

# “We Are Free only when Others Are Free”: Reflections on Freedom from Philosophical and Theological Perspectives

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## Abstract

It requires no measure of razor-sharp analysis or prophecy to observe that, 25 years into a hard-won democracy, millions of South Africans have not yet obtained the freedom that would enable them to collaborate in creating a qualitative, new society. Part of the problem seems to be the dichotomisation of a number of unavoidable questions resulting from freedom. In this article, some of these issues—like the notion of the born free, liberation, corruption, truth and freedom as a gift—are brought into discourse with the matter of freedom. Particular reference is made to the philosopher, Hanna Arendt, as well as the apostle Paul, in their respective interpretations of freedom. The article concludes with some broad strokes on the implications for South Africa of Paul’s understanding of freedom. The basic thesis of the article is that, unless freedom is brought into a critical conversation with philosophical and theological interpretations of freedom, it will not deliver to millions of South Africans trapped in inequality, unemployment and poverty.

**Keywords:** South Africa; democracy; freedom; philosophy; theology

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to show that in the quest for true freedom, there are a number of unavoidable issues. Put differently, in acknowledging that 1994 in South Africa has marked a definite democratic breakthrough in the history of the country, questions are raised on some of the elements that have to be brought into discourse with the matter of freedom. These include free and fair elections, freedom and the born free, freedom and liberation, freedom and corruption, freedom and truth, freedom as a gift, and freedom and service. The basic thesis of the article is that, unless freedom is constantly kept in creative tension to these issues, it will remain reductionist.

The article is organised in terms of four main points: a brief reference to Mandela and Tutu in the context of freedom; an engagement with issues relating to freedom with particular reference to Arendt from the main thrust of the article; a brief note on what is constructed in the article as “subverted fasting”; and a conversation with Paul relating to his understanding



Phronimon  
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>  
 Volume 19 | 2018 | #1963 | 14 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/1963>  
 Online ISSN 2413-3086  
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of freedom. The article concludes with some implications for South Africa, based on Paul's interpretation of freedom.

## **Mandela and Tutu on Freedom**

Before proceeding to some reflection on the theme, I need to make the following declaration: the democratic breakthrough of 1994—call it the Mandela revolution—has indeed been very decisive. It constitutes a significant step in the quest for a free and just society; in brief, it is by definition the achievement of national liberation. It is, therefore, fitting perhaps to begin our reflection with some perspectives from Mandela on freedom. A few examples must suffice. It is his understanding that the quest for freedom is quite often like walking a long road on which one is bound to falter. “I have made missteps along the way,” he says. “But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment.” At his inauguration as the first democratically elected president of South Africa on 10 May 1994, in following Martin Luther King Jr., he pronounced prophetically: “Let freedom reign. The sun never set on so glorious a human achievement” (Mandela Inauguration Speech 1994). He was, however, wary of the challenge that “there is no such thing as part freedom.” And perhaps the most appropriate manifestation from Mandela, for purposes of this presentation, is the connectedness with or consequence of one's own freedom for others:

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. (Mandela Inauguration Speech 1994)

Indeed, “We are only free when others are free...”

Of great importance in any discussion on freedom is Mandela's view (in Hatang and Venter 2011, 110–111) on the *Freedom Charter* which was drafted and adopted at Kliptown 60 years ago, currently named Walter Sisulu Square. At different times after the adoption of the document at the Congress of the People in 1955, Mandela has offered helpful interpretations of which just a few must suffice in the article. First, he emphasises the radical inclusiveness and collective nature of the freedom envisaged in the document. In calling into service the concept of “democratic forces,” he goes on to interpret this as inclusive of all races, all ideological convictions, all parties and indeed also all religions. Second, he expresses the conviction that the country shall never be truly free unless all South Africans enjoy equal rights and opportunities. A salient point that Mandela raises repeatedly is his reference to the *Freedom Charter* as a “historic policy document.” In our continued discussions on freedom, an unavoidable question is of course whether the prevailing horrific levels of corruption, networks of patronage, nepotism and favouritism, cadre deployment, lack of service delivery and the sheer incompetence of some high ranking officials have not rendered the achievement of some of the main tenets of the *Freedom Charter* very difficult, if not impossible.

