

HOW COULD THE BRITISH METHODIST CHURCH PREACH
MORE EFFECTIVELY ON DOMESTIC ABUSE AS PART OF ITS
PROPHETIC WITNESS?

Conradie L.

August 2019

Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

How could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness?

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the University of Chester
for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

by Lynita Conradie

August 2019

The material being presented for examination is my own work and had not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements | 6 |
| Abstract | 7 |
| Summary Of Portfolio | 9 |
| Chapter 1 Introduction | 11 |
| Introduction | 11 |
| Definitions of Domestic Abuse | 13 |
| Causes of Domestic Abuse | 15 |
| Scope of the Research | 18 |
| Overview of Thesis | 19 |
| Conclusion | 22 |
| Chapter 2 The Methodist Conference Report On Domestic Abuse | 24 |
| Introduction | 24 |
| Origin Of The Report | 24 |
| Theology | 27 |
| The Bible | 28 |
| Violence In Scripture: Combatting Texts Of Terror | 33 |
| Gender Equality | 37 |
| “About God” | 37 |
| “About Sin” | 42 |
| “About The Cross” | 42 |
| “About Repentance And Forgiveness” | 43 |
| “About The Church” | 44 |
| “About Marriage” | 45 |
| The Church’s Response | 48 |
| The Prophetic Voice? | 49 |
| Subsequent Work | 49 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Conclusion | 50 |
| Chapter 3 The Prophetic Imagination | 51 |
| Introduction | 51 |
| What Is Meant By The Term “Prophetic”? | 51 |
| Feminist Critique of The Prophetic Tradition..... | 58 |
| Resistance | 58 |
| Transformation..... | 60 |
| The Prophetic Imagination | 64 |
| Preaching As Communication | 69 |
| Prophetic Preaching..... | 73 |
| Conclusion | 77 |
| Chapter 4 Research Design..... | 78 |
| Introduction | 78 |
| The Nature Of Practical Theology..... | 78 |
| My Justification For Choosing Qualitative Research..... | 82 |
| Interviews As My Research Method | 83 |
| Finding Participants (Sampling) | 85 |
| Interview Questions | 86 |
| Data Collection..... | 86 |
| Data Analysis | 87 |
| Ethical Considerations | 88 |
| Subsequent Reflection | 89 |
| Conclusion | 91 |
| Chapter 5 Breaking The Silence | 92 |
| Introduction | 92 |
| Women Have Been Silent..... | 93 |
| The Church Has Been Silent | 96 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Why Break The Silence? | 101 |
| How Will The Silence Be Broken..... | 106 |
| Preaching As Lament | 107 |
| Preaching As Confession/Truth-Telling | 113 |
| Patriarchy | 115 |
| Conclusion..... | 117 |
| Chapter 6 Preaching As Resistance To Patriarchy And Violence | 118 |
| Introduction | 118 |
| Preaching As Resistance..... | 119 |
| Preaching As Resistance To Domestic Abuse | 123 |
| Why Do We Preach?..... | 124 |
| Towards A Feminist Hermeneutic | 126 |
| The Rape Of The Levite's Concubine | 134 |
| Preaching As Persuasion?..... | 143 |
| Can The Sermon Transform Lives?..... | 147 |
| Is The Monologue Sermon The Only Option?..... | 149 |
| Conclusion..... | 153 |
| Chapter 7 Conclusion..... | 155 |
| Overview Of Argument | 155 |
| Quo Vadis?..... | 156 |
| Contribution To Knowledge And Further Work..... | 158 |
| Impact of The Research On My Own Practice | 159 |
| Conclusion..... | 159 |
| Appendix 1 Consent Form | 161 |
| Appendix 2 Participant Information Sheet | 162 |
| References..... | 166 |

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my principal supervisor, Professor Elaine Graham, for her guidance and support. Her incisive questions kept me on my toes.

My thanks also go to Professor Wayne Morris, my second supervisor. It was Wayne who arranged for a scholarship without which, paying fees as a foreign student, I would have been unable to afford to undertake this course of study.

A unique feature of the Professional Doctorate is that it is not a solo effort. I wish to thank my companions on this journey, my cohort. To: Stephen Adams, Claire Dawson, Ruth Craig, Gill Henwood, Susie Collingridge and Helen Warnock, thank you for your friendship and support. I also pay tribute to the late Martin McAlinden, who died before completing his thesis, but whose spirit and courage live on in my memory and have sustained me in difficult times.

Thank you to all my participants who were willing to be interviewed. The rich data emanating from these interviews made an indispensable contribution to this research project.

I also thank my many friends who patiently listened and encouraged me in times of self-doubt and despair.

Abstract

Thesis Title: How Could The British Methodist Church Preach More Effectively On Domestic Abuse As Part Of Its Prophetic Witness?

In 2005 the British Methodist Conference adopted a comprehensive report dealing with domestic abuse, acknowledging it as a worldwide phenomenon. The Report contains general information on domestic abuse, as well as a theological reflection and recommendations as to how the Church might respond to this pandemic. A recurring phrase in the Report is that the Church's "prophetic voice" must be heard, that the Church must speak out against domestic abuse. However, the meaning and scope of such "prophetic voice" is not explained nor adequately clarified.

This Report forms the policy framework within which this thesis is situated, with specific reference to the Church's 'prophetic voice', or 'prophetic witness'. Even though the church has been by and large silent on domestic abuse, there are ways in which this silence can be broken; and the Church needs to respond to the challenge in a practical way. This thesis argues that one of the ways in which this 'prophetic voice' might be heard is by preaching to congregations on domestic abuse in the context of worship. One such source of prophetic preaching is biblical prophecy, derived from both the Hebrew prophets and Jesus of Nazareth. These prophets created what Walter Brueggemann terms the 'prophetic imagination', which serves as counter-voice to the dominant voices of power, exploitation and injustice. This thesis contends that contemporary preachers should exercise a prophetic witness by speaking out against domestic abuse, although, as the data collected from the preachers interviewed demonstrate, there is a hesitation and, to some extent, a reluctance to preach on domestic abuse.

One way in which preaching can harness the prophetic imagination is by viewing preaching as a theological practice characterised by "lament, truth-telling and resistance", terminology adapted from Christine Smith's triad of "weeping, confession and resistance" (1992). The role of preaching as lament is to weep in solidarity with those who suffer, but also to listen to the unheard voices of those who are the victims of domestic abuse. Truth-telling exposes the reality of

domestic abuse and names it as a sin, as well as telling the truth about patriarchy, which is one of the root causes of domestic abuse. Preaching as resistance entails the rejection of patriarchy and violence. A transformation comes about when scripture is read, using a feminist hermeneutic, which exposes the patriarchal nature of the Bible and how this has been used to justify the subordination of women. Ultimately, the aim of preaching is both to persuade and transform listeners, through the exercise of a practical theological prophetic imagination that envisions a world in which there is no violence.

Summary Of Portfolio

When I embarked on my doctoral journey I wanted to focus on my long-standing interest in homiletics and preaching, arising in part from my work as a Methodist Minister. My literature review focused on the current state of scholarship in homiletics, with particular reference to postmodernism and the impact which this might have on the church's preaching ministry. I considered the impact of some of the main features of postmodernism, such a suspicion towards authority and institutions, the uncertainty as to what truth is and the question whether traditional forms of preaching would "survive" postmodernism. I concluded that postmodernism offered a challenge but not a threat, to traditional preaching.

My publishable article addressed the question of preaching on domestic violence in Namibia. It was at this point that an emphasis on the church's calling to exercise a prophetic witness emerged as an important theme. I argued that despite legislation, domestic violence in Namibia was rife, due in large measure to a male-dominated society. I used the history of the church's prophetic witness against apartheid and racial discrimination in both South Africa and Namibia to justify my argument that a similar kind of prophetic witness was necessary in addressing domestic violence.

In my research proposal, I set out my research design, underpinned by a decision to focus on the preaching practices of serving Methodist ministers, lay and ordained. I also began to develop a framework for my argument, based on Christine Smith's three-fold notion of preaching as "weeping, confession and resistance".

My paper on reflective practice dealt with the impact of failure. I related it to a sermon series I had preached entitled "The Treasures of Darkness" and what impact my being Blind had had on both my doctoral journey and my preaching practice. I highlighted the fact that much of the literature on reflection – both in theology and professional education -- used visual images such as mirrors, which as a Blind person I did not find helpful. I argued that instead, I could relate much better to the concept of darkness, something which also helped me cope with the setbacks in my research journey when I was required to redraft material in the

light of critical feedback. I began to regard the process of rewriting essays and chapters as a “womb of life”, or a maturing and growing that took place within the dark recesses of my brain. Out of darkness and failure, I had nevertheless given birth to something new; and this led me further into a definite research topic. It struck me that those who are subjected to domestic violence are experiencing darkness and that it is important for the church to address this issue from the pulpit. It is part of what Walter Brueggemann terms the “prophetic imagination” and this underpins preaching as a theological practice. This encouraged me further to articulate my core research question for my thesis, which was: how could the church (and specifically, the British Methodist Church) preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness?

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introducing the Research Question: How Could the British Methodist Church Preach More Effectively on Domestic Abuse as Part of its Prophetic Witness?

Introduction

Alongside Coca-Cola, Levi jeans and hamburgers, nothing is more common, resilient and widespread in the cultures of the world today than violence against women and children (Tinyiko and Benadar, 2002, p.6).¹

This assertion not only highlights the fact that domestic abuse is a worldwide phenomenon, but also that it is part of the reality of daily life and as common as global brands such as Coca-Cola and Levi and not something about which one only hears in the news media. Yet despite its ubiquity it is often a taboo subject, hidden from view in everyday life and seldom discussed publicly, let alone as a matter for the church and its public worship. Even so, the British Methodist Church has acknowledged the global nature of domestic abuse and has produced several reports pertaining to this issue.

In 2002 the Methodist Conference adopted a report which highlighted the fact that the incidence of domestic abuse in the Methodist Church reflected the incidence of domestic abuse in society as a whole. A working group was formed to produce a more comprehensive report, which was adopted by the Conference in 2005. A subsequent document was adopted in 2010, which contained a list of outside agencies who deal with domestic abuse, as well as a list of resources for small groups. A search of the Methodist Church website has revealed that no further documents and resources have been produced since 2010.

¹ I used this same quote in the paper submitted as my publishable article which forms part of my portfolio. I use it here, as it aptly describes the prevalence of domestic abuse.

While it is the 2005 Methodist Report, adopted by the Conference, which has provided the impetus for this research project, there were several other factors which contributed to my interest in this topic. My previous context, as well as my approach to preaching, have played a significant role in the development of this research. I am a Southern African and practised for many years as a human rights lawyer in Namibia, where domestic abuse was but one of many issues with which we dealt in our human rights organisation. It has been my experience that legislation in itself does not provide magic solutions to problems; legislation for combating domestic abuse has by no means put an end to this phenomenon in Namibian society.

In addition, my upbringing as a Methodist and subsequent training for the ordained ministry took place within a context where the church had played a significant prophetic role in challenging the white oligarchy and discrimination against black people, especially before 1994 when the elections were held for the 'New South Africa'. I have therefore always been aware of the importance of preaching on social issues and do so frequently. During Advent 2012, while still in Namibia, I preached a sermon series under the title of: 'Enabling Birth'. On 9 December 2012 – the day before International Human Rights Day – I preached a sermon entitled: 'Cast out, rejected', using the story of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16 and 21) and talked about domestic abuse.

This sermon formed the basis of my DProf Publishable Article, on preaching on domestic abuse in Namibia. When I relocated to the United Kingdom in 2013 I began to wonder whether the British Methodist Church had any policies on domestic abuse. The various Methodist Reports on domestic abuse were brought to my attention and after studying them, the question arose whether Methodist ministers – lay and ordained – were aware of their prophetic witness and whether they ever preached on domestic abuse.

I have had no personal experience of domestic abuse, though I have always been aware that it is a common phenomenon. Another important contributing factor is that subsequent to commencing my thesis, experience within the Church has led me to realise that the Church does not always listen as attentively as it could to

the voices of minority groups and people on the margins. This inattentiveness is not intentional; very often the Church may not even be aware that it is not listening. As my arguments have developed, I have become increasingly conscious of how important it is for the Church to listen more attentively to neglected voices, but also to apply its written policies in practice more intentionally.

Definitions of Domestic Abuse

Although the primary focus of this thesis is prophetic preaching on domestic abuse, it is necessary to clarify how this term is understood by providing some definitions of domestic abuse, although this summary is not intended to be exhaustive, but simply indicative. According to Refuge, a UK-based network of Women's Aid organisations,

Domestic abuse is the abuse of one partner within an intimate or family relationship. It is the repeated, random and habitual use of intimidation to control a partner. The abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological, financial or sexual. Anyone forced to alter their behaviour because they are frightened of their partner's reaction is being abused (Refuge Domestic Violence Service Warwickshire, 2017).

A broader definition is given by another U.S.-based agency:

Domestic abuse and emotional abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married; heterosexual, gay, or lesbian; living together, separated or dating. Examples of abuse include: name-calling or putdowns; keeping a partner from contacting their family or friends; withholding money; stopping a partner from getting or keeping a job; actual or threatened physical harm; stalking; intimidation. Violence can be criminal and includes physical assault (hitting, pushing, shoving, etc), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking. Although emotional, psychological and financial abuse are not criminal

behaviors, they are forms of abuse and can lead to criminal violence. (Tearmann Society for Abused Women, 2015).

The latest definition of domestic abuse, emanating from the Home Office, which is used in all Government documents, reads as follows:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. (Home Office, 2012, www.gov.uk).

It is clear from these definitions that domestic abuse encompasses both physical, emotional and financial abuse and that it is not necessarily limited to men as the perpetrators and women the victims. The term 'family relationship' includes relationships between parents and children and is not limited to partners in a civil or marriage relationship, nor is it limited to heterosexual relationships. A common denominator in these definitions is abuse of power, intimidation, the

tendency of one person to control another and sexism. These will be recurring themes throughout this thesis. The Methodist Report contains similar definitions to the ones which I have cited (paragraphs 1.2-1.4 of the Report).

Causes of Domestic Abuse

Having provided some definitions of domestic abuse, I turn to a brief consideration of some of its causes. A greater understanding of the aetiology of domestic abuse might better enable preachers not only to tell the truth about domestic abuse, but also to proclaim a message of resistance to the behaviour which leads to such abuse. This may result in more effective preaching and I will explain what I mean by “more effective” later in this chapter.

The key question seems to be whether the phenomenon of patriarchy is the root cause of domestic abuse. It appears that most feminist writers believe this to be the case to a greater or lesser degree. Patriarchy, in its broadest sense, refers to structural and systematic male dominance and gender hierarchy (Heise, 1998, p.263; Tracy, 2007, p.576). While both Heise and Tracy acknowledge that patriarchy is the root cause, both of them ask the question: if this is so, why do not all men abuse women, ‘even though all men are exposed to cultural messages that posit male superiority and grant men as a class the right to control female behaviour’ (Heise, p.264; Tracy, p.578)? I will return to this question below.

In order to reach further clarity on this, Heise argues for the adoption of an ‘ecological framework’ in relation to gender violence and patriarchy, because it provides a much broader and multifaceted base for conceptualizing the phenomenon of domestic abuse (Heise, p.265). In terms of this approach, additional patterns of causation are taken into account. For example, risk factors such as whether boys witnessing violence against their mother are likely to be violent towards their partner; or whether being abused as children, would lead them to being violent in adulthood. However, none of these factors should be considered a prerequisite for future violence (Heise, p.267-268). Moreover, in families where husbands are the main decision-makers and, for example, control where their wives may go, are likely to experience more violence. Violence is also more likely in authoritarian family structures (Heise, p.270).

Other studies show that in societies where 'wife-beating' is the norm or is condoned, men are more likely to abuse their wives (Heise, 2011, p.12-13). Men who abuse alcohol have been found to be more likely to abuse their wives and where there is sexual jealousy and where the wife has a higher standard of education than her partner, this may also contribute to a greater propensity to violence (Heise, p.271-272). A cultural definition of manhood that is linked to toughness and dominance, as well as rigid gender roles, may also sow the seeds of abuse (Heise, p.278-279). Other reasons why men abuse women are said to be psychological; that men's and women's brains are 'wired differently' and that many violent men suffer from personality disorders (Tracy, 2007, p.578-581). And while the way in which certain religious teachings deal with gender may be a contributing factor to abuse, research suggests that most men who belong to such groups and attend church regularly, do not necessarily abuse their partners (Tracy, p.581-582).

Viewing domestic abuse from a slightly different angle, but one which I suggest is quite comprehensive, is that of Evan Stark (Stark, 2013, p.17 ff). He views domestic abuse as a form of 'coercive control' (Stark, p.17). According to this model – and this is borne out by the definitions of domestic abuse to which I referred earlier – most abuse is either non-violent or 'non-injurious' (Stark, p.18). Moreover, such abuse is seldom a 'one-off'; it largely manifests itself over a period of several years; it is chronic rather than acute (Stark, p.21). This approach emphasizes the gendered nature of abuse, by defining 'coercive control' as, 'A strategic course of self-interested behaviour designed to secure and expand gender-based privilege by establishing a regime of domination in a person's life' (Stark, p.21). This form of control is characterised by subordination, subjugation, control and isolation, as well as intimidation and threats, surveillance and violence is used to 'keep the woman in her place', as it were (Stark, p.23). Such control tactics can also be more indirect, such as depriving a woman of basic resources and micro-managing her behaviour or finances (Stark, p.27). Stark's approach serves to demonstrate not only that domestic abuse is much more than violence, but also that power and control are at the heart of such abuse. Moreover, Stark's approach makes it clear that much domestic abuse does not involve

physical violence, but often other forms of control – psychological, financial and emotional.

It is clear then that the aetiology of domestic abuse is complex. However, in spite of the fact that there may be additional risk factors, there can be no doubt that gender and power lie at the heart of domestic abuse. The fact that not all men abuse women cannot detract from this structural and systemic base. All the other factors mentioned by both Heise and Tracy still involve some form of the 'male/female divide', namely, a man wishing to control a woman, directly or indirectly. And surely the root of this gendered nature of domestic abuse is patriarchy as a system of hierarchical power relations which, in spite of the recognition of gender equality in many societies, is still prevalent, in one form or another. This will be illustrated further in subsequent chapters.

As regards the criticism of the feminist approach which 'blames' patriarchy as the root cause, referred to above, I agree with the approach by Groves and Thomas (2014, p.29-31), who point out that proponents of patriarchy as the root cause of domestic abuse do not see patriarchy as monolithic or universal. The ways in which patriarchy is experienced and understood differs according to culture and tradition. Yet I understand this to mean that even in societies where there is gender equality, at least on the face of it, patriarchy may be more subtle and indirect than in societies where women are denied an education or to work outside the home. All these factors need to be considered in reaching an understanding of the nature of patriarchy (Groves and Thomas, p.31).

In order to provide clarity, then, it may be helpful to offer a working definition of patriarchy, acknowledging that there may be more than one way of understanding it. In its simplest form, the word means 'rule by the father', according to the Greek etymology of the word. A useful perspective is provided by Gilligan and Snider (2018, p.6):

We define patriarchy as a culture based on a gender binary and hierarchy, a framework or lens that: leads us to see human capacities as either 'masculine' or 'feminine' and to privilege the

masculine. [It] elevates some men over other men and all men over women.

I would argue, therefore, that whether one views the aetiology of domestic abuse as a result of patriarchy alone or whether one takes a broader view, ultimately, gender and power lie at the heart of domestic abuse. This approach does not lose sight of some of the other risk factors mentioned previously but the common themes are power, domination, control and subjugation. These themes will recur in subsequent discussions.

Scope of the Research

In this thesis I will use the term 'domestic abuse', rather than the term 'domestic violence'. The reason for this approach is that 'domestic abuse' has a much broader scope than 'domestic violence', since, as both the above definitions and the discussion on the causes of domestic abuse indicate, abuse does not necessarily include violence; for example, in cases of emotional abuse or manipulative behaviour. This is also the terminology which the Methodist Report employs. Moreover, the Report recognises that domestic abuse includes both men abusing women, women abusing men and children and parents abusing one another. However, since the majority of cases of domestic abuse involve men abusing women, this was the main focus of the Methodist Report and also the main focus of this thesis. I do not lose sight of other forms of abuse, but for practical purposes my focus will be on men abusing women.

As regards terminology, I will use the term 'preacher' throughout this thesis. This includes both ordained clergy and local preachers, lay people who are trained and accredited to preach. All local preachers are required to attend a quarterly meeting in their respective circuits. The purpose of the meeting is to provide mutual support, as well as continuing development (Methodist Church, 2020).

These local preachers make a valuable contribution to the church's preaching ministry on a weekly basis, more especially in the light of the growing shortage of clergy. They formed an important part of my research interview sample.

There are several reasons why my research question contains the words “more effectively”. Omitting these words would have implied that I assumed that there was no preaching on domestic abuse within the Methodist Church even though there is no basis for this assumption. However, I am not suggesting that one can measure the effectiveness of preaching. Instead, I would argue that preaching more effectively on domestic abuse means creating an awareness of the necessity for such preaching and finding the means by which to address the topic in a way which exposes the evil of domestic abuse and offers alternatives to patriarchy and violence. Thus, preaching more effectively means that those who choose not to preach on domestic abuse need to be encouraged to do so in the ways propounded in this thesis, thereby making the Church’s prophetic witness more relevant. And those preachers who do preach on domestic abuse might be encouraged to do so more confidently by adopting preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance as a possible model. I will elaborate further on the concept of ‘prophetic witness’ in my overview of the thesis. I bear in mind that ultimately the crux of my research is the Church’s prophetic witness as it relates to preaching on domestic abuse, but that ultimately, the Church’s prophetic witness extends to exercising that in a variety of contexts and is not limited only to preaching on domestic abuse.

Overview of Thesis

I will now proceed to give an overview of the various chapters which will serve to answer the research question: how could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness?

In Chapter 2 I will introduce and critique the Methodist Report. I will concentrate on its theological reflection on domestic abuse and highlight some of the themes which emerge, which include how we interpret the Bible, how we view God and how we deal with violence in scripture. There will also be a discussion of how the Report addresses a theology of forgiveness, the church and its use of power and a theology of marriage. My analysis of the Report will be conducted in conversation with relevant literature. I will point out that a recurring phrase in the Report is the Church’s ‘prophetic voice’, but that one of the lacunae in the Report is that

there is no explanation of what the ‘prophetic voice’ might be and how it will be heard, apart from a brief mention of preaching and teaching on domestic abuse. This provides me with a way into my research.

Since the main focus of this thesis is the concept of ‘prophetic voice’ and ‘prophetic witness’ – I use these phrases interchangeably – Chapter 3 will begin to explore the nature of prophetic witness. I will elaborate on the church’s understanding of prophecy both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. To be prophetic means to speak out, to challenge injustice and oppression. However, prophetic writings are not without difficulty and I will offer a feminist critique of some of the “offensive” metaphors employed by the prophets and how one might best deal with such problematic speech. The way in which the prophets went about speaking out can be characterised as, in the words of Walter Brueggemann, an exercise of a ‘prophetic imagination’ (Brueggemann, 2001, 2012). I will explore how such a prophetic imagination informs preaching in that it postulates an alternative narrative to the status quo as embodied in the dominant narratives of consumerism, violence, inequality, discrimination and so on.

If the church is to give expression to this prophetic imagination, one route might be through its preaching, which, I will argue, is both a communicative act and a rhetorical art. I will argue that despite the fact that many are sceptical of the value of the sermon in its traditional form, that it still remains an effective vehicle for communication. I will conclude Chapter 3 by examining what prophetic preaching might be, drawing on both the responses of my participants, and current literature.

In Chapter 4 I will outline my research design. I will locate my research within the field of practical theology and its alliance with feminist research and highlight some feminist epistemological principles, including how this discipline makes use of qualitative research. I will indicate how I went about collecting my data, justifying why I decided to make use of semi-structured interviews in preference to other research methods, while acknowledging the limitations of this method. I will discuss why I interviewed ministers – clergy and local preachers – in order to discover what their understanding was of prophetic preaching and their

attitude to preaching on domestic abuse, their approach to the reading of scripture, whether they were feminists and how they viewed inclusive language and whether they were familiar with the Methodist Report. I will outline how I went about analysing the data and mention some of the obstacles which I encountered.

In Chapter 5 I will argue that the church has been largely silent on domestic abuse, both in general and from the pulpit. I will discuss this evidence and argue that if the Church is serious about having its prophetic voice heard, the silence must be broken by giving voice to the 'prophetic imagination'. I will argue that one way in which this might be achieved is by viewing preaching as entailing the practices of 'weeping, confession and resistance', in the words of Christine Smith (1992). I will refer to this as Smith's 'triad'. However, since 'weeping' and 'confession' are not adequate descriptions, I will suggest an alternative triad of 'lament, truth-telling and resistance'.

I will then embark on a discussion of lament within the Biblical literature and how preaching might use lament both as an expression of sadness and anger, and also an expression of solidarity with those who suffer. This will be followed by a discussion of the second element of the triad: what it means to 'tell the truth' about domestic abuse. The truth is, I will argue, that patriarchy is one of the root causes of domestic abuse and naming domestic abuse as a 'sin'.

Chapter 6 will deal with the third part of the triad, namely preaching as resistance against patriarchy and violence. I will elaborate on the concept of resistance preaching and what it entails. Ultimately, I will argue that lament, truth-telling and resistance are all part of a prophetic witness against the dominant narratives of patriarchy and violence. Such resistance to patriarchy and violence is in part a hermeneutical task, since it leads to a feminist reading of scripture, repudiating the dominant androcentric paradigm of the Bible. Such prophetic witness also requires preaching to 'unmask' violence in scripture by tackling its 'texts of terror' such as the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19). Finally, such prophetic preaching moves beyond lament, truth-telling and resistance into a more constructive mode, by seeking to persuade listeners that there is an

alternative to patriarchy and violence. This calls for preaching not just as hermeneutical but rhetorical and persuasive. Such persuasion is possible if we are clear about our objectives in preaching, namely to connect with listeners and speak out against injustice. Such persuasive preaching may then open the possibility of transformation.

In Chapter 7 I will briefly recapitulate my main argument and deal with ancillary matters, such as the shortcomings of the Revised Common Lectionary and the importance of training preachers on prophetic preaching.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the focus of this research and has introduced the main themes upon which my argument will be based. I am not suggesting that preaching on domestic abuse is a magic solution which will eliminate all domestic abuse, nor am I suggesting that it is simply a matter of reading the Bible employing a feminist hermeneutic. Instead, I will argue that cultivating an awareness of prophetic preaching which is bold and courageous and which challenges the dominant narrative by offering an alternative imagination, is but one step in advancing the church's prophetic witness and that this approach has a bearing on preaching on other social issues as well; I am advocating that the Church needs to take its prophetic witness more seriously.

The Methodist Church, like many denominations, produces many documents on various topics and uses theological terminology such as 'prophetic witness'. However, the practice of preachers and the awareness of local congregations may not always reflect what appears officially in the shape of such Reports. The objective of this research is to clarify what it means to preach prophetically and how such preaching could be employed to address domestic abuse from the pulpit, in order to try and transform listeners and to create awareness that domestic abuse is an everyday phenomenon. Such preaching would convey to the victims of domestic abuse that the church cares sufficiently about them, to preach prophetically on the subject, despite potential risks and barriers. It would convey to perpetrators that the church does not condone abuse in any form. Moreover, such preaching would demonstrate that the Church does not pay mere lip service

to theological discussion, but that it is prepared to put into practice what it preaches on paper.

Chapter 2

The Methodist Conference Report On Domestic Abuse

Introduction

The 2005 report on domestic abuse to the Methodist Conference (Methodist Conference, 2005) forms the framework within which my research question – ‘How could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness?’ – is situated. This report is wide-ranging and includes both an analysis of the prevalence of domestic abuse, as well as a theological reflection on how the church might deal with this pandemic (www.methodist.org.uk). In this chapter I will give a critical overview of the report, identifying the various themes that emerge and discussing why the report provides such an important stimulus for my research question. I will critique the Report with reference to other literature which deals with the various themes and point out what I consider to be the shortcomings of the Report. I will concentrate mainly on Section II, the theological section, as this forms the basis of my research question and will lay the foundation of subsequent chapters. My reading and critique of the Report are against the backdrop of the church’s call to exercise a ‘prophetic witness’. This forms the crux of the matter, since the Report therefore represents more than an investigation into domestic abuse as a social problem; rather, it is a theological reflection on domestic abuse in light of the fact that the church claims a prophetic witness.

Origin Of The Report

In 2002 the Methodist Conference voted to adopt the findings of a study on domestic abuse conducted at Southlands College, Roehampton University. In light of findings which revealed that the incidence of domestic abuse in the Methodist Church reflected that in society as a whole, a working group was established. The 2005 report (henceforth ‘The Report’) was the result of the work which they conducted (Methodist Conference, 2005, p.1). The group consisted of people working in the field of domestic abuse, victims of domestic abuse and theologians.

Representatives from other denominations also contributed to the work (2005, p.1).

The Report is comprehensive and detailed, but before turning to Section II, the Theology section, I will highlight some of the main areas covered in Section I, since these inform the subsequent theological discussion.

In Section I the Report introduces various definitions, to which I referred in Chapter 1. It is acknowledged that domestic violence includes psychological abuse, as well as threats of violence and damage to property. This is borne out by the definition used by the Crown Prosecution Service, referred to in Chapter 1 and also by research conducted by Nason-Clark and Clark Kroeger (2004), even though their study is not limited merely to domestic abuse (p.23). It is for this reason that the Report adopted the term 'domestic abuse', rather than 'domestic violence', as it encompasses both violent and non-violent abuse (Methodist Conference, 2005, paragraphs 1.1-1.3).

Section I of the Report offers some significant findings: about power and control, fear of consequences and the failure of the church. Firstly, it notes that most cases of domestic abuse take place within a context in which "one person uses power and control to dominate and to ensure that the other complies" (paragraph 1.7). This is borne out by my discussion of power and control in Chapter 1 when I dealt with the aetiology of domestic abuse. I will elaborate further on the question of power and control in Chapter 5 when discussing patriarchy, and in Chapter 6 when discussing preaching as resistance to patriarchy and violence. The extent of such control is demonstrated by the fact that a 'secondary' consequence of domestic abuse is that where there are visible injuries, the abuser is unlikely to allow the victim to leave the house (paragraph 1.8). Secondly, many victims do not report abuse, because they fear that they will not be believed, or that they deserve what has happened to them (para. 1.7). I will return to this theme in Chapter 5 when discussing breaking the silence on domestic abuse. Moreover, abused women fear for the safety of their children or that their children will be taken away from them. Women are often afraid that if they leave their partner, they would be homeless and suffer financially (para. 1.9). Thirdly, and

significantly, the Report refers to other recorded incidents where many women have found a lack of support in their church, though there were some cases in which support was offered (para. 1.10). I will discuss the church's silence in Chapter 5, not least because it undermines its claim to be offering a 'prophetic witness' in the face of domestic abuse.

In response, the Report stresses the necessity for the church to address domestic abuse at different levels: the need for transparency, clarity about how unacceptable behaviour is handled and how pastoral care is offered (para. 1.27). It is noted that churches worldwide have responded in various ways to domestic abuse (para. 1.31-1.34); something which opens up international and ecumenical dimensions for my thesis.

Before embarking on a discussion of the theology which underpins the Report, it is worth noting that the Report states that "Social justice is a Methodist stance" (para. 1.35-1.37). It is therefore locating its discussion of domestic abuse within a wider context of Methodist social teaching – another reason to place the concept of 'prophetic witness' at the heart of my research. Throughout their history, Methodists have been involved in social justice in their service to the poor and deprived. Even though examples of social or prophetic action given in the Report do not include preaching, it is nevertheless the case that it could form a significant manifestation of the Church's involvement in social justice, as my thesis will argue. I will demonstrate in Chapter 3 that a stance on social justice includes, or is equivalent to, a 'prophetic witness'. Moreover, Wesley preached the Gospel to the poor and took seriously both scriptural and social holiness. Those who were victimized responded positively to his message. Thus, Wesley is seen to have combined the "evangelistic with the prophetic" (Snyder, 1980, pp. 86-87) and directed much of his ministry amongst the poor. Whether or not Wesley regarded himself as engaged in prophetic preaching, as such, the fact is that a prophetic witness is central to Methodists' self-understanding, as is a preferential option for the poor and marginalised (Snyder, p. 49). I will return to a preferential option for the marginalised in Chapter 3.

Theology

As a presbyter in the British Methodist Church, it is my understanding that the Church accommodates a variety of theological positions. The Theology Section (Methodist Conference, 2005, section II) does not attach any particular 'label' to its theological position, whether feminist, liberationist, conservative or evangelical. In general, therefore, Section II provides a broad-based perspective, which could accommodate the various theological positions of individual preachers and other members. Similarly, the theological reflection does not intend to be prescriptive, but "indicative of the kind of theological responses that might appropriately be made to the experiences of those caught up in domestic abuse" (para. 2.2). What is paramount, however, is the notion of prophetic witness, and it is this that underpins my approach to the Theology of the Report.

The theological reflection is founded on the understanding that God intends human beings to flourish and grow in loving relationships with one another, drawing on the image of "abundant life" (John 10:10; 2.3). Therefore, God does not intend people to suffer from, or to perpetrate domestic abuse and God will work with humanity to end the abuse and the damage it inflicts (para. 2.3). I would agree with this stance and in subsequent chapters I will demonstrate how this concept of "abundant life" might be expanded and what this might mean in practice.

The Report states that the theological reflection has been informed by wider work, but that it has a British cultural specificity (para. 2.4). It is not clear what this means, and one shortcoming of the Report might be said to be this lack of attention to cultural difference. It is worth noting, for example, that the membership of the British Methodist Church is ethnically and racially diverse. Similarly, the Report does not mention whether its conclusions might be of broader application beyond British shores. This is particularly relevant since, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, domestic abuse is a worldwide phenomenon.

I will now proceed to discuss various theological themes that emerge from my reading of the Report in more detail. These are: biblical interpretation; violence in scripture; gender equality; models of God; sin and the cross; marriage. I will

then conclude by reiterating the significance of the Report's claim to be advancing a prophetic witness, even though its implications are not clearly spelt out.

The Bible

The Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) acknowledges that the Bible is a "crucial theological resource" and requires interpretation in order to work out how it relates to contemporary life (para. 2.5). Differences among interpreters are linked, among others, to theological tradition and the books which people read. These differences are particularly evident in controversial issues such as sexuality and violence. The Report warns against a literal interpretation of the Bible; interpretative work is essential (para. 2.5). Certain principles, however, do underlie biblical interpretation such as taking into account the background and culture of the Bible and its effects on the ways different authors and communities portrayed God; comparing scripture with scripture, that is, avoiding proof texts and placing passages within their proper context; how the twin cultures of the Bible and contemporary times may affect reading and trying to discover "the principles for today that emerge from such reflections on scripture" (para. 2.7). This is important because, as the ensuing discussion will show, an approach to scripture has an impact on approaches to violence, marriage, forgiveness, and so on. And since preaching is the focal point of this thesis, biblical interpretation influences the way in which sermons are prepared and preached.

