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The Church Land Programme and Black Theology of Liberation: Solidarity and Suggestions for an Innovative Methodology

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Abstract: Black Theology of Liberation, particularly in South Africa, has always been for Black people in the world and produced theological reflections through the lens of Black people. In the evolving scholarship on BTL, there has been challenges in its middle class positionality toward the Black poor and oppressed. The Church Land Programme in Pietermaritzburg was presented with a similar challenge on its positionality in its work on land reform. The CLP's shift from an organisation working on behalf of the Black poor to working with them may provide suggestions for BTL's methodology and positionality. This article analyses the Church Land Programme's community-led publications and how these provide innovative methodological choices for Black Theology of Liberation scholars. Firstly, it explores the Church Land Programme's history, strategic shifts, and publication partnerships within communities. Secondly, is analyses the publications' use of stories from within communities. Finally, it discusses new methodological choices in Black Theology of Liberation through lessons from the Church Land Programme's shift and resultant publications. The results reveal that narratives from below can be promoted in Black Theology of Liberation's methodology.

Keywords: Black Theology of Liberation; land and housing; South Africa; narratives; Church Land Programme; methodology

Academic Editors: Fergus King and Alfred Sebahene

Received: 23 October 2024
Revised: 4 February 2025
Accepted: 10 February 2025
Published: 19 February 2025

Citation: Mlambo, Ntandoyenkosi. 2025. The Church Land Programme and Black Theology of Liberation: Solidarity and Suggestions for an Innovative Methodology. *Religions* 16: 262. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020262

1. Introduction

Black Theology of Liberation in South Africa developed through the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Motlhabi 2009; Tshaka and Makofane 2010, p. 534). Black Theology of Liberation in South Africa was inspired by liberation theology in Latin America, the works of James Cone, and the civil rights movement in the United States of America (Tshaka and Makofane 2010, p. 533). The BTL connection to BCM was founded in the aim to galvanise and organise toward political and economic liberation for Black people[1] (Tshaka and Makofane 2010, p. 534). There have been challenges presented by BTL's class structure in scholarship, with some defending the theological movement against its labelling as middle class (Tshaka and Makofane 2010, p. 541). Another movement or organisation which has faced discussion on its positionality is the Church Land Programme.

In the late 1990s, the discussion around land and housing reform was at its height in South Africa. The Church Land Programme was initiated through a partnership between the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) in 1996 (Church Land Programme 2024a). The Church Land Programme initially worked with churches in discussing land reform through their own land resources. However, their work shifted toward collaborating with communities toward land and housing reform. The author's view is that the Church Land Programme's

case study reflects a move from a top-down organisation toward a transformative pro-poor organisation. Furthermore, this post-2004 transformation may assist BTL in developing methodologies that reflect a shift from middle class positionality toward a positionality that engages the poor and oppressed. This article analyses Church Land Programme's community-led publications and possible innovative methodological choices in Black Theology of Liberation, particularly its South African iterations. Firstly, it discusses the Church Land Programme's history, strategic shifts, and publication partnerships within communities. Secondly, it analyses the publications' use of stories from below and within communities. Finally, it explores innovative methodological choices in Black Theology of Liberation through the Church Land Programme's case study and publications.

2. Methodology

This article uses various literature in a desktop study in order to discuss the opportunities that the Church Land Programme's case study provides. This article uses dissertations, historical narratives, and the Church Land Programme's publications in order to show the Church Land Programme's activities and growth in their work toward land and housing transformation. Also, this article includes use of journal articles and books to answer the research question. Additionally, this article engages hermeneutical choices in Black Theology of Liberation using the concept of social constructivism and narrative theology. The next section covers the Church Land Programme's history and evolution.