At different times and in diverse contexts on the continent of Africa, the notion of the inter-subjective nature of human freedom has found a variety of expressions. One such expression

is Nkrumah's statement on the achievement of Ghana's independence in 1957—that Ghana shall only be really free when the whole of Africa is free:

Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa. (Nkrumah 1957)

The notion is also captured by Tutu's (2009) idea of the rainbow nation, much as some social analysts have expressed wariness of the depoliticised nature of the metaphor. In fact, in more concrete terms he has repeatedly said that white people shall only be free if black people are free.

“Rainbow nation” is a term coined by Archbishop Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa after the first fully democratic election in 1994. The phrase was elaborated upon by President Nelson Mandela in his first month of office, when he proclaimed: “Each of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.”

## **A Discourse between Freedom and Related Issues**

### **Free and Fair Elections**

If the elections of 2014 are anything to go by, even the most cynical will have to agree that they were indeed free and fair. Having said this, however, we must not lose our critical capacity to interrogate something that has gone as smoothly as the elections. There has to be some concern about the seven million registered voters who did not care to vote, leave alone those who are eligible but do not care to register. Are they simply exercising their democratic right or is there an unwritten text that needs to be deciphered? For example, how do we know for sure that these are not poor and unemployed people who have become entirely disillusioned and have given up hope? How do we know that these are not fellow South Africans who have witnessed the lavish and decadent lifestyle of the elite class and the rise of the middle class and have retreated further into marginalisation? We shall only know if indeed we begin to accept that our own freedom is tied up with the freedom of others. This is the essence of genuine human solidarity, which is profoundly expressed in the African philosophical idea of *Ubuntu*, that in its simplest form is about community solidarity and about finding my own identity in the identity of others.

### **More Sources to Draw from for a Collective/Communal Understanding of Freedom**

Apart from the idea of *Ubuntu*, there are a number of simple and self-evident sources we can draw from in inculcating the consciousness that either we learn to live together as sisters and brothers or to perish as fools (King 2013). Three examples must suffice. First, there is the slogan of old from the COSATU trade union movement: “An injury to one is an injury to all, a victory to one is a victory to all.” Beyond the new appearances of fragmentation and division, beyond the legitimate quest for ethnic self-identification, beyond party political and ideological differences, beyond the religious pluralism, we need to arrive at an understanding of solidarity which says that if one schoolboy dies in a dehumanising pit toilet, all South

Africans are seriously implicated. This holds equally true when a mine worker dies at Marikana, or a farmer is killed, or young women are murdered, or children molested, raped and killed. On the bright side, if international awards are bestowed on South Africans, or our sports people do well, or a cabinet minister handles his or her portfolio well, or South Africans indulge in acts of kindness, it is a victory for all. Second, the trade union slogan feeds into the Biblical metaphor of *body*. No other metaphor expresses the interrelatedness and interconnectedness, i.e. human interdependence and solidarity better than *body*. If the small fingers are tied, the hands are handicapped; if the feet stop walking, the whole body is stuck; if the stomach stops digesting the food, the body is not properly nourished. In Christian terms, a major challenge thrown up by the body metaphor is that special attention and care are to be given to the weaker parts of the body. Third, very few cultural institutions are as important as *family* to all Africans—white or black. We need to inculcate once more the very basic understanding that we are all children of the living God, sons and daughters of Abraham and Sarah, born of one seed and consequently sisters and brothers of one another. It is as simple and as complex as that.

