

**Toward a Theological Response to Prostitution:  
Listening to the Voices of Women Affected by Prostitution and of  
Selected Church Leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

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**ABSTRACT**

This feminist, qualitative research project explores how the voices of women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and of selected evangelical church leaders in that city, could contribute to a life-affirming theological response to prostitution. The thesis engages sociological and theological sources to interpret the data gathered; contextual Bible study sessions provided access to the women's voices, and semi-structured interviews revealed church leaders' perspectives. During conversations with the women, six core themes emerged, reflecting their contextual understanding of the social and theological ramifications of prostitution: their entrance into prostitution; God; sin; humanity (Christian anthropology); justice; and the church. The women articulated that: 1) prostitution was a means of survival; 2) God is a protective figure in their lives; 3) sin is equated with prostitution and uncleanness; 4) humanity is rejecting; 5) injustice is a normalised experience; and 6) they are unwelcome in the church due to their status as 'sinners,' and have few expectations that the Christian church or its leaders would help them exit prostitution. These themes reportedly resonated with interviewed church leaders, who expressed empathy for the women. Bringing both sets of voices together in a discussion of the Story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), however, revealed several theological deficiencies held by the evangelical church that currently impede the formation of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution. These deficiencies primarily involve an excessively narrow understanding of sin, salvation, and repentance in light of the Kingdom of God. This thesis offers a theological response to these specific deficiencies, based on an appropriation of the Peter and Cornelius story (Acts 10:1-48) to the evangelical church in Addis Ababa. This study contributes new understanding about the gift that women affected by prostitution have to offer to the evangelical church in Addis Ababa. The insights of all of the participants in this study draw attention to an expanded, Biblical view of salvation in light of the Kingdom of God, a vision that places responsibility on the community of faith to mediate God's holistic program of restoration for the full human being. Further areas of study could include voices of other key stakeholders within the wider Christian church in Ethiopia to address additional theological deficiencies that impede a life-affirming theological response to women affected by prostitution.



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Leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
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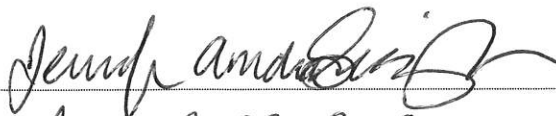
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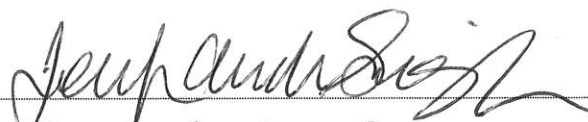
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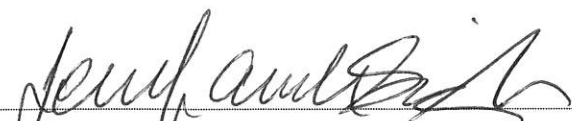
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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to two very important women in my life who left this world far too early, but who left a legacy of what it means to live for the glory of God's Kingdom that has come and is coming:

My beloved mother, Veena Singh (1955 – 2015)

and

My dear friend and sister, Hareg Zihon (1973 – 2014)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for the privilege to have been able to do this work, and for His enabling grace that has sustained me through every stage of this project.

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'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.' (Ephesians 3:20)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
A Personal Story .....	1
Introductory Comments .....	4
<b>Defining Prostitution.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Social Context of Prostitution in Ethiopia .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Prostitution Research in Addis Ababa.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Sociological Research .....	8
Research Conducted by the Ethiopian Church .....	9
Evangelical Research .....	9
<b>Formation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY).....	11
Establishment of the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC).....	12
<b>Theologising About Prostitution.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The Purpose of this Research.....</b>	<b>15</b>
Basic Approach of the Research .....	16
Scope of the Research .....	17
Limitations of the Research .....	18
Anticipated contribution to Knowledge.....	21
<b>The Structure of the Thesis .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Prostitution in the Sources .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Prostitution in the Old Testament .....	26
Prostitution in the New Testament.....	28
Prostitution as Understood by the Church Fathers.....	29
<b>HIV/AIDS Theology: A Theology of Life .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Overview of African Womanist Theology.....</b>	<b>32</b>
Theology of God .....	33
Christian Anthropology.....	35
Ecclesiology .....	36
Summary .....	38
<b>Important Points Within the Theological Strands.....</b>	<b>38</b>
The Kingdom of God .....	39
<b>A Brief Word About Orthodoxy .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Methodological Approach .....</b>	<b>52</b>
Reflexive-Dialectic Process .....	54

Methods Used .....	57
Time Period for Fieldwork.....	65
Preparation for Fieldwork .....	66
Amharic Language Acquisition .....	66
Learning How to Listen .....	68
Selection of Research Assistants .....	69
Research Settings .....	71
Selection Criteria for Research Participants .....	72
Issues Related to Translation .....	76
Methodology Procedures: Challenges and Limitations .....	77
Ethical Issues .....	78
Data Analysis Process.....	78
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Presentation of Data .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Experiences of Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness.....</b>	<b>82</b>
Discussion of Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness .....	85
<b>Stories of Pregnancy .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Pregnancy and Prostitution .....	87
Pregnant as a Teenager .....	89
Pregnant and Alone.....	91
Discussion of Pregnancy: Chased-Out, Confused, and Alone.....	92
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Presentation of Data .....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appropriating Biblical Stories.....</b>	<b>97</b>
God Is a Protector: ‘God protects us and is with us’ .....	97
Self-Identification as a Sinner: ‘ <i>We know we are sinners</i> ’ .....	105
Humanity as Rejecting: ‘Human beings cannot accept [us]’ .....	113
Injustice as Normalised: ‘Man is not judged, it is shameful for a woman’ ....	117
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Chapter 6: Presentation of Data .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>123</b>
Jewish Influence on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church .....	123
<b>Data: Public Practice of Worship.....</b>	<b>125</b>
Standing Outside the Gates .....	125
<b>Data: Expectations of Church Leaders.....</b>	<b>132</b>
Looking for Exemplars .....	132
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Chapter 7: Presentation of Data .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Recurring Themes.....</b>	<b>145</b>
Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness .....	145
God: A Protector or Personal Saviour to Women in Prostitution? .....	148
Sin Identity and Sin Hierarchy.....	154
Hatred and a Lack of Acceptance: Humanity as Rejecting .....	161
Injustice as a Normalised Experience .....	165
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>170</b>

<b>Chapter 8: Bringing the Voices Together .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Identifications and Correlations .....</b>	<b>172</b>
The Younger Son Who Stands Outside the Church.....	172
Few Leaders Like Jesus, Many Older Brothers .....	178
Expecting a Father .....	185
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Chapter 9: Toward a Life-Affirming Response to Prostitution .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Conversion of Peter: Reconfiguring Sin .....</b>	<b>198</b>
Peter’s Vision and Response.....	198
Peter’s Response Appropriated to the Evangelical Church .....	199
<b>Giving and Receiving Hospitality: Salvation Reconsidered.....</b>	<b>201</b>
Peter Offers Hospitality to Cornelius’ Men .....	201
Peter’s Hospitality Appropriated to the Evangelical Church.....	201
<b>Repentance Understood as Being Found: Willingness to Be Found in Cornelius’ Home: .....</b>	<b>204</b>
Peter Embarks on a Journey.....	204
Peter’s Journey Appropriated to the Evangelical Church.....	204
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Chapter 10: Conclusions and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Summary of Research Process .....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>211</b>
Theological Education from the Margins .....	211
Capacity-Building with Strategic Evangelical Church Leaders .....	212
Learning from Exemplars .....	213
<b>Areas for Further Research .....</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Concluding Remarks .....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix 1A: Contextual Bible Studies, Flamingo Women .....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix 1B: Contextual Bible Studies, EWAR Women .....</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Contextual Bible Study Sample Discussion Guide.....</b>	<b>220</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Story-Telling Example .....</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Appendix 4: List of Emerging Themes as Identified by Women Affected by Prostitution .....</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Interviews with Selected Evangelical Church Leaders.....</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Primary Sources: Contextual Bible Study Transcripts.....</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Primary Sources: Interview Transcripts .....</b>	<b>225</b>
<b>Secondary Sources .....</b>	<b>226</b>



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ECFE	Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EKHC	Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
ETC	Ethiopian Theological College
EWAR	Ellilta Women at Risk
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
IEC	International Evangelical Church



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### A Personal Story

In April 2009, I made my first trip to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and met an Ethiopian woman who was to become my friend, sister, and, in 2014, roommate,<sup>1</sup> when I moved to Addis Ababa to work alongside an organisation called Ellilta Women at Risk (EWAR). Hareg was a staff member of EWAR, a Faith-Based Organization (FBO) based in Addis Ababa that, since 1996, has been providing rehabilitative opportunities to women seeking to leave prostitution.<sup>2</sup> Hareg first came into contact with EWAR when she was engaged in prostitution as a teenager. After forming a relationship with one of the EWAR outreach workers, Hareg joined the rehabilitation program, and several years later she returned to the organisation to work as one of their prevention coordinators. Reflecting on her initial encounters with EWAR, Hareg said:

Before I came to Women at Risk, I never heard anything about God. Everything that I was hearing about God [when at Women at Risk] was a surprise to me because I didn't even know about God. I didn't even know I was created by God. [crying] There were so many times that I should have died. There were times when people wanted to kill me. There were times that people took a gun out on me. There were times when people tried to run over me [with a car]. But, God protected me from all that, and that really amazed me, touched me. To rescue a person is very important because even Jesus gave the example of the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine and going and to find the one that was lost.<sup>3</sup>

Hareg's statement indicates that her understanding of the existence and character of God were non-existent while engaged in prostitution, before connecting with EWAR. Her views of God as a protector and Jesus as a shepherd who rescues the one lost sheep are insightful and theological: they speak to the nature and character of God. These thoughts that were captured in a documentary produced by a Canadian media organisation were never shared directly by Hareg with those she spent her last days with: her colleagues at an independent evangelical church in Addis Ababa. Tragically,

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<sup>1</sup> I lived with Hareg and her adopted seventeen-year old daughter from February to November 2014 where we sought to live as a family, sharing meals, household responsibilities, our life stories, and our common Christian faith.

<sup>2</sup> Since its inception, this local FBO has offered psycho-social, economic, educational, spiritual, and child-care support to over one-thousand women who have expressed a desire to leave prostitution. See 'What We Do,' Ellilta International.org. [www.ellilta.org/what-we-do/](http://www.ellilta.org/what-we-do/) (April 17, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> *Unashamed: A Journey to Hope*, directed by Darren Kaulback (Toronto, Canada: Listen Up TV Productions, 2011), DVD. I assisted in the production of this documentary.

on November 8, 2014, Hareg died suddenly in our home in Addis Ababa at the age of forty-one.<sup>4</sup>

In the weeks following Hareg's death, one of her closest friends for many years, CF, desired to meet with some of Hareg's most trusted colleagues. Hareg had been working as a teaching pastor for an independent evangelical church in Addis Ababa for several years prior to her death and, while the church was aware of Hareg's past employment with EWAR, they were unaware that she had also been a participant in the rehabilitation program. CF, who was also the leader of EWAR, articulated her desire to speak with Hareg's colleagues as follows:

I wanted them to know Hareg's whole story so that they did not miss out on the beauty of her life. The beauty of her life was the fruit of all the pain she had endured. I wanted them to be aware of the complete transformation that Hareg had experienced in her life, and for God to receive the glory for her life.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the pain that CF is referring to relates to Hareg's years spent living on the streets of Addis Ababa engaged in prostitution. This is how Hareg described her entry into prostitution:

I must have been about thirteen. I got so tired of my mom's beating, so one day, I just ran away. I thought I had only gone so far and it got dark, and I started to cry. Then this guy came and kind of comforted me and he took me to his house and he raped me. He was going to visit his friend's house where they were having a wake, so after he raped me, he took me to that place and left me there for about seven to eight days. And every time he wanted to have sex, he would come and get me. One day, a lady from my mom's neighbourhood was coming to visit the family and she saw me there, and she went back and told to my mom. The next night, my mom came with some guys, grabbed me, beat me. I didn't want to go home but I had no choice. I did not want to go home because of [my] mom beating [me] up. The difference here [in Ethiopia] is you cannot say 'I do not want to.' Here, someone decides for you. After being brought back, the beating got worse, so I ran away again. I started working again on the street, but working on the street is really hard because if you are not picked-up by someone, then you do not have any place to spend the night. Even when I would be picked-up by a man, I would not negotiate, I would just go give the service and if he gives me money, fine. If he didn't, that was the beginning because I didn't know I could ask money for it. I just thought it was something you do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The autopsy carried out was inconclusive, citing either heart issues or a brain aneurysm.

<sup>5</sup> Notes from a personal telephone conversation with CF, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, April 20, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Unashamed: A Journey to Hope.



Hareg lived through a significant amount of abuse, abandonment, fear, confusion, and exploitation as a young woman that caused deep pain in her life, pain that CF was intimately acquainted with as a result of their friendship. In the wake of Hareg's death, CF wanted Hareg's colleagues to be aware of the degree of transformation Hareg had undergone in her life, as testament to the God that Hareg had followed for most of her adult years. The two small vignettes shared by Hareg, the story of her entry into prostitution and her reflections on her knowledge of God before and after encountering EWAR all speak to the profound contrast between Hareg's past life and the life she was living right up to the moment of her death.<sup>7</sup> CF had wanted Hareg's life to be celebrated in its entirety, and did not believe this was possible if the pain of Hareg's earlier life was left unspoken.

CF never had the opportunity to share with Hareg's colleagues. When a mutual friend of CF and Hareg's who was a member of the evangelical church where Hareg worked approached the church leaders to ask to share something about Hareg's life on behalf of her EWAR family, the church leaders indicated that they did not want to hear what CF had to share:

They indicated strongly that they did not want to hear what we wanted to share. It seemed that the church did not want to know...they knew we were coming from EWAR. I wanted to ask the church to ask themselves why. Why was it not okay for Hareg to have been able to share her whole story? I wanted the church to see that even after all that Hareg had passed through, she was not fully free because she was not able to tell her story.<sup>8</sup>

The story of my friend Hareg, her life, and the weeks following her death, highlights the primary intersection for this research project: Ethiopian women who have been affected by prostitution<sup>9</sup> in Addis Ababa and the evangelical church. Hareg's reflections of witnessing God's protective character in the midst of attempts made against her life demonstrate that she had an ability to theologise about her past experiences in prostitution. When reflecting on her teenage years, Hareg discerned a life-preserving presence in her life that she called God, and more specifically, Jesus Christ. She also dedicated her adult years to helping other vulnerable people in her community through her work at EWAR and the independent evangelical church she

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<sup>7</sup> Hareg died a few hours after leading a youth group meeting at the independent evangelical church she worked for.

<sup>8</sup> Notes from a personal telephone conversation with CF, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, April 20, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> I am choosing to use the descriptor 'affected by prostitution' because the research participants in the project were women who were engaged in prostitution at the time of the research and women who were in a rehabilitation program seeking to exit prostitution.

served in. How is it, then, that my friend was unable or unwilling to share her entire story with the very church she worked for up to the day she died? Why did she feel the need to hide, or to bracket out the prostitution chapter of her story? Why was CF, the leader of an FBO, motivated to tell Hareg's story posthumously? These are just some of the deeply personal questions that served as the catalyst for this research project.

### **Introductory Comments**

Hareg's story is one of several perplexing situations that have contributed to the formation of the research project. This chapter outlines some of the overarching questions and issues that helped form the context in which this research project arose. Further motivation for this project grew out of my professional and personal engagement since 2009 with women affected by prostitution in a variety of different countries around the world,<sup>10</sup> including Ethiopia. Within the various locations where I worked, I observed that while a number of these societies were highly religious, there was a glaring shortage of religious institutions engaging with prostitution at a grassroots level.

What I did discover were a number of outliers from the evangelical Christian community in the countries I visited, not people who represented large churches or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), but who offered a range of services and interventions to women either currently involved with or seeking to leave prostitution. This observation left me perplexed as I tried to understand why formal religious institutions, particularly evangelical Christian churches, were not engaged at a grassroots, practical level with women in prostitution.

The FBO sector in which I worked for sixteen years and my Christian faith have influenced the questions that I bring to the topic of how the Christian church, particularly the evangelical church, responds to women in prostitution. I believe this to be a strength of the thesis rather than a weakness: a truly constructive and useful exploration of the role that the Christian church plays when working with women in prostitution can best be achieved by someone sympathetic to and understanding of Christianity as a belief system. This research project is the result of years of trying to make sense of some of the trends that I observed in various countries around the world, specifically countries that claim an overwhelming Christian population.

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<sup>10</sup> My work with the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution (ICAP) and Samaritan's Purse International involved travel to, and project management involvement with, grassroots, (FBOs) in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. This exposure gave me an opportunity to gain a rudimentary understanding of prostitution in various contexts.

As a practitioner-researcher, I have sought to identify the presuppositions, biases, and inadequacies in my own thinking, and I will highlight them and how I have sought to overcome them, particularly in Chapter Three. Personal interest and a desire to see change should not prevent a person from engaging in academic research, but should deepen the desire for accurate and rigorous research in that area. This is my intention over the next chapters, as I bring theological and sociological questions to my study of prostitution in the Ethiopian context.

### **Defining Prostitution**

Ascertaining academic consensus around the terms ‘prostitution’ and ‘prostitute’ is difficult due to the wide spectrum of views held within the multidisciplinary field of feminist theory, which itself encompasses various positions (e.g. liberal, Marxist, radical,<sup>11</sup> and domination theory<sup>12</sup>). All of these feminist approaches have helped to inform the discourse on prostitution. Each of them is located within contemporary feminist debates on prostitution that delineate a continuum of perspectives on prostitution.<sup>13</sup>

The typical liberal feminist position on sex work is that it should be decriminalised in order to enable women to exercise autonomy and agency over their bodies.<sup>14</sup> For other feminists, notably those who prioritise the testimony of sex workers themselves, the term sex work<sup>15</sup> points toward a profession that requires laws,

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<sup>11</sup> I recognize the influence that philosophers such as John Stuart Mill and ideologies such as Marxism had in the creation of this field of study. Feminist theory crosses many disciplines and seeks to understand gender inequalities and the structural factors that contribute to the oppression of women, and desires ‘to change the situation.’ See Elaine Storkey, *What’s Right with Feminism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Domination Theory is another feminist position espoused to by scholars such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon who view sex itself as intrinsically violent, and therefore prostitution as the penultimate example of this violence: ‘male dominance is sexual ... meaning: men in particular, if not men alone, sexualize hierarchy.’ See Catherine MacKinnon, ‘Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: “Pleasure Under Patriarchy,”’ *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989), 315.

<sup>13</sup> Stephanie Wahab, ‘Creating Knowledge Collaboratively with Female Sex Workers: Insights from a Qualitative, Feminist, and Participatory Study,’ *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no. 4 (2003): 626-627, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://qix.sagepub.com/content/9/4/625>.

<sup>14</sup> Lacey Sloan and Stephanie Wahab, ‘Feminist Voices on Sex Work: Implications on Social Work,’ *Affilia* 15, no. 4 (2000): 468-469, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.aff.sagepub.com/content/15/4/457>.

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘sex-work’ is credited to Carol Leigh, who invented the term as a result of her desire to ‘reconcile my feminist goals with the reality of my life and the lives of the women I knew. I wanted to create an atmosphere of tolerance within and outside the women’s movement for women working in the sex industry.’ See Carol Leigh in ‘Inventing Sex Work’ in Jill Nagle (ed.), *Whores and Other Feminists* (London: Routledge, 1997), 225.

regulations, and protective policies<sup>16</sup> to ensure the well-being of all those involved.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that in this thesis I use the term *prostitution* to define a type of work in the sex industry that is non-consensual and entered into with very little agency. Because of the stigma associated with the label *prostitute*, and a desire to move away from discourses in which the women lose agency and are reduced to the way in which they are forced to earn an income, I use the phrase *women affected by prostitution* throughout this thesis. This language encompasses women who are either currently engaged in prostitution or were in the past.

While not all radical feminists are sex worker exclusionary feminists,<sup>18</sup> some radical feminists<sup>19</sup> define prostitution as an institution of male domination and exploitation of women, therefore viewing all forms of prostitution as violence against women rather than as work,<sup>20</sup> and therefore characterizing women in prostitution as victims and sexual slaves.<sup>21</sup> Criticisms of this position focus on the disenfranchisement of the women involved to such a position, and note that there is a significant gap in the literature related to sex work and prostitution that engages with the women themselves.<sup>22</sup> In part, this thesis is intended to address that gap.

Those feminists who wish to see an eradication of sex work and prostitution, as well as those who defend sex work as valid work and desire to improve the rights and

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<sup>16</sup> Recognising that sex workers are among the most vulnerable people in society and are routinely subjected to violence, discrimination, and harassment, Amnesty International has published a policy calling on governments to engage in actions that protect the human rights of sex workers, including: decriminalising consensual sex work, and ensuring that sex workers are protected from harm, exploitation and coercion, and are provided with access to education and employment options. See 'Amnesty International Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers' (2016). [https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/amnesty\\_policy\\_human\\_rights\\_of\\_sex\\_workers\\_-\\_embargoed\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/amnesty_policy_human_rights_of_sex_workers_-_embargoed_-_final.pdf), accessed May 28, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Sloan and Wahab, *op cit.*, 469.

<sup>18</sup> Sex Worker Exclusionary Feminists (SWERFs) are radical feminists who do not consider prostitution to be compatible with prostitution.

<sup>19</sup> Neo-abolitionist radical feminists are known for their desire to see all aspects of the sex industry outlawed (e.g., pornography, strip clubs, escort services, etc.) and to have laws enacted like those in Sweden and Norway which penalize those consuming sexual services and not those selling sexual services, and which offer economic opportunities to those engaged in prostitution. See Gunilla Ekberg, 'The Swedish Law that Prohibits the Purchase of Sexual Services Best Practices for Prevention of Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings', *Violence Against Women* 10, no. 10 (2004): 1187-1218.

<sup>20</sup> Sally Cameron and Edward Newman (eds.), *Trafficking in humans: social, cultural and political dimensions* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008), 82.

<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Barry, founder of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is credited with the term *female sexual slavery* in her book *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Wahab, *op cit.*, 626.

conditions of those involved, have conducted research on the subject. However, it is important to note that research conducted with women for whom prostitution is a current or past experience is essential in order to give clear articulation to their voices/lived experiences, primarily in a sociological context. This type of research has been missing, most notably in the literature on prostitution that emerged from the second wave of Anglo-American feminist discourse.<sup>23</sup> In her critique of the Western discourses on prostitution, Ethiopian scholar Bethlehem Tekola notes that often very little differentiation is made between the institution of prostitution and the practitioners of prostitution internally:<sup>24</sup>

While the voluminous literature on both of them [prostitution and prostitutes] is the result of different perspectives and different judgements, the literature that seeks to understand them from within is amazingly thin.<sup>25</sup>

In order to address the gap in the field of sociological research on prostitution within the context of Ethiopia, Tekola says that:

Any effort to enrich our understanding of the lives and concerns of the women behind commercial sex work in Ethiopia...[should] shift the focus of research even more towards the women themselves to bring to the foreground their *emic* descriptions of life behind commercial sex.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason, this research project aims to privilege the voices of women affected by prostitution throughout the research as they seek to theologise about their life experiences.

### **Social Context of Prostitution in Ethiopia**

Although estimates of the number of women in prostitution are difficult to ascertain, a 1990 study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that 7% of all sexually active women in Addis Ababa were involved in prostitution.<sup>27</sup> The WHO determined in 2011 that in Africa, the average age of those involved in prostitution was between 25 and 30 years old, except in the urban areas of Ethiopia and Kenya where

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<sup>23</sup> A new book being released in October 2018 by Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Worker's Rights*, seeks to bring a fresh perspective to contentious questions related to the growing global sex-worker rights movement. See <https://amazon.com/Revolting-Prostitutes-Fight-Workers-Rights/dp/1786633604>.

<sup>24</sup> Bethlehem Tekola, *Poverty and the Social Context of Sex Work in Addis Ababa: An Anthropological Study* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2005), 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization, 'Preventing HIV among sex workers in sub-Saharan Africa: A literature review' (Geneva: World Health Organization Press, 2011), 5.

lower age estimates were discerned.<sup>28</sup> This coalesces with former research conducted in 2002 that found that nearly 60% of sex workers identified were between 15 and 25 years old. Most sex worker respondents in that study stated that they had started commercial sex for economic reasons, thereby linking poverty and sex work.<sup>29</sup>

Research with child prostitutes in Addis Ababa in the year 2000 revealed that children fled their homes for the streets of Addis Ababa to escape early enforced marriage, abuse in the home, and not being able to attend school. In the same study, 74% of the respondents interviewed were either orphans or migrants from disadvantaged, impoverished, single-parent homes who had arrived in Addis Ababa with aspirations of being able to provide enough money for both their families and themselves.<sup>30</sup> This is clearly articulated by one participant in the study: ‘The only way I found to help my poor family is through prostitution. I cannot find any other job.’<sup>31</sup>

### **Prostitution Research in Addis Ababa**

#### **Sociological Research**

Bethlehem Tekola highlights that a significant amount of sociological research relating to prostitution has been conducted in Ethiopia since the 1960s. She observes that ‘... commercial sex has been an important and attractive topic for sociological research in Ethiopia.’<sup>32</sup> Tekola critiques both research themes and methodological approaches for being repetitive, with projects focusing mainly on the causes and consequences of prostitution, and the methodology focusing on quantitative questionnaires with small samples of women in prostitution:

Researchers have not only focused on quantitative evidence at the expense of qualitative evidence but have also tended to take commercial sex workers as objects rather than subjects of study.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Family Health International-Ethiopia and Addis Ababa City Administration Health Bureau, ‘Mapping and Census of Female Sex Workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,’ (Addis Ababa: Family Health International-Ethiopia, 2002): xi.

<sup>30</sup> Rahmet Abdella, James Hoot, and Selamawit Tadesse, ‘Seldom Heard Voices: Child Prostitutes in Ethiopia,’ *International Journal of Early Childhood* 38, no. 2 (2000): 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Bethlehem Tekola cites the following studies on commercial sex work in Ethiopia since the 1960s: Mayor, 1962, 1963; Andargatchew, 1967; Lema, 1968; Laketch 1978, 1991; Banchiyeleku, 1984; Ayehunie, 1987; Mehret, 1990; Habtamu, 1991; Baardson, 1993; Kebede, 1993; Tamene, 1993; Atakilt, 1994; Gedu, 1995; Alemayehu, 1996; Aklilu 1998; Hussein, 1998; Seble 1998; Mulumebet, 2000; Bethlehem, 2000, 2002. See Tekola, *op cit.*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

Tekola believes that as result of this objectifying type of research, the findings and conclusions about prostitution have leaned toward portraying prostitution as an evil practice that has negative moral, social, economic, and health consequences for society as a whole<sup>34</sup> and portraying the women involved as ‘embodiments of evil itself.’<sup>35</sup> Those more sympathetic to the women most often present them as illiterate, helpless victims of an evil system with very little agency.<sup>36</sup>

### **Research Conducted by the Ethiopian Church**

With reference to prostitution research conducted by the Christian church (Orthodox and Protestant), I was able to find very few projects. Few have attempted to frame prostitution in Addis Ababa theologically. ‘Making a Living in the Street: Street Sex-Workers in Chechnya’ (May 2013) was conducted by a Deacon in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) for the completion of his master’s degree in social anthropology at the University of Addis Ababa.<sup>37</sup> The author states ‘I wanted to do this research for my theology [from a theological perspective] but my title was not acceptable.’<sup>38</sup> He goes on to explain that his professor was an urban anthropologist and would only evaluate the research from an anthropological, and not ‘from a Christian point of view,’<sup>39</sup> therefore compelling the author to stay within the confines of the professor’s discipline. The Deacon stated that: ‘you will do a research ... then they will put it on their shelf,’<sup>40</sup> alluding to his belief that research findings in this field tend not to be acted upon.

### **Evangelical Research**

One unpublished research project that has attempted to understand the intersection of the evangelical church with women affected by prostitution was conducted by Wudasio Kassa in 2014, ‘Evaluating the Church’s Response towards Female Commercial Sex Workers (FCSWS): Case of Selected Evangelical Churches in Addis Ketema Sub-

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>37</sup> Ermias Kirkos, ‘Making a Living in the Street: Street Sex-Workers in Chechnya,’ Unpublished master’s thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Interview Transcript: Deacon EK, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), 10/5/16: 12, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

City.’<sup>41</sup> The aim of Kassa’s research project was to understand how selected evangelical church leaders perceived women in prostitution and the lack of services provided by evangelical churches to these women. Some of the major findings included: ‘all of the [church] respondents argue that God loves and forgives the sex workers if they repent before him.’<sup>42</sup> Kassa also found that a lack of awareness regarding prostitution and a lack of budget by the churches for such ministry were some of the main reasons why churches were not involved with these women. This research is important as it reveals the programmatic emphasis that evangelical churches in Addis Ababa tend to place on working with marginalised communities, and a theme of conditional acceptance in the church community through love and forgiveness extended by God ‘if they repent before him.’<sup>43</sup>

Kassa’s research provides a brief survey of Old Testament and New Testament texts related to prostitution with the aim of seeking a theological response for commercial sex workers (i.e., how to convince commercial sex workers of the value that God places on human sexuality in Genesis 1, and the ways in which prostitution stands against this).<sup>44</sup> The theological response articulated in the research is very short and did not include the voices of women affected by prostitution in its theologising; only the voices of selected evangelical church leaders were included.

### **Formation of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church**

The Ethiopian Christian church dates back to the fourth century AD with the conversion of the Axumite Kingdom of Northern Ethiopia by St. Frumentius.<sup>45</sup> Christianity became the state religion in 330 AD and was affiliated closely with the political life of the country until 1974 when the monarchy was overthrown in a *coup d’état*.<sup>46</sup> Ethiopian evangelicalism dates from the arrival of missionaries from the Church Mission Society (CMS) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Wudasiye Kassa, ‘Evaluating the Church’s Response towards Female Commercial Sex Workers (FCSWS): Case of Selected Evangelical Churches in Addis Ketema Sub-City.’ Unpublished master’s thesis, Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, June 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>45</sup> Sergew Habele Selassie, ‘The Establishment of the Ethiopian Church,’ accessed May 28, 2018, <http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/English/Ethiopian/prechristian.html#2intro>.

<sup>46</sup> Girma Bekele, ‘Evangelicals in Eastern Africa,’ in *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Brian Stiller (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 240-241.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.



Scandinavian missionaries arrived in Ethiopia in the 1800s with the intention of renewing the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and to inspire a ‘coming back to the Bible’ movement. Unfortunately, these intentions were not well received by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and this eventually led to the formation of the two largest evangelical denominations in Ethiopia (to be discussed in the following section).

From 1974 to 1991, Ethiopia was under the rule of a communist regime, and the evangelical church was forced underground due to significant persecution by the political rulers. During this time, the evangelical church experienced explosive growth and now accounts for 20% of the population.<sup>48</sup> Historians note that while Ethiopian evangelicalism initially resembled the traditions of its founding Western missionary agents, after Communist rule the evangelical church ‘effectively re-emerged as Pentecostal.’<sup>49</sup>

### **Establishment of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)**

The Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM) grew out of an early-1800s revival movement in the Church of Sweden that had been inspired by Pietist and Moravian ideas, including a significant emphasis on individual conversion.<sup>50</sup> SEM established a base in Massawa, Ethiopia, in 1866, hoping for permission from the rulers of the day to work with the Oromo people, as the policy of the country at that time prohibited any mission work in the interior of Ethiopia.<sup>51</sup> The German Hermannsburg Mission (GHM) arrived in 1927, followed by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission and the Danish Evangelical Mission (DEM) in 1948, both of whom were operating in Southern Ethiopia.<sup>52</sup>

The turning point in the growth of evangelism in Ethiopia came during the reign of King Menelik II (1889-1913), at which time a movement emerged within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that saw members of the church expressing evangelical convictions.<sup>53</sup> This brought these members, who did not desire to leave the Orthodox Church, into conflict with EOTC officials ‘due to their evangelical convictions regarding salvation, as well as their disagreement with EOTC traditions such as *teskar*

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>50</sup> Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS Foerlaget, 1978), 114-115.

<sup>51</sup> Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 207.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

(the offering of Mass for the dead), the mediating role of Mary, veneration of the cross, and use of icons.<sup>54</sup> This new evangelical wing of the EOTC desired to remain under the church and to renew it from within; however, they were eventually excommunicated, denied baptism for their children and refused burial places for their dead.<sup>55</sup>

In 1959, a new evangelical congregation called *Mekane Yesus* ('Jesus' dwelling place') was established as a result of the EOTC's efforts to outlaw the new movement.<sup>56</sup> The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is the second largest evangelical church in Ethiopia; however, their inception came about as a failure to reform the EOTC, as the Lutheran mission which started the EECMY never had any intention of starting an independent Ethiopian evangelical church.<sup>57</sup> Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* has been the basis for the doctrinal teaching of the EECMY, with the *Large Catechism* having significant influence as well.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Lutheran theology has been a major influence in the doctrine and practice of the EECMY.

### **Establishment of the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC)**

In 1918, a medical doctor and missionary from the United Presbyterian Board of Foreign Mission of North America responded to an influenza outbreak in Western Ethiopia.<sup>59</sup> Dr. Thomas Lambie then founded the Abyssinian Frontier Mission in 1926 and eventually merged with the Sudan Interior Mission organisation (SIM, now called Serving in Mission) which had been founded in 1893.<sup>60</sup> It was not long before tensions developed between SIM and the EOTC due to SIM's 'strong pietistic missionary heritage that placed a high emphasis on personal conversion and on living radically transformed life in the light of the Bible.'<sup>61</sup> Bekele asserts that:

The primacy of evangelism, i.e., the preaching of the word to "save souls" as much as possible, and using social concern as its auxiliary was fundamental to SIM's missionary policy. Such a narrow and compartmentalised view of mission, to this present time, has given the

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>58</sup> Oyvind M. Eide, *Revolution & Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth & Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-1985*, (Oxford: James Currey Ltd., 2000), 81.

<sup>59</sup> Bekele, *In-Between*, 212.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

EOTC a reason to accuse western missionaries of using works of charity to “steal” its members and manipulate converts to a new religion.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike the founders of EECMY, SIM resolved that a new native evangelical Christian community would be the outcome of its missionary work, therefore making church-planting its primary goal. The missionaries who participated in this work were from a wide variety of denominations; however, Bekele argues that most of these missionaries belonged to groups that tended toward the fundamentalist end of the theological spectrum, placing a high emphasis on personal character formation as a sign of conversion.<sup>63</sup> This theological tendency is discussed in detail throughout the thesis.

### **Theologising About Prostitution**

Ethiopia is a country in which religion plays a significant role in people’s lives:

Religion permeates morals, work, relationships . . . whether they are Muslims, Orthodox Christians or others, [Ethiopians] share a deep conviction that there is a God who is creator of the heaven and earth<sup>64</sup>

Placing prostitution within theological discourse is therefore highly relevant in a societal context like Ethiopia where over 50% of the population identify themselves as Christians,<sup>65</sup> and the Christian God is included in the process of how people attribute meaning to their lives. When a member of the evangelical church in Addis Ababa encounters a woman standing on a street corner in a red-light district in the city, there are Christian moral teachings and societal perspectives that form the lenses through which this person sees this woman, labelled ‘prostitute.’ This research posits that in order for the Ethiopian evangelical church to sufficiently see, understand, empathise with, and respond to the woman on the street corner and the myriad of experiences she represents, this requires *listening* to how these women make meaning of their lives.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>64</sup> Vasanen in Alemayehu Mekonnen, *Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 27.

<sup>65</sup> Gerald West and Musa Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 253.

<sup>66</sup> Experiences of childhood sexual abuse, poverty, early-childhood marriage, lack of educational opportunities, broken homes, and violence are but some of the common themes reported in the narratives of women who are/were engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa. See Kaulback, *Unashamed*.

In addition, I learned through the course of my research that to ask a woman affected by prostitution to interpret her experiences of prostitution strictly within a feminist sociological framework is unusual in the highly religious context of Ethiopia. Therefore, this research project aims to explore what happens when Christian Scripture is included as a dialogue partner for women affected by prostitution as they endeavour to interpret their experiences related to prostitution.

Prostitution is a patent example of an experience that is rife with contradictions, as evidenced by the current divided discourse in the field of sociology. Christian theology mediated through Christian Scripture provides a framework for making sense of the contradictions of experience<sup>67</sup> and has produced many notable perspectives<sup>68</sup> and contributions to understanding issues of personhood and human sexuality, as exemplified by Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*.<sup>69</sup> But current academic literature on prostitution raises the question, how often have women affected by prostitution been included in the process of theologising about issues such as personhood and sexuality, and have they had their perspectives included in the creation of new theological insights? Within the Ethiopian context, Tekola's question reverberates: how often have researchers sought to understand women affected by prostitution from within?<sup>70</sup>

Operative theologian Kosuke Koyama asks, 'Is not involvement the only soil from which theology germinates?'<sup>71</sup> Doing theology 'from below' is a term that was coined by Koyama, a Japanese theologian who worked with rural Thai farmers. Instead of trying to teach great theological treatises to his audience, he included his audience in the process of grappling with the human situations they faced *in light of* Christian theology. He wrote:

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<sup>67</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction, Third Edition* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 193.

<sup>68</sup> Christian feminism is a form of feminism that seeks to recover the female voice in Biblical materials, and to include a female perspective in the way theology is done and in the theological content produced.

<sup>69</sup> In Pope John Paul II's seminal work, he sets out to develop an 'adequate anthropology' which he insists must be a theology of the body. He says: 'When we speak of the meaning of the body, we refer in the first place to the full awareness of the human being,' Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary of John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body,"* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2003), 5.

<sup>70</sup> Tekola, *op cit.*, 35.

<sup>71</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (London: SCM, 1974), ix.

The greatness of theological works is to be judged by the quality and extent of service they render to the people to whom [we are] sent...<sup>72</sup>

Thus, this research project seeks to theologise about prostitution and to expand the horizons of the theological understanding of prostitution in order to transcend the current theological categories used for meaning-making. This is achieved by placing a priority on listening to the voices of women currently in prostitution and exiting prostitution, as they interact with selected Christian Scripture and explore how these stories come to bear on the stories of their lives. This project will also listen to the voices of selected evangelical church leaders as they seek to understand prostitution for it has been highlighted by Ethiopian scholar Alemayehu Mekonnen that:

Reasoning within the boundary of the Scriptures, developing theology that helps us [Ethiopians] to know God better, addressing social and economic issues...are all [currently] lacking.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, this project aims to address the current deficiency identified by Mekonnen.

### **The Purpose of this Research**

The preceding discussion highlights two important features of research into prostitution in Ethiopia: 1) the differing ways of making sense of prostitution that are available through the wide spectrum of feminist theory and found insufficient in the highly religious context of Ethiopia; and 2) the absence of prostitution research in Ethiopia from disciplines outside sociology.

The theological gap in the literature on prostitution is discussed in more detail in the Chapter Two, the literature review. The implications of the gap can be described as both ecclesiological and missiological: how does the evangelical church understand its identity *as* the church with reference to prostitution, and how does the evangelical church conceive of her role in participating in *missio Dei*,<sup>74</sup> particularly toward those who have been affected by prostitution? Furthermore, is there space in the evangelical church for women affected by prostitution? Does the evangelical church want to learn of their experiences and hear their articulations of faith? How can the evangelical

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>73</sup> Mekonnen, *op cit.*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> According to missiologist David J. Bosch, *missio Dei* refers to God's self-revelation as the One who loves 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. *Missio Dei* emphasises the good news that God is a God-for-people. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 10.

church respond appropriately, relevantly, and in a life-affirming manner toward women who have been affected by prostitution?

One of the main purposes of this research project is to listen to the voices of these women. While it is important and relevant to hear the perspective of the evangelical church leaders—and a significant portion of the thesis is dedicated to this—considering that this project is intended as a gift of the women’s voices to the Ethiopian evangelical church, the voices of these women are privileged throughout the thesis.<sup>75</sup> This research project is an attempt to give a voice to the marginalised;<sup>76</sup> therefore, the voices of women affected by prostitution are fundamental to this thesis and the formation of the primary research question. This research project has been designed to place Ethiopian women affected by prostitution as the primary interlocutors<sup>77</sup> in the development of a theological reflection and response emerging from their reality, experiences, needs, interests, questions, and resources.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, the research project aims to further the discourse on prostitution within the Ethiopian context, and to create different theological categories for understanding the plight of women affected by prostitution beyond the current sin/sinner categories that the evangelical church predominantly holds to.

### **Basic Approach of the Research**

The research seeks to address the following three questions:

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Frostin states that theologies of liberation which employ methods such as contextual Bible study require that we not only make ‘an option for the poor,’ but that we also accept ‘the epistemological privilege of the poor’ which involves an epistemological paradigm shift in which the poor and marginalised are seen as the primary dialogue partners of theology. See Gerald O. West, ‘The Bible and the poor,’ in Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 131.

<sup>76</sup> Gayatri Spivak defines the subaltern as those occupying a space of difference—of marginalisation—in a society who have limited or no access to the cultural imperialism apparatus in a society. Spivak says that a “true” subaltern group whose identity is its difference (based on this definition, the author of this study categorizes Ethiopian women affected by prostitution as a true subaltern group), there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; therefore, the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation. See Spivak in Rosalind C. Morris, ed. *Reflections on the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 40.

<sup>77</sup> Within the remit of liberation theology, where contextual Bible study is located as a method, Peter Frostin argues that the chief interlocutor chosen in the development of a theology of liberation is the nonperson, the poor, the exploited classes, the marginalised races, all the despised cultures. See Peter Frostin in Gerald O. West in ‘The Bible and the poor,’ in Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 135.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

1. To what extent can the voices of women affected by prostitution and the voices of selected evangelical church leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, contribute toward a life-affirming theological response to prostitution?
2. Do women affected by prostitution have a gift to offer to the evangelical church, and if so, what is it?
3. Why is the evangelical church unable (or perhaps unwilling) to receive this gift?

By extent, the first question seeks to identify the degree to which the potential contributions of women affected by prostitution and of evangelical church leaders can help to unearth some of the theological presuppositions that influence the current thinking and praxis of evangelical churches toward women in prostitution. *Life-affirming* is further defined in Chapter Two within the context of African Womanist theology.

In order to answer the three questions, the following secondary questions will also be answered:

1. How do women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa make theological sense of their lives?
2. How do evangelical church leaders perceive women affected by prostitution?

The project involved a data-collection process that consisted of contextual Bible studies with women currently in prostitution, women exiting prostitution, and selected evangelical church leaders. The project also invited selected evangelical church leaders to participate in semi-structured interviews. Based on the data collected, themes were identified with reference to descriptive theological categories that help to answer the primary research question.

### **Scope of the Research**

This study focuses on two groups of women affected by prostitution: 1) women currently engaged in prostitution in the city of Addis Ababa who will be referred to as the Flamingo Women; and 2) women that are engaged in a rehabilitation program exiting prostitution who will be referred to as the EWAR Women. These two cohorts of women will be explained in greater detail in Chapter Three. Church leaders were selected based on access through relationships with the FBO that I volunteered with for three years (2014–2016), and represent a cross-section of leaders from the major evangelical denominations represented in Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Kale Heywet

Church (EKHC), Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Mulu Wongel, Addis Kidane, and Mesrete Kristos. I did have one key informant from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC).

### **Limitations of the Research**

The following limitations describe the parameters that I have established for the research project for the purpose of answering the primary research question. I am aware that each of these factors are important and valuable to understanding the context in which the research took place; however, these factors are not explored in great detail in the current thesis.

First, I recognise that the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has had a tremendous influence on Ethiopian Christianity as one of the oldest national traditions in the history of Christendom since its inception in the Fourth Century<sup>79</sup> and currently represents 43.5% of the Ethiopian population.<sup>80</sup> Due to time and financial constraints, I did not have the resources required to cultivate trusting relationships with the EOTC that would have allowed for the type of access required for this research project. Despite this limitation, I believe that a valid contribution to knowledge can be made by engaging with the Ethiopian evangelical church which is currently estimated to represent 20% of the population.<sup>81</sup>

Second, I acknowledge that due to theological and pastoral differences between the EOTC and evangelical church, there are gaps and tensions that are raised in the current research project. I am aware that the gaps and tensions that are highlighted in my research point to the historically complex relationship between the EOTC and evangelical church<sup>82</sup> and that there still exists some strain between the two groups.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Donald Crummey, 'Church and Nation: the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century)' in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Vol. 5*, ed. Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 457.

<sup>80</sup> Bekele, *Evangelicals Around the World*, 241.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>82</sup> Girma Bekele addresses the historical development of these tensions throughout his book *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lends of Mission* particularly in Chapter Eight 'Protestantism in Ethiopia: A Paradigm Shift or Proselytism Gone Wrong?' in Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lends of Mission*, 198-245.

<sup>83</sup> Despite the strain between the two groups, there are examples of bridges being built between the EOTC and Faith-Based Organisations with an evangelical persuasion. For example, the ministry I served with (EWAR) were invited in 2014 by several EOTC priests in Addis Ababa to host a prostitution awareness workshop with their leadership. The invitation was issued as a result of the twenty-years of experience that EWAR had in working with women affected by prostitution. This workshop resulted in EWAR being asked by these local EOTC priests to pilot a prostitution awareness training program in their congregations.



While a historical overview of these complexities is beyond the remit of the current project, a few brief historical points will be highlighted. The EOTC has sought to maintain the unity of the church despite the extensive political and doctrinal challenges it has faced, both from those within the country and from those outside of Ethiopia for hundreds of years, leading to a certain degree of reticence toward foreign missionaries.<sup>84</sup> While the first wave of Protestant missionaries from the mid-1600s<sup>85</sup> to mid-1800s did not intend to initiate a new sect of Christianity or to develop an alternative church, this is precisely what has taken place in Ethiopia, particularly over the Twentieth Century.<sup>86</sup> For example, after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935-1936), the spread of evangelical Protestantism was highly visible after liberation resulting in renewed religious tension between the EOTC and the new community of evangelical Christians.<sup>87</sup>

The development of evangelical Christianity and new churches that are not affiliated with the EOTC have challenged the very unity that the EOTC has strived to protect, as exemplified at the Church Council of Boru Meda in 1878 under Emperor Yohannes where: ‘sectarianism was marginalised and the doctrinal position forwarded at [the Council] has remained normative to the present’<sup>88</sup> and the Emperor announced ‘the Tewahedo doctrinal faith to be the only theological position of the Church.’<sup>89</sup> Therefore, it is understandable that evangelical church growth over the last two-hundred

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<sup>84</sup> Tensions with foreign missionaries can be traced to the arrival of the Jesuits in 1557, the first foreign missionaries to Ethiopia. The Jesuits arrived with the misunderstanding that the Ethiopian rulers of the day were willing to submit to Catholic beliefs and practices. The Jesuits were eventually expelled in 1632 and Tewahedo Orthodoxy was reinstated as the state religion. See Donald Crummey, ‘Church and Nation,’ 463.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Heyling is credited as the first Protestant missionary to Ethiopia from Germany. Tibebe Eshete states that Heyling purposed to ‘work with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with the aim of ‘revitalising’ the institution so that it would focus on its scriptural origins, reform, and be endowed with a heightened sense of evangelisation in accord with the doctrine of salvation.’ See Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>86</sup> Unlike the first wave of missionaries from Anglican and Lutheran traditions, who at the beginning did not see the need to create a parallel institution, and therefore handed converts to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the arrival of the SIM missionaries in the 1900’s taught their converts from the start that they should form their own congregations, separate from the Orthodox Church. SIM insisted on the separate existence of the new convert’s communities independently evolving into local churches buttressed by the belief that these new converts should form new social groups. See Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement*, 80.

<sup>87</sup> Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 182.

<sup>88</sup> The Council of Boru Meda ended tensions between three different theological schools that were present in the EOTC. See Crummey, ‘Church and Nation,’ 466.

<sup>89</sup> Emperor Yohannes was motivated to issue this decree in an effort to eliminate religious and ethnic tensions in Ethiopia at that time through promoting a unitary religion. See Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 70.

years which has been motivated by different theological and pastoral aims than those of the unified vision of the EOTC, has perpetuated a complex relationship between the two groups.<sup>90</sup>

Third, I recognise that ‘the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is deeply rooted in the culture of Ethiopia’ and embraces culture as a part of its faith.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the women who have participated in this study, the majority claiming a nominal background in the Orthodox Church, have been exposed to wider cultural influences which have impacted their perceptions of pertinent topics that have emerged through the research, such as purity and pollution.<sup>92</sup> My thesis has not explored these cultural influences at an anthropological level<sup>93</sup> in great depth; however, I am aware of works directly related to the influence of Ethiopian culture on Christian faith and practice.<sup>94</sup> The absence of this type of analysis has possibly lead to some gaps in the interpretation of the data that is presented, which I recognise.

Fourth, despite the EOTC affiliation of most of the women affected by prostitution who participated in this research and the primacy of Biblical interpretation within the EOTC,<sup>95</sup> the women exhibited a low level of Biblical literacy. It emerged

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<sup>90</sup> I experienced the complexity of this relationship at various points in my research and exercised sensitivity with my research participants to ensure that I was not trying to exacerbate these tensions (e.g. dispensing with the use of a physical Bible during the first set of contextual Bible studies so that my participants did not think I was trying to proselytize them, which is a common tactic when evangelical Christians approach women in prostitution).

<sup>91</sup> Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 35.

<sup>92</sup> For example, in Southern Ethiopia, *Fandano* was practiced among the Hadya and Kambata people groups which is a syncretistic fusion of traditional religion, Christianity, and Islam and involved sacrifice, purification rites, fasting for extended periods, and prayers bearing the marks of the three religions. See Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective* (2010), eds. Chris Hann & Hermann Goltz highlights the need for anthropologists to incorporate the Orthodox and Catholic East into the discussions and analyses of Christianity as a social, cultural, and historical formation. See Juraj Buzalka, ‘Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective (Review),’ *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2011): 572, accessed August 21, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2011.0018>.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Boylston’s anthropological study ‘Shades of the Divine: Approaching the Sacred in an Ethiopian Orthodox Community’ seeks to ‘trace the articulations between ritual, hierarchical authority, and matter through which Ethiopian Christians constitute and embody their relationships with each other, with the environment, and with the divine.’ See Tom Boylston, ‘Shades of the Divine: Approaching the Sacred in an Ethiopian Orthodox Community’ PhD, (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012), 3.

<sup>95</sup> Keon-San An’s recent work on Biblical interpretation in the EOTC suggests that preaching is the primary practical medium through which Biblical interpretation is conducted in the EOTC and that throughout its history, preaching has been a conduit for the strong teaching tradition among Biblical scholars and priests in the EOTC who have often trained for over thirty years before taking on leadership within the church. See Keon-Sang An, *An Ethiopian Reading of the Bible: Biblical Interpretation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke Company Limited, 2016), 157-158, accessed 16/8/16, ProQuest Ebook Central <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=4570725>.

through the course of the contextual Bible studies, the main method of data collection, that the women had a limited familiarity with Biblical texts apart from those related to King David and the Hebrew temple cult in Jerusalem that influences EOTC worship and theology.<sup>96</sup>

For example, the women were familiar with the character of King David, while not with the Biblical stories related to David, who is referred to as *Mezmoor Dawit* (Psalmist David) by most Ethiopians. It is common in an EOTC service to have a portion of a Psalm read; therefore, even the most casual attender to the EOTC would be familiar with David. As a writer of Scripture, David is a highly esteemed figure and this was reflected in the women's responses of disbelief over the actions of David toward Bathsheba.<sup>97</sup> This sentiment of disbelief was also reflected during a contextual Bible study on the rape of David's daughter Tamar, where some of the women were uncertain that David, *Mezmoor Dawit*, could be a character in such a story and asked:

**Woman 1:** Is King David and Psalmist David the same person?

**Woman 2:** No, they are not.

**Translator:** Yes, it is.<sup>98</sup>

Therefore, a lack of Biblical literacy among the women who participated in this research produced some challenges to the contextual Bible study method that was chosen as the primary means of data collection. This method and how these challenges were overcome are further explained in Chapter Three.

