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CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: FROM PROPHETIC QUIETISM TO SIGNS OF PROPHETIC RECOVERY

ABSTRACT

The history of prophetic witness against the system of apartheid is well recorded. Church leaders such as, among others, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Rev. Dr Beyers Naude, Dr Allan Boesak, Rev. Frank Chikane and Dr Brigilia Bam are well-known names in this context. Post-1994, the situation, as far as the prophetic involvement of the church in society is concerned, has changed dramatically, with the church withdrawing from the public arena. The article traces some of the reasons why this retreat of the church into the periphery has occurred in a post-1994 situation where inequality, unemployment and poverty still prevail. The article also examines attempts at reclaiming the prophetic voice in the public arena from different sections of the Christian faith. The conversation on both factors informing the retreat into the periphery and attempts at returning to the public arena is located in the quest for transformation.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is indeed a great privilege to contribute a piece in honour of Prof. Pieter Verster, with whom we have become closely acquainted through the Southern African Missiological Society (SAMS). In our informal conversations during the SAMS congress, Prof. Verster expressed a concern regarding the role of the church in post-apartheid South Africa. In deep appreciation of Prof. Verster and in honouring him for his scholarly contributions, we saw it fit to revisit this topical and relevant issue of the role of Christianity in transformation.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to trace some of the reasons for the inner emigration of Christianity and to pose the pertinent question: Has the manoeuvring of Christianity into the periphery and its privatisation not resulted in a situation where Christianity as the majority religion cannot significantly contribute to the fundamental and thorough transformation of society? Secondly, in response to this question, to develop a proposal on the necessary involvement of Christianity in the genuine and thorough transformation of society. What is the form of such involvement? Signs of hope such as the re-grouping and re-emergence of prophetic Christianity are emerging in South Africa. Perhaps, a more profound question to be addressed is whether Christianity itself is not in serious need of transformation. The involvement of Christianity in social transformation will mainly focus on inequality, unemployment and poverty, in light of the gospel and the values of the reign of God.

2. THE INNER EMIGRATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Where is the prophetic voice of the church in post-apartheid South Africa?

The Christian faith gave a courageous witness during the struggle against apartheid. Bhiman (2014:50) and Masuku (2014:16) remind us that religious leaders and formations, including the Christian faith, were influential in challenging and exposing the evils of apartheid in all its manifestations. Since the demise of apartheid and the dawn of democracy in 1994, Christian faith in South Africa has retreated into a false neutrality and has, as a result, seemingly gone into recess, with the consequent failure to make any impact on social transformation. Few courageous Christian leaders such as former Archbishop of Cape Town Desmond Mpilo Tutu have made their voice heard in public against some of the social ills facing the country. There reigns a general reverberating silence. South African Black

theologians such as, among others, Motlhabi (2008:x), Mosoma (2015:19) and Tshaka (2009:159) bemoan the conspicuous silence of the Christian church and its leadership in post-1994 South Africa, where legacies of racism (although abolished from statutes), poverty, unemployment and inequality reign supreme. The church does not operate in a political vacuum in which these social ills take place. Hence, Tshaka (2009:159) finds the silence of the church in the public domain astonishing. Kritzinger (2012:237) also laments the silence of the church in public matters:

It is painful to admit that many South African theologians (including the church) have been reluctant to raise their voices publicly on certain issues since 1994.

This article traces some of the factors behind the voicelessness of the Christian church in South Africa post-1994. The list of factors identified is by no means exhaustive of other matters of concern relating to the absence of the prophetic voice of the church in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.2 False neutrality under a new dispensation

Motlhabi (2008:x) notes that, since the political transition in South Africa from a minority to a majority rule in 1994, the church has seemingly gone into recess, with the result that its critical voice in public matters is curiously missing. It appears that the new developments that have taken place in the country since political liberation have been misconstrued by the church as a time for religious leaders to return to their spiritual business of preaching and counselling, while public matters become the sole preserve of politicians. For instance, this view was expressed recently by some church leaders and members who were livid with the leadership of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) for requesting the President of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party to resign following the Constitutional Court ruling that he had violated the Constitution when he failed to comply with public protector Thuli Madonsela's remedial action on the non-security upgrades to his Nkandla homestead. According to them, this is a political matter that was meant to be resolved by politicians. It is not the business of the church to comment, let alone reflect on this contentious matter. The church must focus on its spiritual business (Mahlakoana & Thakali 2016:1). It is ironical that public funds (to which, I take, religious leaders also contribute) were used for those upgrades; yet they are seemingly not concerned about how this issue affects the church.