### **Bringing Freedom into Discourse with a Diversity of Issues**

Having approached the question of freedom from a somewhat generalising and broad perspective, I would like to proceed now to engage some issues which can be ill avoided in any discussion on freedom. If indeed we accept that we are only free if others are free, we are called to transcend all manner of dichotomy as much as possible. The issues lined up for critical discourse are identified as prone to dichotomisation and, if divorced from the very freedom we speak about, would render genuine freedom virtually unattainable.

### **Freedom and the Born Free**

The arrival of democracy has given rise to ever new concepts and terminologies. A rather striking example of this is the concept “born free.” The term is specifically current in ruling party circles, with the exception of the secretary general of the African National Congress who has expressed his serious reservations about the term. It is used for the 600 000 South Africans born in 1994, the year of the Mandela revolution. Much as it is a well-intended concept to identify those whose birth coincided with the democratic breakthrough in the country, it remains a gross misnomer. The reason for saying this is quite simple and is articulated here as a question rather than a statement: What freedom is there for those born into the triad of inequality, unemployment and poverty? Does this not constitute a glaring contradiction?

We have to manifest, therefore, without being disrespectful to those who use the term, however well intended it appears to be, that they do so for purposes of political expediency.

There seem to be fewer objections to resorting to the social media for engagement with an issue not necessarily articulated in academic writing, but of significance in the ongoing conversation on a particular issue, in the case of this article—the matter of freedom.

Particular reference is made here to a BBC News programme (2014) in which interviews were conducted with six South Africans from the “born free” generation. Quite noticeable is that the concept is put in inverted commas, carrying the connotation of so-called. The interviews were aimed at recording some of the experiences of those who are growing up without apartheid with no notion whatsoever about the struggles waged by the older generation. The six were not necessarily tested on their acceptance or rejection of the term “born free,” but in the programme they were identified as such. What runs through the interviews as a thread is a rather personalised and individualistic understanding of freedom. An almost perfect illustration of this is the interview with Thabang Mabaso, who was born in a place called Orange Farm, arguably one of the poorest areas in the whole of South Africa. What finds reflection in his interview is not the stark reality of squalor, want and deprivation of thousands of Orange Farm dwellers, but the opportunity he got to attend art school, become a professional ballet dancer; and he was giving ballet lessons at the time of the interview. For Nisha Lutchman from Walkerville, south of Johannesburg, “freedom” is connected to whether she can go to a shop without taking off her jewellery for fear of being mugged. For security reasons she does not drive on her own, though she had obtained her driver’s licence. Crime in her understanding is worse than before. Tyron Miller, who enjoys the luxury of participating in a rather expensive sports code, namely motocross riding, sees the end of minority rule as a “really big change” for his parents, and he regards himself as “one of the first generation to be born free.” The fourth interviewee, Mahlatse Legodi, landed in jail for four months for stealing a cell-phone. For him “freedom is the freedom to live a better life.” Khensani Khoza from the South African black middle class is a law student as well as a radio DJ at a university radio station. Perhaps the most striking aspect of her interview is the plea for granting the ruling party more time to deliver on its promises. The last of the six, identified only as Chanelle, is a top skateboarder, a student with ballet as a hobby. She draws attention to the fact that the skating community is racially mixed with a “sense of community.”

There are diverse sides to the interviews. First, there is a very positive note to all the interviews, which is clearly indicative of the positive and hopeful disposition of some young people in South Africa. Second, there are some aspects of the interviews—indeed quite brief—which are extremely worrisome. Instead of blaming young black and white, male and female South Africans who might not have the full benefit of exposure to the history of South Africa under colonialism and apartheid, the Western media are to be blamed, much as a caricature might be created by speaking of the Western media in general terms. The interviews feed into rampant individualism and consequently a truncated and supra-reductionist understanding of freedom. The main thesis of this article is diametrically opposed to such an understanding of freedom, which in unsophisticated terms is about collective freedom, freedom of the entire South African population, in a word, democratic freedom. This understanding of freedom, which had been enshrined in the *Freedom Charter* 60 years ago, is clearly contradicted by Van der Merwe (2014) in her complaint that black peers get job opportunities more easily and that black people suddenly are “more equal” than others. She finds that the white youth are being discriminated against. Once again, as a very young South African, she is not to be blamed if for a number of obvious reasons the older

generation is inclined to a treacherous amnesia about the past as well as shying away from helping the youth to arrive at a better understanding of the complexities of South African society today. All of these have grave negative consequences for the meaning of freedom as a collective project about which we sing in the national anthem: “Let us strive and work for freedom in South Africa our land.”

