

**Reclaiming God and reclaiming dignity:  
the history and future of black liberation  
from internalised oppression**

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*Abstract*

One of the most painful things brought about by the apartheid system in South Africa is instilling internalised feelings of oppression in blacks. Its result has been a pathological self-hate within blacks themselves. According to Mason, “we harbour inside ourselves the pain and the memories, the fears and the confusions, the negative self-images and the low expectations, turning them into weapons with which to re-injure ourselves, every day of our lives”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, reconciliation is needed within the blacks themselves to restore them to the state of creation as ordained by God.

**Introduction**

This article aims at discussing the liberation of black people from the internalised oppression which has been entrenched through the long and painful history of apartheid in South Africa. This system of oppression was officially and legally entrenched in 1948 after the National Party came to power. After that, skin colour became a determinant factor in placing people within the different echelons of society, with whites at the top, followed by coloureds and Indians to blacks at the bottom of the scale. Thus, the de-humanisation of people by means of their skin colour led to the internalisation of an inferiority complex and the internalisation of oppression. These were created to be deeply entrenched in the system of those people of skin colour who were regarded to be of lower rank in society. This dehumanisation was deeply rooted in the system in that it led to black people doubting their humanness and doubting whether God was their God.<sup>2</sup> Thus, this article is entitled “Reclaiming God and reclaiming dignity: liberating black people from

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<sup>1</sup> Mason M. Internalised oppression, first published in Reiser, R. and Mason, M. (eds) (1990) *Disability equality in education*, London: ILEA.

<sup>2</sup> For some black people, the God whom white people worshipped could not be the God whom they were worshipping (Tshaka & Mogashoa 2010:535).

internalised oppression”. In this article, we will firstly look into apartheid as a system of oppression, giving special attention to its history of dehumanising black people, which led to the internalisation of inferiority complexes and of oppression, which in turn led to blacks doubting their humanness and whether God was really their God. Secondly, we will look into the continued relevance of black theology in a new South Africa, and then we will conclude by engaging critically the issues of reconciliation, as it is needed to restore blacks to the state of creation as ordained by God.

### **Apartheid as a system of oppression**

Apartheid<sup>3</sup> was the ideological policy which the National Party (NP) used with devastating effect in the general election of May 1948. It was an Afrikaner, deeply rooted, dehumanising system of racial segregation based on the pseudo-understanding of Calvinism. The Afrikaners conceived of themselves as a chosen and covenanted people, like the Israelites of the Old Testament, and early Afrikaners presumed a divine mandate to smite heathen peoples and reduce them to their pre-ordained position as perpetual hewers of wood and drawers of water.<sup>4</sup> To the Afrikaners, the Old Testament was like a mirror of their own lives. In it they found the deserts and fountains, the droughts and plagues, the captivity and the exodus. Above all, they found the Chosen People guided by a stern but partial Deity through the midst of the heathen to a promised land. And it was the Old Testament and the doctrines of Calvin that moulded the Boer into the Afrikaner of today.

This interpretation of the Old Testament and the Doctrines of Calvin led to the establishment of the ideology of apartheid, which was incarnated through racism, segregation and the establishment of the Bantustans (homelands). This incarnation<sup>5</sup> of the ideology of apartheid led to the exploitation, humiliation and oppression of black people, which in turn resulted in black people living in a segregationalist environment and thus internalising the inequalities of races. But for Pheko “Apartheid is more than Racism, separate development and freedom, Bantu Homelands, whites only, native pass laws, racial discrimination and fascist minority settler rule over the indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> Apartheid was spawned during World War II. At this time both Afrikaans and English speaking citizens were on active service. Among the Afrikaner intellectuals who remained in South Africa, much planning took place on the new order to be brought into being should the Nationalists come to power in the future. The projected doctrine of apartheid was expounded in texts. In 1945 apartheid was declared the official policy of the National Party (Smith 1979:6).

