


# A reflection on the potholes that bedevil the post-1994 South Africa's social transformation trajectory

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**Dates:**

Received: 03 June 2025

Accepted: 02 Sept. 2025

Published: 30 Sept. 2025

**How to cite this article:**

Tondi, P., 2025, 'A reflection on the potholes that bedevil the post-1994 South Africa's social transformation trajectory', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(1), a10857. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i1.10857>

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Evidently the toxic or antisocial manner in which some South Africans, from all levels of society, engage one another, especially in situations of contestation on either a position of power within a group or dissension of opinion on a socio-cultural, political or economic issue, is an indication that they are from a traumatised society. One of the possible contributing factors to this culture of violence, either verbally or physically, is the historical background and social construct of a society that was orientated and sustained through the apartheid draconian system that thrived on violation of human rights. On 08 May 1996, while adopting a Constitution that was designed to form the basis for an alternative society, the people of South Africa declared as their desire 'to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.' Therefore, the main objective of this article is to review the meaning of the concept of transformation and renewal from both the socio-cultural underpinning and Pauline theology of transformation and renewal as presented in the Letter to Romans 12:2. Significantly, from black theology of liberation's approach, such an exercise requires some *praxis* (reflection and action approach) and a sense of an absolute need for *metanoia* [change]. The qualitative research methodology utilised in this study identified themes and trends from reports and literature on the post-1994 South Africa's transformation trajectory and its challenges of inequality and poverty, and leadership crisis.

**Contribution:** The article argues for a sincere consideration and embracing of moral values that signify an alternative society with a renewed mind, embedded in African cultural beliefs and practices alongside Paul's theology of transformation and renewal as essentials that have the potential to contribute towards the healing of a traumatised South African society in its social transformation trajectory.

**Keywords:** black theology; renewal; traumatised society; transformation; African humanity; moral values; transformative leadership.

## Introduction

The following epigraph identifies and emphatically expresses what really lies at the heart of what was experienced during July 2021, namely, 'mistakes and weaknesses' of the past that have come back to haunt the post-1994 South Africa in its democratic transformation and renewal trajectory:

Everywhere man blames nature and fate,  
yet his fate is mostly but the echo of his character and passions,  
his mistakes and weaknesses. (Democritus 1966)

In an opinion piece, titled, *Violence in South Africa: An uprising of elites, not of the people*, Friedman (2021:1) aptly observes that, 'from time to time, South Africa is rudely reminded that its past continues to make its present and future difficult'. This statement was informed by the impact of violent protests and political unrest that, from 09 July 2021 to 18 July 2021, engulfed South Africa and threatened the country's stability. This was believed by journalists of both print and electronic media, and social and political analysts to be the manifestation of a reaction of some communities to the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Republic of South Africa for his contempt of court.

The July 2021 riots had a grave negative impact on the economy of the country, to the extent that it disrupted economic activities of major industries within the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal

**Note:** The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Black theology and Africa: Liberation, justice and the African context', under the expert guidance of guest editors Prof. Mogomme Alpheus Masoga and Prof. Luvuyo Ntombana.

provinces that provide scarce employment to the local communities. Furthermore, the acts caused severe damage to the infrastructure, which is critical for the operations of some of the businesses that were affected (Friedman 2021). Obviously, considering the extent of the damage to these facilities, the recovery and rebuilding is something that would take some time and cost millions of rands. From the conversations that ensued, it became apparent that the violent reaction was not a coincidence, but the result of some unresolved contestations and poisoned social relations that are motivated by a culture of political intolerance and disruptions (Everatt 2021; Mongale 2022; Vhumbunu 2021). As it will be later argued in this article, intolerance and violence are antisocial behaviours of a traumatised society that have been inherited from the apartheid era.

What became apparent from the 2021 incident is that, even though the violent protests and socio-political unrest that ensued could be perceived as an act that possibly expressed the anger and frustration of the South African communities who live in abject poverty and have to daily grapple with the challenges of unemployment and inequality (Tondi 2023; Vhumbunu 2021), it was, in the main, an act that was 'an assault on democracy by the elite' (Friedman 2021:2).