### **Captivity or Born Free?**

An important aspect relating to the notion of the “born free” is looking at some of the factors which render the term a gross misnomer. In this respect, an article titled: “Is the ‘born free’ generation really so free?” in the *Daily Maverick* by Redelinghuys (2013), is quite helpful. What makes the brief article quite interesting, is that Redelinghuys turns the idea of this article about something of a collective freedom on its head. His line of discourse is that, in broad general terms, those born in 1994 and thereafter are free, but his pertinent question is whether they are individually free. He enumerates the issues on which a broad and general interpretation of freedom might be based, like participating in a real democracy, freedom of movement, freedom of access to employment and freedom from racial discrimination. Yet, in posing the question on whether they are free individually, he asserts that they are “hobbled by a range of crippling impairments that will be difficult to overcome and that will rob them of much of their freedom” (Redelinghuys 2013, n.p.). He goes on to single out issues like unrealistic expectations, the state of the education system, incompetent bureaucrats, youth unemployment, the loss of freedom in the mode of financial independence and psychological and self-esteem consequences.

Thus far one can hardly refute what is raised by Redelinghuys. There is, however, a very serious omission in his presentation, which renders an honest conversation on freedom as intended in this article, virtually impossible. The critical questions on who owns and controls the means of production, the protectionism among those who do and the complete lack of any reference to the history of inequality and poverty in South Africa, turn freedom into the real captive.

Krog (2015, 17), in her quite radical and provocative proposal on how to achieve fundamental change and thoroughgoing transformation in South Africa, articulates well why and how freedom is in great jeopardy. She asserts:

... die retoriek van vryheid en geregtigheid het toenemend verdamp in lospraatjies oor 'n ontwikkelingstaat deur ministers wat op die oog af nie die wil of eens 'n greep op selfdissipline het om te funksioneer binne gedefinieerde morele verbande nie. Vryheid is deur hulle (en ook weens die voorbeeld van baie van ons witmense!) verander tot vryheid om te *shop* en nie tot verantwoording geroep te kan word nie. (Krog 2015, 17)

[Translated by author: The rhetoric of freedom and justice has evaporated increasingly in loose talk about a development state by ministers who apparently do not have the will to function with self-discipline; or do not even understand the concept of self-discipline within defined moral boundaries. Through them (and also through the example set by many white people), freedom has been changed into freedom to “shop” without being held accountable]

In biblical terms, the most we can say is that we are not born free, but we are born for freedom (Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury). That explicates why some interpret the quest for freedom as an ongoing struggle.

