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DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150509/JCH43.v1.8

ISSN 0258-2422 (Print)
ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)

Journal for Contemporary History
2018 43(1):160-177

THE CHURCH AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STRUGGLE TO LIBERATE THE FREE STATE PROVINCE

Abstract

The article outlines the contributions of the church to the liberation struggle in South Africa. In doing so, we limit the content to the contributions of church activities in the Free State. The point of departure is that the liberation of South Africa was not only a result of the barrel of the gun – instead, the barrel was complemented by various peaceful liberation forces, including the activities and the narratives of the church. The arguments of this article are based in decolonial theory, a discourse that sensitises understanding that the liberation of South Africa should not only be interpreted politically, but that liberation transcends politics to other spheres of life, and it involves total liberation and emancipation. Data in this article was collected through interviews and questionnaires, which focused mainly on the role of the church in the liberation of the Free State. In this article, it is argued that the place of the church in the post-1994 histories and narratives should be one of being a champion of social justice, equity and the fair distribution of resources, as well as playing a role to unmask corruption, which continues to subject the people of the Free State to poverty and marginalisation.

Keywords*:* Churches; liberation struggle; Free State; liberation theology; mission schools; apartheid.

Sleutelwoorde: Kerke; vryheidstryd; Vrystaat; bevrydingsteologie; sendingskole; apartheid.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The role of the church in the liberation of South Africa in total, but especially at provincial level, and in the Free State in particular, has not received its fair share of attention. Various scholars (Bailie 2009:105; Campbell 2004:85; Dlamini 1988:44; Molobi 2014:196; Rasool 2000:3; Saunders 2009:25; Storey 2012:1) have described how politicians have contributed to the liberation of South Africa, without much acknowledgement of the role of civic and religious groups. By emphasising one side of the historical narratives of the liberation struggle, we negate the contributions of the unsung heroes and

heroines, consequently providing a biased history of the liberation struggle. In this regard, we agree with Boesak (2005:107) that the role of Christians and the church community in South Africa is inadequately researched and, as argued by Van der Merwe and Oelofse (2013:108), the most underrated form of resistance in liberation narratives. Cognisant of this view, this study focuses on the contributions of the church in the Free State. It should, however, be acknowledged that there may be other activities of Free State churches that contributed to the liberation of South Africa that are not reported here. It is worth noting that the struggle of the church varied from one congregation to another, and between individual members of the clergy.

Despite differences in theological orientations, the black church and some white English-medium churches, in partnership with the local community (such as traditional leaders), generally played a crucial role in ending the apartheid system in South Africa (Muller 2008:129). The struggle for freedom was fought from the platform of tradition, as well as from within religion itself, while, at the same time, both tradition and religion were used as resources in the struggle to gain freedom (Khumalo 2007:10). According to Hudson-Allison (2000) the non-violent approach of the church proved to be a major factor in the downfall of apartheid, despite predictions that transaction comes through violent revolutionary cataclysm; moreover, ecclesiastical forces played no small role in ending apartheid (Rodriguez 2012:2). The church felt obliged to engage in a prophetic vocation against the apartheid system. This article is limited to church activities that did not support the apartheid system. By focusing on church activities that opposed the National Party (NP); the ruling party during the apartheid years in South Africa, this article is framed in decoloniality, which is opposed to various forms of oppression and which works to achieve liberation that emancipates people and champions social justice.

