A POSTCOLONIAL MISSIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS SEX WORKERS: A PROPOSED LIBERATIVE PRAXIS FOR URCSA

by

LEOMILE MANGOEDI

submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the subject of

THEOLOGY

(MISSIOLOGY)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF. MJ MASENYA

CO- PROMOTER: PROF. TD MASHAU

JUNE 2023

DECLARATION

Name: Leomile Mangoedi

Student Number: 35389745

Exact wording of the title of the thesis as it appears on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

A POSTCOLONIAL MISSIOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TOWARDS SEX WORKERS: A PROPOSED LIBERATIVE PRAXIS FOR URCSA

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

23 December 2023

Signature

Leomile Mangoedi

ABSTRACT

This study probes the issue of the marginalisation of women in sex work by the church with the aim of developing a liberative praxis for the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) based on the research question: *How can a postcolonial reading of the Bible shape the church's missionary praxis towards the liberation of sex workers?* Sex workers are judged morally while sex work is identified as sin by the church. Apart from a re-reading of the text of Luke 7:36-40, the researcher also critically analyses the current missional praxis of the URCSA, engaging texts such as the Bible, the Church Order and the Confessions, especially the Confession of Belhar. The aim is to uncover how the URCSA reads and interprets these texts especially in the context of the marginalised.

As a missiologist coming from a certain ecclesiological, theological, and cultural backround, I unpacked the discussion by employing the missiological framework using the praxis matrix model to carry out a postcolonial reading of the Bible. The aim is to address the primary rationale of this thesis namely, to create a respectful, hopeful, liberative encounter between Black women in sex work and the church that is silent in the face of their marginalisation.

In addressing the rationale and ultimately responding to the research question, an attempt is made to unmask the influence of the colonial reading of the Bible on the black church, because such a reading disempowered and oppressed the people. The employ of the Contextual Bible Study method enabled the creation of a platform for engagement between women in sex work and the Bible. The study is not only engaging the Bible, but it also, formed a creative dialogue between other scholarships such as womanist theologies, feminist theologies and *bosadi/*womanhood redefined biblical hermeutics and these women.

This study thus proposes a Belharic missiological postcolonial reading of the Bible that aims at liberating, restoring, and transforming the lives of women in sex work. It presupposes that the Bible should be read and interpreted from the experiences of poverty, abuse, inequality – from the perspective of marginalised black women.

Key words

Missiology, Missional ecclesiology, Missional praxis, Praxis matrix, the Belhar Confession, postcolonial, Liberation Theology and Black Theology

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work of this nature would not have been possible without all the support I received. I want to acknowledge the help I received from the Holy Trinity, God the Father, Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour and the Holy Spirit the one who empowered me. My deep gratitude goes to my promoter, Professor MJ Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele), who pushed me beyond boundaries that I did not know existed. She believed in me when I did not believe in myself. Her relentless attitude, guidance and encouragement when I lost hope got this project to where it is today. It is an honour to be guided by a person of your calibre.

I express sincere appreciation to my co- promoter, Professor TD Mashau, for being my mentor from the first day I stepped into academia. You pushed me to publish to the extent that you co-published with me. The random calls you made to ensure I did not give up on this project made a huge difference.

The support I received from the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology throughout this project is greatly appreciated. Your financial muscle assisted me to get where I am today.

To the University of South Africa for allowing me to register for PhD and your understanding throughout the whole journey, I say thank you. For all the years you granted me bursary for this project, I also say, thank you.

I am grateful to the Tshwane Leadership Foundation for allowing me to come into your space. To Professor Stefan De Beer and your team, thank you for taking me to different ministries that deal with women's issues such as the Lerato House. The support and the passion that your team displayed in this ministry throughout the project are remarkable. I hope there will be collaboration between the TLF and the URCSA regarding women in sex work in the future.

I cannot thank my parents, Michael and Martha Moetsi, enough for their support throughout the whole journey. They kept on encouraging me. It is unfortunate that Mama did not live to see the end of it but I know she will be proud of her daughter where she is. This project is dedicated to the both of you. To my younger brother, Thabo Moetsi, thank you for the love and support.

To my husband, Mashapa Mangoedi for your understanding and for having to endure my absence, so many times, thank you, Skat. I would not have done it without you. You are my rock. To my

children, Koketso and Onkarabile, I know you did not understand, and you still not do not understand why mommy was always busy and could not give you attention. My apologies, my babies; I will try to make up for lost time.

I am also grateful to my current employer, the Department of Correctional Services, for granting me research leave as and when I needed it.

Lastly, I express my appreciation to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for your continuous support throughout the journey. There was a time I requested a one-year study leave and you granted it. Thank you. I hope I can give back to you and the community by making this project come alive.

ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Contextual Bible Study
URCSA	Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa
DRCA	Dutch Reformed Church in Africa
DRMC	Dutch Reformed Mission Church
NGK	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk
NGKA	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika
NGSK	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sending Kerk
TLF	Tshwane Leadership Foundation
IMM	Intergrated Ministerial Model
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
NSWP	Global Network for Sex Work Projects
WHO	World Health Organization
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
ZCC	Zion Christian Church
PEN	Participate, Envision, Organize
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie
BK	Belydende Kring
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
FBO	Faith Based Organizations
SWEAT	Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce
ANC	African National Congress
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Program
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
AsgiSA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
LGBTI-Q	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Sex work and sex workers are on the rise in South Africa. Section 20(1) (aA) of the Sexual Offences Act of 1957 refers to sex work as a trade which remains illegal to date. However, it is prevalent in every South African city including the City of Tshwane where the present research took place. Men and women including young adult males and females engage in sex work for different reasons. Many sex workers claim that they are often without support from their communities especially the church. The current research is focused on black female sex workers. The reason for selecting this group is that black women experienced triple challenges during colonisation and later apartheid. They experienced discrimination based on gender, class and race (as discussed later in this chapter). As an ordained minister of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), I grew up in a poverty-stricken context of Thembisa where a lot of people needed support because of the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Most of these people were women and remain the face of these challenges. Sex workers are no different as they form part of this community that needs support daily. Apart from having to deal with the issue of poverty and marginalisation, they also must face the stigma embedded in sex work.

I presuppose in this study that the church is one of the agencies that should provide support for these marginalised community members. My observation on the role of the church towards sex workers is that the church does not respond to the marginalisation of sex workers and if it does, it is more in negative and judgmental terms. The current research is thus an investigation into how the church, with particular reference to the URCSA, can use a postcolonial missiological lens to read the Bible in order to develop a liberative praxis for sex workers. It is my presupposition that just as the Bible was used by Black theologians of liberation as a liberative tool not only to unmask the hermeneutics of apartheid and oppression, but also to advocate God as one that stands on the side of the poor to liberate the masses of the oppressed blacks, the same can be done to liberate

sex workers and their poor conditions in the City of Tshwane. I am particularly interested in investigating the praxis of the URCSA because it embraced a liberative hermeneutic to read and apply the Bible for the liberation of the oppressed black people of South Africa during apartheid.

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa came into existence as a result of an intentional schism from the staunch founder of apartheid, the Dutch Reformed Church. As an offshoot of this church, URCSA was formed as a voice that spoke against apartheid with the influence of the Black Theology of liberation which sought to give new meaning to the gospel. I am however wondering why the same tool and energy could not be used in the post-apartheid context of the marginalisation of sex workers in the City of Tshwane, and elsewhere in the country, to advocate for an ecclesiological praxis which is liberative, life-giving and transforming. It is thus my hypothesis in this study that the Bible can and should still be used as a tool that provides a transformation and an empowering agenda to sex workers in the City of Tshwane, an approach which can be replicated elsewhere or in different contexts when dealing with sex work and sex workers.

1.2 PERSONAL INTEREST

Due to the background mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, I decided to engage in an academic journey of writing this thesis to provide agency and advocacy on issues relating to sex workers and their marginalisation, including the challenges around their stigmatisation. This study is meant to provide sex workers with a much-needed voice towards their liberation. I was persuaded to undertake this scholarly journey because in my experience as a city dweller, I have witnessed the plight of many sex workers in the pavements of the streets of the City of Tshwane like Bosman, Francis Baard and the nearby suburbs such as Marabastad, Sunnyside and Arcadia. Sex work is of particular concern to me because it is an unsafe line of profession. The young women involved in this profession are not protected by the law and therefore, are stigmatised by their communities.

As a young black woman from Thembisa,[1] I have great empathy for female sex workers in the City of Tshwane because their experiences of poverty and marginalisation remind me of my own

[1] Thembisa is a township that is situated in the northern side of Kempton Park under Ekhurhuleni Municipality. The township was established in 1957 when black people were forcefully removed by the apartheid government from Alexandra, Edenvale and Kempton Park to be resettled there. Thembisa is an Nguni word meaning promise. It became a beacon of hope to the many black people who were left homeless. See www.sahistory.org.za .Accessed on 2020/09/27.

upbringing. I was raised by my grandmother along with seven other children and two grandchildren with the salary of a domestic worker. When I started my theological training in 2004, my father was retrenched, and life started to take a difficult turn. In narrating my personal story, I try to position myself in terms of my motives and relationality as an individual. Poverty was rife in my context and opportunities to study were limited due to economic hardship. As a young black woman, one experienced the triple challenges mentioned earlier on. In a country that is still haunted by the legacy of its apartheid past, one continues to experience challenges of class, race and gender discrimination, whether in the society or in the job market and even elsewhere. Sex workers are not excluded from this predicament, and they experience more difficulties because their practice is neither regularised nor legalised.

In addition, patriarchy still helps in defining the role of women in the society. Although not all sex workers are in the venture for the money, many of the women engage in the trade because of poverty. Some end up not getting any money because they are serving slave masters and pimps—mostly men, who drug them and rob them of the cash they have worked for. Others are into the sex trade because they engage in unskilled jobs and earn meagre salaries that can neither sustain them nor support their families. These women are enslaved by an exploitative capitalist system that continues to rob them of their dignity, just like many other poor women in South Africa who remain in the margins of the mainstream economy. The challenge faced by sex workers made Kari Kessler to ask, "What is happening within this structure called capitalism that forces women to sell their sexual services for lack of a better paying alternative?" (2002:221).

Women who find themselves in sex work are not only marginalised and enslaved by capitalist and at times patriarchal systems, but they are also vulnerable and criminalised, the victims of so-called "social costs" (Satz 1995). According to Satz (1995:68), sex work is costly. She calculates the social costs as if they were money – by that she means the high risk, disease, social moralism and possible marital instability if the buyer is married.

I do not approach this topic as an expert, but as an ordained minister of the church and a black woman who grew up in the margins, as already highlighted. My concern is on how the church should respond in such a context. The role of the church is critical in the lives of these women because not only are some of the sex workers from our communities, but they are also members of our churches while others are students in our institutions of higher learning. They support their

stay in the city and their studies through sex work. How should the church as an institution that represents the love and the image of God respond to this endemic practice? How can the church reach out to those in the margins, in particular the sex workers? My view is that the church is not created to operate within its walls and to benefit its constituencies only. It is an institution that should be responsible for the community. It needs to minister to those in the margins, including sex workers, hence the choice of the URCSA as my case study in this research.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sex workers in South African cities like Tshwane are not only a reality, but they also remain in the margins. Many factors push female sex workers to engage in this trade. For instance, many of the sex workers come from poor backgrounds and they get into the sex industry to make ends meet. Some of them have little or no educational background and that makes them unemployable. Their desperate situation does not only make them vulnerable, but it also makes them susceptible to HIV and other sexually communicable diseases.

The sex workers in the City of Tshwane remain in the margins and they are also open to danger. They struggle with rejection as well as issues of naming or identity. They carry a social stigma as they are called *bomakgoša* and are classified as women and men without morals. Sex workers have no access to health and social services because the community perceives them as outsiders. Their trade is considered illegal, and they are morally judged as indecent people who do not deserve to be protected even when their dignity is violated. My initial questions are what are our communities, including churches, doing to liberate sex workers from a biblical interpretation that condemns them as sinners without understanding their background? What kind of support do they receive from society? The society needs to realise that sex workers are also members of our communities who deserve services such as justice and protection against crime, violence and harassment. The task of liberating sex workers and restoring their human dignity is therefore the prerogative of communities as well as faith-based institutions like churches and organisations which are at the forefront of fighting for the rights of all. My view is that the church, which played a critical liberative role during apartheid, can still do the same to address the plight of sex workers in the City of Tshwane. If the church managed to depose the oppressive structures of the apartheid system by using the Bible as a liberative tool, it can do the same in the case of sex workers. Consequently,

my main research question is how can a postcolonial reading of the Bible shape the church's missionary praxis towards the liberation of sex workers? To unpack this research question, the following sub-questions will be answered:

- What is the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and what kind of Bible reading has informed such a hermeneutic?
- What is theology's contribution to the church's missional role which is liberative towards sex workers?
- How do sex workers read the Bible and how do they understand and interpret the role of the church in their liberation?
- What kind of missional praxis should the church propose and what kind of postcolonial reading informs such a praxis?

The main aim of the present study is to carry out a postcolonial reading of the Bible together with sex workers to propose a liberative praxis for the church, the URCSA, as regards the liberation of sex workers. To accomplish this aim, the following objectives will be addressed:

- To study and outline the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and the kind of hermeneutical lenses that inform such a praxis;
- To investigate how theologians have read the Bible and interpreted the missional role of the church towards sex workers and their liberation;
- To study the Bible with sex workers in order to unmask their understanding of the missional role that the church should play in their liberation;
- To propose a postcolonial reading of the Bible that seeks to shape the church's missional praxis towards the liberation of women.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is undertaken from a missiological perspective but with a particular focus on postcolonial missiology and its praxis. To achieve the main objective of this research, both literature review and empirical research are conducted. The empirical research is conducted among sex workers in the City of Tshwane to tap into their understanding of the Bible regarding the role of the church in their liberation. The research is carried out through interviews and the use of questionnaires. The questionnaire is designed using the praxis model (to be described later under

the theoretical framework). Through the praxis model, I seek to position myself in the situation of the sex workers, analyse their context and read the text of Luke 7:36-50 with them. The aim of reading the text is to find a liberative praxis for the URCSA.

The focus group comprised fourteen young women between the ages of 18 and 30 and the goal was to use the Contextual Bible Study method proposed by Gerald O West. The method allows participants to engage with the Scripture and offer a liberative reading in a particular context. It is a dialogue between what West calls the "learned reader" and the "ordinary readers" (West 1993:11). The focus group comprised sex workers since they have first-hand knowledge of what is happening in the field of sex work, while at the same time the study will help to amplify their voices in view of their liberation. To glean information from sex workers, I served as a facilitator in the interview sessions. My role as a facilitator was to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard and that every opinion is respected and recorded. The idea is to encourage every participant to be active. According to West:

> The facilitator should manage conflict and make the group a safe place for member contributions; the facilitator should train others to become facilitators; the facilitator should clarify what is not clear and should summarize the discussion; and the facilitator should enable the group to become aware of and involved in the needs of the community (West 1995:228).

By conducting this study from a missiological point of view, I employ the praxis model. However, I acknowledge and appreciate the existence of other praxis models such as the Cycle of Mission Praxis (Karecki 2005:159) and the Holland and Heriot's Pastoral Cycle (1983:7). The development of the Cycle of Mission Praxis was influenced by the Holland and Heriot's Pastoral Cycle (Karecki 2005:160). The Pastoral Cycle was introduced as a way to bridge the gap between the church and the local context. The method aims not only to engage with and understand the local context from a theological perspective, but also, to bring about transformation (Karecki 2005:159). Transformation became a bigger part of South Africa's political agenda after the 1994 national elections (Karecki 2005:160). According to a report by the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), transformation aims to deal with two sets of factors—to meet the social and economic demands as well as to build a context of national and global opportunities and challenges (Karecki 2005:160). Therefore, the Pastoral Cycle helps the church to discern what is happening and to think deeply about the challenges facing the communities in order to come up with solutions to those challenges.

Kritzinger refers to praxis as a constant interaction between theory and practice (2011:49). However, he also introduces what he calls a mission praxis matrix (2011:50). The difference between the three is that the Pastoral Cycle and the Cycle of Mission Praxis have four dimensions each, namely, insertion, social analysis, theological reflection and strategies for mission. Kritzinger's praxis matrix though, has seven dimensions. He adds reflexivity and ecclesial scrutiny to the existing Cycle of Mission Praxis. The ecclesial scrutiny challenges the role of the church in its surroundings. It asks critical questions such as "what has the church been doing and how does that affect what the community is presently encountering"? (2011:51). In addition, how do our encounters assist in the journey of transformation? Kritzinger's justification is that a praxis is a continuous reflection on one's context and actions. The common goal of all the three praxis models is that they seek to bring transformation where social injustice is intense. In addition, they help a particular community to understand its context. Employing the mission praxis matrix, therefore, I aim to carry out a postcolonial missiological reading of the Bible that is liberative to sex workers and to propose a liberative praxis for the URCSA.

This study will also probe the praxis of Christian NGOs in relation to sex workers, that is, what they do with sex workers and how they read the Bible with them (see details later in the chapter). I choose the postcolonial theory to highlight what West (2018:140) calls "entanglements". According to West, the time of entanglements was not simply a period that appeared unimportant, but a period that came with lots of complexities. It affected the past, the present and the future of Africans. The time of entanglements comprises the challenges and changes that took place when Africa was colonised (West 2018:242). The first entanglement was the introduction of the Bible in the 1400s by the European colonialists and the implications that came with it. The Bible was used as a force to penetrate the interior and peripheral regions of the African continent. West notes that not only did the Dutch settlers occupy the Cape in 1652, but they also used the Bible to "baptize, marry, bury and generate the myths that sustained the European colony" (West 2018:241). I discuss the entanglements in detail later in this chapter under postcolonial hermeneutics.

1.5 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Introducing the theoretical framework and defining the concepts to be used in this study are significant at this point. As Nelleke Bak has noted, a theoretical framework is important for ensuring coherence and establishing the boundaries of the project (Bak 2004:17). It shapes and organises the thesis so that it is focused on a particular subject and is not all over the place. The key concepts on which the theoretical framework of this study is built include missiology, postcolonial, black, woman, gender, and black liberation theology. However, I will elaborate on them as the study unfolds.

1.5.1 Missiological framework

Mission is such a contested concept because of its historical connection with colonialism. David Bosch correctly notes that mission originates from the West, which is home to the Catholic and Protestant Christians (Bosch 1991:3). The missionaries from the West introduced Christianity to what came to be known as the Third World—Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania. As a result, the concept of "mission" gained unpopularity in parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. While Bosch acknowledges the disapproval of mission in what is now known as developing countries, he also takes us back to the origin of mission. The word "mission" was defined in the sixteenth century as "to be sent" – "it was the sending of the Son by the Father and of the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son" (Bosch 2001:1). However, the West interpreted the term mission in the context of people who are sent to other people or countries to convert them to Christianity (Bosch 1991:2). Such an interpretation of mission caused tension in the developing countries. To uncover these unsolicited truths caused by the West, postcolonialism reconstructed the understanding of the Bible and exposed acts of colonialism, dictatorship, social injustices and corruption in every sphere of society (Rukundwa 2008:343). The postcolonial theory challenged how the West used the Bible to oppress people in developing countries. While colonialism stripped the colonised of their humanity and resources, postcolonialism focused on raising the silenced voice of the oppressed (Punt 2003:63). However, the definition of mission changed in the twentieth century (Bosch 1993).

Although, mission had negative connotations in Africa, Bosch maintains his view of mission as a state of salvation. Even though the definition of mission has changed over times, mission remains

a Christian enterprise. Jerry Pillay (2015) shares the same sentiments as Bosch's that the definition of mission is wide. In his view, the definition of mission is defined by one's tradition and denomination from which they come (Pillay 2015:1). For some denominations, mission is centred on salvation, service (*diakononia*), worship (*leiturgia*), transformation of the society, community work, transformation, and the planting of churches (Pillay 2015:1). Mission is centred on salvation—the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ for all humanity. Therefore, mission is defined based on how God relates with the world. That relationship defines the church as missionary, which means carrying out God's mission of standing against oppression, injustice, discrimination, and poverty (Bosch 1991:13). The Belhar Confession (Article 4) emphasises this by stating that the church ought to stand where God stands. In my view, the statement implies that the church should stand against injustice, oppression and discrimination. However, the marginalised such as sex workers (in the context of this thesis) would have to define the church considering their challenges – whether the church is on the side of the poor and the marginalised.

1.5.1.1 The Africanization of Mission – addressing the colonial shortfalls

Jerry Pillay is not incorrect in his definition and reflection of mission. I beg to differ with Pillay's definition and reflection of mission. He seems not to recognize the shortfalls of mission, especially on the African continent. The introductions of missions in Africa, was not innocent. Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango (2018) attests to the fact that the landing of Christianity in Africa was not innocent. The missionaries and the colonialists came to Africa to subjugate black people from Southern Africa – while the missionaries came to disidentify them, the colonialists stripped them off economic and political liberation (Mbuwayesango 2018:31). Consequently, Africa had to recreate its story by finding and redefining mission according to its own context – addressing its experiences. In redefining mission, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa stood together during the years, 1986-1990 against injustice (Kritzinger 2013:197). Kritzinger (2013) uses the praxis matrix to unpack the role that the Reformed church played against injustices so that he can help us understand the balance between what the church did and what informed her actions (Kritzinger 2013:198). The agenda that the two churches carried was one – standing for justice and challenging the apartheid policies of socio-economic and political injustices (Kritzinger 2013:199). As a result, the Belhar Confession was adopted as the united voice of the church against injustice in support of unity, reconciliation and justice (Belhar

Confession of the URCSA).[2] The Belhar Confession would emphasise this by stating that the church ought to stand where God stands (Article 4 of Belhar Confession). In my view, the latter statement refers to the church that stands against injustice, oppression, and discrimination. The question is, are we there yet as Africans? Can we say that we understand what mission is, in line with our context? Are we winning as far as the act of justice is concerned?

Mission is not innocent; however, it is also not irrelevant. Every Christian including the previously oppressed, the marginalized, poor and the rich deserves an opportunity to redefine mission based on how God relates to her/him – the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ for all humanity. Musa Dube (2022) alludes to the fact that the colonialist used the Bible as a scramble for Africa. The colonialists including the missionaries used the Bible to invade Africa. Africans are therefore called through mission to reclaim their land using the very same Bible. That would mean the will and the courage to carry out God's mission of standing against oppression, injustice, discrimination and poverty (Bosch 1991:13).

1.5.1.2 Missiology within the local context

Schreiter (2002:1) defines missiology as a critical reflection on the practice of mission. It is the integration of the academy, church, and society as well as the ability to carry out the study of the church and society. Its explorations aim at enabling society to understand who God is, by reflecting critically on as well as developing processes—taking the gospel to address the people's needs. Schreiter (2002:2) upholds the idea of a local theology. Local theology, for him, engages the community in the context, culture and faith of the believing community. Schreiter's local theology confirms that theology is not only spiritual or theoretical, but also shaped by a certain context—people's experiences. Schreiter defines local theology based on the three principal roots namely, the gospel, the church and culture (2002:20). The three interact with one another. These three roots are what I would compare with Bevans and Schroeder's prophetic dialogue.

Stephan Bevans and Roger Schroeder describe mission as prophetic dialogue (2011:59). They point out that having the two words "prophetic" and "dialogue" next to each other, does not mean

[2] The Belhar Confession is a response of the church against apartheid. It was formally adopted in 1986 by the Dutch Reformed Church Mission Church now URCSA. See https://www.rca.org/resources/belhar-confession Accessed on 2020/05/06

that the one is more important than the other. The concept can also be phrased as mission as prophecy and dialogue or mission as dialogue and prophecy. The latter and the former affirm that the two are equal and are both necessary (Bevans & Schroeder 2011:59).

Additionally, Bevans and Schroeder divide mission as dialogue into five parts namely, dialogue and the *Missio Dei*, Mission Dialogue, Images of Mission as Dialogue, Inspirations for Mission as Dialogue and Biblical Foundations (2011:61). On dialogue and the *Missio Dei*, they maintain that God is rooted in dialogue. God is always in communion with people. God's sense of communion is expressed in the communion of three persons in one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mission as dialogue therefore expresses the need for Christians in mission to build relations with those they are ministering to. As baptised members of the church of God, they are to carry out the mission of God in a dialogical way. Missionaries are being challenged to not only preach to the people but also, to understand the language and the culture of the local people. They are encouraged to love and establish friendships with the people.

Bevans and Schroeder further use three images to describe mission namely, mission as treasure hunt, the missionary as guest and the missionary as entering a garden. As a treasure hunter, one should engage the community and let the community dig deep for the treasure. The second image of the missionary as a stranger and guest, means that as a guest, one should admit that one knows so little and there is a need to learn from the host. As a guest, one should not impose one's ideas but try to rely on the local people for knowledge about their context. Lastly, a missionary should be like one entering into another person's garden. The advice is to enter with an open mind, to admire and gaze at the beauty of the garden. The idea is for one to offer any advice about how the garden should be watered or the type of plants to be planted (Bevans & Schroeder 2011:60).

Considering research in the field of sex work and the stigma around the subject, I am comfortable with the idea of mission as dialogue without dismissing the idea of mission as prophecy. I therefore agree with Bevans and Schroeder that as much as God is dialogical, God is also prophetic in character. Like Bevans and Schroeder, Kritzinger (2008:764) also supports the idea of mission as dialogue. Kritzinger emphasises the need for mission to have a dialogical approach towards followers of other religions. Kritzinger (2008:770) coins the concept of mission as encounterology to explain the relation between missiology and other disciplines by reflecting on all the factors that shape the intentional encounters between the followers of different religious traditions. The aim of

this approach is for missiology to create an encounter with other religions, one which will be respectful and informed (Kritzinger 2008:770). The dialogue is meant to improve relationship and commitment between different religions without any requirement of conversion on either side (2008:771).

The four missiologists above, speak to one another other on two levels—the importance of creating a space for dialogue and the need for missiology to interact on a community level. Schreiter speaks of the local theology that engages the dynamics of the community. Within local theology, mission as dialogue is active, as it seeks to analyse the context in which it is active. For a local theology to take place, one is not expected to go and convert the community, but to find out what the community is all about—its culture, its faith, and its hermeneutics. As mentioned above, Bevans and Schroeder (2011:60) use three images of mission. The images are there to emphasise that mission is never imposed.

This study will consider the community of sex workers to understand its culture, its understanding of Scripture as well as its view of the legislature. Kritzinger's mission as encounterology affirms local theology and mission as prophetic dialogue. Thus, going to the community of sex workers would not be done with the aim to convert them, but as Bevans and Schroeder (2011:62) have recommended, I will be going as a treasure hunter, a stranger and a person entering their 'garden'.

Mission as encounterology will hopefully, create a safe space for dialogue with sex workers. It will enable them to engage in Scripture from their background. The space will be informed by a postcolonial reading of the Bible with the expectation that one would see issues from a different angle. In the next section therefore, a postcolonial reading will help us to see the Bible with a new lens and to produce a liberative interpretation.

1.5.2 Postcolonial hermeneutics

Postcolonial hermeneutics is a key concept in this study since it enables us to read the Bible with a new understanding and in contrast to colonial hermeneutics. However, beyond seeking understanding, the postcolonial reading of the Bible reclaims what the European colonial masters did when they extracted resources from Africa. Postcolonial hermeneutics has accomplished much by interpreting the Bible through the eyes of the oppressed—challenging the triangular

hermeneutics (the Bible provides the text; the West interprets it and the rest of the world reads it) (Rukundwa 2008:343). In addition, postcolonial hermeneutics has exposed the socio-political injustices and poverty struggles in Latin America, Asia and Africa. However, the struggle is far from being over. Postcolonial reading currently faces new challenges in the form of neo-colonialism, social oppression, gender injustice and poverty, among others.

The Bible remains a critical tool for confronting these evils in our society, not as an instrument that was used by the coloniser but as a tool to uplift those in the margins. In this case, Musa Dube is correct to say postcolonialism "is not a discourse of historical accusations, but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed" (Dube 1997:14). The Bible should therefore not be perpetuated as an instrument that was used by the coloniser but as a tool to "enlarge the scope of justice and freedom, whereby the marginal persons recover dignity" (Rukundwa 2008:343).

Nonetheless, postcoloniality is also a contested concept. It is used in different disciplines and therefore does not have one meaning. Sugirtharajah (2006:9) defines it as a critic of colonialism. It is a study that emerged as a voice from the developing countries to take a stand against the empire—the Western countries. Although I use postcolonialism as the theoretical basis for this research, Sugirtharajah maintains that postcolonialism is not a theory but a "criticism". It is essentially a style of inquiry, an insight or a perspective, a catalyst, a new way of life (Sugirtharajah 2006:9). The word postcolonial can be written with or without a hyphen. With a hyphen, the concept indicates the historical period in the aftermath of colonialism. According to Sugirtharajah (2006:9), postcoloniality started around the 1960s but it has no chronological progression from colonisation. Rather, it is the continuation of finding a voice and a critical analysis of what happened during colonisation as well as what is currently happening—neo-colonialism (Sugirtharajah 2006:9).

Without a hyphen, postcolonial symbolises "a reactive resistance discourse of the colonized who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from the Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period and who also continue to interrogate neo-colonising tendencies after the declaration of independence" (Sugirtharajah 2002:13). Even though Sugirtharajah maintains that postcoloniality is not a theory, I intend to use it in the sense of a theory. The idea is to understand the Bible from below. When the Bible was introduced to the

colonised by the colonisers, the colonisers also brought their hermeneutics without understanding the context of Africans. When the Bible was introduced to South Africa, Africans had a culture; they had a religion. Ancestors were venerated and considered mediators between the living and God. Thus, when the colonial masters (the West) came, they did not consider the existing culture and religion of the people and most black Africans accepted the Bible uncritically. They accepted the Christian religion as it was presented to them and allowed the West to demonise their African culture and religion. The idea behind a postcolonial theory is to understand the Bible from the context of vulnerability. The theory questions Western knowledge and the 'truths' that were created by it. It engages in a critical analysis to discover and regain what is lost—recovering the African epistemologies from our backyards, from the brothels and the streets. Accepting the Bible as *sola* scriptura (from a Reformed perspective) would mean the ability to interpret a text in one's circumstances. Therefore, a postcolonial reading will help sex workers to analyse the Bible, to find their voices within the Bible and to expose the colonial agenda of patriarchy, oppression and racism.

Postcolonialism addresses two aspects. First, it analyses the images of the colonised that the coloniser constructed and second, it considers how the colonised came up with strategies to go beyond those images to articulate their self-worth, identity and empowerment (Sugirtharajah 2002:11). The latter is an entanglement that occupied the culture of the Africans. Therefore, colonialism and post-colonialism remain entanglements (West 2018:246). The Bible remains the role player in both eras. The next entanglement is apartheid. Again, the Bible remains the point of reference. I will refer to apartheid frequently in this project, as it is the most recent form of oppression. In this regard, the year 2020 saw the establishments of movements such as "Black lives matters". The movement emerged because of the killings of black people which were and still are believed to be influenced by racism.[3]

During the apartheid regime, the Bible was used to justify racial separation. However, theologies such as Black Theology and liberation theology used the Bible for de-racialisation. Due to its history, Africa continues to analyse and reflect on what it means to be African. In addition, African biblical scholars advance the concept of entanglement by engaging in post-colonial biblical

[3] The movement is more popular in the USA where police brutality against black people has claimed the lives of many young black people. See www.blacklivesmatter.com. Accessed on 2020/09/29.

interpretation (West 2018:246), meaning, finding in the voice of African people in the interpretation of the Bible. West uses the hyphen purposely. His argument is that the post-colonial theory in the African context is a way to revitalise African biblical interpretation (West 2018:247). The colonial master did not only benefit from Africa in terms of resources, but he denied Africa its culture and history. West therefore argues that engaging in post-colonial hermeneutics is an opportunity to read the Bible from the African inculturation perspective (West 2018:247). I take full cognisance of this point.

Since West acknowledges the proponents of postcolonialism from Latin America, I also do the same. Homi Bhabha challenges the binary mentality of 'us versus them' and argues that there is always a third space, a "hybrid" space (Bhabha 1996:13). The latter refers to the social spaces that do not belong anywhere. Bhabha calls them "unhomely"—they are not homeless or easily accommodated (Bhabha 1996:7). From an African perspective, applying postcolonial theory means giving the Bible a new interpretation that is liberative. Dube (2000) also has challenged the dynamics of patriarchy through her postcolonial readings of the Bible from a feminist perspective.

1.5.3 Postcolonial missional hermeneutic

This thesis is written from a postcolonial missiological perspective. How the biblical text was introduced to Africa has influenced my choice of a postcolonial reading of the Bible as it seeks amongst other reasons, to interpret the text from the perspective of the former colonised. The term has been coined to analyse the systems of colonialism especially in the African, Asian and the Latin American contexts. Therefore, a postcolonial reading of the Bible aims to out root the interpretation of the Bible from the West. Dube (2000:15) views postcolonial as a way to describe the modern history of imperialism, which can be done through the critical analysis of the process of colonialism and the struggle for political independence. In addition, postcolonialism looks at how independence was attained in non-Western worlds, though it does not yet recognise the challenges of neo-colonialism (Dube 2000:15).

Mission as part of missiology is not innocent. It has its fair share in how the Bible was interpreted by the West in Africa. South Africa is a good example of how the Bible was interpreted to justify the system of apartheid (Mosala 2006:134). According to the Dutch Reformed Church, white people were God's chosen people. Dube (2005:17) condemns how the Western church particularly

the Reformed church claimed "chosenness". According to the reports from the World Council of Churches, the concept of the chosen people is based on three ideas.[4] Firstly, it maintains that the chosen people are endowed with the "divine mission" of guiding and civilising African people. Secondly, the chosen people cannot mix or reproduce with other people. Thirdly, the "chosen people's right of ownership over the land is given by God".[5] That was already a claim of superiority by the coloniser. Therefore, the word mission has different connotations because of the history of missionaries in South Africa. Dube (2000:12) refers to Kwesi Dickson's definition of mission as exclusivist—a "*tabula rasa* doctrine which maintains that the culture of those being evangelized cannot be looked upon in any way as a basis upon which to build". What Dickson meant with the preceding quote and his concept of exclusivism was that for Christianity to establish its roots among people who are being evangelised, their culture had to be forsaken. Dickson's view of Scripture was that of exclusivism. To support his claim, he describes Paul as an exclusivist in his letter to the Galatians (Gal 4:8-11). The Galatians had performed rituals daily, bringing honour to their religion. However, according to Paul, the Galatians did not know God and were worshipping "beings that by nature are not gods" (Dube 2000:13). Dube challenges Western imperialist interpretations of the Bible by raising two issues. Firstly, she insists that there is no connection between the cultural texts (the Bible), its readers and its institutions (Dube 2000:15). The question she asks is, "what ethical responsibility does it lay on contemporary Western and non-Western biblical scholars?" (Dube 2000:15). According to Dube, the ethical responsibility would be that there should be an equal level of power between the West and the non-West interpreters when it comes to the interpretation of the Bible (Dube 2000:15). If not, the Bible remains an authoritative book that perpetuates the oppression of the non-Western people (Dube 2000:17). Secondly, how can postcolonial subjects read the Bible without perpetuating what Canaan Banana recognises as a self-paradigm of constructing one group as superior to the other? (2000:15). How the Bible was interpreted and introduced by the West suggests that there was an unequal power distribution and to this day, power remains unequally distributed (Dube 2000:17). Dube (2000:17) argues that a postcolonial reading of the Bible should be transformative and empower the disempowered races by creating new systems. This thesis affirms that the hermeneutics that the West introduced to many black people still have an impact on our lives. According to Dube (2000), the connection

[4] World Council of Churches. Reports and Background Papers: South Africa in Crisis. Vol. 17 of 1983, 19.
[5] World Council of Churches. Reports and Background Papers: South Africa in Crisis. Vol. 17 of 1983, 19.

between biblical texts and Western imperialism has had several implications for reading biblical texts especially by postcolonial subjects of African origin.

Therefore, in this study, the aim is to find, together with the sex workers and using postcolonial hermeneutics, a model that will transform the current *status quo*. The question is how should we as postcolonial subjects receive and interpret the Bible? Albert Curry Winn argues that in order to find a liberative way of understanding the (Christian) Scriptures, the latter, should not be the starting point (Winn 1998:404). He notes that Scripture has been read from the eyes of the dominant but now we must read it from "the underside"—with the poor and the oppressed and not for them (Winn 1998:404).

1.5.4 Postcolonial mission of the church

Christian mission in Africa is a controversial term. As Tinyiko Maluleke has argued, it is implicated by imperialism, conquest and colonisation (Maluleke 2007:503). Colonisation started with the Bible. How the churches interpret the Bible was informed by the Christian mission, which played a major role in shaping the faith of black people. Black theology and postcolonial scholars such as Dube, Mofokeng and Maluleke explain the role of Christian mission by citing the anecdote about the coloniser and the colonised which says, "When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white had the land, and we had the Bible" (Dube 2000:3).

The question is if black people knew about the 'transaction', would they have continued with the prayer? However, even after black people realised the price which they had to pay for being Christians, they remained Christians. Maluleke (2007:503) is convinced that loyalty to Christianity could be because of the fear of letting go.