### **A Conversation with Hannah Arendt: Freedom and Liberation**

Another question we need to engage, is whether freedom and liberation are merely interchangeable or whether they express different dimensions of the same issue. When following Hannah Arendt (1963, 29–33) in one of her classical writings entitled *On Revolution*, I contend that there is a differentiation between the two. I submit that one can be liberated without necessarily being free. Once again, in South Africa liberation was achieved in 1994. As Christians, we firmly believe that the revolution of 1994 and the emergence from a dark night of despair to a brighter tomorrow has been nothing less than a miracle. Yet, are we free? To be free in Arendt’s interpretation is to take action towards creating something new, something different? According to her, freedom has to do with a situation where the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold (Arendt 1963). She goes on to argue for the coinciding of freedom and the experience of a new beginning. In returning to the question on whether freedom and liberation are the same, Arendt contends that liberation may be the condition of freedom but by no means leads automatically to it; that the notion of liberty implied in liberation can only be negative, and hence, that even the intention of liberating is not identical with the desire for freedom (Arendt 1963). Of particular importance for Arendt’s understanding of freedom is the interconnection of freedom with equality. Allowing herself to be strongly informed by ancient Greek thought, she draws a distinction between what the Greeks understood as *isonomy* and *democracy*. Whereas the latter concept bears the connotation of a rule by the majority or the rule of the many, *isonomy* refers to a mode of “no rule” and consequently no division between rulers and ruled. With reference to equality, Arendt suggests that going back to Greek thought, equality which is seen as a danger to freedom, was then almost identical with it. However, freedom and equality were not innately and inherently part of human beings, but a quality of the *polis*, the city, the country. For Greeks, therefore, no-one could be free except among their peers. Arendt contends:

... what the “men of revolution” had in mind when they claimed that revolution aimed at freedom and the birth of freedom spelled the beginning of an entirely new story, we must first notice the rather obvious fact they could not possibly have had in mind merely those liberties which we today associate with constitutional government and which are properly called civil rights. (Arendt 1963, 31–32)

In elaborating on other liberties, including the human claim to be free from want and fear, are for Arendt the results of liberation, *but by no means the actual content of freedom* [my

italics]. Freedom, for Arendt, is participation in public affairs or unrestricted admission to the public realm.

If all of us are forced to live under the dictates of neo-liberal capitalism, which is running havoc in the lives of people as well as devastating mother earth, how free are we in fact? If only a very powerful, hegemonic, aristocratic, elitist few benefit from the system, how free are the rest of us? If only the surrogates of neo-liberal capitalism and the *petite bourgeoisie* are amassing and accumulating wealth while working class people continuously die at Marikana, how free are we? How free are people who are still locked up in post-colonies either in the form of townships or squatter camps, encircled and contained and far removed from the centres of power? Church people and theologians are challenged to begin to understand that a constitution, which is arguably one of the best in the world, is rendered meaningless for millions of citizens who are not yet free to embark upon the creation of something qualitatively new—an unimaginable and transformed South Africa.

Once more, let it be clear that 1994 with the ascendancy of Mandela to power has indeed been a decisive moment in South African history. The basis has been firmly established, the conditions have been created, and democratic mechanisms have been put in place. It is up to all of us now to take forward the struggle for freedom which in the Mandela metaphor may indeed emerge to be “a long road to freedom.”

### **Freedom and Corruption**

Part of the difficulty we encounter in our quest for greater freedom for all, is the magnitude of corruption in society. The Bible reveals prophetically that there is a human propensity towards using freedom or liberty as a source of corruption. Free people can quite easily become very corrupt people. To be sure, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This holds true for political as well as economic power.

In the media, the picture of corruption that emerges is quite even-handed in exposing state as well as private sector corruption. We hear of serious instances of corruption in state departments, but we also hear of the contravention of the Companies Act, the fixing of the bread price and the milk price, all of which make the poor suffer even more. The very simple and yet pertinent question is: Are the levels of corruption in society not seriously jeopardising our hard-won democracy?

These two paragraphs under the heading “freedom and corruption” constitute nothing more than scratching the surface. In a way, this conceals the very complex nature of the discourse between freedom and corruption. In the magazine *The Globalist*, Wasow (2011) grapples with the vexing question whether the available data suggest any stable relationship between democracy and corruption. There is no space here to engage the data from Transparency International and Freedom House, except to say that Wasow’s findings based on these data suggest the following three issues: that it is not clear that more democracy results in more corruption; secondly, that more political rights and greater civil liberties are associated with



lower corruption; and thirdly, evidence does not support the idea that greater freedom and democracy could be expected to aggravate corruption. This represents, however, only a particular perspective. In a thoroughgoing article, in which they equally fall back on data relating to corruption in its relation to freedom, Pieroni and d'Agostino (2013, 54–72) seem to be suggesting something different. Their article interrogates the prediction that freedom, particularly economic freedom, would be beneficial in reducing corruption, but their main finding is that empirical evidence across the globe and in the continent of Africa in particular, does not necessarily corroborate the prediction.

