

## ELUSIVE FREEDOM: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

ANDREW PREVOT  
*Georgetown University*  
*Washington, District of Columbia*

The title of my talk announces one of its central claims, namely that freedom is elusive. As soon we seem to take hold of it—whether conceptually, institutionally, or spiritually—we discover it again, only at a distance. This distance, though, does not suppress the human passion for freedom but renews it. The struggle continues. This slogan expresses another central claim of this talk. By emphasizing the elusiveness of freedom, my goal is not to encourage pessimism or despair but rather to motivate action. My argument is against self-satisfaction: the false comfort of feeling oneself free enough already.

The English phrase, “the struggle continues,” translates the Portuguese, “*a luta continua*.” Eduardo Mondlane, the first president of Mozambique’s anti-colonial liberation movement FRELIMO, introduced this rallying cry in the 1960s, urging his followers to keep fighting because victory was not yet won.<sup>1</sup> In 1973, it became the title of a documentary film about FRELIMO, which aired in the U.S. on the African-American-oriented public television series, *Say Brother*.<sup>2</sup> In postcolonial Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah adopted it as a part of his message to workers.<sup>3</sup> It may be familiar to members of the CTSA thanks to Ada María Isasi-Díaz’s book, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology*.<sup>4</sup> Echoes of it may also be heard in the new chapter, “Enfleshing Struggle,” which is set to appear in an updated edition of M. Shawn Copeland’s *Enfleshing Freedom*.<sup>5</sup> This saying reverberates across diverse contexts of social protest.

In the first part of my talk, I focus on the protracted freedom struggle of Mozambique. This context has not been discussed in any Plenary Session at the CTSA.

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<sup>1</sup> African Information Service, with photos by Robert Van Lierop, “Mozambique: The Struggle Continues,” *The Black Scholar* 5, no. 2 (October 1973): 44–52, at 51.

<sup>2</sup> “Say Brother; African Liberation Committee Film; A Luta Continua (The Struggle Continues),” 25 October 1973, GBH Archives, [http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V\\_7E8FD3E200F84CC3ABEE5D8CCC94FD12](http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_7E8FD3E200F84CC3ABEE5D8CCC94FD12).

<sup>3</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *The Struggle Continues: Six Panaf Pamphlets* (London: Panaf, 2006 [1973]), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *La Lucha Continues: Mujerista Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming).

The anthropologist Devaka Premawardhana contributed his ethnographic knowledge of this country to a 2022 Invited Session on Interreligious Learning in the Global South.<sup>6</sup> There have been plenaries related to liberation, human rights, and social justice,<sup>7</sup> and paper sessions on African theology,<sup>8</sup> which anticipate some of the points I want to make. But I would like us to consider Mozambique directly, both because its particular story—in which the Catholic Church is deeply implicated—deserves to be better understood and because it is a powerful symbol of the continual struggle for freedom taking place everywhere. I refuse all false binaries between the local and the global, the contextual and the traditional, the practical and the philosophical. Writing in solidarity with the people of Mozambique, I argue that any C/catholic theology that speaks about freedom needs to be informed by the historical, intersectional, and spiritual strivings of those who have been deprived of freedom, wherever they may be.

In the second and third parts of my talk, I comment on the material and spiritual conditions of freedom. I reflect on these conditions as they are sought both in Mozambique and in other social and theological contexts that may be closer at hand. Although the particularities of each place matter, there are connections, such as exploitative relationships of multinational capital and global networks of aid, solidarity, and resistance. Governmental, nongovernmental, and specifically ecclesial and religious organizations are involved in all of this. There are also isomorphisms, such as common patterns of economic inequality, racial subjugation, gender-based violence, social fragmentation, and climate crisis. In North America, as elsewhere, groups suffering from material unfreedom and persons of whatever material status who strive to make choices that align with God face enormous challenges. They have to confront equivocations in the meaning of freedom, restrictions on its material scope that divide the haves from the have-nots, and mysterious barriers to its spiritual fruition, exemplified by the Pauline saying, “I do not do what I want” (Rom. 7:15 NRSV).

In response to these problems, the compromise solutions provided by economic, political, cultural, and religious liberalism take us only so far. The stunning merger of liberalism with Catholic theology achieved by John Courtney Murray more than a half

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<sup>6</sup> B. Kevin Brown, “Interreligious Learning in the Global South—Invited Session,” *CTSA Proceedings* 76 (2022): 88–89; and Devaka Premawardhana, *Faith in Flux: Pentecostalism and Mobility in Rural Mozambique* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> For example: M. Shawn Copeland, “The New Anthropological Subject at the Heart of the Mystical Body of Christ,” *CTSA Proceedings* 53 (1998): 25–47; María Pilar Aquino, “Theology and Indigenous Cultures of the Americas: Conditions of Dialogue,” *CTSA Proceedings* 61 (2006): 19–50; Bryan N. Massingale, “*Vox Victimarium Vox Dei*: Malcolm X as Neglected ‘Classic’ for Catholic Theological Reflection,” *CTSA Proceedings* 65 (2010): 63–88; Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “A Global Sign of Outward Grace: The Sacramentality of the World Church in the Era of Globalization,” *CTSA Proceedings* 67 (2012): 14–22; and Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Theology and (De)humanizing Work in the Twenty-First Century,” *CTSA Proceedings* 75 (2021): 1–17.