In a book written as a tribute to Steve Biko, *I write what I like,* Aelred Stubbs mentions Biko's critique of the church that when Christianity landed in the Cape in 1488, it did not give the local people a chance to learn about it and put it into context. Biko argues that the white missionaries did not give space for Africans to engage with the subject of Christianity. It was introduced somewhat rigidly (Stubbs 2009:60). Christianity introduced a new culture in the form of new clothing, new customs, new forms of etiquette and new medical approaches (Stubbs 2009:60). As

a result, all the practices of black people including their culture, their dressing and their beliefs were described as barbaric (Stubbs 2009:60). Biko argues that black people accepted Christianity uncritically and that the colonialists introduced the notion that "whosoever brings the new order knows it best and is therefore the perpetual teacher of those for whom the new order is brought" (Stubbs 2009:60).

Black people therefore uncritically accepted the hermeneutics that the colonialists brought with them (Stubbs 2009:60). According to Biko, missionaries were always right in the eyes of black people. Biko refers to them as "these new know-all tutors" (Stubbs 2009:60). The missionaries played a role in how black people view the church; even in the modern South Africa, the misinterpretation of Scripture played a role. The major concern that Biko had was that Christianity, as introduced by the colonialists, did not bring equality in a country that was "teeming with injustice and fanatically committed to the practice of oppression, intolerance and blatant cruelty because of racial bigotry" (Stubbs 2009:61). Unsurprisingly, some black people were unable to relate to this, as it made them feel like "unwanted stepchildren of a God whose presence they cannot feel" (Biko, in Stubbs 2009:61).

However, black scholars did not ignore this understanding of the church and of Scripture. The emergence of Black Theology and postcolonial theology was precisely for that reason, as both reflect the black understanding of Scripture. Whilst postcolonial theology seeks to expose social injustices and colonialism within the Bible, black theology "is not confined to one group or denomination only, nor is it an automatic universal revelation to all black" people" (Boesak 1984:22). Black theology, as a response to the atrocities experienced by black people, fought against racism. Its crux was that God is on the side of the oppressed and the poor. Therefore, the black church is not defined by the colour of the skin but by its struggle against inhumanity (Boesak 1984:22).

The question is how far has the black church today gone in removing the white image of the church—in terms of how its members relate to the Bible and/or the Reformed doctrine? The Bible was undoubtedly the instrument used by the oppressor to gain economic, social and political control. However, has the church found a new meaning of its existence since the Reformed tradition landed in South Africa? Has the paradigm shifted from dividing the church along racial

and class lines to that of transformation? Has the church raised its voice against issues of marginalisation including of sex workers, women and the poor?

To answer these questions, one would agree with Bonganjalo Goba that the church ought to develop relevant hermeneutics (Goba 1981:1), a theology that is contextual such as liberation theology. Liberation theologies sought to change the interpretation of the Bible by the West by challenging oppression and the social, economic and political injustices experienced by black people.

The aim of this thesis is to approach the interpretation of the Bible from a postcolonial mission viewpoint to unearth certain interpretations of the Bible that seek to perpetuate oppression instead of promoting liberation. In this case, the goal is to offer a new missional praxis for the URCSA to liberate sex workers.

1.5.5 Church's mission to the margins

The margins in South Africa were produced by the colonial and apartheid systems. According to Mosala (2006:136), black women experienced oppression and exploitation in every area including gender, race, and class. What Mosala did not capture is the violence that is perpetuated against black women's bodies such as sexual violence, poverty, and inequality. Most black women, even those who did not live during the historically recorded period of apartheid, have inherited those oppressive acts. These constitute the people on the margins where the sexual workers also find themselves. The margins do not only have an impact on the livelihood of sex workers but on their social status as well. Due to poverty and inability to educate themselves, some sex workers surrender their bodies to make end meets. As a response to the challenges faced by sex workers, Althaus-Reid (1999:42) poses a question to liberation theology: how far is it willing to see "Christ on the side of the sex workers as he is on the side of the poor and oppressed"? The same question can be posed to the church—how far is it willing to see Christ on the side of the young black woman on the streets of the City of Tshwane, trying to make a living by removing her panties? Where is the voice of the church?

As mentioned earlier, the Belhar Confession was the voice of the church during the apartheid regime. It spoke against the system of segregation and advocated for unity, justice, and reconciliation. The Confession (Article 4) advocated for a church that stands where God stands.

This statement cannot be taken at face value. The margin, from where the sex workers operate, is complex by nature. It is marked by social injustice—no one is willing to listen to the sex workers. The law is not on their side. The society is not on their side. The church is quiet. They are perceived as sinners and outsiders. Their voice is silenced because of their engagement in the sex trade. The question is where does the church stand regarding the plight of sex workers? The law is clear that sex work in South Africa is illegal (see Section 1.1).

To Thinandavha Mashau (2018), the church that stands where God stands identifies with the margins and belongs to God. It is a church that is willing to stand against injustices and with the wronged. Mashau further argues that *standing where God stands* is "standing beyond known borders". However, he does not emphasise the complexity that characterise these borders. The church on God's mission is subjected to a biblical hermeneutic that is liberating and that should come from an uncomfortable space—'going beyond known borders'. The margins are hostile, confronting them will therefore not be easy. Mosala (2006:138) captures it correctly when he argues that Bible readers should not be subjected to textual authority, but they are expected to engage critically with the text. Therefore, the church that stands where God stands is a church in the margins—it is not to remain there but to liberate the marginalised. Notably, Mashau (2018) asserts that a church that is on a mission is a church that should not be afraid of its "pavements".

1.6 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Sex work remains a thorny and highly emotive issue in South Africa. Thus, organisations such as Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Training (SWEAT) challenge the South African legislature on the legal status of sex work.[6] The SWEAT calls on the South African government to decriminalise sex work. It argues that "the decriminalization of sex work could avert HIV infections by 33-46% in the next decade, according to a new study published in The Lancet, the world's leading medical journal" (SWEAT 2014).[7]

[6] SWEAT, an organisation that is based in Cape Town, offers support to sex workers in Africa. Its mission is to defend their human rights and mobilise support for them throughout the continent. See http://www.sweat.org.za/index.php/about-sweat/vision-and-mission [Accessed on 2014/08/20].
[7] See http://www.sweat.org.za/index.php/item/565-sex-workers-call-on-government-to-follow-the-evidence-and-decriminalise-sex-work Accessed on 2014/08/20.

The primary rationale of the present thesis is not to advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work. The study seeks rather to nurture a respectful, hopeful, liberative dialogue between young Black female sex workers and the seemingly silent church to understand their circumstances and the expectations from the stakeholders such as the church and other Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs). For instance, the expectations of sex workers in Marabastad could be different from the expectations of the sex workers in high-end marketplaces like Pretoria East. The lives of the sex workers in Marabastad are perpetually in danger and at risk. Their health is compromised in several ways because of poor hygiene. According to the documentary done by Special Assignment, a program on the TV station SABC 3, sometimes, their clients do not use condoms.[8] The documentary also notes that the law does not protect the sex workers. Most of them open cases of rape with the police but as soon as they disclose that they are sex workers, the cases would be dismissed. As stated by Gareth Newman from the Institute of Security Studies, crimes related to gender-based violence especially against sex workers have increased since 2011. However, the crime statistics reports the opposite. The reason the crimes statistics seem to be lower, is that most victims do not report these crimes to avoid being victimised by the law (Newman 2018).[9]

The research will be done by analysing specific texts of the Bible such as Luke 7:36-50—the woman who was marginalised because of what we think might be a sexual sin. The pericope does not really specify the sin that the woman committed and that led her to be ostracised by the Pharisee. Their words to Jesus were "If you knew who this woman was" (Luke 7:39). The question is did they know who Jesus was? The aim is to read the identified pericope with the sex workers from a postcolonial perspective, identify the aspect of marginalisation and identify the emperor and what solutions they would offer to fight the stigma. In the context of the thesis, a postcolonial perspective is used to highlight the colonial past of black people in South Africa and Africa as a whole. The main task, regarding the postcolonial reading of the Bible, is to expose the colonial understanding of the Bible that does not liberate but instead continues to discriminate and marginalise vulnerable members of the community such as sex workers. The focus will be on young women in the margins—those who are struggling to eke out a decent living in the current South Africa but opt for sex work as a way out of their predicament.

[8] Special Assignment SABC 3, 20:30, 26 August 2018.
[9] Ibid.

It is of significance to note that both male and female sex workers (heterosexual, homosexual and transgender) across all racial, religious, economic, social and cultural barriers engage in sex work (Luiz & Roets 2010:26). I choose to focus on young black women, as they remain a particularly vulnerable group within the black community of South Africa. According to my preliminary observations, they are the most prominent 'suppliers' of sex services, while men receive and create the demand for sex. However, it seems that these women are in danger in many respects, as they lack the resources to protect themselves. The question is, where is the prophetic voice of the church in the case of marginalised sex workers? What should be an appropriate missional response from churches like the URCSA?

1.7 LIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

1.7.1 The URCSA's mission limited to its understanding of FBOs as agents of the church's mission to the margins

Due to the limitation of the study, I will focus firstly on young black women between the ages of 18 and 25. The field research was under the supervision of the Tshwane Leadership Foundation in the City of Tshwane. The sampling of the focus group is between 10 and 15 women who currently reside in the Marabastad area. These are women who, based on the societal perception, are expected to have 'decent' careers from the respective educational institutions and from the latter get into the corporate world. They are now seen as a 'shame' because they have embarked on the journey of sex work.

In the whole process, the interpretation of Scripture plays a major role. However, I will not focus on the hermeneutical aspect of the text from a biblical scholar's point of view. Rather, the analysis will be conducted from a missiological as well as a postcolonial perspective. My focus will be on the attitude of the church towards the sex workers and the way the sex workers also view the church considering its interpretation of Scripture. I focus specifically on the literature, which describes the current mission practice from the URCSA.

I also take note however, that although the phenomenon of sex work is not addressed within the mainstream church, it is handled by Christian organisations which are associated with the URCSA while the PEN is associated with the Dutch Reformed Church. The organisation, Tshwane Leadership Foundation, organises an outreach to sex workers. It provides immediate help with

basic things such as toiletries, bath facilities and breakfast.[10] Therefore, the study of the FBOs such as the TLF and the PEN will assist in understanding their praxis in relation to sex workers. How do they define their role? Who are these FBOs according to the sex workers?

1.7.2 The term 'margins' and sex workers

There is a great deal of tension between sex workers and the rest of society, between sex workers and the church and between sex workers and the law. The margins are mostly created by the unwritten laws of society, which constitute societal norms often placing men over women. By norm, I mean an act that is considered common practice in a particular context. There are societal expectations regarding how women should behave, when they should get married and when they should have children. When a woman fails to comply with these norms, the society marginalises her for not living up to its expectations. Usually, these rules encourage the superior behaviour of men towards women. While it is acceptable for a man to buy sex, it will be an abomination for a woman to sell sex. When one does not meet these standards, one is then marginalised. However, the same laws do not necessarily apply to men. Socially, sex workers are human beings that are being judged morally. South Africa is predominantly a religious country with Christianity leading at 86%, which means the society still holds the moral compass, high.

Challenging the attitude towards the margins, Althaus-Reid (1999:39) introduces what she calls "Indecent Theology". She defines indecent theology as a theology that challenges what liberation theology defines as 'decent'. The aim of 'indecent theology' is to "uncover, unmask and unclothe that false hermeneutics which considers itself as 'decent' and as such, proper and befitting for women especially in sexual matters" (Althaus-Reid 1999:39). Is it possible that sex workers are viewed as 'indecent subjects'? Althaus-Reid (1999:42) views liberation theology as a theology that has constructed a patriarchal Christ who is "un-dialogically" incompatible with the current theology. She claims that "liberationists are guilty of making women suffer a split personality syndrome, encouraging them to engage in political critical thinking and ideological critique but becoming uncritical, unsuspicious and even dulled when thinking of Christ" (1999:42). The question that Althaus-Reid poses to liberation theology is, how far is it willing to see Christ not

[10] Tshwane Leadership Foundation known as TLF

only as one who he is "on the side of the poor and oppressed" but also, as one on the side of the young black woman on the streets of Pretoria, trying to make a living through sex work?

Can the Bible therefore be a liberating tool for young black women on the margins, in particular those involved in commercial sex work? Does the Bible also recognise these young black women as people created in the image of God and Jesus as incarnated in these women? Is there a need to de-patriarchalise the understanding of Christianity as defined even by the liberationists? These were issues emanating from black feminist theologians. Patriarchy made them question the agenda of liberation theology. Althaus-Reid challenges the liberation theology from the Latin American perspective but there are similarities between the North American and the South African contexts. To challenge the margins, sex workers would need to develop what Paul Ricouer calls a hermeneutic of suspicion—a radical critique of the text and its meaning and a suspicion against understanding (Gadamer 1985). However, for a woman in the sex work business to do the latter, she needs to be afforded the opportunity to air her voice. A church is an institution that can offer that safe space. How far is the church therefore willing to reach out especially in provinces like Gauteng where women in sex work are so visible?

1.7.3 Sex workers in the City of Tshwane

The Gauteng Province is known as the smallest province in the country, yet it is the nation's economic hub. People from the semi-rural and rural areas and from other African countries migrate to the province for better livelihood (Mashau & Mangoedi 2021). Sex work has also become part of the economic empowerment for many of these migrants. Concepts such as *'blesser'/'blessee'* have taken the sex work world by storm (to be discussed in Chapter 3). It shows that there are new trends within the industry, which has grown and become more complex. Not even the law enforcement agents or the church laws are able to control it. Sex work has spiralled and become darker. The alarming rate of unemployment is probably the cause of the upsurge. At a location in the City of Tshwane, Hammanskraal, there is a *stokvel* called *mavuso*. *Mavuso stokvel* is a slang for transactional sex. A woman would spend the night with a man for money. What happens is that people gather at a particular place to drink and have fun. At midnight, the host of the *mavuso* would

announce how much it would cost to take a woman that night. The amount varies from R200 to R300 a night.[11]

A few years ago, a 32-year-old woman known by her pseudo name, Zodwa Wabantu, who does not shy away from flaunting her vagina, has been trending on social media in South Africa. She is known for not wearing panties. In an interview with the newspaper, TimesLive, Wabantu recounted, "Growing up people always told me I would be nothing. I know what I am here for. I knew I had 'something' but I didn't think it would be this big".[12] Zodwa Wabantu narrates a personal story to which the many young black women can relate. She started 'hustling' after her mother's death. Growing up with her grandmother and aunt was not easy and she fled from home when she was 16 years old. In her words, "I knew I had to hustle". After failing matric, she went from one job to another and ended up dancing at nightclubs for a fee. She also slept with men for money. She says people call it "prostitution" but she calls it 'hustle'.[13] It is possible that other young girls see her as a role model. In the same interview, Wabantu was recorded as saying, "No child should have to do what I do".[14] However, in a video that went viral on social media, Zodwa contradicted that statement as she encouraged young women not to shy away from using their "female persuasion".[15] In her exact words, Wabantu was recorded in the women's magazine, *all4women* saying, "Ladies, you have power and you must use it. Take it from me. I am using my *punani* (a slang word for a female genital organ) to make R35 000. I don't know how to dance. All I do is to shake my ass and get paid. So, my b*tches, use your *punani* and be yourself".[16] The tactic is called *'serope wa mperekela'* (an expression meaning that the selling of my body is beneficial to oneself).

The video attracted many negative comments from other females. However, the story is evidence that sex work has become more complex. More young women in our society face economic challenges and sex work (whether we call it hustle, having fun, prostitution, *"ho gosha"* or *"mavuso"*) has become a vital part of their lives.

---

[11] See https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/mavuso-stockvel-sex-shock-20160511. Accessed on 2018/02/14.
[12] See www.timeslive.co.za. Accessed on 2018/02/23.
[13] Ibid.
[14] See www.timeslive.co.za. Accessed on 2018/02/23.
[15] See www.sowetanlive.co.za. Accessed on 2018/02/23.
[16] See https://www.all4women.co.za/1343767/entertainment/sa-celebs/zodwa-wabantu-condemned-for-claiming-she-uses-her-private-parts-to-make-money. Accessed on 2018/02/25.

1.7.4 Sex work and the challenges of COVID-19 in South Africa

When the pandemic of Covid-19 hit country, President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa announced a total shutdown. There was no business open except for essential services. No person was allowed to go to work except the security cluster. Sex work became affected because of its alleged illegal operations. Sex workers were not included in the formal unemployment fund.[17] According findings by Gender Justice, a large literature of sex workers in South Africa are street based.[18] As a result, the Gender Justice has introduced digital sex work, though it is still at a research stage. [19]

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned earlier in Section 1.4, this study is empirical research, as it involves interviews and discussions with participants. Hence, a primary focus is the ethical considerations in terms of the risks involved (Khanlou & Peter 2005:2336). The participants were issued consent forms to verify that they agreed to participate in the project. The consent forms explain the purpose of the project, its procedures, potential risks, benefits, and alternatives so that participants understand that their decision to participate in the study is voluntary (Khanlou & Peter 2005:2337). Thus, I take full responsibility for obtaining the consent forms.

The interviews were completely anonymous. I agree with Khanlou and Peter that participatory action research means challenging the *status quo* and that could leave the participants even more vulnerable, marginalised and exposed to some hostile environments (2005:2337). It is important in that regard that an acute sensitivity to the politics and culture of the community, is demonstrated before a participatory action research is initiated (2005:2337). That would mean orientating oneself in the language, religions, and rituals of the community.

Secondly, sex work is not only sensitive but also vulnerable. Therefore, the research should not benefit the researcher alone but the participants as well in that their voices should be heard as far as it is possible in the project. As mentioned earlier, participatory action research (PAR) generally

[17] See https://www.justgender.org/digital-sex-workers-standing-in-the-criminalisation-gap-of-south-africa/ Accessed on 2023/06/10
[18] Ibid
[19] See https://www.justgender.org/digital-sex-workers-standing-in-the-criminalisation-gap-of-south-africa/ Accessed on 2023/06/10

involves groups and communities that are vulnerable and oppressed necessitating that great care is taken to ensure that the participants benefit from the research (Khanlou & Peter 2005:2336).

Lastly, I declare not to commit plagiarism but commit to acknowledging every source that I use throughout this project.

1.9 CHAPTER DIVISION

1. Introduction

I present my own agency as a researcher – who I am and how I am related to the community of sex workers. The chapter also lays a ground for the research, including defining key missiological and postcolonial concepts. The chapter continues with the unpacking the rationale of the research – the push and pulls of sex work, how the trade has expanded and the places where sex workers are found within the City of Tshwane. The chapter introduces the research question for the thesis as follows: How can a postcolonial reading of the Bible inform the church's missional praxis in the liberation of sex workers? The aim of this study is to carry out a postcolonial reading of the Bible and propose a missional praxis towards the liberation of sex workers.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

In chapter 2, literature review of related work is carried out including, among others, the description of the matrix praxis as a research methodology. The praxis serves as a map to navigate the study. It also serves as an analytic tool for the issues relating to the church and sex work, the texts that are used to explain these issues, the reader of the Bible and how is he/she reading? The tools deployed include missional ecclesiology as a theoretical framework. Throughout the thesis, the engagements pivot around the church and its role in the lives of sex workers. The main aim of this chapter, therefore, is to study and outline the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and the kind of hermeneutical lenses that informed such a praxis. What then is theology's contribution to the church's missional praxis which is liberative for sex workers? The chapter thus presents a literature review of how theologians have read the Bible and interpreted a missional role of the church towards the liberation of sex workers.

3. The Church, Bible and sex workers: a case for URCSA

The chapter unpacks the reformation theology as well as the texts that the URCSA uses to define its doctrine. The chapter analyses the role of apartheid in the birth of the URCSA and its influence

on the church's interpretation of the Bible. In addition, the chapter probes the URCSA's definition of mission in the context of sex workers.

4. The Bible, church, and liberation of sex workers: Voices from the margins

Using the praxis matrix and the CBS method, I embark on a journey to understand how sex workers read and understand the Bible. In doing that, I use a postcolonial reading of the Bible – reading the Bible in context. Firstly, I read the Bible with sex workers from Marabstad to unpack the gospel text according to Luke 7:36-50 in relation to their context. Secondly, I read the text with the learned readers to understand the scholarly view on the text. The aim of the chapter is to study the Bible with sex workers to determine their understanding of the missional role that the church should play towards their liberation. The Contextual Bible Study approach proposed by Gerald O West was deployed in the researcher's interactions with the sex workers during the Bible study sessions.

5. The Belhar Confession and sex workers: The URCSA and mission as transformation

What kind of a church's missional praxis should we propose for the church and what kind of a postcolonial reading informs such a praxis? The aim of the chapter is to propose a church's missional praxis based on the Belhar Confession and a postcolonial reading of the Bible which is liberating for sex workers.

6. Reading the Bible from a postcolonial missiological lens to develop a liberative praxis for the URCSA

The chapter is a response to the research question: How can a postcolonial reading of the Bible shape the church's missional praxis towards the liberation of sex workers? The response however will extend to Chapter 7 that features the summary, conclusion and recommendations. The chapter deals with how the praxis matrix can be used with the Belhar Confession to develop a liberative praxis for sex workers. In addition, the chapter considers the unnamed woman in the Lukan text as a liberative figure who went beyond the patriarchal boundaries to get the forgiveness of Jesus.

7. Summary, conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 7 contains the summary of the thesis. It also outlines the recommendations to the church, the URCSA, especially the need to collaborate with the TLF to address the plight of young black women in the margins. The chapter also outlines recommendations for future research on the current topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter has outlined the research by presenting the background of the study, the problem statement, the research methodology, the theological framework and the definition of concepts. The chapter also introduced the research questions and the limitations of this study.

The current chapter examines the missiological and postcolonial framework, reviewing the current conversations on the marginalisation of sex workers. The chapter starts with the methodology, which takes a praxis matrix. It is followed by the definition of missional ecclesiology as a missiological framework in the context of sex work.

In this chapter, the theological interpretation of the church's role in the lives of sex workers, will also be outlined. This will provide us with a methodological framework within which empirical research among sex workers in Marabastad is conducted. In order to achieve this, this chapter will address three premises, which will be structured in the following manner: the first premise is the ecclesial scrutiny. The church in the community usually represents social justice especially in relation to marginalised communities such as sex workers. Therefore, ecclesial scrutiny is not only about the role the church plays in the community, but it also gives an opportunity to the community to engage the practices and traditions of the church and how the church executes its role towards them.

The second premise of this chapter is that when interpreting the Scripture, the church needs to consider the factors that lead sex workers to sex work. Throughout the thesis, the argument is that the colonial system and later the apartheid apparatus contributed to a systemic poverty especially visible in the lives of black women. Educational opportunities were minimal. According to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the education for black children was aimed at preparing learners for manual labour and menial jobs that the government thought would be suitable for black children.[20] The plan was for black people to continue to be subservient to the apartheid system.[21] The dawn

[20] See https://www.britannica.com/event/Bantu-Education-Act. Accessed on 2022/09/11.
[21] Ibid.

of democracy in 1994 also did not make it easy for black people, as the country's socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and inequality intensified (Tshepo Masipa 2018:1). Currently women remain at the tail end of the economy with their unemployment rate at 38% compared to that of men at 33%.[22] Substantially, the unemployment of women put them at a place where they are excluded from both economic and social prospects. The system makes it hard for them to access opportunities to earn income and access labour markets (Adato et al. 2006:229).

Therefore, the third and the last premise of this chapter is that the church and, the URCSA, through the Belhar missional ecclesiology, has an opportunity to liberate sex workers from structural sin. I argue that the adoption of the Belhar Confession brought about a new missional understanding. It introduced a language that was anti-colonial and anti-apartheid. Although the Belhar Confession raised the voice of the church against apartheid, the post-apartheid and post-colonial eras brought new and other persisting challenges especially to most black women who still face challenges of being discriminated against because of their gender, culture, race and socio-economic class. Due to these challenges, the job market has become very stringent.

In engaging the premises above, the method of praxis matrix as well as the Contextual Bible Study (also known as CBS) will be applied. The CBS and the praxis matrix methods will be integrated to analyse the socio-economic status of sex workers in Marabastad. Secondly, the methods will be used to establish the relationship between the sex workers and the church. Thirdly, they will be used to analyse the relationship if any, the church has created with sex workers, and lastly, to create a missional praxis that will be liberating to the sex workers.

The study focuses on Marabastad because it is the part of town that the focus group (sex workers) of this research resides. Marabastad is made up of poor communities whose members struggle to make ends meet. It is selected for this study also because the area lays bare, the challenges of economic inequality that South Africa is facing in the post-apartheid era. On the one hand, one would find formal businesses that are booming and informal businesses of hustlers who stand by the roadside selling small items to motorists and passers-by. On the other hand, one finds homeless people among whom are sex workers who try to make a living the best way they know how, whether illegally or legally.

[22] See https://www.statista.com/statistics/1129481/unemployment-rate-by-population-group-in-south-africa/. Accessed on 2022/09/12.

2.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.2.1 Agency

The objective of the chapter is thus to examine the three premises mentioned above and to determine the missional praxis that the church can employ towards the liberation of sex workers. The latter will also consider the role the church is currently playing in the lives of sex workers. The chapter comprises the following subheadings: missional praxis, biblical missiology, colonial and apartheid missiology, postcolonial missiology, postcolonial ecclesiology and postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. Since the research methodology employs the praxis matrix, the structure of the chapter will follow the matrix. See the illustration below:

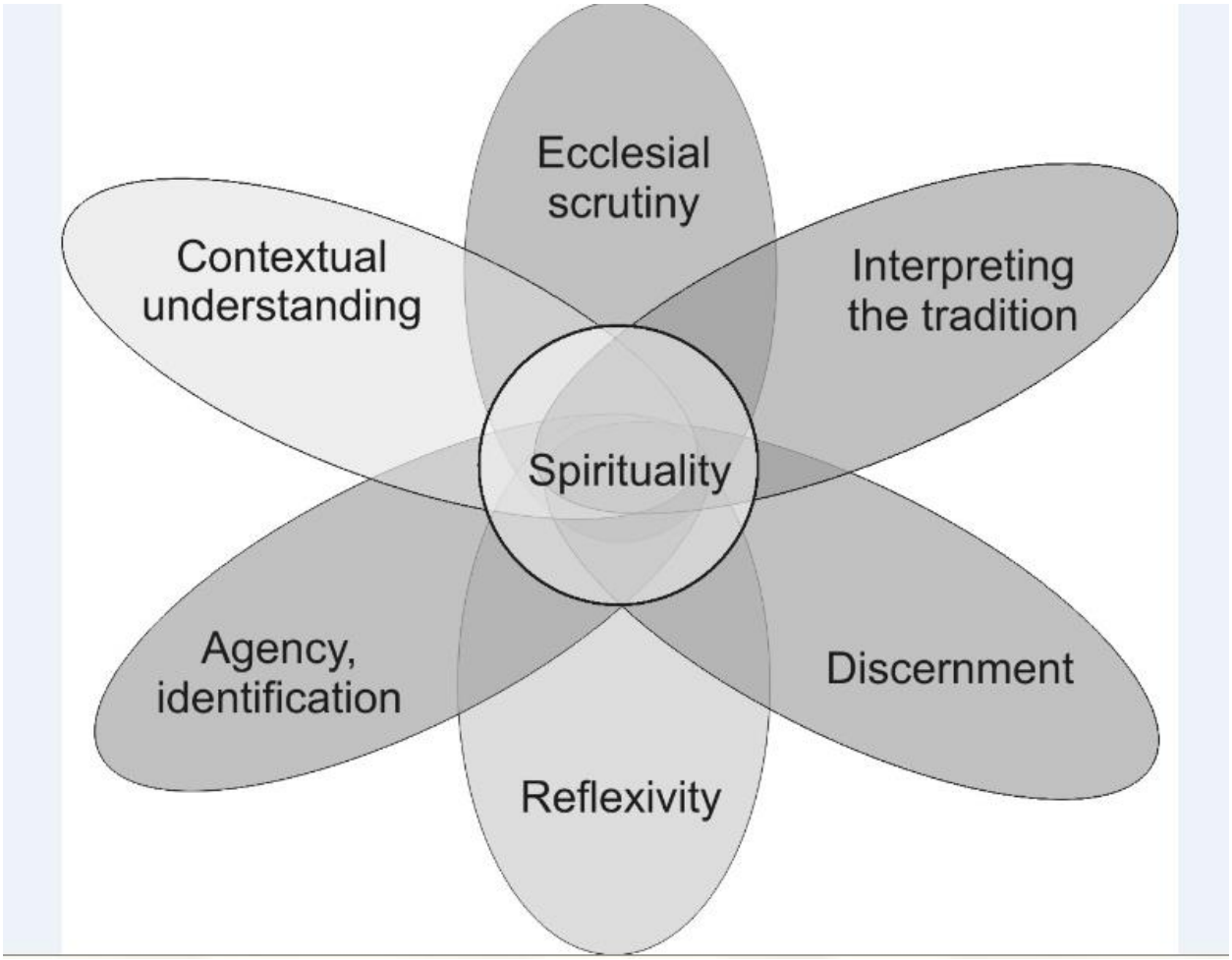

Diagram A: *The praxis matrix*

According to Kritzinger and Saayman (2011:51), agency on the one hand, asks the question:

> Who are we? How are we related to the community? Who are other key actors or interlocutors? What other encounters taking place?" On the other, it asks, "who are they? How are they related to the community? Who are other key actors? Who are their interlocutors?

Agency seeks to understand the economic challenges faced by the community involved in mission, its culture and its social position.

The industry of sex work has become very complex over the years. It has managed to develop itself through different sectors. It has expanded from the poorest to the richest communities. I chose the poorest community because its members are the most vulnerable and some of them opt for commercial sex work mainly for economic reasons. In most instances, these sex workers are not safe. They cannot even depend on the law for protection, as their practice is considered a criminal offence (Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957). Not only do they struggle with the challenges of being accepted, but also, with issues of naming and shaming by the community.

Language plays an important role in the sex business. For instance, in the Marabastad community, no woman calls herself a sex worker. They refer to their services as *"ukuphanda"*[23] and to themselves as having *blessers* (explained further in the chapter), while others refer to themselves as women who are making a living. Being called sex workers is offensive to them. According to Charlebois and Koroueva (2013:4), language in the sex work business translates to how people perceive the business in a particular area. In Chapter 1, I have tried to show why sex work is a preferred term instead of prostitution. Carol Leigh, a sex workers' rights activist, coined the term "sex worker"[24] in 1970 to highlight the work that is provided rather than the customer.[25] The term prostitution is regarded as derogatory. To sex work activists such as Kat Banyard and Carol Leigh, prostitution comes with many negative connotations including shame. Banyard and Leigh explain that the term prostitution is used by the legislature, and it carries a stigma and implies a certain level of criminalisation.[26]

Organisations such as the UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted sex work as an acceptable term. However, according to an article in The Guardian newspaper, an activist

[23] *Ukuphanda* is a Zulu word meaning, "to fend for yourself".
[24] See www.nswp.org Accessed on 2020/06/15.
[25] Ibid.
[26] The dangers of rebranding prostitution as 'sex work' by Kat Banyard. See https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jun/06/prostitution-sex-work-pimp-state-kat-banyard-decriminalisation Accessed on 2020/06/16.

Kat Banyard claims that the term sex work, originates from an organisation called Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP).[27] The organisation openly called for brothels and pimps to be recognised as work.[28] Therefore, it proposed the concept of sex work as work instead of as prostitution. As a result, sex work was used by the NSWP as the go-to terminology for organisations such as the UNAIDS and the WHO, which accept that the concept sounds respectful and dignified. However, because of organisations like the NSWP which seeks to be politically correct, the term sex work comes across as work.[29] According to the Open Society Foundations, all sex workers do this type of work to earn a living.[30]

The question is do sex workers at Marabastad make enough money from sex work to earn a living? Most of the women in our informal conversation before the Bible study session mentioned that they are in Pretoria to make money to support their children. Out of the fourteen women that the researcher interviewed, only one did not have a child. Those that had children are single parents. They send all their earnings home to the children, but they did not disclose how much that would be.

Marabastad is a preferred area by sex workers because of its busyness. The cost driver is the major transport mode, the Belle Ombre Railway Station,[31] which makes it easy for commuters to enter and exit Pretoria. There is also a big taxi rank on Boom Street. Thus, the influx of transport makes it accessible for people outside Pretoria to come to Marabastad in search of better opportunities. However, the inflow of people increased other challenges such as homelessness, slumlords and the informal sector of which commercial sex work, forms a big part (Ribbens & De Beer 2017:3). Businesses such as commercial sex work are easy to set up because of the many people especially men who leave their homes for Pretoria to search for work. However, according to the group of women interviewed by the researcher, many of their clients are taxi drivers around Marabastad.

[27] The dangers of rebranding prostitution as 'sex work' by Kat Banyard. See https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jun/06/prostitution-sex-work-pimp-state-kat-banyard-decriminalisation. Accessed on 2018/03/14.
[28] The dangers of rebranding prostitution as 'sex work' by Kat Banyard. See https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jun/06/prostitution-sex-work-pimp-state-kat-banyard-decriminalisation Accessed on 2018/03/14

[29] Ibid.
[30] Understanding sex work in an open society. See www.opensocietyfoundations.org Accessed on 2020/06/15.
[31] See https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/30278/02chapter2.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y. Accessed on 2022/09/12

Their choice of this group of clients stems from issues of security whether against thieves or against bad weather. Taxi drivers usually offer a shelter for them overnight when it rains or in extremely cold conditions.

Although sex workers may see opportunities of getting quick cash because of the influx of people, Marabastad faces several social and economic challenges. It is overcrowded and poor living conditions prevail in its many dilapidated buildings with the increase in crime, poverty, lack of services, lack of community involvement and support, uncontrolled hawking, squatting, land claims, unemployment and lack of housing (Ezekiel Ntakirutimana 2018:2). The question "who are we?" cannot be fully answered without analysing the contextual understanding of the issues surrounding sex work.

2.3 CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING

The question that contextual understanding asks is "where do sex workers earn a living?" When doing a missional study, contextual understanding is important. This is where scholarship asks questions such as "what is going on around us? What is good or bad about our community? What are the problems we need to address?" (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:16). The context of this study is Marabastad. The name Marabastad originates from the name of either headman Maraba or chief constable and interpreter Jeremiah Maraba.[32] Chief Maraba was the founder of the Maraba Village, which is located south of Marabastad.[33] Marabastad holds a significant meaning in the history of South Africa especially because the apartheid system played a role in its emergence—apartheid influenced its infrastructure (Christie 2010:22). In 1881, Indian and coloured people received more rights and therefore stayed together with the white community in Marabastad (Christie 2010:21). However, because of complaints from the white community, the Indian people were then separated from them and resettled in *bazaars*[34] (Christie 2010:21). When the white community again complained about the coloured people, they also, were demarcated to what was called the Cape

[32] See Marabastad Market on www.sahistory.org.za. Accessed on 2021/03/08.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Bazaar was the term used by the apartheid government to describe a more elevated place of stay than a location. See https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/30278/02chapter2.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y. Accessed on 2022/07/31.

Location or Cape Boys, which was declared a black township in the year 1888, as many black people flocked there from the rural areas to seek employment.

2.3.1 The economy of Marabastad

Marabastad is the economic hub of the City of Tshwane, as it comprises, among others, an Asiatic bazaar area, '*muti* shops' and street vendors.[35] There are formal and informal businesses owned by South Africans as well as foreign nationals. Marabastad is characterised by street hustle, cultural diversity and homelessness, among others. Sex work constitutes part of the informal businesses that operate in Marabastad because it is one of the unregulated businesses in the area. Unregulated businesses are in the main considered illegal. Seymour (1992:126) argues that using the term 'illegal business' is not advisable in academic circles, as it implies illegal activities according to government standards. Rather, she proposes the terms micro-enterprise, small business or entrepreneurship as alternative terminologies (1992:126). However, in the context of this thesis, the term 'illegal' is preferred to emphasise the infringement of the constitution (Section 20(1) (A) of the Sexual Offences Act of 1957).

Apart from its busyness and the many people from across South Africa looking for and doing business there, Marabastad is also a religious community with a mosque and a Hindu temple.[36] However, the sex workers are more visible at night when they look for clients. During the day, they sit and bask in the sun. According to a documentary televised on the program called "Special Assignment" on the South African Broadcast television (SABC), sex workers use the bush to conduct their business.[37] They set up mini shelters or temporary 'rooms' made up of blankets.[38] Conducting their business in the bush poses much danger for sex workers and because their practice is illegal, they are often not protected by the law. The SABC documentary reports that they are often raped but are not assisted by the justice system. The stigma that sex work carries poses even more danger to them, as they would not want to report their offenders for fear of being rejected and further marginalised.

[35] See the History of South Africa on www.sahistory.com. Accessed on 2020/11/10.
[36] Ibid.
[37] SABC News Special Assignment of 26 August 2018.
[38] Ibid.

