

A missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex-work industry

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Abstract

This article explores the possibility of the involvement of the ecumenical church in addressing the complex issue of sex trafficking. It is done through a glocal theological theory built on missional theology and social ethics as human trafficking is reinterpreted to be a theological issue which could lead to a life-giving mission. Research takes place within the transformative paradigm using a mixed-methods approach, and the theory and praxis are examined with the fullness of life, human dignity, hope, justice and healing in mind. As a destination for sex trafficking, empirical research was done in Rustenburg, South Africa, among victims and survivors, missional workers and church leaders, and experts in the field. This assisted the investigation into the viability and content of this theory. It is then argued that a missional appropriation based on hope, liberation and justice adds a new dimension to being church and leads to a transformative mission to victims.

Keywords

Sex trafficking; transformative paradigm; glocal theory; ecumenical church; Missio Dei

Introduction

This article presents the research findings of the author's doctoral thesis, "A missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex-work industry" (Kotze 2019). This research is necessitated by a current limited theological reflection on this growing global issue and the complexities surrounding it. It is a defining problem of the twenty-first century (Shelley 2010:58) and the

dark side to globalisation that must be addressed (Robinson 2002). It is also often described as a modern-day form of slavery (Shrikantiah 2007:162). As this criminal enterprise expands, it will become all the more necessary to tackle this problem on all possible levels through various stakeholders, even possibly through the ecumenical church.

As a multi-faceted complex crime, human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person, often over international borders, but also within the boundaries of a country, for the purpose of exploitation (United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, henceforth UNGIFT 2010:7). As can be seen in this definition, Kruger (2015) states that human trafficking includes three parts: the action, the means, and the purpose. Europol (2005:9) adds that exploitation includes the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. In the author's doctoral thesis, the focus fell on sexual exploitation in the form of sex trafficking, and it, therefore, forms the focus of this article.

Keleher (2010:1) describes sex trafficking as "exploitation in its rawest form." It includes commercial sex and is induced by force, fraud or coercion, even if such a person has not reached 18 years of age. It often causes irreparable physical and psychological damage to the victim (United States Department of State, henceforth USDS 2014:9).

The United Nations General Assembly introduced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December of 1948 as the first internationally recognised instrument to articulate fundamental human rights that are to be universally protected. Contained within the Declaration is the statement (USDS 2010:175): "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude: Slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."

South Africa also acted in this regard and implemented the Trafficking in Persons Act 7/2013 on 9 August 2015. According to Kruger (2015), this means that South Africa finally has a strong legal position to fight trafficking from, but that the physical implementation of this legislation might leave much to be desired, as is the case with many countries worldwide. Anybody could therefore still be vulnerable to exploitation (Burke 2013:9).

The question, therefore, needs to be asked to whose responsibility are the exploited individuals and about whether they also the responsibility of the ecumenical church? It is about more than just passively being the church in a vulnerable society; it is about adapting the church's understanding of herself to become an actively involved stakeholder in addressing sex trafficking and the lives of its marginalised victims and perpetrators. It is about more than finding a sustainable way to reintegrate these individuals back into society; it is to restore life in fullness to them. The church must counteract injustices in life and work together on prohibiting these acts of violence.

The question that remains is why this is of particular concern to the Christian church and therefore warranting this research? Carson (2016:58) states that the reason is two-fold. The first is the problem of attitudes to prostitution. According to Carson, there should, in theory, be no difference between the church's response to the family in the distress of debt bondage and the woman who is enslaved in a brothel. Victims of sex trafficking, however, face additional problems on top of enslavement and violent abuse, including extreme prejudice and stigma as they are often seen by society as "socially dead slaves and whores".

These kinds of responses compromise the reaction to sex trafficking at every level, from the enforcement of legislation to the care of the victims. It also inhibits many Christians from becoming involved in the solution to this problem. Simultaneously, one might become so concerned about sex trafficking that other forms of trafficking are neglected (Carson 2016:59).

The second reason, according to Carson (2016:59), is the current debate regarding how the sex trade should be viewed. It has a direct impact on how sex trafficking should be tackled. The question in this debate is around the decriminalisation of prostitution and whether it should be made a legitimate enterprise. This research does not, however, attempt to provide an answer to such a complex issue but rather examines the complexities therein in order to be better informed.