It is for this reason that I will elaborate on the interpretation of scripture, since, in my view, the Report does not give sufficient attention to this subject. These principles go beyond, though do not contradict, the approach of the Report. It is generally recognised that anyone who reads the Bible, does so from a particular vantage point. This can be demonstrated through some consideration of cultural differences, as Suggit (1994), a South African theologian, suggests. We do not come to the Bible with "a blank mind"; "there is no naked biblical religion" (p.12). Therefore, we approach scripture with certain assumptions and presuppositions which are influenced by our experience of God or the teaching of the church (p.12). Moreover, those who read scripture give their own meaning to what they read, and this depends on their context (p.75). As Suggit relates, people in South

Africa and South America have identified their struggle for liberation with the Exodus story (p.76).

The context within which people read the Bible determines the “lens” through which they “see” what they read (Borg, 2001, pp.3-4). Borg suggests that in the twenty-first century we need new lenses, as the old lenses have become opaque and prevent us from seeing differently; these lenses have become a stumbling block (pp.4, 6). Just as people require new spectacles from time to time, Bible readers require new lenses in order to see the Bible in a new way (p.6). I would argue that one could apply this metaphor to a feminist reading of scripture: no longer reading the Bible through the lens of patriarchy but through a feminist lens. This does not mean that we make the Bible say what we want it to say; rather, readers must enter into dialogue with the Bible and recognise that it is an ancient document that should be read metaphorically, thereby enabling us to see more than one meaning in the text, generating meanings beyond what it might have meant in the past. This leads to a non-literal reading of scripture, very different from a literal reading of the Bible in the past and by some readers in our time (Borg, 2001, pp.39-41).

But for some people, a purely visual image of a “lens” may be difficult to understand and a more useful metaphor might be that our reading of the Bible might involve hearing different ‘voices’ in the text. Given that I am advocating breaking the silence surrounding domestic abuse, making room for different voices in the reading of scripture might be a good hermeneutical strategy for approaching our use of scripture in relation to prophetic preaching. While the dominant interpretive voice of the past belonged to male clergy, other interpreters’ voices are becoming more prominent: women, ethnic minorities, among others. Such groups, whose rise to prominence has been as a result of greater awareness of justice in the secular world, read the Bible from a different vantage-point; and this is important when we come to consider the impact of prophetic preaching. These groups engage with scripture in a way which enables them to experience it as life-giving, allowing all people to flourish (Stuart and Thatcher, 1997, p.251). The “self-appointed guardians” of the past no longer have the monopoly (Stuart and Thatcher, 1997, p.249). Their past experience of the

Bible has been what Stuart and Thatcher call a “bedtime story” reading of the Bible (1997, p.246). But this is no longer the case. If we treat the Bible as a set of “bedtime stories” it means that we take the Bible at face value and do not engage with it, much less expect it to be prophetic or challenging.

I am sympathetic to the efforts of the Report to advocate the necessity for careful interpretation and for its basic acceptance that a report of this nature needs to represent a broad theological spectrum. However, while the Report is clear that the Bible cannot be used to justify gender inequality and violence, the fundamental, structural issue of patriarchy is not sufficiently clearly named in this section, even though the Report acknowledges that domestic abuse encompasses, among others, domination and power.

The Report also does not address the question of how a view of the authority of scripture has an impact on an approach to its interpretation. This latter point is important as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate. For example, our approach to scripture is not only influenced by our context and by which “voices” we hear; it is also influenced by the way in which we view the authority of scripture. If we see the Bible as having absolute authority we stand in a hierarchical relationship to the Bible and view it as something to be obeyed passively and not questioned (Brock, 1993, p.70). However, if we “demystify” authority, as Brock puts it, we then enter into dialogue with the Bible. The Bible retains its meaning, but it does not control us in a hierarchical sense, especially when we see a biblical passage as reinforcing suffering and oppression (p.70).

The image Brock (1993) uses is that of a mirror. She suggests that we examine the Bible, “as a source of mirrors that sharpen our view of what our past has been, of what we believe and do not believe, of what we must transform, and for who we are to become” (p.71). But once again, a visual image is not helpful for everyone. It is notable that Brock turns from visual to aural metaphors here, by suggesting that we take cognisance of complex voices inside us (p.71). For example, in a patriarchal society one of the dominant voices is hierarchical, with males “high up” in the hierarchy and women “lower down”. I understand Brock to say that when we hear a hierarchical voice it would alert us to our own tendency to be

hierarchical. This principle could apply in a positive way if we heard other voices, such as the voice of transformation, we might be encouraged to work for transformation. I do not believe that Brock is suggesting that in this approach we can make the Bible say what we want to hear. Instead, this approach encourages interaction with the Bible in a way that allows us to see and hear ourselves in its texts but also to see and hear others. We will become aware of both how we may be part of an oppressive structure and how we may transform an oppressive structure. She calls this approach a “hermeneutics of wisdom” (p.73). She also warns against reading biblical stories of women and men and using them as role models (p.73). The reason for her warning is that this might lead us to elevate and “sanitize” them and “to limit what they can tell us” (p.73). While I understand this warning, I would argue that seeing someone as a role model does not necessarily mean that one overlooks their weaknesses; the very fact that biblical characters display their flaws can be very encouraging to us today, as the stories enable us to see our own flaws and how to deal with them.

Pui-Lan Kwok (1993) also proposes that the authority of the Bible should be “demystified and deconstructed” so that this authority cannot continue to be used against marginalised women. Unlike Brock, she does not refer to the hierarchical relationship with the Bible but emphasizes the importance of a different hermeneutical strategy (p.109). She stresses the fact that many women suffer multiple oppression and that this fact also plays a role in our hermeneutical approach. If I understand Kwok correctly, she advocates a multidimensional feminist hermeneutic which does not concentrate on gender alone, but also takes into account class, race and culture (p.111).

But a view of the authority of scripture is not only about hierarchy. Many people have experienced scripture as coercive and threatening (Camp, 1993, p.162). She takes the approach to the authority of scripture further by asserting that the authority of texts is always understood in relation to the authority of persons (p.163). The text authorizes the person and the person authorizes the text. There is a dialogue between the text and the person and this leads to the creation of new persons to participate in this ongoing interaction. This is life giving and brings

together biblical traditions and present circumstances to create new life for the present and the future (p.163).

I would argue that the approaches of Brock, Kwok and Camp encourage multiple voices to speak and to be heard in dialogue with one another: voices of the texts and the characters they portray and voices of those who interpret the texts whether they are white, male, heterosexual clergy, women in Latin America or Africa or feminist academics from a variety of backgrounds. These approaches do not discount or deny the authority of scripture. Instead, they give a meaning to the notion of 'authority' which is not coercive or hierarchical but allows scripture to speak in dialogue with those who read it. This approach does not view the Bible as having absolute authority, nor does it view the Bible as inerrant. The Bible is essentially a human product of elite males and requires a critical approach (Fontaine, 1997, p.93). It contains instances of both oppression and liberation. One might well ask whether there is a simple way out of the dilemma which the Bible presents; a dilemma which arises when we no longer take the Bible at face value and read it uncritically. It would be tempting to give up on the Bible altogether. But Fontaine (1997) proposes that instead of reading the Bible in a way that produces shame, terror and helplessness, and a reading in a way that supports men's right to abuse, it could be read as liberation, post-holocaust as feminist theologians have begun to do (p.111). Her approach suggests that in the same way that the Bible has been used to condone patriarchy and its consequences, it can be used as a "locus for our critique of that system" (p.111). I agree with her notion that the Bible is too important simply to give up on reading and interpreting it (p.112). As long as scripture is being used to abuse people and entrench patriarchy, ignoring the Bible's message of responsibility to the poor, for example, readers of the Bible need to engage with it critically, exposing its flaws and highlighting its message of hope (p.112). I would agree with this approach. I would argue that "giving up" on the Bible seems like an easy way out. Moreover, the Bible has been influential over almost two millennia in justifying women's subordination to men, but, in surprising ways, has played a role to empower women (Newsom et al, 2014, p.xxviii).

While the Report acknowledges the complexity of the Bible and the fact that it has been used to justify gender inequality, there is no mention of the possibility of a feminist hermeneutic. Such a hermeneutic takes cognisance of a preferential option for the marginalised, as well as challenging patriarchy and violence. I will discuss a feminist hermeneutic when I deal with preaching as resistance against patriarchy and violence in Chapter 6, as part of a framework for prophetic preaching on domestic abuse.

Violence In Scripture: Combatting Texts Of Terror

The writers of the Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) were aware of its limitations in being able to deal with all biblical passages which mention domestic abuse (para. 2.7). There was a recognition that using the Bible to justify domestic abuse has been as a result of a “gendered” interpretation (para. 2.7). This is something of an understatement, but it highlights the necessity of ‘liberating’ the Bible from such an interpretation, a recurring theme in this thesis.

The Report acknowledges that many of the Old Testament law codes treat women as the property of men and are based on certain cultural assumptions which no longer apply, which means that they cannot be relied upon to justify their continued application (para. 2.8).

Regarding stories that deal with the abuse of women, reference is made to the approach of Phyllis Trible’s (2002) ‘texts of terror’. Such stories must not be avoided but be faced and serve as a focus for anger and outrage at similar contemporary stories of abuse (para. 2.9). I would argue that further elaboration of the ‘texts of terror’ and violence in scripture is necessary in order to expose this violence and to suggest possible approaches to these ‘texts of terror’, lest they be ignored and avoided.

An elaboration on violence in scripture is essential, especially since, until the past few decades, stories of violence have been ignored or explained away, as a result of a dominant patriarchal ideology (Scholz, 2017, p.85ff). Many have denied that rape, as we understand it, was present in ancient Israel, since women were the property of men and therefore did not have a choice in the matter of sexual

intercourse (p.87). Such scholars argue that one cannot employ a contemporary concept in biblical interpretation and apply it to biblical texts. However, biblical interpretation always involves contemporary language and perspective (p. 87). I agree with Scholz that one cannot simply try and explain away or avoid biblical stories of rape and other forms of violence. This is the premise on which the ensuing discussion of violence in scripture is based: violence against women and the violence of God.

How could violence in the Bible be approached? When answering this question, we also need to take account of the fact that God is often portrayed as violent or the one who seems to become involved in war. The approach of scholars to violence in scripture is by no means uniform.

The first two chapters of Genesis may provide a clue for a discussion of violence in scripture. The creation stories indicate that God spoke creation into being; God made humans in God's image and God pronounced that it was very good (Creach, 2013, pp.6-8; 23; 26). Thus, violence, according to this approach, was never part of God's plan and violence by humans was what Creach calls an "intrusion into the order of creation" (p.6). Any violence which God may have condoned or indirectly perpetrated is seen as corrective or redemptive (p.7). Violence in scripture also needs to be seen as a constant tension between creation and order set over against chaos and evil (pp.9-10). In his approach, Creach asserts that many texts that seem to promote or encourage violence are read too simply, since "the historical circumstances in which portions of the Bible were written speak against any easy justification of violence" (p.8). I would disagree with this approach. Whatever the historical circumstances may have been, violence is violence. A violent scene in a novel may be fictitious, but this does not detract from its violence. And as I will illustrate below, it is not always evident that violence in the Bible is condemned outright. The Bible is often simply completely silent.

Using a slightly different approach, which does not necessarily contradict that of Creach, Johanna Van Wijkbos (1998) sees violence in the Bible as "a clear view of human interaction as full of the potential for violence and of the actual execution

of it" (p.23). She believes that the biblical writers viewed violence as directly opposed to God's intention for creation (p.23). This accords with Creach's view, though her emphasis is slightly different. For her, the first mention of 'sin' is not in Genesis 3, but in Genesis 4 where we find the story of Cain murdering Abel, the first recorded act of violence in the Bible (pp.23-24). God clearly disapproved of Cain's act of violence. The biblical writers, asserts Van Wijkbos, had "no illusions about human nature". Writers of biblical stories were familiar with violence as part of their history (p,24). Yet Van Wijkbos recognises that it is possible for human beings to control their violence (p.25).

Dominic Crossan (2015), similarly, asserts that human beings are not "natural-born killers" (p.66). He sees the mark of Cain as being on human civilization, not human nature. "Escalatory violence is our nemesis, not our nature; our avoidable decision, not our unavoidable destiny" (p.66). Crossan's notion is not entirely convincing, as he does not clearly justify his claim that violence does not come naturally to human beings. I would agree with Van Wijkbos that humans can control their violence, but I am not convinced that violence does not come naturally to us, as Crossan seems to suggest.

Violence in scripture is not played down by Van Wijkbos (1998). Much of the violence in the history of Israel was against the backdrop of enslavement and subsequent liberation and often this violence was perpetrated by Israel's enemies. She is clear that these stories, whether fact or fiction, should not be seen as a model for future violence (pp.24-25). Ultimately, God desires 'shalom', as some of the prophetic writings indicate (p.25; Isa2:4). Crossan (2015) may not disagree with this stance, though he does suggest that God is a God of non-violent distributive justice and violent retributive justice (p.28). For Crossan, Christ is the standard by which we measure everything else in the Bible (p.35). The importance of Jesus as the non-violent witness is also emphasized by Denny Weaver (2013, p.24). Jesus taught those who were oppressed "to turn the tables on social superiors" rather than to resort to violence (p.24). Thus, for Weaver, God is fully revealed in Jesus as a non-violent God (p.105). He recognises that the Bible contains various 'pictures' of God, from violent conquests in Joshua, to the suffering servant songs in Second Isaiah (p.115). He goes as far as saying that any

picture of God as having a violent character, could be seen as wrong judgments or distortions on the part of the biblical writers (p.129). One cannot subject the Bible to a 'flat' reading. If one does that, one could justify war, execution of rebels, etc. The Bible is a historical book, the beginning of a story which lives on today (p.131). I would argue, therefore, that one cannot justify violence with reference to the biblical narrative, but neither can one explain away the fact that God is portrayed as violent or as remaining silent in violent situations.

Creach (2013) sees it differently, even though, like Weaver, he does recognise the possibility that the Bible could be seen as flawed, though this does not detract from its truth. He says this in regard to the notion of a "warrior God" (p.48). He asserts that if we recognise God as 'warrior', we at the same time recognise that God is there to comfort the oppressed against evil forces and to stand alongside them, fighting against oppression rather than just being an idle bystander. Moreover, the recognition of a warrior God is a recognition of the reality of evil and that God is in conflict with evil in the world (p.61).

I have attempted to capture some of the various approaches to violence in scripture and the violence of God. Ultimately, I would argue that one must recognise, as most biblical scholars seem to do, that the Bible comes from a time and cultural context which is 'foreign' to us in the twenty-first century. Whether or not one sees God as violent or as a 'warrior', I suggest that it is clear that the overall biblical message is, as an earlier reference to Van Wijkbos (1998) suggested, that God desires 'shalom' (wholeness). However, I would argue that the image of a 'warrior God' in the Bible is difficult and cannot simply be explained away.

Whatever our stance may be in regard to the violence in scripture and the violence of God, we cannot shy away from biblical texts which contain violent stories. How do we deal with stories which graphically depict violence against women, without clearly indicating their explicit condemnation of such violence? I will return to this question in Chapter 6 when dealing with preaching as resistance against patriarchy and violence.

Gender Equality

As far as gender equality is concerned, the Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) refers to the way in which the stories in Genesis 1-3 have been used to justify gender inequality and points out that account should be taken of the overall gospel message referred to above, namely, God's desire for human flourishing together, not harming one another (para. 2.10). I would add to this the fact that Galatians 3:26 clearly states that all are equal before God, whether slave or free, Jew or Greek, male or female.

Despite that, however, New Testament teaching on "male headship" is often problematic, although the Report advocates a reading which takes account of the New Testament as a whole and applies the same approach as to the Old Testament legal codes (para. 2.11-2.12).

Finally, when supporting victims of domestic abuse, the Report advocates that they should be pointed to biblical messages of liberation, especially in Jesus' encounters with people such as the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11); the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the woman with a haemorrhage (Mark 5:21-42), as examples of positive responses (para. 2.14). I will return to this matter in the next chapter.

"About God"

The Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) next deals with the question of how God might be understood, since a distorted or hierarchical picture of God could be replicated, albeit indirectly, in human relationships (para. 2.16). For example, if God is portrayed as being all powerful, wholly other and majestic, without mentioning other attributes of God such as love and relationship, power may be used by others to dominate or manipulate people. God's power is not coercive domination but acts through the costly self-giving love of Jesus through his death and resurrection, which is the model of power which human beings should be encouraged to emulate (para. 2.16). This approach does not deny hierarchy but refers to hierarchy in which there is mutuality and equality, as opposed to coercion and domination (para. 2.17). This does not constitute a denial of power

but offers an alternative approach to worldly power; power which is exercised in a loving way; a power which encourages intimacy and relationship; a power which is used to enable, to create, to energise; a power that enables, rather than disables, human potential. This power is the opposite of the dynamics of domestic abuse which are about domination and abuse of power (para. 2.18).

This aspect of the Report is important because it highlights issues relating to power and domination and these will be recurring themes in later chapters of this thesis. However, in a discussion of power and domination, I would have hoped that the possibility of viewing God other than as “father” might have been mentioned. I appreciate that the Report was not intended to push a specific theological agenda, but a brief reference to the “gender” of God would have enhanced the discussion on power and highlighted how God’s “maleness” has often been used to the detriment of women. The ensuing discussion will elaborate on how we might view God and whether God is exclusively male.

In raising the issue of language about God I am not suggesting that one can fully understand God, nor that I wish to make God in my own image. However, if human relations mirror understandings of God, then a preacher’s interpretation of the Bible and use of language and imagery about God may make a difference to the way in which listeners to a sermon respond to the preacher’s message.

I referred earlier to the fact that the Report emphasizes that God is a God of love and justice, whose power is not coercive. I agree with this notion, but it requires further elaboration. Writing from a feminist perspective, Christine Smith (1989) asserts that foundational to women and men who preach with a feminist theological consciousness, is an affirmation that God is a “liberating, confronting presence in the world” (p.75). This encompasses both the language used for God, as well as images of God as liberator (pp.75—78). Moreover, she considers it important to see the work of Jesus as one of relationality: Jesus’ intimacy with God, his compassion and solidarity with others. She believes this to be “at the heart of preaching from a feminist perspective and becomes the soul of our preaching” (p.88). This picture of God is not of a God of wrath and judgment, but of a God of compassion and a God who is present. Whatever our picture of God

may be, God is not merely a distant and disinterested spectator. It is a God who, among others, heard the cry of the enslaved Israelites (Exodus 2:25). And it is a God whose message, spoken through the prophets, was a message in solidarity with those on the margins; those whom God wished to liberate from the bondage of kings and other oppressors.

This establishes the argument that God has compassion and is a God of relationship and solidarity. However, for many people, even the familiar, traditional view of God as “father”, is unhelpful. If God is exclusively male, it implies that men’s experiences are normative, privileged and superior; if they constitute the exclusive representation of the divine, women are accorded a subordinate status (Graham, 2009, p.66). It does not necessarily follow, however, that the solution lies simply in attributing feminine characteristics to God by way of compensation. Certainly, there are feminists who find feminine characteristics for God in the holy spirit. But viewing the trinity as two male ‘persons’ and one female ‘person’ may perpetuate androcentric perspectives (Radford Ruether, 2002, p.53). Instead, as Radford Ruether proposes, Jesus’ use of the name “abba” (sometimes translated as “daddy”) when addressing God, could provide a helpful paradigm (p.55). Jesus, in using this word, reflects a relationship of affection, rather than a father-son relationship. Seeing God in this way, anticipates the new community which Jesus came to establish in which there are no hierarchical relationships; it is a relationship of equals and mutuality (p.55). This, I would argue, accords with the approach of the Report; a God wanting a mutual relationship with people. This approach challenges the dominance that characterises patriarchy and recognises that women, as is the case with men, can also be called by God to teach and preach and are not confined to their homes to be “dutiful wives” (p.56).

Another approach suggested by Radford Ruether (2002) is to use the word god/ess and to attribute to god/ess both male and female characteristics but also to encompass other voices. She explains it thus:

Images of god/ess must be drawn from the activities of peasants and working people, people at the bottom of society. Most of all,

images of god/ess must be transformative, pointing us back to our authentic potential and forward to new/redeemed possibilities (p.59).

I concur with Radford Ruether, but I wonder whether her approach could be interpreted as advocating that God is nothing other than the sum of human characteristics. Even so, her image of god/ess offers a model of human flourishing with whom women who are the victims of domestic abuse would identify more closely, rather than a god who is male, omnipotent and Lord.

A different approach, though not necessarily contradicting Ruether, is that of Sallie McFague (1982) in her explanation of some of the thinking regarding 'metaphorical theology'. Not only does a masculine image for God exclude women, it also leads to a view that men have godlike attributes. Masculine images are not limited to father but include such images as lord, judge, master, king (p.147). This imagery has further consequences which McFague explains thus: "God, as transcendent being, is man's superior other and woman in this hierarchy becomes man's inferior other" (p.148). Thus, in the hierarchy, God is superior to men and women are inferior to men. This leads to other forms of hierarchy and dominance: husbands over wives; priest over parishioner; white over black, and so on (p.148). This reinforces the notion that finding other metaphors for God goes far beyond what we know in contemporary society as 'political correctness'. It comes down to the inherent hierarchy of the dominant culture which views God as exclusively male.

How might this situation be overcome? If this is what McFague (1982) refers to as the "root-metaphor" of Christianity, it is necessary to change this "root-metaphor" (p.164). For feminists, the root-metaphor of Christianity is liberation, which amounts to more than liberation from male domination (p.164). She points out, correctly in my view, that the parables of Jesus and his teachings are "intrinsically destructive of conventional power arrangements" (p.165). For example, the parable of the wedding banquet (Luke 14), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), among others. The parable of the wedding banquet is about inclusion of all people, not just those who are at the top of the social ladder. The parable of

the Good Samaritan illustrates how someone despised by the establishment of the day showed love of neighbour which neither the priest nor the Levite demonstrated. Jesus was stretching the concept of love of neighbour beyond the limits of Jewish society. Contemporary examples of the Samaritan will depend on the context of a particular community. It is, for McFague, more about images of a relationship with God, as opposed to mere pictures of God, though I would argue that one's picture of God has a bearing on one's relationship with God (p.166). Moreover, images of God also express our experience of God. Feminine images of God, for both women and men, bring to mind experiences such as rebirth, nurture, unmerited love, compassion, forgiveness, to name a few (p.177).

However, parental images of God, whether masculine or feminine, may not be helpful in all cases. While I do not have a problem with God as mother, it may be that, just as some people have negative associations with a father figure, others may have the same negative experience of a mother figure. Another image suggested by McFague (1982), though she does not use this model to the exclusion of other models, is God as 'friend' (p.179). She sees this model as encompassing, among others, mutuality and reciprocity. But the image of friendship goes much deeper. She explains it by asserting that: "Jesus, in his identification with the sufferings of others throughout his life and especially at his death, is a parable of God's friendship with us at a most profound level" (pp.179-180). This is evident in Jesus' parables about the lost sheep, the beatitudes and his sermon in Luke 4:18 proclaiming the liberation of those who are oppressed (p.179). This relationship of friendship is not authoritarian, but it is also not necessarily one of equality (p.182). If I understand this approach correctly, McFague suggests that we are not God's equals, but that does not mean that our friendship with God is hierarchical. Jesus, as a human being, needed friends; he identified with people in their situation; he offered hospitality (John 21 when he cooked breakfast for his disciples) and washed their feet (John 13). Our obedience to God as friend, therefore, is not out of fear but because we love and are loved.

I would argue, as the preceding discussion indicates, that one's picture of God need not be uniform, nor are the various images to which I have referred, at

opposite poles. But, as will become clear in Chapter 3, for the purposes of prophetic preaching, God is a God in solidarity with those on the margins; a liberating God, not necessarily or exclusively male or female, but a God who desires a relationship with people.

“About Sin”

The Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) argues that the sin of domestic abuse must be named: not only the outward forms of abuse, but the desire to exercise power and control over others (para. 2.25). Sin is an alienation from God and others; it consists both in action and inaction; sin is individual and corporate, including systems that oppress and exploit others (para. 2.26).

Significantly, the Report mentions that the sin of domestic abuse is often attributable to the fact that there are different expectations of gender roles, most often, privileging men over women. The Report expresses this as “One label for this social system is patriarchy” (para. 2.27). But this does not mean that it is only men who abuse women, as was mentioned in Chapter 1. Moreover, there is a recognition that gender inequality still exists both in the church and in society (para. 2.27).

That domestic abuse is a sin and must be named as such, is in accordance with the view of Marie Fortune (Fortune, 2005). The matter of naming and exposing the reality of domestic abuse as a sin will be dealt with more fully in Chapter 5.

“About The Cross”

Many victims of domestic abuse have been told by church leaders that they should endure their suffering in imitation of Jesus on the cross. This is clearly a distorted view of the cross and it is against this backdrop that the Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) discusses a theology of the cross (para. 2.28).

The cross is a symbol of suffering but cannot be used to justify suffering or abuse (para. 2.29). This raises questions of substitutionary atonement, which is seen by some as a justification for suffering (para. 2.30). The Report attempts to deal with this by stating that:

in the face of domestic abuse, it may be more life-giving to emphasise the suffering of Christ as his living through consequences of his life choices, rather than speaking only of God's intention for Christ to suffer, or of Christ choosing to suffer (para. 2.31).

Christ's inclusion of all people, among others, was what brought him into conflict with the authorities who decided that he must die. The cross is a symbol of suffering but also a symbol of resistance to everything that diminishes life. The link between the cross and resurrection provides a sign of hope and new life (para. 2.31).

Ultimately, argues the Report, the cross as a symbol of suffering is also a symbol of putting an end to suffering. Abuse can never be justified through reliance on the cross, nor can it be justified by the metaphor of "taking up the cross". Discipleship may include danger and rejection, but it is much more than that: living as spirit-filled disciples and manifesting the fruit of the spirit (para. 2.32-2.36).

Therefore, the symbol of the cross cannot be used to condone abuse, nor can it be used to diminish suffering. In this respect, the approach adopted by the Report is in accordance with the approach of Brock and Parker (2001), who argue that a view of the atonement as something which God required God's son to do, as substitute penalty for our sins in order to save others, lends itself to the justification of violence in general and domestic abuse in particular. It paints a distorted picture of God as a father who allowed his son to be tortured (pp.31-39).

"About Repentance And Forgiveness"

The Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) acknowledges that very often victims of domestic abuse are glibly told simply to forgive, as if this could be done instantaneously (para. 2.37). This is clearly a distorted view of what forgiveness means. Forgiveness cannot wipe out the past. Instead, it allows people to move on

in new relationships and to let go of the past, without necessarily forgetting what happened to them (para. 2.40).

There is a relationship, then, between forgiveness and repentance. The latter involves the wrongdoer acknowledging the wrong they have done and seeking to change their ways, and it might entail reparation. Repentance does not necessarily mean that the wrongdoer no longer poses a threat to victims (para. 2.41).

The Report acknowledges that encouraging a victim to forgive her abuser could be a form of manipulation or domination. Moreover, forgiveness does not mean that a victim should be forced to remain in a relationship with her abuser (para. 2.43). And forgiveness does not mean that an abuser has no further responsibility to change or mend his ways (para. 2.44). This accords with the approach of Marie Fortune (2005), who has, over several years, been involved in working with victims of abuse. Many victims of abuse have been counselled simply to forgive their abusers and to move on. Reliance is placed, among others, on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 and Matthew 18. The latter chapter deals with forgiving "seventy times seven".

The question of forgiveness in the Bible, just like male headship or violence, needs to be addressed multi-dimensionally; not reading scripture literally and not quoting verses out of context. It means that forgiveness ought not to be used as a 'weapon' against abusers, nor should it be used in such a way that it has the potential to lead perpetrators into thinking that forgiveness on the part of the victim releases them from any obligation of repentance and provides an easy way out. Thus, Fortune (2005) also acknowledges that forgiveness is a process which cannot be hurried. To do so, would be insensitive and unrealistic (p.162). Moreover, "forgiving and forgetting" is not biblical (p.163). Forgiveness is not the starting point; it is the last step in the process of healing (p.168).

"About The Church"

The Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) acknowledges the church as a human organisation. It highlights the complexity of the use of power within the church:

both power given through the church's Standing Orders and other forms of power (para. 2.46-2.48). Victims of domestic abuse often experience power as that which silences them. The church does not face up to the harshness of abuse. In hiding from the horror, it appears to condone abuse (2.49). The reason for this is often that the church wishes to avoid dissension and to opt for peace at the expense of justice (para. 2.49). Many people have experienced the church to be the last place where it is acceptable to acknowledge that one's life is not in order. Grief is understood better than anger and physical illness rather than mental illness. This is as a result of a warped understanding of "holiness" (para. 2.50). Instead, the church should be the place where people support one another through pain and suffering, no matter what that may entail (para. 2.50). I will say more about the church's silence in Chapter 5.

In paragraph 2.52 the Report makes the important point that in the context of domestic abuse, the church can be a "prophetic voice in society as a whole". This involves pointing to the values of the kingdom of God, emphasising inclusive love and healing. This includes caring for victims, providing opportunities for perpetrators to change and modelling safe relationships of mutual respect. However, there is much more to the church's prophetic voice than this, although the Report does not specify how the Church should embody new kinds of relationships. This is the core of my research question: if the church sees itself as having a prophetic voice it needs to understand what this means in theory and practice; what the implications of such a prophetic voice might be and how this is actually expressed in the life of the church as a whole.

"About Marriage"

Domestic abuse often takes place within a marriage relationship or a relationship modelled on marriage. The church recognises marriage as a partnership of equals. The vows made during the Marriage Service are the same for both parties (Methodist Conference, 2005, para. 2.57). The Report does not condone the traditional teaching of "male headship" and "female submission" (para. 2.57-2.60). Difficulties arise where the marital relationship breaks down, especially through abuse. Traditionally, many have seen marriage as permanent, rather than

mutual delight and joy (para. 2.61). This has led to women often being forced to remain in abusive relationships. This view is not correct, and people should not be forced to remain in an abusive relationship (para. 2.61).

I mentioned earlier that the Bible is a complex document. This is so not only because of the difficulty pertaining to violence in scripture, but also in regard to the way in which a particular view of marriage has been used to persuade a woman to remain in an abusive relationship. The Report recognised that domestic abuse often takes place within intimate relationships, whether the couple is married or not. Some churches teach that the man is the 'head' and that the woman must 'submit' to the man, leading to male domination and female subordination (para. 2.57). This approach views marriage from a patriarchal standpoint. But where does this teaching come from and is it correct?

Methodist marriage liturgies ask the same questions of both partners: the wife is no longer required to promise to "obey" her husband (para. 2.57). The aim of marriage is "mutual delight, nurture and flourishing. Violence has no place in that vision of relationship" (para. 2.58). The Report acknowledges that in the past permanence of a marriage relationship has taken precedence over mutual flourishing and delight. However, remaining in an abusive relationship is not considered to be right within a Christian theology of marriage (para. 2.61).

Even so, in the same way that one cannot ignore violence in scripture, one cannot ignore passages in the Bible which, at least on the face of it, condone male headship and female subordination. Such texts need to be interrogated in order to discover what they might mean in contemporary society and bearing in mind the focus in this thesis on domestic abuse.

The question of marriage requires further elaboration in order to place it in proper perspective. In ancient Israel, marriages were normally arranged by the woman's father who would make sure that his own prestige would not be damaged. She would remain a stranger, to some extent at least, in her husband's house and would at best become part of her husband's property. If her husband chose to take another wife, she had little protection (Countryman, 2001, p.138). This indicates that the way in which family life is understood today is very

different from that of ancient Israel. But one cannot limit the notion of marriage and family life to that of ancient Israel. If the family was central to ancient society, it was not so for Jesus. He placed a higher premium on discipleship than on commitment to family (Countryman, 2001, p.149-151; Mt 10:37). As far as Jesus' teaching on divorce is concerned, he saw women and men as equal and this meant that, contrary to the practice in ancient Israel, Jesus taught that a husband could not divorce his wife by disposing of her as he would dispose of a slave; instead, he had to give a good reason for divorcing her (Countryman, 2001, 156). This means that: "In this way, Jesus abolished one part of scripture the divorce law, on authority of another, the creation accounts" (p.156). This teaching is viewed by Countryman as a redefinition of the centrality of the family and male headship, as it was practised in ancient Israel. When looking at marriage and the family as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, therefore, one cannot apply its principles uncritically to our contemporary society.

But this is not the end of the matter, since other passages in the New Testament have been used to justify female subordination, thereby forcing women to remain in an abusive relationship. How could these passages be deconstructed?

The passage in Ephesians 5:21-33 has often been used to justify the subordination of women and the domination of men. There does not seem to be consensus regarding the authorship of Ephesians, whether it was Paul or someone else. However, I would argue that the authorship of this passage is irrelevant for the present discussion. Even if it is accepted that marriage is a "sacred covenant", a marriage in which a husband abuses his wife is no longer sacred. It would be unreasonable to expect a wife to remain in a situation where her safety is at risk and require her to remain married for the sake of a covenant which the husband has breached by his abusive behaviour (Miles, 2002, pp.19-22). Moreover, the teaching in Ephesians 5 often concentrates on verse 22 in which wives are instructed to submit to their husbands. Yet, this approach overlooks verse 21 which states: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (NIV). Moreover, the remainder of Ephesians 5 talks about mutual love and respect. I would agree with Miles that this passage has been interpreted only from the husband's viewpoint, instead of looking at the passage as a whole.

Furthermore, this misinterpretation also loses sight of the fact that a loving relationship is not a relationship in which one person hurts or abuses another. "Love does not hurt! Love heals!" (Hollies, 2006, p.41).

I would argue that, having regard to the preceding discussion on biblical interpretation, that when it comes to the biblical teaching on marriage, one cannot adopt a literal approach, as is often the case. Instead, passages such as Ephesians 5 need to be viewed as a whole, always bearing in mind that it is hard to imagine that any biblical writer, even though they wrote mostly from an androcentric perspective, ever intended a woman to remain in an abusive relationship for the sake of a so-called covenant, or that anyone should be subjected to domestic abuse and be able to justify it by picking out verses from the Bible and quoting them out of context. As many biblical scholars would argue, if one views the overall message of the Bible, it is a message of love, not abuse.

The Church's Response

Section III (Methodist Conference, 2005) contains several recommendations relating to the church's response to domestic abuse and one can see how it begins to envisage how, in practice, the church might model a different community.

For example, the introductory paragraph of section III, states that: "The church...needs to be a place of worship, safety, healing and growth, and to offer a prophetic voice to society as a whole" (para. 3.1).

Similarly, in addressing certain practical ways in which the church could respond to domestic abuse, the Report encourages awareness raising and transparency (para. 3.2-3.3). In teaching and worship a church should embody the various aspects of the theology proposed in Section II (3.6); not least to "Speak out against domestic abuse, and state uncompromisingly that domestic abuse is a 'sin'" (para. 3.3.6).