The sex workers in Marabastad claim that their economic status keeps them on the street no matter how hostile Marabastad may be. Although sex work is not a solution to poverty, sex workers are making a marginal living out of it. According to Letlape and Dube (2019:122), 90% of women practicing sex work in the City of Tshwane are in Marabastad. Other businesses which attract traders in Marabastad include selling fruits and vegetables; peanut roasting and selling; selling perfume and jewellery; beadwork and selling *'pap en vleis'*,[39] *mopani* worms and herbals (Seymour 1992:128). According to Seymour (1992:126), many business holders in Marabastad are women, while the booming business environment in the City of Tshwane which includes Marabastad, encourages internal and border crossing (Mashau & Mangoedi 2021:1). Most people especially women, come to Marabastad for better livelihoods. Some can go back home in the evening while others find shelter in Marabastad.

2.3.2 The role of the church in the economy of sex workers

The dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994 was a breath of fresh air to the majority of black South Africans who were previously disadvantaged by the colonial and the apartheid systems. However, post-colonialism and post-apartheid came with the rise of neo-colonialism, thus, the continuous struggle of hegemonies and the ideologies of apartheid remained. The majority of black South Africans continue to be poor. The majority of black South Africans remain unemployed and destitute and the most affected, are women.

According to the Department of Statistics in South Africa, 49.2% of the population above the age of 18 falls below the poverty line.[40] With that being said, 52% of women fall below the poverty line compared to the 46.1% of men.[41] R.W Nel argues that the post-colonial world is wracked by the vast economic inequalities between and within nations (Nel 2011:2). If the said challenge has not called upon the church to question its existence, its doctrine and its mission, then one would argue that postcolonial missiology is pertinent.

[39] *Pap en vleis* is the Afrikaans name for the popular local maize and meat meal.
[40] Poverty on the rise. See www.borgenproject.org.za Accessed on 2020/11/21
[41] Ibid

The current economic challenge was inherited from the previous colonial and apartheid systems. The economic challenges that continue to haunt the post-colonial era calls upon the church to come to the realization that colonization and its impact do not lie in the past. The high unemployment rate that may have led women to sex work remain with us – it is a current challenge. The church will not be able to address these challenges without sex workers. The current economic challenges call upon the church to be proactive in mission – question the status quo and have an impact in society. Mission calls upon the church to be socially, economically and politically active in societies embracing the love and the compassion of God in the lives of the marginalized.

2.3.3 Shift from sex workers to *blesser/blessee* or sugar mommy/daddy

Although we have examined the term sex work in general terms, it is also acknowledged that in metros such as the City of Tshwane, the practice has developed and advanced over the years. Sex work, as a transactional activity, has carried much stigma over the years and while, today, the concept remains the same, the terminology has developed. The terms *blesser* and *blessee* are now trending. A *blesser* is someone whom by virtue of his high economic status can 'bless' the *blessee* with expensive gifts (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2017:121). Although the concepts *'blesser'* and *'blessee'* are used by commercial sex workers to suggest monetary or material transactions, the terms "are primarily religious words" (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2017:121; Letlape & Dube 2019:121). It seems that the religious concepts are used to persuade the society to accept commercial sex work as not sinful (Letlape & Dube 2019:121). However, Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele (2017:122) argues that the understanding of the concepts by commercial sex workers has nothing to do with religion but everything to do with commercialising one's body for monetary or material gifts. Before the terms *'blesser'* and *blessee* came into use, the terms sugar mommy and sugar daddy were used to refer to a *blesser*, be it a male or a female. In addition, the term 'Ben 10' was used to refer to a *blessee,* except in this case the male was younger than the female in the relationship. The use of these terms shows how far sex workers go to seek acceptance in the society. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (1.7.3), sex work is otherwise called *"mavuso stokvel".*

2.4 ECCLESIAL SCRUTINY

On the question of the role of the church in the context of sex of work, Kritzinger (2011:51) asked, what have churches/religions been doing in this situation? How does the role of the church affect our present encounters? In his analysis of the church and its role in the community, Kritzinger questions whether the community as an agent of mission can assess the past actions of the church(es) in its context. The community has the power to define the role of the church in its context. It is important that its members become active participants in how the church responds to their challenges be it social or economic. It means then that the church has a significant role to play in responding to the challenges faced by communities. However, the church does not always play a positive role. On the role of the church, Kelly Brown Douglas states that, "it can either be in the vanguard for social change or it can be a stubborn antagonist to that change" (2000:95). Our history of apartheid confirms the latter statement by Douglas. The white dominated church especially the N.G. Kerk, sponsored apartheid whilst the black church stood for social change. According to Kritzinger and Saayman (2011:5), the community as an agent of mission is hereby called to assess the past actions of the churches in their contexts. In Chapter 3, a thorough analysis of the history of the church and its impact on the communities is presented. However, how much of that history does the community know? In addition, how does that history affect the communities today (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:5)? Although the women interviewed in this study did not say much about the church, religious institutions such as the Mariammen Temple and the Mosque form part of the landmarks in Marabastad. Some of the women in sex work who are interested in Christian churches largely attend the ZCC Star and St Engenas Church. However, these religious institutions play a minimal role in the lives of the sex workers in Marabastad except the ZCC. The ZCC provides an alternative solution when these women are sick. Most of them opt to go to ZCC to avoid the shame of being stigmatised in a public health care facility, as ZCC is known for its prophetic and healing practices (Mashabela 2017:5).

Lastly, an ecclesial scrutiny considers how the community relates to the churches that are active in their surroundings (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:5). Although the latter may be true, the community members, especially sex workers in this context, relate to a church that is mindful of their culture; that is, a church that understands its surroundings. The ZCC fulfils this expectation,

as it caters mainly for black people. However, it does not reach out to them in terms of their essential daily needs. We ask, is there a church that can minister wholly to sex workers?

2.4.1 The black church amidst white supremacy and its definition of sexuality

In chapter 1, I have articulated briefly on what a church means in the context of this project. Even in this chapter, the process of unpacking the definition of the black church continues as it carries relevance in the context of sex workers. A black church is an institution that is in the middle of the black struggle for freedom (Douglas Kelly Brown 2012:12). Nonetheless, it does not carry the struggles of black people especially on their sexuality. Kelly Brown (2000) argues that white supremacy has done well in looking down on the sexuality of blacks – denigrating anything that is not white. In addition, white supremacy has been a negative influence that played a role on fostering domination on how the black sexuality discourse should be managed (Kelly Brown 2000). Kelly Brown (2000) continues to argue that through the patriarchal hegemony (explained later in the chapter), the white culture continues to control black bodies especially that of black women, dehumanizing them and treating them as property and labour commodities, rather than as human beings (Kelly Brown 2000). In South Africa, the story of Sarah Baartman resonates with the exploitation of black female bodies. Although Sarah Baartman might have gone to Europe willingly to make money, it does not mean that she was not a slave (Mothoagae 2016:71). Daniel Mothoagae argues that she was in Europe to make money for the slave owner not for herself (2016:17). Nonetheless, to the slave master, her body was not meant for sexual intercourse for sex work, it was ridiculed because of her big genitals (Mothoagae 2016:18). She suffered dehumanization in the hands of white supremacists. White supremacy has taken the power to define the bodies of black women whether they are superior or inferior (Mothoagae 2016:18). The black sexuality discourse is not something the church can dismiss as taboo. The church needs to engage on the issues of sexuality instead of dismissing them as demonic. There are black women who have embarked on sex work and can relate to the story of Sarah Baartman. Engaging them on issues of their sexuality will hopefully restore their dignity and affirm their humanness. Any black church that does not engage on the experiences of black people, can never be a black church

2.4.2 Sex work and the church

The church in the City of Tshwane is playing a minimal role in the lives of sex workers in Marabastad. The Tshwane Leadership Foundation is a Christian organisation that engages in multiple community projects on homelessness, women and girls, as well as children and youth, among others.[42] Through the TLF, the church reaches out to poor and vulnerable communities with transformation and spiritual nurturing.[43] The organisation has several housing communities for different ministries, for instance, Nkululeko Community Center, Akanani, The Potter's House, The Inn and the Lerato House.[44] The Lerato House is a shelter for young women and girls between the ages of 9 and 25 who are either at risk of abuse or affected by sex work and/or trafficking. The Lerato House currently serves as boarding for some women and/or a drop-in centre for others. As a drop-in centre, it offers women, especially those who are homeless, bath and the use of ablution facilities, bread and tea as well as sanitary towels. I visited the Lerato House with the outreach team from TLF in order to engage with the sex workers at Marabastad. The best we could do was to ask how they were doing. Their living conditions were inhumane. The place smelled of stale urine and blocked sewage.

As an institution, the TLF is operated by six community churches around the City of Tshwane, one of which is the URCSA. The aim of the organisation is not just to reach out to the marginalised community, but also to work towards a liveable, transformative community. The latter is done through programmes that assist marginalised communities to build their own resources. In addition, the TLF provides health support for sex workers. It runs a clinic called Sediba Hope Foundation, where sex workers get free medication as well as condoms.

Thus, the TLF has remained consistent in terms of providing essentials to sex workers. Every Friday, the TLF staff hosts homeless people including sex workers to a morning devotion to provide moral and spiritual guidance in its efforts to empower them to face their challenges. However, the mainstream church is not involved in the spiritual needs of sex workers. As commendable as the FBOs' effort to assist sex workers appears to be, it is not sustainable.

[42] See Tshwane Leadership Foundation on https://tlf.org.za/about/. Accessed on 2022/09/05.
[43] See https://tlf.org.za/about/. Accessed on 2022/09/05.
[44] Ibid.

2.4.3 The economic role of TLF in the lives of sex workers

As mentioned above, the TLF does provide essentials such as sanitary towels, bread and tea for sex workers, daily. Most, if not all, the sex workers that the researcher interviewed from Marabastad, solely depend on the TLF for essentials because the money they make on the streets is sent to their family members at home. Most of them come from backgrounds of abject poverty and therefore become vulnerable to inhumane systems of homelessness, trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation. Being dependent on the TLF and other FBOs for survival, deprives the women some measure of freedom including the freedom of the mind, economic freedom, and social freedom. Although commendable, the FBOs' programmes in some ways perpetuate poverty. What sex workers need is "a new consciousness and to reaffirm their humanity as sacred" (Methula 2014:58). The agenda of alleviating poverty by the FBOs particularly the TLF, is noble but the system of administering perpetual handouts particularly to black people, is demeaning. For a long time, the voices of black women were silenced. If the TLF seeks to assist sex workers through outreach programs, then, it needs to include the voice of sex workers in developing an action plan that will transform their lives. The role of the church in this discourse is missional—to stand amid the struggle of the marginalised and bring them to the centre. It needs to play an active role in introducing the marginalised to a transformational life (Kotze & Niemandt 2020:418). However, for transformation to be effective, the church would need to introduce the marginalised to the love of Christ. The church needs to introduce the kind of praxis that will unearth the systems that perpetuate economic suppression.

2.4.4 Postcolonial missiology

Postcolonial Missiology creates space for Scripture to be radically unmasked – exposing the domination and imperialism that defined biblical interpretation during the eras of colonialism and apartheid. The church hereby needs to critically engage the system that created the marginalisation of sex workers through the re-reading of Scripture and creating new hermeneutical lenses that will speak to the de-marginalisation and de-patriarchalization of sex workers. The pertinent question is: what is postcolonial Missiology in the context of reading the Bible for the liberation of sex workers? What is its role in the lives of sex workers especially, looking at the question of gender?

The assumption is that most people who enter sex work are women under circumstances which include abuse and economic desperation (Kesler 2005:225). How do these narratives affect women in the business of sex?

2.4.2.1 Gender and sex work

A much-contested space is the issue of gender in the feminist and womanist theologies, especially in African cultures. The question of who is supposed to be a man and a woman dominates the theological landscape (Quero 2017:81). The reason for the latter is because of our historical context. Morrell and Lindegger (2012) are of the view that apartheid and colonialism had separated political and economic landscapes along the lines of racial and social classes, thus creating a hegemonic masculinity. He defines the concept of hegemonic masculinity as "gender power in conjunction with issues of male hierarchy" (Morrell and Lindegger 2012:12). The male hierarchies in our society are created by the society which is influenced by binary thinking (Quero 2017:81). The binary thinking stems from normalcy which is created by the Western world to the colonies using the concept to define the realities of the colonized and labelling their culture and societies (Quero 2017:81). The normalcy gave birth to the binaries such as the masculine and the feminine (Quero 2017:82). Normalcy and the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity put African women under a continuous subjugation and heteronormative patriarchy.

Judith Butler, in contrast with the normal definition of gender in terms of sex, challenges the heterosexual thinking of the definition of gender. The word gender from the Oxford Dictionary means "the state of being female or male with references to social and cultural differences" (Oxford Dictionary 2002:372). The latter definition is problematic to Butler (2006:9). She finds the definition of gender rather problematic as it is limited to sex under the auspices of male and female (Butler 2006:9). Butler illustrates the dynamics of power being displayed from heterosexuality – one can either be male or female to be classified under gender. These hegemonies according to her are also visible in the feminist theory. Butler challenges how the feminist theory assumes that its existence is based on the lack of women representation within political circles (Butler 2006:2). Her concern is that the feminist perception of a woman puts women at a place where they are subjects. In my understanding of the latter, the emancipation of women does not rest on representation. According to Butler, treating women as subjects is a perpetuation of the patriarchal system (Butler 2006). In her critique of feminist theory, she warns that the definition

of feminist should not rest on only identity and political representation. It makes women to be subjects of the system – being defined and reproduced according to the requirement of the system (Butler 2006:3). In other words, feminism is subjected under the structures of power where it should supposedly freed from. If women continue to be under the system of patriarchy, the system will continue to define and subject them under its law. In her critique of what is perceived as the definition of gender, Butler dismisses what she calls "heterosexual matrix" – that there is more to gender than being pinned down to sex. Butler argues further that the hegemony of gender based on sexuality further causes social constraints, taboos and prohibitions (Butler 2006:21). For women in sex work to be free, the narratives around sex work needs to be de-patriarchalized. The continuous existence of binary thinking in the society exacerbates the triple challenges of racism, class and gender that black women have always been subjected to. Kobo (2018) maintains that these problematic definitions of gender have violated and humiliated black African women by downplaying the role that patriarchy played in their lives.

Considering the arguments above, postcolonial missiology with its role of rereading and re-interpreting the Bible for the aim of emancipation, calls on the church and the community to come and do theology together (Nel 2011:12). It is not an easy exercise as it does not only call on the church to be a prophetic witness, but also to be shamefully embarrassed (Nel 2011:12). The second aspect of postcolonial missiology is also that of an affirming theology to the marginalized, therefore calling on the *bosadi* theology to re-arise.

2.4.2.2 Postcolonial as part of the bosadi (womanhood-redefined) biblical hermeneutic

A postcolonial reading of the Bible does not only disempower the imperialist. Its interpretation deals with the harsh realities that sex workers find themselves faced with – prejudice and being marginalized. A postcolonial reading of the Bible will thus expose the domination of biblical interpretation that supported colonization and apartheid. However, the challenges of colonialism persist in the African continent. Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) in her approach of revisiting the *bosadi* (womanhood) argues that the dependence of African biblical studies on the West has created a perpetual legacy of colonial and apartheid South Africa (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:742). She continues to argue that the Old Testament and the New Testament do not employ

African epistemologies, thus creating graduates that are irrelevant to the African discourse (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:742). In support of Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele), Mashau insinuates that it is imperative for Africans to tap into their own resources (2018:142). Substantially, Kritzinger adds that "we need to explore the indigenous faith-and-knowledge systems embodied in the proverbs, idioms, rituals, songs and prayers of our communities and bring these to bear on the theological and political questions we are grappling with" (2012:242:243).

Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) uses the *bosadi* concept to analyze the post-colonial discourse. According to Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele), post-colonialism did not only come with racial and economic disparities, but it also came with patriarchy. She argues that our liberation theologies did not give much attention to the issues pertaining to women, especially, the issues that had to do with patriarchy (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:749). In concurring with the agency that the *bosadi* approach brings, this thesis accentuates that the biblical hermeneutic needs to change when it comes to women especially those on the margins. The *bosadi* (womanhood-redefined) approach, is an urgent call for a decolonized biblical understanding.

2.4.5 Postcolonial ecclesiology: lessons from the Belhar Confession

As noted in Chapter 1 and the present chapter, that is Chapter 2, the Belhar Confession played a significant role as the voice of the church against apartheid, especially within the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (see 2.2.2.4).

Since its inception, the Confession was perceived as the voice of the church during the struggle against apartheid. The Confession and its significance in this thesis relate to its Christological foundation for the unity of the church (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:3). Although it was born out of the struggle, the Belhar Confession remains relevant in the face of today's injustice, social ills, and economic struggle. It a voice from the church that called for the reversal of the damages caused by apartheid and by biblical hermeneutics that insisted on the oppression of black people. However, the emergence of black theology, liberation theology and now the theologies created for the discourse of women such as *bosadi* (womanhood redefined) challenged the *status quo* (Mosala 2006:135; Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele[2015:741).

In his article, "The implications of the text of Esther for African women's struggle for liberation in South Africa", Itumeleng J. Mosala argues that with the emergence of liberation theologies, the new reading of the Bible by black people helped them discover that liberation, as opposed to oppression and conquest, is a key biblical message (Mosala 2006:136). For her part, Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) coined the term *bosadi* (2005:741). The understanding of *bosadi* lies in the biblical hermeneutics that is woman centred. The *bosadi* approach is the awakening commitment to the issues of women which were left unattended by the liberation theologies such as the South African Black Theology and the Black Theology of liberation from North America. Secondly, unlike the liberation theologies that engage on a scholarly level only *bosadi* hermeneutics identifies with women of any race and class. Essentially, *bosadi* hermeneutics focuses on the experiences of women from the African-South African context with an agenda to liberate them (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2017:747).

Therefore, the Belhar Confession (Article 3), with the element of missional ecclesiology, took up the challenge to confront any biblical hermeneutics that promoted injustice, oppression and racism. Allan Boesak argues that the Belhar Confession does not seek to attack or defend, but to uphold and to affirm (Boesak 2008:2).

The Confession also aimed to uphold the agenda of the missional ecclesiology of affirming the Triune God (Article 1 of the Belhar Confession). Thus, the church does not only correspond to the unity of the Triune God, but it also finds its living space in the Triune God (Niemandt 2012:3). The understanding of the latter statement mirrors a church that carries the agenda of God—a church on the side of the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed.

In line with the postcolonial theoretical framework, what is proposed in this study, is a biblical hermeneutic that is liberating to sex workers—an affirmation that God is on their side. Within this framework, one would re-imagine transformation in the lives of sex workers. The marginalisation of sex workers calls upon the church to be missional in its nature by addressing the centre of oppression and injustice. It challenges the church to be "the alternative community in society", which lives in a just, reconcilable, and compassionate world (Kritzinger & Saayman 2017:174).

Belhar(ic) missional ecclesiology highlights an urgent need to change the discourse on sex workers. With the *bosadi* approach embracing the postcolonial agenda—interpreting the Bible

through the eyes of the marginalised and the Belhar Confession—sex workers can be re-membered within the Christological engagement.

In its essence, missional ecclesiology compliments the Belhar Confession in the sense that the church must stand where God stands, against all injustice and with the wronged and the powerless against the powerful (Boesak 2008:3). The Belhar(ic) missional ecclesiology is an awakening to the church; it reminds the church of its role in the neoliberal society.

2.4.6 Contextual Bible Study: reading the Bible with sex workers

As noted in 1.4 above, this research integrates a praxis matrix with Contextual Bible Study (CBS). The researcher takes cognisance of the similarities that the two praxes present. The praxis matrix is a tool of transformation (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:4) and it complements the CBS in supporting change within marginalised communities or churches. However, CBS is made up of core values comprising community, criticality, collaboration, change, context, and contestation (West 2017:238). The following paragraph outlines the core values of CBS.

2.4.6.1 Community

The community is where CBS begins; CBS will not achieve its goal without engaging the relevant stakeholder – the community. These communities, according to West (2017:238), are the organised poor, working class and other marginalised groups. Sex workers are part of a community and CBS seeks to help these communities engage their everyday realities.

2.4.6.2 Criticality

"Criticality" deals with a systematic and structured way of analysing all aspects of life (West 2017:239). The analysis is done by selecting a biblical text and drawing out critical questions from that text, for instance, in relation to the life of sex workers and their communities. West (2015:239) asserts that, "CBS constructs a critical dialogue between a critical reading of life (the first text) and a critical reading of the Bible (the second text)". When CBS analyses the context of the poor and marginalised communities, its point of departure is the Bible. In 3.2.1 above, the study has engaged the first text which is a critical reading of life by examining what is happening in the lives of the women in Marabastad.

2.4.6.3 Collaboration

For West (2017:239), CBS is located within the collective work of biblical interpretation among organised communities of the poor, working class and the marginalised. The latter groups collaborate with organic intellectuals to deliberate on the daily struggles experienced by the groups.

Collaboration is what Black Theology has sought to do, that is, to advocate for the Jesus who is on the side of the poor and the oppressed together with the communities (Buffel 2015:352). Reading the selected text with sex workers is at the heart of this thesis. It is therefore a collaboration between the researcher and the community.

2.4.6.4 Change

As mentioned earlier, CBS advocates for transformation (West 2017:240). The transformation takes place between the society, the self, and the church. It is not forced. It takes place through an engagement with the text. West (2017:240) argues that the change that CBS promotes is not about understanding the Bible better, but about reading the Bible for change.

The context of the women from Marabastad is the face of the struggle. West (2017:241) emphasises that struggle is "a key socio theological concept". The struggle reminds the sex workers that they need to survive—even if it means selling their bodies or working under unfavourable conditions as domestic workers (further details in Chapter 4). Engaging the Bible for them would need the persistence of Jacob who says, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Gen 32:24 NIV). West (2017:240) affirms that the key to understanding change is the recognition that personal relationships are rooted in socio-economic systems.

2.4.6.5 Context

In engaging the praxis matrix, the question that was posed by Kritzinger and Saayman (2017:5) is pertinent here: "How do the communities of mission understand their context: social, economic, political and cultural factors that influence where we live or work"? West (2017:241) ascertains that CBS offers resources to analyse the economic, cultural, political, and religious layers of the context.

2.4.6.6 Contestation

Thus far, the discussion has shown that the interpretation of the Bible is contested. Through engagement with liberation theologies, Western theologies and Reformed theologies, one sees that the Bible is a subject of contestation especially due its rootedness in South African Black Theology and South African womanist/feminist/*bosadi* theologies. According to West (2017:242), CBS as a model identifies with the struggle, acknowledges that there are theologies or biblical voices that bring life and theologies or biblical voices that bring death. Although the contestation may be there, West (2017:242) appreciates only the theologies or biblical voices that bring life, noting that the Bible itself is a site of struggle – life-giving as well as bringing death. What follows is how the interpretation of tradition plays a role in the entire ongoing praxis.

2.5 INTERPRETING TRADITION

The dimension of interpreting tradition is crucial in terms of determining how agents of mission interpret Scripture. Colonialism played a role in shaping biblical interpretation in developing countries, especially, in the Latin American context of class oppression and the North American and South African contexts of racism. The interpretation of the Bible was used to promote white supremacy. Ukpong (1999:313) argues that the methods of biblical interpretation are traced back to the time of Origen of Alexandria when the interpretive tradition was allegorical and uncritical. Although that tradition laid a foundation, it was replaced by the historical critical method in the 17th century, which was followed by the literary approaches in the 20th century (Ukpong 1999:313). These methods formed the foundation for the interpretation of the Bible in Africa.

However, the emerging theologies of liberation sought to challenge the methods developed in the West by interpreting the Bible in relation to the context of the poor, the marginalised and the oppressed. Through the postcolonial reading of the Bible, the colonial method of reading the Bible was exposed and problematized. Postcolonial criticism is a biblical criticism that addresses the complexities produced by historical and discursive colonialism (Punt 2010:4). Therefore, as an interpretive tradition, a postcolonial reading of the Bible is mostly suited to expose the reading of the Bible that is oppressive, instead of liberative to sex workers. The whole purpose of reading the text of Luke 7:36-50 is to create an encounter between biblical texts and a particular context—of sex workers. The starting point of the latter is a missional hermeneutic. The research argues that

sex work is a structural sin and therefore cannot be defined based on ethics and morals without the analysis of what leads women to engage in the practice.

2.6 DISCERNMENT FOR ACTION: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE BIBLE

2.6.1 A missional hermeneutic

The contested definition of sin differs from context to context. Reinhold Niebuhr, a Protestant theologian from the United States of America, notes that, according to a Christian doctrine, a human being is never to be held responsible for sin (Wiley 2002:10). The emphasis that sin is inevitable, and its fate lies in its inability to be resisted or avoided, offended the moralists and the rationalists (Wiley 2002). In building, his argument, Niebuhr, engages the theology of Paul especially in Romans 1:20-21, which states: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that they are without excuse…" (NIV). In other words, through discernment, even the things that God did but were not seen with the naked eyes, could be seen with the spiritual eyes. People can therefore not claim ignorance. Paul further states that, "sin entered the world through one person and death through sin" (Rom 5:12, NIV). Based on these two verses, it seems that Paul supported the view that sin is inevitable. However, that does not take away the responsibility from a human being not to sin. In my understanding of Paul, sin implies the knowledge of good and evil. Although it can be inevitable, God still manifests God through human conscience and that is the reason St. Paul argues *"that they are without excuse"* (Romans 1:20-21).

In analysing the theology of Paul, Niebuhr further notes that Augustine affirms the statements of Paul by saying that although the creation of the human nature was without fault, human beings inherited corruption— they inherited sin from Adam (Wiley 2002). Augustine asserts that while human beings inherited sin, they still possess the good qualities of God, and they are still responsible for their actions (Wiley 2002). This statement by Augustine may seem like a contradiction—he accepts that the nature of human beings is fallible but does not exempt them from taking responsibility. On the concept of free will, he emphasised that the idea neither supports nor includes free will to do well. Augustine's point implies that human beings are not able to do

the will of God. Therefore, they would have to be liberated from free will to be able to do God's work and will.

Augustine admits that freedom can easily be manipulated. According to Niebuhr, John Calvin agrees with Augustine on the concept of free will only if the freedom does not take away the responsibility of human beings. Therefore, both Augustine and Calvin maintain that in the Pauline tradition, "the will is free in the sense that a human being is responsible for their own sin and is not free in the sense that a human being out of their own will can do nothing but evil" (Wiley 2002). The latter is the reason Augustine insists on the liberation of human beings from their own strength. In addition, both Augustine and Calvin agree that "free will is denied to the point of offering human beings an excuse for their sin" (Wiley 2002).

Paul opines that the complexity of free will, comes from the fact that human beings are prone to sin; it is almost impossible not to sin (Wiley 2002). Paul meant that since sin came through the original human being, it passed upon all men [women] and therefore death was upon us all (Rom 5:12). Niebuhr calls it "an inherited corruption" (Wiley 2002). Hence, according to Niebuhr and Paul, sin is inevitable. They both interpret and define sin from the context of the original sin in the Garden of Eden. It was in the garden that a serpent was able to convince a human being that God does not want them (her and her husband) to eat the forbidden fruit. The serpent let Adam believe that God is jealous of him and that eating the fruit would open his eyes. He would be like God in that he would have knowledge like "God, of good and evil" (Wiley 2002). However, defining sin from a different context such as that of poverty will require more than the concept of free will. Do sex workers have a free will? Is there an option besides offering oneself for money in a context of economic hardship?

Compared to Reformed theology, Latin American liberation theology dismisses Western theology of seeing and defining sin as an individual deed. Gustavo Gutierrez in his reflection on the criticism of individual sin defines sin as a social construct, which defeats the ends of justice (Nelson 2009:84). Gutierrez, a liberation theologian from Latin America, argues that as opposed to the notion of sin as the offence of an individual against God, sin is structural and systemic. The white European and Anglo-American people base their argument on the system of oppression that they created (Nelson 2009:84-85). Therefore, what was at play was the issue of power against the powerless—the oppressor against the oppressed. Gutierrez compares his view of sin to that of Karl

Marx. Although they agree that within society, issues of power are at play, their views of how sin is structured are slightly different. According to Marx, sin is when the oppressed (read: the powerless) is disobedient to the oppressor (read: the master) and does not follow the rules on which the society is structured, that is, the poor should remain poor while the rich should become richer (Nelson 2009:86). Like Marx, Gutierrez maintains that sin is a construct by "the powerful over the powerless" (Nelson 2009:86). The concept of sin is a construct that is meant to marginalise the poor—to disempower the most vulnerable in the society as in the dehumanisation of black people by white people or the violation of black female bodies that persists to this day. Defining sin as the responsibility of an individual (as Niebuhr has done) was constructed in a way that it did not deal with the system of oppression, but it dealt with an individual. The systems of oppression and racism taught the oppressed to read the Bible from the perspective of wrong and right. It did not teach the oppressed to analyse the Bible critically—to question the Bible.

Gutierrez (2009:84) however, views sin as political and social. It is not only the act of an individual against God, but also an act of injustice by an oppressive system. Therefore, the absence of justice is the cause of the poverty, injustice and oppression experienced by the marginalised. However, Gutierrez (2009:88) does not rule out the fact that there is also a structure that was developed, leading to the situation in which the oppressed find themselves.

Gutierrez also does not deny the personal aspect of sin. Behind the action that is labelled as sin, an individual is responsible and willingly rejects God and neighbour (Nelson 2009:88). The different arguments leading to the definition of sin seem to be contextual. Reformed theology views sin from the perspective of the individual while the Latin American liberation theologians view sin from a structural perspective. Scholars have explored the definition of sin based on the context, but also based on how individuals respond to sin; yet all the voices we have heard so far are male. The pertinent question that can be asked at this stage is: what is or may be the response of feminists or womanist liberation theologians and/or biblical scholars to the notion of sin?

2.6.2 The feminist and the womanist reading of the Bible

The feminist movement began to challenge the prejudices that exist against women such as sexism. This section illustrates how the feminist scholars read the Bible to challenge patriarchy. The second part of the section will comprise the womanist theology to exemplify how African American

womanists read the Bible considering the experiences of black women. The last part of the section will be a dialogue between the two theologies on their definition of sin.

Feminist scholarship played a role in soliciting that men and women are equal, are to be treated equally and to get equal opportunities (Joosed 2014). Although there are women such as Josephine Ahikire (2014) who feel strongly about the feminist movement and its agenda, the movement has received a lot of criticism from both North America and Pan-African circles. Gerald West (2008) however argues that it is not about who interprets the Bible, it is about how the Bible is interpreted that matters. According to West (2008), the text and the African context need to go hand in hand. West (2008) alludes to the fact that how the reader moves from text to context, carries authentication when engaging with ordinary readers of the Bible in the church and the community. Womanist theology without being in dispute with West's sentiments, emphasizes the fact that theology should problematize the issues facing black women such as race, class and gender including sex, sexuality, sexism, and sexual exploitation (Townes 2003:159). The birth of womanist theology was influenced by the shortcomings of Black Theology and Feminist Theology failing to address issues regarding the oppression of black women (Townes 2003:160). For instance, Black Theology did not address matters pertaining to sexism and classism while Feminist Theology did not address racism (Townes 2003:160). The failure to address the preceding matters only perpetuated the oppression of black women leaving them vulnerable to the systems of colonization and apartheid in South Africa. In addition, womanist theology has added homophobia as a form of oppression that needs to be seen as a theological problem (Townes 2003:165). As a form of a solution, Townes (2003) calls for the black church to start analyzing both consciously and unconsciously, the messages of oppression that they preach from the pulpit. Upon doing the latter, they need to start infusing the liturgy with the proclamation of unity, reconciliation, and justice (cf. The Belhar Confession). Although the two theologies mentioned above have done and continue to do so much in unpacking the perpetual oppression of women whether white or black, there are still shortcomings. The women who are the research focus of the current study, are not academics. They are what West calls 'ordinary readers of the Bible' (1993:11). West was not using the term as a form of condescending, but he wanted to bring awareness to scholars that there are non-academic Bible readers, and they also need to be accommodated. In so saying, the theological jargon will not assist us to reach the intended goal, which is, reading the Bible with ordinary readers for their liberation. The language used for Feminist and Womanist Theologies will not be

understood at Marabastad, therefore it will defeat the purpose. As a result, a theology such the *bosadi* approach to biblical interpretation will resonate better (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:747). Firstly, because of the language used – *bosadi* is a Sepedi term meaning *womanhood* (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:746). When one speaks of womanhood it does not divide. It is an inclusive term – women in academia, women from church and women from the marginalized societies including sex workers. Secondly, the *bosadi* approach was conceptualized by someone who is familiar with the South African context of apartheid and colonialism. Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (2005) is aware of how the Bible was used as an instrument of oppression to black men and women. Consequently, the *bosadi* approach is aware that the relevance of the African Bible interpretation is the one that deals with the harsh realities on the ground (Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele 2005:742)). Although Masenya Ngwana' Mphahlele (2005) acknowledged that her counterparts from the Feminist and Womanist Theology do not supporting racism, classism and sexism; nonetheless it comes as a shortfall that issues of sexuality are not addressed as a theological problem. Could it be that they also view sexuality as a 'sin' that should be avoided in the theological discourses? How would these aforementioned theological schools of thought define sin in line of their scholarship?

2.6.2.1 The response of the Feminist Theology vis-a-vis Womanist Theology on sin

In Genesis 1:31, after God created everything, the Priestly editor notes that he saw that it was good. According to Reeves and Madueme (2014:191), Moses meant that within what God created, the good meant the absence of sin, corruption, benevolence, and death. Adam was instructed by God not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). The instruction from Genesis was the first instance wherein God introduced death because of transgression. What is now referred to as the 'original sin', it is claimed, began with Adam (Reeves & Madueme 2014:199). According to the narrative in Genesis 3, Adam justified himself to God saying, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12, NRSV). Derek R. Nelson argues that the concept of sin has contributed to the perpetual oppression of women (2009:115). Nelson mentions two examples. The first is that the bodies of women were seen as being closer to nature and therefore more sinful. The second example is that Eve has been blamed for the effects of the 'fall' (Nelson 2009:115).

Feminist theologians such as Mary Potter Engel and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza however, do not recognise sin as stemming from individuals but rather, as structural. Engel (2009:117) identifies two ways of avoiding a view of sin as an individual act, that is, by viewing sin as both structural and relational. Thus, Engel's definition of sin places sin and evil together because in her view, where there is sin, there is evil (Engel 2009:117). This means that evil is socially constructed, and sin is an act that is created by 'responsible individuals' to reinforce structures of oppression (Engel 2009:117). By structures, Engel refers to social powers such as patriarchy over which an individual is not directly responsible. Although sin and evil are not synonymous, they reinforce each other. In her view, evil has two sides, that is, lament and blame (Engel 2009:117). Thus, Engel challenges the notion of the original sin, which blames Eve for accepting the forbidden fruit and refers to her as the instigator of sin. Engel says Eve was a victim and evil was done to her. Eve experienced violence and oppression (Engel 2009:118). In placing emphasis on Eve's experience of oppression, Engel (2009:118) creates the awareness that "the sins of women are at least talked about differently and may be different altogether from the sins of men".

In relation to the present study, my observation is that female sex workers are viewed with shame and disgust more than men who sell or buy. As a solution, Engel (2009:118) suggests that, "evil and sin though inseparable are to be stressed differently in varying contexts". Schüssler Fiorenza shares more or less Engel's sentiments but from a different angle, as is she also of the view that although sin may be of individual nature, it is more structural than individualistic. Although Schüssler Fiorenza has not written explicitly about sin from the New Testament perspective, she unearths the challenges of *kyriarchy* and androcentrism. As a solution, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests the practice of *ekklesia* that enables people to live in a society where all members are equal and have equal rights.

Feminist scholars have always been vocal about women's issues in the West and their voices have not gone unheard. The voices were however not enough, according to the women from the developing countries. I use the term 'developing countries' on purpose. According to Aram Ziai in his essay, "Postcolonial perspectives on development", the concept of developing countries entails a process of economic growth, industrialisation, social differentiation, mental change, and democratisation (2012:3). Developing countries include African, Asian, Latin American and the

Caribbean countries. All these experienced colonisation and different forms of racism, classism and sexism as well as economic and political oppression.

Black women experienced challenges from the colonies that are different from those of their white counterparts, for instance, in terms of the three forms of oppression—racism, sexism and classism. Jacquelyn Grant has lamented that the cries of women of colour are often ignored, not only by white feminist scholars, but also by liberation theologians (Grant 1995). As a solution, Alice Walker coined the term 'womanist' while Delores Williams is known for her vocalisation of womanist theology.[45] Womanist theology addresses the challenges of black women especially in North America; but it also opens a space for dialogue with other theologies such as black liberation theology and feminist theology. Womanist theology, through its proponents, Delores Williams and Jacquelyn Grant, saw to it that the cries of black women are communicated and heard.

In view of South Africa's history (of racism and apartheid), female biblical scholars in South Africa refused to be spectators. For example, scholars such as Christina Landman and Madipoane Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) took a stand in the discussions of challenges faced by women especially that of gender oppression. More broadly, they also challenged the status quo. In her article, "African womanist hermeneutics: a suppressed voice from South Africa speaks", Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (1995:149) affirms the strength of black women, noting that "in the midst of all socioeconomic conditions they survive and amidst pervasive oppression caused by *kyriarchal* structures they are not crushed". She challenges the norm by demonstrating that male voices are dominant both in the society and in the church structures. Like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) also uses the term *kyriarchy* to show the different dynamics at play. As a system, *kyriarchy* promotes structures that are unjust, racist, sexist and classist (Masenya 1995:150). The *kyriarchal* system, in many ways, has silenced the voices of women because it has stood in the way of their education, social welfare and human rights.