### **Anticipated contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the discipline of missiology through furthering the discourse on what an appropriate response by the Ethiopian evangelical church to women affected by prostitution might be in Addis Ababa. What does the mission of God look like with reference to women affected by prostitution? What does it mean to be the church of, and the church for, those who have been affected by

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<sup>96</sup> Donald Crummey notes that Ethiopian Christianity is deeply conscious of its Semitic roots which were reinforced by the centuries preceding the Christian era, as Ethiopia has been culturally and politically dominated by Semitic speakers. See Donald Crummey, 'Church and Nation,' 460.

<sup>97</sup> While conducting inductive Bible studies on the life of David (the story of David and Bathsheba, and the rape of David's daughter, Tamar) it was interesting to note the disbelief that several women expressed when David was implicated as one of the 'sinning' characters in the stories they listened to. After hearing the entirety of the David and Bathsheba story, one woman remarked: 'You mean that David also commits sin? I thought he was a prophet.' The same woman interjected a few minutes later while discussing the death of David's son: 'I never expected. I never expected we were talking about David in the Bible.' See notes from Transcript of David and Bathsheba Session Flamingo Women, 20/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Transcript of the Rape of Tamar Session Flamingo Women, 2/27/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

prostitution? These are just some of the questions that this research project intends to examine.

I am not satisfied with the current polarized discourse on prostitution taking place within sociology. The terms *worker* and *liberated*, or *victim* and *sexual slavery*, are inadequate categories to address the following statement given by one of my key informants who currently works as a lay counsellor for EWAR:

The women who work in the street and the bar are not there because they want to. They are not there because it is a nice place to be. Everybody needs to realize it is not just Ethiopian women [who are] at risk and offer friendship, offer love, and offer some level of care to help them out. Most people think these women don't change, but I want to say, we change. If we are loved, if we are cared for, we do change.<sup>99</sup>

In Margaret Guider's research of the Brazilian Church and its response to prostitution, she says: 'Prostitutes stand as a constant reminder to the church that they cannot save those whom it does not include.'<sup>100</sup> This research project is intended to bring the voices of women whose lives have been affected by prostitution to the fore, with the intention of unearthing new theological categories that help to make sense of the lack of response by the evangelical church. Through this process, the Ethiopian evangelical church was invited to be a part of a process of listening, learning, and being challenged in their presuppositions and beliefs about 'prostitution' and 'prostitutes,' with the hope of developing an adequate theological understanding of prostitution.

By working toward a theological framework informed by African Womanist theology, HIV/AIDS theology, and the theological concept of the Kingdom of God, which are discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two, it is hoped that women affected by prostitution will be able to influence further the ways in which the evangelical church in Addis Ababa responds to prostitution.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two reviews selected literature that establishes the foundation for an informed theological reflection on the data to be presented in the thesis, and the process by which a theological response will be sought. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach that guided the decisions that I made with reference to the research design and details how the research was carried out.

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<sup>99</sup> Kaulbeck, *Unashamed*.

<sup>100</sup> Margaret E. Guider, *Daughters of Rahab: Prostitution and the Church of Liberation in Brazil*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 154.

Chapter Three also outlines the contextual Bible study method that was followed and how it was appropriated to the context of the research participants in Addis Ababa.

Chapter Four presents the first set of data that was generated from several contextual Bible studies on the story of Hagar with several groups of women affected by prostitution. This chapter describes some of the emerging themes related to my participants' common experiences prior to their entry into prostitution.

Chapter Five presents some of the data generated from the contextual Bible studies I conducted with women affected by prostitution in the first phase of my fieldwork. Potential emerging themes that may give an indication as to how these women perceive God, sin, humanity (Christian anthropology), and justice are highlighted here. These descriptive theological categories were chosen as a result of their categorisations within the fields of Biblical and systematic theology, and their potential to help answer the primary research question.

Chapter Six presents data generated from selected contextual Bible studies with women affected by prostitution, with attention to emerging themes in the ways these women make sense of the church, and particularly in how they understand the church and its leadership and in the spiritual practices they have adopted and/or subverted in order to be a part of the worshipping community.

Chapter Seven presents some of the data generated from the twenty-one semi-structured interviews<sup>101</sup> that I conducted with selected evangelical church leaders in Addis Ababa between June and October 2016. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the emerging themes that have been identified through the voices of the women with specific reference to how the women make sense of the how they came to be in prostitution (prelude to prostitution), God, sin, humanity (Christian anthropology), and justice, the voices of the evangelical leaders are brought into a discussion regarding the degree of resonance and dissonance they share with these themes.

Chapter Eight brings the voices of the women and selected evangelical church leaders into conversation with reference to the themes that have emerged from the data pertaining to the church. The story of the Prodigal Son is introduced as a meeting place for these two sets of voices with the intention of the data presented clarifying and

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<sup>101</sup> In order to answer the primary research question, specific data generated from fourteen interviews has been referenced in the thesis. Appendix 5 lists the details of those interviews. During my interviews, I sought to take on a posture of empathetic neutrality, which Michael Quinn Patton defines as an empathetic stance in interviewing that seeks vicarious understanding without judgement (neutrality) by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness. See Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 40. In Chapter Three, I describe more fully the semi-structured interview process I used.

diagnosing some of the major theological deficiencies that are currently impeding the development of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

Chapter Nine explores the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10) for its potential to respond to the theological deficiencies that have been identified through listening to voices of the women and selected church leaders throughout the research process.

Chapter Ten outlines recommendations and conclusions that have resulted from the research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Prostitution has been woven into the fabric of the Judeo-Christian story since its inception. The Bible makes metaphorical references to prostitution in various Old Testament texts and includes stories of women engaged in prostitution as well as accounts of Jesus Christ Himself interacting with women considered to be prostitutes. Therefore, contemporary challenges that the social issue of prostitution presents to Christian mission and ministry are far from being unique to this age.<sup>1</sup> As Margaret Guider states with regard to her research with the Brazilian Church and prostitution:

it is important to note that there is limited research available on the interactive processes by which social attitudes about prostitution inform and are informed by Christian moral teachings, ecclesial constructions of reality, and pastoral practices.<sup>2</sup>

In order to understand some of the specific challenges that prostitution brings to bear on the moral teachings and pastoral practices of the evangelical church in Addis Ababa, it is important to survey briefly how the Christian tradition has historically made sense of prostitution. To that end, this chapter provides a brief sketch of how the Old Testament, New Testament, and church fathers have dealt with prostitution.

As discussed in Chapter One, at the time of writing, prostitution research conducted from a theological perspective in Addis Ababa is limited to my own findings from Wudase Kassa's research.<sup>3</sup> None of the research before my own addresses the evangelical church's response to prostitution and this thesis is an attempt to fill that gap, and there has been little theological reflection on prostitution in Africa. Therefore, this chapter will explore two related streams of African theology that have sought to engage with contemporary issues on the continent, namely: 1) HIV/AIDS theology that has provided a theological framework for engaging with those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and; 2) African womanist theology that has addressed issues of gender injustice. These two conversations will highlight principles I will use in the thesis to frame my data theologically. In particular, this existing material on HIV/AIDS

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret E. Guider, *Daughters of Rahab: Prostitution and the Church of Liberation in Brazil*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Wudase Kassa, 'Evaluating the Church's Response towards Female Commercial Sex Workers (FCSWS): Case of Selected Evangelical Churches in Addis Ketema Sub-City.' Unpublished master's thesis, Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, June 2014.

theology and African womanist theology provide examples for how to understand and respond to contentious social issues missiologically.

In addition, these two conversations serve as exemplars of life-affirming theological responses which will help to define the primary research question. This exploration will also introduce some of the defining principles of the theological concept of the Kingdom of God that are relevant to the thesis, particularly pertinent elements from the Biblical books of Luke and Acts as those relate to women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. The emphasis on Luke's writing is warranted because of the high proportion of the data derived from stories authored by Luke.

The aim of this chapter is to: 1) review existing literature that can help make sense of how the church historically has dealt with women affected by prostitution and to identify strengths and weaknesses within these approaches and then to; 2) explore how the church, within the African context, has worked to create viable theological frameworks to address contentious social issues. The works reviewed in this chapter will aid in the creation of a theological framework from which to analyse the data that will be presented in the thesis. Particularly, the works reviewed will inform the selection of theological categories within which I frame my discussion of the voices of the Ethiopian women. These categories include how the women make sense of God, sin, humanity (anthropology), injustice, and the church.

## **Prostitution in the Sources**

### **Prostitution in the Old Testament**

The Lexham Bible Dictionary defines prostitution as the exchange of sexual activity for money or goods, an activity explicitly condemned in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:29) and covered by the command 'you shall not commit adultery.'<sup>4</sup> The most frequently used Hebrew word for prostitution, *zonah*, has a somewhat elastic meaning and can be interpreted as sexually inappropriate actions outside of marriage (implying adultery).<sup>5</sup> In Leviticus 21, priests are forbidden from marrying someone who had been defiled by prostitution, and if the daughter of a priest had engaged in prostitution, she should be burned: 'As for the daughter of any priest, if she is defiled by prostituting, she is disgracing her father—she shall be burned in the fire' (Leviticus 21:9). When

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<sup>4</sup> Brenda Heyink, 'Prostitution,' *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), <https://biblia.com/books/leb/Ge34>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Ge34.



Judah condemned his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, to death by burning (Genesis 38:24), it was to this law that he appealed before the revelation that she had been impregnated by him. Upon learning the truth, he declared that Tamar was ‘more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah’ (Genesis 38:26).<sup>6</sup>

The Old Testament condemns temple prostitution and sacred prostitution (Deuteronomy 23:17, Exodus 34:16) but includes several references to such practices within Israel (2 Kings 23:6-8, 1 Kings 14:24, 1 Kings 15:12) and among other communities and nations (2 Kings 23:7) within the Old Testament as.<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew word used in these contexts is *q'desah* and refers to a woman who engages in sexual intercourse as a function of religious beliefs and formal fertility ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Proverbs specifically warns against the dangers of women engaged in prostitution and allegorises folly (the opposite to wisdom) as a licentious woman luring young men away from the wise paths of God.

Prostitution is used throughout the Old Testament as a metaphor for idol worship (Exodus 34; Leviticus 20; Deuteronomy 31; Judges 2 and 8; 1 Chronicles 5; 2 Chronicles 21) and the prophets frequently condemned the Israelites for engaging in this practice (Jeremiah 2-3; Ezekiel 16, 23, 43).<sup>9</sup> In short, prostitution is cast in a negative light throughout the Old Testament despite its being associated with several prominent Biblical characters (Tamar in Genesis 28; Rahab in the Book of Joshua; Gomer, the wife of Hosea in the Book of Hosea).

Responses to prostitution outlined in the Old Testament, particularly the ones seen as instigating the act included burning and permanent singlehood (Leviticus 21:9). Never marrying implied insecure status within the community, because such a woman would never have an heir.<sup>10</sup> In many respects these responses can be equated with death, either literally (with the prescription for burning), but also by not allowing a woman ever to marry. Therefore, it is difficult to discern a life-affirming theological response to prostitution found in the Old Testament where literal death and virtual exile seem to be the only responses.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Lexham English Bible* (4th Ed.), (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Heyink, *op cit.*, 2Ki23.1.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Heyink, *op cit.*, Eze16.

<sup>10</sup> Women obtained social status as wives and mothers, children were highly valued and infertility was a great misfortune, see Karen R. Keen, ‘Sexuality, Critical Issues: Marriage and Procreation,’ *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), <https://biblia.com/books/leb/>

## Prostitution in the New Testament

Sexual moderation and self-control were esteemed values in the Graeco-Roman culture in which the New Testament was written; however, acceptance of prostitution within the wider culture was not seen as an excuse to overindulge.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the open presence of prostitution in the New Testament's social context, Christians were specifically commanded not to participate in it (1 Corinthians 6).<sup>12</sup> The Apostle Paul exhorted Christian men not to have sex with a woman engaged in prostitution because Christian men's bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit and they were commanded to be holy dwellings. The Greek word used in the New Testament for prostitute is *pornea* which has connotations of fornication and was often associated with all manner of sexual immorality, including incest, use of a prostitute, remarriage after divorce, and sex with a slave.<sup>13</sup> As does the Hebrew word *zonah*, the Greek word *pornea* has broader denotations than prostitution and includes a range of sexual vices.

It is noteworthy that despite injunctions against prostitution in both the Old and New Testaments, when the New Testament makes references to specific women engaged in prostitution, they are almost always named in a positive light.<sup>14</sup> Specific examples of this are illustrated in the story of the female sinner who anointed Jesus at Simon's house in Luke 7 (while not named a prostitute specifically, many traditions of the church hold that this woman was a prostitute), prostitutes being named as those entering the Kingdom of God before the righteous in Matthew 21, and the manner in which Jesus interacted with two women considered to be adulterers – the woman almost stoned to death (John 8) and the woman at the well (John 4). Jesus demonstrated grace to each of these women who were labelled as 'adulterers' which was completely out-of-step with the prevailing social and religious norms of that day. Prostitution was seen to bring significant dishonour to a woman and relegated a woman to the most degraded position; she was deemed opposite of the priestess, who symbolised purity.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the uncleanness associated with prostitution, Jesus' interactions with women thought to be engaged in prostitution in the New Testament were completely countercultural, signifying a reversal of the prevailing social order. This reversal is seen clearly in Matthew 21:31-32: 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Heyink, *op cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Keen, *op cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Heyink, *op cit.*

<sup>15</sup> Keen, *op cit.*

entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did.’<sup>16</sup> Jesus attracted significant criticism from the surrounding religious establishment for pronouncements such as these, but that did not cause him to curtail his interactions with those labelled as prostitutes and adulterers.

While prostitution was never condoned in the New Testament, there is a shift in how prostitution is responded to in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said that *pornea* (sexual immorality) begins in the heart and defiles a person (Mark 7:21; Matthew 15:19), shifting the emphasis to a higher ethical standard. The Gospel accounts that deal with women thought to be engaged in prostitution bring Jesus into direct conflict with the prevailing religious establishment of the day, those who defended the religious norms outlined in the Old Testament. Jesus demonstrates a different ethic (which I will discuss further in the *Kingdom of God* section at the end of this chapter), but, to summarize here, he never condemned them or spoke about burning or exiling them. Rather, He allowed these women to worship Him (the woman who anointed Jesus in Luke 7), set them free from death (the woman almost stoned to death in John 8), and gave them a new status in the community (the woman at the well is arguably the first female ‘evangelist’ of the New Testament).

### **Prostitution as Understood by the Church Fathers**

Since the inception of Christianity, prostitution has not been condoned;<sup>17</sup> however, it did not exclude those engaged in prostitution from salvation, and at different points in history, it was considered necessary evil in order to avoid greater evils. For some of the church fathers, sexuality was closely related to reproduction, and intercourse not related to having children became increasingly problematic. St. Augustine, for example, was not in favour of non-procreational sex within the bonds of marriage and said that: ‘unnatural [non-procreational] use of it is abominable in a prostitute, but more abominable in a wife.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *The Holy Bible*, New International Version.

<sup>17</sup> Some scholars contend that while prostitution was considered a shameful and stigmatising occupation for women, it was not explicitly prohibited in the Hebrew Bible, often appearing in a list of prohibitions related to adultery and appropriate conduct for unmarried daughters still living in their father’s house. See Ken Stone, ‘Marriage and Sexual Relations in the World of the Hebrew Bible,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 182.

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Mazo Karras, ‘Reproducing Medieval Christianity,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 273.

Augustine therefore saw prostitution as serving a function in society, and laid the foundation for tolerance toward prostitution where he argued that if prostitution was abolished, unchecked excessive sexual desire, sexual violence, adultery, and homosexuality would abound.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Aquinas perfected Augustine's theory by affirming that 'even the palace must have its drains'<sup>20</sup> equating women in prostitution to the sewage system of a castle. Disapproval of prostitution was also expressed in the writings of the Fathers where the term 'prostitution' was often used to refer to an unclean moral condition, not necessarily tied to the selling of one's own body.<sup>21</sup>

Justinian, perhaps under the influence of his wife Theodora, who had formerly been engaged in prostitution, took measures to defend prostitutes from pimps and to redeem them from that lifestyle.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, while not condoned, prostitution was discussed and tolerated at some level in late classical Christianity.

### **HIV/AIDS Theology: A Theology of Life**

When the HIV/AIDS epidemic began to spread in Africa in the 1990s, Christian churches of all backgrounds had to grapple with its widespread impact, and they had to make sense of what was happening from a theological perspective. Was HIV/AIDS a punishment from God on those He deemed wicked? Many African theologians were not satisfied with this theological categorization in the midst of such immense suffering; the theology available to African theologians was not adequate and found wanting in the face HIV/AIDS. Tinyiko Sam Maluleke states that the initial theological silence in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic was a result of its 'ugly, relentless, and chaotic' attributes.<sup>23</sup>

In the wake of HIV/AIDS, African theologians were challenged to discover life-affirming ways of understanding, living with, and responding to HIV/AIDS within the church in Africa. To that end, African theologians believed that if they listened carefully, they could discern an alternative voice within the Bible, one that critiqued the dominant ideology of retribution and reward that many Church leaders ascribed to, and

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<sup>19</sup> T. Sardella, 'Prostitution,' *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), <https://biblia.com/books/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, 'Towards an HIV/AIDS-Sensitive Curriculum,' in *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, ed. Musa Dube (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2003), 66.

they began to do this.<sup>24</sup> This process led the church and theological training institutions in Africa to re-read Scripture in ways that affirmed life, uprooted injustice, and counteracted death.<sup>25</sup> A theology of HIV/AIDS<sup>26</sup> was eventually derived from this process of listening to the Bible *and* listening to the voices of those who had been infected and affected by the disease. This process, in turn, empowered the African church to initiate ministries to prevent and respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

HIV/AIDS forced the African church to examine some of the structural issues that leave the most vulnerable people in society powerless<sup>27</sup>, and to move the discourse beyond the realm of personal morality ('wicked people being punished') into thinking through how Biblical themes such as lament, hope, redemption, healing, justice, compassion, and love intersect with and are manifested in the experience of HIV/AIDS.

This research project builds on the experiences of the African church in its theologising and subsequent response to HIV/AIDS, with the goal of giving space for the voices of women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa to be heard. These women's voices can contribute to the ongoing conversation about prostitution, and perhaps transcend the current categories of meaning-making that have been ascribed through sociological inquires, by discovering new theological categories. In this manner, perhaps the evangelical church in Addis Ababa might be able to hear and understand more clearly, and then respond practically to the woman who says:

I came into the work for the sake of my folks...my dream is to see them live better. I am prepared to accept a sacrifice even greater than HIV, a sacrifice that might even result in my immediate death as long as I can help bring better days for my folks.<sup>28</sup>

'A theology of life is ... [a] product of a life-threatening context. It is born out of the problematic life experiences in which people...of the whole world find themselves. A theology of life is a response by the people to the pain and suffering brought by all that

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<sup>24</sup> Musa W. Dube and Musimbi, R.A. Kanyoro, *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 62.

<sup>25</sup> Musa W. Dube, 'Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS & Global Economic Era,' *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (2003): 539.

<sup>26</sup> Nyambura J. Njoroge, 'Beyond Suffering and Lament: Theology of Hope and Life', in *Shaping a Global Theological Mind* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 119. Since 2000, Njoroge has been a part of a community of theological educators in Africa attempting to develop theological literature and theological curricula that speak to the multidimensional reality of HIV and AIDS.

<sup>27</sup> Musa W. Dube, *HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>28</sup> Bethlehem Tekola, 'Negotiating Social Space: Sex-Workers and Social Context of Sex Work in Addis Ababa,' *African Study Monographs* 29 (2005): 172.

endangers life, such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic'<sup>29</sup> In the same manner, this project seeks to build on HIV/AIDS theology by listening to women affected by prostitution who have experienced pain, suffering, and life-threatening experiences in order to move toward a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

### **Overview of African Womanist Theology**

African Womanist Theology is a strand of theological reflection arising from the lived experiences of women seeking to make sense of God and the contexts in which they experience God on the African continent. It is derived from Womanist Theology, a theology specifically concerned with the lived experiences of African-American women. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians began in 1989 to facilitate research, writing, and publications by a Pan-African, multireligious and multiracial network of women concerned about the impact of religion and culture on African women.<sup>30</sup>

African Christian Womanist Theologians follow similar commitments to those of liberation theologians<sup>31</sup> in their common quest to address all forms of oppressions that limit the potential for life, with particular reference to African women. African Womanist Theologians are deeply concerned to make theology relevant for life and to change the ways women are treated.<sup>32</sup> While informed by feminist theological perspectives, African Womanist Theology prefers not to use the word *feminist* as one its descriptors because of the negative connotations the term carries in Africa.<sup>33</sup> One of the key questions that these theologians ask is: 'What meaning can faith have in churches that seek to be liberated without sharing the people's battles with the forces of oppression assaulting their dignity?'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Moji A. Ruele, 'Facing the Challenges of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa: Towards a Theology of Life,' in *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, ed. Musa Dube (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2003), 80.

<sup>30</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Liberation theology in the classical sense refers to the theology that evolved from Latin America in the Twentieth Century in protest against the inability in the Western church and missionary circles, both Catholic and Protestant, to grapple with the problem of systemic injustice and places an emphasis on a preferential option for the poor. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 432-433.

<sup>32</sup> David Kirwa Tarus, 'Theology of social Transformation in the Theological Works of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,' *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33, no.1 (2014): 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*, (London: Sheffield Academic press, 2002), 80.

One way of answering this question is demonstrated through African Womanist Theologians' commitment to orality and stories being the point of departure for theological reflection. African Womanist Theologians accept story as a source of theology for they are aware of the primary role of stories in African cultures and they build on this resource when developing their theologies.<sup>35</sup> These theologians often ask 'what is the meaning of the story [at hand] as a whole?' and they then seek to reflect on the experiences shared from the perspective of Christian faith.<sup>36</sup> After this type of reflection, these women will often identify the factors that promote life-giving and life-enhancing ways of building the overall community.<sup>37</sup> African Christian Womanist Theologians are committed to theologising about contemporary and contextual issues (e.g. gender injustices, poverty, exploitation, maternal-child health issues) that 'undergird and nourish a spirituality for life.'<sup>38</sup>

Precisely because of its overarching commitment to life, this strand of theology is highly communal and praxis oriented: there is a conscious effort to develop a liberative response to the many factors that challenge life in Africa.<sup>39</sup> For these reasons, African Womanist Theology is an important dialogue partner for this research project as it seeks to make theological sense of the lived experiences of Ethiopian women affected by prostitution. The narrative, contextual, and practical emphases of African Womanist Theology are strengths of this approach that will aid in the process of hearing and understanding the voices of Ethiopian women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. Some of the theological commitments/themes of African Womanist Theology that are relevant to this project will now be discussed. In light of the fact that questions about God, humanity, and the church arose repeatedly during the data collection process for this thesis, I will review in the next three sections the discussions of God, anthropology, and ecclesiology in African Womanist Theology.

## **Theology of God**

### **The Relational Liberator and Great Householder**

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<sup>35</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

African Womanist Theologians stress that the existence of God is not problematic to the African worldview and therefore do not begin theologising from an apologetic stance; rather, they start their arguments from the perception that God exists in a trinity and in a relational way.<sup>40</sup> They contend that a relational understanding of God helps to shape community and that the diversity of God, as exemplified in the Trinity, is a model for social interaction.<sup>41</sup> This understanding of God has led to a communal approach to theology where the voices of many are included, not just that of learned experts, and the everyday concerns of the community become the basis for theological inquiry. Oduyoye argues that ‘a theology divorced from ethical demands would have little relevance in Africa’.<sup>42</sup> As a result of this commitment, African Womanist Theology views the primordial saving act of God in the Old Testament – the Exodus of the Israelite people from captivity in Egypt – as an exemplar of God’s holistic, redemptive activity in human history. Salvation, redemption, liberation, and reconciliation are viewed as one activity of God who seeks to liberate humanity from sin and oppression.<sup>43</sup>

The creation narratives found in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis are informative for African Womanist theologians who emphasise that ‘the universe belongs to God who created it and that there is an interdependence of God’s world and God’s people.’<sup>44</sup> The redemption of all of the created order is vitally important to these theologians and they believe that God is the only hope for social transformation.<sup>45</sup> Relational healing (between humanity and God, humanity within itself, and humanity and the created order) and wholeness are emphases in African Womanist Theology, leading to concerns in such areas as God’s hospitality, African hospitality, and women in the household of God. Hospitality is an important theme for African Womanist Theologians who at times have identified God’s hospitality as mothering, a quality of relating which is found in God and is expected in men and women as both are made in the image of God.<sup>46</sup> These studies have revealed women’s experiences of God as the Great Householder who empowers all and recognises all as children in a parent’s home

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<sup>40</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 16.

<sup>43</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 48.



and around the one table.<sup>47</sup> This perception of God as a good parent offering hospitality to His children and gathering them around the family table to share a meal is a helpful metaphor that will be referenced later in the thesis when reflecting on how women in Addis Ababa affected by prostitution make sense of who God is.

Oduyoye notes that the immediacy of God in African affairs is demonstrated through the God-related names that people on the continent often bear.<sup>48</sup> I personally witnessed this in the Ethiopian context where female names such as: Merheret,<sup>49</sup> Emnet,<sup>50</sup> Kidist<sup>51</sup> and Fikir<sup>52</sup> were very common. Therefore, God is a reality in the context of Ethiopia and by extension, a reality that must be taken into consideration when listening to the voices of women affected by prostitution. To that end, the African Womanist perspective on the theology of God will be used to interrogate some of the data that will be presented in Chapter Five of the thesis.

## **Christian Anthropology**

### **The Image of God and the Hospitality of God**

African Womanist Theologians centre their Christian anthropology on the theological affirmation that men and women are created in the image of God and they are suspicious of any reading of Scripture that denigrates women.<sup>53</sup> There is a strong emphasis on the role that both men and women have in participating in the redemptive mandate of God which includes responsibility for the well-being of the whole community, including the family.<sup>54</sup> The clarion call of Christian anthropology for African Womanist Theologians is that every human being has significant value as a reflection of the Triune God and to treat human beings in any manner that diminishes their humanity is a direct offense to the God of the Universe.

Hospitality is a dominant theme in African Womanist Theology and with reference to Christian anthropology it is seen as a mark of divinity, something to which

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<sup>47</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 'The African Experience of God through the Eyes of an Akan Woman, *Cross Currents* 47, no.4, (Winter 1997/1998): 202.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>49</sup> Amharic word for *mercy*.

<sup>50</sup> Amharic word for *faith*.

<sup>51</sup> Amharic word for *promise/covenant*.

<sup>52</sup> Amharic word for *love*.

<sup>53</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 72.

human beings should aspire both to give and to receive.<sup>55</sup> These theologians view human hospitality as a response to God's hospitality, a way of reflecting God's hospitality through our dealings with nature and human beings.<sup>56</sup> With this giving and receiving of hospitality comes a responsibility for all of humanity to engage in justice, care, and compassion ministries as an expression of the divine image all humans are expected to reflect.<sup>57</sup>

'African women's theology foremost values the humanity of women as those also created in the image of God. African women's theology roots its relevance in its response to the dilemmas and celebrations of God's people on the African continent.'<sup>58</sup> Oduyoye asserts that women's suffering, sacrifice and spirituality, resisting evil and death should remind people of the nature of God and not of the sin and inferiority that has become associated with the humanity of women.<sup>59</sup> Scripture cannot be used to delegitimize the inclusion of femaleness with reference to the norms of humaneness. To be authentic, 'Christian theology must promote the interdependence of distinctive beings and stand by the principles of inclusiveness and interdependence.'<sup>60</sup>

For Oduyoye, to be human means to acknowledge the full story of women's lives, which often includes chapters of pain, sorrow, and struggle alongside of joy and fulfilment. To be made in the image of God means to have the entirety of our lives, the lived experiences of women and men, bear witness to the God of Creation. For women who have been affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa, this model of Christian anthropology can help to illuminate the extent to which their life experiences have contributed to or diminished their sense of being a human being made in the image of God.

## **Ecclesiology**

### **The Household and Hearth-Hold of God**

African Womanist Theologians move from images of the church as described in the New Testament to the lived experiences of African people to describe their

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>58</sup> Musimbi Kanyoro, 'Engendered Communal Theology: African Women's Contribution to Theology in the Twenty-First Century,' *Feminist Theology* 9, no.36 (2001): 40.

<sup>59</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 97.

ecclesiology.<sup>61</sup> Lived experiences are taken seriously in the process by which African Womanist Theologians make sense of the church, particularly the experiences of women who they believe have been ignored by the church. For this reason, an emphasis is placed on listening to the stories of women in their self-understanding of the church for ‘... the way women narrate their experiences of the Church can be an indication of what they understand the church to be.’<sup>62</sup>

Home-making is a major part of women’s experiences in Africa and as a result of this, it became one of the primary focal points for theological reflection amongst African Womanist Theologians. The understanding of the church as the household of God is an important theme for these theologians, for they assert that the picture of the Jerusalem community of Christians painted by Luke in Acts is a model of the hearthhold of Christ.<sup>63</sup> In order for the household to be a place that nurtures life to its fullest expression, issues of injustice which are often a part of the daily experience of African women such as polygamy, early marriages, female genital mutilation, widowhood, and poverty, African Womanist Theologians pursue justice for women as a paradigm for their ecclesiology.<sup>64</sup> They have a deep concern for the redemption of the church from what they deem to be patriarchal captivity, inherited from European theologians, that undermines its ability to mediate Christ to the world. Justice and participation are therefore very important concepts in their ecclesiological framework.<sup>65</sup> The work of the church is highly practical for African Womanist Theologians and should be aimed at what they term ‘life-sustaining actions,’<sup>66</sup> actions that place the church in solidarity with the struggles women encounter in their everyday lives and that work toward the elimination of all forms of dehumanisation present in society.<sup>67</sup>

In this highly familial perception of the church, congregational life provides a haven for the lost and replaces the traditional extended family, which is fast deteriorating as a result of rapid urbanization, unprecedented personal mobility, and

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>62</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>64</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 17.

<sup>65</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ‘The Church of the Future, its Mission and Theology: A View from Africa,’ *Theology Today* 52, no.4 (1996): 499, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://tj.sagepub.com/content/24/4/494.citation>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

endemic poverty.<sup>68</sup> The family is viewed as the place of unconditional love and acceptance, and the household or hearth-hold imagery used to describe the church by African Womanist Theologians describes the expectation of women for the church to be ‘a household in which all can feel at home and because all are accounted worthy.’<sup>69</sup> Oduyoye summarises task of the church as one of liberation: ‘Liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together on the journey home, with the church as the umbrella of faith, hope, and love.’<sup>70</sup> African Womanist Theologians advance a practical ecclesiology rooted in social transformation<sup>71</sup> and this model will be highly valuable to this project that is working toward a theological response to prostitution that takes seriously, the everyday lived experiences of women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa.

## **Summary**

The theological categories that I have chosen to highlight from African Womanist theology are categorisations that I will use later in the thesis to organise some of the data generated in the research process. In particular, the questions of how women affected by prostitution in Addis make sense of God, humanity, and the church will be addressed in Chapters Five and Six and the African Womanist Theology of God, Christian anthropology, and ecclesiology presented so far will be used to interrogate the data presented. I recognize that African Womanist Theology covers a wide variety of theological topics including Scripture, Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, and I will refer to these areas of theology when relevant.

### **Important Points Within the Theological Strands**

In the first part of this chapter I have examined insights to be gained from the Old Testament, New Testament, and Church Fathers in their responses to prostitution as well as the African church’s response to HIV/AIDS and the contribution of African Womanist theologians. These biblical and theological perspectives help to provide a theoretical basis for addressing the primary research question of the thesis. Particularly, the Old Testament, New Testament, and Church Fathers’ perspective on prostitution show that prostitution was predominantly viewed negatively in the Israelite and early Christian communities, and sanctions against this type of behaviour were well

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 497.

<sup>69</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, 99.

<sup>71</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 19.

articulated by both the biblical authors and Church Fathers. However, despite the principal view of prostitution as a sin, the prominence given to characters such as Tamar (Genesis 38) and Rahab (Book of Joshua) in the Old Testament narrative, Jesus' countercultural responses to women suspected of prostitution and adultery, and the actions of Emperor Justinian during the period when the state was instrumental in shaping the church's beliefs and practices, suggest that there has been space within the community of faith for women engaged in prostitution.

HIV/AIDS Theology and African Womanist theology have contributed ideas for how to conceive of God as the interrelated, Triune God who is committed to a programme of life, especially for those who find themselves on the margins of society. This life agenda includes liberation, healing, and the restoration of dignity for all that have suffered from the dehumanising effects of poverty, disease, and injustice. The renewal of the Image of God is vitally important to HIV/AIDS Theology and African Womanist theologians in their conception of Christian anthropology. Household, hospitality, and welcome into a family are some of the key images that undergird African Womanist ecclesiology. This picture of a household, or hearth-hold, is anticipatory imagery for it hints at what is hoped for by those who are currently living outside of family and/or household structure, those living on the margins of society such as women affected by prostitution which will be clearly articulated through the voices of the women presented later in the thesis.

Anticipatory language is often used to describe one of the central theological concepts of Christian eschatology: the Kingdom of God. I will now bring Christian understandings of the Kingdom of God into the discussion because it has potential to contribute to a theological framework of understanding and responding to prostitution in Addis Ababa.

### **The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is a theological construct that is often discussed within the categorisation of Christian eschatology: theology of the end times or things to come. Eschatology is an important dialogue partner in the thesis because the future, or how one thinks about the future, has direct bearing on how a person will live in the present. In addition, Christian theological views about the future have had significant bearing on how the Christian church has responded to its social context in various eras, as I will note in my discussions of the three main positions held in Christian eschatology.

Biblical scholars agree that the Kingdom of God, the reign of God, is a dominant theme in the Gospel accounts; however, no consensus has been reached regarding what Jesus meant by *the reign of God*. George Eldon Ladd writes: ‘the Hebrew-Christian faith expresses its hope in terms of the Kingdom of God which is rooted in the Old Testament and grounded in the confidence that there is one eternal, living God who has revealed Himself to men and has a purpose for the human race.’<sup>72</sup> Thus, the presence of Christ is one point of consensus among New Testament scholars in coming to a definition of the Kingdom of God.

The Old Testament use of the Hebrew word *malkuth* (Kingdom) and the New Testament use of the Greek word *baselia* (Kingdom) attest to the rank, authority, and sovereignty exercised by a king: a kingdom is the authority to rule, the sovereignty of the king.<sup>73</sup> Ladd asserts that when Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God, he is not referring to the realm or extent of his Kingdom, as the entire universe is His domain, but he is speaking about the quality or type of kingship, rule, and authority that exists in the Kingdom of God.<sup>74</sup> Following on from Ladd’s description, the Kingdom of God can be said to be a description of the quality of life when a human being is living under the rule, reign, and authority of Jesus Christ.

Jurgen Moltmann says that the central theme of *baselia* in the Synoptic Gospels is referring to the message, acts, miracles, and parables of Jesus before Easter.<sup>75</sup> Moltmann goes on to say that: ‘the peculiar feature of his proclamation of the kingdom lies in the fact that nearness to, entry into, and inheritance of, the kingdom are bound by him to the decision of the hearers and their attitude to his own person.’<sup>76</sup> In Moltmann’s view, the person of Jesus and the message of Jesus are inextricably bound to each other.

### **Eschatological Positions Relevant to Evangelical Theology**

The timing of the Kingdom of God has been a contentious point amongst scholars for many years and whether the Kingdom of God is already present in the world or if it is a future transformation far beyond our present experience. Significant amounts of Biblical scholarship have been undertaken to discern when the Kingdom of God will commence and how this relates to a one-thousand year reign of Christ on earth and to

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<sup>72</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Exposition on the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967), 217-218.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

His second-coming. The four main positions are called post-millennial, amillennial, premillennial, and realised eschatology and are all related to how scholars read those Scriptures that make reference to the return of Christ, especially some passages in the Book of Revelation.<sup>77</sup>

The post millennial position holds that the Kingdom of God is now being extended in the present through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, and once the world has been Christianised, Christ will return after a long period of righteousness and peace (the millennium).<sup>78</sup> Amillennialism (also referred to as non-millennialism) is based on a non-literal reading of the Book of Revelation and was the dominant interpretation of the Kingdom of God for the Christian church from the time of St. Augustine until the Puritans made their debut in the Seventeenth Century and laid out the groundwork for post-millennial thinking.<sup>79</sup>

For the purposes of this research, the premillennial and realised eschatology positions will be explored at more depth in the following section.

### Premillennialism

Premillennialism is based on a more literal understanding of the Book of Revelation (not taking into consideration that it is written within the genre of apocalyptic literature and cannot be read prosaically as one would read a newspaper) and was fuelled by a growing pessimism with the evangelical church at the turn of the Twentieth Century. The view that history was the inevitable march of progress was challenged by events such as the American Civil War, a challenge amplified by the two World Wars that happened in the Twentieth Century.<sup>80</sup> These events created an increasing preoccupation with the power of evil, the justification of the righteous, and the rescue of the faithful from a world that was thought to be falling into darkness. This preoccupation gave rise to the hope among some Christians for dramatic divine intervention, followed by a period of justice, peace, and prosperity under the kingly rule of Christ on this earth.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 20.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Kuzmic, 'Eschatology and Ethics: Evangelical View and Attitude,' in *Mission as Transformation*, eds. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1999), 137.

<sup>79</sup> St. Augustine's theology heavily influenced the equation of earthly reality and the divine kingdom, with the result that the medieval church claimed that presence in the visible church was tantamount to being in the Kingdom of God. Protestants followed a similar path in equating the Kingdom of God with the invisible church, the spiritual body of Christ. See Stanely J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 477.

<sup>80</sup> Kuzmic, *op cit.*, 141.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

Premillennial theology's basic pessimism regarding the direction of human history emphasises a discontinuity between the present world and the Kingdom of God, viewing all promises related to the Kingdom of God as other-worldly and to be fulfilled in the future.<sup>82</sup>

Premillennialism gave rise to dispensationalism,<sup>83</sup> which has captured the imagination of evangelical eschatology since the mid-Nineteenth Century (particularly in North America) and has a tendency to favour evangelistic activities at the expense of social engagement in order to ensure that the Gospel of Christ is preached before the return of Christ.<sup>84</sup> Dispensationalists believe that the powers of evil will have their full reign on earth before the return of Christ and as a result of this, a completely new earth will be inaugurated by Christ's second coming. The verbal proclamation of Christ and the saving of 'souls' becomes the number one priority for mainly dispensationalists due to their conviction that the current world will one day become kindling. This brand of eschatology has had a significant influence, particularly on American mission-sending agencies such as Serving in Mission (SIM), one of the founding institutions of the second largest evangelical church in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church (EKHC), Ethiopian Word of Life Church.<sup>85</sup> The influence of SIM on the doctrine and practice of the EKHC will be discussed further in Chapter Seven of the thesis; however, at this point, it is important to note that premillennial-dispensational eschatology will become relevant to the primary research question when examining the data generated from evangelical church leaders.

### Realised Eschatology

Wolfhart Pannenberg stated that 'the doctrine of the Church begins not with the Church but with the Kingdom of God' and believes that precisely because of God's reign, those who chose to live under His reign, as His church, are provided with the opportunity to

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<sup>82</sup> Grenz, *op cit.*, 618-619.

<sup>83</sup> Dispensationalism was significantly influenced by the founder of the Plymouth Brethren in Great Britain, John Nelson Darby, and was given clear articulation in the Twentieth Century through the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible, first published in 1909. Dispensationalist premillennialists have significantly shaped American fundamentalist thought. See Kuzmic, 142.

<sup>84</sup> Kuzmic, *op cit.*, 142.

<sup>85</sup> Girma Bekele asserts that Dr. Thomas Lambie, founder of Serving in Mission (SIM) Ethiopia, and founding organisation of the EKHC, held to a highly dogmatic missionary paradigm that brought most of its early missionaries from fundamentalist groups, thereby influencing the theology and practice of the EKHC. See *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 242.



live in unity.<sup>86</sup> Pannenberg asserts that the only unity among humankind ‘that does not bear the seeds of its own destruction is the unity brought by caring for others.’<sup>87</sup> For Pannenberg, justice is not an option for the church but a requirement for being the church for ‘a kingdom of true justice would bring the fulfilment of man’s social destiny ... [and] satisfy the needs of each individual.’<sup>88</sup>

Pannenberg argues that in order for the church to be relevant to society, the church must never abandon its critical role of witnessing to the limitations of any given society or it runs the risk of becoming a superfluous entity.<sup>89</sup> Pannenberg notes that when the church neglects its social responsibilities and becomes caught-up in other-worldly concerns and exclusively spiritual matters, they can become ‘bastions of conservatism.’<sup>90</sup> These are perhaps prophetic words, given the impact that premillennial thinking has had on the theory and practice of the evangelical church in North America today and its pursuit of mission work.

In this thesis, I take the ‘here/not yet’ position (realised eschatology position), that God’s reign has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ, but its ultimate consummation remains a future event.<sup>91</sup> The inauguration of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is announced in all three Synoptic Gospels, and in particular, Luke details Jesus’ announcement of the Kingdom of God being present in the synagogue by the reading of the Isaiah scroll in Luke 4. For this reason, I will now focus my discussion on the Kingdom of God to two books Luke authored: the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

### **The Kingdom of God as Portrayed in Luke-Acts**

The primary reason that I have chosen to focus on the eschatological concept of the Kingdom of God particularly through the two-volume work authored by the Apostle Luke is that the majority of the Gospel stories that I studied with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa were from the Book of Luke.<sup>92</sup> Second, the Gospel of Luke

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<sup>86</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 78.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *op cit.*, 20.

<sup>92</sup> Luke 7:36-50 (The woman who anointed Jesus); Luke 1 (Birth of Jesus); Luke 15 (Prodigal Son); Luke 10:25-37 (Good Samaritan); Luke 13:10-17 (Crippled woman healed on the Sabbath);

is characterised by its inclusion and special attention to women's narratives<sup>93</sup> and this is highly relevant to the primary research question that seeks to listen to and discern the narratives of Ethiopian women. Third, both Luke and Acts have a significant emphasis on the inclusion of outsiders, social outcasts, and those deemed as sinners by the ruling religious establishment of that time, particularly as it pertained to table-fellowship.<sup>94</sup> Fourth, Luke 4 is a highly descriptive account of Jesus' announcement of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God and what it will entail. These are all factors relevant to the discussion at hand. The corpus of literature on the Kingdom of God is extensive, and I believe that through a focused analysis of the Kingdom of God in Luke-Acts, the thesis can progress in a focused manner toward its stated goal of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

Scholars believe that Luke's primary audience after Theopholis (to whom the two-volume work is addressed), was a mixed-audience of Jewish believers and Gentile Christians who were working through the process of what it meant to be a community. Luke is addressing an audience coping with a delayed *Parousia* and he focuses his attention on addressing the quality of life that has been initiated with the arrival of the Kingdom of God.<sup>95</sup> The announcement that Jesus makes in the synagogue at Nazareth 'is a declaration that Jesus has been empowered by the Spirit to inaugurate the liberation of God's people' and the Book of Acts will 'subsequently show how this liberation unfolds in the life of the church.'<sup>96</sup>

Luke's recording of Jesus' parables of the Kingdom of God provide comparisons to help illustrate what the Kingdom of God is and is not.<sup>97</sup> Parables were Jesus' preferred teaching style, which often left His audiences mystified and appeared to turn conventional knowledge on its head. Capon states that with Jesus 'resorting so often to parables, his main point was that any understanding of the kingdom his hearers could come up with would be a misunderstanding.'<sup>98</sup> For this reason, it is important to limit

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<sup>93</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 43-44.

<sup>94</sup> Philip. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 93.

<sup>95</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 129.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>97</sup> The Greek word for parable, *parabole*, means to make a comparison, to put one thing beside another in order to make a point. See Robert Farrar Capon, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 10.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

the scope of this research project's discussion about the Kingdom of God to particular, identifiable themes as articulated in Luke-Acts. In the following sections, I deal with some of the themes related to the Kingdom of God. These themes will help to lay the groundwork for the task of theologically framing the data I will present later in the thesis.

### **An Invitation**

Kuzmic states that the Kingdom of God is identified by the redemptive activity of God in history through the person of Jesus Christ and that its arrival does not come by human achievement. Rather, 'humans are invited to repentance and faith by which they enter the Kingdom, and are invited to both responsible *participation* [emphasis his] in the Kingdom-already-arrived, and to the watchful *expectation* [emphasis his] of the Kingdom-still-to-come.'<sup>99</sup>

The Kingdom of God, in many respects, is an invitation to life as God intended, life to the full (John 10:10). Jacques Ellul asserts that throughout the entire Bible, God is seen as granting life and that 'the central element of that life is freedom – freedom that includes a relationship with the God who grants that life.'<sup>100</sup> As the thesis explores various data generated from the contextual Bible studies, the degree to which the research participants have experienced, and/or denied this invitation to life, will be explored.

'Salvation comes to a chief tax-collector, of all people, but only after Jesus has taken the initiative and invited himself to the house of Zacchaeus.'<sup>101</sup> The Kingdom of God is an invitation issued by the King Himself, Jesus Christ. In the various parables presented in Luke's Gospel, particularly the Parable of the Banquet (Luke 14), God is the one issuing the invitation to the guests. This is important to remember because God orders his servants to go out and find those who will attend the banquet, after the first set of guests deny the invitation. The issue of an invitation into the Kingdom of God comes from God and God alone, and the extent to which the evangelical church understands and follows this teaching will be examined.

### **Authority Rests with the King**

The multiple meal scenes presented in Luke's Gospel (Luke 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 19:1-10; 22:10-38; 24:28-32) are presented as teachable moments where

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<sup>99</sup> Kuzmic, *op cit.*, 154.

<sup>100</sup> Jacques Ellul, *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, trans. Willem H. Vanderburg (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010), 195.

<sup>101</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 108.

the prevailing social and religious norms of the day – that often excluded those on the margins – were called into question in light of the ‘radical reorientation of perspective that life in the Kingdom demands.’<sup>102</sup> The inauguration of the Kingdom of God has brought about a significant shift in the social norms<sup>103</sup> that are expected in every aspect of life, including the mundane, everyday activity of table fellowship. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented as the initiator of these new social norms pertaining to table fellowship and portrays Jesus as a ‘provider or saviour, either as one presiding over the meal or as one who offers God’s salvation to others.’<sup>104</sup>

The data presented will reveal the social norms that women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa have to contend with, and this will be contrasted with the boundary-breaking hospitality that Jesus Christ inaugurated with the Kingdom of God. The question of whether the evangelical church understands that the Kingdom of God belongs to the King, and therefore it is His prerogative to invite whomever He desires to the eternal banquet will be probed. A common misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God conflates the role of the Christian Church as the gatekeeper of God’s Kingdom based on a deficient understanding of God’s authority in the matter. To that end, the thesis will explore whether this deficiency is present in how the evangelical church interacts with women affected by prostitution.

### **Release, Reversal, Reordering**

The Greek word *aphesis* (release) features importantly in the Book of Luke, suggesting that the ministry of Jesus ‘will have much to do with freeing people from the captivity of sin. Sin is not so much a situation of guilt that has to be forgiven as a plight from which ones needs to be set free.’<sup>105</sup> The concept of release is important to the thesis because of its close relation to the concept of sin. The dominant theological understanding of prostitution in Ethiopia is that it is a sin. The thesis will probe how women affected by prostitution and evangelical church leaders understand sin, and the

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<sup>102</sup> Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom according to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2015), 88.

<sup>103</sup> Norms are values defining acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and behaviours for group members. Norms bring order and predictability to the environment, helping members to understand the world see Philip F. Esler, ‘Family Imagery and Christian Identity,’ in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997), 132.

<sup>104</sup> Kuhn, *op cit.*, 88-89.

<sup>105</sup> Brendan Byrne S.J., *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 48.

extent to which their perception of sin is currently aiding or impeding the development of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

To this end, the Lukan parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) will be discussed in Chapter Eight because it illustrates a reversal motif where the reader learns that ‘the wastrel son is welcomed with a lavish party while the dutiful son stands outside and grumbles.’<sup>106</sup> Richard Hays asserts that one of the interpretations of this parable should be read as ‘prefiguring the analogous reversal in Acts, where many Gentiles receive the preaching of the gospel with joy while many Law-observant Jews balk and raise qualms about this missionary development.’<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the story of the Prodigal Son will feature significantly in the second half of the thesis.

### **Acceptance**

On Byrne’s account, ‘“acceptance/non-acceptance” is pivotal to Luke’s understanding of the ministry of Jesus. The “acceptable year of the Lord” is the season of God’s “hospitality” to the human race, which is Jesus’ mission to proclaim and enact. It is a time when people are simply accepted and no judged.’<sup>108</sup> While Byrne does not diminish from the fact that the inauguration of Jesus’ earthly ministry was a summons to conversion, he states that: ‘before conversion, there is acceptance, welcome, a hand held out to the afflicted, the trapped and the bound.’<sup>109</sup> In contemporary Ethiopia, acceptance is not a predominant experience for women affected by prostitution with reference to the evangelical church; therefore, the theme of acceptance is an important lens through which to analyse the data that will be presented.

### **The Reign of God has Implications for the Present**

‘The heart of liberation is freedom from the bond of sin. But spiritual “release” is, in Luke’s perspective, a beachhead and pledge of a liberation that will encompass the totality of life, including the socio-economic structures of society.’<sup>110</sup> As indicated in the section the formation of the evangelical church in Ethiopia in Chapter One, an emphasis on personal conversion has been a guiding principle for how the evangelical church practices mission within its context. Bekele argues that due to Western evangelical influences in the formation of the Ethiopian evangelical church, particularly those related to the largest evangelical denomination (EKHC), evangelism has been the

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<sup>106</sup> Hays, *op cit.*, 132.

<sup>107</sup> Hays, *op cit.*, 132.

<sup>108</sup> Byrne, *op cit.*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

main focus of the church's activities, at the expense of social engagement.<sup>111</sup> To what extent does the evangelical church appropriate the 'here' of the 'here/not yet' dimension of the Kingdom of God when it comes to women affected by prostitution? This is an important consideration to discuss with reference to the data that will be presented as the thesis strives to answer the primary research question.

### **Welcome, Hospitality, and Fellowship**

Byrne argues that 'the whole mission of Jesus according to Luke can be summed up in the phrase "the hospitality of God."<sup>112</sup> Hospitality is a main feature in the cultural make-up of Ethiopia; however, the research data will reveal the rather small extent to which women affected by prostitution are able to experience cultural hospitality and hospitality extended by the Christian church in Ethiopia. The data presented from the voices of the women and evangelical church leaders will be interrogated for the extent to which these critical elements of the Kingdom of God are being manifested in the evangelical church's interactions with these women.

### **A Brief Word About Orthodoxy**

The majority of the women who participated in the research described themselves as coming from an Ethiopian Orthodox background. To that end, pertinent aspects of Ethiopian Orthodoxy will be brought into the process of theologising throughout the thesis. A fuller discussion of Ethiopian Orthodoxy is presented in Chapter Six; however, it is important to note at this point that Orthodox concepts of salvation, sin, and the church will be important dialogue partners in the thesis.<sup>113</sup>

### **Summary**

This chapter has sought to review a wide range of sources from the Christian tradition that will serve as the basis for theological reflection that this thesis purposes to do. In particular, a theological response to prostitution in the context of Addis Ababa will be informed through dialoguing with African Womanist and HIV/AIDS theology that have both emerged from contexts of suffering, structural and gender injustices, and the desire to articulate a theology of life. I have identified the Kingdom of God as one of the main

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<sup>111</sup> Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 389.

<sup>112</sup> Byrne, *op cit.*, 50.

<sup>113</sup> Orthodox theology holds that salvation is a process of deification (*theosis*), sin is viewed as a sickness that needs to be healed, and the church is viewed as the Bride of Christ. These themes will be further explored in the chapters where data generated from the voices of the women are presented. See Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity Volume II: Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Andrew Smith (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 2012), 371-385; 254-258; 391-399.

theological lenses through which the data generated by the project will be explored. My intention in what follows is to reflect on the data in view of the various theological themes outlined in this chapter. As I do so, themes related to the Kingdom of God will become apparent in the context of the Ethiopian evangelical church's response to women affected by prostitution.





## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the qualitative methodological approach that I followed in the project. Qualitative research<sup>1</sup> was deemed the most appropriate way to approach the primary research question because it focuses on data derived from interviews with, and observations of, research participants.<sup>2</sup> I present the rationale for the particular methodological approach and follow that with details related to the time period for fieldwork, preparation for fieldwork, the research setting, the selection criteria for participants, issues related to translation, ethical issues, and the data analysis process.