Paragraph 3.10 reiterates the importance of being inclusive, the use of scripture and the importance of promoting gender equality. It also highlights the necessity for training (para. 3.19).

Finally, in stressing the importance of working with government and other agencies for prevention, protection and support, the Report reiterates that such action will “enable the prophetic voice of the Church to be heard” (para. 3.24). Even though the Report does not elaborate on what these words might mean in practice, nevertheless, here can be seen a clear statement of intent to embody a ‘prophetic witness’ in all aspects of its life, including liturgy and preaching.

The Prophetic Voice?

I have already highlighted certain shortcomings in the Report (Methodist Church, 2005). I accept that a report of this nature is limited in its scope. However, one would have hoped that more emphasis could have been placed on the “church’s prophetic voice”, especially in the light of the Methodist stance on social justice, though as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, a prophetic voice involves far more than a stance on social justice. This might have included an exploration of prophetic preaching, since the sermon is the focal point of a Methodist worship service. It is to be welcomed that the Report advocates the naming of domestic abuse as a sin, but, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6, preaching needs to go further than that and include preaching as resistance to patriarchy and violence.

I would also argue that more emphasis might have been placed on the use of language, not only as it relates to power, but to inclusive language in general.

Subsequent Work

The latest report on domestic abuse is a report adopted by the 2010 Conference. This report focused mainly on naming agencies who deal with domestic abuse and offered a list of resources for small group discussion. The fact that no further work has been done on domestic abuse since 2010 is a cause for concern. I am mindful of the fact that the Church faces many challenges, not least of all, matters relating to safeguarding, but one would have hoped that this fact might have elicited further work. One of my participants expressed her dismay at the long time lapse and hoped that this thesis might make an important contribution to the issue of domestic abuse, especially in relation to preaching.

When I interviewed my participants, I asked them, among others, whether they were familiar with the 2005 Report: awareness of its existence and its contents. The majority of the participants knew of the existence of the Report but were not very familiar with its contents. Two participants had not heard of the Report until I contacted them requesting an interview. It is a reality that the Church produces several documents and it is not surprising that preachers are not familiar with the contents of all of them. In the concluding chapter I will provide possible solutions to this difficulty.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the main features of the 2005 Report to conference. I have acknowledged the merits of the Report, bearing in mind the limitations of a report of this nature, in that it could not deal with every aspect of domestic abuse in detail. I would argue that the Report clearly indicates that the church takes domestic abuse seriously. However, I have also argued that if the Church wishes its prophetic voice to be heard, it needs to be much more intentional in bringing this about. One of the ways in which to do this, is by preaching on the subject, as a practical way of exercising its prophetic witness. It is the matter of prophetic preaching which will form the subject of the next chapter, bearing in mind my suggested approach to the Bible.

Chapter 3

The Prophetic Imagination

Introduction

My research question is: how could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness? I noted in Chapter 2 that the Report employs the terms “prophetic witness”, and ‘prophetic voice’ but that it does not elaborate in detail on what this might mean. In this chapter I will discuss what the concept ‘prophetic witness’ encompasses. I would argue that the word ‘witness’ might have multiple meanings, but for the purpose of this thesis, I will employ the concept of prophetic witness and prophetic voice as it pertains to preaching. I will deal with the roots of the term “prophetic” with specific reference to the Bible and how biblical prophecy might serve as a paradigm for contemporary preaching. However, many of the metaphors employed by the prophets are offensive to feminists. I will discuss some of these metaphors and how they might best be dealt with and understood. Notwithstanding these offensive metaphors, I will argue that the prophets, acting as God’s representatives, were a counter-voice to the dominant voices of that time, creating what Walter Brueggemann sees as a “prophetic imagination”. I will deal with the nature of this imagination and how it might inform preaching. This will be followed by a discussion of what preaching entails as both a communicative act and a rhetorical art. Finally, I will link definitions given by writers on prophetic preaching with the views of my research participants, in order to set out in more detail how they, and the church, might understand and undertake prophetic preaching.

What Is Meant By The Term “Prophetic”?

A helpful starting point for an understanding of certain concepts is to find their etymological roots. This technique is employed by Jean-Pierre Prevost (1996) when discussing the etymology of the word ‘prophet’ (p.6). The word is derived from the preposition ‘pro’ (for) and ‘phetes’, (to say). Thus, prophesying involves ‘saying’ and is a verbal act. The prophets were not writers; the writing of their

speeches came later (p.6-7). A prophet is someone who speaks 'before' the community; it is public speech by a representative sent by God to speak in God's name (pp.6-7). Prevost's approach, however, does not represent the full picture as far as biblical prophecy is concerned. Scholars, such as Davies (1996) point out that the prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible was derived from various sources, some of which may contain oracles from the prophets who bear the name of prophetic books, such as Jeremiah, but also containing redactions and literary writings which came from a source other than that of the original prophet (pp.51-59). Thus, not all the writings which are classified as "prophetic", are prophetic in nature; some of it is purely literary and "prophetic" writing is a canonical concept (pp.52-53). Accordingly, biblical prophecy is comprised both of original sayings of individual prophets, as well as later redactions which included reinterpretations of past events (p.58). This suggests that if biblical prophecy is viewed in this pluralistic way, there is scope for more reinterpretation in contemporary society. I will return to this point when dealing with prophetic preaching.

It is now widely accepted that predicting the future was not the role of the prophets. Instead, one needs to bear in mind that they spoke in different socio-political contexts. Thus, the prophets during the early monarchical period, such as Elijah and Elisha, functioned differently from later prophets such as Amos, Jeremiah or the various Isaianic prophets (Schnasa Jacobsen, 2009, p.16). For example, Elijah not only spoke for God but also confronted certain practices, as the story of Naboth's vineyard demonstrates. In that story he condemned the way in which king Ahab, under the influence of queen Jezebel, abused his power by taking Naboth's vineyard from him (1 Kings 21). Elijah also performed miracles, for example in 1 Kings 17, in his encounter with the widow of Zarephath, where he saved her and her son from starvation by causing the jars of oil and flour not to run out.

These prophets did not speak in oracles as did some of the later prophets (Schnasa Jacobsen, 2009, p.15). Prophets such as First Isaiah confronted kings regarding the evils in society (Isaiah 5). And prophets such as Jeremiah and Amos spoke in oracles (Schnasa Jacobsen, 2009, p.16). And prophets who lived during

the time of the Babylonian exile offered hope and encouragement (Ezekiel 37). This serves to demonstrate the importance of the context of the biblical prophets and thus the context of prophetic preaching today, even though one cannot always be sure of the precise historical context of some prophetic utterances and that many past events were interpreted by subsequent editors (Nicholson, 2014, p.162).

If prophecy was not about predicting the future, what might their function have been? This question is answered by Brueggemann, who asserts that:

To be sure, the prophets anticipate the future that God will give. That capacity to know the future, however, is not because of any manipulating, future-telling procedures that ancient Israel decisively rejected. Rather, the prophets know in a deep and intimate way about the character of God and so can anticipate God's constancy, which will be decisive in the future as in the past (Brueggemann, 2002, p.160).

In other words, the prophets bore testimony to God's faithfulness in the past and the present, giving an assurance that God will remain faithful in the future.

Some scholars have viewed the historical prophets as social activists. But Brueggemann (2002) is of the opinion that this is not entirely correct:

Social action that seeks to establish justice in the world is surely grounded in biblical warrants, but is more likely to be understood as 'covenantal' rather than 'prophetic'. In fact, these prophets have remarkably little to say about specific issues, and they rarely urge particular action. They are primarily poets who bring the world to voice outside of settled convention. While the future is implied in their discernment and the reality of God and while justice is intrinsic to their characteristic utterance, the most important aspect of their speech is their re-perception of the world as God's arena for faithful governance (p.161).

This “re-perception of the world” will become more significant when I discuss the notion of prophetic imagination.

But Brueggemann’s notion that the prophets were not social activists could easily be misunderstood. They may not have been social activists, but the prophetic literature certainly carries themes of both social and religious critique, even if it is not always clear what the exact context of such critique might be (Davies, 1996, pp.60-61). It may be better to regard the prophets as essentially social commentators, who used both poetry and prose to convey their message, which was always related to the world in which they lived. In that respect, their task is not dissimilar to that of contemporary preachers. And it can be said that they did have an interest in the future, insofar as present acts within a community would have a bearing on its future (Prevost, 1996, p.9).

Even though the various prophets operated in different contexts and despite the uncertainty surrounding which utterances were original and which were reinterpretations, we can detect certain principles which would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to biblical prophecy in general. I proceed to discuss some of these principles.

I have already pointed out that the origin of biblical prophecy is unclear (Birch, 1991, pp.240-241). They do not seem to have played a leadership role; they did not have a following and they came from different walks of life; some were priests, Amos was a shepherd (Amos 1:1; Petersen, 1981, pp.10-11), although Carroll (1979) suggests that the prophets may have attracted and have been recognised as prophets by their rhetorical language, which contained elements of experience, insight and analysis of his community (p.42). They were called and operated independently; they were not part of an institution. The prophets were thus *sui generis*: they were not ordained; they were accountable only to God; they operated under God’s authority, as opposed to human authority. In this sense, they have no precise equivalent in the contemporary world. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, they did not operate in a vacuum, nor did they act arbitrarily.

The prophets spoke God’s word, through poetry, rhetoric and through short oracles (Petersen, 1981, pp.92-93). But in saying that the prophets spoke God’s

word, it does not mean that they were God's "microphone" or "amplifier" (Borg, 2001, p.123). They spoke from their personal experience and knowledge of God, not their knowledge about God (p.123). Their "communication" with God is somewhat mysterious and I would suggest that Prevost (1996) may be right in asserting that the prophets were "men of the spirit", even though only Ezekiel lays claim to this (p.15). But whatever the prophets' means of communication with the divine, the God from whom they derived their authority was the God of the covenant; the God of the exodus; the God who delivered the Israelites from the bondage of the Pharaoh (Birch, 1991, p.124). And the God who liberated the Israelites was a God who heard their cry of suffering, even though they may not necessarily have directed their cry at God (Brueggemann, 2010, p.10).

This attention to the cry of the people led God to resolve to offer an alternative possibility and this was brought about by a human agent, Moses (Brueggemann 2010, p.11). He had a defined role as intermediary between God and the people. The people left Egypt and God made a covenant with them at Sinai. The significance of the covenant is that God wanted a relationship with God's people and there are several examples of covenants, both before and after the exodus, such as the covenant with Noah and Abraham (Genesis 9 and 17 respectively, made before the Israelites went to Egypt) and the Sinai covenant (Exodus 19 and 20) made after the exodus).

I would argue that this covenant relationship is at the heart of biblical prophecy. For, if God is the God of the exodus, the liberator, God is on the side of the oppressed and opposes all systems that cause people to be in bondage (Birch, 1991, p.123). A clear statement of who this God is, is summed up in Exodus 20:2, the preamble to the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (NRSV). Thus, foundational to prophetic speech is God's care for the afflicted and oppressed and God's demand for justice and righteousness. And this care is not limited only to those with whom God made a covenant; it is universal and inclusive (Birch, 1991, p.156). Thus, speaking on behalf of those victimized and marginalized by powerful and political institutions, is a prevailing theme in prophetic literature from the earliest stages of prophecy (Gottwald, 1996, pp.140-141).

If we accept that the prophets were God's messengers, opposing injustice and oppression and being on the side of the afflicted, it is inevitable that they would encounter opposition (Birch, 1991, p.241; Clements, 1996, p.114). Monarchs did not appreciate interference with their actions; they did not take kindly to those who challenged their kingship. The prophets often spoke a disturbing message which included God's indictment against monarchs for their unfaithfulness, their breaking of the relationship which God desired (Birch, 1991, p.246). Yet, even in the midst of this broken relationship, God's faithfulness prevailed; God was not going to let go or give up on God's people, even though God was angry (pp.247-248). The prophets' message was also one of hope and inclusiveness; God's justice and care extend far beyond the bounds of God's chosen people (pp.252-253).

Another important aspect of the Hebrew prophets was that they were keen observers of their community. They were well-versed in economics and spoke against many practices that exploited the poor (Petersen, 1981, p.93). They also knew about international affairs; they were in touch with what was happening in neighbouring countries (p.93). And since the foundation of prophecy was God's covenantal relationship with God's people, the prophets were well versed in the history of God's people (p.93). The fact that the prophets had a knowledge of their community is important, since that meant that they did not simply rant and rave, nor did they speak in a vacuum, but they spoke with authority, born of a sound knowledge of their context. I will return to this point when I discuss prophetic preaching.

Biblical prophecy is not limited to the Hebrew Bible. Many New Testament writers quote from the Hebrew prophets, in order to make the connection between Jesus and the sacred Jewish tradition (Borg, 2001, pp.115-116). This is borne out by the opening words of Hebrews: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:1-2, NRSV). Jesus is God incarnate and, I would argue, brings a new dimension to prophecy by what he said and did, as will become clear in the ensuing discussion. In addition, Jesus is viewed by many as a prophet in his own right, described as the prophet par excellence. In Luke 4, Jesus preached in the synagogue in his hometown of

Nazareth, at the commencement of his ministry, telling his listeners that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind and to set the captives free and concludes by saying: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:16-21, NRSV). This essentially means that Jesus brought a message of God's justice and love (Borschel, 2009, p.5). The effect of this message in Luke 4 is powerfully described by Judith McDaniel (2004): "Armed with power of the spirit, Jesus yanks his listeners into another reality, a realm that is truer than anything they have ever known before" (p.65). And she challenges preachers that their assignment, too, is to proclaim that the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing (p.65). In this passage Jesus, quoting from Isaiah, is interpreting the Hebrew scripture and using it as a lens through which to view his culture. Thus, Jesus looks at his culture from God's point of view and that is also the task of the church in its prophetic witness in preaching (pp.65-66). And Jesus' message in this passage that he is ushering in a new era, inevitably leads him to criticise those who continue to oppress and those who benefit from the poverty of others. And the establishment feels very threatened by anyone who challenges the present order (Brueggemann, 2001, p.84). The gospels contain many other examples of Jesus quoting the prophets. Jesus, as it were, connects the Hebrew prophets with the New Testament, but also adds his own dimension to them. Using the example from Luke 4:18-22 referred to earlier, Jesus not only quoted this prophecy, but he lived it out by the way in which he associated with the poor and the oppressed: his prophetic witness was thus not only in words, but also in his actions. As Prevost (1996) explains: "Put on the lips of Jesus, the quotations from the prophets have a strictly theological function...Jesus agrees with the prophets on essentials: he shows complete solidarity with them, and appeals to the same God" (p.21).

The New Testament has several other references to prophecy and many characters are portrayed as prophets, such as Zechariah, Simeon and Anna. These prophets all spoke about the promise of the Messiah and his important role in the future (Luke 1 and 2). John the Baptist is viewed as the connection between the last Hebrew prophet, Malachi and the Messiah. John was the forerunner of Jesus, the one who "prepared the way" and called people to repentance (Matthew 3:1-

17). And the word 'repentance' essentially means to change the old way (Schnasa Jacobsen, 2009, p.16). And as was the case with the Hebrew prophets, New Testament prophecy also took place within a community. These prophets saw their task as being both prophetic and pastoral and New Testament prophecy was not in the prophet's own voice but in the power of the risen Christ and/or the Holy Spirit (Schnasa Jacobsen, 2009, pp.16-17).

Feminist Critique of The Prophetic Tradition

In the previous section I mentioned that the Hebrew prophets made use, among other devices, of rhetoric and metaphor. However, some of the metaphorical language or analogies used in much of the prophetic literature is offensive to contemporary sensibilities. For example, it employs violent imagery by portraying God as warrior; or, more relevant to my concerns, uses language which condones sexism and misogyny. In this section, therefore, I will consider how prophetic preaching might overcome this problem, focusing on feminist critiques of prophetic literature.

Many contemporary feminist biblical critics have focused on the nature of much of the language of some of the Hebrew prophets. One vivid example of this is the seemingly innocuous marriage metaphors of Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which veil a deeper, darker undercurrent of sexual violence and misogyny. Feminist critics have set about exposing these troubling metaphors, while at the same time acknowledging that it is not easy to distance oneself from a tradition of prophetic literature that has historically empowered oppressed peoples and continues to inspire many in their journeys of faith. As a response, these feminist critics have adopted strategies which closely resemble a dynamic I have already identified: one of "resistance" and "transformation".

Resistance

Writing as a womanist (African-American) Biblical scholar, Renita Weems examines the nature of the language used by the Hebrew prophets to express the covenantal relationship between God and Israel and how this has been used to portray women (and female sexuality) in sexist and misogynistic ways (Weems,

1995). Metaphor is a device which draws a close analogy between two formerly unconnected phenomena; and through an analysis of passages in Hosea 2 as well as texts from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Weems explores how the nature of the marital relationship is treated as analogy for God's love and Israel's unfaithfulness. But it is that projection of a relationship beyond the realm of human marriage into a metaphor for the covenant between humanity and God which for Weems constitutes the heart of the problem. Power and domination are therefore at the heart of the marriage metaphor. God was always "masculinized" and Israel always "feminized". Metaphors of faithless women and wronged men bolster cultural understandings of God as male, exercising patriarchal rule; they permit views of women and the female body as uncontrollable and dangerous; and serve as justification for a husband (God) to retaliate physically against his wife for her transgressions. And while this relationship was mutual the prophets concentrated on the wife's obligations, rather than those of her husband. God is portrayed as a "victim" of infidelity who has been driven to extreme measures because of infidelity and dishonour (Weems, 1995, p.19). Such powerful associations thus sanction the abuse of power in human relationships, not least in forms of violence against women, since they embed the notion of violence and inequality as inevitable characteristics of marriage, sexuality and gender relations.

Julia O'Brien echoes this in her work on Hosea 1-2 (O'Brien, 2008). Hosea is told to take a prostitute, Gomer, as his wife, not because he loves her but because the prophet wishes to compare this relationship to Israel's unfaithfulness (O'Brien, 2008, p.30-32). However, one of the most damaging metaphors in the story of Hosea and Gomer is what O'Brien terms 'God as (Abusing) Husband' to depict the nature of Israel's covenant with God and what that means for the nation's common life and its relationship with neighbouring nations. She struggles with the way in which the sexual and social hierarchies of the patriarchal family suffuse such imagery.

Both writers acknowledge that the purpose of such language of marital infidelity was provocative. It aimed to shock, to justify the divine outrage, in the way that a husband would be entitled to be outraged by his wife's actions. It was intended to

evoke disgust and revulsion (Carvalho, 2018, p.110). In a patriarchal society a husband had power over his wife and could demand absolute fidelity and purity. In order to put Hosea's use of the metaphor into perspective, Gale Yee points out that the Israelite understanding of marriage differs markedly from our contemporary understanding. Marriage was patrilineal and patrilocal. Male interests were primary. Love and romance were not very important. Adultery was a punishable offence because it violated a man's absolute right to have sex with his wife and it could put his paternity into question. If caught in adultery the woman could be stripped naked in public and her acts publicly exposed (Hosea 2:2-3; Yee, 2014, p.301-302). However, different rules existed for men: they could have extramarital sex, unless an engaged or married woman was involved and he was caught in the act (Yee, 2014, p.302). This is the context within which Hosea's metaphor needs to be viewed.

It appears, then, that the purpose of the prophets was to bring home to people just how serious their behaviour was, by using the metaphor of marriage which was at the heart of Israel's culture (Weems, 1995, p.12-15). As far as Weems is concerned, the prophets' audience – most likely predominantly elite men – would have understood and identified with the marriage metaphor. In essence, the prophets were accusing them of acting like promiscuous women (Weems, 1995, p.40-42). This begins to suggest an alternative way of understanding these metaphors, not as condoning patriarchy but calling it to account. In Weems' view, for example, these texts require what she sees as a dual hermeneutic: one which helps readers resist ways in which texts subjugate aspects of a reader's identity and one which allows a reader to appreciate those aspects of texts that nurture their struggle for personhood (Weems, 1995, p.100).

Transformation

Feminist scholars suggest several ways in which one could deal more constructively with these metaphors and see them as a call for justice and transformation. In *Battered Love* Weems calls for readers to look beyond these ideological meanings and look instead for hope and restoration grounded in the constancy of God's redeeming love in the midst of damaged relationships. A

marriage metaphor also conjures up notions of romance, connectedness and intimacy (Weems, 1995, p.90, 99). Readers need to question which visions of biblical writers are worth implementing and those which encourage violence, need to be critiqued and resisted (p.103). And Weems asserts that there is “no similarity between battering husbands and avenging gods” (p.106). As Weems sees it, even in the midst of obscene metaphors, there is room for finding a challenge to injustice and finding liberation, by the way in which the prophets challenge the abuse of power by the dominant elite (p.111). The marriage metaphor in Hosea does ultimately involve the restoration of the relationship (Hosea 14) and this creates other possibilities such as a realm where good news is preached to the poor and all are included (Weems, 1995, p.111). In that respect, the significance of the prophets’ use of metaphor is to evoke greater understanding of, and commitment to, Israel’s covenantal relationship with God.

Weems attempts to rehabilitate the tradition, therefore, by focusing on its likely audience. She argues that historically speaking, the marital metaphor in prophetic literature probably originated in an intention to ‘shame’ an elite male audience by comparing them to wanton, unfaithful women. She suggests that the stress on the volatility of the marital relationship could have been an attempt to capture the ambivalence of Israel’s covenant with God, balanced between forgiveness and judgement. The positive side of this is that the marriage metaphor possesses a profundity and intimacy that speaks vividly of the divine-human bond; but the unintended consequence of these metaphors is felt by women who have suffered sexual violence. In that respect, Weems reads this prophetic literature through the lens of reader-response theory and so draws a strong connection between Biblical metaphor and contemporary experience. One might argue that historically such texts reflect an ancient culture very different from our own, but Weems insists that the impact of these metaphors continues to resonate for women today. Such language “should not only matter to us; it should haunt us” (1995, p. 110).

But Weems’ view is not supported by Julia O’Brien. She sees Weems’ approach as amounting to compelling readers “to remain with a metaphor that continues, every time it is used, to reinforce an abusive frame” (O’Brien, 2008, p.50).

O'Brien's solution is to avoid the alternatives either of granting total authority to Scripture or of rejecting it entirely. Instead, she proposes reading Scripture as literature rather than divine edict, enabling a more imaginative and nuanced reinterpretation. For her, this is about reading the Bible "with eyes wide open" (2008, p.101). This offers an alternative strategy for those who wish both to engage sympathetically with the Bible whilst "admit[ting] that at times it can be downright horrible" (2008, p.48).

O'Brien therefore seeks to find an engagement with the text that remains sympathetic yet is not afraid to challenge its limitations. Scripture can never be, she argues, simply a "transparent window into the divine", although she is confident that by engaging in critical and constructive debate with Biblical texts, "we will find God not simply in the words of Scripture but instead in our wrestling with them" (2008, p.67). Such a strategy of resistance and transformation encourages readers to dissociate themselves from an automatic identification with the dominant male which results in his exoneration for acts of violence. Rather, O'Brien encourages readers to view the text by recognising its patriarchal nature and to ask how this text reflects our present culture. She argues that the fact that the story in Hosea ended "well" obscures the fact that the story is in essence an example of patriarchy, domination and abuse of power (O'Brien, p.71-72). Challenging the patriarchal nature of Hosea and, for that matter, of the Bible as a whole, should lead readers to challenge patriarchy in contemporary culture. The Bible is a human document and should inform our lives rather than act as a "rule book" (O'Brien, 2008, p.74-75).

Carvalho's view develops those of Weems and O'Brien, by drawing a direct connection between the plight of women during biblical times and that of women today (Carvalho, 2018, p.130). She also refuses to take the authority of the text or its metaphors at face value; not every biblical text was meant to be "uplifting" or "admired", independent of its historical context. She argues that historical contexts need to be understood without exonerating or reinforcing patriarchal norms, and advocates reading texts with what she terms "aesthetic sensibility" in order to be moved by their "literary artistry" (p.131). This involves not only a hermeneutics of suspicion, but also a hermeneutics of listening, by asking where

God is; whether the portrayal of God is one of indifference or presence in various situations (Carvalho, 2018, p.131).

Other metaphors which are problematic are those that portray God as a “warrior”. In Chapter 2 I discussed how we might approach violence in scripture, and I should briefly return to this with reference to feminist scholarship on its use in the book of Nahum. In the portrayal of God as warrior there is normally a pattern of injustice inside or outside the community; this enrages Yahweh who then takes revenge by destroying the nation(s) with military might (O’Brien, 2008, p.102). Using Nahum as an example, O’Brien suggests that one’s views of anger plays a part in deciding how to deal with this problematic book. Anger is either justified, as an act of protest, or simply an uncontrolled loss of temper. Nahum invites readers to ask what justice looks like and who benefits from it: is Nahum about political oppression or gender injustice? That will depend, asserts O’Brien, on one’s ideological bias (O’Brien, 2008, p.122-123), which serves to reinforce the point that prophetic literature as rhetoric is designed to make an impact on its audience.

This discussion of some of the metaphors employed by the prophets, metaphors which cause feminists and others to feel uncomfortable, points to the fact that there is no simple way to deal with this form of speech. Such metaphors cannot be dealt with uncritically just because they happen to be in the Bible. However, I would argue that while these metaphors remain open to critique this does not necessarily entail a complete rejection of biblical prophecy. The contemporary reader (and, one might conclude, preacher) should be prepared to challenge and redirect the meaning of these texts in the interests of a call to justice. Feminist scholars such as Weems, O’Brien and Carvalho have shown some of the ways in which readers do not have to dismiss such texts or metaphors outright but can remain open to their liberative power.

Having discussed the basic tenets of biblical prophecy, I will now proceed to consider a further dimension of prophecy, what Walter Brueggemann calls the ‘prophetic imagination’.

The Prophetic Imagination

I would argue that a true appreciation of biblical prophecy may enable us to imagine the kind of world, in which people need not live in fear of their lives; a world where the values of the reign of God take precedence, what Brueggemann calls the “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2012, p.2). He sees prophetic proclamation as an attempt to imagine the world as if Yahweh, as trinity, is a real person and an effective agent in the world (p.2). This ‘thesis’ leads him to a second, which he sees as a “derivative thesis”, namely that prophetic proclamation is the “staging and performance of a contest between two narrative accounts of the world” (p.2). There is the dominant narrative, on the one hand and the “Yahweh” narrative on the other hand. He gives as an example of the dominant narrative US military consumerism, which is contrary to the Yahweh narrative of peace (p.4). I would argue that violence in general and domestic abuse in particular, is another example of such a dominant narrative which is contrary to the reign of Yahweh.

The word ‘imagination’ is not used by Brueggemann (2012) to signify a far-fetched fantasy as in a fairy tale. Nor, as I understand it, is it a bringing about of a utopia which is unattainable and unrealistic. Instead, it paints, through the use of symbols, and metaphors a picture which offers an alternative to the dominant picture. Imagination “moves outside the box of the given and the taken for granted” (p.24). Much prophetic speech is poetic anyway, which opens up new possibilities, since it is Brueggemann’s contention that poetic language can probe depths which linear prose cannot (p.24). I interpret Brueggemann’s notion to mean that poetic language can stir the emotions in a way that more direct language may not achieve. In other words, it is not a mere intellectual statement of facts, though this may have its place. The Hebrew prophets spoke in symbolic language of a world in which the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid (Isaiah 11:6 NRSV) and swords are turned into ploughshares (Micah 4:3 NRSV).

All these metaphors speak of transformation. It is also a world which Jesus referred to as the reign of God. He explained this in parables where the lost are

found and everyone is included. He, too, used symbols and metaphors in his parables, for example, the wise builder who built on rock and the foolish builder who built on sand (Matthew 7:24-29). This parable illustrates the difference between a deep and superficial faith. And the reign of God is also subversive; where those who mourn, those who are poor in spirit, those who are meek and merciful – often despised by the world because they are not in keeping with the dominant culture – are considered blessed by God (Matthew 5:3-12). And it is a world where the blind shall see and the prisoner will be set free, referred to earlier when discussing the passage from Luke 4.

The notion of prophetic imagination is contrasted with the “dominant imagination” (Brueggemann, 2012, p.32). How would we understand the contrast between these two narratives? These contrasts are based on the recognition of the prophetic imagination of relationship, while the dominant imagination is preoccupied with control, described by Brueggemann as “rushing past relationships in pursuit of control” (p.31). This is linked to my earlier reference to God’s covenantal relationship with God’s people. I mention a few of Brueggemann’s examples in order to illustrate this contrast. These examples may lead us to consider how a sermon on domestic abuse might harness the prophetic imagination in order to indicate the kind of world God may desire.

Brueggemann (2012) contrasts the prophetic imagination of fidelity or infidelity versus the dominant culture which works by coercion or manipulation; that is, fidelity comes from a relationship while infidelity comes about as a result of a breakdown in a relationship. Then there is obedience or disobedience, while the dominant narrative assumes no accountability beyond self-interest; that is, the prophetic imagination envisages boundaries, while the dominant imagination does not. I would argue that perpetrators of violence exceed such boundaries. Then there is hope or despair while the dominant narrative attests that “there are no new gifts to be given” (p.32). He elaborates on the contrast between the dominant imagination and the prophetic imagination, when he asserts: “Prophetic imagination always offers yet another utterance and refuses closure and absolutism, the very modes in which dominant imagination specializes” (p.32).

The point Brueggemann is making is that prophetic imagination offers new possibilities; that there is always new hope, but not in the sense of unrealistic and simple optimism. This way of imagining is dynamic; it does not assume or accept that the dominant culture needs to remain as it is; it is a constant challenge to the dominant imagination, which could amount to cynicism, in which nothing new is possible. I would argue that such cynicism can be as a result of having given up hope that the world can ever change for the better; that domestic abuse could ever stop happening.

Moreover, God is constantly at work in our contemporary world in the same way that God delivered God's people from the bondage of Pharaoh and gave them new hope after the exile (Brueggemann, 2012, p.40). The task of contemporary prophets is to uncover these new possibilities and to challenge the dominant culture (pp.39-40). Such uncovering is not authoritarian or "excessively confrontational" (p.41). It is not entirely clear what Brueggemann might mean by the phrase "excessively confrontational", and I would argue that there may be circumstances in which being "excessively confrontational" may be necessary. I will elaborate on this notion when I discuss preaching as resistance in Chapter 6.

This prophetic task is interactive, since both preacher and congregation are situated within the dominant imagination and both parties long for something new (Brueggemann, 2012, p.41). Ultimately, as Brueggemann aptly puts it: "Prophetic imagination thus counters dominant imagination as a practice that cannot give life because it fails at truth-telling" (p.45). I would argue that this statement contains, in a sense, a combination of exposing the reality of the dominant culture and at the same time offering a life-giving alternative. I will deal in more detail with exposing reality, as it pertains to domestic abuse, in Chapter 5 and with the life-giving alternative in Chapter 6, when I discuss preaching as resistance to patriarchy and violence.

However, there is an acknowledgment that the task of prophetic imagination is a difficult one. Brueggemann (2012) gives various examples to illustrate why this is so. Among others, imagining a word of generosity:

when the old parsimony has failed? ... A world of trusting relationships when the tale of self-sufficient lives has grown cold? ... A turn towards emancipation when we cower in resistance against any 'departure' (exodus) from old safe places of compulsion? (p.40).

Thus, the prophetic imagination requires a paradigm shift, challenging established ideas; it is subversive because it challenges everything in our culture of consumerism and the abuse of power, the illusion of autonomy and the foolishness of self-sufficiency (p.42). I would argue that this notion of prophetic imagination is instructive for a general understanding of an alternative world and can be applied more specifically to prophetic responses to domestic abuse. However, the use of the term 'prophetic imagination' is not the only way in which this can be expressed. In Chapter 2 I pointed out that the Report recognises that God wants human beings to flourish in loving relationship with one another. It is what John's gospel refers to as having "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10; Methodist Conference, 2005, para. 2.3). And while the word 'imagination' is not used, I would suggest, if my interpretation of Brueggemann's concept of prophetic imagination is correct, having life in all its fullness would be part of what might constitute such prophetic imagination as a measure of an alternative vision of present reality. People who are abused by others are not experiencing life in all its fullness, nor, for that matter, are those who perpetrate such violence.

I would argue that, while the notion of the prophetic imagination is rooted in scripture and is a useful paradigm, a more contemporary analogy might shed more light on our understanding of prophetic imagination. The source of this assertion came from one of my participants. When I was canvassing Brueggemann's 'prophetic imagination' with JD, he mentioned that he found this a helpful metaphor and he linked it with the famous utterance of Martin Luther King Jr, "I have a dream". And although Brueggemann does not use it as an example, I would argue that this utterance does paint a picture of a world alternative to the reality of racism in the United States at that time, racism being the dominant narrative and King's 'dream' the alternative narrative.

I acknowledge that this speech might not be seen as a sermon in the conventional sense. However, I do not think that this detracts from its significance as an example of prophetic imagination. The speech was rooted in scripture, as it used examples from scripture, from Isaiah 40, among others. Throughout the speech King used the present reality of racism and then offered an alternative, for example: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."² And the speech is rooted in his faith in God. King exposed the reality of racism, which is an example of Brueggemann's (2012) reference to 'truth telling'. But King then continued by painting a picture of what a world free of racism might look like.

The 'dream' metaphor is forcefully employed by Darryl Schafer (2018), a contemporary American pastor (p.102). It is a dream of confession and repentance; a dream that invites listeners to listen with God's ears to those on the margins; a dream which names the realities of racism, elitism and prejudice and a dream of hope for a better future (p.102). This kind of dreaming is not airy-fairy and unrealistic. I would argue that it is an extension of Brueggemann's notion of the prophetic imagination; like poetic speech and metaphor, dreaming envisages new possibilities.

If one were to apply the 'dream' metaphor to domestic abuse, one could dream of a world where everyone was safe; where no-one feared other people; where no-one would be subjected to coercion and violence: an all-inclusive society in which the rights and dignity of all people are respected.

Although I would agree that the language of poetry and metaphor can reach places which 'linear prose' might not, I would suggest that the alternative world which is portrayed by such imagination, can also be expressed in more concrete terms. It is true that Jesus' parables and use of metaphor are powerful. However,

²www.stanford.edu accessed 20 December 2018

the alternative message offered by the gospels, also contains examples of direct teaching by Jesus, as well as his encounters with those on the margins, for example, eating with tax collectors (Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus, among others). For it was those very teachings and encounters which caused the religious leaders to feel threatened. I would suggest that this forms part of the prophetic imagination and that it is a combination of poetry and metaphor and dreams as well as more direct speech. I will elaborate on this when dealing with how a preacher might use the Bible in a transformational way, in Chapter 6.

I would argue, therefore, that the general tenets of biblical prophecy could serve as a paradigm for contemporary preaching. I will now discuss different functions of preaching as a practice, before relating the principles underlying biblical prophecy and preaching, to prophetic preaching.