### **Freedom and Truth**

In the battle against diverse forms of corruption, the relationship between freedom and truth emerges to be quite important. In a polemic with the Pharisees in John 8, Jesus creatively integrates truth and freedom: “The truth will set you free.” The concern of the Pharisees was about heritage, ancestry and roots. Jesus’ worry was about the liberating potential of the truth. His concern was that their claim to a remarkable ancestry was opportunistic because they did not display the same obedience, trust in God and sacrifice as Abraham. Quite often we ourselves are exposed for calling the ancestors into service when we are in trouble. We then show a remarkable memory and recollection of their bravery, honesty, integrity, their work for justice, reconciliation and peace without necessarily following in their footsteps. Once more, “truth” for Jesus is not whether they can prove scientifically that Abraham was their father, but whether the truth happens in their daily lives in the form of radical discipleship. The question then and now is not whether we can philosophise or theorise about the truth, but whether *we stand for the truth*.

### **Freedom and Service**

In the Bible, perhaps more than the relationship between freedom and truth, there is the integration of freedom and service. In theological parlance, freedom is not for self-aggrandisement and self-enrichment, but for service. We are set free for service predicated on love. Bond slaves can only respond to the instructions of the master; free people can serve selflessly. In congratulating students at the graduation ceremony, where the paper was read on which this article is based, they were affirmed in the following manner: “In saying *proficiat* to the qualification you have obtained, let me respectfully also say: education in any form brings a measure of freedom, but also a measure of responsibility to serve others in a manner that would hasten the establishment of a qualitatively new society” (Botha 2014).

### **Subverted Fasting: Breaking the Shackles**

In Isaiah 58 the question of freedom is interpreted as so important that it warrants a liturgical break. As if the Liberator God is calling on His people to *stop the noise*, to shut the doors and to break the yoke that is burdening the oppressed and downtrodden. He is calling for a subverted fasting where onlookers will know that we are fasting, not from the smell of our breath or the appearance of our face, but by witnessing the broken shackles on the ground and by seeing those who were in bondage, going free! Indeed, the measure of fasting God desires

is to untie the chains of injustice. It is James who teaches us that the religion God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

### **A Conversation with Paul: Being Set Free for Freedom**

One of the disservices exegetes and interpreters of the Bible have done to Christians in general and the church and theology in particular, is a depoliticised, individualised and spiritualised image of Scriptures. This is particularly true of the way in which the New Testament has been presented. Since the 1990s, however, more and more studies have emerged with convincing evidence to the reality that the New Testament could hardly be read and understood except within the matrix of the Roman Empire. A conversation with the apostle Paul, for example, would be rendered hugely reductionist if notice is not taken of “the extent to which much of Paul’s key terminology is borrowed from and turned against imperial discourse” (Horsley 2003, 133). Horsley’s argument is that terms like gospel, “saviour,” peace, salvation, faith, lord, ecclesia are all imperial concepts used with reference to the Roman Empire and the emperor specifically. Paul has creatively applied all of these to Jesus Christ and by so doing, was helping his readers in understanding that He was the real, alternative emperor of the world (Horsley 2003, 134).

Arguably one of the most profound examples of Paul’s interpretation of the gospel in the matrix of empire is his accentuation of freedom in his letter to the Galatians. “We have freedom now, because Christ made us free” (Gal. 5:1 from the *Inspirational Bible*); “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (*Inspirational Bible, New International Version*); “Christ has set us free to live a free life” (*The Message*, translation by Peterson). The whole of chapter 5 and indeed the entire letter to the Galatians—as is true of the letter to the Romans—could hardly be understood fully if disconnected from empire. In fact, as far as Galatians is concerned, the very place was a province of the Roman Empire, ruled from Rome militarily and economically. The province did not escape the violence, oppression and heavy taxes of the Roman Empire, nor the promises of peace in the mode of the *pax Romana* and the concomitant issues of material wealth and prosperity.