Following the research, a third reason that could be added is the extent of the problem of sex trafficking around the globe and the effect it has on its victims and families. According to Carson (2016:1), it is not difficult to motivate the Christian church to respond to the appalling industry of sex

trafficking due to the abuse of power and vulnerability linked to it and the contradiction of everything Christians understand of God's love. Carson states that many Christians are, therefore, already involved in tackling the problem at many levels, including in rescue, rehabilitation and prevention work, yet more is needed.

For the most part, the church has historically had polarised attitudes toward prostitutes as they have either been seen as sinners in need of saving or as recipients of some kind of special grace. Self-reflection is required in order to respond appropriately (Carson 2016:7). The question is then to what a Christian response should entail? Missional theology and ethics could assist in answering these questions. The invisible needs to be made visible and addressed.

The aim of this research is, therefore, to analyse and evaluate the possibility of the involvement of the ecumenical church in addressing the complex issue of sex trafficking through a theological theory built on missional theology and social ethics in order to formulate a missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex work industry. It could bring a new dimension to the nature of church in a post-modern global era.

This theological theory should be glocal in nature. The term "glocal" refers to a global construct with an impact on local communities (Engelsviken, Lundeby & Solheim 2011:viii). A glocal theological theory is then necessary as the issue of human trafficking is simultaneously a global and local challenge.

It needs to enable both the creation of a global life-giving mission through the ecumenical church, as well as the creation of a customised local life-giving mission with key concepts derived from the global initiative, as the Christian God invites his church into a life-giving mission for all (World Council of Churches, henceforth WCC 2012:4).

This research, therefore, proposes the following hypothesis: "A missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex work industry built on a transformative approach could lead to a life-giving mission to the victims thereof."

Research methodology

In this study, the research is based on a transformative paradigm with a mixed methods approach. According to Mertens (2009:10), the use of transformative, culturally appropriate, and multiple methods of research and evaluation can lead to an understanding of the patterns of diverging results and their implications that will, in turn, create social change.

According to Mertens (2009:10), it recognises that serious problems exist in communities despite their resilience in the process of throwing off the shackles of oppression, as well as making visible the oppressive structures in society. The transformative paradigm, therefore, supports the integration of the wisdom of the invisible toward the creation of a constructed knowledge base that furthers social justice and human rights, as it is firmly rooted in a human rights agenda (Mertens 2009:11). An important aspect is then the conscious inclusion of a broad range of people who are generally excluded from mainstream society (Mertens 2009:14).

It is an essential perspective to this research as it connects to mission from the margins (WCC 2012:15) and Bosch's (1991:189) transformative approach to missions, as it is important to remember that researchers could also learn from those who are engaged in this struggle. Mission is then something that is in itself being transformed and at the same time an enterprise that transforms reality. The word "Transforming" is then an adjective which describes an essential feature of Christian mission (Bosch 1991:xv).

This makes transformative research extremely useful when dealing with the power struggles and complexities involved in sex trafficking, as well as the invisibility problem when including those that have generally been excluded. The empirical research, therefore, aimed to gain as much knowledge as possible about the phenomenon of sex trafficking and the involvement of the ecumenical church and experts therein, and also aimed to examine the evidence for human trafficking in Rustenburg, South Africa in order to investigate the viability of a glocal theological theory. As is discussed in more depth later in this study, the theological methods employed in the investigation of this theory included in depth exegesis,

ethics and a missional hermeneutic, with mission as a central interpretive tool framed within the *missio Dei* (Goheen 2016:3–4).

Ethical clearance had been granted to this research by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria.

The complexity of human trafficking for the sex work industry

In the creation of a missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex work industry, it is vital to examine the complexities of this crime against humanity. It is all the more important when taking into account that South Africa is one of the countries in Southern Africa that is a key destination and, to a lesser extent, a country of origin and transit for women and children trafficked both to and from Africa and globally (National Prosecuting Authority, henceforth NPA 2010:iii).

