets comprise of the Aged, the Old Men, the Ruling Set, the Young Married Men, and the Warriors (1953:40). As in the case of the *Agĩkũyũ*, when a new set is created, “the present ruling set hands over to the succeeding set at the *ntuiko* ceremony” (1953:40). Interestingly, some of the older warriors remain, “for a few years after marriage, until the next *ntuiko*” (1953:40). The common denominator in these generational changes is that they mark a clear break from one cultural orientation to another. Thus, a cultural evaluation of Mugambi’s idea of paradigm shifts, from liberation to reconstruction, will easily find its parallel with the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka* and *Ameru Ntuiko* of Kenya.

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<sup>16</sup> The system of naming is linear, and the names vary in the Tigania, Imenti and Igembe divisions of Eastern Kenya, which the members of the *Ameru* ethnic group occupy (Middleton 1953:40).

<sup>17</sup> Compare also the contention of Edward Schillebeeckx that Christians express their faith within divergent paradigms and models (1989:316).



Although the concept or philosophy behind the *Itwika* unified the *Agĩkũyũ* community towards a renewed society, it was challenged not only by the colonial powers (as we have seen above), but also by divisions from within, a phenomenon that can easily be compared to tribalism in modern day Africa. As John Lonsdale has noted:

Kikuyu moral-political thought was twice divided. Vertical, kin-based, loyalty to *mbari*, opposed horizontal solidarity in age-sets or *riika*. Dynastic charters of separately sweated *mbari* progress also clashed with the collective cleansing promised in the costly ritual of generational renewal called *Itwika* (2003:58).

Lonsdale goes on to say:

History taught the perils of this divided counsel, not least the failure to persuade the (Carter) Land Commission of the early 1930s to return alienated Kikuyu land. The toughest interest groups, the hundreds of sub-clan *mbari*, were also the most divisive. Their elders had sole responsibility for their land...land elders began to accept that the impatience of juniors was a forgivable response to closure of opportunity. Age-sets, ladders of straightness, were increasingly splintered. Some youths were still initiated collectively, by tradition; some in a missionary hospital without due ritual; yet others, children of the poor, by the roadside. Some young women, daughters of keen Christians, escaped the discipline of genital surgery entirely. Ideas of generational authority, finally, had become blurred over time, but no less powerful for that (2003:58).

Nevertheless, the above studies have shown that the idea of social reconstruction will be cultural endorsed, even though Mugambi may not be conscious of it. In other words, as post-Cold War Africa had to “break away” (*twika*) from its past, it engaged in a new process of reconstructing itself, knowing that the previous theo-cultural pattern of “doing things” had broken away, thus giving rise to a renewed way. Can Africa continue being in “previous” tune, following the theo-cultural *Itwika* (“break away”) from colonialism, apartheid, and African dictatorships, and after the African church has largely been left to the African leadership? Thus the shift in theological paradigms can also be seen in African cultural activities, as culture is never stagnant. Mugambi’s call for a change of theological paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, in African theology, can thus be assessed from a cultural perspective.

Another insight that comes from the study of the *Agĩkũyũ Itwika* is that it was, first and foremost, a cultural generational shift, carried upon the six pillars of culture, namely, politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion that Mugambi (1989a: 128; cf. 1986:32) has explored. In other words, the revolution that had to do with generational patterns ushered in a new religio-cultural emphasis, without necessarily making a dramatic break with the past, but rather continuing as a “marked” continuity. Such a shift of religio-

social gear can be clearly felt by the entire society. In view of this, the *Agĩkũyũ* shift from matriarchy to patriarchy and the shift from monogamy to polygamy and vice versa were all forms of the cultural *Itwĩka* that the community underwent in certain periods of their history. As a way of life, *Itwĩka* permeates all aspects of life within the *Agĩkũyũ*, that, as with Mbiti's view of religion in Africa (1969:1), it is not always possible to isolate it. Even though the *Itwĩka* ceremonies are not commonly held today, the spirit nevertheless lives on, a spirit that is constantly invoked and experienced whenever the society is in religio-social transition.

As John Lonsdale notes, even though the last *Itwĩka* was celebrated at the turn of the last century, its cleansing ideas, "had supported young Christian readers, *athomi*, in their sometimes-scandalous innovations in the 1920s. Thoughts of renewal were in the air once again" (2003:58). With culture being characteristically resilient in nature, *Itwĩka* cannot be wished away or ignored as we conduct our theological discourses. Mugambi's idea of paradigm shift can thus be seen from this perspective.

Having seen how the *Agĩkũyũ* community paradigmatically shifted interchangeably, we shall, in the following sub-section, address the African rites of passage and thereby attempt a sample of paradigmatic shifts in the African heritage, which generally covers a wider constituency than the above-mentioned samples. This will lead us to question whether the idea of the African rites of passage fits into Mugambi's idea of paradigm shifts. Second, if there is a sense in which they are connected, then to what extent can they enrich the idea of a theological paradigmatic shift, from liberation to reconstruction, as advocated in Mugambi's works?

### **6.1.3. The case of the African rites of passage**

For Mugambi, African rites of passage refers to those various rituals which a community undertakes systematically according to its traditions to mark various shifts with regard to a particular individual member of the community from the first stage of life to the last (1989a: 122). African rites of passage start from birth to initiation and then to marriage and finally death. These shifts inform the individual how to behave, act or focus. On the other hand, rituals are "dramatic and symbolic expressions of a community's comprehensive self-understanding" (1989a: 203). They are characterised by use of

symbols and dramatic activities, including for example, a natural object such as Mount Kenya, which may be accorded symbolic significance, in this case symbolising the magnificence of God for the peoples who live around the mountain.

Similarly, marriage is, among other things, a status symbol in traditional African society. It symbolised that the married person had entered the process of becoming an elder, thereby earning automatic respect (1989a: 204). Indeed, every rite of passage in African traditional society is ritually enacted. This enactment of the respective rites of passage symbolises the progressive transition of an individual from one phase to another, within the context of corporate identity (see, Kenyatta 1938:130-187).

According to Mugambi (1989a: 205), rituals manifest the religious consciousness of the African people. For example, burnt animal sacrifice is a predominant feature of traditional African rituals. An animal without blemish and of one colour symbolises the purity and sincerity of the community's intentions in a ritual, as well as the perfection of God to whom all rituals are ultimately directed (: 205). Similarly, a reference to the ancestors in all rituals indicates the consciousness of African peoples that the human community includes not only the present generations, but also past and future generations (Mugambi 1989b: 205; *cf.* Moila 2002a: 67-70).

Mugambi's emphasis on paradigm shifts in African theological articulation in the twenty-first century can be seen from the background of African rites of passage. In other words, the African emphasis on ritual shifts from childhood to adulthood is informed by the prevailing realities within the individual and the society. For example, birth symbolises the entry of the child from the generation of the unborn to the generation of those who are born (Kenyatta 1938:163f). The born child can only be named after an important event that takes place around the time of birth, after the season or time of day in which the birth took place. The child is therefore named according to the established customs of the particular community (Mugambi 1989a: 96-97). These customs clearly respect the contexts and situations under which a child is born.

To the parents, the birth of a child symbolises the transition from one stage of elder-hood to the next (Kenyatta 1938:164). Initiation, as the second major African rite of passage,

symbolises the transition from childhood to adulthood. As Obeng (2000:44) has pointed out, initiates in the African cultural setting are separated from normal society, and their normal obligations and rights suspended; they are then instructed on their future role as adults and potential parents (2000:44). Obeng goes on to write:

They are 'reborn' in their new status and incorporated into society. The cutting of the foreskin, labia or clitoris, or other body incisions and markings, are symbols of setting aside childhood and taking on a new personality. The initiate is changed (2000:44).

Obeng compares the Christian rite of baptism with the African rite of initiation, when he writes:

In Christianity too, baptism is an initiatory rite. It is meant to wash away sins of individuals and incorporate them into the church. Thus it functions as a rite of entry into the Christian church. Through it the individuals are 'reborn' and become incorporated into Union with Christ (2000:44).

Reading this cultural dialogue in conjunction with Mugambi's call for a shift of theological paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, raises several concerns. First, has Africa attained theo-socio-cultural maturity, and if so to what extent? Second, if the people are "reborn" through African (or Christian) rites of passage and incorporated into union with Christ (that is, receiving the rite of Christian baptism), how real is Africa's post-Cold War rebirth? Third, to whom will Africa be incorporated to - as she moves towards the paradigm of reconstruction? Fourth, if Africa is to be incorporated through Euro-American capitalism or to the G8 most industrialised (western) nations, will this mode of reconstruction be inauthentic, being dictated from outside?<sup>18</sup>

As in the case of initiation, marriage in African Traditional Religion symbolises entry from adulthood to elder-hood (Mugambi 1989a: 204). Its importance is compounded by the fact that the traditional African custom expects every adult to marry. An adult who is not married according to African custom cannot become a leader of his or her community (Mugambi 1989a: 198; *cf.* Kenyatta 1938:163ff). Marriage, as a process, extends throughout the life of the married partners, and even beyond. It "never ends" (Mugambi 1989a: 98). It is concluded by the transactions and social contracts between the families involved, as children come to cement it (Mugambi 1989a: 199; *cf.* Kenyatta 1938:163ff).

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<sup>18</sup> This can be compared to the European reconstruction after WW2, where post-war reconstruction turned out to be nothing more than American acculturation (see, Ellwood 1992:227; Maddison 1989:19; Sutcliffe 1996:140; Zink 1957: 3-4; Wall 1991:113; Willett 1989:105).

Marriage as an African rite of passage from childhood to adulthood raises more or less the same questions, as did the rite of initiation. In other words, as a shift from childhood to adulthood/elder-hood, where do we draw a clear demarcating line and say that Africa has attained her "married status" in her theo-socio-cultural realm? Who will conclude the transactions and social contracts between the people of Africa in its task of rebuilding Africa? Further, who are the two "families" bestowed with the responsibility of seeing to the success of the social reconstruction (Marriage) of Africa? If the "two families" refer to outsiders, then Mugambi's concept of reconstruction will be put to the test.

The final major rite of passage in Africa is that of death. As Mugambi says, death symbolises the transition from the physical to the spiritual mode of existence (1989a: 204). Indeed, death in traditional African thought is viewed as the transition into another mode of existence. As with the Christian faith, it is not viewed as the end of human life, but only a transition from one mode of being or existence to another. As Moila says, Africans perceive death as a departure from this life rather than complete annihilation of the person (2002b: 68). It is thus believed that death is a bridge to the world of the ancestors. As he further says, death takes a person away from human society without breaking the ties between the person and his or her people (2002b: 68). Death releases the human spirit and soul from the body for continued existence. Seen from the perspective of ancestor-ship, death is a promotion to a higher level of being. It is however imperative to acknowledge that not everyone becomes an intermediary between God and people (ancestor) after death, but only those who were adults and leading exemplary lives<sup>19</sup> before death (Moila 2002b: 69).

In assessing Mugambi's call for a paradigm shift, the idea of the transition at death to ancestor-ship raises various concerns. First, can one say that the concept of liberation is exemplary while the new concept of reconstruction is of a higher realm? Second, to what extent is the concept of reconstruction a promotion to a higher level of theological articulation in Africa?

Viewed from the perspective of death in the African context, the concept of liberation in African Christianity cannot then die, as ancestors do not disappear completely from the

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<sup>19</sup> Exemplary lives refer to a life that upholds virtues such as, truth, honesty, hospitality, justice, as opposed to vices such as greed, hate, theft, and witchcraft.

people unless they failed to lead exemplary lives while on earth. While their physical presence disappears, their spiritual role is felt throughout, as their new intermediary task as an ancestor remains of crucial importance to society. In view of this, the concept of liberation as an intermediary form of dialogue with the now dominant paradigm of reconstruction need not cause any tension in the articulation of African theology. This however poses another challenge, namely, after reconstruction, where do we go from there? Will other paradigms be born, as did reconstruction, when one day it joins liberation in the spirit world? This leads us to the question of ancestor-ship in traditional African society. Will liberation, which has motivated Africans towards constitutional independence, continue to play a theo-ancestral role, as it points, by implication, to that theo-socio-cultural life which is its climactic apex? This question inevitably points to our earlier contention that old paradigms seldom die, rather some of their elements remain in the "new." In viewing the paradigm of liberation from the perspective of ancestor-hood, it will exist paradoxically, that is, it will be with us and yet it will not be with us! This raises yet another question, namely, has Africa reached its theo-socio-cultural apex? Has Mugambi provided the real way forward in the *now* "matured" and "promoted" African theology of our time or has he miscalculated it all?

This question causes us to re-evaluate Dedji's contention that in helping to shift the emphasis of theological discourse in Africa, "Mugambi has demonstrated that, not only has African Christian theology reached its maturity, but it can now make its contribution to world-wide Christianity" (2003:86). Viewed in this light, Dedji's contention finds resonance with the observation of James Cone, that "the reconstruction paradigm is relevant, even beyond Africa" (Mugambi 1995: viii).

Moila explains that on arrival in the world of the living dead, namely ancestor-ship, the deceased attain supernatural powers; that is, unlimited powers over the lives of the living:

Some intercede with God for us, others are responsible for the animal kingdoms,  
and others are responsible for other kingdoms of the universe (2002b: 69).

Moila's view agrees with that of Thoka (1925:360) who says that, "ancestors exercise a subordinate jurisdiction over the different departments of the universe under the immediate supervision of God Himself" [*sic*]. Seen from the idea of ancestor-ship, the role of reconstructionists will be extensive, as some will be required to attend to the various

levels of reconstruction as economists, theologians, moralists and so on. Describing God's gifting for mission in the church as being one body with different functions, the Apostle Paul can write:

It was God who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 5:10-13).

If we apply this argument, reconstruction, like liberation, will be needed in all fronts, be they cultural, personal or ecclesial (*cf.* Mugambi 1995:15-17).

The study on the African rites of passage, as shifts from one stage in life to the other, has clearly resonated with the earlier section on the *Agĩkũyũ itwĩka* where a shift in one area of life will affect other areas of life, and ultimately affect an entire society. This has strengthened our contention that paradigm shifts in Africa are an authentic way through which social reconstruction can be accelerated. Understanding that within one major paradigmatic shift other minor paradigmatic shifts can also take place simultaneously gives hope that a change in people's views on politics, aesthetics, kinship and so forth could be triggered.<sup>20</sup>

#### **6.1.4. A critical appreciation of paradigm shifts in the African context**

A number of scholars on African (theological and religious) studies tend to go too far with regard to the African concept of future or paradigm shifts for that matter.<sup>21</sup> A case in point is Mbiti who claims that African cultural traditions and religions lack dynamic concepts of the future (1969: 15-28). This therefore means that Africans do not readily conceive the idea of paradigm shifts, as they lack dynamism that would propel them to appreciate change, as "the African concept of time is limited to the present and the past" (Tarimo 2005:19). Interestingly, Daniel Etounga-Manguelle goes beyond Mbiti. His carefully constructed view deserves a quotation at some length:

Some societies condition their members to accept uncertainty about the future, taking each day as it comes. There is little enthusiasm for work. The behaviour and opinions of others are tolerated because deep down people feel relatively secure in

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<sup>20</sup> The *Agĩkũyũ itwĩka* has demonstrated that whenever a major shift in the way people conduct their affairs takes place, it affects the entire society socially, economically and politically. This forces the people to re-adjust themselves to fit into the new dispensation. In so doing, more (minor) paradigms emerge and the chain of events continues.

<sup>21</sup> This study considers that the idea of paradigm shifts connotes the twin idea of "past and future" of the community under investigation.

the status quo. In other societies, people are acculturated to conquer the future. This leads to anxiety, emotionalism, and aggressiveness, which produce institutions oriented toward change and the limitation of risks. The African, returning to the roots of religion, believes that only God can modify the logic of a world created for eternity. The world and our behaviour are an immutable given, bequeathed in a mythical past to our founding ancestors, whose wisdom continues to illuminate our life principles (2000: 68-69).

Etounga-Manguelle goes on to say:

The African remains enslaved by his [*sic*] environment. Nature is his [*sic*] master and sets his destiny. The African, anchored in his [*sic*]-ancestral culture, is so convinced that the past can only repeat itself that he worries only superficially about the future. However, without a dynamic perception of the future, there is no planning, no foresight, no scenario building; in other words, no policy to affect the course of events. There can be no singing of tomorrows so long as our culture does not teach us to question the future, to repeat it mentally, and to bend it to our will. In modern society, everyone must prepare and plan the future (2000: 68-69).

From the perspective of both Mbiti and Etounga-Manguelle, the African system of thought is a closed culture, which therefore always overlooks the possibility of change and innovation. As Aquiline can note:

A closed culture is unselfconscious and scared of change. Of itself, it is incapable of advocating structural change (*read shift of paradigm*). Criticism is often not tolerated and alternative proposals intending to enhance change are not welcome. In different circumstances, constructive criticisms directed toward culture are most often dismissed as enemy conspiracy. Such an attitude makes a culture vulnerable. The truth is that the more it clings to a rigid and unchanging tradition, the more it is likely to be marginalised, shrink, and disappear as the forces of modernization and globalisation gain momentum. This is the case for conservative cultures. Socio-economic and cultural development demands self-awareness, self-criticism, flexibility, creativity, and openness to change (2005:19).

By implication, Mbiti and Etounga-Manguelle both appear to suggest that the idea of paradigm shifts is not authentically African. In essence, this conclusion seriously threatens Mugambi's proposal for a paradigm shift in African theology, from liberation to reconstruction. If the concept of paradigm shifts is not inherently African, then Mugambi's proposal must be an imposition from outside of the African continent. This may help justify Maluleke's remarks when he says that Black and African theologies may understandably view both the "invitation" (to shift paradigms) and the "contextual analysis" inherent in the invitation with suspicion (1994:246-7).

Nevertheless, the case studies given earlier of the *Agĩkũyũ* and their shift from matriarchy to patriarchy, the *Agĩkũyũ Itwĩka*; and the case of the African rites of passage clearly show that it is epistemologically incorrect to claim without reservation that African cultures and



religions do not possess a dynamic concept of the future. As Tarimo rightly states:

Naturally, all human beings are endowed with the gift of reason and as such are capable of anticipating the future with hope and a certain degree of dynamism. Metaphysical figures of speech, symbols, rituals, and spiritualities can easily demonstrate this assertion. A static culture does not exist. Everything is subject to change. What happened in the course of African history is that external forces of political and religious domination suppressed cultural and religious dynamics (*as seen in the case of Agikûyû Itwika – my emphasis*).<sup>22</sup> Consequently, concerns about self-defence and self-preservation became important (2005:20).

It is thus erroneous to claim as Mbiti and Etounga-Manguelle have done, that African cultures and religions are only adjusted towards the past and the ancestors. Indeed, the concept of time, from the perspective of cultural dynamics and survival, is significantly more intricate than the depiction that they have offered (see, Tarimo 2005:20). One would rather say that African cultures have experienced diminutive growth because they were denied space to develop by external forces from the outside such as slavery and colonialism. Internal factors such as ethnic wars,<sup>23</sup> competition, rivalries and other conflicts among African people cannot be ignored either. Equally, it is inaccurate to build on the erroneous idea that African traditional religions lack a transcendental dimension, or even to allege that their ethical foundations are merely anthropocentric, and as such they are not able to envisage eschatology and the goal of human evolution.<sup>24</sup> Hence, this study has clearly shown that the idea of paradigm shifts is inherently African.

#### **6.1.5. The case of paradigm shifts in church history, theology and mission**

Thomas Kuhn triggered the debate about paradigm shifts and conceptual change in the social sciences when he published his provocative book entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)<sup>25</sup> (Bubner 1989:242). Kuhn argues that natural sciences change and

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<sup>22</sup>Kenyatta cites a case when in 1925 it was the turn of the Irūngū or Maina generation to take over the government from the Mwangi generation. The colonial government declared it illegal and seditious. Although they had already begun singing and dancing in their *Itwika* ceremonial songs and dances to mark the termination of rule by the Mwangi generation, they were disrupted, hence their culture was violently suppressed by the powerful colonial forces (Kenya 1938: 196).

<sup>23</sup> Ethnic wars, for instance, changed the Zulus from being a circumcising community to a non-circumcising one. Through wars people change their religious structures *cf.* Isabel Phiri 1997b.

<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, the office of an ancestor, studied above, clearly connotes an eschatological dimension or a transcendental dimension as it encouraged people to lead a virtuous life – as that was the only qualification that would have earned a promotion to a person upon his/her physical death. Hence one was to become a living-dead, an elder – whose influence among the living remained even after the earthly demise.