Evidently the toxic or antisocial manner in which some South Africans, from all levels of society, engage one another, especially in situations of contestation on either a position of power within a group or dissension of opinion on a socio-cultural, political and economic issue, is an indication that they are from a traumatised society. There is always an element of intolerance and a tendency to resort to verbal or physical violence whenever there is disputation. One of the possible contributing factors to this culture of violence is the historical background and social construct of a society that was orientated and sustained through the apartheid draconian system. The system had an attitude and behaviour that was intolerant to divergent opinions and as such thrived on blatant violation of human rights of majority of the people of South Africa, especially those who were openly opposed to its ideology. On 08 May 1996, while adopting a Constitution that was designed to form the basis for an alternative society, the people of South Africa declared as their desire 'to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights' (RSA 1996:1).

Therefore, the main objective of this article is to review the meaning of the concept of transformation and renewal from both the socio-cultural underpinning and Pauline theology of transformation and renewal as presented in the Letter to Romans 12:2. Furthermore, the intention is to argue for a sincere consideration and embracing of moral values that signify an alternative society with a renewed mind, advocated for in African cultural beliefs and practices and Paul's theology of transformation and renewal (metanoia), and their implications for a traumatised South African society in its democratic transformation and renewal trajectory. Significantly, from black theology of liberation's approach,

such an exercise requires some *praxis* (reflection and action approach) and a sense of an absolute need for *metanoia* [change]. In its own style, the article calls for a revival of a serious and intentional black theological reflection as a praxis on the post-1994 South Africa's socio-political and economic challenges and leadership crisis.

## Research problem and objective

As demonstrated in Manganyi's (2019) seminal work, titled, *Being Black in the World*, the toxic or antisocial behaviours and expressions that are daily experienced in the social and political spaces of the post-1994 South African society are obviously the product of the trauma that the majority of its people experienced under the apartheid rule and ideology. Hence, Makgoba's (2012) question:

Is it a surprise that [South Africans] are a nation characterized by glaring, intractable high levels of violent crimes, abuse, gender-based and child-based violence with very little respect of human life and human dignity? (p. 26)

From this, it is obvious that the scars of the past experiences of the dehumanising apartheid hegemony remain entrenched into the psycho-social makeup of the post-1994 South African society, and are what is making social relations and interactions extremely difficult and painful (De Gruchy 2011:64).

In addition, Manganyi (2019:4) notes that 'appearing together with the communication gap between blacks and whites has been the assault on national cohesiveness, which is progressively being replaced by polarisation in attitudes, interest and goals'. Reflecting on the reality of this situation and at the same time advising on what could be a solution in addressing the culture of antisocial behaviours and violence, Ramphele (2008) asserts that:

[T]ransformation of [the post-1994 South African] society calls for its reorientation from past values and practices defined by racism, sexism, inequality and lack of respect for human rights towards the values reflected in our national constitution. (p. 8)

Accordingly, the idea of a healed and democratic society can be achieved through the realisation of a South Africa grounded in values that are an antithesis of the apartheid draconian system. What this implies is that to operationalise these ideas of establishing an alternative society, there is a need to deliberately identify and inculcate into society moral values that can be embraced and be lived to sustain social cohesion and stability.

The main objective of this article is to create an understanding of the conceptualisation of transformation and renewal (metanoia) as something intrinsic to the black theology of liberation and a therapy for a traumatised post-1994 South African society in its democratic transformation and renewal (metanoia) trajectory. In this context, De Gruchy (2011:64) aptly points out that the present struggle in the post-1994 South Africa is 'to ensure a more just and democratic society and develop [individuals] potential in ways that are personally fulfilling and contribute to the common good'.

## Research methods and design

The following are the key research questions that this article attempted to address: (1) Is the post-1994 South African society really making any progress in healing from its past (a divided and violent society)? (2) How South Africans engage, especially in situations of contestation on either a position of power within a group or a difference of opinion on socio-cultural, political and economic issues? (3) What does the concept of transformation and renewal mean in the post-1994 South African context, from both the socio-cultural and theological perspectives? (4) What kind of leadership does the post-1994 South Africa needs to 'establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights?'