Preaching As Communication

In this section I will discuss how one could understand preaching as an act of communication. My own preaching ministry, like that of many others, largely involves a monologic sermon in which I speak and the congregation listens. Preaching as an act of communication differs from other forms of communication such as lecturing, though I would argue that preaching does contain an element of teaching. One of the important ways in which preaching differs from other acts of communication, is that in the Methodist Church, only certain people are permitted to preach. If they are lay people, they are required to be accredited as local preachers, after they have undergone a course of study. If they are clergy, they would have authority to preach, either as probationer presbyters or ordained clergy. In terms of Methodist discipline, no-one may preach who has not been given authority to do so by one of the means I have mentioned.

However, important as the authority of the church may be, many homileticians point out that the act of preaching has its origins in the God who speaks. In a sense, preachers are the voices of a God who spoke creation into being and Jesus, whose ministry was characterized by speech and our preaching today is a continuation of Jesus' preaching (Littledale, 2011, pp.15-18; Bruce, 2016, pp.14-17). Thus, the authority to preach derives both from the church and from God. It

is for this reason that many writers stress the fact that preaching is, apart from being a communicative act, also a theological act. It is another way of expressing the importance of making connections between the world of the Bible and the world of today. It involves reflecting on and struggling with the religious questions in life (Smith, 1992, p.3). Another way of expressing the importance of theology in preaching is that of Trevor Pitt (2010) who asserts that: "Theological preaching ought to be an exciting process of discovery as the Christian tradition is reinterpreted and reapplied within contemporary social contexts and human experience" (p.67).

I understand Pitt (2010) to be saying that preaching is much more than simply expounding a portion of scripture as an academic exercise, but in a way which makes no connections with people's real life situations, or, as Pitt aptly puts it: "It is no longer enough to distil relatively harmless, topical lessons from biblical texts" (p.67). This is reminiscent of the discussion in Chapter 2, that the Bible is not simply a 'bedtime story'. This latter point is important, as it is a well-known fact that the word 'preaching' has acquired a somewhat pejorative connotation in the eyes of some people in our contemporary culture (Heywood, 2013, p.2). It is my sense that this could be due partly to the fact that many people may be of the opinion that sermons do not speak to their real-life situations. This is borne out by Richard Littledale (2011) who somewhat cynically comments that "People come to church hungry for an electrifying encounter with God, and leave after a stultifying encounter with the preacher" (p.48). I concur with Littledale's view that preaching does not simply convey information; it expects to change lives (p.53). The notion as to whether the sermon can change lives will be further elaborated in Chapter 6.

But preaching as a communicative act is not only a theological act; it is also a rhetorical art. That is, preaching is an art of connecting with the congregation" (Hogan and Reid, 1999, p.9). The authors define rhetoric as

the study of what is persuasive in human communication, whether intentional, or simply as a consequence of the human

condition. Rhetoric is concerned with all of the processes by which people use symbols to influence one another (p.9).

However, one needs to make the connection between preaching as a theological act and a rhetorical art. The authors point out that theologically speaking, to view preaching as a rhetorical art takes account of the fact that a preacher is communicating God's word through language within a specific historical and cultural context. The paradigm for this communication is the incarnation, the Word made flesh who dwelt among us (Hogan and Reid, 1999, p.16). I would argue that this connection between theology and rhetoric in the context of preaching, is important. If there was no such connection, preaching as rhetoric would resemble the kind of rhetoric a lawyer would use in a court room: presenting arguments to try and persuade a judge to find in favour of her client. On the other hand, if there was no rhetoric in preaching, one could simply tell a Bible story or expound a portion of scripture without any connection whatsoever with the lives of one's listeners or an attempt to persuade them to view life differently or to think differently.

I would argue, then, that the way in which Martin Luther King Jr employed his 'dream' metaphor, referred to earlier, is an example of rhetoric. Effective rhetoric may involve, for example, the use of repetition to bring home a particular point. I cite another example to illustrate the way in which rhetoric can be used to great effect. In 1977 Desmond Tutu preached at the funeral of Steve Biko, who had died in police custody. It was a difficult time in South Africa. In his sermon, Tutu urged his hearers to work for reconciliation and repeatedly used the phrase "black and white together have already overcome", as a message of hope without losing sight of reality. There is an invitation to a new creation (Cilliers, 2016b, pp.377-378). I would argue that a similar technique might be employed when preaching on domestic abuse, urging people to envision a world free from violence. Such rhetoric makes a connection with the prophetic imagination discussed earlier. It also involves both the heart and the mind.

It is also recognised that sermons are delivered to particular people at a particular time and place and in a particular situation (Reid and Hogan, 2012, p.16). A

preacher prepares a sermon with a specific audience in mind. And while one could preach a similar sermon in a different location before a different audience, one would have to take account of that different audience when preparing a sermon. There is a persuasive intent to preaching, regardless of whether a preacher has a specific intention to persuade listeners or “simply depicting a possible ‘world’ – in which she invites her hearers to enter simply by listening – with her words” (Reid and Hogan, 2012, p.16). I will elaborate on the matter of preaching as persuasion in Chapter 6.

I have pointed out that preaching is a communicative act and a rhetorical art in a specific setting. But it is more than that. In this communication, the preacher acts as a witness; a witness to what she has heard through studying the scriptures, a witness to God’s voice, communicated in a sermon (Long, 2005, p.47ff). This is important, bearing in mind that we are dealing with the church’s prophetic witness as it pertains to preaching on domestic abuse. I would argue that there is obviously a difference between the use of the word ‘witness’ by Long and the use of the word in a courtroom, even though there are certain features of a courtroom witness which could be applied to preaching. The role of a witness is to testify about events which they have seen or about which they know because they are experts, for example, a doctor testifying in a personal injury claim who evaluates the extent of such injury. Witnesses testify to the truth; they advance the case of one or the other litigant; they aim to persuade the judge that they are correct and credible and they have a sound knowledge of the subject or event about which they testify. And witnesses interpret situations. Two eyewitnesses to an accident are unlikely to give exactly the same evidence, even though the salient features may coincide. If this is the case, both are reliable, though they may emphasize different aspects. The same is true of a preacher. Preachers interpret scriptures and events differently and there may be merit in all the interpretations, but the emphases may differ. And, in the majority of cases, witnesses deliver oral evidence; a silent witness would be no use in litigation and no use if the prophetic voice of the church is to be heard through prophetic preaching. But what is prophetic preaching?

Prophetic Preaching

Homileticians are not unanimous in their understanding and definition of prophetic preaching. Moreover, some prefer the term 'social justice', 'public issues' or 'liberation' preaching (Tubbs Tisdale, 2010, pp.1-2). I proceed to discuss the nature of prophetic preaching by drawing on the responses of my participants to my question as to what prophetic preaching is, the literature on prophetic preaching, as well as applying some of the aspects of biblical prophecy discussed earlier and how these can be related to contemporary prophetic preaching, in order to arrive at a definition of prophetic preaching. I will continue to use the term 'prophetic', without losing sight of the other terminology employed by some writers.

I mentioned earlier that I see the prophets as *sui generis* and that they do not have a precise equivalent in our contemporary world. The most obvious difference is that prophetic preaching, at least within the parameters of this thesis, takes place in a church, an institution and is done by those to whom the church has given authority to preach. However, I would argue that despite this, biblical prophecy is the lens through which we try to understand prophetic preaching and that it serves as a useful paradigm for this type of preaching because the prophets were both observers and commentators, interpreting situations through God's eyes, as it were. This is also the task of contemporary prophetic preaching. And if biblical prophecy as discussed previously is at the root of our understanding of prophetic preaching, it is necessary that we try and hear the prophets in our contemporary world (Brueggemann, 2010, pp.119-120). The perspective which Brueggemann (2010) offers in his book "Journey to the common Good" is not, as I see it, a contradiction of his notion of the prophetic imagination, but rather adds another dimension to approaching prophetic writings, namely God's notion of steadfast love, justice and righteousness, (the alternative narrative) as opposed to wisdom, wealth and power (the dominant narrative (p.38; p.119). It is Brueggemann's (2010) belief that the God of Sinai and beyond, still "indwells the text", thus making the utterances of the prophets relevant for today (p.122). I would argue that it is for this reason that prophetic preachers need to take seriously the writings of the prophets – both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament – and

the God whose message they speak. I interpret Brueggemann's notion of the "God who indwells the text" to mean that the faithful God of Sinai and beyond remains interested in the future of God's people, in every generation.

I mentioned earlier that the prophets were keen observers of their community and that they were well-versed in history, economics and international affairs. This is also part of the task of prophetic preachers today. We need to have a sound knowledge of the affairs of the world which would include, an awareness and knowledge of, domestic abuse. There are some writers who would agree with this notion. For example, Audrey Borschel (2009) stresses the importance of preaching on the news as part of the church's prophetic calling, and encourages preachers to study the news, not merely through "meagre soundbytes", but in a more thorough way, making use of multiple sources (p.10). And Pieterse (2001) believes that knowledge of poverty and its causes is important in preaching prophetically in a context of poverty. Similarly, the importance of "doing one's homework" is also stressed by Wogaman (1998, p.80). I do not understand any of these writers as saying that before one can preach prophetically on a given issue one needs to be an expert, but rather, that there must be adequate preparation and reading on the particular subject. In addition, a prophetic preacher must be bold in their proclamation, not focusing only on non-contentious issues. It is easy for a church to concentrate only on those issues which concern them directly. A prophetic preacher needs to encourage and challenge a congregation to ask how they might respond to events in their community and the world at large and that worship cannot be a substitute for other actions (McMickle, 2005, pp.7-8). Prophetic preaching challenges those who have become too comfortable and who have little regard for those who are not. A prophetic preacher is called upon to reinterpret the prophets in a way that resonates with contemporary listeners. Prophetic preaching is good news to the poor and the downtrodden. Prophetic preaching "speaks truth to power" (McMickle, 2005, p.12).

When I asked my participants about their understanding of prophetic preaching, they recognised that prophecy was not about future prediction. There was an acknowledgment that the Bible is important in prophetic preaching. For example, participant JN commented: "I wonder if we lack the confidence in the authority

God gives us through the Bible". This was said in the context of prophetic preaching, but I would argue that it would have wider application. In a slightly different vein when referring to biblical prophecy, participant AN pointed to the way in which the Old Testament prophets warned people of the consequences of their behaviour and how John the Baptist called people to repent. Indeed, warnings are prominent in Hebrew prophecy.

There were several other responses regarding the importance of the Bible in prophetic preaching. For JE, prophetic preaching includes showing people a way of living, bearing in mind Jesus' words that he is the way. For GN, prophetic preaching includes holding up the love of God as a standard; "that's the plumb line". She then asks how we show that love in practice in the way we treat others, asking such questions as: do we buy fair trade goods? Do we consider injustices both locally and globally? "It is about trying to show what the kingdom of God is meant to be like because I see it through what I read in the Bible and then to get us all to work with God to get closer to what the kingdom of God would be like". And I would argue that the kingdom (reign) of God is part of the alternative narrative. GN's notion of "holding up the love of God" is echoed by Philip Wogaman (1998) who asserts that the whole point of the prophetic word is God's love; this message needs to be heard in a context of love and that justice ultimately depends upon the love of God (p.20). I would argue that the mere fact that God desires a relationship with God's people is an indication of God's love and that this goes back to God's alternative narrative. And, bearing in mind GN's question about how we put God's love into practice, prophetic preaching should lead to action and transformation; I will elaborate on this in Chapter 6.

Another aspect of prophetic preaching relates to 'truth telling', as discussed earlier. This includes connecting the biblical message to specific issues. Some of my participants felt strongly about this element of prophetic preaching. According to participant JN this entails speaking to people about things which could easily be avoided and, for example, reminding them that "poverty is on their doorstep". Moreover, being passionate about social justice, he wondered whether people were sufficiently worked up about inequality in wages, education and the right to live in safety. I gained the impression that he felt that people should in fact

be worked up. He also questioned how relevant some preaching is to the lives of those who hear sermons. JD understood it as being a challenge to the church as well as to the community. He considers it important to address contemporary issues from the pulpit.

There was also an acknowledgment among some of my participants that prophetic preaching is preaching that offers an alternative to the dominant narrative, though they did not use these exact words. JH, with reference to Brueggemann's notion of prophetic imagination, offered not only her understanding of what this means in practice, but also stated that one must not misunderstand the nature of prophetic preaching. "it is not about telling people how nasty they are, but actually describing an alternative narrative for where we are right now". I understand this to mean that one cannot change people's thinking by instilling a feeling of guilt without offering a way out of their guilt into a new way of thinking. She then offers an example, with specific reference to domestic abuse. For her, the alternative narrative states that, "It isn't right for me to be neglected or forced to have sex when I don't want to or hitched or denied money or have my tongue controlled". This example offers an alternative to the dominant narrative of domestic abuse which is about power and control.

Some of my participants were aware of the fact that as preachers they speak for God and try to discern God's will for God's people. GR takes this very seriously when she says "We are used by God to speak for God. We are not up there speaking for what we want to speak about". EL understands this as trying to discern what God's will is, not by some hunch, but connecting scripture to life in the world. For MR prophetic preaching is about making people whole so that they may fulfil their calling as disciples. She believes that this is the evil of domestic abuse; "it stops us from fulfilling our calling".

How, then, might one define prophetic preaching? The task of prophetic ministry asserts Brueggemann (2001) is: "To nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us" (p.3). And I would argue that this might be brought about by prophetic preaching which is preaching rooted in scripture and is a counter-voice,

in that it proposes an alternative to the dominant voice by naming issues which cause people to be oppressed and in bondage. Such preaching offers an alternative narrative which proclaims the love of God as the plumb line and speaks a liberating word whose aim is to bring about transformation. I would argue that the love of God is the alternative narrative because it is all inclusive and liberating. The prevalence of violence is the dominant narrative; speaking against such violence and dreaming of a world where everyone can live in safety and free from violence, is the alternative narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that in order to preach prophetically, it is important to understand the term “prophetic” as it is used in the Bible and how that relates to our contemporary understanding of prophetic preaching. I have argued that prophetic imagination can enable us to try and make sense of the world which the prophets imagined and how we might employ such understanding in our time, by offering a counter-voice to the dominant voice of power and violence through preaching, which is both a communicative act and a rhetorical art. I have argued that the prophets were the representatives of a God who cared and still cares for the vulnerable. I have pointed to the difficulties with some of the metaphors employed by the prophets; metaphors of Israel as an unfaithful wife and God as a wronged husband and how such metaphors are offensive to women, in the way that they appear to condone violence and domination. But it is not sufficient to cultivate a prophetic imagination; we need to use this imagination to break the silence on domestic abuse and to resist the dominant narrative of both silence and violence. In Chapter 5 I will deal with the question of how to break the silence on domestic abuse, with reference to both literature and the empirical evidence from my data. How I went about collecting and analysing my data will form the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to explore how Methodist preachers approach preaching on domestic abuse, in order to arrive at strategies to increase the effectiveness of such preaching. In Chapter 2 I analysed the Methodist Report as one of my data sources and pointed out that social justice is a Methodist stance and that the Report was written within that context and in Chapter 3 I introduced prophetic preaching. In this chapter I will discuss my research design. Since the discipline of practical theology forms the basis of my theoretical framework, I will examine the basic tenets of this discipline and point out its alliance with feminism and highlight some feminist epistemological principles, including how this discipline makes use of qualitative research. This will be followed by an explanation of my research methodology and methods and justifying the choices which I made. I will next review the way I went about selecting participants and how I identified the questions to be covered in my interviews, how I collected and analysed my data and the obstacles I encountered. I will also deal with ethical considerations. Finally, I will discuss subsequent events and my reflection on them, and the impact this had on my approach to this thesis.

The Nature Of Practical Theology

The discipline of practical theology does not seem to lend itself to easy definition. This much is recognised by many writers, such as David Lyall (2009) who suggests that perhaps it is best not to define practical theology at all (p.159). I agree with this approach and would argue that instead of trying to define practical theology in precise terms, one could explain the nature of practical theology by referring to various tenets of the subject.

In essence, practical theology is the study of theology in action in the day-to-day lives of believers (Miller-McLemore, 2012, pp.5, 14). It also explores the “dissonance between professed beliefs and lived realities through the study of practice” (p.17). This is done by analysing the practice and performance of, for

example, a faith community, in order that such practice might be transformed and could lead to people thinking differently (Bennett et al, 2018, p.60). A helpful analogy is that of a sports team who would study its performance after a game, by watching a video recording, in order that it might improve its performance and discover its mistakes. It would do so by analysing various aspects of the team's performance, its strategy and tactics (Bennett et al, 2018, p.60). If it was a rugby team, it would watch the video recording and analyse its performance, within the context of the rules of rugby. The recording would, for example, indicate where the rules may have been violated and would explain why the team were awarded penalties against it: it would enable the team to ask itself: is what was done in practice, in accordance with the "theory" of rugby? Is the referee's interpretation of the rules the same as that of the players? If one were to apply this analogy to the present subject, practical theologians analyse performance by means of empirical research, using research methods from the social sciences (Ballard and Pritchard, 1996, p.17). But the use of such methods is underpinned by theology (Bennett et al, 2018, p.60). In other words, it analyses the relationship between theory and doctrine on the one hand and practical action on the other hand. It asks how we get from mere words to actions (Ballard and Pritchard, 1996, p.43). And an important source for the practical theologian is the Bible (Ballard, 2011, p.35ff). However, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, the Bible is not unproblematic and how it is read and interpreted has a bearing on how it is translated into practice, the practice of preaching and the practice of everyday life.

In applying these principles to the present study, I will explore the practice of preaching on domestic abuse in the British Methodist Church. The Report adopted by Conference (Methodist Conference, 2005) recommends preaching on this subject as part of the Church's prophetic witness. This study asks whether this is the case in practice and if not, why not? Is there a 'dissonance' between the theory, the Conference document and the practice of the preaching of its preachers? But it also asks: how can this theoretical study be translated into practice, in order to transform such practice?

In order to explore the practice of preaching, I conducted research among Methodist preachers. The subsequent sections of this chapter will set out how I

went about doing this. I bear in mind that I approach my research from within a particular context - which I explained in Chapter 1 - and that I am not completely neutral, even though one attempts not to allow one's personal biases to stand in one's way (Bennett et al, 2018, p.123). For example, one of my participants responded almost completely contrary to my own stance and the stance of my other participants. Initially, I wondered whether this data would be useful. However, on reflection, I realised that this data would and did, make an important contribution towards putting the responses of the other participants into perspective. Ultimately, I agree with the assertion that, "There is only one key question for the researcher in practical theology: how to engage old understanding with new understanding" (Bennett, et al, p.124).

This implies that one cannot discard 'old understanding'. Instead, 'old understanding' needs to be deconstructed in order to gain new understanding. The tradition of patriarchy and violence, the 'old understanding', needs to be re-formulated in order to bring about transformation so that other voices can be heard from the pulpit, the voices of those who have the courage to expose domestic abuse and to offer a resistance to such abuse. This might involve rethinking our approach to preaching and the starting point is exploring how preachers understand their preaching practice.

Not only is this study situated within the field of practical theology, but it also takes account of the fact that the focus is on preaching on domestic abuse against women. To that end, I recognise the importance of feminism within the field of practical theology. In Chapter 5 I will point out that for centuries the church has excluded women in exegesis, ordained ministry and so on. Feminist practical theologians resist the disenfranchisement of women, their silencing and exclusion and the patriarchal nature of biblical interpretation (Graham, 2012, p.194-196). I recognise that feminist research uses gender as a lens through which to evaluate data and seeks to privilege women's voices and lived experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2014a, p.3-4), an objective that sits well with my overall research aim. A few examples of feminist research will illustrate what this "feminist lens" looks like in practice; I will then indicate the relevance of this scholarship for my research.

“How survivors of abuse relate to God”, was a study conducted by Susan Shooter (Shooter, 2012). She recognised the silence surrounding abuse, especially where the abusers were clergy. Her study provided an opportunity to listen to the abused women and thereby to break the silence (Shooter, p.2-3). In another study Anne Phillips researched the experiences of girls between the ages of 11-13 within various church contexts. This study highlighted the body image of girls, and gendered stereotyping, often by boys who, for example, frowned upon girls who wished to play football (Phillips, 2018, p.23 ff). She wanted to work with girls and encourage them to connect their faith with their lives and “to draw on the resources of spirituality to build their resilience and gendered self-confident awareness” (Phillips, p.23). Hesse-Biber interviewed college students for her research regarding eating disorders. Body image, gender stereotyping, what their boyfriends would think of them if they were fat, were all factors which contributed to their desire to be slender (Hesse-Biber, 2014b, p.182-183).

All these examples illustrate that feminist research seeks to listen to women’s voices, to women’s lived realities. Feminist research aims to be emancipatory and to liberate women from being subordinated to men (Porter, 2018, p.83). When I submitted my research proposal in 2014, I did not fully appreciate the role which a feminist approach to research might play. However, by the time I conducted the interviews in 2016 I had realised that these principles of feminist qualitative research and their findings would be important for me. They provided examples of how I might establish what preachers’ attitudes would be to the use of inclusive language and a feminist reading of the Bible. Even though at the time of formulating my research design, I did not know how many participants would be men and how many would be women, I realised that my interviews would provide a very effective mechanism for listening to the voices of women preachers and also to the voices of “sympathetic” men.

In my research design, I also needed to take into account that one of the goals of feminist research is to support social justice and social transformation (Hesse-Biber, 2014a, p.3). I also needed to acknowledge my own stance on issues of social justice and the importance of emancipation both of women and of other marginalised groups. This is important since, as I pointed out in Chapter 2, social

justice is a Methodist stance and this thesis argues that a practical application of this stance is manifested, *inter alia*, by the Church's prophetic witness. Moreover, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, preaching has the potential to contribute to social transformation. My approach to my research therefore reflected those wider goals of feminism. This therefore involved firstly listening to the voices of women preachers in regard to their preaching practice and approach to the Bible, and secondly considering how women's voices could be heard more clearly through exposing the reality of domestic abuse from the pulpit.

I anticipated that some preachers might be hesitant to preach on domestic abuse and I wanted to establish the reasons for such hesitation and incorporate them into my research strategy. The study by Susan Shooter, referred to above, (Shooter, 2012), clearly indicates the silence surrounding the abuse of women within a church context. I therefore had to formulate my interview questions in a way that would allow women to express their "fears" of preaching on domestic abuse, and that they would not fear that they would be judged by their answers. I would argue that having an opportunity to have one's voice heard by means of an interview on one's preaching practice, could in itself be a form of liberation. So my awareness of the importance of attending to hidden voices within feminist approaches to research, as outlined above, meant that I was able to listen to my participants with a feminist "ear" and be attuned to influences of patriarchy and male domination in the church and how that might have an impact on people's preaching practice.

My Justification For Choosing Qualitative Research

In deciding whether to use quantitative or qualitative research, I took into account my research question and how it could best be answered (Mason, 2002, pp.27-31). In understanding the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research, I found a metaphor used by O'Leary (2014) instructive. She suggests that one way of understanding the distinction is by viewing the left and right side of the brain. The left side likes the logic and certainty of quantitative research, while the right side makes more room for uncertainty and gives less credence to structure (p.8). This approach does not consider the one as being superior to the

other, but rather as different ways of knowing (p.9). One cannot take this analogy too far and create the impression that qualitative research is necessarily chaotic and unstructured. The analogy has mere illustrative value. If my research question had been: “how many Methodist preachers preach on domestic abuse?” quantitative research would have generated numerical statistics. But since my research question asks how could the Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness, statistics would not have provided sufficient in-depth data which would have enabled me to answer the question. It was therefore necessary to delve deeper by collecting data which would answer the question whether preachers preach on domestic abuse, but also how they go about doing so and their understanding of various ancillary concepts. I would not have been able to answer these questions by means of a statistical analysis. Moreover, as I will indicate below, there were also practical considerations which played a role in the choice of my methodology. Furthermore, a literature study without primary data sources, would not have answered my research question, since the literature deals with a context broader than just the Methodist Church.

Interviews As My Research Method

Interviews within the research context allow one to engage in an in-depth discussion with the one being interviewed. They involve dialogue and interaction (Mason, 2002, pp.62-63). It was my view that preachers would be in the best position to talk about their preaching practice, their understanding of homiletics and their approach to the Bible, as well as their attitudes to preaching on domestic abuse. This would be the most appropriate way of generating data for further analysis. I considered that the data generated from interviews would provide the most appropriate ‘evidence’ to answer my research question (p.37). I chose not to use questionnaires because it is well known that the response rate is low and although I might have collected data from a larger number of preachers, questionnaires would not have enabled me to explore my questions in the same depth as the interviews did; there would not have been the interaction and dialogue which interviews provide (O’Leary, 2014, p.216). The use of questionnaires would also have presented practical difficulties.

Notwithstanding the fact that I considered interviews to be the most appropriate method for collecting my data, there are certain caveats which must be borne in mind. Firstly, I am mindful of the fact that interviews are by no means completely neutral and I was aware of my own views and biases while conducting the interviews. I acknowledge that as an interviewer I was in a sense an “insider”, in that I am also a preacher and that there was a danger of being too subjective. However, feminists argue that subjectivity is not necessarily an obstacle to generating knowledge, as positivists seem to suggest (Naples and Gurr, 2014, pp18-20). I would argue that as long as one is aware of the potential difficulties, being an “insider” does not necessarily detract from the reliability of the data which is collected and analysed. I would argue that one way to minimise the risk in this regard, would be to avoid asking ‘leading questions’. An example from the court room would illustrate this. When representing clients in civil or criminal cases, a lawyer is not permitted to ask her client leading questions, ie questions which would, as it were, ‘put words in someone’s mouth’.

A second caveat is that an interviewer has certain power over an interviewee, in that an interviewer sets the agenda and chooses what questions to ask and when to ask them (Hesse-Biber, 2014b, p.185-186). And this power extends to the decisions made by a researcher in regard to which data to use and which data to omit or simply ignore (Slee, 2018, p.42). Moreover, I agree with Fran Porter’s assertion that researchers need to take responsibility for the decisions they make, rather than trying to deny the powers which researchers have (Porter, 2018, p.88). Moreover, it has been recognised that semi-structured interviews provide a degree of flexibility (Porter, 2018, p.88). For example, when I asked one of my participants about her understanding of “prophetic preaching”, she told me that she was not familiar with “jargon”. I tried to explain the question to her in an alternative way, but ultimately, I did not press her too far. This flexibility also means that if a participant wishes to explore certain aspects in more detail or wishes to add something that may not be strictly relevant, she has the opportunity to do so. Without losing sight of these caveats, I would nevertheless argue that in this particular study interviewing was the most appropriate method.

Finding Participants (Sampling)

I interviewed both presbyters and local preachers, (lay people), as the latter play a significant role in the preaching ministry of the Methodist Church, as there is a shortage of clergy. In view of the fact that I was quite new in the British Methodist Church at the time and did not know many people, a friend who had done some freelance work for the church and who had several contacts among preachers, offered to furnish me the names of preachers, with their permission. This offer came about when I mentioned to her that I was undertaking this study and had not been sure of the best means of sampling. After I had been given several names, I communicated with the various people and received responses from some of them. During the first few interviews I asked participants for more names. Communication with these potential participants, resulted in more people expressing a willingness to be interviewed. I bear in mind the disadvantage of this process of sampling, known as snowballing, as it may compromise the diversity of the sample (Ritchie et al, 2014, p.129). However, one participant was referred to me by an acquaintance who was not part of the study and is not a Methodist. In addition, one participant approached me directly, having heard about my study from a friend. Some of this participant's views initially seemed contrary to the views of my other participants. However, on reflection, I realised that this added an extra dimension to my data. I ultimately interviewed 9 people, both lay and ordained. I acknowledge that this is a relatively small number. However, despite having communicated with several other potential participants whose names I had been given, I did not receive a response from any of them. I was aware that I could not force people to participate and, after careful consideration and having regard to the data I had collected, I decided not to seek further participants. I did not know any of the participants prior to the interviews, though it transpired that one of my participants and I had attended the same course several years ago. By sheer coincidence, I met a number of my participants subsequent to my interviews in completely unrelated settings.

Of the nine participants whom I interviewed there were seven women and two men. Five were ordained and four were local preachers. They came from different parts of the country. I did not ask their ages. The number of years for which they

had been preaching varied from three years to more than twenty years. I anonymised them by using the first letter of their forename, together with the last letter of their surname. In seeking participants, I did not intentionally choose seven women and two men. The criterion was their willingness to participate.

Interview Questions

I conducted semi-structured interviews since they provide more flexibility than fully structured ones. The framing of the interview questions was informed by the Methodist Report (Methodist Conference, 2005), as well as the literature I had read at that stage. It became clear that I would need to explore their understanding of prophetic preaching, their approach to the Bible, their general preaching practice- including the use of the lectionary, use of language and whether they saw themselves as feminists - and whether they thought that the sermon could transform lives. There were also questions regarding their knowledge of the Methodist Report and whether they had been trained in prophetic preaching. Finally, I wished to establish whether or not they preach on domestic abuse and, if not, why not.

Data Collection

Once the participant had indicated their willingness to be interviewed, I sent them a consent form to be signed and returned to me (Appendix 1), as well as a participant information sheet (Appendix 2). Once I had made the appointment for the interview, I sent the participant a list of the questions which I would ask them. For practical reasons, I conducted all my interviews over the telephone using a digital voice recorder. All my participants were comfortable with this method. Telephone interviews are accepted as a legitimate means by which to collect data. And, since I am completely blind, I would in any event have missed non-verbal cues even if I had conducted the interviews in person (O'Leary, 2014, p.219). This fact notwithstanding, meeting someone in person has obvious advantages, as one can build a rapport which is more difficult on the telephone. However, I did pick up nuances in the voices of my various participants, as I am used to listening to people's voices, the only medium through which I can deduce enthusiasm, reluctance, and so on.

I transcribed all the interviews verbatim onto a computer in Word format. I then printed all the transcripts in braille, my preferred medium of reading.

Data Analysis

The matter of data analysis proved a particular challenge. I decided against the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software because I was uncertain whether these programmes would work with my screen reader. I also took into account the fact that even if it might have been possible to use them, it might have involved a great deal of extra time. All the books which I consulted explained data analysis by means of diagrams which were very difficult to follow. Apart from the fact that the scanner software which I use does not cope well with diagrams and columns, using diagrams are problematic for me since, not ever having been able to see, visual representations are not helpful, even if they had been tactile. There is software available nowadays which makes production of tactile diagrams possible. (Examples of diagrams are: O’Leary, 2014, p.307; Ritchie et al., 2014, pp.276-302). It was also not possible to use columns, highlighting or marginal notes, as these have their own complications.

Ultimately, I analysed the data, using thematic analysis, what Ritchie et al. (2014) describe as “framework” (p.282ff). I started by ‘immersing’ myself in the data, by repeatedly reading my braille transcripts. I then identified themes and subthemes. These included: prophetic preaching; use of the Bible; feminism; violence in scripture; whether participants preach on domestic abuse, and so on. I created these themes and subthemes in a Word document and pasted relevant material from the transcripts under the relevant headings of the themes and subthemes. I created separate files for each theme, as using the matrices suggested by Ritchie et al. (2014) was not practical, for the reasons stated earlier (Ritchie et al., p.284). These separate files were printed in braille. I filed each theme, separating these with a narrow card, bearing the theme heading in braille and filing them in such a way that the label heading stood out above the pages of the relevant theme, so that I could find them easily. I used these themes and related them to the literature. These together determined the structure of the thesis and what information from the data would be used in which chapter. In

analysing the data, I used a process of deductive reasoning. I had identified the themes before I conducted the interviews. The data provided insights into the various themes which I had canvassed with my participants (O’Leary, 2014, pp.304-305).

I am mindful of the fact that nine participants represents a very small sample of Methodist preachers and I bear in mind that research findings need to be credible and generalizable (Ritchie et al., 2014, p.348 ff). However, as I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, many of the views expressed by my participants accord with views expressed in the literature. In addition, research which was conducted in the United States among Roman Catholic priests revealed some similarities to the views of my participants and the literature study, with specific reference to reservations which preachers have on preaching on domestic abuse.

Ethical Considerations

My research proposal was accompanied by the mandatory ethics application required by the University and ethical approval was granted.

I would concur with some of the ethical considerations postulated by Linda Bell (Bell, 2018, p.85). These include: doing no harm, confidentiality, privacy and anonymity and informed consent; dignity and safeguards to protect vulnerable groups. And in addition, Graham and Llewellyn (Graham and Llewellyn, 2018, p.45) point out that ethics in research also aims to contribute to the welfare of participants; trust is at the heart of ‘good’ research. “Researchers have to assess not only whether they have avoided harm but also whether they have modelled best practice” (Graham and Llewellyn, p.45).

I endeavoured to protect my participants and follow best practice. The participant information sheet clearly stated that participants could withdraw from the interview at any time. None of them withdrew, nor did anyone terminate the interview before it had been completed. Participants were offered the opportunity to check the transcripts, but none of them availed themselves of this offer. As far as confidentiality and privacy are concerned, I anonymised them by using the first letter of their forename, together with the last letter of their

surname. I stored the transcripts on the hard disc drive on my computer. My computer is not linked to anyone else's computer. The only hard copy version of the transcripts is the braille copy. I mentioned earlier that I did not make use of computer software for data analysis because I was not sure how well such software would work with my screen reader. In addition, if I had used such software, it is very likely that I would have needed assistance and this might also have compromised the anonymity and privacy of my participants.

I had no sense during the interviews that any of my participants were uncomfortable with the questions that I asked, nor did I gain the impression that they felt threatened or intimidated by my questioning.

Although I did not consider my participants a "vulnerable group" as such, I was mindful of the possibility that one or more of them might be victims of domestic abuse. I did not ask any of my participants whether they had had personal experience of domestic abuse. I have not used any data which might have the potential of causing harm, I have made sure to avoid any information which might have the possibility of revealing the identity of my participants.

I acknowledge that it would have been prudent to have information regarding support services which might have been available to participants if I sensed that they might need support after an interview. However, as I am accustomed to listening to people on a pastoral level, I would have taken action if I had thought it necessary that a participant might need support. I did not discern any such circumstances. If I had felt that I needed support after conducting interviews during which sensitive information had been shared, I would either have consulted my spiritual director, or made use of a counselling service to which Methodist ministers have access.

Subsequent Reflection

Throughout my doctoral studies the importance of keeping a research journal was repeatedly emphasized. However, my keeping of such a journal has been sporadic. This does not mean that I have not reflected on my data, the literature and the doctoral journey as a whole. I have not cultivated the habit of writing

things down, since before technology, that was not possible, and this has led to my operating largely “in my head”. Subsequent to my interviews, my reflections have in fact resulted in some further insights. I discuss these briefly, acknowledging the importance of reflection as part of the discipline of practical theology (Bennett et al., 2018, p.132).

One of the recurring themes in the literature is the matter of “voice” and “silence”, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. A choir in which I sang, sang a song in 2017 by Jay Althouse entitled “I have a voice”. It reads in part:

I have a voice I know is special,
A voice uniquely my own,
But when I sing together with others,
I know that I’m not alone;
I have a voice;
I have a dream;
I have a song that I’ll sing for you.