<sup>8</sup> For example: Cyril Orji, “African Theology,” *CTSA Proceedings* 66 (2011): 106–107; Emmanuel Katongole, “African Panel and Discussion—Selected Session,” *CTSA Proceedings* 69 (2014): 91–92; and Emmanuel Katongole, “Reading *Laudato Si*’ from an Africanist Background—Selected Session,” *CTSA Proceedings* 72 (2017): 77–78.

century ago has deeply shaped the ethos of the CTSA and yielded many lasting results.<sup>9</sup> However, there is a danger that this liberal framework will tempt theologians to become satisfied by abstract principles and half measures and to forget the urgency of ongoing struggle. As the Black feminist Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer declares, “Nobody’s free until everybody’s free.”<sup>10</sup> Although liberalism aims at universality, it leaves many in desperate straits. Questioning the limits of liberalism, along with other insufficient paradigms of freedom, I contend that theology needs to keep fighting for an integral emancipation that leaves no one in figurative or literal chains. In the final analysis, freedom is elusive because it is nothing other than full sanctification: God’s life radiant through incarnate existence.

### ELUSIVE FREEDOM IN MOZAMBIQUE

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century, slavery already existed in the lands of southeastern Africa now known as Mozambique. Captives of interethnic wars were often enslaved. They were either kept within hierarchical households, in patron-client relationships, or traded to Arabia and India in exchange for textiles and metalworks. Portuguese Christian settlers and creoles imitated this slaveholding practice as they established trading posts for ivory and gold and plantations known as *prazos* in the interior. For several decades in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, the trade in slaves from this region of Africa increased dramatically, both because of the growth of plantation economies around the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and because of the labor vacuum created by first British—and then French—abolitionism. The capitalist ambitions of certain Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans changed the nature of slavery, stripping the enslaved persons of the meager social protections they had in the traditional system. Marauding bands conducted violent raids to acquire many thousands and eventually millions of Black “bodies” to ship to Zanzibar, the Seychelles, Brazil, or Cuba.<sup>11</sup>

Although Portugal had maintained a small presence in Mozambique, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century, with Europe’s “scramble for Africa,” that attempts were made to reduce the entire population to the slave-like condition of colonial rule. The decades of the twentieth century leading up to the nationalist struggle for liberation were marked by a two-tiered society similar to South African apartheid. The minority who were recognized as Portuguese citizens (including Whites, Indians, mixed-race persons, and a small number of assimilated Blacks) were paid at higher rates, enjoyed the right to vote, and were by many such measures “free,” though it was common for the non-White members of even this group to suffer from discrimination.

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<sup>9</sup> John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005 [1960]); and John F. Quinn, “*We Hold These Truths* at Fifty: John Courtney Murray’s Contested Legacy,” *American Catholic Studies* 122, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 31–51.

<sup>10</sup> Fannie Lou Hamer, “‘Nobody’s Free Until Everybody’s Free’, Speech Delivered at the Founding of the National Women’s Political Caucus, Washington, D.C., July 10, 1971,” in *The Speeches of Fannie Lou Hamer: To Tell It Like It Is*, ed. Maegan Parker Brooks and Davis W. Houck (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 134–139, at 136.

<sup>11</sup> Malyn Newitt, *A Short History of Mozambique* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017), 52–55.

By contrast, Black natives, who made up the vast majority of the population, were subject to forced labor, denied all but the most elementary education, and harassed by police. Subsistence farmers were coerced into planting cash crops and selling them at low prices that left them wanting for food, or else were simply driven from their land. Others were compelled to work for unjust wages in the mines of the Transvaal.<sup>12</sup>

The Catholic Church cooperated with such arrangements. The Vatican entered into a formal concordat with Salazar's authoritarian regime. Catholic missionary schools took on the responsibility of providing primary education to Black natives. The aim was supposedly positive: to liberate them from their allegedly primitive and sinful ways by giving them both civilization and salvation. Yet the reality, as Mondlane observed, is that the Catholic Church was training natives to be "servants of Portugal."<sup>13</sup> Local Catholic leaders, such as the auxiliary bishop of Lourenço Marques, labeled all indigenous resistance to colonial rule as "terrorism" and "communism," forbade priests from supporting it, and declared, "The native people of Africa have the obligation to thank the colonialists for all the benefits which they receive from them."<sup>14</sup>

There were some exceptions to this pre-independence alignment of Catholicism with colonialism. The Missionaries of Africa (known as the White Fathers because of their white habits) trained some local African clergy and encouraged them to integrate indigenous cultural elements with Catholic faith. This emphasis on inculturation increased after the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II). As the push for national independence grew in the 1960s, some African seminarians and priests joined the movement. A subset of White Fathers and Burgos fathers assisted the armed struggle.<sup>15</sup>

Mondlane received his early education in a Swiss missionary program where he learned to sing African American spirituals as a child, the very songs that inspired James Cone's Black theology.<sup>16</sup> Members of Mondlane's Presbyterian community arranged for him to do further study in South Africa, Portugal, and the United States, culminating with a doctoral degree in sociology from Northwestern University. They hoped that, as a return on their investment, Mondlane would come back to Mozambique to lead a youth ministry initiative.<sup>17</sup> Some scholars argue that Protestant missions provided fertile ground for revolutionary activity because they had critical distance from the Catholic political establishment.<sup>18</sup>

However, one should not overlook the fact that Mondlane had to break free from the patronizing, racist attitudes of his Christian community in order to become an anti-colonial leader and find freedom in his personal life. His benefactors vehemently opposed his decision to marry a White American woman, named Janet Johnson,

<sup>12</sup> Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1969), 35–57 and 76–98.

<sup>13</sup> Mondlane, *Struggle for Mozambique*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Mondlane, *Struggle for Mozambique*, 74.

<sup>15</sup> Eric Mourier-Genoud, *Catholicism and the Making of Politics in Central Mozambique, 1940–1986* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 86–87, 96, 103–104, and 114.