Another resultant development, due to lack of prophetic participation by the church in South Africa since the demise of apartheid, was the rise in some circles to the slogan *critical solidarity with the state*. According to

Motlhabi (2008:x), this slogan was inspired by the need to support the initiatives of the new ANC government to rebuild the country and redress the inequalities caused by the apartheid system. Some sections of the church supported the ANC government during the struggle against apartheid. Unfortunately, this slogan has entrenched the church's complacency to respond to, and give input on the socio-economic problems that followed political change. This still demands the critical and prophetic voice of the church.

Furthermore, some of the religious leaders, who used to exercise prophetic ministry, are employed in senior positions by the democratically elected government. Once they become assimilated by the new establishment, they will champion the idea of critical solidarity with the state in their churches. Because of this pseudo-assimilation, these church leaders teach their members to do anything in order to work uncritically with this new government (Tshaka 2009:160). This is a ploy by those in power to quell any confrontation that might come from the masses.

2.3 Christian church and religious plurality under a new dispensation

Since the dawn of democracy, South Africa has become a secular state, which, according to the Constitution, gives recognition to all religions. This means that, unlike in the apartheid dispensation where Christian religion used to enjoy more recognition than other religions, under a democratic rule it has to co-exist with other religions on an equal footing, even though the majority of the population are Christians. The changing religious balance of power under the democratic rule often has social and political effects in the public square and the Christian church, in particular. For instance, in South Africa, churches have to deal with a government that evidently has some control over churches. In this regard, Motlhabi (2008:14) rightly points out that, when society is experiencing serious moral crises, religious institutions, including the church, are afforded neither the space nor the opportunity to take the lead. Such an initiative must come from the government. As a result, since religion is pushed into the background, religious institutions become followers of state initiative and, in so doing, are unable to provide moral leadership to society and religious conversations in public.

In this context punctuated by religious plurality, Christian religion has to co-exist with other religions in a precarious and vulnerable equilibrium in the public space. In such situations, those in power often exploit the vulnerability and fragility of religion by promising religious leaders rewards and incentives in exchange for hijacking religion for political expediency. According to Vellem (2014:279), a classic example is the ordination

of President Zuma in May 2007 as priest in the Full Gospel Church in KwaZulu-Natal. There have been attempts to create multi-faith structures that owe their loyalty to the ruling party. The formation of the National Interfaith Council of South Africa (NICSA) is one example that denotes the close relationship that exists between individual religious leaders and the post-democratic government.

Having alluded to this, one can conclude that lack of participation on public matters by religious institutions, including the church, can be attributed to religious domestication by the ruling party (ANC).

2.4 Lack of a prophetic voice as a result of guilt

Kritzinger (2012:235) maintains that voicelessness can be attributed to guilt when a group feels inadequate and unworthy to make public pronouncements, given their negative track record of past actions. For instance, when some of the church members and ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) critique the government on various issues, they are reminded that their church supported apartheid. As a result, their prophetic voice has no moral ground or credibility.

Those in power tend to suppress voices of dissent and instil a sense of guilt whenever they are challenged. It is, therefore, not by chance that, as soon as one becomes critical (whether that someone has been deemed credible by others) of a stance that the government is taking on a particular issue, the credibility and loyalty of that someone is called into question. A case in point: When former emeritus Anglican Bishop of Cape Town Desmond Tutu levelled criticism against the ANC-led government in his Nelson Mandela lecture, celebrating ten years of democracy, he argued that South Africa is sitting on a powder keg of poverty, as long as Black empowerment continues to benefit only a small elite group. He lamented the fact that the culture of robust debate, which had characterised the anti-apartheid movement, is suppressed under the leadership of the ANC regime.

According to Tshaka (2009:9), the then President of the ruling party Thabo Mbeki, in his annoyed response to Tutu's remarks, accused Bishop Tutu of being unpatriotic. He further stated that the archbishop has never been a member of the ANC and would have hardly any knowledge of what happens in an ANC branch. When those who dare to speak truth to power are silenced in this manner, they equally develop a sense of guilt that they are discrediting a liberation movement which played a significant role in the emancipation of the oppressed.