3. Church Land Programme: History and Evolution

3.1. Its Beginnings

The Church Land Programme is a non-profit and nongovernmental organisation initiated in 1996 (Church Land Programme 2024a). The organisation was initiated as a joint project between the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) and the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA) (Church Land Programme 2024a). The PACSA was formed in 1979 by White Christians looking to educate White churches on the effects of Apartheid on Black people in the country (Manda 2014, p. 263). After Apartheid ended, the PACSA partnered with communities in order to seek their own liberation from things that undermined their freedom and dignity (Manda 2014, p. 263). Additionally, the AFRA is an independent nongovernmental organisation which aims to redress injustices (particularly through land) and ensure and tenure for all (Harley and Fotheringham 1999, p. 6). Furthermore, the AFRA collaborated particularly with Black South Africans in rural areas in South Africa (who have been dispossessed of land, are subject to insecure land tenure, or do not have resources to access land) (Harley and Fotheringham 1999, p. 6).

The Church Land Programme was officially established in 1997 (Church Land Programme 2024a). The Programme was initially focused on church-owned land and the process of land redistribution in the 1990s and early 2000s while also focussed on challenging the Church's engagement with the national land question (Church Land Programme 2024a).

3.2. Growth

The Church Land Programme has grown and shifted throughout its existence. Stephen Phiri, in his dissertation on the Church Land Programme, discusses the shifts in detail. Phiri discusses the history of the Church Land Programme using the following eras:

1. The formation of CLP: 1994–1997.
2. The 'conventional' NGO: 1997–2001.
3. The beginnings of change: 2001–2004.
4. The shift: 2004–2007.
5. The consolidation of the shift: 2008–2017 (Phiri 2018, p. 162).

The Church Land Project (As the Programme was called at the time) was formed three years after the official end of Apartheid and when land redistribution was at the top of the national governmental and social agenda (Phiri 2018, p. 165). It was assumed that the institutional church possessed a lot of land and there was an initiative to contribute to the land reform agenda (Phiri 2018, p. 165). In June 1994, a conference was held by the PACSA to look at how the church could contribute to this agenda. The result of the meetings and this initiative was the Church Land Programme.

3.3. Evolution

After its formation, the Church Land Programme began work as what Phiri calls a "conventional NGO" (Phiri 2018, p. 170). The CLP understood itself as a mediator, partner, and connection between the government, churches, and communities (Phiri 2018, p. 168; Butler et al. 2007, pp. 3–4). Even with this mediatory role between different positionalities, the organisation used conventional language normally used by nongovernmental organisations that did not reflect that mediatory role, particularly toward the landless poor (Phiri 2018, p. 168; Butler et al. 2007, p. 4). This includes the use of words like "stakeholders, progress indicator, exit, development processes, development facilitation, consultants, and contracts" (Phiri 2018, p. 170). Over time, the team at the Church Land Programme states that, "We became aware of the dangers of reaching an analytical conclusion to speak '*for* the interests of the poor' without serious reflection on and criticism of our own practice" (Butler et al. 2007, p. 4). However, there was a shift in how they connected with power within government and its view of communities over time.

The Church Land Programme began a strategic shift which culminated in cementing its new strategy in 2004 (Butler et al. 2007, p. 1). Having been what would be considered a "normal NGO" from its inception, the organisation changed their strategy for a number of reasons (Butler et al. 2007, p. 1). After 2001, the organisation raised concerns around the land redistribution process and the ruling government's approach to land reform and distribution (Philpott and Butler 2004, pp. 7–11). Also, the Church Land Programme had theological focus on using liberation theologies and the focus on the poor as the thrust for their day-to-day work (Phiri 2018, pp. 172–73; Philpott and Butler 2004, p. 2; Butler et al. 2007, p. 34). Furthermore, they used liberation theology in the understanding of and arguments about land and in its contextual bible studies with churches and church leaders to reflect on issues of land (Phiri 2018, pp. 172–73). Moreover, the intertwined relationship between the South African Council of Churches and the government was causing concern for members with the Programme as it preferred consistent critical solidarity with the government (Phiri 2018, p. 179). Moreover, an interview with the one of the founding colleagues, Graham Philpott, reveals some impetus for the change, noting:

> What prompted the need for a change was when we realised that what we were doing was problematic, that what we were doing was going against the very things that were intended and was actually causing problems. . .we were masking the power dynamics within the community. . .In other places where we were working, we realised that as land was transferred, what was taking place, was the educated and often businessmen from the area. . .would gain control of the land that had been transferred. And the poorer households. . . were left more vulnerable. (Philpott in Phiri 2018, p. 181)

Philpott discussed the discomfort that grew as the organisation saw how power dynamics affected the Black people who were supposed to be economically emancipated through land reform. Also, the growing relationship between the churches and government created a need for change in how the Church Land Programme positioned itself as an organisation. After the realisations throughout this time, the organisation re-looked at its

form, function, and identity. In 2004, the organisation began a strategic planning process that created a new direction for the Church Land Programme (Church Land Programme 2024b). It began to focus more intently on practice and reflection on practice (Church Land Programme 2024b). This had a profound effect on the way the organisation approached its work (Church Land Programme 2024b). The Church Land Programme states that it now had a commitment to "walking with communities towards the realisation of the choices that they make[sic]" (Church Land Programme 2024b). The Church Land Programme opened up to the "politics of the poor and its practice is guided by an active solidarity with people in the struggles that they define and take forward on their own terms" (Church Land Programme 2024b).

The Church Land Programme's journey reflects an evolution from operating as a traditional NGO which seemingly worked for the poor to working in critical solidarity with the poor (Butler et al. 2007). This journey from its beginnings to this change shows a shifting orientation as land reform also evolved. This shift moved them from an organisation that worked for the poor and with those with power in churches and government. Additionally, the shift was toward an intentional solidarity with the poor and landless and a critical distance with the current governmental status quo over time. The organisation calls this emerged solidarity an alignment with the movements of poor people and learning from their agency (Butler et al. 2007, p. 8). The next section will analyse some of the Church Land Programme's publications after this shift.

4. Church Land Programme: Publications with the Poor and Marginalised

Over the course of its existence, the Church Land Programme has been releasing information on their journey. However, after the strategic shift in 2004, they started to release publications that were community-focused. These include newsletters and books in partnership with the communities they worked and continue to work in. In this section, I detail some of the publications and the CLP's intentional partnership with the poor and marginalised.

In the newsletters formed by the Church Land Programme after 2004, there has been an intention to create the newsletter with communities rather than for communities. In one newsletter in 2010 named *People's Food and People's Sovereignty*, the Programme begins by writing a blurb on their walk with communities (Church Land Programme 2010, p. 1). The organisation explains that they have experienced coming across poor and marginalised people who do not eat even for 3 days in a row. Additionally, the organisation notes that the communities mentioned in the newsletter are part of a larger context of land injustice that the government of the time had not figured out (Church Land Programme 2010, p. 1). However, they note that the reader must engage with the story in its own context and remember to engage with the stories with the knowledge that "it is necessary to respect the thinking, strategies and leadership of the people over their own lives and struggles" (Church Land Programme 2010, p. 1). In the following parts of the newsletter, the Programme focusses on the stories of the communities, bringing actual words from members of communities. The Programme details the stories of the *Zamintuthuko* farmers group, who use traditional land (Church Land Programme 2010, pp. 1–2). Also, it tells the story of the St Joseph's farm in Dundee which "allows" the community to use the land for vegetable growth and many other stories, noting the community's challenges and struggles without pushing a narrative (Church Land Programme 2010, pp. 1–2). Rather, the stories are told of the work these groups do and how they build lives despite poverty and injustice.

Another newsletter in 2006 uses the same aforementioned structure. It initially explains that the South African government has applauded itself on the amount of land restitution achieved since the start of its Land Restitution Programme in 1996 (Church Land

Programme 2006, p. 1). However, they note that there must be critical nuance given to the land restitution journey in South Africa (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). The newsletter then notes the following:

> This newsletter looks at what the people who have lodged claims have to say. It looks at Land Restitution from 'the ground' and not from 'the top'. It examines if the Restitution Programme is *really* bringing about justice and healing the wounds from the past. (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1)

