


Spiritual freedom and development in Africa: A theological perspective



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Numerous studies have shown that freedom is a constituent component and provided the principal ends of countries' development and socio-economic well-being. However, the emphasis was placed on the physical aspects of freedom that foster development. The spiritual dimension is frequently conspicuously lacking in such interventions. Therefore, the current study postulated that development depends not only on physical aspects of freedom but also on spiritual determinants. This article is a rhetorical criticism. The author utilised the argumentation discourse and dialectical approach as the methodological framework. It sought to explore the concept of spiritual freedom and its possible implications for development within an African context of poverty. Therefore, this article proffers a fresh insight into the theological discourse in contemporary Africa to inspire further scholarly investigations into this area of research.

Contribution: This research investigated the role of spiritual freedom in development. The analytical framework's applicability resulted in fresh discoveries and crucial findings on the potential impact of spiritual freedom on development. It is essentially the study's key contribution. As such, the study may be used as a theoretical foundation for further investigation and applicability. This study aimed to offer a scholarly contribution by exploring characteristics of spiritual freedom that promote development using this interpretative technique that draws and improves on well-established paradigms of development studies. Furthermore, this research creates an uncommon blend of rhetorical critique, argumentative discourse, and dialectical and biblical-theological approaches toward giving a perspectival interpretation with special implications for the African context.

Keywords: spiritual freedom; inner freedom; outer freedom; Africa development; theological perspective.

Introduction

Development and freedom are among the most controversial, most widely discussed and ambiguous concepts within the current debate on development. However, it should be noted that development is a concept that was first introduced in the West after the Second World War in the early 1950s and merely meant economic advancement (Myers 2011:26–27). Nonetheless, as Myers points out that the term goes beyond the economic dimension in modern usage. It emphasises aspects of humanity (health, education and social interactions) that improve the welfare of the poor and contribute to the quality of life.

Since the Second World War, the development process has been influenced by a variety of factors, including critical global concerns and shifts, the cold war, the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant economic discourse in the world, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and, more recently, the emerging signs of post-neo-liberalism (Potter et al. 2018:4).

Within the context of development, it is imperative to understand the concept of freedom. This concept is a newly-introduced notion in the development literature. It has inspired new development theories that address human needs. For example, Sen (1999:3–20) argues that actual development cannot be identified merely by the growth of the national product or the increase in basic income. Instead, he emphasises that economic development means expanding people's fundamental freedoms, namely freedom of opportunity, and political and economic freedom. He explains that development attempts to eliminate the fundamental impediments to freedom such as poverty, repressive regimes and limited economic prospects. According to Amartya Sen, human *unfreedom* is the leading cause of poverty.

Sen (1999) also contends that countless individuals have been denied fundamental substantive freedoms despite global economic growth and technological advancement. These include satisfying hunger, access to medical care, suitable housing and safe drinking water—all inextricably linked to economic poverty. Although poverty is a global issue, sub-Saharan Africa and the South Asia regions are unquestionably impacted by this phenomenon. As Sen (1999:99) points out, these regions have the lowest per capita income levels globally. In this context, Jafarzadeh and Beheshti (2012:324) view freedom as essential for developing people's well-being. Nyerere (n.d.:1–3) likewise claims that freedom and development are closely intertwined. They are mutually reliant, which means that development is unattainable without freedom, and freedom is unsustainable without development. As a result, there is a dialectical relationship between freedom and development.

Freedom is therefore an essential factor for achieving development. Moreover, as Jafarzadeh and Beheshti (2012) demonstrate:

Freedom can protect humans from natural disasters (such as floods, earthquakes, and droughts), social problems (such as mortality, low life expectancy, and illiteracy), and economic problems (such as unfair income distribution, low per capita income, etcetera) by expanding human options and providing ... (p. 323)

Freedom in terms of development has clear socio-economic implications. However, while it is essential to ensure development in all the traditional domains, including social, physical and economic, this overview does not provide a complete picture. In addition, other aspects such as the spiritual dimensions of the experience must also be considered. Development should be therefore a holistic approach.