2. THEORETICAL LENS: DECOLONIALITY

Decoloniality is not a singular theoretical school of thought (though it is grounded in the earlier works of Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano), but a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as being the fundamental problem of the modern age (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:13). Decoloniality is committed to challenging and reformulating the communicational scientific discourse from a criticism of the mediating power of Anglo-American hegemonic thinking, to a native cultural paradigm (Huerfano *et al*. 2016:78). With the lens of decoloniality, the church engaged in the struggle because apartheid had, in the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2009:28), dismembered South Africans from their land, from labour, from power, and from memory, which destroyed the base from which people launched themselves into the world. The theory rejects modernity, which is located in the oppressed and exploited side of the colonial difference, in

favour of a liberation struggle from colonialism, for a world beyond Eurocentric modernity (Grosfoguel 2011:21). This lens allows us to argue that, despite South Africa gaining political independence from white minority rule in 1994, the struggle has not ended, especially against coloniality, which is represented by the aftermath of colonial systems that continue to manifest itself in modern-day South Africa. Consequently, the church should continue the struggle towards total emancipation and a better life for all. In this regard, the church should challenge colonial systems that have remained in place long after apartheid, or colonial rulership, has been "displaced" (Muchie and Gumede 2017:177; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:13).

This article justifies the use of the decoloniality lens, because it challenges dominant discourses or narratives that consider the liberation struggle of South Africa predominantly through the barrel of a gun and through political figures. While guns and politicians played a role in the liberation, decoloniality allows us to argue that less appreciated narratives, like the role played by the church, were crucial in achieving liberation. Decoloniality is central to this article, especially in positioning the role of the Christian church in post-independence South Africa. The argument is that coloniality, as a residue of colonisation, is reminiscent of colonisation and its tendency to patronise black people (Tshaka and Makofane 2010:539). Colonisation should be resisted by the church through an emphasis on social justice, equity, emancipation and the common good of all citizens, despite political and religious affiliation. Hence, we concur with Desmond Tutu, as cited in Sparks (2006:295), that He is a God of surprises, uprooting the powerful and unjust to establish His kingdom.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW: LOCATING THE LIBERATION ROLE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS LEADERS

The role of religion in politics is a topic that has gained enormous significance in view of the events of 11 September 2001. It has caused a belief that the influence of religion on politics is negative, harmful, and something to be avoided (Rasool 2000:1). While it is true that religion could have negative effects in society, this article delimits the role of the church to its positive influence in bringing about the liberation of South Africa, particularly in the Free State Province.

We should clarify that the church was not in consensus on how to address the atrocities of apartheid, largely because one part of the church was English (which predominantly represented black people of different languages) and the other was Afrikaans. The latter supported the NP and the former opposed it (Muller 2008:129). For delimitation purposes, the focus of the article is on the church that opposed apartheid.

In many respects, the church's opposition to apartheid was a battle for justice; one that built the legitimacy of the church as a political actor with real

power to promote social change (Van der Merwe 2003:1). This part of the church articulated a liberation theology, rather than a conservative theology seeking to maintain the *status quo* (Tshaka and Makofane 2010:536). The liberation theology supported the poor, which meant that the black theology of liberation needed to denounce the white theology that was comfortable with its association with the elites of society (Tshaka and Makofane 2010:537). Informed by this argument, the following paragraph focuses on leaders in the national arena who, informed by liberation theology, evoked the need to displace colonial structures which reduced most black people to second-class citizens in their own land.

Various church leaders took part in the liberation struggle in South Africa. Religious leaders were obliged to maintain their historic role as the moral conscience of society and to raise their voices in protest against, "violations of human dignity" (Omar 1999:27). Among these leaders could be counted John Langalibalele Dube, an outstanding educationist; Sol Plaatje, author and newspaper editor; and Rev. Walter Rubusana, a man of the cloth and an important essayist (ANC 2012:3). Religious leaders took up prominent leadership roles in their churches and within ecumenical organisations where they were mainly responsible for radicalising (Rodriguez 2012:iii).