This study utilised a qualitative research methodology to analyse secondary data from scholarly publications, namely, articles from journals and books, social commentary from newspaper articles and other relevant publications. It employed both grounded and phenomenological research designs, and the intention was to have 'a careful description of conscious everyday experiences and social action of subjects', and also to 'develop a substantive theory that is grounded in data' (Delpont, Fouché & Schurink 2011:316–320). The data are presented in the form of themes and patterns, and this is for the purpose of critically reflecting and making meaning of the phenomenon being discussed.

## Conceptual framework

From what developed into a plethora of media reports and research on the phenomenon, it is apparent that the causes and what became the consequences of the July 2021 protests and socio-political unrests, called for critical social analysis and theological reflections on the post-1994 South Africa and its struggle to transition to a democratic dispensation. Accordingly, *praxis* is a concept that was used by the late renowned Brazilian educationist and philosopher, Paulo Regulus Neves Freire, who believed that any action intended to bring about *profound change* must be preceded by a *deliberate and critical reflection* (Freire 1970:25–51). For black theologians, who had to deal with the realities of the situation of the dehumanising attitude and acts of apartheid hegemony, praxis is what serves as a combination of action and theory in theological hermeneutics (Boesak 1984; Mofokeng 1988; Mosala 1989; Pityana 2012). In this way,

[T]heological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they are called and addressed by the Word of God, it would be a critical theory, worked out in the light of the Word accepted in faith and inspired by a practical purpose. (Gutierrez 1973:11)

Applied in this essay, praxis describes how a serious spiritual and intellectual reflection on the message from the gospel of true liberation (or biblical teachings) by someone who is a Christian is supposed to be followed by actions that demonstrate true discipleship and obedience. For example, confronted by a situation of injustice, the person must be able to act from the premise of what the gospel of true salvation

encourages or demands. Linked to praxis is the idea of *metanoia*, which refers to the process of 'change in one's way of life resulting from spiritual conversion' (South African Oxford Dictionary). The latter refers to a *transformative change* of heart and mind, similar to what became of Paul's life after the Road to Damascus experience (Ac ch. 9).

As articulated by Ogbonnaya (2025:29) using the gospel as the basis, the chief objective of African liberative theologies has been and continues to be about 'restoring the self-esteem of Africans shattered by centuries of denigration and dehumanization'. What's more, considering the unfolding shifting geopolitics, as a form of a struggle against colonialism and apartheid in all its forms, African liberative theologies' clarion call and actions need to be intensified in that even in the postcolonial era 'Africans continue to suffer because of subtle forms of cultural imperialism heightened by globalization and totalitarian ideologies' (Ogbonnaya 2025:29) across all the countries of the South.

Key to the African liberative theologies' mission is to 'emphasize the distinctiveness and worth of Africans and their experiences for articulating the Christian faith and for transmitting this message to new generations of Africans' (Ogbonnaya 2025:29). This can only be achieved when Africans articulate Christian faith from their daily experiences and struggles, and to a large extent are able to interpret the Scriptures from within their context and cultural experiences and practices in the post-colonial Africa, and effectively apply it in their efforts to provide solutions to their socio-political and economic challenges.

## Socio-cultural meaning of transformation and renewal (*metanoia*)

It is incontestable that, South Africa's pre-1994 apartheid system was intended to create and perpetuate a situation of political exclusion and division of communities, racial oppression, human degradation and economic deprivation (Mbeki 1998:41). Consequently, this ideological paradigm, that, among other things, thrived on intolerance and blatant violation of human rights, has given birth to a polarised, broken and hurting society, described as the 'most violent nation in the world'. The following stanza from a submission, in Okot p'Bitek (2001) book, titled, *The defence of Lawino*, aptly describes the poisoned social relations condition in the post-1994 South African society:

There's a family feud that is not settled yet.  
It's as if there is a murder case still awaiting appeasement  
It is as if they fear to incriminate themselves.  
Ochol and his brother are now diametrically opposed  
Party politics has broken family bonds, has brought us new evils.  
(p. 86)

Essentially, the post-1994 South Africa is a society in the process of a fundamental change (*metanoia*) from an apartheid segregated socio-cultural structure, an authoritative and

unjust society, to a democratic society grounded in a patriotic national cultural identity and humanising values. Makgoba (1997:172–175) aptly observes that, in the process of alienating and marginalising African cultural heritage, the ideological designs of colonialism and the apartheid hegemony distorted culture as a phenomenological concept. Unfortunately, this led to the disruption and decentring of African beliefs and practices that are key in promoting social harmony, stability and prosperity.

In congruence, Mbeki (1998:43) explains the idea of transformation as a process that involves ‘... the termination of the conflict which is inherent to the relationship of domination on the one hand and subservience on the other’. From this, it can be surmised that the post-1994 social transformation process, as a synthesis, should adopt as its main objective to deprogramme and reconstruct a society that has had its socio-political and economic relations framed on attitudes and actions that fostered alienation and marginalisation of the majority of South African society. Ramphele (1995:200) explains that as an important part of a metamorphosis process, transformation has to be about the transgression of social boundaries which made sense in the past, but which stand in the way of creative response to a changing environment. In this way, as demonstrated by Makgoba (1997), Mbeki (1998) and Ramphele (1995), transformation process, as a socio-political and economic tool for change, has as its key priority the breaking of practices and experiences that in society impinge on the harmonious socio-political relations and interaction between individuals and communities. More specifically, it is about ridding South Africa of practices of the apartheid system of white minority domination that have inhibited the economic development of South Africa to its full potential.

Furthermore, against the backdrop of South Africa’s past history of colonialism, apartheid legacy and control by a minority government, the idea of transformation can also be explained as a movement aimed at ‘progressing towards a better society – a non-racial society’ (Comment 2004:10). This process must be led by a certain calibre of leadership that will also be able to tackle the shifting geopolitical landscape that is playing out. The expectations related to this move, from an exclusive to an inclusive society, unjust to a just society, broken to a healing society, are enormous and more than anything need authentic, transformative, effective and ethical leadership.

As observed by Van Heerden (2010), in his book that bears a thought-provoking title, *Leaders and Misleaders* and other scholars, political history has a number of examples that provide us with some basic understanding and appreciation of the significance of leadership that regards as critical process, a move from a situation of socio-political and economic disaster and hopelessness to a situation of socio-political remake, hope and prosperity. The situation of Zimbabwe is one of the recent classical examples of what we can describe as a project that, in the beginning, had impressive milestones, but was unfortunately sabotaged by leadership that became an antithesis of what was the original plan, namely, the

creation of a country free from colonialism and economic deprivation of the black majority. Makgoba (2023:4) regards as Africa’s socio-political pandemic the ‘hopelessly poor, selfish and greedy leadership’ conduct that has become a normal within some countries of modern sub-Saharan Africa.

## Pauline theology of transformation and renewal in the Letter to Romans 12:2

Motivated by what had become his experience of God’s mercy and power that was the result of his encounter with the Risen Christ and the effect it had on his belief, thinking and actions, Paul in his Letter to Romans earnestly exhorts a community that had embraced the Christian faith to demonstrate as their act of true discipleship by doing the following:

And do not be conformed to this world [*any longer with its superficial values and customs*], but be transformed and progressively changed [*as you mature spiritually*] by the renewing of your mind [*focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes*], so that you may prove [*for yourselves*] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [*in his plan and purpose for you*]. (Rm 12, v. 2, The Amplified Study Bible 2016:1845)

Explaining the essence of the list of letters that Paul wrote to various communities that had embraced the Christian faith, Mugambi (1995:1) points out that in these letters:

St. Paul’s articulates general theological principles derived from the Gospel as he understood it, then makes specific recommendations applicable to the particular problems raised by the congregations to whom he addresses his respective epistles. (p. 1)

This observation provides us with an idea on how theology evolves, and how Christian praxis is developed.