The meaning of the concept of spirituality has evolved over the years. For example, Jerome used it for the first time between 347–420 AD to describe the quality of life impacted by the Holy Spirit (House 2018:692). However, Eastern religions and non-Christian traditions have influenced contemporary spirituality such as Islamic Sufism, Jewish Kabbalism and neo-gnosticism. Nevertheless, spirituality can be understood as the attitude of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical objects.

Thus, this study is rhetorical criticism. The researcher utilised the argumentation discourse and dialectical approach as the methodological framework. It explores the concept of spiritual freedom and its possible implications for development in an African context of poverty from the biblical-theological perspective.

Africa development problem

Africa is blessed with abundant natural resources; yet, it is one of the world's poorest continents. African countries fall

behind in development compared to East Asian countries that underwent the same decolonisation process. This resulted in several discourses, debates and theories to comprehend and explain Africa's underdevelopment. For instance, some analysts attributed Africa's slow economic progress to a lack of competent leadership and ineffective economic policies (Ayuk & Unuigbo 2019:2), while others ascribed it to African governments' reluctance to mimic European countries to pursue prosperity and development (Chitonge 2015:x). Others criticised capitalism and neo-colonialism as barriers to true empirical sovereignty and poverty alleviation in Africa today (Chitonge 2015:x). Although most African states got independence over half a century ago, the development debate continues. Africa has failed terribly in resolving the problem of underdevelopment and putting itself on the development path.

After a look at the African development problem, the following subsection focuses on the concepts of spiritual freedom.

Human freedom

Freedom is not an easy concept to define. The reason is that freedom is understood in different ways allowing no single, unifying analysis of the concept. Gray (1991:17) understands freedom as 'the absence of impediments, the availability of choices, effective power, status, self-determination, doing what one wants, or self-mastery'. Frame (2013:823) refers to freedom as various abilities and the lack of specific inabilities, which he calls preventers. He explains that these abilities can be described as different kinds of freedom.

Freedom is the ideal of every human being. This is because people want to be free from society's constraints, do what they desire and be who or what they choose. As a result, the quest for freedom has preoccupied humanity (both religious and secular) for generations. It impacts various facets of human existence such as political, economic and religious to mention but a few. It is an innate need. Lindsley (n.d.:1) observes that some scholars emphasise inner or emotional freedom, whilst others, like Sen (1999:1), emphasise freedom from external limitations such as slavery or political oppression. For example, the quest for freedom led several African nations to claim independence in the 1960s. The process of freedom caused the Berlin wall to be torn down.

Similarly, after a long history of oppression, in 1994, a new democratic dispensation of freedom was established in South Africa. Lindsley (n.d.:1) also mentions religious and other groups pursuing the idea of freedom. For example:

- Hindus seek to free themselves from the illusion of this world through the oneness they experience with the universe.
- Buddhists are in search of enlightenment that will help them detach themselves from the desires of this world.

- Atheists wish to free themselves from an objective moral rule by a deity.

Likewise, several liberation theologies have emerged by seeking freedom from different arenas. For example, Gustavo Gutiérrez (1975) wrote his *Theology of Liberation*, which focuses on the political and economic situation in Latin America. Such a theology seeks to light the injustices endured by the populace and deconstruct the structures that cause and enable such injustices to exist. Furthermore, liberation theologians believe God created the church to provide liberation to those in need (Tate 2012:535). Likewise, James Cone (2010:88) developed *A Black Theology of Liberation* to identify with the oppressed black American community. According to him, an actual human being entails 'being free'. However, he adds, this is not abstract freedom; it is valid only if a tangible rejection of oppression accompanies it.

Moreover, the development of feminist theology addresses the problem of the marginalisation of women that limits their freedom. For example, Kanongata'a developed 'a theology of humanhood that acknowledges all persons as equal with equal access to freedom, justice, and peace'. She argues that women are not only a gendered species characterised by their subordinate function; 'they' are also human beings (Handasyde, McKinney & Pryor 2021:13). The emphasis is on being liberated from restrictions or limitations. Thus, it can be argued that both religious and secular traditions are searching for freedom from various limitations in the lives or areas of human beings. This search is prominent in their literature.