One such leader was John Dube, who lead the first African ecumenical group to challenge both the church and government on its segregationist policies (Maimela 1999:37). Dube was the first President of the African National Congress (ANC) when it was formed in Bloemfontein on 8 January 1912 as the South African National Native Congress (SANNC) (Khumalo 2008:1). Dube served as an ordained minister of the Congregational Church. This important connection helped Dube define church-state relations in colonial South Africa; thus forging the role that African clergy would later need to play in the struggle for South Africa's freedom and democracy (Khumalo 2007:1). By the time of his death on 11 February 1946, Dube had established himself firmly as one of the leading pioneers and veterans of a struggle waged from a religious platform (Khumalo 2007:1). He is credited for his defiance of the missionaries' tendency to "divide and rule" the African people – he resisted submission to Rev. Stephen Clapp Pixley, who exercised such "divide and rule" tactics (Khumalo 2007:10). Throughout the life of John Dube we notice the involvement of religious leaders at a national level, which then cascaded down to provincial levels. At provincial level, we will focus on the contribution of the church and its leaders in the Free State Province.

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data to unearth the contributions of the church to the liberation of the Free State were gathered through a combination of research methods. Politicians and religious leaders were met and interviewed, including five clergy and two

politicians. In cognisance of the weaknesses, and to mitigate the challenges of interviews as data-gathering technique, a focus-group discussion with church leaders and the community was also conducted. The interviews and the focus-group discussions centred around the following question: What were the contributions of the church to the liberation of the Free State in pre- and post-independence South Africa? The data was voice recorded and transcribed. The themes for discussion emerged from the data, which was analysed through the lens suggested by Laws and co-authors (2003:395), and which involves the following steps:

- Step 1: Reading and rereading all the collected data: The data from the interviews and focus-group discussion was read and reread until we heard the views of the participants.
- Step 2: Drawing up a preliminary list of themes arising from the data: Major issues and themes were identified and arranged according to the research question of the study.
- Step 3: Rereading the data. We checked whether the identified themes were in line with what the participants had said, and whether it corresponded with the research question.
- Step 4: Linking the themes to quotations and notes: The themes that emerged from the data were linked to scholarly views.
- Step 5: Perusing the categories of themes to interpret them: In the interpretation of data, cognisance of the research question was taken.
- Step 6: Designing a tool to assist in discerning patterns in the data: This was done to triangulate and determine the patterns during data analysis.
- Step 7: Interpreting the data and deriving meaning: This step mainly involved highlighting the research findings and arranging material according to categories that are premised or guided by the research questions.

By following the above steps, we managed to come up with themes that subsequently became the subtopics that could be discussed. The themes where then linked to various scholarly works to either substantiate, or disprove the findings of the study. The data was coded independently by the two authors and, after encoding the data, a discussion of the findings and the themes that had emerged from the findings followed. In the following section the profile of the participants will be explained briefly.

4.1. Profiles of the participants

Most of the participants were members of the mainline churches. These churches were chosen based on the decoloniality theory; we located church

leaders who were, and still are against apartheid, and who championed social justice and peace in the political and liberation space. These religious leaders were assigned pseudonyms to comply with research ethics. To mitigate bias and to gain information on the political dimension of the role of the church in the liberation space, two politicians were included as interviewees. The focus group included both community leaders and church leaders in view of unearthing the community narratives of the church in relation to the liberation of the Free State.

5. THE ROLE OF FREE STATE CHURCHES IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

The following section explains the contributions made by the church in the liberation of the Free State.

5.1. Articulation of the theology of resistance vs state theology

Liberation theology and state theology were a result of hermeneutical interpretations of biblical texts, in which the Bible was used for justifying apartheid and promoting armed resistance (Van der Merwe 2013:115). Liberation theology was used to oppose the atrocities of the apartheid system. This theology was premised on the deconstruction of missionary and white rule hegemony, which had deprived local people of their land and other forms of wealth. Liberation theology influenced the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and encouraged the associated development of black theology. Individuals of the calibre of Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Abraham Tiro and Malusi Mpumlwana were on the forefront of these struggles (Walshe 1991:34).