<sup>25</sup> As early as 1913, Ernst Troeltsch, in a lecture on religion and economics, asked the important question, “What does the real life of religion show us about an inner and essential influence exerted on the religious life by economic life and by the growth of classes and castes in society, which is largely economically conditioned?” (Greinacher 1989:227). In 1925, Karl Mannheim wrote, “In the cultural sciences especially, we are convinced that not every question can be posed – let alone solved – in every historical situation, and that problems arise and fade away in a particular rhythm which can be ascertained... (that here) problems not

succeed one another, whereby, “we may now take it for granted that the differences between successive paradigms are both necessary and irreconcilable”<sup>26</sup> (Kuhn 1962:102). As Stephen Toulmin has noted, “it is sufficient that basic conceptual changes in fact take place,” which transform, “the theoretical basis of the natural sciences either rapidly or gradually” (1989:233). This contention opened up “academic disputes” as to whether “we should call these changes ‘paradigm switches’” (1989:233). Kuhn’s insistence on the radical character of scientific change became highly influential,<sup>27</sup> and his name forever attached to the concept of paradigm shifts.<sup>28</sup>

In line with Kuhn’s theory, Hans Küng, in his historico-theological subdivisions, submits that the entire history of Christianity is composed of six major paradigmatic shifts. These are:

- a) The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity
- b) The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period
- c) The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm
- d) The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm
- e) The modern Enlightenment paradigm
- f) The emerging ecumenical paradigm (1984:25).

Küng suggests that each of these periods reveals a particular understanding of the Christian faith (1984:25). In other words, each suggests a new theo-missiological

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foreshadowed by anything immanent to the preceding thought processes emerge abruptly, and other problems are suddenly dropped...Here, if anywhere, we see the saying confirmed that nothing can become a problem of practical life beforehand” (Mannheim 1952:135)

<sup>26</sup> Following Thomas Kuhn, “we may give the name of paradigm to these major, comprehensive models for understanding theology and the church – models built up in the wake of wide-scale upheavals, marking the turn of an era; and we may call the replacement of an old interpretative pattern by a new paradigm candidate ‘a paradigm change’” (Küng 1989:214). These paradigms, “built up in the wake of wide-scale upheavals” can also be referred to as “major” or “dominant” paradigms as opposed to the “minor” paradigms. This however raises a problem particularly when we consider that some of these “wide-scale upheavals” can be overtaken by other events. For example, WW2 is considered a “wide-scale upheaval” that shook the whole world, yet in the twenty-first century, it cannot any longer influence a major shift in African theology. In his “Postscript” (1969), Kuhn contended that, “A paradigm is not a theory or a leading idea. It is an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on - shared by the members of a given community” (Küng 1989:215). In other words, “several theologies are possible within a single paradigm” (1989:215).

<sup>27</sup> By so doing, Kuhn completed, “The historicization of human thought that had begun in the eighteenth century, and so finally undercut older views about the ‘immutable’ order of nature and human knowledge. The task for those who are interested in the theological implications of contemporary natural science is, therefore, not to replace one static but outdated system of doctrine (paradigm) by another, equally static but more up-to-date system: instead, it is to carry further the work of (Ernst) Troeltsch and those other theologians who have reflected on the specific relevance of *Historicismus* to the projects of theology and cosmology” (Toulmin 1989: 233-234).

<sup>28</sup> Kuhn was astonished at the impact his theory had. As Rüdiger Bubner has written, “Kuhn’s philosophy went beyond his own original intentions. For the concept of paradigm change was initially no more than a generalisation drawn from insights, which he had acquired while investigating the Copernican revolution in astronomy a few years previously. It is interesting therefore to note that in the overwrought hermeneutical atmosphere of German philosophy especially, Kuhn has been greeted with lively assent” (1989:242).

emphasis, as theology is done within a particular context and situation (Mugambi 1995:19f). Indeed, a theologian cannot theologise in a socio-cultural vacuum, hence when, “a theologian tries to answer questions which are not relevant to the people amongst whom he or she lives, the theology thus articulated is deemed irrelevant” (1995:20). This understanding helps us to see the purpose of paradigm shifts in Christian theology, namely, to make the Christian gospel relevant to the various socio-cultural contexts that tend to emerge throughout history.

Küng fails however to acknowledge a seventh paradigm that can inform global Christianity, namely, the “back to Africa” paradigm. This, as Bediako notes, represents the centre of Christian gravity that has shifted back to Africa, where the Christian population constitutes more than half of the total population of Africa (see, Barratt 1982; Bediako 1990; 1992; 1995).<sup>29</sup>

David Bosch, in his well-researched book, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (1991; 2003), traces various paradigm shifts in church history. His central thesis claims that within the global history of the church there has been a paradigm shift from the Enlightenment paradigm towards a post-modern, ecumenical paradigm. He builds on this idea of paradigm shifts by arguing that the early Christianity took an astonishing “leap of life” from one world to another, since “it understood itself as the vanguard of a saved humankind” (1991:16). Bosch holds that contemporary Christian testament scholars thus affirm what the systematic theologian Martin Kähler said some decades before, that “mission is the mother of theology” (1991:16). He goes on to state that the Christian testament writers were not scholars “who had the leisure to research the evidence before they put pen to paper,” but rather, wrote in the context of an “emergency situation” of a church which, “because of its missionary encounter with the world, was forced to theologise” (1991:16). Bosch thus sees the Gospel accounts, “not as writings

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<sup>29</sup> Kwame Bediako’s contention about the shift of Christian gravity towards Africa received a major encouragement from Jürgen Moltmann when he says, “Today the Christian faith is acquiring new centres of gravity in Africa, Latin America and Asia, and these new centres are accompanied by the development of non-European Christian theologies. The traditional centres of theology are receding into the background and threatening to become marginal. This process is undoubtedly painful for European theologies. It is a demand for transformation. But first of all it evokes a series of highly disturbed reactions. There is the retreat syndrome: ‘if they don’t want to listen to us any more, let them get on with their theology by themselves.’ ‘We are simply Europeans and intend to go on being so.’ Then there is the bandwagon syndrome: ‘We need a European liberation theology too, or an American Minjung theology’” (1989:222).

produced by an historical impulse but as expressions of an ardent faith, written with the purpose of commending Jesus Christ to the Mediterranean world” (1991:16).

As in the case of the cultural dialogues described earlier, Bosch’s work maintains a strong contention that paradigm shifts are inevitable from time to time in our human endeavours. Bosch builds on the hypothesis that the idea of mission and theology in the first-century paradigm was characterised by the “sending of preachers to distant places” (1991:17). As time went by however, the mission paradigm was broadened and became synonymous with “service” to ones “neighbour,” a trend that greatly informs modern missionary trajectories (1991:368-520). It is of little wonder therefore, at the conclusion of his book, that he asks, “Is everything mission?” (1991:511).

In identifying the early factors that contributed to the paradigm shifts in theology, Bosch includes the first century interpretation of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19; Bosch 1991:56ff); the significance of Luke’s Gospel and the increasing concern for the poor (1991:84ff); Paul’s conversion and Call (1991:125ff); the emergency of heretical groups in church history such as Gnosticism; medieval characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church; individualisation of salvation and ecclesiasticisation of salvation; direct and indirect “missionary wars”; the colonial factor, and the mission of Monasticism (1991:214-236). Other factors that have influenced or affected paradigm shifts in church history, including the enlightenment period of eighteenth century Europe, where the mission motif changed dramatically and in turn, ultimately led to the emergence of the post-modern paradigm (1991:349ff).<sup>30</sup>

In discussing the “elements of an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm,” which he feels is the modern theo-mission paradigm, Bosch (1991) sees them as being characterised by various elements. These include, “church-with-others” (1991 368ff), “shifts in missionary thinking” (1991:369ff), “mission as *Missio Dei*” (as God’s work, and not human activity) (1991:389ff), “mission as the quest for justice” (1991:400ff), mission as evangelism and contextualisation (1991:409-425), and mission as liberation and inculturation (1991:432-455). This leads Bosch to ask the question, “Is everything mission?” in the new paradigm of Christian mission (1991:511).

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<sup>30</sup> C M Mwikamba also sees mission shift from the same perspective (2000:11ff).

Bosch's idea of paradigm shifts however differs sharply with Mugambi's (2003) in his insistence that when a paradigm loses its immediate social relevance it becomes obsolete. Hence liberation, as a guiding framework, is obsolete after Cold War, Apartheid and Colonialism. Bosch thus holds that "old" paradigm seldom disappear completely (1991:186). For as in Hans Küng's view of paradigm shifts in theology, he indicates that the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period still lives on in parts of the Orthodox churches (1984:25). Further, as J. Brauer reminds us, in virtually all denominations today, we find fundamentalists, conservatives, moderates, liberals and radical believers, side by side (1984:12).

Building on the thinking of Kuhn, Langdon Gilkey can explain:

As Kuhn's own examples from the development of modern science show, however, this conception of a fundamental paradigm shift in a discipline assumes certain important and essential *continuities* – as did my own examples above from nineteenth-century evolutionary philosophy. For a paradigm in a science even to be able to shift, the continuity of the scientific discipline within which the salto takes place is assumed; and, of course, it is also assumed that a wider culture, at once permissive and supportive of that discipline, remains dominant (1989:367).

He goes on to aver:

Paradigm shifts, therefore, take place within a cultural and historical continuity that itself does not pass away. Our model points to changes in a culture's developments, not changes of that culture itself, the mutation of the culture into something quite different. Much as the older view of scientific development saw that development as a steady accumulation of cumulative 'advances,' the one building on, enlarging and improving the earlier ones, so the new understanding sees this continuity as characterized by sharp shifts of interpretation, method and construction of theory – but nevertheless against the historical background of a continuity within which these shifts can be clearly noted, described, compared. It was, after all, the 'modern scientific community' that experienced or underwent these paradigm shifts; it was the developing scientific culture that turned first to one and then to the other of them, not to mention (of course) the continuity of natural process that was assumed as the relatively stable 'object' which these shifting paradigms successively sought to illuminate. A comparable 'environment continuity' (of culture and of church) within which significant changes take place, would necessarily be a presupposition for any discussion of paradigm shifts in theology or in theological ethics (Gilkey 1989:367-368).

There remains therefore a strong possibility that people are committed to more than one paradigm at a time, a fact that helps this present study to appreciate the idea of "dominant" and "minor" paradigms being present simultaneously within African theology.

Bosch's understanding of paradigm shifts is nevertheless problematic because he develops his work for a global constituency. In contrast, Mugambi, confines his theological

articulation to the African context. Bosch appears to address the whole world of Christian theology. As Bosch admits, he is no longer able to define mission as it goes beyond his ability to swallow, a risk he seems to accept! Hence, for Bosch, mission means:

A multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, (*reconstruction – my emphasis*), peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization, and much more. And yet, even the attempt to list some dimensions of mission is fraught with danger, because it again suggests that we can define what is infinite (1989:512).

Knud Jørgensen contends that the conception of church and mission has gone through four major paradigm shifts during the last two centuries.<sup>31</sup> These are:

- 1). The ellipse structure of the modern mission movement (which dates back to Paul and the Antioch and is later found within the monastic movement and the church) was rediscovered by William Carey through his vision of establishing mission societies. This idea is described in his *An Enquiry into the obligations of Christians to use means for the conversion of the Heathens* from 1792. This resulted in a number of mission societies with an elliptic relation to the local church/established church. This structure should also be seen in the light of the advancing voluntarism, especially in the USA.
- 2). The establishment of the International Council for Mission in 1921, and the World Council of Churches in 1948. These institutions merged in 1961; behind the fusion lay an ecclesiology and missiology related to the integration of church and mission, despite many warnings that in this way the issue of mission was in danger of drowning in the agenda of the established church.
- 3). As a reaction to this ecumenical development, there was a strong emphasis on the role of the local church and mission societies among evangelicals, particularly voiced by Ralph Winter in *The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission* from 1973. He distinguishes between modality and sodality, come-and go-structure, as two equally important sides of the nature of the church: to be church is to maintain a static, inviting church structure, and a dynamic, centrifugal mission structure. By dissolving the monastic system, the reformation church lost its sodality structure. In a Scandinavian context Johannes Aagaard (1985) distinguishes between Peter's column apostolate and Paul's wandering apostolate.
- 4). Finally, today we experience a shift from church with a mission/mission society towards missional church<sup>32</sup> (Jørgensen 2004:558f).

Jørgensen's contention that, "a paradigm shift requires a shift of worldviews, also for the church" (2004:560) finds agreement with Tiina Ahonen's view when he says that the comprehensive Lutheran (church) understanding of the missional church results from a history of different paradigms (2004:574). Jørgensen quotes Péri Rasolondraibe, Director

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<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Moltmann argues that theology is in transition in three stages. These are: 1). From the denominational to the ecumenical age; 2). From the Eurocentric age to the age of humanity as a whole; and 3). From the age of mechanistic domination of the world to the age of ecological world-wide community (220-225).

<sup>32</sup> The term "Missional Church" is an expression of the fact that the Church is not primarily an institution with services, activities and a mission in the periphery (Jørgensen 2004:564; see also, Mogens Mogensen 2003). A "Missional Church" is a church that recognises the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. By so doing, a rediscovery of the gifts of the spirit in a broad biblical conception, in equipping the missionary congregation, as a post-modern reality is now possible.

of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Mission and Development, who has distinguished the following missiological paradigm shifts:

- 1). *The church without mission*: The Lutheran Church of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not only saw mission as a function of the state but also was so preoccupied with self-justification that it was unable to carry out mission.
- 2). *Mission without the church*: In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mission took place through revival movements, apart from the institutionalised mainline churches.
- 3). *The church in mission*: In the second half of the twentieth century, ecclesiology and mission were brought together, and the church began to understand itself as "God's people, created and empowered by the word, fed at the lord's table, and sent and led by the Holy Spirit to participate in God's mission in the world" (Ahonen 2004:574; cf. Rasolondraibe 2001:331-333).

Similarly, Frans Wijsen sees the development of paradigm shifts within the Roman Catholic Church in four particular phases:

- 1). The first missionaries in the modern time went to the non-Christian countries to bring to the so-called "pagans" the light of Christ and His message of Salvation. According to them the pagans lived in the shadow of death. They were convinced that outside the church there was no salvation.
- 2). Soon missionaries came to understand that individuals need some social support for their conversion. So, the "salvation of souls" approach was soon supplemented by the "planting of the church." In practice this meant the transplantation of the European Christianity to the mission countries.
- 3). But, already before the Second World War it became obvious that this mission method was not very effective. In consequence another approach developed. The aim remained more or less the same, but the method changed. Still the missionaries wanted non-Christians to enter the church. But the church from her side could meet the pagans halfway, by an "adaptation of Christianity" in its externals, language, vestments and rituals.
- 4). Whereas the "adaptation" approach was still very strong in the sixties, and has become stronger again due to the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, some missionaries and local priests worked out a new understanding of mission. It was recognized that Christ was already present in the non-Christian cultures. The missionary's task was only to help the non-Christians to discover the active presence of Christ in their lives (2001:219).<sup>33</sup>

The above examples reveal that the changes in the mission of the church are greatly influenced by common issues such as the political climate, religious needs, economic and social factors. Hence, the industrial revolution, which brought printing machines, influenced the paradigm shift in the mission of the Church as religious literature could now be readily published and used in its mission outreach to the world. With the introduction of sophisticated transport systems, Christianity is able to travel globally, beyond their places of origin (see, Snyder 1980; Mugambi 1989b; Gilkey 1989).

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<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the Second Vatican Council of 1962 recognised and approved the shift that had taken place. Karl Rahner, looking back at the Second Vatican Council, has said that the most important result of the Vatican II was that the Church became aware that it had become a World Church (1979:716).

As Küng has convincingly pointed out, our contemporary experience of the world is a constitutive element in determining new theological paradigm(s) (Greinacher 1989:228; cf. Mugambi 1995:19-20). This needs however to be vigilantly monitored, as the church may conform to some new emerging (but negative) patterns of the world rather than the other way around (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Nevertheless, it is from such a background that Mugambi has looked at the close of the Cold War and the fall of Berlin Wall; the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990<sup>34</sup> and the end of apartheid; and finally, globalisation.<sup>35</sup> Each has had a profound theo-cultural effect upon Africa.

On the whole, paradigm shift(s) in church history, theology, mission and even as noted among the *Agĩkũyũ* community's cultural shifts, and in general, in the case of the African rites of passage, becomes necessary because freshly acquired recognitions about the conditions of life as a whole show that the old one is no longer adequate (cf. Kuhn 1962; 1970:5f). The pressure for change builds up when people come to "experience inappropriateness" in the old model. The history of science, for instance, documents the change from the Ptolemaic to the Copernican worldview (Kuhn 1962; 1970:6-10). Even though the concept of paradigm change presupposes the view that history reveals ongoing development patterns of understanding of the cosmos, it also implies that in developments of this kind, there is simultaneous continuity and discontinuity (cf. Küng 1984:25; Brauer 1984:12; Gilkey 1989:367; Bosch 1991; 2003:186).<sup>36</sup>

Having reviewed the various understandings of paradigm shifts in the theology of mission, this study has demonstrated that Mugambi's idea of paradigm shifts is in line with church history and present theological trends. The only distinctive factor to consider is that paradigm shifts in western and African thought, of which the latter Mugambi attempts to speak for, are contextually different. A theo-cultural dialogue has thus helped us, not only

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<sup>34</sup> Mandela had a very symbolic effect upon liberation theology in Africa. He was metaphorically seen as the (Prophet) Moses who was to come to liberate the people of South Africa in particular and Africa in general, and escort them to the promised land where the oppressive Pharaoh no longer had control.

<sup>35</sup> Even though globalisation has been seen to have negative effects on Africa, it has, nevertheless affected the paradigm shifts in the mission of the church in Africa. The task of the church is to redefine itself in the light of globalisation.

<sup>36</sup> As noted among the *Agĩkũyũ* community, they were initially a matriarchal society who shifted to patriarchy and later to matriarchy. Similarly, the community initially practiced monogamy as the ideal model of family-hood only to shift to polygamy and later to monogamy as the ideal form of marriage. The Christian presence, the contact with the world at large, and various economic factors could have influenced the change of paradigm. The quest for a better understanding of cosmos is instrumental in determining paradigm change.



build upon our hypothesis that paradigm shifts are a necessary component in all our human endeavours, but also to point out the need for Africa to extricate itself from the current paradigmatic wilderness.

## 6.2. Examining a dialogue with philosophy

In view of the ongoing debate, Mugambi appears to be following the trend that is also seen in the Greek philosophical thought, which held that we must always follow the currents of history. Obviously, this has its own dangers. With modern society undergoing rapid social and technological change, the following questions must be asked, How will African theology survive the onslaught of such rapid social and technological change? Will it keep on changing paradigms rapidly?<sup>37</sup> In the light of such uncertainties, will African theology live in a constant state of flux, where the only certainty is uncertainty?

Taking the example of the Greek philosophers, Heraclitus argued, around 500 BCE that nothing is permanent and (that) everything is in perpetual flux<sup>38</sup> (see, Allen 1985:29-31). Such an absolutist statement conflicts with its own stated content, for if everything is in flux how was Heraclitus able to make such a doctrinaire and ontological statement? Heraclitus was opposed by his younger contemporary, Parmenides, who not only identified Ultimate Reality with unchanging being, but (much like Hinduism) said that whatever is involved in change (read paradigm shifts) lacks being (Allen 1985: 29-31). However, as Allen has shown:

Plato sought to accommodate Parmenides' insistence that what is ultimate must be – and that to be is to be fully actual or complete, and hence unchanging. He agreed with Heraclitus in thinking all (*sense bound*)<sup>39</sup> things are in flux, but Plato said there are nonsensible things, the Forms, which are unchanging (Allen 1985:31).

Plato, thus, attributed some degree of reality to physical things by seeing them as imperfect copies of universal forms. Aristotle followed Plato in equating changelessness with divinity, although his views have had a corrupting influence on the Christian doctrine of God, for they encouraged the idea that God is in all respects changeless (Allen 1985:29-

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that an emphasis on change (read, shift of paradigms) is not necessarily a bad idea, or a mark of conservatism. As seen in Hegel's case, the fluctuations of history are "the necessary beats of a universal rhythm," and hence, "whatever happens must be regarded as inevitable and rational and good" (Ray 1993:102-103).

<sup>38</sup> In fact his most widely quoted comment was that one cannot step twice into the same river.

<sup>39</sup> The italicised words in the brackets are my own emphasis.

31). Seen from this light, Mugambi's idea of paradigm shifts follows the Greek school of thought with its obvious consequences of uncertainty (as seen above).

As Bosch notes, one of the criticisms of the paradigm theory is that, "it fosters relativism, that there really are no ultimate norms or values" (1991; 2003:186). In discussing this point, Michael Barnes notes that any form of relativism is self-refuting as it is impossible to hold simultaneously that all doctrines, religions and conceptual schemes are relative and that a doctrine of relativism is itself true in an absolute way (1983:493). The "anthropologists' heresy stresses that 'right' can only mean 'right for a given society,' and that it is therefore wrong for one society to criticize or interfere with another. But the introduction of an absolute in the second provision makes the argument inconsistent" (1983:493).

In view of this, Kuhn discards the criticism that paradigm analysis must succumb to a complete relativism. Rather, he sees it as concerning an ongoing interplay between subjective and objective components in which judgements of facts and of value are constantly called to account by the ongoing dialogue of questions and answers in which "scientists may always be asked to explain their choices, to exhibit the bases for their judgements. Such judgements are eminently discussable, and the man [*sic*] who refuses to discuss his own cannot expect to be taken seriously" (1977:337).

Within his famous "Postscript," Kuhn decisively responds to those critics who reject his contention that the validity of a paradigm can only be accepted if one is prepared to step within its "circle" and that it "cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle" by telling them that his position does not amount to total relativism (1962; 1970:205-207). Kuhn attempts to qualify his earlier position by explaining that he is a "convinced believer in scientific progress" and that later scientific theories (read, new paradigms) tend to be better than previous ones (1970:207).