In his study on freedom and development, Nyerere (n.d) identifies three types of freedom:

- *National*: Is the ability of people of a given country to govern themselves without interference from outside.
- *Socio-economic*: Freedom from hunger, disease and poverty.
- *Personal*: An individual's right to live in dignity and equality with others, freedom to participate in decision-making that affects one's life, and freedom from arbitrary arrest.

Nyerere observes that one cannot be truly free until all three types of freedom are assured. They are conducive to actual development. In other words, when freedom is not guaranteed, economic development is non-existent. Inversely, the lack of development portrays the loss of freedom that Sen (1999:15) refers to as unfreedoms. In this regard, Sen identifies various forms of unfreedom. Such as famine (which denies millions of people around the globe the freedom to survive), 'malnutrition, lack of access to health care, clean water, functional education, gainful employment, or economic and social security'. He observes that famine is unusual in nations with a functioning democracy. However, it is common in regimes governed by authoritarian tyrants. He points out that the two countries seemingly leading the 'famine plague'

globally, namely North Korea and Sudan are both under dictatorial regimes.

Nyerere (n.d:3) elucidates that the purpose of development is the greater freedom and well-being of the people. Therefore, true freedom cannot result from force. He argues that development may be achieved through force (particularly in a dictatorial regime), such as building impressive infrastructure and industries. However, these structures cannot strengthen a nation or a community or provide a basis for the people's freedom. He identifies education and leadership as the only way of achieving development that delivers freedom to people. This type of development will promote only outer freedom and free people from physical impediments.

Additionally, Frame (2013:823–825) emphasises three distinct sorts of freedom. Firstly, moral freedom opens up space to do good. This is also the most critical freedom mentioned in the Scripture because it leads to spiritual freedom. The Apostle Paul refers to this type of freedom when he states, 'for the good that I want, I do not do, but I practise the very evil that I do not want' (Rm 7:19). Frame explains that, unfortunately, according to the Scripture, this freedom was completely lost during the Fall. However, the good news is that through the redemptive work of Christ, humans have been set free from that bondage (Jn 8:34–36).

Secondly, Frame (2013:824) classifies compatibilism as a form of freedom. The latter he describes as doing what someone wants to do. He adds that under the prevalent conception of freedom, if individuals cannot do what they want, they act irrationally or are compelled by an external force (someone or something). According to Frame, in the compatibilist concept of freedom, people are free to follow their strong desire but not always free to carry out their general desires. Although the Scripture does not refer to compatibilism as a type of freedom, Frame points out that theologians and philosophers often refer to this moral consistency as 'freedom'.

Thirdly, Frame (2013:824) identifies libertarianism (frequently referred to as incompatibilism) as a form of freedom. This freedom concerns moral responsibility and emphasises that God does not predetermine human choices. The view he puts forward is: 'Human will is independent of God's plan and the rest of human personality.' For libertarians, individuals cannot be held responsible for decisions caused by anyone or anything (including their desires), which is not the result of their free will. Reflecting on this type of freedom, it is evident that it refers to the *spiritual* dimension but cannot foster true spiritual freedom. It does not have a Scriptural basis: individuals are not innocent because their actions result from free will. The issue remains to ascertain whether an individual's free will does not cause the action. Libertarianism makes it challenging to prove any individual's guilt (2013:825).

1. Bible quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

After discussing the concept of human freedom, the following section will look at freedom in the Old Testament.

Freedom in the Old Testament

The Old Testament word for freedom is to express this ethical value individually or societal level. Although the term 'freedom' does not appear verbatim in the Old Testament, this does not mean the idea of freedom did not exist in ancient Israel. Verbs such as 'to save', 'redeem', 'rescue' and 'lead out' are used frequently to convey the idea of freedom primarily from the context of slavery (Fahlbusch & Bromiley 2008:350). For example, Exodus 3:17 reads:

So I said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Political freedom is portrayed in the Old Testament as a redemptive act of God for Israel. It is 'a necessary commitment of God and perhaps a decisive of God's essence' (Sakenfeld 2008:652). God heard the cries of his people who were oppressed by the burden of slavery in Egypt. According to the narrative, God decided to liberate his people through the mediator, Moses.