<sup>16</sup> James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Faris, *Liberating Mission in Mozambique: Faith and Revolution in the Life of Eduardo Mondlane* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Teresa Cruz e Silva, *Protestant Churches and the Formation of Political Consciousness in Southern Mozambique (1930–1974)* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2001).

because of how this relationship would be perceived. His reply shows that, as feminist theory emphasizes, such a private matter was in fact deeply political and theological. In defense of his *marriage*, he wrote,

It is my belief that political issues, economic issues and social issues will be rectified only if we humans here on earth receive God's demands and execute God's will. For me, human salvation does not begin in heaven but in this world. If our churches are interested in human problems, it is my conviction that they should take an interest at least in practicing what they know is God's will here in the world.<sup>19</sup>

In statements such as this, Mondlane demanded that Black people in Mozambique, and indeed everywhere, be recognized as full human beings with the freedom to pursue their own happiness. He presented this recognition as a strict matter of Christian obedience.

Mondlane was a leading figure in FRELIMO's armed struggle for independence, which began in 1964. This revolutionary war was not concluded until 1974 when a coup in Portugal finally ended the colonial regime. Militant resistance to the occupying Portuguese forces was a morally justifiable response to the brutality of the colonial system and the massacre of nonviolent protesters.<sup>20</sup> If a peaceful resolution had been possible, it would have been preferred, but Portugal stubbornly refused. In the fight for liberation, unity of vision was difficult to achieve. Tensions between regional ethnic groups, which had not regarded themselves as a single nation; clashes between capitalist and communist models of material freedom, which were fueling a global "Cold War" that was actually quite hot; and differences between traditional African, Catholic, Protestant, and other religious and humanist accounts of spiritual freedom complicated the struggle. Everyone in the movement wanted to be free, but they lacked a univocal concept. Although Mondlane endeavored to address these tensions, tragically, in 1969, he was assassinated. His death and the deepening rifts in the movement foreshadowed a fierce conflict over the future of the country.<sup>21</sup>

The hope that sustained FRELIMO was that independence would rescue Mozambique from its misery, and in some respects it did, but freedom in the fullest sense remained elusive. Soon after victory, the country was plunged again into war. Contras funded by the White-supremacist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa attacked the fledgling government's military and infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> These external destabilizing forces built on, and built up, resentment among certain rural Mozambicans who opposed the modernizing, secularizing, and collectivizing initiatives of the new socialist, single-party state. FRELIMO and RENAMO, as the counter-revolutionary movement came to be called, fought a brutal war until 1992,

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Farris, *Liberating Mission*, 86.

<sup>20</sup> African Information Service, "Mozambique: The Struggle Continues," 46.

<sup>21</sup> George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 135–172.

<sup>22</sup> William Minter, *Apartheid's Contras: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994).

which left approximately one million dead, many millions displaced and traumatized, and many metrics of social and economic development plummeting. Although there were atrocities on both sides, RENAMO was condemned for using particularly inhumane tactics such as destructions of hospitals and schools, massacres of civilians, and abductions of women as sex slaves. Women suffered greatly in the war. They were unsafe at home and in refugee camps.<sup>23</sup>

To some extent, the conflict was about their place in society. The cultural clash between “tradition” and “modernity” that partly fueled the war concerned economic questions, such as whether local African chiefs would retain the power to allocate land, but it also concerned gender questions, such as whether Mozambique would continue to practice traditional rites of female initiation that, though typically not involving genital mutilation, did require women to submit to patriarchal authority. Women-led initiatives such as the Organization of Mozambican Women (OMM) increased women’s participation in education, labor, military service, and politics and pushed for modernizing reforms that some Mozambicans viewed as threatening to their indigenous lifeways.<sup>24</sup> These fights revealed an ambiguity: Did freedom mean restoring a cultural past suppressed by European imperialism or forging a new egalitarian future beyond every domination, including by African men? The answer was clear for many prominent women in Mozambique’s struggle, such as Josina Machel, an early leader of FRELIMO who is celebrated each year on Mozambique’s National Women’s Day (April 7).<sup>25</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, FRELIMO loosened its commitment to state-run socialism and began efforts to liberalize the economy and democratize the political apparatus. This shift was a pragmatic necessity given waning support from the Soviet bloc, the devastating effects of the war, and the immediate need for foreign aid and investment.<sup>26</sup> Privatization of property and the plan for a multi-party state facilitated the country’s transition from war to relative peace. However, these policy changes were no panacea. They came with fresh problems of neocolonial extractivism and entrenched inequality. Although Portuguese rule is over, multinational corporations linked to the U.S., the E.U., Russia, China, and Brazil reap profits from the land and resources of Mozambicans and sometimes violently quash local resistance. The

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<sup>23</sup> Lily Bunker, “War Accounts from Ilha Josina Machel, Maputo Province,” in *The War Within: New Perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique, 1976–1992*, ed. Eric Mourier-Genoud, Michel Cahen, and Domingos Manuel do Rosário (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2018), 181–200; Mario J. Azevedo, *Tragedy and Triumph: Mozambique Refugees in Southern Africa, 1977–2001* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 70; and “Mozambique: Civil War,” *Mass Atrocity Endings*, 7 August 2015, <https://sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/tag/mozambique/>.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen E. Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 131–36; and Helena Hansen, Ragnar Hansen, Ole Gjerstad, and Chantal Sarazin, “The Organization of Mozambican Women (A Organizacao Mulher Mocambicana/OMM),” *Journal of Eastern African Research & Development* 15 (1985): 230–244.

<sup>25</sup> Ama Biney, “Uncovering Josina Machel from Obscurity: African Women Hidden in His-story,” *South African History Online*, 3 April 2014, [www.sahistory.org.za/archive/uncovering-josina-machel-obscurity-african-women-hidden-his-story-ama-biney-3-april-2014](http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/uncovering-josina-machel-obscurity-african-women-hidden-his-story-ama-biney-3-april-2014).