Having seen how Mugambi's idea of paradigm shifts fits well within the Greek philosophical school of thought, this section has pointed to the danger of being considered relativists in our theological articulation. This is tantamount to fundamentalism, a

tendency that denies reason a chance within our discourses. This has subsequently led us to study St. Paul<sup>40</sup> and the concept of reconstruction – to which we now turn.

### 6.3. The Apostle Paul and the concept of reconstruction

As Nlenanya Onwu observes, the Greek verb *anaikodoméō* (Acts 15:16) equivalent “to reconstruct” or “to rebuild” (structure and relationships), can also mean, “to reconcile” (1994:37). The related verb *oikodoméō* can be understood to mean “to build up” or “to develop” (1994:37). This latter Greek term has particular significance in the Apostle Paul’s ministry as seen in his epistles (1994:37), where it is used to denote a specific apostolic task in relation to the community (see, 2 Cor. 10:8; 12:19; 13:10; Jer. 1:10). The Apostle could, however, destroy (*kathairéō*), as in 2 Corinthians 10:4, but he did not take his work that way. Rather, he took his ministry as one of constructing buildings where none had been built. Hence, with regard to the establishment of the church in the city of Corinth, the Apostle can write: “I planted the seed, (*but*) Apollos watered it, but God made it grow” (1 Cor. 3:7).

The Apostle acknowledges God as the great builder and concedes that human beings need to play their developmental roles (*read reconstruction*) in different ways. In the process of building (as in Paul’s use of the planting of seed imagery) or rebuilding (as in the case of Apollos watering the seed, which Paul had planted), every participant matters, as God will reward both. Again, as the Apostle can write to the church in Corinth:

The man who plants (*constructor*) and the man who waters (*reconstructor*) have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder and someone else is building (*rebuilding – my emphasis*) on it.... If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light (1 Cor. 3:8-12).

The Apostle Paul’s view in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is significant because it is an actual building (*read, reconstruction*). The term *oikodoméō* (“build up”) in this text is “also perceived as a spiritual task of the *ekklésia*” (Onwu 1994:37). In 1 Thessalonians 5:11 as “a pastoral exhortation to the individual Christian, Paul indicates the form in which he

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<sup>40</sup> St. Paul’s theology is considered as crucial area that will easily speak for the New Testament theology because of his immense contribution as a missionary, an interpreter of Christ’s ministry and the Christian doctrines as shown in the book of Romans and Galatians. His many letters in the NT clearly gives guidelines on Christian ethics – which he imparts to his readers. In my view, he is no doubt the most prominent Christian theologian after Jesus Christ.

participates and expects other fellow Christians to participate in the up building/development of the community and the brethren” (1994:37). The noun form of the verb *oikodome*, therefore, “refers to the development of the community and the individual in Christ both physically and spiritually” (1994:37). Paul’s work therefore shows that development/building and reconstruction are synonymous terms in biblical theology.

In scripting the books of Romans and Galatians where he provides a kind of systematic theology for Christian instruction, St. Paul taught the various Christian doctrines such as justification, sanctification, salvation, curse, wrath, God’s favour, the position of Gentiles in the new dispensation, food for the idols, and the grace of God. In addition, the Apostle embraces Jews and Gentiles as equal sons and daughters of God. By so doing, one can rightly argue that he becomes the second most reconstruction figure in the Christian testament after that of Jesus. His teachings provide badly needed direction for the young Christian church. Consequently, his writings define the church of Christ in the clearest tones. Although he was not among the twelve disciples, he surpassed them by his church planting and his provisions of ethical and spiritual guidance, as the first epistle to the Corinthians will attest. His teachings constitute modern Christianity, as we know it today, for he has redefined and reconstructed the new people of the Christian community.

On his way to Damascus, where he intended to persecute the early Christian church (Acts 9) Paul (Saul) was changed from a persecutor to a perfecter of Christianity (Mugambi 2003:175). Interestingly, he did not question the “institution of slavery, but he challenged the slave masters to treat their slaves as if they were not slaves,” and the slaves to behave, “as if they were equals with their masters” (2003:175). As Mugambi says, “this was social reconstruction at its best” (2003:176). The Apostle demonstrated that attitudes must be changed before institutions can be reformed. In Romans 12:1-2, he appeals to church to work towards reconstructing the patterns of the world and not vice-versa. This call appeals to a wide constituency of people today, throughout the world. Clearly, Paul sought to reconstruct the Christianity of his time, thereby heralding a new Christian society built upon the foundations of the old.

#### **6.4. A critical evaluation**

Jesse Mugambi and other proponents of paradigm shifts, such as Bosch, fail to act adequately with regard to the paradigms that have been shifted from (for example, in the case of liberation and inculturation). In other words, do these paradigms become “minor,” subordinate, sub-paradigms, or “dominant”? Alternatively, should they be consigned to the ash heaps of history? Mugambi holds that they become obsolete or are rendered irrelevant (1991; 1995; 2003); while Bosch (1991; 2003) contends that parts (or elements) of the old paradigm remain in the new. This however does not indicate the extent to which some parts of the old paradigm are retained in the new. Consequently, it drives us to the danger of finally not shifting at all but simply marking step, as if a military parade!

Mugambi’s insistence that “a shift is a shift – if you decide so just shift without looking backward” poses significant danger. Hence, it is important to ask the following questions: What do you do with the conservatives in the society, who ironically are always in the majority in rural Africa (Mugambi 1989b)? Is it possible to shift from the paradigm of liberation to reconstruction, with people who do not understand what liberation holds for them? Where do we begin? Is it first to educate the “liberated” people or to “announce” that the time for paradigm shifting has come? These questions show clearly that the procedure of implementing the idea of paradigm shifts needs to be paid more attention.

In general, the challenge as to who does the shifting remains. That is, is it the armchair theologians of Africa who have very little connection with the African church, if any at all, or the entire “market” of rural Africa? How will this idea be actualised to the ordinary Christians in Africa, who do not have the “luxury” of written theology? How does the ordinary Christian in rural Africa feel about the change in post-Cold War Africa as opposed to pre-Cold War Africa?

#### **6.5. Conclusion**

This chapter was based on the premise that the case studies presented, have something to offer to the proposal for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, in Africa of the twenty-first century, as recommended by Jesse Mugambi in his post liberation works. Consequently, it has surveyed some theo-cultural dialogues that are relevant to our study. It has also surveyed a philosophical dialogue alongside other dialogues that have helped in

shaping the chapter. The study has also revisited the paradigm shifts in church history, in an endeavour to evaluate, authentically, the appropriateness of Mugambi's proposal for a paradigm shift in African theology.

The findings of the chapter have shown that Mugambi's idea of a paradigm shift is largely authentic. It strikes a working chord with the above-cited dialogues despite some defects. For example, the cultural version of generational shifts (that is, the *Agikûyû* concept of *itwîka*) amounts to a move towards an African traditional version of social reconstruction(s), as the cited cultural shift ushered in a new emphasis on land cultivation paradigm hitherto unknown. It also points out that the idea of paradigm shifts has been part of African traditional society. In other words, society keeps reconstructing itself through cultural shifts and thereby re-adjusts itself to ever-emerging contexts.

Following dialoguing with the paradigms of liberation and reconstruction, each of which has a strong background in the Hebrew bible, we reviewed the strengths and the shortcomings of the two concepts, as paradigms in African theology. In moving towards the conclusion of the chapter, we still found that our initial concerns were not entirely settled. We have to ask: Did Jesse Mugambi make a blunder by calling for a shift of paradigms, from liberation to reconstruction, when we (in African Christianity) have not exhausted the concept of liberation? What is the ideal model for African Christianity today? Is it more appropriate to try other paradigms such as reconciliation, charismatic gifting and so forth, as modelled on Christ's ideal mission? Why always focus on the Hebrew Bible for theological paradigms while the Christian Testament<sup>41</sup> remains the fulfilment of the promises made in the former? Does Africa need one theological paradigm at a time? Alternatively, does African theology need to be done from the perspective of "minor" and "dominant"<sup>42</sup> paradigms? Do we have a common model of doing African theologies? These questions have prepared us to study in the next chapter, some examples of Christological paradigms.

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<sup>41</sup> Even though the proponents of a theology of liberation cite Luke 4: 16-22 among other biblical texts, they appear to emphasise Exodus 3 as the central text. This means that Hebrew Bible texts are given more prominence over that of Christian testament texts.

<sup>42</sup> This is an open admission that African theology can be done from more than one paradigm due to the plural nature of Africa. Indeed, the diversity and the homogeneity of the African people calls for the need to articulate various theologies by using different paradigms, at any given time and in various African "contexts" while at the same time foregrounding one as the dominant paradigm.

## CHAPTER 7

### AN EXPLORATION OF SOME CHRISTOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

#### 7.0 Introduction

The task of this chapter is to look at some Christological paradigms alongside the paradigms of liberation and reconstruction that the researcher considers as leading frameworks at the centre of the current debate. The purpose of this venture is informed by my conviction that in the New World Order, Africa is still in the paradigmatic wilderness. And with both paradigms (of liberation and reconstruction) being rooted in the Old Testament (Exodus and Ezra-Nehemiah respectively), there is need for African Christianity to relocate itself firmly within the Christian testament, which is the fulfilment of the old covenant. In so doing, it is hoped that our theological thirst will be quenched. In the hope of finding a way forward for African theology in the twenty-first century, several themes relevant to the African context will be explored that are considered to be relevant to the study of African Christian theology.

Four paradigms relevant to the African context will be explored, namely, reconciliation, market-theology, charismatic theology, and inculturation. The study acknowledges that inculturation has become one of the most notable “minor” paradigms, while liberation has been the most “dominant” paradigm in African theology since the early 1960s. Yet, the question remains, which paradigm will be the leading paradigm in African theology of the twenty-first century? To answer this important question adequately, we will need to survey the other theological themes present in African Christianity before settling on any one. The researcher readily acknowledges that it is not possible, given the limitation of time and space, to exhaust the Christological paradigms. Rather, it will be explored through the consideration of a few examples that the researcher considers are of great importance alongside liberation and reconstruction.

#### 7.1. A dialogue with the reconciliation paradigm

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Hereafter*, TRC) which was formed after the newly elected National Assembly passed the “Promotion of National

Unity and Reconciliation Act" in May 1995 (Lipton 1999:60ff; Maluleke 1997c: 109ff) best illustrates how crucial the paradigm of reconciliation is for modern day Africa.<sup>1</sup> In the TRC hearings, perpetrators of apartheid crimes and other human rights violations were called upon to account for their misdeeds. Depending on the recommendations of the TRC, most were granted amnesty after confessing their crimes (see Sparks 1995; Maluleke 1997c). They were forgiven after confessing their guilt and after denouncing their evil past. Desmond Tutu, whom Wole Soyinka (1999:100) describes as "the moving spirit behind the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" chaired the TRC.

The TRC has been hailed throughout Africa by the church and civil society as the best way forward for a continent full of war, genocide, corruption, general violence, economic woes, sectionalism, and bad governance. It was later launched in Ghana after the then opposition leader John Agyekum Kufuor won the election in December 2000 and subsequently sworn in as president on January 7, 2001.<sup>2</sup> Sierra Leone's truth commission has "more recently" asked how combatants in the country's brutal civil war could "slice open the wombs of pregnant women and amputate villagers' limbs in the name of a senseless civil war" (see, Sarpong 2004). On February 2006, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia began Liberia's truth commission, which officially opened its first

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<sup>1</sup> Maluleke contends that the idea was not original to South Africa, as it had been tried elsewhere with modifications, especially in Latin America (1997c: 110). The South African Parliament set up the TRC with the mandate to establish "as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights committed under apartheid from March 1960 to December 1993 (later extended to May 1994) by conducting investigations and holding hearings (Lipton 1999:60). This Seventeen member commission consisted of three committees. i). The Human Rights Violations Committee, which was to investigate gross violations of human rights. ii). The Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, which was to formulate a reparation policy and restore and rehabilitate the lives of victims and survivors of violations. iii). The Amnesty Committee, which had the power to grant amnesties on condition that the applicant made a full disclosure of the facts (see, Sparks 1995; Maluleke 1997c; Lipton 1999). In March 2003, after seven years of hearing testimony about the apartheid era, the TRC formally released its recommendation that the South African government pass laws obliging the corporate world to make restitution for the wrongs of the apartheid era. This clearly divided South Africa into two political constituencies, namely, big business, which is still largely dominated by Whites, and the victims of apartheid, who are the vast majority of the Blacks. Interestingly, President Thabo Mbeki's response was two-pronged. On April 15, his government announced that it would make a one-time payment of reparations; it also made some symbolic gestures, such as announcing the foundation of a national memorial day and the construction of some monuments to liberation. But on the other hand, Mbeki rejected the TRC's calls for a corporate tax to fund wider-scale reparations, and criticised lawsuits that had been filed against multinational corporations based in the United States (see, Posel and Simpson 2002; Maluleke 1997c; Lipton 1999 *cf.* <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/>). His refusal to support the tax and lawsuits was seen as a victory for white South African business interests that still dominate the economy, hence the question was asked by the critics of the TRC, where there can be genuine reconciliation without mass reparations being made.

<sup>2</sup> Ghana's reconciliation commission is referred to as the National Reconciliation Commission, which was formed to examine the abuses that took place under the leadership of the President Jerry Rawlings (Sarpong 2004).



sittings on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006. In its two-year mandate, the commission was set to begin to investigate into crimes committed during the 24-year civil unrest (1979-2003). Consequently, the victims and alleged perpetrators of crimes were due to give evidence.<sup>3</sup> It has been recommended in Kenya, although it is not yet actualised.

With recent African history being littered with memories of tumult and war, such as the Rwandan genocide of 1994; civil war in Congo and the Democratic republic of Congo; civil war between Biafra and Nigeria in 1967; civil war in Chad in the 1980s; the Somalia crisis, the civil war in Sudan between the South and the North, and the prolonged war between Ethiopia and Eritrea that ended in 1991 but keeps flaring up, the rest of Africa may be forced to learn from South Africa's TRC (see, Nthamburi 1991, 1995). In turn, South Africa, a once scorned country, may now become the cornerstone of African theology,<sup>4</sup> from which an African theology of reconciliation may emerge.<sup>5</sup> Socio-political events tend to influence theological articulation (as seen in the European age of Enlightenment and in the African struggles for political independence), hence the South African TRC may have its own impact in the African theology of the twenty-first century.

In analysing the theology based on the paradigm of reconciliation, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, has highlighted the theme of forgiveness in his African studies. First, he firmly rejects Archbishop Desmond Tutu's model of truth as reconciliation and warns, "Saints are dangerous for your health" (*cf.* Knighton 2001:18; Soyinka 1999:23ff, 2000).<sup>6</sup> He wonders:

Would the Truth and Reconciliation ethic have been applicable, even thinkable in post-Acheampong Ghana? In post-Mobutu Zaire? Will it be adaptable in post-Abacha Nigeria? That circumstances may make such a proceeding expedient is not to be denied, but we must not shy away from some questions: would it be *just*?

<sup>3</sup> See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6036531.stm> 2006/10/10

<sup>4</sup> Tinyiko Maluleke contends that no sooner had "our TRC wrapped up its work than we realised that reconciliation in South Africa is incomplete and meaningless unless it encompasses not only Southern Africa but the rest of the African continent as well" (2005b: 110). He sees the TRC as having been one of South Africa's "most marketable and exportable products. We now look forward to hosting the world's biggest sporting event, namely the soccer world cup in 2010" (2005b: 119).

<sup>5</sup> Brigalia Bam, a South African theologian, sees the TRC and its reconciliation role as part of reconstruction (1995b: 45-52). While reconciliation and reconstruction in the South African case may have gone (or may be going) hand in hand, this study holds that this may not necessarily hold true for other African states or the world at large, for there are those who require reconstruction but not necessarily reconciliation or *vice versa*. In this regard, Nehemiah's reconstruction project did not put much emphasis on reconciliation with the former oppressors or with those Jews who did not go into exile.

<sup>6</sup> Wole Soyinka wonders: "How on earth does one reconcile reparations, or recompense, with reconciliation or remission of wrongs? Dare we presume that both, in their differing ways, are committed to ensuring the righting of wrongs and the triumph of justice?" (1999:23-24).

And, more important, how does it implicate both the present and the future? (1999:19).

According to Ben Knighton, Soyinka advocates “an equilibrium of reparation<sup>7</sup> and forgiveness theology” (*cf.* Knighton 2001:18). This means, “the offenders should make restitution to the oppressed community, who are given the choice to decide whether it makes a sufficient closure of the offence to let go the full demands of retributive justice” (2001:18). Accordingly, reconciliation can only come through behaviour-changing forgiveness, “but forgiveness is normally possible only after restitution”<sup>8</sup> (2001:18).

In Soyinka’s view, others cannot securely follow the path of South Africa, where no comprehensive reparation took place after apartheid.<sup>9</sup> Rather, he cites the case of the return of hundreds of stolen cattle among the pastoralist tribes of Sudan, where the Nuer and the Dinka<sup>10</sup> made reparation after eight years of conflict within the Sudan People’s

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<sup>7</sup> For the whole of Africa, Soyinka sees genuine reparation as that which must involve, “the acceptance by Western nations of a moral obligation to repatriate the post-colonial loot salted away in their vaults, in real estate, business holdings, and cover ventures by those African leaders who have chosen to follow the European precedent in the expropriation of a continent” (1989:86). This plunder could never have been possible, and would not have “reached such mammoth portions, without the collaboration of those same commercial centres of Europe and, lately, the wealthier Arab nations” (1989:87). In other words, “the wealth of the Mobutus, the Babangidas, the Abachas, but also the de Beers, Shell Surrogates Incorporated, etc. of the continent should be utilized as down payment, as evidence of internal moral cleansing, that would make any claims for worldwide reparations irreproachable” (1989:86).

<sup>8</sup> Soyinka cites the case of the year 1990 when he had been invited to Trinidad and Tobago’s 100 year celebration emancipation, signifying the formal end of slavery. During that period, a coup d’état was staged (1989:76). In the uncertain atmosphere that followed, some Trinidadians went on a looting spree (1989:77). Following three or four days of stalemate, the police got tired of the waiting game with the captors and their hostages. Taking advantage of the independent radio that had escaped seizure, the Chief of Police went on air and lectured the people of the Island of Trinidad on their “evil ways” (1989:79). In a no-nonsense speech, he reminded them that their looting was un-Trinidadian and warned that it would not be tolerated. Consequently, he gave them 48 hours to return the looted property. He said, “Just lay down your loot in front of your houses. We will come round and collect them, and return them to their owners... So return your loot, and let Trinidad return to herself” (1989:79). Soon afterward, Soyinka drove around the Island with a friend and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the returned goods laid out neatly in front of the houses. He saw, “Wheelbarrows were trundling through the streets in reverse directions, filled with clothing, toys, appliances, etc. The rum and beer were of course never recovered, but even the shopkeepers did not seriously expect to see such items restored to their shelves in undepleted forms” (1989:79). For Soyinka, restitution in Africa is possible, as was the case with the Island of Trinidad.

<sup>9</sup> Soyinka’s view is clearly seen in A. Leslie Milton remarks that, “...as recent criticisms of the lack of white participation in the “Truth and Reconciliation” proceedings have shown, there is at least a perception that among many in the white community, “reconciliation” means refusing to dig up the past. They are looking forward in hope to a new future in which the sins of the old dispensation are no longer spoken of. Put differently, for some, reconciliation has already been effected through the renunciation of minority rule. For others, reconciliation is still a future prospect, to be established through the establishment of social justice growing out of political freedom. For as long as the idea of “reconciliation” remains un-reconciled, the very concept will be a focus of division rather than unity” (1997:98).

<sup>10</sup> Both tribes are Nilotic by race.

Liberation Army.<sup>11</sup> Soyinka thus sees the South African method of reconciliation as merely a time bomb that can explode, as the root cause of the problem was not solved but shelved. This he likens to stock thieves not returning the cattle they had stolen. Soyinka's words appear to contradict the teachings of Jesus, expounded by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:9-21, "Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody...Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay' (*cf.* Deut. 32:35), says the Lord...overcome evil with good."

On the other hand, forgiveness in Africa is not just an individual affair. Rather, it is inherently "a communal quality that has bearing on individuals and groups" (Knighton 2001:25). The difficulty of "forgiveness without reparation" as a back up plan to a reconciliation paradigm in Africa is put under a litmus test in Knighton's research among the Northern-Western Kenya and North-Eastern Uganda communities. Writing about the various feuds among the communities who are pastoralists, Knighton goes on to say that:

On 24<sup>th</sup> January 2000, 700 Pian Karamojong (of North-East Uganda) with AK47 assault rifles raided the herds of 2, 000 Pokot in Kenya, killing 14 – 100 including women and children. The raiders made off with 1, 800 head of cattle, 5, 000 sheep and goats, as well as camels. The counter-raiding continued while I stayed with the Pian, who were selling the cattle in Namalu market in case state authorities should come looking for oxen branded by the Pokot. Ever since they became neighbours, raiding has gone on intermittently not only between Karamojong and Pokot, but also them and Jie, Dodos, Turkana, Samburu, Marakwet, Sapiny or Sabawoot, and Bukusu. In June 2000 within Karamoja, Dodos raided the Jie (2001:19).