From Egypt, where the Israelites were enslaved, they became free, a people belonging to God with their land, name and identity. God gave them commandments and laws to govern them to take care of the orphan, the widow and the strangers who live among them. For example, the Lord commissioned the Israelites:

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and the widow, that they may eat in your town and be satisfied. (Dt 26:12)

Again, according to Exodus 21:2, the Lord commanded: 'If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years, but on the seventh, he shall go out like a freeman without payment.'

After the Israelites settled in the holy land, they prospered and began to ignore the prescriptions God gave them. This was evident during the judges' period, 'there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (Jdg 17:6). Consequently, repeated idolatry and numerous other transgressions caused Israelites to be subjected to foreign political domination and forfeit their freedom. A similar situation befell Israel when they deviated from God's law, and the Assyrians conquered the kingdom of the North (2 Ki 17:7–23). Later the kingdom of the South was taken in captivity to the city of Babylon (2 Ki 21:10–15).

Nevertheless, throughout this history, the will of God was that Israelites might enjoy freedom in their land. In contrast,

their rebellion prevented them from enjoying it from time to time. Interestingly, the Scriptures attest that God extended his highly-esteemed freedom to strangers and enslaved people who lived among Israelites (Verbrugge 2000:181). The following utterances testify this:

- You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex 22:21).
- You shall not hand over to his master an enslaved person who has escaped from his enslaver to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place he chooses in one of our towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him (Dt 23:15–16).

Thus, throughout their history, Israelites struggled to preserve their freedom. Prophets decried this condition in different ways. For example, Isaiah condemned this situation in the following terms:

Your rulers are rebels, and companions of thieves, everyone loves a bribe and chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, nor does the widow's plea come before them. (Is 1:23)

According to the biblical testimony, the Lord addressed Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah. Suppose they do not oppress the alien, the orphan or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in their land, nor walk after other gods to their ruin. In that case, the Lord will let them dwell in the land he gave to their fathers forever and ever (Jr 7:6).

From the examples above, it can be inferred that because leaders of the people have broken the law of God, they have enslaved the society as a whole, which previously was free. This situation had economic and social development implications. The Israelites retained their freedom by depending on the Lord but lost it when deviating from God's demands. In other words, freedom is only in submission to the Lordship of God; otherwise, there is no freedom.

The narrative depicts how a glimmer of hope sprung during this dark and desperate period. A prophetic word was uttered to the distressed, devastated, and captives that the Messiah would come. 'Bring good news to the afflicted ... to bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim freedom to the captives, and freedom to prisoners' (Is 61:1).

This verse refers to the spiritual dimension of freedom. Moreover, several other prophetic messages refer to spiritual freedom, for example, Ezekiel 36:26–30:

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers, so you will be my people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and produce of

the field so that you will not receive the disgrace of famine among the nations again.

This passage clearly shows that inner spiritual regeneration may lead to a new level of productivity and development. It is also confirmed by the well-known Scripture of 2 Chronicles 7:14:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sins and will heal their land.

This Scripture points in the same direction that inner transformation produces extraordinary results, not only the forgiveness of sin, but also the healing of the land. The healing of the land could mean restoring the condition of peace, security, health and wealth. In the present world, this translates to spiritual freedom fostering socio-economic transformation.

The following is an overview of the concept of freedom in the New Testament. This is crucial to comprehend the mentioned concept against the background of the new dispensation and how it relates to development.

Freedom in the New Testament

The Greek word for freedom is *ἐλευθερία* (*eleutheria*). This concept derives from the verb *ἐλευθερόω* (*eleutheroō*). According to Verbrugge (2000:180), it means to free or set someone free, for example from slavery or any form of bondage that prevented an individual from acting of his or her own accord. He specifies that in classical Greek, *ἐλευθερία* primarily had a political and social meaning. For example, freedom from domination by others or one is suitable as an accessible subject to participate in public debates over civic matters of the city. This contrasts with the enslaved people who did not enjoy the full right of citizenship. Thus, *ἐλευθερία* also includes the concept of the independence a state maintains in its external relations. In this regard, the concept often has a strong meaning which rests on its connection with internal freedom (Kittel 1978:491).