<sup>4</sup> Du Toit, A. *No chosen people: the myth of the Calvinist origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and racial ideology* in The University of Chicago Press (Chicago Journals) (*American Historical Review*), vol 88, No.4. 1983:920.

<sup>5</sup> Incarnation in this context refers to causing of something to happen or bringing an idea or theory to life.

African majority, that is Apartheid on the surface, but the root of Apartheid is the story of the dispossessed people. The story of a stolen land, of bloodshed, colonialism and invasion. The story of indigenous African government's overthrown and white rule enforced by guns".<sup>6</sup> Land dispossession, as evident in Pheko's assertion, played a crucial role in the incarnation of the inferiority complex within black people. It also resulted in many black people internalising oppression. The apartheid system has taught black people to doubt their humanness and thus internalise oppression. This is capitulating in the speech by PW Botha (1985):<sup>7</sup>

We do not pretend like other whites that we like blacks. The fact that, blacks look like human beings and act like human beings do not necessarily make them sensible human beings. Hedgehogs are not porcupines and lizards are not crocodiles simply because they look alike. If God wanted us to be equal to the blacks, he would have created us all of a uniform colour and intellect. But he created us differently: Whites, Blacks, Yellow, Rulers and the ruled. Intellectually, we are superior to the blacks; that has been proven beyond any reasonable doubt over the years. ... [Botha went on to say] By now every one of us has seen it practically that the Blacks cannot rule themselves. Give them guns and they will kill each other. They are good in nothing else but making noise, dancing, marrying many wives and indulging in sex. Let us all accept that the Black man is the symbol of poverty, mental inferiority, laziness and emotional incompetence.<sup>8</sup>

This, with all the dehumanisation, exploitation, suppression and oppression of the apartheid system, led to the acceptance by black people of the idea that they are inferior. This inferiority complex incarnated itself in the psyche of black people and thus became part of their thinking. This is why the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in my view seems to have gone deceptively smoothly. Black people seem to have internalised or accepted that they deserve everything that is happening to them. This led to them to forgive easily the perpetrators of the past (apartheid perpetrators) during the TRC hearings, thus leading to cheap reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> The TRC failed to link reconciliation and justice together. It failed to realise the damage the apartheid system had caused in the minds of black people. Exploitation, oppression, humiliation became daily bread and part of the lives of black

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<sup>6</sup> Pheko, M. *Apartheid: the story of a dispossessed people*. London: Marram Books. 1984:1.

<sup>7</sup> This is PW Botha's Crossing of the Rubicon Speech of 1985.

<sup>8</sup> See. Sunday Times 1985, August 18.

<sup>9</sup> Cheap reconciliation refers to reconciliation which is not centred on restitutive justice.

people; hence they internalised oppression and their inferiority complex. The following words of Dr Verwoerd in a speech on Native education in 1953 are also important for making the point clearer: “I want to remind honourable members that if the Native in South Africa today in any kind of school in existence is being taught that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake”. He further argued: “What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics, when it cannot use it in practice? That is absurd ... There is no place for the Native in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour”.<sup>10</sup>

This internalisation of oppression is even worse because it received biblical and theological justification.<sup>11</sup> By theology, we refer to the fact that the Bible was used to put a godly official approval of the teaching which the apartheid system gave to black people (that black people are inferior). The Bible was used as a justification for the condition which blacks found themselves in, as a condition ordained by God. This is even worse because black ministers who were supposed to preach liberation were also trapped into this system of internalised oppression. This is clearly articulated in the words spoken by one of the ministers of a black church (Dutch Reformed Church in Africa), Rev Ramolahlehi, who argued that “they in the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (the black church)<sup>12</sup> came to salvation in Christ through Apartheid”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Fenwick & Rosenhain. *South Africa: from settlement to self determination*. South Africa: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.1991:74.

<sup>11</sup> It is also fairly common to ascribe the so-called apartheid of the previous centuries to the influence of the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) and particularly to the ‘Calvinist’ theology promoted (Prozesky 1990:58).