It is of utmost importance to understand its texture and shape, even though findings might be disturbing. One of these disturbing facts is that between the years 2012–2014, more than 500 different trafficking flows or trafficking routes were detected around the globe, with victims from 137 different countries (UNODC 2016:1). South Africa is currently ranked 27th out of 167 countries for the prevalence of human trafficking, with an estimated 0.453% caught in some form of human trafficking (Global Slavery Index 2016). These numbers only account for detected victims, not taking hiddenness and other factors into account (UNODC 2016:1). From the empirical research, it was clear that no one is exempt from this crime and it happens everywhere.

Determining the exact extent of this crime remains difficult as very little research has been done into the prevalence or patterns of human trafficking in South Africa (Wilkinson & Chiumia 2013). Even then, numbers might not be accurate as the growth, magnitude, complexity and hidden nature of this phenomenon do not support the development of a reliable victim estimate (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, henceforth UNODC 2014:30). The high demand for low-cost labour by global economies (Shelley 2010:165), the inadequacy of law enforcement and insufficient legislation on human trafficking makes this all the more challenging (Shelley 2010:57).

The number of countries that have criminalised most forms of trafficking as set out in the United Trafficking in Persons Protocol has, however, increased from 33 in 2003 to 158 in 2016, yet the average number of convictions remains low. As judicial resources are not always available to assist the victims and prosecute the traffickers, it is difficult to detect, investigate and successfully prosecute cases of trafficking in persons (UNODC 2016:1).

According to Aronowitz (2009:16), another compounding factor in the low conviction rate is that victims rarely report any wrongdoing and are often unwilling to cooperate with law enforcement officials if identified and rescued. Aronowitz states that the main reasons thereof are the fear of reprisal from traffickers, lack of trust in authorities, rejection by families and the lack of opportunities in their country of origin.

Victims may not even see themselves as being exploited, especially if they are in love with their trafficker or pimp (Bureau National Rapporteur Mensehandel 2003). This fact contributes toward a situation where nongovernmental organisations, international agencies and governments provide different kinds of data and statistics, most of which are often not comparable (Aronowitz 2009:16).

Statistics, however, should not be a deciding factor in formulating a missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex work industry. This research is not ultimately about the extent of the problem but instead about the individuals and groups involved. A victim-centred approach is then needed. UNODC (2016:1) states that there is always more that needs to be done in assisting victims and prosecuting traffickers.

Understanding the complexities of the phenomena at hand is of utmost importance. According to Aronowitz (2009:23), viewing human trafficking from multiple perspectives will ultimately assist in obtaining a better understanding of the problem at hand. These perspectives, as was discussed in the original thesis, include sociology; globalisation; migration; poverty and economy; the influence of gender; political instability and corruption; supply and demand; various trafficking flows; groups and syndicates; street-based versus brothel-based sex workers; fear, control and victim compliance; the use of violence; dehumanisation; the exploitation of vulnerability; *ukuthwala* and forced marriage; resocialisation; debt bondage; *juju* and other forms of psychological control such as Stockholm

syndrome and trauma bonding; child trafficking; the rise of the internet; stigma; rights and more as the issue grows. As an ever-growing crime, the physical and psychological consequences thereof will also worsen over time.

At the same time, supply and demand keep on rising. Purchasers seek the victims' bodies in the destination countries, where the demand for especially male sex buyers creates a strong multibillion-dollar profit incentive for traffickers (Green 2008:317). One of the problems is that the victims, and especially child victims, are only useful in the sex industry for a short period and once they are no longer attractive or young enough, they may be abandoned, further victimised, or in some cases, killed to prevent disclosure. The discarding of "old" victims creates a demand for new prostitutes, and in turn creates a never-ending cycle of supply and demand (Walters & Davis 2011:7), exacerbated by a fear factor. This cycle appears to have strong links to organised crime syndicates, which can be small, loosely organised, or organised crime groups or networks and can operate locally, nationally or transnationally (Burke 2013:15).

According to USDS (2009:180), those most vulnerable to being trafficked are those living in regions characterised by extreme poverty, such as which exists in Africa, with women and children comprising 80% of this number, and with around 50% of these victims under the age of eighteen. They often flee from their circumstances in search of a better life (Shelley 2010:58).