2.5 The role of the media in a new dispensation

Kritzinger (2012:238) asserts that the role played by print and electronic media cannot be underestimated. In general, religion is no longer newsworthy, unless it grabs the newspaper headlines for the wrong reasons or draws controversy in the form of scandals such as a pastor embezzling church funds or a dubious charismatic preacher feeding members snakes and instructing them to drink petrol.

In the past, the media was instrumental in exposing the views of theologians who were defending and rejecting the political system of apartheid, and theology was a key “site of the struggle”. This is a form of censorship imposed by journalists and editors. Most of the media sections seldom cover the views of different churches on public matters.

3. INTERIM CONCLUSION

I concur with Masuku (2014:164) that the critical and prophetic participation of the church in South Africa is still relevant in a country bedevilled by a sea of social and economic injustices, with the resultant challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment in its wake. All these and many other forms of social ills are turning the country into what Vellem (2014:274) dubbed a “squatter camp”. Unfortunately, the poor are at the receiving end. However, a thorough context analysis is crucial, according to Kritzinger (2012:239), as we ponder the silence of the church and its leadership in matters relating to the public. For instance: Who were the power brokers between 1989 and 1994 in South Africa? What was the precise nature of our political transition to democracy? Why have the sociopolitical and economic challenges after the demise of apartheid rendered political liberation meaningless for the majority of South Africans? Is it perhaps that economic freedom was compromised in the negotiated transitional settlement? It may be that the uncritical stance and lack of prophetic voice of the church, among other things, can be attributed to our failure to understand what is happening around us.

4. A BRIEF PROPOSAL ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

4.1 Transforming Christianity

As mentioned earlier, some underlying factors have informed the retreat of the church and theology into the periphery of South African society. A proposal on how to transform the situation can now be formulated,

based on a question: Is there an escape for church and theology from their inner emigration or retreat from the public arena? Put differently, is there a way back into public life in South Africa?

The starting point for this to happen is a transformation of Christianity itself. Surely, an untransformed, privatised, individualised and depoliticised Christianity will have no bearing whatsoever on the transformation of the country. Analogous to Bosch's (1991) *Transforming mission*, the notion of transforming Christianity is like a double-edged sword. First, there is a need for Christianity as a religion to be transformed. Secondly, it needs to be transformed in a manner that potentially unlocks the very transformative content of Christianity.

One fairly clear issue is that the essential transformation of Christianity is not more doctrine or more confessions, but a conversion of Christianity to particular categories of people in society, including women, children, the disabled, and the working class people, in general, as well as those affected most by socio-economic inequality, unemployment and poverty.

4.2 From a retreat into the periphery to a bold, but humble return to the public arena: Signs of hope

Already in the 1990s and, in particular, in the past five years or so, promising signs of hope have emerged of concerted efforts of religion to manoeuvre out of the periphery into the public arena. Vellem (2014:273) helps us understand "public" to mean not only public domain in the sense of the social media, for example, but with reference to specific people such as those in the informal settlement of Diepsloot, where he has been involved in research. Once again, the transformation Christianity needs in South Africa is not greater piety and greater doctrinal understanding, but a focus on the "still destitute, the still poor and the still denied", to speak in very simple terms with Boesak (2009:271).

4.3 The moment for deep introspection has arrived

Before surveying and analysing a few very distinct examples of the resuscitation of prophetic Christianity in South Africa, there is a need to take one step back and deal, albeit briefly, with the challenge of the imperative for an inner transformation of Christianity. A recent report of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights (CRL) reveals a number of serious pathologies in religion or more specifically, Christian religion. The situation described in the first section of this study, relating to the lack of prophetic involvement of Christianity in the new dispensation, is aggravated by some unpleasant aberrations in Christianity, as exposed by the CRL report. In general, the

pathologies exposed in the report centre around “the commercialisation of religion and the abuse of people’s belief systems”. The report corroborates unpleasant incidents covered in the media such as the eating of grass, snakes and rats; the drinking of petrol, and the use of insect killers for healing purposes. As far as the commercialisation of religion is concerned, the report exposes the abuse of prayer to extract money from gullible followers and non-compliance with the law. In a few instances, the following was found: “holy water” for healing purposes was sold and members were instructed not to use medication; some churches did not have bank accounts; no annual financial reports were submitted, and there was no proper governance structures or visas for foreign religious leaders.

