PROPHETS
INTERRUPTING GOD-LANGUAGE: RETHINKING THE IMAGE OF GOD AS LIBERATOR IN ISAIAH 42

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1. Introduction

Freedom, give us freedom, now
Freedom has come and it won’t be long

The words of this song, ‘Calypso Freedom’ sung by Sweet Honey In The Rock together with many other songs of liberation have served as inspiration for people in oppressed situations everywhere to fight for justice and liberty for all.3 Like the song says:

Yes I will pray for freedom, I will sing for freedom
I keep fighting for freedom, I keep marching for freedom.
My freedom is a comin’ and it won’t be long
My freedom is a comin’ and it won’t be long

Drawing on the ancient stories of a God who has liberated Israel from a life of slavery and oppression, these songs speak of people’s unwavering belief that God is the liberator God who will hear their cries, see their misery, and like Israel of old, liberate those who continue to be trapped in the ever new chains of oppression and bondage created by unjust political regimes, racial and sexual discrimination, violence, class and socio-economic impediments.

However, we have to face the reality that we are living in a world filled with complex political situations, where religious language is often

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1 This paper forms part of a larger project on rethinking the image of God as liberator, showing how the minor or muted voices in the text interrupt the traditional image for God.
3 In the book of J.H. Cone, The Spirituals and the Blues, New York, 1972, Cone shows how the spirituals, which played an important role in the struggle for freedom, were essential for identity and survival. Cf. also the South African DVD, ‘Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony,’ which depicts the role of music and songs in the struggle against Apartheid. As one freedom fighter, Lindiwe Zulu says: ‘Song is what keeps us alive.’