In introducing the term *bosadi*, Masenya acknowledges the achievements of feminist and womanist theology. However, she employs the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach to relate to the challenges that black South African women faced during and after the apartheid era. Without

[45] See www.religion-online.org/article/womanist-theology-black-womens-voices/. Accessed on 2018/09/07.

causing further division between whites and blacks, *bosadi* hermeneutics empowers women who faced and fought against social, political, and economic struggles (Masenya 1995:152).

The structure created by apartheid became an obstacle to the progress of black women. To date, the unemployment rate remains high. Sometimes, sex work is not a choice but the only option open to the women because of the system. The church therefore needs to develop a new praxis as well as a new hermeneutic that will be liberative to sex workers. The interpretation of Scripture should talk to their context and affirm their *bosadi(ness).* Masenya (1995:153) avers that hermeneutics that will consider the lived experiences of black women, would have to be accountable to their African culture and their multifaceted layers of oppression. The rereading of the Scripture would have to be non-sexist and non-racist, and the church needs to get to a point where it sees Christ on the side of sex workers.

2.6.3 A missional ecclesiology: Christ and sex workers

In paragraph 1.5.5 above, the question that emerged was how far are liberation theologies willing to see Christ on the side of sex workers? Althaus-Reid (1999:39) uses the concept of "indecent theology" in a positive way to challenge what is considered 'decent'. Indecent theology is meant to uncover, unmask, and unclothe the false hermeneutics especially about women's sexuality (Althaus-Reid 1999:39). When the women under the tree at Bosman Street, Pretoria, think about their children and ask for a domestic job, they also carry their sexuality with them. Noteworthy though, is the fact that the women also carry Christ. During the second Bible Study meeting with these women, *Sophy[46] asked the researcher to pray before the session could start. When asked why she made the request, she answered that everything needed to start and end with Christ.

This thinking agrees with Althaus-Reid (1999:40) who argues that Christ is the starting point for a Christology done from the perspective of women's bodies. Missional ecclesiology might be a foreign concept to the sex workers from Marabastad, but these women are the church. In his article, "The call for African missional consciousness through renewed mission praxis in URCSA", Eugene Baron states that the church as an agent of mission should not lose its credibility but should be seen through the salvific events of Jesus Christ (2019:10). By credibility, Baron (2019:11) refers

[46] Sophy is a pseudonym for one of the participants in the focus group. On the consent form, the participants had asked that their real names be not used.

to David Bosch's six Christological salvific events, specifically, that of Jesus' incarnation. Baron's argument is that the church relates to the Jesus who embodied humanness. Therefore, the church's hermeneutic should not be about salvation only. It must also include the Christ who has compassion for the marginalised, the poor and the oppressed. Sex workers are also included in these categories of those on the margins. Therefore, Baron (2019:11) criticises the church that does not side with the "victims".

Secondly, "the church should embody the cross through self-emptying and humble service" (Baron 2019:11). Missiologically, the cross symbolizes an act of forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and love. Bosch (1991:515) defines the mission of the cross as that which identifies with the weak and those who are at loss. The cross also symbolises suffering, discrimination, marginalisation, violence, and oppression.

The resurrection of Christ from the dead, which is the third credibility of the salvific events of Christ, symbolises hope, newness, and rebirth. The resurrection symbolises victory over the cross (2019:11). The life, death and resurrection of Christ touched issues on the ground. The marginalised can relate to the suffering of Christ because they also experience rejection and stigma.

The fourth Christological salvific event is the ascension of Jesus Christ. The ascension symbolises God's reign over the kingdom, the church, and the society (Baron 2019:11). Thus, "the church should be committed to justice and peace in the social realm" (Baron 2019:11). The latter statement is problematic though. When Baron uses the word "should", he is tasking the church, giving it an obligation, calling on the church on duty to recognise what it is supposed to be doing and has not done yet, that is, to hear the needs of the marginalised, including those of sex workers.

The fifth salvific event is Pentecost. It calls on the church to proclaim God without borders—from the rich to the poorest. The proclamation will reach the marginalised and those at the centre of the economy.

The last event is *Parousia.* Parousia depicts mission that is, the future of the risen Christ for the nations (Baron 2019:12). It is a sign of hope that the coming of God will bring everlasting justice and peace on earth.

The theoretical framework above is meant to challenge the church and probe questions relating to its obligation towards sex workers. Questions such as how far the church has gone in embracing

mission as part of its agenda, are pertinent. Mission in this context, would be the church as a community of witness to and participation in God's future—here and now (Niemandt 2012:9). When proclaiming Christ to sex workers, people who are marginalised, stigmatised, and judged, words such as sin, alienation, judgement, conversion, forgiveness do not have an impact. The text that has been chosen for this thesis is Luke 7:36-50 in which the unnamed woman was brought to Jesus. Despite the judgement, she continued to serve Jesus. Although there was an outcry against this woman, Jesus accepted her. The following section is a critical analysis of the story of that woman, who anointed Jesus' feet in the Gospel of Luke.

2.6.4 A missional ecclesiology: theological reading of Luke 7:36-50

2.6.4.1 The unnamed woman in Luke 7: 36-50: What was her "sin"?

The unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-50 has stirred much debate in biblical scholarship. The disagreement is around the question of what this sin was, that Luke mentioned. According to Luise Schottroff, the sin mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 7:36-40 was prostitution [sex work] (Schottroff 1993:138). Schottroff (1993:145) uses the term "prostitute" in her exegesis of Luke 7 to highlight two challenges that emanate from the text—firstly, the sexism that emerges out of the Christian tradition and, secondly, the way the Pharisees looked down on the Jewish tradition.

According to Schottroff (1993:138), the Christian tradition views prostitution [sex work] as a moral rather than a social problem. However, it cannot be either/or because it is as much a moral as it is a social problem. Schottroff's idea adds to the many different arguments within biblical scholarship. For instance, C.H. Cosgrove goes as far as analysing the meaning of the unbound hair, weeping, the kissing of Jesus' feet and the pouring of ointment over him, in the context of the Mediterranean and Greco-Roman cultures (2005:678). According to Cosgrove (2005:691), in the Mediterranean world, the unbinding of hair could be (but did not include a sign of being unmarried) a sign of mourning, a sign of someone expressing distress, a sign of sorcery or an indication that someone is carrying demons. Following his analysis of the Mediterranean world, Cosgrove (2005:691) argues that there is nothing that was "sexually provocative, indecent or even a bridge of etiquette" in the woman's action. Rather, the woman's unbinding of her hair was a sign of grief. She was soliciting help or mercy from Jesus (2005:690). Jesus interpreted the actions of the woman

as a sign of hospitality and pronounced forgiveness for this unnamed woman because "she loved much" (Luke 7:47).

John J. Kilgallen holds a different view of the notion of forgiveness in this story. According to him, the woman was already forgiven when she entered Simon's house (1998:114). His argument is that the story of Luke 7 is a continuation of the previous discussion, and the forgiveness of sins was meant for the Pharisees and the legal experts, who had refused to adhere to God's plan through Jesus, that is, with their lack of faith and refusal to be baptised (1998:114-115).

Although the story starts with Simon inviting Jesus to come and eat with him, it quickly turns the attention to the unnamed woman and her gestures. Kilgallen (1998:111) remarks that although she was a silent character, Jesus' pronouncement at the end of the story, makes her central. For Schottroff, the behaviour of the Pharisee could be seen as an act of anti-Judaism in the context of the book, because of the lack of forgiveness and the attitude of self-righteousness (Schottroff 1993:145-146). However, Jesus accepted and forgave her while teaching the Pharisee the importance of forgiveness. In the context of Marabastad, therefore, what would 'forgiveness' mean to a woman who is experiencing the social problem of being pushed into sex work, a woman who is in the business because she is a single parent and unemployed? What is more remarkable about the Lukan text is that the woman does not ask for forgiveness. It is 'assumed' that she has repented because of her gestures (Schottroff 1993:147).

2.7 REFLEXIVITY

Kritzinger (2008:772) reflects on the concept of reflexivity by asking a question: how does one integrate the whole matrix praxis in a life of faith? Has any learning and growth taken place in this interfaith encounter? Is one learning from one's mistakes? Reflexivity is the process of reflecting on one's behaviour, faith, and beliefs. It is a process that gives sex workers an opportunity to ask questions such as who they are in the society. Regardless of their role as sex workers, mothers, or sisters, they remain daughters. Reflexivity gives them a chance, after thinking about their lives, to learn from their mistakes. Reflexivity is a journey that requires honesty. According to Kritzinger (2011:179), it requires one to think deeply about whether they were able to integrate the praxis matrix, for instance, the ability to participate in both theory and practice, action and faith, prayer, and planning.

2.8 SPIRITUALITY AND SEX WORK

Kritzinger and Saayman (2011:189) define spirituality as the crux of the praxis matrix, the heart of mission praxis. Spirituality is the experience and understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit that motivates and guides the church in her participation in God's mission and it differs from context to context (Kritzinger & Saayman 2011:189). In the context of sex workers, therefore, spirituality is defined from a place of stigma and being judged because of the nature of their profession. Communities are built in such a way that they define society based on what is considered 'normal' (Althaus-Reid 2006:81). Althaus-Reid argues that 'normalcy' is inspired by the binary thinking, for instance, if a person is not a saint, then, he or she is a sinner; if not decent then she or he is indecent (2006:81). The binary thinking creates a space for inhumanity, labelling, demonising, shame, and silencing (2006:81). It is not easy to control 'normalisation', as it is attached to the body, a platform where the performance of human sexuality takes place.

A change of discourse and of the landscape is the solution that produces a better outcome. For a long time, from the ear of the colonial to the apartheid system, the interpretation of Scripture was done from the ivory tower, silencing the voices of the poor and the marginalised. Althaus-Reid (2006:83) calls on scholars to move beyond binary thinking as an act of resistance and of liberation to open spaces for becoming.

Vuyani Vellem considers spirituality from a different dimension—African religiosity (2014:1). Vellem (2014:1) argues that African spirituality "does not require inclusion in Western frameworks but equal recognition as a value system amongst others". With a complicated history of apartheid, it is important that we define spirituality from a liberative point of view. However, we need to analyse critically and, if possible, remove the labelling of sinfulness/saint and indecent/decent around sex work.

2.9 CONCLUSION

The current chapter engaged with three issues, the first being the ecclesial scrutiny. It reflected on the obligation of the church towards sex workers in Marabastad. Although the church extends its services through the FBOs, it is not doing enough to advance the mission of God in that space.

Secondly, the chapter engaged with different scholars on the interpretation of Scripture especially in reference to the definition of sin. The argument in this thesis is that sex workers cannot be judged based on structural sin. As argued earlier in the chapter, the unjust system of racism, sexism and classism created minimal or no opportunities for black people, especially black women. Most sex workers have taken up the profession to make ends meet and support their immediate families.

The third which is the last premise of the chapter is that the church, through the Belhar missional ecclesiology, has an opportunity to liberate sex workers from systemic sin. Missional praxis, in the form of matrix praxis, offers liberative self-introspection. It also gives the marginalised a space to interpret the Bible in a way that brings hope to their harsh realities.

The next chapter is an analysis of the URCSA. Chapter 3 sought to set the stage by analysing texts that are used by the URCSA. The texts on which the church doctrine is based, and which follow the Reformed tradition comprise of the Bible, the Church Order and the Belhar Confession. The analysis of these texts will give a picture of the basis for the church's interpretation of Scripture. In addition, the role of apartheid in the formation of the URCSA will be examined.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCH, BIBLE AND SEX WORKERS: A CASE FOR URCSA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present a theological understanding of the Reformed tradition's view of the Bible regarding sex work(ers). The chapter seeks to answer the question: what is the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and what kind of Bible reading informs such a praxis? The main aim, therefore, is to study and outline the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and the kind of hermeneutical lens that has informed such a praxis. In addition, the chapter will engage the five *solas* and how they were used to undermine the local context of the black people.

To achieve the aim of this chapter, I will first reflect on the formation of the URCSA and on how that background informs its theological understanding of the concept of sin in general, and of sex work. Given the history of the URCSA's formation, which is deeply entrenched in the apartheid history, I argue that the intersectional nature of oppression manifests itself violently on the bodies of women. A woman's body is a complex mix of commodity and agent in the face of structural sin and injustice; hence, the need to reread the Bible and revisit the doctrine of the URCSA. As has already been noted, the notion of sex work is always caught between legal and moral arguments of whether the practice is ethically right or wrong. Therefore, this practice will be analysed by critically considering the definition of sin from different perspectives. The chapter will also investigate how the understanding of sin affects the lives of sex workers.

3.2 THE BIRTH OF THE URCSA

This section presents the background of the URCSA to provide a historical context regarding its identity, mission praxis and the hermeneutical principles underlying its attitude and praxis towards sex workers in the City of Tshwane. I will reflect on two critical issues namely, the URCSA as a missionary product of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) and the URCSA as a product of the struggle against apartheid.

3.2.1 URCSA as a missionary product of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa

3.2.1.1 The history and birth of the DRC

The first European settlers to arrive in South Africa were the Portuguese in 1488. However, in 1652, the Dutch Calvinists who settled in South Africa introduced the Reformed tradition and the Dutch East Indian Company or the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC)* and established a fort at Table Bay (Balia 1989:10). They did not colonise the area extensively but used the stop for ships and for hungry sailors so that they could get food and water. Shortly after that, they made a permanent settlement in the Cape and established the Dutch Reformed Church *(Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk)* (NGK) in the 17th century.[47] The DRC was known as the largest and original Afrikaans denomination at the time. It included its sister churches, the *Calvyns Protestantse Kerk,* which split from the DRC in 1859 and the *Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) which was established in 1853 (Du Toit 1984:617-632).

During the 19th century, the Reformed church was established along racial lines. The DRC formed what came to be known as the three 'daughter' churches namely the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendeling Kerk,* (for the coloureds), which was established in 1881, *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika,* (for the black people), which was founded in 1859[48] and the Indian Reformed Church in 1947. These churches were known in Afrikaans as *"Zendingkerk*" or "mission congregations" (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:101). The term "mission" meant that the three churches had no right to self-govern and were largely dependent on the DRC for sustenance. A culture of paternalism and dependency grew out of this mission approach.

The DRC was a staunch supporter of the system of apartheid from its inception until 1986. It developed a theology of apartheid to justify its belief. As a result, the DRC lost its membership in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982 in Ottawa.[49] It was only in 1986 in a document called *"Kerk en Samelewing"* that the DRC reviewed its policies and for the first time, pronounced "racialism as sin" (van der Merwe 2013:5).

[47] See Dutch Reformed Church on http://www.britannica.com. Accessed on 2019/01/18.
[48] See Dutch Reformed Church in Africa on http://www.britannica.com. Accessed on 2020/07/03.
[49] Ibid. See further details later in this chapter.

3.2.1.2 The mission of the DRC and birth of three daughter churches

Since the establishment of the URCSA, it has celebrated missional understanding by embracing diversity and living to its missional calling. On the journey to discover its missional calling, the URCSA revealed that it did not support the system of apartheid. The position of the URCSA expressed through the Belhar Confession, made a mark throughout the world. However, change did not happen immediately at the dawn of democracy within the URCSA family. The last 26 years of the URCSA's establishment, has not successfully undone the impact of the DRC especially, on black people.

This section therefore seeks to unpack the mission of the DRC and the birth of what came to be referred to as its daughter churches, DRCA, DRMC and the RCA (Baron 2019:3). The reason behind the status of these churches is that the DRC perceived itself to be the mother of the churches of the majority black affiliation which had an inferior status (Baron 2019:3). The use of the term mother signified that the black churches were strictly under the DRC's guardianship and could never be independent, as they were not mature enough (Baron 2019:4). Mission to the DRC meant that black people ought to be converted to Christianity and that all white people were already Christians. When the missionary work started, it did not matter that black people had their own religion. In other words, if they had their own spirituality, they had to discard it. They were under the control of the DRC (Baron 2019:4).

3.2.1.3 Extensive history of URCSA

As an offshoot of the DRC (see Chapter 1), the URCSA emerged in the context of oppression, inequality, and the injustice to black people. The theology of apartheid as practised by the DRC met with resistance from liberation theologies such as Black Theology. The latter sought to address the oppression experienced by black people and related to the struggles of black people from all corners of the earth. Womanist theologies form part of liberation theologies that addressed and still address oppression and patriarchy experienced by black women. Liberation theologies, therefore, differ from context to context as their underlying structures of oppression such as religious, racial, economic and political are immediately recognisable.

The origin of the URCSA can be traced to 1889 when the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established for black people. The church was also known as the *"Bantoekerk"* (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:102). In 1974, the General Synod of DRCA began to talk about church unity with the DRC,

the DRMC and the RCA (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:102). The DRMC and the RCA supported the idea of unification and in 1976, the RCA issued a statement: "The family of NG Churches should become one Reformed Church. Synod empowers the Synodical Committee to initiate discussions towards church union with other churches of the NG Family and that the church councils should be informed accordingly" (*Acta RCA* 1976:76-77 en 172). After several meetings that took place in the struggle against the apartheid regime, the Uniting Reformed Church was born on 14 April 1994. The church comprised the DRCA and the DRMC (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:102) with member churches in South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia that make up seven Regional Synods. The talks of unity between the URCSA and the DRC continue to date, and the unification has brought many benefits to the people especially, the integration of the different races. The Belhar Confession, which speaks boldly about reconciliation, unity, and justice, was introduced. The pertinent question is: Does the new dispensation of the URCSA imply that it has been able to deliver service to its people who are on the margins and are poverty-stricken? Has the URCSA been able to produce new hermeneutical lenses that enable readings that bring hope to communities that are in despair? What does Article 2 of the Belhar Confession, that is, "together serve God in this world; and together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder this unity," mean to the marginalised?

3.2.3 Hermeneutical principles underlying the mission of the DRC

3.2.3.1 Historical grammatical method embedded in the Sola Scriptura approach and how it undermined the role of context in mission work

In his article, "The role of the church in socio-economic transformation: Reformation as a transformation process," Leepo Modise acknowledges the 500 years of Reformation in 2017. It was in 1527 that Martin Luther protested the Roman Catholic Church (Modise 2018:2-3). The Reformed tradition is founded on the five *solas* namely *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone), *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *sola fide* (by faith alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *solus Christus* (through Christ alone).[50] According to Modise, the solas were the key principles of the Reformation (2018:3). In this chapter, the *sola Scriptura* will be a point of reference in understanding the interpretation of Scripture according to the Reformed tradition.

[50] See www.theopedia.com. Accessed on 2016/06/14. (Use sources from Reformed theologians)

It is of significance to note that the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* distinguishes the Reformed tradition from other traditions such as Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, or modern Evangelicalism (Mathison 2001:255). However, the focus here is not on the comparison of the different traditions. Mathison defines *sola Scriptura* according to the Reformed tradition and he breaks the subject into five characters. Firstly, the Holy Scripture is the sole source of normative revelation, which means it is perfection and is therefore sufficient (Mathison 2001:256). By perfection, Mathison sees the Holy Scripture as the perfect word of God that is complete, without error and infallible. Martin Luther explains that infallible does not mean "there is no falsehood" (Mckim 1998:54). However, Luther was not looking at the technicalities of Scripture but rather "the ability of the word to work righteousness in us" (Mckim & Rogers 1998:54). Mathison considers Wayne Gruden's definition helpful, which is that perfection means that Scripture "contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly" (Mathison 2001:257). The Scripture as the sole source of revelation would also mean it is sufficient. As much as the Holy Scripture is regarded as a source of revelation, perfect and infallible, it does not exist in a vacuum. Its sufficiency comes from the fact that it needs to be interpreted and preached in the church, for the church and by the church (Mathison 2001:259). Scripture is also said to have the final authority. Mathison (2001:260) acknowledges that even though there are other authorities, they are subordinate, and Scripture is the ultimate. It is the only one inspired and therefore the only final authoritative norm. Mathison also sees Scripture as inspired. He rightfully quotes 2 Timothy 3:16 to define inspiration: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God". Modise (2018:3) concurs with Mathison that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. However, the church, the Fathers and tradition are fallible, and all are measured against one infallible perfect standard, which is the Scripture (2001:261). The word infallible is the next characteristic of the Scripture that Mathison mentions. By that, he means that the Scripture is inspired by God and inherently infallible (2001:262). Infallible would mean the Scripture has no error.

The third element that Mathison mentions is that Scripture is to be interpreted in and by the church. This statement confirms that the Church, as a subordinate authority to the Scripture, is the pillar and ground of truth (2001:267). Mathison explains that the authority that Christ has given to the Church to teach and disciple, does not supersede the authority of Scripture. The Church is meant to interpret, teach, and proclaim the Word of God (2001:269). In that regard, Mathison highlights

three aspects of the authority of the Church that were mentioned by Francis Turretin. Firstly, the church in its teaching, should respect the articles of faith. Secondly, it should take responsibility in making constitutions and canons conducive to good order. Thirdly, it should have laws which will guide the church when it comes to matters relating to discipline (2001:270).

The fourth element is that "Scripture is to be interpreted according to the rule of faith" (Mathison 2001:273). Mathison highlights a few challenges that the interpretation of Scripture faced within the Reformed tradition including the challenge of hermeneutics. Every Christian, whether new or old, faces "the reality of multitudes of conflicting interpretations of Scripture" (2001:274). Since there were conflicting interpretations and not one way of interpreting the Old Testament, the sacraments or the book of Revelation, and the Church had to deal with schisms. What Mathison proposes as a solution is that the "apostolic gospel that served as the hermeneutical context and rule of faith must take its place in the hermeneutics today" (2001:275). The rule of faith that is expressed here is also known as the *regula fidei* in Latin, meaning the Scripture should have the ultimate authority. However, the reason for writing a thesis that is battling with the standard of hermeneutics is precisely because Scripture became vulnerable in the face of the hegemony of white supremacy. Therefore, hermeneutics cannot start with *sola Scriptura* without engaging with the margins. The margins were created by those who interpreted Scripture in a way that was oppressive to the black majority. Hermeneutics will have to start by decolonising the Scripture, followed by the de-patriarchalisation of the Scripture.

3.2.3.2 Understanding of sin in relation to the URCSA

It is acknowledged that Reformed theologians hold different views about sin which are influenced by their denominational backgrounds (Alston & Welker 2007:20). In the South African and the URCSA context, I consider the factors that influence our interpretation of Scriptures that relate to sin.

Currently, the practice of the URCSA regarding sin is that when a man impregnates a woman out of wedlock, the woman faces discipline. The discipline entails that she be cut off from her church duties for a certain period. The congregation regards her as a person who has fallen into sin *[o wetse sebeng]* or *[o bewa ka tlasa tao]* (it means to be put under church discipline). In most congregations that I am familiar with, the Church Council uses the eighth commandment, which

is “Thou shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14), to justify their disciplinary action. The question is whether that view and interpretation of Scripture justify the argument. Which underlying epistemology do we use to guide what we regard as our truth and how do we as a church understand and interpret the Scripture? What is the truth about sin and what informs the practice of discipline?

3.2.3.2.1 The legal documents of the URCSA

The URCSA as a church uses the Church Order as its constitution. The Church Order contains the church’s regulations and stipulations. It guides the church from the General Synod, the regional synods and the Presbyteries, down to the congregations. Together with the Church Order, the church is guided by confessions consisting of the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of the Synod of Dort and the Confession of Belhar (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:102). When it comes to discipline, Stipulation 68 is used, and it states as follows:

> When carrying out ecclesiastical supervision and discipline overseers should always bear in mind the spiritual nature of their task, and avoid the spirit of civil administration of justice. They should never see themselves as judges, but rather as parents, with sincere humility before God, whose task it is to bring back those who have strayed with tender love and concern, irrespective of the person.

This is further explained in Stipulation 69.1 as follows:

> Ecclesiastical supervision covers the entire life conduct of all members, while discipline involves punishable sins that go against the Word of God and the confession of faith.

Plaatjies van Huffel (2013:102) notes that:

> The Church Order of URCSA does not address every situation of the church. Nor does it presume to be exhaustive or to cover everything. Ordinarily, however, when something is not mentioned in the Church Order of URCSA the omission is deliberate and intentional.

Over the years, the congregations have been using the above-mentioned stipulation to mete out discipline to unmarried women who become pregnant. As mentioned by Plaatjies van Huffel, the Church Order does not address every situation – the stipulation mentions “sin” and leaves it to the congregation to interpret what sin is, who has sinned and how the church should deal with it.

The concept of sin is not addressed theologically in the Church Order. The danger of leaving it to the congregation is that its interpretation of what constitutes sin, is not situational. The congregation often does not consider the factors that surround the many pregnancies in the black

context, which is a context that still has an alarming rate of unemployment, poverty, gender-based violence and the marginalisation of vulnerable groups such as sex workers. The church's handling of sin does not seem to work, since more and more women continue to get pregnant outside of wedlock. Are we then avoiding the white elephant in the room? Although the Church Order does not specify gender, women have suffered the injustice of being judged and placed under discipline when they become pregnant outside of marriage. This thesis does not suggest in any way that the church should not discipline its erring members. As the Kairos document says, "the people look to the church, especially in the midst of our present crisis for moral guidance".[51] However, considering our past, one cannot ignore the role that the colonial system played in how Scripture was interpreted and is still being interpreted today. God was not introduced to black people as a loving God, but as a judgmental God. Therefore, it is crucial to decolonise the interpretation of Scripture. Nonetheless, before we address what is happening at present, we need to probe what happened in the past that brought the present predicament.

3.2.3.2.2 Sin as "*mea culpa"*

As mentioned in section 2.2, a pregnant woman outside of marriage is considered a 'sinner'. To start the conversation, Steve Biko alludes to the fact that sin has been treated by the church as *"mea culpa".* What Biko implied was that the interpretation of the Scripture does not address the context in which black people find themselves (Stubbs 2009:62). According to Biko, the church added to the insecurities of its black constituencies with its view of sin, which condemned the sinner and enforced feelings of guilt (Stubbs 2009:61). The sermons from the pulpits insinuated that black people were thieves, housebreakers, stabbers, and murderers as well as adulterers (Stubbs 2009:61). Biko challenged the church by pointing out that the aforementioned are only the results of some deeper issues such as poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, lack of schooling and labour migration, among others (Stubbs 2009:61). However, these root causes are never mentioned. Instead of considering these factors in the conversation, the missionaries were quick to associate black people with theft, laziness and sexual immorality while everything credible was associated with whiteness (2009:61). Such sermons and interpretation of Scripture do not liberate

[51] Kairos Document: A Challenge to Action 1985. Challenge to Action 5.6

its constituencies. An interpretation that does not seek transformation and renewal of the mind is not of God.

3.3 THE URCSA AS A PRODUCT OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID

3.3.1 Unpacking apartheid ideology

The apartheid regime was founded by the National Party or the *Herenigde Nasionale Party*. When South Africa went into the apartheid regime, it had already undergone the first two phases of what J.A. Loubser calls "three paradigmatic phases" that South Africa has been through with apartheid being the third phase (Loubser 1996:322). According to Loubser, the migration of the Dutch to South Africa in 1652 was the first phase, followed by the British rule from 1795 and the Afrikaner nationalism phase from 1924 (1996:322). The Afrikaner phase was symbolised by the Great Trek in 1836 (1996:322). The Great Trek was preceded by their victory over the Xhosa nation in 1835 and their endurance of the suffering from the British people.[52] Before 1835, the British emancipated slaves. Although, according to South African history, the Afrikaners did not have slaves, they resisted their emancipation.[53] The Afrikaner nation resisted the equality of races. For them, it was of significance to preserve Afrikaner nationalism and to do that, they enforced the concept of the "chosen people", as discussed in Chapter 1. In addition, they enforced the culture of separation, which marked the beginning of apartheid. The unique element about apartheid as an ideology is that Scripture was used to justify it. Among the many biblical texts that were used was "the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-8" (Farisani 2014:207). According to Farisani, the Afrikaners reckoned that it meant that it was the will of God that different races should be separated (2014:207). The ideology then developed into a system.

3.3.2 Apartheid and the formation of a black church

Apartheid as a system played a major role in destabilising South Africa, politically, socially, and economically. By destabilisation, I mean that the system was built in such a way that the black, coloured, and Asian people were deprived economically, socially and politically. Policies such as

[52] See Voortrekker. www.britannica.com Accessed on 2020/07/08.
[53] See History of slavery and early colonization in South Africa. www.sahistory.org.za. Accessed on 2020/07/08.

the Native Land Act of 1913, Group Areas Act that advocated the carrying of pass and inferior education for blacks, the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970[54] and many more, ensured continuous poverty, unfair labour practice, oppression, and injustice to the black majority.

These policies served as the foundation on which the black churches were built. The Dutch Reformed missionaries reported that the Khoikhoi attended their mission service for the first time in 1658.[55] The misconception of the missionaries was that black South Africans did not have religion. When the missionaries arrived in South Africa, black people did not believe in one Supreme Being who could be influenced by prayer on behalf of other human beings. As part of their religious acts, black people used to perform rituals to spiritual beings and ancestors. However, the arrival of missionaries in South Africa changed the face of religion and influenced the way black people viewed God and their culture. Black people in South Africa started losing their voice when English and Afrikaans took over their languages (Greenfield 2010:517). According to Boesak (1984:86), "It is Reformed Christians who have spent years of working out the details of apartheid, as a church policy and as a political policy". As stated in their policies, the Reformed Christians believed that it was God's will for the church to be separated based on colour and race (Boesak 1984:86).

The system of apartheid did not only oppress and suppress black people, but it also left them dislocated. The birth of Black Theology (as mentioned in Chapter 1) was partly to restore the dignity of black people; yet Black Theology is understood and accepted by the minority black elite. As Tshaka (2015:1) has rightfully noted, "It is a theology that is wrongly perceived as being political". Although the URCSA was established, the roots of the Reformed theology are still entrenched in its tradition. The existence of the Reformed tradition continues to be a reminder of the painful history of apartheid (Lephakga 2013:1). Although, the status quo may be a reminder of where we come from as the URCSA, the journey that the URCSA undertook to resist apartheid and what it stood for is commendable.

[54] See A history of Apartheid. www.sahistory.org.za Accessed on 2020/07/11.
[55] See https://photius.com. Accessed on 2017/11/02.

3.3.3 Movement of resistance towards the formation of the URCSA

This paragraph seeks to unpack the road that led to the formation of the URCSA. Meetings took place between the DRCA, the DRMC and the DRA. The first meeting was the Cottesloe in 1960 and was followed by the *"Broederkring"* in 1974 and the last one was the Belhar Confession in 1982.

3.3.3.1 Cottesloe Meeting

After the Sharpeville Massacre, the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiated the Cottesloe Meeting that was held on 7-14 December 1960. The meeting comprised delegates from eight-member churches of the WCC from South Africa. The meeting reflected on the aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre (Meiring 2013:29). The delegates were to reflect on the situation in South Africa specifically on the:

> current situation in South Africa, the Christian interpretation of the gospel in terms of the race relations, the interpretation of recent history from a Christian perspective; the impact of the state of emergency in South Africa and the Church's Witness in terms of justice, mission and ecumenical co-operation (Meiring 2013:31).

After Cottesloe, the DRC established a commission that would report to the synod of the DRC on the Cottesloe findings. The aim was to keep the conversation on race related matters alive in the synods of the DRC. The first report from the Commission was accepted by the General Synod of the DRC in 1966 and reviewed in 1969 (van der Merwe 2013:2). In 1970, the General Synod appointed a permanent Commission that would deal with race and ecumenical matters (van der Merwe 2013:2). In 1974, the General Synod approved a report from the Commission (van der Merwe 2013:2), which produced the document, *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture (Ras, Volk en Nasie).* The document confirmed the DRC's support of the National Party government. The policy of the DRC reflected extensively on its view of race relations in South Africa. It was rejected by the Protestant churches all over the world mainly because the DRC supported the government's policy of separation and the use of the Bible to justify it (van der Merwe 2013:3). As a result, the DRMC and the DRC established what was called "*die Belydende Kring",* also known as the *BK* (Kritzinger 2010:2). The task of the *BK* will be discussed in the next section.

Thus, both the DRMC and the DRC supported the apartheid system and offered a biblical justification for the policy of separation (van der Merwe 2013:2). The document was then presented to the Protestant churches across Europe, but it was denounced. When the delegates from the DRC took their last trip to Germany to meet with the representatives of the *Reformierte Bund*, the *Bund* declared in its report:

> We can therefore, only regard the *Nederduitsch Gereformeerde (NG)* Evert Beukes report of 1974 as a theological confirmation of the present political system in South Africa, in which the separation of races means in practice the dominion of the one and the discrimination, denial of rights and exploitation of the other.

The DRC was therefore suspended from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982. It was a wakeup call for the DRC and it forced the church to go back to the drawing board. Subsequently, the policy was reviewed, and a new document was drawn called "Church and Society" *(Kerk en Samelewing).* The document was released in 1986 (Strauss 2018:3) and it changed the face of the DRC.

3.3.3.2 Die Belydende Kring – BK

In 1974, ministers from across South Africa met in Bloemfontein and formed a Black Renaissance Convention (Kritzinger 2010:4). Out of that meeting came the formation of the *Broederkring van NG Kerk* (BK) [Circle of Brothers]. According to Kritzinger (2010:3), the birth of the BK came because of the exclusion of the Dutch Reformed Church ministers and some homelands leaders at the Black Renaissance Convention. The reason for their exclusion as argued by Kritzinger (2010) is that the attendees of the Convention perceived all the members of the Dutch Reformed Churches as the representatives of apartheid. After a long struggle and much debate, they were allowed to participate in the convention. The incident made the ministers from the DRCA and the DRMC realise the need to unite against social injustice. The idea of BK was then born. The aims of the BK were summed up in three words namely unity, reconciliation, and justice. In 1983, the name changed to *Belydende Kring* to include women (Kritzinger 2010:3). Kritzinger illustrates the significant role that the *BK* played in the formulation of the Belhar Confession. According to him, it was at the 1979 Annual *BK* Conference that a theological declaration was drafted. Rev Chris Loff encouraged participants at the meeting, which consisted of ministers from the DRCA, the DRMC and the RCA and the declaration was named the *BK* Declaration. Then, in 1983, the Belhar

Confession was drafted. The wording of the Belhar Confession echoed that of the *BK* Declaration as it had similar theological content as the Belhar Confession (1986).

3.3.3.3 Kerk en Samelewing

Clearly, 1982 was a year of awakening for the DRC. As mentioned earlier, it was in 1982 that the DRC lost its membership of the World Council of Churches. Although it looked like a bad omen for the DRC, one of its ministers, Dr P. Rossouw stated that Ottawa was not the end but the beginning (van der Merwe 2013:4). The DRC had to review its policies and issue a document called *"Kerk en Samelewing"* or Church and Society. For the first time, the DRC declared apartheid a sin. The first document of the *Kerk en Samelewing* was approved in 1986 (van der Merwe 2013: 5-6). The document was the first to oppose the *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* that was released in 1974. In the new policy document, the following (as recorded in the document of *Kerk en Samelewing*) were the amendments:

> The Scriptures do not forbid racially mixed marriages. In its pastoral work, however, the church must give due warning that social circumstances, as well as ideological, philosophical, cultural and socioeconomic differences and other factors, may cause serious tensions. Where such marriages do take place, those involved must receive pastoral guidance in all aspects of marriage.[56]

With the document, all beliefs about apartheid and the theology used to justify it were rejected (van der Merwe 2013:6). Nonetheless, the DRC has not united with the URCSA. To date, talks of unity are still ongoing. According to the minutes of the Sixth General Synod of URCSA, the DRC and the URCSA drafted a Memorandum of Agreement (Acta 2012:180) that they would work together in spreading the gospel of Christ and promoting human dignity and gender equity. In the light of the latter, the question is: what role has the URCSA played in responding to issues of marginalisation?

3.3.4 Final meeting and the beginning of URCSA as a splinter group of the DRC

The Belhar Confession was accepted in 1986 by the Synod of the NGSK. In 1994, the URCSA adopted it as one of its official confessions. The Confession was the only confession from South Africa, and it echoed the voice of the church against the atrocities of apartheid. The Confession

[56] Kerken Samelewing: 'n Getuienis van die Ned. Geref. Kerk p.61.

denounced injustice, oppression, and separation (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:1) and affirmed the church as the family of God. Not only did apartheid have a negative impact on the church, but it also caused havoc to family life and the livelihood of millions of South Africans (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:1).

The Belhar Confession was drafted and adopted by the DRMC Synod of 1982, and it focused on three issues: (1) reconciliation in Christ, (2) the unity of the church and (3) the justice of God (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013). The DRMC committed itself to oppose any form of injustice and inequality in the society. The resolution of the team that drafted the Belhar Confession and of the whole Synod which supported it, indeed illustrated the strength of faith at a difficult time. The Confession sought to restore and reform what the apartheid system destroyed—the unity of the church of God that the Holy Communion table brought (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013). The Confession was adopted by the DRMC in 1986 and the DRCA approved it in 1990 and included it as one of its confessions. In April 1994, the DRMC and the DRCA united to form what is today known as the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

The Belhar Confession challenged the status quo, that is, the theological justification of apartheid (Plaatjies van Huffel 2013:5). The Confession changed the face of theology and that of the church, as it broke the boundaries of oppression and separation that had existed for more than three centuries. It moved the black church from the margins to the centre. For the first time, the DRC and its white supremacists heard the voice of the marginalised.