It struck me that my research focus was on the whole question of voice and silence: the voices of victims are not always heard in the church, either from the victims themselves or through the voice of the preacher and the voices of the marginalised are not always heard in our biblical interpretation. I also realised that as a minority group in the church – there are very few blind presbyters – my voice is not always heard. This is not necessarily intentional or malicious. It is often a question of people not being aware that they are unaware!

The point of this reflection is that it made me realise just how important it is for the church to give a voice to the voiceless: that their voices need to be heard not only their own voices, but through the voices of preachers. For too long, the church has silenced too many people.

This project has enabled me to read some of the literature with a different ‘ear’. Ultimately, if the church were to exercise its prophetic witness more intentionally by preaching on domestic abuse, there is the possibility that this may lead to a

general recognition of the importance of ensuring that everyone's voices will be heard in the church.

When I started my research, this did not form part of my initial thinking. These insights came about through subsequent reflection, even though I did not document them in a research journal.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the location of my research within the discipline of practical theology and its alliance to feminism. I have argued that my use of semi-structured interviews was the most appropriate method for establishing the practice of preaching on domestic abuse in the Methodist church. I recognised the limitations of this method of data collection. I described how I went about analysing my data and how this analysis has provided a framework for the discussion in the ensuing chapters. I discussed the ethical considerations in this research. Finally, I demonstrated how subsequent and continued reflection on my research has led to new insights. In the next two chapters I will further develop the themes which have emanated from my primary data and the literature study.

I wish to make it clear that the purpose of describing the obstacles which I encountered during my data analysis, has not been to make excuses. I realised that this needed to form part of my methodology chapter and that is the reason why I pointed out the difficulties which are part of my reality. I am by no means suggesting that writers of books intend to make it difficult for blind people to understand their layout. I recognise that we live in a visual world, but at the same time, pointing out these difficulties could be a means by which my own voice is heard in this research. It is with the phenomenon of 'voice' in mind, that the next chapter will advocate breaking the silence on domestic abuse.

Chapter 5

Breaking The Silence

Introduction

In Chapter 3 I pointed out that the prophets were God's messengers who made use of oral communication to convey their message. They did not remain silent on important issues, such as exploitation of the poor and other forms of injustice. I argued that contemporary prophetic preachers, even though they operate differently to biblical prophets, nevertheless are called to be God's spokespeople. A prophetic witness is not a silent witness, but one which will speak out against domestic abuse and other forms of oppression. In Chapter 4 I alluded to the importance of hearing other 'voices'. In this chapter I will provide evidence which suggests that the church has remained largely silent on domestic abuse, both in preaching and in other areas; women's voices have not been heard. This evidence can be divided into two parts: firstly, the reasons why the church has either silenced women or caused them to be hesitant to speak out about domestic abuse and secondly, the reasons why the church has kept silent on domestic abuse, more particularly as it pertains to preaching on the subject. I will argue that the resistance to prophetic preaching in general and the hesitation to preach on domestic abuse in particular, is proof of this silence. In other words, an unwillingness to preach on domestic abuse leads to preachers not raising the issue from the pulpit and this amounts to keeping silent. My reference to "church" is not restricted to the Methodist Church, but refers to the church universal, since the evidence does not emanate solely from the Methodist Church, but also from a study conducted among a group of Roman Catholic priests in the USA, as well as some worldwide research. I will then argue that the silence must be broken, and the voices of women must be heard. I will base this assertion on the fact that even though my participants expressed their reservations with regard to preaching on domestic abuse, the majority of them acknowledged the necessity to preach on it. And how could the church go about breaking this silence? I will introduce what I will refer to as Christine Smith's (1992) triad of preaching as weeping, confession and resistance. However, since in my view 'weeping' and 'confession' are not adequate, I will use the words 'lament' and 'truth-telling'. I will employ this triad

as a paradigm for giving 'voice' to the prophetic imagination, which I referred to in Chapter 3. I will argue that this triad represents an alternative to the dominant narrative. As a point of departure, I will deal with the role of lament in the Bible and discuss how it might be employed in preaching on domestic abuse. This will be followed by a discussion of preaching as confession: naming the reality of domestic abuse. I will argue that the root of domestic abuse is patriarchy and I will discuss the meaning of this concept.

The purpose of this chapter in answering the research question: how could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness, is to acknowledge the church's silence and to understand the reasons for such silence. The next step will be to explore how this silence can be broken. I do not make a judgment on the justification for the reasons for the church's silence, nor can I simply dismiss the reasons therefor. However, I will argue later in this chapter and in Chapter 6, that the obstacles are not insurmountable and that there may be ways of overcoming them. Ultimately, if the church takes its prophetic witness seriously, breaking the silence on domestic abuse is imperative.

Women Have Been Silent

For most of its history, the church has not officially allowed women to preach. It is only within the last century that some denominations have begun to ordain women, though Methodist lay preaching dates back to Wesley's time. Thus, a large part of its constituency – in many churches the vast majority – has been kept silent. Silence is disempowering; having a voice is empowering. Or, as Hudson and Turner (2014) aptly assert: "The voiced woman is one who recognizes her own value and thus accords herself the right to speak" (p.12). Moreover, the human voice is an instrument of power and can be used to influence others (p.13). The most apparent reason for not allowing women, until recently, to preach, is patriarchy, which will be dealt with later in this chapter. Furthermore, there are some denominations, most notably the Roman Catholic Church (there are others), that continue not to allow women to be priests or to preach. I would argue that the very fact that in these denominations women's voices may not be heard from

the pulpit means that their voices do not count on an equal basis with men's voices, for if they did, they would be allowed to preach (Bons-Storm, 1996, p.16). But, unfortunately, even in situations where women and men hold equal positions there is no guarantee that women will be heard. Evidence from secular organisations shows that in some instances where women are in management, men may still try and "silence" or marginalise them (Pryce, 1996, p.14).

It is against this backdrop that I will deal with some of the reasons why women in the church have remained largely silent or hesitant to speak about domestic abuse. I alluded to this in Chapter 2 when discussing the Methodist Report and its finding on women's silence which is borne out by the ensuing discussion. There can be many reasons for silence. On the one hand, people are silent because they may not wish other people to know about their private lives or thoughts. This could be because of feelings of guilt and shame or a fear of what others may think or fear of retribution if a perpetrator finds out that his acts have been disclosed by a victim. On the other hand, silence may be as a result of women fearing that they may not be understood or believed. In the latter case, they become what Riet Bons-Storm refers (1996) to as "the incredible woman", the woman who is not believed. The title of her book suggests that this is the case: her research among women in the Netherlands revealed that pastors do not always believe the stories of women who seek their counsel in matters of domestic abuse (pp.18-20). This fear of not being believed or not being taken seriously, was also one of the findings of research conducted by Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010), whose research was carried out in several countries. They cite examples of women reporting domestic abuse to their churches and who were either not believed or not taken seriously (pp.47-49). In one of the case studies the abuse was by a pastor whose reputation seemed more important to the church than the welfare of the victim. Even though this latter case may not constitute domestic abuse, I would argue that it is an illustration of the fact that women are not always taken seriously or believed. Moreover, the silence of the church in cases of abuse – especially, but not limited to, abuse by clergy – is also highlighted by Susan Shooter in her research among survivors of abuse and how they relate to God (Shooter, 2012, pp.1-2). In another case study by Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010), a wife who worked

as a church office manager disclosed to her pastor that her husband, a Sunday school superintendent, had abused her and had been arrested and was in jail. But he did not believe her, saying that the man was too nice a person to abuse his wife (pp.67-68). I would argue that all these examples illustrate what it means to be “the incredible woman”.

There might be several other reasons why women are not always believed or taken seriously by the church in matters of domestic abuse. I would argue that even in churches where women are permitted to preach, the church and society in general are still dominated largely, though not exclusively, by men and there seems a reluctance on the part of churches “to relinquish dominant masculine imagery in liturgy, in academic theology and in ecclesiological representation” (Shooter, 2012, p.4). This constitutes the dominant culture. And beneath what Bons-Storm (1996) calls “a relatively thin veneer of emancipation theory and practice covers a deep-seated longing” that women should play their traditional roles as dutiful wife and mother (p.35). Any subject which reveals this dominant culture or “dominant discourse” becomes taboo, thus giving only certain people a right to speak. Being able to speak gives power; speaking out on such taboo subjects results in a battle for power (p.63). The “dominant power” is represented by white, well-educated, heterosexual males which means that women can only speak truthfully about their lives if they use the language of this group (p.63). I interpret Bons-Storm’s approach to mean that any voice which threatens or challenges the dominant voice results in attempts to silence those other voices. This dominant group holds the conviction that only men are worth listening to and that women should be attentive to men’s words (p.65). And even though he refers to a secular context, I would argue that Mark Pryce’s (1996) explanation for the reason why in some cases men try to silence women, could be equally applied in the church:

In the secret places of the heart, some men are afraid to learn from women. There is a deafness inside men, an ignoring of women, and a deluded formation of male identity which has its roots in the fear of women’s power and skill (p.17).

I would argue that it strengthens the notion that the dominant voice feels threatened by the alternative voice; that gender equality goes deeper than allowing women to preach; that prophetic witness is more than a policy on paper.

But this does not paint the full picture, as many women have begun to rebel against this 'dominant discourse'. More and more women are realising the gap between this dominant discourse and their own situation. However, this rebellion can lead to confusion and can result in her being thought "mad" (Bons-Storm, 1996, p.83). It is recognised by Bons-Storm that this new voice, the voice which goes against the dominant discourse, is always a "rebellious" voice. I would argue that the approach by both Bons-Storm and Pryce is reminiscent of my discussion in Chapter 3 where I highlighted the dominant narrative versus the alternative narrative and that those who are part of the dominant narrative may feel threatened by those who offer an alternative narrative; monarchs felt threatened by the Hebrew prophets and I would argue, with reference to the examples I have cited, many men may feel threatened by those women who challenge this male dominance (Shooter, 2012, p.30).

This discussion highlights the importance of those who offer pastoral care, listening to other voices; the voices of the abused and the vulnerable; not in a patronising way, and not in a way that imposes their dominant voice in pastoral encounters, but listening to them attentively and taking them seriously. But taking women seriously in such pastoral encounters is not sufficient; for too long the church has remained silent from the pulpit.

The Church Has Been Silent

Apart from silencing women to speak about domestic abuse in the church, there is ample evidence which proves that the church has been largely silent on matters of domestic abuse, both in general and from the pulpit. I proceed to present this evidence. This silence has been described as a "holy hush" and as a result, the collective voice of the church is rarely heard on domestic abuse and church leaders are seldom invited to secular consultations on domestic abuse (Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark, 2010, pp.18-20). I would concur with the authors' view that this could lead to the erroneous assumption that Christians cannot offer a

biblical response to women who suffer, that her healing journey has nothing to do with her walk of faith and that pastoral care has nothing unique to offer (p.20).

There are several reasons why the church has been silent on domestic abuse. In discussing these reasons, I am not suggesting that they are justifiable, but they cannot simply be ignored. The church needs to find a way out of the silence. I proceed to discuss some general reasons, followed by those which pertain to silence from the pulpit. I realise that there is some overlap between these two sets of reasons.

There is no doubt that domestic abuse is a sensitive issue and that many people feel uncomfortable about it in the church, let alone from the pulpit. Research suggests that this silence could be as a result of a denial that domestic abuse happens in the church and, in any event, many see it as someone else's problem (Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark, 2010, p.18). There is a notion that if domestic abuse was a problem, why has the pastor never mentioned it? Others may think that the woman must have deserved what was done to her and wonder why the woman did not leave her partner, if it was that bad (p.71). And there are those who wonder whether talking about domestic abuse in the church would stop such violence.

A recognition and concern regarding the church's silence on domestic abuse from the pulpit, led John McClure and Nancy Ramsay (1998) to compile a book of essays written by various authors, to serve as a resource for preachers. Their view is that the reasons for such silence are as a result of a denial that violence is happening within a particular community and that pastors may be afraid that their image in the community may be tarnished if they preach on such topics.

In the introduction to the book, the authors make a further important point by stating that silence is not only an absence of speech. The silence communicates a negative message to victims, perpetrators and bystanders. To victims, that they are alone in their suffering; to perpetrators, that the church does not hold them accountable for their evil deeds and to bystanders, that it is "okay to remain on the side-lines of a brutal and sometimes a deadly game" (p.2). I agree with this assertion, for it puts into perspective the discussion on the reasons for the

church's silence and it provides strong supporting evidence for the necessity of breaking the silence, since there is a danger that the silence could be seen as tantamount to complicity with violence or a general lack of awareness or even an indifference to domestic abuse. McClure and Ramsay emphasize that preaching is only one aspect of the church's ministry but that it is an important component (p.3).

In addition to these views, there is empirical evidence which proves that many preachers are reluctant or hesitant to preach on domestic abuse. I asked my participants for the reasons why preachers are reluctant to preach on domestic abuse: what the barriers were to such preaching. I proceed to discuss their answers to my question. I recognise that there is some overlap between my question regarding the barriers or resistance to preaching on domestic abuse and the question whether preachers do in fact preach on the subject. I will deal with these latter responses when I present evidence to justify my view that the silence needs to be broken.

I bear in mind, as mentioned in Chapter 4, that nine is a very small number of participants. For that reason, I will also draw on a study in the United States, conducted among 11 Roman Catholic priests (Nellissery, 2003). The research question pertained to how priests deal with spousal abuse. I take into account that the research was conducted among Roman Catholic priests who are male, single and celibate. I note that the use of the term "spousal abuse" is similar to my use of the term 'domestic abuse'. The study did not focus primarily on homiletics but covered a much broader scope regarding priests' responses to spousal abuse. I would argue that this study provides a broader understanding of the church's hesitation to preach on domestic abuse and also demonstrates that some of the responses of some of my participants bear some resemblance to the responses of the priests. The latter provides a further understanding of priests' hesitation to preach on domestic abuse.

A factor which was mentioned by several of my participants, relates to pastoral issues, as they pertain to domestic abuse. There was a concern that preachers would not necessarily be able to follow up on their preaching if pastoral issues

arose from such preaching. Participant GN was particularly concerned that a sermon on domestic abuse could “start a conversation which may create very great difficulties for someone in the congregation that you can’t then follow up because they are not going to talk to you about it”. Participant JH said that part of the reason why pastoral follow-up may be difficult is that presbyters tend to have pastoral charge of more than one congregation and do not necessarily have as much contact with individuals in the congregation as a result. This also led to presbyters spending less time with a particular congregation than used to be the case. Moreover, most Methodist churches rely heavily on local preachers who would not necessarily preach in only one or two congregations and in my experience, most local preachers do not play a prominent role in pastoral ministry. There is therefore not always continuity. For example, as a presbyter of three churches, my congregations see me in their pulpit four times a quarter, sometimes only once a month. Similarly, Nellisery’s study revealed that priests were particularly concerned about confidentiality, even though the priest who does preach on spousal abuse said that he makes sure to emphasize that his examples do not refer to anyone in the congregation (Nellisery, 2003, p.137).

Apart from pastoral issues, there is a concern that preaching on domestic abuse could upset a congregation. Participant JD mentioned that preachers may be anxious to be seen to be interfering in other people’s lives if they were to preach on issues such as domestic abuse. EL recognises the hesitation and possible pitfalls and gives the perspective that “there is a pretty strong expectation from some people that they do not come to church to be upset and preachers perceive that in the congregation I think more than the congregation feels it”. She thinks that preachers feel pressure not to “rock the boat”. MR also recognised the “danger” of upsetting people, but nevertheless expressed great concern that preachers do not seem willing to tackle domestic abuse from the pulpit. The response of the participants in Nellisery’s study was similar. There was a fear of upsetting the congregation, a fear of causing controversy in what they saw as a “messy subject” and a fear that one would create problems instead of solving them (Nellisery, 2003, p.135). For example, one of Nellisery’s participants had preached a sermon on violence after 9/11 and some people were upset that he

had raised it from the pulpit. Moreover, JD mentioned that there could also be the fear of being culturally insensitive where, for example, different cultures may have different ideas regarding family structure. But fear of upsetting a congregation is not unique to preaching on domestic abuse. It applies to prophetic preaching in general and is one of the reasons given for a “resistance” to prophetic preaching (Tubbs Tisdale, 2010, pp.15-16).

Closely related to this is the fact that a worship service needs to cater for a variety of people and that they have different expectations. AN pointed out that for many people in the pews domestic abuse may be outside their experience. In similar vein, Nellissery’s (2003) study revealed some interesting reasons as to why priests do not preach on spousal abuse, with particular reference to Sunday mass. One said he preaches on spiritual things; he has to expound the scriptures and preaching on spousal abuse would not be spiritual and several said that it would not be liturgical. They are obliged to follow the liturgy and if there is nothing in the reading of the day about spousal abuse, they will not preach on it (pp.138-139). Another said that he preaches homilies rather than sermons; perhaps if he could preach sermons it would be a different matter. Sunday mass is family time; it must be a happy time with focus on the positive things in life; the goodness of God, not the negative things (pp.138-140).

Some of the priests also expressed concern as to how it would impact on parish life in general: there were many (p.140). These responses are not far-fetched. An assertion by Brueggemann, with reference to prophetic preaching, aptly describes both the dilemma and the everyday realities which presbyters face:

The task (of prophetic preaching) is difficult because such a preacher must at the same time ‘speak truth’ while maintaining a budget, a membership, and a program in a context that is often not prepared for such truthfulness (Brueggemann, 2012, p.1).

A significant factor which plays a major role in preachers resisting preaching prophetically is a feeling of inadequacy, of not feeling qualified to do so. My interviews revealed that most of my participants said that they had not had a great deal of training in prophetic preaching; some had had none. Any mention of

prophetic preaching did not usually make reference to specific issues such as domestic abuse. Participant EL told me that when she has raised the issue at preachers' gatherings the response has mostly been that they do not feel qualified to preach on domestic abuse and would not feel equipped to deal with questions which people may ask them. Being ill-equipped for such preaching was also given as one of the reasons why Nellisery's (2003) participants did not preach on domestic abuse (pp.136-138). I would argue that feelings of inadequacy are not unique: Jeremiah made the excuse that he was too young (Jeremiah 1:6) and Elijah had become afraid of the consequences of his battle with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18 and 19). I acknowledge that Elijah was doing more than just speaking, but it illustrates the difficulties which prophets faced then and still face today.

I would argue that I have presented sufficient evidence to prove that the church has been by and large silent on issues of domestic abuse, both in general and in its preaching. The purpose has not been to accuse the church, but rather to provide the foundation for my case that the silence needs to be broken.

Why Break The Silence?

My argument that the silence needs to be broken is not based solely on the fact that the Methodist Report talks about the church's prophetic witness. The case for breaking the silence is strengthened both by writers on the subject, as well as the responses of my participants, notwithstanding the hesitation expressed by some of them. Moreover, some of Nellisery's participants considered it a good idea to preach on domestic abuse. I will first deal with the responses of both my participants and those of Nellisery. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the literature.

My question to my participants was: "do you or have you ever preached on domestic abuse?" If the answer was in the negative, I followed it up with the question: why not? And "do you think it is important/necessary to preach on domestic abuse?" While I did not use the phrase 'breaking the silence', I suggest that this is implied. My general impression is that all my participants were aware of the prevalence of domestic abuse in the community, though not all of them

were familiar with the Methodist Report on domestic abuse. The majority of them said that they would preach on domestic abuse, though they did not all think that preaching an entire sermon on the topic was necessarily the most helpful approach. Participant JN, who is passionate about social justice, has not preached an entire sermon on domestic abuse but has often used it as an illustration; his sermons are not necessarily based on only one topic. I asked him what his view was on those who would avoid preaching on domestic abuse. He said:

I think it is weird that we would want to avoid preaching on topics like that. I would not avoid it. I think people who come to church do not always take the issues that they face, seriously. One of the important things about trying to evangelize is that people see that the church is not afraid to speak to the issues that are on their hearts. Abuse is so common to people's experience. People seem to feel more safe expressing these things; it is strange that the church should want to avoid these things. Particularly because the church has historically been so tied up with abuse.

He also recognized that preaching on domestic abuse offered good news: "the beginning of the good news is that even in the context of worship it is okay to embrace that side of yourself that has been affronted by someone or society." When I asked him if it was important to preach on domestic abuse and to encourage preachers to do so, he said: "If we cannot preach on it, should we really be preaching, if you like? If people are avoiding things, then how can we really enter into the complexity of scripture and those things which confront and afflict us". I note that this view is completely at odds with some of Nellissery's participants who did not think that preaching on domestic abuse was preaching on "spiritual things". I would argue that JN clearly sees the connection between preaching, scripture and the experiences of people in their everyday lives.

Participant JD had once preached a whole sermon on domestic abuse, though it was several years ago. He, too, thought it important to preach on such issues; one cannot pretend that it does not happen or that Christians do not do bad things. He would not be afraid to preach on domestic abuse. However, he did recognize

that one had to be “pastorally ready” if a victim or perpetrator happened to be present in the congregation.

Participant MR has preached on domestic abuse and considers it important. Her approach is that a loving God wants us to love, not abuse, one another. Preaching and praying alongside broken people is important to her. She is particularly passionate about this. EL shares this view, though she would not necessarily announce it as a theme. She was not sure that a whole sermon should be devoted to domestic abuse, for fear that people would “switch off”. Nevertheless, she believes that preachers should not only preach on their pet subjects and preachers should not be self-indulgent. She also makes the important point that “Women are sitting there, and men in the congregation, thinking that they must be the only one, if (domestic abuse) is never mentioned”.

AN, who has preached on domestic abuse, gives an interesting perspective. She believes that people in situations of domestic abuse or who have other pastoral needs, are constantly assessing preachers, “as to whether this is somebody whom they would feel safe to talk to about their problems.” I interpret this to mean that perhaps if a preacher talked about domestic abuse from the pulpit a victim may feel at liberty to talk to the preacher afterwards. I will return to this point when dealing with truth-telling.

Participant JH had a different approach. She does not deny the importance of preaching on domestic abuse but is very conscious of how this is done so that people are not put off. She said: “I have found it less effective in terms either of raising consciousness or in supporting people who are living in such circumstances, to have a face-on theme service about domestic abuse.” Her approach is to use it in illustrations. The examples she gave are, that when preaching on “picking up your cross” Jesus did not mean that we should be doormats. Giving thanks in all circumstances does not mean accepting violence passively; violence is an evil situation. I see her approach as more subtle, but she does not avoid the issue.

Both JE and GR were a little more hesitant when I asked them about preaching on domestic abuse. JE would not preach a whole sermon on domestic abuse. She

approaches it from the point of view of how we treat one another. Her hesitation is mainly for fear of making people feel that they are being “got at”, or that people come to worship and preachers have used an issue “to beat a drum that is theirs”. She would not preach a whole sermon on domestic abuse and is aware that it needs to be done sensitively and in a way that “does not detract from worship”. She believes that “if we preach it explicitly from the pulpit, we could put people’s backs up and lead to them ignoring us completely”. In her view, small groups are a more appropriate forum for discussing domestic abuse. GR also emphasizes the importance of the way in which preaching on domestic abuse is done. She strongly emphasized the necessity for getting one’s facts right. But she makes the important point that: “However, it is very difficult, because if you get up in church and talk about this topic to a congregation that are used to the church being patriarchal, you are going to get people’s backs up the wrong way.” She recognises that violence is wrong and as our conversation progressed, I had the impression that she was getting closer to the point of recognising that such preaching was necessary, provided one got one’s facts right. It is her view that “a lot of people trust what comes from the pulpit” and that is why getting our facts right is so important. Her preaching places great emphasis on love, especially from John’s gospel.

At the opposite pole was participant GN, who has never “actively” preached about domestic abuse. She has preached on other social justice issues, such as child poverty, fair trade and disability. Her view is that the church is not ready to preach on domestic abuse. The church is starting to become a safer place as a result of greater efforts at safeguarding. She does not think that the culture has changed sufficiently but believes that as the church moves forward with safeguarding issues, domestic abuse will come to the fore.

The majority of Nellisery’s (2003) participants were aware of the prevalence of spousal abuse and the manifestations thereof, but of his 11 participants, only two had preached on spousal abuse occasionally; one had done it once and two others had made reference to the subject by using what they call “pithy one-liners”. The remainder had not preached on the topic at all (pp.94-100; 135). In general, there

was a greater willingness among my participants to preach on domestic abuse than among those of Nellissery, but I bear in mind their particular context.

The themes that have emerged from these responses are that preaching on domestic abuse is important: it shows that what goes on in people's lives is not removed from what the church proclaims; that the church cares about the matter of abuse and that it might - not necessarily will - encourage people to speak more openly about their own situation of abuse. These themes are also present in the literature. I have already referred to McClure's and Ramsay (1998) notion that breaking the silence on domestic abuse shows that the church is aware and cares. In Chapter 3 I mentioned that the biblical prophets were keen observers of their community and spoke out about the evils in society. This, assert Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010), is also the task of the church today, with specific reference to domestic abuse (p.10). And they ask the important question: "When will people talk about abuse in theological language? When will they tell us what the Bible says? When will the church speak to people of faith about matters of abuse in the home?" (p.10). I will return to these questions in Chapter 6.

I would argue that there is at least some evidence to suggest that sermons about domestic abuse have the potential to encourage people to talk more openly about it in church or to their presbyter and this may result in having a profound impact on people's lives. These are some of the findings from the research conducted by Clark Kroeger and Nason-Clark (2010, p.53ff). And recognising that preaching on sexual violence is a challenge, Marie Fortune nevertheless advocates the necessity for doing so. She believes that despite the challenge, silence means isolation to both offender and victim. Speaking and preaching about sexual violence "gives permission" to victims to talk to their minister" (Fortune, 2005, pp.190, 223). An experience related by Rebecca Parker provides further evidence of what may happen after preaching a sermon on domestic abuse. She led a Bible study class after a sermon on the abuse of women. Gradually, all the women in the group started to relate their stories of abuse. It transpired that most of them had known one another for years, but nobody knew about the other's abuse; they had never talked about it before. By the end of the session, they all agreed that she should continue such preaching. As she remarks poignantly: "My sermons were

disrupting their ability to suffer in silence... They all talked about what it had been like to remain silent” (Brock and Parker, 2001, p.38).

None of the evidence which I have presented – neither from my participants nor from the literature – suggests that preaching on domestic abuse will provide magic solutions to the problem. However, I would argue that the vast majority of the evidence proves the necessity for breaking the silence, even though I acknowledge that how one goes about doing so is important. I will elaborate on this aspect below and in Chapter 6.

In this section I have demonstrated that a great deal of silence surrounds domestic abuse, as far as the church is concerned. This silence is as a result of women not always being taken seriously, those giving pastoral care not being able to come to grips with domestic abuse and the presence of the strong dominant male voice. While my participants recognised the importance of preaching on domestic abuse, there is still much fear and hesitation, especially in regard to how such preaching is done and what consequences it may have both on a pastoral level and the response of congregations in general. Moreover, Nellisery’s study, albeit from a different context, provides some corroboration for my notion that the church has been largely silent.

How Will The Silence Be Broken

In advocating the necessity of preaching on domestic abuse, I am by no means suggesting that a preacher should ‘bulldoze’ her way in. That is certainly not how the biblical prophets went about their business. For the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 6, I will explore ways in which this silence can be broken to enable other voices to be heard: breaking the silence of the preacher and breaking the silence of women and hearing the church’s prophetic voice.

The prevalence of domestic abuse, as I have demonstrated previously, is beyond question. Moreover, I would argue that it is common knowledge that racism, sexism and homophobia, among others, could, together with domestic abuse, be categorised as “radical evil” (Smith, 1992, p.1). Smith believes that preaching on these “radical evils” is necessary and the way in which she suggests this could be

done is by viewing preaching as weeping, confession and resistance (p.2). I see these three words as a triad of preaching. In employing the triad in this thesis, I am not suggesting that this is the only way in which to approach preaching on domestic abuse. However, I will argue that it is a useful model.

Smith does not use the term 'prophetic preaching' but I would argue that the fact that she refers to preaching on 'radical evils' implies that such preaching is prophetic. Moreover, I would argue that this triad might be one way of responding to the prophetic imagination: challenging the dominant narrative. For, as the ensuing discussion will show, all three parts of the triad form part of the alternative narrative. But before embarking on this discussion, I wish to suggest that Smith's components of the triad might not go far enough. I will use the term 'lament', rather than 'weeping', as lament involves more than weeping. Moreover, as far as 'confession' is concerned, even though Smith explains the use of the word, I suggest that 'exposing reality' or 'truth-telling' may embrace more appropriately what one is trying to achieve. Thus, Smith's triad will be referred to as: preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance and, ultimately, they all constitute a resistance to the dominant narrative within the context of the prophetic imagination.

Preaching As Lament

I did not canvass the question of lament with my participants, since I only realised its full significance when first drafting this chapter in 2018, whereafter I read more widely on the subject.

Even though suffering and lament are part of our everyday lives it appears that the church has by and large neglected the practice of lament. The purpose of this section is to place into perspective Smith's (1992) notion of "preaching as weeping", by examining the reasons for the neglect of lament, lament in the Bible, what lament encompasses and how it relates to preaching on domestic abuse.

Many Christ followers seem to think that if we are to praise God in all things and if nothing can separate us from God's love, lament might be perceived as a lack of faith. But this is not realistic because the world in which we live is a world of

disorientation and “disequilibrium” (Brueggemann, 1984, p.51). Thus, instead of seeing a lack of lament as a sign of faith, it is more likely either a denial of reality, or a “wishful optimism” and a notion that people of faith should not embrace negativity (p.51). These assertions of Brueggemann are in the context of his discussion of the Psalms. And in similar vein, but more particularly with reference to the prophets who took loss and grief seriously, Brueggemann (2012) asserts that the current dominant narrative is one that, “(rushes) past loss to confident recovery according to a tight ideology of success” (p.81). I interpret this to mean that in a culture where financial security and success count a great deal, the notion of grief and loss could be a sign of failure or vulnerability, something to which we would not necessarily readily admit.

A closely related reason which has been suggested for the absence of lament, especially in the western church, is that the church has become, what Stephen Lakkis (2009) calls “obese, bourgeois and powerful” (p.172). I understand this to mean that the church may be under the impression that there is no need for lament. Yet, the Hebrew Bible contains multiple examples of lament which come from a people who saw themselves elected by Yahweh and in a covenant relationship. As long as they observed the covenant, they surely deserved something better than their present torment. There was a feeling of entitlement to better things and this was the basis for the practice of lament in the face of suffering and the horror of destruction (pp.173, 176). In the New Testament, apart from the passion narratives, lament is less prominent. Despite the persecution of the early church, there is, for example, no sign of lament in the book of Acts (p.177). It is Lakkis’ view that suffering in the New Testament and the early church, took on a different meaning: there was no feeling of entitlement; to suffer was part of discipleship and was an honour and a distinction was made between deserved and undeserved suffering (pp.179-180). Ultimately, Lakkis does not advocate that the church should not engage in lament; instead, he recognises that life is constantly threatened by suffering and that there will always be a need to cry to God. He asserts: “If the lament of the churches connects with the destructive forces of oppression and injustice, it may then stand in a long tradition of biblical lament and align itself with the work of Christ” (p.181). While

Lakkis may be correct in his assessment of lament in the new Testament, there is a danger that he could be misunderstood. The disciples might well have thought of suffering as an “honour”, but this view does not take account of other forms of suffering which may not have come about in the act of proclaiming the gospel.

I mentioned earlier that lament involves more than weeping. How, then, might we define lament? We have noted that human suffering is part of everyday life and lament is a response to such suffering, on the part of the one who suffers. But the one who laments may also be responding to the suffering of others. Lamenting is not mere whining, nor does it necessarily mean that the lamenter has resigned herself to her situation (Polke, 2009, p.44). Instead, lament can be seen as coming from someone who has not been silenced but who is “putting up a fight, refusing to fall silent”. It could even be a form of revolt (p.44).

The psalter, in particular, contains many psalms of lament, what Brueggemann calls “Psalms of disorientation” (Brueggemann, 1984, p.51). Biblical laments are mostly addressed to God. They recognise suffering and plead with God that God should hear them and appealing to God to do something (Polke, 2009, p.52). But lament also signifies a relationship with God, trusting that God can do something to alleviate the situation (Welz, 2009, pp.118, 132). Lament can also include complaint to God, holding God directly or indirectly responsible for the situation (Tiemeyer, 2013, p.102). But lament always happens within the boundaries of faith. It is a crying out against God, anger against God, puzzlement at the situation, but recognising that God is present (Buchanan, 2013, p.157). And lament recognises that God is attentive to darkness and weakness, a God “of sorrow and acquainted with grief” (Brueggemann, 1984, p.52).

Lament in the biblical sense, as Polke (2009) sees it, is Jesus’ cry from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk15:34; Polke, p.52). This was a desperate cry, a cry of loneliness, perhaps even an accusation. And, I suggest, it is a cry with which many people could identify; those who suffer domestic abuse or other difficult situations. The God of the Hebrew Bible becomes, as it were, the God who suffers.

But why is lament important? None of the proponents of lament see it as doing it for its own sake; it is not, as we have seen, merely whining. Many of the lament psalms contain honest, even shocking, language. The psalmists tell God exactly how they feel. They do not shy away from their reality of suffering. They stem, as we have noted, from a relationship with God (Brueggemann, 1984, pp.53-54). These psalms enable us to give voice to our own grief and suffering. In other words, we could find our voice, our own cries to God, through these psalms. Lament allows people to articulate their grief and anguish. That was the objective of ancient rituals of communal lament (Boase and Taylor, 2013, p.206).

But it is generally recognised that lament as an expression of deep sorrow, pain and anguish, also serves as the starting point of the healing process (Boase and Taylor, 2013, p.206). Put differently: "To lament implies, therefore, to search for new orienting clues allowing a proper response to what has happened without denying its demand" (Klein, 2009, p.21). These approaches are borne out by the fact that the vast majority of the psalms of lament contain either an element of hope or conclude with praise (Matthews, 2013, p.191). Examples can be found in Psalm 13 and Psalm 22, among several other psalms. That lament can act as a healing agent, is also the view of Denise Ackermann (1998) writing as a South African feminist, with specific reference to the years after 1994 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She advocates a form of communal lament where victims and perpetrators lament together; on the road to hope and healing; confronting the past, letting go of the bitterness, leading to new hope (pp.95-96). This form of lament, as was the case with biblical lament, is not a 'one-off outburst', but a process.

But practising lament and paying closer attention to psalms of lament and other expressions of lament in the Bible, would also allow other voices to be heard. I cite two examples to illustrate how this might be brought about.

The first example is from Robert Parry who argues for a fresh look at the book of Lamentations as a source of lament (Parry, 2013, p.125). It is believed that the book was written as a liturgical response to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and was used in public worship (pp.125-126). He asserts that the church can

learn from the Jewish tradition of reading Lamentations, not only in the context of the destruction of Jerusalem, but also to reflect later events in Jewish history (p.127). Thus the text finds ongoing significance for the community and is not limited to the events portrayed by its original authors. The book continues to be meaningful to the descendants of those who suffered the destruction of Jerusalem and the later destruction of the temple in 70 CE (pp.128-129). The point that Parry makes is that Christians need to read Lamentations not only as reflecting their own suffering, but more importantly:

The book speaks of the brutal violence of the nations against Israel and it is sobering for gentile Christians to read the text not from the position of suffering-Israel, but in the role of the oppressive nations. Read in this way the book serves to invite the communities that have persecuted Israel to listen to the voices of their victims (pp.130-131).