The 2006 newsletter continues to detail the stories of the Oakford and Roosboom communities and their journey in land restitution. The writers of the newsletter note that Oakford is 1100 hectares of land outside of Verulam in KwaZulu-Natal. It was purchased in the late 1800s by Catholic Bishop Jolivet, who also established the Oakford Priory (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). The amount of people living at the mission station grew due to growing work opportunities nearby and a growing commitment to Catholicism (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). However, due to the enaction of the Group Areas Act in the 1950s and 1960s, Black people were removed from the Oakford land (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). The displaced people of Oakford, as well as the Dominican sisters who remained on the land, applied for land restitution which took around 9–10 years to be completed due to governmental red tape (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). The 2006 newsletter continues to tell a story of a Black man who was offered land in the 1900s as an elite, which was built up as a Christian community with little Zulu traditions allowed. In 1975, those living on the land (*Roosboom*) were forcefully removed to a township called *Ezakheni* (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). The Roosboom community petitioned to be returned to the land during democracy, while the new democratic government offered 26 million in order to develop RDP housing (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). However, they did not see evidence of this and started to fight for the development (Church Land Programme 2006, p. 1). Again, the publication is not about the organisation but recognises the strength and liberating force of marginalised communities as well as the long wait for land restitution.

Finally, a book was released by the Church Land Programme with the name *Living Learning*. The book is published by the organisation but is written by members of *Abahlali BaseMjondolo*'s Rural Network. In the book, the authors mention the following:

> Living Learning is part of a living politics. It is not about heavy things to be learned by us 'fools' from 'smarter' people. Publishing a booklet out of our Living Learning could also be there for those 'smarter' people to learn from the 'fools'... Living Learning is about what's happening in and outside of the University classroom. So we are trying to combine the two universities—the one of experience and the one of academics. (Figlan et al. 2009, p. 7)

The book details a series of experiences, reflecting on the university of experience. The writers are on the ground and live through the fight for liberation in and through the land. Also, they mark that their discussions are not simply for the record but should be part of knowledge generation and the fight for liberation for land-oppressed people. Overall, the publication reflects the partnership with marginalised peoples but stepping back to let these voices be heard for the journey toward liberation. The Programme works within communities and communicates community lives. The evolution of the Church Land Programme has shown the shift from a top-down positionality toward solidarity and work with the landless poor. Also, these publications show the innovative use of land but also show how the Church Land Programme has enacted this new dynamic with the poor.

Having discussed the CLP's shift and publications, the next section will explain and analyse Black Theology of Liberation's middle class positionality.

Black Theology and Its Middle Class Positionality

As mentioned in the Introduction, Black Theology of Liberation was formed as a theological form and tool for the liberation of Black people in South Africa and across the world. Black Theology of Liberation scholarship is still aimed toward the goal of liberation of Black people using a theological lens. In this goal of liberation, there have been reform discussions to its scholarly structure and communication.

Motlhabi states that there have been five phases of evolution of Black Theology of Liberation in South Africa: an emergence, an engagement and response, a second generation and its set of initiatives, the first paradigm shift, and a theological wilderness (Motlhabi 2009). Black Theology of Liberation in South Africa had an emergence and development from the 1960s and 1970s (Motlhabi 2009, pp. 164–68). Black Theology then went through a short lull and resurgence in the 1980s, with a second generation of scholars arising (Motlhabi 2009, pp. 168–69). It is here that the paradigm shift began, with gender and class being raised as analytic points for Black Theology of Liberation (Motlhabi 2009, pp. 169–71). Furthermore, the dawn of democracy was in 1994, and attention toward Black Theology of Liberation was waning (Motlhabi 2009, pp. 169–71) while other theologies arose. This fourth phase also presented an issue for Black Theology of Liberation scholars, as their attention was diverted toward a new democratic dispensation, dulling the revolutionary knife of BTL. In the fifth phase, Motlhabi communicates that a theological wilderness was entered into where there was a lull (Motlhabi 2009, pp. 171–73). However, there have been continued scholarship on Black Theology of Liberation in this time and commitment to its value for the ontologically Black. In discussions on Black Theology of Liberation, there have been concerns raised on its positionality amongst the middle class. Reddie details that Black Theology may be seen as a middle class academic endeavour (Reddie 2020, p. 5). Also, he states that "Black Theology has often ignored class differences and the internalised, middle class bias that is often secreted within the body politic of Black communities in the UK and the USA" (Reddie 2020, p. 5). Buffel states that Black Theology of Liberation theologians have not shown demonstrable intention to partner with the poor and engage with them on what it means to be poor, oppressed, and exploited (Buffel 2010, p. 477). Furthermore, there is no evidence of empirical research in numerous articles on Black Theology of Liberation in order to show what the poor and oppressed are saying (Buffel 2010, p. 477). The Church Land Programme had a similar positioning issue in its formative years. The organisation began reflecting on its relationship with the landless poor and moved toward partnership with and listening to the poor.