Traffickers then target those affected by this and other vulnerabilities such as femininity and age, and when they are trafficked, they are severely physically, sexually and psychologically abused. Violence creates fear and leads to control. Through this, they become more vulnerable and isolated (International Organisation for Migration, henceforth IOM 2006:49). The vulnerable are then often left to their own devices and face a daily battle for survival as they are stuck in drug abuse, debt bondage, and at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. They are also vulnerable to being continually assaulted, robbed, raped and killed on the streets (Weitzer 2010:9). The trauma experienced by these victims is unspeakable and utterly inhumane, and they are slowly dehumanised.

From the empirical research, it was clear that efforts for the dehumanisation are made until victims cannot fight back and feel as though they have no

voice. They are forced to submit to their perpetrators in a kind of “unwilling” acceptance of their circumstances. This is further exacerbated by the continual threat of violence, which leads to an “obedience out of fear.” The fear factor in victims’ lives cannot be underestimated as it influences the victims’ willingness to fight for freedom or even survival.

Power and greed were also some of the influencing factors explored in empirical research. Working yourself into a position of power seemed important to survival in these networks. It is important to note that perpetrators might sometimes, therefore, be former victims themselves.

Trafficking victims are, therefore, particularly vulnerable to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to severe physical and sexual assaults (Burke 2013:232). Prolonged exposure to the level of trauma trafficking which victims are subjected to can lead to somatisation, dissociation and even pathological changes in identity. They are also at risk for self-destructive and risk-taking behaviours as well as re-victimisation (Burke 2013:233).

Van der Westhuizen (2015) adds that these victims might never become survivors due to the amount of trauma experienced. They might even experience permanent neurobiological changes, with the cortical region of the brain having permanent damage. Even the limbic system can fail, and therapy might not work.

Another psychological development in trafficking victims might be Stockholm syndrome (Burke 2013:9) and trauma bonding (Van der Westhuizen 2015). Both of these psychological effects would mean that these victims cannot fight for themselves. It is, however, essential to note that even more symptoms may be present (Burke 2013:233) which can even influence a victim’s perspective on his/her perpetrator.

Adding to this issue is the newly explored African cultural practices such as the spiritual practice of *juju* whereby victims are manipulated into thinking that they are under the control of one or another’s spirit, as well as the practice of *ukuthwala*, the practice of the abduction and forced marriage of young girls often with the consent of their parents (Van der Westhuizen 2015). All these factors contribute toward the victim’s hope diminishing over time. The issue is more complex than ever before, and the

role of theological reflections will become all the more important as this issue is addressed from a religious point of view.

Someone needs to stand in the gap for these vulnerable individuals. The Latin root of “vulnerability” points to “wounds” and “wounding”, meaning that wounds need to be covered and healed; otherwise, the individual will continue bleeding (Culp 2010:3). Unfortunately, the victims of sex trafficking have never been more invisible in one of the most visible industries in the world. According to Kruger (2015) victims of trafficking most often do not even look like they are victims and most people are not even aware that this is impacting their community, but the issue is severe and widespread (USDS 2014:13).

Adding to the complexity is the ever-evolving definitions of human trafficking, the changing nature of perpetrators who might have been victims once, the lack of healing and reintegration strategies of victims into society, the lack of support to the families of victims and perpetrators, economic challenges and the ever-growing demand (Van der Westhuizen 2015).

As was seen in die empirical research and interviews, the identification or process of determining who are truly victims of trafficking is therefore complicated. Some victims did not even realise they were victims of sex trafficking until given the language to express what happened to them. The dichotomy between sex work and sex trafficking is also essential, even though small. Few people would ever be able to distinguish one from the other without the building of long-term trust, as stigma was rife. The way the victims were stigmatised was often through judgement, which led to further dehumanisation and a loss of the sense of self in victims. It was interesting that although victims might have been trapped in this crime for a long time, it was usually big and sudden changes to the status quo that led to a victim starting to fight for freedom again. This could be anything from rejection, children or even finding a person(s) to trust. It is also important to make sure that victims want to get free before initiating action or intervention, as being rescued does not automatically lead to freedom.