Liberation theology, as premised under the auspices of liberation theology, is associated with communist thinking, which is opposed to state theology (McKinnis 2010:8). State theology, however, was a hermeneutical interpretation that justified the *status quo*, characterised by racism, capitalism and totalitarianism (McKinnis 20101:8). To counter state theology, liberation theology was connected to and buttressed by the narratives of Black Consciousness (BC). The philosophy of BC, therefore, expresses group pride and the determination of the black to rise and attain the envisaged self (Biko 1978:2). In addition, Magaziner (2009:221) notes that, “As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, students, church people, and other activists reassessed the nature of life under apartheid through the lens of liberation theology; they looked critically at themselves and at their communities, and argued that if some sort of change was going to come, it needed to begin at the level of the individual, on the fraught terrain of consciousness.”

BC, aligned to liberation theology, was highly critical of the role that Christianity had played in the subjugation and pacification of black people

and, therefore, sought to find an alternative to the mainstream white version of Christianity that had been used to justify, firstly, colonisation and then, apartheid (Pheko 2013:13).

Liberation theology was unavoidable in its quest to evoke a revolutionary spirit as a counter-hegemonic strategy against the white Afrikaner church. The struggle was aimed at displacing the state theology, which, according to Edgar (2005:4), promised people heaven, but did nothing to help them in the fight against the evil under which they suffered. Given this milieu, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and influenced by liberation theology, helped to facilitate the anti-apartheid struggle by black churches. The Council supported civil disobedience as a proper response to apartheid (Lueker 2012:3-4). To derail the oppressive structure, coalitions of trade unions, churches and other civic groups organised conferences and economic and cultural boycotts, and raised funds for South African activists and their families (Bratyanski 2012:2). The success of this campaign was encouraged by the fact that South Africa's black political culture was hospitable to liberation or contextual theology. Consequently, by the mid-1980s prophetic Christians were playing a major role in delegitimising the South African state and empowering the liberation movement (Walshe 1991:28). In essence, liberation theology facilitated public disobedience and evoked a need for the people of South Africa to move towards a struggle for independence. Furthermore, liberation theology situated the church in an anti-apartheid space that emphasised social justice, equity and a non-racial approach to life and resource allocation.

Hence, in the years before 1994 the church did not totally reject actions like illegal civil disobedience, sabotage, or even other forms of violence. To the contrary, the church was part of the struggle and urged its followers and members to actively take part in the struggle, and to see this participation as a calling based on a specific way and method of interpreting the Bible (Coetzee 2004:336).

In the spirit evoked by liberation theology during the 1980s at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa embraced liberation theology and banned the South African flag from all its church buildings. The reason was clear: the regime's injustices had put it beyond the pale of civilised nations, and its orange, white and blue flag had become a pariah symbol of racism and oppression (Storey 2012:1).

The Methodist Churches in the Free State heeded the call to ban the flag in protest against the atrocities of the apartheid government. The success of the banning of flags was backed by strong ecumenical constituencies and agencies (Khumalo 2007:9). The impetus for the armed struggle was propelled further by the singing of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, which, to the church, symbolised, more than any other piece of expressive culture, the struggle for African unity and liberation

in South Africa (Coplan 1985:46). Because of the influence of the song in evoking the nationalist spirit through religion, the apartheid government banned it in 1969, and denied its political status (Coplan and Jules-Rosette 2005:289). However, banning the song did not negate the need for people to engage in a struggle to displace apartheid. To the contrary, the banning facilitated a counter-hegemony strategy as a means to achieve social transformation, allowing people to worship God and to live peacefully, devoid of oppressive structures.

5.2 Theology of peace and tranquillity

While the theology of resistance, or liberation, was one of the vocal spaces in which the non-white church in the Free State stood up to champion liberation, another theology was embedded among religious leaders: the theology that promoted peace and tolerance of differences. This theology neither denied, nor accepted the injustices perpetrated by the state, but sought to evoke an unarmed approach to conflict resolution. Rev. Motlothakwane noted that, as Christians around Thaba' Nchu and Botshabelo, they framed a slogan during the colonial era reading, "this is not the Christian way". According to him, this phrase sensitised Christians to avoid engaging in the armed struggle against apartheid and, instead, to find amicable processes to resolve differences. This type of theology was premised on the philosophy that it was important, "to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace" (McKinley and Blake 2015:5). Church leaders, in turn, pledged themselves to non-violent action, while recognising that many of the oppressed had, in good conscience, reluctantly turned to the use of force against an illegitimate regime that was unwilling to negotiate (Mayson 1989:34).