In this particular case, Paul explains to Romans what it means to be a true disciple of the living God, how to honour God concretely in their everyday life and actions as a response to his grace and mercy, his forgiveness of their iniquities as people who have received Jesus Christ as the atonement. The response is expected to be in a form of self-sacrifice, meaning offering to God their entire lives (their being, thinking, attitude and behaviour). This was most probably informed by the fact that he was highly saddened by the conflict that persisted between Jews and Gentiles within the church that was found in Rome, which centred around disagreements about the Mosaic law, circumcision and the position of Israel in salvation history (Neil 1962:452–453).

History has proven how Scripture can be a powerful source of transformation and renewal for any milieu, and this is confirmed by Gutierrez (1973:210) who describes the process of transformation and renewal, in societies such as the post-1994 South Africa, as ‘a quest to satisfy the most fundamental human aspirations – liberty, dignity, the possibility of personal fulfillment for all’. In May 1972, addressing a Conference on Religion that was organised by Black



Community Programme (BCP) and held at the Ecumenical Lay Training Centre, in Edenvale KwaZulu-Natal, Biko (1978) noted that:

Christianity can never hope to remain abstract and removed from the people's environmental problems. In order to be applicable to people, it must have a meaning for them in their situation. If they are oppressed people, it must have something to say to their oppression. (p. 64)

In this way, he was trying to explain the basis of black theology as a situational interpretation of the gospel within a situation of oppression and its dehumanising effects. Biko (1978) was not being out of line here; in that as a lay person he was trying to make sense of the Christian faith in a situation in which Christ's commandment was disregarded, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Mk ch. 12 v. 30). He was trying to make sense of the living reality of God in a situation of suffering, marginalisation, poverty, inequality and unemployment.

From the Reformed tradition's perspective, Biko (1978) was making a call to the church to serve its purpose and respond accordingly to the realities and challenges of its time by taking a stand against social injustices that were causing excruciating pain in the black communities. As Pillay (2017:2) points out, in the 16th century, the reformers challenged the church and sought to have it reawakened so that it can serve its purpose and stand up against the challenges of its time. Consequently, among other things, this spirit led to the formulation of the Five *Solas*, namely, *Solus Christus* [Christ Alone], *Sola Scriptura* [Scripture Alone], *Sola Fide* [Faith Alone], *Sola Gratia* [Grace Alone] and [To God's Glory Alone]. Obviously, as one of the five *Solas*, right from the beginning, the Scripture (*Sola Scriptura*) provided and continues to provide the absolute and appropriate point of reference for the Church to be able to stand up, confidently and courageously, against any social ills and spiritual void that may be found in its communities at various times. This is further confirmed by Pillay (2017:2) who asserts that 'at the center of the Reformation was the quest to return to the Bible', to the gospel of true liberation.

As it is strongly argued in this article, the current social situation of the post-1994 South Africa – 30-years after the launch of a democratic dispensation – is a manifestation of what remains the antithesis of a 'just and fraternal society, where people can live with dignity and be agents of their own destiny' (Gutierrez 1973:x). Central to this existential dilemma is the total failure of those who have been apportioned with the responsibility to lead and drive the processes of social, political, economic and cultural transformation, and bring about profound change (metanoia) that will bring an end to social ills and poisoned social relationships within the post-1994 South Africa. This is because right from the beginning of the transition journey from apartheid to democratic dispensation, some of the former 'comrades' who had become lawmakers, lacked the moral obligation to always aspire to do what is right and be truly human.

More than anything, this is as the result of what Makgoba (2023:17) regards the 'shift from being driven by values of honesty, principle, ethics and a "better life for all" towards materialism, greed and self-interest'. Evidently, this antisocial situation or behaviours that display a disconnection from the aspirations of a 'just and fraternal society' call for a moment of individual self-reflection, psycho-social and spiritual transformation and renewal, especially among those who have been apportioned the responsibility to lead profound change in the post-1994 South Africa.