The purpose of the research project is to contribute applied knowledge<sup>3</sup> that will aid the evangelical church in Ethiopia in its understanding of prostitution in its context, with the intention that the church will respond by increasing its level of involvement on behalf of women affected by prostitution. This position indicates that the study takes a praxis posture, meaning that the explanations uncovered by the research will be valued, particularly by the evangelical church leaders, and this will lead them, in turn, to increased understanding of prostitution and action on behalf of women affected by prostitution.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, in the decisions I made regarding the study's design, I have focused on the primary research question: to discern a life-affirming theological response to prostitution. This study is not intended to be merely descriptive or explanatory, although I give significant attention to discerning how both women affected by prostitution and evangelical church leaders make sense of prostitution. Rather, it is a collaborative project moving toward the potential formation of an operative theology, where current structures, values, and beliefs undergirding prostitution are uncovered,<sup>5</sup> examined, and reflected upon by the research participants themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Qualitative research demands a high level of self-awareness by the researcher as the primary research instrument and allows for theories to be developed from the data emerging from fieldwork. See Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods, Third Edition* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2002), 11, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 216. Applied research locates the source of its inquiry in the problems and concerns of people, in this case, women affected by prostitution.

<sup>4</sup> Praxis means that explanations are valued when they help people understand the world and to take action that changes it. See W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, Sixth Edition*, ed. Jeff Lasser (Boston: Pearson Education, 2006), 99.

<sup>5</sup> In accordance with the Critical Theory perspective, Neuman discusses Pierre Bourdieu's argument that the goal of research is to uncover and demystify ordinary events. See Neuman, *Methods*, 95.

## Methodological Approach

The methodological orientation of the research aligns with feminist inquiry, which places an emphasis on participatory, collaborative, change-oriented, and empowering forms of inquiry.<sup>6</sup> Participatory research treats research participants not as passive objects but as active subjects with an important role in deciding how the research is carried out.<sup>7</sup> Collaboration speaks to the emphasis placed on the involvement of research participants as a group, and not just as individuals, in order that the group may be able to share information and analyse problems among themselves.<sup>8</sup> Change-oriented inquiry seeks not only to describe and evaluate a social reality but to seek to transform that reality with, rather than for, oppressed people.<sup>9</sup> An empowering stance holds research to be a service to the participants as a priority, who will then use the knowledge gained for their own empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

Feminist research grounds itself on these commitments: 1) the importance of the lives, opinions, and experiences of women; 2) the possibility for changes in thinking and behaviour in order to fight against oppression and improve living conditions and relationships; 3) the acknowledgement that the researcher is not neutral; and 4) the view that knowledge should be accessible to everyone, not only to the researcher or scholarly community.<sup>11</sup> One example of this type of research is Frances Shaver's study among sex workers that details the actions she and her team undertook to practice self-awareness in the data collection process, develop rapport with the women she was studying, and to generate knowledge from her findings that would potentially help the women:

We made it clear by our actions that we were guests in their territory...and that we were able to do the research without putting them at risk or alarming the johns. We also made it clear during these conversations that participation was voluntary and that we would take *no* for an answer and move on politely...this light-hearted exchange created an opportunity for them to change their minds once we had gained their respect...these

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<sup>6</sup> Patton, op cit., 130.

<sup>7</sup> Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman, 'Feminist Action Research,' in *Feminist Methods: Social Research*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 185.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Boontinand, 'Feminist Participatory Action Research in the Mekong Region,' in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights*, ed. Kamala Kempadoo (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 182.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

information conversations provided opportunities for us to describe where our findings were destined and what the returns might be for sex workers.<sup>12</sup>

Shaver and her team were acutely aware of their guest-status and took measures to ensure the safety of their research participants. The research team respected non-participation as an answer from the women and engaged in dialogue with the women while in the process of collating their findings, highlighting the potential benefits of the research to the women. Shaver highlights some of the challenges of designing ethical, non-exploitative research projects with sex workers in this particular study through providing a detailed account of how her research team gained access to the research field through a step-by-step guide for how to enter the stroll the women were working (e.g., work in pairs when strolling, hand out business cards, carry a stroll kit etc).<sup>13</sup> She underlines the importance of adopting participant-centred, harm-reduction guidelines that protect sex workers while legitimating the role of the researcher. Shaver's research is an example of feminist inquiry with reference to women engaged in prostitution, and has helped to inform the design of my research project.

Because the primary question of this research relates to framing prostitution theologically, it is important to acknowledge the role of Christian feminist theology. There are varied ways of defining Christian feminist theology; however, some outstanding features of this approach include taking a special interest in the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their beliefs, and their experiences of oppression and liberation.<sup>14</sup> Denise Ackermann, a white, South African, feminist theologian who has contributed to the discourse on African HIV/AIDS theology discussed in Chapter Two, describes what she calls a feminist theology of praxis as an important emphasis in feminist studies.<sup>15</sup> A feminist theology of praxis is concerned with ethical issues that affect women, issues such as sexuality and violence against women. It is an explicitly contextual form of theology, which speaks from within specific situations, identifies suffering, articulates possibilities of hope and transformation, and is grounded 'in a

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<sup>12</sup> Frances Shaver, 'Sex Work Research: Methodological and Ethical Challenges,' *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20, no. 3 (2005): 301, accessed December 8, 2013, <http://jiv.sagepub.com/cgi/conent/abstract/20/3/296>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Denise M. Ackermann, 'From Mere Existence to Tenacious Endurance: Stigma, HIV/AIDS and a Feminist Theology of Praxis,' in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, eds. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2006): 225.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

method that in its most profound sense is understood as the unity of knowledge as activity and knowledge as content.’<sup>16</sup>

For this reason, I have chosen the methods selected for data collection in the research project – contextual Bible studies and semi-structured interviews – for their potential to capture the lived experiences of women affected by prostitution and to hear their descriptions of suffering and hope. The challenge for feminist researchers is often to connect voice and perspective to praxis: what the researcher is hearing, how that interacts with the explicit and implicit theoretical frameworks he or she holds, and acting in the world with an appreciation for, and recognition of, how those actions inherently express social, political, and moral values.<sup>17</sup> For the Christian feminist, ‘praxis is based on the willingness to be God’s hands in the world, alleviating oppression and forming communities of endurance and hope and new understandings of what constitutes human flourishing.’<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this research project is designed to uncover potentially new ways for the evangelical church in Addis Ababa to understand what a life-affirming response to prostitution could be.

### **Reflexive-Dialectic Process**

An important aspect of feminist inquiry is self-awareness, the ability of the researcher to discern and to make explicit the lenses and influences that have shaped how they see the world. Qualitative research places a high regard on the researcher as the primary research instrument; therefore, it is critical for the researcher to consistently engage in a reflexive-dialectic posture,<sup>19</sup> throughout the course of the research.

Reflexivity reminds the researcher to be attentive to, and conscious of, the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those of the research participants.<sup>20</sup> In order to practice a reflexive-dialectic posture, I have had to engage in self-questioning through every phase of the research.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>17</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> Ackermann, *op cit.*, 226.

<sup>19</sup> Social knowledge used in critical social science in which subjective and objective sides are blended together to provide insights in combination unavailable from either side. This orientation values knowledge as a process that integrates making observations, reflecting on them, and taking action. See Neuman, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

## Reflexivity: Design Stage of Research

During the design stage of the research, I realized that the predominant view that I held toward women affected by prostitution was the economic position and poverty explanatory model, one that views women in prostitution as inhabiting a social environment that offers few opportunities to earn an independent income; therefore, engagement in prostitution is assumed to be an economic activity.<sup>22</sup> One reason that I originally held this view was that the Amharic word used to describe prostitution by the women themselves, *shekela*, translates into English to ‘going to do business.’<sup>23</sup>

Second, as a result of the twelve years of international project development experience that I had prior to starting this research project, poverty had been one of the major factors I had observed for women entering into prostitution; therefore, this was the dominant category I used to make sense of prostitution. Third, in my work with Christian, grassroots organisations providing assistance to women seeking to exit prostitution in Asia, Central Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>24</sup> I had heard countless stories of women being exploited and forced into prostitution. These stories led me to essentialise the experiences of women affected by prostitution: all women in prostitution were victims. While I do hold to a radical feminist position that views prostitution as a form of violence and oppression against women,<sup>25</sup> I was challenged in this position as I reflected on the scholarly discourse related to prostitution and realised I was committing representational obliteration of these women’s agency, which in turn, eliminated the possibility of including the women’s assessment of what they needed and their analysis for solving the problems they faced.<sup>26</sup>

In order to address the presuppositions that I brought to the research project, I intentionally chose research methods that would facilitate dialogue with my research

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<sup>22</sup> Joanna Phoenix, *Making Sense of Prostitution* (London: Palgrave, 1999), 53.

<sup>23</sup> I learned *Shekela* during my initial engagement with EWAR in 2009 when the staff and the women in the rehabilitation program used this word to describe prostitution.

<sup>24</sup> I was the Executive Director for the International Christian Alliance on Prostitution (ICAP) in 2009 and travelled globally to visit over fifty, grassroots organisations in that year, providing assistance to women seeking to exit prostitution.

<sup>25</sup> Melissa Farley references research that has been conducted since the 1980’s that has documented and analysed the sexual and physical violence that is a normative experience for women engaged in prostitution. Research that she mentions and that have influenced my own position include: Barry (1995); Dworkin (1981, 1997, 2000); Hughes (1999); Jeffreys (1997); Hynes and Raymon (2002). See Farley, ‘Bad for the Body, Bad for the Heart: Prostitution Harms Women Even if Legalised or Decriminalised,’ *Violence Against Women* 10, no. 10 (2004): 1094, accessed October 22, 2012, <http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/10/10/1087>.

<sup>26</sup> Sealing Cheng, ‘Muckraking and Stories untold: Ethnography Meets Journalism on Trafficked Women and the U.S. Military,’ *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 5, no. 4 (2008): 15.

participants about their lived experiences and their appropriations of Christian Scripture to their lives: semi-structured interviewing and contextual Bible study (explained in greater detail later in this chapter). I allowed for open-ended, free-flowing conversation into areas that the research participants wanted to discuss. Linda M. Williams' volume, *Harm and Resilience among Prostitute Teens: Broadening our Understanding of Victimization and Survival*, highlights how important it was for the semi-structured interviews in her project to 'flow into areas that the participant wanted included in her 'story' of her life.'<sup>27</sup>

### **Reflexivity: Fieldwork Stage of Research**

In the fieldwork stage of my research, I tried always to attend to how much I was leading and how much I was allowing the research participants to lead the discussion in order that they could share as much, or as little, as they wanted to about their lives. During this phase of the research project, I documented my reflections of the contextual Bible study sessions in order to remember salient points from our time together and things that I wanted to follow-up on in our next session. At the beginning of each contextual Bible study, I always provided a recap of the previous session and invited the women to share their reflections on what they had learned. These moments helped to facilitate reflexivity on the part of the women, for they were able to recall and reflect on the material we had studied and to raise any residual unresolved questions or concerns.

With reference to the semi-structured interviews I conducted with selected evangelical church leaders, I always took notes during the interview, reflected on the notes after the interview, and looked for themes in the interview. When I went to the next interview with another leader, I would often refer to some of the themes I had discerned from the previous interview and bring that into the conversation with the current interviewee (maintaining confidentiality of the past interviewee). In this manner, I was able to test some of the observations I was making with my research participants and to question areas of resonance and dissonance between the church leaders with reference to how they each perceived the evangelical church was currently responding to prostitution in Addis Ababa. This process helped me discern what questions to ask my research participants and to compare what I was hearing in real-time to what I had heard previously.

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<sup>27</sup> Linda M. Williams, 'Harm and Resilience among Prostitute Teens: Broadening our Understanding of Victimization and Survival,' *Social Policy & Society* 9, no. 2 (2010): 246.

## **Reflexivity: Data Analysis and Writing Stages of Research**

During the data-analysis process of the research (which started in Ethiopia toward the end of 2016), I engaged with my colleagues at EWAR about what I was discovering through the contextual Bible studies and interviews. This collaborative approach helped me to be aware of the presuppositions and assumptions I was bringing to the research process, and to check how carefully I was listening to my participants.

In the writing phase of the research project, mostly conducted outside Ethiopia (from 2017 to 2018 in the UK and Canada), I continued in a reflexive-dialectic process by dialoguing with my former Ethiopian colleagues from the ministry I served with, EWAR, about my findings. In particular, two of my colleagues visited with me in Canada in October 2017, and I discussed with them some of the major themes I had discerned from the data generated from the contextual Bible studies. We conversed about the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) and whether this story would be an appropriate frame for reflecting on some of the data. At the end of the conversation, each of us had come to a deepened understanding of the significance of the Prodigal Son story to women affected by prostitution (more on this in Chapter Eight).

To summarize, throughout every stage of the research, I have sought to engage in a reflexive-dialectic process that builds on specific moral commitments, that reflects consciously on the context and processes of knowledge creation, and that emphasises the implications and uses of new knowledge.<sup>28</sup> A reflexive-dialectic orientation views internal and external realities as two, interwoven sides of a single, dynamic whole.<sup>29</sup>

## **Methods Used**

### **Contextual Bible Studies**

Within the field of prostitution research, several have noted that prioritising the use of participatory techniques gives sex worker's experiences and feelings epistemic priority by creating 'discursive space' in which alternative narratives can be articulated.<sup>30</sup> To that end – to give priority to the women's voices – I utilised research tools that maximised the women's participation as co-researchers and subjects in the study.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Neuman, *op cit.*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Phil Hubbard, 'Researching Female Sex Work: Reflection on Geographical Exclusion, Critical Methodologies and 'Useful' Knowledge,' *Area* 31, no. 3, (1999): 235.

<sup>31</sup> Participatory inquiry is a methodological orientation that places vulnerable people at the centre of inquiry [in this case prostituted women] recognizing that their understanding of self and their lived experiences take priority, particularly because they have been denied the validity of their statements.

In my exploration of participatory research methods, I decided to utilise contextual Bible study as the primary method for accessing the voices of the women. This method was selected based on the following criteria: 1) the potential for semi-literate populations to engage in a process of exploring Christian Scripture; 2) the priority placed on understanding the cultural and socioeconomic contexts that inform how people interpret the Bible;<sup>32</sup> 3) my exposure to the work of Bob Ekblad, who has documented his extensive experiences of reading the Bible alongside of subsistence farmers in Central America, prisoners, undocumented workers, and other marginalised groups among the Latin American population in the United States;<sup>33</sup> and 4) the ability for this method to challenge dominant readings of Scripture that often reinforce prevailing cultural norms that reinforce non-liberative messages to those on the margins of society.<sup>34</sup>

Relevant to this project, contextual Bible study has been utilised significantly by African contextual and African Womanist theologians, with particular reference to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This approach has enabled the voices of those who are infected with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS on the African continent to contribute to a deeper interpretation of Christian Scripture in light of the situations of oppression they face.<sup>35</sup> Contextual Bible study starts with the question: ‘How do the life experiences of the reader serve as a key for reinterpreting the Bible?’<sup>36</sup> African Womanist theologian Musa Dube asserts that this hermeneutical point of view in the struggle against HIV/AIDS points toward reading and re-reading the Bible with a focus on saving life.<sup>37</sup>

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This orientation recognizes that people who have experienced stigmatisation, isolation and oppression have the most potential for analysing and understanding their experiences. See Stephanie Wahab, ‘Creating Knowledge Collaboratively with Female Sex Workers: Insights from a Qualitative, Feminist, and Participatory Study,’ *Qualitative Inquiry* 9, no.4 (2003): 630, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://qix.sagepubcom/content/9/4/625>.

<sup>32</sup> Rene C. Padilla, ‘Contextual Scripture Engagement and Transcultural Mission,’ in *Global Voices on Mission*, eds. Daniel K. Darko & Beth Snodderly (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2014), 217.

<sup>33</sup> Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Ekblad notes that marginalised populations often experience distance from God and find it difficult to hear good, new, surprising, liberating news from those representing the dominant culture. See Ekblad, xvi.

<sup>35</sup> Musa Dube’s book *HIV&AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008) which outlines various ways of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into theological education, includes teaching students how to lead Bible studies with those affected by HIV/AIDS in a manner that assists people to appropriate their situation to relevant Biblical texts. See especially her Chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



This approach reflects the commitment of South African theologian Gerald O. West to facilitate meaningful interactions with the Bible among marginalised people. West claims that ‘... for a dialogue to take place between text and context a real flesh and blood African reader is required.’<sup>38</sup> In the process of appropriation, readers of Christian Scripture are empowered to bring their life experiences to bear on a particular biblical text.<sup>39</sup> Readers are treated as the experts of their lives and their lived experiences are taken seriously. Ekblad notes that West’s model of contextual Bible study ‘empowers people as their voice is respected and elevated above the voices of the dominant culture.’<sup>40</sup>

The contextual Bible studies were similar to a focus-group discussion interview, in that the participants were able to hear each other’s responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they heard what the other women had to say about a particular Biblical story.<sup>41</sup> The women had the opportunity to agree and disagree with each other in this setting. Data were generated not only from listening to the individual responses of the women in the contextual Bible study sessions, but from also observing how they interacted with each other. Their interactions enhanced the quality of the data because they provided checks and balances on each other’s views<sup>42</sup> (discussed in greater depth in later chapters where the data are presented). The goal of the focus-group model is to collect high-quality data in a social context where people consider their own views in the context of other views.<sup>43</sup> The contextual Bible study format provided this opportunity to the Flamingo Women who were a group of women currently engaged in prostitution and comprised one of my research participant groups which will be explained in greater detail in the Research Settings section of this chapter.

Contextual Bible study allows for story-telling, which is a common mode of communication in African culture, and thereby allows for the stories of the text and the participants to intersect.<sup>44</sup> Research among vulnerable populations must seek out

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<sup>38</sup> Gerald O. West, ‘Biblical hermeneutics in Africa,’ in Diane B. Stinton (ed.), *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (London: SPCK, 2010), 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Ekblad, *op cit.*, x.

<sup>41</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 386.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Dube, *op cit.*, 72.

silenced voices;<sup>45</sup> contextual Bible study is specifically geared toward unearthing such voices. In order to encourage openness in the sessions, all the Bible studies were conducted in the Amharic language. The following section will outline how I appropriated this method to my research project.

#### Contextual Bible Study Session Format: Flamingo and EWAR Women

The Flamingo Women were one cohort of participants who resided in the Flamingo community of Addis Ababa. The selection of these women and the research setting will be explained later in this chapter. I conducted twenty-six contextual Bible study sessions with these women between June 2015 and October 2016. Appendix 1A furnishes a list of the sessions and the Biblical stories included in those sessions. I also conducted six sessions with the EWAR cohort (comprised of women participating in the EWAR rehabilitation program at the time of the study) which is referred to in Appendix 1B.

The approximately one-hour sessions began with Ethiopian greetings, which take a few minutes, and then a discussion about how everyone's week had been. A recording device was activated at the beginning of the session in order to capture everything that was said. I would then introduce the Bible story I had selected for the session through my simultaneous translator and ask my key informant, AC (my research team will be discussed later in this chapter), to read the passage. When introducing the Biblical story, I would use a story-telling format,<sup>46</sup> and provide some pertinent contextual/background details. A sample of how I appropriated a story-telling method in the contextual Bible studies is found in Appendix 3. I did not teach, but tried to give a very basic overview of the key points in the story and then ask my key informant, AC, to read the passage from her electronic Bible on her phone. Due to the Ethiopian Orthodox background of the participants, AC advised against the presence of a physical Bible at our session (which might lead to suspicion that we were trying to convert the participants).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Julie Cwikel and Elizabeth Hoban, 'Contentious Issues in Research on Trafficked Women Working in the Sex Industry: Study Design, Ethics, and Methodology,' *The Journal of Sex Research* 42, no.4 (2005): 309, accessed December 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3813783>.

<sup>46</sup> This approach was discussed at length with my primary supervisor, Elaine Storkey. She has led contextual Bible studies in various countries in which she highlighted sensitive issues such as rape and domestic violence through Christian Scripture and engaged communities in discussing the occurrence of these issues in their local context. Supervision Notes: Dr. Elaine Storkey, November 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Girma Bekele notes the strained relationship between evangelicals and the EOTC because the EOTC has historically viewed evangelicals as 'sheep-stealers' whose only interest is evangelism. See Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch Through the Lends of Mission History and Contemporary Challenges in Ethiopia*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 243.

After the story was introduced and read to the women (as all of the women who participated were semi-literate, they were not able to read the text themselves), I would then ask prepared questions related to the story and the women's lives. Prior to each session, I would prepare a discussion guide designed to spur discussion about the plot of the story at hand, the characters involved, and any points of connection between the character in the story and the women. Appendix Two furnishes an example of a discussion guide. While the discussion guides did help to facilitate the discussions, I did not follow them rigidly and I endeavoured in each session to allow the women to set the course of the conversation based on their interaction with the text at hand. Very often, the conversation went in directions I could not have foreseen, adding to the richness of the data generated. One example is when studying the story of the birth of Christ, the women engaged in a lengthy discussion about abortion and asked why Mary went through with the pregnancy<sup>48</sup> (discussed further in Chapter Five).

The questions I asked were not meant to force the women to draw parallels between their lives and those of the Biblical characters but rather to stimulate a reflective process by which the women might be able to think about situations that had occurred in their lives. For example, during my preparation for the study on Hagar, which included sociological research on some of the mitigating factors for prostitution in Addis Ababa, I had speculated that some of the women had possibly left their family of origin either by their own volition or against their will. One factor for leaving was the loss of employment as a housemaid and having no familial support or shelter to rely on.<sup>49</sup> I considered it reasonable to ask whether the women had faced situations similar to Hagar's when she left the home of Abram and Sarai; I asked the following questions:

Has any one of you been chased out of the house? Thrown out?<sup>50</sup>

Have you ever had an experience like Hagar, like the angel came while she was in the desert, hopeless, did you have such an experience where someone came to help you when you were desperate?<sup>51</sup>

These questions, especially the first, resulted in several of the women recounting their own stories of how they came to be involved in prostitution. One example follows:

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<sup>48</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Yoseph Endeshaw, Mebratu Gebeyehu, Belete Reta, 'Assessment of Trafficking in Women and Children, In and from Ethiopia,' *IOM, International Organization for Migration Addis Ababa* (Geneva: IOM Publications, 2006): 17.

<sup>50</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session Flamingo Women, 26/09/2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The man who lived with me chased me out when I got pregnant and I became a prostitute after nine years of marriage. I gave my baby to my parents so that she does not see that I am a prostitute. I don't want her to learn this which I do for a living.<sup>52</sup>

When I prepared these particular questions, I did not anticipate that the women would directly refer to their experiences in prostitution; however, that is exactly what happened in a number of our sessions. This was one of the unintended outcomes of my data collection process, as I did not realise that the women would draw so heavily on their lived experiences in prostitution as they participated in answering the questions that arose in our sessions. This outcome speaks to the effectiveness of the contextual Bible study method and its premise that 'the social location of readers informs the type of Biblical interpretation they will make.'<sup>53</sup>

Further analysis of the Hagar sessions appears in Chapter Four, but at this point it is given as a sample of the type of response elicited from the contextual Bible study approach. At the end of each session, the participants were asked to decide when would be the most optimal time to meet next, and time was given to address any logistical issues, questions or concerns raised in the study of the Biblical text, or stories that had been shared by the women.

#### Contextual Bible Study Session Format: Evangelical Church Leaders

I held three contextual Bible study sessions with selected evangelical church leaders between 2015 and 2016. The average attendance at the three sessions was seven participants, with approximately the same number of men as women. Two of these sessions, on the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) and the woman almost stoned to death (John 8), were held at the Ethiopian Theological College (ETC) due to its central location in Addis Ababa, and the ease of traveling to this location for the participants. The last session on the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) was conducted at the main office of EWAR. All these sessions were conducted in English, and I also had a translator present. The leaders preferred to participate in English, and my translator assisted with any linguistic challenges they encountered. A recording device was used to capture each of these sessions, which followed the same format as above.

The leaders also documented their answers to questions, in smaller groups, on flip-chart paper, and shared their responses with the entire group. These sessions each lasted for about 1.5 hours and inspired discussion related to how to respond to

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Musa Dube, *HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*, 68.

marginalised women, particularly women in prostitution. Some of the data generated from these sessions will be presented in the body of the thesis.

### Relational Sessions

I also held five sessions during the same time period with the Flamingo Women. These were dedicated to cultivating some level of trust and rapport with the women. The issue of trust is often a major challenge in research conducted with vulnerable populations, particularly those who have been sexually exploited.<sup>54</sup> Susan Dewey recounts how she was able to develop trust with the trafficking victims she was interviewing because ‘stories about my own family history [made] them trust me because they believed I was not so different to them.’<sup>55</sup> Dewey was highly aware of the power differential that existed between her research participants and herself, as a mid-twenty year old ‘who had just finished a PhD ... [and was] positioned as an expert on gender issues.’<sup>56</sup> She sought to overcome this by drawing on the commonalities between her life story with that of the of her research participants, which is a model I sought to follow.

One poignant example of sharing my life story occurred when my mother passed away in October 2015. During our first contextual Bible study session after I returned to Ethiopia, the Flamingo Women expressed their condolences and concern for my family, affirmed that my shortened hair (which I had cut after my mother’s death) followed Ethiopian grieving practices,<sup>57</sup> and then shared about the loss of loved ones in their own lives. We all cried, and it was a very memorable session because death was now a shared experience. I was deeply moved in that session by the women’s empathy for my family in Canada at that difficult time.

Because this research project required a participant-centered approach,<sup>58</sup> these relational sessions were as critical to the data collection process as the Bible studies. These sessions gave opportunity to gain a richer picture of my participants’ lives

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<sup>54</sup> Trust is critical not only to the recovery and resettlement in the community of those who have left situations of sexual exploitation, but also the role the women who have exited these situations can play in research among those who are still experiencing situations of exploitation. See Denise Brennan, ‘Methodological Challenges in Research with Trafficked Persons: Tales from the Field,’ *International Migration* 43, no. 1/2, (2005): 42.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Dewey, *Hollow Bodies: Institutional Responses to Sex Trafficking in Armenia, Bosnia, and India* (Sterling, UK: Kumarian, 2008), 179.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>57</sup> Cutting most of one’s hair off after the death of a parent is a common grieving practice in rural Ethiopia (which I had not been aware of until returning to Ethiopia after my mother died). At the start of our session and before I said anything, the women knew because of my appearance that my mother had died. They then explained this cultural practice to me, and affirmed my unintended adherence to Ethiopian grieving practices.

<sup>58</sup> Shaver, *op cit.*, 301-302.

because we engaged in social activities such as birthdays and shared meals. They also allowed me to hear from the women about their level of comfort with the study and whether the time we had set for our weekly sessions was still working for them.

### Selection Criteria for Biblical Stories

The stories that I chose for the sessions with the Flamingo and EWAR cohorts were based on the following criteria: 1) relevance of the story to the life of a woman affected by prostitution (e.g. the story of Hagar and the prevalence of housemaids in Addis Ababa that fall prey to prostitution, due to the abuse and exploitation they suffer in their master's home); 2) ease of being told/translated from English to Amharic so as not to become convoluted and onerous for the translator (for example, expository passages from Paul about the body were not appropriate for this study, whereas Old Testament and Gospel narratives proved to be fruitful for engaging these women; 3) if a lively discussion ensued from one story, I would carry over the discussion into the following week in order to allow the women a full opportunity to engage with the story, as was the case with the story of the crippled woman (Luke 10:13-17), the story of Ruth, and the story of the lost son (Luke 15) which were all conducted over a multiple-week period.

With reference to the evangelical church leaders, the three stories chosen were based on their potential to facilitate a discussion on the plight of the marginalised; major theological themes that emerged included redemption, forgiveness, and acceptance.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews: Evangelical Church Leaders**

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method of data collection with the evangelical leaders for the following reasons: 1) the opportunity it provides to interviewees to answer in their own words and to express their personal opinions;<sup>59</sup> 2) the space it gives for an informal conversation to occur and salient questions to emerge from the immediate context; 3) questions are often worded in an open-ended format which increases comparability of responses; 4) compatibility with common Ethiopian modes of communication, which emphasise story-telling.

I did have a few questions prepared beforehand related to the interviewee's knowledge and/or experiences with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa; however, the interviews were very conversational and often provided important insights into related topics such as gender relations, theological understandings of God and sin, and historical context about how the Ethiopian church has responded to marginalised women (more in Chapter Seven).

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<sup>59</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 348.

## Time Period for Fieldwork

Research with vulnerable populations that seeks to highlight the perspective of the persons themselves often implies working closely with social service providers, as evidenced in research with exploited populations.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the use of creative research and investigative methods is recommended when conducting research on women in the sex industry and accessing unlikely key informants because this can be a challenge to recruiting research participants.<sup>61</sup> Heather Montgomery's study of child prostitution in Thailand<sup>62</sup> recommends that one way to overcome issues of access is to base the research in a rehabilitation home.

Therefore, in order to work closely with a social service provider and to overcome issues of access, I relocated from Kampala, Uganda<sup>63</sup> to Addis Ababa in 2014 under the auspices of and as a volunteer for the organisation, Ellilta Women at Risk (EWAR) which granted me legal permission to live in Ethiopia. As a part of the two-year volunteer agreement, EWAR agreed that I would be allowed to carry-out research with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa, independently from the organisation, while also having access to human resources (staff) and women who were engaged in the EWAR rehabilitation program. EWAR afforded me the opportunity of being imbedded in a local, faith-based organisation that, since 1994, has been providing assistance to women seeking to exit prostitution. It also gave me access to this hard-to-reach and highly vulnerable population in Addis Ababa, and to a supportive community of colleagues.

Due to my mother's diagnosis of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) in April 2015, I had to travel back to Canada several times throughout that year to provide care. This impacted the schedule for my fieldwork, which I had planned to complete at the end of 2015. After my mother passed away in October 2015, EWAR graciously granted me an additional year of service and secured the needed permissions required for me to live in

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<sup>60</sup> Brennan, *op cit.*, 39.

<sup>61</sup> Cwikel and Hoban, *op cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Heather Montgomery, 'Working With Child Prostitutes in Thailand: Problems of practice and interpretation,' *Childhood* 14, no.4, (2007): 421, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.chd.sagepub.com/content/14/4/415>.

<sup>63</sup> I lived and worked in Uganda for an international NGO for one year prior to moving to Ethiopia. During the first year of my research in Uganda, I realised that I would be a more effective researcher if I took measures to address the power differential between myself and the women I hoped to research. This implied stepping down from a fundraising and project management position within the international NGO employing me.

Ethiopia for another year. Therefore, the fieldwork I engaged with lasted from February 2014 to October 2016, thirty-three months.

The first phase of my fieldwork in 2014 was spent largely engaged in: 1) participant observation through volunteering at EWAR; 2) relationship-building with both women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa and evangelical church leaders, particularly through planning and facilitating a one-week, awareness and capacity-building workshop with thirty evangelical church leaders working within or near to red-light districts in Addis Ababa and; 3) language acquisition (discussed in more detail in the Amharic Language Acquisition Section of this chapter).

The second phase of my fieldwork was carried out in 2015 and consisted of contextual Bible studies with women who were actively engaged in prostitution in the Flamingo community in Addis Ababa and women who were participating in the rehabilitation program at EWAR. The third phase of my fieldwork was conducted from December 2015 to October 2016 and consisted of contextual Bible studies with the aforementioned groups, as well as selected evangelical church leaders. In addition, the third and last phase of my fieldwork also included semi-structured interviews with selected, evangelical church leaders.

### **Preparation for Fieldwork**

In order to prepare for the second phase of my fieldwork, which included contextual Bible studies with women affected by prostitution and semi-structured interviews with evangelical church leaders carried out between 2015 and 2016, I spent 2014 and the first half of 2015 engaged in the following activities: 1) Amharic language acquisition; 2) learning how listen to vulnerable Ethiopian women and evangelical church leaders; and 3) selecting research assistants.

### **Amharic Language Acquisition**

Amharic is the official national language of Ethiopia and is the language of trade and commerce in Addis Ababa. Amharic is a Semitic-based language with its own distinct script, called Ge'ez or Ethiopic in English, or *fidal* in Amharic.<sup>64</sup> Due to its sentence structure, extensive vocabulary, and the depth and elasticity of meaning associated with a number of words, Amharic words cannot often be translated one-to-one in English. When working in spoken or written Amharic and translating to English, and vice versa,

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<sup>64</sup> 'Amharic Language,' accessed May 31, 2018, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Amharic-language>.



various levels of equivalency are happening simultaneously by the person translating to ensure lexical, idiomatic, grammatical-syntactical, experiential, and conceptual equivalence.<sup>65</sup>

Because Amharic is the most widely spoken language in the Addis Ababa area, I anticipated that the data collected from the contextual Bible studies would be in Amharic; it was therefore imperative for me to gain a working knowledge of the language before commencing the second phase of my fieldwork. While having to rely on translators to assist in the data collection, I thought that it was important to gain a basic understanding of the language to develop rapport and trust with my future research participants.

In order to immerse myself in the language throughout the three years that I lived in Ethiopia, I shared a home with Ethiopian women, I volunteered in the EWAR office (where Amharic was the main language spoken), and I attended several Ethiopian evangelical churches. I also enrolled in the Mekane Yesus Joint Language School (now called the Mekane Yesus Language and Intercultural School) for two months of full-time language lessons in 2014. This school<sup>66</sup> specialises in the Growing Participator Approach that emphasises learning a language within its sociocultural setting, listening to how the host culture makes sense of everyday life, and focusing on vocabulary acquisition in order to navigate everyday life tasks before studying the rules of the language.<sup>67</sup> I graduated in high-standing from the full-time program with a basic level of spoken Amharic, and a beginner level of reading and writing.

After completing full-time study, I hired a private tutor (who also worked part-time at the language school and was therefore qualified to teach) who came to my home several times a week over two months for one-hour sessions to help build on what I had learned in language school, particularly with words and sentences related to prostitution in Addis Ababa.

In summary, I spent two months full-time and two months part-time learning the Amharic language from trained professionals, and immersed myself in the language through my living, volunteering, and researching contexts for the duration of the three

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<sup>65</sup> Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures*, Seventh Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 160.

<sup>66</sup> 'My Joint Language School,' accessed May 11, 2018, <https://www.schoolandcollegelistenings/ET/Addis-Ababa/1395291540742026/MY-Joint-Language-School>.

<sup>67</sup> 'Growing Participator Approach,' accessed May 11, 2018, <https://growingparticipatorapproach.wordpress.com/the-growing-participator-approach-gpa-a-brief-state-of-the-art-and-some-practical-illustrations/>.

years that I lived in Ethiopia. Therefore, language acquisition was a daily and intentional activity I pursued for the entirety of my three years in Ethiopia.

### **Learning How to Listen**

Denise Ackermann states that a feminist theology of praxis is interested in the praxis of listening, a type of listening that is participatory, deliberate, empathetic, ‘eschewing the contestable notion of impartiality and practicing listening that speaks of care and solidarity in situations of suffering.’<sup>68</sup> I was able to develop my listening skills through my volunteer role at EWAR, as I constantly had the opportunity to interact with women participating in the rehabilitation program, both in Amharic and through translation. I was able to hear many of their stories, to sit in silence as they shared about the pains in their past, to observe how they lived their daily lives, and to watch how they interacted with each other, their children, and the staff of EWAR. This was very helpful in learning more about the past and present contexts of the women’s lives.

My involvement at EWAR fostered a deep and genuine interest in the women who were participating in the rehabilitation program, and this helped to develop the active listening skills<sup>69</sup> required for both the contextual Bible studies and semi-structured interviews I conducted. In particular, though being an intentional member of the EWAR community and interacting with women in the rehabilitation program on a daily basis, I learned how to let questions emerge from the immediate context in the natural course of things. This helped to increase the salience and relevance of questions that I asked the women, a noted strength of the informal conversation interview technique, during my fieldwork.<sup>70</sup>

Ackermann also asserts that a feminist theology of praxis requires a quality of listening that respects cultural differences and a type of discernment that is sensitive to the context, place, and plight of the narrator, and ‘is aware of other narratives, some of which may paint very different pictures.’<sup>71</sup> I learned how to listen for diversity in the voices of the women that I interacted with through dispensing with an essentialised view of all women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. This primarily happened through creating friendships with women who had formerly been engaged in

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<sup>68</sup> Ackermann, *op cit.*, 232.

<sup>69</sup> Active listening includes an interest in, sensitivity, and respect for your research participants that is demonstrated by space for open responses in the interview process. See Patton, *op cit.*, 417.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>71</sup> Ackermann, *op cit.*, 232.

prostitution, particularly my key informant AC. My friendship with AC taught me to listen for the uniqueness of every story that my research participants have shared about their lives, and to honour those differences through coming to each contextual Bible study session and interview, aware of my own presuppositions.

My friendship with various women who were formerly engaged in prostitution and their participation in the research also taught me the importance of paying attention to social norms<sup>72</sup> such as *kenfer meto melaf* (pitying sounds)<sup>73</sup> which is a common response when situations of suffering are voiced. In addition, I learned the importance of listening to the silences:

The art of conversation in Africa is delicate, developed, complex, and beautiful. It is an important recreation, and is an exquisite refinement of the African culture. It would be inexcusable for a speaker to drone on and on without reference to his [her] listeners, without being attentive to their presence, without pausing ever so often to re-establish contact with them. To miss the pause would be just as inexcusable on the listener's part.<sup>74</sup>

An integral part of my research formation was learning how to listen for the silences and pauses. It was vital to learn that a pause was often pregnant with meaning and to not try to rush through that moment in a contextual Bible study or semi-structured interview.

### **Selection of Research Assistants**

My roommate in 2014 was the first key informant in the research and was selected for the following reasons: 1) her experiential knowledge of prostitution; 2) her relationships with women currently engaged in prostitution and women who had exited prostitution; 3) her professional experience of working with women seeking to exit prostitution; and 4) her desire to be a part of the research project due to her work as a teaching pastor in a local evangelical church. Hareg had sensed a deficiency in the evangelical church's understanding of women affected by prostitution and had a deep desire to facilitate dialogue between these two groups.

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<sup>72</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 393.

<sup>73</sup> *Kenfer meto malef* refers to an auditory sound that Ethiopian people will make when encountering the pain and suffering of another individual. The *tsk tsk* sound made with the mouth is a common reaction when an Ethiopian experiences pity toward another person in need. It acknowledges the presence of suffering and is an act of solidarity. (EWAR Empathy/Sympathy Bible Study Notes, June 9, 2015)

<sup>74</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai* (Notre Dame: Fides/Claretian, 1978), 181.

After my roommate's untimely death in November 2014, I selected AC as my key informant because of the first three criteria outlined above, especially AC's desire to dialogue more with evangelical churches about the situation of prostitution. I had known AC as a friend since 2009, and she was also the best friend of my roommate, and she wanted to participate in the research as a part of my roommate's legacy.

In mid-2014, I worked alongside a local, leadership organisation in the planning and facilitation of a one-week workshop with evangelical church leaders, aimed at developing the capacity of the leadership to work with women engaged in prostitution. In this process, Deacon EK of the local leadership organisation became one of my key informants with respect to traditions and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC). I had come to realise that the EOTC was a significant context for women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa through my volunteering at EWAR.

In addition, and because he had earlier conducted his own research on prostitution in Addis Ababa, Deacon EK helped facilitate some of the contextual Bible studies with evangelical church leaders in 2014 and 2015. WM was selected as a key informant from the evangelical church (and facilitator of interviews), based on his position of leadership in one of the largest evangelical denominations, his knowledge of the evangelical church and experiences working for it, and his access to key leaders in the evangelical denomination.

I also selected several EWAR staff in mid-2015 before the commencement of the contextual Bible studies, to act as simultaneous translators based on their English proficiency, experience with simultaneous translation, and familiarity with the context of women currently engaged in prostitution. The three EWAR staff who provided simultaneous translation in the contextual Bible studies had worked for many years with women seeking to exit prostitution and were highly aware of the circumstances of their lives which was a great asset to the quality of translation.

Due to the busy schedules of the three EWAR staff who had been helping since the beginning of 2016, ML was selected as a consistent simultaneous translator for the remaining contextual Bible studies. She was selected based on her English proficiency, experience with simultaneous translation, availability, knowledge of Christian Scripture (important because the biblical Amharic is different from everyday Amharic and quite difficult), and her desire to be a part of the research project.

Therefore, all the people that participated in this research were selected based on their knowledge of the particular contexts they represented, their lived experiences

within those contexts, their relationships with other people within the constituencies they represented, and their expressed interest/desire to be a part of the research project.

## **Research Settings**

### **Women Engaged in Prostitution: Flamingo Community**

The primary research setting for the contextual Bible studies with women currently engaged in prostitution was selected based on the following criteria: 1) access to appropriate research participants;<sup>75</sup> 2) existing relationships in the community; 3) centrality of location in Addis Ababa making it easy for my participants and myself to travel regularly to the community; 4) potential for answering the primary research questions.

The Flamingo community is located adjacent to Bole Road, one of the main thoroughfares in Addis Ababa and a few meters from Meskel Square, considered the centre of Addis Ababa. Due to the centrality of its location and its proximity to foreign embassies, businesses, and government offices, this area is a popular red-light destination for people in the diplomatic, business, and government sectors. My key informant, AC, had existing relationships with women in the community and thought they would be open to participating in the research. In addition, AC had relationships with a café and evangelical church in the community, both of which availed their premises, free of charge, to conduct the Bible studies.

The first round of sessions occurred in the café; however, due to the level of noise from other patrons, the women asked if we could meet in another locale. When AC suggested the church, the women responded favourably. AC and I were concerned that the women might have thought we were trying to convert them (a common suspicion among EOTC background Christians toward evangelicals); however, the women appreciated the quiet and privacy that the church location offered and regular attendance by several women in the group increased once we switched locations.

In order to reduce power differentials between myself, my research team, and the women, we met at the back of the main sanctuary on wooden benches arranged in a semi-circle. The main sanctuary was tiled but housed in a canvas tent, and the guard always sat outside the steel gate so that the only people in the room on most occasions was myself, AC, my translator (ML) and the women who participated in the session.

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<sup>75</sup> Selecting appropriate research sites is critical for research with women affected by prostitution, which includes sites with potential for data-rich cases where the researcher can penetrate local networks. See Shaver, *op cit.*, 299.

### **Women Exiting Prostitution: EWAR Project Site**

The contextual Bible studies executed with the EWAR women were conducted in the multi-purpose room at the EWAR Project Site in Addis Ababa. The room provided privacy, quiet, and a safe place for the women to interact with the Biblical stories that were shared. The chairs in the room were arranged in a circle in order to foster maximum discussion and to reduce power differentials between myself, the women, and the translators.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews with Evangelical Church Leaders**

The setting for the semi-structured interviews with the church leaders was selected by the leaders, mainly to accommodate their busy schedules, and all the interviews occurred in their primary place of work, predominantly their offices. Their offices provided a quiet and uninterrupted space for the interviews.

### **Contextual Bible Studies with Evangelical Church Leaders**

Two sessions were conducted at the Ethiopian Theological College (ETC) due to the centrality of its location and ease of participants traveling to this location. Due to my relationship with the college, it offered space free of charge for these sessions. The setting for these sessions was a classroom where privacy was ensured.

## **Selection Criteria for Research Participants**

### **Sampling Strategy**

Determining an appropriate sample size when it comes to conducting research with women engaged in prostitution is difficult as they are considered a hidden population, ‘a group of individuals for whom the size and boundaries are unknown, and for whom no sampling frame exists.’<sup>76</sup> Hidden populations often consist of people engaged in clandestine/illegal or concealed activities which therefore require the application of creative sampling principles.<sup>77</sup> In order to overcome this challenge, scholars engaged in studies with vulnerable populations, including women trafficked for sexual purposes, are encouraged to use different approaches from those commonly used amongst more easily observable populations.<sup>78</sup>

One of these sampling approaches is purposive sampling which is a non-random technique that uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly

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<sup>76</sup> Guri Tyldum and Anette Brunovskis, ‘Describing the Unobserved: Methodological Challenges in Empirical Studies on Human Trafficking,’ *International Migration* 43, no.1/2 (2005): 18.

<sup>77</sup> Neuman, *op cit.*, 240.

<sup>78</sup> Tyldum and Brunovskis, *op cit.*, 18.

specific and difficult to reach population.<sup>79</sup> Purposive sampling is often used in special situations, such as research among vulnerable populations, and requires the judgment of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind. In the example of research among women engaged in prostitution, the researcher uses subjective information (such as locations where prostitutes congregate), and experts (such as those engaged in providing exit services), to identify a sample of prostitutes for inclusion in the research.<sup>80</sup> A study on unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia in the United Kingdom utilised purposive sampling methods by recruiting research participants based on specific, selection criteria that included: age, formerly unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, and had experienced or almost experienced sexual abuse.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling (also known as network, chain, or reputational sampling) is recommended for research that requires recruitment of research participants through various networks.<sup>82</sup> Based on an analogy, snowball sampling begins small but becomes larger as it rolls and picks up additional snow.<sup>83</sup> In this approach, the researcher establishes a relationship with one member or several members of a network relevant to the research project and through the establishment of that relationship, additional research participants are recruited into the project through members of the network. The critical feature in snowball sampling is that each person or unit is connected with another through a direct or indirect linkage.<sup>84</sup> It is important to note that methods such as snowball sampling generally require a systematic recruitment process for research participants.

### **Selection of Flamingo Participants**

The Flamingo community was chosen as the place to recruit women for the project because it is a well-known red-light district in Addis Ababa where sex workers not only congregate but are likely to live. Second, the staff at EWAR recommended this location because of their expertise as a service provider, having worked with women from that area before. Third, my key informant, AC, knew women in the community and thought

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<sup>79</sup> Neuman, *op cit.*, 222.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Lay and Irena Papadopoulou, 'Sexual maltreatment of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors from the Horn of Africa: A mixed method study focusing on vulnerability and prevention,' *Child Abuse & Neglect* 33 (2009): 730, accessed October 9, 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Tyldum and Brunovskis, *op cit.*, 29.

<sup>83</sup> Neuman, *op cit.*, 223.

<sup>84</sup> Neuman, *op cit.*, 223.

that they would be willing to participate in the research, thus providing access to potentially rich cases.

AC and I went to the community and met her contact, who introduced us to a number of women currently engaged in prostitution. We shared about the project and stated that the only criteria to be involved in the study was that each person had to be actively engaged in prostitution at the time. At the first information meeting, several women expressed interest in the project. We asked them to invite other women to the first contextual Bible study session. In this way, the snowball selection of participants began.

This core group was tasked with finding a quorum of participants every week, which was set at six women, and each woman who participated in the study received between twenty Ethiopian Birr, and later fifty Ethiopian Birr to compensate for her time (\$1-2 USD) away from her clients and as a sign of my appreciation for their time. Scholarly research with women engaged in prostitution indicates that compensation is a standard practice in order to ensure that the women do not feel like they are being exploited or that their time is not valued.<sup>85</sup>

I chose six participants as the standard for quorum based on the optimal number of participants Patton recommended in a focus group session.<sup>86</sup> While the Bible studies were not run as a focus group (which entails the researcher asking participants specific questions), the sessions shared some similarities with the focus group model, inasmuch as I asked questions about the Biblical texts we were studying.

It must be noted that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry<sup>87</sup> and while the number of women involved in this study may seem small, according to purposeful sampling, a sample of eight participants (n=8) supports the overall purpose of the study, which is to listen carefully while women affected by prostitution theologise about their lived experiences. When the average attendance at the Flamingo session of six to eight women is averaged with the average attendance of the EWAR women (five to seventeen women), the overall per-session average of women affected by prostitution in this study was eight women.

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<sup>85</sup> In a February, 2016 discussion with the women about the compensation rate (20 Ethiopian Birr/hour, established in September, 2015), we decided that compensation to 50 Birr/hour would better reflect the women's increased costs of living. See Shaver, *op cit.*, 304.

<sup>86</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 385.

<sup>87</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 244-245.



Lola Marie Prince's ethnographic study on resilience among African American women recovering from prostitution included eleven participants (n=11), and involved her developing a relationship with a non-faith based transition home for prostituted women over the span of two years prior to recruiting research participants.<sup>88</sup>

One of the main objectives of this study at-hand was to facilitate a process of theologising about prostitution with women affected by prostitution and evangelical church leaders. Theologising is a process that takes time and this required developing trust between myself and the participants, and the participants with each other. In addition, due to working through translators when conducting the Bible studies, it would have been much more difficult to ensure that each participant was free to share. As well, after the sessions, I hired transcribers to document the voice-recordings from each session, generating hundreds of pages of rich data requiring thoughtful analysis. Therefore, a sample of eight women provided enough cases to be examined in the process of answering the primary research questions. Patton states that: 'the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.'<sup>89</sup> In view of this consensus among qualitative researchers, I concluded that a sample of eight participants was sufficient for this project.

### **Selection of EWAR Participants**

The participants from EWAR were all actively engaged in the rehabilitation program and asked if they would like to volunteer in the five contextual Bible studies that were held at the project site. The criterion for these women to participate was that they were actively engaged in the rehabilitation program at EWAR. These women were not compensated for their time, as the sessions were held during time set aside for regular programmatic activities, so the women were given the option of attending these sessions, which most of the women in the program desired to do. Rehabilitation cohorts are generally comprised of twenty women.

### **Selection of Evangelical Church Leaders**

The selection of church leaders for this project was based on purposive sampling. My research assistant, WM, as a leader in one of the major evangelical denominations, has an extensive network and availed his contacts to me. In several of the interviews that

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<sup>88</sup> Lola Marie Prince, 'Resilience in African American Women Formerly Involved in Street Prostitution,' *The Association of Black Nursing Faculty Journal* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 32.

<sup>89</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 245.

WM helped to facilitate, the interviewee would recommend another church leader whom they thought would have pertinent information to share; therefore, snowballing techniques were also employed. The criteria used to select the leaders included: 1) denominational affiliation, because I wanted to ensure that I had at least one to two representatives from the major evangelical denominations (as outlined in Chapter One); 2) involvement and/or experience with social development programs within the church; 3) level of leadership (because WM encouraged me to meet senior leaders with strategic insights into the church; 4) women and men in order to ensure representation from both genders; and 5) an expressed interest in the project as I did not want to force any leaders to participate in something that did not concern them. WM was instrumental in helping to select the leaders that participated in the semi-structured interviews.

### **Issues Related to Translation**

Data collected with trafficked women, including interviews ‘should use the women’s first language to ensure accuracy of data and context of the experiences. If the researcher does not speak the [women’s] native language, it is essential that a trained translator is used.’ Poor interpretation and translation will lead to false information.<sup>90</sup>

When employing the services of a translator, it is important that the translator understand precisely what the researcher wants to ask, and know that they are to translate verbatim what the research participant is sharing.<sup>91</sup> I was very clear with both the EWAR staff who helped provide simultaneous oral translation during the Bible study sessions and ML, the woman who provided simultaneous translation for the majority of the sessions, that I did not want them to summarise, paraphrase, or give explanations of what the women were sharing. Rather, I asked them to share exactly what they heard, to the extent that they could, in order to reduce the possibility of their interpretations overriding the spoken words of the women and the data becoming contaminated.<sup>92</sup>

One practical way to ensure the validity of the data being collected was to hold a short debriefing time after the women had left each study to review the salient points with my key informant (AC) and ML (the translator, or the EWAR staff member). I would document these in my notebook so that I could refer to them later, and we would

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<sup>90</sup> Cwikel and Hoban, *op cit.*, 312.

<sup>91</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 392.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

discuss whether there were themes/topics that should be probed further in a subsequent session.

### **Transcription of Recorded Sessions**

Every contextual Bible study session and semi-structured interview was recorded on a digital device. I hired two Ethiopians to transcribe the Amharic audio files of the Bible studies into English transcripts. I met with the transcribers regularly, and to clarify unclear points and provide a context for the transcribers I would refer back to the English notes I had taken in those sessions.

Having two transcribers helped to ensure the validity of the translation I was receiving. Transcribing protocols from Amharic to English require the transcriber to translate and type straight into English, as opposed to listening to the Amharic audio file, typing the file up in Amharic and then translating into English. Transcribers take this approach because typing in Amharic script requires software and typing skills that most transcribers lack; thus it is more efficient to listen to the Amharic files and type into English.