5.3 Provision of food and shelter

Another role of the church in the liberation of the Free State was philanthropy. The church provided food and shelter for families affected by detentions. Rev. Kumako, in a focus-group discussion, noted that he and other preachers visited prisons, such as Kgula Thuto, in the early 1990s. According to Rev. Motlothakwane and Rev. Kumako, the church became a pillar of comfort for the families of detainees by providing food, clothing and counselling. The Roman Catholic Church, under the leadership of Father James and through its Bethlehem office, provided clothing for the people of Qwaqwa. In addition to the provision of food, most Free State churches, including Mangaung Apostolic Church, became combined schools and churches to cater for the growing number of black learners. These activities may appear insignificant, but to the detainees' families it served as a source of comfort and an indication that the church was part of the struggle for liberation.

5.4 Church on its knees for peace

To avoid an escalation of the war into an uncontrollable civil war, the church engaged in talks with the liberation forces to mitigate the challenge. A typical example of this support was provided in Bethlehem. In 1988 violence was provoked by a school principal by the name of De Villiers. In an interview for this study, Ntate Nhlapho reported that, during the struggle, Ntate Lebohang and Ntate Khaleb were arrested on 12 April 1989 and taken to Bloemfontein. This was after a Grade 10 learner, Joseph Mbele, had been shot in Tiisetsang. This event provoked the community to engage in a war with the police and the apartheid government. Ntate Lebohang confronted De Villers in an attempt to close down the school in retaliation for De Villiers' apartheid stance and Mbele's death. On 9 August 1989 three more children were killed. This prompted the local people to create a self-defence unit, an organisation for training local people in basic defence skills so that they could defend themselves when they were attacked by the apartheid police or sympathisers. A large number of youth and school children were arrested on 9 August.

Ntate Manyarela confirmed that church leaders played a role in supplying food and clothing, and praying for the comrades who had been arrested and who were being held at the Kroonstad Prison. Ntate Lebohang reported that pastors were influential behind the scenes, but that some were afraid to fight apartheid publicly. Two prominent pastors who denounced the apartheid system on 10 August 1989, were Rev. Mabunda and Rev. Lebila – they were not merely pastors, but comrades. They offered their churches in Bethlehem as hiding places for comrades fleeing the police. In an interview, Rev. Sibili mentioned that Revs Mabunda and Lebila provided food, clothing and security for the hiding comrades. Given that Mabunda and Lebila were pastors, the government never suspected them of providing hiding places in the critical times of the struggle. When it became known that the comrades were hiding in churches, the pastors attempted to mediate between the police and the comrades to achieve a peaceful resolution of differences. During the 1989-1990 marches in Bethlehem, Revs Mabunda and Lebila were at the forefront of the march – their presence helped to reduce the aggression of the apartheid system.

In addition to supporting the nationalists, the church prayed for divine intervention to resolve the political turmoil. According to Rev. Hlalele, the church, particularly in the eastern Free State, met at Phomolohong (now Sefikaneng) every month to pray for deliverance from social injustices perpetrated by the apartheid system During the prayers, people were comforted and there was emphasis on God intervening to end apartheid. A noticeable prayer warrior during the period 1968-1970 was Rev. Khambule. He prayed for peace and healing to the extent that, in Qwaqwa, good results from prayers were known as *Makhambule*. The nationalists sought the assistance of Rev. Khambule and there was assurance that protection would be granted during the struggle.