As discussed, sex trafficking is a multi-perspective and multi-dimensional crime, with a long-lasting and immense impact on those affected by it. All these factors, combined with limitations in research methodology and

statistics, create barriers toward assistance. The ecumenical church could, however, play an important part in combating this crime against humanity when taking all these factors into account.

A theological perspective on human trafficking for the sex work industry

As followers of Jesus Christ and a belief in a God that values human life, the global ecumenical church cannot be disconnected from the world they live in (Gibbs & Coffey 2001:47). The cries of the exploited cannot remain unheard, and violation of human rights cannot go unnoticed. It is therefore vital to understand what the Bible says about sex trafficking, its victims and God's perspective on it.

Theological perspectives, exegesis, ethics and missional theology are used as the foundation of this theological reflection. There are many ways and different lenses through which to interpret experiences and pressing issues of our time, depending upon our starting point. For Christians and the global economic church, a different lens exists as they first and foremost need to interpret the world in light of the Gospel found in the Christian Bible. Venter (1993:247) argues that all theological departures must be primarily made from scripture as a starting point in the hope to see through the eyes of Christ and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

In this reflection, a hermeneutical challenge is the norm of slavery in a biblical time period and the modern-day abhorrence thereof. According to Carson (2016:36), a moral intuition is needed in this hermeneutical challenge, as it had been so useful for social change before. Trying to discern the "Spirit" of the biblical literature regarding slavery and prostitution, and the overall ethos that bears witness to the story of God's dealings with humanity becomes important. Simultaneously, one needs to be aware of prejudice (Carson 2016:104).

Our own historical associations of sin and shame with prostitution that have characterised human interaction dating back to the time of the Bible, often lead us to either ignore the existence of sex trafficking altogether, or on the other hand place so much emphasis on it that our response to it becomes compromised (Carson 2016:102).

The same could be stated regarding a missional reading of the Bible. A missional hermeneutic is central to this study, and therefore interpreting the Bible with mission as a central category needs to be taken seriously to be fruitful, as it is framed within the *missio Dei* (Goheen 2016:3–4).

It is also important to note the danger of oversimplifying or diminishing the complexities of a very difficult issue by selecting only a few scriptures in an otherwise vast and diverse canon (Carson 2016:12) or giving a limited summarised view in this article. In the original doctoral thesis, specific texts were identified that are associated with slavery and prostitution and were then analysed. Those conclusions will partly be discussed here.

According to Carson (2016:101), the sale and purchase of sex are seen as undesirable throughout the scriptures as it is often associated with violence, corruption and idolatry. At the same time, it is also clear though that some double standards do exist regarding prostitution. These double standards are however not theological in nature, but rather cultural and religious as it is based on prejudice, stigma, economic prowess and power. This same kind of stigma is a fundamental problem that needs to be overcome in modern-day society.

The readers, therefore, have a responsibility to discern with the Holy Spirit the ethos of mission, redemption and love, transcending those double standards (Carson 2016:101). Simultaneously an ethical motif of holiness is present throughout the scriptures. Discerning this ethos and motif starts with the character of God.

Throughout theological reflection, it was clear that God is a God of forgiveness, justice and compassion. In the light thereof, God has set freedom and righteousness as divine priorities, with humankind being the receiver. In fact, God has made man in His image for a special bond with Him and has made it a priority to preserve this bond, culminating in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He is the God who transforms even perpetrators and continually gives humankind another chance at redemption. God's love for all will therefore always triumph over the law. He rebuilds, renews, and restores as He creates new identities for those who worship Him. He is the God of the marginalised, the downtrodden and the oppressed. In God, victims are moved from powerless to powerful, living with dignity and restored status.

God sees victims in a different light than sinners needing saving. This kind of view only promotes unethical behaviour. The church should be aware of adding to any form of stigma that adds to the suffering (Carson 2016:102) and simultaneously be an agent of change. The stigmatisation of sex workers is continually undermined throughout the Bible, especially as shown in the stories of Joseph, Tamar and Rahab, and later through the ministry of Jesus Christ (Carson 2016:101). It is important to note that while some texts did uphold slavery, there was a simultaneous reformist position taken in by those laws, and as Carson (2016:105) states, there is a “redemptive impulse” that overrides those. According to Carson (2016:33), divine love is ultimately shown to be incompatible with a system that fuels slavery, as Jesus Christ proclaims freedom to all the captives. According to Carson (2016:105), these redemptive impulses should still inform Christian efforts to counter the injustices of modern-day slavery.

