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Stabanising The Eucharist:
Theological Implications of the Eucharist in the UCCSA for Reimagining an Inclusive and Embodied Community of Faith

Submitted by
Craig Graham Farrel Morrison

Student Number: 222118789

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Professor Charlene Van Der Walt

ABSTRACT
Every person has a sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIE-SC). It's an inclusive term that applies to every individual human being, irrespective of how they self-identify. Every person has a human right to sexual self-identity, whether as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer, asexual, two-spirit, heterosexual or cisgender (identifying with the same gender that one was assigned at birth). A contextual equivalent of the reclaimed word "Queer" in South Africa is *Izitabane*, a plural. It is an isiZulu expression that literally means, "here come the gays". In this dissertation, I argue for the contextual use of this term. Izitabane members of the Church are still most often marginalised and rejected. It is appropriate to reclaim such terminology in our African context as a self-identity.

The author is an active and committed member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). The UCCSA identifies itself as "a justice Church". This Church ordains women, "welcomes all", and affirms that prejudice based on sexual orientation ("homophobia") is a sin. Yet, despite declaring itself a justice Church, its clergy are prohibited from conducting, concluding or blessing same-sex marriages, even though same-sex marriage is constitutionally legal in South Africa. There appears to be a disconnect between the Church's claim to be a justice Church that "welcomes all" and the full inclusion and acceptance (open and affirming stance) of Izitabane members.

This dissertation explores the current SOGIE-SC landscape within the UCCSA based upon the ostensibly competing resolutions of its highest court, the General Assembly, and asks whether the theological distinctives in its understanding of Covenant and Eucharist can bridge that disconnect, since this is a matter of justice. It is especially pertinent since Izitabane persons suffer violence, harm, bigoted discrimination, ostracism and rejection for no other reason than innate sexual orientation and desired identity. Queering, or *stabanising*, refers to the intentional process of decolonising theological heteronormative patriarchy in faith and praxis.

In this paper, through the lens of Systematic Theology, I discuss Queer theory, Eucharist and its Covenantal implications in the UCCSA, explore what it might mean to re-imagine the Eucharist and to stabanise Eucharistic liturgy. The research concludes with a working example of a reimagined, more inclusive, and stabanised Eucharist as an expression of our embodied Covenant.

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A heartfelt solidarity with all people on the margins of faith communities who have endured much violence and pain, and yet continue to model Christ-likeness. Your steadfast love, voices, and rainbow colours have enabled us to see you more clearly. Thank you for the gift you are to the Church. One day, when the Church says “all” we shall truly mean “all”.

I acknowledge every person who’s voice has been muted or attenuated, whose presence has been unrecognised, whose sexuality has been denied, whose personhood violated.
You are seen. You are recognised. You are heard. You are loved.

DECLARATION

I, Craig Graham Farrel Morrison, declare that this dissertation is my own original work. All citations, references, and borrowed ideas and reflections have been duly acknowledged.

I submit this under the Gender and Religion Programme which is under the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. There are no parts of this presentation that have been submitted to another University or higher education institution for degree or examination purposes. Unless it is stated within the text, this is wholly my work.

Craig Graham Farrel Morrison
July 2024

As candidate supervisor, I hereby approve this dissertation for submission

Professor Charlene Van der Walt
December 2024

Wisdom Notes:

We ain't where we wanna be;
We ain't where we gonna be;
But thank God,
We ain't where we used to be.[1]
- ML King Jr

"The only physical thing Jesus leaves us,
with which to build the church,
is a table with food on it"[2]
– Noel Moules

[1] https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7219739-we-ain-t-what-we-oughta-be-we-ain-t-what-we, accessed on 3 December 2023.
[2] https://fingerprintsoffire.com/guide/11-subversive-celebrant/ accessed on 29 February 2024.

A Poem:

All Means All

I don't want to be a member
Of an exclusive club
Open only to a select few
Concerned with rules and laws
And who is in or out

I want to be part of a church
That lives and breathes
belonging
The embodiment of acceptance
Our wide expanse of welcome
A holy haven
For all the hungry hearts

So Lord let us be
The incarnation of inclusion
A tiny slice of heaven
In our little corner of this Earth
Where
All means all
Means all[3]

- **Karen Kaiser 2023**

[3] https://www.facebook.com/cedarparkunitedchurch/posts/all-means-alli-dont-want-to-be-a-memberof-an-exclusive-clubopen-only-to-a-select/643359424496125/ accessed on 11 July 2023.