The above-mentioned Greek concept of *ἐλευθερία* had taken a philosophical and religious connotation when the institution of the city-state became absolute (Fahlbusch & Bromiley 2008:350). As a result, the law ceased to be a natural expression of freedom. In this context, *ἐλευθερία* 'meant withdrawal from the apparent reality of this world. It was a deliberate surrender to the law and rule of the cosmos or the deity that ruled the cosmos' (Verbrugge 2000:180). For the Stoic teaching, freedom is human's control over threatening external existence by the conscious and deliberate control of their soul (Kittel 1978:496). Unlike Plato and Aristotle who understood freedom as external for the Stoics, freedom was internal. As internal events are not always easy to control, the Stoics emphasise an internal detachment from this world. They also highlight aspects

such as anger, anxiety, pity and the fear of death that would keep one attached to it. However, the Stoics remain challenged to maintain this separation between internal and external freedom; thus, it requires a constant struggle (Lindsley 2015:1).

In the Old Testament narratives, freedom is understood primarily physically. However, as Verbrugge indicates, New Testament writers' idea of freedom extends the scope of the Old Testament. According to this testimony, freedom includes the liberation of all the powers that oppress true humanity, namely sin, Satan, the law and death. This is underlined in Jesus' inaugural sermon:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord. (Lk 4:18 and Is 61:1)

This theme was the introductory message of Jesus and even embodied his whole mission. The term 'poor' may be translated as 'afflicted' or 'humble' and can refer to people oppressed by others or humble themselves before God (Smith 2009:634). The release of the captives could mean freedom from sin and the oppressive powers of evil (Vinson 2008:121). It could also point to the liberation of those who are depressed and discouraged probably because of spiritual, social or spiritual problems; those who suffer from diseases or are possessed by demons. In this context, Myers (2011:131) describes the poor as individuals who do not have the freedom to grow because of physical, mental, social and spiritual restrictions or limitations. Lenski (2008:250) explains that the blind could refer to physical or spiritual blindness, 'the blind, bound captives in dark dungeons'.

From these testimonies, it is clear that the New Testament writers no longer focused on political freedom from oppression, but the spiritual freedom of God's children in Christ (Gl 2:4). This does not imply that political freedom becomes less important or ceases to be the people's aspiration in the new dispensation. In the synoptic Gospels, for example, Jesus himself announced the coming of the kingdom of God (e.g. Mt 3:2). God's reign opposes the Roman empire that dominated the Mediterranean world in the 1st century. God's kingdom will replace human governance and restore freedom and true peace. So, to receive freedom, people must submit to God and his kingdom. The profound implication is that people need to be freed from self, own will and expectations. Only then will they be truly free. Thus, spiritual freedom is a prerequisite to achieving true political freedom.

The Greeks understood the lack of freedom or slavery as a mental problem. Nevertheless, conversely, the New Testament portrays it as a will problem (Lindsley n.d:1). That is to say, someone can be free politically, but still be bound internally to sin. In other words, this individual's will is unfree and controlled by sinfulness. Thus, the concept

ἐλευθερία [freedom] first refers to the liberation from sin as attested by the Scripture (Rm 6:18–22):

Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness ... for you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness ... but now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.

In John 8:31–32, Jesus elucidates this type of freedom when he states that if the disciples continue in his Word, they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free. Then, in verse 34, Jesus asserts that everyone who sins, is a slave of sin.

The Apostle Paul views Christian freedom as the purpose of the believers' calling and a state of liberation from the bondage of the law (Gl 5:1) but bound by love toward one another. The paradox is that freedom does not equate to liberation in the proper sense of the word, but entails slavery through love. In other words, freedom implies a shift from the obligations of the law to those of love. Thus, it is evident from a Christian perspective that the daily practice of love mounts a rampart to maintain one's freedom and exercise faith. For Barclay (1991:109), love is expressed in mutual service and can be considered the essential practical consequence of freedom. Paul explains this relationship: 'For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything but faith working through love' (Gl 5:6).