The most worrying factor is that the perpetrators of such raids not only gain wealth in terms of cattle, but also experience a rise in social status within the community. As a result, they can marry more wives as young women who seek secure and well-provided homes find it acceptable to be taken as second or third wives (2001:19). From this, can the cattle rustlers be forgiven merely because of their confessions of guilt without making them to return the animals they have taken? How, in this case, can reconciliation in Africa be done? How can a theology of reconciliation be constructed, when society treats cattle-rustlers as heroes?

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<sup>11</sup> It is essential to acknowledge that both communities have united to form the Unity Government of Sudan after the late John Garang successfully signed a unity pact with the government of Sudan. Before then, the SPLA operated as rebels seeking autonomy from the government, which was predominantly made up of Muslim Northerners, who were mainly Arabs.

Wole Soyinka has suggested two main resources for reconciliation. The first is legal, where external arbitrators or adjudicators deal with issues of justice in order to heal the wounds as they seek to make peace. Surprisingly, his second resource is that of religious myth. Specifically Soyinka turns to his ancestral Yoruba pantheon and to their rituals and mythology. In this, the gods come down to the mortals to oversee the atonement festival, reminding them of the necessity for atonement and forgiveness.<sup>12</sup> He thus says:

Most African traditional societies have established modalities that guarantee the restoration of harmony after serious infractions – see, for instance, the banishment of Okonkwo after involuntary homicide in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. And, if we may be somewhat whimsical, Emperor Bokassa's bizarre return to Central African Republic, in full knowledge of what fate awaited him, argues strongly for some kind of supernatural intervention – the vengeful souls of the violated children dragging him back from the security of his French asylum? Certainly, a singularly atrocious act appeared to be denied closure until the perpetrator returned to expiate on the scene of the crime. Maybe, in the sphere of abominations, (African) nature does abhor a vacuum. Are we then perhaps moving too far ahead of our violators in adopting a structure of response that tasks us with a collective generosity of spirit, especially in the face of *ongoing* violations of body and spirit? (1999:13-14)

In Soyinka's rejection of the TRC of South Africa, he fails to take cognisance of the fact that human reparations have "seldom initiated reconciliation in any communal conflict in Africa or elsewhere" (Knighton 2001:31). Even the reparations paid by Germany after WW1 did not stop Adolf Hitler from forming his *Triple Entente* with Japan (Italy, later joined as allies) or the Berlin-Rome-Tokio Axis, which finally fought their rivals, namely, the British allied forces of Britain, Russia and the United States of America under the leadership of Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt during WW2 (Peacock 1987: 335). The demand for restitution only fostered resentment and hostility. As Martin Luther King Jnr once said:

Through violence you may murder a murderer but you cannot murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar but you cannot establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you cannot murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that (King quoted in Gathogo 2001:116).

Nevertheless, reconciliation, as a paradigm, is a crucial theme within the African context. Itumeleng Mosala builds on its importance when he states, "Black people (*in South Africa*) want to be reconciled with their history, their culture – past and present; they want to be reconciled with their religious institutions. This reconciliation is a divine requirement" (1987: 25). This outlook may equally serve for the vast majority of the people of Africa,

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<sup>12</sup> Wole Soyinka, "The Scars of Memory and the Scales of Justice," Olof Palme Memorial Lecture, Taylor Institution, University of Oxford, November 16, 2000.

who need theo-social reconciliation. That is, reconciliation with God, their fellow human beings and the environment.

In addition, Mosala strikes a working harmony with Robert Schreiter's perception of the signs of our times when he writes:

If much of nineteenth-and twentieth-century mission occurred in the framework of colonialism and was often characterized as bringing civilization, education, and health to benighted peoples, and if the next phase occurred in the postcolonial period of nation-building, where mission was expressed in terms of solidarity with struggling people (embodied in dialogue, liberation, and inculturation), then perhaps the dramatic events that frame the end of the century point in another direction. That direction is reconciliation (Schreiter quoted in Dedji 2003:6).

Schreiter goes on to say that, reconciliation acknowledges the enormity of the task created by "the consequences of history and the centrifugal powers of the present," and further that, "reconciliation as a form of mission acknowledges the centrality of truth in a world enmerished in lies," seeks safety and security as the basis for trust, "and works toward community in situations of displacement and isolation" (2003:9).

In Hegel's technical sense, the term "reconciliation" refers to both a process and a state. The process is that of overcoming alienation from the social world. The state is that sense of being at home in the social world, which is its result (Hardimon1994: 95). For Hegel, "reconciliation is the movement that makes estrangement (*Entfremdung*) disappear" (1994:95). Being at home in the social world (*Beisichsein, Zuhausesein*), is the linchpin of Hegel's social theory (1994:95). As Michael Hardmon comments, it is the concept out of which "the concepts of both reconciliation and alienation are construed" (1994:95). In Africa, various groups of people, at both the individual and the communal level, are not only alienated socially but also spiritually. This can be seen by the various conflicts that befall Africa (see, Nthamburi 1991; 1995). Such responses give credence to the paradigm of reconciliation.

According to Hegel, people are fully at home in their social world when:

- i) the social world is a home,
- ii) they grasp that the social world is a home,
- iii) they feel at home in the social world, and
- iv) they accept and affirm the social world (Hardimon 1994:95).

Seen from Hegel's perspective, and taking into consideration the above-cited incidences,

Africa is not yet “at home in the social world” (and hence reconciled). This revelation justifies the need for an emphasis on a theology of reconciliation in the twenty-first century.

During his lifetime, Erasmus manifested himself as a man of peace who pointed to the man of peace, i.e., Jesus Christ as his model (Dolan 1964). This was proved by both his lifestyle and his writings, living in such a way those around him wondered whether he was a Protestant or Roman Catholic. To avoid hostile confrontations, he opted to criticise indirectly or jokingly. Yet, Erasmus indicated that Christ, more than he, possessed truth as his weapon of reconciling.

Erasmus reflected on the transfiguration of Christ (Matt. 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36) to bring the awareness that the glory of Christ and blissful peace were shown magnificently in the company of the selected three apostles. In this extraordinary blissful experience, the Apostle Peter desired to have permanent “nests” on the mount. A nest, in Erasmus’s elaboration “is that in which man’s [*sic*] desire is satisfied, in which he tranquilly nourishes his [*sic*] chicks, that is, his [*sic*] desires and wants” (Dolan 1964:355). He understood Christ as truth personified. This is why, for him, Christ is the worm of peace (read, reconciliation) since truth implies peace and, consequently, as Erasmus expounds, our kind of peace should be re-made to fit Christ’s model (1964:357).

Reconciliation as a Christological paradigm finds valuable resource in Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation, which the Christian Testament shows continues even after his death (2 Cor. 5:19-20, *cf.* Milton 1997:97ff). Hence, after his resurrection, the young man, who the women discovered in the tomb early Easter morning says, “Go tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just, as he told you” (Mark 16:7). These are the disciples who deserted him and fled in Gethsemane. This is Peter who three times denied knowing Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). As an ideal reconciler, Jesus continues to reconcile others towards God. Indeed, his resurrection makes the scope of his reconciliation universal. Those who are members of his body are called to participate in his life as he continues to participate in ours, hence his assurance: “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

As a reconciler, Christ plays the role of an African elder who, as peace lovers and initiators, reconcile people in their differences and disputes (Wachege 1992:32). The main role of Elders in the community is to bring calmness, restore peace and harmony. Jesus as the ideal elder however, surpasses their wisdom and skills of managing the affairs of the nation; hence the need to model our reconciliatory skills from him.

Christ emerges in the gospel accounts as a reconciler who is an excellent counsellor, worthy of being imitated. People with different personal problems approach him for help and consult his advice. Some were prominent people such as Nicodemus (John 3). Christ counsels younger people such as Mary and Martha (John 11). This model will no doubt continue to inform the African theology of the twenty-first century and beyond. Christ did not turn away those who came for help, be it for healing or for theo-doctrinal questions like, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Matt. 22:17). He listened to their problems and responded accordingly. In most cases Christ helped them to seek their own solutions to their problems by posing another question (Matt. 22:15-22). This was in order to inspire the counselee to build confidence in him or herself and thereby overcome whatever sort of stress or depression that they suffered. It was a way of providing fishing skills rather than simply giving a hungry person fish.<sup>13</sup> As a reconciler, Christ gives African Christianity an exemplary model for others to draw lessons from.

The strength of reconciliation, as a paradigm, is further seen in Robert Schreiter's words when he says that it "acknowledges the enormity of the task created by the consequences of history and the centrifugal powers of the present" (quoted in Dedji 2003:9). He further states that, "reconciliation as a form of mission acknowledges the centrality of truth in a world enmeshed in lies, seeks safety and security as the basis for trust, and works toward community in situations of displacement and isolation" (2003:9).

As a paradigm for theological reflection in Africa, reconciliation has several faults. First, it assumes that every African predicament deserves a pastoral solution, yet some are political, historical, foreign induced, racial, social or economic. Second, it fails to acknowledge the diversity and the homogeneity of the African people. That is, some are Christians, while others are Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of African

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<sup>13</sup> This is attributed to the popular saying by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, "If you find a hungry person, don't just give him fish, show him or her how to fish."

Traditional Religion. Third, it also fails to acknowledge other socio-cultural diversities<sup>14</sup> that have shaped, and are reshaping the Africa of the twenty-first century. Fourth, being viewed as part of a reconstruction paradigm has weakened the paradigm of reconciliation, yet both paradigms are different, as there can be reconstruction without reconciliation or conversely, reconciliation without reconstruction. The fact that the two paradigms are in constant dialogue, in some areas such as the South African case after apartheid, makes them to be seen, wrongly, as synonymous. From this perspective, it would appear that a more “secular-based” paradigm would best inform African theology of the twenty-first century.

### **7.2. A dialogue with the market-theology paradigm**

The “market-theology paradigm” is an inclusive paradigm whose scope goes beyond mere rural concerns. Building on Jesus’ earthly life, we realise that he moved to the market places, be they rural or urban markets and articulated a theology that took care of everyone, be they rich or poor (see, Matt. 21:12). As Jesus so aptly told the vast audiences that came to listen to him, “seek first the kingdom and its righteousness, and all those things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33). As a market theologian, Jesus becomes an evangelist when he invites his audience to accept salvation by saying:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

This appealing message of invitation to enjoy the benefits of being in the kingdom is very relevant to African Christianity as it wrestles with the burdens of Africa such as moral decadence, HIV/AIDS, promiscuity, tribal hatred, political tensions, hunger, poverty, disease and general permissiveness especially among its teenagers and young people. It is a message of hope and comfort to know that there is One who cares and understands fully Africa’s circumstances (see, Jer. 29:11).

In defining a market, as a place where people from all walks of life converge, it is essential to acknowledge that it can be cosmopolitan, multi-national, multi-ethnic and an international place to meet. It is also a “theatre of the poor, those of low or no income as opposed to the metropolis” (Banana 1991:68). Whilst the market place is predominantly

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<sup>14</sup> Other diversities include race, poverty, and education as factors among many others.



patronised by low-income people, this does not preclude a sprinkling of all other social groups.<sup>15</sup>

Utilising the Swahili word *Soko*, Samuel Kobia explains the market place as:

Not a building, but a place full of people drawn together by the unifying force of Christ. It is a place in which life abounds in plenty and people are happy not because of what they have but because of what they give and receive as a community (2003:193).

Based on this meaning of the “market,” we can rightly say that Jesus inspires us to focus on a “market theology paradigm,” for he was a market theologian, both literally and metaphorically. As a market is a public place, we find that Jesus was a public person and not an ivory tower researcher in a seminary or other institute of learning. As the Messiah, he taught in such a way that his message contained normative signals both to the church and the society, for the restoration of humanity and the world (Banana 1991:69). His messages addressed the concerns of the general public. They were characterised by his vehement attack on social injustices, social and moral decadence, religious orthodoxy and the general corruption of the religious leaders of the day like Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes (*cf.* Matt. 23). He targeted everyone in the “market,” as the ongoing discussion shows, and in turn, every one had something to learn.

Christ’s success as a market-theologian is evident in the accusations he received from the Jews, “We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying he himself is Christ the King” (Luke 23:2). His success can also be seen in the continuation of his ministry. In the early church as Luke tells us in the book of Acts where the apostles became market theologians, rather than armchair researchers on socio-religious matters, they followed in the footsteps of their master. As a “master” market theologian, Christ taught his disciples, and to a large extent his entire followers of all ages, to draw their images as he did, from folklore, wisdom and popular traditions. Hence, we have the example of the parables which refer to agricultural activities (*cf.* Luke 8, the parable of the sower). As one who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), Jesus knew that the lost were not to be found in the synagogues, although ironically there were many there, but in the countryside and the market places!

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<sup>15</sup> This is my observation in both East Africa and South Africa

The case for a market-theology paradigm, as a new theological framework for Africa of the twenty-first century, is further strengthened in the work of Anthony Balcomb (1993:221) who notes that prophetic theology (read, theology of liberation) has largely been restricted to the community of trained theologians who largely provide direction to the vast majority of adherents of the Christian faith. This implies that an all-inclusive theological paradigm, where all have an equal chance of providing theological direction, is a necessity for the Africa of the twenty-first century. Market-theology appears to be such a paradigm that fills the gap! Consequently, the market-theology paradigm differs from that of prophetic theology in that it is premised on the contention that the masses in their respective “market places” can also provide theological direction. This can be done through their oral theologies, sometimes provided in creative and composed gospel music, despite the danger of being dismissed by the “trained” theologians as heretical.

Another distinctive strength of the market-theology paradigm is that it agrees with the Christian doctrine of the priesthood of all believers where every believer is elevated to the status of a priest. Any believer can therefore intercede for himself or herself or for the entire nation. James (5:13-20) tells the market dwellers – the Christians in general – to pray over one another when in trouble, without necessarily waiting for a priest. Similarly, the Apostle Paul tells the Colossians, whom he served as their pastor, to reverse their ministerial paradigm by praying for him (and others) while he was incarcerated in a Roman gaol, “So that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should” (Col. 4:2-6). The market-theology paradigm, thus acknowledges that Africa (and the rest of the majority-world) is like a market place where theology ought to be lived on a day-to-day basis rather than being done within the universities and seminaries as mere academic work.

Kobia builds on the importance of market-theology paradigm when he states:

*Sokoni* (a Kiswahili word which means “at the market place”) is a real event in the real lives of real people called into critical dialogue with life itself. And as a market it is not just a space filled with goods and enterprises. *Sokoni* is also a sanctuary, a place where history is constantly being made. It has become for us the rebirth and renewal of the human spirit (2003:193).

He goes on to say:

Doing theology in the market place of life and in the presence of the community encourages one to bridge the gap between reflection and action. The world is full of markets, and so *Sokoni* can be found everywhere; therefore, theology can be

done everywhere and at all times! (2003:193).

Africa will need to accept the market-theology paradigm or Christianity will die a painful death for being irrelevant to the masses, as this study has striven to show. An explanation on this: In Britain, it is a taboo to talk about the Gospel in the public square (Holloway 1989:37). This has weakened the church so much, that in some centres, only small groups attend Sunday worship services. Some have even closed their doors completely (see Holloway 1989). The fact that Christian faith, in Britain, does not get a public reference and is exclusively private therefore goes against the market-theology paradigm as Jesus set for us to draw some relevant lessons from. In such a situation, how can the church grow? Where will the custodians of the message of Christ get the opportunity to take the message of "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...?" (Matt. 11:28-30).

The market-theology paradigm, in this study, seeks to offer a suggestion by insisting that the Christian gospel has to be shared in season and out of season (2 Tim. 4:2), in public and in private; and to people of all walks of life who live in this great market called Africa! In this way, the church will grow, as even the published works by the so-called "fireside chair theologians" will have others read their works on Christianity in Africa, and not be discarded by a rising secularism.

The problem with the market-theology paradigm however, is that it is not easy to assess its parameters. Thus the question must be asked, are the Africans in the Diaspora covered in this paradigm? If the paradigm targets the majority-world, how can it relate to the rest of the industrialised world? How will it connect us to the rest of the world considering that African theology is done within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, from which the universal church traces its background since the birth of Christ? Should we treat the whole world as a "market place" for theology and ignore the contextual nature of Christian theology? These questions reveal the need for the explication of other paradigms in an endeavour to do get African theology out of its paradigmatic wilderness.

### 7.3. A dialogue with the charismatic paradigm

Jesus is the most charismatic leader who ever lived in history.<sup>16</sup> Although he had incomparable spiritual gifts (*charis*), he chose twelve disciples to bring their gifts as well, thereby showing the need of placing value on each other's gifts (Luke 5:1-11, Mark 1:14-20, Matt. 4:18-22, John 1:35-51). The fact that these disciples came from different backgrounds means that they had each possessed different gifts that needed to be shared corporately.<sup>17</sup>

The charismatic stature of Jesus was such that he commanded reverence from the multitude that followed him and the envy of the Jewish elite who were overshadowed by his power (Mugambi 1998:150). He taught as one who had authority, not as the Scribes and Pharisees (Mark 1:21-22). Using his charismatic authority, he commanded even the unclean spirits, and they obeyed him (Mark 1:27). He commanded the winds and the water, and they obeyed him (Luke 8:25). He withstood the devil's schemes (Luke 4:1-29). He healed the sick (Luke 4:38-44), fed the hungry (Luke 9:10-17), comforted the afflicted (Luke 4:18-20), and restored hope to the desperate (Matt. 9:35-38), as one who had compassion for the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. When he sent the disciples out, he bestowed on them the charisma to go out and heal, teach, preach and restore hope (Matt. 28:18-20). They were, thus, able to offer comfort, counsel, teach, and preach to the people.

From the Charismatic paradigm, African Christianity will learn to accommodate various gifts in the church without its leaders feeling intimidated by those who excel over them. The Apostle Paul contends that if these gifts are well harnessed, they can build the church (1 Cor. 12-14, Eph. 4:10-11), "until we all reach unity in the knowledge of Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). In view of this, the African church of the twenty-first century will no doubt learn the need to value interdependence from this charismatic paradigm. This theme of interdependence is well developed by the Apostle Paul when he says that:

The body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, 'because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body'; it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body...If the whole body were an eye where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact

<sup>16</sup> This view is informed by the fact that Jesus was truly man and truly God, and that he conducted his discourses with great alacrity.

<sup>17</sup> The synoptic Gospels show that they had different backgrounds. This enriched their respective ministries.

God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

Aristotle also recognised the need for interdependence when he defined a human being as a political animal, a creature who is ordained by his nature to live in a *polis* (city), or put simply, within society (Wanjohi 1997:113). In agreeing with Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas can state that:

Man [*sic*] is a social animal, having many wants he cannot supply for himself. He is born into a group by nature. By living with others, he is helped to the good life. First, as regards necessities without which life cannot be lived, his parents support him on for his birth, feeding, and upbringing. Each member of the family helps the other. Secondly, as regards the conveniences without which life cannot be lived well, he is helped by the civil group, both for material benefit, for the state provides public services beyond the means of one household, and for moral advantage, thus public authority can check young criminals when paternal warnings go unheeded (Aquinas 1967:372f; Wanjohi 1997:113).

What does this signify for African Christianity? As Mugambi (1998:150) says, there has been a propensity in some strands of African Christianity to put a ceiling on charismata for only preaching and conversion. Yet as we have already noted, the Apostle Paul's interpretation of charismatic power shows that all skills arise from God's grace and should be regarded as gifts of the Holy Spirit. According to this interpretation, we are challenged to take our work professions seriously, as our service to God and humanity. These professions may vary from being engineers, architects, political scientists, computer scientists, environmental scientists, medical doctors, teachers, artisans, carpenters, lawyers, artists, archivists, and so on. It is a great challenge for the African church of the twenty-first century to become the beacon that maps the direction for the rest of society by making productive use of the many talents that reside in the pews and seats of individual churches every week.

The defects in the charismatic paradigm can be seen in the fact that it mainly focuses on individual gifts. This raises the question as to non-professionals or people whose charisma is not well developed? Sadly, it might lead us into the temptation of discriminating against those whose charisma is found wanting? If so, it would be a contradiction of the Christian gospel of love that Christ so unselfishly inaugurated? In any case, the so-called unskilled rural dwellers constitute the central part of the ministry that Christ came to undertake.

Having seen the paradigmatic wilderness that Africa is sailing through, one wonder:

Wouldn't it be appropriate to rethink the paradigm of inculturation in the light of the changing theo-social circumstances? And since inculturation as a "minor" paradigm has since the 1960s taken a back seat against that of the liberation paradigm, which has been the "dominant" paradigm, wouldn't the twenty-first century be the ideal time when inculturation, as a paradigm, now becomes the *dominant* paradigm while liberation becomes a *minor* paradigm or a back-up paradigm to inculturation? This leads us to address inculturation as a paradigm in African Christian theology. This we now turn.

