

A need for Reformed traditions to transform towards a womanist turning point

**Author:**Amina K. Binca-Mkhesu¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Amina K. Binca-Mkhesu, khusi@tuks.co.za

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The churches in post-1994 South Africa exist in a context of many challenges. This article will review literature from black and womanist perspectives to argue that Reformed traditions need to transform towards a womanist approach. This is because they collaborated to the socio-economic challenges of the post-1994 South Africa. The article reflects on challenges that Reformed churches must overcome, which result from their lack of advocacy and activism against systems of oppression. This further justifies their need to transform towards a womanist turning point. The practical recommendations of this transformation will be discussed.

Contribution: The article contributes towards the development of womanist ecclesiology in South Africa.

Keywords: Reformed; womanist; South African Council of Churches; democracy; South Africa.

Introduction

The prophetic role of churches has been weakened in the midst of socio-economic challenges of the post-1994 South Africa. Most of the socio-economic challenges of South Africa resulted from historical injustices by the oppressive systems of colonialism and apartheid as enforced by a racist government. The Reformed churches collaborated to this through their theological justification of the oppression of black people. Those who are negatively affected by the post-1994 socio-economic challenges are black people, particularly women and children. Black people in South Africa, the majority of whom are Christians, rely on religion as their source of comfort, hope, and resilience in the face of oppression that manifests in the form of poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), among others. The strong religious nature of South Africans can be used to liberate them as it has been used to oppress them. Thus, this article calls for Reformed traditions to contribute towards the liberation of the poor and oppressed by transforming towards a womanist turning point. Perhaps all churches in South Africa need to transform towards a womanist turning point because none of them identifies as womanist. However, the scope of this article is limited to Reformed traditions as most are governed by white theology, and have contributed to the theological justification of racism and sexism. Next, it is imperative to explain what is meant by a womanist approach.

The womanist approach

Womanist theology is a theological aspect of womanism. Womanism is a social transformative philosophy that seeks a comprehensive liberation of all. The womanist philosophy is founded on the experiences of black women. This is because their experience of intersectional oppression based on race, gender, class, and others, enables them to reason and critique various perspectives simultaneously (Phillips 2006:xxxix). Womanism was simultaneously coined by Chikwenye Ogunyemi and Alice Walker. Walker is often acknowledged as the first to mention the term womanism in her 1979 short story 'Coming Apart'. Kobo (2018:81) asserts that Ogunyemi's 'location as an African in Nigeria is arguably the reason her definition of womanism did not receive as much prominence as that of a scholar in the Global North'. Katie Geneva Cannon is known as the first to employ the womanist philosophy from a theological perspective in 'The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness', published in 1985.

Womanist Christology interprets Christ's salvific action as liberation, and it views liberation as the main mission of Jesus Christ. Thus, similar to black theology of liberation (BTL), its analytical starting point is liberation. Womanist theology holds that Jesus identifies with black women because of his solidarity with the poor and oppressed, through his inclusive ministry and his

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quest for liberation. Womanist theology critiques black theologians of liberation for ignoring black women's experiences in their analysis of oppression. It also critiques feminist theology as a construct that was originally intended for white women. However, some liberative tools from both black and feminist discourses are useful in the womanist analysis. A womanist church is one that aims to liberate the poor and oppressed from the perspective of black women's experiences. This is the approach that Reformed traditions in South Africa must adopt in the quest for liberation in the face of socio-economic challenges that are discussed in the following section.

The role of historical and theological injustice in the post-1994 challenges

There is no discussion about the current status of the church, and the socio-economic and political issues in South Africa without a historical reflection of the causes. The theological justification of colonialism and apartheid, as well as pseudo-religion, have been the main contributors that led to the post-1994 challenges. These challenges can be traced back to the conception of Reformed traditions. Without undermining their liberative aspects, the Reformed theologies contain defective elements, which are associated with racism, sexism, and classism. These defective elements emanated from the Reformers' failure, particularly Martin Luther and John Calvin, to employ the central aspect of the gospel of Christ, which, according to black and womanist theologies, is the liberation of the oppressed. The Reformers' theologies from above limited them from employing liberation as the starting point for their theological comprehension. The defective aspects of Reformed theologies were transplanted in Africa to conquer some of the African countries. As such, black women became mostly oppressed by the defects of Reformed theologies. This theological oppression was intensified by the distortion, suppression, and omission of the liberative aspects of Reformed theologies, as well as the non-contextualisation of scripture to manipulate Africans. Therefore, although some aspects of Reformed theologies are liberative, they lose relevance when they are not contextualised and interpreted from the perspective of the oppressed. These defective elements of Reformed theologies continue to create an ambivalence for the black women of South Africa in the post-1994 period who are members of the Reformed churches. Although the church has been the most prominent institution in the lives of the black people of South Africa, it has not fully functioned effectively in the role of liberation. The theological understanding of ecclesiology has not been a liberative one as it has been defined in Eurocentric terms, which do not take into account the lived experiences and struggles of black people. Belgrave (2001) notes that drawing fundamental aspects of ecclesiology from white Western theology led to problems in the black church when it comes to matters of liberation, and this is because white theology is not concerned about the liberation of black humanity. The failures of the Reformers must not be adopted ecclesiastically and theologically. Therefore, the