Prior to establishing the first covenant at Mount Sinai, Abraham, the faithful patriarch, followed the law and circumcision in all its strictness (Gn 17:13; Ex 12:44). The Scriptures (Gn 15:6) attest that Abraham was justified not based on his adherence to the law, but on his faith manifested in love. Galatians 3:6 confirms: 'Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'

Abraham's faith-based justification laid the groundwork for the Christian faith-based justification in Christ Jesus. Christians Jews thought that they were heirs to redemption by virtue of God's covenant with Abraham, through which God chose Israel out of love and toward real freedom (Gn 17:7). Gentiles were therefore permitted to become Israelites by submitting to the ritual of circumcision and adhering to Mosaic Law. In Galatians 4:6, St. Paul says that their experience with the Spirit proves that Gentiles have received the Spirit of sonship in their hearts, crying 'Abba Father' (Gl 4:6). This signifies that God has welcomed Gentiles into the religious community and included them in Abraham's blessing, which includes all nations on the planet (Gn 22:18).

Paul makes it clear that freedom may be misinterpreted or misused. It has the potential to degenerate into libertarianism or antinomianism. It implies that anybody (even Christians) can act according to their preferences or pleasure. Christian freedom, on the other hand, has its limitations. The Apostle

Peter instructs Christians to act as freemen, not as 'bondslaves of God' who use their freedom as a pretext for wrongdoing (1 Pt 2:16).

Thus, freedom is synonymous with dealing daily with the flesh and walking in the Spirit. Freedom in this sense is not absolute; it entails a daily struggle renouncing fleshly desires and contending for the fruits of the Spirit. Throughout this process, it should be kept in mind that fleshly desires are opposed to the fruits of the Spirit. One cannot produce the fruits of the Spirit overnight. It requires time in which the believer is transformed gradually. Christian freedom is therefore a process that enables Christian believers to develop over the years. They can acquire and maintain true freedom when living by the Spirit.

To attain this freedom, Christians must oppose and overcome the desires of the flesh (Gl 5:19–21). As mentioned previously, it is challenging to break free from the desire of the flesh and produce the fruit of the Spirit. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit himself prompts these fruits in the believers. Barclay (1991:109) specifies that 'the Spirit provides counteracting force which motivates and directs them (Christians) to exclude the flesh'. A life guided by the Spirit guarantees true freedom, as Paul asserts: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17). Thus, the proper expression of Christian freedom implies submitting to God.

James 1:25 describes the Word of God as the perfect law of freedom. He states that a person who obeys and practices the perfect law of freedom will be blessed in what he does. James mentions that the law of freedom refers to the law of love for God and one's neighbour. It implies being liberated from egocentrism to serve the needy's interests, and a blessing follows. The promised blessing to the one who hears and practices the law of freedom, as McKnight (2013:161) indicates, pertains to God's favour on that person in this present life. In the same vein, Vacek (1996:64) states that we are also liberated when we freely love. Because we let the beloved's actual and ideal goodness supplant our egocentrism or everyday life.

Jesus summarised or reinterpreted the Mosaic Law and the prophets' message in terms of two dimensions: love for God and one's fellow humans (Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27). These dimensions stamp the Christian responsibility towards one another and accountability before God (Barclay 1991:149). Therefore, the virtue of love is the perfect law of true freedom. In the words of Verbrugge (2000:182), 'the deeper we penetrate the perfect law that gives freedom, the freer we become for such action'. In other words, Christian freedom finds its proper expression in love for God and the neighbour, which also has socio-economic implications. Kakwata (2016:1–10) elucidates this suggested fact: Human beings are called to live in a relationship with God, others and the environment based on love.

Conversely, the absence of this Christian relational dynamic (love) disrupts these relationships. It gives rise to sin at the individual or societal level. Thus, sin can be evident in the unjust, oppressive and exploitative social structures. It is one-way poverty gains a foothold in society (Kakwata 2016:1–10). Sen (1999:16) understands poverty as denying human freedom in this context. Thus, it can be argued that ‘the ethics of concrete love for one’s neighbour is a crucial factor in understanding poverty in Africa and worldwide’ (Wyngaard 2013:iii).