<sup>12</sup> To strengthen or clarify this we will use the history of the Dutch Reformed Church Family as an example. If we remember the years 1857 and 1881 in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church Family, it is where apartheid started in the Dutch Reformed Church Family. At the 1857 Synod of the DRC the question of segregation or not, was dealt with and paved the way for church separation and racism in practice. The Synod of 1857 spoke with a double tongue and that indicates clearly that they could not take a clear stand on issues of Biblical principle. They said Yes this and Yes the other. Their inability to take a qualified stand on the issue paved the way for church and societal apartheid. The decision of the DRC Synod reads as follows. ‘The Synod considers it desirable and according to the Holy Scripture that our heathen members (non-whites) be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible; but where this measure, as result of the weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of Christ among the heathen people, then congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution’. This decision paved the way for the ‘final solution’ for this heathen problem, with the establishing of the first racially separated church in 1881, called the Dutch Reformed Mission Church for ‘coloured’ people (DRMC-Sendingkerk). After this the DRC would establish racially separated churches for black people, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA), and for Indian people, called the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA). That this theology of apartheid became entrenched in the DRC became clear when *Kerkbode*, the official newspaper of the DRC, wrote in its editorial in September 1948, after the National Party came to power on an apartheid policy

Even after all that the apartheid system has done to black people, they still easily forgave the architecture and perpetrators of the apartheid system. This interpretation as observed in the claim by Ramolahlehi is the result of internalised oppression; this was clearly articulated by Steve Bantu Biko when he argued that “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”.<sup>14</sup> But this internalisation of oppression is not a new phenomenon, in that it also happened with the Israelites after Yahweh had liberated them out of Egypt. (All night long the people cried out in distress. They complained against Moses and Aaron, and said, “It would have been better to die in Egypt or even here in the wilderness! Why is the Lord taking us into that Land? We will be killed in battle, and our wives and children will be captured. Wouldn’t it be better to go back to Egypt?” (Numbers 14:1-3). Therefore as Malcolm X once said “We declare our right on this earth ... to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary.”<sup>15</sup>

**The past determines the present and the future (remember where we come from as a nation)**

We have just argued that black people have internalised oppression, thanks to the apartheid project. Apartheid is a thing of the past, but its psychological effects are still prevalent in present-day South Africa. That psychological presence is seen in the growing gap between the rich and the poor which has been racialised.<sup>16</sup> Thus Dlamini asserts,

It must be realized that the explosive situation of racism in South Africa has adverse psychological effects on the lives of both the oppressors and the oppressed. On one hand, the

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platform, 'Apartheid is a Church policy'. This policy meant, in South Africa, white supremacy; all the other races were inferior and they were dealt with in an inferior manner. The result was the oppression of the non-white people of South Africa and the privileged position of white people. Church (DRC) and state were inextricably linked in an unholy union. The state received moral and theological backing for its unjust apartheid policies from the DRC.

<sup>13</sup> See URCSA Agenda for Synod 2008:63

<sup>14</sup> Biko, S. 2004. *I write what I like*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa.

<sup>15</sup> See Dyson, M. 1995. *The myth & meaning of Malcolm X*. USA: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> This is because as it is usually stated that the oppressor lives twice, firstly the oppressor lives physically and secondly the oppressor lives psychologically. The oppressor lives physically in the sense that the oppressor is always there to make sure that the oppressed behaves (in short the oppressor is there to make sure that the oppressed are still oppressed), the oppressor lives psychologically in the sense that even though the oppressor is no longer there, the oppressed will always be oppressed. This then tends to be generation in that it is passed down to the next generation.

oppressors, whose White and superior status is sustained by institutionalised racial segregation (Apartheid), enjoy so many benefits and generally pursue such an affluent life that they find it extremely difficult to accept the equality of all races. One the other, the blacks have gone through so much oppression that they tend to suffer from an inferiority complex. Many do not foresee a time when they will regard themselves as equal to whites.<sup>17</sup>