As expected, religious communities and faith-based organisations responded quickly and, in some instances, fiercely, but, in other instances, very constructively.¹ A discussion of this is beyond the scope of this article. It could simply be mentioned that, in general, there is agreement on the negative impact of the aberrations mentioned and an acknowledgment of the abuses. There is no biblical basis on which these could be justified. However, religious bodies are increasingly convinced of self-regulation and the need to establish peer-review mechanisms with powers to monitor, investigate and, if deemed necessary, discipline. Despite the CRL’s praise for the good work performed by some people (for example, praying for people without making them pay), the report constitutes, in significant revelations, a moment of truth for religion in South Africa. A religion that calls everybody else to account, without exercising introspection and self-criticism, is obsolete and redundant.

The issues raised in the CRL report are extreme and dangerous tendencies in South African Christianity. As much as they are on a different level, they are a stark reminder of the past of Christianity in South Africa, when moral and theological justification was conjured up for the apartheid system. As then, there is at present great danger of religion being abused for issues that have no grounding in the Bible. Conversely, as then, there is currently an opportunity for Christianity to own up to the abuses and to formulate a response aimed at the transformation of the religion itself. There is an opportunity for greater unity and for greater collaboration in the quest for the thorough transformation of society. The so-called mainline churches are given an opportunity to assist in the development of a solid code of conduct or political ethic as well as capacity-building among the leadership in the churches identified in the CRL report that are mainly

1 See, for example, the joint submission to the Commission for CRL Rights by Freedom of Religion South Africa and the South African Council for the Protection and Promotion of Religious Rights and Freedoms.

guilty of the aberrations identified. This should be done not in a patronising way, not as an imposition, but as an accompaniment or partnership. All of Christianity in South Africa should own up to the fact that religion has become dormant in society. It has neglected its prophetic calling and, in the process, disappointed the poor and the unemployed, the needy and the downtrodden, and those who bear the brunt of the disparities and inequalities in the country (CRL Report).

4.4 *The oikos journey*

A major sign of hope in the mid-1990s in South Africa was the emergence of a document entitled *The oikos journey*, which Nolan (2006) identifies as *A new kairos document*. The significance of the document that responds strongly to the “frightening fact that the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer” is perhaps enhanced by the fact that it coincided with the coming into being of what is known in South Africa as the class project of 1996. A brief note on this project suffices. This was the period that saw the shelving of the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) of the South African government as a well-constructed document aimed at offsetting the most debilitating effects of colonial apartheid in favour of a macro-economic strategy called Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). The class project of 1996 feeds into GEAR, which was formulated as a response to neo-liberal capitalism.

The importance of *The oikos journey* is that, with the demise of apartheid, economic apartheid and its concomitant injustices is shown to be the new *kairos*. The new theological crisis in the country is the economic crisis, which is not viewed in general terms, but in terms of a bias for the poor and for women. The church is challenged to speak out in the spirit of the biblical prophets and

to speak truth to power wherever the state or the private sector is colluding in consolidating an unjust system (*The oikos journey* 1996).

The issue is not limited to the state and the private sector, but to the entire cultural system:

We can work for the conversion of the patriarchal household where women are expected to engage in domestic chores at the expense of full engagement in all aspects of democratic society (*The oikos journey* 1996).

Further salient features of *The oikos journey* are suggestions that there are indeed alternatives to the neo-liberal capitalist system or the global

capitalist empire (Saul 2008). Distinct values guide *The oikos journey*. First, Nolan (2006) has the following to say about the idea of alternatives:

The great value of 'The Oikos Journey' is its insistence that there are alternatives. The present global economic system is not natural and inevitable, even if it is common and widespread. Most of us are caught up in it in one way or another. Even the rich are in a sense 'victims of the system' (page 21). But there is a growing number of people in the world today who are resisting the economic system, just as there once was a growing number of people in South Africa actively resisting the apartheid system. The World Social Forum that brings together a very large number of movements of resistance has chosen as its motto, 'Another World is Possible'.

Secondly, as far as the values, on which *The oikos journey* is based, are concerned, the document itself defines those values as follows:

As we continue this *oikos* journey together, we will need to continually return to the gospel of hope on which our church is founded. We will look for places and people in which the values of compassion and sharing, mutual support and equity, above all of justice, are evident – and we will witness to them. We will promote the values of a just society inside the church as well as in society. And we will encourage our people through our messages and our prayers not to give up hope, but to continue the struggle. We can do no less if we are to be co-creators with God of the society which is God's will – that *oikos* which is good for every person and for all of creation.