The reason why I have cited this example is that, if I have understood Parry correctly, he proposes that other voices be listened to when reading the text of Lamentations. I would suggest that this analogy could be applied not only to texts of lament, but to other biblical texts, in order to hear other voices, which have been silent for too long. I will elaborate on this in Chapter 6 when proposing a feminist hermeneutic.

The second example comes from Stephen Garner (2013). He interprets the psalms of lament as recognising the presence of injustice, the oppressed, powerless and voiceless. The silencing of these voices puts the silencers on the side of the oppressor (p.234). He sees the role of these texts as ensuring that the voices of the oppressed are not lost and a demand that God must act. They also highlight the presence of violence in the community and call for transformed relationships. They speak against violence, urging non-violence and the restoration of “shalom in all its fullness” (pp.235-236). He also stresses the fact that lament should not be performed for its own sake and makes the important point that: “Lament is tied to the call for suffering to be alleviated and a new situation entered into, and to challenge hegemonic power in our society that

seeks to remove or marginalize the voices of those who would question it” (p.242).

I have cited these examples to emphasize the importance of listening to the voices of those who suffer, especially where they are on the margins of society because hearing their voices could be very uncomfortable, yet at the same time, challenging the oppressor, the dominant voice, to take notice of these voices and take them seriously.

In this section I have discussed the place of lament in the Bible and the reasons for its importance in the community of faith. For the purpose of this thesis, the voices of those who have suffered domestic abuse need to be heard as voices of lament and their suffering needs to be lamented by others, as an expression of solidarity with them, as I mentioned earlier. It is within this context that Smith’s (1992) notion of “preaching as lament” becomes important. She explains it thus:

people weep when they are alive to those things they cherish and value the most and are touched by something they can hardly name or utter. ... In sermons and acts of preaching, those who preach need to engage their deepest passions, their highest values, their surest convictions and make them present and alive in moments of proclamation (p.4).

And this, in my view, goes beyond mere weeping; it may include groaning and sighing as well (Cilliers, 2017, p.5).

I would argue that in order to do this, preachers would need to embrace not only the practice of lament in a biblical sense, but also be in touch with those who suffer from the ‘radical evils’ of, among others, domestic abuse. I see ‘lament’ as used both in a literal sense, but more particularly, figuratively, by presenting the voices of those who suffer; voices of the prophets and psalmists and voices of those in our own communities. I would also argue that lament can be an expression of solidarity with those who suffer. But preaching as lament is not a matter of manipulating people emotionally. Instead, it is an acknowledgment of

suffering and a starting point for healing and renewal (Brueggemann, 2012, pp.109-111).

Preaching As Confession/Truth-Telling

But lament is not an end in itself. If we are to follow a path to newness, the reality of domestic abuse needs to be exposed, what Smith (1992) terms 'confession'. Most people would associate confession with the prayer of confession in a worship service; a time of acknowledging our sins before God. But confession, as Smith sees it, is much broader than that, since confession practised in this way, could easily amount to an empty ritual and one which leaves people feeling guilty about what they have done, without necessarily offering hope (p.4). By contrast, the word 'confession' as used in this context, amounts to telling the truth about our lives and the world around us. Such truth telling often involves harsh realities. However, if preachers are to offer hope and transformation, realities must first be exposed (p.5). But, as I mentioned earlier, 'confession' is too narrow a concept. It is for this reason that I have proposed the word 'truth-telling', since it encompasses more than 'confession' and is not ambiguous; the word 'confession' could create an impression that one is confessing something for which one was not necessarily responsible.

I have already alluded to some of the realities surrounding domestic abuse. I proceed to discuss these in more detail. I previously indicated that all my participants are aware of the prevalence of domestic abuse in society. But awareness is not enough: such awareness needs to be translated into words. I would argue that a useful point of departure in exposing reality would be to dispel some of the myths surrounding domestic abuse. Christine Smith (1992) wonders whether the term 'domestic abuse' is sufficiently all-encompassing, for violence against women is not limited to domestic situations (p.75). I would argue that while she may be correct, I shall continue to use the term 'domestic abuse', without losing sight of the fact that it is much broader in scope than violence against women in domestic situations. Smith prefers the term 'battered women', but I take issue with this term, as 'abuse' is broader in scope than 'battering' and 'battered woman' sounds negative, in my view. Smith highlights some myths

regarding abused women. In essence, there is the myth that abuse affects only a small percentage of the population. Moreover, domestic abuse is not limited to a certain class of women and men, nor does it have much to do with a woman's or a man's education. There is also a belief that it is easy for an abused woman to leave home (p.76). But Smith indicates that the research suggests that abuse occurs across the board. As indicated previously, this fact was also acknowledged by the Report. She believes that holding to such myths could be an excuse for not addressing the issues.

In similar vein, writing within a context of how to involve men in combating domestic abuse, Al Miles (2002) points out, correctly in my view, that men need to be taught that women do not cause domestic abuse. Yet, it has been his experience when leading training courses for men, that they insist that the woman must have done something which provoked a man to abuse her (p.15). There are men who believe that they have a right to force themselves sexually upon their wives and girlfriends. Many men rely on the Bible for their attitude towards their wives or partners, as we saw in Chapter 2 (p.15).

Domestic abuse can never be justified and an awareness of some of the root causes of domestic abuse is important if preaching aims ultimately to bring about transformation. At the heart of the reality of domestic abuse is misogyny, hatred of women and its reality is lived out in male domination (Smith, 1992, p.65). Male domination means subordination of women. This is the truth which preachers need to confront if transformation is the ultimate goal. Men need to face up to the abuse of their power and the church needs to promote right relationships between women and men (pp.68-69).

While I agree that one of the causes of domestic abuse is misogyny, I would argue that it goes deeper and that the problem lies in patriarchy, which encompasses more than misogyny. I proceed to discuss how we might understand the reality of patriarchy.

Patriarchy

In Chapter 1 I cited a definition of patriarchy by Gilligan and Snyder (2018). The ensuing discussion is an elaboration on this phenomenon. I acknowledge that there is some overlap between this discussion and my discussion in Chapter 1 of the causes of domestic abuse. In essence, patriarchy has been characterized by subordination and domination: patriarchy sustains and perpetuates male control over females. And in order to maintain such control men often resort to violence (Bloomquist, 1989, pp.62-63). Such control results in men having power over women, thereby creating a hierarchical relationship. Al Miles (2002) agrees with the notion that patriarchy is one of the ways in which men justify domestic abuse (p.16). Thus, men's justification for violence against women is as a result of the patriarchal nature of biblical writings - these writings emanate from a patriarchal worldview - in general, as well as the patriarchal society in which many women still find themselves today. The exclusion or oppression of women and other marginalised groups may not necessarily have been the intention of biblical authors; they simply reflected their culture. I would agree with Carole Fontaine (1997) who asserts that "The Bible is the heir of patriarchy, not its originator" (p.94). In other words, the Bible did not create or invent patriarchy; its authors simply reflected the dominant worldview of that time and culture. However, even if one was to accept that patriarchy was part of the worldview of that time and culture, I would argue that one cannot hide behind the culture and condone patriarchy. One also must bear in mind that those who decided on the content of the biblical canon as we know it today, were most likely all male. Thus, the patriarchal nature of the Bible is a result both of biblical writers and those who compiled the canon.

Patriarchy has dominated the history of the church throughout the past two millennia. All popes have been men and until recently, all clergy have been men, as I pointed out earlier. They have dominated exegesis, agendas, theology and have even defined women's sexuality and presented it as a problem (Storkey, 2015, p.204). Men have a privileged position in a patriarchal society and many of them wish to preserve this dominant position and continue to control women by using violence. Patriarchy has been the dominant narrative in church and society

and in the twenty-first century, despite reforms and legislation, remains by and large the dominant narrative (Cooper-White, 2012, pp.54-55).³

Another consequence of patriarchy is that it has led to women being seen as inferior and has resulted in women being “scapegoated for sin” (Radford Ruether: 2002, 16). Radford Ruether does not explain this assertion, but I would suggest that the origin of this notion is the fact that Eve is seen as being primarily responsible for the so-called “fall” in Genesis 3 (Brock and Parker, 2001, p.31). It is recognised by Radford Ruether (2002) that the Bible is essentially patriarchal, while at the same time denouncing certain features of patriarchy (p.19). She uses some examples to illustrate this point. There is the example of idolatry, where males represent the divine and she sees it as “idolatrous to make males more ‘like God’ than females”. Another example is blasphemy: “it is blasphemous to use the image and name of the holy to justify patriarchal domination and law” (p.19).

In Chapter 6 I will discuss how the spell of patriarchy might be broken when I deal with a feminist hermeneutic.

In addition to unmasking the reality of patriarchy and misogyny, it is necessary to acknowledge that domestic abuse is a sin. This is the next step in the journey to transformation. The word ‘sin’ used in this context is estrangement, alienation which is contrary to God’s created order and contradicts God’s intention for our lives (Fortune, 2005, p.13). And as I pointed out in Chapter 2, the Methodist Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) also recognised the necessity of naming domestic abuse as a sin.

I would argue, therefore, that exposing the reality of and telling the truth about domestic abuse and its causes, is an important step towards trying to bring about a society where these realities no longer play such a significant role. Moreover, telling the truth from the pulpit may open up possibilities for women to realise

³ Cooper-White does not use the term ‘dominant narrative’, but I would argue that it is an apt description of her assertion.

that it is “okay” to talk openly about domestic abuse. And, as I have noted, such truth-telling is not part of the dominant narrative.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have dealt with the reasons why women have been by and large silent on domestic abuse. I have also provided evidence which proves that the church has been mostly silent on domestic abuse, both generally and more particularly, in its preaching. I have argued that it is necessary for the church to break the silence. I have suggested Christine Smith’s (1992) triad of preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance as a model for employing the prophetic imagination to resist the dominant imagination. I have discussed the role of lament in breaking the silence and pointed out that lament was not an end in itself and that the reality of the sin of domestic abuse and its causes, patriarchy and misogyny, must be exposed. Having broken the silence by lamenting and telling the truth of domestic abuse, the next chapter will focus on preaching as resistance against patriarchy and violence, in order to persuade and transform people.

Chapter 6

Preaching As Resistance To Patriarchy And Violence

Introduction

The silence has been broken; we have lamented and told the truth about domestic abuse which is rooted in patriarchy, but this is only part of the process of the Church's prophetic witness as it pertains to preaching on domestic abuse. Simply lamenting and telling the truth will have no potential to bring about transformation: the dominant narrative of domestic abuse must be resisted from the pulpit, by offering an alternative narrative. I will introduce the third element of Smith's (1992) triad, namely preaching as resistance. After a general discussion of how resistance preaching may be understood, I will discuss preaching as resistance to domestic abuse. I will then argue that in order for preaching as resistance to take place, preachers need to understand why they preach. This will be followed by a discussion of resistance to the dominant narrative of patriarchy, by employing a feminist hermeneutic in order to unmask patriarchy and violence. I will then discuss the story in Judges 19 and demonstrate how a horrific biblical story might be heard differently. And while this alternative narrative is not suggested as a "magic solution", I will argue that it is, at least, a valid option. But if this alternative narrative is to be used, we need to be able to persuade our listeners that this alternative narrative is possible. I will discuss preaching as persuasion and ask whether the sermon can transform lives and whether the monologic sermon is the only option for preachers. This is an important question, since this form of preaching affords a preacher a certain amount of power and control, both of which are directly linked to domestic abuse, as discussed in Chapter 1. In a sense, then, one could argue that the monologic sermon is part of the dominant narrative.

The purpose of this chapter constitutes the final steps on the way to presenting a world where violence makes space for love and acceptance; a clear prophetic witness that God envisages a world free from violence; a prophetic voice which must courageously proclaim this message from the pulpit.

Preaching As Resistance

In Chapter 5 I discussed Christine Smith's (1992) notion of preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance and explained why the terms 'lament' and 'truth-telling' were preferable to 'weeping' and 'confession' (p.3). She uses these three words, as the title of her book indicates, in the context of "radical responses to radical evil", including sexism, ageism, racism, to name a few examples. I discussed preaching as lament and dealt with its importance. Preaching as truth-telling was dealt with as exposing the reality of domestic abuse - caused mainly but not exclusively, by patriarchy and misogyny - and naming it as a sin.

I turn now to the third part of the 'triad', namely, preaching as resistance. Smith's (1992) notion of resistance goes beyond weeping and beyond confession. While confession is about truth telling, resistance, as it were, takes truth telling a step further. It is not a mere statement of facts and statistics; it is also not a mere reaction to evil. For, in a sense, a mere statement of facts and statistics and reactions to evil, are passive, in that they do not necessarily require a response. But resistance that explicitly takes a stand against evil must be proclaimed in such a way that it mobilizes a community into action (pp.5-6). Such resistance can take various forms. Smith acknowledges that truth telling itself could be seen as an act of resistance in a world committed to the denial of truth (p.6). This echoes Brueggemann's assertion that truth telling does not form part of the 'dominant imagination'. But resistance goes further than mere truth telling. It also goes beyond preaching and hearing good news; it amounts to "being good news", which, I suggest, is responding to preaching in a tangible way (p.7). She refers to this by naming such preaching as "God's redemptive act", which involves opposing evil forces and working with those who seek change; justice is the watchword (p.7).

But Smith's (1992) notion of preaching as resistance has wider application. It appears, having regard to a book of sermons published in 2018, that preaching as resistance has manifested itself, in some quarters at least, in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump (Snider, 2018). The majority of the sermons in the book were preached after the election and address issues of racism, sexism,

homophobia among others. This form of resistance could equally be applied in resisting the social evil of domestic abuse. Snider bases his notion of preaching as resistance on Smith's use of this term and acknowledges how difficult it is to do such preaching. Yet he asserts that the influence of preaching is not to be underestimated (p.1). His approach to preaching as resistance mirrors Brueggemann's metaphor of the prophetic imagination, even though Snider does not refer to Brueggemann. Preaching as resistance names the present realities but it is also an invitation to experience another reality; naming the reality of domestic abuse and inviting hearers to imagine a world in which the reality is non-violence (p.1). He uses what I see as an all-inclusive word, "the call of the kin-dom of God" and counters the present reality of dominance, subjugation and brute power, by emphasizing "Christ's saving work of justice, solidarity and love"; there must be resistance to dominant power structures in order to make room for the "transforming realm of God" (pp.1-2). Such preaching may not change the minds of those in power. Instead, it creates a sense of community and solidarity with those crushed by such power (p.3). I do not understand Snider's approach as discounting the possibility that those in power might change their minds. Instead, the main aim of resistance preaching is to name the evil and to create a climate in which there is both solidarity and hope that the present situation could change. In other words, preaching as resistance does not contain a magic formula which will change everything in an instant. But simply ignoring the evils in the world, the evils of racism, sexism, etc could be seen as an indirect form of collusion. It comes back to the discussion in Chapter 5 regarding the necessity to break the silence.

Preaching as resistance enables listeners to experience a new mode of being, rooted in Christ's saving work. Christ ushered in a new era, as references to his proclamation to, and inclusion of, those on the margins, discussed in Chapter 3, demonstrated. The sermon is the entry point which could cause hearers to long for the kin-dom of God and to spur them into action in order to bring it about (Snider, 2018, p.4). I understand Snider to say that preaching is not an end in itself; it is one medium among many others. "The hard work of marching,

protesting, demonstrating and forging community must accompany the hard work of preaching” (p.5).

Snider asserts that preaching as resistance has three aims, which, I would argue, could serve as an extension of Brueggemann’s prophetic imagination. In essence, preaching as resistance compares and contrasts the present world with the world that God might wish for, (“the subversive truth of the Gospel”). An example of this is found in the “radical imagination of the song of Mary and the ministry of Jesus” (Voelz, 2018, p.165). And resistance preaching invites listeners to another space and time in which the transforming realm of God is experienced (“The transforming truth of the Gospel”); this, too, is evident in Jesus’ ministry which challenged the dominant imagination by resisting oppression. And it equips listeners to “do the truth or make the truth happen by responding to the call of justice” (“The responsibility to the Gospel”). I would argue that this amounts to not being only “hearers of the Word” but also “doers of the Word” (Snider, 2018, p.5).

But resistance preaching, as important as it is, needs to guard against being authoritarian. It must not fall into the trap of those against whom we preach. Preaching can be authoritative without being authoritarian, by listening and collaborating with those who are underrepresented and threatened. An apt description of what this might mean is to ask: “How can I speak with and on behalf of, others, rather than to and for” (Voelz, 2018, p.166). This echoes the notion of listening to other voices, which has been a recurring theme.

Resistance preaching does not simply say what is wrong but offers an alternative to despair and cynicism. Such hope is both real and practical (Voelz, p.167). That was the work of the prophets and that is the task of contemporary preaching.

I would argue that in a sense, preaching as resistance and the persuasive nature of preaching go hand in hand, as I will demonstrate below. I would also argue that even though the principles mentioned by both Snider and Voelz, which both form part of the book of sermons mentioned earlier, could be applied to preaching as resistance in general and are not limited to preaching as resistance in the wake of Trump’s America.

But preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance are not merely useful metaphors. These concepts should form part of a 'homiletical methodology'. This encompasses constructing sermons in such a way that listeners experience forms of oppression, by the language and illustrations preachers use and also by telling the truth of oppression. Then there need to be invitations to respond. "Contemporary preaching needs to be an expression of our redemptive activity in the world". (Smith, 1992, p.8) I would argue that this is about trying to work towards bringing about a world free from violence and other social evils.

But how might preaching as resistance be employed? I mentioned in Chapter 3, Brueggemann's assertion that preaching should not be excessively confrontational. However, I would argue that there may be times when preachers may be called upon not only to be confrontational, but also angry. Anger, in this sense, does not refer to a petulant preacher who might be having a bad day. Instead, it recognises anger as a human emotion which, though it can have negative consequences, could also be employed in a positive way (Campbell, 1986, p.78ff; Wepener and Pieterse, 2016, p.414). God became angry, Jesus became angry, but this anger was rooted in love (Wepener and Pieterse, p.414). If a preacher wants listeners to envision new possibilities, such ideas are not abstract. One cannot be neutral about injustice; there must be passion which will stir the minds and hearts of listeners (p.415). This requires listeners to enter into the passion of the preacher. I would agree with this approach. I do not sense that the authors are advocating a preacher ranting and raving in the pulpit, but rather that preachers are enabling listeners to embrace what they are hearing and to respond to it. They use the expression "Preaching anger must become angry preaching in the pulpit" (p.416). I would also argue that the context in which these writers make these assertions, is important for an understanding of what they are saying. The current situation in South Africa has created a great deal of anger; anger because of corruption, violence and some continued after-effects of apartheid (pp.401-404). It is against this backdrop that they advocate "angry preaching". I would argue that such angry preaching, a form of preaching as resistance, could be appropriate in preaching on domestic abuse. A preacher cannot be neutral about domestic abuse. She needs to empower her listeners also

to be angry about domestic abuse. As was noted in Chapter 5, lament could involve anger. And this requires courage; Jesus fearlessly denounced oppression; contemporary preachers need to follow that example (Campbell, 1986, p.102).

Preaching As Resistance To Domestic Abuse

The foregoing discussion has focused on preaching as resistance in general. But in order to employ preaching as resistance it is necessary to elaborate on preaching as resistance as it pertains to domestic abuse. I recognize that there is some overlap between the discussion on truth-telling in Chapter 5 and preaching as resistance. In Chapter 1 I argued that patriarchy is at the heart of the aetiology of domestic abuse, without losing sight of other 'risk factors'. In order to resist patriarchy preachers need not only to tell the truth about patriarchy, but to make both women and men aware of the fact that men 'objectify' women, by using them as objects to manipulate at will; this worldview of male objectification needs to be deconstructed (Smith, 1992, p.67). In addition, women and men need to be made aware of what Smith sees as "the way in which women become male-identified under male supremacy" (Smith, p.67). I understand this to mean that women need to be encouraged to break the silence, as discussed in Chapter 5. Moreover, male identification causes women automatically to acknowledge male authority, actions and words. Many women choose this in order to survive and protect themselves from violence. Preachers need to be made aware of both objectification and male-identification in order to resist these evils from the pulpit. This will include imagining a new world where there is gender equality not only on the statute book, but also in practice (Smith, p.69). I would argue that this would be part of the prophetic imagination of contemporary prophetic preachers. Preachers need to stop denying the prevalence of domestic abuse and to confront it from the pulpit.

When I discussed the Conference Report in Chapter 2, I referred to the way in which the church has traditionally viewed the sanctity of marriage within a narrow understanding of family life. Preaching as resistance to domestic abuse must include new ways of understanding marriage which do not encourage women to remain in violent relationships but paint powerful, alternative pictures

of mutuality and gender equity. This must be part of the church's theological agenda in order to resist male domination (Smith, p.79-80). A new understanding of sin, as discussed in Chapter 2, is also necessary if we are to break the silence on domestic abuse from the pulpit. This includes a new understanding of the cross, as discussed in Chapter 2, so that the cross is not a symbol of atonement which may justify sacrifice and suffering, but a symbol of both suffering and the hope which the resurrection brings (Smith, p.83-84). Resisting domestic abuse from the pulpit also involves deconstructing the traditional understanding of creation which sees women as inferior. And preachers need to hold perpetrators accountable for their violence and encourage restitution and restoration (Smith, p.84-85).

I have briefly discussed preaching as resistance as it pertains to domestic abuse. In essence, it entails resisting patriarchy and violence. Before examining how such resistance may be brought about through preaching, it is important that preachers understand why they preach.

Why Do We Preach?

This may seem a strange question. It is obvious that as a presbyter I preach every Sunday because that is part of both my calling and the expectation of the church; it is, 'part of the job', so to speak. But I would argue that there is more to preaching than that. For if we do not know what we wish to achieve through our preaching, what would be the point of doing so? It was for this reason that I asked my participants why they preach, apart from the fact that it is their calling and that it is expected by the church.

There are a number of common themes that emanated from my question to my participants as to why they preach. All of them emphasized the importance of scripture and the necessity to help hearers understand the scriptures in such a way that they can apply it in their own lives, to give people 'tools' for living as a Christian in the world. They believe that the Bible has something to say to people today and for GR scripture is still relevant, because human nature has not changed: violence has always been there, but she believes it is important to apply scripture to today's situations. JH's metaphor is interesting. She does not preach

thematically, but uses scripture as if she were breaking open bread and feeding chunks of it to the congregation so that they can appropriate scripture for themselves and understand how to relate scripture to the issues they face in their daily lives. That preaching should be relevant, appropriate and connect with everyday life, was also stressed by both EL and MR.

GR felt strongly that she was “God’s voice”, that she was not speaking for herself but for God. This point connects with what I said in chapter 3 that the prophets were the mouthpieces of God, as contemporary preachers are today. Following on from the point that preachers are in the service of God, a number of participants stressed the importance of one’s conduct in church and beyond church: are we the same people in church as outside? Thus, preachers are not divorced from what they preach. Jesus’ preaching on the realm of God was reflected in the whole of his ministry and in his life (Bartow: 1997, 98-99). Bartow explains this by asserting that there is no separation of the medium from the message. In other words, the effect of sermons on listeners depends to a large extent on the credibility preachers have in their community. It does not guarantee persuasion but the response of listeners to a sermon will be influenced by their view of a preacher’s conduct and character (Reid and Hogan, 2012, pp.8-9). I would argue that this is related to my discussion in Chapter 3 regarding preaching as witness. The credibility of a witness in court is a major factor when evaluating the reliability of evidence and the same goes for a witness in the pulpit.

JN has a very definite goal: he preaches “for conversion, even to regular churchgoers”. He wants to keep people on fire; not to be complacent, to keep progressing and, “preaching to myself at the same time”. In similar vein, JD wants the church to move forward, depending on the need of the time. Preaching needs to encourage, exhort, challenge. Challenging people is important for all the participants. But encouraging people and enabling them to realise that they are loved and valued by God is also necessary, asserts JE.

In reflecting on my own objectives in preaching, I would agree with the views of my participants. That ancient book, the Bible, needs to come alive for people in our time and people need constantly to be challenged especially on social issues.

But it has also been my experience that many people seem to have a very narrow view of the Bible, not reading it critically. But I am also aware that there needs to be a synergy between what people hear from the pulpit and what they experience in their daily lives. This is the reason why I would argue that it is necessary to preach on domestic abuse: we have noted the prevalence of the phenomenon in our society; the media often make reference to domestic abuse; preaching on it connects the world out there with what we hear in church. This was also a common theme in the responses of my participants. I would argue that preaching needs to make connections between the biblical text and the world of the listeners to the sermon, as Stephen Wright (2007) helpfully asserts: "Preaching that does not engage with the world views and unexamined assumptions swirling around our culture, will be preaching that, for the most part, fails to connect with the concerns of most listeners" (p.53). Thus, sermons are not preached in a vacuum but are preached in the midst of a world where there are plenty of other messages which are heard by those who listen to sermons. Such messages come from social media, television and several other sources (p.67).

In addition, I would argue that one of the reasons why we preach is to enable people to encounter the living God through the use of scripture. But how such an encounter is brought about will depend largely on how a particular preacher approaches scripture.

Towards A Feminist Hermeneutic

When I discussed the approach of the Conference report to the Bible in Chapter 2, I pointed out that the Bible was a complex document which should not be read literally. I also pointed out that we need to listen to "other voices" when reading scripture. If we are to practise resistance preaching, we must pay close attention to the way in which we approach the Bible. Given my emphasis in Chapter 4 on adopting a feminist methodology in order to attend closely to the silenced voices of women, it follows that in my approach to interpreting Scripture, I should employ a feminist hermeneutic. I do not see this as a "magic solution" but rather that this might be an effective way in which to resist the dominant narrative of

patriarchy and violence and open up new horizons of more inclusive and liberatory readings.

In advocating a feminist Biblical hermeneutic, it is necessary briefly to examine what is meant by feminism. In essence, Christian feminism and resultant feminist theology are based on the premise that women and men are equal, since God made both women and men in God's image, according to the account of creation in Genesis 1:27 (Carmody, 1995, pp.6-7). Moreover, as Carmody tritely points out, children get half their chromosomes from their mother and the other half from their father and that women and men have both played an equal part in shaping human history (pp.6-7). While this is obvious, it is not how society functions in practice. Thus, Christian feminism offers a counter-voice to the dominant voice of patriarchy, a system that has dominated human history from the beginning of time and has had a negative impact on the lives of both women and men. Patriarchy has caused women's voices to be silent and has diminished women's influence. Patriarchy is unjust and has led to women being seen as inferior to men; but Christian feminists strive for a world where women and men are equal and where the one does not rule over the other (p.35). Christian feminists "are proposing revisions designed to remove the baleful effects of traditional patriarchy and accommodate the insights of women" (p.66). Moreover, feminists want to root out patriarchy and emphasize how the church and society can benefit from their contribution. The predicate "Christian" in a discussion of feminism is important, as far as Carmody is concerned; "by a dozen titles, then, Christians should be feminists" (Carmody, 1995, pp.2-3). If feminism is primarily about equality, with no hierarchy between women and men, men can also be feminists in their outlook (p.7).

Carmody's approach to feminist theology is not the only one. There are several strands of Christian feminist theology. Many poor women point out that their approach to theology is different from that of white well-educated wealthy women. For many poor women oppression is about much more than gender and patriarchy. Their oppression is also related to class, race and economic status (McKenna, 1994, pp.185-186). This is important because just as there is the male

dominant culture, there is a danger that there could be dominant voices in feminism; dominant voices of white privileged women (p.185).

One example of how poor women are oppressed is found in the biblical story of Hagar and Sarah in Genesis 16 and 21. Sarah was the dominant of the two women, since Hagar was a slave and a foreigner (p.186). Hagar's oppression was as a result of both her gender and her social class. I understand McKenna's approach – echoing that of other prominent feminist and womanist theologians -- as one which warns against domination of any kind. Thus, in interpreting biblical stories one must be mindful of all marginalised voices, not only women of a specific class or race but all women.

In the light of my discussion of Christian feminism, I will now examine how scripture might be interpreted from a feminist perspective. How has patriarchy influenced the reading of scripture and how might the feminist hermeneutical voice counter the dominant patriarchal voice?

I dealt with the feminist critique of some of the metaphors employed by the prophets in Chapter 3, where I pointed out that given the offensiveness of some of these metaphors to women, that it would be tempting to give up on the prophets altogether. The same is true for the remainder of the Bible. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, on the face of it, the Bible promotes patriarchy and power, the very core of domestic abuse. Accordingly, feminist theologians propose that the Bible be read in such a way that patriarchy and power are unmasked. This cannot be done simply by focusing on texts which deal with selected biblical women (Sawyer, 2002, p.11). Instead, it needs to be recognized that patriarchy is a system of power relations between men and women, determined by particular constructions of masculinity and femininity.

And while it is true that the Bible is essentially patriarchal and that the decrees laid down for sexual behaviour indicate that male interests are central, there are texts which challenge patriarchal autonomy. For example, it was at Sarai's suggestion that Abram impregnated Hagar, in order to ensure that Abram would have descendants, given that Sarai was barren (Sawyer 2002, p.51). The point Sawyer makes is that Abram was the passive party in the story and that "as a

woman, her assertiveness further undermines her husband's authority in the face of the super-macho power of the divinity" (p.53). However, this does not detract from the overall patriarchal nature of the Bible. For even though Sarai is the assertive one, her barrenness was frowned upon in a patriarchal society and it is within this context that Sarai takes the initiative to ensure that Abram will have an heir (Exum, 1985, p.76-77). And it must be borne in mind that the Bible is a book written by men, whose canon was determined by men and whose interpretation and exegesis was by and large male-dominated for the greatest part of the history of biblical interpretation.

I recognize that feminist scholars do not adopt a uniform approach in order to counterbalance this male hegemony, though their approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I also recognize that in a thesis of this nature it is neither possible nor practical to deal with all these approaches. For this reason, I proceed to discuss Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "fourfold hermeneutic" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984) as a framework that might better equip preachers to challenge domestic abuse in their engagement with Biblical texts. I will do so in conversation with other literature. Fiorenza's model of 'suspicion, proclamation, remembrance and creative actualisation' enables preachers both to challenge and reclaim patriarchal texts in order to preach more effectively against domestic abuse.

A few introductory remarks will place her approach in proper perspective. The purpose of feminist theology, as Schüssler Fiorenza sees it, is advocacy and liberation (p.xiv). She takes what I see as a broad view of patriarchy,

a pyramidal system and hierarchical structure of society and church in which women's oppression is specified not only in terms of race and class but also in terms of 'marital status' (p.5).

I find her reference to the Bible as 'mythical archetype' versus the Bible as 'historical prototype' particularly instructive as a way in which to clarify how the Bible has been traditionally interpreted and how an alternative approach might work. If the Bible is a 'mythical archetype' it is universal for all time and must be accepted as patriarchal, androcentric and dominated by a male God. In this view

of the Bible, it is normative and authoritative for all times and all cultures and should either be wholly accepted by feminists or rejected out of hand. This view of the Bible is, as far as Schüssler Fiorenza is concerned, still part of the dominant narrative of many preachers (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.11-12). The Bible as 'historical prototype', on the other hand, allows revelation to be an ongoing process. This approach does not seek to identify with certain biblical texts and traditions, but rather solidarity with women in biblical religions (p.14). Women can then make connections between their own struggles, historical struggles of women and thereby develop a vision for the future (p.14). The Bible is no longer something to obey or submit to uncritically. Instead, it involves a critical interpretation of biblical texts and then making connections between such texts and the present situation of women (p.15). It is from this base that Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a fourfold hermeneutic, which encompasses a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics of proclamation, a hermeneutics of remembrance and a hermeneutics of creative actualization (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.15 ff). I will discuss each of these in turn.

A hermeneutics of suspicion is the starting point, since the Bible is written in androcentric language and reflects patriarchal social structures. Such an approach is in contradistinction to a hermeneutics of consent and affirmation. Schüssler Fiorenza uses the symbol of unearthing the 'feminist coin' from the Bible, with reference to the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15. This has resulted in unearthing maternal God-language in the Old testament, women's apostleship in the early church and the leadership of women in the ancient synagogue (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.15-16). A hermeneutics of suspicion also questions the way in which certain texts have been read from an androcentric point of view and then have sought to justify the treatment of women. In her discussion of a hermeneutics of suspicion, Deborah Sawyer suggests reading such texts 'against the grain' (Sawyer, p.47-48). She cites 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as an example. At face value, this passage forbids women to speak or teach in church and instructs them to dress modestly. The reason given by the writer is that Eve, not Adam, was deceived and therefore that Eve was the transgressor. This text has been used and

still is used, by many denominations, to justify the exclusion of women from the priesthood and certain other offices and positions.

However, feminist hermeneutics reveal a more complex picture. 1 Timothy is believed to have been written later than some other epistles and after a period in the history of the early church where women seem to have been more prominent (West, 2004, pp.165-166). This text reflects the patriarchal nature of the Graeco-Roman household and seems to contradict the egalitarian approach of the early church in order to make it more acceptable to the unequal societal status quo, the dominant worldview (p.166). The complicating factor is the writer's patriarchal reading of the Genesis story, in which all the blame for the "fall" is placed on Eve (p.167). This notwithstanding the fact that Adam had a choice; he was not obliged to eat the fruit and is as much to blame as Eve is. Although this reading is obviously androcentric one also needs to read this text in the light of the overall message of the New Testament and conclude that it is not in keeping with the overall ministry and message of Jesus (pp.169-170). This example reinforces my earlier point that one cannot simply ignore or "wish away" this text and other "texts of terror". Instead, we must engage with them critically and constructively. I would argue that the way in which 1 Timothy 2 has been used against women, is a good example of Schüssler Fiorenza's assertion that we study statements about women but not about men and this reflects the androcentric paradigm of our culture (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984, p.16). Reading texts 'against the grain' is therefore an act of resistance to the dominant patriarchal narrative. I will return to this point when dealing with the story of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19.

Schüssler Fiorenza also makes the point that all androcentric biblical language must be understood as generic language, unless the context indicates otherwise and unless women and female aspects are explicitly excluded (p.17). There are some contemporary translations, such as the New Revised Standard Version, that attempt to be inclusive, except that this translation still designates God as male. A hermeneutics of suspicion thus focuses on both biblical translation, as well as biblical interpretation.