There is a possibility that, given the fallible human nature, some of the Christian Jews used their socio-cultural heritage to discriminate against Gentiles and relate to them as if they were God's stepchildren. Most significantly, what is key in this verse is a warning by Paul to those who are Christians to be careful not to submit or conform to world standards or to tendencies and practices that are the antithesis to what God's grace and will is about.

## Moral values that are essential for the post-1994 South Africa – An alternative society

Goodman et al. (2017:61) describe values as 'the relatively permanent and deeply held preferences of individuals or groups, they are the basis on which attitudes and personal choices are formed'. This means, attitudes, personal choices and actions that we embark on in our communities are mostly, consciously and unconsciously, informed or influenced by values that are held by individuals or a group. The purpose of this description is to highlight how moral values are critical in influencing the behaviours of a society and contribute interpersonal relations. Transformative values have a potential to promote social cohesion. Values are embedded in the message and teachings of the gospel of true liberation.

The process of individual transformation and renewal (metanoia) that Paul is referring to involves the adoption of a new mindset and behaviour. In a way it requires of all who are Christians in a divided, broken and hurting society to be guided by moral values that are not distinct from the gospel of true liberation, in their personal lives and their relationship and interaction with others in time and space. This means in their relationships with others, they are expected to be, for example, not like in the story of Cain and Abel (Ex 4) in which the elder brother rose against the younger one just because he did not understand that they are supposed to complement each other and coexist, and create their world. As ordained by God of love and peace, Cain had a responsibility with respect to his younger brother Abel, and as Boesak (1984) asserts:

The responsibility involves being human in community with one another in God's world. It means to seek together for true humanity; to attempt together to make something of God's objectives visibly operative in the world; to let something of God's own heart become visible in fraternal relationships; and in corporate relationship to history, to humanise the world and keep it humanised. (p. 149)

Indeed, from the socio-cultural underpinnings and the Pauline theology, presented in this article, it is expected of individuals and communities in the post-1994 South Africa, a society established 'on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights' (RSA 1996:1) to have a transformed and renewed (metanoia) mind. Accordingly, Dolamo (2023) notes that:

[P]ost-colonial Africa [South African society in its transition trajectory] needs to recapture the values and principles enshrined in the philosophy of *botho/ubuntu* if its people are to enjoy dignity that they deserve. (p. 1)

As an alternative society, there is an expectation that in their engagements, decision making processes and actions, South Africans would be found ready and willing to be guided by high moral values, such as compassion, courage, integrity, and accountability. These values can briefly be explained as follows:

- **Compassion:** It is considered an important value within the African culture, especially among those in leadership, and it serves to underscore the ability of a person to express or demonstrate 'a feeling [of empathy] for the suffering of others, promoting one to selflessly give help' (Teffo 1999:145). This value is normally evident in leadership that possesses a deep and comprehensive grasp of the needs of its people and constituency and is committed to ensuring that they are addressed. In the Letter to Colossians (Ch. 2 v. 12), Paul encourages believers to clothe themselves with *compassion* as one of the characteristics of true discipleship. This is about building connections in a dehumanising post-1994 South African society.
- **Courage:** In simple terms, it is a value that emphasises the need for individuals or leaders to be brave to tackle difficult social situations and confront structures that undermine the rights of the marginalised or voiceless to have 'better life'. Furthermore, it is described as 'the ultimate commitment to truth – the willingness to sacrifice all for what [one knows] to be right and good' (Van Heerden 2010:151). What's more, 'courage as a virtue is a feature of a person who is courageous to the extent that they engage [without fail] in courageous actions' (Ladikos 2004:77). For the action or decision to be regarded as courageous, it must have an element of aiming to achieve a valuable goal.
- **Integrity:** Principally, it is about consistency and reliability, or the projection of a personality that is informed by sound principles, which are the essentials for authentic and effective leadership (Covey 1991:18). Furthermore, explaining what integrity means in relation to leadership functions, Van Heerden (2010:18) observes that 'in a world lacking inspirational leadership, the challenge is clearly moral than intellectual. Integrity, the essential requirement for leadership is what is missing'.