The oikos journey has unfortunately not really taken off. South Africa was, at that time, still gripped by euphoria about the occurrences of 1994 with the first ever democratic elections and the ascendancy of Mandela to power. Had we only heeded the prophetic call of *The oikos journey*, matters might have turned out completely differently for the country. *The oikos journey* adds value to the understanding of prophecy or what it means to be prophetic. It shows that the prophetic ministry of the church is more than exposing the idols or showing opposition to the apartheid regime. There is a new pilgrimage for which church people will have to be equipped.

4.5 A New Kairos

The past five to ten years have seen a re-emergence of *kairos*. What passes the review for discussion, in this instance, is the celebration in 2015 of the *Kairos document* that emerged in 1985 as a theological response to the crisis of apartheid. The thirtieth anniversary of the *Kairos document* (1985) brought together a few of the signatories of the document. The *kairos*

theologians met to celebrate, in the wake of the tragic occurrences at Marikana where, among others, thirty-four mine workers were killed by the police. In the statement emanating from the Kairos celebrations in August 2015, the reference to this is fairly stark: "... the pain of Marikana and the reasons behind (multinational profit before people and corporate greed) hovered over the conference" (Kairos Southern Africa, posted 20 August 2015).

Based on the recognition that the coming of Jesus and his teaching about a new kingdom and a new reign against the Roman empire of his day completely passed them by, participants in the celebration describe the *New Kairos* as follows:

In our time, we find that various sites of pain and struggle are joined in a Global Kairos, a shared quest for justice. In our discussions, we named our shared struggle against the scourge of this global empire of our times. Empire is an all-encompassing global reality seeking to consolidate all forms of power while exploiting both Creation and Humanity. The empire we face is not restricted by geography, tribe, language or economy. Empire is an ideology of domination and subjugation, fuelled by violence, fed by fear and deception. It manifests itself especially in racial, economic, cultural, patriarchal, sexual, and ecological oppression. Empire deceptively informs dominant, white supremacist, capitalist paradigms controlling global systems and structures. Global empire is sustained by weapons and military bases (hardware) along with ideologies and theologies (software).

According to the sponsors of the *New Kairos*, from a theological point of view, an expansion is needed from engaging church and state theology to a resistance against imperial theology. An unintentional analytical shortcoming might be operating in this instance. More often than not, church and state theologies serve as pretexts for an imperial theology. A further issue is that, often, what is regarded as mere ideology is, in fact, an imperial theology. Crossan (2008) helps us interpret what might be viewed as Roman imperial ideology as, in fact, Roman imperial theology. New modes of church and state theology are emerging in South Africa, judging from the utterances of politicians from the ruling political party.

In order to explain that the *New Kairos* was not only about analysis, but also about change, a number of very practical steps are identified. For Christian mission in South Africa, the question is whether these steps could be developed into a sustainable ongoing praxis of resistance and liberation. The major similarity with *The oikos journey* is the unequivocal and unambiguous option for the suffering and the poor, inspired by

the dangerous memory of Jesus Christ ... do all we can to return the global and local church to the mission of Jesus to enact the reign of God, opening toward a new way of relating to humanity and the earth (*New Kairos*).

The plan of action specially focuses on the youth, in terms of which the creation of appropriate systems are envisaged

to ensure that young people will be nurtured and mentored in the Kairos understanding of faith, hope, and love and supported in their growth into leadership (*New Kairos*).

4.6 Prophecy as unburdening: The re-emerging voice of the South African Council of Churches

Perhaps the clearest indication of prophetic religion in South Africa coming to terms with the post-apartheid situation is the re-emergence of the prophetic voice of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). In a very strategic move, the Council created a safe facility for anybody feeling the need to unburden by telling the story of how an individual, a representative of a business interest, a political party or a person of influence, a superior – someone it would be difficult to say “No” to, suggested that something inappropriate should be done in return for favours ranging from promotion to an attractive position, money or shares in a company. In reminding itself of the stern warning by the late president Mandela on how to react when even a democratically elected government has become neither transparent nor accountable, the SACC arrives at the prophetic revelation that the situation constitutes a “desperate need for divine intervention”. In realising that the issue they were dealing with was much more serious than meets the eye, rigorous research has been done in order to come to grips with the real state of the questions on hand and to view them from the perspective of the Gospel. In re-introducing the see-judge-act method of theologising, the SACC’s finding, as far as the “see” part of the approach is concerned, is that the issue at stake was “far greater than corruption, but organized chaos”. The finding is that the matter being dealt with was a “systemic design of madness that ill our governmental environment – a chaotic design”, manifesting and playing itself out in an