5.5 Mission education

Education in mission schools provided fertile ground for educating people and developing a nationalist consciousness. The ground was made fertile by embracing liberation theology as a lens for interpreting the apartheid system. The missions moulded learners to resist the Apartheid Government and to become leaders of the resistance. Free State colleges that taught many of the nationalists were Narysec College and Tarton College. The missionaries' commitment in educating Africans and spreading "civilisation" was premised on the belief that saving souls demanded the promotion of literacy, and the teaching of the English language was to facilitate the process of saving souls so that earthly sinners could read the Word of God (Southall 2014:3). In addition to spreading civilisation, the missionary education, located in liberation theology, was seen as a key ideological vehicle for popularising liberation struggles with the aim of gaining power for the black leadership of the national democratic liberation movements (Prew 2013:134). Mission schools were able to produce and domesticate emerging black elites for the important terrain of student mobilisation, ideological debate and resistance (Reddy 2004:7). Prophetic Christianity, as practiced in the mission schools, became more articulated and more broadly based in supporting the liberation struggle (Walshe 1991:37). Hence, the study of the Bible was approached from the context of oppression and struggle against injustice (Pauw 2007:179).

6. POST-1994 STRUGGLE OF THE FREE STATE AND THE CHURCH

With independence in 1994, many people were relieved to see the transfer of power from the white minority to the black majority government. However, long after political liberation, poverty, structural racism, inequality and unemployment are still rife and economic liberation remains an illusion to millions of poor people; a "better life for all" has been deferred (Buffel 2017:1). The "new South Africa", like the end of colonialism, did not bring about economic transformation in Africa as it did in Asia. If anything, it entrenched the economic inequalities inherited from colonialism (Mbeki 2009:9). New forms of colonisation have emerged; an old system clothed in new garments continues what colonisation and apartheid started (Tshaka and Makofane 2010:538). Hence, we tend to agree with Hofmeyr (2004:28) that the concerns of the church have moved from the struggle against apartheid to the building of South Africa – this means the restructuring of society, housing and infrastructure and a better life for all. The restructuring of society is indispensable in a post-independence South African context, because the country emerged from a deeply divided and volatile political past into a stable, non-racial liberal democracy (Sisk 1995:10). The struggle of the church is taken into a contemporary juncture, especially through the lens of decoloniality, to

challenge and disturb the oppressive *status quo*, which is now premised on black people oppressing other blacks.

Decoloniality avers that political independence was not enough to end the struggle of the people who suffered under apartheid in South Africa. The struggle continues, because black people are still generally marginalised and living in poverty. Hence, the role of the church in the contemporary juncture has changed to one addressing the coloniality of power that continues to impoverish the people of the Free State. The liberation role of the church did not cease after 1994 because, as observed by Maimela (1984:48), there will always be people in society who, for a variety of reasons, consider themselves to be deprived and oppressed in some way and, therefore, in need of liberation, whether political, economic or socio-cultural.

In 1994, soon after freedom from apartheid had been achieved, the church in the Free State was hopeful that it could establish a reciprocal relationship with the ANC Government. Ntate Sigadula noted that the visit by first post-1994 President Nelson Mandela to meet with religious leaders, such as Rev. Gatsha, served to encourage optimism that a new era in the relationship between state and church was being ushered in. However, this relationship did not materialise as expected, as confirmed by De Villiers (2004:109). South African churches, church leaders and theologians found that appreciation for their role in the peaceful transition did not translate into privileged public roles. Rev. Kumako stated that the challenge that the church is facing at present is that pastors are only remembered by politicians during election times for mass mobilisation. From their side, churches wish to engage with the government of the day continuously to address the concerns of the people. According to Rev. Kumako, despite the contribution of the church to liberation, the Bible was abolished in schools, and everything that relates to the Bible and its teachings has been outlawed.