In order to ensure accuracy of the English transcripts I received from the two transcribers, I asked several of my colleagues to look over the documents for accuracy.

The semi-structured interviews were all conducted in English and I hired the University of Saskatchewan, Social Sciences Department, Transcription Services, to produce English transcripts from the audio files of these interviews. They had no difficulty understanding the voices of the participants. I was able to verify the transcripts with the extensive notes that I took in each semi-structured interview.

### **Methodology Procedures: Challenges and Limitations**

Challenges encountered during the contextual Bible study sessions with the Flamingo cohort included these: participants coming to the sessions intoxicated (which impeded their ability to participate in the discussions); women speaking over one another and not allowing others to share; children of the women present misbehaving and causing distractions; irregular attendance of some participants; and not raising expectations about what I could do to help the women (an unspoken expectation because I was a foreigner).

I learned that patience and humility were essential to managing our sessions, which implied giving time for the women to attend to their children, coaching my simultaneous translator and key informant (AC) in facilitation techniques to ensure that all voices in the group were heard, and listening to the stories of suffering and hardship

that were a part of their daily lives without casting myself as any sort of Saviour. Since leaving the research field, my key informant, AC, has continued her relationships with the core group of Flamingo Women who attended our sessions. The women know that AC works for EWAR, and AC on several occasions has invited them to join the rehabilitation program. So far, none of them have accepted this offer.

One of the greatest challenges in this type of project is leaving the research field knowing that your research participants are still living in semi-permanent housing in a slum area of Addis Ababa, longing for an alternative means of generating an income. In order to overcome my limitations as a foreigner (and given my current location in Canada), I have remained in regular contact with AC and continue to encourage her in her relationships with the Flamingo Women. While we are both aware that the EWAR rehabilitation program will not solve all the challenges these women face, we hope that one day they might be able to join the program.

### **Ethical Issues**

Researchers working with highly vulnerable populations are expected to follow the highest ethical stands, and to that end, I sought to ensure that the participants in this project were well informed about the purpose of the research. In a similar study with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors living in the United Kingdom from the Horn of Africa, the participants were given a full verbal and written explanation of the project and asked to sign a consent form.<sup>93</sup> Because the women from Flamingo were semi-literate, it was not appropriate to prepare a written document to explain the research. Rather, I spent time explaining the project orally and gave time for the women to ask any questions they had. My explanation of the project was translated and then explained by my key informant, AC. AC verified that the women understood what the research project was about and how they were being asked to participate. The women were then given a consent form typed in the Amharic language. The form was read to the women and they were asked if they had any questions before signing the document.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Meti Amirtham states that the purpose of analysis is to ‘summarize the completed observations in such a manner that they yield answers to the research questions. It is the purpose of interpretation to search for the broader meaning of the answers by linking

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<sup>93</sup> Lay and Papadopoulos, *op cit.*, 730.

them to other available knowledge.’<sup>94</sup> I engaged in content analysis in order to interrogate the thematic content of what the women shared with reference to various theological categories that I selected based on the relevance of the content the women shared to the selected categories.

Two different data sets served to triangulate my attempt to answer the primary research question: contextual Bible studies and semi-structured interviews with selected evangelical church leaders.<sup>95</sup> Triangulation seeks to test for consistency among different kinds of data, and where discrepancies occur, to use those places as an opportunity for deeper analysis.

For example, when discussing how women affected by prostitution perceive God (discussed in Chapter Five), the women expressed their experience of God as a protector. When this was compared to how evangelical church leaders think these women understand God, they answered that God must act as a saviour to these women. This may not seem like a significant difference but it became a site for theological reflection directly related to the primary research question.

The emerging themes suggested in the thesis have come from data generated from the contextual Bible studies conducted with the Flamingo and EWAR cohorts. The data analysis process has therefore included these components: reflection on the conversations themselves, identification of major themes, theological reflection on these themes in light of the various strands of theology outlined in the literature review. I have taken what emerged from observing and interacting with my participants and allowed theoretical reflection to emerge from my fieldwork.<sup>96</sup>

The process of reflection has included the following steps: reading English transcriptions of each of the sessions conducted with the participants in this study, reflecting on the stories some of the women shared during various sessions and drawing-out similarities and differences between their narrative and that of the Biblical text we were studying, identifying key words and phrases used by the participants in the Amharic language, tabulating the frequency of these words and phrases in Microsoft Excel, and then examining these words and phrases within Ethiopian cultural and religious contexts as well as wider theological conversation. I did not reflect on this portion of data in isolation, but rather in a dynamic process that included extensive

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<sup>94</sup> Metti Amirtham, *Women in India: Negotiating Body, Reclaiming Agency* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), 36.

<sup>95</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 247.

<sup>96</sup> Patton, *op cit.*, 129.

conversations with the following groups: my Ethiopian colleagues working for EWAR, key informants to my research, and Ethiopian evangelical church leaders.

All these groups helped to provide an understanding suited to the Ethiopian context in which I was working and my participants were living, which helped to appropriate my preliminary findings within a theological framework. For example, after *shame* and *a fear of being shamed* featured prominently in a study on the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) I facilitated with a selected group of church leaders,<sup>97</sup> I discussed the findings in detail with several of my Ethiopian colleagues, asking if I should initiate further discussion of the idea that the Ethiopian evangelical church being asked, in part, to *take on the shame* of women affected by prostitution, just as the character of the father in the story of the Prodigal Son took on the shame of both of his sons. My colleagues affirmed that reflecting on the role and character of the father, with reference to women affected by prostitution, had the potential for catalysing a discussion with evangelical church leaders that could challenge their thinking and possibly lead to the consideration of a different theological lens through which to view these women.<sup>98</sup> This is one example of the many conversations I had throughout the course of my research process where I have sought to engage in a participatory process of data analysis.

### Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological influences that helped to shape the design and execution of this research project, with particular attention given to treating the women in this project as participants engaged in the process and not simply as objects to be studied. The chapter explains how the research was carried out in Addis Ababa, steps I took before beginning the fieldwork, criteria for selecting the research participants, and strategies I used to ensure the validity of the data being generated. The primary methods for data collection, contextual Bible study and semi-structured interviews were explained and a detailed description of how these sessions were conducted was provided. In addition, challenges encountered in the data collection process, processes for data analysis, and ethical decisions were also discussed. The following chapter begins the presentation and discussion of the data, with a view to discerning a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

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<sup>97</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session Church Leaders Pt. 2, 06/04/16, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>98</sup> Conversation with ST and YA (Ethiopian Colleagues), 07/04/16, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

## Chapter 4: Presentation of Data

### Introduction

This chapter presents data generated from the Hagar contextual Bible studies I carried out with the Flamingo Women who were engaged in prostitution at the time of the project, and the EWAR Women who were participating in the EWAR rehabilitation program at the time of the study. I selected the story of Hagar, found in the Book of Genesis 16 and 21, as one of the first contextual Bible studies for the following reasons: 1) previous readings of this text with single and widowed women in Africa produced lively discussions and I anticipated the same might happen with these women; 2) Hagar was a housemaid to Abram and Sarai; therefore, I thought she might be a character that the women could possibly identify with, as a common story in Addis Ababa is that of a rural young woman travelling to Addis Ababa in search of a better life, being hired as a housemaid and, after experiencing abuse and/or exploitation at the hands of her employer, entering prostitution;<sup>1</sup> and 3) the use of Hagar among Womanist theologians in African American culture has produced a variety of ways to appropriate this text to women suffering from exploitation and abuse.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, I anticipated that initiating the contextual Bible study process with the story of Hagar would help to develop rapport with the women and interest among the women in the research project.

The story of Hagar is significant to the research because the greatest amount of data from the twenty-six contextual Bible study sessions that I conducted with the women was generated from this Biblical story. The Hagar story also had the unintended consequence of serving as a catalyst by which the women were able to share their stories of how they became involved in prostitution. I did not anticipate this outcome; however, the data shows that this story helped the women to recount the various circumstances and situations they faced during their prelude into prostitution. Emerging themes will be highlighted as the data are presented, and these themes will be brought into discussion with the various strands of theology outlined in the literature review with reference to the primary research question.

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<sup>1</sup> *Unashamed: The Journey to Hope* [DVD], Director D. Kaulback, Toronto, Canada, Listen Up TV Productions, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> According to Dolores S. Williams, African Americans have appropriated the Biblical figure Hagar to their lives for over two-hundred years. See 'Hagar in African American Appropriation,' in *Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 172.

### **Experiences of Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness**

When I left my aunt's place, there was no one that I knew and I didn't even know Amharic very well. I was very lonely although there were so many people around and I was hungry and I couldn't ask anyone for food. I slept out, and it is very difficult when you face something you haven't faced before in your life. I stood there [on the street] and I was confused. I considered my self being in one of the caves in my home place than in Addis. I felt very lonely even though there were people around me.<sup>3</sup>

This story was shared by one of the EWAR women participating in the Hagar Bible study in response to the question, 'Have you ever felt in your life that you are in a desert? Not physically, but have you ever felt that there is nothing around you?'<sup>4</sup> When I originally drafted this question in my discussion guide for this study, I did anticipate that some of the women would draw a parallel between a desert-experience and the circumstances that preceded their entrance into prostitution in Addis Ababa; however, this is the time period in several women's lives that they chose to reflect upon when answering this question.

The young woman who shared the story above (who will now be called Saba) had been under the care of her aunt, and while she did not share the exact reasons why she left her aunt's home, her leaving resulted in her coming to an unfamiliar place: the streets of Addis Ababa. Although Saba was not objectively alone or isolated, she recounted her feelings of loneliness while in the midst of people around her: these were people to whom she could not communicate some of her most basic needs (food and shelter). This experience of loneliness while surrounded by people was significant for Saba, as she used the phrase 'people around her' twice when recounting her story. With nowhere to go, Saba slept 'out' (on the street) and she recalled the difficulties of confronting a situation she had never encountered before: '*it is very difficult when you face something in your life that you haven't faced before in your life.*'<sup>5</sup>

Saba's sense of bewilderment at her circumstances is captured in her use of the word 'confused' when reflecting on her experience of standing on the street. Saba related her first days on the streets to a desert-like experience and admitted that she preferred living in a cave in the part of Ethiopia that she came from to standing on the streets of Addis Ababa engaged in prostitution. Saba's use of the word *confusion* is an appropriate descriptor when examining the factors that she had to cope with in her new

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<sup>3</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016: 6, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



surroundings: hunger, sleeping outside, and her inability to communicate with those around her. The mention of caves is notable as caves are predominantly located in the rural areas of Ethiopia. A cave in Saba's hometown seemed more hospitable in that moment than sleeping on the streets of Addis Ababa where she could not even communicate her need for food.

A sense of community characterises life in Africa and this moves people, particularly women, to care for strangers, those who are sick and in need, widows, the disabled, and others deemed vulnerable.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it is understandable that Saba experienced an acute sense of loneliness and isolation after leaving her aunt's home. Despite being surrounded by many people, no one present on the street corner where she stood demonstrated the kind of care for Saba that would have communicated a sense of community to her. She had no relational tie to the people passing by her or any sense of place or belonging in this unfamiliar context. African cultures emphasise that 'a human being is born into a human community, and that is what makes him or her human.'<sup>7</sup> Saba was alone, and to be alone in the Ethiopian context can be interpreted as being a non-person.<sup>8</sup>

This equation of isolation with non-personhood is reflected in African Womanist Christian anthropology inasmuch as it takes African culture seriously and recognises life as life-in-community.<sup>9</sup> Within the Ethiopian context, life-in-community is appropriated through the significant emphasis placed on greetings. Whether encountering a life-long friend, or a brand-new acquaintance on the street, greetings will usually last for several minutes, and these serve to convey the message, 'I see you; therefore, you are human.'<sup>10</sup> Failure to greet a person appropriately can be a source of great offense in Ethiopian culture.

When Saba recounted her experience of standing on the streets surrounded by people, she did not mention anyone approaching her and greeting her. This is an

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<sup>6</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2001), 34.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Participant observations from living in Ethiopia and conversing with my Ethiopian colleagues, 2014-2016.

<sup>9</sup> David Kirwa Tarus, 'Theology of social Transformation in the Theological Works of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,' *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33, no.1 (2014): 7.

<sup>10</sup> Participant observations from living in Ethiopia and conversing with my Ethiopian colleagues, 2014-2016.

important omission because had someone greeted her, she would have experienced a sense of acknowledgement rather than of invisibility. Her repetition of the phrase ‘people around’ underscores how confusing this experience was for her; she stated ‘*It is difficult when you face a situation you haven’t faced before in your life.*’<sup>11</sup> In Africa, it is rare for people to define themselves without reference to their immediate or extended family;<sup>12</sup> therefore, it is understandable that Saba experienced deep loneliness and confusion after leaving her aunt’s home and finding herself on the streets of Addis Ababa.

Another woman in the Hagar Flamingo session (the name Fikir will now be used) shared the following story in response to the question, ‘Has any one of you been chased out of the house? Thrown out?’:<sup>13</sup>

My uncle brought me to Addis [Ababa from Hwassa] promising that he will educate me, but he never sent me to school. He used to beat me daily then I run [to Hawassa] and began working in a house as a maid.<sup>14</sup>

The woman went on to share that after growing up in the town of Hawassa (southern Ethiopia) working as a housemaid, she met another uncle in that town and he sent her back to Addis Ababa to look for her brothers who were then working in Addis Ababa. When she found her brothers, they were not able to host her so she returned to the uncle in Hawassa. However, as did the first uncle who brought her to Addis Ababa under the guise of educational opportunities, this second uncle also refused to send her to school. Fikir went on to say:

Then I met a girl who was in the same kind of problem as I was, and we agreed to run away and be on the streets. We heard that there was a place around Kolfe [area of Addis Ababa] where women do business [prostitution]. So we went. When we got to the place we asked the women and they told us there is a job. When we asked what we are supposed to do, they told us we stand at the door and do short or overnight. I had no idea what they were talking about but my friend did. She had been in the business before. At first, I decided not to do such business but the woman [pimp] encouraged me and taught me how to do it, so I became one of them. I used to give every coin I make to that woman [pimp] for I was young and did not really know money.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>12</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ‘A Church in Dialogue as the Family of God,’ *e-Publications@Marquette* 1, no. 1 (1995): 35.

<sup>13</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session Flamingo Women, 26/09/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4

<sup>15</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session Flamingo Women, 26/09/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

After several journeys characterized by running between Hawassa and Addis Ababa, Fikir found herself unable to secure a permanent dwelling with family members or a means for attending school. Fikir recounted running to Addis Ababa with another young woman facing a similar predicament. The two girls decided to go to a red-light area in Addis Ababa; however, based on how she told her story, it seemed that Fikir lacked clarity regarding the type of ‘business’ that was being practiced in this part of town: *‘we asked what we are supposed to do.’*

A common theme that emerged throughout several of the Bible studies I conducted (not just the Hagar sessions) was the women admitting that before becoming involved in prostitution, although they had heard about prostitution and that it was a way to earn an income, they were unaware of what prostitution actually entailed: exchanging sexual acts for payment. This explains why Fikir described having to ask the pimp what she was supposed to do: *‘stand at the door and do short or overnight.’*<sup>16</sup> Fikir spoke of her confusion regarding what was being asked of her, *‘I had no idea what they were talking about’*<sup>17</sup> and once she received clarification, she was resistant to take up her new job. However, due to the necessity of meeting her basic needs as a homeless young woman on the streets of Addis Ababa, this young woman reluctantly became *‘one of them.’*<sup>18</sup> Fikir’s confusion about what prostitution entailed is highlighted in her reference to giving all the proceeds she earned to the pimp, *‘I used to give every coin I earn to that woman [pimp] for I was young and did not really know money.’*<sup>19</sup> Fikir’s story suggests that a significant degree of confusion marked her entry into prostitution.

### **Discussion of Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness**

Leaving/running, confusion, and loneliness are themes that Saba and Fikir highlighted as they related their stories of entry into prostitution to Hagar’s foray into the desert. Saba and Fikir described the streets of Addis Ababa (where they began prostitution) as a place where they experienced hunger, homelessness, linguistic challenges, and confusion as to what *shekela* (‘doing business’) actually meant. Similar to Hagar, both women left familiar places for an unknown destination: Neither Saba nor Fikir had premeditated plans to engage in street prostitution, just as Hagar had not planned to find

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

herself near a spring in the desert (Genesis 16:7) or the Desert of Beersheba (Genesis 21:14).

On Womanist Theologian Dolores Williams' account, leaving and running in the Hagar story are emblematic of risk-tasking: 'She [Hagar] takes the risk rather than endure more brutal treatment by Sarai ... she has run off into the wilderness as a lone woman without family support or protection.'<sup>20</sup> Hagar finds herself running and alone just as Saba and Fikir did. Phyllis Trible commends Hagar for 'taking command of her own life under the threat of Sarai.'<sup>21</sup> Both Williams and Trible interpret Hagar's running as an action of survival, an attempt to preserve her life. While Saba was not forthcoming about why she left her aunt's home, it is clear that both Saba and Fikir were seeking survival on the streets of Addis Ababa when they left their families.

Williams notes how African American women resonate with the themes of survival-struggle, poverty, and oppression that are highlighted in the Hagar story and that 'God helped them make a way out of no way.'<sup>22</sup> Williams notes that 'God is not only involved in the women's survival struggle, but also that God supports their struggle for life, which making a way suggests.'<sup>23</sup> Williams' interpretation can be applied to Saba and Fikir's stories as 'trying to make a way' when they found themselves on the streets of Addis Ababa, trying to figure out how to engage in prostitution. Both women sought to secure the basic means of life when they found themselves outside their families, the traditional African unit tasked with sustaining life.<sup>24</sup>

When theologising about the contentious issue of HIV/AIDS, African theologians have stressed the sanctity of life and that as a result of God being the Creator of life, life is good and should be made good when it is threatened by evil.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, actions taken to protect life such as undergoing Anti-Retroviral Treatments (ARTs) by those infected by HIV/AIDS are encouraged. Saba and Fikir's turn to prostitution as a means

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<sup>20</sup> Dolores S. Williams, 'Hagar's Story: A Route to Black Women's Issues,' in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993): 19-20.

<sup>21</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Dolores S. Williams, 'Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation,' in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letter Russell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 177.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Orobator, *op cit.*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, 'Christian theology of life, death and healing in an era of antiretroviral therapy: reflections on the responses of some Botswana churches,' *African Journal of AIDS Research* 9, no. 4 (2010): 433, <http://dx.doi.org/10/2989/16085906.2010.545658>.

of survival is not be analogised to taking ARTs; rather, the point being made is that precisely because life is considered sacred, in the case of these two young women, actions such as prostitution can be viewed as an attempt to preserve their lives when they faced life-threatening circumstances such as hunger, homelessness, and a lack of family. Hagar's foray into the desert was precipitated by Sarai's harsh treatment;<sup>26</sup> she was fleeing the person who threatened her life. Hagar fled twice to a desert, a place known for its inhospitable climate and limited means for preserving life. Saba and Fikir equated desert experiences in their lives with finding themselves on the streets of Addis Ababa, places where they encountered loneliness and confusion about what was entailed in prostitution, the means of survival available to them in that moment.

### **Stories of Pregnancy**

The topic of pregnancy surfaced frequently during the Hagar Bible study sessions. The level of discussion indicated the ability of the women to appropriate Hagar's story to their own. Pregnancy forms a major part of the plot line in the story of Hagar, and pregnancy is not uncommon among women who have experienced prostitution in Addis Ababa. The following stories will now be shared in the context of how the themes of leaving/running, confusion, and loneliness intersected with participants' experiences of pregnancy.

### **Pregnancy and Prostitution**

The man who lived with me chased me out when I got pregnant and I became a prostitute after nine years of marriage. I gave my baby to my parents so that she does not see that I am a prostitute. I don't want her to learn this which I do for a living.<sup>27</sup>

The woman who shared this story, who will be called Hiwot, was responding to the question, 'Has any one of you been chased out of the house? Thrown out?'<sup>28</sup>

Hiwot's statement of becoming '*a prostitute after 9 years of marriage*'<sup>29</sup> is notable because it speaks to her role and status in Ethiopian society. Marriage is the expected social status for adult Ethiopian women and it confers significant respect on

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<sup>26</sup> The Hebrew word (*'nh*) used for 'afflict' in Genesis 16:7, has a strong connotation and is the same word used to characterise the suffering of the entire Hebrew population in Egypt, the land of bondage. See Tribble, *op cit.*, 13.

<sup>27</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session Flamingo Women, 26/9/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

women within the hierarchical society of Ethiopia.<sup>30</sup> Although wives appear to be subordinate in the culture, they also effectively influence the direction of the family, as encapsulated in the Ethiopian proverb: ‘a man who is sent or advised by a woman has no fear of death.’<sup>31</sup> A woman married for as long as Hiwot who now must provide for her needs through prostitution signifies a substantial reduction of status. Hiwot was no longer under the protection of her husband’s household or under his absolute authority<sup>32</sup> and she was put in a vulnerable position, similar to that of Hagar when she fled from Abram and Sarai’s household. In the Ancient Near East, slaves like Hagar had special protections in the household of their masters, and in Genesis 21, after leaving with her son Ishmael, Hagar no longer had access to the economic resources and protection she needed in a nomadic culture in which men ruled families, tribes, and clans.<sup>33</sup>

Coupled with having given up her child, Hiwot was no longer a wife or a mother. Hiwot’s decision to have her parents raise her child accords with the life-preserving theme of ‘mothering’ that runs throughout African Womanist theology: ‘the indescribable provision for the sustenance of life ... God’s hospitality to humanity.’<sup>34</sup> In the mothering characterisation, God is viewed as nurturing and mentoring a child as a compassionate mother.<sup>35</sup> Hiwot engages in mothering her child in order to ensure that her daughter is not exposed to prostitution; she was committed to preserving the life of her child.

Another woman, who will be called Seble, answered the same question in the following way:

When I was 8 months pregnant, the father of my child chased me out saying that the child was not his. I only had the clothes I wore. It was around Sebategna area [outskirts of Addis Ababa] and I stayed on the streets for three days.<sup>36</sup>

Seble’s story parallels Hiwot’s story of having to leave her home after becoming pregnant, with Seble detailing her husband’s accusation of the pregnancy being the result of infidelity. Analogous to Hagar’s being accused of despising her mistress, Sarai

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<sup>30</sup> Field Notes from Focus Group Discussion with Ethiopian Women, 7/2014.

<sup>31</sup> Alemayehu Mekonnen, *Culture and change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum 2013), 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Williams, ‘Route,’ *op cit.*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Oduyoye, *op cit.*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/ 2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

(Genesis 16:5), Seble was charged with committing adultery. These acts formed the ostensive reason both were thrown out of their homes. Both Hagar and Seble had not planned on fleeing their homes; rather, they both fled threats to their lives and found themselves in an unfamiliar place with just the clothes on their backs.

### **Pregnant as a Teenager**

While reflecting on the desert experience of Hagar and why she would have run to a desert, the participants in the session characterised the desert as ‘not easy’ and possessing ‘nothing... only sand, sun, rocks, snakes, scorpions and hyenas.’<sup>37</sup> This description of the desert spurred the following story from a woman who will be called Emebet:

When I was 15 years old and in school, I got pregnant. I couldn’t give birth at home, so I run away when I was three or four month pregnant. I went to a place called Dewalle in the Somali region. It was a desert place. I hitchhiked big trucks that transport fuel. I went to Djibouti, gave birth there and got back here when my girl became 6-months old. I had difficult labour and the people around me talked Somali, Afar, or Arabic. When my girl became 6-months old, I returned back to my mom’s place. This story reminded me of my experience. A desert is a difficult place.<sup>38</sup>

Emebet recalls running to the desert as a pregnant young woman. As an unmarried child (a fifteen-year-old would still be considered a child in Ethiopia) she was unable to tell her family that she was pregnant, as this would have dishonoured her family and brought shame to them.<sup>39</sup> In collectivist cultures<sup>40</sup> the maintenance of honour is critical to a family’s standing in a community and this is compromised when one family member participates in an act the community considers shameful. This shame falls on every member of that family.

In order to preserve her family honour, Emebet embarked completely alone on what could be classified as a dangerous journey (hitchhiking on fuel trucks) into a foreign land where different languages were spoken around her. Emebet implies themes

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Highly collectivist cultures value absolute loyalty to the group, which is often the immediate and extended family. Individuals are expected always to act in the best interest of the group in order to accrue honour for the entire group. The individual also holds obligations toward the group, including protecting its reputation in the community. See Myron W. Lustig and Jolene Koester, *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures, Seventh Edition* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 108-109.

<sup>40</sup> Philip F. Esler, ‘Family Imagery and Christian Identity in Gal 5:13 to 6:10,’ in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. Halvor Moxnes (London, Routledge, 1997), 124.

of loneliness and confusion when she says, ‘*I had difficult labour and the people around me talked Somali, Afar, or Arabic*’<sup>41</sup> for there was no one around her with whom she could communicate when going through labour. Unlike the other women’s stories that have been shared, Emebet left the desert and returned to her mother’s house when the child was six months old, presumably at a point when she believes that she may have been welcomed back into her family. Emebet’s story draws attention to the fact that when pregnancy occurs outside marriage, it can become a reason for a woman to leave her familiar surroundings and place herself in a dangerous and highly unfamiliar environment (both socially and linguistically), one similar to a desert. As Williams points out, survival in the desert required hospitality, for it is ‘hardly a place where a lone woman and child ought to be wandering without sustenance, shelter, or protection.’<sup>42</sup> Emebet was able to return and receive once again hospitality—the means of life—from her family.

A woman who will be called Meheret shared the following story of being chased out her home:

I left the house when I was still a child. My mom (step-mom) was a drunkard and my elder sister also. Our dad lived away on work. My mom used to insult and beat us and finally I was forced to leave the house due to the ongoing dispute [conflict]. I used to work for neighbours to go to school. I got pregnant and got a baby, but the father [of the baby] did not support me.<sup>43</sup>

As did Emebet, Meheret recalled leaving her home as a child due to an abusive situation which ‘*forced [her] to leave home.*’<sup>44</sup> Meheret described a situation of leaving that was not entirely of her own choice as a means of survival ‘*due to the ongoing dispute.*’<sup>45</sup> Meheret leaving her home results in pregnancy and single-motherhood due to a lack of any kind of support from the child’s father. As a young mother without any support or education Meheret would have had to find a way to support herself and the child. All of these circumstances would be considered destabilising forces in the African understanding of family with its emphasis on unity, solidarity, participation, co-responsibility, mutual aid and place where life is ‘welcomed, nurtured, and revered.’<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, ‘Route,’ *op cit.* 30.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session Flamingo Women, 26/9/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Orobator, *op cit.*, 36.



Instead of welcoming her child into a traditional family, Meheret was forced to leave her relatives and look to the survival of her new family of two.

### **Pregnant and Alone**

One woman, who will be called Tiru, responded to Hagar's flight to the desert, a place of 'nothing'<sup>47</sup> as characterised by Meheret above, as follows:

My second desert experience was when I give birth to my child there was no one who would bring me food. I was so hungry after I gave birth. It was in Tirunesh hospital, in Akaki [Addis Ababa]. I started laboring on Thursday and gave birth on Monday. They had an IV on me. There [were] people, Chinese, faranjis [foreigners], around me but how can [I] ask them? When I went to the hospital I had few baby clothes so when the hospital people ask for my family to bring more clothes, there was no one. I had no family. In my room there was a lady who had given birth but her child has died so when I couldn't bear the hunger anymore I asked her to give me some food. These were the two occasions that were deserts for me.<sup>48</sup>

As a result of Tiru's being alone when she gave birth, there was no one to help her meet her most basic needs, including food. Tiru was in a hospital in Addis Ababa, surrounded by people from different countries and unable to ask for help. '*How can I ask them?*'<sup>49</sup> This experience of being surrounded by people but unable to communicate due to linguistic limitations is a theme that also surfaced in Saba's story.

When Tiru was asked for the whereabouts of her family after her lengthy labour, she was unable to provide the culturally expected answer: she had no family and no one to ask in her time of recovery and hunger. In most African cultures, after giving birth the mother is showered with gifts by her husband and relatives.<sup>50</sup> The arrival of new life is one of the most celebratory times in a person's life. By contrast, Tiru had no one to share this experience with. In an act of desperation, Tiru approached another woman who had just lost her child. At this point when telling her story, Tiru broke down and began to cry, which suggests that there was much more to this story than her words were able to convey that moment.

The lack of dignity associated with asking this other woman for food is difficult to understand from a Western cultural perspective; however, within the Ethiopian cultural context, this was a humiliating act. To ask a person in mourning for anything is very

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<sup>47</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 81.

countercultural, as grief and mourning are times when members of the community gather around a person and bring basic items (such as coffee and sugar) to the mourning house. The same cultural practice of the community's gathering around a person and providing for their basic needs also applies in the situation of birth.<sup>51</sup> As a result of Tiru's aloneness and in order to meet her own basic needs she resorted to begging from someone in mourning. This would have been a very confusing experience for Tiru, as it broke all the social norms related to mourning; instead of giving to the woman who was mourning the loss of her child, Tiru asked for something from her instead. In the Bible study that day, Tiru's tears communicated her grief regarding the circumstances of her life in that time that had brought her to a point where she was completely alone with no one to ask for help. Loneliness and confusion punctuated Tiru's story.

### **Discussion of Pregnancy: Chased-Out, Confused, and Alone**

The stories of pregnancy featured in the previous section highlighted themes of being chased-out upon becoming pregnant, experiencing a sense of confusion at the circumstances that the women were facing at the time, and feeling alone. Seble and Hiwot identified with Hagar's flight from Sarai's home, being chased out by the authority figure in their households; Emebet and Meheret resonated with Hagar's young age, recounting stories of becoming pregnant as teenagers; and Tiru related her birth experience to Hagar's desert experience, connecting with the loneliness she experienced in that moment.

Being chased-out, confused, and alone are not life-affirming experiences, much less when pregnant, but rather are descriptors that point toward survival: 'making a way out of no way.' Williams points out that Hagar's story has spoken to generations of black women because it has 'been validated as true by suffering black people.'<sup>52</sup> Hagar's struggle for survival has been appropriated to the lives of many women who have experienced rejection and has become a symbol for the oppressed.<sup>53</sup>

The stories of Seble, Hiwot, Emebet, Meheret, and Tiru attest to the suffering they experienced when they became pregnant, and the significant factors they had to overcome in order to survive. Their stories catalogue a variety of oppressive situations that they had to struggle against in order to survive: poverty, homelessness, abuse, and

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<sup>51</sup> I experienced the cultural practices associated with death and birth through the various deaths and births that occurred during the three years I lived in Ethiopia.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, 'Route,' *op cit.*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Tribble, *op cit.*, 28.

power imbalances in their homes that precipitated being chased-out. As a result of these situations, each of the women experienced her pregnancy in a desert-like context comparable to Hagar's literal desert experience.

A significant context for African Womanist theologians is the life experiences of women, how they struggle for survival and 'the sources of the impulses that make them seek to enhance life for others.'<sup>54</sup> Pregnancy was a life experience that caused Seble, Hiwot, Emebet, Meheret, and Tiru not only to struggle for life but also to struggle for the lives of their children. Pregnancy was a life-impulse for these women, one that gave these women the strength to overcome the deserts they found themselves in, just as Hagar did.

### Summary

This chapter has presented data generated from the Hagar contextual Bible studies and highlighted the stories rooted in their social location<sup>55</sup> of prostitution, either experienced in the past (for the EWAR women), or as a current reality in their lives (for the Flamingo Women). Their experiences of prostitution have highlighted the themes of running/leaving, being chased-out, confusion, and loneliness in the Hagar story, and serve as examples of how one's position in society informs and influences the way in which one reads the Bible.<sup>56</sup> The women resonated with Hagar's desert forays, particularly with the fact that hers was an environment filled with challenges that had to be overcome.

The story of Hagar enabled these women to enter into a process of storytelling, a method that has been noted within theological responses to HIV/AIDS to break the silence and stigmatisation that surround those carrying the disease.<sup>57</sup> The character of Hagar enabled these women to reflect on their initial entry into prostitution, their experiences of pregnancy, and the pain and suffering they experienced. These commonalities created a sense of solidarity<sup>58</sup> among the women; as one woman shared,

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<sup>54</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, *op cit.*, 32-33.

<sup>55</sup> Social location is an important factor in the contextual Bible study method, for it takes people's locations in society seriously and examines the various relationships that empower or disempower them. See Muse W. Dube, 'Facing the Challenges of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa: Towards a Theology of Life,' in *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, ed. Musa Dube (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2003), 102.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>57</sup> Martha T. Frederiks, 'HIV and Aids: Mapping Theological Responses in Africa,' *Exchange* 37, (2008): 12.

<sup>58</sup> During contextual Bible studies with those suffering from HIV/AIDS, it has been observed that the group becomes a place of solidarity for the participants involved. See Beverley Haddad,

another was eager to do the same, and they realised that their stories were not unique, and they were not alone. As a result of the resonance between the character of Hagar and the women who participated in the Hagar sessions, and the similarities among the women, they were able to engage reflexively with the Biblical story of Hagar. The stories shared in this chapter reflect the women's ability to appropriate the challenges of Hagar's desert foray to their own lives, although the appearance of a divine figure did not feature in their narratives.

However, one woman, who will be called Meron, relayed her desert experience in the following way:

When I was working and living in Addis, my mistress told me to leave, she chased me out. I spent the night at the church. It was so dark and I was very scared. I thought a hyena will come and eat me. I prayed to God and God sent me someone, a woman who had a similar situation like me. Even the church guards were tempting me and I said to them that I came to the church to sleep and not to have sex with them. That was a difficult moment in my life.<sup>59</sup>

Meron had a divine encounter when experiencing darkness, fear, and danger from the predatory guards surrounding her. Meron cried out in the desert and received an answer. Similar to Hagar who found herself in the wilderness, a place of near destruction, Meron discovered God in a new and profound way.<sup>60</sup> Meron's prayer was answered by the arrival of another woman facing similar circumstances, and Meron was able to overcome that 'difficult moment in her life.'<sup>61</sup>

Inasmuch as it emphasises God's divine action in her life at a time of great need, Meron's story is theological. Musimbi Kanyoro states: 'Theological reflections by women in Africa are still like an oasis in a desert because the number of theologians is still very small ... stories help to discover the interconnection between faith and action.'<sup>62</sup> Meron's theological reflections link her faith in God to her action of prayer. Her story serves as an oasis in the deserts that the women in this chapter have experienced and confirms Phyllis Trible's characterisation of Hagar as a theologian.<sup>63</sup>

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'Reflections on the Church and HIV/AIDS: South Africa,' *Theology Today* 62, (2005): 33, accessed November 13, 2016, [tj.sagepub.com](http://tj.sagepub.com).

<sup>59</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Haddad, *op cit.*, 34.

<sup>61</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, 'Engendered Cultural Hermeneutics: The Power of Story,' in *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002): 91.

<sup>63</sup> Trible, *op cit.*, 18.

Similar to Hagar, who named God as ‘the God who sees me (*El Roi*)’ (Genesis 16:13) and based on this revelation is able to return to the home of Abram and Sarai, Meron was able to articulate what God did for her on that day when she was chased out of her home. Meron’s story is one that articulates the intersection of human and perceived divine intervention: the task of theology.<sup>64</sup>

Chapter Five will continue this process of theologising as data generated from a variety of contextual Bible studies are presented and emerging themes are identified.

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<sup>64</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 18.



## Chapter 5: Presentation of Data

### Introduction

This chapter will continue to present data generated from a variety of different contextual Bible studies that I conducted with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. The stories that were chosen for these sessions were based on their potential to foster discussion among the women; therefore, the following criteria were considered in their selection: 1) a marginalised person, primarily a woman, is featured as one of the main characters; 2) the main character was considered a social outsider, on some level, in the story's context; and 3) the story could easily be relayed in Amharic.

This chapter describes how women affected by prostitution interacted with various Biblical stories, and how their insights reveal their understandings of God, sin and ways to deal with sin, humankind (theological anthropology), and justice. The chapter is organised to highlight these four themes.

The categories selected, while not exhaustive, have been chosen for their pertinence and their potential to answer the primary research question. These explanatory theological categories belong to the standard categorisations in the Biblical and systematic traditions of theology and as such are appropriate lenses through which to view these data.<sup>1</sup> These categories have also been utilised by African Womanist theologians; therefore, I do not seek to impose Western theological traditions on the data; but rather, to organise and reflect on the data in a way already utilised by a variety of Western and non-Western theologians.

### Appropriating Biblical Stories

#### God Is a Protector: 'God protects us and is with us'<sup>2</sup>

This statement emerged during a contextual Bible study session on the story of the birth of Christ, according to the Gospel of Luke and Matthew.<sup>3</sup> The women were responding to the question, 'Why did God tell Joseph to give the baby the name "God Saves"?'

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley J. Grenz says that the Christian theologian seeks to set forth a coherent presentation of the themes of the Christian faith. Traditionally these include God (theology), humankind and the created universe (anthropology), the identity of Jesus (Christology), the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's work both in the individual and in the world (pneumatology), the church as the corporate expression of Christian faith (ecclesiology), and the consummation of God's program for creation (eschatology). See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Scripture passages used: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38, 2.

What meaning does this name give to you?’<sup>4</sup> The woman who made this statement appropriated the name ‘God Saves’ to her own lived experience of God’s presence and protection.

In order to gain an understanding of how women affected by prostitution make sense of who God is, this section will present data that were generated from the following contextual Bible studies: the Christmas story (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38, 2), the story of the woman who was almost stoned to death (John 8), and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).

During the session on the Christmas story, the women were asked to discuss what the name ‘God Saves’ meant to them:

**Translator:** What meaning does this name give you?

**Woman 1:** God is there, he is our protector. The name reminds us.

**Woman 2:** God is our protector. We can’t live without him

**Woman 3:** God protects us and is with us. He is with us so we are protected.<sup>5</sup>

The women did not hesitate to participate in this portion of the discussion, and were quick to give their definition of ‘God Saves.’ Pressed further for stories of God’s saving character in their own lives, every woman in attendance that day responded to the question:

**Translator:** Did you have an experience where you witnessed God’s protection?

**Woman 1:** Whenever we are in trouble we say God save me.

**Woman 3:** We go to church and when bad things happen we say God save us, and every morning we say God be with us.

**Woman 4:** This neighbourhood is difficult. People throw stones, and when a stone misses us we say God protected us.<sup>6</sup>

The respondents to this question testified to invoking the name of God when in a perilous situation. This is significant as it speaks to the theocentric worldview characteristic on the African continent and the belief that God is present to human beings.<sup>7</sup> Woman 4’s comment reflects an ability to see God’s protective action in the daily challenges she faces in her life. Woman 4 then elaborated that in the Flamingo

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<sup>4</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2001), 46.



community, women in prostitution are often the target of teenagers and/or drunken men throwing stones at them while shouting insulting, derogatory words about their work:

A stone was thrown to me and it missed me and hit my friend's eye. She got sick for many days.<sup>8</sup>

Another woman shared a different type of story:

I always have easy delivery (child birth). No pain. Once when I was in hospital, someone came and sat by my bed thinking I was his daughter. When he discovered he was wrong, he asked me if I have people with me and when I told him I do not, he bought my baby clothes.<sup>9</sup>

Normally when a woman gives birth in an Ethiopian hospital, family members bring meals and are always present in the room of their loved one during visiting hours. It would be highly abnormal in Ethiopian culture to leave a relative who has just given birth completely alone.<sup>10</sup> After discovering this unusual situation, this man provided tangible care to this woman through the purchasing of clothes for her child. This man saw the situation of this woman and responded in a manner that clearly provided practical care for this child, and he comforted this woman in her time of loneliness. This woman classified the actions of this man within the realm of her lived experiences of God's protection in her life. It is interesting to note that her story derived from the birth of one of her children, which suggests that this woman was able to appropriate one of the key elements of the Christmas story, the birth of Jesus, to her own life.

### **Identifying with Mary**

During the contextual Bible study on the birth of Christ, the women focused on the age at which Mary became pregnant and related this detail to when they had first become pregnant. For example, one woman shared in the context of the discussion that she became pregnant at fourteen years of age.<sup>11</sup> The women in the group went on to engage in a lengthy discussion about abortion: '*if it was us, we would have run for abortion.*'<sup>12</sup> When this thought was probed, several of the women shared their own stories of abortion:

**Woman 1:** I have aborted in the past. Nothing happened to me, but now since I sleep with many men, it is dangerous for my womb.

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<sup>8</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> I witnessed this first-hand during the birth of my research informant's son at the Korean Hospital in Addis Ababa in 10/2016.

<sup>11</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

**Woman 2:** I aborted since I lived with my parents and afraid of being rejected [by my parents].

**Woman 3:** We abort because we feel shame, and afraid of how to look after it without a father.<sup>13</sup>

Shame, fear of rejection, and fear of how to care for a child without a father are the reasons that were articulated by the women who had undergone an abortion procedure in their past. At this point in the discussion, a wistfulness and sadness could be detected in their tone of voice as they remembered their past experiences. The story of the birth of Christ catalysed a discussion about the place of abortion in the lived experiences of the women, and caused the women to reflect on what Mary may have experienced in that moment of learning she was pregnant:

**Translator:** What do you think Mary felt when she knew she was pregnant? Do you think she felt Joseph will be willing to marry her?

**Woman 1:** If it is God's will, yes.

**Translator:** When Joseph found out she was pregnant before his dream, what did he feel?

**Woman 1:** Since [he might believe she] got pregnant from someone else, he might hate her.

**Woman 2:** He will reject her.<sup>14</sup>

The women had no trouble inhabiting the inner thoughts of Joseph toward his fiancée, which connects to how single parenthood and unplanned pregnancy are viewed in Ethiopian contexts.

### **Birth Stories**

When the women were asked if they remembered the place where they gave birth to their first child, they responded as follows:

**Woman 1:** Before nine year, I went to a place and paid nine birr for the bed. The house was poorly constructed. The rain filled the room and the bed, but nothing happened to me. Those days, people never rented a room to women who have babies. But I was allowed.

**Woman 2:** I was a prostitute when I gave birth and I used the business room for delivery also. I was not worried since God helps the poor.

**Woman 3:** I gave birth to my son, the son I lost, in a prostitute's house since I could not find a place for rent. The catholic moms (Sisters of Charity) helped me and gave me room to stay in. I tried to work as [a] maid to raise him up and he died after two years.

**Woman 4:** The woman where I rented a room helped me a lot. I gave birth to my first baby there. That woman did not even make me pay rent for the room. After a year, I left to start to work.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

It is important to note that every woman in attendance was eager to share her story at this point; this did not always happen in our studies. Three of the women make reference to the less-than-ideal circumstances they experienced at the time of their delivery, with particular attention to the physical location where they gave birth. Similar to the story of the birth of Christ, these women gave birth in culturally unusual locales that were associated with low social status, even with ill repute, a lack of hygiene, and poverty. When reflecting on Jesus' birth in the stable, one woman said:

No, not good [to be born in a stable], but there are those that give birth on the road, you birth in God's hand. For the poor, any place is a place of birth.<sup>16</sup>

This statement suggests that this woman identified with the social unacceptability of the place where Jesus was born and appropriates this to her own context of poverty where '*any place is a place of birth.*'<sup>17</sup> Because of her belief that '*you birth in God's hands,*'<sup>18</sup> to her thinking there is no delivery room that is beyond God's reach. Her conviction coalesces with how African Womanist theologians speak of God as 'always present in human affairs ... as the one who takes the side of the weak and vulnerable.'<sup>19</sup> Each of the stories presented in this section points to the women's lived experience of God as a protector, and their ability to appropriate the story of the birth of Christ to their lives, particularly the character of Mary in her time of childbirth.

### **God Does Not Judge**

During a contextual Bible study on the story of the woman who was almost stoned to death (John 8) the women were asked, 'If Jesus forgave the woman, do you think he will forgive you, too?' One woman replied:

Yes, we think he will forgive us. He is not like man. Also if he forgives us, we will be out of this life and not stay in it.<sup>20</sup>

This woman distinguishes between what she believes God will do for her compared to what a person would do. This theme of contrasting the actions of Jesus with those of people in the community are reflected as well in the following exchange:

**Translator:** How did Jesus see her?

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<sup>15</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing, op cit.*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

**Woman 1:** In a good way.

**Woman 2:** He didn't hate her as people did.

**Woman 3:** In a different way [to the society]. He wanted her to turn back from sin and live.<sup>21</sup>

The women discussed the contrast between Jesus' posture toward the woman in the story—who was classified as a sinner and adulterer about to be stoned to death—to the posture of the people of that day. The women highlighted the positive manner in which Jesus viewed this woman, and Woman 2 highlighted the fact that Jesus did not hate her as the people about to stone the woman possibly did. Woman 3 articulated her belief that Jesus wanted the woman to live, compared to the crowd who were calling for her death that day.

The John 8 story enabled the women to reflect on experiences in their own lives where they were treated in a countercultural manner that pointed toward the love of God, rather than the judgment of God. The following statements were in response to the question, 'Has anyone come to you and told you something about your life in the past like a prophet?'<sup>22</sup>

Once a young man told me that God loves me and told me to go back to the Lord I believed before.<sup>23</sup>

Another woman shared:

Once when I was pregnant, in the evening at 10 pm four guys came to kill me and I ran and went to church in the morning. In the morning in [the] church service, the pastor called me out and told me what had happened to me in the evening and told me that God loves me and took care of me.<sup>24</sup>

In this passage, the woman recounted a perilous situation while in prostitution, where she was forced to flee from her attackers and consequently ended up in a church. In the morning, the pastor not only recounted what had happened the night before to the woman, but also made a pronouncement of God's love for her. The pastor did not judge the woman for the situation she found herself in, or scold her for the occupational hazards that her job lent itself to, but moved forward with a demonstration of practical care to this woman in her time of need (in Amharic, *took care of me* implies practical care). In this highly vulnerable and traumatising situation, this woman did not

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<sup>21</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session EWAR Women, 12/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

experience the judgement of God through this pastor; rather, she experienced God's presence and care.

This theme of God not acting as a judge further surfaced in the Bible study on the Samaritan woman (John 4):

**Translator:** In the story, the Teacher knew everything about her life. Do you think God knows everything about you and He sees what you do?

**Woman 1:** Yes, we know we are alive because of Him.

**Translator:** Do you think God judges you?

**Woman 2:** No, God does not judge us, but we know a day will come for us to be free.

**Translator:** Do you think God judges you for what you do?

**Woman 1:** No, I know a day will come for me to lead a better life.

**Woman 2:** No, it may take time, but He will come for us.

**Woman 3:** He thinks good for us.<sup>25</sup>

Although these women believe that God is aware that they are engaged in prostitution, none of the respondents thought that this reality served as grounds for them to be judged by God. In addition, Woman 1 attributed her very existence to God, and the other respondents articulated their belief that God would come to them and bring about a better life for them by granting them freedom from the life they were then living.

#### **Discussion: God Is a Protector**

The excerpts highlighted from the contextual Bible study sessions on the stories of the birth of Christ, the woman almost stoned to death, and the Samaritan woman indicate that these women believed strongly in God's presence in their lives (which fits with the observation that Africans live in a spiritual universe<sup>26</sup>). The story of the birth of Christ catalysed stories of childbirth, particularly birth events that occurred while the women were engaged in prostitution. Child-bearing is central to African women's self-image<sup>27</sup> and this may have been one of the reasons why the women were able to appropriate the character of Mary, particularly her vulnerability and the unconventional way in which she had to give birth, to their own stories of childbirth. Despite the challenging circumstances the women faced while giving birth, they expressed their belief in God's sovereignty in these moments through statements like, '*birth happens in His hands.*'<sup>28</sup> This belief aligns with the African theological perspective of God: 'the universe belongs

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<sup>25</sup> Transcript of the Samaritan Woman Session Flamingo Women, 6/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6

<sup>26</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>28</sup> Transcript of Christmas Story Session Flamingo Women, 19/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 6

to God who created it and [there] is an interdependence of God's world and God's people.'<sup>29</sup>

The story of the woman who was almost stoned to death facilitated further discussion related to God's protection. One woman shared:

God is here with us. When we are facing big problems, we cry out to him. We do that because we believe he is with us.<sup>30</sup>

Another woman said:

God is always with us. We call upon his name and cry before him asking when he will take us out of this life and make us equal with others. Sometimes I say to God, 'if you don't take me out of this life, I will not believe in you anymore.' I believe God reaches out to anyone who calls on him.<sup>31</sup>

These statements fit with an African Womanist understanding of God, which 'underlines the expectation that God will hear our cries and [will] come to our rescue.'<sup>32</sup> In the midst of encountering inequality within their communities, due to their engagement with prostitution, these woman did not doubt that God is present with them; rather, they expressed their hope that the God they are crying out to will one day hear and respond to their desire to be free from a life of prostitution.

This theme of hope in God to bring them out of prostitution was also expressed in the session on the Samaritan woman, where the women highlighted their belief that God does not judge them for being engaged in prostitution. This story enabled the women to express their understanding of God as relational, as Someone they can communicate with, which is why they continue to call out to Him in times of need. This crying resonates with African Womanist theologians who assert that '...God heard our cry, saw our discomfiture, saw us distraught and under oppressors, and liberated us. This liberation is for a purpose; it is in the plan of God to make us truly human.'<sup>33</sup> Analogous to Hagar, the women sensed that God sees them in their current situation, and while a new life may not be imminent, they hold out hope that one day He will come to rescue them from the lives they are currently living.

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<sup>29</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 14.

<sup>30</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads*, 23.

The three contextual Bible study sessions referenced in this section suggest that women affected by prostitution view God as a Protector because of their lived experiences, and while this finding may not be unique to women affected by prostitution, it is notable that they described their lived experiences of prostitution as a reference point for their description of God as a Protector. The women appropriated stories from their lives that facilitated discussion related to God's protection and presence in their lives, particularly in vulnerable and difficult situations. The women also expressed their hope for a future life outside of prostitution. This hope supports a view of God, also held by African Womanist theologians, as a relational Liberator who hears the cries of His people and will respond.

### **Self-Identification as a Sinner: *'We know we are sinners'*<sup>34</sup>**

A review of the data generated by all the study sessions shows that the topic of sin appeared consistently in the sessions on the following Bible stories: the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-50); the story of Joseph (Genesis); the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4); the crippled woman healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17); the rape of the concubine (Judges 19); and the woman who was almost stoned to death (John 8). During the session on Luke 7:36-50, the women were asked to appropriate the story of the woman who anointed Jesus to their lives:

**Translator:** In Ethiopia, who are the leaders like those religious leaders in Jesus' time?

**Woman 1:** The rich people and elders hate us and consider us dirty.<sup>35</sup>

**Woman 2:** They [religious leaders and the community] think and say that we are poor and made ourselves dirty so they don't want to be associated with us.<sup>36</sup>

**Translator:** When you look at yourself in the mirror, how do you look at yourself? Like the way the religious leaders looked at you or like the woman who is forgiven and accepted by God?

**Woman 2:** We know we are sinners and we know that he is able to deliver us from our sinfulness.<sup>37</sup>

These comments were shared by the women when reflecting on how the religious leaders at Simon's house viewed the woman who took an alabaster jar of perfume and poured the contents over Jesus' feet. The participants in this study classified themselves

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<sup>34</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Review Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

as dirty, having made themselves dirty (through engaging in prostitution), and they therefore considered themselves sinners. The use of the word ‘dirty’ in close proximity to the word ‘sin/sinner’ is a recurring theme in several of the contextual Bible studies. For example, the frequency of their use of the word ‘dirty’ (four times in one of the anointing woman sessions) is notable as it used by the women to describe how others view them, and how they characterise their lives.

The use of the verb ‘deliver’ is significant, particularly with reference to the nouns ‘dirty life’ and ‘our sinfulness.’ The word ‘deliver’ in this context points to an attribute of God, an action associated with divine intervention and suggestive that God is the only one who can remove these women from ‘this dirty life/our sinfulness.’