Reformed tradition in South Africa has to transform towards a contextual theological and existential imperative. The Reformed traditions must be the prophetic voice and be active in challenging these socio-economic challenges that continue to suppress the poor and the marginalised. When the Reformed traditions transform towards a womanist turning point, they can adequately become a prophetic voice confronting the challenges of the modern South Africa. The following section discusses various challenges that the Reformed traditions in South Africa must overcome.

The challenges facing the Reformed churches in South Africa

Smit (2003:233) and Fourie (2011:364) ask the question 'Can we still be Reformed' in the midst of South African modernity? The recent history of South Africa 'has brought tensions and challenges to the fore that merit a serious consideration of this question' (Fourie 2011:364). Most tensions and challenges of being Reformed in South Africa seem 'to be internal, namely Reformed theology itself' (Fourie 2011:364).

The Reformed theology that was used to justify apartheid was also used in the struggle for liberation against apartheid. However, the liberative Reformed theology that was used in the struggle against apartheid 'did not prepare the Reformed Christians adequately for South Africa's radical modernisation' (Fourie 2011:364). Another internal challenge is that of divisions between the Reformed churches in South Africa (Fourie 2011:364). The external challenges that the Reformed traditions in South Africa are faced with include the 'nature of the radical transformation that is still taking place', namely 'the rapid institutionalisation of modernity' (Fourie 2011:264–365). This is to be expected because the 'political, economic and social changes – which took centuries to take place in Europe – were instituted virtually overnight in South Africa' (Fourie 2011:365). To answer the initial question of whether it is still possible to be Reformed in South Africa, this article suggests that it is possible, particularly if the Reformed traditions can transform towards a womanist turning point. The future of the church in South Africa cannot be discussed 'without confronting the deficient structures and forms of faith that were transplanted by the missionaries in Africa and South Africa in particular' (Vellem 2013:146). In 1980, Boesak mentioned that the black church in South Africa had not attained its authentic identity because white control is making it difficult for black people to identify with the church. In the 21st century, Boesak (2009:49) noted that the gospel of subservience presently exists in 'subtler forms', and he continues to talk about the problem of the unity between church and empire that continues to suffocate black humanity in oppressive conditions, of which black women suffer the most.

Black people have inherited structures that are 'geared to the needs of people who have no sensitivity whatsoever for the black situation' (Boesak 1980:18), and this makes it hard for the black church to express their faith effectively, that is, in a way that liberates them. Church structures that have been

inherited by black people are not womanist because they do not identify with the black experience of the communities they serve. Laguzia (2017) affirms that:

The Christianity introduced to Africans by the missionaries carried with it both the culture of the Bible and that of the west, with regard to women participation in the church. Armed with a superiority complex and an ignorance of the traditional religions, they enforced a Christianity which was embedded with their prejudices. They did not present a God of love to the people. (p. 7)

The statement by Laguzia is true to Africa in general and South Africa in particular. The God that was introduced by missionaries in South Africa hates black people and their culture. Vellem (2013) mentions that the defective teachings of the 19th-century missionary enterprise continue to exist. Indeed, the racist and sexist western theology that was preached in the apartheid South Africa continues to express itself in subtle ways in the post-1994 South Africa. Hence, the need to transform towards a womanist turning point. The womanist approach is adequate because it acknowledges the influence of the socio-economic conditions in the lives of the oppressed. Like BTL, it acknowledges that people's thinking is affected by socio-economic conditions, and it is not afraid to identify with their struggles (Boesak 1980). The Reformed churches in South Africa must grasp that when the 'oppressed employ the ideology of the oppressor ... results that are injurious to the oppressed group can be reasonably anticipated' (Belgrave 2001:10). When Christianity was introduced to Africa, the term 'missionary' mostly referred to men, and the educational opportunities that were created for women equipped them for the roles that the church deemed suitable for women, such as home crafts, cooking and cleaning the home (Isichei 1995:80). The Western church model, that was introduced to Africa adopted the Reformers' patriarchal path by enforcing the idea of 'male superordination and women subordination', they justified it (sanctified it or made it holy) theologically through Christological approaches (Belgrave 2001:110). Grant (1990:206) highlights the irony in that those women regarded as ontologically more religious than men were not permitted the authority to define religion. Grant (1995) also posits that:

Women have been denied humanity, personhood, leadership, and equality because of the church's history of negative Christology. This aspect of negative Christology has resulted primarily from overemphasis on the maleness of Jesus. The maleness, in actuality, has become idolatrous: the maleness of Jesus has been so central to our understanding of Jesus Christ that even the personality of Jesus, and interpretations of Christ have been consistently distorted. (p. 132)

This is the same Jesus that was introduced to Africans, the one who was confined in a patriarchal prison that was obsessed with the supremacy of men. Christ was not only in the prison of patriarchy, but he was also imprisoned in a cage of white supremacy – a racist Christology. He was portrayed as Caucasian, and this led to the deification of whiteness, which is expressed in a theological allegory and language that associates white with 'good' and 'pure', while black represents 'badness', 'sin' and 'evil' (Grant 1995). This had cultural and socio-political implications that justified racism:

That is, there is a fallacious notion that God has created White people superior to Black people, and thus God has given White people the divine right and obligation to rule over/oppress Black people. (Belgrave 2001:111)

Grant's (1995) argument concerning the racist Christology is that:

... the church has been a bastion of racism. This is reflected not only in the practice of much of its populace, but in the structures and in the theologies of the churches. Studies on church leadership (including present patterns), religious and educational institutions, and the history of theology confirm this. For example, even though 'open itinerancy' is claimed in the church, it is more likely that White men would be placed in leadership in Black and integrated churches, than that others, especially Black men and women, would be so placed. (p. 133)

The double imprisonment of Christ implies double distancing of women away from Christ's personhood. This double alienation from God is indicated in the scenario that, when theological education became accessible to white women, they became recipients of the racist theology. Where feminist (which are dominated by White women) and black (which are dominated by black men) interpretations of scripture affirmed the equal status of all humanity, black women's voices remained unheard (Laguzia, 2017). There is also a third dimension of the imprisonment of Christ which Grant identifies as 'The Historical Imprisonment of Jesus Christ by the Privileged Class' (Belgrave 2001:112). She critiques the classism embedded in traditional Christology, highlighting how the theology of the white church has reshaped Jesus' image. While the Bible portrays Jesus as a carpenter from a Jewish peasant class and a servant to humanity, this 'lowly Jesus' has been reimagined in theological, social, political, and economic terms as a figure of privilege. This transformation aligns Jesus with the elite and oppressive societal structures, erasing his Jewish heritage, his experience as part of a conquered people, and his suffering and death to make him more acceptable to the powerful ruling classes (Belgrave 2001:112). The Reformed churches, which are governed by Reformed theology in South Africa, preach a gospel that is predominantly white and patriarchal, one that is alienated from the past, present and future of the communities that it is meant to serve. Sadly, even black preachers' messages employ a white theological lens, which they were taught in the dominant white theological institutions. For this reason, authentic black scholars – those who are black-conscious, employ contextual and relevant black liberative discourses in their work rather than reproducing the oppressive western approaches, and they are involved in the struggle for liberation they call for the decolonisation of academic institutions. Masenya (2005) argues that South African theological curricula rely on Western epistemology rather than African realities. She says this resulted in:

... a legacy inherited from colonial and apartheid South Africa, [theology] scholars have produced graduates who, after

completion of African their studies, remain irrelevant to their African-South contexts: a situation which is alarmingly similar to what used to be the case in apartheid theology during apartheid South Africa. (Masenya 2005:742)