The Church Land Programme's case study (which explores strategic shift and publications) presents lessons in order to move away from a middle class positionality toward a positionality for liberation that is engaged with the poor and oppressed.

The next sections discuss how the Church Land Programme's shift and subsequent publications give lessons for methodological suggestions for Black Theology of Liberation to move away from a middle class positioning.

5. Possibilities for Community-Led Embodiment in Black Theology of Liberation

The previously mentioned publications have interesting particulars. The publications are published through the Church Land Programme. However, rather than using the conventional NGO language, the publications discuss the lives, challenges, hopes, and continued struggle of marginalised communities. Additionally, these communities are discussed according to what they are building (in addition to suffering through) as well as their continued ways of subversion of injustices found in a post-1994 South Africa. Also, oppressed peoples are able to speak on their own experience in the publications.

The publications mentioned above can offer methodological suggestions for work in Black Theology of Liberation away from a middle class positionality.

Black theologians have discussed over decades theoretical foundations in Black Theology of Liberation. Ngcokovane details the search not only for epistemological definition for BTL but also methodological choices in the 1980s (Ngcokovane 1989, p. 35). He contends that BTL must lean on perspectives informed by Black people's experiences and faith (Ngcokovane 1989, p. 36). This view, over the course of Black Theology of Liberation's (BTL) existence, has been marked as a clear epistemological thrust for BTL. Furthermore, at this point of BTL's existence, Ngcokovane reflects the continued need to discuss and evolve the tools of analysis and methodological tools toward liberation for Black people across the world (Ngcokovane 1989, p. 36). In 2022, Maluleke states that the original themes and currents of BTL have remained as poverty and inequality are prominent in the day-to-day lives of Black people (Maluleke 2022, p. 117). Yet, these are underscored by nuanced identities through gender, class, sexuality, and culture (Maluleke 2022, p. 117).

An example of discussions that are reflected in this nuanced intersectionality is Oliver's reflection on Black Theology of Liberation and Coloured identity (Oliver 2024). Oliver reflects on the ontology of Coloured marginality within South Africa (Oliver 2024, p. 1). Explaining the formation of Coloured identity and culture, Oliver details that Coloured[2] people are seemingly existing outside on the margins of the subject-object relationship between the White subject and Black African object (Oliver 2024, p. 2). The marginality of Coloured identity is also found in the diminishing of the complex history of slavery across the Indian and Atlantic Oceans toward the Cape in South Africa and continued lack of discussion of the Coloured identity in relation to the ontology of Blackness (Oliver 2024, pp. 2–3). Some Coloured people may not find space in Black Consciousness or Black Theology of Liberation and may be searching for other liberatory theological frameworks (Oliver 2024, p. 7). However, Oliver suggests that Black Consciousness can provide that framework by noting that "Blackness is a shared reality in which general and particular aspects of subjugation and liberation can be voiced" and that the 'Black' in Black Theology of Liberation is for all oppressed peoples (Oliver 2024, p. 8).