The psychological effects which were caused by the apartheid system had a terrible impact upon black people. They resulted in black people doubting their humanness and doubting whether the God that was presented to them by missionaries and ministers of religion was their God. They resulted in black people internalising the inferiority complex and thus hating themselves. This self-hate is visible in present-day South Africa and is seen with black people trying “flee from being black”. Black people try in every way to be white or closer to the white lifestyle. This self-hate which resulted from the internalisation of oppression which was caused by the apartheid system was the greatest sin the apartheid system had caused. Thus Malcolm X once said:

When you teach a man to hate his lips, the lips that God gave him, the shape of his nose that God gave him, the texture of the hair that God gave him, the colour of the skin that God gave him, you’ve committed the worse crime that a race of people can commit. And this is the crime you’ve committed ... This is how you imprisoned us.<sup>18</sup>

Internal oppression did not only allow black people to imbibe a second-class citizenship given to them by white structures, but it created essential distrust within black people themselves and distrust for each other. It was the likes of Willie Lynch who capitalised on this, thus Lynch asserted with regard to the making of slaves:<sup>19</sup>

Take this simple little list of differences and think about them. On top of my list is ‘age’ but it’s there only because it starts with an ‘A’. The second is ‘COLOR’ or shade, there is intelligence, size of plantations and status on plantations, attitude of owners, whether the slaves live in a valley, on a hill, East,

<sup>17</sup> Dlamini T.L.L. The role Swaziland Churches should play in the liberation of South Africa in the *Journal of Black Theology*. 1988:44.

<sup>18</sup> Dyson, M. *The Myth & Meaning of Malcolm X*. USA: Oxford University Press. 1995:129.

<sup>19</sup> This speech was delivered by Willie Lynch on the bank of the James River in the colony of Virginia in 1712. Lynch was a British slave owner in the West Indies.

West, North, South, have fine hair, course hair, or is tall or short. Now that you have list differences, I shall give you an outline of action, but before that, I shall assure you that distrust is stronger than trust and envy stronger than adulation, respect or admiration. The black slaves after receiving this indoctrination shall carry on and will become self refueling and self generating for hundreds of years, maybe thousands. Don't forget you must pitch the old black male vs. the young black male, and the young black male the old black male. You must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves, and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves. You must use the female vs. the male. And the male vs. the female. You must also have your white servants and overseers distrust all blacks. It is necessarily that your slaves trust and depends on us. They must love, respect and trust only us. Gentlemen, these kits are your keys to control. Use them. Have your wives and children use them, never miss an opportunity. If used intensely for one year, the slaves themselves will remain perpetually distrustful of each other". [sic].

The results of this divide and rule policy described by Willie Lynch which was later used by the apartheid system resulted in what Frantz Fanon asserted: that "the negro is enslaved by his inferiority ... and thus negroes have self hate; they are constantly trying to run away from their own individuality and to annihilate their presence". Fanon went on to say that "the black man is insulted and feels insignificant". And thus Forsythe asserts the following: "the natives are dehumanised, and thus they are anxious, insecure, devalued, abandoned, hypersensitive, and feel worthless. This neurotic behavior in turn fosters intra-group rivalries among the blacks – 'false' consciousness".<sup>20</sup>

### **Land dispossession: a tool for internalisation of oppression in South Africa**

Now turning to the present South African<sup>21</sup> situation where the internalised oppression is evident, we now focus on the land issue which is at the centre of the problems of South Africa. The history of land dispossession in South

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<sup>20</sup> Forsythe, D. Frantz Fanon -the Marx of the third world, in *Phylon*, vol 34, no 2, Clark Atlanta University. 1973:161.

<sup>21</sup> For decades, South Africa's unique status rested on the extreme character of apartheid: it represented a conscious system of social engineering, gradually constructed following the National Party's election victory in 1948, explicitly designed to maintain white supremacy (see Siedman 1999:421).