Masenya (2005) mentions that an African scholar who chooses to identify with grassroots African Bible readers who are not familiar with hermeneutics has to contend with the 'insider/outsider' dilemma of the theological academy. She highlights that most black preachers have remained recipients of Western theology, making their theology irrelevant to grassroots contextual realities. Womanist churches are likely to exist independent of the Reformation; that is, they do not trace their foundations from Reformed traditions. They are a product of black women who, through their life experience of oppression, have identified a need to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ by and for themselves towards reclaiming their liberation. The womanist churches will develop as products of black women's revolution, and as a great stride, they must be accentuated in ecclesiological life. Jesus does not upgrade the role of women by giving new dignity to old tasks, but creates alternatives (Boesak 2019). This means:

... he does not try to reform old, unworkable, oppressive systems; he overthrows them, and gives women a freedom not derived from revamped patriarchal ideologies that remain unchallenged and unchanged at the core, pretending change but in reality, continuing to define women's freedom within the borders of acceptability for men. (Boesak 2019:4470)

Unlike Reformation which is aimed for something that is good but requires a bit of correction here and there, revolution is an independent formation. This is the reason Cone (2010:77) highlights the necessity 'to speak of the black revolution rather than reformation'. However, there is a significant number of black South African women in the post-1994 period who are adherents of Reformed traditions, and this is why it is significant to discuss the need for the Reformed churches to transform towards a womanist turning point. This suggests that there are lessons that the Reformed churches can learn from womanist ecclesiological approach. This is affirmed by Laguzia's description of the Reformation as a continuous *semper reformanda* event which remains relevant in the 21st century, 'especially to African women since the unholy trinity of the reformers ... have been questioned, critiqued, and categorised in order to recover the prospect of the reformation of Church and society' (Laguzia 2017:7). The Reformers' theological interpretations cannot be relevant and meaningful in the post-1994 South African context when they are preached as they were in the 16th-century Western context. They must not be interpreted through white lenses. For Reformed theologies to be effective, there must be a radical transformation, perhaps similar to Boesak's 'Radical Calvinism', but taking matters even deeper as Boesak (2019) acknowledges that he and his generation did not reach the necessary depths. A womanist transformation will acknowledge that the starting point of Reformers' theologies is associated with defective aspects, and thereafter seek to employ the correct foundational lens of liberation. This can potentially transform the defective

aspects of Reformed theologies into liberative ones. Other concepts that have been regarded as fundamental to the Reformed traditions may not be able to be transformed in order to have relevance in the South African context, and thus may have to fall away. Mosala (1987) argues that white tools cannot be used to counter whiteness; however, for the sake of the black people in Reformed traditions, the article calls for a womanist transformation of these tools. This includes employing womanist hermeneutic of deconstruction, where oppressive aspects are exposed and deconstructed to transform them into liberative ones. Where white agenda is transformed to black, coupled with whatever is to fall away from that, traditionally, ecclesiastically, epistemologically, hermeneutically and in praxis. The dominant androcentric descriptions of God will have to be challenged. For the Reformed churches to transform towards a womanist turning point, there must be discussions around the concept of womanist Presbyterianism, womanist Lutheranism, womanist Methodism and so on – all who share in the Protestant Reformation. This may sound impossible, as it is a combination of two distinct theological lenses; however, Boesak (2010) agrees that it is possible for one to be black and Reformed. Therefore, for the sake of black women in the Reformed churches, the defective theologies of the Reformers will have to transform towards a womanist turning point. The womanist Reformed church would be the one that, in Boesak's (2019:510) words, reclaims the Reformed tradition 'not simply as an adversary to be challenged or a burden to be resignedly carried; a lethal tool in the hands of' White-minded followers of White Reformation, but 'as genuine inspiration for our struggle for liberation, justice, and dignity'. The author is not aware of any church that identifies as womanist in South Africa. The only church known to identify as womanist is 'The Gathering: A womanist Church' which is based in the United States of America. The next section provides practical approaches that the Reformed traditions can follow in their transformation towards the womanist turning point.

Practical recommendations towards a womanist church

Repentance

The first step for the Reformed traditions to transform towards a womanist turning point is genuine repentance.

This would mean an authentic acknowledgement by the Reformed traditions of their historical contribution in the oppression of black people through the theological justification of apartheid. True repentance is not only drafted on paper, but it goes with a change of actions – the actions that display identification with those who are poor and oppressed as a result of historic theological justification of apartheid and oppression of black people. This repentance also means active resistance of current subtle expressions of racism and other forms of oppression, because they never ended; they have only changed face. The womanist church rejects oppressive theological interpretations that promote

racism and sexism. It employs liberative hermeneutical approaches.