This implies a connection between the law and freedom. Moetyer (1995:70) explains that when God gave the law at Mount Sinai, it was not meant to save the people of God, as they were already redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Exod. 12:13). The law was given instead as a style of life to maintain the freedom of God’s people. He asserts that ‘the law of God becomes the law of freedom since it safeguards, expresses and enables the life of true freedom into which Christ has brought the believers’. Obedience to the law of freedom maintains freedom and leads to blessedness (Ja 1:25). These may refer to God’s goodness or future blessing, eternal salvation (Moo 2011:95) or material blessing in the life of a believer, hence socio-economic advance.

Fahlbusch and Bromiley (2008:350) elucidate that freedom can take on various forms: conscience, belief, opinion, information, doctrine, education, et cetera. It is recognised universally that only a democratic government can guarantee these different forms of freedom at individual and societal levels. Freedom can only be sought, granted or exercised within the limits of the law. The reason is that citizens are bound by the laws that govern them. This implies that freedom is not absolute but relative and means acting according to specific rules. People are free to the extent that they do not operate against the established laws that determine their role and behaviour in their society. Thus, freedom cannot exist in opposition to the law; only under the law. A similar principle applies to the perspective of Christian freedom.

As presented in the New Testament, the idea of freedom also denotes liberation from the power of death. The latter, in this context, is the consequence of sin due to the breaking of the law. Numerous verses testify about this condition and outcome (Rm 6:21, 23; 7:10–11, 23–24; 1 Cor 15:56). As a result, sin leads to death (Rm 7: 9–11). In other words, the power of sin is death. It should be mentioned that death has a twofold meaning: it denotes physical or spiritual demise.

As mentioned above, Paul presents freedom to the Romans succinctly as believers’ empowerment to be liberated from sin, the demands of the law and, ultimately, death. The liberation from these powers, particularly from death, does not mean its complete abolition but entails, as Verbrugge (2000:181) explains, ‘the liberation from the inevitability of its compulsion and claim’. The truth is that physical death is an inevitable fate of all human beings. However, the Scripture states that the sting of death has been removed through the

redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:55). This implies a promise of life after physical death.

In summary, it should be mentioned that the meaning of *ἐλευθερία* in the New Testament contrasts with the secular Greek mentality at the time (Verbrugge (2000:181).

- Human beings are unfree (Rm 6:20; 2 Pt 19) and unable to liberate themselves.
- For the New Testament writers, freedom is God’s redemptive work, as is the case in the Old Testament.
- Freedom is not synonymous with libertinism – doing what seems good without restriction.
- Freedom is the purpose of believers’ calling. They find their true freedom by depending on the life of God in Christ (Rm 6:22; Gl 5:1; 1 Pt 2:16).
- Freedom can only be granted and exercised within the law. The perfect law of freedom is love, which focuses on God and one’s neighbour. The law was not given as a condition for salvation, but rather to maintain true freedom.
- Those free do not belong to themselves but to Christ who liberated them (1 Cor 6:19).
- Freedom is not primarily political liberation, but liberation from the law of sin.
- Internal freedom often produces external freedom and holds socio-economic implications (healing of the land).
- To experience the fullness of life as God intended, human beings ideally need inner and outer freedom. Therefore, these two dimensions constitute complete freedom.

The implication of inner freedom for external freedom

From the discussion above, it was observed that the main focus of the New Testament writers was not political or economic liberation, but inner freedom. In the New Testament, the redemption perspective is not primarily political liberation, but rather the individual’s salvation. Jesus was born and exercised his ministry when Israel was under the domination of the Romans. He neither engaged in a struggle or subversive activities to overthrow the Roman Empire’s political system, nor did he expect it from his followers.