<sup>26</sup> Georgi M. Derluigan, “Mozambique in the 1980s: Periphery Goes Postmodern,” in *The War Within*, 203–220.

freedom of global capital tramples on the freedom of the people themselves. Despite increasing growth, the structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have diverted monies from education and healthcare and worsened conditions for the impoverished majority.<sup>27</sup>

Although the struggle against capitalist exploitation continues, it is certainly good that the civil war has ended. Freedom requires peace. The lay Catholic community known as Sant'Egídio, which had been doing humanitarian work in Mozambique, facilitated the peace process. With assistance from the archbishop of Beira, they made contacts with the reclusive RENAMO leadership and gradually convinced them to come to Rome for a formal dialogue with the FRELIMO government. It is remarkable that such a humble religious organization, started in 1968 by young Italian Catholics who simply wanted to live the gospel and follow the teachings of Vatican II, made such an important contribution to the common good. Yet it was the voluntary participation of each side of the conflict and the voices of Mozambicans crying out for a better future that ultimately liberated the country from its death spiral.<sup>28</sup>

Recent popes have made apostolic journeys to Mozambique, bearing messages of peace: John Paul II in September 1988, while the war raged on, and Francis in September 2019, following the signing of a new peace accord meant to ensure safe and free elections. On his visit, Francis discussed the economic and social conditions that make lasting peace possible. He noted advancements in the areas of education and healthcare. He made special mention of the youth of Mozambique who are the present and the future of the country. He highlighted the needs of the unemployed and the landless poor. And he expressed solidarity with those suffering from recent climate-change-related cyclones.<sup>29</sup> According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Mozambique was the most vulnerable country in the world to adverse effects of climate change in 2019 and the fifth most vulnerable from the period of 2000 to 2019.<sup>30</sup> One encouraging aspect of Mozambique, from a human rights perspective, is its 2015 decriminalization of homosexual activity. This decision distinguishes Mozambique from countries such

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<sup>27</sup> Jason Beste and James Pfeiffer, "Mozambique's Debt and the International Monetary Fund's Influence on Poverty, Education, and Health," *International Journal of Health Services* 46, no. 2 (2016): 366–381; Lucas Atanásio Catsossa, "Globalização do capitalismo extrativista, recursos naturais e o neocolonialismo na África: desafios e perspectivas para Moçambique," *Entre-Lugar* 12, no. 23 (July 2021): 310–355; João M. Paraskeva, "Mozambique: Neocolonialism and the Remasculinization of Democracy," in *The Developing World and State Education: Neoliberal Depredation and Egalitarian Alternatives*, ed. Dave Hill and Ellen Roskam (New York: Routledge, 2008), 197–215; and "Human Development Index (HDI)," accessed 9 May 2023, [www.hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI](http://www.hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI).

<sup>28</sup> Andrea Riccardi, "Promoting Democracy, Peace, and Solidarity," *Journal of Democracy* 9, no. 4 (October 1998): 157–167.

<sup>29</sup> Francis, "Meeting with the Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps" (Apostolic Journey to Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius [4–10 September 2019], Maputo, Mozambique, 5 September 2019), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2019/9/5/autorita-mozambico.html>.

<sup>30</sup> David Eckstein, Vera Künzel, and Laura Schäfer, "Global Climate Crisis Index 2021," Jan. 2021, [www.germanwatch.org/en/19777](http://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777).

as Uganda that are moving in the opposite direction, with deadly consequences.<sup>31</sup> Although the pope did not address this topic on his visit, he has since declared that “being homosexual isn’t a crime” and “God loves us as we are.”<sup>32</sup>

In the area of religion, Mozambique boasts traditional African, Islamic, and Christian (including Protestant, Catholic, and Pentecostal) faith communities, which either survived the 1970s Soviet-style suppression of religious freedom or, as is especially the case with Pentecostalism, blossomed in more recent decades.<sup>33</sup> The embrace of indigenous traditions—which happens in part through inculturation and, in some cases, multiple belonging—is an important means by which Mozambicans and other Africans resist Western imperialism and affirm their dignity.<sup>34</sup> This point is emphasized by Teresia Hinga, Elochukwu Uzukwu, Florence Oso, Stan Ilo, and other African theologians.<sup>35</sup> These scholars recognize that African culture is not a static, idealized given but a work in progress that is plural and contested. Questions remain about how best to mediate between ancient religiocultural practices and forward-looking possibilities and how best to embody the sanctifying grace of God in the midst of contemporary African realities.

Although the spiritual freedom that is sought through these complex choices about identity is not reducible to the achievement of material (i.e., political economic) freedom, these areas of struggle are related in various ways. To take one disconcerting example: the ongoing Al Shabaab insurgency in the northern Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado draws on the frustrations of an impoverished Muslim community that has been mistreated by foreign mining companies and abandoned by government complicity and corruption.<sup>36</sup> The idea that worship of Allah requires armed struggle

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<sup>31</sup> Carmeliza Rosário and Camila Gianella, “Progressive Legislation in the Context of Generalised Conservative Public Opinion: The Case of LGBT Rights in Mozambique,” in *Queer Lawfare in Africa: Legal Strategies in Contexts of LGBTIQ+ Criminalisation and Politicisation*, ed. Adrian Jjuuko, Siri Gloppen, Alan Msosa, and Frans Viljoen (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2022), 57–80.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Nicole Winfield, “The AP Interview: Pope Says Homosexuality Not a Crime,” 25 January 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-gay-rights-ap-interview-1359756ae22f27f87c1d4d6b9c8ce212>.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Chingono, “The Role of Religion in Fuelling War and Promoting Peace in Mozambique,” in *Religion and Human Security in Africa*, ed. Ezra Chitando and Joram Tarusarira (London: Routledge, 2019), 197–217, at 199; Premawardhana, *Faith in Flux*, 21; and Liazzat Bonate, “Islam in Northern Mozambique: A Historical Overview,” *History Compass* 8/7 (2010): 573–593.