Ecclesiastical identification

A church in South Africa cannot be European; otherwise, it will have defects that this article has addressed. A South African church must have a South African identity. Yes, South Africa is a diverse and multicultural country and has no single identity; however, it is a predominantly black country, and the majority of its citizens are poor. An authentic church in South Africa is identified by its blackness, because its very main goal is to liberate the poorest and the most oppressed people, who are black people. Blackness is the identification and active involvement in the struggle for liberation. Therefore, one of the practical recommendations is for the Reformed traditions in South Africa to identify as black not only in policies but most importantly through the active involvement in projects aimed for the liberation of the poor and oppressed people.

Towards a womanist thought

For the members of the South African Reformed traditions to adapt to the notion of black and womanist approaches, there will have to be a transformation of the mind. Colonialism and apartheid started in the mind.

Therefore, the responsibility of the church is to decolonise the minds of both the oppressors and the oppressed through the teachings that align with womanist theology. The ministers of this church must be passionate about liberation, which is Christ's main mission. The womanist approach will use the experiences of black women for a comprehensive liberation of everyone. The Reformed traditions will have to take pride in black women and recognise their potential to lead. In the post-1994 South African context, black women are the hope of the Reformed traditions that seek to transform towards a womanist turning point in the quest to liberate the most oppressed. Jesus surely identifies with black women as the most oppressed. He knows them, and specially equips them with the wisdom to lead, nurture, survive and resist oppression. Much can be learned from them and their experiences. A Church that has repented, identifies with the oppressed, and ensures that it is equipped with the liberative tools of womanist theology as it becomes actively involved in liberating the oppressed.

Activism

That salvation by grace produces actions cannot be overemphasised in womanist theology, for it does not consider theory and action as separate entities but as interdependent on each other (Belgrave 2001). This means one cannot find a situation that Maimela referred to earlier where church confessions do not match with church praxis. A church that is transforming towards a womanist turning point will be known by its impact. It 'Struggle[s] to achieve Black liberation by any [and every] liberative means

necessary!' (Belgrave 2001:344). In line with the womanist ecclesial model, the Reformed churches must ask questions that will assist in identifying socio-economic challenges and their causes in the black communities they serve, and once a proper analysis has been conducted, action must be taken. Belgrave (2001) affirms that a liberator-church must be an 'Institution of Liberative Praxis' and serve as a 'Multidimensional Liberation Centre' in its community. He asserts that:

The church should seek to address the causes as well as the symptoms of the complex web of problems and challenges facing the [black] community ... It will be an institutional site to which local people, especially the poor, will have access. The liberator-church will use its resources and network/contacts to improve the spiritual, social, political, economic, physical and mental health, educational, familial and personal well-being of the community it serves. (Belgrave 2001:345)

Unity and collaboration

A womanist church recognises the invisible church. The South African government cannot address socio-economic issues on its own; it requires the cooperation of citizens, and the church can play a huge role in this regard. Fourie (2011) affirms that:

... politics is not in a position to address the substantial challenge of formulating and implementing policy that can address extreme levels of poverty without the assistance of people and groups willing and able to embody their convictions. (p. 368)

This does not mean the church must agree with all that the government does, but it plays a significant role of being the prophetic voice of the poor, the marginalised and oppressed, a voice that is not part of government but guides the government to ensure justice. For the Reformed church to be effective in this, it must break barriers of division from within. Fourie (2011:369) calls for the Reformed ecclesiology to 'make dialogue and cooperation especially possible for Reformed Christians' and strengthen the unity of the holy catholic church.

Collaboration with other members or groups that may not necessarily be Christian (the anonymous Christians) but strive towards the same goal of liberation is encouraged. Fourie (2011:369) affirms that 'the universality of God's presence has through the ages provided Reformed Christians with the resources to collaborate amidst differences – often also with those who do not regard themselves as Christians'.

Prioritising children and youth

A transformation towards a womanist approach requires the development and care of young people to be taken seriously to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the struggle to liberate the oppressed. Young people fall under the category of the most vulnerable; thus, a true womanist church must be willing to support and guide them in the journey of growth and self-discovery. Belgrave (2001) claims that:

... a society's young people are the human barometers of what is wrong and of what is right with the larger society. That is, the young are typically the most vulnerable, the least psycho-emotionally developed and the least empowered persons within a society (since power typically rests in the hands of society's adults). This translates into young people being the mostly likely to be victimised or adversely affected by the social problems existent within a society. (p. 335)