The next part of Schüssler Fiorenza's fourfold hermeneutic is a hermeneutics of proclamation which "assesses the Bible's theological significance and power for the contemporary community of faith" (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.17). This approach makes connections between oppressive biblical texts and the contemporary struggles of women. It resists the notion that such oppressive patriarchal and sexist texts can claim the authority of divine revelation. It also assesses the interaction between patriarchal biblical texts with contemporary culture. But the oppression of women is not reinforced only by patriarchal texts. For example, some women are told to stay in an abusive relationship with reference to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and women's call to altruism is used to justify their submission and subordination (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.18). Connected with Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of a hermeneutics of proclamation, is what Marjorie Procter-Smith refers to as a "feminist theology of proclamation" (Procter-Smith, 1993, p.313). She sees this as a commitment to change; a commitment to women which must take precedence over a commitment to scripture which can be oppressive and disempowering. This model of proclamation, entails pointing to texts that silence women; texts that portray women's struggle for emancipation, their courage and resistance to oppression. Such proclamation aims to bring about change in church and society; it is emancipatory and empowers women to speak for themselves (Procter-Smith, p.313-314). I would argue, then, that such a hermeneutics of proclamation is not possible without a hermeneutics of suspicion.

The third part of Schüssler Fiorenza's fourfold hermeneutic is a hermeneutics of remembrance "that recovers all biblical traditions through a historical-critical reconstruction of biblical history from a feminist perspective" (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.19). This involves viewing biblical history from a feminist perspective: the suffering of women, their role in history and tradition, which are found both in egalitarian texts and androcentric patriarchal texts. This enables us to feel solidarity with the suffering of our fore-sisters, as well as enabling us to express our solidarity with both present and future suffering (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.19). I understand this to mean that women take centre-stage in a reconstruction of biblical history, by, for example, highlighting the role of women in the early church

and reclaiming the biblical roots of a discipleship of equals. Accordingly, a hermeneutics of remembrance does not focus solely on patriarchal oppression, but also on the liberation of women (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.20).

The final part of the fourfold hermeneutic is a hermeneutics of creative actualization. Not only do women remember their historical roots, they actively engage in biblical stories “with the help of historical imagination, artistic recreation, and liturgical ritual” (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.20). Biblical stories are retold from a feminist perspective and to “create narrative amplifications of the feminist remnants that have survived in patriarchal texts” (Schüssler Fiorenza, p.21). I would argue that one can make a connection between this creative actualization and the prophetic imagination which posits an alternative narrative of gender equality as opposed to the dominant narrative of patriarchy. In addition, creative actualization involves creating new liturgies and prayers in a way that resists traditional androcentric language. This is important since the sermon is part of the whole liturgical experience during a worship service.

What is the relevance of this for my aim of developing models of preaching as resistance to domestic abuse? I would argue that Fiorenza’s fourfold hermeneutic would deconstruct the objectification of women and male-identification to which I have referred. This is so because this hermeneutical approach turns the biblical story on its head, as it were. It does not shy away from ‘awkward’ biblical texts but faces them head-on and names them as texts of terror. At the same time, as discussed in this section, there is a message of liberation to be found within the pages of the Bible, especially in the ministry of Jesus, to which I referred in Chapter 3. This model might also impact the style and substance of preaching in a more constructive way. If preachers treat the Bible as a mythical archetype, there is a danger that sermons will encourage listeners to believe that the Bible must be “obeyed” uncritically. It could lead to the glib statement “the Bible says”. However, if preachers were to treat the Bible as historical prototype, listeners may be encouraged to regard the bible as a living document which is open to new revelations. This hermeneutical approach does not deny the authority of the bible, but instead, encourages an approach to scripture as non-hierarchical. It also has the possibility that preachers will not use the Bible to manipulate people, but

to liberate them. Moreover, this hermeneutical model does not lose sight of the fact that the Bible does have power and that, despite its flaws, many have found in its pages hope and comfort, amidst all the abuses to which the Bible has been put against women (Ringe, 2014, pp.3-5).

This overview of feminist hermeneutics does not contradict the conclusions of the Methodist Report discussed in Chapter 2. Instead, it offers a more nuanced way in which to read and interpret the Bible. It has highlighted the importance of exposing the patriarchal nature of the Bible and how this might have an impact on preaching on domestic abuse.

The use of this fourfold hermeneutic, therefore, might serve to equip preachers to preach on domestic abuse because it seeks to confront the Bible head-on, taking a critical but reconstructive approach. It does not seek to explain away texts of terror, nor to avoid preaching on them, but it does make connections between violence in the Bible and violence in the contemporary world, thereby enabling preachers themselves to address such issues in their sermons.

In the light of the discussion of preaching as resistance to patriarchy and violence, I proceed to discuss how a biblical story provides a good example of how this might be done in practice.

The Rape Of The Levite's Concubine

The majority of my participants recognised the importance of confronting violence in scripture and they agreed that the stories about violence were dreadful. They also accepted that the fact that the Bible contains stories of violence does not constitute a condonation of such violence. The Bible is not a rule book nor is it simply an ethical document, which must be followed slavishly and uncritically. This reflects the hermeneutical model discussed in the preceding section. Bearing this in mind, I proceed to discuss the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 and how one might approach this story and how we might understand it today. The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate ways in which violence in scripture may be approached, by using an example of such an incident and bearing in mind the principles which I outlined in Chapter 2 when

dealing with violence in scripture. I will also use this narrative to illustrate how one might apply Christine Smith's triad discussed in Chapter 5 and in this chapter, as well as a feminist hermeneutic.

Judges 19 tells the story of a Levite who took for himself an unnamed concubine. She became angry with him and went to her father's house. He went to fetch her and after staying with her father for several days she and he returned to their home. On the way, they spent the night at Gibeah. They were offered hospitality by an old man. During the night, the old man's house was surrounded and the mob demanded that the Levite come out so that they could "have intercourse with him" (19:22). The old man refused them entry, but he offered his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine, instead. The concubine was gang-raped and was left at the door of the house. The next morning the Levite found his concubine on the doorstep. When he received no response to his call, he put her on his donkey. He returned home and cut her body into twelve pieces and sent the body parts throughout Israel. Then he called a counsel. When he was asked what had happened the Levite said that they had tried to kill him and had raped his concubine. This led to an attack on the people of Gibeah. It is interesting to note that the Levite nowhere mentions that the concubine was offered to the men. The blame was placed squarely on the men of Gibeah, the Levite exonerating himself completely.

This story clearly demonstrates that men seem to have more value than women. The "old man" was not going to allow a mob to abuse his guest, the Levite. Yet he was quite prepared to offer both his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine as a substitute, seemingly not caring what the consequences might be. This is a shocking story, a graphic example of violence against women. And it is more shocking that such a story should have found its way into the canon, especially as it is not the only story in the Bible that portrays violence against women.

It has already been acknowledged that the Bible was written in a particular time and place. The book of Judges deals with a time in Israel's history when they kept on disobeying God. And while Creach (2013) may be correct when he suggests that violence against women in the book of Judges symbolizes Israel's

deterioration and downfall, this fact does not detract from the awfulness of the deed (p.125). He does not see the book of Judges as overlooking the violence done to women but “offers a strong, if subtle critique of it”. He recognises that Judges does condone violence but sees it as serving the purpose of liberation (p.126). However, I find it hard to read any elements of liberation when reading Judges 19. And even if Creach is correct that these stories should not be taken literally, one cannot ignore the violence in this narrative (p.128). Moreover, Creach does not view the book of Judges as misogynist, because roles of men and women in the book are “more complex than is often recognised” and the graphic portrayal of violence does not constitute tacit approval (p.127). But I would argue, by the same token, that there is no explicit condemnation of the violence and this could lead one to deduce a certain neutrality of the author(s) of this story. What is more, if this story is not an example of misogyny, it begs the question: what is it then? I would suggest Creach’s approach is an example of what Schüssler Fiorenza sees as viewing the Bible only from an androcentric point of view, as discussed earlier. Moreover, there is no indication that Creach has placed what Schüssler Fiorenza calls a ‘warning label’ on this passage; instead, he has overemphasized the historical context at the expense of making a closer connection to a contemporary context (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985, p.130).

I would argue that whether or not the author(s) of this story are neutral, a reader cannot be neutral. Therefore, I concur with Phyllis Trible (2002), who describes this story, together with those of Hagar and Ishmael, the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel) and Jephthah’s daughter (earlier in the book of Judges), as ‘texts of terror’. My understanding of her approach is that she does not ‘play down’ the violence in these stories. These are stories of outrage which are interpreted on behalf of their female victims, “in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again” (p.4). In interpreting this story, Trible draws a comparison with an account in Genesis 19 where Lot offers females to satisfy males’ pleasure. The stories show that the rules of hospitality protect only males, not females. The ‘old man’ in Judges 19 could not, in terms of the rules of hospitality, allow his male guest to be violated. Yet he was prepared to offer his daughter and the Levite’s concubine.

And it is noteworthy, as Tribble points out, that in neither the Genesis nor the Judges story does the male host offer himself in place of his guests. Innocent women are used to gratify men's desires (p.54). Tribble points out that this anonymous woman has no humanity, no friends; she is property, object, tool (pp.60-61). As Tribble poignantly puts it: "Lesser power has no woman than this, that her life is laid down by a man" (p.61).

But for Tribble (2002), this story does not simply belong to a distant era. She points out, in my view correctly, that misogyny, violence, rape still occur in our own time. In many societies, women remain mere 'objects' (p.66). She urges that the present reality of this story needs to be confessed and that it requires repentance and a stance that says, "never again"! (p.66). A different perspective is that of Van Wijkbos, though I do not see this approach as contradicting that of Tribble but taking the story further. I indicated in Chapter 2 that Van Wijkbos (1998) believes that all violence in scripture is contrary to God's view of creation. As regards the story in Judges 19, Van Wijkbos contrasts the difference in the socio-economic context of the Bible, with the contemporary context. It was pre-industrial, and women were by and large part of an extended family. She sees contemporary women, at least in western industrialised society, as better off than biblical women, but recognises that in our time, homeless women, for example, are very vulnerable (pp.31-32). But she qualifies this by stating:

These observations should serve to avoid simplistic messages that take for granted improvements in women's experiences today over those of women in biblical times. Rather, delineating distinctions as clearly as possible may help to focus and sharpen questions in terms of contemporary women's lives (p.31).

Whatever our approach to this story it needs to be borne in mind, as has been mentioned previously, that the fact is that the worldview within which biblical authors operated is the dominant male worldview (Exum, 2016, p.xxiii). As a result, the female voice is either silent or what Exum sees as "muted". Thus, it seems to me, that this is the point of departure for Exum when interpreting Judges 19. The anonymity of the concubine encourages readers not to view her as a

person in her own right (p.140). Exum sees the rape of the concubine as a punishment for leaving her husband; she is no longer entitled to male protection. She has acted against the social order, against the patriarchal system (p.143). The subsequent dismembering of her body serves to “de-sexualize” her. For Exum, the narrator is not consciously misogynistic, though it is not clear how she reaches this conclusion. Rather, she sees it as “a subtext motivated by male fear of female sexuality and by the resultant need of patriarchy to control women” (p.145). Jenni Williams (2014) also stresses the silence and muteness of the woman and that she had no choice, but points out that despite her silence, the author chose to give a graphic description of what happened to her. (Judges 19:27, 55) The description fills the reader with horror; it is brutal, dreadful. But silence is not limited to the woman: God is silent and the author is silent, in that he makes no judgment, other than to point out the lawlessness and lack of morality in the kingless Israel (pp. 53, 57). But for Williams, the fact that the woman is silent, does not mean that her story is silent. It may resonate with many contemporary readers. Ultimately:

The woman is silent, as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 is silent, but like him she is centre stage. Her story shouts at the reader, demanding attention. Those who have been silenced, even as the woman was silenced, may find their story shouted here (p.60).

And in order for this story to ‘shout’ in the lives of contemporary women, a re-reading of the story in Judges 19 will allow both this story and the stories of women today to speak and act “boldly against misogyny in all of its perverted forms” (Kuja, 2016, p.89). And in contrast to both Creach and Exum, Kuja’s view is that misogyny is at the heart of this story (p.90). This approach is significant, bearing in mind that Kuja writes as a male; yet I see his view that misogyny is the root of the violence as a strong one. For, as he sees it, the woman was not only silent and silenced; she was stripped of her humanity; she was objectified (p.92). Misogyny comes about because males in a patriarchal society “could not bear the otherness of a female, and so turned to violence in order to eliminate the threat” (p.92). And the actions of males in the story have, for centuries, been justified by accusing the unnamed woman as an adulteress deserving of punishment (p.93). It is suggested by Kuja – and I find his argument persuasive – that not only should

this woman be viewed with compassion; she should also be granted a return to dignity (p.93). It is about hearing her voice speaking through the silence, as it were, allowing her to speak against misogyny and all its consequences. This approach resonates with what was mentioned in Chapter 2, regarding a dialogical reading of scripture which allows the reader to hear other voices in the text, voices which may not have been heard previously. Kuja echoes the views of Tribble, Exum and Williams, that this story reflects the story of many anonymous women in the present. And this reading of the story allows us to participate in healing and the rooting out of misogyny (p.94). And for Kuja, as for Williams, “the silence of the biblical text often speaks louder than words” (Kuja, p.94). But Kuja also sees this story as having an important message for men: namely, “an honest and often painful reflection on the ways we (males) feel threatened by the female other” (p.95). Ultimately, we need to find in this story what Van Wijkbos calls a “liberative word” (Van Wijkbos, 1998, p.32). We can do this without playing down the stark reality of the violence in this story.

This is a horrific story; it is a story which should cause us to lament: to lament its cruelty, to lament the fact that this defenceless woman did not have a support of a community. I would go as far as saying that we should mourn her rape and death. And we need to acknowledge the violence in the story and recognise that it is awful, it cannot be played down or justified. Moreover, we need to read the story, as the above discussion has demonstrated, in a way which empowers contemporary women to hear their stories in the story of this nameless woman and to make clear that such stories are not unique to a time long ago; they are the stark reality of many women’s lives throughout the world. At the same time, such contemporary reading needs to make it clear that even though this story is in the Bible, it cannot serve to justify violence against women, or any other violence, for that matter (Cooper-White, 2012, pp.38-41).

This story is also a good example of what Schüssler Fiorenza means when she refers to certain biblical passages that “cannot claim the authority of divine revelation”, as discussed earlier (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984, p.18). Moreover, this story may empower women who have suffered violence to identify with this woman and enable them to know that, ultimately, God is on the side of those on

the margins. I would argue that Kuja's (2016) approach is particularly instructive, especially in regard to his challenge to contemporary men and the hard questions which this story might evoke in their minds as part of telling the truth about violence. I would argue that Kuja's approach offers a message of resistance; resistance to violence and misogyny. But resistance preaching, in resisting the dominant narrative, needs to offer a message of hope; that the way of violence is not the only way.

If we place the story in Judges 19 within the overall message of the Bible, we find a message of love and solidarity, especially with those on the margins. This was Jesus' message, for example Luke 4:18, which speaks of "good news to the poor", as has been mentioned previously. Moreover, I would argue that this story should hold men accountable for violence, with reference to my earlier discussion of Smith's approach to resistance preaching.

All the above approaches recognise the awfulness of this incident and do not try and make excuses for the behaviour of the Levite. They send a clear message that violence can never be condoned. But this is not everyone's view. I deal briefly with Victor Matthews' (2004) approach, in order to illustrate how not to approach such stories, in my view. Although Matthews, in his commentary on Judges, recognises the awfulness of this story, nevertheless, in my view, draws what I consider to be a pious platitude from this story, in his application to our contemporary world. He mentions the fact that people often place clergy on a pedestal, though, like the Levite they are not always exemplary characters and talks about their responsibility to their congregations in how they live and what they preach. He considers that even negative examples can be instructive (pp.201-202). I fail to see how this approach relates to the story in Judges 19. Moreover, he continues by commenting on the various wrong choices made by the concubine and her husband: could the couple not have worked out their relationship; should they not have left early in the morning, thus avoiding the necessity of having to stay overnight, to cite some examples of his approach (p.202). While it may be true that wrong choices were made, nowhere in his commentary, does Matthews deal with the incident in a way which speaks to women who have suffered violence, nor to men who perpetrate it. I would argue

that simply to say that life's choices bring consequences, is too trite and does not display the courage to tackle the passage head-on and to take a stand on the fact that such violence, while its origin and reasons might be explained within its historical context, can surely never be condoned. I am not suggesting that Matthews condones the Levite's behaviour; instead, I am suggesting that he plays it down and does not come out strongly enough against it. His approach is not a resistance to patriarchy or violence.

Having discussed the various approaches of biblical commentators to this passage, I return to Schüssler Fiorenza's (1984) fourfold hermeneutic in terms of how preachers might apply it to Judges 19. I bear in mind, as mentioned previously, that the purpose of feminist theology is advocacy and liberation. If one were to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion to Judges 19, one would not justify the treatment of the Levite's concubine by asserting that she must be punished for leaving her concubine. Instead, as the previous discussion has demonstrated, one must see the story for what it is: cruelty and violence, which cannot be justified under any circumstances.

A hermeneutics of proclamation would connect the awfulness of this story with the plight of many contemporary women and their experience of violence. Patriarchy is at the heart of this story and as I indicated in Chapter 1, it is the root cause of domestic abuse. And using the approach of Procter-Smith (1993) referred to earlier, this text is an example of a woman who was oppressed and silenced, but who was unable to offer resistance.

And in a hermeneutics of remembrance this story could serve to remember this unnamed woman and contemporary women who face violence and to offer and express solidarity with women today. Such remembrance will not focus solely on the historical context of Israel's lawlessness, but rather on the circumstances of the woman in this story. And in expressing solidarity, it might empower women to become more proactive in their struggle against violence.

A hermeneutics of creative self-actualization could contribute to bringing this about. This might involve re-enacting this story in a creative way through artistic expression such as drama, poetry or music (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985, p.134-

135). New liturgies and prayers could serve both as acts of lament but also resistance and healing.

Subsequent to the submission of my thesis, I preached on Judges 19 on Domestic Abuse Sunday on 24 November 2019. Without giving a full summary of the sermon, I will briefly outline how my research has had an impact on my preaching on this passage. (I had never preached on it but had preached other sermons on domestic abuse, using the story of Hagar and Ishmael).

Having regard to the responses of my participants and their concern for the possible consequences of preaching on domestic abuse, especially from a pastoral point of view, I highlighted these risks at the beginning of the sermon and invited people to talk to me should the sermon raise any pastoral issues for them. In previous sermons on domestic abuse I had not been as conscious and mindful of this fact. (My previous sermons on domestic abuse were preached before completing my research).

I pointed out the dangers of passing off the story simply by asserting that the event described here is a consequence of turning away from God. I then used Smith's triad of lament, truth-telling and resistance. The sermon largely echoed my preceding discussion, though I did not specifically mention that I had used a feminist hermeneutical approach. In addition, I mentioned that the story needs to be seen within the overall biblical message fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. And I used Smith's triad to suggest that Jesus lamented the state of the world; Jesus told the truth about the evils in the world and he resisted the status quo by keeping company with women, outcasts, etc. So threatened did the Establishment feel, that they killed him. I then challenged the congregation by asking if we have become too comfortable and complacent. And whether we have lost our commitment to our prophetic witness. The message of Judges 19 moves us to say an emphatic "no" to all forms of violence and to offer an alternative to the dominant voice; the value and dignity of all and that we are daughters and sons of God.

I did not keep a written record of the congregation's response and I am mindful of the ethical implications of discussing them in detail. But a few points will give

an indication of their response without overstepping ethical boundaries. I gained the impression that few, if any, knew that this story was in the Bible. Those appointed to read the lesson on that day, were shocked to read it and wondered what kind of sermon would come out of it. I did not receive any negative comments. Overall, there was a realization that it took courage to preach on such a passage and topic. I also gained the impression that no-one was surprised that I should tackle this passage, as they seem to have become accustomed to the fact that my preaching is, as far as they are concerned, very different from that to which they have been exposed in the past.

I did not feel uncomfortable about preaching on this passage, as I strongly believe in the church's prophetic witness and am not afraid to go beyond my comfort zone. I was a little nervous as to how the congregation would respond, though I did not anticipate that it would be altogether negative.

In my discussion of resistance preaching I have argued that such preaching offers an alternative: an alternative to patriarchy, power and violence; an alternative to despair and cynicism and a way of hearing the voices of silenced women such as the Levite's concubine. Ultimately, the aim of such preaching is to persuade listeners that there is an alternative to the dominant narrative of patriarchy and violence. Not all homileticians agree that preaching has persuasive power. Nevertheless, I will argue that preaching does have the potential to persuade.

Preaching As Persuasion?

In my discussion of preaching as resistance, I pointed out that such preaching is not only about confronting issues in a way which in itself could be seen as resistance, but also that such preaching invites listeners to a new way of being and a new way of thinking. I also bear in mind Voelz's (2018) assertion that resistance preaching might not result in oppressors and others changing their minds (pp.163-167). Nevertheless, if preaching is a rhetorical art as discussed in Chapter 3, how could preaching be employed as a rhetorical art in a practical way?

In advocating preaching as persuasion, I do not believe that such persuasion is tantamount to manipulation or that it is done in an authoritarian way. Such an

approach does not lose sight of the fact that a preacher has a certain amount of power, but such power is not dominant, nor is it coercive (Hogan, 1999, p.3). Moreover, persuasion does not mean that the person who is being persuaded might change their opinion, though this may result. Instead, I would argue that persuasion in preaching may lead someone to think differently, or to realise that there may be an alternative point of view. In worship we are persuaded that God loves us and invites us to new life and that we are all included (Hogan, p.3). I would agree with the approach that discourse is inherently persuasive, regardless of whether the preacher intends to persuade her listeners (Hogan, p.3; Hogan and Reid, 1999, p.16). And persuasion does not mean that the opinion of others is not respected. Another aspect of the persuasive nature of preaching is the question of passion and emotion. I referred earlier to 'angry preaching' and I mentioned that preachers could not be neutral when preaching about domestic abuse. If a preacher has no passion or feeling regarding the subject on which she is preaching, especially domestic abuse, this may soon be evident. Stirring emotions does not mean that a preacher must be manipulative, making herself guilty of 'emotional blackmail'. Yet, there may be times when passion and emotion could be an effective tool. I find an example used by Hogan and Reid (1999) to be instructive in this regard, as it illustrates the point well (pp.70-72). In 1837 in the United States some lay people wrote a letter to some congregational ministers requesting permission for the Grimke sisters to preach against slavery. Permission was refused, not least of all, because a woman speaking in church would be taboo. However, there was also a fear that their passion would stir listeners. Ultimately, it seems, they did speak against slavery and their passion and vivid description of the dehumanizing effects of slavery stirred many people. I would argue that passion and emotion have their place, provided it was genuine and listeners had a sense that the preacher really cares (Hogan and Reid, pp.71, 73).

There always needs to be a balance between emotion and reason. I point out that reference to 'emotion' is broad and would include anger, outrage, shock, sorrow and joy. It is about moving people, not manipulating them (Hogan and Reid, p.84); preaching as persuasion means to "woo" rather than to "win" (Reid and Hogan:

2012, p.74). Or, put differently: “To playfully nudge them or gently lead them or humbly offer them a means to see things ‘god’s way” (Clader, 2003, p.7). Persuasion is to influence rather than to conquer. This does not involve imposing one’s views on a congregation, but instead, making them aware that there is more than one viewpoint. Wooing is collaborative, in that it invites and does not demand. It provides a foundation for people to live in relationship with one another and with God (Reid and Hogan, p.76). It also involves respecting a congregation, not talking down to them, but also not talking “above their heads” (Reid and Hogan, p.76). This approach accords with the discussion in Chapter 5 in regard to whether my participants thought it necessary to preach on domestic abuse. It will be recalled that their concern was that such preaching should not be done in a judgmental way and by ‘telling people how nasty they are’. In other words, one cannot persuade people if they feel they are being ‘got at’. Instead, the images of ‘wooing’ and ‘gently nudging’ imply a process, not bombarding them, in a way that resembles the rapid fire from a machine-gun.

Reference was made in Chapter 3 to the poetic speech of the Hebrew prophets and the importance of metaphor and imagery. This could also be a useful tool in persuading people by clarifying a point; it could be effectively employed to ‘playfully nudge’. The writer of Psalm 23 found the image of the Lord as his shepherd a helpful metaphor which portrayed his intimate relationship with God. This is powerful imagery, though for contemporary people such a metaphor might be more alien and an imaginative preacher may find other ways of explaining this intimate relationship. As is the case with balancing reason and emotion, the same is true for balancing figurative and more literal speech.

I have previously referred to the role of the Bible in preaching and how a “gendered’ interpretation has led to the justification of the oppression of women, in the broadest sense. However, I would argue that the Bible could also play a positive role in preaching, by persuading or influencing listeners, not by selecting proof texts, but by highlighting passages which speak of inclusion and equality, passages which speak of God’s grace. I would agree that giving people an assurance of God’s grace provides the ground for transformation, which might then lead to changing behaviour (Lundblad, 2004, pp.29-30). This approach does

not have as its starting point condemnation and repentance but grace. Repentance might follow as a result of hearing a word of grace. Preachers need to enable listeners to connect the text of scripture to the text of life. A message of welcome and inclusion will help those on the margins realise that the message is for them. Many people have been excluded by the church (Lundblad, 2004, pp.30, 51). It is my impression that Lundblad believes that preaching has the potential to persuade. This is not only borne out by her book, but by its pithy title, namely: "Transforming the stone: Preaching through resistance to change". And the parable of the banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 may be one example of how everyone is welcome. It speaks of inclusion of everyone, no matter who they are. A preacher, in telling this parable, could use contemporary analogies of who such people are, for example, people of different sexual orientation, divorced people, to name a few. This parable is one example of the community which Jesus was building: where lepers are touched and the concept of family is redefined (Lundblad, 2004, p.51). This message was uncomfortable then, as it is uncomfortable to some people in our society today. A sermon on this parable would encourage people to think differently; for those on the margins to know that they are included; for those who are prejudiced against those on the margins to realise that such prejudice is not in keeping with the gospel message of transformation.

I take issue with those who argue that persuasion or an ability to influence others, is hierarchical or manipulative (Smith, 1989, p.46; Rose, 1997, p.10). This approach loses sight of the fact that persuasion does not need to be this, as the above discussion demonstrates. I recognise the possibilities for such manipulation; nevertheless, I would agree with Hogan's (1999) pithy assertion that: "One trained in twentieth-century rhetorical theory, advancing the argument that a spoken public discourse should not be persuasive is like suggesting that a group of musical instruments should not make music" (p.9). In reality, most, if not all, forms of communication involve a degree of persuasion.

The potential of a sermon to persuade listeners leads to a further question, namely whether the sermon can transform lives. This will form the subject of the next discussion.

Can The Sermon Transform Lives?

If one of the objectives of preaching is to evoke a response, for example, if a preacher was to have an “altar call” after a sermon, it begs the question whether the sermon can in fact transform lives. I recognise that such transformation cannot be measured but I would argue that a preacher needs to strive for such transformation in preaching. I also wish to make it clear that when speaking of transformation, I am not suggesting that transformation is instant; it is gradual and may sometimes only occur after an extended period of time (Lundblad, 2004, p.121). I am also not suggesting that this transformation will necessarily happen after every weekly sermon. All my participants, who are all active preachers, believed that the sermon remained an effective vehicle for communicating the Gospel, even though they acknowledged that nowadays, many people are sceptical of the effectiveness of preaching. Moreover, all of them were of the view that the sermon can change and transform lives. They all recognised that such transformation did not happen in an instant but gradually, sometimes over a long period of time, though how a sermon transforms lives is difficult to determine accurately, if at all. And, as JD put it, “I don’t think it necessarily transforms people in the way we intended”. And, he added, “People have internal conversations, linking what is going on in their lives with what I am saying and some of which will speak to them”. I would argue that JD makes the important point that different people hear and interpret sermons differently and therefore respond differently; often responding contrary to what may have been intended by the preacher. This is analogous to different people interpreting scripture differently, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Such transformation was, however, dependent on certain factors. JE felt strongly that a sermon could only be transformational if the preacher leads worship and preaches in obedience, “that their words are not what they want to say, but what the Holy Spirit prompts them to say”. And those who hear need to be receptive to the sermon through the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This comment links with the point made earlier in this chapter that preachers are the spokespeople of God; they do not represent themselves.

GN also believes that the sermon can transform lives but feels strongly that this will not happen if people are pushed in a certain direction. Instead, she believes in opening people's minds before God or allowing people to do so. I interpret this to mean that it is not about manipulating people in a certain direction but is an example of the 'playful nudging' alluded to previously. I would argue that this links with the discussion in Chapter 3 regarding the use of images and metaphors, to spark a prophetic imagination which envisions the world differently. This approach does not avoid difficult issues, but challenges people to begin to think differently. I would argue that one can challenge people without offending them, though the prophets did sometimes cause offence and perhaps offending people cannot be avoided altogether in prophetic preaching.

GR elaborated extensively on her view that the sermon can change lives by telling me that she has witnessed it first-hand. She has seen over a period of time how people went out and did something positive in their lives after one of her sermons and one person became a preacher as a result.

AN gave a very different but, I suggest, poignant example of the transformational effect of preaching on a congregation. She told of an ecumenical partnership which had come about by three denominations coming together. One of the denominations was willing to give up their building and worship in the building of one of the other denominations. It transpired that what she called "intelligent preaching" paved the way. She did not elaborate what this preaching looked like, but I sensed that the point she was making was that the preacher had prepared his congregation for the move by the way in which he preached over a period of several months. This enabled them to make the transition to a new form of church in a different building. I would argue that, while AN did not give exact details of the sermons and preaching method, her point was that effective preaching has at least the potential to transform people by enabling them to go on a "journey". I would also argue that a series on domestic abuse may have the potential to transform people's thinking: to victims that the church cares, to bystanders that they need to be aware and to perpetrators that, though the church does not condemn them, their abusive behaviour could not be condoned.

EL agreed that sermons can transform lives, in the sense that one often unexpectedly touches the lives of people. She also believes that sermons can transform the preacher. MR also believes in the power of the sermon to transform and persuade; for her it is gradual, what she calls “a drip-drip thing”.

I would argue that it is significant that all the preachers whom I interviewed believe in the power of the sermon to persuade and transform, especially as all of them are active preachers, both lay and ordained. However, there is no magic formula for bringing about such transformation. At best, I would suggest that the preparation and preaching of a sermon needs to have as its objective to empower people to change and to give guidelines or pointers as to how to bring this about, but I also bear in mind that this process of change is not dependent only on the preacher. The listener needs to be receptive to the message. A possible starting point in transformational preaching on domestic abuse, might be to invite hearers to imagine a different world from the one which is familiar to them, that is, the prophetic imagination, discussed in Chapter 3 and evoking such imagination through a process of preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance.

But there is no unanimity on the question whether preaching can transform lives (Rose, 1997, pp.75-81). While Rose does not deny the potential for preaching to transform people, she contends that such a view of preaching still implies a gap between preacher and congregation. The premise on which Rose views preaching is that this gap needs to be narrowed. I would argue that while this contention may have some merit, this gap is to some extent inevitable if preachers continue to employ the traditional monologic form of preaching. This begs the question whether the monologic sermon remains the only option.

Is The Monologue Sermon The Only Option?

I have already mentioned the fact that some writers express doubt as to whether the monologue sermon is the only way in which to preach. In response to the danger of manipulation highlighted earlier, and in view of contemporary forms of communication by means of technology, some homileticians prefer a more participatory style of preaching, in order, among others, to try and address some of their difficulties with the persuasive nature of preaching and its potential to

come across as hierarchical or authoritarian. In preaching on domestic abuse, this is especially important, if preachers are to unmask patriarchy, which is characterised by dominance and control. It is possible that a monologic sermon could come across as a form of power and control. In the ensuing discussion I will highlight some ways in which to bridge the gap between pulpit and pew, without suggesting that they are 'magic' solutions or that they constitute an exhaustive list. When I refer to a 'monologic sermon' I mean the traditional form of preaching where a preacher prepares a sermon and delivers it in church, without any participation from the congregation either in sermon preparation, or during the preaching event.

Alternative views on traditional preaching are based on a sense of connectedness, mutuality and solidarity which are harder to achieve in traditional ways of preaching (Rose, 1997, pp.23-25). A conversational model of preaching seeks to address the gap between preacher and listener so that the preacher is not the sender and the congregation the recipient (Rose, p.92). The congregation plays a part in sermon preparation in a pre-sermon meeting where they discuss the biblical text with the preacher, ask questions and bring their own interpretations of the text. This form of preaching is not necessarily dialogical or interactive, though it can be. In essence, a conversational model of preaching is an ongoing discussion between preacher and congregation and makes room for different voices to be heard, especially formerly excluded voices, such as women, the poor and the disenfranchised (Rose, pp.93-97). There is a resonance between this approach and that of Schüssler Fiorenza (1984, p.38), who asserts that biblical interpretation is no longer limited to the clergy; other voices need to be heard and it is her view that clergy can no longer prepare sermons on biblical texts in the seclusion of their study, without having discussed it with a group of people beforehand. This approach to preaching also alters the power relationship so that the preacher is no longer the authority figure (Rose, p.98). Conversational preaching allows listeners to make their own discoveries and builds community in which people may begin to trust one another; an ethos of safety is created and people feel that their experience and opinion are valued (Rose, pp.123, 127).

I would agree that this conversational model of preaching could be of great benefit to preacher and hearer alike and could bridge the gap between preacher and listener. It would also be a means of hearing voices that have been silent for too long. However, I would argue that the practical application of such a model could be a challenge. Rose (1997) acknowledges that she has not dealt with the “how to” of such a model (p.122). In reality, arranging a pre-sermon meeting each week could be difficult, especially in situations where presbyters have pastoral charge of more than one church, which means that they could find themselves in a different pulpit each week. Such a meeting would require a commitment from members of a congregation. One would never be able to involve the whole congregation and this could result in a small group doing this each week and a danger that this could be seen as an elitist group. Another factor is that local preachers are an important component of the church’s preaching ministry. They are volunteers, many of whom are also in full-time employment. This might also be an obstacle in such a model. I would argue that this model would work in an ideal world where most or all members of a congregation are committed to this task and where there is continuity in preaching, in that the same preacher is in the same pulpit for most of the time. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that this model would have the potential of bridging the gap between preacher and listener and might address some of the power dynamics referred to earlier.

A similar model – and one which I would argue may be more appropriate than the model proposed by Rose - could potentially involve the whole congregation. Two weeks before the sermon a preacher prepares short exegetical notes and makes them available to various groups in the congregation: an evening or morning study group, or a lunch time meeting. In addition, members who are not part of a group also have access to these notes. The preacher is not present at the meetings. The members are able to place their thoughts in a sermon suggestion box by the Wednesday before the sermon is to be preached. The preacher is not obliged to use the suggestions, but the outcome of these discussions will enable the preacher to “listen” to the voices of her congregation, thus bridging the gap

between preacher and listener (Wardlaw, 1988).⁴ Wardlaw's model is based on research and his own ministerial experience. As a result of such preaching, the congregation connected the sermon to not only their daily lives but also to their context. It resulted in the church becoming actively involved in several issues, such as drug abuse, refugees, etc. He sees it as connecting the present social context with the biblical context. I would argue that even though this model may be difficult to put into practice for the reasons stated above, it could be a useful tool. It has the potential to involve the whole congregation. Moreover, it would make connections between the small groups in the church and the preaching event and it has the potential to mobilize the congregation into action. I am not suggesting that this is a magic formula which would bring about transformation, but I would argue that it does create that possibility. Moreover, if a preacher wished to address domestic abuse from the pulpit, this model might alleviate some of the barriers discussed in Chapter 5.