#### 7.4. A dialogue with the inculturation paradigm

The inculturation paradigm has as the main text Matthew 5:1-20, where Jesus says:

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

For those biblical exegetes who have tried to interpret the "law" as the first five books of Moses (the Pentateuch, or *Torah*) or the entire Hebrew bible, in other interpretations, this study goes further and suggests that "law" does not necessarily mean the inscripturated law. It can also mean the law of the people, namely their cultural heritage. This emphasis is strengthened by the Psalmist's (24:1) contention that "the earth is the Lord's and everything there is in it," including of course the law of the African people, namely, their cultural heritage.

David Bosch (1991: 447) traces the origin of inculturation when he says that Pierre Charles introduced the concept of "enculturation" of cultural anthropology into missiology. It was J. Masson who first coined the phrase *Catholicisme inculturé* ("inculturated Catholicism") in 1962. Subsequently, it gained currency among the Jesuits, in the form of "inculturation." Afterwards, in 1977, P. Arrupe, the Jesuits superior-general, introduced the term to the Synod of the Roman Catholic Bishops. By so doing, he began the process that gave it the universal currency that it enjoys today. As time went by, it became widely accepted in Protestant circles as well.

As implied above, the term and the concept of inculturation clearly gained currency in the 1970's, largely because of the efforts of African bishops and theologians who saw it "as an

ally against the consequence of cultural alienation and a guarantee of a genuinely African Christianity” (Shorter 1988: xi). Although relatively new in Africa, inculturation is an old process in the history of Christianity in which African Christianity is a legitimate heir. However, it is an inheritance that was lethargic and uneventful until the twentieth century, when the African Roman Catholic Bishops and theologians popularised it as a significant theological category. It finds its terminological parallel, among the protestant theologians, in words such as indigenisation<sup>18</sup> and Africanisation.<sup>19</sup>

To an extent, however, Oliver Alozie Onwubiko appears to differ with Bosch’s survey on the origin of inculturation. He says:

Not long ago research on the term *inculturation* traced its origin to a 1962 article attributed to a Belgian author who talked of *une christianisme inculturé* (cf. Waliggo, J. M. et al.; *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, 1986, P. 32). But today scholars identify its origin with a 1959 article in which inculturation appeared in a missiological sense. It appeared in the context of “*I*” *initiation valuer permanente en vue de l’inculturation.*” The article, *Mission et culture non-chrétiennes*, was concerned more with the mission of Christianity to non-Christian religions and cultures. Both of these articles seem to pay more attention to the adjustment of non-Christian cultures and religions, than of Christianity, in inculturation (2001:385).

As a paradigm, inculturation is set on the premise that the Christian faith must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each human culture. It recognises that a plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies (Bosch 1991:452). Seen in this light, and considering that culture encompasses the entire life of a person, inculturation connotes the idea of social reconstruction.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, it received positive recognition by the resolutions of the consultation on Gospel and culture, which was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation and held in 1978 in Willowbank, Bermuda, when the Willowbank Report opted for the “dynamic equivalence” paradigm of inculturation. This widely acclaimed consultation thus sets inculturation, as a paradigm, following in the steps of the pioneering work done by Eugene Nida and later by Charles Kraft. As Bosch (1991:453) notes, “dynamic equivalence,” as a variation of the previous Eurocentric “translation approach” – which was knowingly ethnocentric – is, however,

<sup>18</sup> Alward Shorter is credited with popularising inculturation in the Roman Catholic Church, while Bolaji Idowu is associated with popularising indigenisation among the Protestant Churches.

<sup>19</sup> This study differs with Mugambi’s view on the two concepts of “inculturation” and “indigenisation.” For him, these are two separate concepts with different meanings (see, 1995:67f). In this study, inculturation has been treated similar to that coined in Roman Catholic circles, while indigenisation as coined and popularised by the likes of Bolaji Idowu (1965) within Protestant circles. This study treats them as synonymous, despite Roman Catholics having popularised inculturation more than how the Protestants popularised indigenisation.

<sup>20</sup> Mugambi (1996:32) cites the six pillars of culture as being politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion.

only one of the several current inculturation patterns. Others include the anthropological, praxis, synthetic and semiotic models. In view of this, these “inculturation patterns,” as noted above, can also be seen as “back-up” models to the inculturation paradigm.

Mugambi does not however treat inculturation as a distinct paradigm from liberation. First, he strictly attributes it to the Roman Catholic Church. He says that as a term, it was “recently coined by Catholic theologians to explain the process by which the Catholic Church becomes rooted in every culture, without destroying Catholic ecclesiastical identity, tradition and history” (1995:8). He goes on to say that:

The semantic inspiration of inculturation is *incarnation*. In theological terms, incarnation is the manifestation of the divine in human corporeality. God becomes manifest in Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, inculturation is the manifestation of the church in the various cultures where it has been introduced and established (1995:8).

By strictly attributing inculturation to the Roman Catholic Church of today, Mugambi fails to acknowledge its present status in the current theological discourses in Africa, as an acceptable theological term for both Protestants and Roman Catholics. The issue of where it originated however need not hold African theology at random.

Our position in this study is strengthened by Dedji’s contention that inculturation has “become the common expression among African Catholics and Protestants, as well as among French – and English – speaking theologians to pursue the phenomenon of Africanisation” (2003:31). In acknowledging that indigenisation was previously associated with the Protestants while inculturation has been formerly associated with Roman Catholics, he admits that both expressions are synonymous to the Africanisation of the Gospel (2003:31).<sup>21</sup> This fact clearly points to the indispensability of inculturation, as one of the paradigms in African theology.

Conversely, Mugambi differs with Charles Nyamiti, a Tanzanian, and a pioneer of African Catholic theology, who rightly categorises African Christologies into two types, namely Christologies of liberation and Christologies of inculturation (Nyamiti 1989:17-39). Mugambi argues that Nyamiti’s analysis, which distinguishes between liberation and

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<sup>21</sup> Valentin Dedji goes on to say that, “while the inculturationists are mainly from Anglophone Africa, the liberationists are mainly from francophone Africa” (2003:32). While we may not completely agree with this view, it nevertheless points to the fact that inculturation and liberation are two important poles of African Christianity.



inculturation as two poles of African Christian theology, is too sharp because “the African theologians concentrating on inculturation are also concerned with liberation, and conversely, those concentrating on liberation are also concerned with inculturation” (Mugambi 1995:9).

The findings of this study suggests that Mugambi’s argument is not convincing enough, as it shouldn’t be a surprise for inculturationist to compare notes with liberationists and *vice versa*. For paradigms have common denominators and common points of departure. In any case, with liberation having been the “dominant” paradigm since the 1960s, its dialogue with other “minor” paradigms, such as inculturation, was a matter of course. In reviewing Mugambi’s book, *From Liberation to Reconstruction* (1995), Maluleke contends that the shape of the reconstruction paradigm and its potential for effectively replacing the inculturation-liberation paradigms remains unclear (1996:473). This ambiguity is brought about by Mugambi’s failure to draw an adequate distinction between inculturation and liberation, as separate paradigms whose theology is nevertheless done within the same geographical region.

Seen in this light, it appears to the researcher, that Mugambi wants to tell us that in every geographical region there must be one paradigm at a time. This would therefore invite us to close our eyes to other “minor” paradigms that exist in Africa and consequently see only the most dominant one. The other alternative is to force all paradigms into the dominant one, in a forced marriage of convenience, thereby providing inconvenient and ambiguous theological position(s). As Maluleke has remarked:

The so-called African theology of liberation was only one current in African theology. There were others. There was the so-called “inculturation” current, whose precursors and inspiration were the likes of Placide Tempels’ *La Philosophie Bantoe* (first published in 1945) Griaule’s *Dieu d’eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemméli* as well as the kinds of early socio-anthropological studies of African religions done by Evans-Pritchard and others. Indeed, the first generation of self-conscious and written African theology during the twentieth century was deeply influenced by these works (2000b: 24).

Thus, by forcefully grouping liberation and inculturation together, Mugambi appears to avoid the difficulty of treating them as separate theological entities in African theology. His failure to draw a distinction between inculturation and liberation as separate paradigms also implies that he does not see other paradigms in African theology besides liberation and reconstruction (and where the former becomes obsolete). This is inaccurate

in as far as we shall take Mbiti's contention that in Africa, we have three main types of theologies (1986:46). That is, symbolic (art forms), written (academic) and oral (grassroots). Viewed in this light, there are written (academic) paradigms such as liberation, inculturation and reconstruction among others.<sup>22</sup> There are symbolic (art forms) paradigms that are expressed in drama, dance, art and so forth. Similarly, there are oral (grassroots) paradigms that are expressed in the creativity of the predominantly rural people of Africa through Christian gospel music as contained on radio cassettes, video and DVD Christian gospel music recordings,<sup>23</sup> and sacred songs in African melodies as sang in our modern churches and socio-religious gatherings (such as at burials, demonstrations) and some elements of liturgical celebrations. The challenge, thus, is to bring the unwritten and the symbolic paradigms to the foreground in a formal way and putting them on par with the above paradigms. Perhaps, further research on this topic ought to be considered.

In comparing various terminologies such as Africanisation, adaptation, accommodation, contextualization, indigenisation, acculturation and inculturation, Oliver Onwubiko explains that the latter is still the better term for both Protestants and the Catholics. He says:

... adaptation gives the impression of an extrinsic activity, accommodation gives the impression of syncretism, contextualization gives the impression of the gospel preached and moderated within and by a given context. Indigenisation is often associated with nativism and the process of the domestication of the Gospel. It is favoured by Protestant missionaries who advocate the "three-self" theory in order to establish "indigenous churches" that are "self-governing," "self-supporting," and "self-propagating," in a way that rejects outside influence.<sup>24</sup> Acculturation correctly gives the impression of the replacement of foreign cultural elements with native ones, but some missionaries replace one European cultural element with another (their own). Acculturation, unfortunately, is a colonially-determined term which gives anthropologists an opportunity to get to the root of a culture often to destroy and replace it with their own. Inculturation, understood as a form of evangelisation of peoples and cultures, expresses an aspect of the process of the influence of the

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<sup>22</sup> Those roughly corresponding to Mbiti's analysis are Fr. Charles Nyamiti's three "schools" of African theology: the speculative school (systematic and philosophical), the socio-biblical school (dealing with sociological and ethnological questions) and the reactionary school (e.g., the South African type of Black theology) (Nyamiti 1973:1). Obviously, the emphasis seems to be on the "written theology" (Mbiti), or the "speculative school" (Nyamiti), as Africans are busily engaged in publishing articles and books on African theology. For further details see bibliography.

<sup>23</sup> The provision of Gospel music being contained in video cassettes is indeed anew development – especially in the Africa of the twenty-first century – as my participatory observation has showed.

<sup>24</sup> An example is seen in as early as 1861 when Henry Venn advanced the "three-self" theory in order to stop the Anglican Church from further financial burdens in the evangelization of the vast continent of Africa. Cf. E. A. Ayandele 1966. *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria* (London: Longman) p. 180-181. The study however does not treat his view, on indigenisation as being propelled solely by the early European protestant missionaries (like Venn) as the authentic one, as African theologians such as Bolaji Idowu have also popularized it.

gospel preached to peoples. It is in this regard that inculturation is a theological term and must be theologically understood, and pastorally applied (2001:387).

The strength of inculturation, as a Christological paradigm, is that it consciously follows the model of the incarnation, hence the Willowbank Report refers specifically to John 17:18, 20:21 and Philippians 2:7 (Stott and Coote 1980:323). This incarnational dimension of the “gospel being ‘en-fleshed,’ ‘em-bodied’ in a people and its culture” is not so much about church being expanded, but of the “church being born anew in each new context and culture” (Bosch 1991:454).

Inculturation suggests a double movement. That is, there is inculturation of Christianity and Christianisation of culture. By so doing, the Gospel remains Good News while at the same time it becomes a cultural phenomenon (see Geffré 1982:482), as it takes into account the implication of systems that are already present in the context (Schreiter 1985:12f). As a paradigm, inculturation therefore offers the cultures “the knowledge of divine mystery” on one hand and on the other; it helps them “to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought” (Bosch 1991:454).

As Pedro Arrupe notes, inculturation’s concern is to become “a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’” (quoted in Shorter 1988:11). From this understanding we can deduce that the focus, then, is on the new creation. This new creation is the synthesis that comes as a result of the interface between the Gospel and culture, leading to the transformation of the old. This view however fails to acknowledge the limitations of inculturation, as inculturation does not mean that culture is destroyed and something new built on its ruins. In any case, the philosophy that holds that a new sweeping broom should always radically replace the old one as long as it pleases people can, at times, become catastrophic to the same society that it seeks to serve.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Experience has pointed out the danger of radical change among people. For example the change from civilian rule to military rule in Uganda after the 1971 coup brought untold misery to the country, which was once considered the pearl of Africa. The radical shift from single party political dictatorship to multiparty democracy in post-Cold War Africa in my opinion has brought confusion, as people struggle with too much freedom until that time unknown. If these gains are not well harnessed, they can result in anarchy. Kenya, in my view, has clearly demonstrated this danger, as too much freedom has unfortunately led to the promotion of tribalism.

Bosch points to the danger in the North Atlantic where inculturation process has been so “successful” that Christianity has become “nothing but the religious dimension of culture – listening to the church, society hears only the sound of its own music” (1991:455). Sadly, the Western world has “often domesticated the gospel in its own culture while making it unnecessarily foreign to other cultures” (1991:455). While in the real sense, the Christian gospel is foreign to every culture, it is however important to establish whether the tension, as experienced between the African Christians and the missionaries in the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century, emanated from the Christian gospel itself or from the way the Christian gospel was presented. Seen in this light, any genuine inculturation ought to view the Christian gospel as the liberator of culture, while at the same time be conscious of the fact that it has the potential of imprisoning culture (*cf.* Walls 1982:99). Thus adherence to this viewpoint could have avoided the unnecessary “conflicts” between the missionaries and the African Christians, as noted above.

In view of the fact that culture (and inculturation) is an all-embracing reality and in considering that Mugambi’s theology of reconstruction is an all-inclusive theology – as we noted in chapter five, we realise therefore that inculturation, as a paradigm, cannot be rendered obsolete when considering a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction - especially when we recognize that it (inculturation) is an African initiative that is aimed at a local renewal of Christianity. If anything, a genuine attempt at reconstructing Christianity in Africa needs inculturation. Seen from this perspective, the whole idea of inculturating the Christian gospel in our contexts and situations is clearly a means of doing a theology of reconstruction. Interestingly, and despite having a liberating role, it also has a reconstructive role. This however hardens our argument, for where do we put inculturation, as a paradigm, in the new dispensation? Could it be the all-inclusive paradigm that embraces and informs other paradigms in African theology? How effective would it be when handling non-cultural issues? Are there issues that are outside culture? Is inculturation the only task of theology in Africa today? If inculturation remains a tentative and a continuing process, can there be any paradigm that can effectively replace it? These questions establish the difficulty of instituting a single dominant theological paradigm that empirically provides an authentic framework of doing theology in the African Christianity of the twenty-first century.

## 7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have dialogued with various Christological paradigms, such as reconciliation, market-theology, and charismatic paradigms. This study has considered it necessary to evaluate them alongside the more “common” paradigms of liberation and reconstruction. By so doing, the study has considered the pivotal role that Christology plays in any Christian theology today. It is set on the premise that Christological paradigms are relevant and appealing to African Christianity. As with Christ, whose functionalities in Africa include ancestor-hood, liberator, reconstructor, host and guest, fatherhood, motherhood, chief-hood and kingship among others, Christological paradigms would no doubt reach the targeted audience.

Building on the premise that reconciliation, market-theology, inculturation, charismatic, liberation and other possible paradigms not discussed here,<sup>26</sup> are deemed “minor” paradigms as opposed to reconstruction which the study considers to be a “dominant” paradigm in the African theology of the twenty-first century, the contention is strengthened by Mbiti’s explanation of the African indigenous view of the universe (1975b: 34-35), when he writes:

*Events (read shifts) come and go in the form of minor and major (read dominant) rhythms. The minor rhythms are found in the lives of the living things of this earth (such as men, animals and plants), in their birth, growth, procreation and death. These rhythms are thought to occur in the lives of everybody and everything that has physical life. The major rhythms of time are events like day and night, the months (reckoned on the basis of the phases of the moon), the seasons of rain and of dry weather, and the events of nature which come and go at greater intervals (such as the flowering of certain plants, the migration of certain birds and insects, famines, and the movement of certain heavenly bodies). All these rhythms (read paradigm shifts) of time suggest that the universe will never come to a halt, whatever changes there may be (1975b: 34-35).*

The strength of this chapter, as a major treatise, in this study, is seen in Bosch’s insistence that people are habitually and simultaneously dyed-in-the-wool to more than one paradigm. He therefore builds on his contention that old paradigms rarely die completely when he says:

Martin Luther, whose break with the preceding paradigm was exceptionally radical, in many respects still harboured important elements of the paradigm he had abandoned. The same was true of Karl Barth. Likewise, people who, by and large, still operate within the old paradigm may already embody significant elements of

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<sup>26</sup> The topic of Christological paradigms cannot be exhausted given the limitations of space and time. This study has only explored the most “relevant” paradigms in its bid to locate a way forward with regard to paradigmatic shifts in African theology. Other Christological paradigms may include rural-ministry, celebration, and family paradigms.

the new. An excellent example of this was Luther's contemporary, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), who remained within the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm yet at the same time heralded a new era (1991; 2003:186).

Edward Schillebeeckx confirms this when he notes:

An analysis of the various – Synoptic, Pauline, Johannine, Petrine, Asia Minor, etc. – traditions in the New Testament makes it clear that, even within what is globally one and the same, albeit varied, conjunctural-cultural period, Christians express their faith within divergent paradigms and models. Striving for one and the same paradigm (in a kind of ideal 'theological consensus') would lead to an impoverishment of the gospel's very message, too rich to be contained within one paradigm. 'Do not extinguish the Spirit!' (1989:316).

In analysing this chapter, we realise that Africa needs various paradigms in view of the fact that old paradigms "still lives on in parts" of the new (Bosch 1991; 2003:186) and that "old paradigms seldom disappear completely" (1991; 2003:186). Since the various paradigms "are not opposed to each other, instead they are complementary" (Ezeh 2003: 135), it is therefore imperative to explore them thoroughly. In particular, we realise that inculturation, as a paradigm, cannot be totally abandoned within African theology, as it is one of the goals of theologising in the African context. In his post-liberation works, Mugambi contends that in reconstructing African Christianity, the twenty-first century will have to stabilize culturally by manifesting a characteristically African outlook towards ritual, symbols, vestments, music, liturgy, architecture, metaphors and theological emphasis (1995:43). These concerns are clearly a continuation of what African theology has been trying to do from the 1960s. This clearly shows that even with Mugambi's idea of paradigm shifts, the idea of inculturation (and the other paradigms as noted above) will not fade into obscurity with the coming of reconstruction as the *new* and dominant paradigm.

New paradigms therefore do not render old paradigms obsolete, as the people in the particular society remain the same. New paradigms rather act as a continuity of what is already in existence. Although Maluleke errs by implying that the idea of a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, is suspicious and inauthentic and thereby resisting "home-grown black and African theologies" (1994:246-7),<sup>27</sup> he is nevertheless correct in his observation that paradigm shifts are a continuity from one older paradigm to the new

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<sup>27</sup> That some proponents of a theology of reconstruction did resist home-grown theologies does not mean that they can never be right at any one time, for after all, to be human is to err! Hence, those who are making mistakes today can be theologically accurate tomorrow!! Hence, there is a need to listen to every contributor in African theology in post-Cold War Africa. Could it be that Saul can turn out to be Paul and thus be a blessing to the articulation of post-Cold War African theology?

(whether we are conscious of it or not), thus reinforcing the view that some elements of the old paradigm will have to remain in the new. Building on this thought Maluleke can write:

Many of the basic assumptions of cold-war African theology continue to be basic to the overwhelming majority of the new proposals for African theologising – admittedly to various degrees. It is important that we recognise that post-cold war African theologies are continuous with previous African theologies even if and when their proponents espouse and proclaim a radical discontinuity. (*Thus*) African theology cannot and will not abdicate the gains made – and ambiguities inherited – during the past fifty odd years. (*In any case*), a careful reading of Villa-Vicencio reveals that although he genuinely seeks to propose a new metaphor for theology and a slightly different orientation, he is methodically still beholden to the liberation paradigm. Ironically, Mugambi’s “take” on reconstruction is methodically also still largely beholden to the inculturation paradigm. Robin Petersen’s otherwise ground-breaking and “different” study of AICs turns out to be largely a pursuit of such familiar categories of classical ecumenical theology as oppression/ domination, protest/resistance and *kairos*. In fact, Petersen himself admits that his study is merely a “reconstruction within the prophetic theology paradigm itself.” in many ways the works of Kwame Bediako and Lamin Sanneh offer a sophisticated continuation of certain discourses within West- (and East-?) African inculturation theology (2000b: 28).

In view of this and with regard to Mugambi’s paradigm of reconstruction, a comparative analysis of the methodology of doing theology of reconstruction and of Christological paradigms will show that the reconstruction approach is all-inclusive and appears to embrace all other paradigms mentioned here.