The first article of the Confession states that God is on the side of the oppressed and condemns injustice. The article serves as Article 4 of the Belhar Confession — "to stand where God stands" (Kritzinger 2010:10). The second Article is "the willingness to suffer" and it serves as Article 5 of the Belhar Confession (Kritzinger 2010:8). It calls on the church to do the will of God even if at times it may be against the worldly authorities. The church should be willing to suffer for God. The third Article is about divine initiative, and it affirms the divinity of God. The last Article (Article 4) that the Confession sought to address shows "God revealed as willing justice on earth" (Kritzinger 2010:10). It affirms the God who is set to liberate men and women from oppressive powers through Jesus Christ and the God who is set to bring about justice and peace. The Declaration was the voice of the church against the government policies, and it spoke against the oppressive system that the government had imposed on South Africa's black majority.

3.4 THE CHURCH AND MISSION

3.4.1 The church's missionary understanding

Considering the above-mentioned role of the DRCA and the DRMC in the struggle against apartheid, one could say that the mission of God was at work. It is important to exercise caution when using the concept of mission – taking cognisance that the term is contested. As noted by Bosch, mission cannot be captured in one definition (Bosch 1991:11). It is like a tree with many branches, but the trunk of that tree is the Christian faith. Bosch does not limit the definition of mission to only one characteristic. Although this thesis focuses on Christian mission, Bosch recognises that mission also plays a role in some other religions such as Islam and Buddhism (Bosch 1991:11).

Within the Christian faith, mission is the presence of God in the world amongst God's people. It is the active Gospel of God. Bosch distinguishes between *missio Dei* and missions. According to him, *missio Dei* is God's revelation to the world (Bosch 1991:12). Bosch views mission as "God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate" (Bosch 1991:12-13). Mission, however, is how people relate to God. Mission forms part of the church's commission. It has to do with times, places, or needs or participation in the *missio Dei* (Bosch 1991:13).

Missio Dei and mission play a major role in the Christian faith and broadly relate to humanity. The world is hungry for the face of God in the face of injustice, poverty, oppression, and marginalisation. Bosch understands these entanglements very well, as he places the church amidst these realities.

3.4.2 Evolvement of mission in the history of URCSA

Although Bosch defines *missio Dei* and mission in the context of South Africa, one also takes note (as mentioned above) that the introduction of Christianity in South Africa was not at all innocent. The researcher respects Bosch as a scholar of missiology but the issue is that Bosch defines mission from above. He neglects what Schreiter (2002:39) calls "listening to a culture". Perhaps Bosch

tried to focus on a wider range of audience and left the "culture" to local theologies such as Black Theology.

The God that the black majority got to know from the colonialists was not at all loving. It was not the God who stood with the marginalised and the poor. It was the God who identified with and who "chose" the colonial master, as noted in Chapter 1. However, the Black Theology in South Africa, following the footsteps of the American Black Theology, introduced a new praxis for the oppressed, poor, and marginalised black people. It introduced the God who is on the side of the poor and the oppressed (Buffel 2015:352).

However, unlike in the American context, Black Theology was not popular in churches. It was individual ministers who formed forums like the *BK* and the meeting where the Belhar Confession was discussed that first acknowledged the existence of Black Theology (Tshaka 2015:1). Through the forums, Black Theology played a major role in changing the face of mission in South Africa, especially in the URCSA. It is a theology that prides itself in the "preferential option for the poor" (Buffel 2015:350). However, according to Tshaka (2015) and Buffel (2015), Black Theology has not lived to expectation. Tshaka argues that, over the years, the black church has not embraced black theology (2015:4). He specifically refers to the URCSA which he says is not a black church (2015:3). According to him, a black church is one that takes the lived experiences of black people seriously in theological reflection (Tshaka 2015:3). Buffel makes a similar point as he refers to the black church as "disturbingly quiet and apathetic in the midst of pain, suffering, marginalisation and dehumanization as a result of poverty" (2015:350).

Mission, as echoed by Bosch, is the presence of the church in the society (Bosch 1991:11). Mission is not neutral. Rather, it looks at the world from the perspective of the Christian faith (1991:11). The church will therefore raise its voice and empower the marginalised as it did during apartheid through the Belhar Confession.

The Belhar Confession does not only call on the church to stand where God stands but its Article 2 states that "together serve God in this world; and together fight against everything that may threaten or hinder this unit".

As mentioned earlier, the voices within black scholarship have changed the face of mission; therefore, the church needs to continue to build an African praxis that will embrace all peoples despite class, colour, or race.

3.4.3 Towards a missional ecclesiology

The role of the church in the lives of sex workers is significant. The visibility of the church within communities still brings hope to the people especially the downtrodden. Eugene Baron and Khamadi J. Pali (2021) calls for a 'reimagining church'. Baron and Pali (2021) argue that for a progressive missional ecclesiology to take place, the church needs to respond to the context of its constituencies in fulfilling God's mission on earth. As a solution to develop a missional ecclesiology that is relevant and perhaps borrowing from Baron and Pali, a missional ecclesiology that is 'reimagining'. Kalemba Mwambazambi (2011) proposes an "African ecclessiology". He recommends three ways in which the African ecclessiology can be approached and in this context, the researcher will mention one (2011:4). The first approach he names it Christ centric – calling for Christ and the Bible to be at the centre of African ecclesiology (Mwambazambi 2011:4). The name of African ecclesiology sounds like a good name however the concept itself seems to be missing a point. Our problems in Africa started when the colonialist introduced the Bible and Christ to the black people. Missional ecclesiology calls for a church that is in the middle of the experiences of black men and women – poverty, sexuality, marginalisation, oppression, and racism (Kobo 2018, Baron 2019, Tshaka 2014). The conversation on unpacking missional ecclesiology as a church that is African and Reformed are dealt with later in the thesis (Chapter 5).

The role of the church in the lives of sex workers is significant. The visibility of the church in society still brings hope to the people especially the downtrodden. Therefore, bringing or taking hope to the people whether rich or poor, marginalised and/or oppressed is what missional ecclesiology should be—a church with others. Missional ecclesiology is a church that is called to complete Christ's work on earth. Niemandt (2012:1) defines missional ecclesiology as the "discussion of what the church is called to be and to do − its nature, its purpose, its hopes, its structure and practices". In line with Niemandt, Newbigin asserts that a church or *ekklesia* is a community of humankind that shares in the life of the kingdom of God. For Newbigin, the church is more than a religious community that gathers to do religious rituals. He goes on then to define

the church in three ways. First, the church reflects a body of people who have given their lives to Christ. Secondly, the word church refers to a congregation.

Congregations are communities which organise themselves sometimes according to the geographic area or a particular church tradition that they follow. Lastly, Newbigin defines church as a community that gathers for religious activities such as worship, prayer, sacraments and singing (Goheen 2002:4). Goheen (2004:5) notes that Newbigin defines mission as a church that bears witness to Christ, on the one hand and mission as a church that reaches out to its community through evangelism, on the other hand. Secondly, mission gives birth to people who are witnesses in their daily lives whether at work, in the family or in the community.

While this research concurs with Newbigin, as cited by Goheen, it would also like to acknowledge that the church in South Africa is complex. The ideas of Newbigin are acceptable yet seem to be farfetched in a context where mission played a vital role in the oppression of the black majority.

The beginning of colonisation also marked the introduction of the Christian mission to many black people. Many black people were converted to Christianity. However, they were introduced as "other". Black Christians were dominated by white Christians in terms of their customs and culture (De Gruchy 1986:41). The black churches were called 'mission churches' because white Europeans believed that they were in Africa to convert the 'sinners'. Thus, black people were 'dis-membered' from their own culture and identity. The religion that was introduced by the white Europeans did not at all identify with African customs of unity and *ubuntu*. The Christian missionaries arrived in Africa and divided the African nations by what Biko called "institutionalization". Churches were divided into denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church, Methodist, the Dutch Reformed and Anglican but no Christian knew how they differed from one another (in Stubbs 2009:62). Biko identifies the act with bureaucracy and that through institutionalisation and bureaucracy, the church lost its identity and missed its priorities (Stubbs 2009:62). Instead of concentrating on the needs of the people and restoring their dignity, the church focused on structures and finances.

The question that this project seeks to answer is, how does the church become missional in a context that is still haunted by the history of apartheid? In post-apartheid South Africa, can the church, as Biko said, still be seen as a model of white indoctrination?

Therefore, in defining missional ecclesiology in the context of sex workers who are women and are black, the church is obliged to insert the Cycle of Mission Praxis. It needs to ask critical questions such as, who are we as a church? Who do people say I am? (Matt 16:13).

3.4.4 Mission to those on the margins

Alluding to Psalm 137:4, Kofi Appiah-Kubi asks, "How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land, in a strange language, in a strange thought, in a strange ideology"? Tshaka is repeating these words from the Psalm as an emphasis that the Christian faith does not resonate with the lived experiences of the African people (Tshaka 2020:2). According to Tshaka (2020:3), the words of the Psalmist echo the lamentations of black people and the lived experiences of black people that were never narrated.

Therefore, mission to the margins embraces the idea of the church being where the marginalised are. In the same breath, mission to those on the margins speaks of people who are liberated to serve God in their different circumstances, with their different languages. Tshaka (2020:3) argues that Christianity needs to employ methods that allow black people to tell their own stories and their lived experiences. However, the system on which Christianity was built in South Africa did not create that safe space. In the words of Althaus-Reid (2000:32), colonialism created borders around Christianity.

In addition, the orthodox churches such as the URCSA are not ready to confront the system upon which Christianity was built. Mission was built on a system that created white supremacy and colonial hegemony. Bosch (1990:379) correctly argues that mission presupposes the ambience of Western colonisation. With the West introducing Christianity to the formerly colonised countries, it also translated how the inhabitants should respond to Christianity, how the Bible should be interpreted and by who.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to persuade scholarship to reinterpret the concept of mission so that it becomes relevant to the margins. Mission, especially to sex workers, in the words of Puleng Segalo, would allow for situated truths and self-representation (Segalo 2013:2). By allowing sex workers to tell their stories in their own languages, the church would be moving them from the margins to the centre. However, by silencing them because they are perceived as 'sinners',

the church would be perpetuating oppression and disempowerment. It is against this background that mission to those in the margins needs to begin in the familiar place of a black woman in the margins—the black church.

3.5 THE CHURCH, BIBLE AND MISSION WORK

3.5.1 The church and Bible

3.5.1.1 Ecclesiological understanding

When the URCSA started, the aim was to unite all the Reformed churches, as mentioned earlier. The church did not only renounce apartheid as a heresy as it stood against racism; it also stood against ethnicity and sexism as well. However, the latter, argues Modise, was only a unification process which the church of God should strive for (Modise 2016:36). Hence, when talking about the church or *ekklesia*, we are talking about, as per the Apostle's Creed, "the communion of saints".[57] The URCSA is a confessional church and its doctrine lies solely on the confessions of faith and Scripture, as mentioned earlier. The emphasis on Scripture in the church is complimented by the confessions that the church relates to. The Belgic Confession, Article 27 for instance, affirms the belief and confession of one single catholic or universal church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers, awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. The word "unity" seems to be a common ground when it comes to salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit. The Belhar Confession also opens with the point that the Triune God exemplifies the unity of the church through the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The term Triune symbolises a relational unity (Modise 2016:37).

In understanding the church as united, the Belgic Confession echoes the words of the missiologist, Susann Liubinskas, who uses the metaphor of the body in defining ecclesiology. While the Belgic Confession mentions "a gathering of true Christian believers" (Article 27), Liubinskas (2013:402) compares the church to the body of Christ. The latter concept is from the Pauline theology, and it is inspired by the text of 1 Corinthians 12:12-30. The metaphor of the body describes a real relationship that exists between Christ and the church (Liubinskas 2013:403). Without disputing

[57] See the Christian Reformed Church.crcna.org.za. Accessed on 2020/08/22.

the unity and diversity element that the text displays, Liubinskas (2013:404) shows that the emphasis on this text is more than that. It is also on the church being constituted by Christ.

The ecclesiological understanding would then be a church that is called by God to serve God's people. It holds the values that the church stands for, that is, reconciliation, justice, and unity (Belhar Confession, Article 1).

3.6 URCSA'S UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND MISSION TO SINNERS

3.6.1 Re-reading the Belhar Confession considering human sexuality and what is sinful

The term "re-reading" is a disclaimer. The Belhar Confession was written in response to the social, political, and economic injustices against the black majority. However, this research will explore a re-reading of the creed from the perspective of human sexuality and of what may be considered sinful by the church. On the one hand, when the Belhar Confession was first conceptualised, the church was raising its voice against injustice in the form of racism and gender discrimination. On the other hand, patriarchy and sexism also contributed to the unfair treatment of women. When the Confession was theorised, apartheid was already declared sin. However, the white government did not see separation as sin but as God's will. One may thus argue that the definition of sin is relative.

The church attaches human sexuality to morality and ethics. For instance, sex before marriage is considered a sin. Sex workers often hide what they do because of the stigma that comes with the work. The condemnation they face places them on the peripheries and not at the centre. The thesis does not accuse the church of judging sex workers, but it seeks to challenge the church to liberate them from such prejudices—to be a voice of hope. The agency of the church through the Belhar Confession sought to fulfil the hope that was lost in the black majority. The re-reading of the Belhar Confession in light of human sexuality and the definition of sin seeks to conscientize the church to what its confession entails. Article 2 of the Belhar Confession states that, "Separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted".

The Belhar Confession is not naïve in its statement above. Although it confronted the unethical and immoral behaviour of the apartheid government, the church was aware that its fight was not

against individuals but the system of segregation. Nowhere does it single out an individual or even encourage revenge against one another. However, it advocates for unity, reconciliation and justice. In the church, especially in the congregation where I am a minister, when a woman is pregnant outside marriage, it is considered sin. The person will appear before the church council and the congregation. She will be put under the *"tug"* (URCSA church book). The definition of sin in the context of the church is biased because it deals with an individual with a problem. However, the argument in this thesis is that sin is basically systemic.

Therefore, now is the time to resuscitate the Belhar Confession to speak to the challenges faced by sex workers who are disadvantaged by the law and the society. Leepo Modise (2018:4) argues that since the gospel is about liberation, it demands that men and women create new structures of human relations that enhance freedom and not oppression. Thus, it is time for the church to create a missional praxis that will liberate sex workers from the system that led them to opt for sex work as a way out of economic deprivation.

3.6.2 URCSA's understanding of sex workers and their practice

The URCSA forms part of several churches within the City of Tshwane. Although the church itself comprises the working class and students, it is surrounded by homeless young men and women. According to a study conducted by I. Swart, M. Rabe and S. De Beer, many of the occupants in this city are the youth and 80% of these young people are migrants. The reason is that the inner city of Tshwane (Pretoria) is the largest economic hub in the continent (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019:2). Most of the young people come to Pretoria for a better livelihood. The other reason for the flock could be because of what Mashau (2014:1) calls "the hills and valleys in the African City of Tshwane", which include the universities, the government departments such as the Home Affairs, the Reserve Bank, and other departments. However, the hills and valleys for many young people have not yielded the expected results. Many youths remain unemployed and on the margins. The situation therefore leaves them vulnerable, susceptible to substance abuse, prone to commercial sex work, human trafficking, which lead to the society marginalising them further (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019:2).

In engaging the pavements of Tshwane and facing the challenges of homelessness, drug abuse, trafficking, sex work, several NGOs and the FBOs were formed within the City of Tshwane. The

NGOs and the FBOs were born post-1994 (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019:3). The FBOs include Participate, Empower, Navigate (also known as PEN) and the Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF). Although the mainstream church may not be playing a role or taking a lead in the marginalisation of young people especially women who are involved in sex work, the organisations in the fringes of the church are.

Noteworthy, PEN is an organisation under the Dutch Reformed Church whilst the TLF was formed by some ordained ministers of the URCSA. Here, the TLF is of interest as it focuses on marginalised homeless young men and women. In addition, it is on the fringes of the URCSA. The TLF operates more than half a dozen projects; two of which are drop-off centres that assist sex workers who live on the streets to get a bath and breakfast in the morning.[58] They also assist with sanitary towels. The question is, is the church doing enough to liberate sex workers?

In an article written by Swart, Rabe and De Beer, the latter question was asked as a critique to the role that the FBOs and churches in Pretoria Central especially the Catholic and the Methodist Church, have played in the lives of the marginalised. The FBOs and the churches are commended for their role in providing essential needs to homeless young people. Some churches do provide shelter. However, some young people are disinterested in church. Some only go to church for the toiletries, ablution facilities and food that the church offers. Although there is a sense of aloofness, some youth realise that the church can be their first, if not the only stop, to get their basic needs (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019:9).

While the latter is true, necessary, and appreciated, the churches and the FBOs have gone into a self-critical journey in the role they have played so far. Although their aim is to eradicate homelessness, the picture remains unchanged (Swart, Rabe & De Beer 2019:9). The church is aware of its shortcomings. Either the challenge is bigger than what it has anticipated, or its resources are limited.

Though the FBOs and the churches in Pretoria have not reached their goals yet, the broader church including the URCSA needs to realise that societal aspects such as a sense of belonging or social cohesion and participation in the mainstream, are essential.

[58] See tlf.org.za. Accessed on 2020/09/12.

This project is not a critique of the efforts of the church and the FBOs, but a contribution that focuses on sex workers. Perhaps what the young women need is the "preferential option for sex workers" (Avaren 2009:14).

Besides, the FBOs especially the TLF, which deals with homelessness in the City of Tshwane, we have secular organisations such as Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Force Task (SWEAT). The effort of the organisation is discussed in Chapter 4.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter has examined the Reformed tradition and its view of the Bible regarding sex work(ers). It acknowledges the significant role that the URCSA played during apartheid, also leading to the transition to a democratic era. However, the challenges faced by the society did not end with the establishment of democracy. The crux of the thesis is how the church deals with the question of sin in the post-apartheid context. The chapter shows that although the Church Order guides the church in maintaining order and morals, its theological definition of sin is unclear. This makes the document vulnerable, as anyone can use and interpret it to his or her own advantage. The church as an institution that is trusted by its constituencies as a body that reflects the presence of God, needs to consider the factors that cause women to sell their bodies. The silence of the church is daunting and no longer acceptable. Missional ecclesiology calls the church to be at the centre of the struggles faced by black women who engage in sex work for financial gain.

Although the church or the Church Order does not and it has not addressed the issue of sex work, it has addressed sin. In this case, sex work is judged based on morals and on what is considered "decent". Thus, the interpretation of church texts, for instance, the Bible, the Church Order, and the Belhar Confession are silent regarding sex workers. Chapter 4 presents a theological understanding of the plight of sex workers. The chapter will place the voices of the sex workers side-by-side with the voices of scholars. The women in sex work from Marabastad are given an opportunity to read and interpret the Bible from their own perspectives.

CHAPTER 4

THE BIBLE, CHURCH AND LIBERATION OF SEX WORKERS: VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter will feature an engagement with a group of sex workers who reside in Marabastad, Pretoria, South Africa. The goal of reading the Bible with these women is to produce a transformative encounter with them. The exercise was carried out due to my persuasion that the "learned reader" and the "ordinary reader" (to be explained later) could help to find a liberative mission praxis towards the marginalised sex workers.

The main aim and objective of this chapter is thus to study the Bible with sex workers to determine their understanding of the missional role that the church should play in their liberation. For a postcolonial and missiological contextual Bible reading, the researcher together with the focus group engaged with the main text of this investigation, which is Luke 7:36-50. Contextual hermeneutical lenses were employed to expose the rejection and judgmental attitudes that sex workers face especially from religious leaders. The chapter therefore focuses on the themes that emerged during a Bible study session and focus group interviews that were conducted to achieve the intended goal.

The chapter also focuses on how the women understood and applied the said text in their contexts. Most of those who participated in the Bible study were aware of their circumstances and their relatively low educational background, but they were not keen on changing them. Their limited education thus threw them into a vulnerable state. As Mangoedi and Mogashoa (2014:89) have affirmed, being black and a woman results in double marginalisation and these women also experienced discrimination in terms of both race and gender. However, sex workers are not just viewed as black women. They are young black women who are morally judged.

Thus, this chapter will address the following questions:

- How do sex workers read the Bible?
- How do sex workers understand and interpret the church's role in their liberation?

The preceding questions seek to engage the main aim of this thesis, that is, to expose the colonial understanding of the Bible that does not liberate but instead continues to discriminate against and marginalise vulnerable members of society such as sex workers. The chapter will be divided into the following sub-sections:

- Research design
- on being missional and transformative
- theological reflection from the learned readers
- theological reflection from the ordinary readers
- synthesis and
- Conclusion

The following sub-themes of humanity, rejection, forgiveness, the love of God and sin, will form the pivot around which the chapter will rotate.

4.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE FROM A MISSIOLOGICAL POSTCOLONIAL VIEWPOINT

As indicated in Chapter 1, Gerald West raises a critical argument about entanglements (West 2018:243). One of the entanglements that he mentions is how the Bible was interpreted by the West. West (2018:243) considers the Bible a significant tool of entanglement between colonialism and post-colonialism. By entanglement, West means the complicated yet compromising role that the Bible played in the lives of African people in the colonial and apartheid eras. Missionaries such as Robert Moffat played a significant role in translating the Bible into Southern Sotho (West 2018:245). However, Moffat's translations of the Bible were not a true reflection of what the original text meant. Musa Dube argues that the translations were often appropriations, manipulations, transformations, and rewritings to achieve the missionaries' personal agendas (Dube 2014:158). A postcolonial reading of the Bible thus seeks to expose such interpretations that were influenced by the West. Dube (2014:158) also points out that every translation or interpretation implies a conflict between dominating and dominated cultures and languages. A postcolonial reading of the Bible exposes the hegemonies of Western biblical interpretations that do not affirm the humanity of black women. Susan Smith argues that not only Western hegemonies became a challenge to Africa, Asia and Latin America but the internal forces as well. For Smith,

"there is an internal colonialism which operates when local political elites suppress the voices of the poor, of women and of indigenous people" (2004:5). She contends that it is through the postcolonial reading and interpretation of the Bible that the voices of the poor and the marginalised can be heard (2004:5).

The women who were the participants in the Bible study session were intentional about engaging their backgrounds—their lived experiences. As much as a postcolonial reading and interpretation of the Bible is about engaging the text as well as the history and culture found in the Scripture, it also locates the context of the poor and transforms the margins.

4.3 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON LUKE 7:36-50 BY ORDINARY READERS

This section analyses the text of Luke 7:36-50 and it is divided into the following subsections: 4.3.1 Textual analysis; 4.3.2 Contextual analysis; 4.3.3 Social analysis and 4.3.4 Spiritual analysis.

4.3.1 Textual Analysis

When asked what the text was about, individually, by a show of hands, the ordinary readers concluded that:

- The text was about Simon and the woman who was called a sinner
- About Jesus' forgiveness of the woman
- About Simon judging and rejecting the woman
- The woman washing the feet of Jesus

Noteworthy, some of the respondents did not have Bibles because the researcher did not have enough Bibles to loan them. However, they were able to share. When asked about the main characters and their views of these characters, the group members identified the following:

- Jesus: a man that does not judge. Respondent 1 further mentioned that Jesus is welcoming, and that the unnamed woman trusted him.
- The unnamed woman: Respondent 2 indicated that the unnamed woman was a sinner and a person who was loving and caring.
- Simon: a Pharisee who was judgmental and had no love
- Guests: Respondent 3 identified guests as people who asked who the woman was. In addition, the respondent described the narrative as a story that shows Simon asking if

Jesus was a true prophet. Respondent 4 indicated that "Simon doubted Jesus because Jesus did not know the unnamed woman was a sinner".

In describing the relationship between the woman and Jesus, both groups agreed that the relationship demonstrated love and forgiveness. Additionally, Respondent 7 mentioned that Jesus gave the woman parental love, forgave her and gave her freedom.

In the following question where the participants were asked to retell the story in their own languages and words, the researcher divided them into 2 groups. Each group had seven participants. Group 1 responded that the story is about a woman who is embarrassed by Simon. Group 2 added that the story is about a nameless woman who had many sins and cried to Jesus for forgiveness.

4.3.1.1 The sin in Luke 7:36-47

After probing the story and the treatment the unnamed woman received from Simon, the next question was about the sin that Luke was talking about. The groups engaged with the question with so much more enthusiasm than the other questions. When asked what sin the author of the Gospel of Luke could be referring to, Group 1 reported that it is *'bokgoša.'*[59] Respondent 1 from Group 1 mentioned that the woman was sleeping with different men and drinking alcohol, but she had love. Respondent 2 from Group 1 added that she had no morals [but had love]. She was sleeping with different men in exchange for money. She did not believe in God.

The argument from Group 2 was that the woman was not a sinner. Respondent 1 from Group 2 believed that she was just trapped by the Jewish law, expected to follow the social norms and standards. According to Group 2, the woman was being punished for not following the Jewish laws, for instance, she might have been expected to marry but she was single therefore perceived as a prostitute. Group 2 insinuated that Simon saw the expensive oil and assumed that she got it through prostitution since she was not working. The group added that this woman might have been an independent working woman.

As the researcher was about to go on to the next question, the debate got more intense. When Group 1 insisted that the sin was (in their own words) *'bokgoša'*, the discussion heated up. Group

[59] *'Bokgoša'* is a Pedi word meaning prostitution. It is used derogatively to refer to sex workers. See https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2016-06-21-kenny-kunene-denies-knowing-blessee-amanda-cele-labels- -her-a-magosha/. Accessed on 2022/06/27.

2 maintained that in the Gospel of Luke, there is no record of this woman being a prostitute. Respondent 2 in Group 2 said Simon had a problem with the woman because she was a leader. Her leadership in this instance is defined by her move to approach Jesus. According to the participants, Jesus' welcoming attitude towards the unnamed woman proved to be ungendered. Respondent 3 in Group 2 added that Simon was pursuing the woman for sexual favours, but the woman rejected him. That led to the jealousy of Simon hence he called her a sinner. Men do not like rejection. When you start rejecting them, they call you a sinner.

4.3.2 Context analysis

The next question was about the Pharisees and the way they treated the woman. Groups 1 and 2 identified Simon as a Pharisee and unanimously agreed that he was jealous and judgmental and had no love. Group 1 agreed that Simon was jealous of, judging, undermining, and rejecting the woman. Group 2 insisted that Simon treated the woman as someone who was not supposed to come to Jesus.

The following part focused on the context of the participants. The first question about the context of the participants asked them to identify a Pharisee in their individual contexts. Group 1 identified a man called Mashiane*[60] who resided in the same place as the participants. According to the participants, Mashiane challenged single women. He lured them into sex. Respondent 4 from Group 1 described Mashiane as an abuser, a religious man who was judgmental and who influenced others to reject vulnerable women. Group 2 identified Simon as a church they once went to, which they described as judgmental and condescending to homeless people. Although they were never labelled as sinners, they felt rejected and unwelcome.

The next question was who the participants identified the unnamed woman with, in their own context. The researcher gave them a water break at that point. When they came back and continued the conversation, Group 1 started by identifying a woman by the name of Amina*. A respondent from Group 1 described her, saying, "Although she is a prostitute, she has love and care". The second woman identified by Group 1 was Portia* who was described as being different from Amina. Portia is described by a respondent in Group 1 as a bully because she once left her kids

[60] Mashiane is a pseudonym. Participants requested that real names should not be included in the thesis.

alone overnight to attend a party. Her kids are now in foster care. Group 2 agreed with Group 1 about Amina and Portia, whom they claimed terrorised the whole community by sleeping with different men in their residential area.

When asked if participants were able to identify with the story of this woman and in what ways, only Group 1 responded in the affirmative. They justified their answer by saying, "Even if you do bad things, God looks at the heart of a person even if the world may judge".

4.3.3 Spiritual analysis

The present section places the text of Luke 7:36-47 in the cultural and geographical setting of the participants. Subsequently, the text is placed in the context of the participants' spirituality and their view of the church. The section started by challenging the participants to come up with their own solutions. The first question asked was whether in their view, there was a way out of their situation. Group 2 responded in the affirmative but emphasised that it depended also on an individual's choice. They referred again to Amina who they claimed was filling the void in her life by sleeping around with men. She does not make use of the services provided by the organisations around them[61] but prefers to get her provisions from men.

Responding to the question of what the church does or should do to transform the situation, Group 1 mentioned individual counselling. Group 1 also made a detour and mentioned that it is problematic for the church to preach to hungry people. They identify Christians as people who should serve, hence, their point that when they go to church, they expect to get food before being preached to.

In Group 2's response though, there was a disclaimer that they also did not go to church. They added, "We might reject the church at first but the more you come to us the more we will listen". A respondent in the group also opined that, "The more the church avails itself to sex workers, the more transformation will take place".

The last question in the conversation asked how the church could best create a safe space for women who have been marginalised and rejected. Group 2 mentioned that the church must move

[61] By organisations, the participants referred to the Faith-Based Organisations around Pretoria.

to those communities; the church must enter the space of sex workers and understand their context. The latter is for the church to understand what prompts women to get into the sex work industry. The church should understand the psychology behind the actions of the women. For example, a person does not have a roll-on but can afford to buy beer. The FBOs provide essential services for them but they prefer to sleep around with men.

Respondent 2 from Group 1 emphasised the issue of individual counselling. In counselling, it is easier for them to talk to a stranger than a person they know. Respondent 3 in Group 2 mentioned that "it is important for us to be reminded that God loves us." The last comment came from Respondent 4 from Group 2 who said that "It is painful to be rejected by the world. Words are important. Say positive words to women who are rejected. Make them feel that they are also human. Some women like Portia reject people because they are also rejected".

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As outlined in Chapter 1, the method used to conduct the interviews is the Contextual Bible Study (also known as CBS). The method was developed by the Ujaama Center for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research in South Africa. One of the main reasons for using the CBS method is to describe the situation which sex workers find themselves, as CBS encourages a reading of the Bible from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed (Breen 2012:1). The CBS also enables people to improve their conditions physically and mentally for the process of social liberation and transformation to take place (Breen 2012:1). According to West, for CBS to be a success in South Africa, the Bible needs to be read from a South African context (West 1993:13). Although liberation theologies such as Black Theology demonstrate a commitment to the struggles of black people, they are also cognisant of the African context. Quoting Mosala, West (2010:7) argues that the success of black theology lies in considering "the history, the culture and the ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point". Our context shapes and informs our reading of the Bible (West 1993:13). Acknowledging our context when reading the Bible not only gives us perspective but it also puts the readers in a better position to transform their context.

Contextual Bible Study, as expounded by West, requires a commitment to reading the Bible in a transformative way. West (1993:12) identifies four areas of commitment namely: 1. Reading the Bible with a different community from yours; 2. Reading the Bible analytically; 3. Reading the Bible with a commitment to transform individuals and community socially; and 4. A commitment to personal and social transformation through CBS.

To read the Bible from the context of the poor and the oppressed encourages transformation in poor and unequal societies. The Bible study promotes interaction between a facilitator and participants. West refers to the participants as ordinary readers and facilitators as trained readers. The term ordinary readers refer to the readers who do not have any training or pre-critical way of reading the Bible (West 1993:9). Usually, ordinary readers would include the non-literate but who can listen, discuss and retell the Bible. Ordinary readers would also refer to those readers who are poor and oppressed including women (1993:9). Trained readers have a biblical training background and usually want to serve the community and the church. West contends that although the trained readers might be privileged because of their educational background, CBS offers a space for both trained and ordinary readers to learn from each other (1993:9).

In his book, Contextual Bible Study (also known as CBS), West (1993:27) mentions three modes of reading the Bible critically. The CBS provides a safe space for the participants to engage the text and apply it to their context without fear of being judged.

The New English Version was used for the Bible study of the text of Luke 7:36-50. The focus was on the following thirteen questions:

1. What was the text about?
2. What are the themes that emerge from this text?
3. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
4. Can you retell the story in Luke 7:36-47 in your own language?
5. Can you describe the relationship between Jesus and the woman?
6. What sin could Luke be referring to? What is your definition of sin?
7. Who are the Pharisees in this text and how did they treat the unnamed woman?
8. Whom would you identify as a Pharisee within your own context and why?

9. Who do you think this woman is in your context and how is she being treated?
10. Can you identify with the story of this woman and if so, how?
11. Is there another way of making a living besides being a sex worker?
12. What has the church done or what should the church do to transform the lives of sex workers?
13. In your view, how can the church best create space for women who have been marginalised and rejected by their communities?

The participants were fourteen in total. The group of women ranged between the ages of 18 and 30. Although they had no theological background, they were able to read and engage the text critically. Most of the women participated in the Bible study, which took place at the Tshwane Leadership Foundation in Pretoria. When the process started, one of the participants volunteered to open with a word of prayer. The participants and the facilitator then took turns to introduce themselves. The researcher who is also a facilitator explained the aim of the Bible study and the technicalities around issues pertaining to ethical clearance and consent forms. The researcher also explained to the participants that there is no wrong or right answer. However, we should note that West (1993:16) cautions against accepting the reading of ordinary readers uncritically. According to him, the danger is that trained readers could represent the ideas of the ordinary readers better than reality would warrant (West 1993:16). Trained readers should be able to engage critically with ordinary readers. West argues that the advantage of having trained readers engage with ordinary readers is that they empower ordinary readers to discover and recognise their own identity, value and the importance of their experiences and contributions in the interpretive processes. With the group engagement, I discovered that the assumption that marginalised communities are voiceless is untrue. Rather, they are never given a space to express their opinions on matters of own concern. The opportunity to engage in a contextual Bible study gave them a new perspective and meaning to their lives.

The second level in the process of the Bible study was when the facilitator asked one of the participants to read the text of Luke 7:36-50. The session was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of three questions and the whole group participated in responding. In the second part, the group was divided into two sub-groups.

4.5 THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF LEARNED READERS ON LUKE 7:36-50

This section is a critical analysis of the story of the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-50 and engaged with the question, what was the woman's "sin"?

4.5.1 Textual analysis

The story of the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-47 has generated much debate within biblical scholarship's circles. The disagreement is around the nature of the sin that Luke mentioned. According to Schottroff (1993:138), the sin was sex work, for she uses the term "prostitute" to describe the unnamed woman (Schottroff 1993:145). In her exegesis of Luke 7:36-47, Schottroff identifies two challenges that emanate from the text—firstly, the sexism that emerges from the Christian tradition and secondly, the way the Pharisees looked down on the Jewish tradition.

It should be noted that during a formal banquet or Sabbath, it was common to invite a rabbi to the meal after he has taught in the synagogue (Schottroff 2013:4). Nonetheless, when Simon saw how Jesus responded to the woman's gestures, he rejected Jesus' prophetic character (Mouton 2013:3). Roles changed—when the woman gained honour from Jesus, Simon was ashamed (Mouton 2013:6). Mouton affirms that Jesus did not show compassion to the unnamed woman; he liberated and healed her (2013:9). One would wonder in the context of Marabastad, what 'forgiveness' means to a woman who is experiencing social problems that pushed her into sex work, a woman who is in the business because she is a single parent, unemployed and has fewer or no other options because of lack of resources? Remarkably, the woman in Luke 7:36-47 did not ask for forgiveness. Rather, she overstepped her "sociocultural boundaries" by showing up where she was not expected—at the Pharisee's table to anoint a King (Mouton 2013:5). Jesus did not only pronounce the forgiveness of her sins, but he also restored her dignity.

4.5.2 Social analysis

4.5.2.1 Sex work and the state of decriminalisation in South Africa

Sex work is one of the oldest professions in the world (Punt 2021:2). However, in countries such as South Africa it is still viewed as illegal (Sexual Amendment Act 32 of 2007). The term illegal implies that every aspect of sex work is criminalised including the selling and buying of sex,

pimping and the running of brothels (Walker & Oliveira 2015:30). Criminalisation of sex work, therefore, puts sex workers at risk of gender-based and structural violence including police brutality and being violated by their clients (Walker & Oliveira 2015:130). The latter is in addition to the multi-layered risks involved in the injustice embedded in sex work. Although this thesis does not advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work, it is important not to ignore the current debate raised by sex work organisations such as SWEAT, which advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work. SWEAT argues that sex work should be acknowledged as work and that sex workers should have a voice that informs and influences social debates.[62] Beyond the space of sex work organisations, the conversation about the decriminalisation of sex work also arose within the circle of South Africa's ruling party known as the African National Congress (ANC). It was during the ANC's 54th elective conference that the ruling party took a decision to decriminalise sex work.[63] However, the announcement was not welcomed by the vast majority of South Africans (Punt 2021:2). Sex work in South Africa is mainly associated with immorality. In a country that claims to be predominantly Christian, the idea of decriminalising sex work can easily cause a stir.