### **Correlating Prostitution with Sin: ‘Our job is not clean’<sup>38</sup>**

The association between prostitution and uncleanness or sin generated so much discussion that the Luke 7 story carried over into another session. In the second session, the women discussed their reasons for not attending church:

**Woman 1:** My job is not good.

**Woman 2:** I am not clean, I sleep with men, not good for me.

**Woman 3:** Our job is not clean.

**Woman 4:** God does not like our job.<sup>39</sup>

Prostitution viewed as a barrier to attending church services is something that will be explored more fully in Chapter Six, but for the purposes of this section it is important to note how these women describe their work: not good, not clean, not good for them (me), and something that God does not like. These descriptions are value-laden in that these women are assessing their perception of the right and wrong implied in what they do, categories they would have learned at a young age. In Ethiopia, children are taught at a young age to distinguish between good and bad, what to do and what not to do, what to believe and what not to believe.<sup>40</sup>

Woman 4 goes as far to say that God does not like or approve of her job. While based only on the data presented above it is difficult to ascertain if this is an ascribed value this woman has received from society or an internally held value by this woman, it would be fair to say that over the twenty-six sessions that I held with these women as

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<sup>38</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4-5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Alemayehu Mekonnen, *Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum Studies in Mission), 44.



a participant-observer, their self-identification with uncleanness and God's assumed displeasure with their jobs is something that surfaced frequently.

During a contextual Bible study on the crippled woman who was healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), which included discussion of the religious and cultural barriers that Jesus transgressed in order to heal people, a discussion regarding barriers to church attendance for these women took place. One woman characterized her work as '*sexually impure and [it] is adultery.*'<sup>41</sup> Another woman stated that, '*currently we are in adultery and we do know that we live in sin.*'<sup>42</sup>

At the conclusion of a contextual Bible study on the story of the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) where the women were asked what they learned from the story, several of the women spoke about the importance of teaching and advising their children not to do bad things, based on their reflections on the actions of Amnon. One woman remarked:

We are adulterers, but we have something to say about this life when we are out of this life.<sup>43</sup>

The women spoke of their self-identification with sin as a result of their work in prostitution with remarkable candour, hinting at the temporary nature of this status. Every time the women identified themselves as sinners, involved with sin, living a dirty life, or being an adulterer, they used present tense verbs, reflecting a lack of permanency associated with these terms. Other research conducted in Addis Ababa also supports the idea that women in prostitution view their work as temporary rather than life-long.<sup>44</sup> These women do not feel fated or doomed to the status of 'sinner, adulterer, having a bad/unclean job' forever; rather, once leaving this job, they hope to be able to shed this identification.

### **Sinful to the Point of Non-Humanness: '*Am I this dirty?*'<sup>45</sup>**

The affiliation of prostitution with dirtiness/uncleanliness has caused some women to question their own value. During a contextual Bible study with the EWAR Women on the story of the woman who was almost stoned (John 8), the women were asked, 'Does

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<sup>41</sup> Transcript of the Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Pt. I Session Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of the Rape of Tamar Session Flamingo Women, 19/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Bethlehem Tekola states that women are reacting to situations of economic misery. See Bethlehem Tekola, *Poverty and the Social Context of Sex Work in Addis Ababa: An Anthropological Perspective* ((Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2005), 34.

<sup>45</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session EWAR Women, 12/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

the society you live in have the right to call you dirty and belittle you?’<sup>46</sup> One woman shared how people used to think of her as dirt under their nail and how much this used to hurt her. She used to ask herself, ‘*Am I this dirty?*’<sup>47</sup> While in prostitution, this woman was subjected to insulting words by her surrounding community as they referred to her as the dirt under their nails.

In the same study, the women were asked, ‘Has anyone said some bad things to you? They won’t stone you, but have you had such an experience? Was there a time when they wanted to punish you with their words and actions?’<sup>48</sup> One woman shared the following story:

I have an experience that I won’t forget. One day, the police took us all and put us on the back of their pick-up truck and one of them said, ‘drop this garbage/trash at the dumping site.’ Most of us were hurt by his comment and we cried hard. Whenever I see a policeman I always remember the remark. [A] stone being thrown at me was easier. I considered as if I died.<sup>49</sup>

Another woman replied:

It happened to me by my mother-in-law. She said things that I don’t want to repeat here. She called me ‘*shermuta*’ (adulterer). She also said so many bad words and I cried so hard. I felt so bad and sad. When I think of her today, I remember the words she said to me.<sup>50</sup>

These two women recount stories in their lives where they were made to feel less than human because they worked as prostitutes. The first woman was rounded up in a standard prostitution bust, as often happens on the streets of Addis Ababa, and the policeman set about to dispose of these women as they would a bag of garbage: at the city dump. The dehumanising comment had a negative impact on all the women in the truck that evening, as evidenced by the hurt and tears that they experienced together. The extent to which one woman was made to feel less than human in that moment is captured in her statement, ‘*I considered as if I had died.*’ The comment by the policeman brought this woman to the brink of her own self-conception as a human being. The woman equates the pronouncement of the policeman with one of the stones that was almost thrown at the woman in the John 8 story, and surmises that a physical stone might have been easier to bear than the pain inflicted by the policeman’s words.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session EWAR Women, 12/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

The second woman could not even bring herself to express some of the things that her mother-in-law called her after being labelled a *shermuta*. This Amharic word is very strong and the English rendering of ‘adulterer’ does not quite capture the level of degradation associated with this term (whore, hooker, bitch, slut, trash). This word is reserved for the highest level of insulting a person and is associated with prostitution and the ‘dirtiness’ of prostitution. To call a woman *shermuta* is to call her a non-person, and therefore undeserving of the basic respect ordinarily accorded to human beings. This characterisation had a significant impact on this woman; as she said, ‘I felt bad and sad,’ and it is something that she cannot forget.

These stories of being equated with dirty fingernails, trash, and a *shermuta* emerged in the context of the women reflecting on how their surrounding community has treated them while they engaged in prostitution. Each of the women expressed the pain associated with the thing they were called which caused them to question their worth as a human being.

#### **Dealing with One’s Sin-Load: Perfume and Water**

**Woman 1:** Going with perfume will reduce her sin.

**Woman 2:** Rather than staying at home and being depressed, it was good to go and take him the perfume which will reduce her sin.<sup>51</sup>

These answers were shared in the first session on the story of the woman who anointed Jesus in response to the question, ‘Do you think it was easy [for the woman] to go and touch Jesus?’

The women were contrasting the actions of Mary with the woman who bled for twelve years (Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25 – 34, Luke 8:43 – 48) and approached Jesus for healing. The women expressed in the study their belief that in this story, it would have been easier for the woman with the alabaster jar to touch Jesus than for the bleeding woman who grabbed the edge of Jesus’ garment. Regarding the story of the bleeding woman, the respondents in this Bible study believed that the main character did not have anything to offer in exchange for the healing she hoped to gain. Mary, on the other hand, had an object of significant value that carried the potential for reducing her ‘sin burden.’

This idea of an object having the ability to reduce or take away sin is reflected in some of the responses captured in a contextual study on the story of the Samaritan woman at the well:

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<sup>51</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

**Translator:** What is this living water?

**Woman:** Previously, she lived in sin. He gave her this water so that she is free from her sin. The water is something that cleans her sin.<sup>52</sup>

The association between sin and uncleanness is brought to the fore in this statement where this woman expressed her belief that the living water that Jesus is offering to the woman at the well will free her and cleanse her sin. The women in this study resonated with the living water being offered by Jesus. As the discussion continued, themes of having to work in order to reduce one's sin-load emerged as the women contemplated how they could get access to the living water spoken of in this story:

**Translator:** What do you think you should do to get this living water?

**Woman 1:** We pray asking God to help us stop this [prostitution] and change.

**Woman 2:** God said help me, I help you.<sup>53</sup>

The idea of having the ability to reduce sin through prayer and hard work is reflected in the statements above where these women express their internalised belief that God helps those that help themselves. One of my Ethiopian facilitators actually challenged the last woman's statement and asked where she had heard this, saying, 'Where is this written [that God said help me, I help you]?'<sup>54</sup> The woman was unable to answer the question. This sentiment was also observed in a contextual Bible study on the story of Joseph, during which one woman remarked:

For me, we expect change in a big thing [through prayer]. But if we decide to change our life and work hard, things will be changed. And [then] God helps me to get out of this kind of life.<sup>55</sup>

The sequencing of events in this statement is notable: prayer, choose to change, work hard, then change will occur. One might suggest that this woman expects God to make Himself present to her and assist her to leave a life of prostitution *after* she has completed all of the things that she has outlined.

Reducing one's sin-load is a theme that emerged in correlation with the idea of having to work hard in order for God to be moved to help. The belief that God could help these women out of a life of prostitution was expressed, but it was linked to the condition that the woman make a choice for change and do hard work. A deeds

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<sup>52</sup> Transcript of Samaritan Woman Session Flamingo Women, 6/2/2016, Addis Ababa, 3

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> Transcript Story of Joseph Pt II. Session Flamingo Women, 15/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

orientation toward sin can be observed through the ways in which the women interacted with several Biblical texts, and is possibly a coping strategy for dealing with sin.

### **Worse Sins than Others? A Hierarchy of Sin**

While studying the rape of the concubine (Judges 19), a discussion about the events that took place occurred:

**Translator:** Why was the old man more concerned about the man, rather than the concubine?

**Woman 1:** Sex is not supposed to be between two men.

**Woman 2:** He is a man who is not supposed to be in such sex and he is also a guest.

**Translator:** The woman is also a guest, so why?

**Woman 1:** Yes, she was a guest but she is a woman. Culturally, sex between same sex is an abomination and this man had no choice. He was forced. It was not because he valued man more than the woman. The culture forced him.<sup>56</sup>

The women did not condone the actions of the old man pushing the concubine outside the house into the hands of her would-be assaulters; however, the women in this study articulated their belief that sex between two men was wrong (an abomination) and that, in cultural terms, his guest status was more important to preserve than that of the concubine. The discussion continued:

**Translator:** You said sex with man is sin, is raping not sin too?

**Woman 1:** Yes, but sex between same sex is worse.

**Woman 2:** Bible also says it.

**Translator:** Why is same sex worse?

**Woman 1:** It is not common.<sup>57</sup>

The women expressed that sex between two men was not common (the connotation here being unnatural) and denoted a worse form of sin than the rape of the concubine. This is an interesting observation by the women and suggests that they were guided by a belief that the rape of a woman by a man was a less egregious form of sin than two men having sex. The women seem to side with the old man in this story, who had to make a choice as to who he would send outside his home to appease the threat posed by the attackers. While this is just one example, there were several occasions during the course of the contextual Bible studies when extended discussions took place regarding the severity of a sin, and whether some sins were worse than others.

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<sup>56</sup> Transcript of Rape of the Concubine (Judges 19) Session Flamingo Women, 19/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

## **Discussion: Self-Identification as Sinners**

The responses in this section relate to the connection the women drew between a state of dirtiness/uncleanliness and prostitution. The women expressed their view that religious leaders in the community perceived their means of income generation as ‘making themselves dirty’;<sup>58</sup> therefore, the women were to blame for their dirty state. This ascribed status of ‘dirty’ has subjected the women to dehumanising treatment by their surrounding community, and even caused some of them to question their own worth as human beings. Excerpts from various sessions were shared as examples of the women conceiving of sin as a burden that can be alleviated partially through their own efforts, and that some sins are worse than others, which suggests a hierarchical view of sin.

An exploration of sin regarded as contamination appears in greater depth in Chapter Six; however, at this point it is important to highlight that the women’s expressed understanding of sin is highly related to the individual. In many ways this reflects a classic Reformed theological understanding of individual, personal sin as condemnation, enslavement, and depravity that leaves the person guilty before God.<sup>59</sup> Their view of sin also accords with an Old Testament perspective that values sexual purity and renders a person unclean and therefore inadmissible to the community if they have violated the prescribed norms for sexual behaviour.<sup>60</sup> This is interesting in light of the Orthodox background of these women, for in the Orthodox theological tradition, sin is conceptualised as an illness that needs to be healed and therefore requires the assistance of a physician, that is, ‘a priest, the spiritual father.’<sup>61</sup> Ironically, these women had received words of condemnation and distancing behaviour from the religious leaders in their community, rather than witnessing the posture of a physician-priest who might draw near to them.

The women’s strong sense of sinfulness is evident, and one woman commented during the session on the woman who anointed Jesus that ‘the story relates a lot to us.’<sup>62</sup> The treatment that these women received in their surrounding community only served to

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<sup>58</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Review Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Grenz, *op cit.*, 202-207.

<sup>60</sup> Ken Stone, ‘Marriage and Sexual Relations in the World of the Hebrew Bible,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 181.

<sup>61</sup> Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy: The Science of the Fathers*, trans. Esther Williams (Hellis, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 2006), 44.

<sup>62</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 5.

reinforce their ‘sinner’ identification. In their perception, this identification can be removed only if they disengage from prostitution.

**Humanity as Rejecting: ‘Human beings cannot accept [us]’<sup>63</sup>**

This statement emerged during a contextual Bible study on the woman who anointed Jesus, as a response to the question, ‘Do you think there are human beings who can accept you like Jesus?’<sup>64</sup> The women were reflecting on the actions of Jesus in the anointing woman story (Luke 7:36-50) that takes place at Simon’s house, where the host, Simon, questions the unorthodox actions of his esteemed guest toward this woman of ill repute in the community. When appropriating Jesus’ actions to that of the surrounding community, one woman said: ‘Human beings hate and reject. Human being cannot accept, they think bad of you. So only God can accept us.’<sup>65</sup>

When the participants in the session were asked to put themselves in the position of the anointing woman, and to imagine what they would have felt after wiping Jesus’ feet, two women answered in the following way:

**Woman 1:** I would have been happy.

**Woman 2:** He is forgiving and knew all about her and she receives forgiveness.<sup>66</sup>

When asked what they thought the religious leaders were thinking when they saw how Jesus treated this woman, they said:

**Woman 1:** This is a sinful woman—how can she do this?

**Woman 2:** How did she come here, and [He] accepted her?

**Woman 1:** How did this sinful woman come to be with us?<sup>67</sup>

This question was not difficult for the women to answer, as indicated by the multiple responses of Woman 1. It was a rare occurrence in our studies to get multiple responses to the same question by one woman. The women did not appear to have any trouble inhabiting what they thought the religious leaders of that day were thinking, which could indicate the similarity that these women see between their own experiences and that of the woman who anointed Jesus. When questioned about the actions of Jesus in this story, the women responded:

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<sup>63</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Review Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Review Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 1.

**Translator:** The religious leaders pushed her away, did Jesus do the same?

**Woman 1:** No he accepted her and forgave her and let her go free.<sup>68</sup>

The women contrasted Jesus' actions to the response of Simon, and expressed that within their own context it would be inconceivable for their surrounding community to accept them in the same manner that Jesus accepted the woman who anointed Him. It is interesting to note that Woman 2 highlights the forgiving nature of Jesus as closely tied to the concept of acceptance, and notes that Jesus would have known 'all about her,' possibly a reference to the woman's reputation in the community. Woman 2 shares her belief that in that moment of wiping Jesus' feet, the woman in the story receives forgiveness. It is striking that when asked to put herself in the story, Woman 2 articulates a reception of forgiveness.

Hatred, a lack of acceptance, and being thought of poorly by the surrounding community were some of the experiences the Flamingo Women recounted during the two Bible studies I conducted on the story of the woman who anointed Jesus. The women in the study drew links between the religious leaders in the story and the people in their own community. For example, when asked, 'Who are the people who could judge the sinners, just like the rich men in the story?' the women responded:

**Woman 1:** Human beings.

**Woman 2:** Some people hate us, some spit on us, those that insult us.<sup>69</sup>

The women appropriated the character of the religious leaders to that of their surrounding community where they have experienced significant rejection, similar to the woman who anointed Jesus. In addition, the participants in the study identified with the woman who anointed Jesus, and equated the treatment of Simon's guests with the type of degrading treatment they had received at the hands of their community.

This sentiment of exclusion correlates with a response shared during a contextual Bible study on the woman who was almost stoned to death (John 8), when the women were asked how they thought their community viewed them:

When we want to go to big celebrations, we feel ashamed because we are prostitutes and people do not want to be with us. The people do not think that one day we may leave this work [and] become like them.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.



Ethiopian celebrations and festivals are often celebrated at both a family and community-wide level, so it is very common for festivities to be held in an open-air location in the centre of a community.<sup>71</sup> This woman expressed a desire to be a part of her community; however, due to her involvement in prostitution, she has experienced that people in the community do not want to be near her. African Womanist theologians stress within their Christian anthropology that African culture recognises life as life-in-community; therefore, being human requires living with a consideration of other people and not living in isolation.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, this woman is not able to participate in this aspect of life in her community due to the fact that her means of income generation is considered shameful.<sup>73</sup>

The label ‘prostitute,’ as interpreted by this woman, seems to imply a feeling of being permanently relegated to the status of a non-community member due to the lack of belief, by the community, that this woman could potentially *not* be a prostitute one day. It has been noted that within Ethiopian culture, ‘there is a sceptical attitude towards people outside of the immediate family’ which makes it difficult to trust each other.<sup>74</sup> As this story came to a conclusion, the women were asked to reflect on what they had learned and one woman shared about the circumstances under which she thought the community might be able to accept her:

**Translator:** What is your thought about this story?

**Woman:** This story has taught us a lot. For example, right now I am a prostitute, a sinner and God does not like that. But if we stop sex work, God will forgive me and so will people. People who used to hate us and keep themselves away from us will be close to us, and will like us if we leave this life. If I don’t [leave this life], I will stay dirty and people will continue to hate and disrespect us.<sup>75</sup>

This woman refers to her identity as a prostitute, a sinner, and as a person that God does not like. To what extent have these labels been taken on by this woman and reinforced by the way in which her surrounding community has treated her? While this

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<sup>71</sup> I experienced this during my three years of living in Ethiopia as a participant-observer and had the opportunity to join a number of national, community, and familial celebrations.

<sup>72</sup> David Kirwa Tarus, ‘Theology of Social Transformation in the Theological Works of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians,’ *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 33, no.1 (2014): 7.

<sup>73</sup> Lorraine van Blerk’s research among young Ethiopian women engaged in sex work documents the shame associated with behaviours related to sex workers in Ethiopia. See Lorraine van Blerk, ‘Poverty, Migration and Sex Work: Youth Transitions in Ethiopia,’ *Area* 40, no. 2 (2008): 250.

<sup>74</sup> Mekonnen, *op cit.*, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Transcript of Stoning Woman Session Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

cannot be clearly ascertained from her remarks, it could be suggested that her involvement with prostitution has enabled a self-rejecting identity in this community. Her perceived pathway to acceptance is significant, as it suggests that stopping prostitution must precede forgiveness by God, and forgiveness by God must precede forgiveness by the community. It could be suggested that the cessation of prostitution was perceived by this woman as the condition required to attain forgiveness and its corollary, acceptance, by God. This woman believed once she was forgiven and accepted by God, her community would stop distancing itself from her, that they would be 'close to [her].'<sup>76</sup>

### **Discussion: Human Beings Do Not Accept Us**

This section presented excerpts from various contextual Bible study sessions that suggest that women affected by prostitution view humanity as rejecting. The primary reason given by the women for not experiencing a sense of acceptance by their communities was because of their involvement in prostitution. The women recognised in the stories discussed that Jesus was forgiving and accepting, but because of their status as prostitutes within their communities the community failed to extend acceptance or hospitality toward them.

The women drew a close correlation between forgiveness and acceptance: if God forgives them for being engaged in prostitution, then they will be accepted by the community. These types of statements are indicative of these women's longing for acceptance and point to their understanding that hospitality is conditional. In their view, only if they could pull themselves out of prostitution would they then be worthy of receiving hospitality at the hands of their community.

The Biblical stories referenced in this section gave the women permission to talk about the poor treatment they have received at the hands of their community. Mercy Amba Oduyoye observes that redemption often includes a sense of rescue in the story of the Hebrew people; therefore, the redemption Africa experiences by turning to God is from 'the perversions of human nature that make it possible for some to prey on others and for individuals to trample upon the humanity of others.'<sup>77</sup> As things currently stand, it seems the humanity of these women is being trampled upon through the rejecting, non-accepting, and sometimes even degrading treatment they face, all of which is the antithesis to being treated as an image-bearer of God.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Oduyoye, *Beads, op cit.*, 23.

African Womanist theologians affirm that men and women are created in the image of God, and precisely because of the interrelated nature of the Godhead, this fact should shape all social relations.<sup>78</sup> Instead of their surrounding community viewing prostitution as a means of survival, these women are deemed as unacceptable to the community and denied basic hospitality within it.

### **Injustice as Normalised: ‘Man is not judged, it is shameful for a woman’**

This statement emerged in a contextual Bible study session on the story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) and the women were asked to reflect on how Ethiopian society views women in society, compared to men:

**Translator:** So do you think the society judges and blames the woman [for prostitution] and not the man? Why does the society blame the woman?

**Woman 1:** Yes, man is not judged. It is shameful for a woman, but it is like it is his right and [he] has no shame.

**Woman 2:** It is shameful for a woman not for a man.

**Woman 3:** Even married men come to us and it is ok since it is his money.<sup>79</sup>

The women were intrigued by the story of Judah and Tamar and the lengths to which Tamar went to in order to ensure an heir for the patriarch’s family. The women were perplexed by the apparently hypocritical manner in which Judah decided to deal with his daughter-in-law when he discovered that she was pregnant out of wedlock, even though he had denied his youngest son to Tamar, as per the levirate marriage customs of the day:

**Translator:** What was Judah’s reaction when he heard of her pregnancy? How did he act?

**Woman 1:** If he saw her by the road, he considers her as a prostitute.

**Woman 2:** He passed judgment, and said burn her.

**Woman 3:** Angry, and does not want her.<sup>80</sup>

The women reported having experienced the one-sided blame and judgement Judah pronounced over Tamar, and expressed similarities in how they had experienced Ethiopian society and its assignment of blame for the existence of prostitution on the shoulders of women. The women articulated that Ethiopian men are not tainted with the shame associated with prostitution the way women are. They stated that even for married men, there is no prevailing social stigma related to engaging in prostitution as a

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<sup>78</sup> Tarus, *op cit.*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Transcript of Judah Tamar Session Flamingo Women, 29/9/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

client: there is no dominant ‘client-shame.’ The inherent imbalance in this shame-bearing burden suggests a sense of injustice experienced by the women affected by prostitution.

This apparent gender bias was also highlighted at the beginning of this story, when the women were reflecting on Tamar’s predicament as a multiple-widowed woman in the Ancient Near East:

**Translator:** If you remember, her father in law told her to go back to her parents’ house and sit like a widow. How do you think she felt?

**Woman 1:** She could not have been willing. It was only that she had no choice.

**Woman 2:** Even my parents will doubt me if all my three, two husbands died. They hold me accountable and give me names.

**Translator:** Do you think the society blames her for the death of her two husbands?

**Woman 1:** Yes, they will consider her accountable and will give her names.<sup>81</sup>

It is notable that the women identified so easily with the character of Tamar at this juncture in the story, and expressed their certainty that they would be held accountable for what had happened to all these husbands. ‘Even my parents will doubt,’ could be suggestive of the fact that even the closest of kinship relations in Ethiopian society are not necessarily spared in situations such as these, when the assignment of blame for the unexplainable is important.

The assignment of blame was a consistent point of discussion throughout this particular Bible study and suggests that self-blame is a common experience for some women affected by prostitution. For example, when asked about how prostitution could potentially be curtailed in the Ethiopian context, and addressing the ‘demand-side’ of prostitution, the women answered in the following way:

**Translator:** It is the man who should be stopped from coming, not the woman, is it not?

**Woman 1:** In Saris (an area of Addis Ababa), the government has closed down such places where prostitution is done. Now, they [the women] are hiding and doing it in secret. So not only men, but women should also stop. If we are not here, men will not come. If we are not available, they will not come.

**Translator:** You say, they come because we are available, but if you know men will not come, will you continue availing yourselves?

**Woman 1:** We are the ones who open our door and welcome them.

**Woman 2:** The government should give women work.

**Woman 3:** I started to make coffee on the street and the government took it from me.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

‘If we are not available, they will not come’<sup>83</sup> is a statement that implies a supply-driven rather than a demand-driven understanding of why prostitution exists. Also, the remark, ‘we are the ones who open our door and welcome them’<sup>84</sup> suggests Woman 1’s identification with the role of a temptress/seducer, inviting men into prostitution, as opposed to the desires of men driving the industry. Woman 2 expresses her belief that the government should be providing assistance to women affected by prostitution to find work outside of prostitution, which could suggest that economic reasons are the primary motivator for her involvement with prostitution.

Woman 3 shared about her efforts to start a small coffee stand (very common on the streets of Addis Ababa) and the very government Woman 2 looked to for assistance taking this small business away from Woman 3. Implied in this statement is the fact that this woman tried to pursue an alternative means of income generation, but instead of the government assisting in this effort they shut her business down.<sup>85</sup> This situation gives some insight into the unjust situations that these women on the margins face when trying to survive.

That women seem to engage in some level of self-blame when ascribing causation for prostitution in their context, which could be a coping strategy for them. This analysis by the women negates the role of the male clients of prostitution in Addis Ababa, and places the shame of prostitution solely on the women involved in prostitution. This might indicate one of the factors that allows negative stereotypes toward women affected by prostitution to flourish in wider Ethiopian society.

### **Abuse of Power: An Example**

During a contextual Bible study on the rape of the concubine (Judges 19), the women engaged in a lengthy discussion on the similarities between this story and that of the high-profile rape and murder of a young Ethiopian girl in Addis Ababa, Hanna Lalango, a few months prior to this Bible study.<sup>86</sup> *‘They [the stories] are similar in that they*

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<sup>82</sup> Transcript of Judah Tamar Session Flamingo Women, 29/9/2015, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> In Ethiopia, the government has very strict rules related to establishing small businesses, and even petty traders on the side of the road must obtain the proper government documentation in order to sell their wares on the street. The government also requires tax revenues from street-peddlers. While Woman 3 did not elaborate on the circumstances that led to the closure of her small business, it is well known within Ethiopian society that it is very difficult these days to establish a small business on the side of the road, especially in the capital city.

<sup>86</sup> Sixteen-year old Hanna Lalango was abducted on her way home from high-school and gang-raped for several days before being dumped on the side of the road in Addis Ababa in 2015. The abductors contacted Hanna’s parents about her whereabouts, and the family was able to access

were both raped but not totally similar.’<sup>87</sup> This woman was alluding to the fact that young Hanna was not dismembered, as the concubine was. The women were asked whether they thought that this type of story (the violent rape of a woman) is familiar or uncommon in Ethiopian society. One woman responded:

I have seen a police[man] rape a girl. The police use their gun so that she does not scream.<sup>88</sup>

This woman elaborated that she had witnessed the rape of a woman by the Federal Police behind the Millennium Hall in Addis Ababa (a popular conference venue), with a gun held to her so that she would keep quiet.<sup>89</sup> This story sparked a lengthy discussion about police brutality, and several women shared animatedly about their perceptions of the police and their hatred for the police, which prompted the question:

**Translator:** Why do you hate the police?

**Woman 1:** They use their position as a cover-up to do all they want.

**Woman 2:** They killed a young man and were caught as they were coming back to apologize. They did not know he died.<sup>90</sup>

The story shared by Woman 2 reflected the impunity she had witnessed by the police, despite being caught in this particular case, for the police did not know that their actions toward the man had actually caused his death. Woman 1 speaks directly to her belief that the police use their position of power to ‘do all they want’, which could be indicative of the number of injustices this woman has witnessed. The women did not appear to view the police as advocates or as offering any sort of protective service to them.

It could be suggested that women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa face injustices unique to their marginal position within society. These women have been exposed to injustices, and their coping mechanisms include self-assigning blame and internalising the episodes they have either experienced or witnessed. The length of the

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treatment in a local hospital for a number of injuries including a fistula. Hanna was able to identify three of her attackers at her bedside before succumbing to her injuries and passing away. This case caused outrage across Ethiopia, was discussed extensively for months in local media, and was picked up by some international media outlets as well. See: Jacey Fortin, ‘Gang rape spurs calls for reform in Ethiopia.’ Last modified December 17, 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/12/gang-rape-spurs-calls-reform-ethiopia-201412176163836478.html>. (accessed May 20, 2017).

<sup>87</sup> Transcript of Judges 19 Rape of the Concubine Session Flamingo Women, 19/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Field Notes Rape of the Concubine (Judges 19), 19/3/2016

<sup>90</sup> Transcript of Rape of the Concubine (Judges 19) Session Flamingo Women, 19/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

discussion of the rape of the concubine story indicates the degree to which the women were able to draw parallels between the treatment of the concubine in this story and the ways in which they had experienced or witnessed injustices in their own lives.

### **Discussion: Injustice as Normalised**

The two Biblical stories discussed in this section demonstrate that the women were able to appropriate the situations and characters represented by Judah, Tamar, and the concubine to their own lives. The Judah and Tamar story catalysed a discussion about the demand side of prostitution where themes of self-blame emerged. The story of the concubine reminded the women of the troubling story of the rape and murder of Hanna Lalango and catalysed discussion around those tasked with upholding justice apparently doing the opposite. In African Womanist Theology, justice must be part of what makes the church a place where men and women walk together in redemption. These stories highlight that the women engage in blaming and shaming themselves, and this has led to a normalisation or expectation of injustice in their lives. Such an expectation of injustice is a barrier to developing a life-affirming theology.

This section gives some indication of the prevalence, normalisation, and expectation of unjust treatment of women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. Women's theology of hope denounces experiences of oppressive cultural beliefs, hunger, disease, and injustice for they are seen as outside of the will of God.<sup>91</sup>

### **Summary**

This chapter has described some of the data generated in various contextual Bible study sessions held with the Flamingo and EWAR women. This chapter has sought to represent carefully the voices of the women, and to suggest emerging themes that may provide some indication as to how women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa make sense of God, sin, humankind, and justice within their context. God as a protector, the women's self-identification as sinners, humankind as unaccepting, and injustices as normalised experiences are some of the main themes that emerged in this chapter.

Chapter Six will present data generated from various contextual Bible studies that explore emerging themes pertaining to how women affected by prostitution make sense of the church.

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<sup>91</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 113.





## Chapter 6: Presentation of Data

### Introduction

This chapter presents data generated from selected contextual Bible studies with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. The Biblical stories chosen for the sessions featured in this chapter were based on the same criteria as those treated in Chapter Five. The data presented are categorised and discussed with particular reference to furthering an understanding of how these women make sense of the church in their context.

Questions considered in this chapter include: Do the women engage in public practices of worship and, if so, how? What are their expectations of the Christian church and its leaders? What messages, if any, do they have for church leaders? Through an exploration of the women's responses to questions in various contextual Bible study sessions, emerging themes will be suggested that may provide insight into how these women make sense of the church in their context.

Over the course of my fieldwork, the majority of the research participants acknowledged either past or present affiliation with the EOTC, which correlates with the religious landscape of Ethiopia where approximately thirty-six million people identify as Orthodox Christian.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the data presented in this chapter will be discussed with an understanding that to the research participants the EOTC forms the main context and example of the concept of *church*. To that end, it is important to engage in a brief excursus that will describe the main influences on the faith and practice of the EOTC today before the data are presented.

### Jewish Influence on the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is classified as an Oriental Orthodox Church, a designation given to those Orthodox churches at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD that disagreed with the view that God was fully revealed in Christ in human form (one God, two natures).<sup>2</sup> Rather, the Egyptian Orthodox Church, with which the Ethiopian Orthodox Church shared strong ecclesial and church governance ties, held to the doctrinal stance of one God, one nature. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church states that 'the two natures became united into one nature without separation, without confusion,

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, 'Orthodox Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,' (2017): 9.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Moore, 'Christianity in Ethiopia,' *American Society of Church History* 5, no. 3 (1936): 275-276, accessed April 24, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3160789>.

without change.’<sup>3</sup> Churches that hold to this belief have come to be known as monophysite Christians,<sup>4</sup> and some scholars argue that this doctrinal characterisation added to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s geographical isolation from the Christian church of Europe.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of European influence, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church derived a significant amount of its identity from its perceived Jewish roots, as found in the *Kebra Nagast*. This important piece of Ethiopian literature holds that the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9) visited King Solomon, and during that visit the King fell on top of the Queen during that visit and she became pregnant. The child she bore was Menelik, who is thought to have been raised in the court of Jerusalem and was there anointed King of Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that King Menelik’s followers took the Ark of the Covenant from the temple at Jerusalem to Ethiopia to Aksum in Northern Ethiopia, giving rise to the characterisation of Aksum as the Second Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> The *Kebra Nagast* is highly important to the identity of Ethiopian Christians, for it serves as evidence of Ethiopian descent from David, who was considered a forbearer of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

To this day, Ethiopian Christianity is therefore thought to be deeply influenced by Jewish elements such as in its religious practices. Jewish elements are seen as sources of the forms in which the central ideas of Christianity have been clothed, for example, the manner in which the Eucharist is taken, the ways the Sabbath is observed, and the architecture of the church are considered to have been influenced by the archetype of the Jewish temple.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ‘The Issue Between Monophysitism and Dyophysitism,’ *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Faith and Order*, accessed May 23, 2018, [www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/dogma/monodyo.html](http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/dogma/monodyo.html).

<sup>4</sup> Monophysites are those who believe in one nature of Christ, which created a schism in the Orthodox Church in 451. The Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian and Indian Orthodox Churches are also called non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. See H. H. Pope, Shenouda III, Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, ‘The Nature of Christ,’ Pamphlet of St. Mark Coptic Church, New Jersey (1999): 3.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, *op cit.*, 276.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Hammerschmidt, ‘Jewish Elements in the Cult of the Ethiopian Church,’ *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1965): 2, accessed April 24, 2018, [www.jstor.org/stable/41965723](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41965723).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen, ‘Is the Church of Ethiopia a Judaic Church?’ *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 12, no. 2 (1999): 214.

<sup>9</sup> Hammerschmidt, *op cit.*, 3.

Orthodox scholar John Binns notes that there is not one single Eastern Orthodox Church, nor one doctrinal tradition which can be called Orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> With reference to Ethiopian Orthodox doctrine, faith, and practice, limited resources are available in English.<sup>11</sup> For these reasons, various strands of the Orthodox theological tradition, including the insights of a deacon from the EOTC (one of my key informants in the research project), will be referenced in the analysis of the data presented in order to gain a clearer understanding of how women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa make sense of the church.

### **Data: Public Practice of Worship**

#### **Standing Outside the Gates**

‘We do not go inside (the church), we go and return from outside.’<sup>12</sup>

During a contextual Bible study session on the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus at Simon’s house found in Luke 7:36-50, the women were asked about their church attendance:

**Translator:** Do you [ladies] go to church?

**Woman 1:** We do not go inside, we go and return from outside. We pray from outside the gate.

**Translator:** Why? People pray from inside, why not you?

**Woman 2:** We do not go inside, we can even pray from home and the Lord does hear. So no need to go into the church.

**Translator:** Why not?

**Woman 3:** It is not good and difficult you know, you sleep with a man in the night and going into the church in the morning is hard.<sup>13</sup>

The first two women indicated that they attended the EOTC, although they did not go inside the physical building. Rather, they participated from outside the gates of the church. The architecture of the church provides insight into this practice as the entirety of the EOTC complex is considered sacred. This includes either a circular or octagonal physical building surrounded by a large churchyard protected by a fence with a gate

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<sup>10</sup> John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>11</sup> John Binns’ *The Orthodox Church of Ethiopia: A History*, was published in 2017 as a comprehensive study in English that addresses the theology and history of the EOTC which has not been done before. See <https://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/new-book-the-orthodox-church-of-ethiopia-a-history/>, accessed April 24, 2018. I discovered this book only in the last month of writing my dissertation and was unable to obtain a copy and therefore have had to rely on various articles and the English website of the EOTC.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

complex.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, those who remain outside the church building during the service are considered to have attended the church.<sup>15</sup> It is not uncommon in Ethiopia to find people prostrating themselves on the roadway adjacent to an Orthodox Church or making the sign of the cross and bowing in front of an Orthodox Church compound from a roadway, as to the Orthodox believer these areas are considered sacred. Those who feel particularly ritually unclean can be found standing in the churchyard throughout the service, and often there are as many people, if not more, in the churchyard as inside the building.<sup>16</sup>

Ethiopian Christians' understanding of ritual purity and impurity in sexual matters is based on Leviticus 15.<sup>17</sup> According to the laws set forth in this text, people who are ritually unclean are allowed to approach the church building while still in an unclean state; however, they must not enter.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, they can be seen standing in prayer outside the church door during the services. This practice is not unique to the Ethiopian Church and is common among Oriental Orthodox Churches, although in other churches it is customary for people to remain at home during periods of ritual uncleanness.<sup>19</sup>

Based on this common understanding of the ritually unclean standing further away from the church building when coming to participate in a worship service, the responses of all these women suggest that they identify themselves with the ritually unclean. It seems that these women have taken things one step further by standing *outside* the gate of the church and not within the designated area of the church compound for those who consider themselves ritually unclean. Church attendance is important within Orthodoxy for it is believed that there is no salvation outside the church<sup>20</sup>, and prayer, an integral

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<sup>14</sup> The internal structure of the circular and octagonal Ethiopian Orthodox Churches consists of three concentric rings: 1) the *Maqdas* (Holy of Holies) is the innermost part where the *Tabot*, a representation of Ark of the Covenant rests, and only priests and deacons have access to this area; 2) the *Keddist* (the covenant/promise) is the second chamber, which is reserved for those who can receive the Sacrament (Communion) – those who feel pure, have fasted regularly, and have conducted themselves blamelessly (therefore you usually only find infants and the elderly in this chamber) and; 3) the *Qene Mahleti* (the place of the cantors) is where the singers who praise God with hymns and musical instruments are found. See Sergew Hable Selassie, 'The Ethiopian Orthodox Church,' in *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1970), 65.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Pedersen, *op cit.*, 205-206.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity Volume II: Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Andrew Smith (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012), 397.

part of the order of service, is one of the paths to salvation as deification, or *theosis*, and is the goal for all adherents to the Orthodox Christian faith.<sup>21</sup> For these reasons, it is understandable that these women go to considerable lengths to attend a service at the EOTC.

### **Self-Limiting Behaviour**

This theme of attending an EOTC service from outside the gate as a possible indicator of the degree to which these women associate with those who are ritually unclean was also detected in the following statements given in the anointing woman contextual Bible study:

**Translator:** This woman [in the story], who is rejected as a sinner, could come to Jesus, so why are you afraid of going to church?

**Woman 1:** Our job is not clean so we are not allowed to go in.

**Translator:** Who said that?

**Woman 1:** It is our belief [that we are not allowed to go in], but God did not say ‘you did this and that’ and rejected us.

**Woman 2:** God does not like our job.<sup>22</sup>

Both the women who responded to this question drew an association between their job and their belief that their job is directly correlated with activities that render a person unclean and therefore unfit to participate with the worshipping community in the church building, or even from within the churchyard where the ritually unclean worship. When Woman 1 was pressed on her statement that she was not allowed to go into the church because of her job, she clarified by stating that this was a shared belief amongst with whom identified, those engaged in prostitution. She further explained that it is not God who has made this prohibition, but rather it was self-imposed because of traditions in her community.

Woman 2; however, did associate God’s displeasure with her work, and another woman said later on in that study: ‘I will not go [to church] since my job is not good.’<sup>23</sup> This identification of prostitution with God’s disapproval could also serve as a contributing factor to why these women identify so clearly as ritually unclean.

The women were then asked whether or not they thought the woman who anointed Jesus (commonly held by African readers as Mary Magdalene who is assumed

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<sup>21</sup> *Theosis* is described in Eastern Christianity as not only correction from the consequences of the Fall but above all, as the realisation of the goal to which humankind was called: being made in the Image and likeness of God. See Alfeyev, *op cit.*, 371.

<sup>22</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

to be a prostitute)<sup>24</sup> had stopped engaging in prostitution (doing whatever it was that she was doing that qualified her as a sinner) before going to Jesus:

**Translator:** Do you think the woman in the story, went to the Lord after she stopped what she was doing?

**Woman 1:** No, she went before she stopped.

**Translator:** So, why are you saying you will not go [to church] until you stop this [prostitution]?

**Woman 1:** We will still go to church but since we are not clean, we go to church but will not go inside since we are not clean, not good for us. I wash my body, take shower, go to church and pray from the outside.

**Woman 2:** I am not clean, I sleep with men, not good for me.

**Woman 3:** We know God will not say you came, you are dirty. We can't [because] our culture teaches us to not go inside.<sup>25</sup>

Although Woman 1 acknowledged that the woman in this story was not necessarily ritually clean before she approached Jesus, she emphasised her belief in the importance of her own ritual cleanliness before approaching the worshipping community and she detailed the lengths to which she went to attain a sense of cleanliness (washing her body, taking a shower) before approaching the church. The Orthodox understanding of salvation as deification stresses the importance of the body-soul-spirit union in the process of becoming like God; therefore, the physical body has significant value before God.<sup>26</sup> This woman's self-perceived ritual uncleanness did not stop her from participating in corporate worship, but it did cause her to observe cultural rules that would ordinarily keep her away from those she perceived as ritually clean.

**Translator:** So you believe that the culture hinders you from going in?

**Woman:** Yes.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that my participants paid close attention to the expectation that the ritually unclean who desired to participate in a church service should do so from outside the church. Maintaining this distance was predicated by their conception of what deemed a person clean and unclean, and prostitution, their self-described means of generating an income ('job') excluded them from the inner chambers of the Orthodox Church.

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<sup>24</sup> My colleagues at EWAR, evangelical church leaders, and my key informants apprised me of this belief through my interactions with them over my three years in Ethiopia.

<sup>25</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Alfeyev, *op cit.*, 379.

<sup>27</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 6-7.

During a contextual Bible study of the story of the crippled woman who was healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), the women further explained their motivations for standing outside the church when participating in an EOTC service:

**Translator:** Are there laws in church today that stops religious people from helping you?

**Woman:** No, there is no law that stops us. For example, our work is sexually impure and is adultery. No church leader stops us from getting into church or worshipping. We ourselves choose not to go in and only pray from outside. There is no barrier put by church at all.

**Translator:** If you go, will they help you?

**Woman:** What help? Yes, if we go they will advise us whether we are Protestant, Orthodox or Muslim. We do not go, not because they stopped us, but by ourselves.<sup>28</sup>

The first respondent characterised her work as sexually impure (adultery), and reiterated that it was not people in the church or the church itself stopping these women from worshipping from inside of the church. The woman indicated that it was her choice and spoke on behalf of the group by saying ‘we ourselves choose not to go in’. She repeated this point when asked her opinion of whether help would be found if she were to attend a church, ‘we do not go, not because they stopped us, but by ourselves.’<sup>29</sup>

It appears that the women had created an alternative way of coping with their perceived ritual uncleanness: by standing outside the church gate. They perhaps did so out of fear of contaminating a place that they valued and considered scared. The weight of the shame they expressed regarding their means of income-generation ‘I am not clean, I sleep with men, not good for me’ or ‘our job is not clean’<sup>30</sup> was palpable and has created a distancing spiritual practice for them.

When the women were asked if they thought they would be accepted by the Orthodox Church, a question that arose when the women were reflecting on how the woman who anointed Jesus was treated by the guests at the party, one woman said: ‘we will not be accepted.’<sup>31</sup> Their perceived lack of acceptance might be linked to their self-identification with ritual uncleanness and their understanding of the EOTC as a place more accommodating for the ritually clean than for the unclean.

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<sup>28</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Session Pt. I, Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 5-6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

### **Discussion: We do not go inside (the church)**

In the preceding section, I reported that the women's reasons for not entering an EOTC building were related to their being ritually unclean, even though they acknowledged that no one had told them they were not allowed to enter. Orthodox theology holds that the church is only truly comprehensible within experience;<sup>32</sup> therefore, participation in the life of the church is very important for its followers. The purity of the church is an important principle because 'its members are people who possess personal holiness thanks to their own spiritual efforts and the grace of God ... [however] there are no sinless people.' However, it is significant that the church believes 'holiness is the calling of every person, and the church promotes personal holiness, not just as an ideal, but as a norm.'<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, it is understandable why the women in this study view their ritually unclean status as a barrier to their entry into the church building. Deacon EK provides further insight, particularly from the EOTC context, as to why women do not go inside of the church:

Ethiopians are religious people...opposed to prostitution. So they [women in prostitution] are excluded from the community. They don't want to go to church. They don't want to go to [because] people know that they are sex workers. So they are highly excluded. They have the psychological problem, they think that they are not clean to go to church. So they do not want to go to church and pray.<sup>34</sup>

Due to the excluded status of women in prostitution, these women are prone to keep a safe distance, not only between themselves and their families of origin, but also between themselves and places of worship. Deacon EK's observation of the exclusion of women engaged in prostitution is supported by research that found 95% of Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia believing prostitution to be morally wrong.<sup>35</sup> These women have been branded by society as outsiders and as such, they have not been welcomed into spaces traditionally reserved for religious insiders.

When pressed as to the source of this distinction between clean and unclean, Deacon EK explained:

In our Church, there is a big difference between theology and tradition. When it comes to theology, we all are the house of God. We are the temple

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<sup>32</sup> Alfeyev, *op cit.*, 389.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 414-415.

<sup>34</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Pew, 'Orthodox', *op cit.*, 56.



of the Holy Spirit. So, God is with us. It's not with that construction or building. That's what we believe. But, when it comes to tradition, people think that the construction is holy. So if the construction is holy and if you say you are not allowed to enter to that temple because you are not clean, so you can't go to church, you should stay at your house. But that's not theology, that is the tradition or that is the understanding of the people, that's not what the church teach.<sup>36</sup>

Deacon EK pointed to the contrast between Orthodox theology and Orthodox tradition as the reason why women in prostitution keep their distance from the church. Tradition holds that the actual church building is a holy place and as such, should be treated with reverence. This treatment implies the exclusion of anything (or anyone) that might defile this place. Like many faithful Orthodox believers, the women involved in this research project were following a well-known tradition that seeks to preserve the sanctity of one of the EOTC's most sacred places.

Deacon EK went on to explain that the strong traditions regarding ritual cleanness in the EOTC have derived from the Jewish influences on the church:

Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is different from the other Christian sectors because it is highly influenced by the Judaism... we are highly influenced by the Judaism. So if you look at the Old Testament, if you are a sinner, you can't go to the temple, you have to stay at your house. You have to be purified. That's exactly what we have, this exactly what we have here in Ethiopia. So if people think they are a sinner, they won't go to a church because they think that can't. How do you say, spoiling?<sup>37</sup>

Deacon EK also outlined the principle of *yariksatan* in the EOTC tradition which indicates that an unclean person has the capacity to make a sacred place cursed:

*Yariksatan* means they [women in prostitution] will make it cursed. The place is holy, but if you are a sinner and if you go to church, you will make it cursed. So, for the sake of the church, to keep it holy, it's better to stay at your house. In addition to that, if you don't have a holy conscious, it's better not to go to a church. You have to stay at your house. But that is the tradition. Because of this tradition, first is you think that they [prostitutes] are not allowed to go to a church.<sup>38</sup>

Deacon EK noted that the reaction of an Ethiopian person not engaged in prostitution toward a woman engaged in prostitution attending a church would be similar to that of the guests at Simon's house when the sinful woman came to anoint Jesus. 'People would say, "How can she come to church? She is a sinner, He is a Rabbi, so how would

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<sup>36</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 6

she come to Him?''''<sup>39</sup> This fear of making a holy place, or person as in the case of Jesus, cursed (*yariksatan*) is an ever-present danger in the minds of those who identify as sinners, especially women engaged in prostitution who often believe 'that they are cursed.'<sup>40</sup> When I asked Deacon EK if he thought that women engaged in prostitution stayed away from the Orthodox Church out of a sense of respect for the holiness of the church, he replied: 'that's exactly what they think: for respect of the church ... and respect of God.'<sup>41</sup> It therefore seems that the women's presence outside the Orthodox Church gate while a service was in progress was an act of reverence and obedience, as they sought to ensure that they did not participate in *yariksatan*.

Deacon EK did say that despite the belief in *yariksatan*: 'no one is able to contaminate you. That is not true. That's not written in the Bible.'<sup>42</sup> So, although the tradition and theological understanding of 'cursing' are not aligned at this point, it seems that tradition is stronger than theology in this situation.

The data presented in this section therefore suggest that women affected by prostitution viewed the church in the following ways: 1) 'church' for these women was the EOTC (as no reference was made to evangelical churches by any of the women); 2) 'church' was primarily a building, a situated place where prayer occurred and other worshippers gathered for a communal service; 3) 'church' was a place that welcomed the ritually clean, those that considered themselves holy and; 4) 'church' was an important place that carried great value for these women, and despite the restrictions surrounding the participation of the ritually unclean, some of these women had discovered alternative ways of attending services.

### **Data: Expectations of Church Leaders**

#### **Looking for Exemplars**

#### **Church Leaders Compared to Jesus: 'There are few...'<sup>43</sup>**

When the Flamingo Women read the story of the crippled woman healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17) they began to discuss what they perceived as the main duties of church leaders in their context. After one woman identified 'teaching, preaching, and

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath, Pt. II, Flamingo Women, 2/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

baptizing<sup>44</sup> as the main duties of religious leaders, the women were asked to contemplate whether Jesus had to teach, preach, and baptize the crippled woman before healing her. The women responded:

**Woman 1:** He is Lord; he saw her; he called and healed her.

**Woman 2:** He laid his hands on her and healed her.

**Woman 3:** People can't heal you.

**Woman 4:** I don't like priests. They are involved in witchcraft. They usually lead such activities. I have witnessed a woman who died of such curse [from a priest].

**Woman 5:** This is not a religious leader, he does not know God.<sup>45</sup>

The women distinguished the conduct of Jesus from the conduct of religious leaders in their own context. Woman 3 stated her conviction that people (and in this case a priest) did not have power to heal people. The women differentiated between Jesus' immediate action of administering healing to the crippled woman in the story and the questionable association with the occult by a current religious leader. Woman 4 shared her perception that priests were involved in witchcraft (as well as her belief that this was unusual). Her evidence for this belief was that someone she knew had died from what was thought was a curse cast on this woman by a priest. It seems that Woman 4's experiences with priests led her to the conclusion that priests are able to call upon spiritual powers associated with darkness. On the grounds that priests are instruments of life, not darkness and death, Woman 5 rejected the characterisation of 'priest' as someone who could be involved in witchcraft. Within Orthodox theology, the moral condition of the celebrant is tied to the efficacy of the sacrament being administered;<sup>46</sup> therefore, it is understandable the women delineate what types of behaviour are acceptable for priests.

As the contextual Bible study on the crippled woman healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13) continued, the women were asked:

**Translator:** When the religious leaders looked at this woman [the crippled woman] did they consider her life as important as that of their cattle? Did they value her?

**Woman:** They did not value her.

**Translator:** Why? They are religious leaders.

**Woman 1:** Maybe because she is sick.

**Woman 2:** They think she is sinful.

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Alfeyev, *op cit.*, 418-419.

**Woman 3:** We remember the woman who washed the feet of Jesus and the woman who committed adultery. They wanted to stone her, but Jesus said one who is not a sinner should throw a stone.

**Woman 4:** The woman who was bleeding for twelve years, Jesus healed her.

**Translator:** Why are the leaders not following the example of Jesus? They were witnesses of what Jesus has done.

**Woman 2:** They are human beings, weak, just like us.

**Woman 1:** They never believed in the teaching of Jesus. They rejected him. It was with time after that [they] probably read what was written and believed. As said earlier, they have witnessed Jesus defending the woman who committed adultery who they wanted to stone.<sup>47</sup>

It is significant that when the women were asked to reflect on whether they believed the religious leaders valued the life of the crippled woman, two of the women referenced Bible stories the group had previously studied (the woman who anointed Jesus, the woman who was almost stoned for adultery from John 8, and the bleeding woman). These women were comparing the actions of Jesus in these other stories to the actions of the religious leaders being presented in the current story, an example of intertextual referencing. The first two women view the crippled woman's sickness and presumed that sinfulness was the reason religious leaders did not value this woman in their community.

The women's citation of other examples of Jesus' actions toward presumed sinners with reference to the story at hand is quite remarkable and suggests that these stories made an impression on these women. Their ability to recall these stories with accuracy and to posit the actions of Jesus as contradictory to those of the religious leaders in the Luke 13 story is notable. They suggested that being human was one reason why the religious leaders were unable or unwilling to follow the example of Jesus in the women's own day. The statement 'they are human beings, weak, just like us'<sup>48</sup> suggests that this respondent did not view the religious leaders in the story as having transcended human nature; rather, she saw these religious leaders as very human and perhaps even weak like her.