<sup>34</sup> Simão Chimango, “Inculturation and the Gospel: A Mozambican Perspective,” *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 348/349 (1999): 98–104.

<sup>35</sup> Teresia Mbari Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 59–80; Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 4; Florence Adetoun Oso, EHJ, “Inculturating the Faith in Africa: History, Context, and Debates,” in *Handbook of African Catholicism*, ed. Stan Chu Ilo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 80–94; and Stan Chu Ilo, “Theology and Church in Africa Today,” in “Perspectives on Church and Theology in Africa,” ed. Margareta Gruber, Stan Chu Ilo, and Stefan van Erp, *Concilium* (2023/2): 19–35, at 21.

<sup>36</sup> Emilia Columbo, “Stabilizing Mozambique,” Council on Foreign Relations, 29 August 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/report/stabilizing-mozambique>.



against the state, and even justifies human rights abuses, only gains traction because social misery is widespread. However, the nexus of religious practice and political economy also has more positive dimensions. Mozambique's religious traditions, including Islam, inspire grassroots efforts to build life-affirming communities of peace and justice and help their participants cope with the traumas of poverty and war.<sup>37</sup>

On Pope Francis's visit, he spoke with an interreligious gathering of young Mozambicans, urging them to avoid resignation and anxiety and to draw on their diverse religious traditions to nourish their joy, creativity, and solidarity. He told them,

Keep singing and expressing yourselves in fidelity to all the goodness that you have learned from your traditions. Let no one rob you of your joy! . . . It is not good to give up! Repeat after me: it is not good to give up! (All repeat: It is not good to give up!) . . . God loves you, and this is something on which all our religious traditions are agreed. "For him, you have worth; you are not insignificant. You are important to him, for you are the work of his hands. Because he loves you. Try to keep still for a moment and let yourself feel his love. Try to silence all the noise within, and rest for a second in his loving embrace" (*Christus Vivit*, 115).<sup>38</sup>

Freedom is elusive. The struggle continues. And yet, as Pope Francis reminds us, the love of God that is revered by multiple religious communities is here in this world. The spiritual practices that open us to receive this love are not supposed to separate us from the historical realities of our lives but to return us to them with renewed strength.

### THE ELUSIVENESS OF MATERIAL FREEDOM

Mozambique's struggle confirms the emerging consensus among Catholic theologians and ethicists that freedom and unfreedom have material conditions.<sup>39</sup> Freedom is not merely a transcendental capacity for volition intrinsic to human nature. It is also a function of political, economic, and other material relations, which in some respects vary quantitatively. Those who preside over larger stores of material objects, because structural and social advantages permit them to do so, are materially freer. The world is arrayed to gratify their desires. By contrast, those on the losing ends of

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<sup>37</sup> Chingono, "Role of Religion," 203–205.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, "Interreligious Meeting with Youth" (Apostolic Journey to Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius [4–10 September 2019], Maputo, Mozambique, 5 September 2019), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2019/9/5/giovani-mozambico.html>, citing Francis, *Christus Vivit* (25 March 2019), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html).

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005 [1986]); M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, trans. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); and David E. DeCosse, *Created Freedom under the Sign of the Cross: A Catholic Public Theology for the United States* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022).

exploitation, racism, sexism, and colonialism are materially less free or even unfree. The world is for them a place of control and exclusion, which often fails even to satisfy their basic needs. The distribution of material freedom is wildly unequal.

Although theology's interest in freedom is not limited to the question of who has access to what, the fact that some hoard material wealth while many others are deprived of it is a gravely sinful situation that demands a theological response. The triune God of incarnate love whom Christians worship wants everyone to enjoy embodied, agential, and joyous relationships with others and with the created world. This is what Laurenti Magesa, interpreting the moral wisdom of African religions, calls "abundant life."<sup>40</sup> God's desire is for everyone to be free, not only spiritually but also materially. The divinely willed fullness of freedom depends on collective struggles to overcome material inequality and the forces that produce it—struggles like Mozambique's fight against Portuguese empire. But even if this or that significant battle may be won, the powers driving unfreedom are frustratingly nimble and intransigent, as Mozambique's postcolonial history indicates.

To have any hope of eradicating unfreedom, we must endeavor to fathom its complexity. Chattel slavery, like that suffered by the more-than-a-million Mozambicans who were captured and sold at the height of the nineteenth-century slave trade, is the paradigmatic example of material unfreedom. Persons who are enslaved in this manner, whether by law or force, are regarded as property. They are treated as objects of another's arbitrary will. Master and slave are both human, therefore endowed with agency, but materially one is free to do as he or she likes with extraordinary impunity, while the other is constrained by coercion, brutality, and trauma. Nevertheless, as Copeland demonstrates, enslaved women and men enfleshed freedom through practices of resistance and survival. Using what little material resources they had, and relying on the grace of God, they fought for the liberation of their people.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the success of abolitionist movements—which many African Americans interpret as another Exodus experience, a divine intervention in history<sup>42</sup>—slavery tragically remains a reality in the world of the twenty-first century. Modern slavery is carried out by persons, businesses, and states in the forms of "bonded labor, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, or forced marriage."<sup>43</sup> Its perpetrators and victims are not limited to any specific race, gender, or geographic region, but rates are higher in contexts destabilized by poverty, war, and ethnic or racial discrimination, and enslaved women face particular hardships because of their sex/gender. The abductions and forced marriages during Mozambique's civil war exemplify these dynamics.

In addition to slavery in the strict sense, violent patterns of exploitation, racism, sexism, and colonialism generate life circumstances that *feel* like slavery and resemble it in many respects. Low-wage workers, whether in the mines of the Transvaal or the

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<sup>40</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 38–59.

<sup>42</sup> Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, Updated Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 320.