As a paradigm, rooted in the social sciences and engineering, reconstruction comes as a strong guest (and host) to African theology, especially when we consider the pragmatic nature of the people of Africa whose metaphor of rebuilding easily strikes a chord with the African plight, where Africa is in ruins in various sectors of its social fabric. By considering for example, Jesus as a reconstructor in African Women’s theology and the various levels of reconstruction, it becomes a Christological paradigm. It is no surprise therefore that Dedji sees a theology of reconstruction as that “which gives priority to biblical motifs such as Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Repentance” (2003:7). This leads us therefore to treat the above paradigms considered in this chapter, including liberation and reconstruction, as relevant to the African theology of the twenty first century.

In viewing reconstruction as the dominant paradigm in African theology today, we nevertheless have to take the note of Schillebeeckz’s caution when he writes:

If, therefore, we are able to speak about *the* paradigm in today’s situation, *it will be the paradigm of ‘humanity,’* the paradigm of the (undefinable) cry for the humane, open to God’s future, which transcends human history. A religion, which in fact

has a dehumanising effect, in whatever way, is either a false religion or a religion, which understands itself wrongly. This criterion of humanizing proclaimed by Jesus, this concern for the humanity of humankind, is not a reduction or evacuation of religion; it is the first condition for its human possibility and credibility. It is of this God, and no other, that Jesus Christ is 'the great symbol': 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15; see 2 Cor. 4:3-4) (1989:318).

This chapter has considered some relevant Christological paradigms. Consequently, it has helped us rethink the debate on Mugambi's call for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction. In so doing, it has strengthened our hypothesis that the call is largely appropriate, despite some defects. Further, it has prepared us to consider the conclusion of this entire study. This will provide a forum where various insights, gathered in the course of this study, will be disclosed.



## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE STUDY

#### 8.0 Introduction

In the introduction to this thesis, the study set out to unveil the statement of the problem: How appropriate is Jesse Mugambi's proposal for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, in the development of African theology in the twenty-first century? Its hypothesis has been that Mugambi's proposal for a paradigm shift, from liberation to reconstruction, is largely appropriate in as far as the shift would not render the "outgoing" paradigm of liberation and other "minor" paradigms obsolete. Rather as the liberation paradigm becomes a "minor" paradigm in the African theology of the twenty-first century, reconstruction becomes the "dominant" paradigm that embraces all other paradigms. The introduction thus launched the study by providing the historical background, methodology and an analysis of the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of Jesse Mugambi's rich heritage and background, where he came into early contact with the concepts of liberation and reconstruction from the time of his childhood. Hence, the *Mau Mau* in the liberation war of the 1940s and 1950s introduced him to the concept of liberation at an early age. His excellent credentials presented him as one who deserves our scholarly attention. His socio-scholarly formation attested to this.

Chapter 3 portrayed Jesse Mugambi's works as following in the developmental trends of African theology. In other words, his understanding of African theology strikes a working chord with other leading scholars in this field. These notable Christian scholars in tropical Africa who have produced extensive published theo-philosophical works in Anglophone Eastern Africa include John Mbiti (Kenya); Zablun Nthamburi (Kenya); Charles Nyamiti (Tanzania); Laurent Magesa (Tanzania); Emmanuel Katongole (Uganda) and John M. Waliggo (Uganda). In Anglophone West Africa, Kwame Bediako (Ghana); Byang Kato (Nigeria); John Pobee (Ghana); Kwesi Dickson (Ghana); Bolaji Idowu (Nigeria); Mercy A. Oduyoye (Nigeria and Ghana);<sup>1</sup> Odupe Oduyoye (Nigeria); Edward Fashole-Luke (Sierra Leone); Harry Sawyerr (Sierra-Leone); Lamin Sanneh (Gambia). In Francophone

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<sup>1</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye is a Ghanaian married in Nigeria. Therefore, she belongs to the two countries.

Africa, Jean-Marc Éla (Cameroon); A. Ngindu Mushete (Democratic Republic of Congo); F. Eboussi-Boulaga (Cameroon); Kä Mana (DRC). In Central and Southern Africa, Canaan Banana (Zimbabwe); Gwinyai H. Muzorewa (Zimbabwe); Manas Buthelezi (South Africa); Desmond Tutu (South Africa); Gabriel Setiloane<sup>2</sup> (South African); Isabel Apawo Phiri (Malawi); Tinyiko Sam Maluleke (South Africa);<sup>3</sup> and Allan Boesak (South Africa). This gives Mugambi credence.

Chapter 4 set out to survey the African theologies of liberation in which Jesse Mugambi has been an active participant since the 1970s when he released his widely quoted paper, "Liberation and Theology."<sup>4</sup> The chapter was able to demonstrate that reconstruction is "a different kind of liberating theology, because the opportunity for it is so rare" (Schreiter 1999:110). For whether we are "in South Africa, Eastern Europe, Chile, Argentina," Somalia, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Ghana, Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, or the Democratic republic of Congo – it is a "moment of grace that should not be bypassed" (: 110 -111). In general, the chapter has strengthened our hypothesis by its findings that though they may not have been conscious of it, African theologians, since the 1960s, were on one hand working on a theology of reconstruction, especially with regard to inculturation - as this involved deconstruction of cultural biasness and ethnocentrism of the western missionaries - while still working on a theology of liberation whose Exodus motif was the *dominant* paradigm. By so doing, the argument of this study is strengthened and augmented, in that there are "minor" and "dominant" paradigms at work in African theology at any given time in the history of African Christianity.

Chapter 5 took the study a step further by analysing Jesse Mugambi's theology of reconstruction. It went beyond mere statement, by explicating its methods and sources, as well as some of its fundamental concerns. These additional areas were examined from a perspective of comparative analysis between Mugambi's works and other African theologians who have been co-pioneers in this field.

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<sup>2</sup> Most publications says that he is from Botswana; but as the researches have shown, he is a South African, who at one time, worked in Botswana.

<sup>3</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri and Tinyiko Sam Maluleke are among the new breed of African theologians who are able to correlate African culture and the Christian gospel of Christ. As such, they cannot be effectively counted within the category of the old theologians, such as, Mbiti, Idowu and Mugambi. However, their respective contributions, especially appearing in some pristine theological Journals show that they are clearly able to articulate their contemporary theology in Africa. Obviously, there are other upcoming theologians who, due to limitation of space and time, did not feature in this section.

<sup>4</sup> *WSCF Dossier 5* (Geneva1974)

Chapter 6 provided a theo-socio-cultural analysis of theology of reconstruction, striking a working chord with the theo-philosophical dialogue and the theo-historical dialogue. The chapter was able to demonstrate that there is need to accommodate both the “new” and the “old” paradigms in the new and “dominant” paradigm of reconstruction, as paradigms “still lives on in parts” of other paradigms (Bosch 1991, 2003:186). In other words, they co-exist. As church history has shown, even the protestant reformer, Martin Luther, and the great twentieth century Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, “in many respects still harboured important elements of the paradigm” they had abandoned (Bosch 1991, 2003:186).

Chapter 7 provided an exploration of some Christological paradigms that are relevant in African theology today. These were, the Charismatic, the Inculturation, the Reconciliation, Liberation, the Market-theology and the now “dominant” paradigm of Reconstruction. The chapter foregrounded the discussion on “minor” and “dominant” paradigms by its insistence that African theology in the twenty-first century could best be done by incorporating both the “minor” and “dominant” paradigms, as the diversity and homogeneity of Africa would thus dictate. This is strengthened by the chapter’s findings that new paradigms do not render the old paradigm(s) obsolete - as the people in a particular society remain the same; rather, new paradigms act as a source of continuity for the existing paradigm(s), hence, they compliment each other in theo-social discourses.

This chapter (8) will provide some final insights of the study, resolutions and a conclusion of the entire study. Among others, these insights will include, “reconstruction embraces other paradigms,” and “liberation precedes reconstruction.”

As Martin Luther King Jnr. once said: “It is those who are filled with the spirit of God who can bring unbelievable changes both in individual lives and the life of the society” (quoted in Kobia 1993). In the light of this perspective, only time will tell whether Mugambi’s project of reconstruction will bring about real change in the articulation of African theology of the twenty-first century.

## **8.1. Some insights from the entire study**

### **8.1.1. Revolution precedes reconstruction**

As has been noted in the study, liberation or revolution precedes reconstruction. A

pertinent illustration of this was the declaration of Kenya's independence on December 12, 1963 following the *Mau Mau* war of liberation in Kenya (1940-1960). Kenya's hard fought freedom heralded a new wave of social reconstruction in the newly independent nation. As would later take place in South Africa, following the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years of detention in an apartheid gaol, Kenyatta emerged after suffering ten year's of incarceration in a colonial gaol preaching forgiveness and reconciliation. Remarkably, the presumed leader of "darkness and death" freely borrowed from the words of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; cf. Elkins 2005: 359). Kenyatta then introduced the concept of *Harambee* – as a movement through which domestic resources were to be mobilised for the development (read reconstruction) of the Kenyan Nation (Ogot 1981:69).

Another case study that can be used to demonstrate the insight that *revolution precedes reconstruction* is the case of Central America after liberation. That is, in some parts of Central America, after the base communities flirted with the books of the Maccabees to inspire their faith in the context of armed uprising, Christians turned to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The reason for turning to these books, as Boff and Boff (1987:35) explains, is because the two books "portray the efforts at restoring the people of God after the critical period in Babylon captivity" (: 35).

In view of this, it will suffice to concede that the pastors and priests of Central America sanctioned the armed uprising on the basis of the book of Maccabees that inspired and sanctioned their consideration towards mounting an armed insurrection. Nevertheless, the end of the war affected their hermeneutical preferences as they found themselves more at home with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as opposed to the former. This change was brought about through the cessation of war, and the need to move into a new phase of national reconstruction. There was, now, a clear-cut need for Christians to turn to a systematic theological reflection of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah with a reconstructive motif that Mugambi is advising the post cold war African theology (of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) to shift to. For in his view, there is no need for any further "armed uprising" as "war" is over just as in the case of Central America.

War, in Mugambi's viewpoint refers to the several oppressive situations that have affected

the people of Africa since the colonial invasion. These include slavery, state-sanctioned racism (apartheid), colonialism, missionary involvement and the western ethno-centricism, the Cold War, political dictatorships among some post independent Africa nation states as evidenced by the embracing of political pluralism among others. This insight, that revolution precedes reconstruction has led us to embrace Boff and Boff's views on Central America, and in turn, has provided us with a rich resource of information and inspiration as we attempt to draw some parallels between Mugambi's proposal for a paradigmatic shift towards reconstruction, and a hermeneutical reflection on Ezra-Nehemiah's post-exilic theology of reconstruction.

In such instances where there were "revolutions," as in the Babylonian captivity, the American Civil War and the post-WW2 Europe, attempts at social reconstruction soon followed, in an endeavour to repair the destroyed "shrines" of society. This leads us to consider the insight that "history repeats itself."

#### **8.1.2. Does history repeat itself?**

The insight that "history repeats itself" has been demonstrated through the findings of this study. In particular, that the gains of reconstruction are sometimes lost and people revert to the quests for liberation again. For example, in the early 1960s, Kenyatta led the post-colonial reconstruction of Kenya. As Mugambi has noted (in Chapter 2), the economy did well and other sectors of the national fabric prospered (see, also Githiga 2001:44). However, this economic growth soon deteriorated following his death in 1978. Kenyatta encouraged Kenyans to take destiny into their own hands and make a clear break from the colonial past (*read "start reconstructing yourselves – you now have what it takes to do so!"*) (see Ogot 1981:69). He would play his post-colonial reconstruction role by telling his audience, "*Na tusahau yaliyopita tujenge taifa,*" that is, "let us forget the past and build (*read – let us reconstruct*) the nation!"

And by 1989, Kenyans were back in street battles with the police, as they demanded economic rejuvenation, good governance and "genuine" liberation and reconstruction of their beloved Nation. In the street demonstrations, where history was repeating itself, Kenyans began calling for a "second liberation" (*read genuine reconstruction*) as the gains of the "first" liberation (of the 1960s) had been "lost" through bad governance,

impoverishment, inertia, corruption and dictatorship that Kenyatta's successors had allegedly brought in.

Subsequently, and as the third President of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, was sworn in on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2002, the over 500, 000 strong crowd could not imagine that the incumbent, Daniel Moi, would hand over power to his former arch-rival in the turbulent politics of Kenya (see Elkins 2005:359f). As Kibaki promised, he would provide innovative leadership (unlike his predecessor), free from the above vices, the highly charged crowd could not help as they saw Kenya being reborn. To some, Kenya had attained a "second-liberation" and could now begin a genuine process of reconstruction.

Similarly, despite some significant gains during reconstruction, following the American Civil War (1865-1877), where federal troops were withdrawn from the South in 1877, whites again began voting and excluding African-Americans (Voegeli 1967:161ff; McPherson 1965:132-5). Additionally, White Southern Democrats soon took control from African-American and Caucasian Republican office holders (Voegeli 1967:180-181). By the end of 1877, all the gains of reconstruction had virtually disappeared, and African-Americans were again relegated to second-class citizens (Voegeli 1967:161ff; McPherson 1965:132-5). It would not be until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr. (1929-1968) that this situation would begin to change. It is, nevertheless, interesting to note that after liberation (1861-1865), reconstruction (1865-1877), the calls for a fresh quest for liberation re-appeared (1877-1960s).

Thus, in our African context, social reconstruction ought to address possible loopholes so as to avoid a repeat of situations such as those that have dogged Kenya and the American reconstruction of 1865-1877 and beyond. Probably, it is wise to start by educating the people of Africa about the need to change their attitude by first addressing their "inner persons" (*cf.* Eph. 3:16). This can be done through the pulpit, schools and colleges, among other places. For as with the case of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments to the constitution where African-Americans at last nourished hopes for full equality, disenfranchisement was

later sneaked back after 1877.<sup>5</sup> This shows that the emphasis on personal reconstruction should not be taken for granted in the African context. Indeed as the Apostle Paul prays:

I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your *inner being*, so that Christ may dwell *in your hearts* through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).

### **8.1.3. Reconstruction embraces other paradigms: A dialectical relationship?**

Mugambi's call for a paradigmatic shift from liberation to reconstruction in African theology is dialectical in the sense that the "dominant" concept of reconstruction can best be seen in relation to other "minor" or "subordinate" concepts. By dialectic, I mean the art of dialogue, the development of thought through give and take, with the implied assumption that some differences exist (see, Ellul 1981:292). This view holds that (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich) Hegel (1770-1831) went beyond his discussion of logic in describing his dialectic of history, and involves thinking in terms of the total movement of history, rather than focussing on one phase.

Hegel thought that "everything has a rhythmic destiny: it comes to fruition, it comes to grief, (and) it enters a higher truth" (1981:293). This, according to Hegel's philosophy, is the rhythmic pattern manifested by the career of anything, "be it a scientific concept, a literary movement, a national policy, a religious creed, a political institution, an economic system, a philosophic principle. Everything vanishes into its opposite (but) nothing ever passes away (completely)" (1981:293). Contrary to Hegel, not all theses and antitheses combine to produce syntheses, although some do.

The word "dialectical" can also refer to complex thoughts that cannot be summarised simply, but where truth resides within the tension (not the synthesis) of one idea with another. The underlying assumption is that human experience is so complex that we can understand it only by allowing a number of logical tensions (but not complete contradictions) to stand (Ray 1993:176). Of course, there are dangers in some aspects of this dialectical thinking. Hence it can be un-dialectically pushed to the extreme – as did Hegel – which ends in total relativism. For Hegel, truth is realised only at the end of

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<sup>5</sup> The drive for emancipation was consummated in 1865 by the adoption of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment abolishing slavery in every state of the union (McPherson 1965: ix).

history. According to his theory, therefore, almost anything within history provides an approximation in movement towards finality.

Having critically analysed some of the major aspects of Hegel's thinking about history, we should recognise (against the logic of orthodoxy) the bible's affirmation that God's revelation in Christ did not bring total fulfilment. This will only occur in the final eschaton (see, Ray 1993:178). Hence, Christian orthodoxy, within classical Christianity, rightly recognises that divine truth has been revealed in history. Jesus Christ is the Truth. Thus the Christian testament's truth claims, or any African paradigm for that matter, must not be Hegelised away (relativised) by being rendered obsolete; rather an inclusive approach has to be found to accommodate various paradigms in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Seen in this light, reconstruction need not be seen as a paradigmatic synthesis, but rather as part of the "necessary tension" in African theology, or in any human endeavour for that matter.

Equally, Mugambi's proposal for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction, ought to be seen as a "necessary continuity" rather than a "radical break" from one paradigm to another. Hence, the various cases of paradigm shifts in African context, studied in chapter 6, have pointed out that paradigm shifts, like leadership transfer, do not change radically as this "jeopardizes the harmony of ancestral life" that they are there to uphold (Magesa 1997:67). Thus, a radical shift would put "the community's life at risk" (1997:67).

In view of these philosophical parameters, our contention in this study is that the concept of reconstruction can embrace other paradigms such as market-theology, charismatic, reconciliation, liberation and inculturation. This assertion is significantly strengthened by Kä Mana's assertion when he sees Christ as the catalyst of reconstruction. He goes on to argue that the theology of reconstruction integrates the motifs of identity (read, other

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<sup>6</sup> Various scholars have been critical of the Hegelian systematisation of reality. In other words, Hegel's employment of thesis-antithesis-synthesis was his way to create a linearity, which exposed truth (thesis) and its tensions (antithesis) and moved toward a resolution (synthesis). For instance, the criticism levelled by Søren Kierkegaard was that, "the Hegelian model relegates reality to the noumenal realm; it neglects the existential realm of reality where tension and anxiety cannot be resolved neatly" (Harris 2006:23). Thus, the synthesis is artificial. The relationship between thesis and antithesis "must be preserved and embraced" – for indeed, this is the dialectic – an "unresolved diastasis" (2006:23). Hegel's model is thus problematic to our quest for an all-inclusive theology (which includes tensions!), for any methodology that promulgates reason over faith has to be denounced because when paradoxes exist, faith is paramount (an echo of Anselm's dictum *fides quarens intellectum* which of course Karl Barth was also fond).



paradigms besides liberation) and liberation, but moves towards the need to reconstruct Africa as well as the rest of the world in accord with humane requirements (2002:91). Seen in this light, the paradigm of reconstruction is clearly the “dominant” motif in African theology today, as it is able to integrate and accommodate other motifs.

In addition, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke’s contention that a theology of reconstruction has been posited in some Majority-world countries, albeit unconsciously and despite Mugambi’s insistence that the paradigm of liberation has been the dominant paradigm since the 1960s, qualifies our hypothesis in this study, that paradigms can exist within one another. Thus, a paradigm that is dominant within a particular period in history, and in a particular context and situation, can be empirically effective when it works hand in hand with other subordinate paradigms that are also at play. Hence, our findings, in this study, agree in large degree with Maluleke, as quoted by Stinton:

The proposal for some theology of reconstruction is not new in the Third World. Most Third World theologies, insofar as they have been local initiatives aimed at local renewal, have been kinds of theologies of reconstruction. Africans and churches north of the (*River*) Limpopo have been for a long time been engaged in theologies of reconstruction<sup>7</sup> of one sort or another (2004:252).

Owing to the fact that liberation has been the “dominant” paradigm, the paradigm of reconstruction has been a subordinate or “minor” paradigm insofar as the former has been well developed in African theology. In view of this, Africa, in the twenty-first century, with its homogeneity and its diversity, as noted in Chapter 3, will best be served by reconstruction as a “dominant” paradigm, while liberation, inculturation, market-theology and other relevant paradigms remain as subordinate or “minor” paradigms, which assist in helping make reconstruction, as a paradigm, empirically effective. As an integrating paradigm, reconstruction will not render other paradigms obsolete, as this would contradict its inclusive approach in doing Christian theology in Africa. This therefore means that reconstruction, as a paradigm, will always be in dialogue with other paradigms in Africa. This is what is meant by reconstruction!

As a “dominant” paradigm, reconstruction fits in various forums. For example, politicians can treat it as a clarion call in post-Cold War Africa to galvanise their respective citizens

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<sup>7</sup> Seen in this light, the likes of Jesse Mugambi, Jean-Marc Ela, John Mbiti, Bolaji Idowu, Kwesi Dickson, John Pobee and Charles Nyamiti have been doing a theology of reconstruction albeit unconscious of the concept of reconstruction as a subordinate paradigm, even though the “dominant” paradigm since the 1960s has been (the paradigm of) liberation as modelled on the Exodus motif.

to work harder for the common good of their countries. As the Apostle Paul warns an otherwise lazy and lethargic Thessalonian church: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat" (2 Thess. 2:10).

Church leaders can equally appeal to their congregations to revisit their rich African cultural heritage, such as the need to extend hospitality to everyone, including strangers, along with other concepts that are compatible with the Christian gospel of Christ. As we have noted above, the concept of reconstruction is entirely compatible with the African traditional society, where rebuilding and re-examination are seen as crucial elements for the African person. Hence, communion with the ancestors ensured that re-examination leading to rebuilding or reconstruction was guaranteed. Thus, as far as 1938 when Jomo Kenyatta published his quasi-religious book, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*, he dedicated it to his departed parents, Mūigai (father) and Wambūi (mother) and:

All the dispossessed youth of Africa: for perpetuation of communion with ancestral spirits through the fight for African freedom, and in the firm faith that the dead, the living, and the unborn will unite to rebuild (*reconstruct*) the destroyed shrines.