It is important to note that during the Bible study, the issue of patriarchy also came up. The participants reason that the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-47 was judged based on the patriarchal Jewish culture. Although the word 'patriarchy' never came up, it could be insinuated from the conversations. The participants argued also that the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-47 was judged according to the Jewish law. For instance, there are certain gestures that a woman should not make towards men. According to Judith R. Baskin, the rabbinic tradition held that women were perceived as created differently from men and this made them to be ineradicable and problematic to men (2015:13). This research does not rule out other motives behind Simon's contempt for the woman but agrees that patriarchy was the order of the day in the Jewish culture.

4.5.3 Socio-economic analysis

4.5.3.1 Push and pull factors for sex workers

The reasons women or men engage in sex work vary from one person to another. According to Vanwesenbeeck (2013:12), some of the reasons for going into sex work include financial, sexual and recreational ones besides coercion, as in trafficking. The reasons for sex work make the

[62] See www.sweat.org.za. Accessed on 2021/10/05.
[63] "ANC resolves to decriminalise sex work". See www.enca.com. Accessed on 2021/10/05.

industry to be more complicated, as the criminalisation of sex work makes it hard for sex workers to report crime conducted against them because of the stigma and the Sex Criminal Act (Sexual Amendment Act 32 of 2007). As argued by Mgbako et al (2013:1426), the stigma against sex workers leads to discrimination and deprivation of other social needs including health care, justice, access to education and other essential needs. Consequently, sex work agents such as SWEAT advocate for sex work to be decriminalised because the demand for or the supply of sex work will always be there. Not only do the organisations engage in the conversation of decriminalisation, but government also has recently begun conversations about decriminalising sex work.[64]

The women at Marabastad are into sex work business for financial benefit. It has been noted that young people in South Africa today have obtained high levels of higher education than their parents. However, the levels of incompleteness remain at 50% (De Lannoy et al. 2020). The higher education policies have been developed to give those who dropped out after Grade 9 a chance to continue through technical vocational training (De Lannoy et al. 2020). Statistics shows that only 8% of the ages between 18 and 24 register for a university or college degree and not all of them graduate. The most affected are black Africans and coloureds from poor economic backgrounds (De Lannoy et al. 2020). In 2006, unemployment was at 40% (Borhat et al. 2006). Of the group between the ages of 15 and 24, unemployment was at 30% and between the ages of 25 and 30, unemployment stood at 41%. The most disadvantaged people in all the groups were African females living in rural areas and the key determinants of unemployment are race, gender and class (Borhat et. al 2006).

Currently, the situation of unemployment is not getting better in South Africa, and it has resulted in the rising levels of poverty. Hence, Chibba and Luiz (2014) rightly argue that poverty has been identified not only with inequality but also with unemployment. The challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment are rising at an alarming rate. According to the Daily Maverick, the unemployment rate as of 30 November 2021 stood at 46, 6% in South Africa.[65] The socio-economic status of the people is getting worse by the day and the gap between the poor and the rich is widening. The call is urgent for the church to respond to the question by Kessler (2002), "What is happening within this structure called capitalism that forces women to sell their sexual

[64] See https://www.justice.gov.za/m_statements/2022/20220208-Decriminalisation-SexWork-DM.html. Accessed on 2022/11/21.
[65] South Africa's unemployment rate hits new record high. See www.business.co.za. Accessed on 2021/12/02.

services for lack of a better paying alternative?" In the same vein, Kessler (2002:222) argues that sex work should be an option for women who choose it as work not a means of survival. However, the high unemployment rate in the country does not leave most people with many options. Some citizens though have more options than others. Therefore, when it comes to sex work, it is empirical to mention economic indices such as the growth domestic product, the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). These economic programs were initiated by the African National Congress in 1994 to combat the post-apartheid economic challenges such as poverty, inequality and unemployment (Chibba & Luiz 2011:308). In 2006, the RDP, which at that time was known as Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), developed into Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA). The program did not produce anticipated results of lowering the rate of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Through AsgiSA, the South African government was expected to curb up 50% of poverty but it failed (Chibba & Luiz 2011:309).

Chibba and Luiz (2009) also note that the BEE program, which was supposed to offer a relief to the business sector, has not succeeded much in supporting the private sector. As part of its objectives, the BEE was to promote economic transformation especially of black people and create opportunities for black women to access economic activities, infrastructure, and skills training (Kruger 2011:209). However, the program failed the people it was meant to serve (Chibba & Luiz 2009; Kruger 2011). According to Chibba and Luiz (2009), only selective state-led, multipartite negotiation and selective private sector benefited from the BEE. As of South Africa's Quarter 2 of 2022, the unemployment rate stood at 33, 9%.[66] Black women who are out of the labour market and are economically inactive make up to 47% compared to 35, 6% of males.

Young women engage in sex work primarily for economic reasons. As argued by Punt (2021:5), theological discussions on sex work are mostly consumed by the moral aspects at the expense of the relation between sex and the economy. The discussions need to address the core issue, which is the material need of sex workers. The country's weak economy does not provide many options especially to young women who are in the sex business. They find themselves at the periphery of the economy that does not favour the marginalised. Methula (2014:113) argues that the "struggle for economic justice creates an opportunity to search for sustainable economic alternatives that are

[66] See www.statsa.gov.za. Accessed on 2022/11/21.

founded on the common good". Following Methula, I argue that the new paradigm shift should speak to the economic freedom of many poor black people who continue to be poor under the new dispensation. The economic struggle of sex workers is at the centre of postcolonial mission. It calls on the church to find ways of interpreting the Bible to bring hope and transform the lives of sex workers.

4.5.3.1 Role of the URCSA in the socio-economic status of sex workers

It has been 28 years since the inception of the URCSA. Although the church has achieved some political freedom alongside the country, most of its membership and the communities where it is located remain poor. No amount of political freedom can replace economic freedom. Modise (2018:11) acknowledges that although we celebrate 28 years of existence as the URCSA, it is not deniable that the country still suffers from internalised racism and oppression and that poverty remains the biggest challenge that the church is facing (Modise 2018:10). The Belhar Confession, which the church has identified with since 1986, states clearly that, "God stands on the side of the poor". Therefore, the church that believes it was called by God is expected to "stand where God stands", on the side of the poor and the marginalised. Modise (2018:10) observes that the URCSA has played a role in poverty alleviation through its program called Service and Witness.[67] Its partnership with international donors has created opportunities for projects that relate to job creation, income generation, funeral parlour and skills development (Modise 2018:10). It is commendable what the church is doing amongst its members, as a church that does not look after its own is ignoring God's call to "stand where God stands"—amongst the marginalised that are commonly not found in the church such as sex workers.

4.5.4 Spiritual analysis

4.5.4.1 On being missional and transformative

What would mission that is transformative look like in the context of sex work especially in a poor environment like Marabastad? During a Bible study session, one of the respondents suggested that the church would need to reach out to sex workers. She was calling for the church to go beyond

[67] Service and Witness is one of the three core ministries recognised by the URCSA. The two other ministries are proclamation and worship and congregational ministry. They are all in the Article 5 of the URCSA Church Order.

its pews and start approaching the margins. The visibility of the church in the marginalised communities is a call for the church to move beyond its monolithic approach to mission. Kritzinger (2011:42) states that the mission of the church is the participation of people in God's work on earth. He employs a multi-dimensional approach to highlight the themes of reconciliation, evangelism, healing, justice and earth-keeping (2011:43). Although, the multi-dimensional approach seems all-encompassing, it does not touch on the immediate challenges that confront the marginalised such as poverty, destitution and unemployment, among others. Mission demands that the church penetrates the heart of sex workers whose life remains in danger daily because of the nature of their work. Mission calls on the church to approach the margins with empathy, understanding why sex workers chose this career to fend for their needs.

For a very long time, the church, particularly the then N.G. Kerk in Suid Afrika, has been active in the struggle against apartheid through the Belhar Confession, the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960 and the *Belydende Kring* in 1974. Mission was defined from the angle of how the church should respond in the face of oppression and segregation. However, as Baron (2019:16) argued, the church can no longer speak and participate on behalf of the oppressed while suppressing the very same voices that need to speak for themselves. It is imperative for the church to stand against any kind of injustice and disunity and its mission will not be realised until the church repents. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the foundations of colonisation and apartheid are still entrenched in the history of the church and manifest in our daily practices. The church also still carries the burden of discrimination based on racism, ethnicism, tribalism, classism, gender and age (Senokoane 2019:6).

During the period of colonisation and subsequently of apartheid, the church justified the dehumanisation of black people through slavery, child and women abuse and racism. When the URCSA was formed in 1994, some of the problems of the past such as ethnicity and gender disparities remained. For example, to date one still finds in a Xhosa or Sotho dominated speaking congregation gender inequality at the level of church leadership. Senokoane acknowledges that the church managed to bring together black and white, poor and rich, literate and illiterate, men and women, young and old, heterosexual and LGBTI-Q as well as married and single. However, the so-called "coexistence" is not real when in a church context some voices remain muted. White people still take decisions, the rich still exercise power over the poor and the literate over the non-literate. More men still occupy positions of power than women and the LGBTI-Q remain in the

closet because of the stigma around homosexuality. However, since the URCSA is a church that prides itself in diversity, it has made significant contributions to mission since its inception in 1994 (Baron 2019:14; Kritzinger 2017:9). The URCSA created a new culture by developing a new hymnal book that embraced all ethnic groups in South Africa (Baron 2019:15). The church also found its missional voice through the Belhar Confession (1986), which not only captured the cries of the church against the injustices of apartheid, but also served as a mission praxis for the voiceless and the marginalised.

It is imperative for a church like the URCSA to play an important missional role as an agent of transformation beyond its borders. The URCSA is a church that has a unique history due to colonisation and apartheid. It has lived through the experiences of biblical heresy that promoted whiteness and devalued black people. In promoting whiteness, the church fuelled anger and poisoned relations amongst black people (Senokoane 2019:6). That is how colonisation played out – it infiltrated the economic, social, political and psychological lives of black people. Therefore, for transformation to take place and enable mission not to be compromised, the church especially the URCSA needs to heal. The main reason the women in Marabastad engage in sex work is to make ends meet. A missional church is not only required to reach out to the women in Marabastad, but also to create a transformative space for them. The situation of the women in Marabastad calls for the church to be radical in her approach especially in making an impact in their socio-economic status.

4.5.4.2 Role of the URCSA in the lives of sex workers through Faith-Based Organisations

The Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF) is a Christian organisation that was founded in collaboration with churches and local communities in 1993.[68] Two m/inisters of the URCSA in the persons of Rev. Sakkie Kloppers and Rev. Stephan De Beer were amongst those who were there from the beginning of the TLF. Both men left the church to pursue community ministry on a full-time basis. The TLF engages in programs of poverty alleviation, addressing the root causes of homelessness and the abuse of women and children.[69] It has 15 programs that include outreach work, drop-in centres, transitional and special needs housing, life and social skills training,

[68] See www.tlf.org.za. Accessed on 2022/11/21.
[69] See www.tlf.org.za. Accessed on 2022/11/21.

palliative, and geriatric care.[70] The drop-in centres are mostly used by sex workers to collect day-to-day essentials such as food, toiletries, and accommodation to some extent. The URCSA is not directly involved in the running of the organisation. It is commendable what the organisation is doing—meeting the needs of the poor and the marginalised daily. However, it is more than charity that sex workers need. They need to know to which extent the grace of God will be sufficient for them.

4.5.4.3 Spirituality of sex workers at Marabastad

The church should not only be missional in her approach to sex work but also be postcolonial in her approach to the transformation of the lives of those on the margins. Most of the women who participated in the Bible study were not church members. They only go to the Zion Christian Church[71] (also known as the ZCC) to get help with what is termed as *'ditaelo'*.[72] The church branch that the women attend is situated in Marabastad, Pretoria. Thus, one can conclude that since it was their first encounter with the text, their voices had not been heard before. They did not even know they had stories to tell and that their stories mattered. Although they were able to relate to and place themselves in the story in Luke 7:36-40, they did not identify themselves as sex workers or prostitutes. The women identified the unnamed woman in Luke 7 36-40 as a "prostitute" but they identified themselves as "women who used to be in prostitution". Perhaps the past tense is used because of the stigma or the fear of being judged. Despite their social status, for instance, being unemployed and to a certain extent being silent and almost invisible, they were bold enough to share their stories with a stranger.

[70] See www.tlf.org.za. Accessed on 2022/11/21.
[71] The Zion Christian Church is an African Independent Church established in 1924 by the Bishop Joseph Engenas Matlhakanye Lekganyane. Its headquarters is in the northern province of South Africa called the Limpopo Province. See www.sahistory.org.za. Accessed on 2022/12/22.
[72] *Ditaelo* is translated as instructions. Mashabela, J.K., 2017. "Healing in a cultural context: the role of healing as a defining character in the growth and popular faith of the Zion Christian Church". *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 43(2), pp.1-14.

4.5.4.4 A postcolonial interpretation of the Bible from a black woman's perspective

As the text was read and interrogated, none of us picked up any gesture that might have led Simon to conclude that the unnamed woman was a sinner. As argued by Mary Foskett, the assumptions projected to the woman as a sinner indicates the "discursive meanings that are embedded in the social structures that not only places women in the impossible and marginalized positions but blames women for being there in the first place" (Foskett 2021:53)

Continuing to view women in a sinister manner not only perpetuates sexism and classism but also continues to exclude them from the mainstream economy. Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (2005:747) points out that the multiple denying factors such as sexism emanate from colonialism and apartheid. However, the experiences of the marginalised serve as a starting point for their biblical encounter (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2005:747). The interpretation of the text in their own language and based on their experiences restores power to them.

The goal of the current study which takes off from a postcolonial perspective is to expose the space of coloniality—the interpretation of Scripture that oppresses and silences the marginalised groups especially black women. According to Punt (2000:8), the postcolonial approach offers an opportunity to reread the Scripture. However, before such re-readings can be carried out, one needs to analyse critically the very imperial hegemonies that continue to have a bearing on the church, particularly, the URCSA.

Firstly, from a missiological school of thought, the writings of the likes of David Bosch and Klippies Kritzinger still carry weight in the discipline and in the Reformed Church. David Bosch's contribution to missions made an immense mark on liberation theology (1991). Bosch argues that mission is a "multifaceted ministry, in respect of witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualization and much more". However, the sub-themes of what mission stands for in the writings of Bosch do not feature the voices of black women. In 1991, when the book *Transforming Mission* was published, South Africa was just on the brink of democracy. The white government and the black political parties had just begun the talks on reconciliation and the government of national unity. The nation was still vulnerable because of the state of apartheid. As Lephakga argues, apartheid did not only leave black people on the margins of society, but it also left them with generational impoverishment,

humiliation, and dislocation (2013:11). It was an opportunity for influential voices in mission to address the damage done by colonisation and apartheid in using the Bible to oppress black people. However, issues of women were left unattended.

Secondly, as we continue to expose the oppression laid out on Scripture, the researcher would like to uncover what is referred to as 'othering'. Both Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) and Kritzinger approach the concept of "othering" from different perspectives. Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (2005) refers to how South Africans especially black South Africans exclude themselves when talking about or referring to other African countries. Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) argues that the withdrawal of South Africans from the rest of the continent creates a negative space for xenophobia (2005:743). She also employs the concept of othering to challenge the discourse of the colonial hegemonies against black women, hence, the use of *bosadi* to restore the stolen identities of black women especially those on the margins. Thus, Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) calls for a process of removing theologies that do not address the experiences of black women in South Africa, for instance, feminist and womanist theologies.

The *bosadi* approach does not only speak to the experiences of black women from the margins but it also seeks to decolonise the spaces of racism, classism, sexism and oppression. One can say therefore that the *bosadi* approach creates space for hermeneutics that focus on the liberation of black women and their experiences (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2005:747). As alluded to earlier, *bosadi* allows women to start with their experiences when interpreting the Bible.

On the notion of 'othering', Kritzinger (2008:765), like Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (2005), challenges the discourse of excluding other religions from dialogue. The absence of dialogue between religions creates not only biases and insensitivity, but also tension in the theological space. Kritzinger (2008:766) is not against Christian scholars focusing on "conveying the correct information" but a shift from "conveying the correct information" to creating a dialogue will leave no stone unturned between Christianity and other religions (2008:767). As a solution, he proposes what he terms "encounterology" (2008:770). Encounterology opens a respectful space for two or more religions to have a dialogue—faith-to-faith and face-to-face. In that way, it helps to combat all biases against any religion.

Encounterology in conjunction with *bosadi* hermeneutics can help women who find themselves at the periphery of the society. Sex workers are women whose stories are never told yet they are

discriminated against. Sex workers may not be practitioners or even comfortable in the halls of academia, but they have a story to tell. When academia engages in dialogue with them, then, the missional praxis becomes a reality. In the absence of dialogue, a space for judgement is created and sex workers are further pushed to the margins. More misunderstanding of their circumstances is also created. Therefore, there is a need for intercontextual encounterology which will help both sex workers and practitioners to engage in a postcolonial reading and interpretation of the Bible that is empowering and liberating to them. The dimension of intercontextual encounterology is a dialogical approach that enters one's culture and space. The church will understand the context of the sex workers, as the dimension calls for a reciprocal relationship.

4.5.4.5 Mission as transformation

The role of the church in a country that is still haunted by the effects of apartheid is significant. As noted in Chapter 2, the voice of the church played a prominent role during the struggle against apartheid through the Cottesloe in 1960, the BK in 1974 and the Belhar Confession in 1986 (see 2.14 above). However, after the dissolution of apartheid, the silence of the church has become extremely worrying. According to Tshaka (2015:4), the "deradicalization of the black church" took place after the transition of South Africa into a democratic state. Tshaka argues that after 1994, churches no longer care about the liberation of the church, but are mostly concerned about how much money they are making. In addition, key black theologians occupied the academic spaces in the institutions of higher learning and/or government positions (2015:10).

The active participation of the church is crucial in a country that is affected by the inequalities caused by the colonial and later, the apartheid regime. The young women who participate/d in sex work to make a living remain on the margins of society. They are not part of the mainstream economy or of the church. Their spirituality and social status are affected. During the Bible study, Group 2, unhesitatingly agreed when asked if the situation faced by sex workers could be changed. However, the respondents added that, "the church needs to come to us". This was the request from a young woman who is homeless and unemployed. The response is an appeal to the church to go beyond its walls and reach out to the margins. In this regard, Jason Oliver Evans argues that the church has not fully lived up to its identity as a voice of conscience for the oppressed persons within and outside of its walls (2012:5).

4.6 SYNTHESIS—THE EMERGING THEMES

In studying the pericope of Luke 7:36-40, the ordinary readers were not afraid to speak out. The differences in the voices of the ordinary readers and of the learned readers regarding whether the woman in Luke was a sinner could cause tension between the scholarly and the ordinary readers, but a creative dialogue should enable the voices of ordinary readers to be heard. Mashau and Mangoedi (2015:7) note that this space is important as it allows for a critical interfacing between the ordinary and the learned reader. Thus, West (2015:245) calls the reading of ordinary and learned readers a collaborative praxis.

4.6.1. Rejected because of 'sin'

When a synthesis of voices of the ordinary and the learned readers was made, it became clear that the unnamed woman was rejected because Simon judged her. What the ordinary readers labelled as "rejection", the learned reader regarded as "marginalisation". However, both the learned and the ordinary reader agree that Simon's attitude towards the unnamed woman was ostracising. No conclusive answer came from either the learned readers or the ordinary readers about the nature of the sin that Simon mentioned. Although some scholars maintain that the woman was a sinner, her unbound hair is not a sign of promiscuity or any type of indecency (Brondyke 2005; Cosgrove 2005). Phanon (2016:74) argues that Simon and the guests judged the woman as a sinner and perhaps as a sex worker because of her strange actions. Two processes are at play simultaneously here through two characters. On the one hand is Simon who was a patriarchal figure and held an important status in the community. His status placed him on a certain hierarchical pedestal (Resseguie 2016:15) and in an advantageous position of power. On the other hand, there is an unnamed woman who is known to be a sinner (meaning she is judged) She is a nameless and voiceless woman (Resseguie 2016:15). The power relation between her and Simon was uneven, as women and children were perceived by the Pharisees as "as things of little value" (Resseguie 2016:15). Secondly, it was her gesture that caused people to judge her as a sex worker. As argued by Resseguie (2016:13), the repetition of "and" in the text (κάί from the Greek translation) illustrates something that is exaggerated. Instead of using a towel to dry the feet of Jesus, she used her hair. That gesture would require the unnamed woman to remove the scarf on her head and untie

her hair – an act that brought shame to a woman. In addition, she entered the house of a prominent leader without an invitation and took centre stage (Resseguie 2016:15). Simon, as a result, remained hostile to the woman.

The question of whether Simon ever accepted the woman as a restored and released member of the community however remains (English 2012:439). Not only did Simon reject the woman, but he also started doubting that Jesus could indeed be a prophet. Simon's reaction to the woman was rather inhospitable compared to that of the unnamed woman (English 2012:439). According to Vanwesenbeeck (2014:15), stigma is harsher and has greater consequences for women. Thus, CBS was a tool for the ordinary readers to share and recognise the power and the control that men still have in their environment (Breen 2012:7). More importantly, through the CBS approach, a black woman from Marabastad was able to discover her voice and this contributed to the process of transformation and liberation.

4.6.2 Justice for the marginalised sex workers

In the dialogue between ordinary and learned readers, there is a concern about the non-responsive voice of the church towards the margins. In addition, there is a call for the church to redefine its mission in the light of sex work within the poor communities and especially by black women.

The Belhar Confession states that, "God brings justice to the oppressed and the hungry" (Article 4). Thinane (2021:2) agrees that God's justice in collaboration with human justice demonstrates compassion towards the poor and the marginalised. God's justice participates in the *missio Dei*. Thinane acknowledges that the concept of justice is broad. The distinction between God's justice and human justice does not imply a comparison of, or an attempt to confuse the two. Rather, it is to unite them. The two forms of justice have one aspect in common—expressing compassion for "the poor and the marginalized in the society" (Thinane 2021:2).

Scholars note that the concept of justice is as much biblical as it is social. Since South Africa continues to grapple with challenges of "inequality with brutal repercussions, specifically for those who are on the underside of power", justice would have to be defined from the perspective of the marginalised and the poor (Botha & Vorster 2017:3, 4). About biblical justice, Thinane (2021:3) points to two forms of justice—the "justice that is aligned to the will of God" and justice that refers

to righteousness. Both refer to the fair treatment of the poor, the fatherless, the widows and the marginalised (Thinane 2021:3). Overall, justice is an aspect of mission reflecting God's love for the marginalised.

4.6.3 From mission to *missio Dei*

As one of the emerging themes, "the love of God" was crucial to the Bible study participants. Although God is not mentioned in the pericope in the Gospel according to Luke, the participants associated Jesus with God. To substantiate their response, one of the respondents mentioned the warm attitude that Jesus demonstrated towards the unnamed woman. When the researcher probed further how they thought the church should respond to the issues of marginalisation and the marginalised, the respondents mentioned that the church should move to the streets. From a scholarly perspective, 'reaching out' may mean, "being sent", which is a concept of mission (Kritzinger 2011:52). Smith associates mission with the Great Commission in Matthew's gospel. The Great Commission became significant to the Protestants, and they were the first to make it mandatory to all believers within the Protestant movement (Smith 2004:1).

However, it is important to mention especially for the purpose of this study that the use of the Great Commission within the Protestant movement was marked by controversy. From the late 18th century onwards, the Anglo-Saxon missionaries defined mission from a territorial and economic expansionist angle. According to Smith (2004:1), being sent meant socialising countries especially from Africa, Latin America, and Asia into the Western culture where imperial powers were complemented. In the same period (18th century), the Roman Catholic Church also adopted the Great Commission but her understanding of the Great Commission was conversion to Catholicism (Smith 2004:2). When the colonialists entered the African continent, the white missionaries regarded black people as "conversion objects" (Thinane 2021:2). The British "believed that mission is all about converting people, planting the church and glorifying divine grace" (Thinane 2021:2).

However, the concepts of *missio Dei* and *missio hominum* challenge the misconception about what mission is. Smith (2002:10) understands *missio Dei* as "God's personal involvement in the mission to gather people into the church". For Smith (2002:13), the "church is the only channel through which God could reach the nations". For Kapya Kaoma, *missio Dei* is mission that is God-centred

(2016:161). *Missio Dei* "emanates from the Triune God and Christians are invited to participate in it" (Kaoma 2016:161). However, the participation of Christians in *missio Dei* is defined through *missio hominum.* Through the *missio hominum*, Christians are challenged to be not the audience in mission but active participants by being relational to each other (Thinane 2021:3). The concept of *missio hominum* in the South African context with a history of apartheid encourages reconciliation between Christians. In other words, Christians are called through *missio hominum* to be active drivers of *missio Dei* (Thinane 2021:3). *Missio hominum* involves a church standing where God stands—a church that stands against injustice and the oppression of fellow human beings. In fact, the respondents affirmed what the *missio hominum* entails—a church that does not reach out especially to the marginalised discards itself from the mission of God. It is a church that does not acknowledge the new paradigm shift in missiology (Bosch 1990). Some of the elements in the new paradigm shift includes mission as action hope, mission as a quest for justice, mission as liberation and God's preferential option for the poor. Thus, Ipsen (2014) proposes "a preferential option" for sex workers. Perhaps the latter can be added to the elements of mission.

4.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter has achieved its aim of reading and studying the Bible with a group of sex workers in Marabastad. Although they had two different opinions about what the sin the unnamed woman was accused of, in the end, both groups concluded that it was sex work. The argument escalated to the learned readers. Both Schottroff (1993) and Kilgallen (1998) agree that the sin was sex work, but Cosgrove (2005) argues that the gesture of the unnamed woman was based on hospitality. It had nothing to do with sin. After a critical analysis of all the arguments, the conclusion of this thesis is that the woman was a sinner, and the sin was engaging in sex work. The argument is based on the voices of the women in sex work in Marabastad. They were able to voice their opinions on what they thought Luke 7:36-47 meant in their context. In the same voice, they did not shy away from challenging the church to move away from the centre towards the margins. Kritzinger (2011:56) argues that "we need a process of discernment to develop the specific attitudes and actions we adopt in the particular context where we find ourselves".

The women expressed their understanding of the missional role of the church in their liberation. The praxis of the Belhar Confession is clear in this context. The church needs to stand where God

stands—on the side of the oppressed and of the poor. Chapter 5 will attempt to define a clear and well-developed mission praxis of the church for the here and now. The chapter will carry out a postcolonial reading of the Bible in relation to the church and sex workers. What kind of missional praxis should we propose and what kind of postcolonial reading informs such a praxis? The aim of the chapter is to forge a missional praxis and a postcolonial reading of the Bible that will resonate with the life of a black woman especially one who is a sex worker.

CHAPTER 5

THE BELHAR CONFESSION AND SEX WORKERS: THE URCSA AND MISSION AS TRANSFORMATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The current study employs a postcolonial interpretation of the Bible in the context of the liberation of sex workers. The method used in the analysis is the praxis matrix model. The pertinent question asked is how would the URCSA engage the model in liberating sex workers and transforming their lives? After engaging with the margins through the ordinary and the learned readers of the Bible in Chapter 4, the chapter focuses on how the postcolonial reading of the Bible is understood by the church and by sex workers. Twenty-eight years after the establishment of the URCSA, the church continues to embody the Belhar Confession as one of its confessions. The question that this chapter seeks to answer is: how far is the URCSA willing to go in standing where God stands—against injustice and with the wronged? (Belhar Confession 1986).

Thus far, the thesis has analysed critically the URCSA's current missional praxis towards sex workers and the kind of hermeneutical lenses that informed such a praxis. In that regard, Chapter 2 examined the Reformed tradition and its interpretation of the Bible especially regarding the notion of sin. The study probed the interpretive method used by the URCSA as well as the secondary texts such as the Church Order and the Belhar Confession. The two secondary texts do not address the issue of sex work, but the Church Order is used when the church decides to discipline erring members. The researcher specifically considered how the church used the Church Order when dealing with sin. As Punt (2021:8) has shown, sex work is associated with the forgiveness of sins and the forgiven sins.

In this chapter, attention will be given to the voices of sex workers in conversation with the Belhar Confession and the church's advocacy for mission. The Belhar Confession played the role of a secondary text to the URCSA, as a voice of the church opposing the apartheid regime and proclaiming it as sin.

Firstly, the section will investigate the role of liberation theologies including the postcolonial interpretation of the Bible in bringing a new liberative message from the Bible especially in the post-colonial and post-apartheid eras. Secondly, it will attempt "to examine the bias of a text in regard to its sources of oppression as well as its life-giving potential" (Russel 2004:27).

The chapter will also feature the voices of sex workers in dialogue with the Belhar Confession. Lastly, it will consider the role of the URCSA in the liberation and the transformation of sex workers and as an advocate of mission.

5.2 GOD ON THE SIDE OF SEX WORKERS

Liberation theology argues that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed (West 2010:3). When Gustavo Gutiérrez coined the concept of "a preferential option for the poor", he intentionally placed spirituality at the centre of poverty, thus, challenging the church to take responsibility for the poor (Gutiérrez 2012:99). The question is why a preferential option for the poor? Why did Gutiérrez choose to give the poor attention? According to Gutiérrez (2012:100), the preferential option for the poor is an integral part of liberation theology and liberation theology acts as a bridge between real issues on the ground and those who follow Jesus with the aim of advocating for the poor. However, the poor are not to be taken as projects or charity cases for the rich people. Liberation theology calls the poor and the oppressed to be active participants in the struggle for their own justice and dignity (Gutiérrez 2012:100).

The preferential option for the poor is considered relevant in countries and regions which have experienced poverty and oppression such as Latin America, North America and South Africa. The affected countries adopted the agenda of liberation theology in order to bring about transformation in their societies (Buffel 2010:2). Liberation theology will continue to remain relevant in South Africa for as long as poverty, oppression and economic crisis persist in the lives of the majority of black South Africans (Buffel 2010:3). Buffel (2010:3) adds that the relevance of liberation theology lies in continuing to be in the middle of suffering, oppression and injustice.

It is in the light of all these hardships that the advocacy for theology to see God on the side of sex workers becomes relevant. There is an urgent missional call for the church to respond to the marginalisation of sex workers. The aspect of poverty especially as experienced by the women of

Marabastad, buttresses this call. Poverty is one reason that these women take to sex work. In response, liberation theology is clear about its goal—the liberationists are to be co-workers with God in discerning where God is already at work in bringing life amid death (West 2010:2).

However, Althaus-Reid (1999:39) argues that liberation theology has not done enough to unmask a theology befitting for women that advances the process of Christology especially in "sexual matters". The process of building towards a complete Christology is not finished until Christ is realised in "women's bodies" (Althaus-Reid 1999:40). Such a theology would be labelled as indecent theology by liberation theology, which ironically claims that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed (19991:41). When will the God who is on the side of women in sex work then arise? In challenging the liberationists, Althaus-Reid (1999:41) argues that if liberationists claim that Christ is neither male nor female in the sense that Christ represents the community of the poor, then, it would not be impossible for Christ to be found in a girl sex worker who is with two men at a Buenos Aires public toilet.

For Christ to be realised among sex workers, narratives around sex work and the stigma around sex workers need to change, which means one cannot afford to use a generic phrase such as 'the poor and the oppressed'. Such a statement is too general especially at a time in which various forms of stigmatisation have emerged such as discrimination against sex workers and gender non-conforming persons. The present situation calls for scholarship to recognise a God who is on the side of sex workers. In this regard, Ipsen (2014) calls for a preferential option for sex workers and critiques the liberation theology of participating within the societal constructs of what is considered 'decent.' Liberation theology shied away from creating a theology that views God as on the side of sex workers (Ipsen 2014). To change the narrative, Ipsen reads the Bible with a group of sex workers who were calling for the decriminalisation of sex work. Changing the narratives will not only allow a safe space for sex workers to speak but it will also transform societal binaries, that is, what is defined as wrong or right.

Althaus-Reid therefore proposes a theological praxis from queer theology to think of ways to transform societal ills—a theology of love. According to her, a queer theology reflects a loving relationship (Althaus-Reid 2007:303). The change of language in theology will assist the church to change its perspective towards sex workers. Arguing from the perspective of queer theology, Althaus-Reid is of the view that theology is dominated by a language of love. Theological themes

such as redemption should bear fruits of freedom, love, deliverance from suffering and danger (Althaus-Reid 2007:203). These themes often come up in sermons in a church space but through the missional praxis which allows the church to engage with its margins, such themes can go a long way in addressing issues pertaining to liberation as well as the transformation of the lives of sex workers. It may thus be argued that a postcolonial missional praxis for the URCSA has the potential to give hope to sex workers.

5.3 A PROPOSED POSTCOLONIAL MISSIONAL PRAXIS FOR THE URCSA

The situation in which sex workers in Marabastad find themselves is damning. It may not be an exaggeration to note that the environment is inhumane. It strips one of dignity leaving one without any sense of home, that is, in terms of safety and providence. The context of Marabastad is a challenge not only to sex workers but also to the church at large. The condition of the sex workers calls for a postcolonial missional praxis that will intentionally move the church out of its comfort zone. I would like to argue that the church has a responsibility through its ethical use of the Bible to change the narrative of sex workers from that of marginalisation to one of liberation. Therefore, in the church setting, sex workers should not be regarded as visitors who should be absorbed by the church or who should receive charitable donations. The idea of mission calls upon the church to welcome sex workers as confessing members of the church and to encourage them to become participants in their own empowerment and liberation.

The word "confessing" is used intentionally here. Both Tshaka (2017) and Kgatla (2022) identify the URCSA as a "confessing church". However, the connotation comes with a baggage of colonial and apartheid history. When the Reformed tradition was introduced into Africa by the Dutch Calvinists and later the French Huguenots, the church prided itself in its identity as a "confessing church" (Tshaka 2017:4). The confessions were written in a particular European context – the history of their evolutions. In other words, when Christianity was introduced into South Africa, it was introduced through the Reformed faith (Tshaka 2017:4). Through the work of the missionaries, African people embraced the Reformed faith at the expense of losing their identity. Tshaka argues that when the reformed faith was introduced in Africa with all its confessions, it was influenced by the church fathers from Europe. However, the confessions did not have anything to do with the African context and its realities (Tshaka 2017:4). Thus, when Reformed theology

was introduced to South Africans, it did not address any of the African cultures or challenges. Tshaka contends that instead of the West becoming relevant in Africa, they came and recreated the continent (2017:3-4). As a result, Africa remained with different worldviews and cultures and colonisation left it a wounded continent with many complexities (2017:4). Colonisation dislocated African people in terms of culture and spirituality among others. Consequently, Africans remained foreigners in the Reformed faith that they have embraced since 1859.[73] Since 1859, members of the URCSA defined their membership based on their status as confessing members. According to the Church Order of the Northern Synod of URCSA, the only condition for becoming a confessing member is to confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour (2012:8). Kgatla (2022:6) defines a confessing church as a church that distinguishes herself from the "ideologies of the world that compromise the call of Jesus to be Lord and Liberator of the gospel".

Consequently, the black church was forced to reflect critically on the effect of colonisation and apartheid on black people. To change the narrative introduced by the white Reformed church, liberation theologies in South Africa emerged. Black theology, contextual theology and African women's theology emerged out of the struggle against colonisation and apartheid (West 2010:3). In singling out the struggles faced by black people due to oppression, West (2010:3) contends, with reference to Frostin, that the struggle related to socio-economic issues, gender inequality, sexism, racism, and ethnicity. However, West (2010:3) says that Frostin's list is incomplete without normality (referring to able-disabled), sexuality (referring to heterosexual-homosexual) and morality (referring to HIV-negative/ignorant HIV positive).

When liberation theologies in South Africa emerged, it was an urgent call to change the status of oppression amongst black people in the country but when black theology emerged, it immediately challenged the biblical hermeneutic which was employed to justify apartheid (Tshaka 2013:3). As a result, black theology brought tensions with it especially within the Reformed tradition (Tshaka 2013:4). Tshaka argues that there were strains between those who supported the legitimacy of apartheid and those who condemned the legitimacy of apartheid (Tshaka 2013:3). It is significant to add that amidst the pulls, the Bible remained a supporting document to both the black and the Reformed theology. Black theology was clear about its mission to decolonise the Reformed theology by bringing in interpretations that speak to the experiences of black people. West

[73] See Dutch Reformed Church on http://www.britannica.com. Accessed on 2022/12/04.

(2010:4), engaging Mosala, asserts that black theology should start with the experiences, the struggles, and the culture of black people. As noted earlier, it is imperative for any biblical hermeneutic especially directed to the African people to start with the realities of Africans (Tshaka 2013:7).

In many ways, the formation of the Belhar Confession challenged the context of apartheid. Although the content was formulated to engage with and stand against the apartheid regime, it continues to be relevant to a changed and changing context (Tshaka 2013:4). The URCSA redefined mission. The church opened a space for "the voice of the marginalized to be God's symbol of injustice, voicelessness, oppression and suppression" (Baron 2019:13). In that case, the church cannot be silent in the face of the stigmatisation of sex workers.

5.3.1 Dealing with the silence and prejudice of the church on the marginalisation of sex workers

The interpretation of the Bible in the church has been clouded by rules of morality, that is, by what is wrong and what is right. Martin Hugo Cordova Quero challenges what could be considered the "decent patterns of society" versus the "indecent". The indecency/decent patterns are inspired by the binary thinking in the society that produces positive and negative oppositions (Quero 2017:81). Such connotations and labels encourage the continuous victimisation of sex workers as well as the 'otherness' as alluded to by Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele) (2005) and Kritzinger (2008). Sex workers are regarded as people who not only are on the margins but should also belong there. Quero (2017:81) argues that humanity is clouded by the 'normalcy' created by the Enlightenment, giving meaning to reality, colonising and labelling all other cultures and societies.