The inextricable connection between Galatians and the Roman Empire is well illustrated by Horsley (2003, 28) in his reflection on the Roman practice of crucifixion. In helping us to understand Paul’s assertion in Gal. 3:1, namely “Christ was publicly exhibited before your eyes as crucified,” he states:

The Romans deliberately used crucifixion as an excruciatingly painful form of execution by torture (basically suffocation), to be used primarily on upstart slaves and rebellious provincials. Many of the victims were never buried but simply left on the crosses as carrion for wild beasts and birds of prey. As with other forms of terrorism, crucifixions were displayed in prominent places for their “demonstration effect” on the rest of the population. (Horsley 2003, 28)

Let us now turn to the way in which Paul understood freedom. Any assumption to the effect that his reflection on freedom is a type of polemic, with what was offered by the Romans and of course the Jewish law, shall not be too farfetched. The latter issue features strongly in

Galatians 5. A number of creative moments in how Paul deals with the question of freedom will now pass the revue. They shall first be enumerated and then discussed briefly: freedom as a gift, freedom as endangered reality, freedom and truth and freedom as service in love.

### **First, Freedom as Gift**

In human terms and based on the convictions people have on struggling for liberation and justice, freedom is indeed something that could be achieved through human endeavour. Any study of the revolutions of the world corroborates this (cf. Nautz 2008). For Paul, however, in theological terms, freedom is a gift grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Precisely for that reason, his insistence upon the Galatians is that they hold on to their freedom with all their might. Like soldiers on guard, they are to be steadfast in their freedom and not to be caught napping (Luther), nor fall into the trap of thinking that the freedom granted by Christ is to be topped up by something else. In the context of chapter 5, that something else would be the law of circumcision. Quite emphatically, Paul tells the Galatians that the yoke of slavery has been broken and they were free to go.

### **Second, Freedom as Endangered Reality**

For the Galatians, there were at least two threats to their freedom. The one danger is explicitly mentioned in the text, namely that of people going around with the false doctrine of the need for circumcision as a prerequisite for freedom. They were insisting upon what could be called in simple terms a “you must religion”: you must be circumcised, you must observe the law. And much as Paul’s objection to the insistence on the Jewish law could and should not be construed as anti-Semitic, his interpretation is crystal clear that no top up is needed for the freedom offered as a free gift in Christ. The second, but more dangerous threat, is not so obvious in the text. Once more, the Roman Empire with its state-of-the-art architecture, literature, poetry, philosophy, military power, economic wealth and indeed the prospect of peace, must have been a real threat to the freedom wrought upon the Galatians by Christ.

### **Third, Freedom and Truth**

In Galatians 5, Paul creatively and incisively draws a connection between freedom and truth. As Jesus himself does in John 8:32 in his confrontation with the Pharisees:

Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free ...

His confrontation is with those who lay claim to the truth that Abraham is their ancestor. Put differently, they claim to be of very important heritage, namely from the generation of a patriarch and consequently people with an impressive cultural heritage. Jesus, however, exposes them by pointing out that they were not doing what Abraham had done. The radical discipleship characteristic of Abraham’s life was completely absent from theirs. In a word, Jesus debunks their truth claims and their distorted interpretation of freedom by telling them the truth.