It is therefore that Bauckham (2016:28) states that mission is, therefore, the hermeneutical key through which the scriptures should ultimately be understood. It is a way of reading the whole scripture with mission as its interest and goal in attempting to understand what the church’s mission is in the world.

Biblical literature is clear in its support of the view that Christians should work towards the eradication of prostitution, without condemning the prostitutes themselves (Carson 2016:105). At the same time, the eradication of sex trafficking is in line with the ethos of the gospel of Jesus Christ and bringing restitution to those caught in it as a return to the former status in which they were created. According to Carson (2016:55), there is a moral imperative for Christians to see slavery and exploitation of others as incompatible with what we know and understand of God. Working against sex trafficking must, therefore, be central to the church’s role in the world. A Missional approach could assist in this endeavour.

A missional appropriation on human trafficking for the sex work industry

According to Carson (2016:107), the biblical ethos of redemption and freedom has profound implications for a Christian response to human

trafficking. It informs the church's identity and its mission. Following the example of God, the church is to reach beyond itself to others in mission.

Missional theology could assist in this endeavour as it provides for a global theory which can be lived out locally. Missional theology is built on the foundation of the *missio Dei*. According to Niemandt (2007:147), the *missio Dei* is the mission of the church in the world that belongs to God. It is the good news that God loves the world and is at work in the world and the church. The church has the privilege of then participating in what God is already doing in the world through His redemptive work started in Jesus Christ (Bosch 1991:10, 391; Hancke 2005:25).

God is the source of all mission, and the church needs to discern where God's Spirit is at work in the world in order to join Him in His mission (Balia & Kim 2010:223). As the Triune God is, in essence, a sending God, He sends the church into the world (Bosch 1991:390) with the aim being the transformation of life.

This mission starts on the doorstep of every believer as the church does not do mission; it is mission (Bosch 1991:372). To do this, the church needs to be incarnationally present in the world, and especially in the community it finds itself. The incarnation points to the embodiment and sacrifice (*kenosis*) of Jesus Christ and His redemptive love and works on earth. The Holy Spirit continues to do this work today, and through this working, the church needs to live out this incarnation and make disciples of Christ in both word and deed (Balia & Kim 2010:233). According to Niemandt (2013:31) transformation is then inevitable when people experience the love of Christ.

Living out the incarnation also leads to the formation of a new missional spirituality, which is formed within the nature and presence of God (WCC 2012:14). A missional spirituality leads to the transformation of all life destroying values and systems. It is especially important in the issue of sex trafficking, as one's prejudice can be an obstacle toward transformation, and stigma constantly remains an issue. The discernment and transformation of the self is, therefore, an essential first step, and this happens through the universality and redemptive work and mission of the Holy Spirit, the *missio Spiritus* (WCC 2012:10). Through this mission, the believer is led to action in the world, as the Holy Spirit also empowers the individual

and the church to partake in the *missio Dei* in reaching the unreached, marginalised and powerless. This is also an essential part of empowering those at the grassroots level to join in the mission.

Niemandt (2010:16) notes that a new missional language will surface when this transformation takes place. Language forms an essential part of the being of a culture or church and serves as a sign of a new missional spirituality. It will be related to phrases such as “to be sent”, “incarnation”, “inculturation”, “discipleship”, and “a willingness to cross boundaries.” It is the consequence of a new identity for the church.

Bosch (1991:393–510) describes in-depth what this new mission encompasses. It is first and foremost to be a mediator of salvation, but is also a quest for righteousness, evangelism, contextualising, deliverance, inculturation, a ministry commandment for all God’s children, testimonies towards other faiths, mission as theology and mission as action in hope. It partakes in the canonical ethos that challenges the status quo of all marginalisation and oppression. McManus (2005:1) therefore argues for an approach where the individual is valued, and the fear of judgement is overpowered by the love of Jesus Christ. Victims need to be seen through the foundation of Genesis 1:26, all as equal and created in the *imago Dei* for a special connection with Him.