Africa is coupled with the exploitation, humiliation and oppression of black people. Land dispossession had a terrible impact upon black people. It resulted in black people being aliens, slaves in their ancestral land. It resulted in black people being aliens to themselves. It resulted in black people being generationally poor. It resulted in the incarnation of the inferiority complex upon black people. Black people as result of land dispossession internalised oppression. Hence the resolution of the land issue in present-day South Africa will help to liberate black people from the internalised oppression and also to reclaim God. Land is central to black people.

In the African tradition the land plays an important role, the subject is seen as the property of revered ancestral spirits who control the fertility of the land and care for their descendants. When a child was born in an African tradition, the umbilical cord was buried, symbolically uniting the baby to the ancestral spirits. Therefore the process of land dispossession had a tremendous effect upon Africans, because it caused a split between them and their ancestors. This had a tremendous effect upon their identity. This point is strengthened by Mosoma's assertion that "the question as to whether or not the land is a gift from the ancestors is non-negotiable for the indigenous people and it forms the basis of their self-understanding and bondedness to the soil from whence they came to which they shall return".<sup>22</sup> From this we can now see that the land is central and important to African people, because the understanding is, that land is where they came from and it is where are going to be buried. Furthermore, we can see that there is a link between Africans and their ancestors who are buried in the same land. Having conceded that there is in fact a link between Africans and their ancestors, there must be a link between the land and the history of African people. This point is supported by Mosoma: "Land, for blacks, is sacred and central to their whole civilisation. It cannot be bought or sold, for it belongs to the living, the dead and the yet unborn. It cannot be ravaged and exploited beyond its capacity for renewal, since it is the living link between the past memories and expectant future in which the new generation will actively participate."<sup>23</sup>

The land<sup>24</sup> is sacred in Africa because of the fact that our ancestors are buried in it. Without the land, we could not have a home for our ancestors.

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<sup>22</sup> Mosoma, D. (vol 1), *Restitution/reparation: a commitment to justice and peace* in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* of 1991 vol 5 No.1. 1991:26.

<sup>23</sup> Mosoma, D. (vol 1), *Restitution/Reparation: A commitment to Justice and Peace* in the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* of 1991 vol 5 No.1. 1991:26.

<sup>24</sup> In the African context, the land is valued as a resource of livelihood. The land produces food and water, which give life to all living things. To understand this we will use words used by Sunbird (Dragon Journal: Issue 3) "We become filled with the land and one day the land becomes filled with us. We also become filled with a deep love of it, the rocks and roots of the earth are in our blood, the air we breathe is full of magic, the spirits speak audibly through the rustling of leaves and the deep howl of the wind, through the waterfalls and the



That is why we kneel barefoot next to the grave when we want to communicate anything to our ancestors, showing a lot of respect for the land on which our ancestors lie. In some African societies when death strikes in a family, no one is allowed to till the land. After the funeral, in some cultures, we do not touch the soil with a hoe, do not plough or till the land until a ritual of cleansing the family is performed. In understanding the importance of the land and between ancestors and African people we are going to use the following assertion by Nyamiti who said “When ancestors are neglected or forgotten by their relatives they are said to be angry with them and to send them misfortunes as punishment. Their anger is usually appeased through prayers and ritual in the form of food and drinks. The ancestors long for contact with their earthly kin; that is why they are supposed to visit often”.<sup>25</sup> From this we can see the importance of the land and ancestors with African people. Africans are supposed to visit their ancestors often so that they can look after them. So when African people are dispossessed of their land, which is where their ancestors are buried, it is difficult for them to visit their ancestors often and this – as seen from the assertion – results in ancestors punishing Africans. In short, when Africans are dispossessed of their land, they neglect their ancestors unintentionally. This has a tremendous effect upon them, because the result of their neglect of their ancestors is punishment.