Although the struggle against formalised, legalised apartheid has come to an end, the struggle for justice is not over, and that struggle has evolved into global struggles against new forms of global apartheid and new and renewed struggles for justice, and all struggles involve challenges to prophetic theology at its deepest core (Boesak 2014:1057).

6.1 Reducing poverty

The struggle of the church of the Free State has taken on a new dimension; that of addressing poverty in the community. The Free State, particularly the Afromontane area, is largely impoverished and faces migration and unemployment (Mukwada *et al*. 2013:384). Poverty is evolving rapidly, especially when the concept of poverty is broadened to incorporate notions of relativity, vulnerability and capability deprivation (Mathieson *et al*. 2008:30). For the church to address the lived realities of the people, the Free State church has engaged in various community activities. These include the provision of

water and food hampers for the less privileged and elderly members of the church by the Phuthadtjhaba Roman Catholic Church. Through these kind gestures, the Free State churches are able to bridge the gap caused by the failure of politicians and other social institutions. In addition, as was indicated in the focus-group discussions, churches in the Free State, in partnership with Round Table business partners and non-governmental organisations, such as Siyavusana, promote gardening activities and poultry farming to address food shortages and unemployment. Moreover, according to Rev. Netha, churches, such as the Methodist Church in Qwaqwa, are providing healthcare, particularly to people who suffer mental distress and challenges due to poverty and other causes. The struggle of the church to eradicate poverty is important, because the apartheid system transferred government to black people, without handing over the economy, which is essential for total emancipation and a better life for all. Decoloniality calls on church leaders to play an active role in unmasking and challenging coloniality through religious discourses.

6.2 Promoting peace

The other role of the post-independence church in the Free State is the promotion of peace. This role, though often overlooked, is one of the important roles of the church in its attempts to maintain social cohesion and harmony. The general development of South Africa is held back because of the prevalence of extreme cases of violence and abuse against women and children, and the church in the Free State has taken up the struggle to mitigate this challenge. The pursuit of peace by the church is echoed by the observation of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:10) that, "[what] Africans must be vigilant against is the trap of ending up normalising and universalising as a natural state of the world, however, it must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed because it produces a world order that can only be sustained through a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies". Failure to do so will mean the post-independence South Africa will experience a new form of coloniality, which is violence.

According to Revs Hlalele and Kumako, to end social pathology, the church is obliged to find solutions for the problem through engagement with various stakeholders. Every month, church leaders visit taxi ranks, police stations, hospitals and schools to promote the gospel of love, peace and reconciliation which, according to them, South Africa needs to ensure total emancipation and liberation of the people. According to the two clergymen, the manifestation of violence in society speaks of a failure to address social issues in the post-independence South Africa and, consequently, these ills continue to manifest today. In support of the observation by the clergymen, Duncan and Egan (2015:6) indicate that apartheid poses a challenge to every Christian worthy of the name, to see the whole South African situation in the light of the law of love,

and to realise that the salvation in which they believe includes deliverance from everything that is mean, unworthy and restrictive. In this respect, the struggle for liberation is not just the struggle for land or possessions. Actually, the struggle for liberation is our attitudes to one another (Hankel 2014:175).

7. CONCLUSION

The article provided information on the contributions made by the church in relation to the liberation of the Free State. Through the interviews and the focus-group discussion it became clear that the church made a significant contribution by means of the liberation theology and by preaching peace to mitigate people's aggression towards the apartheid system in the Free State. The church also fell to its knees to pray for detainees and provided food, shelter and security during the struggle. Through the decolonial lens, the less appreciated, yet significant narrative of the liberation of the Free State was exposed and it was argued that the role of the church in contemporary South Africa has not ceased, but continues to aid suppress and marginalise Free State people in eliminating that which prevent them from attaining total emancipation, freedom and equal opportunities. In conclusion, the position of the church in the continued quest for liberation should be premised on values such as equity, social justice and the empowerment of all people. It is within this role that the church will continue to transform the community of the Free State, and to eradicate all forms of oppression.

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