According to Quero (2017:81), normalisation is based on elements such as "labeling, dehumanizing, demonizing, exoticizing, stigmatizing and silencing". These are triggered by the unwritten laws of society that are exacerbated by the domineering male interpretation of the Bible. The challenge especially for women is to read the biblical text that is male dominated and male-interpreted (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2005; Quero 2017). Quero (2017:93 argues that the interpretation of the Bible within the church is mostly influenced "by the systems of hierarchies based on gender, sexual orientation, class and race" and the church has used those systems to obtain power to judge which bodies/body deserve/s God's grace and which do not (Quero

2017:93). However, the systems of hierarchies have more to do with how the coloniser trained the colonised, for instance women, to read and interpret the Bible (Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] 2005:187). According to Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] (2005:187), black people were trained to read the Bible through the agenda of the colonisers while the poor "colluded with elitist texts and interpretations". The reading and interpretation of the Bible did not only have a racist and classist impact, but it also impacted how women especially black women read and/or related to the Bible. Masenya [Ngwana' Mphahlele] (2005b:187) further argues that patriarchy played a significant role in how people approach the Bible, for instance, reading and interpreting the Bible from a male perspective. Two issues need to be noted.

Firstly, the burden of colonisation and later apartheid in South Africa has left the black church no choice but to reinterpret the Bible according to its own context. Secondly, black scholars have the responsibility of stripping the Bible of the racist, sexist and classist stance created by the same systems of colonisation and apartheid. Quoting Mugambi, West (2004:310) argues that the Bible, especially in Africa, remains the mostly influential book; therefore, a single translation and interpretation will not do justice to its interpretation, given the broader socio-historical contexts.

The silence of the church towards sex work is because of, firstly, the judgemental attitude towards sex workers and secondly, the misunderstanding of the church that stands where God stands against injustice and with the wronged (Belhar Confession Article 4).

As discussed in chapter 4, although the role of the TLF is acknowledged, the visibility of the church especially the URCSA as a body of Christ is crucial in the lives of sex workers. The women of Marabastad live in appalling conditions with inadequate primary healthcare, lack of empowerment, and lack of shelter to provide security. The role of the church therefore is not only to offer them alternatives to make a living besides sex work, but also to restore their dignity. The researcher is of the view that the missional understanding of the Belhar Confession can serve as a fitting starting point for its praxis.

5.4. MISSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE BELHAR CONFESSION TOWARDS SEX WORKERS

The adoption of the Belhar Confession was a milestone for the DRCA and the DRMC which later became the URCSA after the merger. The Confession became known and accepted worldwide by several churches and it is seen as "the bedrock of theological reference and reflection as well as the salient point of theological identity within the URCSA" (Boesak 2008:1). However, the Confession also has its shortcomings; for instance, there has been an obstacle to the reunification process between the URCSA and the DRC to this day. Nonetheless, the Confession remains an important theological document for the process of the unification of the church (Boesak 2008:1).

To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to state that the aim of the Belhar Confession is to uphold and to affirm. It is neither meant to attack, defend, condemn nor rationalise. It is meant to testify and proclaim (Boesak 2008:2).

The Belhar Confession remains relevant in the face of present-day challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, as it was during the apartheid regime when it was first adopted in 1986. In the context of this thesis, the Belhar Confession is brought to the centre of the marginalisation of sex workers where sex workers are ostracised because of their choice of a means for their livelihoods. The Belhar Confession (Article 4) clearly opposes any form of oppression, injustice, and suffering. It starts by professing that the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is the one who gathers, protects and cares for the church (Article 1). The statement is also affirmed by the document of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for the Study of the Renewal of Worship, which says, "Blessed are the people of God who are deeply aware that they are both called by and address the triune God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit".[74] The statement acknowledges the protection and care of the triune God (MacMaster 2017:273). According to MacMaster (2017:273), the protection for the church is an affirmation to the church that God is the Subject, the Initiator and Creator of the church. In the era of oppression, injustice, economic exploitation and racial discrimination, the church needed assurance that the triune God was on its side. Racism

[74] "Worship the triune God". Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. See www.worship.calvin.edu. Accessed on 2021/01/23.

implied that skin colour defined the social status of black people. For instance, while black people were dehumanised, white privilege meant getting better education, economic power and being favoured by the justice system (Boesak 2019:2).

Although the church and the world continue to acclaim the Belhar Confession, it is evident that the struggle did not end in 1994 when apartheid was abolished. Black people, within and outside the URCSA, continue to experience hardship in the form of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, among others. However, the church remains at the centre of the lived experiences of black people (Tshaka 2015:3).

The Belhar Confession was formed to declare apartheid as heresy (Tshaka 2015:2). It was also meant to be a voice for the voiceless black majority who were on the periphery of the society including sex workers. It was a radical voice that stood against the regime of the time. However, the voice of the church that was so loud through the Belhar Confession went silent after 1994. As Tshaka puts it, the church "de-radicalized" (2015:4). For the Belhar Confession to remain relevant, it needs to redefine its mission in terms of its constituencies. The constituencies should not be limited to the members of the URCSA but extend to the surrounding communities including the community of sex workers. The missional understanding of the Belhar Confession is centred on reconciliation, unity, and justice. It emphasises the issue of justice in Article 4 which states that, "God supports the downtrodden" (The Belhar Confession 1986). The downtrodden could be any person who has experienced oppression or been treated badly by people in power. In the current research, the downtrodden would-be sex workers because of their marginalised status in the society. Consequently, the liberation of sex workers depends upon the radicalisation of the church—a church that is visible where sex workers are. It is one thing to issue a confession as a church, but it is another, to confess with the downtrodden physically on the street where they reside. However, the question is how far did the Belhar Confession go in advocating for inclusivity?

5.4.1 Finding a feminine voice in the Belhar Confession

Although, the Confession was and remained the voice of the church during the apartheid regime, which proclaimed it as a false doctrine, it failed to embrace gender inclusive language. According to Piet Naudé, the Belhar Confession did not give attention to issues of sexism and gender

discrimination at the time it was drafted because those issues did not pose any danger (2004:207). However, the researcher disagrees with Naudé's claim. When the Belhar Confession was issued, South African women were already experiencing the challenges of sexism. Christina Landman affirms that from the 1970s, the feminist movements have been calling for a just language (2006:284). She acknowledges the contribution of the Belhar Confession towards justice but argues that it missed the opportunity to embody its confession in the language of interconnectedness (2006:284). Landman uses the concept of embodiment in two ways—first, to refer to the physical bodies of women which often experience injustice in the form of violence such as rape and assault (2006:284). As one of the female sex workers in Marabastad mentioned, most nights the sex workers would offer their bodies to taxi drivers in exchange for a place to sleep. This is an example of how vulnerable the women in sex work are. In addition, the fact that the men take advantage of them shows how unjust the justice system is. The women are unable to report cases of non-consensual sex because sex work is illegal but if they do not offer their bodies to the exploiters, they risk being violated by more men in the open.

Second, embodiment in another sense, according to Landman, means that justice should be expressed through language. She argues that the power of language lies in how it breaks the silence, it shows women how they are perceived, and it creates them (Landman 2006:284). With, it is unjustified for the Belhar Confession to exclude women and their experiences. If this thesis is to find a liberative interpretation of Scripture for women in sex work, then, it should also challenge secondary sources trusted by the URCSA to embrace women especially those who are black. To begin, Landman proposes an inclusive language such that in Article 1, the nouns "Father, Son" are changed to "Caretaker and Saviour" (2006:287). Unfortunately, issues of gender inequality persist in the post-apartheid era. Recognising racism as a thorn which dehumanised black people does not necessarily include the dehumanisation of black women. When addressing issues of racial segregation, it is important to recognise that black women endured racism not only because of their skin colour, they were marginalised also because of their social status and their gender. As Kobo (2013:3) notes, women have been silenced for centuries and that rendered them weak. When you silence a person, you take away his or her power to be human. It is through their voices that they could erase the pain of racism, sexism, and classism. Back to the text of Luke 7:36-47, Simon the Pharisee rejected the unnamed woman based on her social status; she was a sinner. He even rejected the fact that Jesus accepted her gestures and pronounced the forgiveness of sins upon her.

In his critique of the Belhar Confession, Ernst Conradie observes that the word "inclusive" is not featured. He argues that although inclusivity might be implied in the core themes of the Belhar Confession, for instance, unity, reconciliation and justice, the integral meaning it carries cannot be taken for granted (Conradie 2017:153).

The Belhar Confession made it clear that for the status quo to change, the church had to be radical about how it read and interpreted the Bible. For instance, when colonisation and apartheid set in, the missionaries who introduced the Gospel to the colonised claimed to understand it best. Even though that was the case, black people "embraced the message" (Conradie 2017:158). The imperial powers dictated how black people should pray, how they should relate to God and how they should adopt their culture.

The inferior status that blacks were relegated to because of the colonial system earned them the term "victim of colonization" and their white counterparts were referred to as perpetrators (Conradie 2017:158). Conradie (2017:158) argues that inclusivity should not be about the one group and not the other. If the grace of God is to be realised, both groups would need to radically accept each other and other marginalised groups—sex workers, prisoners, the poor as well as the homeless. Conradie does not refer to inclusivity in a naïve sense. He is aware of the controversy behind it and therefore notes the radical inclusive approach of Jesus, one that made him to be perceived as a troublemaker in his hometown of Nazareth (2017:156). Hence, Conradie observes that due to radical inclusivity, Jesus was excluded. Jesus was first excluded for engaging with the lame, the sick, sex workers, tax collectors, lepers, the mentally ill, the Pharisees, the Romans, and the Samaritans. These were marginalised by the society, but Jesus called them to conversion and repentance (Conradie 2017:154). The irony is that there was also exclusion amongst themselves. For instance, the lepers were ostracised because they were contagious, and the Samaritans and the Pharisees were not culturally aligned. The Samaritans were perceived as inferior.

For the church to realise the missional understanding of the Belhar Confession, it would have to embrace radical inclusion, that is, be intentional about pushing uncomfortable boundaries. The society may not be ready to receive sex workers as integral to it, but the church needs to set the example even if it entails its exclusion from society.

5.4.2 Sex workers in conversation with the Belhar Confession and the URCSA

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the current research calls for a Belharic missional ecclesiology, which defines a church that is ready to re-member women in sex work. Sex workers, like the unnamed woman in Luke 7:36-40, are identified as sinners. Like the unnamed woman, they are also ostracised by the society. Women in sex work especially those who were part of the focus group in Marabastad come from poor backgrounds and four of the participants came from broken families (divorced parents). Nevertheless, one thing they have in common is that they are the products of constructed poverty, which made it difficult for them to advance economically. Historically, Black women have always been caught between two worlds— a black and a white world (Knight 2007:24). The oppression that black women were subjected to, including racism, classism and sexism, caused them to compete unfavourably in the white world. Some black women especially those in the corporate world, tried to change their appearance, behaviour and speech to resemble those of whites (Knight 2007:4). The triple challenges of racism, classism and sexism also served as a disadvantage to black women, academically. Their social status did not only place the women in sex work below the poverty bar, but it also shaped their outcomes in life, for instance, in terms of inequality between them and affluent women. Women involved in sex work in Marabastad, fall among the majority who did not make it to school. To them, sex work seems to be the only option since they are not likely to make any headway in the corporate world. As a result, their economic status places them at the margins of the society and they are forever judged for committing themselves to sex work.

Furthermore, their side hustle places them on the wrong side of the law because legally they cannot report any kind of sexual abuse against them. The acts of abuse mentioned by the women in Marabastad come from clients who do not want to pay after the act and from men who force themselves on the women. Again, being commercial sex workers puts them at risk of chronic illnesses. Ill health hinders their work because "they need to be functionally healthy to attract clients and generate income" (Letlape & Dube 2019:131). Lastly, they do not make enough to live a decent life. They remain homeless despite having daily income. How then does the Belhar Confession considering its themes of unity, reconciliation and justice serve as a liberation praxis for women in sex work?

5.4.2.1 The Belhar Confession and the praxis matrix

Unity

Can the Belhar Confession integrate with the praxis matrix to form a liberation praxis for women in sex work? That question is what this thesis seeks to address. The Belhar Confession is premised on three core values namely unity of the church, reconciliation in Christ and the justice of God (Plaatjies-van Huffel 2013). The unity of the church forms an integral part of the Belhar Confession which is the secondary text of the URCSA. Regarding the contextual understanding of the Confession, unity addresses the issue of racism within the Dutch Reformed family. The Confession stresses that hatred of other people and different ethnic groups is a sin that Christ has already conquered.

Consequently, the art of enhancing intercontextual encounterology will assist the church to establish a liberating praxis for women in sex work. The church is therefore called to create a safe space for women in sex work to tell their stories. Telling their stories will allow the church to understand the context and culture of women in sex work. It will open intertextual dialogues and give the URCSA an opportunity to do mission among the marginalised. Opening dialogue will also assist the church to understand their economic struggle and be in solidarity with them instead of being on the other side of the fence. Their transformation lies in their power to speak, not in their silence. The unnamed woman in the story in the Gospel of Luke was not given a chance to tell her story. She was called a 'sinner' because of her gesture. Although she took centre stage in the story, her name is not mentioned. Her culture is not mentioned. In the end, Jesus asked Simon, "Do you see this woman?" Was that an act of reconciliation?

Reconciliation

According to Linda Elaine Vogt Turner, Simon was a Pharisee, one of the elect bodies of lay elders. The Pharisees were also known as progressive lawyers who judged and passed down the oral traditions comprising the legal and moral traditions of the elders (Vogt Turner 2015:320). Vogt Turner describes the attitude of Simon towards the unnamed woman as that of a groom who is not happy with the chosen bride. Jesus narrated the story about forgiveness to expose Simon's judgmental character who relinquished his role as a host that should offer hospitality to a guest to the unnamed woman (Vogt Turner 2015:320). Upon narrating the story, Jesus pronounced

forgiveness, declaring that, “great love wins forgiveness” (Cosgrove 2005:689). Forgiveness was a major theme that emerged from the Bible study with women in sex work. The narration of the story to Simon was Jesus’ way of demonstrating that neither Simon nor the unnamed woman was innocent. However, both received forgiveness. As a result, reconciliation became possible between the unnamed woman and Simon because they had equal status; they were both forgiven.

Nonetheless, Landman questions the use of language in the Belhar Confession. She argues that reconciliation can never be on equal status between men and women if the Belhar Confession continues to describe God as Father (2006:286). Landman proposes a more inclusive language, for example, the word ‘father’ be changed to God so that women can also know that they are accepted in the church as confessing members. The justice of God is when reconciliation happens without any sense of prejudice.

The last theme that emerged under reconciliation was ‘rejection’. The Belhar Confession is clear that the church rejects “sanctions made in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour” (Article 3). Although the Confession was written at a time that hatred based on race and colour was a major challenge, it does not mean it stopped there. The Confession continues to be a significant text in the URCSA and its surrounding communities. Thus, the above-mentioned Article 3 should add “classism”. Women in sex work are not only looked down upon because of perceived immorality but their economic status is also a challenge.

Justice

Some of the emerging themes from the engagement with the women in sex work were humanity, rejection, and forgiveness. The women identified Simon as a judgmental religious man while the other group identified him with a judgmental church. The women in sex work also emphasised that Simon projected rejection towards the unnamed woman, yet Jesus affirmed her humanity. The Belhar Confession in (Article 4) is explicit regarding the issue of justice and states that “the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need”. In short, “the church belonging to God should stand where God stands”. The women in sex work are no exception. Therefore, not only is the church called to confess the text, but also to put it in action. Justice is that the URCSA goes beyond its walls to reach out to the marginalised women in sex work. It is not enough to mention that God is on the side of the poor and the downtrodden without the discernment for

action. As a liberation praxis, the URCSA through the Belhar Confession needs to empower women in sex work, develop anti-drug abuse programs and engage them in the gospel. Sex work may be called work, but it is not sustainable. For instance, three women are on chronic medication. Another woman is recovering from drug abuse. According to her, she was assisted by the TLF to be drug free.

5.5 DISCERNMENT FOR ACTION

The women sex workers from Marabastad explained that they embarked on sex work to meet their financial needs and support their children. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the majority are single parents. The current project would not be complete without a strategy, a plan to move forward. In this section therefore, discernment for action as part of the praxis matrix is critically analysed. The discernment for action implies the action that both the church and sex workers would take towards the transformation of their context. To that end, the first step is to uproot the colonial understanding of the Bible by allowing the voices of marginalised women such as sex workers to be heard. Secondly, the URCSA needs to identify the existing tools within the URCSA, those that could benefit sex workers spiritually and economically. Lastly, the URCSA is called to create a transformative encounter with sex workers within its space.

5.5.1 A critical understanding of the URCSA's Integrated Ministry Model

The Integrated Ministry Model (IMM) of the URCSA is a model that emphasises unity, reconciliation, and justice for the church to work as a community (Modise 2020). The IMM was created for the church to enhance collaboration between the structures of the church such as the special ministries, church councils, presbyteries, and synods (General Synod Church Order 2012:160).[75] The concept of *ubuntu* is employed to reinforce the sense of community (Modise 2020:1). When John Mbiti presented the concept of *ubuntu*, he built an idea around African theology, a "theology that is cultural-sensitive, humane and community focused" (Gathogo

[75] Special Ministries are offices within the church namely the Christian Women's Ministry, Christian Women's League, Christian Men's Ministry, Christian Youth Ministry and Christian Children's Ministry. A Church Order document is a document comprising regulations of the General Synod. There is also a Church Order of the Regional Synods, which consists of the Stipulations that are communicated to the presbyteries and the local congregations.

2022:1). Similarly, when Modise (2020:3) incorporated the idea of *ubuntu* into the IMM, he envisaged a church community that is compassionate, gentle, hospitable, and available to others.

The IMM consists of core and support ministries, which are under the governance of the local church council. They exist in all the structures of the church, for instance, from the local congregation, presbytery, regional and the General Synod levels. The core ministries consist of Proclamation and Worship, Service and Witness and Congregational Ministry. The support ministries include finance and administration, judicial matters, communication, and archive. The model is a framework used to tackle economic and social challenges faced by the church including social issues such as poverty, orphanhood, HIV and AIDS-related matters, supporting a hospice or having programs relating to the pandemic (2012:166).

The IMM has been created to enforce agency within the church. Modise (2018:14) claims that the IMM is a tool that "ought to play a role in socio-economic transformation". The church uses the space of the IMM to empower congregants through workshops, seminars, and conferences on how to address socio-economic challenges. Through the model, the church can play an active role in poverty alleviation and economic liberation of needy members of the church (Modise 2018:14-15).

In making proposals to address the challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality faced by the church, Modise (2020:2) suggests that the African lens of *ubuntu* should be used. He acknowledges the contribution made by Weli Mazamisa on the concept of being "African and Reformed", which is a call for Africans to embrace "interconnectedness of different compounds like households, families, clans, tribes and the community" (Modise 2020:3). Nonetheless, the latter will not happen until the church goes back to its radical approach. Most black people are experiencing the harsh realities of poverty, which then breed anger, frustration and apathy and a weak ego structure (Kgatla 2022:6). The URCSA's Sixth General Synod also rightfully acknowledged that most of the URCSA members come from poor communities (Acta 2012 Sixth General Synod of URCSA). Another mode of poverty can mean not being able to acknowledge challenges such as gender-based violence, the marginalisation of vulnerable members of the society such as sex workers and drug addicts.

The Sixth General Synod of the URCSA took cognisance of the economic challenges faced by the citizenry, particularly, its own members. The economic inequality is visible especially amongst

the black people who constitute the majority of URCSA's membership. In addition to the economic challenge facing the country, the church has encouraged members to engage in politics to uplift South Africa's poor and oppressed (Acta 2012 Sixth General Synod of URCSA). The church is aware that for it to be relevant, it must be entrenched in the community—take part in the struggles of the community and provide solutions.

Furthermore, it has taken cognisance of the rife corruption within the public sector and urged members to play a role in becoming advocates of change and guarding against corruption. According to the Acta Synod of 2012, the church laments that corruption has made South Africa's struggle for economic and political justice for apartheid's poor and oppressed, seem like an illusion (2012:72).

Consequently, as a resolution, the church decided to engage the government on matters of corruption and mismanagement of taxpayers' money (2012:74). In addition, the church urged the government to put in "proper economic policies" to advance the economic situation of the poor majority. In the same vein, Modise (2020:15) suggests that the ministries for instance, Service and Witness, should develop "strong policies that govern the institutions for relief and charity to alleviate poverty as a short-term goal". The church should also recognise that economic transformation would not be a short-term goal. Colonialism and apartheid created socio-economic inequalities by not recognising black people as equal to white people. Today, the church and the society at large are still dealing with what Kgatla (2022:6) calls "chronic corruption" as well as challenges of structural sin because of inequality, homelessness, racism, and classism. The IMM thus needs to be a live document, engaging and embracing issues of sex workers within the space of the church, while the church needs to engage the margins through the IMM. Currently, the model operates within the walls of the church except when the church is doing charity work, for instance, giving to orphanage or old age homes. As a result, the model hinders the mission of the church to become a transforming agent within the society.

5.5.2 A transformative encounter

A transformative encounter calls upon the church that is on the side of the vulnerable and the marginalised such as sex workers to stand where God stands. For the church to heed the call of transformation, it needs to be intentional and go beyond its walls. For successful transformation to

take place there must be "a dialogical approach in which a Christian enters into a journey of mutual witness with a follower of another faith" (Kritzinger 2008:764). Although Kritzinger refers to a process of interreligious dialogue in the latter statement, in relation to sex workers and the church, it would have to start with an intercultural dialogue. To enter the space of sex workers, the URCSA would not be entering as a judge but as a church upholding the mission of God with the aim to create transformative encounters.

When the URCSA entered a new dispensation in 1994, it was a giant step for the church, perhaps even a new dawn. According to Baron (2019:13), a new church was built with equal relationships and participation in God's mission on earth. In his view, the new church brought with it a structural change such that the URCSA was no longer at the receiving end of mission – where it would no longer be referred to by the DRC as a "daughter" church but as a "sister" church (Baron 2019:13). However, that was not the end but the beginning of mission for the URCSA. The effects of apartheid remained among the black majority—poverty, unemployment, and inequality. It was a call for the URCSA to redefine its mission on the African continent.

The face of URCSA has changed. It has now become what Baron (2019:15) calls an "amalgamation of various ethnicities, gender and race". However, for a church to realise a transformative encounter it needs to do two things—firstly, "reading the signs of the times" (Kritzinger 2008:776). Sex work is induced by high unemployment rate, poverty and, to some extent, destitution. For that reason of these structural challenges, Punt (2021:16) argues that sex work remains a complex and highly emotional issue. It is thus not enough for the church to proclaim through Belhar Confession that it stands where God stands. The church needs to take the Belhar Confession and turn it into a missional praxis.

Secondly, the voices from the margins need to occupy the pews of the URCSA not as charity seekers but as active participants in God's mission. The URCSA should allow the voices of the marginalised to be God's symbol against injustice, voicelessness, suppression and oppression (Baron 2019:13). The latter will be possible through a postcolonial reading of the Bible together and interpreting it to discover a liberative and transformative voice/ trajectory. Thus, it is crucial for this project to include the voices of sex workers in dialogue with the Belhar Confession.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The adoption of the Belhar Confession is a step in the right direction but the members of the URCSA need to be transformed spiritually to align with it. The hope of sex workers to experience destigmatisation and demarginalisation depends on the Confession and the way the members of the church communicate it to them. The Confession is not just a document that is acknowledged and recited by members of the church. It should be a praxis model that is used to discern the struggles in their surroundings especially in the margins where sex workers are located currently. As Tshaka (2015:3) has argued, the black church should insist on taking the lived experiences of black people seriously in its theological reflection. The Belhar Confession, thus, should not shy away from speaking directly to issues of marginalisation, for instance, of sex work, even if it means its contents must be re-written.

CHAPTER 6

READING THE BIBLE WITH A POSTCOLONIAL MISSIOLOGICAL LENS FOR A LIBERATIVE PRAXIS FOR URCSA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the chapter is to find a postcolonial reading of the unnamed woman sinner. The chapter seeks to read the Lukan text towards her affirmation. Throughout the thesis, I have argued how the praxis model would be developed as a transformative encounter with a view to addressing the marginalization of sex workers. Also, I am of the view that the model should be used by the URCSA in conjunction with the postcolonial reading of the Bible as a liberative praxis for sex workers. The Belhar Confession paved a way in the previous chapter in terms of building a praxis towards the liberation of sex workers. The chapter comprises a postcolonial reading of the Bible with a specific attention to the unnamed woman sinner. She played a silent yet an important role in the Lukan text – uncovering a theological theme of forgiveness. Women in sex work were able to hear her story and the researcher thought it would be important to feature the reading right here at the end to form closing arguments. Lastly the chapter addresses the question of the postcolonial missional praxis towards the liberation of sex workers.

6.2 POSTCOLONIAL READING OF THE BIBLE: PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN IN SEX WORK

Reading the Bible with women in sex work in Marabastad has offered a window for the church, in this case the URCSA, to see its shortcomings. Although an English translation was used to read the text, the interpretation was done in African languages. The researcher did not object to the use of these languages because she wanted the women to recreate their own space. Mbuwayesango (2006) affirms that translating the Bible into one's language allows postcolonial subjects to discern biblical truths and have a direct encounter in their languages. Through their language, they claimed their identities. Although the women in sex work are not academic scholars, they were able, through the engagement with the Lukan text, to unmask the patriarchal stunts demonstrated by

Simon. As argued by one participant, Simon did not want the woman to go near Jesus and touch him because of her gender. However, the woman illustrated courage (*o bontshitse sebete* – her exact words) by going beyond boundaries mapped out for women.

Some scholars refer to the unnamed woman as Mary of Magdala (King 2006; Quero 2006). However, this study opts to refer to her as the unnamed woman as per the Lukan text. Not even the women in sex work from Marabastad asked for her name.

The unnamed woman is portrayed as an exemplary leader, a visionary prophet, and a disciple (King 2006; Quero 2006) but also by patriarchal exegetes as what King calls a repentant sinner only because they wanted to discredit her as a leader. Hinsdale (2011) agrees with King that Mary of Magdala's act of repentance was interpreted by patriarchal interpreters as a woman who could no longer be seen as a devoted disciple or as the apostle but as a representation that women should repent from their sexual crimes and bold speech. Nonetheless, the unnamed woman showed leadership when she broke the patriarchal boundaries by touching Jesus. She retells her own story and remains a model of hope for the marginalised sex workers.

As mentioned by another participant during the Bible study session with the women in sex work, Simon wanted to discredit the unnamed woman because she refused to sleep with him. For Quero (2017:82), Mary of Magdala or the unnamed woman was suffering the hetero-patriarchal binary—defined and confined in a space of decency/indecency. The unnamed woman however refused to be restricted by the constructs and norms imposed by the society. Although the women from Marabastad agreed that the unnamed woman was a sex worker, she was hailed as a heroine for approaching Jesus despite Simon's resistance. Nonetheless, Quero (2017:91) is not convinced that her repentance was voluntary. She argues that the unnamed woman gave up her sexuality because she felt pressured by the binary norms of society. Even so, she showed up for her own story and agenda, as an intruder in the house of Simon. The comments and objections from Simon did not derail her. Even though she was a marginalised sex worker, she remained legitimate in her leadership (King 2006:288). She refused to see herself as a non-entity and went on to wash the feet of Jesus, a figure seen as holy. King (2006) maintains that the washing of feet was a preparation for the burial of Jesus. However, what did the repentance mean for a woman who was known as a sex worker?

6.2.1 From a sex work to righteousness?

When one reads about Jesus' attitude towards the unnamed woman, one notices that Jesus was non-judgmental towards the woman but affirmed her. Jesus was not even concerned about what the sin was. Turner (2015) interrogates the issue of sin and argues that the challenge starts when no one wants to be guilty of sin. Turner (2015) maintains that Simon quickly condemned the unnamed woman so that his own shortcomings would not be exposed. Unlike the unnamed woman, Simon did not show hospitality to Jesus in his home, but the woman washed Jesus's feet (Phanon 2016:74). The sign of water demonstrated hospitality and warmth. Jesus further mentions that the woman kissed his feet but Simon did not. A kiss was seen as a friendly greeting, but it was not necessary for one to offer it to guests which means that the woman went an extra mile by so doing (Phanon 2016:74). Her action compared to that of Simon shows that though Simon was the host, and she was the intruder, she did more. Jesus is the only one who appreciates this woman's deed in the plot. As for Simon and his guests, they thought that the woman's gesture symbolised that of a sex worker (Phanon 2016:74).

Phanon (2016) exposes the mistranslations of interpreters such as Turner (2015) who maintains that the forgiveness of the unnamed woman was because she loved much. Arguably, Phanon (2016:75) is of the view that the point depends on which translation one is using to read the text. The English Standard Version translates Luke 7:47 as: "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much". Another translation that Phanon (2016:76) quotes states: "Therefore (because of this conduct), I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven, as is evidenced by the fact that she loved much". He argues that the latter translation is an indication that the woman received forgiveness before she could enter Simon's house whereas the former translation gives the impression that she had to love much so she could be forgiven (Phanon 2016; cf. Turner 2015).

Cosgrove (2005) as mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, maintains that the forgiveness was for Simon and not for the unnamed woman. Phanon (2016) and Turner (2015) agree that when Jesus said to him, "do you see this woman?" it was his way of showing Simon the truth about the love of God which was demonstrated through this woman. That same love led her to love much (Phanon 2016:73). However, I maintain that the forgiveness was for both Simon and the unnamed woman. Simon was also forgiven for his shortcomings – prejudice and his condescending attitude. As

Grenville Kent argues, “Simon’s heart had no place for Mary and his religion had no real answer for the problem of sin” (2010:18). Jesus on the other hand, was able to do away with sin and restore the woman’s dignity. There was no condemnation. The unnamed woman renounced her life of being a sex worker and became a devoted disciple of Jesus (Quero 2006). This research acknowledges (see also Chapter 4) the ongoing conversations and debates within scholarship about what the sin of the unnamed woman was.

This unnamed woman had repented but sex work will remain with us for as long as circumstances around it do not change. Issues of poverty, inequality and oppression are amongst the major factors that serve to perpetuate sex work. Consequently, missional ecclesiology will have to start with the circumstances around sex work – affirm sex workers by assuring them of God’s love and acceptance for them. Jesus plays a very significant missiological role by allowing the unnamed woman known as a sex worker to invade his space. He allows encounterology to take place. In this context, encounterology would mean mission taking place between two people who are on different levels of spiritualty. Jesus opens the door for engagement and dialogue to take place. It did not only benefit the unnamed woman but Simon as well. Jesus is perceived as a holy figure and a prophet who, according to Simon, should not be associated with sinners. The association of Jesus with the unnamed woman changes the narration around sex work. Jesus does not see them as outsiders, but as part of the Kingdom. Quero (2006) asserts, “Sex workers would be the first to enter the Kingdom of God”.

6.3 A SYNERGY BETWEEN MISSIONAL ECCLESSIOLOGY AND THE CHURCH ORDER

For the URCSA to respond meaningfully to the issue of marginalised sex workers, it needs to start empowering its members first. In the last 29 years (1994-2023), the URCSA has been governed by the Church Order, which has been developed over the years to guide the church in line with the Word of God. The document comprises a set of stipulations that serve as the basis for the church’s ministry and praxis (Dreyer 2013). Dreyer argues that the ministry of the Reformed Church as informed by the Church Order is based on the roles of the minister, elder and deacon. All three ministries are characterised by pastoral care that is focused on their members (Dreyer 2013:4). I submit that for the Church Order to be meaningful and impactful, it should be in synergy with the missional ecclesiology of the church. Missional ecclesiology would mean a church that begins its

ministry with "*Missio dei*: God's own self-sending in Christ by the Spirit to redeem and transform creation" (Dreyer 2013:4). Subsequently, Pillay (2015:1) asserts that:

> [The] missional understanding of the church is not about making the church attractive or bringing people into the church, but it is being missional and taking the church into the world to transform the world and reflect the glory of God.

As a church, the URCSA should ask itself how relevant its definition of church has been for the formation of a missional ecclesiology that is meaningful to the whole community of God. Modise (2020) defines community from an African perspective as a group of people that are interconnected in the network of the community of God and humanity. The African way of living has always prided itself as a community that depicts *ubuntu*, a Zulu word that was made famous by John Mbiti in 1969. I propose that missional ecclesiology and the Church Order should be interdependent. However, we should ask how the URCSA members have perceived church documents such as the Church Order.

The Church Order has featured earlier in this thesis as my point of reference on issues of discipline particularly of women who become pregnant outside of marriage. I argue that Stipulation 68 and 69 contain no clear definition as to the type of sin that would require discipline. There are grey areas which leave the document vulnerable especially if a theological understanding of forgiveness and restoration is not applied. I argue that the Clauses 68 and 69 are not meant to embarrass or shame any member of the church but to show where one has gone wrong within Christian precincts. However, these stipulations have been applied to young women rather than the men who impregnated them. Men would receive this kind of discipline only when they confess to the act; otherwise, it remains unknown. It is different with a young woman because her pregnancy bears witness. Does it then mean that for the church, the only punishable sin is being pregnant outside of marriage?

As the URCSA, it is time for reflection and to start using the praxis matrix to determine the church's position as far as missional ecclesiology is concerned. Calling for a prophetic church, Eugene Baron and Moses Maponya argue that it is not only through the church documents that the church can find its voice, but also through the ecclesial imagination of their church members, especially those who are affected by the mentioned documents (2020).

Baron and Maponya (2020) do not reject the use of the official church documents. As argued by Dreyer (2013,) the Church Order and church polity are used to define what church should be. However, Baron and Maponya (2020) suggest that the church should include the members in the pews when developing a missional ecclesiology as a framework that conceptualises the whole body of believers as a prophetic church. In essence, the URCSA church members should be given opportunity in line with the church documents to determine what it means for them to become part of the body of Christ and God's agents in the society.

The Church Order should not be a scary document that is punishing to members of the URCSA but a document that is empowering, affirming and transformational. Therefore, it is important for the church to embark on a continuous review of the document so that it keeps on translating to the type of missional ecclesiology that the church subscribes to.

6.4 CONCLUSION

There are two distinct points that this chapter addressed. Firstly, the unnamed woman in the Lukan text appears to be a woman that restores hope to the marginalized sex workers. Her circumstances did not stand on her way of approaching Jesus. Jesus affirms her by proclaiming the most important theological theme of forgiveness. It did not only empower her, it also restored her as a leader and a true disciple of Jesus.

Lastly, the Belhar Confession is a determining factor on what should inform the missional ecclesiology of the URCSA. The church order is not a separate document that is independent but should be in conversation with the missional ecclesiogical praxis informed by the Bible. In empowering membership, URCSA can recreate a constituency that will respond to the agency of God in the community, especially that of the marginalised sex workers. The rebuilding of the church in terms of how it responds to the marginalized communities starts with how the church defines its missional ecclesiology as a call to God's mission of restoration, transformation and forgiveness. Chapter 7 will respond to the research question of this research, engage the findings and offer recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMATIVE CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarise the findings of the study, make recommendations for further research and respond to the main question of this study, "How can a postcolonial reading of the Bible shape the church's missional praxis towards the liberation of sex workers? I submit that sex work remains a missiological problem and that the approach of the church cannot be from a moral point of view only. Various factors propelled those young women into sex work. Circumstances that lead women into sex work vary including poverty, drug abuse and sexual abuse, among others. The circumstances are a starting point for the church to engage with the women.

It has been a very long and tedious journey. Completing this study has come with several challenges including the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. At some point, I could not meet the 2020 research deadline because the government had relocated all homeless people to shelters. I am thankful to the TLF for assisting me to relocate them in 2021. Talking about sex work with the sex workers was not easy but they learned to trust me with time. My favourite time with the women was when we shared a meal and shared personal conversations about our children and how we would like to raise them to be responsible.

I realised that as a church we have a problem when I asked this question, "Why are you not going to church anymore?" The one participant responded saying, "Because we do not fit in". The question that came to my mind was, is there a criterion for one to go to church or even to 'fit in'? Later as we read the Lukan text together, they explained that the reason that they do not fit in is

because they do not have the beautiful clothes that people wear to church. Secondly, they feel people know what they do for a living, and they are thus ashamed.

7.2 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 began with the narration of my personal background and the objectives behind this research. Doing research about and with sex workers has exposed my shortcomings as an ordained minister of the URCSA – how we look down on sex workers as people without knowing their stories. The study has challenged the way I have been doing missiology and what I thought mission was all about. Missiology is not only about being sent out, as I had thought. It has a lot to do mission as being an encounter with one's surroundings. Sex workers deal with the harsh realities of poverty and the stigma daily.