In the above citation, Belgrave precisely posits that the youth are more vulnerable and most impacted by the socio-economic ills of society. He further mentions that adults who are responsible for socio-economic challenges often blame young people when they 'act out' in response to the impact of these challenges, and this blame leads to double victimisation. Young people in South Africa are faced with multiple challenges. As mentioned earlier, South Africa is faced with high rates of unemployment. In the first quarter of 2015, approximately 3 646 000 young people were unemployed (Graham & Mlatsheni 2015:51), '[y]oung women are more vulnerable to unemployment than young men' (Graham & Mlatsheni 2015:51), and 'African and Coloured youth are far more vulnerable to unemployment than their White or Indian counterparts' (Graham & Mlatsheni 2015:51). Lam, Leibbrandt and Mlatsheni (2008) assert that:

African teenagers in Cape Town tend to have high rates of school enrolment, high rates of grade repetition, and low rates of employment. These patterns are very similar to those that would be found for African youth in all of South Africa. Limited labour market opportunities, driven in part by extreme spatial segregation that is a legacy of apartheid, presumably plays an important role in explaining both the low employment and the high school enrolment. Coloured youth have significantly higher employment rates than African youth, a possible reflection of both closer geographic proximity to jobs and the legacy of the coloured labour preferences that existed in the Western Cape under apartheid. (p. 11)

Jewkes et al. (2001:733) identify teenage pregnancy as a common problem in South Africa, with one in five pregnant teenagers being infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). They further mention that:

The majority of teenagers reported having had sex against their wishes and one in ten had been raped. Experience of coercive sex was a risk factor for pregnancy. Two thirds of teenagers had been beaten by a boyfriend, with pregnant teenagers reporting more episodes. (Jewkes et al. 2001:737)

In South Africa, poverty is a risk factor for substance abuse (Mokwena & Huma 2014:352), and young people in the townships resort to drugs. Mokwena and Huma (2014:353) identify *Nyaope* as 'a relatively new South African illicit drug which is highly addictive and commonly used by youths'.

These problems that are facing the black youth of South Africa are a cry for help. Belgrave (2001:335) agrees that this is 'the opportunity for adults in the church and the community to become advocates for young people', as these young people may not be able to 'clearly understand, articulate and therefore, work through this very difficult process' Belgrave (2001:335).

The Reformed traditions must make the development of youth their priority. The history of South Africa has brought about an identity crisis among the black people, more particularly the youth (Vellem 2007). Moseley (1989) asserts that the church has a crucial role in helping the youth deal with the problem of identity crisis through education programmes (Belgrave 2001:337). Moseley (1989) writes:

The vocation of the [womanist] church is to transmit this commitment to justice, and to solidify its foundations in a divine source of meaning and power intergenerationally, so that the dreams of the ancestors become the visions of the young. This requires education but also 'active engagement' with the values of freedom, justice and human dignity that have shaped the history of our people. If not in the church, where will youth find mentors in grandparents and foster grandparents in whose souls the wisdom of our ancestors are indelibly written? The church is the last vestige of the extended black family and the principal resource for enlightening and strengthening the moral and spiritual development of black youth. (pp. 91–92)

Belgrave (2001:337) asserts that the church is the 'last hope' for the black youth, and the 'salvation' of youth by the church is a reciprocative scenario in that the 'church *saving itself* by preserving its own future and the future' of the broader society (Belgrave 2001:338). Foster (1989:109) agrees that ministry to the youth must incorporate or bind the 'youth into the life and mission of the church as the contemporary extension and expression of Christ's ministry'.

Conclusion

The post-1994 South Africa faces various socio-economic challenges as a result of historical injustice.

The prophetic voice of the Church in South Africa has been weakened as a result of the divisions within the Christian religion, some prominent voices being part of government, South Africa being identified as a secular state as it functions independent of religion, and pluralism that is endorsed by the Constitution and more. It is however argued that the church in South Africa does have power to make a positive change by becoming the prophetic voice of the oppressed, and embracing pluralism to form partnerships, firstly with other Christian denominations, and secondly, with other religious bodies to achieve the common goal of liberation as Christ intended. Through the womanist approach, the Reformed churches will avoid pseudo-spirituality, challenge cultic spiritualities that are a setback to the liberation of black women's bodies, repent for contributing to the oppression of black women, identify with black women, commit to a womanist praxis that is active in the struggle for liberation and prioritise a womanist liberative ministry for the youth.

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Amina K. Binca-Mkhesu: Conceptualisation, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Disclaimer

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