inappropriate control of state systems through a power elite that is pivoted around the President of the Republic that is systematically siphoning the assets of the state (South African Council of Churches 2017).

A very distinct aspect of the unburdening report is the argument that a number of existing pathologies in South Africa such as, among others, drug abuse and violent crime are rendered more serious by state capture. In fact, in the understanding of the SACC, the nature of state capture in South Africa has brought us to the brink of a mafia state. In the “judge” part of the SACC’s response, the analysis of the situation is brought into conversation with Scripture with reference to the Psalms, the Prophetic books and the Gospel. Psalm 12:5, Isaiah 11:1-9, Isaiah 5:24, Luke 4:18-19 and John 10:10 indicate that there is a theological understanding in the SACC that there is a need for the inculcation of a new wave of kingdom values. These include justice, righteousness, peace and a more clear-cut option for the poor and the quest for liberation with healing. Whether the appropriation of Scripture in the SACC’s report is sufficiently strong, inductive and convincing can hardly be engaged in this instance.

4.7 Return of religion

In a rather interesting study entitled *Religion and revival in post-apartheid South Africa*, Chipkin and Leatt (2011:39-46) show that, as South Africa is constitutionally a secular state, there is a dramatic return of religion. There were expectations that, in a secular state, there might be a decline in religion. The basic thesis of the study seems to be that South Africans still find religion important as a manner of facilitating sociopolitical issues, either by hiding behind religion or by calling religion into service in negotiating nagging socio-economic issues. An example showing how religion can function as an escape route is that of “Afrikaners” who formerly belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church that has provided the theological and moral justification for apartheid and has now joined the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. A major finding of the research is that, in South Africa,

like in the many places in which modernity was introduced through colonialism and missions, modernisation was not accompanied by an increasing level of atheism. Quite the contrary; Christianity is a significant part of both our colonial and apartheid histories ... It is clear that in terms of the fates of personal faith, South Africa has been a deeply religious country – religious in African customary terms, in Christianity, and a significant minority of other religious traditions – particularly Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism. Religion has also been very significant to public and political life (Chipkin & Leatt 2011:41).

Christian mission needs to tap into religion’s significance for public and political life in unlocking the huge liberating potential of religion and, by

so doing, contribute to the transformation of both society and Christianity itself. Weary of the pertinent issues, Chipkin and Leatt (2011:43) raise the question as to why particularly Afrikaans-speakers and the Black middle class have swollen the numbers of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Is it indeed a way of distancing themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church that has supported apartheid, in the case of the former, and a manner of finding theological and moral justification for their social location, in the case of the latter. The very simple point to make is that whether this is true or not, religion has the potential to be called into service for different purposes and with different motives and, consequently, also for purposes of transformation.

5. CONCLUSION

The article aimed to reveal some of the factors informing the retreat of Christianity into the periphery and to tentatively propose how religion can relocate from the periphery to the public arena and contribute to genuine social transformation. The article shows that the lack of a prophetic voice of the church in the new dispensation, false neutrality, religious plurality, guilt and the role of the media are some of the factors causing the inner emigration of religion in South Africa. Four issues form part of the proposal on how Christianity can emerge from the ghetto to engage in the public arena with a view to social transformation: the transformation of Christianity itself, advancing *The oikos journey*, responding to the *New Kairos*, following up on the unburdening process of the SACC, and taking the return of religion in post-apartheid South Africa seriously. In all of this, any reductionist understanding of what it means to be prophetic or to have a prophetic ministry should be avoided. This will only come about if the following matters are kept in creative tension to one another: a prophetic ministry aimed at exposing the gods and the idols; avoiding as much as possible any connivance with any government or state in issues that are not advancing kingdom values or taking care of the poor; making available material and human resources in the fight against inequality, unemployment and poverty, and keeping up the dream that a better South Africa is possible.

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