According to Bosch (1991:403), evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable, as the gospel and good news of Jesus Christ are for the needs of the total human being. This is a crucial aspect in avoiding the danger of a theological resocialisation of the victims of sex trafficking and ethically approaching this issue.

Christians are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in proclaiming freedom for the oppressed and to be agents of that freedom. To think missionally about church and an approach to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, therefore, means thinking differently about being church in the world and participating in the *missio Dei*. Within this new paradigm of mission and sex trafficking and the possibility of transformation, hope, liberation and justice plays an important part. Hope should lead to liberation, and when liberated, liberation and justice should be pursued.

Joining God in this mission would mean doing mission in the hope of the transformation of present circumstances (Bosch 1991:498–499). According to Bosch (1991:510), this is mission as action in hope, with the church being the agent of this hope through incarnational living. As was evident in the empirical research, victims' hope diminishes over time and is a necessary aspect of mission. In the case of sex trafficking, the hope would be settled in liberation. As God is the God of freedom, the hope for liberation needs to be acted upon by the church. On this point, it is important to note the importance of hope as the main aspect of the missional approach to sex trafficking, as even if liberation does not happen, hope should not fade. Liberation implies a clean break, a new beginning (Bosch 1991:435) and starts from "below," from the point of view of the oppressed and marginalised, in a "mission from the margins" (WCC 2012:5). This should lead to a life-giving mission for all (WCC 2012:15), which includes liberation from all forms of oppression.

It is interesting to note Paul's stance on liberation, which according to Bosch (1991:445) entailed the humanisation of the slave. It in itself was a form of liberation from socio-political status, stigma and thought, and one which is essential to this research due to the dehumanising effects of sex trafficking and its controlling methods.

Bosch (1991:446) also states that Paul, and later Jesus, did not keep silent in the wake of cultural norms, yet they also did not harbour unrealistic expectations of liberation in their context. It is vital for the church to have a voice and act in liberation, yet also take note of the limits it finds itself in. Hope always leads to the possibility of liberation and transformation (Bosch 1991:447). Hope, therefore, cannot be lost, for the hope of liberation will direct action, action which is founded on the incarnation and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Mission as action in hope and mission as liberation are therefore integrally linked in the plight of the victims of sex trafficking.

Closely connected to hope and liberation is justice, justice for the victims and the consequence of prosecution for the perpetrators. Justice in terms of legalistic and political issues remain on the agenda of the victims. They are in a fight for basic and sexual rights, and the church has the mandate to assist in this space. Simultaneously, the issue of prevention of this tragedy in future is also an issue of justice as perpetrators are not simply going to

disappear without intervention. For Christians, justice is more than merely political or legalistic as it has love as its foundation. As Bosch (1991:403) states, the religious ethic of love will always aim to leave the idea of justice with the ideal of love.

Motivated by love, Christians are always moved to evangelism and the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ (Bosch 1991:403). It should, however, not only be in word, but also in deed and social action as evangelism should generate social involvement. A vertical dimension without an incarnate expression has lost the vision of the *missio Dei* (Bosch 1991:408). Mission as justice, therefore, has a holistic side.

Justice entails transformation and is therefore essentially part of missional theology. The realising of justice happens when the believer lives ethically in obedience to the mission of God fighting for justice (Wright 2010:94). Mission as justice is then also an essential part of mission to those enslaved by sex trafficking.

From the above mentioned it is clear that hope, liberation and justice are connected, and all have an essential influence on thinking missionally about this issue. They are all built on the *missio Dei*, which is transformative in nature and entails the entire life of the believer, has love as a central point and brings change to the oppressed and those in need. These are the ways through which the church could join in the mission of God in the issue of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in a mission to and from the margins.

The ecumenical church needs to learn how to be the hermeneutical sense of the gospel, and therefore the first missional task of the church, especially regarding sex trafficking, would not be to change the world, but rather to change itself (Bosch 1979:246). Through empirical research, it was clear that the church needed to be church outside of its own walls. There is a need to be the church on the streets and in the brothels, even if some resistance is to be expected.