Thus Derek Hanekom, the then Minister of Land Affairs, asserted that “the resolution of the land question lies at the heart of our quest for liberation from political oppression, rural poverty and under-development”.<sup>26</sup> Walker (2005) asserts the following with regard to the land question in South Africa:

For most South Africans the ‘land question’ is a descriptive phrase rather than theoretical construct, with two elements. The first is the history of colonial conquest and apartheid dispossession, whereby white settlers appropriated 87 per cent of the

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silence. Our ancestors were in love with this land. Deep in the soil laid bones of our ancestors, the first people to come to this island, the ones who are our greatest grandfathers and our greatest grandmothers. The bones of our ancestors have gone into the soil and now supply nutrients to the food we eat, add share their energy with the plants, trees, water and rocks, animals and soil. They are part of the land, so when we people of the land, we speak of our ancestors. The land provides us with food, water, clothing, shelter and life. The energy of the land is in every grain of wheat and animals. As a plant grows it soaks up the water from the land and the rain, it feeds from the animals, plants, leaves and people that have gone before (died). Their spirits go into the ground. As the plants grows it feeds from the light of the sun. The land is our provider and we are made of the land, so the land is our mother" (by Sunbird - You sharing Spirit).

<sup>25</sup> Nyamiti, C. *Christ as our ancestor: Christology from an African perspective*. Zimbabwe: Mambo Press. 1984:16.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, C. 2005. The limits to land reform: rethinking the land question, in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol 31, No 4, and December 2005. 2005:805.

land for themselves and reserved 13 per cent for the subjugated black majority. During the Apartheid era this involved the forced relocation of more than 3.5 million people, which intensified deep social dislocation, 'displaced urbanization' and a radically dysfunctional spatial dispensation. Inextricably linked to this history of dispossession is the second aspect of the land question – that of the well-documented decline of black peasant agriculture over the past 100 years or more and the impoverishment of those tied to the remnants of land set aside for black occupation”.

Walker comes up with a wonderful solution in the following assertion: “Based on this reading of the past, the resolution of the land question lies in reversing the shameful history of dispossession and restoring and/or redistributing rural land to black people”.<sup>27</sup>

The issue of the land in South Africa is controversial in that it involves a number of issues.<sup>28</sup> The internalised oppression is evident when it comes to this issue in that the people who are against land restitution or land grabbing are the very same people who were dispossessed of their land. But in dealing with the issue of land, Newbiggin asserts “Any attempt to deal with the present without the awareness of what has gone before can lead to distorted vision and false judgment”.<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is wise that in dealing with land issues we should look into the history behind land issues.

The problem of land dispossession in South Africa can be traced back as early as 1652 (with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company under Jan van Riebeeck). This is because as Fage asserts “The Cape of Good Hope<sup>30</sup> at the southern tip of Africa had been of strategic concern to sea-going Europeans for almost as long as West Africa had been of commercial interest”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Walker, C. 2005. *The limits to land Reform: Rethinking the land Question*, in the Journal of Southern African Studies, vol 31, No 4, and December 2005. 2005:807.

<sup>28</sup> The land issue involves a lot of issues, it involves economic issues (which also involve a lot of issues) but it also involves a spiritual dimension to it. The reason for this is, as Mofokeng asserts, “The white man said to us lets pray. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible” (Mofokeng 1988:34). Therefore the credibility of the Christian faith depends on the resolution of the land question.

<sup>29</sup> Newbiggin, L. *The open secret: an introduction to the theology of mission*. USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1978:3

<sup>30</sup> This is also recently been asserted in the statement of the ANCYL (African National Congress Youth League) after the banning of the ANC liberation song by the equality court “...the judgment serves as a clarion call that we should fight tirelessly for the total liberation of the people of South Africa. We cannot forever live in a society where the absolute component of land, minerals wealth, culture, heritage, Courts and everything is owned and controlled by Settlers. No settler brought land to Africa, and no colonizer will impose on us how our lives are lived”.

<sup>31</sup> Fage, J.D. *A History of Africa*. USA: Routledge. 1988:355.