<sup>43</sup> "Modern Slavery: An Exploration of Its Root Causes and the Human Tool: A CFR Info Guide," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 27 May 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/modern-slavery#!/section2/item-6>.

retail shops of Milwaukee, are compelled to exchange their bodily labors for earnings that may or may not be adequate to sustain their lives. During work hours, members of this “precariat,” as Gemma Cruz calls them, are made to act like assets governed by another person’s or corporate entity’s will.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in the African diaspora, Black communities continue to suffer from what Christina Sharpe calls the “still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery.”<sup>45</sup> To be Black is to have one’s freedom always under threat, whether because of heightened risks of economic deprivation, political disenfranchisement, unjust incarceration, or unprovoked violence.

Likewise, in contexts where patriarchal laws and customs do not give women opportunities to be educated, own property, choose their partners, and make decisions about their bodies, even so-called free women are treated like slaves. Some women in such contexts (whether in Mozambique or the U.S.) do not experience marriage as a relationship of mutual love but as an obligation or even a torture chamber, especially when they suffer from intimate partner abuse.<sup>46</sup> Finally, colonialism is an unjust arrangement in which the arbitrary power of one state or people is exercised over another—reducing it to a source of raw materials and cheap or unpaid labor. Not only Mozambique but, indeed, most countries in the world have suffered as colonies, and their civil societies still exhibit deep divisions between neocolonial elites cooperating with the powers of extraction and the alienated, racialized, and feminized poor.<sup>47</sup>

In this world where seemingly everyone wants freedom, its meaning remains disputed. As Joseph Drexler-Dreis’s recent articles on W. E. B. DuBois and the Zapatistas show, the rulers of global capital and subaltern communities of resistance have very different ways of interpreting it.<sup>48</sup> One question driving polarization in the U.S. and elsewhere is whether freedom should be pursued by guaranteeing private property rights or by increasing access to public goods. While a libertarian emphasis on property rights is supposed to provide everyone equal opportunity under the law, in practice it favors those who are highly capitalized, and it judges and forsakes the poor.

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<sup>44</sup> Cruz, “Theology and (De)humanizing Work,” 3. See also Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 69–84.

<sup>45</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Luce Irigaray, “Women’s Enslavement,” in *Democracy Begins Between Two*, trans. Kirsteen Anderson (New York: Routledge, 2001), 40–48; Kirsten Sword, *Wives not Slaves: Patriarchy and Modernity in the Age of Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021); and Elisabeth Vasko, “The Difference Gender Makes: Nuptiality, Analogy, and the Limits of Appropriating Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Theology in the Context of Sexual Violence,” *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 4 (Oct. 2014): 504–528.

<sup>47</sup> Kris Manjapra, *Colonialism in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Ashley Noel Mack and Tiara R. Na’puti, “‘Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius’: Building a Decolonial, Feminist, Resistance to Gendered Violence,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 42, no. 3 (2019): 347–370; and Godfrey N. Uzoigwe, “Neocolonialism Is Dead: Long Live Neocolonialism,” *Journal of Global South Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 59–87.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Drexler-Dreis, “Unchaining Freedom from Capitalism: W. E. B. Du Bois and Political Theology,” *Theory & Event* 25, no. 2 (April 2022): 304–331 and Joseph Drexler-Dreis, “The Meaning of Freedom and the Kingdom of God: A Struggle against the Fetishization of Our Present World,” *Horizons* 48, no. 2 (2021): 302–319.

Libertarianism comes with draconian consequences.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, while a liberationist emphasis on social welfare—in the form of state-funded education, healthcare, housing, and even employment and income—is supposed to uplift the masses, socialist regimes (like Mozambique’s in the late 1970s and early 1980s) have had disappointing track records, including authoritarian abuses and unfulfilled promises. It is important to be honest about this. Whether such failures indicate fatal problems in the very idea of a socialist political economy or the negative effects of reactionary interference, mismanagement, or other contingent factors is open for debate, but one cannot deny that, by and large, utopian dreams have not been realized.

The notoriously vague concept of “liberalism,” as I am using it here, represents a mediating position that seeks to protect private property and so-called free markets and free trade, while providing a social safety net of some limited value. It is a broad umbrella category that can be pushed in more neoliberal or social democratic directions depending on policy specifics. It is championed by international development organizations and the centrist segments of both major U.S. political parties. Like most compromises, liberalism is unsatisfying. It seeks to soften inequality through welfare programs and human rights initiatives but still tolerates and entrenches it by largely giving free reign to capitalist interests. Although some think liberalism is the surest way to achieve international peace, others argue that a global liberal order that traps many people in unfreedom is not really peace at all but another violence, albeit more concealed. Whatever the case may be, the recent rise in anti-liberal, anti-democratic, and neo-fascist movements is hardly comforting.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that libertarian, liberationist, and liberal models all flounder in different ways neither makes them equal in merit nor justifies an attitude of resignation. On the contrary, Catholic teaching requires ongoing struggle based on the “preferential option for the poor.”<sup>51</sup> In the search for practices that satisfy this criterion, we might look toward Fannie Lou Hamer’s founding of the Freedom Farm Cooperative and the “pig bank” for poor families in rural Mississippi. Although this initiative ended because of insufficient funds, it represented a form of nonstatist and radically democratic solidarity that meaningfully enhanced the freedom of the people themselves. Empirical studies demonstrate positive effects of similar farming cooperatives in contemporary Mozambique. Enterprises owned, not by multinational capital, but by workers—

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) and Andrew Koppelman, *Burning Down the House: How Libertarian Philosophy Was Corrupted by Delusion and Greed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2022).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, eds., *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Ioannis Tellidis, “The End of the Liberal Peace? Post-Liberal Peace vs. Post-Liberal States,” *International Studies Review* 14, no. 3 (2012): 429–435; Roland Paris, “Saving Liberal Peacebuilding,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 2010): 337–365; Andreas Fagerholm, “Towards a Lighter Shade of Red? Social Democratic Parties and the Rise of Neo-liberalism in Western Europe, 1970–1999,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 14, no. 4 (2013): 538–561; and Wendy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