An example of a lack of integrity is demonstrated by how some political leaders of the post-1994 South Africa became involved in corruption schemes that turned it into 'a new normal' – the case of Speaker of the Parliament

of the RSA who had to be investigated 'in connection with allegations that while she was Defence Minister she was paid millions of rands in cash bribes by a South African Defence Force (SANDF) contractor' (Skiti 2024:1). These actions have in turn condoned the emerging culture of materialism and individualism in a nation supposed to be grounded in the Ubuntu social ethic. What is needed are leaders like Paul, whose life radiated integrity, when he was falsely accused by his detractors, and was able to confidently declare: 'I also do my best to maintain always blameless conscience both before God and before man' (Ac 24:16).

- **Accountability:** Generally, it refers to the expectation in families and communities for one to be responsible for one's actions and decisions. In relation to leadership practice 'it includes caring for and deliberating with followers in the active pursuit of organizational goals, transformation, better governance and responsiveness towards human and environmental needs' (Khoza 2011:484).

The significance of these values is highlighted by Daft and Lengel (2000:191), who assert that 'leaders who act from high moral values can lead others through destabilized and oppressive times while maintaining or enhancing others' self-worth and accomplishment'. This type of leadership is appropriate for the championing of processes of creating a preferred future (free from abject poverty, inequalities and unemployment) for the post-1994 South Africa. In support, Mandela (2010:211) identified the following values as critical for ethical and effective leadership: 'honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others'. These moral values he regarded as 'the foundation for one's spiritual life' (Mandela 2010:211).

## Summary of major findings and shortcomings

This article analysed the meaning of the concept of transformation and renewal from both the socio-cultural underpinning and Pauline theology of transformation and renewal as presented in the Letter to Romans 12:2. The qualitative research method that was employed revealed how South Africa's unfinished business of transition from an apartheid political system to the establishment of a society that is truly based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights continues to hold the country back from social, political and economic advancement. The July 2021 protest and socio-political unrests demonstrated how the country will always be sharply and uncomfortably reminded of its past and how this will continuously pose threat to its present and future socio-political and economic prospects of success.

Qualitative research methodology revealed the fact that social cohesion in the post-1994 South Africa is work in progress that requires a certain calibre of leadership, which, among other things, is grounded in moral values that are informed by African socio-cultural values and a liberative theology of transformation and renewal.

The limitations of the study is that it mainly relied on document analysis, and because of time limitations could not engage in other data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, which had a potential of ensuring that the study is rich.

## Conclusion

Evidently, this article has demonstrated how after 30 years of its launch, South Africa stands at the crossroads of either choosing to be; (1) led by a transformative leadership that is fully committed in ensuring that the visions of transformation that are explicitly expressed in the Preamble to its Constitution are translated into action; or (2) continue to be misled by a leadership that is characterised by actions that coerce its people to regard as the new normal, division, antisocial behaviours, acts of deceit, corruption and disregard of human rights and dignity of the poor and marginalised.

What is encouraged here, which is also what is taught by the Ubuntu social ethic and the Christian faith, is an adoption of an attitude within a community that makes the common good a priority. Love and hope for a South Africa that Biko, Sobukwe, and others have lived and died for is what continues to sustain all those who believe in the idea of being fully human together as daughters and sons of a loving and just God. All that South Africans aspire for is to be able to be fully human together as a nation and God's children.

## Acknowledgements

This article is a reworked version of a Chapter titled 'Botho bo tile pele: Reflections on Challenges of Moral Decay in the Post-1994 South Africa', from Pakiso Tondi's (2023) book titled, *Conversation with Thangana: Essays in Honour of Reverend Gladwin "Rassie" Phenyia*. The update in this article is that violence is seen not only as the results of moral decay but also as the side-effects of the traumatized society. The situation is also seen as part of the unfinished social transformation project of the post-1994 South Africa.

## Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## Author's contributions

P.T. is the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article.

## Disclaimer

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