Pheko is correct in asserting that “the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck on the 6 April of 1652 started the dispossession of the African people. The history of South Africa which followed is a tragic story of military suppression, political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation of a people, unprecedented in the history of the civilized world. In fact, the contradictions that are found in this history bear a clear stamp of the conflicting interests of the indigenous African majority and those of the settler minority. For over three hundred years the history of what is in reality the story of a dispossessed people, has been falsified in favour of the settlers and their supporters whose writers recorded it in the interest of what they have misnamed “Western Christian Civilization”.<sup>32</sup> This is also asserted by Thwala when he stated that “relocation and segregation of blacks from whites started as early as 1658 when the Khoi people were informed that they could no longer dwell to the west of the Salt and Liesbeek rivers, and in the 1800s, when the first reserves were proclaimed by the British and the Boer government”.<sup>33</sup> From this we can see that the arrival of the Dutch East Indian Company under Jan van Riebeeck was on its own the cause of land dispossession (or the start of the painful process of land dispossession). Therefore the resolution of the issue of land dispossession is deeply rooted in religion or mission. This is because, as the Dutch East Indian Company advanced from their original plan (to make Cape the point of departure for economic matters) to religious matters, this created the advancement of the process of Africans losing their original land, because missionaries had to come in to South Africa and this meant that more space (land) was needed to cater for them.

This therefore meant that other original inhabitants of the land had to lose their land. From early as this period the Bantu refused the process of land dispossession and this is seen from the excerpt from Commander Jan van Riebeeck’s diary when he asserted that “they (Khoisan) strongly insisted that we had been appropriating more and more of their land which had been theirs all these centuries...” They asked if they would be allowed to do such a thing supposing they went to Holland, and they added: “it would be of little consequence if you people stayed at the fort, but you come right into the interior and select the best land for yourselves”(Jan van Riebeeck).<sup>34</sup>

This pathology of self-hate, strengthened by the loss of the land, provided grounds for attention for theological hermeneutics such as black theology, as we will see in the following section.

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<sup>32</sup> Pheko, M. *Apartheid: the story of a dispossessed people*. London: Marram Books. 1984:1.

<sup>33</sup> Thwala, W.D. Land and agrarian reform in South Africa in *Promised land: competing visions of agrarian reform*. New York: Food First Books. 2006:58.

<sup>34</sup> Morris, M. *Every step of the way: the journey to freedom in South Africa*. Cape Town: Ministry of Education and Human Sciences Research Council. 2004:43-44.

**The continued relevance of black liberation theology<sup>35</sup> in a changing South Africa<sup>36</sup>**

Biko asserts:

Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men. They failed to change the system for many reasons ... but the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people.<sup>37</sup>

Black theology is the story of black people's struggle for liberation in an extreme situation of oppression. Black theology's starting point is the experience of black people; black theology wants to liberate people from oppressive structures of racism, political oppression, economic poverty, social alienation and spiritual enslavement. It seeks to discover what message the Christian gospel has to offer to people who find themselves in oppressive situations. It also seeks to interpret the meaning of God's liberating presence in a society where blacks are being economically exploited and politically marginalised because of their skin colour. And what this means is that black theology puts black identity in the theological context. Cone sums the definition of black theology in the following manner:

The theme of liberation expressed in story-form is the essence of black religion. Both the content and form were essentially determined by black people's social existence ... when Christianity was taught to them and they began to read the Bible, blacks simply appropriated those biblical stories that met their historical need. This is why some themes are stressed and others are overlooked ... they did not debate religion on an abstract theological level but lived their religion concretely in history.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Black liberation theology is a realization, which stems from the reality of the black people (Tshaka & Mogashoa 201:535)

<sup>36</sup> South Africa here is referred to as a changing South Africa, because we are still in the transition from the apartheid South Africa to a new South Africa, where blacks can start realizing themselves as full human beings.

<sup>37</sup> Biko, S. *I write what I like*. Johannesburg: Picador Africa. 2004:30.

<sup>38</sup> Cone, JH. 1975. The story context of black theology, in *Theology Today* 1975 32:144.