<sup>51</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (September 14, 1995), §44, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14\\_091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14_091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html).

including women, people of color, and the formerly colonized—offer opportunities for agency and flourishing that may provide some measure of liberation.<sup>52</sup>

### THE ELUSIVENESS OF SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

The individual and collective wills that are shaped by material conditions of freedom and unfreedom are also influenced by languages, cultures, and traditions that give freedom a more textured, positive meaning. Beyond arbitrary control, or what Karl Rahner calls “the psychological freedom of choice,”<sup>53</sup> freedom ultimately means an alignment with the good and avoidance of evil. It means making decisions that fit a well-discerned picture of how life should be lived. The so-called “negative” freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly, which do not prescribe a vision of the good but limit state coercion, are hallmarks of political liberalism and post-conciliar Catholic teaching. These negative freedoms respect the dignity, choices, and struggles of persons, while permitting various communal mediations of positive freedom, including ecclesial and theological ones.<sup>54</sup>

The socialist regime in Mozambique originally insisted on a secular account of positive freedom and actively suppressed the plural religious practice of the country, branding it as obscurantist. Although the state’s subsequent liberalization on this front has been a boon for individual liberty and various religious institutions, some theologians in various contexts worry that the indeterminacy of a liberal society may dilute Christian faith claims.<sup>55</sup> In liberal environments, the “psychological freedom of choice” takes hold not just of material objects but also spiritual horizons and highest values. In principle, liberalism says: you are free to choose what freedom means to you. It makes a mortal god, not of the government but of the individual.

Versions of this concern come from different ends of the political spectrum, with some lamenting the liberal erosion of social norms related to gender, race, and sexuality and others critiquing the ways that liberal freedoms of religion and expression provide cover for sexist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic practices.<sup>56</sup> Although many in the

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<sup>52</sup> “Fannie Lou Hamer Finds Freedom Farm Cooperative,” Digital SNCC Gateway, accessed 22 May 2023, <https://snccdigital.org/events/fannie-lou-hamer-finds-freedom-farm-cooperative/>; Maren Elise Bachke, “Do Farmers’ Organizations Enhance the Welfare of Small Holders? Findings from the Mozambican National Agricultural Survey,” *Food Policy* 89 (2019): 101792; and Elizabeth L. Hinson-Hasty, *The Problem of Wealth: A Christian Response to a Culture of Affluence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Karl Rahner, “Freedom in the Church,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2, *Man in the Church*, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963), 89–108, at 90.

<sup>54</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166–217; and *Dignitatis humanae* (December 7, 1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html).

<sup>55</sup> R. R. Reno, “Postliberal Theology,” *First Things*, February 2018, [www.firstthings.com/article/2018/02/postliberal-theology](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/02/postliberal-theology).

<sup>56</sup> Asonzeh Ukah, “Apocalyptic Homophobia: Freedom of Religious Expression, Hate Speech, and the Pentecostal Discourse on Same-Sex Relations in Africa,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 36, no. 1 (2021): 72–91; and Richard Moon, *Putting Faith in Hate: When Religion Is the Source or Target of Hate Speech* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

progressive camp may identify as agnostic or spiritual-but-not-religious (SBNR), because they have been alienated by the social conservatism of the “religious Right,”<sup>57</sup> theologians writing in feminist, Black, and queer traditions see the weakness of liberalism on these embodied identity questions precisely as a Christian theological problem: a failure to follow Jesus and be guided by the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

As in the economic realm, so too in the cultural, liberalism is an unsatisfying compromise. Some form of it may be necessary at a policy level, because government coercion is often not the best tool for addressing such sensitive topics, yet a firm stance against state intervention becomes morally questionable when lives are at stake, as in fact they often are. Culture wars have real casualties, such as women targeted by domestic violence, Black persons murdered by police, and gay and trans teens lost to suicide.<sup>59</sup> Although Catholic theology may have principled and pragmatic reasons to support liberalism to some degree, it must also attempt to decipher what is actually entailed by its own most foundational beliefs, which locate the essence of freedom not in individual subjectivity but in the saving revelation of the triune God.

According to Rahner, persons are naturally endowed with creaturely agency, but they are not free in the full Christian sense until they receive the gift of divine life that liberates their wills from unholy attachments and transforms them through wisdom and love. Rahner calls this gift the “freedom of our freedom”:

[God] is the freedom of our freedom by the grace of his self-communication, without which our free will could only choose bondage no matter what choice it might make. ... God’s communication of himself, which is the liberating *terminus ad quem* of our freedom, is called by us grace of justification and sanctification, or sanctifying grace, and the Bible calls it also “divine *pneuma*.” We may say, therefore, that the divine *pneuma* is the liberating freedom of our freedom.<sup>60</sup>

Although Rahner emphasizes the Holy Spirit, he does not forget Christ’s indispensable role. He explains that “this spiritual freedom of our freedom is

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<sup>57</sup> Ruth Braunstein, “A Theory of Political Backlash: Assessing the Religious Right’s Effects on the Religious Field,” *Sociology of Religion* 83, no. 3 (2022): 293–323.

<sup>58</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, with LaReine-Marie Mosely, S.N.D. and Albert J. Raboteau, eds., *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993); and Andy Buechel, *That We Might Become God: The Queerness of Creedal Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> Curtis Bunn, “Report: Black People Are Still Killed by Police at a Higher Rate than Other Groups,” 3 March 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/report-black-people-are-still-killed-police-higher-rate-groups-rcna17169>; Linda Mshweshwe, “Understanding Domestic Violence: Masculinity, Culture, Traditions,” *Heliyon* 6 (2020): e05334; and Rina Torchinsky, “Nearly Half of LGBTQ Youth Seriously Considered Suicide, Survey Finds,” NPR, 5 May 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/05/1096920693/lgbtq-youth-thoughts-of-suicide-trevor-project-survey>.