It is interesting that this woman did not view these religious leaders as occupants of another stratum of humanity; rather, their failure to respond well to the crippled woman caused her to identify them as people like herself, people who were weak and unable or unwilling to do the good they ought to have done. In addition, Woman 1

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<sup>47</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath, Pt. II, Flamingo Women, 2/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

mentioned that even though the religious leaders had witnessed the actions of Jesus, she did not think they believed in his teaching and that after some time they might have come to believe. But in the particular story at hand, it did not seem to this woman that the religious leaders believed in the teaching or personhood of Jesus; ‘they rejected him.’<sup>49</sup> While the Luke 13 story does not use the word ‘rejected’, it is interesting that this woman identified the rejection of Jesus as a reason for the religious leaders’ failure to follow His example. This speaks to the lived realities of this woman and the significant amount of rejection she had experienced in her life.

When asked to appropriate Jesus’ example of leadership with reference to the religious leaders of today, the women responded in the following way:

**Translator:** What about today, are our church leaders following the example of Jesus?

**Woman 1:** Some do. They do teach the word.

**Woman 2:** They may teach but don’t live it.

**Woman 3:** There are few who follow the example of Jesus.

**Translator:** Why?

**Woman 3:** From Orthodox, Protestant, or Muslim, I think only a few can be found. I have seen a man who comes to our area looking for women to sleep with, pouring Holy Water when I went to church.

**Woman 2:** There are both good and bad leaders.

**Woman 3:** Jesus is different. He was always with the poor.<sup>50</sup>

Two of the respondents made reference to church leaders teaching the Word of God; however, from the responses, it seems that the women were not completely convinced that the church leaders they had observed were following the example of Jesus (as they outlined from the three other Biblical stories above). This part of the discussion became quite animated, with Woman 3 answering and interjecting energetically. Listening to the elevated tone and cadences of her speech (from the recording), one can hear that this question touched a sensitive place in this woman. The story that she shared about finding a man who poured holy water in the Orthodox Church in the Flamingo red-light area where she lives, seemed to have provoked a sense of anger in this woman.

The women discerned differences between the posture and actions of church leaders they had personally met and the posture and actions of Jesus they had encountered in previous Bible studies. Jesus’ postures and actions included these: his proclivity toward healing (the woman had bled for twelve years and the crippled woman), his advocacy for people in perilous legal situations (the woman who was

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

almost stoned), and his presence with the poor. The women's consensus was that some leaders adhered to the example of Jesus and some did not. Notably, none of the women shared any stories of church leaders following the examples of Jesus described in the Biblical stories.

The women were then asked the following:

**Translator:** How can we help the religious leaders change their behaviour toward the poor women? What advice do you have for them?

**Woman 1:** I tell him to treat the rich and poor equally.

**Woman 2:** Once I went into church late while they were almost closing down the baptismal point and they pushed me out.

**Woman 3:** You were late, this does not qualify for complaint. You should have gone on time if you wanted your child to be baptised.

**Woman 4:** But though late, they should not have pushed you out.

**Woman 2:** I went to the Orthodox Church to get my son baptised. I specifically went to the water point [in the church] where they baptised and another man told me to go to another church since there were no priests [at the water point]. He told me to go to the church for baptism. I walked a long distance and reached the church and found out that there were no priests at the church. My son is not baptised to date.<sup>51</sup>

This story was told by Woman 2 as an illustration of the inequality she experienced at the hands of church leaders when seeking a religious service or rite. The language she used, 'they pushed me out' suggests aggression in the actions of church leaders and could imply a sense of rejection by church leaders in that moment.

Woman 3 pointed out the fault of Woman 2 for being late and declared that she should not complain about what happened. Woman 3 came to the defence of Woman 2 and said that even if she had been late, she did not deserve to be 'pushed out'. Woman 2 went on to clarify her story and the lengths she went to in order to have her son baptised. She went first to the water point at an EOTC where she thought she would find a church leader to preside over her son's baptism and, after not finding a church leader there, following the instructions of a church member and walking a long distance to another church, discovered that there was no church leader there to preside over her son's baptism.

Woman 3 followed the Orthodox tradition of seeking to have her young son baptised and was denied this church sacrament.<sup>52</sup> In the context of the question from which this story emerged, it is reasonable to assume that this woman viewed her low

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Girma Bekele states that within the EOTC, salvation is intertwined with the idea of being baptised and incorporated into the membership of the EOTC. See Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 398.

standing in society as a reason for the treatment she received at the first church, both being pushed out and then told to go to another Orthodox Church. Presumably, this woman was carrying her young son and instead of being allowed to have her son baptised at the water point in the first church, she is rejected and told to go elsewhere and walks a significant distance, carrying her young son in the hopes of having him baptised. The actions of this woman are suggestive of the value she placed on the rite of baptism, for she was not deterred after what happened at the first church and hoped to encounter church leaders at the second church she walked to.

Walking to this second church is indicative of her economic status, as most Ethiopians in Addis Ababa would have taken a public taxi to travel a significant distance, but this woman likely could not have afforded the 3-5 Ethiopian Birr (20 to 30 cents USD). Her economic status put her at the back of the baptism line, as evidenced both by the way she was treated at the first church and then by having to walk to another church (only to find no one there). This story indicates both the determination that these women have to be a part of the church, and of the barriers that they have faced when trying to secure a religious service, rite, or sacrament from the church. The story highlights the inequality and injustice they have experienced at the hands of the very church they are trying to be a part of.

**Expectations of Church Leaders: ‘*There is not much we expect...*’<sup>53</sup>**

This statement emerged during a contextual Bible study on the crippled woman healed on the Sabbath, where the women were asked to contemplate their expectations of current church leaders. The women replied:

**Woman 1:** There is not much we expect from church leaders. We only put our hope in God.

**Woman 2:** We may only want them to understand that we are not in this lifestyle for luxury.<sup>54</sup>

It seems that these two respondents did not expect very much from church leaders and were seeking to understand their own situation in life, that prostitution was their means of survival, not a choice made out of greed. This runs counter to the pervasive Ethiopian view of prostitution that women engage in prostitution for the purpose of procuring luxury items in life, and not for survival.

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<sup>53</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Pt. I, Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

Woman 2 desired for church leaders to understand that her engagement with prostitution was for survival. In addition, Woman 1 suggested that her hope lay in God and not in what a religious leader could do for her. This suggestion may indicate that Woman 1 expected God, not those tasked with the leadership of the church, to deliver her from her current situation. She had hope in God for deliverance from her current circumstances and instead of blaming God for her life, which would be quite understandable in light of her situation, she said that she could only have expectations of God. Expectations and hope in God are markers of faith and could indicate this woman's perception that He was the only one who can deliver her from her situation. As the discussion continued, the women were asked:

**Translator:** If you go [to the church] and ask for help, will they help you?

**Woman 1:** We are not sure. But if we are prepared to listen to them and also prepared to change our lifestyle, why not? Currently we are in adultery and we do know that we live in sin.<sup>55</sup>

Woman 1 expressed her uncertainty whether church leaders would provide assistance to her and she then told that she thought listening to church leaders and changing her lifestyle could have initiated her getting help. It is interesting to note that this woman did not categorically reject the idea of church leaders providing her with help, but rather outlined a program of actions that could incline church leaders toward her favourably, as conveyed through her rhetorical question: 'why not?' She noted her understanding that as an adulterer living in sin she was excluded from being helped. *If* she were to listen to the advice of church leaders, and *if* she were prepared to leave prostitution, *then*, she believed, she could have been helped.

### **Discussion: Church Leaders Compared to Jesus**

The women articulated very few expectations of church leaders, primarily based on their lived experiences of prostitution: they did not view church leaders as people who emulated the principles and actions of Jesus. A sense of rejection was reiterated by the women when it came to their interactions with church leaders.

This experience of rejection was corroborated by Deacon EK from his leadership experiences within the EOTC. He says that when prostitution was addressed in a sermon, it often came in the form of criticism toward those engaged in prostitution and not of the actual institution of prostitution:

Preaching criticizes the prostitute. Only they [the priests] tell them their problem. I don't want anyone to tell me about my problem but I want the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



churches to come up with a potential solution which can help me to escape this life. But the problem is that the priest's analyse their sin; prostitute sin. They never talk about the solution. So you tell me my problem, you can tell me my sickness, but you have to prescribe medicine.<sup>56</sup>

Based on Deacon EK's analysis, it seems that, in relation to prostitution, analysis and diagnosis of the problem is on offer more often than help. Unfortunately, this one-sided discussion on the causes of the sickness is not bringing healing to the sick. 'We believe that the church is not a court. The church is a clinic.'<sup>57</sup>

Following this point raised by Deacon EK, I asked: 'who is the church for then:?'<sup>58</sup>

According to our theology and church teaching, church is for sick people. Because our church is a clinic, not a court. But people think that the church is only for healthy people which is not true. So like we have to teach our theology when even for people and I even – people's attitude toward prostitute should be changed, right? These prostitutes are excluded even from the social life, not only from their spiritual life. They don't have relationships with their neighbours...because they are excluded. People don't want to have any conversation with them. I can say that they are hated people, or outcast people.<sup>59</sup>

In Chapter Five, the theme of rejection by human beings was explored as one of the possible ways in which the women in this research project made sense of humanity. Deacon EK highlighted that the church was for the 'sick' (those implicated as sinners in a multitude of ways), and that it should operate as a place that cares for the ill. Deacon EK said that the church should not act like a court but rather:

The church is a hospital. So you don't need to be healthy to come to a hospital. You have to be sick to come to a church. That is the purpose of the church.<sup>60</sup>

The differences between the official teaching and traditional practices of the EOTC are prominent once again and indicate the divide between what the church says it should be and how it is actually experienced, especially by people on the margins of the church such as women engaged in prostitution.

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<sup>56</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The theme of rejection by human beings identified by the Flamingo Women in Chapter Five was corroborated by Deacon EK and highlights a discrepancy between the teaching and practice of the EOTC with reference to women affected by prostitution.

**Message to Church Leaders: ‘Help us out of this life...’**

With respect to the theme that the women perceived the rich receiving preferential treatment by church leaders, the women were asked what they would want church leaders to know about them.

**Translator:** What do you want them [church leaders] to understand about you?

**Woman 1:** We want them to help us out of this life and help us carry God’s spirit and serve him.

**Woman 2:** We want them to help us out of this life so that we praise God for delivering us from this dirty life.

**Woman 3:** We do not have a place to live. We cannot stay here where we sleep with men and go to church. To go to church you need to be clean from sexual life, menstrual period blood etc. so please tell them if we get a place to live, then we can keep clean and go to church.<sup>61</sup>

Carrying God’s Spirit, serving God, praising God, and attending church were mentioned by these three women in response to the question about what shape a helping hand from church leaders might take. Each of these activities was predicated on the church leaders’ helping these women leave a life of prostitution. In effect, Woman 3 spoke for all the women: ‘if you help me out of this life of prostitution, I can engage in spiritual activities which I currently deem myself unable to participate in because of the lifestyle I lead.’

Woman 2 viewed church leaders as a conduit of God’s grace and believed that if they had participated actively in her life, she might have been able to experience the emancipatory work of God in her. Such work would have caused her to praise God directly. It seems that the women had a desire to participate in the activities of the worshipping community, such as serving and attending church, and not from a marginal place (outside the church gates).

When the topic of church leaders’ expectations was raised in one of the contextual Bible studies regarded the crippled woman who was healed on the Sabbath, the women were asked:

**Translator:** If priests from the Orthodox Church and pastors from the protestant church come and sit here, what will you want to tell them?

**Woman 1:** I will ask them to pray to God that God brings me prosperity.

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<sup>61</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Review Flamingo Women, 3/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 2.

**Woman 2:** I will ask them to always pray for me that God forgives me and helps me come out of this.

**Woman 3:** I will ask them to pray that we come out of this work.

**Woman 4:** I will not tell anyone anything at all. I pray on my own and ask God to help me come out of this lifestyle.<sup>62</sup>

If given the opportunity to speak with a priest or pastor, the women expressed their desire to ask for prayer from a church leader. This speaks to an intercessory understanding of the role of church leaders. These sentiments support the Eastern Orthodox understanding of priests as mediators between God and Christian people and as spiritually knowledgeable people who are ‘able to travel the same path along which he is to lead them.’<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the women believed that a religious leader’s intercessory prayers would be more efficacious than their own prayers; this could explain in part why prosperity and finding a means of leaving prostitution were the prayer requests shared by three of the women.

Woman 4 claimed that she would not ask for anything and had no need of an intercessor, stating that she would pray on her own. This woman’s response could indicate her lack of belief that the prayers of a religious leader were any more effective than her own. Her prayer request was the same as the other women, which might indicate her desire to leave prostitution as well. It appears that each of these women yearned to leave prostitution, whether through the efforts of an intercessor or on their own, and they believed that calling upon God for divine intervention was an integral part to making this happen.

In order to discern whether or not Woman 4 had perceived any action on God’s part in making her request to leave a life of prostitution a reality, the question was asked:

**Translator:** Has God ever answered your prayer [to come out of this lifestyle]?

**Woman 4:** Not yet, maybe because of my sin. I am still waiting.<sup>64</sup>

This poignant statement indicates Woman 4’s belief that God would hear her prayer one day. She did not answer the question with a ‘no’, but with an anticipatory comment that she was still waiting for God to hear her request and respond. She analysed why her prayer was not then being heard – ‘my sin’ – and stated that she was still waiting. One

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<sup>62</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Pt. I, Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Alfeyev, *op cit.*, 450.

<sup>64</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Pt. I, Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

could infer that despite her lack of faith in the religious leaders around her, she held onto a strong conviction that God would deliver her from a life of prostitution and that she was keeping her eyes peeled for that day.

**Discussion: Help us out of this life**

The women articulated a desire to be understood and helped by church leaders. They wanted church leaders to recognise that prostitution was a means of survival for them, not a personal choice to engage in sin that left them ritually unclean. The data suggest that the women wanted church leaders to intercede for them, and that with both spiritual and physical support offered by the church, they might be able to exit prostitution and thereby be in closer communion with God. These women desired closeness with God, as evidenced through the coping mechanism they employed for attending church.

It is significant that, according to Deacon EK, the official theological position of the EOTC concerning the nature of God is that God is a benevolent Father, one who loves, welcomes ('He wants them to come to Him'), heals, and gives life ('not kill, not a judge').<sup>65</sup> Parents give life, and if human beings are to act in accordance with the EOTC's teaching on *theosis*, this would imply treating women in prostitution as children who are loved – not as convicts deserving judgment. Deacon EK went on to say:

We are the mirror of God, people should see God through us [people in the EOTC]. If we don't love them [women in prostitution], they [women in prostitution] can't see God. If we are not generous, they can't see God. If you don't respect them they don't see God through us. But if we really love them, if we have cared for them, they would see God through us. So, we are the mirror of God, we have to know that. God helps others through us, so we have to be willing to do God's job. When we help prostitutes, we are doing God's job. That's why we are in the world; to benefit others, to bless others.<sup>66</sup>

Deacon EK articulated the essential role that he believed members of the EOTC had in mediating God the Father to women engaged in prostitution. In his view, stigmatising and rejecting behaviour toward women in prostitution become barriers to these women's perception of who God really is. In light of that view, Deacon EK, through the research he conducted himself (to which I referred in Chapter One), through his interactions with women engaged in prostitution, and through his assistance in this

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<sup>65</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Transcript Deacon EK, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 18.

research project, stands as one example of a leader in the EOTC who has listened to one of the dominant messages of these women.

### **Summary**

The themes described in this chapter were identified from data generated predominantly from contextual Bible studies where conversations about perceptions of the church ensued, particularly, the story of the woman who anointed Jesus and the story of the crippled woman whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath. As the women interacted with these Bible stories, the following themes were identified: 1) the women stood outside the gates of the EOTC when attending a service (as opposed to standing inside the church compound or building) due to their fear of contaminating fellow worshippers; 2) the women encountered few church leaders who emulated the actions of Jesus and they expected very little from church leaders. Rather, they put their trust in God to help them out of their life situation; 3) their main message to church leaders was to request help.

These themes were further interpreted by Deacon EK of the EOTC, one of my key informants in this research project. His work helped provide additional context for how the women made sense of the church. The influence of the EOTC has shaped how the women in this project had come to understand the church, an important insight related to the primary research question of my thesis. To that end, in the next chapter I present and discuss data generated from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with selected evangelical church leaders.



## **Chapter 7: Presentation of Data**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents data generated from the fourteen semi-structured interviews I conducted with seventeen different evangelical church leaders in Addis Ababa. Two of the interviews involved multiple participants. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) their denominational affiliation, because I wanted to ensure that I had at least one to two representatives from the major evangelical denominations (as outlined in Chapter One); 2) experience with social development programs within the church; 3) level of leadership, because my research assistant, WM, encouraged me to interview leaders who had strategic insight; 4) representation of nine male and eight female leaders; and 5) an expressed interest in this research project. WM, a leader in one of the main evangelical denominations, helped me gain access to the leaders that I interviewed.

The data presented are discussed with reference to the emerging themes that have been identified already in the voices of the women, particularly themes related to how the women make sense of their prelude to prostitution, God, sin, humanity, justice, and the church. These themes are recapped in the chart found in Appendix Four. The aim of this chapter is to listen to how evangelical church leaders interact with these themes, and to discern the degree of resonance and dissonance that the leaders share with the women with reference to these themes.

### **Recurring Themes**

#### **Leaving/Running, Confusion, and Loneliness**

In several of the semi-structured interviews I conducted with selected evangelical church leaders, when asked directly about their knowledge of the context that women find themselves in prior to becoming engaged in prostitution, several leaders shared stories of women that they had heard of or knew personally.

I have some cousins who came from the North [Northern Ethiopia] who became prostitutes, and I did some investigation there. The majority of them came because of their marriage. She married him, she didn't love him. He was a big man [older man] and she was a small girl [young woman]. Because of this, they run to the cities ... many girls go to Addis. Marriage is a very big problem. In [the] culture [of Northern Ethiopia], at seven, they're married. Immediately. At the age of seven. Imagine.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

Church Elder AG's observation fits with current research that finds early child marriage as one of the major push factors for women in Northern Ethiopia coming to big cities such as Addis Ababa and ending-up in prostitution. Typical factors include young age, naivety, lack of education, and high degrees of vulnerability.<sup>2</sup> Young girls are forced to marry older men because of a long-standing traditional practice that states that girls must be married before their menstrual cycle begins or else they will no longer be eligible for marriage.<sup>3</sup> So, the younger the age of a girl that is married off, the less likely that her menstruation would have commenced and therefore, the family is ensured that their young daughter will have a husband from the community.<sup>4</sup>

In these communities, divorce is unacceptable; therefore, with no one to turn to because of the shame it would bring to both extended families, these young girls often feel trapped by their circumstances, and at the first chance they take the risk of fleeing from their rural communities to urban centres in search of a better life. Church Elder AG went on to say that

There are some poor girls who do not have families, they don't have other opportunities when their families are not there—mother, father died, because of orphan life, they can go to those areas [prostitution areas] as a solution.<sup>5</sup>

Church Elder AG mentioned another vulnerable group in Ethiopia who are also highly susceptible to becoming engaged in prostitution. This group includes girls made vulnerable by their lack of parents or a stable household. Church Elder AG's analysis of family and parenting, or the lack thereof, as major contributing factors to young women running away from their rural homes and finding themselves economically disadvantaged in Addis Ababa was substantiated in my interview with Pastor DJ:

Getting into such kind of life [prostitution] is not easy, unless the community push you—unless the community situation push you. Even those ladies ... who are involved in this [prostitution], when you talk to them, they don't like such kind of lifestyle. But something forces them. Maybe their family ... I read [one story], the lady is involved in prostitution

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<sup>2</sup> Lorraine van Blerk, 'Poverty, Migration and Sex Work: Youth Transitions in Ethiopia,' *Area* 40, no. 2 (2008): 248.

<sup>3</sup> During field research conducted in the Sidama region of Southern Ethiopia in 2015, I observed that the same marriage practices were being followed in this part of Ethiopia, and the women who shared in the focus groups I conducted said that they were between the ages of ten and twelve when they were married off to their current spouse (most of the women who participated in these focus groups had grown children and, in some cases, were even grandmothers). Sidama Field Notes, 3/2015.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 3-4.



because of her mother. Her mother doesn't have, she cannot work. But you see her [the mother] with small children, they can't survive within the city. So at night, she [the daughter] goes and brings some money, at least to help the family.<sup>6</sup>

Whether as an orphan or as a girl living in a highly impoverished home, having to engage in prostitution in order to meet the basic needs of life would be a highly confusing experience for a child. Both Elder AG and Pastor DJ noted in their stories that these were young girls who were trying to survive, and they highlighted the role-reversal that these children took on by having to provide for their families. Themes of loneliness and confusion are suggested by this role-reversal, with a young girl having to sell her body in order to provide for herself and possibly for her family. In the second story, although the young girl had a home to go back to, she had to leave that home in order to do the things that she needed to in order to bring home some income for her family. Although this young girl did not have to leave her home permanently (as did some of the women highlighted in Chapter Four), every night this girl had to suspend her role as a child in the household and take on the grown-up task of providing for her family.

Another factor mentioned by some evangelical church leaders for young women leaving and running away from home is abuse. In an interview with three female leaders in the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church denomination (EKHC, who will now be referred to as the EKHC Women<sup>7</sup>) I learned about a girl they knew who had been raped by her brother and his friend:

There is two boys and the one raped her. Then she stayed silent. Then after two or three days, the other boy raped her. Then she became silent. She didn't even tell to her aunt. She kept silent.<sup>8</sup>

It was only after some time that the girl decided to tell her aunt and when she did, the aunt told the girl to use a condom. After this, the girl became:

... depressed, depressed, depressed and her school friends said, 'Why? [are you depressed]. You can go out and become a street girl. Now you are living as a prostitute in your house.' [So] then she became a street girl and she became to this life [prostitution]. Some girls enter to this life because of raping. Some girls, they are raped by their brother ... even their father rapes

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript of Interview with Pastor DJ, Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church, 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Each of these women has been involved with women affected by prostitution at some time in their lives, on a voluntary basis and outside of the mandate of a church program or ministry. They therefore have met and come to know a number of women engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa.

<sup>8</sup> Transcript of Interview with EKHC Women, 16/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 9.

them, even their uncle rapes them. I heard many testimonies from them. Because of this [rape], they become angry and become street girls.<sup>9</sup>

The disturbing story of this girl's multiple rapes, the apparent inaction of her guardian at the time (except for the advice to use a condom), and her school friend's analysis of the situation that she was a 'prostitute in her own house,'<sup>10</sup> all seemed to be contributing factors to this girl's eventual turning to life on the streets. The silence of the girl after both instances of rape could indicate the trauma she incurred and the self-isolation that the abuse brought on. Silence and depression are all experiences attended by significant loneliness and confusion, and this girl eventually left her aunt's home and entered into a life of prostitution. The EKHC Women surmised that due to the anger that many of these women experience because of the abuse they have experienced, especially at the hands of family members, they turn to the streets. This observation has been made through the EKHC Women listening to the stories (testimonies) of women who have been raped and consequently began living on the streets.

The responses highlighted in this section indicate that some evangelical leaders are definitely aware of some of the contributing factors and circumstances that women in prostitution experience prior to entering prostitution. They understand that survival is one of the main factors for young women entering prostitution. The themes of leaving and running, confusion, and loneliness are therefore not unfamiliar to the leaders represented in this section, suggesting a degree of resonance with the attempts of women affected by prostitution to make sense of their movement into prostitution.

### **God: A Protector or Personal Saviour to Women in Prostitution?**

This section will recount some of the initial encounters that evangelical church leaders had with women engaged in prostitution. One leader shared:

We told them this [prostitution] is sin. Christ loved you, please come out. . . . So those who want to come to Christ, gave their lives—even in the street, they're crying, they're confessing sin, accept Christ as their personal Saviour . . . Then we invite them for lunch for the first time.<sup>11</sup>

This story was recounted by a church leader who helped initiate a program with a church that sought to attend to some of the basic needs of women engaged in street prostitution. The church would send groups of volunteers at night into red-light districts

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<sup>9</sup> Transcript of Interview with EKHC Women, 16/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DM, Mulu Wongel Church, 8/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

and invite women to come to the church during the day to learn about the counselling and job placement services they were offering.

This approach by the church resonates with missiologist Girma Bekele's observation that the basic missiological assumption of Ethiopian evangelical churches has been significantly informed by its Western missionary origins, which compartmentalises evangelism and social concern activities.<sup>12</sup> The church started with the presupposition that the women they were trying to reach did not have a connection to God and needed to be told about the love of Jesus Christ. An acceptance of Jesus Christ as a personal saviour came before any type of social initiative toward the women.

This sequencing of events was also evident in the strategy expressed by another denomination that currently runs a program that seeks to offer assistance to women seeking to leave a life of prostitution:

So, after nine o'clock we went to the street and then we started approaching them and told them that Jesus loves them. We had a small invitation paper ... then they were invited [to the church] in the afternoon.<sup>13</sup>

The approach of this church highlights the importance they placed on the assurance of the love of Jesus Christ as a starting place for any type of personal or programmatic relationship with these women. In my review of all the transcripts of the interviews I conducted with evangelical church leaders, I found a significant amount of discussion with several of the leaders related to evangelistic outreach strategies utilised by the church leaders and their congregations. A leader of EWAR commented that in the early 2000s when the organisation began,

[The church] saw their responsibility as evangelism and then send them to [us], Women At Risk. And there were movements—a lot of movements [of the evangelical church] in the street. And that's why the first girl I ever met, she looked at me and she said—that was the first contact—'You're talking about Jesus. I've heard. That's from evangelism.'<sup>14</sup>

Another leader commented on his surprise at the discovery that many of the women they were trying to 'evangelise' identified themselves as Christians:

These ladies [in the church] just go to them, and they tell them about the Gospel. For your surprise, most of them [women in prostitution] have been

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<sup>12</sup> *The In-Between People: A Reading of David Bosch through the Lens of Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 388-389.

<sup>13</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Transcript of Interview with Leader CF, Ellilta Women at Risk (EWAR), Addis Ababa, 25/10/2016, 2.

Christians in the church. It was heart breaking, some of the stories that we have heard actually.<sup>15</sup>

Elder AZ admitted that he did not expect that the target audience of his church's evangelism endeavours amongst women engaged with prostitution would identify as Christian or as previous church attenders. This presupposition that women in prostitution in Addis Ababa are not connected to God is hinted at in the strategies that these churches used when trying to make contact with these women, and it is part of a long tradition in Ethiopia of what Girma Bekele calls 'evangelising the evangelised.'<sup>16</sup> Bekele notes that a standing criticism of the evangelical church by the EOTC has been its paternalistic stance toward the EOTC, its lack of ecumenical sensitivity, and its emphasis on conversion defined as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup>

The strategies employed by Elder AZ's church adhere to standard evangelical practices, emphasising the primacy of verbal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Verbal proclamation is very important to these churches; however, the semi-structured interviews indicate that the church leaders I interviewed had a poorly developed sense of the perspectives and beliefs of women in prostitution, especially with reference to how they perceived God. Rather, their posture suggests a viewpoint that these women are far from God and need to be brought near through hearing a verbal account of evangelical understandings of Jesus Christ's plan for salvation. It warrants noting that Elder AZ mentioned the heart-breaking impact that the stories of the women had on their volunteers, and this suggests that the volunteers were able to listen to the women, and not just to proclaim a message to them.

Evangelical church leaders appear to view women in prostitution's need for an introduction to a personal saviour as having priority over any other actions on these women's behalf. The thought that some of these women may have already experienced God in their lives as someone acting as a protector appears to be a foreign concept to those in the evangelical church, whose perception of women engaged in prostitution is that they are disconnected from God, are devoid of pre-existing knowledge or experience of God, and need to be introduced to him first.

Although these evangelical leaders resonated with the women in their understanding of prostitution as survival, there seems to be a disconnection between

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<sup>15</sup> Transcript of Interview with Elder AZ, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Bekele, *op cit.*, 228.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

their understanding of prostitution and their response to it. Evangelical leaders place a priority on verbally proclaiming their interpretation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on having people identify as sinners and asking a loving Saviour to cleanse them from their sin. They lead with evangelistic activities and not with humanitarian intervention, a posture opposite to Girma Bekele's call for evangelical churches to stand in solidarity with the poor and ensure that the people they are trying to help do not become objects in their mission-related activities.<sup>18</sup>

During their outreach activities, church volunteers are quick to announce the love of Jesus Christ for these women and *then* to invite these women to a church event the next day. Perhaps a reversal in the sequencing of these activities could aid in the formulation of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution: an invitation to the church first, then the announcement of God's love, and then a discussion on repentance from sins. This will be addressed in the following chapters.

### **Striving to Be a Provider: The Example of the EECMY**

As a result of a conference called 'Kazanchis for Jesus,' the EECMY Kazanchis local church started connecting with women in the Chechnya red-light district of Addis Ababa in 2000.<sup>19</sup> The conference encouraged local churches to become actively involved in the Kazanchis community and the EECMY's local church in Kazanchis was motivated to start interacting with people from all socioeconomic walks of life in their community. However, some in the church expressed reservations about the church becoming involved with women engaged in prostitution. Elder DB explained that those who were against this initiative stated:

If we approach them [women in prostitution], they accepted Jesus, they leave this job. But, we don't have money. How can they leave?<sup>20</sup>

This was a fair question in light of the strong non-governmental organisation (NGO) model that a number of evangelical churches follow<sup>21</sup> and prompted those in the church to problematise prostitution solely through the lens of income generation. The person Elder DB referred to was aware of the limitations of the church's finances and recognized that sharing about Jesus Christ as a personal saviour could result in women ceasing their engagement with prostitution, resulting in their need to find another source

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>19</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Bekele, *op cit.*, 396.

of income. This member of the church acknowledged that the church could not provide an alternative means for these women to meet their basic needs, which placed the church in a morally ambiguous situation with a message to these women along the lines of, ‘give-up your “sinful” means of income generation, but we have no answer for you beyond that.’

Elder DB went on to explain that this sentiment was repeated by the forty women who accepted the invitation church volunteers offered during an evening of evangelistic outreach in the Chechnya red-light area:

We expect maybe one or two [women] ... but around forty came. They congregated in the congregation premises. There was preaching and then after preaching, there was an altar call. The question we had feared very much raised up. They [the women] said, ‘Yes, we know this is not a good way of life. We want to accept Jesus Christ here, but what shall we eat?’<sup>22</sup>

Elder DB says that the church had raised approximately one-thousand Ethiopian Birr<sup>23</sup> and ‘deep inside we were feeling really bad.’<sup>24</sup> The women raised the point that the acceptance of a personal saviour would not instantaneously ameliorate the very real struggle they faced to meet their basic needs. Acceptance of Jesus Christ would entail giving-up the only means of income available to these women, and without a plan for how to have these basic needs met, the women voiced their concern at what this type of commitment could mean. In short, what the church offered—reconciliation with Jesus Christ through the repentance of sins and therefore giving up prostitution—was not enough in that moment. The church could not be a provider to these first women it encountered.

Perhaps this response by the women could have been avoided had the church chosen to pursue different activities or if it had been motivated by different presuppositions in its approach to these women. This apparent dichotomy between receiving Christ and having food to eat suggests a deficient understanding of the social-ethical implications of the Kingdom of God as outlined in Luke 4. Missiologist David Bosch notes that the phrase ‘to let the oppressed go free’ (Luke 4:18) finds its source in Isaiah 58 and refers to a distinct social element in its original context.<sup>25</sup> As opposed to viewing these women as sinful and devoid of any connection to God (and requiring a

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<sup>22</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 1-2.

<sup>23</sup> In 2016, this would have been the equivalent of approximately \$50 USD.

<sup>24</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>25</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 100.

solution to an economic problem), the evangelical church needed an expanded understanding of the social implications of the message they were proclaiming.

In this situation, the church saw itself as the problem-solver. There were difficulties inherent in this characterisation, because the church was unable to provide for all of the basic needs of every woman engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa. Despite this, the EECMY must be commended for how they handled the situation on that day. The church distributed what they could to the women, and this event was the beginning of the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program of the EECMY.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Example of EECMY: An Invitation Evoking Response**

Elder DB recounts that their invitation resulted in significantly more women than they had expected turning-up at the church premises. The invitation provoked a response from the women toward the EECMY Kazanchis church far beyond what the church had imagined: ‘we expect maybe one or two, something like that, but around forty came.’<sup>27</sup> Why is this? Perhaps it was because of the potential for material or other needs to be met by the church. Regardless of the underlying motivations of these women to come to the church, it is significant that they *responded to an invitation*. Preaching and a call to repentance occurred during the outreach activities and happened again after the women came to the church.

Why is it that an invitation to the church produced such a response by these women? Was the response to the invitation indicative of something beyond the possibility for one’s basic needs to be temporarily met? I submit that the offer of hospitality is an important key to understanding the Kingdom of God and His character as not only a *Provider* but also as a *Protector*. Instead of the evangelical church viewing women affected by prostitution as devoid of any knowledge or experience of God in their lives, perhaps an asset-based approach that respects the women’s experiences of God as a Protector could engender a life-affirming response to prostitution.

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<sup>26</sup> The New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program of the EECMY Denomination began in the year 2002 with a goal of providing exit and rehabilitative services to women seeking to leave a life of prostitution. Since its inception, the program reports having assisted over three-hundred women to leave a life of prostitution. Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 2, 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

## Sin Identity and Sin Hierarchy

Through the various inductive Bible studies conducted throughout the course of this project, the women in this study clearly self-identified as sinners. Furthermore, they suggested that sin was often conceived of in a hierarchical manner, with prostitution as one of the worst sins, at the top of the sin-ladder. When evangelical leaders were asked to explain how they believed that the average congregant in their churches viewed women in prostitution, they said the following:

**EKHC Woman 1:** As a sinner.

**EKHC Woman 2:** She is a sinner.<sup>28</sup>

Another leader commented that:

Sometime they [people in the church] say, ‘no these [women] are not coming back because already this [one] is lost. They are lost. They are addicted to not only prostitution. They are already alcoholic; they are already [doing] drugs. They are chewing khat. So bringing back these people is just a waste of our time. Instead of spending much of your time on prostitution, why don’t you go and reach out to other good group people?’<sup>29</sup>

Pastor DJ noted that prostitution was coupled with various other vices in the eyes of the church faithful and as a result of this compounding of ‘sinful’ activities, these women were seen as beyond being brought back from the brink. Instead of spending time and other church resources trying to help these women engaged in prostitution, would it not be more logical to help those who were less steeped in sin?

The repeated use of the word *lost* with reference to women affected by prostitution suggests a deficient understanding of the Kingdom of God in the minds of average Ethiopian evangelical churchgoers. Gushee and Stassen state:

Jesus taught compassion especially for those who are in bondage, who are vulnerable, and oppressed because they are powerless. Jesus was realistic about human sin. The poor, the powerless, the outcasts ... the women, do not receive justice. The lost sheep cannot find its way home. Therefore, love has special regard for those who are in bondage to others or to their own sin.<sup>30</sup>

The lost are precisely those who Jesus is searching after and who qualify, in the economy of the Kingdom of God, for being found. The words used by Pastor DJ to describe the average evangelical perspective on women affected by prostitution—*lost*,

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<sup>28</sup> Transcript of Interview with EKHC Women, 16/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Transcript of Interview with Pastor DJ, Kale Heywet Church (EKHC), 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 335.



*bring*, and *reach*—are words connoting someone or something that needs to be actively found again. If the Ethiopian evangelical church fails to understand that its mandate is to bring and reach those people who are lost to God, to society, and to every form of human community, then, understandably, it will focus its limited resources on those people deemed worthy of being grasped.

It seems that prostitution, alcohol dependency, and drug addiction are all conditions that push a person to the furthest edges of Ethiopian society because of their lack of adherence to accepted social norms. But acceptable social norms must be examined in light of how Christ defines the lost and the church's mandate to the lost. One leader remarked: 'Our interpretation of their activity is merely driven from the culture; the cultural taboos and the cultural norms we have.'<sup>31</sup>

This idea that a woman engaged in prostitution is lost to society is not new, and is reflected in cultures such as Ancient Israel (as discussed in Chapter Two) where society was primarily organised around the household structure. In this structure, a woman in the household had specific roles, and was protected and provided for through her relationship to a male relative of that household. As Jon L. Berquist notes:

Most prostitutes operated outside the system of households. They were relationally different; they did not interact with the society in the accepted patterns through male heads of households. As a result, they wielded a certain power, and were seen as different and strange.<sup>32</sup>

Berquist's language of strangeness could be viewed as analogous to Pastor DJ's use of the word *lost*. Berquist moves on to say:

The strangeness of prostitutes and adulterous women alike is their transgression of the boundaries that ancient Israel built around households ... [they] are "strange" in the sense of deviating from the norm. Because not related to a man who sponsors her in the society, such a woman operates outside the hierarchies and social structures that define most of Israel. These women are transgressive of social boundaries, and yet they live ...<sup>33</sup>

Appropriating this to the situation of women engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, it is fair to say that just like women engaged in prostitution in Ancient Israel, those in Addis Ababa are seen as transgressors of social boundaries. In the words of Pastor DJ, they are lost, and for the average evangelical Christian in Addis Ababa, these

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<sup>31</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AZ, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 12.

<sup>32</sup> Jon L. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality: The Body and the Household in Ancient Israel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 148.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

women have transgressed the social boundaries so extensively that the thought of actively seeking such women seems futile. They have transgressed too far and therefore cannot be ‘reached.’

This idea of women engaged in prostitution as a lost cause was also articulated by the EKHC women when asked:

**Interviewer:** Do you think that most people in the church believe they [women in prostitution] can change?

**EKHC Woman 1:** No, they doubt.

**EKHC Woman 2:** No

**Interviewer:** Why?

**EKHC Woman 1:** Maybe the culture. [The people] have the mind of malice.

**EKHC Woman 2:** They don’t forget.

**EKHC Woman 3:** That backstory.

**EKHC Woman 1:** They don’t forget.<sup>34</sup>

The EKHC Women were emphatic during this portion of the interview when they shared their belief that the average person in their congregation cannot forget the women’s background in prostitution; on some level, people hold these women’s backstories against them (‘mind of malice’)<sup>35</sup> and this impedes the church’s ability to believe women who were once engaged in prostitution can actually change. The EKHC women believe that once a woman has been engaged in prostitution the congregation will always see her as a prostitute.

This point was substantiated by the leader of EWAR, who remarked that in the early 2000s (when the organisation began) people in the church did not want the women engaged in prostitution to be a part of their congregations:

They were worried. A lot of people honestly believed the women are there [in prostitution] because they choose to. Because that’s an easier way of earning money and then a lot of them actually believed they were addicted to sex, the girls were. So they [people in the congregation] were afraid they [women engaged in prostitution] were going to tempt the men and create division in the church.<sup>36</sup>

This conception of woman engaged in prostitution as a source of temptation and therefore a threat to the very order of the church is consistent with historical views of women in prostitution (as discussed in Chapter Two). A special fear of women involved in prostitution has a long history that can be discerned within Israel’s sacred

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<sup>34</sup> Transcript of Interview with EKHC Women, 16/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 5

<sup>36</sup> Transcript of Interview with Leader CF, EWAR, 25/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

wisdom traditions. Examples can be found in the books of Proverbs and Sirach, as noted by Biblical scholar F. Scott Spencer who says that:

beyond the consistent general warning against fraternizing with sinners emerged a particular obsession with escaping the traps of “loose” or “strange” women, epitomized by adulteresses and prostitutes. Notice the characteristic language used in Proverbs ... ‘Then a woman comes toward him decked out like a prostitute; She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home, now in the squares, and at every corner she lies in wait.’<sup>37</sup>

Spencer is referring to Proverbs 7:10-12, which characterises foolishness as a ‘loose’ woman seeking to pounce on her next victim through her tempting ways. This type of caricature reinforces the notion that women engaged in prostitution are villains who lead faithful people away from the path of wisdom. These women were a threat to social propriety in Ancient Israel, and Berquist speaks about the power that they wielded precisely because they were found outside the household structure in Ancient Israel yet still able to survive outside of the social hierarchy.<sup>38</sup> Within the context of Ancient Israel, this type of power was not to be lauded; but rather, to be contained and avoided at all costs.

Church Elder AZ spoke about avoidance of temptation when he reflected on the approach that his church employed when seeking to build relationships with women engaged in prostitution during their night-visits to selected red-light districts in Addis Ababa:

The people involved in this program as we believe, we have serious convictions that they are matured Christians. We are not sending individuals. At least we have three people there; one male, two women are there. So even if the temptation is there, one helps the other, okay ...<sup>39</sup>

Going in a team, and not alone to these red-light districts, is a safety measure that this church employed against the perceived threat that a woman in prostitution poses. Sending mature Christians as volunteers is also another mechanism used to mitigate the threat that these lost women—those that have so severely transgressed social boundaries—pose, in order to safeguard these volunteers from falling into the same path that these women traversed into the borderlands of society. Another church leader remarked:

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<sup>37</sup> F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies, and Women of the Cloth* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 117.

<sup>38</sup> Berquist, *op cit.*, 148.

<sup>39</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AZ, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6.

They [women engaged in prostitution] are seen like fornicators, and also, they are perceived to be threats to marriage, okay? They are threats for a marriage, because especially in Addis, they think their husbands go there and that will affect their marriage. So, that's the perception.<sup>40</sup>

Being classified as a sinner of the fornicating variety, suspected of being addicted to sex, drugs and alcohol, and feared as a threat to the very fabric of society relegates women engaged in prostitution to the lowest rungs of society. As a corollary, these indicators elevate women engaged in prostitution to the top of the sin ladder, which strikes some leaders as grossly unfair. Church Leader FT reflected on spiritual practices of those who consider themselves faithful churchgoers and said

They [Christians] look down on the prostitution people. They think that if they are faithful to their husband, and if they go to church, and give alms to the poor ... they think that they are holy. So, they define their holiness by their external practices, but who knows [what is] inside their heart, they may be more—I mean, more sinful than these prostitutes, I am sure. In their heart they maybe covet other people. But these prostitutes I am sure they are saying—rather than coveting—‘how am I going to escape this life?’ I am sure God sees those of us who think that we are holier than them, so they are hypocrites.<sup>41</sup>

Church Leader FT noted that he had found that churchgoers depended on their external spiritual practices to signify their holiness, but that these practices did not always reveal what was happening in their internal lives. His observation accords with Ethiopian scholar Alemayehu Mekonnen's conclusion that in the early days of the evangelical movement, evangelical converts were expected to demonstrate an inward change and that this change was ‘expected to show itself in the fruit of righteousness, outward actions.’<sup>42</sup> It appears that this has continued to be a dominant feature of the evangelical church in Ethiopia.

Church Leader FT's choice of words is interesting when he notes ‘they [those in the church] may be...more sinful than those prostitutes.’<sup>43</sup> The phrase ‘more sinful’ brings into question the idea that all sins are equal in the eyes of God. The data presented up to this point suggest that the average Ethiopian Christian views some sins as worse than others, an understanding of sin similar to how many women engaged in prostitution view sin. So, it seems that there is agreement between the women and

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<sup>40</sup> Church Leader FT, Evangelical Theological College (ETC), 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Alemayehu Mekonnen, *Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 103.

<sup>43</sup> Church Leader FT, ETC, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 9

churchgoers that sin is understood as a tacitly, if not explicitly, tiered system. While the selected evangelical church leaders represented in this research project may not hold to these views of sin, it is noteworthy that sin is perceived in this manner. Church Leader FT indicated that this hierarchical understanding of sin is partially a result of a misunderstanding of God's grace and the need to work for one's salvation:

In Ethiopia grace is not known when [we] talk about salvation, mainly you base on works. Good works. So, we think that we are saved by our good works and good works are the result of our salvation.<sup>44</sup>

A leader from EWAR corroborated this understanding of salvation based on works:

You earn your salvation through Christ. Yes, yes, yes. It's only through Christ. But that is proven—like you still have to work ... It is like your salvation is something ... you have to keep earning. Then, the hierarchy component part in society is—this is where it becomes very important. Everybody has a place in society and it depends on where you see yourself and that's where conflicts [in the church] come from. If the women who were coming to the Lord stay poor, stay with their heads bowed and [is] like a servant, the bottom of the hierarchy, they will be accepted [in the church] because they are walking on their knees saying, 'I am sorry Lord, forgive me. I am sorry my brother, forgive me.' In that position, they are ok. But the minute the woman seems like she is a part of the church congregation, like the same, like everybody [else], that is when people get uncomfortable because that means they are coming up in the society of hierarchy and they are not supposed to because they are the worst of the worst.<sup>45</sup>

EWAR Leader CF indicated a belief that even when women have left a life of prostitution and entered a church, they are still subject to the sin-ranking system implicitly in place, and the only way to move themselves up the ladder is through works: for the former prostitute, this means continually asking for forgiveness, relegating oneself to a servant (or subservient) position in the church, and never acting or dressing in a manner that might suggest equal footing with a non-prostitute in the church. Her observation confirms the findings presented in Chapter Five, where the women discuss their coping mechanisms for reducing their sin-burden and their conception of sin as something that they need to resolve ultimately by leaving prostitution. EWAR Leader CF said that when women are actively engaged in prostitution, they are seen on the bottom of the social ladder: 'that is why when they come into the church, they need to stay at the bottom.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Church Leader FT, ETC, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Transcript of Interview with Leader CF, EWAR, 25/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

After working for over twenty years with women seeking to leave prostitution, EWAR Leader CF stated that she does not believe that people in the church think that women engaged in prostitution can change:

That is why they [the churchgoers] want them [women who were once engaged in prostitution] to stay at the bottom on their knees all the time because they don't believe they change. The only way they believe that they change ... is if they cover themselves up, are so broken, and always crying and on their knees asking for forgiveness. That is when they believe the women have changed.<sup>47</sup>

This is a heavy mantle for women who have been affected by prostitution to bear, especially for those that are actively seeking to belong to a Christian community. It seems that not only is the position of prostitution on the sin hierarchy highly problematic, but it is also a static position that cannot easily be transcended. Prostitution seems to cement a woman on the sin hierarchy and only through a continually penitential state can a woman ever hope to find a place in the church. This understanding of the church's character seems to contradict directly the tenet of African Womanist ecclesiology that all human beings are the people of God, and therefore all have a place in the Household of God.<sup>48</sup> In the household imagery put forth by Oduyoye, where she articulates that all of God's children have a place around the one table,<sup>49</sup> there cannot be any children sitting underneath the table because of their past or their degree of sinfulness. The practice of the church as described by EWAR Leader CF is not compatible with the inclusive description of the church or the Kingdom of God (which I explore in more detail in the following chapters).

The sin identity-marker firmly attached to women who are either currently or were formerly engaged in prostitution is not only something that the women themselves perceive, but is also a perspective that is observed by the selected evangelical church leaders in this research project. While not ascribing to this point of view themselves, they certainly recognise this viewpoint within the average evangelical churchgoer, and see this as problematic to overcoming the significant amount of stigma that these women face. If the average evangelical churchgoer believes fundamentally that a woman in prostitution can never change unless she is in a continual state of public confession and repentance, these women can never experience successful integration in

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton, 79.

<sup>49</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 'The African Experience of God through the Eyes of an Akan Woman', *Cross Currents* 47, no.4, (Winter 1997/1998): 202.

a Christian community. In addition, these selected leaders resonated with the perception of a hierarchy of sin that places women who have been affected by prostitution on the lowest rung of society. If the leaders represented in this study are able to perceive the limitations that a sin identity and sin hierarchy pose to a women engaged in prostitution, how can they overcome these perceptions within their spheres of influence? These questions will be explored in Chapter Eight with reference to the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15.

### **Hatred and a Lack of Acceptance: Humanity as Rejecting**

A strong theme identified with the women in this study was the perception that they were hated and therefore rejected by society because of their involvement with prostitution. As I reported in Chapter Four, the women in this study particularly noted their perception that if they were able to leave a life of prostitution, they would receive forgiveness from God and in turn, their surrounding communities would then be able to receive them and no longer reject them. They articulated a social perspective within which women in prostitution are contaminated or dirty, as a result of which these women experienced social exclusion in a variety of forms. This idea of social exclusion was also voiced by the selected evangelical church leaders in this study:

Because prostitution is viewed as disrespectful, disgracing for a people involved in such a life ... immediately, when they just involve in such practice, they automatically just excommunicated. I can just say not legally, but in the psychology of the community, they are the one [who] is marginalised because of this issue.<sup>50</sup>

Marginalisation is something that evangelical church leaders have observed within their own communities and expressed in some of the semi-structured interviews in this study as they reflected on how they have observed their congregations interacting with women engaged in prostitution. For example, the EECMY Kazanchis local church encountered this attitude of rejection during the early days of the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program:

At that time, even some evangelists and priests say ‘why do this project work in our compound? Because they spoil our kids. That was the attitude even among evangelists and pastors ... It was difficult for the project leader to discuss about this project [with the congregation].<sup>51</sup>

Church Leader BG went on to say:

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<sup>50</sup> Transcript of Interview with Elder AZ, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church leader BG, EECMY, 30/9/2016, Addis Ababa/2016, 6.

The first challenge was, ‘why do these prostitutes [come] in our compound?’ Because they are sinners, they say. The project people (staff) were challenging them: ‘That’s why Jesus has died. Not for the holy, but for sinners.’ So we—that Jesus has paid for these ladies—the project people were challenging that. Then after of course, still I see not the welcoming face of the people. However, when, like recent—because they witness the benefit of the project in their life so when they reason [see] this, they gradually started to accept the project and the ladies. Of course they are not that much close as the project staff with the ladies. Even it is difficult [for people in the congregation] to shake their hands with them [women in the project].<sup>52</sup>

The EECMY Kazanchis local church experienced significant push-back in the early days of their project because both leaders and members in the congregation struggled with the close proximity of women identified as prostitutes. The church had another small building on the same premises, and were using this as the place for the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program. This opposition points to a deficient understanding of the Kingdom of God expressed by Jesus constantly interacting and sharing meals with women, tax collectors, and other outcasts.<sup>53</sup>

There was a fear that these women would ‘spoil’ the young children also occupying that space. The use of this word by an evangelical church leader is significant and could reinforce the idea brought forth by Deacon EK of the Orthodox Church that sacred spaces are vulnerable to contamination; therefore, the religious faithful need to defend and protect sacred places from the possibility of defilement. Dirtiness and contamination and their self-identification with these labels are also subjects that the women in this research project have spoken extensively about (as reported in Chapters Four and Five). The repeated mention of the nouns *dirty*, *contamination*, and *spoil* suggest that preventing women engaged in prostitution from entering sacred places such as a church compound is justified because the Christian faithful believe that their role is to protect that sanctity of designated holy spaces. This view reveals a misunderstanding of who has the authority to decide who is eligible to be ‘in’ the church, and this misunderstanding relates to a misunderstanding of the Kingdom of God. The parable of the great banquet found in Luke 14 demonstrates that it is entirely Jesus’ prerogative as to who will be invited to the banquet and that a great reversal has been inaugurated in terms of the guest-list.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 268.

<sup>54</sup> Gordon W. King, *Seed Falling on Good Soil* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 74.



Church Leader BG described the challenges his team faced when trying to convince his congregation that these women should be allowed to occupy the same space as the members of the congregation, based on the argument that Jesus died for all sins and sinners. Oduyoye notes that ‘salvation discussions focussed exclusively on giving satisfaction to the injured honour of God and on redemption by the blood of Christ tend to become debates that leave the sinner ... as a spectator.’<sup>55</sup> Church Leader BG appealed to his congregation that the women should be accepted by the church based on the grounds of salvation as substitutionary atonement; however, this proved to be problematic as Oduyoye points out, and did not convince the church immediately of its obligation of hospitality toward the women.

However, over time, the exclusionary stance of the congregation withered to a degree, primarily because of the congregation’s ability to observe change in the lives of these women. Church Leader BG mentions the lack of a ‘welcoming face’ at times, and even at the time of the interview, the inability for some members of the congregation to shake hands with the women (a sign of greeting in Ethiopian culture). These visual and tactile signs indicating exclusion by members of the congregation corroborate the stories shared by the women involved in this research project and highlight how deeply the stigma toward women affected by prostitution runs, even within an evangelical congregation actively engaged in providing assistance to such women.