## **8.2. Some resolutions**

The final resolutions and recommendations of the researcher in this study are firmly established on our argument that we should treat the "theology of reconstruction" as "theologies of reconstruction." This is based on the following researched premises: First, this is an inclusive theology. Inclusive, means that it is a dialoguing theology. As dialogical, it is opposed to an anti-dialogical discourse whose reconstructive motif dialectically embraces other paradigms such as liberation, inculturation (indigenisation), market-theology, reconciliation, and charismatic among others. Due therefore to its all-encompassing nature, there is a strong possibility that it will continue to absorb other emerging paradigms that appear from time to time.

Additionally, in the pragmatic understanding, that Africa cannot be identified as a single geo-cultural context of theology (as noted in Chapter 3 by Takatso Mofokeng), theological articulation will always be influenced by the various "cultures" of Africa. As noted earlier, these cultures include African traditional culture, European (as one of the most dominant), American, Arabic, and Asiatic cultures. This view thereby acknowledges that even within Africa, there are a diversity of African experiences due to differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religion and the particular period of history.

The history of the colonial experience in each particular African nation state further compounds the diversity and the plurality of the African people. Hence, Lusophone Africa, Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Arabophone Africa. The immediate post-Apartheid South Africa and establishment of Namibia adds to the diversity of Africa as different powers had dissimilar traditions of familiarising their colonies (see, Mugambi 1989b: 4). The Arab slave traders, for example, in the East Coast of Africa intermarried with the local inhabitants and their intermarriage produced the Swahili people. The East African situation recalls the South African case where the interactions between Black Africans and White Boers produced the so-called "the coloureds."

Seen in this light, there is need to refer to the "theology of reconstruction," as the "theologies of reconstruction" in forthcoming publications on African theology. As Mugambi freely acknowledges, the various levels in Africa and beyond beg for reconstruction (1995:15ff). With Africa being in such need of various levels of restructuring, the phrase "theologies of reconstruction" is an apposite phrase of reference as opposed to "theology of reconstruction."

Second, there is need to develop well-documented publications with clear, discernible and logical coherent descriptions of "theology of reconstruction." Such works ought to document the definitions, limitations, sources, methodologies and fundamental concerns of the "theology of reconstruction" as a discipline that has emerged from within African 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 make them on par with other systematic theologies.

Third, the parameters of a "theology of reconstruction" should be clearly spelt out. This proposal is prompted by the discovery that the fundamental concerns of a theology of reconstruction such as environmental concerns, the stewardship of creation, depatriarchalisation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, food security in Africa and poverty alleviation are all concerns in the emerging "developmental theology" otherwise called, "Theology and Development." This means that the similarities and differences that exist between the "theology of reconstruction" and "developmental theology" ought to be worked out by African theologians who are concerned with the plight of Africa's theo-

social fabric. This will make it possible for the Theology of Reconstruction to be taught, as a separate module from African Theology, in the institutions of theological formation throughout Africa. Seen in this light, additional research will need to be encouraged so as to develop this further.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### LIST OF INFORMANTS

NAME	PLACE	DATE
Prof. Musa Dube	E-mail interview	10/8/2004.
Prof. Jesse Mũgambi	Nairobi and Kĩgaarĩ	02/06/05-30/07/05
Mzee Nelson Kĩbuti	Ena – Embu	5/7/2005
Mzee Mbũũrĩ wa Kĩnyua	Kĩangai – Kĩrĩnyaga	25/07/2005
Mrs Eunice Marigu Nyaga	Manyatta – Embu	5/7/2005
Michael Nyaga Ngarũko	Kĩgari – Embu	5/7/2005
Mrs Elizabeth Mũgambi	Nairobi -West	7/7/2005
Peter Njirũ Mũreithi	Diffathas – Kĩrĩnyaga	8/7/2005
Most Rev.Dr D.M Gitarĩ	Diffathas – Kĩrĩnyaga	4/7/2005
Rev. Josiah Murage	Pietermaritzburg	24/8/2005
Rev. David Mũrĩithi Ileri	Kĩgari – Embu	5/7/2005
Jemimah Kori Kanyua	Kĩgaarĩ – Embu	5/6/2005
Mrs Daina Muthanji	Ena– Embu	5/7/2005
Bosco M. Maingi	Mombasa	11/10/2005

## APPENDIX 2

### LIST OF MUGAMBI'S WORKS

#### J N K MUGAMBI'S PUBLISHED BOOKS AND PAPERS

JANUARY 1971 - JUNE 2005

- 2005 Christoph Stückelberger and J N K Mugambi, eds., *Responsible Leadership: Global Perspectives*, Nairobi/Geneva: Acton/WCC. (Co-Editor).
- 2005 'Global Warming: An African Perspective' in *Fukuin toh Sekai* (The Gospel and the World), May. (Tokyo, Japan.
- 2005 'Foreword,' in D.M. Gitari, *Responsible Church Leadership*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2005 'Responsible Leadership in Education and Development' in Christoph Stückelberger and J N K Mugambi, eds., *Responsible Leadership: Global Perspectives*, Nairobi/Geneva: Acton/WCC. (Chapter)
- 2005 'Christianity and the African Cultural Heritage,' in Ogbu Kalu, ed., *African Christianity: An African Story*, Pretoria: Department of Church History, 516-542. (Chapter).
- 2004 'Applied Ethics and Globalization', in *Theologies and Cultures*, Dec. (Taiwan).
- 2004 'Religion and Social Reconstruction in Post-Colonial Africa, in J N K Mugambi and Frank Kürschner-Pelkmann, eds., *Church-State Relations: A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2004 'Religions in East Africa in the Context of Globalization' in *Religions in East Africa in the Context of Globalization*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2004 'Challenges to African Scholars in Biblical Hermeneutics' in *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics*, Nairobi: Acton. (Chapter).
- 2004 *Text and Context in New Testament Hermeneutics* Nairobi: Acton (co-editor with a chapter).
- 2003 'Rites of Passage and Human Sexuality in Tropical Africa Today' in *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton (chapter).
- 2003 *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2003 "Evangelistic and Charismatic Initiatives in Post-Colonial Africa" in Mika Vähäkangas and Andrew Kyomo, eds., *Charismatic Renewal in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2003 *Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2002 *Christianity and African Culture*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2002 "Church and State Relations in Africa" in EMW, *State, Nation and Church in Africa*, Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag.
- 2002 "Emissions Trading as an Aspect of Toxic Waste Dumping" in *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa*, Vol. 8 No. 2 and 3, April and August.
- 2001 "Foundations for an African Approach to Biblical Hermeneutics," in

- Mary N. Getui, Victor Zinkuratire and Knut Holter, eds., *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton. Chapter.
- 2001 "Emissions Trading as an Aspect of Toxic Waste Dumping," in J N K Mugambi and Mika Vahakangas, eds., Nairobi: Acton.
- 2001 Co-editor with Mika Vahakangas, *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 2001 "Introduction," in John V Taylor, *Christian Presence Amid African Religion*, Nairobi: Acton.
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- 2001 "Africa and the Old Testament," in Mary Getui, Knut Holter and Victor Zinkuratire, eds., *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton. Chapter.
- 2000 "Theological Method in African Christianity," in *Tangaza Occasional Papers*, No. 10, Nairobi. Article.
- 1999 "Foreword" in K. Hongo, *Starehe Boys Centre: The First Forty Years*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 1999 "Introduction", in Lawrence Henderson, *Development and the Church in Angola: Chipenda the Trailblazer*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 1999 "Foreword", in M. N. Getui and E. A. Obeng, eds., *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*, Nairobi: Acton.
- 1999 "Pastoral Care for Youth and Students," in D.W. Waruta ns H.W. Kinoti, eds., *Pastoral Care in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton (Series co-editor).
- 1999 *Pastoral Care in African Christianity*, Second Edition, Nairobi: Acton. (series co-editor).
- 1999 "Problems of Teaching Ethics in African Christianity", in *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. (Chapter).
- 1999 *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, Second Edition Nairobi: Acton, (co-editor).
- 1999 "The Role of Religion in Public Life," in *Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa*, Vol. 6 No. 1, March. (University of Natal, South Africa).
- 1999 "Religion in the Social Transformation of Africa," in Laurenti Magesa. and Z. Nthamburi, *Democracy and Reconciliation: A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. (Chapter).
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- 1999 "The Christian Ideal of Peace and Political Reality in Africa" in Mary N. Getui and Peter Kanyandago, eds., *From Violence to Peace: A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. Chapter.
- 1999 *From Violence to Peace: A Challenge for African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. (series co-editor).
- 1998 "Missiological Research in the Context of Globalization," in *Swedish Missiological Themes*, Vol. 86, No. 4.
- 1998 "A Fresh Look at Evangelism in Africa" in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXXII No. 346, July (Article).
- 1998 *Theological Method and Worship in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. (series co-editor).
- 1998 "Christian Mission and Social Transformation After the Cold War" in

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- 1998 "A Critique of Method in African Christian Theology" in J.M. Waliggo and Mary Getui, eds., *Worship in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton. (chapter).
- 1998 *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (co-editor).
- 1998 *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (co-editor).
- 1997 "Some Lessons from a Century of Ecumenism in Africa" in Efiog Utuk, *Visions of Authenticity: The Assemblies of the AACC 1963-1992*, Nairobi: AACC. Chapter.
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- 1997 *The Church and the Future in Africa*, Nairobi: AACC (editor with chapter).
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- 1997 *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Nairobi: AACC (editor with chapter).
- 1997 "African Churches in Social Transformation" in J N K Mugambi, ed., *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Nairobi: AACC (chapter).
- 1996 *Religion and Social Construction of Reality*, Professorial Inaugural Lecture, University of Nairobi.
- 1996 "Churches and the Reconstruction of Society and Democracy: Some Reflections from the African Heritage" in Hizkias Assefa and George Wachira, eds., *Peacemaking and Democratization in Africa*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers (chapter).
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- 1994 *Pastoral Care in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Acton (series co-editor) with chapter.
- 1993 *Mission in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Uzima (series co-editor) with chapter.
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- 1992 *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity*, Nairobi: Initiatives (co-editor).
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- 1991 The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future', in *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, Nairobi: AACC.
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- 1989 *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann) Author.
- 1989 *The Rational Path: A Discussion on Philosophy, Law and Religion*, (Nairobi: Standard Textbooks and Graphics). co-author.
- 1989 *The S.M. Otiemo Case: Death and Burial in Modern Kenya*, (Nairobi: The Nairobi University Press). co-editor.
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- 1988 *Philosophy of Religion: A Textbook*, Nairobi: University of Nairobi College of Education). Author.
- 1988 "The Social Context of Christianity in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa," in *Quarterly Review of Religious Studies*, Vol. II, Nos 1 & 2 (Nairobi). Article.
- 1987 *God Humanity and Nature in Relation to Justice and Peace* (Geneva) Author.
- 1987 "The Place of African Religion and Culture in Kenya's Education", in *Quarterly Review of Religious Studies*, Vol. I No. 4, (Nairobi). Article.
- 1986 *Christian Religious Education, Book I* (Nairobi: Longman). co-author.
- 1986 "Principles and Methods of Teaching the African Heritage", in *Quarterly Review of Religious Studies*, Vol I No. 2, (Nairobi). Article.
- 1986 "Luke's Gospel for Africa Today" in *The Weekly Review*, 28th June (Nairobi) Review of book by Yide and Groenewegen.
- 1986 "God, Humanity and Nature in Ecumenical Discussion," in *Church and Society Report, Potsdam, July 1986*, Geneva. Position Paper.
- 1986 "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in the Ecumenical Agenda," in *Church and Society Report, Potsdam, July 1986*, Geneva. Position Paper.
- 1985 "Towards a History of the Church in East Africa," in *Towards a History of the Church in the Third World*, (Bern, Switzerland). Chapter.
- 1985 "Towards a Comprehensive Communication Policy for Kenya," Postgraduate Diploma Paper, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands) Author.
- 1985 "Procedure of R.E. Curriculum Development in Kenya," in *Quarterly Review of Religious Studies*, Vol. I No. 1. (Nairobi). Article.
- 1984 *Report of the UNESCO/ISS/ACCE Seminar on Communication Policy and Planning for Development*, Nairobi: African Council on Communication Education. Author.
- 1983 *Problems of Meaning in Discourse with Reference to Religion* (Nairobi: Ph. D. Thesis, University of Nairobi). Author.
- 1982 *Ecumenical Initiatives in Eastern Africa*, Nairobi: AACC/AMECEA) co-author.
- 1981 "African Christian Theology: A Reflection," in *Salaam: Journal of the National Association of R.E. Teachers*, Nairobi, April. Article.
- 1980 "Christianity and the World Order," in *Hekima: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Nairobi: E.A. Literature Bureau. Book Review of Edward Norman's Book on same title.
- 1980 "Christian Response in Dehumanizing Situations", in *The churches Responding to Racism in the 1980s: Report of the AACC Consultation* (Nairobi: AACC) - Position Paper.
- 1978 "The Biblical Basis for Evangelization," in *The Biblical Basis for Evangelization: Report of the AACC Consultation*, Nairobi: AACC,

- November.  
*Some Perspectives of Christianity in the Context of the Modern Missionary Enterprise in East Africa with Special Reference to Kenya*, Nairobi: M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi. Author.
- 1977
- 1976 *The African Religious Heritage*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press. co-author.
- 1975 *Africa and Evangelization Today: Report of a Consultation on Indigenous African Christian Churches*, Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches. co-author.
- 1975 "Research in the African Religious Heritage", in *Orientation: Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. I No. 1. (Nairobi). Article.
- 1975 "Report of the Consultation on African and Black Theology, Greenhill, Accra, Ghana, Dec. 28-31 1974", in *The Journal of Religious Thought*, Vol. 33 No. 2, Fall-Winter. Washington D.C: Howard University Press. co editor.
- 1974 "The African Experience of God," in *Africa: Thought and Practice* Vol. I. No. 1. (Nairobi) - Article.
- 1974 "Liberation and Theology," in *WSCF Dossier* No 5, Geneva. Position Paper.
- 1974 *Carry it Home*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau. Author, Collection of own poems.
- 1973 (English and French) "The Predicament of Man," in *Presence*, Vol. VI No. 1. (Nairobi) Author, a poem.
- 1973 "Divine Vision", in *Busara*, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, Author, a poem.
- 1971 "White Ants," in *Ghala*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, July. Author, a poem.
- 1971 "Mosquito," in *Ghala*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, July. Author, a poem.
- 1971 "Traditional Religion of the Embu People," in *Dini na Mila*, Vol. V No. 1, (Kampala: Makerere University, Dept. of Religious Studies) Research Paper.

## RESEARCH THESES ON SOME WORKS OF J N K MUGAMBI

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Julius Mutugi Gathogo</b> | Liberation and Reconstruction in the Works of J N K Mugambi, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, PhD, 2004-2006. |
| <b>Tyro Tyni</b>             | Theology of Reconstruction, University of Helsinki, M.Th., 2002-4.  |
| <b>George Fihavango</b>      | Theology of Reconstruction, Th.D., University of Erlangen, 2002-5.  |
| <b>J. Njoroge wa Ngugi</b>   | "Creation in "The Catechism of the Catholic Church"", Ph D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 2001.             |
| <b>E. Farisani</b>           | "Theology of Reconstruction," Ph.D. Research,   |

- University of Natal, 1999-2002.
- Valentin Dedji** Theology of Reconstruction, Ph.D., Cambridge University, 1997-1999. (*Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Nairobi: Acton, 2003).
- Diane Stinton** "African Christologies," Ph.D. Research, 1996-99, Edinburgh University, Scotland. (Forthcoming, *Orbis*, 2004).
- Joern Henrik Olsen** "Christ in Tropical Africa in the Tension Between Identity and Relevance." Ph D. Research, 1996-99, Copenhagen. University, Denmark.
- Ian Ritchie** "African Theology and Social Change: An Anthropological Approach," Ph.D. Thesis, McGill University, Montréal, Canada, 1994.
- Isaac M. T. Mwase** "A Critical Evaluation of J N K Mugambi's Correlation of Christianity with the African Heritage", Ph.D. Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, 1993.



## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEWS WITH J N K MUGAMBI

#### QUESTIONS POSED

JUNE 2, 2005 – JULY 30, 2005

**1. What role have you been playing amongst influential Para-church bodies such as AACC, NCKK etc to warrant you credit in African theology?**

1. My first Research Paper was published in 1968. Its title was "Traditional Religion of the Embu People." It was later published by John Mbiti in *Dini na Mila* Journal at Makerere University (Vol. V, No. 3, 1971).

2. Between 1968 and 1976, I was on the Ecumenical Religious Education Panel which was responsible for revision of the Religious Education Curriculum in Kenya shortly after Kenya became a Republic. In particular, I was responsible (together with three other Kenyan colleagues) for introduction of the African Religious Heritage into the Curriculum. In appreciation of my role, I was commissioned by the Joint RE Panel to co-author the textbook on this Paper in preparation for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. (Jesse Mugambi and Nicodemus Kirima, *The African Religious Heritage*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976. The book went through 13 imprints).

3. In June 1973, I participated in the first exploratory meeting between African and African-American theologians at Union Theological Seminary New York, hosted by Prof. James Cone. There were six African theologians and twelve African-American counterparts. The Africans were: John Mbiti, Desmond Tutu, Kwesi Dickson, Christian Gaba, Fashole Luke and myself. The African-American theologians included: James Cone, Gayraud Wilmore, Preston Williams, Charles Long, Herbert Brown, John Bennett, DeOrtis Roberts, Shelby Rooks and others.

4. The New York exploratory meeting was followed by another reciprocal one at Accra, Ghana in December 1974. I wrote the report of that conference, which was published in the *Journal of Religious Thought* in 1975. The paper by Desmond Tutu, "African Theology and Black Theology: Soul mates or Antagonists" was presented at that Conference. There were twelve African theologians and six African African-American counterparts.

5. In 1974, I was appointed by the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) to serve as the Theology Secretary for Africa. In that capacity I was responsible for contextualization of Theology. Before that time, it was almost taboo to talk of "African Theology" or "African Christian Theology." It was during my time that several issues of the WSCF Presence Magazine were published, containing articles on "African Theology." While in that office I published my Paper on Liberation and theology, which was completed in 1973 and published in the WSCF Dossier no. 5 of June, 1974. This article has been widely cited by many scholars, including Desmond Tutu, James Cone, Kwesi Dickson, and others.

6. My association with the AACC began in 1974, when I joined the planning Team for the AACC Third Assembly that was held at Lusaka in May of that year. My role was to sharpen the themes of Liberation and Salvation within the African context.

7. In 1974, I was invited to become a member of the Worship Committee in preparation of the WCC 5th Assembly, which was to be held in Nairobi in November 1975. Within that committee I was responsible for insisting on the participation of independent churches in the Assembly and also in the activities of the ecumenical movement in general. As a result, the procession of the WCC Assembly was led by the Africa Israel Church (a Kenyan independent church).

8. In 1975, I was a member of the team that produced the document "Racism in Theology and Theology against Racism," drafted in Geneva in September of that year.

9. In 1975, I became a member of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, which role I served for nearly ten years until 1984. It was during that period that the BEM Document was finalized. My role was particularly to emphasise the cultural context of the central Christian rituals of baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Doctrine makes sense only when it is understood in the context of the culture that produces it. Some of the annotations in the BEM Document were drafted by myself during the WCC Faith and Order Conference at Lima, Peru, in January 1983.

10. In 1975, I began to work with the late Kofi Appiah Kubi in the planning for the first Ecumenical Conference of Third World Theologians, which was to be held in Dar es Salaam in August 1976. The two of us dealt with all the logistics of that conference. Thus the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, which was launched in Dar es Salaam, was the fruit of the logistics we facilitated.

11. Between 1974 and 1976, I was in the team that facilitated the Lunch Forum at Church House, Nairobi. The Forum was hosted by the National Christian Council of Kenya. Its aim was to stimulate discussion on contextual theology with particular reference to Kenya. Bethwel Kiplagat was Deputy General Secretary of the NCCCK at the time.

12. In 1978, I attended the Faith and Order Conference at Bangalore, India, where I met Wolfhart Pannenberg for the first time. I also met Kosuke Koyama and Choan Sen Song, the influential theologians from Japan and China, respectively. We discussed the theme of Gospel and Culture on the one hand, and Faith and Science on the other. That was my first encounter with oriental Christian Theology. Among the Catholic theologians I became acquainted with Fr. Samuel Ryan, the Jesuit scholar.

13. In April 1980, I was involved in the AACC Conference at Nairobi, which was to prepare for the WCC Conference on Racism in August of that year. I met Charles Villa-Vicencio for the first time in Nairobi. I invited him to my home, together with Bonganjalo Goba and another South African participant.

14. In January 1982, I participated in the WCC Faith and Order Conference which finalized the BEM Document. There were nine Africans in a conference of one hundred and fifty. These African participants were very active, with the guidance and leadership of such mentors as John Gatu and Mercy Oduyoye. I helped to draft some of the annotations to the Document. The Conference also endorsed the programme on Gospel and Culture, which was to be launched in 1983.

15. In 1982, I co-authored the book "Ecumenical Initiatives in Eastern Africa," published jointly in Nairobi by the AACC and AMECEA. My co-authors were Fr. John Msgr. John Mutiso-Mbinda and Sr. Judith Vollbrecht.