A church participating in this way in the mission of God should have specific and concrete missional goals (Callahan 1983:1). According to Callahan, this is of utmost importance, yet it should also be noted that one church cannot be everything to everyone, hence an ecumenical approach is needed. As

was seen in the complexity of sex trafficking and the consequences therein, a network of skills is needed in assisting the victims and their families in a holistic way, especially in reintegration. It could then truly lead to a life-giving mission.

In conclusion, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a gross crime and indignity against those who have been created in the image of God. The global ecumenical church has a responsibility to be an agent of transformation and assist the victims of this crime to become survivors and live and experience the fullness of life for which they were created. The church has a theological and ethical responsibility and a missional mandate to achieve this. The global theory then assists the church in creating local strategies in this regard.

Guidelines

In the pursuit of a global theory, it was clear that the theological foundation is globally applicable. This, however, needs to translate into a locally useful strategy for the ecumenical church. Practical thoughts and guidelines to a missional approach are needed, which are briefly explored in this section as seen in the literature and empirical research.

As shown, missional theology provides the transformational paradigm needed for the ecumenical church's involvement in the issue of sex trafficking. Within the theory, they need to have specific missional goals which are measurable, and for which they can be kept accountable. This keeps the focus on the action, given that theory often has no practical outflow.

This process of involvement starts with prayer and discernment in joining God where He is already busy. In this phase, understanding the phenomenon at hand is of importance. Awareness, training and education for all possible stakeholders, including those at the grassroots level, are necessary for this process. Simultaneously, opportunities need to be created to encounter and spend time with those caught in the web of sex trafficking. This action will also ultimately assist in the discerning and identification of victims of sex trafficking. Reaching a point of understanding also assists in becoming self-aware regarding prejudices, which ultimately assist the process of

breaking the stigma surrounding victims and also those assisting victims such as law enforcement and other stakeholders.

At the same time, being on the streets and in the brothels provides the space where relationships and trust could be built and stigma addressed. These encounters should, however, be done with no other agenda than to love, as love ultimately leads to trust and transformation, and this trust is strengthened through perseverance. Victims need to feel as though they belong. Often, investing time and resources leads to freedom, even if not physical in nature. In this sense, group outreaches could be leveraged to be the first points of contact for building relationships.

The ecumenical church needs to move to the point where it has an “open-door” policy for the oppressed and marginalised. In having an open-door, it should continuously take on a servant position and be on the lookout and sensitive toward new forms of oppression and marginalisation. In this, victim protection, basic human and sexual rights, and even prevention should be high on the ecumenical church’s agenda. An example of this is not impeding on the victim’s free will in a rescue attempt.

The ecumenical church is uniquely positioned in multiple locations with a variety of talents, resources and skills. Being part of various networks enables the ecumenical church to approach this issue holistically, as is needed. Networks could, for example, be used to create strategic points of contact, drop-in centres or places of safety. Sharing time, talents and treasure between various stakeholders make it more manageable for even one to be involved in an impactful way. It is crucial in bringing hope, courage and life to those who remain trapped.

Working together is not however always the easiest of task, and it requires common ground, Standard Operating Procedures or Memoranda of Understanding. These are especially important in support of those who are already involved in combating this crime against humanity as it creates both boundaries and expectations. One of the ways in which the ecumenical church could support existing stakeholders such as safe houses or law enforcement could, for example, be as a spiritual partner. This includes a pastoral side but also includes assisting victims in finding faith, hope, forgiveness and self-worth. Another critical role for the ecumenical

church is in the process of victim reintegration into society, as networks could be leveraged regarding job skills development and more.

Ultimately, the ecumenical church is sent to be the hermeneutical sense of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this, they, however, need to be aware of the dangers of theological re-socialisation, yet always strive to bring about transformation through a life-giving mission started by God. It is clear that the ecumenical church can be an agent of transformation through a missional approach. These guidelines show that theology and theory can move to praxis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a gross crime against those who have been created in the image of God. The global ecumenical church has a responsibility to be an agent of transformation and assist victims to become survivors. The church has a theological and ethical responsibility and a missional mandate to achieve this. The global theory assists the church in creating local strategies in this regard.

It is clear, as hypothesised, that a missional appropriation of human trafficking for the sex work industry built on a transformative approach could lead to a life-giving mission to the victims thereof.

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