

Black Theology and Africa: Liberation, justice and the African context – special issue

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Black Theology has proved to be valuable in addressing the realities of oppression, injustice and marginalisation, particularly within the global black community because of being grounded in not only the struggles of black people but also their lived experiences. In Africa, Black Theology has intersected with the continent's unique historical, socio-political and cultural challenges. Subsequently, Black Theology has showcased its invaluable role in the fight for liberation, equality and justice. When we sent out the call, we targeted voices eager to explore this theological tradition's role in addressing racial, social and economic injustices in African contexts and beyond. Also, we wanted to explore how Black Theology and African theologies, including their contributions to liberation struggles across the continent, intersect. In addition, we sought a proper analysis of the intersection of Black Theology with cultural identities and indigenous belief systems while examining how African churches and theological institutions promote social change using this theological tradition.

It is evident that Black Theology is pivotal in the struggle for emancipation and human rights. In this case, one must mention the significance of the Church, especially the black Church. The Church is part of a community of believers, encapsulating the values, teachings and mission of Jesus Christ. The multifaceted role of the Church is seen in activities of worship, discipleship, fellowship and societal engagement, subsequently inspired by Jesus' life and informed by biblical teachings (Masoga 2024). According to Dube and Molise (2018:160), 'the role of the church in the liberation of South Africa' is central to the Black Theology project, which 'has not received its fair share of attention'. They also noticed a deliberate neglect of liberation narratives and academic discourses in acknowledging how the sacred institution influenced South Africa's liberation. Dube and Molise (2018:160) found that scholars such as Molobi (2014:196), Rasool (2000:3), Saunders (ed. 2009:25) and Storey (2012:1), among others, neglected to highlight how civic and religious groups contributed to South Africa's liberation; instead, they exalted the contributions of politicians therein. Still, the sacred institution in South Africa is a constant reminder to the communities facing life challenges of the spiritual and moral support it offers (Masoga 2024). Through prayer, Scripture reading, praise and worship, the Church equips congregants to endure the struggle, hoping they will be victorious through faith. It involves honouring God, being openly grateful and seeking spiritual connection (Masoga 2024). Thus, worship should not be limited to Sunday services but form part of all aspects of life, reflecting an attitude of reverence and devotion, of which discipleship is key. It is the Church's duty to teach and nurture believers, aid in the growth of their faith and help them to understand God's Word (Masoga 2024). This includes equipping believers to be able to address challenges, make ethical decisions and live out their faith in the world (Masoga 2024). The Church uses fellowship to foster, nurture and create a sense of community and support, subsequently calling believers to encourage, uplift and care for one another (Masoga 2024). The Church is thus a place where individuals can find belonging, build meaningful relationships and receive practical help. Just as Jesus challenged the norms of His time, the Church has a duty to address societal issues, advocate for justice and care for the marginalised (Masoga 2024). This entails charity work and challenging unjust systems to bring about positive change. In conclusion, the multidimensional role of the Church encompasses spiritual growth, community and societal transformation, reflecting Jesus' teachings and exemplifying His love in action. The Church becomes a powerful force for positive change and a beacon of hope in a broken world by embracing this role (Masoga 2024). While politics tends to juxtapose force with manipulation, the sacred institution encourages pacifism and tolerance. Regrettably, the latter position has received little attention.

Despite the numerous challenges facing societies and the sacred institution in South Africa and beyond, they are manageable (Masoga 2024). These challenges, whether personal, societal, moral or spiritual, are intrinsic to the human experience, and the Christian journey is not exempt from

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them (Masoga 2024). These challenges test faith, character and resilience, necessitating believers to reflect on their convictions and values (Masoga 2024). For Dube and Molise (2018:162), 'the church should challenge colonial systems that have remained in place long after apartheid ...' (see also Muchie & Gumede 2017:177; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:13), especially because the world today often contradicts Christian values. The challenge of living out one's faith authentically is a common theme (Masoga 2024). However, believers tend to struggle with the tension between their cultural norms and biblical principles, requiring them to examine their priorities and make intentional choices that align with their faith (Masoga 2024). Challenges can also be opportunities for growth. The apostle James writes about considering trials as opportunities for joy, as they produce endurance and maturity (Masoga 2024). Thus, challenges have the potential to cultivate patience, perseverance and empathy, moulding believers into stronger and more compassionate individuals (Masoga 2024). The Church should provide a supportive community during challenging times, as it enables people to address difficulties with a sense of unity and solidarity when they experience fellowship, prayer and encouragement from fellow believers (Masoga 2024). The Church also equips believers with spiritual resources, enabling them to face challenges with faith and hope. Challenges also offer opportunities for personal growth, deeper faith and the chance to contribute positively to the world, allowing them to demonstrate the transformative power of the Gospel (Masoga 2024). However,

the main challenge facing the Church in South Africa and beyond is that politicians do not take the sacred institution and its clerics seriously (Masoga 2024). Politicians are still viewing the Church as a vehicle of imposition of neo-colonial intimations (Masoga 2024). We are pleased that this special issue lived up to its expectations. We present a volume that fiercely engages with issues of the biblical text and Black Theology, environmental justice and advocacy, reconciliation, healing and nation-building, womanist and African feminist theological perspectives.

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