I would argue, with reference to Rose's model of conversational preaching and if Wardlaw's model might not be practical in all situations, that another possibility might be effectively employed in preaching on domestic abuse, without losing sight of the fact that it is a sensitive issue, by asking if people may be prepared to tell their stories, or may be prepared for a preacher to share their story anonymously. Small group discussions after a sermon on domestic abuse may be another helpful way to engage with a congregation.

A church in Bradford, which sees itself as a "fresh expression" uses a dialogic model of worship. The service is prepared by a team and each week a member of the team will tell a Bible story in the worship service, mainly from the gospels. This person then acts as a facilitator and encourages those present to share their thoughts in pairs or groups of three. People are encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions, whatever those may be. The church espouses a theology of liberation and is actively involved in non-violent protest and resistance

⁴ Wardlaw's model is from a book accessed via <http://www.religion-online.org> accessed 12 June 2019. No page numbers are provided.

(Howson, 2011, pp.22-25). It is inclusive and encourages people to listen to each other, even if they do not agree. It understands liberation theology as theology which proclaims a preferential option for the marginalised and takes its prophetic witness seriously (p.25).

I did not gain the impression from Howson that he offers this model as a magic formula. However, I would argue that while this form of worship may not always be practical for the reasons that I stated earlier, it could be usefully employed when raising difficult issues such as domestic abuse. Moreover, if I were to use this model, with necessary adaptations for a particular context, I would go further than using stories from the Gospels as the main focus. However, I also acknowledge that in my experience, many congregations may not be comfortable with this level of participation. The crux of Howson's model is the connection that is made between the world of the Bible and the world of today, and then using this connection to mobilize people into the social actions referred to earlier.

I would argue that the above discussion clearly indicates that there is no easy way out of the monologic sermon and that the practicalities of alternative models must be carefully considered, so that, while it may not be possible to use some of the models referred to above on a regular basis, they might be used from time to time, especially when tackling 'tricky texts' such as Judges 19. In this way, some of the difficulties raised by my participants with regard to preaching on domestic abuse, may be addressed. Moreover, one also needs to take cognisance of the fact that different people hear the Bible differently, but also hear sermons differently, a point which was made by participant JD, referred to earlier. A preacher can never be absolutely certain about how her sermon may be received or interpreted by congregations. This remains a challenge for preachers, but at the same time, I would argue that this does not detract from the church's prophetic witness both in general and as it pertains to preaching on domestic abuse.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed preaching as resistance, the third element in the triad of preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance, both in general and resistance to domestic abuse. I have stressed that it is important for preachers to

know why they preach. I have highlighted the fact that resistance preaching involves offering an alternative to the dominant narrative: a resistance to a patriarchal reading of scripture. I have demonstrated how a violent biblical narrative might be heard differently. I have suggested that sermons have the potential to transform lives, even though such transformation is difficult to measure. I have asked the question whether the traditional monologue sermon is the most effective way to communicate the gospel in today's world and suggested some alternative models of sermon preparation and delivery, in order to try and facilitate a closer connection between pulpit and pew. Moreover, alternative models of sermon preparation and delivery could also be seen as an attempt to resist the power dynamics which exist between preacher and listener, so that a congregation, in a sense, takes collective ownership of the church's preaching ministry, so that it is no longer in sole control of the preacher. In my concluding chapter I will briefly recapitulate my overall argument and offer a possible way forward.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to answer the question: how could the British Methodist Church preach more effectively on domestic abuse as part of its prophetic witness? In this final chapter I will provide a brief overview of my main arguments. I will also consider some ancillary issues which relate to the training of preachers, the use of the Revised Common Lectionary and the place of the sermon as part of the overall liturgy of a worship service. Finally, I will indicate what contribution to knowledge this thesis may make, what the limitations of the research were and what further work may be required, as well as the impact of my research on my own practice.

Overview Of Argument

In Chapter 1 I discussed the definitions and causes of domestic abuse and indicated that patriarchy is the root cause, without losing sight of other risk factors. I argued that “preaching more effectively” entails making a clear commitment to preaching on domestic abuse if such preaching is not taking place and finding ways in which to preach and interpret the Bible which will unmask patriarchy and violence.

In Chapter 2 I pointed out that the Methodist Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) repeatedly used the phrase “prophetic voice”, which I see as a prophetic witness. I would argue that the underlying reason for preaching on domestic abuse is not for the sake of doing so. Instead, it is rooted in and connected to, the Church’s prophetic witness. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, the prophets were those who were God’s spokespeople who spoke against oppression. However, some of the metaphors used within the prophetic literature are offensive to feminists and cannot be accepted at face value. Despite these difficulties, the prophets ‘imagined’ a different world. This prophetic witness was given a new dimension by Jesus who not only preached a prophetic witness, but also lived it. The essence of this witness was a ministry of inclusion which recognised and listened to the voices of those on the margins. This is a very important component of the

Church's prophetic witness. Contemporary prophets such as Martin Luther King, Jr, expressed his prophetic imagination by dreaming of a world where all people would be free from racism and other social evils which, I would argue, includes domestic abuse.

In Chapter 4 I outlined my research design and provided my justification for employing semi-structured interviews as my method for data collection. The data collected from my participants, as well as the literature, indicate a hesitation and/or reluctance to preach on domestic abuse. Prophetic preaching is not without its obstacles.

In Chapter 5 I highlighted some of the reasons for the "silence" from the pulpit, which included a sense of discomfort, fear of repercussions and pastoral issues. While these fears cannot be dismissed, I argued that it was necessary to break the silence. This led me to introduce Christine Smith's (1992) triad (as adapted), of preaching as lament, truth-telling and resistance. I argued that this triad could be employed to respond to, and realise, the prophetic imagination. I discussed the role and importance of lament, followed by the truth-telling, of the reality of domestic abuse, by emphasizing that patriarchy was the root cause of domestic abuse, as discussed in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 6 I further developed the theme of breaking the silence by arguing that preaching needs to be used as resistance to patriarchy and violence, by offering a feminist hermeneutic as a tool of resistance. I discussed the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 as an example of how to "unmask" patriarchy and violence in scripture. Furthermore, I argued that preaching has the potential to persuade listeners that a narrative alternative to the dominant narrative was possible and that this had the potential to transform lives. I also raised the possibility of different models of preaching.

Quo Vadis?

I have not sought to offer a 'magic solution' to the question as to how the British Methodist Church could preach more effectively on domestic abuse. I have not argued that simply reading the Bible using a feminist hermeneutic is a magic

wand, nor have I argued that a feminist reading of scripture is a prerequisite for preaching more effectively on domestic abuse, though I would argue that preaching effectively on domestic abuse could be problematic without some recognition that the bible is patriarchal and that it contains stories of violence that cannot simply be explained away. As I indicated in Chapter 1, I acknowledge that 'effectiveness' is difficult to measure. Nevertheless, I would argue that breaking the silence by lament, truth-telling and resistance, could contribute to the greater effectiveness of the Church's prophetic witness, especially if this is connected to the prophetic imagination discussed in Chapter 3.

The responses of my participants clearly indicated that by far the majority, both lay and ordained, had not received adequate training in prophetic preaching and some had had none whatsoever. Moreover, some participants did not know of the existence of the Methodist Report (Methodist Conference, 2005) and others were not fully aware of its contents. The participants recognised – and that has been my experience – that the Conference adopts several policy documents at its annual meeting, but this information is not always disseminated widely and effectively, and people are not always sure what the Church's priorities are.

I would argue that training on prophetic preaching ought to form part of the curriculum for both ordained presbyters and local preachers. In my view, greater awareness and knowledge of the nature of prophetic preaching, would contribute to the effectiveness of the Church's prophetic witness. In addition, adequate training on prophetic preaching could address some of the difficulties which were raised by my participants when they explained why some of them were hesitant to preach on domestic abuse. Such training could also include different ways of reading scripture, discouraging a mere literal reading and encouraging preachers to confront difficult texts rather than shying away from them. Moreover, if drafters of documents wish their recommendations to be put into practice, they need to ensure that practitioners know and are made aware, of what the Church requires them to do.

As far as the Church's preaching ministry is concerned, the majority of my participants use the Revised Common Lectionary. This is also my practice and the

practice of many of my colleagues. A careful search of the Lectionary has revealed that there are few, if any, “texts of terror”. For example, Judges 19 does not appear and since the Lectionary always offers both a gospel and epistle reading in addition to a reading from the Hebrew Bible and the Psalter, it is easy to avoid such texts. I mention in passing that such omissions from the Lectionary only struck me while I was engaged in this research; I had never noticed this before. I would argue that the lectionary needs to be revised to include more ‘uncomfortable’ passages and training preachers to preach on such texts should, in addition to training on prophetic preaching, form part of the curriculum for preachers, both ordained and lay.

I recognise that the sermon forms part of the liturgy of a worship service and includes appropriate hymns and prayers. All my participants agreed that prayers for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse were important, even for those who did not preach on domestic abuse. However, important as prayer might be, I would argue that praying about domestic abuse without preaching on it, is passive and I venture to suggest that it could be viewed as an abdication of responsibility not only to create awareness, but also to send a clear message that the Church cares about domestic abuse and that it does not condone it.

Contribution To Knowledge And Further Work

In this thesis I have sought to clarify and elaborate on the work of the drafters of the Methodist Report, by focusing on the Church’s prophetic witness in the area of domestic abuse. I would argue that this work might also have a bearing on prophetic preaching on other social issues such as racism, economic justice and human trafficking, to name a few. I pointed out in Chapter 4 that one of the limitations of this research has been the small number of participants whom I was able to interview. It would be useful to know whether this small number is representative of the wider preaching ministry and practice of Methodist preachers. Nevertheless, I would argue that the data which I collected and analysed was the context within which I evaluated the Report and read the literature on prophetic preaching and all the ancillary matters which form part of the thesis. Without this data, there would not have been a proper context for my

research, namely the preaching practice of Methodist presbyters and local preachers, even though it was a small number. Moreover, much of the evidence from my participants was corroborated by the literature.

I also note, as mentioned previously, that according to the Methodist Church website, the last time any work was done on domestic abuse was in 2010. In my view, it is necessary to update the website and provide further resources for worship and preaching on domestic abuse.

Impact of The Research On My Own Practice

This research, conducted over several years, has resulted in a greater awareness on my part, of the importance of different “voices”: voices in the church and in the world – especially voices of those who are still silenced, even though this may sometimes be unintentional – voices of scripture read differently; “texts of terror” and other texts. As I indicated in Chapter 6, I preached on Judges 19 subsequent to submitting my thesis. I was aware of this passage but had never realised just how horrific it is. Moreover, in a sermon last year on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), I was drawn to question the meaning of “passing by on the other side”. I “heard” this parable differently and shifted my focus to this phrase rather than the traditional question: “who is my neighbour”. I also was not aware of the shocking and offensive nature of some of the metaphors used by the prophets.

Conclusion

The British Methodist Church is in possession of a comprehensive document on domestic abuse. It recognises the prevalence of this pandemic. It has become increasingly aware of safeguarding and places great emphasis on safeguarding training, safeguarding policies and creating safer spaces. This is both commendable and necessary. However, I would argue that theory is not enough; documents are insufficient; it needs to put into practice what it proclaims on paper; it needs to listen more attentively to the voices of those on the margins. Policy documents on their own, will not achieve this. Moreover, I would argue, at the risk of being seen as insensitive, that the Church needs to be much bolder in

its prophetic proclamation, with the intention that people will act upon such proclamation. The Church cannot afford to be silent about domestic abuse, from the pulpit. A silent witness is not an effective witness. I agree with Alastair Campbell's (1986) assertion that: "the greatest ally of injustice is political apathy, a mentality which leaves in the hands of 'experts' the fate of our fellow humans" (p.102). And, taking this assertion a step further, I would argue that if the Church maintains its silence on domestic abuse from the pulpit, it would be tantamount to the conduct of the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It would amount to passing by on the other side!

Appendix 1
Consent Form

Title of Project: The church's prophetic witness: Preaching on domestic abuse in the British Methodist Church

Name of Researcher: Lynita Conradie
10 Stockton Street Nottingham NG6 8FQ
Telephone 0115 9761420

Email: lynita.conradie@methodist.org.uk

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet, dated 7 April 2016, for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my career or legal rights being affected.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Lynita Conradie

Date: 7 April 2016



Signature:

Appendix 2

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research project that is investigating how Methodist preachers in the British Methodist Church preach on domestic abuse.

Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do not hesitate to ask Rev Lynita Conradie if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like any more information. Please feel free to take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The British Methodist Church has presented various documents to Conference over the past decade, dealing with domestic abuse, which has become endemic in society. These documents recognise, inter alia, that the Church has a prophetic witness and that one way in which this can be exercised is through preaching.

This study will investigate how Methodist preachers in Britain preach on domestic abuse? Which biblical passages do they use? What has the response been from their congregations? What, impact, if any, has such preaching had on their community?

Why have I been asked to participate in this study?

You have been asked to participate in this research because:

You are a Methodist preacher in the Methodist Church in Britain and you have indicated an interest in participating in this research project.

Do I have to take part?

The choice to take part in this study is yours. If you decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. During the interview, you are not under any obligation to reply to any questions you feel uncomfortable answering, and you can stop and leave the interview at any time. Please feel free to contact Lynita Conradie to discuss any questions or concerns you may have before deciding to take part.

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign the consent form. This will give your consent for Lynita Conradie, a doctoral student in Practical Theology, Chester University, to contact you to arrange an interview at a time and place that is convenient for you.

At the interview, which will last approximately 90 minutes, you will be asked questions regarding your preaching practice as it pertains to domestic abuse. Why do you preach on domestic abuse? Which biblical passages do you use? How do you deal with biblical passages which may seem to justify domestic abuse? How has the congregation responded to such preaching? What impact, if any, has this preaching had on your community?

The interview will be guided by both the interviewer and your personal experiences and views. With your permission, the interview will be recorded, and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript to ensure that it is an accurate and faithful record of the interview. At a later stage, it may be helpful to arrange a second meeting with you.

You do not have to agree to this now, and you are free to withdraw from any further involvement, at any stage.

What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?

I have not identified any risks or disadvantages to you taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The aim of this research project is to highlight the importance of the Church's prophetic witness as it pertains to domestic abuse. The research findings could serve as guidance to preachers who do not preach on domestic abuse.

What if something goes wrong?

If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact:

Prof Elaine Graham, Grosvenor Professor of Practical Theology,
University of Chester
Parkgate Rd
Chester
CH1 4BJ
e.graham@chester.ac.uk

Will my interview and what I say be anonymised, and is what I share confidential?

Lynita Conradie will be conducting the interviews and you will be asked how you wish to be identified in the written transcript and the thesis. You can be completely anonymised, or you can decide what information (such as your name, age) you would like anonymised or altered.

Lynita is planning to transcribe all the interviews, but there might be the possibility of employing a research assistant to help her. At the interview, Lynita will discuss whether you are comfortable with this possibility. If a research assistant is employed at a later stage, Lynita will contact you to discuss this process, and the choice is entirely yours.

Lynita will read the transcripts, which will be anonymised in the ways you would like. If you take part in the interview, I will be using extracts from your transcripts when presenting the research at conferences, and in the written thesis.

Who is researching and funding this project?

This project forms part of my doctoral studies in Practical Theology at the University of Chester.

Who can I contact for further information?

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, please do not hesitate to contact:

Rev Lynita Conradie

10 Stockton Street

Nottingham NG6 8FQ

Tel 0115 9761420

Email: lynita.conradie@methodist.org.uk

Thank you very much for your interest in this research.

References

- Ackermann, D.M. (1998). "A voice was heard in Ramah" in Ackermann, D.M. and Bons-Storm, R. (Eds), *Liberating faith practices: Feminist practical theologies in Context*. Leuven, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Peeters, 74-103.
- Ballard, P. (2011). The Bible in Theological reflection: Indications from the history of scripture. *Practical Theology*, 4(1), 35-40.
- Ballard, P. & Pritchard, J. (1996). *Practical theology in action: Christian thinking in the service of church and society*. London: SPCK.
- Bartow, C.L. (1997). *God's human speech: A practical theology of proclamation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Bell, L. (2014) Ethics and feminist research. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. (Ed), *Feminist Research Practice: a primer*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage, 73-107.
- Bennett, Z., Graham, E., Pattison, S., & Walton, H. (2018). *Invitation to research in Practical Theology*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds), (2013). *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.
- Birch, B.C. (1991). *Let justice roll down: The Old Testament, ethics, and Christian life*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Bloomquist, K. (1989). Sexual violence: Patriarchy's offence and defence. In Carlson Brown, J. & Bohn, C.R. (Eds), *Christianity, patriarchy and abuse: A feminist critique*. New York, New York: Pilgrim Press, 62-69.
- Boase, E. & Taylor, S. (2013). Public lament. In Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds), *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 205-228.

- Bons-Storm, R. (1996). *The incredible woman: Listening to women's voices in pastoral care*. New York, New York: Abingdon.
- Borg, M.J. (2001). *Reading the Bible again for the first time: Taking the Bible seriously but not literally*. San Francisco, California: HarperCollins.
- Borschel, A. (2009) *Preaching prophetically when the news disturbs: interpreting the media*. St Louis, Missouri, Chalice Press
- Brock, R.N. & Parker, R.A. (2001). *Proverbs of ashes: violence, redemptive suffering and the search for what saves us*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon press.
- Brock, R.N. (1993). Dusting the Bible on the floor: A hermeneutics of wisdom. In Schüssler Fiorenza E. (Ed), *Searching the scriptures: A feminist introduction, Vol.1*. New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 63-76.
- Bruce, K. and Harrison, J. (Eds). *Wrestling with the Word: Preaching tricky texts*. London: SPCK.
- Brueggemann, W.J. (1984). *The message of the Psalms: A theological commentary*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.
- Brueggemann, W.J. (2001). *The prophetic imagination*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.
- Brueggemann, W. (2002). *Reverberations of faith: A theological handbook of Old testament themes*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Brueggemann, W. (2010). *Journey to the common good*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.

- Brueggemann, W. (2012). *The practice of prophetic imagination: Preaching an emancipating word*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.
- Buchanan, C. (2013). Liturgy and lament. In Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds). *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 153-173.
- Camp, C. (1993). Feminist theological hermeneutics: canon and Christian identity. In Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (Ed), *Searching the scriptures: a feminist introduction, Vol.1*. New York, New York: Crossroad, 154-171.
- Campbell, A.V. (1986). *The Gospel of anger*. London: SPCK.
- Carmody, D. L. (1995). *Christian feminist theology: a constructive interpretation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.
- Carroll, R. (1979). *When prophecy failed: Reactions and responses to failed prophecy*. London: SCM Press.
- Carvalho, C. L. (2018). The challenge of violence and gender under colonization. In Yee, G. A. (Ed), *The Hebrew Bible: feminist and intersectional perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 107-135.
- Cilliers, J. (2015). Where have all the prophets gone? Perspectives on political preaching. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 1(2), 367-383. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2015.v1n2.a17>. (Accessed: 10/07/2019).
- Cilliers, J. (2017). Seeing, sighing, signing: Contours of a vulnerable homiletic. *Scriptura*, 116(1), 1-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7833/116-1-1281> (Accessed: 10/07/2016).
- Clader, L.L. (2003). *Voicing the vision: Imagination and prophetic preaching*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse.

- Clark Kroeger, C. & Nason-Clark, N. (2010). *No place for abuse: Biblical and practical resources to counteract domestic violence*. (2nd ed.). Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Clements, R.E. (1996). *Old Testament prophecy: From oracles to canon*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Cooper-White, P. (2012). *The cry of Tamar: violence against women and the church's response*. (2nd ed.). Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press.
- Countryman, L.W. (2001). *Dirt, greed and sex: Sexual ethics in the New Testament and their implications for today*. London: SCM Press.
- Creach, J.F.D. (2013). *Violence in scripture: Interpretation resources for the use of scripture in the church*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Crossan, J.D. (2015). *Jesus and the violence of scripture: How to read the Bible and still be a Christian*. London: SPCK.
- Davies, P.R. (1996). The audience of prophetic scrolls: Some suggestions. In Reid, S.B. (Ed), *Prophets and paradigms: Essays in honour of G.M. Tucker*. London: Bloomsbury, 48-63.
- Day, J. (Ed). (2014). Prophecy and prophets in ancient Israel: *Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Exum, J. C. (1985). "Mother in Israel": a familiar figure reconsidered in Russell, L. M. (ed) *Feminist interpretation of the Bible*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 73-85.
- Exum, J.C. (2016). *Fragmented women: Feminist subversions of biblical narratives*. (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury, T & T Clark.

- Fontaine, C.R. (1997) The abusive Bible: On the use of feminist method in pastoral contexts. In Brenner, A. & Fontaine, C.R. (Eds), *A feminist companion to reading the Bible: Approaches, methods and strategies*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 84-114.
- Fortune, M.S. (2005). *Sexual violence: The sin revisited*. Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press.
- Garner, S. (2013). Lament in an age of new media. In Bier, M.J. and Bulkeley, T. (Eds), *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 228-245.
- Gilligan, C. and Snider, N. (2018). *Why does patriarchy persist?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gottwald, N.K. (1996). Theology and ideology in Israelite prophecy. In Reid, S.B. (Ed), *Prophets and paradigms: Essays in honour of G.M. Tucker*. London: Bloomsbury, 138-152.
- Graham, E.L. (2009). *Words made flesh: Writings in pastoral and practical theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Graham, E. (2012) Feminist theory. In Miller-McLemore, B.J. (Ed), *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to practical theology*. Chichester, New Hampshire: Blackwell, 193-203.
- Graham, E. and Llewellyn, D. (2018) Promoting the good: ethical and methodological considerations in practical theological research. In Moschella, M. and Willhauck, S. (Eds), *Qualitative research in theological education: pedagogy in practice*. London: SCM Press, 39-59.
- Groves, Nicola, and Thomas, Terry. (2014) *Domestic Violence and Criminal Justice*. London: Routledge.

- Heise, Lori L. (1998). "Violence against women: an integrated, ecological framework" *Violence Against Women* 4/3 262–90.
- Heise, Lori L. (2011) *What works to prevent partner violence. An evidence overview*. London: STRIVE.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2014a) A re-invitation to feminist research. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. (Ed), *Feminist Research Practice: a primer*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage, 1-14.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. (2014b) Feminist approaches to in-depth interviewing. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. (Ed), *Feminist Research Practice: a primer*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage, 182-233.
- Heywood, W.D. (2013). *Transforming preaching: The sermon as a channel for God's word*. London: SPCK.
- Hogan, L. L. (1999). Rethinking persuasion: Developing an incarnational theology of preaching. *Homiletic*, 24(2), 1-12.
- Hogan, L. L. and Reid, R. (1999). *Connecting with the congregation: rhetoric and the art of preaching*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon press.
- Hollies, L. (2006). *Sister, save yourself direct talk about domestic violence*. Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press.
- Home Office. (2012). *New Definition of Domestic Violence*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-definition-of-domestic-violence> (Accessed: 20/08/2019).
- Howson, C. (2011). *A just church: Liberation theology in action*. London: Continuum International.

- Hudson, M. L. & Turner, M. D. (2014) *Saved from silence: finding women's voices in preaching*. St Louis: Chalice Press.
- Klein, R. (2009). The phenomenology of lament and the presence of God in time. In Harasta, E. & Brock, B. (Eds), *Evoking lament: A theological discussion* London: T & T Clark, 14-25.
- Kuja, R. (2016). Remembering the body: Misogyny through the lens of Judges 19. *Feminist Theology*, 25(1), 89-95.
- Kwok, Pui-Lan (1993). Racism and ethnocentrism in biblical interpretation. In Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (Ed), *Searching the scriptures: A feminist introduction Vol.1*. New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 101-116.
- Lakkis, S. (2009). "Have you any right to be angry"? Lament as a metric of socio-political and theological content. In Harasta, E. and Brock, B. (Eds), *Evoking lament: A theological discussion*. London: T & T Clark, 168-183.
- Littledale, R. (2011). *Who needs words? A Christian communications handbook*. Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press.
- Long, T. (2005). *The witness of preaching*. (2nd ed.). Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Lundblad, B.K. (2004). *Transforming the stone: Preaching through resistance to change*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press.
- Lyall, D. (2009). So, what is practical theology? *Practical Theology*, 2(2), 157-159.
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Research*. London, Sage.
- Mathews, J. (2013). Framing lament: Providing a context for the expression of pain. In Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds), *Spiritual complaint: The theology*

and practice of lament. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 187-206.

Matthews, V.H. (2004). *New Cambridge Bible commentary: Judges and Ruth*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

McClure, J.S. (1998). Preaching about sexual violence. In McClure, J.S. and Ramsay, N. (Eds), *Telling the truth: Preaching about sexual and domestic violence*. Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 110-125.

McClure, J.S. and Ramsay, N. (Eds). (1998). *Telling the truth: Preaching about sexual and domestic violence*. Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press.

McDaniel, J.M. (2004). Renaming reality as scriptural Sabbath: Luke 4:14:21. In Alling, R. & Schlafer, D. (Eds), *Preaching as prophetic calling*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing Company, 64-75.

McFague, S. (1982). *Metaphorical theology: Models of God in religious language*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press.

McKenna, M. (1994). *Not counting women and children: Neglected stories from the Bible*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

McMickle, M. (2005). Where have all the prophets gone? *Ashland Theological Journal*, 1-12. Available at:
https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ashland_theological_journal/37-1_007.pdf (Accessed: 16/07/2019).

Methodist Church (2020) *Local Preacher FAQs*. Available at: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/local-preachers-and-worship-leaders/local-preachers/local-preacher-faqs/> (Accessed 21 April 2020).

- Methodist Conference (2005). *Conference Report Domestic Abuse*.
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/views-of-the-church/domestic-abuse/> (Accessed: 24/08/2019).
- Miles, A. (2002). Holding Christian men accountable for abusing women. In Neuger, C.C. & Poling, J. (Eds), *Men's work in preventing Violence against Women*. Birmingham, Alabama: Haworth Pastoral Press, 15-27.
- Miller-McLemore, B.J. (Ed). (2012). Introduction: The Contributions of Practical Theology. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Chichester, New Hampshire: Blackwell, 1-21.
- Naples, N.A. and Gurr, B. (2014). Feminist empiricism and standpoint theory: approaches to understanding the social world. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. (Ed), *Feminist Research Practice: a primer*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage, 14-42.
- Nason-Clark, N. and Clark Kroeger, C. (2004). *Refuge from abuse: Healing and hope for abused Christian women*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Nellisery, J.T. (2003). *The Catholic priest: A witness to the seasons of life – An exploratory investigation of the perceptions and responses to spousal abuse*. Doctoral thesis, USA: University of Georgia.
- Neuger, C.C. & Poling, J. (Eds). (2002). *Men's work in preventing Violence against Women* Birmingham, Alabama: Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Newsom, C.A, Ringe, S.H., Lapsley, J.E. (Eds). (2014). *Women's Bible Commentary*. (3rd ed.). London: SPCK.
- Nicholson, E. (2014). Deuteronomy 18:9-22: The prophets and scripture. In Day, J. (Ed), *Prophecy and prophets in ancient Israel*. London: Bloomsbury, 151-172.

- O'Brien, J. M. (2008). *Challenging prophetic metaphor: theology and ideology in the prophets*. Louisville: John Knox Press.
- O'Leary, Z. (2014). *The essential guide to doing your research project*. (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Parry, R. (2013). Wrestling with Lamentations in Christian worship. In Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds), *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 125-153.
- Petersen, D.L. (1981). *The roles of Israel's prophets*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Phillips, A. (2018) "Come as a girl" exploring issues of participative methodology for research into the spiritual lives and faith of girls-becoming-women. In Slee, N., Porter, F., Phillips, A. (Eds), *Researching female faith: qualitative research methods*. London: Routledge, 23-37.
- Pieterse, H.J. (2001). *Preaching in a context of poverty*. Pretoria, South Africa: Unisa Press.
- Pitt, T. (2010) The conversation of preaching and theology. In Stevenson, G. (Ed), *The future of preaching*. London: SCM Press, 65-84.
- Polke, C. (2009). God, lament, contingency: An essay in fundamental theology. In Harasta, E. & Brock. B. (Eds), *Evoking lament: A theological discussion*. London: T&T Clark, 44-60.
- Porter, F. (2018) "Sometimes you need a question" Structure and flexibility in feminist interviewing. In Slee, N., Porter, F., Phillips, A. (Eds), *Researching female faith: qualitative research methods*. London: Routledge, 83-98.
- Prevost, J. (1996). *How to read the prophets*. Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM Press.

- Procter-Smith, M. (1993). Feminist interpretation and liturgical proclamation. In Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (Ed), *Searching the scriptures: a feminist introduction*, vol. 1. New York, New York: Crossroad, 313-326.
- Pryce, M. (1996). *Finding a voice: Men, Women, and the Community of the Church*. London: SCM Press.
- Radford Ruether, R. (2002). *Sexism and God-talk: Towards a feminist theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Refuge Domestic Violence Service Warwickshire (2017). Available at: <https://www.refuge.org.uk/our-work/our-services/refuge-warwickshire-domestic-violence-service/> (Accessed: 20/08/2019).
- Reid, S.B. (Ed). (1996). *Prophets and paradigms: Essays in honour of G.M. Tucker*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Reid, R. & Hogan, L.L. (2012). *The six deadly sins of preaching: Becoming responsible for the faith we proclaim*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press.
- Ringe, S.H. (2014). When women interpret the Bible. In Newsom, C.A, Ringe, S.H., Lapsley, J.E. (Eds), (2014). *Women's Bible Commentary*. (3rd ed.). London: SPCK, 1-11
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (Eds). (2014). *Qualitative research: A guide for social science researchers*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Rose, L.A. (1997). *Sharing the word*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox press.
- Sawyer, D. (2002). *God, gender and the Bible*. London: Routledge.

- Schlafer, D. (2018). Dependence day: A sermon for the fourth of July. In Snider, P. (Ed), *Preaching as resistance: Voices of hope, justice and solidarity*. St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 100-107.
- Schnasa Jacobsen, D. (2009). Schola Prophetarum: Prophetic preaching: Toward a public, prophetic Church. *Homiletic*, 34(1), 13-19.
- Scholz, S. (2017). *Introducing the women's Hebrew Bible: Feminism, gender justice, and the study of the Old Testament*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1984). *Bread not stone: the challenge of feminist biblical interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1985). The will to choose or to reject: continuing our critical work. In Russell, L. M. (ed) *Feminist interpretation of the Bible*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 125-136.
- Shooter, S. (2012). *How survivors of abuse relate to God: The authentic spirituality of the annihilated soul*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Slee, N. (2018). Poetry as feminist research methodology in the study of feminine faith. In Slee, N., Porter, F., Phillips, A. (Eds), *Researching female faith: qualitative research methods*. London: Routledge, 37-54.
- Smith, C.M. (1989). *Weaving the sermon: Preaching in a feminist perspective*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Smith, C.M. (1992). *Preaching as weeping, confession and resistance: Radical responses to radical evil*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Snider, P. (Ed). (2018). *Preaching as resistance: Voices of hope, justice and solidarity*. St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press.

- Snyder, H. (1980). *The radical Wesley and patterns for church renewal*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Stark, Evan. (2013) Coercive control. In Lombard, N. and McMillan, L. (Eds), *Violence Against Women. Current Theory and Practice in Domestic Abuse, Sexual Violence and Exploitation* (Research Highlights in Social Work 56. London: Jessica Kingsley, 17-35.
- Storkey, E. (2015). *Scars across humanity: Understanding and overcoming violence against women*. London: SPCK.
- Stuart, E. & Thatcher, A. (1997). *People of passion: What the churches teach about sex*. London: Mowbray.
- Suggit, J. (1994). *The word of God and the people of God: The relation between the Bible and the church*. Fish Hoek, South Africa: Celebration of faith.
- Tearmann Society for Abused Women (2015). *Types of Abuse*. Available at: <http://tearmann.ca/about-abuse/types-of-abuse/> (Accessed: 20/08/2019).
- Tiemeyer, S. (2013). The doubtful gain of penitence: The fine line between lament and penitential prayer. In Bier, M.J. & Bulkeley, T. (Eds), *Spiritual complaint: The theology and practice of lament*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 102-125.
- Tinyiko, S.M. & Benadar, S. (2002). "Breaking the covenant of violence against women", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 114, November 2002. 5-17.
- Tracy, Steven R. (2007) Patriarchy and domestic violence: challenging misconceptions. *Journal of the Evangelical theological society*, 50/3 September 2007, 573-594.

- Trible, P. (2002) *Texts of terror: Literary-feminist readings of biblical narratives*. (New ed.). London: SCM Press.
- Tubbs Tisdale, L. (2010). *Prophetic preaching: a pastoral approach*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Van Wijkbos, J. (1998). Violence in the Bible. In McClure, J. & Ramsay, N. (Eds), *Telling the truth: Preaching about sexual and domestic violence*. Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 23-36.
- Voelz, R.W. (2018). Afterword. In Snider, P. (Ed). *Preaching as resistance: Voices of hope, justice and solidarity*. St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 163-167.
- Wardlaw, D.M. (1988). Preaching as the interface of two social worlds: The congregation as corporate agent in the act of preaching. In Van Seters, A. (Ed), *Preaching as a social act: Theology and practice*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, Chapter 2. Available at: <https://www.religion-online.org> (Accessed: 12/06/2019).
- Weaver, J.D. (2013). *The non-violent God*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans.
- Weems, R. (1995). *Battered love: marriage, sex and violence in the Hebrew prophets*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Welz, C. (2009). Trust and lament: Faith in the face of God-forsakenness. In Harasta, E. & Brock, B. (Eds), *Evoking lament: A theological discussion*. London: T & T Clark, 118-136.
- Wepener, C. & Pieterse, H. (2018). Angry preaching: A grounded theory analysis from South Africa. *International Journal of Public Theology*, 12, 401-415.

- West, G. (2004). Taming texts of terror: Reading (against) the gender grain of 1 Timothy. *Scriptura*, 86. Available at: www.scriptura.journals.ac.za (Accessed: 28/05/2019), 160-173.
- Williams, J. (2014). *God remembered Rachel: Women's stories in the Old Testament and why they matter*. London: SPCK.
- Wogaman, J. P. (1998). *Speaking the truth in love: Prophetic preaching to a broken world*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press
- Wright, S. (2000). *Alive to the Word: A practical theology of preaching for the whole church*. London: SPCK.
- Yee, G. A. (2014). Hosea. In Newsom, C.A, Ringe, S.H., Lapsley, J.E. (Eds), *Women's Bible Commentary*. (3rd ed.). London: SPCK, 299-309.
- Yee, G. A. (Ed). (2018). *The Hebrew Bible: feminist and intersectional perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.