Church Leader DB noted that one of the reasons why women engaged in prostitution are highly stigmatised within Ethiopian society is because of the correlation that is often drawn by the larger society between prostitution and HIV/AIDS:

Everybody thinks they are HIV positive. What we have found—they are not HIV positive. It’s only a prejudice. We made a very small study on them and found out ... There were very few who were HIV positive in our project ... it was less than one-quarter compared to the number [of women] ... They [people in the congregation] were thinking, ‘these are the people who bring this STD—sexually transmitted disease—like syphilis, like gonorrhoea. They are the ones.’<sup>56</sup>

This correlation between prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV, serves to feed the exclusionary and anti-contamination attitudes and practices adopted by some evangelical Christians in the Ethiopian context, and it limits the possibility of evangelical churches to be seen as welcoming places by women engaged

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<sup>55</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (New York: Orbis, 2004), 22.

<sup>56</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 14.

in prostitution. The EECMY Kazanchis local church recognised the degree of stigmatisation present within their congregation and actively sought to dispel this through the creation of its Host Family Program.<sup>57</sup> The Host Family Program encouraged families within the EECMY Kazanchis local church to invite women from the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program into their homes during Ethiopian festivals:

The host family, we talk to them, and give some of our opinions, and we tell them about the project. We orient them and among the orientation is that no support [finances] is needed from you, the project will do that ... At their own time, some [of the host family members] visit them [the women] their shop [place of work], some [helped the women] to start a shop, so they visit them regularly. Especially, we encourage them to invite these girls during the holidays.<sup>58</sup>

This program was specifically designed to provide support<sup>59</sup> to women currently going through the rehabilitation program and to help combat some of the stigma toward women engaged in prostitution. The host families expressed their concerns over how to introduce these women to their communities and other family members, according to the people leading the orientation:

‘She is a prostitute, now she is here?’—that is what they are feeling [some of the host families]. But that is what one of the orientations that we give to the host families. Actually, we just tell them [to say that] she is a relative, or a friend. That is all.<sup>60</sup>

Church Leader DB said that the women who were a part of the Host Family Program demonstrated changed behaviour and believed that as a result of this behavioural change they would not return to prostitution: ‘There are some very good examples. Once they are changed with their behaviour, they don’t go back.’<sup>61</sup> Church Leader DB witnessed this first-hand through his own family’s involvement in the Host Family Program during which he and his wife journeyed over a number of years with a young woman who sought to leave prostitution. This woman is now married with three children, and she graduated from a private college in Addis Ababa in 2016. Church

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Support was not financial but took the form of encouraging, talking to, and regularly visiting the women in their places of work and inviting them into the homes of the host families. Transcript of Interview with Church leader BG, EECMY, 30/9/2016, Addis Ababa/2016, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DB, EECMY, 3/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

Leader DB said of her, ‘She is my family. My wife is very family with [her] ... she calls me dad.’<sup>62</sup>

Church Leader DB expressed his belief that the Host Family Program allows women who were engaged in prostitution to have a healthy experience of family again, the feeling of ‘familyhood,’ and that this in turn helps to ‘bring back to their mind the familyhood.’<sup>63</sup> It appears that the Host Family Program was a practical intervention undertaken by the EECMY Kazanchis branch that directly addressed the stigmatisation and lack of acceptance that women in their rehabilitation program faced.<sup>64</sup>

The principles of hospitality and welcome are part of what constituted the EECMY Kazanchis local church Host Family Program and helped to serve as a bridge between the congregation and the women participating in the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program. Host families were exposed to anti-stigmatisation messages and given an opportunity to spend time with the women in the rehabilitation program. These actions resulted in the women becoming humanised in the context of that local congregation. The Host Family Program brought women affected by prostitution into the homes and lives of average evangelical Christians and as a result, stigma toward these women was reduced, even if not completely obliterated, in the wider congregation.

The principles of hospitality, welcome, and invitation exemplified in this program point to characteristic themes of the Kingdom of God, and suggest that the EEMYC Kazanchis local church was able to appropriate their understanding of the Kingdom of God to their ways of relating to women affected by prostitution. This program will serve as a point for further reflection throughout the remainder of the thesis as I work toward a life-affirming theological response to prostitution

### **Injustice as a Normalised Experience**

The women in this study recounted stories (reported in Chapter Four and Chapter Five) of unjust treatment by authorities in Ethiopian society such as the police. The women highlighted that the burden of shame that prostitution brings to (highly collectivist)

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, since the retirement of Church Leader DB, this program has been stalled, but Church Leader BG expressed his hope that the program would be started again in the near future. See Transcript of Interview with Church leader BG, EECM, Addis Ababa, 30/9/2016, 2.

Ethiopian society is placed squarely on the shoulders of the women, with few or no consequences for their male clients.

When selected evangelical church leaders were asked to share about their perceptions of blame and shame with reference to prostitution, one female evangelical church leader shared that in her own life experiences working alongside men women were always blamed when something inappropriate happened:

For me, the prostitution problem is maybe 80% is because of men's behaviour in Ethiopia. It's not because [I have done] the study [on this but based on] things which I faced in my life ... all of [the] mistakes done by men or by women ... is blamed [on] women. There is no way that women can tempt men. If you comb your hair, it's a temptation for men. If you wear many scarves, it's temptation. Whatever. If you washed nicely your face, it's a temptation. Whatever you do. The way you eat is even a temptation! So, even whatever you do, they use for the reason [to blame on the woman] and it's not the right reason.<sup>65</sup>

Church Leader TA highlighted the dilemma that Ethiopian women in general face because they are typecast as temptresses. Church Leader TA believes that no matter what a woman does, she will always be the one blamed if a sexually inappropriate exchange occurs between a man and a woman, much less a woman engaged in prostitution. This idea of the woman-as-temptress was highlighted by the women in this study with particular reference to the identity they take on as sinners. This was also discussed by selected evangelical church leaders in the Sin and Sin Hierarchy section of this chapter (Section 5). Church Leader TA's list of benign acts being misinterpreted as overly sexual speaks to her frustration with this stereotype of the Ethiopian woman as a temptress and the unfairness of how arbitrarily this label can be applied.

The EKHC Women referenced this phenomenon of women being blamed for sexual indiscretions when reflecting on the story of a man in the church who confessed before his elders that he had slept with a woman engaged in prostitution. The elders prayed for the man and advised him not to do the same again; however, that was the extent of the consequences of his actions. The man was even able to convince the elders of the church not to tell his wife about his indiscretions.

**EKHC Woman 1:** If his wife did the same thing as he did, she will be kicked by everybody.

**EKHC Woman 2:** Everybody kick her.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader TA, 2/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 25-26.

<sup>66</sup> Transcript of Interview with EKHC Women, 16/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 11.

The EKHC Women made reference to the likely reaction of the community, particularly the church, if a woman had gone to her elders to confess the same indiscretion as the man in this story. The strong use of language ‘everybody kick her’ is indicative of the extent to which these women view this double-standard as problematic.

Another male church leader, Church Elder AG, referred to this injustice as a cultural problem:

Always, we are blaming—especially when you talk about sexual things—always we are talking about women. But what about men? The big problem is on the man side. Men who are wandering, who are forcing, who are going to the bars, drinking alcohol, after they are drinking they are going to the women. Men are a big problem for women. The woman is there [woman in prostitution] to get money. She could get some money, and live that way. But he goes to her after he drinking, he did it. Our culture, every time, our culture condemns women.<sup>67</sup>

Church Elder AG believes that this blame comes from a historical understanding of women that still prevails in modern Ethiopian culture and said that ‘women are like house equipment for many years.’<sup>68</sup> He stated that

In the previous time, if you wanted to marry, immediately they [the community] would start. Is she *bala moiya* (a good cook)? That’s the big question. Is she a virgin? Those are the main questions. He marries her, if she’s not a virgin, he would beat her. That would happen. It happened for many years. Even now, in some places, it happens. Every time they put themselves [on] top, males are on top areas.<sup>69</sup>

Church Elder AG made reference to a historical gender disparity<sup>70</sup> that in his opinion still exists today; his perception is that men still occupy the places of authority and power in Ethiopian society (‘top areas’). As a result of this gender disparity, society places the blame for sexual indiscretions—which are seen as threats to the hierarchical ordering of Ethiopian society—on women. According to Church Elder AG, men are impervious to any type of blame when it comes to matters of sexual indiscretion.

Church Leader FT made similar comments when discussing prostitution in the Ethiopian context:

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<sup>67</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/9/2016, Addis Ababa, 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Mekonnen states that gender roles are set at a very early age and that women are expected to stay at home and manage household affairs. See *Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 44.

The sad thing is, during the day time, they [men] blames them [women engaged in prostitution]. But you see, in Ethiopia, prostitution mainly happens in the dark, when the legs come out and stand on the street, I know in the dark. And so about in the evenings, in the nights, the men go. In the daytime, they [men] condemn it, but in the evening, in the nights, they celebrate it. Do you see this inconsistency?<sup>71</sup>

Church Leader FT said that he believes women engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa ‘are from the lower level of [the] economic ladder, and people blame them.’ He then compared them to the men who solicit sex from these women:

They [men] think it is an adventure, so why do people go to bars in the evening? I mean they are going there looking for, not only they are going for a drink, and after a drink, you just grabs one of the ladies and it’s right there. So, no one blame men for spending a night with a prostitute.<sup>72</sup>

When asked why he thinks the blame and shame of prostitution is always on the woman, Church Leader FT replied:

The men, they have [a] job and they can cover it. But these people [the women engaged in prostitution], they don’t have other jobs. So you find them in the same place. But the men, they go from place to place, no one knows—identify them. And the other thing they have [is] economic power, men have the economic power.<sup>73</sup>

Church Leader FT highlighted the fact that in the context of prostitution, the clients (in this case, men) have economic power and are not dependent on prostitution to make a living; therefore, they can exercise mobility in terms of what areas of town they frequent for the services of a woman engaged in prostitution. With economic power comes the gift of anonymity, unlike the women engaged in street prostitution who often have a set district/street corner to offer their services in the highly territorial structure of street prostitution in Addis Ababa. This lack of anonymity marks them out as prostitutes and allows them to become the visible sign of blame for socially unacceptable practices.

Despite the fact that prostitution is frowned upon in Ethiopian society and seen as a shame to the society, the leader of the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), the umbrella organization for all evangelical churches in Ethiopia, said that,

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<sup>71</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader FT, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

‘most of the time they [men] are seen as somebody very clever, who can enjoy ladies, like Trump.’<sup>74</sup>

It appears that the selected evangelical church leaders interviewed in this project had a heightened awareness and understanding of the gender injustices that women in Ethiopia face, particularly women engaged in prostitution. References to the hypocrisy in the assignment of blame toward women and not men when it comes to sexual indiscretions, the fact that men often have more economic power than women in Ethiopian society, and historical beliefs about the roles that women should play in society still permeating modern Ethiopian culture were all mentioned as reasons for the disproportionate amount of shame that women engaged in prostitution must bear before the wider society.

Church Leader FT stated that:

Ethiopia is more of like a patriarchal society where the man has the upper hand. And women in general, whether they are prostitute or not, they are perceived to be second class. And so, that mentality, that thinking, it is there. So, men are seen to be the head of the house.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, Ethiopian women, more so those who are highly marginalised and stigmatised, are assigned the role of receptacle of blame for all things related to sexual indiscretions within Ethiopian society. Church Leader FT believes that women in prostitution have become ‘the victim of other people’s choices ... and sometimes, they don’t know even injustice has been done on them.’<sup>76</sup>

The data presented in this section suggest that both the women and the church leaders represented in this research project are aware of the injustices that women affected by prostitution face. The data presented from the semi-structured interviews with selected evangelical church leaders support and affirm the data presented from the women’s experiences of injustice. The responses of the women and selected evangelical leaders suggest that there is agreement about gender injustice being a normalised experience for Ethiopian women in general, and particularly for those on the margins, such as women engaged in prostitution.

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<sup>74</sup> Transcript of Interview with the Leader of the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), 20/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader FT, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

## Summary

This chapter has presented data generated from the semi-structured interviews with selected evangelical church leaders with reference to the emerging themes identified by the women related to their prelude to prostitution, God, sin, humanity, and justice. The data suggest that the church leaders understand the prelude to prostitution that many women have experienced, including the themes of leaving and running, confusion, and loneliness that characterise this period in the life of a woman affected by prostitution. Evangelical leaders appear to resonate more with the characterisation of God as a personal saviour and provider, compared to the women in this research project who referred to God as something of a protector rather than as a provider. This appears to be the only area of dissonance between the themes identified by the women and how the evangelical church understands these themes.

Themes of invitation and welcome were highlighted in the story of the EECMY Kazanchis local church's initiation of the New Life Young Women Rehabilitation Program and the Host Family Program. The burdensome sin identity and sin hierarchy that the women discussed was further explicated by the church leaders, and the church leaders seemed to resonate (while not agreeing with) the over-identification with sin that these women hold. The church leaders resonated with the theme of rejection that women affected by prostitution experience within their surrounding communities, and the leaders were cognisant of the high degree of injustice that these women experience within wider society.

In summary, there is more resonance than dissonance between the themes identified in the women's narratives and the insights of the evangelical church leaders. With this high degree of resonance in view, the themes related to how women affected by prostitution understand the church will be considered in the following chapter with reference to the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). This story will form the framework through which all the major theological themes discussed so far in the thesis will be interrogated as I now move toward my proposal for a theological response to prostitution that is informed by the voices of the women and church leaders who have contributed to this research project.



## **Chapter 8: Bringing the Voices Together**

### **Introduction**

Chapters Four, Five, Six and have presented data generated from various contextual Bible study sessions throughout the course of the research project. Emerging themes that emerged from the women's interpretations of these Biblical stories have been suggested, with particular reference to how the women make sense of their prelude to and entry into prostitution, God, sin, humanity, injustice, and the church. Chapter Seven presented data generated from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with selected evangelical church leaders pertaining to some of the emerging themes identified. That chapter included discussion of the degrees of resonance and dissonance the leaders reported as they reflected on their own encounters with women affected by prostitution.

The primary research question focuses on a life-affirming theological response to prostitution informed by the voices of the women and selected evangelical church leaders, and it is now important to bring these voices together in a discussion. To that end, this chapter will present data generated from both sets of voices but organized according to the themes identified by the women with reference to the church: 1) standing outside of the church and not going inside the main building or compound; 2) low expectations of church leaders and; 3) the shortage of church leaders who are like Jesus; 4) the main message to the church being one of help.

The major source of the data to be explored in this chapter is the contextual Bible studies on the Story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). This particular story will help to examine in greater depth the themes listed above as the thesis moves toward a theological response to prostitution. The Story of the Prodigal Son serves this discussion for several reasons: 1) I was able to conduct contextual Bible study sessions on this story with five different groups of people (two groups of the Flamingo Women, the EWAR Women, a group of selected evangelical church leaders from Addis Ababa, and a group of selected EWAR staff who all participate in evangelical churches in Addis Ababa); 2) it is one of the parables found in the Book of Luke pertaining to the Kingdom of God, the major theological framework that the project seeks to address; and 3) the potential this story carries to diagnose and articulate some of the barriers that currently prevent the formation of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution. Therefore, this story is an appropriate point of departure in order to hear how both the women and the selected evangelical church leaders respond to what David Wenham

calls the ‘gospel within the gospel’. He writes: ‘there is no more powerful a picture of the forgiving love of God or of the motivation behind Jesus’ ministry within the Bible.’<sup>1</sup>

### **Identifications and Correlations**

#### **The Younger Son Who Stands Outside the Church**

The data seems to indicate that the women’s experience of standing outside the church correlates to over-identification with the younger son. As I reported in Chapter Six, the women articulated how they adapted their church attendance practices to those prescribed by the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, which designates space in the courtyard of the church compound for those deemed ritually unclean. Instead of worshipping alongside the ritually unclean, the women said that they choose to stand outside of the gates of the church compound and to worship from there, thereby indicating their strong identification with the ritually unclean.

They repeatedly discussed the correlation between their means of generating an income and their perception that this means made them unclean and therefore inadmissible in the EOTC. This perception suggests why the women go one step further in their separation from the worshipping community and stand outside of the place designated for the ritually unclean. The women also acknowledged that their practice of standing apart from the ritually unclean was self-imposed and they made the point that this type of self-limiting behaviour accorded with the folk Orthodoxy of *yariksatan*: the ability for an unclean person to make a sacred place unclean. Therefore, the women themselves did not think it was appropriate to be in the church compound among the ritually unclean.

Uncleanness as a barrier to entering into an EOTC is highly problematic with respect to a life-affirming theological response to prostitution, because it places these women outside the worshipping community. When I conducted a Bible study session on the Prodigal Son story with a group of selected evangelical church leaders, it became apparent that the leaders correlated the character of the younger son and women affected by prostitution. Similar to the identity-label of ‘unclean,’ this conflation of the women with the younger son character highlighted reasons for why the women are excluded from the worshipping community.

**Translator:** In the story, which character do you think the prostitutes relate to?

**Female Church Leader:** The youngest brother.

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<sup>1</sup> David Wenham, *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 105.

**Translator:** All of you agree?

**All Church Leaders:** Yes.<sup>2</sup>

The leaders went on to describe the character of the younger son:

**Translator:** What does the story tell us about the character of the younger son?

**Female Church Leader 1:** He is rebellious. He did not go out of the house in good faith. He had no manners. He was not obedient.

**Female Church Leader 2:** He is wasteful.

**Male Church Leader:** He is the one who knows his right. After he wasted all his money, he knew his father will accept him. He knew at least he can get a position of a servant. What if he chose not to return? He had no manners, and lived as a poor man, experienced the worst form of poverty. He was emotionally unstable. In all these, the father still hoped that his son will one day return, that is why the father had to run to welcome him.<sup>3</sup>

The adjectives the church leaders used to describe the younger son relate to his wasteful, rebellious, and disobedient actions before encountering the father. While the story outlined in Luke 15 is not exhaustive, these church leaders based their character-assessment on the actions of the younger son at the opening of the story and make no reference to the actions he pursued after being embraced by his father. It is interesting to note that one male church leader acknowledged that the unfavourable characteristics and actions attributed to the younger son were not a barrier to the father welcoming the son back.

When the EWAR Women were asked to assess the character of the younger son, they were not as quick to censure the son; they said: ‘He is restless and lacked patience.’<sup>4</sup> Unlike the church leaders, the women responded to the character of the younger son in the following way:

**Translator:** When you compare [the story] with your own life, which character represents you?

**Woman 2:** Mine is like the younger son. I have made a mistake like that of the younger son and my dad accepted me back as in the story.

**Woman 3:** I am like the younger son, too quick and easily messes up, but quick to repent and regret.

**Woman 4:** I am like the younger son ... too quick to speak but quick to regret too.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There were four leaders present at this session. See Transcript of Prodigal Son Session with Church Leaders Pt. II, 6/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Transcript of the Prodigal Son EWAR Women, 7/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

The EWAR Women identified predominantly with the younger son with Women 3 making reference to repentance (which I treat in more detail in the next section). In their assessment, regret, mistakes, and wasting one's life are all factors associated with the younger son. The Flamingo Women responded to the younger son differently than the EWAR women did:

**Translator:** Which character do you think resembles you, or with which character do you think you identify?

**Woman 1:** I am like the older son.

**Woman 2:** I am like the older brother.

**Woman 3:** Just like them [other two respondents].

**Woman 4:** The older and the father. I will first be angry with him [the younger son], but will not remain in my anger. I will forgive and accept him.<sup>6</sup>

It is notable that none of the Flamingo Women (who were currently engaged in prostitution), identified with the younger son. The Flamingo women identified more with the older brother, which belies a monolithic characterisation of all women affected by prostitution with the younger son. The diversity represented between the responses of the EWAR and the Flamingo Women reflects the importance of listening to and respecting the various life experiences of each of these women that have brought them to the point of identifying with all of the characters in the Prodigal Son story. Assuming that all women affected by prostitution can be identified with the younger son character in this story supports the widely-held view (highlighted throughout the thesis) that women affected by prostitution are sinners, unclean, and therefore inadmissible into the community until their sin problem is addressed.

### **The Younger Son: Exposing a Deficient Understanding of Sin and Who the Kingdom Is For**

The church leaders' identification of these women solely with the younger son is problematic; this is especially the case because they apparently define his character by his disrespectful actions toward his father and his society. This identification places the women in a position of being defined by their perceived bad personal choices—in other words, to be defined, like the youngest son, as the quintessential sinner. This type of interpretation only serves to reinforce an Augustinian view of sin: that sin is primarily pride in the form of extreme self-love and secondarily sensuality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript of the Prodigal Son II Flamingo Women, 4/9/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Sensuality, according to Richard Niebuhr, is linked to pride and inordinate self-love, and it manifests itself in physical gratification, normally of a sexual manner. See Esther E. Acolaste, 'Rethinking

African Womanist theologian Esther Acolaste says that the typical prescribed antidote to the pride-as-sin model is self-sacrifice, but that this is found wanting in the African context where women are already engaged in a life of self-sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> If prostitution is conceived of as a means of survival, as articulated by the women in Chapter Four, then what more can these women be asked to sacrifice in order to rid themselves of their ascribed sinful status? What means of grace can be applied? Acolaste argues that within the highly relational context of Africa sin is the refusal of the self to be a self,<sup>9</sup> and that this understanding lends itself to a corporate and communal response to sin, in contrast to the individualistic response prescribed by the sin-as-pride model.<sup>10</sup> Acolaste proposes that the means of grace for sin, then, is for those living within the household of God [the church] to take practical steps towards those who are outside of the household in a way that ‘full humanity is accorded to all participants in the *oikos* of God.’<sup>11</sup>

The over-identification of women affected by prostitution with the younger son only serves to reinforce the sinner/unclean status that has been ascribed to these women by their surrounding community. This status perpetuates the women’s self-exclusionary worship practice of standing outside the gate of the church. The actions of the younger son in Luke 15 were deemed morally questionable and culturally inappropriate, attested to by the women who classify him as a ‘traitor’<sup>12</sup> to his family. By identifying women affected by prostitution with the younger son—a person full of prideful self-love in the classical theological understanding of sin—the only means of grace available to these women is an individualistic attempt at self-sacrifice. The women choosing not to join those standing in the area designated for the ritually unclean at the EOTC can be seen as a self-sacrificing act, but one that has not effectively addressed the ‘sin’ in their lives because their status within the worshipping community remains the same: they are excluded. The women believe that they are so dirty that they cannot even stand among those who are already unclean: they remove themselves from the worshipping community by going one step further.

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Sin and Grace: An African Evangelical Feminist Response to Niebuhr,’ in *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, eds. Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 125.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of the Prodigal Son I Flamingo Women, 26/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 2.

Evidently, dealing with their ‘sin problem’ individually has not enabled these women to re-enter their worshipping communities. This narrow understanding of sin by the evangelical church points to a classical Western theological conception of sin that places a high emphasis on individual righteousness and neglects the fact that righteousness also includes being in right-relationship to others. Missiologist David Bosch notes that in the Gospel of Luke, the use of the word *hamartolos* (sinner) usually refers to the moral conduct of how one individual treats another.<sup>13</sup> For example, in Luke 16, the rich man is called a sinner because he has no compassion for Lazarus. When the Prodigal Son says he has sinned against heaven and earth, he is not only referring to his conduct; more importantly, he is referring to the way in which he has treated his father.<sup>14</sup>

Karl Barth states that when the Kingdom of God is inaugurated, the Lord Jesus Christ comes and ‘abolishes the unrighteousness of people both in their relationship to him and also in their relationships to one another.’<sup>15</sup> This accords with Acolaste’s view that the means of grace for the ‘sin’ of an African woman must involve the restoration of relationships within the community. In the absence of this restoration, woman affected by prostitution will continue to relegate themselves to the status of the worst of sinners, and therefore distance themselves from the worshipping community: ‘we do not go inside ... we go and return from outside ... we pray from outside the gate.’<sup>16</sup> They do this because they have been relegated to a position in the community that suggests they are beyond the catchment area of the ritually unclean, one could even say the place for the ‘the worst of sinners.’ It is worth repeating a statement shared in Chapter Seven by one church leader:

Sometime they [people in the church] say, ‘no these [women] are not coming back because already this [one] is lost. They are lost. They are addicted to not only prostitution. They are already alcoholic; they are already [doing] drugs. They are chewing khat. So bringing back these people is just a waste of our time. Instead of spending much of your time on prostitution, why don’t you go and reach out to other good group people?’<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics Volume IV, Part 4*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 237.

<sup>16</sup> Transcript of Anointing Woman Session Flamingo Women, 1/10/2015, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Transcript of Interview with Pastor DJ, Kale Heywet Church (KHC), 10/8/2016, Addis Ababa, 9.

As this makes clear, women affected by prostitution are viewed as too lost and therefore unreachable by the church. The identification of women affected by prostitution with the character of the younger son—and the concomitant belief that they are too lost to be brought back into the fold—points to deficient theological comprehension in the following areas: 1) the criteria for what constitutes sinfulness, and 2) who the Kingdom of God is for. It also highlights that most churchgoers in the EOTC and evangelical church make sense of prostitution primarily as a sin rather than as a means of survival, as their only recourse to ‘making a way’ when there is no foreseeable way, as the women described it.<sup>18</sup>

The first deficiency, a narrow understanding of sin, limits the evangelical church to offering an individualistic means of grace that is focused on the women fixing their perceived sin problem. This falls short of the ethical demands of Jesus who objected to drawing boundary lines within Israel that treated some Israelites as beyond the grace of God and allowed for the religious elite to narrowly define sin.<sup>19</sup> A restricted perception of sin fails to take into consideration the unrighteous way that the community treats women affected by prostitution, and the community’s own failure to confess this sin impedes the development of a communal and life-affirming response to prostitution.

The second deficiency is a reminder to look at the portrait of the Kingdom of God that Luke paints in his Gospel, which depicts Jesus’ universal mission to everyone, especially the marginalised.<sup>20</sup> The Kingdom of God was inaugurated for sinners of all stripes. Women feature highly in Luke’s narrative, which includes stories of women who were presumed to be sinful, such as the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-50), a character that the women in this research project resonated with significantly. Biblical scholar Richard Burridge notes that this story ‘illustrates how Luke’s concern for women is part of his wide interest in sinners and outsiders.’<sup>21</sup> Women affected by prostitution are standing outside of the gate of the church, stamped as sinners by society, waiting to experience the universal mission that has come to everyone.

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<sup>18</sup> Dolores S. Williams, ‘Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation,’ in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letter Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2006), 177.

<sup>19</sup> Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 64.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

## **Few Leaders Like Jesus, Many Older Brothers**

The data also seems to indicate that there is a correlating between the women's observation that there are few leaders like Jesus and identification with the older brother.

In Chapter Six, the women appropriated the story of the crippled woman who was healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17) to their experiences with religious leaders. As they reflected on some of the contextual Bible study sessions that featured Jesus healing, forgiving, not judging, and welcoming those that were considered sinners, the women indicated that they had encountered few religious leaders who emulated the character and actions of Jesus Christ. Rather, they shared their experiences of hypocrisy (a priest found in the Flamingo community soliciting a woman) and of one of their children being denied the sacrament of baptism. The women clarified that there were both good and bad leaders within their context, and that they know leaders are human and therefore weak; however, they also speculated that the reason some leaders were not following the example of Jesus is that they do not believe in His teaching.

During a contextual Bible study session on the Prodigal Son, the women were asked the following:

**Translator:** How does the church look at you, how does it receive you, like the father or like the older son?

**Woman:** If we happen to go, they ask 'why are we here?'<sup>22</sup>

This woman answered with a rhetorical question suggesting that she is met with a lack of hospitality and welcome. It would seem that this woman felt she needed to justify herself to the congregation for attempting to attend church. Another woman responded:

In the church when they talk of prostitution, they do not really think of us but condemn our act and judge. Their sermon is full of condemnation and judgement. They never ask how they can help us, but only judge us. Sometimes we are there listening to their sermon while they pass judgement on us.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of being met with words of life and acceptance, this woman was brought face-to-face with condemnation and judgement from the pulpit. Her comment that those in the church do not really think about them conveys her perception that no one takes into consideration the reasons why a woman has engaged in prostitution. This

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<sup>22</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session EWAR Women, 7/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



experience is by no means conclusive or absolute for all women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa; however, it does serve to substantiate why these women think there are few church leaders who are exemplars of Jesus.

Several other women remarked:

**Woman 1:** The question is: will those who know us accept us for who we really are?

**Woman 2:** My landlord, the owner of the house I live in, knew I was a prostitute. I am now out of that life but she struggles to accept me and keeps doubting and telling me that we can never change. They do not ask what our problem is and how they can help us.<sup>24</sup>

These statements suggest that these women have experienced rejection due to their engagement with prostitution and that they long to be accepted within their community, which includes the Christian church in the context of Ethiopia. These women state their desire to be accepted and understood, but their past engagement in prostitution (as these comments are from the EWAR women who exited prostitution) is viewed as a barrier to their being welcomed into the surrounding community. Despite the fact that Woman 2 was no longer engaged in prostitution when participating in this session, her past was grounds for her landlord to engage in rejecting behaviour towards her. Rejection appears to be a dominant theme of the women's interactions with the church and community.

This theme of rejection was also identified in a contextual Bible study session on the Prodigal Son story with evangelical leaders during which they engaged in an extended discussion about the role of the older son. Through the course of the discussion, they discovered that the character of the older son was a relevant point of departure for evaluating how the evangelical church currently responds, in general, to women affected by prostitution:

**Translator:** When we think about the Ethiopian church, which character does the church relate to? How does the church act?

**Female Church Leader 1:** Like the older brother.

**Female Church Leader 2:** It is hard to say about today's church. But the true church should be like the father. My church is like the father.

**Female Church Leader 3:** If the churches today are like the father character, there will be no prostitutes outside on the road. They would all come back to church.

**Female Church Leader 4:** There are all three characters in the church. There are those that observe God in their life and walk carefully who are like fathers. There are those that are holy who keep themselves isolated and don't really relate, these ones can't accept those that they think are sinful.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

They are judgemental. There are those that lead a careless life, enjoying [a] sinful life that come and go all the time, just like the younger son.

**Female Church Leader 1:** If a church rejects prostitutes or sinners, then the church has really missed its purpose. The existence of the church is then not for sinners but for a different purpose. A church that rejects sinners is not here for the gospel then [but] for a different reason and purpose.

**Male Church Leader:** Let's be honest; the church is also struggling internally. There is so much sinfulness within the church and our problem is not just dealing with the sin from the outside. So this has weakened the church also.<sup>25</sup>

These leaders strongly identified the evangelical church with the character of the older son in its attitudes and practices toward those deemed as sinners, particularly women affected by prostitution. One of the leaders describes her church as acting in accordance with the father and that the 'true church'<sup>26</sup> should follow this example. Other than this leader, the rest of the participants recognised the church's failure to portray the character of the father toward these women. The male church leader even confessed that the sin within the walls of the church was not being dealt with, much less the sin crouching outside of the doors of the church. These leaders demonstrated their awareness of the rejecting, rather than accepting, face that they are showing to these women, which parallels the rejection of the older son toward his younger brother and father by not entering into the homecoming celebration that is in progress at the end of Luke 15. Therefore, it would be reasonable at this point to say that the evangelical church leaders in this project are able to identify with the actions of the older brother, thus suggesting an older brother characterisation of the evangelical church toward women affected by prostitution.

### **Rejecting Behaviour Fuelled by Fear**

Further reasons given by several evangelical leaders for the generally rejecting behaviour of the evangelical church toward women affected by prostitution were explained as follows:

When the Gospel comes to our land, one word came to our mind: separate from the world. We are living in the world, but in every direction, we are not encouraged to go to these people [women affected by prostitution], to reach these people, we are instead to run from that area [red-light districts]. To be isolated. To not communicate with these kinds of people, like prostitutes, bar owners. Because if we go to the bad areas, they [people who go to bad areas] are afraid that they may be attracted to drinking alcohol or other [things]. If I drink alcohol, I will go to the prostitutes. Because of

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<sup>25</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son, Church Leaders Session Pt. II, 4/6/2016, Addis Ababa, 3-6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

this, totally, it is rejected to go those areas, even around those areas. If I go, immediately, the church would condemn me, launch an investigation, and take action.<sup>27</sup>

Church leaders and congregation members avoid approaching women in places where prostitution is occurring for fear that they may be tempted by who and what they find in these places. In addition, there is a strong perception by society that anyone seen associating with a woman in prostitution must be involved somehow in this unclean activity, and they would therefore risk losing their good reputation in the community.

When the participants were asked to name some of the barriers that exist in the Ethiopian church today between women affected by prostitution and the church, one leader said:

Religious barrier. If a man is seen talking with prostitutes and is a minister, he is judged. If he brings her to church, still people talk [gossip]. If you have a good heart for a prostitute as a woman [in the church], they [the community] say 'maybe she was a prostitute before.'<sup>28</sup>

This church leader then went on to share a story about when she first started speaking to women engaged in street prostitution, and the negative reaction she received from various family members:

People told my brother they saw me with prostitutes, and he asked me if I am doing this for lack of a job. Another time, my son's dad was told. He came and saw me with them, looked at me before he hit me.<sup>29</sup>

This leader highlighted the stigmatisation and potential abuse that those willing to associate with women engaged in prostitution face. While this last story is an extreme example, the leaders described the risks of being judged, rejected, and losing their reputations before their community of faith if they associated with women affected by prostitution. It would appear that church leaders have a significant amount to lose should they choose to interact with these women and to extend acceptance toward them.

Based on the observations and stories shared by selected evangelical church leaders in this section, it is understandable that women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa have encountered few religious leaders like Jesus. The leaders identify an older brother proclivity to the way in which the evangelical church treats these women, and

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<sup>27</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son, Church Leaders Session Pt. II, 6/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

highlight some of the reasons why they have engaged in rejecting behaviour toward the women.

### **The Older Brother: Exposing a Deficient Understanding of Salvation**

The fact that the evangelical church characterises itself as the older brother with reference to how it treats women affected by prostitution helps to explain why church leaders have been reticent to demonstrate a sense of welcome and acceptance to these women. The leaders articulated that they have a significant amount to lose, not least their good reputations, if they were to choose to associate with women affected by prostitution. Analogous to the older brother in the story of the Prodigal Story, who became angry when he discovered that his father had thrown a lavish banquet for his rebellious brother who had squandered his father's property—property the older son had worked hard to cultivate (Luke 15:30)—evangelical church leaders are reticent to associate with women affected by prostitution for fear of squandering their good standing in the community.

While this response is understandable on some level, it should be noted Biblical scholarship points to the fact that the older son in the Luke 15 story approaches his father as a slave to a master, not as a son to a father.<sup>30</sup> As a servant, the older son has worked many hours to cultivate the property and never disobeyed his master; therefore he is blameless and deserves the reward he has worked so hard for. What the older son fails to realise in this moment is that everything that his father has already belongs to him simply because he is his father's son—and not his slave. The older son viewed his relationship to his father as entitling him to certain rights in the household, rather than as joyful membership in the loving father's family.<sup>31</sup> This parable has often been called the story of two lost sons: the older son is unable to understand the grace that gained him his place in his father's household, which is a metaphor for God's dwelling-place, that is, His Kingdom.

The appropriation of the older son character to the evangelical church by selected evangelical church leaders points to a deficient misunderstanding of what it means for a person to be found in the Kingdom of God. The return of the younger son to the family home has been referred to as a picture of salvation that highlights the elements of 'right relationship, the overcoming of sin and death, and the recovery of true identity,'<sup>32</sup> all of

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: A Commentary and Play on the Parable of the Prodigal Son* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 72.

<sup>31</sup> Wenham, *op cit.*, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Murray Rae, *Christian Theology: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2015), 94.

which are components of the Kingdom of God. The older son is unwilling and unable to recognise that, quite literally, the keys of his father's kingdom have been given to him already and therefore he can dispense with this myth of scarcity that he is harbouring. He has nothing to fear because everything that belongs to the father is his. The rejecting behaviour that the older son engages with toward his father and younger brother results from his failure to understand the true nature of his relationship to his father, in 'whose home and heart there is room for both lost sons.'<sup>33</sup>

The type of rejecting behaviour that the evangelical church and EOTC has been prone to toward women affected by prostitution, as described throughout the thesis, is antithetical to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who, as a 'friend of sinners' (Luke 7:34), modelled table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners.<sup>34</sup> For the Ancient Israelites, sharing a meal with those considered ritually unclean was inconceivable, as this practice stood in direct contradiction to Leviticus 19:2 ('Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy'). For Jesus, sharing a meal with such people was one way of bringing near those who were considered far off. This was an embodied parable of acceptance.<sup>35</sup> Jesus never feared that His reputation in the community would suffer if He shared table-fellowship with religious outsiders, because He was secure in His identity as the Son of God.

Applying this principle to Christian communities, Jurgen Moltmann has the following insight:

When ... communities engage in particular tasks for those who in our midst live on the periphery of society, such as handicapped people, ex-convicts, drug addicts, and people who are politically isolated, their reception is even more dubious. Whoever eats and drinks with "sinners and tax collectors" is easily compromised and stamped as "friend of sinners." Struggling to accept those who have been denied often bring one more denial than help.<sup>36</sup>

Moltmann acknowledges that it can be costly for the religious insider to accept an outsider, but that this is precisely the mandate of the Kingdom of God.

Acceptance of the outsider is a dominant theme in the Gospel of Luke, particularly in the parables of the Kingdom, which present a reorientation to the concept of salvation. Bosch says that in the story of the Prodigal Son, 'salvation means

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<sup>33</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Burridge, *op cit.*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Open Church: Invitation to a Messianic Lifestyle* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 34.

acceptance, fellowship, new life,' and that this is demonstrated through a banquet. Banquet imagery is often used for this purpose: for example, Jesus has table-fellowship with Zacchaeus, the Prodigal Son is treated to a feast, and those from the streets and alleys of the town are invited to the rich man's banquet (Luke 14:16-23).<sup>37</sup> In addition, Jesus' healing ministry 'can be seen as an activity consistent with his general acceptance of ordinary people and even sinners and his habit of eating with them. In the same way that Jesus was able to heal sick people rather than being infected by them himself, so his acceptance of those who were "impure" made them whole rather than polluting himself.'<sup>38</sup> This point affirms that the evangelical church has nothing to fear by associating with women affected by prostitution. Sharing table-fellowship was just one of the tangible ways that Christ mediated salvation to those on the margins. Bosch states, 'whatever salvation is ... it includes the total transformation of human life, forgiveness of sin, healing from infirmities, and release from any kind of bondage.'<sup>39</sup>

It would seem that this holistic understanding of salvation related to the Kingdom of God, which includes liberation from and liberation to God and neighbour,<sup>40</sup> is lacking in the evangelical church. This has resulted in women affected by prostitution being branded as sinners; at best they have been ignored by religious leaders and at worst they have been condemned and judged by them. Mercy Amba Oduyoye has an apt challenge for the church in this situation: 'The Church cannot describe itself as holy and mean that it is separate from the world and the world's agenda. Stating doctrines inside the Church will not liberate unless the Church gets out into the streets, heals the sick and confronts the unjust.'<sup>41</sup> Avoiding red-light districts or areas where women affected by prostitution can be found in Addis Ababa does not align with the model Christ left for the church.

These evangelical church leaders' recognition that the church tends to act more like the older brother toward women affected by prostitution reveals a deficient understanding of salvation. A proper understanding of salvation acknowledges that Christ accepts those who are considered outsiders. The evangelical church's older-brother tendencies have led it to engage in ambivalent, rejecting, inhospitable, and

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<sup>37</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Burridge, *op cit.*, 66.

<sup>39</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

<sup>41</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2001), 88-89.

judgemental actions toward these women, and these actions run counter to the accepting and welcoming behaviour prescribed by Jesus Christ as He modelled the Kingdom of God.

It is not surprising then that when the women in this project articulate their understanding of the church they can identify but few encounters with leaders who were like Jesus to them. The open-handed welcome and acceptance of the father in the Prodigal Son story has not been a consistent experience for these women. On the absence of this kind of acceptance, Jurgen Moltmann writes:

Acceptance is the atmosphere of humanity. When acceptance is lacking, the air becomes thin, our breathing falters, and we languish. Therefore we are repulsed by the indifferent glance, hurt by disregard, and humanly destroyed when others deny us.<sup>42</sup>

The women in this research project have repeatedly acknowledged their lack of acceptance by their surrounding communities, including the Christian church, and have recounted instances when this lack of acceptance made them feel less than human. Women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa are languishing in an atmosphere that is currently permeated with more rejection than acceptance, and that is why they can say: ‘There are few [church leaders] who follow the example of Jesus.’<sup>43</sup>

### **Expecting a Father**

Another correlation identified in the data is between the women’s minimal expectations of the Church and its leaders and their perceptions of the father character. The women in this research project expressed very few expectations of church leaders and said that they only wanted leaders to understand that prostitution is a means of survival for them. There was a certain degree of ambivalence shared when the women were asked if they thought the church would help them. The data suggests that their means of income-generation equates with adultery, which makes them unclean and therefore sinners. The women identified significantly strongly with being sinners throughout the course of the contextual Bible studies. In addition, in a number of comments throughout various sessions the women communicated their belief that if they stopped engaging in prostitution, then they would be forgiven by God, and only then would the community accept them. This if/then formula implied that the women had to help themselves

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<sup>42</sup> Moltmann, *op cit.*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Session Pt. II, Flamingo Women, 2/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

before they could ask for or expect help from their surrounding community, especially the church.

This sense of conditionality was also hinted at during a contextual Bible study session with a group of evangelical church leaders:

**Translator:** If prostitutes come to the church what do you think they will expect?

**Female Church Leader:** They will not expect to receive love and acceptance. They will find it hard to trust.<sup>44</sup>

Another leader went on in that session to explain:

God accepts us all the time. We may wrong people and whenever we return and ask those we wronged for forgiveness, they even add more fire and show us [a] bad face. But for God, he always has open arms, accepts us without questioning us ... If we know God [is] hurt by sin, we know that it is better [for us] to get back to God since we know of repentance. As a prostitute, she may not understand there is a way of restoration and does not know of God's mercy and love. Therefore, the sin takes her far away from God in guilt and shame.<sup>45</sup>

This leader contrasted the reaction of God toward those who have done wrong compared to the reaction of those in the community, and expressed her belief that a woman affected by prostitution may lack the ability to understand God's mercy and grace leading to restoration of a relationship with God. In effect, this leader tried to explain why a woman affected by prostitution would not trust a church offering love and acceptance toward her. While the leader acknowledged that God 'accepts us without questioning us,'<sup>46</sup> she also said that it would be better for these women to 'get back to God'<sup>47</sup> and that the 'way'<sup>48</sup> to do that is through repentance, which implies that the women have to do something: agency is required for this coming back to God. This point is highlighted in the following story that another leader shared as she appropriated the story of the Prodigal Son to a situation in her own life:

My aunt's daughter used to steal and steal from her own mom and was feeding a young man. After some time, she reconciled and came back home, but she was pregnant. Not only that, she was used to taking drugs and was an addict. She ran away again. After some time, she came back again with a child after living on the streets from some time. When she

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<sup>44</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son, Church Leaders Session Pt. II, 6/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



[came] back with a child, she asked her mom for forgiveness and her mom took her back in.<sup>49</sup>

In this appropriation, the leader highlighted that only after the daughter asked for forgiveness for everything she had done did the mother accept her back into the family. This is a significant point: forgiveness preceded acceptance and re-admittance into the family. From the statements shared by the church leaders in this section, it would seem that repentance and/or asking for forgiveness precedes acceptance toward the person who is far from God or their family.

The expectation that the sinful party must do something in order to restore their relationship to God was also reflected during a contextual Bible study session with the EWAR women on the Prodigal Son. However, in this session, the women expressed what surprised them the most about the story:

**Woman 1:** [The] return of the son since he knew what he did was wrong.

**Woman 2:** How can he return after he did all the harm to his own dad, how can he face him again?<sup>50</sup>

The women resonated with the expectations of the younger son as he made his plan to return home and said they did not expect that the son would return to his father after losing the inheritance, and that the father would be so good toward his son in accepting him back without speaking about his mistakes.<sup>51</sup> The women said the younger son had made a big mistake and did not deserve the elaborate reception that he received from his father. Another woman shared:

The son did not deserve the treatment he received, but as a father, as long as he is a father he could not be cruel toward his son just like a parent cannot be cruel to their own flesh.<sup>52</sup>

When asked what they believed the story communicated about the character of the father, one woman replied:

The father is a good man, a man of God and he also has a deep love for his son even though he [the younger son] is making a mistake, he still loves him.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Transcript of the Prodigal Son EWAR Women, 7/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

This woman senses a type of love in this story that is able to pardon the mistakes that the younger son has made. The woman ascribes this love to the character of God and surmises that the father was a man of God.

The women were then asked whether they believed the father loved both of his sons, and one woman replied:

The father loves the younger one. In this country, many families loves much the naughty one, even [if] they have [done] bad things and also hurt them [the family].<sup>54</sup>

As a follow-up to this question, the women were asked:

**Translator:** So all of you think that in Ethiopia the parents love the child that is more naughty [than the other children]?

**Woman:** From the beginning, this is a mythical expression: nobody hates his own child; you cannot cut your own finger just like that—family is family.<sup>55</sup>

After reciting this proverb, the woman held-up her hand to me in that session, and mimicked trying to cut off her thumb to illustrate that we need four fingers and a thumb to make-up a hand, and that in a family, even the naughty child has an integral place in the family unit. The woman's gestures seemed to suggest that there would be an incomplete hand without a thumb, and as a corollary, there would be an incomplete family if a 'naughty child' were cut off from the family unit. This Ethiopian proverb emerged when the women reflected on the role of the father in the Prodigal Story, and drew a correlation between the unconditional actions of the father and the tendency for Ethiopian families not to cast out children who have misbehaved. So while acceptance of the younger son by the father surprised the women in this study, the women also alluded to a cultural belief that prioritises accepting one's child back into the family despite poor behaviour.

Even though these women have few expectations of the church and its leaders to provide assistance to them, the reflections they shared during various contextual Bible study sessions on the Prodigal Son story suggest that they recognise the unconditional quality of the love the father demonstrates toward his younger son, especially as they likened it to a particular Ethiopian proverb. This recognition of the father's character is significant and will be discussed further in the next section. Despite the church leaders and the women acknowledging the father's unconditional acceptance of the younger

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<sup>54</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session 1, Flamingo Women, 26/12/2015, Addis Ababa, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

son, there does appear to be an if/then understanding of acceptance by God. This is based on the church leaders' articulation of repentance (in this section), the women's experiences (articulated throughout the thesis) of having to help themselves before they can ask for help from others, and the women's stated belief that the younger son did not deserve the treatment he received from the father (in the Prodigal Son reflections). The perceptions of the church and the women point to an incomplete understanding of what repentance entails and how this relates to God accepting wayward children back into the fold.

### **The Father: Exposing A Deficient Understanding of Repentance**

Repentance understood as a precondition to acceptance back into a family or community is problematic for women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. Both the women and the church leaders described a sequence of events that would be required before a person could be accepted back into a family or community: 1) asking for forgiveness, followed by 2) receiving forgiveness or pardon. From the data generated throughout the project, it would seem that repentance is understood by the women as ceasing their dominant means of income-generation. The women have expressed repeatedly their hope that, once they have stopped engaging in prostitution, God would forgive them for this act and that their surrounding communities would see fit to accept them again. When the church leaders appropriated the story of the Prodigal Son to the lives of women affected by prostitution, they identified repentance as a means of returning to a family they had left and returning to God. Therefore, repentance was explained as something a contrite person does in order to restore a relationship, and as a path that the contrite person must traverse.

These understandings of repentance, which place agency for this action squarely on the shoulders of the 'guilty party,' have been challenged by various Biblical scholars. Some scholars hold to a position that it was repentance that brought the Prodigal Son home, while other scholars question whether this an accurate reading of the text, based on the interpretation of the Greek phrase 'he came to himself.'<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Bailey argues that the Prodigal Son returns to himself in that moment, and comes up with a plan to fix the immediate problem at hand: his hunger. It is notable that one of the women in a

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<sup>56</sup> Based on the Hebrew and Aramaic words for repentance, Kenneth Bailey argues that there is insufficient evidence in the Greek to support a translation of the term 'he came to himself' as repentance. Aramaic and Syriac share the same word for repentance, and in the Syriac translation of Luke 15: 17, the word used is *nefesh* which emphasises a shift in a frame of reference and was an important term in Oriental thought. See Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*, Combined Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 173-180.

contextual Bible study on this story also highlighted hunger as the motivation for the younger son's return home: 'The son was hungry, and was determined to convince his father [to] receive him like one of his servants'.<sup>57</sup> Her statement echoes Bailey's interpretation.<sup>58</sup> The Prodigal's words 'I have sinned against heaven and before you' (Luke 15:5) echo those of Pharaoh to Aaron and Moses during the plague of locusts when Pharaoh was trying to 'work' Moses and did not demonstrate remorse or a change of heart.<sup>59</sup> This parallel is drawn to support the interpretation that it was not remorse or a repentant spirit that drew the younger son home. Bailey is convinced that instead of repentance drawing the son home, it was his stomach, for he believes that the entire Luke 15 chapter redefines the concept of repentance:

... in the parable of the lost sheep Jesus redefines repentance as "acceptance of being found." Neither the lost sheep nor the lost coin find themselves. Rather, the shepherd and the woman, at great cost in time and effort, *find* their lost sheep and coin. Repentance is thus something done for the believer. It is not something the believer does for himself/herself.<sup>60</sup>

Bailey therefore believes that repentance is an acknowledgment by the one considered a sinner of being found by the Triune God. He asserts that this understanding of repentance portrayed in the Prodigal Son story challenged the rabbinic doctrine of repentance that prevailed in Ancient Israel which carried the ideas of reparations and of atonement.<sup>61</sup> A person was expected to make reparations before they could repent, and this is precisely why the younger son in the story planned to ask his father to be a servant in his household. The story of the Prodigal Son was intended to turn this understanding of repentance on its head.

David Bosch notes that this story is 'a dramatic story about repentance and forgiveness,' and that Luke 'frames his entire body of writing with the idea of salvation that has dawned in Christ'.<sup>62</sup> It is the appearance and involvement of Jesus Christ in the everyday lived experiences of the people He ministered to that demonstrated that the Kingdom of God had come, and because of that repentance and forgiveness become a

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<sup>57</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session EWAR Women, 4/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 3

<sup>58</sup> Bailey, Poet, *op cit.*, 178.

<sup>59</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey, *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1989), 133.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-130.

<sup>61</sup> The rabbinic doctrine of repentance was based on Lamentations 5:21, Malachi 3:7 and certain Midrashic texts that indicate that a person has to turn toward God before God would turn toward them. For that reason, the idea that repentance is a work that a person does prior to God's acceptance of them is found throughout rabbinic literature. See Bailey, *Poet, op cit.*, 179.

<sup>62</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 105.

reality to those people. The inauguration of the Kingdom of God brought an end to guilt offerings and sin offerings, and *metanoia* (Gk ‘repentance’)<sup>63</sup> became a turning toward the reality that the Kingdom of God was near and among the people Jesus was in contact with.

In this conceptualisation of repentance, the degree of contrition the younger son experiences prior to his return to the family home is irrelevant because the main event in the story is the father’s acceptance of the son. When the father embraces the younger son, the younger son dispenses with the speech he had prepared because he realises that he does not have to offer to be a servant or any other solution to their estrangement.<sup>64</sup> The relationship has been restored because the younger son has allowed himself to yield to the embrace of his father.

The direct application of this understanding of repentance to the evangelical church in its interactions with women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa would suggest that it is the role of the church to seek after and find these women, as opposed to waiting for them to come to the doors of the church. This sentiment was affirmed by Church Elder AG, who shared the following observation during a semi-structured interview:

Every Sunday, they [the church] says, ‘is there anyone that will accept Christ?’ We are inviting. Who brought them? Nobody brought them to that place. We don’t want to go, but we are expecting them to come. It’s a big problem with the church.<sup>65</sup>

This elder found this expectation troubling and commented on the proximity of Christians to women engaged in prostitution in Addis Ababa:

Christians are very far from that area [areas where prostitutes are]. Very far from that area. Because the culture tells us when we become a Christian, that [the prostitute area] is like a complete hell area. If you are in that area, you are just living in the hell. Nobody told us to pick up those people, to bring them to Christ. To take the Gospel to those people. We are told only one direction: run from them.<sup>66</sup>

This one-directional running is the opposite to the type of running modelled by the father in the story of the Prodigal Son. The father does run, but he runs *toward* his son,

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Bailey, *Cross, op cit.*, 58.