16. In 1983, I was invited to serve as Visiting Scholar at the Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, where I taught contextual Theology together with Enrique Dussel from Argentina and Theo Matthias from India. Our host was Richard Dickinson.

17. In January 1983, I met Larry Rasmussen for the first time at the conference of the American Association of Christian Ethics in Indianapolis.

18. In May 1983 I met Lamin Sanneh for the first time at a conference of the Consultation on Christian Unity (COCU) in Louisville, Kentucky, May 1983. We shared a Platform during one of the plenary sessions.

19. In August 1983, I attended the WCC 6th Assembly in Vancouver, Canada. I became acquainted for the first time with the theology of Native Americans. I appreciated the affinity between our two world-views.

21. In 1984, I became a member of the WCC Sub-Unit on Church and Society. Our focus was Science and Technology on the one hand, and Church and Society on the other. It was in that context that I met such theologians as Arthur Peacocke (UK) and Chirles Birch (Australia).

22. In 1985, I was invited to prepare a Paper for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Eucharistic Congress of the Roman Catholic Church which met at Nairobi that year.

23. In 1986, I attended the WCC Conference on Church and Society at Potsdam, East Germany. This was my first time to experience the "Iron Curtain." I visited an Extermination Camp for the first time at Sachsenhausen. It reminded me of my childhood.

24. In 1986, I was appointed Chairman of the Department of Religious studies, University of Nairobi. In that capacity I was able to facilitate the participation of younger scholars in the development of African Christian Theology.

25. In 1987, Fr. Carroll Houle (Mary knoll) was posted from Tanzania after twenty years to Kenya. Together we started the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern African Theologians, which has produced a series of texts on contextual African Christian Theology.

26. In 1986 I published "God Humanity and Nature in Relation to Justice and Peace," (Geneva: WCC, 1987).

27. In 1988, then I published "Philosophy of Religion" a text book for undergraduates.

26. In 1988, I published, as Editor, "A comparative Study of Religions," a textbook for undergraduates.

27. In 1989, I published the following books: J N K Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann); J N K Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for*

*Evangelisation* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press); J N K Mugambi, *The African Heritage and contemporary Christianity* (Nairobi: Longman)

28. In 1990-1991, I was appointed Visiting Mellon Distinguished Professor at Rice University, Houston, Texas. My host was Prof. Werner Kelber, the famous New Testament Scholar. I taught contextual approaches to religious thought. In 1990-1994 I was appointed Registrar of the University of Nairobi. I was the first and only academic to hold that position.

29. In March 1991, I delivered the Rockwell series of lectures at Rice University.

30. In 1994, Ian Ritchie wrote a doctoral thesis on my works, submitted to McGill University, Canada.

31. In 1992, I published "Critiques of Christianity in African Literature," (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers).

32. In 1993, Isaac Mwase wrote a doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to South-western Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

33. In 1995, John Mihevc wrote a doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to the University of Toronto.

34. In 1995, I published "From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War," (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers). The book was launched by Desmond Tutu at Nairobi on 5 March, 1995.

35. In 1997, I was invited to be Official Opponent (External Examiner) at the University of Helsinki, Finland, in the Public Defence of the Doctoral Thesis of Mika Vahakangas on Charles Nyamiti, the Tanzanian theologian.

36. In 1998, Joern Henrik Olsen wrote his doctoral thesis on my works, submitted to the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

37. In 1999, Diane Stinton wrote her doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

38. In 2000, Valentin Dedji wrote his doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to the University of Cambridge.

39. In 2002, Njoroge wa Ngugi wrote his doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to the Catholic University of America.

40. In 2003, Elelwani Farisani wrote his doctoral Thesis on my works, submitted to the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

41. In 2003, I published "Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction." (Nairobi: Acton, 2003).

**2. While, for instance, Bediako's theology is highly influenced by the theology of his academic mentor, Prof. Andrew Walls, whose works has influenced your works?**

I would like to respond to this later. I hope the first question suffices for the time being. You will find some answers in Dedji's book. Whereas Bediako is influenced by Walls the missiologist, my influences have been more in systematics and philosophical theology. Among North Atlantic missiologists, I very much appreciate the works of Lesslie Newbegin. He lived for many years in India, and became convinced that you must be willing to listen to others before you can dare to talk at them. Among my teachers were Samuel Kibicho (Kenyan) and Joseph Dondders (Dutch). However, my theological formation is wide: It lasted 15 continuous years until completion of my doctorate in 1984. Thereafter, I continued to search, and my research continues!

**3. Apart from the fact that you fit well in the current developmental trends in African theology, what are your other credentials that can make us listen to you when you call for a shift of paradigm, from liberation to reconstruction?**

This I shall respond to separately. It is another chapter!!

**4. Are there specific books from your mentor(s) that we can read and get a clear picture on your points of academic or theological inspiration?**

*Read:*

Paul Tillich - *The Courage to Be*

Emil Brunner: -*The Word and the World; Justice and the Social Order.*

John A.T. Robinson: - *Honest to God.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: - *Letters and Papers from Prison; The Cost of Discipleship*

Soren Kierkegaard: - *Journals*

**5. Why in particular do we find your works being characterized by issues such as: a) Gospel and culture b) liberation and reconstruction among others?**

**a) Gospel and Culture:** I am convinced that the Christian faith stands or falls depending on the way in which Christian mission relates the Gospel to various cultures. The apostolic church nearly collapsed over this issue, as documented in Acts Chapter 15 and Galatians Chapters 2 and 3. The main question, which precipitated the crisis in mission during the apostolic generation, was whether Gentile Converts should adopt Jewish culture as a precondition for admission into the Church. St. Peter was of the conviction that Gentiles should be 'circumcised' into Judaism before they could be accepted into the church. St. Paul, in contrast, was of the view that as far as conversion to the Christian faith was concerned, Jewish 'circumcision' and Mosaic 'Law' were of no advantage to anyone, Jew or Gentile. In Christ there is "...neither Jew nor Gentile, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free - all are one in Christ." The modern Christian missionary enterprise, and its precedents throughout church history, completely deviated from this Pauline teaching about the relationship between Gospel and Culture, and followed the Petrine doctrine of "circumcision" as a precondition for conversion. I think doctrinally we have to choose between the Petrine position, which was rejected at the Ecumenical Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) and the Pauline position, which was accepted as the consensus and the norm for Christian mission. In his teaching, Jesus emphasized that he came to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to abolish them (Sermon on the Mount). St Paul followed this path in his illustrious mission to the Gentiles. In view of this Pauline perspective, the modern

Christian missionary enterprise has been terribly bad news, demanding of converts to abandon their cultures and imitate the missionary as a precondition of conversion. Neither Jesus, nor St. Paul, would make such a demand. The Ecumenical movement has spent considerable time on this theme, and the works of Eugene Nida (USA) and Lesslie Newbigin (England) are instructive. More on this can be read in the works of Kosuke Koyama (Japan) Choan Sen Song (Taiwan) and M M Thomas (India).

**b) Liberation and Reconstruction:** My first Paper on "Liberation and Theology" was written in 1973 and published in Geneva in June 1974. Such authors as James Cone, Desmond Tutu, Kwesi Dickson and others quoted it severally. A careful and critical study of the Exodus narrative raises serious questions about the beginning and the end of the exodus process. Too often scholars have focused on the process of liberation from Pharaoh's oppression to the freedom in Canaan. However, the Exodus narrative does not end with the invasion, siege, conquest and eventual occupation of Canaan. The narrative continues with the former slaves becoming invaders and oppressors themselves. They then adopt the norms and values of the people they conquered. They wanted to have a king, despite advise against that wish by Samuel (I Sam. 8). Saul, the first King, became a despot and they had to contend with a new form of oppression. There is great difference between oppression by Pharaoh and oppression by Saul. We find the same historical drama repeated in the New Testament. There is contrast between oppression by Caesar, and oppression by Herod. The rhetoric of liberation, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, focused on the former kind of oppression.

My earliest paper on Reconstruction was written in February 1990, shortly after the release of Nelson Mandela, and delivered to the AACC General Committee meeting on 30th March 1990. Reconstruction focuses on the problems that nations and cultures must deal with after foreign oppression has taken a back seat. In the 1970s I was in the forefront of the struggles for liberation in Africa. But after two decades of that line of thought I discovered that it is essential to move beyond the rhetoric of liberation. Liberation tends to be focused on the past. Reconstruction is focused on the future.

The Exile Narratives provide another paradigm on the basis of which oppressed people can find encouragement. Ezra-Nehemiah provides a paradigm rather different from that of the Exodus. There is a great contrast between the leadership of Moses and Joshua in the Exodus narrative, and that of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Exile Narrative. The Leadership of John the Baptist and Jesus may also be contrasted with that of Caiaphas and Herod in the New Testament. We can also contrast the leadership of St. Peter and St Paul. Studied in this way, the theme of Reconstruction stands high on a pedestal, focusing on the constructive future rather than on the destructive past.

**6. Do you have particular people whom you consider to have inspired you to be what you are today (as a scholar, as a publisher)? If so, please explain.**

The list is very long. But I could mention the following for a start:

i) Edward Taylor. He taught me English language at Machakos College in 1966-67 and gave me some storybooks from his personal library. I developed skills of fast reading in order to peruse these gifts.

ii) Hugh Trappes. He gave me tips on the grammar and style of the English language. He taught me literary criticism at Kenyatta College in 1968.

iii) Rev. Ronald Dain. He encouraged me to sharpen my skills as a researcher as early as 1968. He was a mathematician and at the same time an Anglican priest, who taught himself Christian theology and read very widely. He taught me at Kenyatta College in 1968. He introduced me to the contemporary western Christian theologians in a very memorable way. With his prompting I read Tillich, Bultmann, Barth, Brunner, Feuerbach, Jaspers, Bonhoeffer, Robinson, Cox, Berger, Taylor, Altizer, van Buren, etc.

iv) Professor John S. Mbiti. He is one of my mentors. He published my first research paper at Makerere, though I was never one of his students. He sent me a very encouraging critical comment on the Paper before publishing it (*Dini na Mila*, vol 5 no. 3, 1971). He encouraged many African students to conduct research on their cultures and histories, and he took the trouble to publish those research papers under very severe financial constraints. He issued more than 20 volumes of Occasional Research Papers at Makerere University, and was the prime mover of *Dini na Mila*, the Journal of the Department of Religious Studies at Makerere in which my Paper was published in 1971.

v) Professor (Bishop) Stephen Neill. He was the founder chairman of the Department of Religious Studies (1970-73) in our University. I later succeeded him as fourth Chairman of the department (1986-1990). He taught me as an undergraduate in 1971-73. He was very prolific and very articulate. He challenged me and others in my class, and I responded positively and constructively.

vi) Professor Joseph Donders (Washington Theological Consortium). He taught me the art and skill of critical thinking. He taught me contemporary philosophy, and showed me how to blend critical thinking with creative teaching and preaching. Prof. Donders never taught theology at the University of Nairobi. We respected and admired him as a teacher of philosophy. But above all else, we admired him as the Chaplain of St. Paul's Chapel, which served the University of Nairobi community. It is important to relate one's academic learning to the daily problems of individuals and communities which one has the privilege to serve. Donders was also a prolific author whose style remains admirable – very readable!

vii) Fr. Carroll Houle (Maryknoll), who joined me in 1987 from Tanzania, and together we facilitated the launch of the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern African Theologians. He left Kenya in 1999, after 12 years of very fruitful service with regard to the development of Christian theological scholarship. During that period, I helped to shape the publishing Programme for Eastern African theologians.

viii) Prof. Kwasi Wiredu (University of Ghana) who took great interest in a philosophical Paper I had published in 1974 (*Thought and Practice*, Vol. 1 No. 1). He gave me confidence in scholarly publishing.

ix) The editorial staff of East African Literature Bureau (1971-74); Oxford University Press (1972-89); Longman (1988-89); Nairobi University Press (1988-90); Initiatives Limited (1989-92).

x) Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for his wisdom and encouragement. He launched my book

"From Liberation to Reconstruction" at Nairobi on 5 March 1995. The earliest paper on the Theology of Reconstruction had been written and delivered through his invitation at the AACC General Committee Meeting on 30 March, 1990. It appears as one of the chapters in the book from Liberation to Reconstruction.

xi) Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat. He challenged me to interact with students and young people in preparation for the next generation of leaders. He arranged for the typing and circulation of my first research paper in mimeograph (1968).

xii) Moderator John G. Gatu. He became my mentor, when we served as the only Kenyan members of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, 1974-1984. He reminded me of the necessity to root academic theology in the lives of Christians and churches at home and abroad.

xiii) Prof. Werner Kelber (Rice University Houston, Texas). He invited me to serve as Visiting Mellon Distinguished Professor at Rice University, Houston, Texas (1990-91) and arranged for me to deliver the Rockwell Lectures in March, 1991. This was an opportunity to shape and clarify my thoughts as I researched and revised my manuscripts.

xiv) Dr. Richard Dickinson (Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis). He invited me to serve as Visiting Scholar and Professor at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, in a team together with Henrique Dussel (Argentina) Theo Matthias (India) and Gorge Gejardo (Brazil), in 1982-1983. This was an opportunity to share and test my views and ideas with scholars from other parts of the world and other forms of training.

xv) Prof. Hans Dieter Betz (University of Chicago) Former Chairman of the Society for new Testament Studies (SNTS). He responded constructively and positively to my Paper on Reconstruction during the Conference on New Testament Hermeneutics at Hammanskraal, South Africa, August 1999. In his response he went much further than myself by declaring that the NT as a whole is premised on Reconstruction! (See "Interpreting the New Testament in Africa," Nairobi: Acton, 2001, p. 6).

xvi) Prof. Daniel Patte (Vanderbilt University). He followed up the theme of Reconstruction and applied to Hermeneutics in a very programmatic way, leading to publication of the *Global Bible Commentary* (2005) and the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* (2007).

xvii) Prof. Knut Holter (Stavanger School of Mission and Theology, Norway). He invited me to participate in the consolidation of OT scholarship in Africa (see *Interpreting the OT in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2000).

xviii) Prof. Peder Borgen (University of Trondheim, Norway). Former President of SNTS: He responded positively to my Paper on Reconstruction at the Hammanskraal Conference in 1999. (See, *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, Nairobi: Acton, 2001, 1-4).

xix) Prof. Vernon Robbins (Emory University). He responded positively to the Hammanskraal Conference on NT Hermeneutics. (See, "Interpreting the NT in Africa," 275-291).



xx) Prof. Christoph Stükelberger (University of Basel). He invited me to join in Globethics.net, a programme to promote applied ethics globally (see, *Responsible Leadership: Global Perspectives*, Nairobi: and Geneva: Acton and WCC, 2005).

xxi) Dr. Phil Noss (United Bible Societies). He welcomed the proposal to facilitate publication of a series of volumes containing Papers on Bible Translation by UBS consultants in Africa (see, *Bible Translation Series*, Acton Publishers, 2004-05).

xxii) Dr. Roger Hutchinson (Emmanuel College, University of Toronto). He invited me to serve as a Visiting Professor teaching Theology of Reconstruction (1999).

xxiii) The late Bishop John V. Taylor. He responded positively to my Paper (that was published) published in the Internal Review of Mission (1998) and invited me to write an Introduction to the Second Edition of his book, *The Primal Vision*, (SCM, 2001; also published as *Christian Presence amid African Religion*, (Nairobi: Acton, 2001).

xxiv) Prof. Gerrie ter Haar (University of Utrecht, Netherlands). He invited me to participate in a Workshop on Academic Publishing at the conference of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) at Durban, South Africa, July 2000. Acton books were exhibited together with those of other major academic publishers in Europe and North America. I explored the constraints of Academic publishing in tropical Africa, and proposed ways and means of overcoming them. She also accepted to avail two of her books for publication in the Acton Catalogue.

xxv) Stein Villumstad (Norwegian Church Aid). He published his book *The Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Within and Without*, (Nairobi: Acton: 2005). In the book he compared my work with that of Walter Wink.

## **7. After “successfully” championing the idea of theological shift, from liberation to reconstruction, what is your other/current project?**

The Practical implications of the Theology of Reconstruction led me in at least two directions:

**a) Applied Ethics.** It is clear to me that among leaders; knowledge and expertise are necessary but not adequate prerequisites for responsible leadership. To become a responsible leader, one must have convictions based on values, norms, principles and attitudes, which emanate from within. Externally induced norms cannot produce responsible leadership. Jesus is the leader per excellence because his values, norms, principles and attitudes were not imposed upon him by the Sanhedrin or by the Roman Authorities. He taught with authority, not as the scribes. That is why the crowds followed him. What does it mean to be a responsible leader in Africa today? What does it mean to be a responsible leader in the world today? Few individuals would match the standard set by Jesus.

**b) Environmental Rehabilitation.** Human beings have plundered and destroyed the beautiful and bountiful world in which God placed us. We must repent and try to restore the beauty and bounty that God has created. We should compete in rehabilitating nature, not in plundering it for selfish profit.

**8. What role did your wife, Elizabeth Nyathira, play in your theo-socio-scholarly formation. What distinctive role, in your life, can you attribute to her?**

We met at Machakos College in 1966 when both of us were being trained as Primary School teachers. We remained friends and got married in 1972, after six years of friendship. Thus she has been the silent half of my personality! She has supported me all along. While I pursued philosophy and theology, she pursued fashion design. She retired in 1998, in order to focus on our family matters. We are grateful to God for this family. We have mutually supported each other all along.

**9. How have you applied your theology in your professional work and social service?**

Specifically, I have applied my theology in my professional work and social service in the following manner:

1. My work on reform of the Religious Education curriculum (1970-1986). It was during this period that I co-authored *The African Religious Heritage* Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1976.

2. My work on Local Ecumenism (1978-1982). It was during this period that I co-authored *Ecumenical Initiatives in Eastern Africa* (Nairobi: AACC/AMECEA, 1982).

3) My work on "Appropriate Technology." I was member of the WCC Working Group on Church and Society 1984-1994. It was then that I published my book *God Humanity and Nature in relation to Justice and Peace* (Geneva: WCC, 1987).

4) My work on Economic Reconstruction. I was Senior Consultant for Development and Research in 1994-97. What did this entail? During this period I conducted several workshops at local community levels to encourage local communities to improve their local economies without having to depend on charity from government or external benefactors. These were in Ghana, Cameroon, Tanzania and Kenya. I have continued this thrust since then. This work is still in process, and since then I have conducted many workshops involving community workers from many countries of tropical Africa.

5). My work on Climate Change and Global Warming. I have been a member of the WCC Working Group on Climate Change (1994-2006). During this period I participated in the UN Climate Change negotiations (Kyoto Protocol) and represented WCC in the UNEP Governing Council meetings.

6. My work on Rainwater Harvesting. In 2002 I was elected Vice Chairman of the Kenya Rainwater Association, which brings together about 300 agricultural and civil engineers involved in rainwater harvesting. In 2004 I was elected a trustee of the Association. I am convinced that the solution to effective adaptation to global warming along the tropics is sustainable rainwater harvesting. Rainfall floods can be stored for domestic, agricultural and industrial use during the dry months and years. The technology is available. What is needed is imagination, creativity and community participation at congregational and parish levels. I have tested this model, and it works. On this see my book, *Fresh Water to Eradicate Poverty* on the Norwegian Church Aid Web site, at the page on "Understanding the Issues."

## APPENDIX 4

### A POEM BY JESSE MUGAMBI

#### LETTER TO MY CHILD<sup>1</sup>

Africa, my only child, my only home,  
You are a child no more.

Cry aloud no more like a suckling  
baby,  
Do not fail to blow the golden fire  
before it dies,  
To kindle the golden flame that has  
always blown  
At the Central Hearth of your African  
brain.

They thought you were an imbecile,  
My only child!

But now they realize in agony,  
In their dire guilt and shame,  
That they were wrong;  
Now their home-made pride tumbles  
down  
With a mighty moaning fall,  
And I calmly watch their cold ruins as  
they lie  
Lost, prostrate, and begging,  
Begging your infant mercy.

And while they lie sadly thus,  
Overgrown with a success – failure  
complex  
That lets all their decaying history  
down,  
I will sing a victory song over you,  
My only child, my only home,  
For you are now a child no more.

Africa, you are now a man (*or woman*)  
of age,  
For you have borne your initiation rites

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from, *Carry it home*, 1974, by J.N.K. Mugambi pp.85-7.

Like a hero sanely bred from your  
mother's breast;

Let them know you are a man,  
Not a human parody,  
Nor a child that speaks and toddles late;  
Let them know you will never be a  
lifeless stooge  
Like those that crown their Hellenic  
city-halls.

Yes, Africa,  
You are my only child, my only home,  
And this is why I will neither rest nor  
sleep  
Until your sinews are fully grown.  
Now that you have come of age  
In adolescent eruptions of hope and  
power,  
Shun all your boastfulness, but bear  
with pride  
Your early pains of second-birth and  
circumcision.

There is a lengthy winding stair  
That you must spiral through, my child,  
A bumpy stair that you must climb with  
total care,  
Before I contently sign and spit  
blessings  
Upon this bony frame that weathers day  
by day,  
To see you crowned in world esteem,  
Upon the Tower of Liberty.