Chapter 1 sought to unpack the debates around sex work. The arguments were built from the history of racial oppression in South Africa – the role that liberation theologies played in unmasking the racial ideologies. The chapter raised the following sub-questions:

The URCSA is governed by the Bible, the Church Order and the Confessions in doing its mission. When it comes to confessions, I only engaged with the Belhar Confession because it resonates with the URCSA's experiences as a church. It illustrated the revolutionary voice of the church – how it stood bold against the injustices of apartheid. Chapter 1 contains the research methodology including the key concepts of the thesis such as Missiology, Postcolonial and Black Liberation Theology. It is significant to understand the concepts in the context of the thesis as well as in engaging different scholars and their contexts.

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review and the missiological framework. The chapter defined the missiological and postcolonial framework showing the current debates around sex work and the marginalisation of sex workers. Regarding the missiological methodology, I used the praxis matrix to analyse, unpack the context of sex workers, and understand the identity of the sex workers from Marabastad. What is their relationship to their community? Who are their dialogue partners (agency)? Sex workers have gained much attention from non-governmental organisations such as UNAIDS, Sisonke Gender Justice, World Health Organization, and local faith-based

organisations such the Tshwane Leadership Foundation. Overall, the church does not play any active role in their matters.

The praxis matrix unmasked the contextual understanding which focused on where and how sex workers earn a living. The findings were that Marabastad is a known and organised business area. It is full of culture and diversity. Women who are sex workers conduct their business there and most of their clients are taxi drivers. The next dimension of praxis matrix is the ecclesial scrutiny, that is, how the church affects our present encounters. It is noted that most women in sex work in Marabastad go to the ZCC because it assists them with matters of healing. Most of them are not members of the ZCC but they go there regularly to get help when they are sick.

Throughout the thesis, I sought to unmask the impact of colonialism on how black people interpreted the Scripture. I argued that reading and interpreting the Bible from a postcolonial missiological perspective should be informed by the circumstances of the poor. Interpretation starts with using the lens of the marginalised. It does not start from the Bible.

Further, I tried to determine the discernment for action, which also required the unpacking of the church's view of sin. The findings are that sin cannot be defined from the perspective of an individual. Various factors determine the actions of individuals especially in contexts that have been affected by colonialism. The colonial system created an unequal society where some people had more privileges than others. Most black people especially black women did not receive the benefit of good education and that contributed to their inability to get reasonable jobs. Most sex workers end on the streets because their parents or guardians could not give them a good foundation. Thus, a recurring situation of poverty is experienced from generation to generation. In addressing the issue of sex work, therefore, the church would have to consider the dynamics around it to empower the women and give them hope.

Lastly, part of the praxis is the spirituality of sex workers. Sex workers are kept imprisoned by the labelling from the society that is informed by social binaries. A society that is defined by the binaries of what is right/wrong or indecent/decent is not able to unmask its problems and the cause of the problems faced by sex workers. Sex work is not the problem of an individual; it reflects on

the church, in this case, the URCSA and the society to which sex workers belong. The thesis serves as a basis for the URCSA to redefine the spirituality of persons who engage in sex work to empower them. Most black people grew up with the consciousness of God and going to church was imperative. It is only on growing up that our circumstances dictated otherwise. Thus, sex workers are not only marginalised, but they also judge themselves. The URCSA needs to play a role in reintroducing God to them as a loving, compassionate, and reasonable God. As part of the methodology, I also employed Gerald West's Contextual Bible Study approach mainly for the following reasons:

a) Due to the stigma, women in sex work are ignored, as they are associated with the shame of their business. Therefore, the CBS created a safe space for them to discuss their situations without being judged.

b) The CBS gave the women in sex work an opportunity to engage with the Bible and to be heard. For the first time, their views were recorded in a doctoral thesis. The CBS trains a facilitator (this researcher was the facilitator) to give more time to participants to engage.

Chapter 3 presents the history of the Reformed tradition in South Africa and the factors that influence its interpretation of Scripture. It was important to understand the context of the URCSA and the tradition that shaped it. The chapter is not only a simplistic history of the URCSA, but it also sought to analyse critically how the issue of sex work fits into the space of the church. The findings show that the URCSA relies on the Bible, the Church Order, and its Confessions on how to do and be church. These texts are important in the code of conduct of the church. However, the Church Order is vague in terms of the church's definition of sin. Therefore, in disciplining members, the URCSA applies the Church Order arbitrarily, and not scripturally. The Church Order needs to be reviewed theologically and be specific about the definition of sin to assist members, especially those who are not theologically inclined.

Chapter 4 presents the voices of women in sex work through the reading of Luke 7:36-50. Through the CBS, the women in sex work read the text and engaged on it. The chapter comprises a critical understanding of the Gospel according to Luke 7:36-50 from the perspectives of the learned and the ordinary readers. The interpretation of the Bible from a postcolonial missiological perspective plays a critical role throughout the chapter. After listening and analyzing the voices from the

margins and infusing them with the voices from the learned readers, the thesis sought a postcolonial reading of the Bible from the church and sex workers in Chapter 5. It is significant for the context of the thesis to narrate clearly what the role the church is expected to play in changing the situation for women in sex work. During the Bible study session, they identified the unnamed woman, one of the main characters in the Lukan text as a sex worker. Secondly, to the question on what the church is expected to do to change the circumstances of sex workers, they mentioned that the church should come to them. It might have come out arrogantly, but it was not. They were not willing to go back to church because as mentioned earlier 'they do not fit in'. They have offered a missional ecclesiology to the church – going beyond the walls. They have offered a praxis and I want to name it a Belharic missional ecclesiology. Without knowing the contents of the Belhar Confession, the women in sex work just reminded the URCSA to stand where God stands. God is not only found in the buildings of the church with the affluent church members. God is found on the rough edges of society – with the homeless, the marginalised, the poor and the abused women and children. The visibility of the URCSA in those spaces would have made the Belharic missional ecclesiology alive.

Hence, Chapter 5 firstly, engages the current liberation theologies on how far they have gone in dealing with issues of marginalisation and poverty. Although the Liberation Theology and the Black Liberation Theology have participated in the struggle against injustice and indignity, they remained in the comfort zone as far as issues faced by women in sex work are concerned. It should be highlighted that women in sex work are also part of the black community that is struggling with systemic poverty; their challenges therefore deserve to be singled out. Unapologetically so, it is time for liberation theologies to see Christ through the eyes of a girl standing on the street corner of Marabastad waiting for the next client.

In engaging a postcolonial reading of the Bible with a postcolonial missiological lens for a liberative praxis for the URCSA, Chapter 6 unpacks the character of the unnamed woman sinner, what informed her gestures as an intruder in the house of Simon. The objective of the chapter was to assist the URCSA to define its liberative praxis from a voiceless, marginalised woman who has received forgiveness from God. As a church, we tend to miss the love of God through sex workers if we take the stance of Simon – standing with our objections and questioning the prophecy of

Jesus. Secondly, the chapter proposes a missional ecclesiology that is congruent with the Church Order to empower the members of the URCSA to become active participants in the kingdom of God.

7.3 A POSTCOLONIAL MISSIOLOGICAL LENS FOR A LIBERATIVE PRAXIS FOR SEX WORKERS

"How can a postcolonial reading of the Bible shape the church's missional praxis towards the liberation of sex workers?" To develop a liberative praxis from a postcolonial missiological perspective calls on the church to be active participants in mission, that is, approach the margins. Women in sex work need to know that they also carry the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* is not only spiritual but should be understood in a physical sense as well. The URCSA therefore, has an opportunity to affirm women in sex work as human beings created equally in God's image.

Although the thesis has argued that sex work is a result of structural sin, I also acknowledge that there is no dignity in sex work. The church has a resource in the IMM to create other opportunities for women in sex work to liberate themselves economically. Churches still have a positive influence in the black communities. The URCSA should thus use its positive influence to reintegrate women in sex work in the society and make economic opportunities to be available for them.

The dimension of ecclesial scrutiny entails a reciprocal relationship that creates a space for encounterology to take place. I take into cognisance the role that the faith organisations have played through the TLF. However, encounterology is not about one party receiving from the other. The work of the TLF is commendable but it is limited to charity. Encounterology, as mentioned in Chapter 5, is the intention to enter someone's space and allowing her or him to enter one's space without any offence. When done with a purpose, the process is bound to yield fruits of transformative encounters. It is time for the URCSA to understand that the Belhar Confession as a praxis is a lived document and as a church, standing where God stands means standing physically and spiritually against oppression and injustice. The church needs to be visible in Marabastad. The visibility of the church has the potential to alleviate stigma, to improve access to medical assistance for women in sex work and to expand its thinking in other areas. As the church reaches out, it will

empower women in sex work to understand and interpret its own tradition. Additionally, this proposed liberative praxis will assist the church to re-interpret its own tradition and to use the Bible to reshape its theology of mission. Re-interpreting the tradition is an opportunity for the URCSA to assess critically its position and to consider whether its way of doing mission speaks to the current situation of poverty, ill health, and gender-based violence, to mention a few.

The URCSA's history of apartheid has also pushed it to re-examine its way of interpreting the Bible and hence the birth of the Belhar Confession. However, in the post-apartheid era, it is confronted by the margins, in this case, the women in sex work. The difference between the marginalised women in sex work and women under the apartheid era is that with the former, the church needs to read and interpret the Bible with them. It is not going to be easy, but the hermeneutics should come from an uncomfortable space going beyond known borders. Interpreting the tradition is an opening for reflexivity for the church—a reflection on the church's current theology of mission.

Reflexivity is not only a way for the church to reflect on what it has been doing. It also serves as an opportunity for the church and women in sex work to look back at the whole praxis matrix and see whether they have achieved their goals. Both parties are to consider whether the process has assisted them to see their past mistakes and whether they have resolved to learn from them. Praxis loses its meaning if practice and theory are not integrated. It also loses its meaning if the process is not accompanied by prayer, faith, and planning. That leads us to the next dimension which is spirituality.

Spirituality is not a naïve move for either the church or women in sex work. Although the aim of this thesis is not to convert or to condemn the women in sex work, it does not prevent the church from proclaiming the word of God. However, the church should do its interpretation in the context of women in sex work, that is, to interpret the Bible with them. The postcolonial interpretation of the Bible calls for the church to interpret the Bible in context, acknowledging the socio-political and economic status of those who are on the margins. The church should thus realise that it is not approaching the margins to further marginalise the women in sex work but to liberate them by listening to them, seeing them, and assuring them that they matter. The one lesson from the street that I walked away with was that these women can interpret the Bible based on their context. They are aware of what is happening around them.

For the URCSA to rediscover its spirituality in the context of sex work, it needs to go beyond the idea of binary thinking, mentioned in Chapter 5. The thinking in terms of what the society perceives as wrong or right perpetuates inhumanity, stigmatisation and demonisation. For transformational encounters to be realised fully, the church needs to remove all labelling around sex work—sinfulness or indecent, as mentioned in Chapter 3. Hence, both the church and the women in sex work, need to get to a place where they develop an action plan—discernment for action.

The last dimension, that is, a discernment for action, asks the question, what are the strategies and actions that can transform the context of women in sex work? From the Bible study, one woman said they would want to see the church reaching out to them. The URCSA is situated in the middle of Pretoria, not far from Marabastad. It has an opportunity to develop missional projects – go to Marabastad and share the space with women in sex work. The aim would not be to convert them, but to demonstrate the reign of God and to give them hope. They can start by reading the Bible and engaging with it together. Reading the Bible with the women in sex work will empower them so they can experience the reign of God and may consider other ways of making a living than through sex work. The reign of God would mean a liberation period in which those who were previously excluded are now included to experience the grace of God. Additionally, the church has the advantage of attracting men and women from different walks of life; therefore, the church together with women in sex work, can propose projects to empower the sex workers to change their socio-economic status. As a result, using the praxis matrix, the URCSA can collaborate with the TLF to rebuild, restore, and liberate the lives of women in sex work by continuously applying the Belhar Confession as a praxis.

7.4 MY CONTRIBUTION

To my knowledge, this is the first study from a postcolonial missiological perspective contributing to the URCSA regarding sexuality. I had a challenge in finding research in terms of building my arguments especially from black scholarship in the field of Missiology. The conversation of black sexuality amongst black scholarship is close to non-existent. My findings are:

Sex workers define their spirituality from a place of shame and marginality.

7.4.1 Findings

In the following section, I would like to revisit the sub-questions that constituted the key question of the thesis as a way of stating the findings of this study:

- What is the church's current missional praxis towards sex workers and what kind of Bible reading has informed such a hermeneutic?

The thesis has demonstrated that the URCSA in its current missional praxis has used the Bible to exclude and marginalize sex workers.

- What is theology's contribution to the church's missional role which is liberative towards sex workers?

In the context of the current project, it is of significance for the church to consider the race and gender categories when taking their position towards sex workers before they are ostracised. The Church Order as the main code of conduct document used by the church is quiet on the definition of sin. As a result, the current practice is that women who fall pregnant outside of wedlock are put under discipline and one can argue that the preceding practice is gender insensitive and patriarchal.

Lastly, African Women's theologies need to be embraced as a discourse to challenge the perpetuating presence of patriarchy within the church. Theologies such as *bosadi*/womanhood-redefined have played a significant role in empowering women from all walks of life whether women in the academia or the ordinary woman on the street regardless of race. Both women are included in the preceding theology, they can relate to it and create a safe space to engage on shared concerns.

- How do sex workers read the Bible and how do they understand and interpret the role of the church in their liberation?

Sex workers define their spirituality from a place of shame and marginality. The latter is mainly because of the stigma that sex work carries. Usually when the church looks at sex workers, it does not consider the circumstances that led to sex work but judges them on the outcome of those circumstances. Consequently, their recommendation is that the church should move into their space and understand the circumstances that led them to do sex work.

- What kind of missional praxis should the church propose and what kind of postcolonial reading informs such a praxis?

First, the URCSA should start by redefining its missional praxis that is gender inclusive.

Second, the interpretation of the Church Order is vague and the members of the URCSA are not conversant with how and where to apply it especially regarding the issue of discipline.

Lastly, the Belhar Confession needs to be a missional praxis not just a confession. The members of the URCSA need to live and confess it. It continues to be an important document not because of its history but also due to its meaning towards the marginalised sex workers.

7.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is not the last attempt for the postcolonial missiological study to find a liberative praxis for sex workers. For further studies it would be interesting to explore the response of the Belhar Confession in the challenges regarding the ecological crisis. Without a commitment to nurture and preserve Mother Earth as a country, we stand the risk of long-term poverty. The circumstances of poverty led most sex workers to transactional sex. In addition, they are the victims of systemic poverty. Their poverty is inherited from the era of apartheid where their parents did not have adequate education to be able to empower them. However, how can the URCSA through the Belhar Confession respond to the challenges of ecology to empower communities and bring awareness to issues of nature conservation?

Secondly, the thesis argued that it is through the missiological postcolonial reading of the Bible incorporated with the Belhar Confession that the lives of women in sex work can be liberated, restored, and transformed. This translates into the fact that the Bible is to be read and interpreted from the perspective of sex work. The interpretation should be informed by the young women's experiences of poverty, abuse, inequality and of being black women. The Bible should be read and interpreted with them and not for them.

As part of my conclusions, I acknowledge the limitations within the study. Research is determined by a certain scope, and it cannot be too broad. It needs to be achievable and be done within a certain timeframe. Hence, the research did not:

1. Pursue the power dynamics between the buyer and the seller.
2. The influence of the patriarchal African culture which gives men the upper hand over women. That would have also entailed problematizing African proverbs that perpetuate patriarchy, thus disempowering black women by silencing them.

As a researcher I am grateful to be able to enter the world of women in sex work. It has transformed my encounters. For instance, throughout the thesis I addressed women in sex work as sex workers. Therefore, as I journey with them through the thesis, I learnt that the stigma stems from the labelling. Sex work is what they do, not who they are. This study remained committed to the transformation and the liberation of women in sex work. Although the thesis is researched within the specific context of Tshwane, the model can be implemented by the URCSA in general.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adato, M, Carter, M R & May, J 2006. Exploring poverty traps and social exclusion in South Africa using qualitative and quantitative data. *The Journal of Development Studies* 42(2): 226-247.

Ahikire, J 2014. African feminism in context: reflections on the legitimation battles, victories and reversals. *Feminist Africa* 19(7): 7-23.

Alston, W M & Welker, M 2007. *Reformed theology: identity and ecumenicity II. Biblical interpretation in the Reformed tradition*. Vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Althaus-Reid, M 1999. On wearing skirts without underwear: 'indecent theology challenging the liberation theology of the pueblo'. Poor women contesting Christ. *Feminist Theology* 7(20): 39-51.

Althaus-Reid, M 2000. Re-writing God by cancelling the sex debt in theology: a response to Clare Herbert's 'Who is God for you?' *Feminist Theology* 8(23): 31-35.

Bak, N 2004. *Completing your thesis: A practical guide*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Banyard, Kat 2016. The dangers of rebranding prostitution as 'sex work'. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/jun/06/prostitution-sex-work-pimp-state-kat-banyard-decriminalisation. Accessed 16 June 2020

Baron, E & Maponya, M.S., 2020. 'The recovery of the prophetic voice of the church: The adoption of a 'missional church' imagination'. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41(1), a2077. https://doi.org/10.4102/ ve.v41i1.2077. Accessed on 14 June 2023

Baron, E & Pali, K J 2021. The shaping and formation of a missional ecclesiology of township congregations in the Mangaung Metro Municipality during COVID-19. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(3). A6832. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6832. 1-11 Accessed 10 June 2023.

Baron, E 2019. The call for African missional consciousness through renewed mission praxis in URCSA. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45(3): 1-19.

Baskin, J R 2015. *Midrashic women: formations of the feminine in rabbinic literature*. Waltham: Brandeis University Press.

Bevans, Stephen B & Schroeder, Roger P 2011. *Prophetic dialogue: reflections on Christian mission today*. New York: Orbis Books.

Bhabha, H K 1996. *Locations of culture: discussing post-colonial culture*. London: Routledge.

Bhorat, H R Kanbur, and N. Mayet. 2013. The impact of sectoral minimum wage laws on employment, wages, and hours of work in South Africa. *IZA Journal of Labor & Development* 2(1): 1–27.

Bhorat, H, Papier, J, Vally, S & Robinson, M 2006. *Youth unemployment and education in South Africa.* Cape Town: Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust Dialogue.

Black lives matter 2020. Blacklives.com. www.blacklives.com Accessed 29 September 2020.

Boesak, A 2008. To stand where God stands: reflections on the Confession of Belhar after 25 years. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34(1): 1-29.

Boesak, A A 1977. *Farewell to innocence: a socio-ethical study on black theology and black power*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Bosch, D J 2011. *Transforming mission: paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. New York: Orbis Books.

Botha, J. and Forster, D.A., 2017. Justice and the missional framework document of the Dutch Reformed Church. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, *38*(1), pp.1-9.

Buffel, O 2015. Bringing the crucified down from the cross-preferential option for the poor in the South African context of poverty. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 43(3): 349-364.

Chia, P 2006. *On naming the subject: the postcolonial biblical reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Chibba, M & Luiz, J M 2011. Poverty, inequality and unemployment in South Africa: context, issues and the way forward. *Economic Papers: A Journal of Applied Economics and Policy* 30(3): 307-315.

Christie, G 2009. Landscape of meaning and memory in Marabastad. https://respository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/3078/Complete.pdf?sequence=10. Accessed 3 July 2018

Christie, G 2010. Landscape of meaning and memory in Marabastad. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

Cone, J H 1984. *For my people: black theology and the black church*. New York: Orbis Books.

Conradie, E 2017. Conversion towards radical inclusivity, in *Belhar Confession: the embracing confession of faith for church and society.* M A van Huffel-Plaatjies & L J Modise (ed). Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 153-160.

Cosgrove, C H 2005. A woman's unbound hair in Greco-Roman world, with special reference to the story of the "sinful woman" in Luke 7:36-50. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124(4): 675-692.

Crenshaw, K 1989. Dermaginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and anti-racist politics. *U. Chi. Legal F.*, 139.

Daily Sun 2016. Mavuso stovel sex shock. https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/mavuso-stockvel-sex-shock-20160511 Accessed 2018/02/14.

Davies, P., 2014. A Learning Missional Church: Reflections from Young Missiologists Beate Fagerli, Knud Jorgenson, Rolf Olsen, Kari Storstein Haug and Knut Tveitereid (eds.) Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series. Oxford: Regnum Books *86*(3), pp.271-273.

De Lannoy, A, Graham, L, Patel, L & Leibbrandt, M 2020. Why is youth unemployment so intractable in South Africa? A synthesis of evidence at the micro-level. *Journal of Applied Youth Studies* 3(2): 115-131.

Department of Justice South Africa. Section 20(1) (aA) of the Sexual Offences Act of 1957. http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1957-023.

Department of Statistics South Africa. PO211 1st Quarter 2014. http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2014

Douglas, K B & Hopson, R E 2000. Understanding the black church: the dynamics of change. *Journal of Religious Thought* 56(2/1): 95.

Douglas, K B 2018. *Sexuality and the black church: a womanist perspective*. New York: Orbis Books.

Dreyer, W.A., 2013, 'Missional ecclesiology as basis for a new church order: A case study'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69(1), Art. #1368, 5 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ hts.v69i1.1368

Dube, M 2000. *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible.* St. Louis. Chalice Press.

Dube, M W 2012. The scramble for Africa as the biblical scramble for Africa: postcolonial perspectives, in *Postcolonial perspectives in African biblical interpretations.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1-26.

Dube, M W 2014. Translating Ngaka: Robert Moffat rewriting an indigenous healer. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40(1): 157-172.

English, J A 2012. Which woman? Reimagining the woman who anoints Jesus in Luke 7: 36-50. *Currents in Theology and Mission* 39 (6): 435-442.

Evans, J O & Lafayette, D B 2012. The black church after King: toward a liberationist ecclesiology in African American evangelical perspective. Emory University: Candler School of Theology. 1-50.

Farisani, E B 2014. Interpreting the Bible in the context of apartheid and beyond: an African perspective. *Studia Historiae Ecclessiasticae* 40(2): 207-225.

Fiorenza, E S 1999. Sharing her word: feminist biblical interpretation in context. Boston: Beacon Press.

Flipper, J S 2010. What's wrong with sin? Sin in individual and social perspective from Schleiermacher to theologies of liberation. *Theological Studies* 71(4): 969.

Foskett, M., 2021. An initial reading of Luke 7: 36–50: anti-Asian hate and intersectional interpretation. Wake Forest University, 46-54.

Gadamer H G 1984. *Phenomenology and the human sciences: the hermeneutics of suspicion*. New York: Springer.

Gathogo, J 2022. John Mbiti's *ubuntu* theology: was it rooted in his African heritage? *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 48(2): 1-22.

Goheen, M 2002. The missional calling of believers in the world: Leslie Newbigin's Contribution, in *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission after Newbigin.* Grand Rapids: Wm. B: Eerdmans Publishing, 37-54.

Grant, J., 1995. Womanist Jesus and the mutual struggle for liberation. *The recovery of Black presence: An interdisciplinary exploration*. 129-42.

Green, B L (ed) 1995. *Black Women's Blues: A Literary Anthology, 1934-1988*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenfield, D 2010. 'When I hear Afrikaans in the classroom and never my language, I get rebellious': linguistic apartheid in South African Higher Education. *Language and Education* 24(6): 517-534.

Gruchy, J W D 1986. The church and the struggle for South Africa. *Theology Today* 43(2): 229-243.

Gutiérrez, G

Gutiérrez, G 2012. Preferential option for the poor, in *An immigration of theology: theology of context as the theological method of Virgilio Elizondo and Gustavo Gutierrez.* Eugene: Pickwick Publishing, 99.

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly (ed) 1995. *Words of fire: an anthology of African-American feminist thought*. New York: The New Press.

Holland, J & Henriot, P 1992. *Social analysis: linking faith and justice*. 9th Printing. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Ipsen, A 2014. *Sex working and the Bible*. New York: Routledge.

Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS 2011. UNAIDS terminology guidelines. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

Kaoma K., 2016. From *missio Dei* to *missio creatoris Dei*. An eco-theology, climate justice and leadership development. D. Werner & E Jezlitzka (ed). Geneva: Globethics.net. 159-177.

Karecki, M 2005. Teaching missiology in context: Adaptations of the pastoral circle, in *The pastoral circle revisited: A critical quest for truth and transformation*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 159-173.

Kent, G.J., 2010. Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman of Luke 7: the same person? This article was originally published as: Kent, G 2010. Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman of Luke 7: The same person? *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 13 (1): 13-28.

Kesler, K 2002b. Is a feminist stance in support of prostitution possible? An exploration of current trends. *Sexualities* 5(2): 219-235.

Kgatla, T 2013. *The transformational, intersectional and transcendental agenda of mission: quest for a spirituality of the road.* Wilmore: First Fruits Press.

Kgatla, T 2022. Reading Belhar Confession in a wounded world. URCSA News: The Official Newspaper of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa.

Khanlou, N & Peter, E 2005. Participatory action research: considerations for ethical review. *Social Science & Medicine* 60(10): 2333-2340.

Kher, Aparna 2008. DEV/ODG reports and policy papers: review of social science literature on risk and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS among fishing communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. A literature review. Norwich: University of East Anglia.

Kilgallen, J 1998. Forgiveness of sins (Luke 7: 36-50). *Novum Testamentum* 40(2): 105-116.

King, K L 2006. Canonization and marginalisation: Mary of Magdala, in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing , 284-290.

Kobo, F A 2013. *If I only touch His clothes, I will be healed: a reading of Mark 5 v 21-34 by women who seek to name and reclaim their place in society and in the ministry of Jesus. A cry to God of life*. Washington: National Council of Churches.

Kotze, P. and Niemandt, C J 2020. A missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex-work industry. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, *6*(1), pp.405-428.

Kritzinger J N J & Saayman, W A 2011. *David J. Bosch Prophetic integrity, cruciform praxis.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Kritzinger, J N J 2008. Faith to faith-missiology as encounterology. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29(3): 764-790.

Kritzinger, K 2010. Celebrating communal authorship: the Theological Declaration of Belydende Kring (1979) and the Belhar Confession. *Studia Historiae Ecclessiasticae* 36: 1-13.

Kritzinger, K 2011. Mission as..." must we choose? A dialogue with Bosch, Bevans & Schroeder and Schreiter in the South African context. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studie* 39(1-2): 32-59.

Krüger, L P 2011. The impact of black economic empowerment (BEE) on South African businesses: focusing on ten dimensions of business performance. *Southern African Business Review* 15(3): 207-233.

Landman, C 2006. Can justice be embodied in sexist language? A challenge to the Confession of Belhar: Barmen en Belhar. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal= Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 47(1-2): 283-290.

Lephakga, T 2013. The history of theologized politics of South Africa, the 1913 Land Act and its impact on the flight from the black self. *Studia Historiae Ecclessiaticae* 39(2): 379-400.

Letlape, OW & Dube, M 2019. Experiences of female commercial sex workers in Marabastad, Pretoria. *Global Journal of Health Science* 11(12): 1-16.

Liubinskas S 2013. The body of Christ in Mission: Paul's ecclesiology and the role of the church in mission. *Missiology* 41(4): 402-415.

Luiz, J M & Roets, L 2000. On prostitution, STDs and the law in South Africa: the state as pimp. *Journal of Contemporary African studies* 18(1): 21-38.

MacMaster, L L 2017. Standing where God stands (outside the gate, with Christ), in *Belhar Confession*. Stellenbosch: African SunMedia, 273.

Maluleke, T S 2007. Postcolonial mission: oxymoron or new paradigm. *Swedish Missiological Themes* 95(4): 503-527.

Manganyi, J S & Buitendag, J 2013. A critical analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity. *HTS: Theological Studies* 69(1): 1-13.

Mangoedi, L & Mogashoa, M H 2014. Mission from the margins: a reflection on faith by" women" displaced or trafficked into forced labour in the City of Tshwane. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 42(1-2): 88-106.

Masenya (Ngwana' Mphahlele), M 2017. Reading Proverbs 7 in the context of female 'blessers' and sugar mamas in South Africa. *Scriptura* 116: 120-132.

Masenya, M 2005a. An African methodology for South African biblical sciences: revisiting the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach. *Old Testament Essays* 18(3): 741-751.

Masenya, M 2005b. The Bible, HIV/AIDS and African-South African women: a bosadi (womanhood) perspective. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 31(1): 187-201.

Masenya, M 2005c. Their hermeneutics was strange! Ours is a necessity! Rereading Vashti as African-South African women, in *Her master's tools? Feminist and postcolonial engagements of historical-critical discourse.* C van der Stichele and T Penner (ed). Brill: Boston, 179-194.

Masenya, M J 1995. African womanist hermeneutics: a suppressed voice from South Africa speaks. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11(1): 149-155.

Mashau, T 2020. Pushing the naked envelop further: a missiological deconstruction of the empire and Christianity in Africa. *Missionalia* 48 (1): 41-57.

Mashau, T D & Mangoedi, L 2021. From a pit to a palace: deconstructing the economics and politics of labour migration in the City of Tshwane through the lenses of Genesis 41:41-57. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(4): 1-8.

Mashau, T D 2014. Reimagining mission in the public square: engaging hills and valleys in the African City of Tshwane. *HTS Theological Studies* 70(3): 1-11.

Mashau, T D 2018. Standing where God stands: JNJ Kritzinger as an encountering missionary and missiologist. *Missionalia* 46(1): 131-145.

Masipa T 2018. South Africa's transition to democracy and democratic consolidation: A reflection on socio-economic challenges. https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.1713. Accessed 14 June 2023.

Mathison, K A 2001. *The shape of sola Scriptura*. Moscow: Canon Press & Book Service.

Mbuwayesango, D R 2006. How local divine powers were suppressed: a case of Mwari of the Shona, in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*. R.S Sugirtharajah (ed.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 259-268.

Meiring, P G J 2013. Remembering Cottesloe: delegates from the Cottesloe consultation tell their stories. The Reformed Churches in South Africa and their struggle for justice: remembering 1960-1990. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal=Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54(3-4): 29-41.

Methula, D W 2014. Engaging in the struggle for economic justice in the streets of the City of Tshwane. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 42(1-2): 107-119.

Mgbako, C A Bass, K G, Bundra, E and Jamil, M 2012. The case for decriminalization of sex work in South Africa. *Geo. J. Int'l L.* (44). 1423.

Modise, L J 2020. Reading the URCSA Church Order with African lenses: a Belhar Confession Perspective. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 46(3): 1-16.

Modise, L J 2018. The role of the church in socio-economic transformation: reformation as a transformation process. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 44(3): 1-16.

Morrell, R Jewkes, R & Lindegger, G 2012. Hegemonic masculinity/masculinities in South Africa: culture, power, and gender politics. *Men and Masculinities* 15(1): 11-30.

Mosala, I J 1992. The implications of the text of Esther for African women's struggle for liberation in South Africa. *Semeia* (59): 129-137.

Mothoagae, I D 2016. Reclaiming our black bodies: reflections on a portrait of Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman and the destruction of black bodies by the state. *Acta Theologica* 2016(Supp24): 62-83.

Mouton, E 2013. "What is a woman that you are mindful of her?" Aspects of irony and honour in Luke 7: 36-50. *Dutch Reformed Theological Journal=Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 54 (Supp 5): 221-231.

Mwambazambi, K 2011. A missiological reflection on African ecclesiology. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(1): 1-8.

Nel, R W 2011. Postcolonial missiology in the face of empire: in dialogue with Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37: 157-170.

Nelson, D.R., 2009. What's wrong with sin: sin in individual and social perspective from Schleiermacher to theologies of Liberation. A&C Black.

Niemandt, C J 2012. Trends in missional ecclesiology. *HTS Theological Studies* 68(1): 1-9.

Ntakirutimana, E 2018. 'Housing challenge and urban regeneration: a contribution of faith-based action with special reference to a case study from the City of Tshwane'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(3), a5151. https://doi.org/ 10.4102/hts.v74i3.515. Accessed 14 June 2023.

Phanon, Y 2016. Is she a sinful woman or a forgiven woman? An exegesis of Luke 7: 36-50 Part I. *AJPS* 19 (1): 59-71.

Pillay, J 2015. The missional renaissance: its impact on churches in South Africa, ecumenical organisations, and the development of local congregations. *HTS Theological Studies* 71(3): 1-6.

Plaatjies van Huffel, M A 2013. The Belhar Confession: born in the struggle against apartheid in southern Africa. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiaticae* 39(1): 185-206.

Punt, J 2021. Revelation, economics and sex: the Bible and sex work in South Africa. *Journal of Early Christian History* 11(2): 76-95.

Quero, M.H.C., 2017. The prostitutes also go into the kingdom of God: a queer reading of Mary of Magdala 1. In *Liberation theology and sexuality*. Althaus-Reid M (ed). Routledge, 81-110.

Rakundwa L.S., 2008. Postcolonial theory as a hermeneutical tool for Biblical reading. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *64*(1). 339-351.

Reeves, M R & Madueme, H (ed) 2014. *Adam, the fall, and original sin: theological, biblical, and scientific perspectives*. Ada: Baker Academic.

Resseguie, J L 2016. The woman who crashed Simon's party: a reader-response approach to Luke 7:36–50. *Characters and characterization in Luke-Acts. Library of New Testament Studies*: academia.edu, 548. 7-22.

Ribbens, M. and De Beer, S.F., 2017. Churches claiming a right to the city? Lived urbanisms in the City of Tshwane. *HTS: Theological Studies*, *73*(3). 1-11.

Russel, L M 2004. Cultural hermeneutics: a postcolonial look at mission. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 20(1): 23-40.

Satz, D 1995. Markets in women's sexual labor. *Ethics* 106(1): 63-85.

Schottroff, L 1993. *Let the oppressed go free: feminist perspectives on the New Testament*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Schreiter, R J 2015. *Constructing local theologies.* New York: Orbis Books.

Segalo, P 2013. Women, they too have their story: re-imagining the female voice and body. *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 112(1): 1-10.

Senokoane, B 2019. URCSA as an Impossible Community. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 45(3): 1-13.

Seymour, E L 1992. A preliminary study of the role of women in the informal sector in Marabastad. *South African Journal of Ethnology* 15(4): 126-133.

Smith, S 2004. The interface between the biblical text, missiology, postcolonialism and diasporism, in *IAMS Assembly, Malaysia.* http://missionstudies. org/archive/conference/1papers/fp/susan_smith_full_paper.pdf (accessed June 16, 2012).

Stubbs A 2015. *I write what I like: selected writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sugirtharajah, R S 2002. *Postcolonial criticism and biblical interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sugirtharajah, R S 2005. *The postcolonial biblical reader*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Swart, I Rabe, M & De Beer, S 2019. Young people on the margins in Pretoria central: are the faith-based organizations making a difference? *HTS Theological Studies* 75(4): 1-12.

SWEAT 2014. www.sweat.org.za/index.php/about-sweat/vision-and-mission. Accessed 20 August 2014.

Thinane, J S 2021. 'Missio Dei as the main project: project management model for mission of God'. *Pharos Journal of Theology* 102(2): 1–17.

Townes, E M 2003. Womanist theology. *Encyclopedia of women and religion in North America*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington. 159-176

Tshaka, R S 2014. 'On being African and Reformed? Towards an African Reformed theology enthused by an interlocution of those on the margins of society'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 70(1). Art. #2070, 1–7. https://doi. org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2070. Accessed 20 March 2023.

Tshaka, R S 2015. The black church as the womb of black liberation theology? Why the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) is not a genuine black church? *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(3). Art. #2070, 7 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2070 Accessed 15 April 2023.

Turner, L E V 2015. *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: the forgiven sinner*. Simon Frazer University: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. 318-326.

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern African Church Order 2012. Willington: CLF Publishers.

URCSA Netwerk 2016. https://urcsa.net/documents/. Accessed 6 May 2020.

Van der Merwe, J M 2013. The Dutch Reformed Church from human relations and the South African scene in the light of Scripture to church and society: the struggle goes on. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39 (1). http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1017-04992013000100010&lng=en&tlng=en. Accessed on 10 February 2023.

Vanwesenbeeck, I 2013. Prostitution push and pull: male and female perspectives. *Journal of Sex Research* 50(1): 11-16.

Vellem, V S 2014. Spirituality of liberation: a conversation with African religiosity. *HTS/ Theological Studies* 70(1): 1-7.

Walker, R & Oliveira, E 2015. Contested spaces: exploring the intersections of migration, sex work and trafficking in South Africa. *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 11(2). 129-153.

West, G 2010. The legacy of liberation theologies in South Africa, with an emphasis on biblical hermeneutics. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36: 157–183.

West, G O 1993. *Contextual Bible Study*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

West, G O 2015. Reading the Bible with the marginalised: the value/s of contextual Bible reading. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1(2): 235-261.

West, G O 2018. African biblical scholarship as post-colonial, tri-polar, and a site-of-struggle, in *Present and future of biblical studies: celebrating 25 years of Brill's biblical interpretation*. Tat-siong Benny Liew (ed).

Leiden: Brill. 240-273.

Wiley, T 2002. Original sin: origins, developments, contemporary meanings. Mahwah: Paulist Press.

Williams, D.S., 2006. Womanist theology: Black women's voices (1986). *Womanist Reader*, pp.117-125.

Wojcicki, Janet Maia 2002. Commercial sex work or *ukuphanda*? Sex-for-money exchange in Soweto and Hammanskraal area, South Africa. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 26: 339-370.