Nevertheless, in his introductory message, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God to be at hand (confirming his precursor, John the Baptist’s message). The command was for people to repent to enter into this new dispensation (Mt 3:1–3; 4:17). This may sound like a declaration of war. One cannot proclaim a kingdom where another already exists without implying war. However, Jesus responded with nonviolence to Roman occupation and instructed his followers to follow suit.

An apt example is Jesus’ response to the Pharisees and Herodian’s trick question of whether people should pay tax or not. The issue of taxation, as Culpepper (2007:4, 12) suggests, ‘was set in the context of political and economic

oppression'. Nevertheless, Jesus reminded them to 'render to Caesar things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's' (Mk 12:17; Mt. 22:21). Similarly, the Apostle Paul teaches a nonviolent response to the socio-political oppression by the Roman Empire. This nonviolence is based on the importance of inner freedom (1 Cor 7):

Each man should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it, but become free, instead of doing that if you can. He who was called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman; likewise, he who was called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. (vv. 20–23)

At the time, believers who were enslaved were awarded their freedom. A clear example is Onesimus, whom Paul recommended to Philemon, emphasises that he is no longer enslaved but more than an enslaved person (Phlm 16).

It is noticeable that inner freedom has repercussions for the surrounding world. The inner freedom can be considered a fountain from which other freedoms sprout. There is a parallelism between the central theme of the book of Exodus, 'Let my people go', and the mission of Jesus as defined in Luke. He came to set the captives free (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18). The researcher strongly believes that this expression of freedom can be extended to every area of life for individuals and communities. Thus, the notion of freedom is perceived as *holistic* and covers the whole universe. For example, Paul, according to Romans 8:19, declares:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself also will be set free from slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Luke also emphasises that God's ultimate goal is to restore all things (Ac 3:21).

It should be mentioned that freedom cannot be limited to physical aspects such as socio-economic advance, and political or civil rights, as Sen (1999:3) advocates. This apparent freedom is incomplete if it is not accompanied by internal freedom and transformation. As mentioned previously, people can be free physically but bound in their inner being. For example, in South Africa, the apartheid system, which existed between 1948 and 1991, is considered one of the major causes of the current situation of socio-economic poverty in the country (Wyngaard 2013:17). South Africa has been independent since 1994. However, society is presently reeling from a massive wave of corruption in both the private and public sectors (Kruger & De Klerk 2016:97). An inner, sinful dispensation binds the liberated leaders. According to Kruger and De Klerk, corruption thwarts a country's development, endangers a society's social fabric, and inhibits moral renewal.

It means that both inner and outer freedoms are needed for an individual or African society to live the fullness of

life that God has planned for them. This was the purpose of Jesus' ministry: to free the captives from inside and outside (Lk 4:18). Lindsley (n.d:1) asserts, 'Freedom from the bondage to sin, the Law, death, and lies about reality will inevitably push further until it leads to freedom in all areas of life.' Thus, most importantly, inward healing or spiritual freedom often leads to outward healing or social, economic and political transformation.

Conclusion

This article aimed to articulate the concept of spiritual freedom from a theological perspective and examine its possible implication for development. It explored the relationship between the physical aspect of freedom and development by indicating how this type of freedom constitutes a basis for development. Development and physical freedom are interrelated – people cannot achieve one without the other. 'Freedom is both the goal and the means to human development' (Myers 2011:30). There is evidence that physical freedom promotes development. However, this achievement is incomplete if it is not guided by spiritual freedom.

It is argued in this article that the inner quality of life leads to outward actions. God's commandments, which Jesus summarised as love for God and one's neighbour, entails the perfect law of complete freedom. It promotes inner freedom that produces physical freedom and often fosters socio-economic transformation. Inner freedom nurtures transformation in two ways: First, it attracts divine blessing and predisposes people to demonstrate love for God and those in need. Society's lack of such love (the perfect law of freedom) has a destructive effect. It leads to enslavement and gives rise to sinfulness. Subsequently compromises development and dehumanises people. If people are free, which means if they abide by the perfect law of freedom, positive change is possible. Second, it will lead to inner and outer freedom and foster socio-economic development. Thus, it becomes clear that holistic freedom is needed for people to enjoy the fullness of life, such as God intended for them

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