Another nuanced revelation is one of discussion on gender in Black Theology of Liberation. Kobo (2020) discusses the intersections of oppression in race, class, and gender which have been discussed in a journey toward liberation. Using the concept of *ubuhlanti*[3], Kobo discusses a decolonial liberative view of the space, explaining it as one that holds and includes Black women as important but also a source of power and life not found in a Eurocentric paradigm (Kobo 2020, p. 3). Ubuhlanti is then a paradoxical but liberating concept (and used by Kobo in forming conceptual framework for furthering Black Theology of Liberation) in subverting Eurocentrism and patriarchy (which may also be found in Black Theology of Liberation as well) (Kobo 2020).

These reflections show that the development and evolution of Black Theology of Liberation have noted the nuance and tensions that exist in racial identities and gender, particularly in South Africa. With liberal democracies (here I focus on South Africa) that cannot address capital structures' effects on the oppressed, racialised inequalities, nuanced racial identities, and gender identities, the struggle for liberation continues and the epistemological thrust toward the 'least of these' remains. In evolving work, the interlocution of liberation has expanded to look at class, gender, sexuality, and nuanced racial identities toward liberation for marginalised and oppressed peoples. With that being said, what role does the 'least of these' play within the work about and for them?

Kunnie, as others do, marks the importance of the leaning of Black Theology toward oppressed Black people (Kunnie 1994, p. 40). Also, Kunnie explores the use of the Black folk tale as an analytic and methodological tool toward methodology rooted in Black culture.

This indication is 30 years old but points to a methodological tool that must be explored in the evolving work of BTL: the voices of the poor and marginalised.

Vellem (2014) asks the question of who the interlocutors of Black Theology should be (or urban Black public theology in his article). Indicating the deconstructive nature and tone of *ekasi*, he notes that Black Theology must be enacted in the places of Apartheid destruction and survival. Also, West (2020) asks the same of hermeneutical work. He claims that, despite having a hermeneutics of suspicion, there must be a development of biblical readings by and for the marginalised using contextual bible studies (West 2020, pp. 7–8).

The epistemological thrust of BTL within the South African context is clear. This article suggests a methodology that goes beyond the thrust and yet grounds it. This article calls for active use of marginalised voices within BTL scholarship, particularly in the South African context. The use of actual stories and words from the marginalised in communities provides depth and nuance to the epistemological thrust of BTL.

Narratives such as those in the Church Land Programme's publications can provide localised discussion on struggles toward liberation and an embodiment of BTL that cannot be found in other methodological choices. The Church Land Programme's story shows a shift toward valuing narratives from oppressed peoples and the nuance that comes from them. The Church Land Programme does communicate the difficulty in performing this work due to the differences and dynamics involved in these discussions (Butler et al. 2007). However, the work produced serves a strong purpose as different individuals can reflect on poverty and resilience, particularly through intersecting identities such as race and gender. Issues of gender, class, and racial nuance within Blackness may be communicated more effectively if voices such as the ones Oliver and Kobo speak of are heard, as is seen in Church Land Programme's publications where the marginalised communicate for themselves toward liberation. Furthermore, the Church Land Programme's case study and its publications show that the marginalised are fully able to interlocute their own context and theologise about these contexts. The narratives of the marginalised may help BTL in producing innovative hermeneutics from marginalised peoples. These hermeneutics can be effective for liberation as they are from the oppressed for their own liberation.

The Church Land Programme is intentional when it explores stories of resilience and resistance from the marginalised. Their publications are largely stories of land from the landless poor. The land and housing struggles discussed in the publications are contextual and point out particulars of communities and their choices without comparing them with others or overall meta-narratives in rural areas in South Africa. This offers a pluralist epistemological thrust for land and housing transformation in South Africa. The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013, or SPLUMA, requires work to provide spatial frameworks in local contexts alongside localised spatial frameworks (Republic of South Africa 2013). However, the actual implementation of these local development strategies is exceedingly rare. Also, the outworking of housing and land transformation is slow (High Level Panel 2017, p. 203). Localised discussion is key to land and housing transformation in the expanse of South Africa. Furthermore, organisational structures that engage communities with a sense of subverted power dynamics create opportunities for solutions to be created from the ground. The stories around land and housing from the landless poor are suggestions that assist BTL in its own work on communicating on land and liberation in varying contexts. These will allow a radical theological lens for land reform not only from universities but from the marginalised as well.