In South Africa, black liberation theology was expressed under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement.<sup>39</sup> One of black theology's failures in South Africa was to be a practical theology which will help the oppressed black people.<sup>40</sup> By this we refer to the fact that black theology became only a theoretical theology which was not fully brought down to the real situations in which blacks find themselves. It unintentionally became an object of the elites. Thus Mosala (in Tshaka & Mogashoa) criticised black theology when he asserted that:

it cannot be contested that although black theology has developed and is well and alive, it has not yet, as a weapon of theory, become the property of the struggling black masses. To this extent, it is a theory that has not yet become a material force because it has not gripped the masses. It has served its purpose well as a weapon of criticism against white theology and the white society. That activity, however, does not replace criticism of the weapon itself.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, there is still a continued relevance of black liberation theology in South Africa, but we need a black liberation theology which will percolate to the black masses. It should also be a black liberation theology which will help black people to be free from the chains of internalised oppression and also help them to reclaim God.

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<sup>39</sup> Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the black world for a long time. Its essence is the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on a self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that they seek to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Biko further on asserts that "At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude, but if one's mind is so manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his powerful masters. Hence thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being complete in himself (Biko 2004:101).

<sup>40</sup> Tshaka, R.S & Mogashoa, M.H (eds). 2010. *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and theology in Southern Africa*. South Africa: University of Stellenbosch.2010:534.

<sup>41</sup> Tshaka, R.S & Mogashoa, M.H (eds). 2010. *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and theology in Southern Africa*. South Africa: University of Stellenbosch.2010:541.

### Conclusion

Reconciliation in South Africa has been quick-fixed. This led to cheap reconciliation, by which we mean reconciliation which is not centred on justice and restitution. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leader of the confessing church in Germany during the Second World War, differentiated between cheap and costly grace. For him, cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnated.<sup>42</sup> What Bonhoeffer meant was that grace is free but it is not cheap. Therefore, it is my contention that the same must be said of reconciliation; we as Christians need to be reconciled with ourselves and with God. But this reconciliation is not cheap; it is costly.

Therefore, in trying to reach a costly reconciliation in South Africa we need a reconciliation which unapologetically insists on restoring justice. This justice must give special attention to the question of land restitution. To strengthen this we will use the assertion by Fray Pedro, who claimed that: "As medicine is necessary to help repair the wounds which we suffer in our flesh and to put the body back in its pristine condition of health, so also is restitution necessary to close up the wounds caused by a violation of the virtue of justice, to be put once again in their original condition of balance and equity".<sup>43</sup> This demonstrates costly reconciliation and a political healing that restitution effects as an act of restorative or communicative justice. More importantly, it acknowledges that the act of taking someone's property or belongings (this includes identity) causes or inflicts wounds. He went on to assert that:

Those wounds cannot be wished away, but have to be nursed. In a word it calls for appropriate restitutionary measures. As Tutu once said, if you have my pen, it is ludicrous to say let us reconcile before you return my pen. For Tutu genuine reconciliation can only take place if the object taken is returned<sup>44</sup>.

Therefore, as has been alluded to, the apartheid system has instilled the internalised feelings of inferiority and oppression in black people. This internalisation has led to the painful process of self-hate among black people. This was done through the suppressive, exploitative and dehumanising

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Bonhoeffer, D. 1995. *Cost of discipleship*. New York: Touchstone.

<sup>43</sup> Mosoma, D. (vol 1), *Restitution/Reparation: A commitment to Justice and Peace* in the Journal of Black Theology in South Africa of 1991 vol 5 No.1. 1991:27.

<sup>44</sup> Mosoma, D. (vol 1), *Restitution/Reparation: A commitment to Justice and Peace* in the Journal of Black Theology in South Africa of 1991 vol 5 No.1. 1991:27.

system of apartheid. This system had a terrible impact upon black people; it resulted in the destruction of the identity of black people who are deeply rooted in the land. This system was even sanctioned through the Bible. Therefore it is necessary to restore land to black people in order for them to be reconciled to themselves and to the wider community. True reconciliation and true justice in South Africa can only be attained when land is restored to black people. Land restitution will restore dignity to black people who were stripped of that dignity when land was expropriated from them.

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