<sup>65</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Elder AG, 18/7/2016, Addis Ababa, 1.

not away from him. But according to Church Elder AG, Christians are ‘very far’<sup>67</sup> from where women engaged in prostitution can be found.

These comments stand in stark contrast to Karl Barth’s understanding that ‘Christians are those who find that the world and they themselves are loved in all the unbridgeable distance from God which God himself has bridged, so that now they too can and may and should love him in return—they who are far from him, him who is near to them, crying “Abba, Father” to him—they who are far from him as those who are now very near to him.’<sup>68</sup> It would seem that those whom Church Elder AG is referring to, Christians who are living in the reality of the ‘unbridgeable distance,’ are unable or perhaps even unwilling to recall how they were brought near to God. This lack of remembrance has caused Christians to flee from rather than create a bridge toward women affected by prostitution. This cultural practice is highly problematic but does help to explain in part why women affected by prostitution have so few expectations of the church and its leaders.

One theme identified in this research was the women expressing their belief that God has been a Protector to them throughout many perilous situations in their lives and that He will ‘help [them] come out of this lifestyle.’<sup>69</sup> This lack of expectations toward church leaders was also conveyed during a contextual Bible study session on the crippled woman healed on the Sabbath:

**Translator:** If priests from the Orthodox Church and pastors from the protestant church come and sit here, what will you want to tell them?

**Woman 1:** I will ask them to pray that we come out of this work.

**Translator:** Has God ever answered your prayer?

**Woman 2:** Not yet, maybe because of my sin. I am still waiting.<sup>70</sup>

This sense of longing for God to answer their prayer to exit prostitution was also evidenced in how they women viewed the character of the father in the Prodigal story:

**Translator:** In the society [surrounding community], which character do you want to meet?

**Woman 1:** Father.

**Translator:** Why? Why do you want to meet him?

**Woman 1:** He was forgiving and merciful<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Barth, *op cit.*, 59.

<sup>69</sup> Transcript of Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath Session Pt. I, Flamingo Women, 26/3/2016, Addis Ababa, 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 4

<sup>71</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session 2, Flamingo Women, 9/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

This woman expressed her desire to meet a forgiving and merciful person in her surrounding community who reflects the character of the father in this story, one who is forgiving and merciful. This is interesting in light of the comment made earlier in this section by one church leader who did not believe that these women understand God's mercy and therefore 'a way of restoration.'<sup>72</sup>

Woman 1's longing to encounter the Father is echoed by Barth's explanation of how God comes and establishes His Kingdom as the Merciful One<sup>73</sup>: when invoking the name of the Father, 'everything depends on whether or not it is done in sheer need ... in sheer readiness ... in sheer helplessness ...'<sup>74</sup> The sense of need, helplessness, and readiness to exit prostitution that has been articulated by the women throughout the data presented in the thesis points to a longing for these women to encounter the Father in increasing measure. The women recognise the presence of God as a Protector in their lives, but have failed to observe this incarnated at a consistent level through the very people tasked with modelling the actions of the father.

One church leader remarked:

They [women engaged in prostitution] don't know Jesus. They know God, okay? But, this God for them is a very distant God. But this God is not only distant but He's very close. He's loving. He's here to help you, to transform your life, okay? And we need to show them the love He has shown on the Cross. So, that's what we are lacking ... We have to live what we preach. They need someone to walk with them and show them that love of Christ. Accept them. The problem is we have always—our love is conditional. So show them unconditional love and they will surrender.<sup>75</sup>

In Church Leader FT's estimation, the evangelical church has not been an exemplar of unconditional love to those deemed outcasts in Ethiopian society. Church Leader FT believes that if women affected by prostitution were to experience that kind of love, incarnated through the people of God, these women would be able to receive the gift of God's acceptance.

Therefore, repentance understood as being found by God and accepted into His Family is one possible part of a life-affirming response to prostitution in Addis Ababa. The data presented in this section reflects that the women in this study are longing to encounter the Father, the one whom they describe as loving and merciful. They were

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<sup>72</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son, Church Leaders Session Pt. II, 6/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Barth, *op cit.*, 237.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader FT, Evangelical Theological College (ETC), 10/5/2016, Addis Ababa, 13.

able to recognise the unconditional nature of the father's acceptance of the younger son in the Prodigal story, even without having experienced that kind of unconditional acceptance from the Christian church. A deficient understanding of repentance that places sole agency for this action on the women only serves to reinforce the conditional understanding they hold in terms of how they can be accepted by their communities again. The women were inspired by the actions of the father toward the younger son; one woman remarked that the father in the Prodigal Son Story reveals 'a different kind of love, amazing love.'<sup>76</sup>

Building on this reconceptualization of repentance as being found by God the Father, the thesis will move toward offering a theological response to prostitution in the following chapter.

### **Summary**

This chapter has sought to evaluate some of the themes related to the church as identified by the women in this study in light of reflections about the story of the Prodigal Son shared by both the women and church leaders. This theological analysis, guided by the voices of the participants in this project, has helped to diagnose several barriers to the formation of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution, namely: deficient understandings of sin, salvation, and repentance. The over-identification of sin with personal morality has conflated the status of these women to that of the insolent younger son in the Prodigal Son story, which points to classical understandings of sin as pride and precludes conceptualising sin as a lack of right-relatedness and the formation of one's true identity in Christ. The character of the older son in the story highlights the fact that the evangelical church assumes an older son perspective when it comes to the Kingdom of God which impedes its understanding of the holistic nature of salvation and the fact that God has the authority to decide who is 'in' and 'out' of the Kingdom. Last, the character of the Father brings attention to the fact that a works-related understanding of repentance only serves to concretise the women's belief that they must help themselves at some level before they can approach the church and its leaders for assistance in order to exit prostitution.

The voices of the women and church leaders have helped to identify some of the deficient theological understandings that are currently impeding a life-affirming response by the evangelical church toward women affected by prostitution. A critical tactic when seeking a theological response to a situation like prostitution in the context

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<sup>76</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session EWAR Women, 7/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 6.



of Addis Ababa is to identify some of the major impediments preventing a response. Now that some of these barriers have been established, the next chapter will build on the insights gained from the participants in this project and outline a way to overcome these theological deficiencies in order to respond to prostitution in a life-affirming manner. To that end, it is hoped that the main message of the women to the church ('help us out of this life, help us out of a life of survival, of making a way out of no way,' as referenced in Chapter Six) can begin to be answered.



## **Chapter 9: Toward a Life-Affirming Response to Prostitution**

### **Introduction**

This chapter builds on the findings from the research project, particularly some of the theological gaps raised in Chapter Eight with reference to how the evangelical church understands sin, salvation, and repentance in light of the Kingdom of God. The story of the Prodigal Son helped to diagnose some of the reasons why women affected by prostitution hold to the view that they are too sinful to enter a church, have experienced few leaders like Jesus, and have few expectations that the church and its leaders will help them to exit prostitution. The character of the younger son, older son, and father in the Prodigal Son Story have brought into focus some of the challenges that the evangelical church faces with respect to responding to women affected by prostitution.

In order to address some of these theological deficiencies and to chart a way forward, this chapter will explore the story of the Apostle Peter in Chapter 10 of the Book of Acts (Acts 10:1-48). I outlined my reasons in Chapter Two for referring to the Kingdom of God as Luke described it in his two-volume work. Acts 10 details the intersection of two important conversion narratives: 1) Cornelius the Gentile (and his household); and 2) Peter the Apostle and the process by which he overcomes his initial resistance to the prospect of sharing the Gospel with a Gentile.<sup>1</sup> This story is highly relevant to answering the primary research question as it was written by Luke to a community working through two significant issues: what constituted mission to those who were considered unclean (Gentiles); and how and the degree to which the newly forming community of faith include those originally branded as outsiders by the religious establishment. Therefore, it is reasonable to focus on a few aspects of Peter's character and actions recorded in this story as potential reference points for how the evangelical church might move forward in a life-affirming response to prostitution. In the Biblical tradition, Peter has been referred to allegorically as the church (the Rock); consequently, it is logical to draw parallels between the character of Peter and the evangelical church. Throughout this thesis, I have related the lived experiences of my participants to Biblical texts and I will continue to do so as I move the thesis toward a life-affirming theological response.

In addition, as the thesis seeks to make a missiological contribution by offering a life-affirming theological response to prostitution, it must be noted that the theology of Acts has been described as a theology of mission, 'describing the mission of the early

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<sup>1</sup> Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 2003), 162.

church and powerfully implying this must continue to be the nature of the church, even if there is opposition and persecution.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, I have chosen the Peter and Cornelius story as an appropriate story to begin discussing how the evangelical church may be able to overcome some of the theological inconsistencies identified in the thesis.

### **Conversion of Peter: Reconfiguring Sin**

#### **Peter's Vision and Response**

Acts 10 opens with Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile<sup>3</sup> who had favour before the Jewish people, receiving a vision from an angel of God who instructed him to 'send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.'<sup>4</sup> The narrative that follows this event is Peter's preparation for, and response to, the invitation he receives from Cornelius. While the men are on their way, Peter also has a divine vision of a large sheet being let down to earth with all kinds of animals accompanied by a voice that says, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat!'<sup>5</sup> Peter's initial response to the vision is one of refusal. Three times he says: 'Surely not, Lord ... I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'<sup>6</sup> The voice tells Peter: 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'<sup>7</sup>

The implications of the vision emerge as the narrative develops: Peter's rejection of the animals parallels his rejection of the Gentiles.<sup>8</sup> Peter embodied the prevailing social and religious norms of the day, where dietary laws were a major impediment to social relations between Jews and Gentiles; therefore, his initial response to the vision is understandable. Based on his understanding of what constituted clean and unclean in his context, Peter thought he was responding to the vision in the right way. However, he failed to realise in that moment that his beliefs had become faulty. The issue between Peter and the heavenly voice in that moment was Peter's assumption that he was the determiner of what made something clean or not, and therefore, that he knew

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 186.

<sup>3</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Book of Acts 10:1-8. All Scriptural references in this chapter from, *Holy Bible: Today's New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Acts 10:13.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 10:14.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 10:15.

<sup>8</sup> Gaventa, *op cit.*, 165-166.

more than God.<sup>9</sup> After the vision ceased, instead of continuing in his denial, Peter began to ponder the implications of what he had seen.

The vision not only entreats Peter to acknowledge that these animals are clean but instructs him to take them into himself, to ingest them. The symbolism of closeness is difficult to deny at this point: Peter is being asked to relate intimately to things (and to people, as it later becomes apparent) that he had spent most of his life avoiding. The vision begins the process of dismantling Peter's framework of cleanness/uncleanness through reinforcing that only God has the authority to arbitrate between what is clean and unclean.

### **Peter's Response Appropriated to the Evangelical Church**

Chapter Eight of the thesis identified a theologically deficient understanding of sin as one of the barriers to the evangelical church's ability to respond inclusively to women affected by prostitution. Sin understood in the narrow sense of personal, immoral choices left the blame of prostitution solely on the shoulders of the women, a view revealed clearly in the women's comments both about injustice having become a normal experience in their lives and about their belief that they would have to stop their involvement in prostitution (their 'sin') before they could be accepted back into their communities. Moreover, the women's strong identification as sinners left them feeling unclean and unworthy of participating in their primary worship community, the EOTC. As a result, the women engaged in self-limiting worship practices that caused them to stand apart from the ritually unclean during an EOTC service. These coping mechanisms employed by the women to deal with their identity as sinners (both self- and societally-ascribed), do not suggest a life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

Peter's response to the vision he received is instructive for the evangelical church, as it highlights his willingness to suspend and then dismantle an important component of his theological framework. A narrow understanding of sin, especially related to women affected by prostitution, fails to understand sin as not treating our neighbour as ourselves, withholding compassion from those who are vulnerable, and not being in right-relationship with one another. David Bosch notes that according to Luke's Gospel, those who are oblivious to their own sins are worse sinners and that 'they are

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

not really righteous but *self*-righteous [emphasis author's], particularly in respect of others cf. the elder son in Luke 15:29.<sup>10</sup>

To this end, this theologically deficient understanding of sin could be addressed by the evangelical church by suspending its labelling of women engaged in prostitution as sinners. Peter was clearly reminded by God that only He has the authority to label what is clean and unclean. The evangelical church does not have the authority to label and decide who is in and who is out of the Kingdom of God, just as Peter did not have a mandate to determine what animals were worthy of being ingested, and which ones were not for: 'The Kingdom is the Kingdom of *God* [emphasis author's]; it is God's reign, God's rule.'<sup>11</sup> All authority belongs to God because it is His Kingdom, and the vision Peter received reinforced this truth.

Therefore, in order to correct a theologically deficient understanding of sin, the evangelical church could suspend its narrow categorisations of sin, and instead contemplate the broader implications of sin within the Kingdom of God which includes the church reflecting on the ways in which it has missed the mark<sup>12</sup> by failing to respond to women affected by prostitution.

Second, the women in this study have provided another lens through which to view prostitution: 'making a way out of no way',<sup>13</sup> a means of survival. The story of Hagar enabled the women to articulate their stories of how they came to be involved with prostitution and to appropriate many aspects of Hagar's life to their own, especially her pregnancy and desert forays. They emphasised in their stories themes of leaving and running, confusion, and loneliness, and like Hagar, they were trying to forge a life in the midst of significant challenges such as poverty, single-motherhood, and homelessness.

Peter received the vision given by God and took the time to contemplate what he saw and heard. He allowed the vision to challenge his theological categorisation of clean/unclean, and he was reminded that only God had the authority to decide what is clean and unclean. This process enabled Peter to respond to the two men that arrived at

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<sup>10</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 106.

<sup>11</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Popular Exposition on the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Publishing Company, 1959), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Both the Old and New Testament, despite different nuances to the terms used for sin, fundamentally view sin as failure and missing the mark. See Stanley J Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 184.

<sup>13</sup> Dolores S. Williams, 'Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation,' in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letter Russell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 177.

his gate right after he had the vision. The evangelical church in Addis Ababa has been given a vision that challenges its theological conceptions of clean and unclean: the New Testament. One has only to survey a number of references in the New Testament that speak directly to this issue, particularly in the Book of Galatians: ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’.<sup>14</sup> A life-affirming response to prostitution will require an expansion of the current theological understanding of sin by the evangelical church, which can be aided by seeing and hearing women affected by prostitution through a lens of survival.

### **Giving and Receiving Hospitality: Salvation Reconsidered**

#### **Peter Offers Hospitality to Cornelius’ Men**

While Peter was contemplating the vision he had just received, Cornelius’ men arrive at Simon the Tanner’s home (where Peter is staying) and stop at the gate, asking if Peter is staying there. The Holy Spirit tells Peter to meet the men, and not to hesitate in going with them when they ask.<sup>15</sup> At this point, Peter knows that since the Spirit has directed him to meet with Cornelius’ men, ‘then God Himself has abrogated the Jewish ban on the more intimate forms of fellowship between Jew and Gentile’.<sup>16</sup> After the men identify themselves to Peter and explain that they have come as a result of the vision Cornelius received, Peter ‘invited the men into the house to be his guests.’<sup>17</sup>

#### **Peter’s Hospitality Appropriated to the Evangelical Church**

The thesis has identified that the lack of a wholistic understanding of salvation has impeded the formation of a life-affirming response to prostitution. In Chapter Eight, the character of the older brother in the Prodigal Son story illuminated the degree to which the evangelical church identifies with the older brother’s actions in this story in relation to women affected by prostitution. They articulated that due to their fear of losing their good standing and reputation in their communities they judged, rejected, and stayed away from areas of Addis Ababa where these women could be found. The evangelical church leaders who participated in this project readily identified the lack of acceptance that both society and the church has for these women.

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<sup>14</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 10:19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Philip. F. Esler, *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 94.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 10:23.

The second part of the Peter and Cornelius story provides insight for how the evangelical church can potentially overcome their older brother proclivities toward women affected by prostitution, and work toward mediating the salvific work that Christ exemplified through his earthly ministry, particularly through His giving hospitality to and receiving it from people deemed to be sinners.<sup>18</sup>

When Peter came down the stairs in Simon the Tanner's house and opened the gate that separated him from Cornelius' men, the theological dismantling that Peter experienced because of the vision became operative: Peter began to apply the implications of the destruction of his clean/unclean categorisation to these men by receiving them as guests. Inviting Gentiles to stay in a Jewish home would have broken all social conventions of that day, but that did not stop Peter. In addition, Peter responded to their invitation to travel to Cornelius' house so that Cornelius could hear what Peter had to say<sup>19</sup> thereby engaging in a reciprocal act of hospitality with these men. Peter took a significant risk that day by inviting these men into the home he was staying at; however, a fear of being contaminated by these men and their Gentileness or losing his reputation with his surrounding community did not dissuade Peter.

Peter's example in this scene displays the wider dimensions of salvation, for instead of categorising these men as unclean or beyond the grace of God because of their ethnic status, he listened to their request and then offered hospitality. He was aware of their status as Gentiles but that did not become a barrier to his offering lodging for the evening, or travelling the next day with them to Cornelius' home. Peter engaged in simple but very humanising acts with these men and thereby communicated that he no longer viewed them as outsiders.

The example of Peter in this scene is instructive for the evangelical church because it illustrates how to be a conduit of the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. First, Peter opened the gates of Simon the Tanner's house and let these men in. He did not lead with an evangelistic activity aimed at having these men confess their sins, but listened to them and responded. As discussed in Chapter Seven of the thesis, one Ethiopian church (EEMYC Kazanchis branch) extended an invitation to women engaged in prostitution, the women responded, and the church listened to their stories, catalysing a ministry to women seeking to exit prostitution. It was a simple but profound act: the church issued an invitation and the women responded.

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<sup>18</sup> Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 275.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 10:23.



Second, giving and receiving hospitality is a mark of divinity; Mercy Amba Oduyoye remarks that Christians: ‘need to look at God’s hospitality and how we reflect this in our dealings ... in the human community’, and she notes that responsibility, reciprocity, and hospitality are all themes which help to define what it means to be human to African women’.<sup>20</sup> An emphasis by the evangelical church on emulating Christ’s hospitality toward women affected by prostitution could potentially aid in the reduction of dehumanising treatment, at least by the evangelical church.

Third, a more wholistic understanding of salvation in the Kingdom of God that emphasises extending hospitality to the marginalised in society might help to expand the evangelical church’s conception of salvation beyond models of Jesus’ death on the cross as penal substitution and atonement.<sup>21</sup> Biblical scholar Karl Allen Khun notes that while in Luke’s writings Jesus’ death is portrayed as an atoning salvific act, Luke does not emphasise its atoning significance in his writings.<sup>22</sup> Rather, Luke chooses to emphasise salvation by way of the broad array of benefits that a person may experience: healing from disease, release from demonic spirits, deliverance from oppression, return of dignity, restoration to one’s community, abundant provision, and the eventual defeat of death itself.<sup>23</sup> Jesus’ offer of forgiveness, translated from the Greek word *aphesis* (release), includes not only atonement for one’s personal sin but also encompasses a program of restoration for the totality of a person’s life, even if that will only be realised in part before the arrival of God’s reign in full.<sup>24</sup>

Similar to the opportunity that Cornelius’ men presented Peter with when arriving at the gates of the house he was staying at, the evangelical church in Addis Ababa has an opportunity to participate in the healing, delivering, and restorative work of God’s Kingdom by simply offering hospitality, without any conditions toward women affected by prostitution.

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<sup>20</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology: Introductions in Feminist Theology*, eds. Mary Grey, Lisa Isherwood, Catherine Norris, Janet Wootton (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>21</sup> Murray Rae, *Christian Theology: The Basics* (Routledge: London, 2015), 98-107.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 252.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Repentance Understood as Being Found: Willingness to Be Found in Cornelius'**

### **Home:**

#### **Peter Embarks on a Journey**

As the story moves on, Peter travels with Cornelius' men and is received warmly by Cornelius and his household, all who have been waiting for their guest. Peter is willing to enter the home of this Gentile man, while acknowledging that according to the prevailing social and religious norms of the day, associating with Gentiles is unthinkable. However, God has shown Peter that he must not call anyone impure or unclean.<sup>25</sup> As the scene unfolds, Peter begins to preach the Gospel to Cornelius' household, the Holy Spirit comes on all who hear the message, the offer of baptism is given, and then Peter accepts the invitation to stay with Cornelius for a few more days.<sup>26</sup>

#### **Peter's Journey Appropriated to the Evangelical Church**

Chapter Eight identified a theological deficiency with reference to the evangelical church's understanding of repentance that impedes the development of a life-affirming theological response to women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa. The data presented from the contextual Bible study sessions suggested that both the women and the church leaders understood repentance as: 1) an action that the 'guilty' party initiates in order to restore relationship with the injured party; and 2) and a critical first step that must occur before forgiveness and acceptance are extended by the injured party toward the guilty party.

A deeper exploration of the Prodigal Son story was offered that supported the view that God finds the lost son, as opposed to the guilty party having to do something in order to entreat God's mercy. In that chapter, I also noted the women's longing to encounter the merciful father portrayed in Luke 15, and their reports of having met very few religious leaders who exemplified the actions and character of Jesus.

Within the context of the Peter and Cornelius story, it can be argued that Peter's conversion by the vision he received can be categorised as a moment of repentance, an experience where God met Peter and inaugurated a greater degree of freedom in his life. Repentance in the writings of Luke carry themes of enslavement, although the patterns of enslavement differ among the many characters described in the Book of Luke and

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<sup>25</sup> Gaventa, *op cit.*, 168.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 10:34-48.

Acts.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the vision, Peter was bound to a theological framework that made sense of the world through a lens of clean and unclean. Peter's pondering, and subsequent implementation of the vision by offering hospitality to Cornelius' men reflected a fresh, new perspective. Peter was able to see, listen, and treat these Gentile men in a manner that conveyed that they were no less than him as a Jewish man. This new perspective freed Peter to offer hospitality without fear of repercussions, to join these men on a journey to Cornelius' house, and to enter Cornelius' home. Peter had to go through a conversion before he could embark on a journey toward the Gentiles, and that is precisely why God met Peter through the vision and the voice. God found Peter and this encounter set Peter free to do the work of mission as inaugurated by the Kingdom of God. Peter was therefore willing to be found in Cornelius' home surrounded by Gentiles, and to be a living witness to Jesus Christ in that place.

Peter's experience of repentance, of being found by God at the beginning of this story is instructive to overcoming a view of repentance that focusses on making reparations by the 'guilty' party. First, a greater emphasis on the understanding of grace, the factor that allows every human being to be found by God, could help to overcome this deficient view of repentance. 'We enter into the Kingdom of God and into our family ... only by grace through God's merciful birthing of us—apart from having fulfilled any requirements, made any right choices, or performed any act in order to receive entrance as any sort of payment or reward.'<sup>28</sup> It would serve those tasked with leadership in the evangelical church to remember the grace which enabled them to first encounter Christ, and to be mindful of the continual need to be found by Christ in all forms of enslavement, including theological beliefs.

Second, repentance understood as being found by God has the potential to free the evangelical church to find themselves in unlikely places, like Peter, such as the areas of Addis Ababa where women are engaged in prostitution. The women articulated, particularly in Chapter Six, the lack of religious leaders that they have encountered modelling the healing, praying, and deliverance ministry of Christ which they were able to identify throughout the contextual Bible studies we did together. The women communicated their experiences of encountering God as a Protector and their longing to meet the Merciful and Loving Father depicted in the story of the Prodigal Son. If evangelical leaders were to come closer to women affected by prostitution, the potential

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<sup>27</sup> Bosch, *op cit.*, 104.

<sup>28</sup> Bob Ekblad, *A New Christian Manifesto: Pledging Allegiance to the Kingdom of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 38.

for these women to meet the Father they are waiting for and to be found by Him increases significantly. The presence of evangelical leaders in closer proximity to these women would also address the themes expressed by the women of few religious leaders exemplifying Jesus and having few expectations of the church and its leaders.

The evangelical church is passionate about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the story of Peter demonstrates that verbal proclamation of the message of Christ to Cornelius' household followed a series of important events in the life of Peter, including Peter being found by God and having a fresh, new perspective about the Gentiles imparted to him. The evangelical church can increase the effectiveness of its proclamation of the Gospel through remembering its continual need for grace in order to be found by God and consistently reviewing whether the church has become enslaved to certain theological beliefs and entreating God to free them from that. In this manner, the evangelical church can move forward on a journey toward women affected by prostitution, finding themselves in the places where the women are, and incarnating the homecoming embrace exemplified by the Father that reinstated his son into the family.

### **Summary**

This chapter has sought to address some theological deficiencies related to how sin, salvation, and repentance are conceived of in the Kingdom of God. Through an exploration of the Peter and Cornelius story in Acts 10, a theological response has been proposed that includes the evangelical church: 1) suspending its label of women affected by prostitution as sinners and viewing these women as engaged in survival; 2) offering unconditional hospitality; and 3) placing a greater emphasis on remembering the grace that brought them to Christ, and 4) embarking on a journey toward women affected by prostitution.

The thesis will now move toward its conclusion and articulate practical implications for the theological responses outlined in this chapter.

## **Chapter 10: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This research has sought to engage in a process of theologising about prostitution within the context of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As described in the introductory chapter, this project has aimed to discern a life-affirming theological response to prostitution informed by the voices of women affected by it and by selected voices among the evangelical church leaders in Addis Ababa. This chapter will summarise the main features of the research, articulate conclusions and answers to main research questions that emerged within the project, and offer practical suggestions for missiological responses by the evangelical church.

### **Summary of Research Process**

The thesis began with an introduction to the situation of prostitution and the formation of the evangelical church in Addis Ababa, in order to provide a context for the two main groups that participated in this study. Next, a literature review provided an overview of scholarly discourses relevant to answering the primary research question, including a brief historical sketch of prostitution in the Old Testament, New Testament, and the Classical period; African contextual theologies; and theologies of the Kingdom of God. Chapter Three outlined the methods chosen to generate data for this project (contextual Bible studies and semi-structured interviewing), and the rationale for the decisions made pertaining to the design of the study.

Chapters Four to Six presented some of the data generated from the contextual Bible study sessions with the women and highlighted emerging themes with particular reference to how the women made sense of: their entry into prostitution; God, sin, humanity, justice/injustice, and the church. Chapter Seven presented data generated from the semi-structured interviews with selected evangelical church leaders and evaluated the degree of resonance and dissonance the leaders had with the themes identified by the women. Chapter Eight brought the voices of the women and church leaders into a discussion pertaining to the story of the Prodigal Son. This story provided a lens for the data presented and helped to diagnose several theological deficiencies that currently hinder the formation of a life-affirming theological response to prostitution by the evangelical church in Addis Ababa. Chapter Nine proposed a theological response to the three main theological deficiencies identified, understood as: a limited view of sin, salvation, and repentance in light of the Kingdom of God. This chapter examined the existence and resolution of these same deficiencies in the Acts 10 story of Peter's interactions with the household of Cornelius the Gentile. Some of the actions and

character-traits of the Apostle Peter, as represented in this story, were appropriated to the evangelical church to provide an example of how to overcome the theological deficiencies that this research project has identified.

### **Conclusions**

The research set out to address the following three questions:

1. To what extent can the voices of women affected by prostitution and of selected evangelical church leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia contribute toward a life-affirming theological response to prostitution?
2. What is the gift that women affected by prostitution have to offer to the evangelical church? (Do women affected by prostitution have a gift to offer to the evangelical church, and if so, what is it?)
3. Why is the evangelical church unable (or perhaps unwilling) to receive this gift?

In order to answer these questions, the research first sought to discern how women affected by prostitution make theological sense of their lives through the contextual Bible-study process. The data generated from these sessions suggested that the women view prostitution as a means of survival and identified themes of leaving/running, confusion, and loneliness as characteristic to their experiences preceding entry into prostitution. The women acknowledged God as a protective figure and do not believe that God judges them for their engagement in prostitution, unlike their surrounding communities, from whom they have predominantly experienced rejection and condemnation. The women strongly identify with a 'sinner' identity and view prostitution as something that makes them unclean, and therefore inadmissible to their primary community of faith, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC).

Due to the rejection that these women have experienced from their surrounding communities, injustice has become a somewhat normalised experience. One should recognise here that within the Ethiopian context women engaged in prostitution bear the sole burden of the associated societal blame and shame; male clients are impervious to blame or shame.

The women shared that they have few expectations of the Christian church or its leaders, whether EOTC or evangelical. As the women reflected, through the contextual Bible studies on Jesus' ministry to the marginalised, they expressed that they have encountered few religious leaders in their lives who model the example that Jesus left for his followers, and that they ultimately place their trust in God to help them exit a life of prostitution. If given the chance, these women stated, they would want Christian

leaders to know that they are engaged with prostitution as a means of survival; they also would request help to escape from that life. These women affirmed God as a constant presence in their lives, and they expressed their longing to encounter someone in their surrounding community who emulates the father depicted in the story of the Prodigal Son, because ‘He was forgiving and merciful.’<sup>1</sup>

The theologising process that these women engaged with has produced themes that provide insight into how they make theological sense of their lives. When the evangelical church leaders were asked to reflect on the themes described by the women, it was discovered that the evangelical church shares a greater degree of resonance than dissonance with these women. One point of dissonance occurs between the women’s perception of God as a Protector who is present in their lives, and the evangelical church’s perception of God needing to be a Saviour figure to these women. This perception helps to explain why the primary means by which the evangelical church has sought to respond to women affected by prostitution has been through evangelistic activities focused on the verbal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to repent and believe.

The data generated from the selected evangelical church leaders suggests that the participants in this project have an understanding of the circumstances that precede a woman’s entry into prostitution, and that they are familiar with the rejecting and stigmatising behaviour that society (including Ethiopian Christians) demonstrates toward these women. The evangelical leaders admitted that the evangelical church embodies the character and actions of the older son in the Prodigal Son story when appropriated to women affected by prostitution, and identified that their older-brother proclivities are partially motivated by a fear of losing their good reputation before their surrounding communities. Leaders studied in this project also articulated that evangelicals generally view a woman affected by prostitution in the role of the younger son in the Prodigal Son story: as a sinner who has made bad personal choices and is in need of God’s forgiveness, which must be requested while expressing contrition. (Leaders participating in the study did not necessarily endorse this perception of women affected by prostitution.) The points raised by the women and the evangelical church leaders in their theologising about the Prodigal Son moved the project toward a theological response informed by another Biblical character: the Apostle Peter. Peter

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of Prodigal Son Session 2, Flamingo Women, 9/4/2016, Addis Ababa, 2.

had his dominant theological framework dismantled and reframed by God so that he could fully participate in the mission of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, the first conclusion that can be drawn is that the voices of the women and selected church leaders offer significant contributions to a life-affirming theological response to prostitution. This study has diagnosed several theological deficiencies held by the evangelical church, particularly with respect to a narrow understanding of sin, salvation, and repentance. The insights of participants in this study draw attention instead to a more expansive, biblical view of salvation in light of the Kingdom of God, a vision that places responsibility on the community of faith to mediate God's holistic program of restoration for the full human being. These contrasting visions explain the current lack of a robust and life-affirming theological response to prostitution in Addis Ababa.

In answer to the second research question, women affected by prostitution do have gifts to offer to the evangelical church in Addis Ababa: their lives and their unique interpretations of Christian Scripture contribute to the church's understanding of the Kingdom of God. Precisely because of their lived experiences on the margins of society, the women's interpretations point the church toward the promise of the Kingdom of God, and to the gaps in how the Kingdom of God is understood and lived-out within the evangelical church—particularly in relationships with the marginalised.

Third, the research suggests that the reason the evangelical church is not able to receive the gift that these women have to offer is because they are not aware that women affected by prostitution have things to say about God. The evangelical church has primarily viewed prostitution as a sin-problem that can be solved when women express their contrition, ask God for forgiveness, and accept Jesus Christ into their hearts as a personal saviour. Problematising prostitution through a narrow understanding of sin, salvation, and repentance has prevented the evangelical church from examining how its understanding of the Kingdom of God has impeded the formation of a life-affirming theological response to women affected by prostitution.

To this end, three recommendations will now be suggested to help the evangelical church practically start to overcome the theological deficiencies identified above, in order to catalyse a theological response to prostitution in Addis Ababa.



## **Recommendations**

### **Theological Education from the Margins**

In order to help expand the evangelical church's theological paradigms regarding sin, salvation, and repentance in light of the Kingdom of God, it is recommended that the evangelical church engage in a process of listening to those within their congregations who are considered to be on the margins of society, which may or may not include women affected by prostitution. By employing the contextual Bible-study method, local congregations can help access the voices of the marginalised within their communities, listen to how they make theological sense of their lives, better understand the challenges they face, and gain a greater clarity about how the Kingdom of God is being manifested, or veiled, in their lives. This process will help evangelical leaders to discern, within their own context, the ways in which the ministries of their local congregations and the behaviour of their congregation members aid the marginalised—or, alternately, impede marginalised congregants' experience of the reversal, acceptance, and welcome that the Kingdom of God inaugurates. Key insights, with the permission of those who have participated in the contextual Bible studies, can be shared with the wider congregation and help to inform future ministry activities. This is a cost-effective and easily implemented strategy for evangelical church leaders to start expanding their theological frameworks with reference to the Kingdom of God.

After engaging in this type of internal evaluation, it is recommended that several evangelical leaders from the same geographic areas of Addis Ababa gather together and share what the marginalised within their own communities have taught them about the Kingdom of God. Major points of learning and gaps identified can be documented and sent to the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE), the major umbrella organisation for all the evangelical churches of Ethiopia, with a request to the ECFE to provide teaching and training to local congregations that address the key deficiencies that have been identified.

The aim of this recommendation is to sensitise evangelical churches, in a participatory manner, to the wealth of theological knowledge that has largely remained untapped within their congregations. The insights of those on the margins offer a point of reference for how evangelical church leaders might bring their teaching and ministry activities into greater alignment with the inclusive, hospitable, and welcoming principles that demarcate the Kingdom of God.

The hope is that such inclusion of marginalised voices, informing how local congregations understand and practice mission, would stimulate greater sensitivity within local congregations toward the marginalised in their surrounding communities, which may include women affected by prostitution. Increased understanding of and sensitivity to the Kingdom of God within evangelical church congregations may lead to women affected by prostitution being recognised, heard, not judged as sinners, and welcomed into these churches.

### **Capacity-Building with Strategic Evangelical Church Leaders**

The leaders represented in this project demonstrated an empathic stance toward women affected by prostitution demonstrated predominantly through their knowledge of the circumstances that lead women into prostitution as a means of survival. To deepen and spread that empathy, it is recommended that sensitivity and awareness training drawing on material generated from this thesis be made available to such leaders as a way of increasing their ability to challenge common but narrow theological beliefs—beliefs that relegate women affected by prostitution to the status of unclean sinners, rejected by society and the church. In addition, such training can include simple, cost-effective ways that local congregations can begin to embody hospitality and welcome to women affected by prostitution, without conditions.

Chapter Seven discussed a successful example of such embodiment, relating how the EECMY Kazanchis local congregation offered an invitation to the women in the red-light district close to their church. EECMY Church Leader BG said that the first few times the church approached the women in the Chechnya Red-Light District in Addis Ababa, ‘We failed. Then we went again and distributed another invitation card, and they came to the project.’<sup>2</sup> The church was not deterred by having to issue multiple invitations to the women to join a welcome program hosted at the church. The church was not afraid of rejection and kept trying. This type of tenacity and perseverance is essential who are trying to build relationships with women who have been rejected repeatedly by various facets of society.

Some churches in Addis Ababa, such as the Mulu Wongel Hiya Hewlett local congregation,<sup>3</sup> have engaged in such activities, highlighting the fact that this is not an

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<sup>2</sup> Transcript of Church Leader BG, Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), 9/30/2016, Addis Ababa, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Mulu Wongel Hiya Hewlett local congregation started working with women engaged in prostitution in 2011 after attending a capacity-building training workshop with Ellilta Women at Risk (EWAR) but unfortunately, due to funding and political issues, the rehabilitation program ended. Some of the

impossible task for the evangelical church. As one leader from the Mulu Wongel church stated: ‘This is the responsibility of the church...our people [Ethiopian people] are passionate people. [We, the church] just need awareness creation.’<sup>4</sup>

Strategic leaders have the ability and authority among their followers to garner this passion and influence their congregations to model the hospitality that Christ extended to those on the margins. The more passion and awareness that can be generated among strategic leaders, the higher the probability for local congregations to follow the example of their leaders and welcome these women into their churches.

### **Learning from Exemplars**

Providing opportunities for strategic evangelical church leaders to spend time with current ministries in Addis Ababa that are offering compassionate care to women affected by prostitution will also increase leaders’ ability to challenge non-life-affirming theological beliefs held by evangelical Christians. As discussed in this thesis, church leaders are often afraid of losing their good reputations by associating with women affected by prostitution.

In order to overcome this fear, it is recommended that strategic leaders spend time with organisations such as Ellilta Women at Risk (EWAR) who have befriended and assisted women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa for over twenty years. Since its inception, EWAR has been able to assist over one thousand women seeking to exit prostitution, and their children. EWAR’s staff exhibit the ability to love these women as sisters and to welcome them into a family created among the staff and the women they are helping. I have personally witnessed and experienced this sense of family for the past nine years since my relationship with EWAR first began. For example, when my mother passed away in the middle of this research project, the staff of EWAR, and the women who were participants in the program at that time, held traditional grieving services<sup>5</sup> in honour of my mother. In addition, one day while conducting several contextual Bible studies on the story of Ruth with the EWAR women, I was overcome by my own grief and started to cry in front of the women. One of the EWAR women said that if God could help her pass through all that she had, surely He would be able to

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leadership of the church continue to hope that the program can be started again. Transcript of interview with Church Leader DM, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, 5-9.

<sup>4</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader DM, Mulu Wongel Church, 10/8/2016, 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> A *lexo* [house of crying] is a traditional Ethiopian gathering that happens over several days after someone has passed away, and is held at the home of grieving relatives. The primary purpose of the *lexo* is to ensure that the grieving family members are not left alone in their initial days of grieving.

help me and that is what she would pray for. This is one of the moments in the course of this research that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

EWAR is not just a rehabilitation program; it is a compassionate community that initiates contact with women engaged in prostitution and develops a relationship with them, on the street, without conditions. When a woman decides to join the program, members of EWAR's staff stand alongside her in one of her greatest life-transitions, listen to the entirety of her story, cry alongside of her, share meals with her, care for her children, and provide her with the opportunity to feel like she is part of a family again.

EWAR humanises these women again through meaningful relationships. This process is not learned through a training manual or theological textbook, but through immersion and bearing witness. The staff of EWAR are able to relate to the women not because of their own educational backgrounds or skill-level, but because most of them know what it is to have been on the margins and to have experienced the Kingdom of God, the nearness and presence of Christ, in those places.

Therefore, strategic evangelical church leaders would benefit from spending significant time with groups like EWAR, for as one church leader said:

We need to identify with them [women engaged in prostitution]...to be able to listen to them. They are struggling. Sometimes we don't give them an ear. So these people, sometimes more than money, they need somebody to listen to their challenge. So, even by listening then healing can come, healing can come.<sup>6</sup>

The staff of EWAR are able to identify with the women precisely because of the way they have learned how to listen. Strategic leaders also can learn how to listen, be present, and communicate a sense of family to these women by spending time with organisations such as EWAR and the EECMY host-family program discussed in Chapter Seven. Both of these programs demonstrate the homecoming welcome that the father in the Prodigal Son extended to his son, and incarnate the welcoming embrace of the father that the women in this study have articulated they are longing to encounter.

### **Areas for Further Research**

While this thesis has proposed a life-affirming theological response to prostitution in Addis Ababa, a significant portion of the thesis was spent diagnosing the theological deficiencies that hinder such a response. Further research can be conducted that entirely focuses on proposing a response, and could include the voices of other stakeholders such as evangelical congregation members, EOTC leaders and congregants, and faith-

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript of Interview with Church Leader FT, 5/10/2016, Addis Ababa, 11-12.

based organisations based in Addis Ababa working with vulnerable women. The inclusion of other voices can help to reveal additional theological deficiencies impeding a life-affirming theological response to prostitution and encourage the emergence of creative, effective, and respectful responses.

In addition, as outlined in the limitations of the thesis in Chapter One, I am aware that greater attention to the implications of the ongoing complexities between the EOTC and evangelical church with reference to doctrine and pastoral practices, and the wider cultural influences that have impacted the women's perceptions of various themes that emerged throughout the theologising process would have enriched the findings of this project. For this reason, it would be helpful if serious work was done in both of these areas in order to build bridges between the EOTC and evangelical church that could lead to a more fully-orbed, life-affirming theological response to prostitution.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This thesis began with a personal story. I conclude by honouring my friend Hareg, who was never able to share the entirety of her life story with the evangelical church of Ethiopia. Hareg spent a significant portion of her short life serving a church that was unable or unwilling to receive one of the greatest gifts she had to offer: her perspective as a Christian woman with past experiences of prostitution. Hareg experienced Jesus Christ in a unique way and carried out His Kingdom mission with great fervour because she had been found by Him while in prostitution. As a leader in the evangelical church, her experiences gave her extraordinary empathy for those who were suffering and in pain. Hareg's legacy is that despite not experiencing the freedom to share her story in its entirety with the evangelical church, she was able to lead many toward the promise of life as God intended, life in abundance:

‘The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.’<sup>7</sup>

As a pastor, this is precisely what Hareg did for so many women affected by prostitution. My hope is that this thesis will create space for other women affected by prostitution to share the entirety of their stories, without fear or shame, and that the evangelical church will not miss out on the gift that women like Hareg offer.

As EWAR Leader CF said:

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<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, ‘Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI,’ Vatican, April 24, 2005. Accessed March 1, 2018, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20050424\\_inizio-pontificato.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050424_inizio-pontificato.html)

I wanted them [the evangelical church] to know Hareg's whole story so that they did not miss out on the beauty of her life. The beauty of her life was the fruit of all the pain she had endured. I wanted them to be aware of the complete transformation that Hareg had experienced in her life, and for God to receive the glory for her life.<sup>8</sup>

To that end, one purpose of this thesis has been to ensure that the beauty of Hareg's life is recognised, in hope that evangelicals might acknowledge and accept the gift of the thousands of Haregs standing outside the gates of their churches, waiting to be invited in. May the fruit of Hareg's life be grafted into the leaves of the tree that will be for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) in order that many other women affected by prostitution in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia will experience the release, hope, and freedom promised in the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Notes from a personal telephone conversation with CF, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, April 20, 2018, 1.

**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1A: Contextual Bible Studies, Flamingo Women**

No	Date	Story	# of Women in Attendance
<b>2015</b>			
R1	Thursday Jun 25	Relationship Building	6
	Saturday Sept		
R2	19	Relationship Building	8
BS	Saturday Sept		
1	26	Hagar (Genesis 16 and 22)	6
BS			
2	Monday Sept 28	Bleeding Woman (Mark 5:21-43)	6
BS			
3	Tuesday Sept 29	Judah Tamar (Genesis 38)	7
BS			
4	Thursday Oct 1	Anointing Woman ( Luke 7:36-50)	8
BS		Review of Anointing Woman (Luke 7:36-50)	
5	Saturday Oct 3		2
BS			
6	Saturday Oct 3	Stoning Woman (John 8:1-11)	6
R3	Thursday Oct 8	Distributed 6 Hygiene Kits	5
BS		Christmas Story (Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38)	4
7	Saturday Dec 19		4
R4	Friday Dec 25	Christmas Lunch, took pictures	4
BS			
8	Saturday Dec 26	Prodigal Son (Luke 15)	4
<b>2016</b>			
BS			
9	Saturday Jan 9	Rahab (Joshua 2)	4
BS			
10	Saturday Jan 16	Ruth Chapter 1	5
BS		Ruth Chapter 2 and China	
11	Saturday Jan 23	Testimony	5
		My Birthday, served cake, took pictures	
R5	Saturday Jan 30		5
BS			
12	Saturday Jan 30	Ruth Chapter 3 and 4	5
BS			
13	Saturday Feb 6	Samaritan Woman (John 4)	7
BS			
14	Saturday Feb 13	Dinah (Genesis 34) 50 ETB Began	3
BS		David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11 and 12)	
15	Saturday Feb 20		6
BS			
16	Saturday Feb 27	Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)	6
C	Saturday Mar 5	Cancelled due to traffic	

	BS			
17	Saturday Mar 12	Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)		5
	BS			
18	Saturday Mar 19	Rape of the Concubine (Judges 19)		5
	BS			
19	Saturday Mar 26	Crippled Woman Healed on Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17)		6
	BS			
20	Saturday Apr 2	Pt II Crippled Woman (Luke 13:10-17)		5
	BS			
21 R5	Saturday April 9	Prodigal Son (Luke 15) Again +		6
	Saturday June	Cake		
	D1 25	Discussion on <i>Sekoka</i> (Lament)		5
	BS			
22	Saturday July 9	A Wise Ruling (1 Kgs. 3:16-28)		6
	BS			
23	Sat August 6	Widow Son Raised (Luke 7:11-17)		6
	BS			
24	Wed August 17	John 4 Again (Samaritan Woman)		6
	BS			
25	Sat September 24	Story of Joseph (Genesis - first part of story)		6
				5
	BS			
26	Sat October 15	Story of Joseph Pt. II (Genesis)		



## Appendix 1B: Contextual Bible Studies, EWAR Women

No.		Date 2016	Story	# of Women
B1	16	Sunday Jan	Ruth part 1	20
B2	16	Sunday Jan	Ruth part 2	20
B3	16	Sunday Jan	Ruth part 3	20
B4	5	Friday Feb	Hagar (Genesis 16 and 22)	15
B5	12	Friday Feb	Stoning Woman (John 8:1-11)	17
B6		Thurs Apr 7	Prodigal Son (Luke 15)	5

## **Appendix 2: Contextual Bible Study Sample Discussion Guide**

Q: Let's put ourselves in this story. What would you feel if you were pregnant, in the desert, and an angel were saying these words?

Q: Do you remember that at the beginning of the story Hagar was the maid? Do you think she wanted to sleep with Abraham?

Q: Why did she sleep with him, then?

Q: Did she have a choice? Could she say no?

Q: Why did Hagar disrespect Sarai when she found out that she was pregnant?

Q: What do you think Hagar was feeling when she was running away?

Q: Have you heard of a story similar to Hagar's, whether in the past, or right now, or even in your own lives?

Q: Hagar ran away to the desert. Do you think the desert was an easy place?

Q: Have you ever felt in your life that you are in the desert? Not physically, but have you ever felt that there is nothing around you?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session, EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, 1–6, Addis Ababa.

### Appendix 3: Story-Telling Example

The following is a direct quotation of how I told the story of Hagar to a group of women exiting prostitution. The words written below reflect the back-translation, or how my spoken English words were translated into Amharic at the time of the session and then translated back into English by the person who transcribed the recording of this session:

Today I want to tell you a story about a woman who faced many problems in her life. I will tell you about a very old man and old woman who were not able to have a child. These people were very rich. They had many cows and sheep but not children. They had a house maid who served them in the house who was from a different country, had a darker skin and was young. The old lady thought that if her old husband had sex with the maid she could give birth to a child and the child could become hers. She took the maid to her husband so that he could sleep with her. The girl became pregnant. When the girl saw that she was pregnant from the husband she disrespected the old woman. The old woman became angry and said to her husband that the maid was not showing her respect so she had to fire her. The old man then replied that she can do whatever pleases her with the maid. The old lady beat her and pushed her, then the girl ran away and went to the desert. When she was in the desert, pregnant, hot and thirsty, there came an angel from the heavens. The girl's name was Hagar and the angel called her by her name and asked her where she was and where she was going. She told him that she had run away from her master. The angel told her to go back to the old man's and woman's house and to serve them. He told her that she would have many children and grandchildren. He told her that the name for her unborn child is Ishmael, and the meaning of the name is 'God heard my cries'. And he told her that the baby when he grows would be like a wild donkey and strong. He would be like a warrior who rises up against his brothers.<sup>2</sup>

After I told the story, I would ask a series of questions prepared in advance with the aim of contextualising the story to some aspect of the women's lives, and then a conversation would ensue. During these sessions, my translator would simultaneously translate the conversations the women engaged with so that I was able to ask follow-up questions apart from those I had prepared, and so that the women could direct the course of the conversation. My prepared questions served as a guide to our conversation; however, I made every effort to allow for the insights and feedback given by the women to guide the direction of our discussions. I was able to record most of what the women shared and I had these recordings transcribed afterwards by an Ethiopian man and an Ethiopian woman.

My key informant was instrumental in helping to contextualise the Biblical stories to the context of prostitution that each of these women faced. Her ability to help these women understand the Biblical stories I shared was invaluable due to her intimate knowledge of prostitution—gained through experience and now through trying to help those seeking to leave prostitution. I learned through this process that translation does not just relate to how words are communicated, but also to how concepts, experiences, and ideas are transferred from one person to another.

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<sup>2</sup> Transcript of Hagar Session, EWAR Women, 5/2/2016, 1, Addis Ababa.

**Appendix 4: List of Emerging Themes as Identified by Women Affected by Prostitution**

<b>Theological Category</b>	<b>Emerging Theme</b>	<b>Chapter</b>
<b>Reasons for entry into prostitution (prelude to prostitution)</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Leaving/running, confusion, and loneliness	4
<b>How the women perceive God</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> God is a Protector	5
<b>How the women make sense of sin</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Self-identification as a sinner: <i>'We know we are sinners'</i>	5
<b>How the women understand humankind (theological anthropology)</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Humanity as rejecting: <i>'Human beings cannot accept us'</i>	5
<b>How the women understand justice/injustice</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Injustice as normalised: <i>'Man is not judged, it is shameful for a woman'</i>	5
<b>How the women make sense of the church</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Standing outside the church, apart from the ritually unclean: <i>'We do not go inside the church'</i>	6
<b>What do the women think of current church leaders</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> There are few church leaders who are like Jesus: <i>'There are few...'</i>	6
<b>What are the expectations of the women with reference to the church and its leaders</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> Few expectations of church leaders: <i>'There is not much we expect'</i>	6
<b>What is the main message of the women to the church and its leaders</b>	<b>Main theme:</b> <i>'Help us out of this life'</i>	6

## Appendix 5: Interviews with Selected Evangelical Church Leaders

Date	Name of Church Leader	Position	Denomination	Duration
16-Aug-16	Belaynesh	Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC) Training Program Manager Women's Program	EKHC	1.12:38
16-Aug-16	Bizunesh	EKHC Discipleship Women's Leader National Program Coordinator	EKHC	
16-Aug-16	Medanit	Works with Bizunesh	EKHC	
10-Aug-16	Pastor Dejdin Dejene	EKHC General Secretary for Addis Ababa Churches	EKHC	1.15:34
10-Aug-16	Alemu Zegey	Elder Mulu Wongel Church, Hiya Hewlett Branch	Mulu Wongel	1.04:35
20-Oct-16	Pastor Tsadiku Abdo	President Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia (ECFE)	Mulu Wongel	1.16:31
25-Oct-16	Serawit Teketel Friedmeyer	Director Ellilta Women At Risk (EWAR)	IEC	48:13:00 2:04 38:03:00
2-Oct-16	Reverend Tseganesh Ayele	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) Women Ministry Department Director	EECMY	2.00:10
30-Sep-16	Berhanu Getachew	EECMY Project Coordinator New Life Young Women Rehabilitation	EECMY	1.48:04
3-Oct-16	Duro Burje	EECMY Project Coordinator New Life Young Women Rehabilitation (2002-2012)	EECMY	1.24:46
8-Oct-16	Dr. Meaza Haile	Teacher Mulu Wongel Church, Hiya Hewlett Branch	Mulu Wongel	40:49:00
5-Oct-16	Deacon Ermias Kiros	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Deacon	EOTC	12:17 27:48:00 46:30:00
18-Jul-16	Alemayu Goshu	Serving in Mission (SIM) Outreach and Training Coordinator	EKHC	1.08:56
5-Oct-16	Dr. Frew Tamrat	Vice-Principle & Head of Graduate Studies Evangelical Theological College (ETC)	EKHC	1:10.:01
20-Oct-16	Nebiyu Haile	Program Manager Ellilta Women At Risk (EWAR)	Addis Kidane	47:00:00
20-Oct-16	Teru Tekle	Consultant	Mesrete Christos	1:31:05
20-Oct-16	Yeti Andarge	Project Manager Ellilta Women At Risk (EWAR)	Mesrete Christos	

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- Transcript of Hagar Session EWAR Women, September 26, 2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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