Going beyond the desktop literature and entering into empirical research such as interviews and participatory action research is risky. This is because there must be intentional positionality enacted throughout the process, and power dynamics must be considered, even if the researcher is Black. However, it offers suggestions, despite this risk, for hearing

the marginalised and opening space in research for those words to develop and evolve BTL. Vellem (2012) indicates that there are some who cannot be interlocutors for BTL (and I must admit sometimes I believe he was talking about me and many other middle class academics who attempt to talk on behalf of the "masses"). The favoured interlocutors are the marginalised and poor. Baron (2024) has recently discussed the epistemological importance of the narrative approach. In his article, Baron discusses the use of storytelling and narratives not only as methods to be taken seriously but also methods that have positioning within a wider epistemological shift and are therefore crucial for academics and theologians (Baron 2024, p. 2). Narratives provide an opportunity to form a different epistemological paradigm, particularly in theology (Baron 2024, p. 2). Furthermore, he states that narrative theology furthers an important concept of 'embodied truth' (Baron 2024, p. 2). This truth forms narratives that are not based in abstract theories (Baron 2024, p. 2). These narratives emerge from people and include emotions and cognitive experiences (Baron 2024, p. 2). Black Theology of Liberation was formed or founded on narratives of Black people (Baron 2024, p. 3). Scholars working on BTL have not focussed on abstract theories but rather on Black people's real oppressions and hope for liberation for Black people. Scholars like Kunnie, Maimela, Kobo, and others explore these oppressions for liberation. However, additional methods can be used to expand academic work to include those written about in this epistemological work toward liberation.

This narrative approach is not meant to dilute the academic project but add embodiment in it, and Baron notes that "Black Theology of Liberation can only be dead if there are no more stories of Black oppression" (Baron 2024, p. 7). With the nuances of class, sexuality, and gender within an evolving BTL, there must be investment in narratives that develop a pluralist academic project and communicate that which the marginalised say, live, and struggle for toward liberation. This may allow BTL to move from a middle class positionality to a positionality that shows work with the marginalised.

6. Conclusions

The Church Land Programme was set up as an NGO that worked for land-oppressed communities within the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Over time, it evolved to choose partnership as a tool for liberation and produced publications that indicate the communities' agency beyond the CLP organisation. Black Theology of Liberation has been noted as a theology with a similar issue on positionality. The Church Land Programme's publications offer suggestions for change. They offer methodological suggestions for BTL, one of which is to allow the voices of the marginalised to take centre stage in academic work focussed on BTL. This will allow for a methodological alignment with the epistemological thrust toward the 'least of these'. However, it allows the 'least of these' to communicate their thoughts not as 'fools' (Figlan et al. 2009, p. 7) but as the experts of experience and the expert interlocutors of BTL. This offers an opportunity for Black Theology's positionality to shift from middle class scholarship to open to all who are ontologically Black who seek liberation.

Funding: This article is based on a conference presentation presented at Yonsei University in Korea in August 2024. This research was funded by the University of South Africa.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data included is available in the references listed.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] The world Black is used in the same way Oliver uses Blackness, marking it as "a shared reality in which general and particular aspects of subjugation and liberation can be voiced" (2024, p. 8). I acknowledge that it is a word for those who are ontologically Black (those oppressed peoples of colour across the world who carry a colonial wound and who share realities of subjugation and resistance).

[2] Coloured people have a complex racial identity in South Africa (Adhikari 2006). The Coloured identity cannot be explained in any one way but can be marked as a nuanced racial identity founded in: "...a phenotypically diverse group of peoples descended largely from Cape slaves, the Indigenous Khoisan population and a range of other people of African and Asian origin...Being also partly descended from European settlers, Coloured people have popularly been regarded as being of 'mixed race' and have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy" (Adhikari 2006, p. 143).

[3] Ubuhlanti is a physical space in IsiXhosa culture and home structure where members of the family living in that space keep their livestock (Kobo 2020, p. 2). It is a space which marks the source of life and symbolises wealth (Kobo 2020, p. 2).

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