<sup>60</sup> Rahner, “Freedom in the Church,” 94.

established by the very act of God freely present in the flesh of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> By acknowledging the communication of divine life through Christ and the Holy Spirit, Rahner may seem to imply that there is nothing elusive about the freedom of our freedom. He believes that it has already been outpoured and that the church is already an effective sign, or sacrament, of this liberating grace.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, Rahner recognizes that weighty questions remain open about how each person should choose to act in particular circumstances in order to receive this grace. Although norms derived from faith and reason set up basic parameters, there is much at an individual and contextual level that requires prayerful discernment. His thoughts on spiritual freedom draw on the Apostle Paul, Augustine, and Ignatius of Loyola, along with other Christian ascetical and mystical sources that detail processes of detachment from sin and union with God. At the same time, Rahner generalizes this spiritual discernment process, arguing that it is implicitly at work in any human being who makes a “fundamental option” in favor of the holy mystery of love that is the horizon of their existence. In this way, he opens the door to non-Christian (or perhaps “anonymous Christian”) experiences of spiritual freedom.<sup>63</sup>

While acknowledging Rahner’s contributions, his student Johann Baptist Metz and others who have taken a political turn in Catholic theology have sought to make the effects of sanctifying grace more clearly manifest in history and society.<sup>64</sup> The struggle to bring spiritual freedom out of the realm of transcendental abstraction and into concrete reality continues for multiple reasons. As I have indicated, there is the challenge of reaching theological consensus on concrete questions related to political economy and cultural identity, and there is the dissatisfying quality of liberal compromises. There are also, as Karen Kilby notes, major gaps between ideal visions of society and what people are actually willing to do, as well as opaque entanglements between structural and personal sin, which keep sanctity at a distance.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, as Jennifer Beste argues, the horrors of child sexual abuse and other traumatizing

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<sup>61</sup> Rahner, “Freedom in the Church,” 95.

<sup>62</sup> Rahner, “Freedom in the Church,” 96.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Rahner, “On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 2, *Man in the Church*, trans. Karl Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963), 217–234, at 230; Karl Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, trans. Charles Henkey and Richard Strachan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 17 and 26–27; Karl Rahner, “The Liberty of the Sick, Theologically Considered,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 17, *Jesus, Man, and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 100–113; Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, *Concerning Vatican Council II*, trans. Boniface Kruger (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973), 390–398, at 394; and Peter Joseph Fritz, *Freedom Made Manifest: Rahner’s Fundamental Option and Theological Aesthetics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

<sup>64</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Crossroad, 2007); J. Matthew Ashley, *Interruptions: Mysticism, Politics, and Theology in the Work of Johann Baptist Metz* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); and Gaspar Martinez, *Confronting the Mystery of God: Political, Liberation, and Public Theologies* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> Karen Kilby, *God, Evil, and the Limits of Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 56 and 95–97.

experiences such as those related to war and oppression can have devastating effects on the survivor's sense of personal agency and relationship with God.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, there is the profound malformation of the will, recounted memorably by Paul and later Augustine, which inclines it at least partly *against* the good. Although neither of these early Christian sources adequately denounces material slavery and its analogues, such as patriarchy, both can help us see that such injustice is predicated on a more enigmatic spiritual slavery, which the world has hardly begun to abolish: a subservience to whatever it is within us that desires domination over others. Paul calls this the “sin that dwells within me” (Rom. 7:20 NRSV), and Augustine calls it the *libido dominandi*, “the lust for mastery.”<sup>67</sup> It appears in slaveholding practices that have existed throughout human history. It appears in modern colonial powers, like the ostensibly Catholic Portugal. It appears in the neocolonial extractivism carried out by multinational corporations and the corrupt, oligarchic rule of many postcolonial governments. It appears in militarized police forces, anti-woke laws, toxic masculinities, and the global arms trade. All that is materially wrong in the world is a sign of a deep spiritual crisis, a radical unfreedom of the will that we seem incapable of overcoming by ourselves.

In view of these fearsome realities, we might ask: what would an abolitionist movement against spiritual slavery look like? It would certainly involve prayer, because our freedom is not free until it enters into communion with the infinite freedom of God. True prayer does not make one want to forsake the world. It makes one want to witness its liberation. It makes one cry out, impatiently, for this day to come.<sup>68</sup> And it would require poetry, because freedom must be sung before it can be achieved. But such practices are just the beginning of a divine-and-human work too deep and powerful to be fully understood.

As I bring this talk to a close, I would like to leave us with the words of Noémia de Sousa, a great Mozambican poet of anti-colonial resistance. My hope is that, while seeking peace, Christians would not lose the passion for justice that she describes:

Before the new horizons which open themselves like a gift to us  
our souls which have been resigned now learn to desire  
both with strength and in rage,

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<sup>66</sup> Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37–57.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, bk. I, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3; Lisa M. Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020); Jennifer G. Bird, “To What End? Revisiting the Gendered Space of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 from a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective,” in *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 175–185; and Katherine Chambers, “Domination and Slavery as Political Ideas in Augustine’s *City of God*,” *Heythrop Journal* 54, no. 1 (2013): 13–28.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Prevot, *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality amid the Crises of Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015).



and they rise up, warrior-like,  
ready to face the hard struggle . . .<sup>69</sup>

Freedom is elusive. The struggle continues. May God be with us, because the work we have to do is not something we can do on our own.

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<sup>69</sup> Noémia de Sousa, “Poem for Rui de Noronhain,” in *Stained Glass: Poetry from the Land of Mozambique*, ed. Luis Rafael (Howrah, India: Roman Books, 2011), 123–125, at 123.