## **Freedom as Service in Love**

Arguably, the most creative moment in Paul's understanding of freedom is the interconnection between freedom and service in love. For him, the empowerment of the Galatians lies in viewing and treating all people as equals. Their "service loving" and "loving service" would be the ultimate proof of their freedom. This is diametrically opposed to an understanding of freedom as a source of self-aggrandisement—the pursuance of selfish interests and a pretext for corruption. The text consequently reveals indispensable implications of freedom which call the Galatians to the creation of an entirely new society. The reference to the responsibility which freedom brings makes clear that we are not simply dealing with an inner emotion, but something that needs to be worked out as a public reality. The public nature of service loving manifests in the inculcation of radically new relationships between the Galatians and others, which have as their source the Creator-*Spiritus* who—like the guardian of an orchard—produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

The issue of the huge responsibilities which go hand in hand with freedom is introduced in an incisive manner by Groody (2009, 110–113), based on Catholic Social Teaching. He highlights the two-pronged nature of freedom as "freedom from sin and freedom for love." Conversely, there are also two sides to the freedom coin, namely fundamental rights and fundamental responsibilities. He understands fundamental rights to include civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights. Concomitant to these rights in Catholic social teaching are the "incumbent responsibilities and duties to the common good" (Groody 2009, 112). The implications of such thinking are crystal clear for a country like South Africa. In simple terms, freedom is not free and in slightly more sophisticated terms, "with increased power comes increased accountability, with great wealth comes great responsibility, and with human rights come human duties" (Groody 2009, 113).

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Galatians 5 in its Implications for South Africa**

In a somewhat generalising fashion, Paul's take on freedom is now brought into discourse with the South African context, albeit very briefly. A challenge to church and theology is to overcome the dichotomy between reading a text like Galatians 5 in isolation from the social reality. Whether one undertakes a reading in front of the text, in the text or behind the text (West 1993), the implications for South Africa are clear. By not mustering the courage to face the past as radically suggested by Krog (in *Beeld* of 30 June 2015), South Africa remains at best a post-colony. Put differently, the country is still suffering the after-effects of colonialism and apartheid in terms of a hugely resilient legacy. Krog formulates this differently and perhaps more progressively by suggesting that "n Sistemiese foutlyn het gekeer dat ons wonderlike politieke verandering nie aangevul kon word deur ewe wonderlike verandering nie." [Translated by author: A systemic fault line has prevented our wonderful political change from being enhanced by equally wonderful change.] All of this is of course aggravated by quite a number of critical issues, one of which is the emergence of a class of very powerful, arrogant, elitist, intransigent political leaders. Then there is the culture of

entitlement, patronage, cadre deployment and nepotism; all of which have given rise to a growing social distance between the elite and the rest of a predominantly black population suffering the triple crisis of inequality, unemployment and poverty. There exists indeed an understanding of freedom which feeds strongly into the culture of consumerism. To be free is to have the political power which guarantees free access to the resources of the country. To be free is to have both the material wealth and the ability to shop at will and to consume decadently as the measure of freedom from others. Or perhaps the most treacherous impediment for genuine freedom in the sense of Hannah and Paul is the fear of freedom. Ultimately, though, the quest for real freedom in South Africa will be a “long walk,” unfortunately so. Paul uses the metaphor of an athlete participating in a race. In borrowing from the forerunner of the Olympic Games, he draws attention to impediments in the form of fellow athletes who might be out to cut in before others and thereby retarding them in the race.

### **No Dichotomisation**

This article is a reworked paper presented shortly after the 2014 general elections in South Africa. For a number of obvious reasons, the article draws from some of Mandela’s ideas on freedom, more out of respect and as background to a slightly more critical discourse on the meaning of freedom. The main thrust of the article is the attempt to bring freedom into conversation with issues from which it cannot be divorced. There are of course numerous other issues related to freedom that were not selected for discussion. Perhaps a thoroughgoing discussion on freedom and justice from an economic perspective should have found more space in the article. Be that as it may, it may be safe to suggest that one of the main objectives is achieved in showing that the notion of freedom is slightly trickier and indeed more complex than those who use the term for purposes of political expediency would want us to accept. Arendt and Paul are helpful in the effort to indicate that there are deeper and, as yet, outstanding matters on how freedom is understood in South Africa.

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