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ABBREVIATIONS & KEY TERMINOLOGIES

Eucharist	The historical equivalent of the more commonly used Breaking Bread, Holy Communion, and the Lord's Supper. Eucharist in the Reformed tradition is nonetheless well understood.
Gender	Gender includes the social, psychological, cultural and behavioural constructs of being a man, woman, or other gender identity and gender expression.
Homophobia	"'Homophobia' is shorthand for stigmatising attitudes and practices towards people who demonstrate sexual diversity," according to West, Van Der Walt and Koama (2017).[4]
Izitabane	The isiZulu plural for LGBTQIA+ (Zithabane) people
Isitabane, Zithabane	The singular of Izitabane.
LGBTQIA+	A collective descriptor for people who self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, plus.
NGK	The *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church), NGK, amongst the oldest of the Afrikaner Calvinist Churches; the formerly white branch of this church in South Africa. With the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (NHK) and the Reformed Churches in South Africa (Dopper), they are considered three sister churches of South Africa.
The Pastoral Plan For Transformation - PPFT	The Pastoral Plan program was implemented from 1994 -1999 within the bounds of the UCCSA. It aimed to fashion the Church's public witness into a Justice Church, moving it from a maintenance orientation towards missional engagement.
SA SYNOD	The South Africa Synod of the UCCSA is one of seven Synods making up the UCCSA.
Sex and Gender	Sex refers to biological traits[5], while Gender refers to cultural and psychological traits and expression associated with sexuality.
SOGIE-SC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics.
Stabanise	Derivative verb from Izitabane.
UCCSA	United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, established on 3rd October 1967 with the unification of the CUSA, Bantu Congregational Church, and American Board Mission/Disciples of Christ, later adding the London Mission Society in 1972. I use ***C***hurch for the denomination and **c**hurch for a local congregation.

[4] West, GO, K. Kaoma, C. Van Der Walt. 2017. When Faith Does Violence, published by The Other Foundation, http://theotherfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/When-Faith-Does-Violence.pdf.

[5] Adrian Thatcher defines sex as, "the division of a species into either male or female, especially in relation to the reproductive functions. Whatever else sex is, it is about the ability of species to reproduce."
Cf. Thatcher, A. 2011. God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 4.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

The key question to grapple with here is whether the praxis of the UCCSA regarding Izitabane persons is consistent with the liberationist and redemptive theological implications of the Eucharist. The Kairos Document (1985, 1986) marked a pivotal moment for the Church and people of faith in Apartheid South Africa. Subtitled as a "Challenge to the Church," the Kairos theologians identified that the Church is "a site of struggle"[6] against racism, exclusion, and oppression (1985, 1986, Article 27). South Africa faced a *kairos* — an eschatological moment of *opportunity*. In 1985, as the old world of violence, fear and racism disintegrated to ruin, a new sense of hope, liberation, *koinonia* emerged. The Kairos Document played a role in catalyzing this ecclesiastical shift, ushering in a new political dispensation. South Africans experienced a sense of societal hopefulness, national vitality and liberative social reality.

PLURALITY AND BACKLASH

Within ten years, South Africans of all backgrounds stood in historic queues to vote in the first democratic election. Mandela led the nation into a new era of freedom. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's biblical motif of the "Rainbow Nation" described this post-apartheid vision of harmony, multiculturalism, and human rights. A new Constitution enshrined diversity and dignity, rejecting the violence and inhumanity of the past. It promised inclusion for everyone, affirming a place for all people at the table of humanity.

However, this vision faced fierce resistance. Heteronormative patriarchy and religious conservatism pushed back against the new democratic Constitution and its equality provisions guaranteeing the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons. The pushback was fueled by both imported American culture wars and biblical fundamentalism (Palm 2019, West *et al* 2016, Gunda 2017)[7].

[6] The Kairos Document (1985, 1986) presented the "site of struggle" as a conflict between those in the Church aligned with the status quo and those aligned with the oppressed (Article 27).

[7] Gunda, RM. 2017. Silent No Longer! Narratives of Engagement Between LGBTI Groups and the Churches in Southern Africa. Johannesburg: The Other Foundation.
Palm, S and L. Gaum. 2021. Engaging Human Sexuality: Creating Safe Spaces for LGBTIQ+ and Straight Believers in South Africa, in Journal Theologia 3 (2), November 2021, pp.162-182.

Homophobia became the new apartheid in the Church. Despite Constitutional protections, LGBQTIA+ people found themselves suffering all manner of discrimination, marginalisation, and violence. They also found this abuse in the Church. Graham Duncan, writing about the Presbyterian Church, forcefully asserts for all, "The issue of human sexuality is a matter of justice denied to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ) people in South African churches." (2021, p.1)[8]

This is not merely a matter of justice, however, for most of the Churches have declared theological positions rejecting LGBTQIA+ persons, sometimes refusing to recognize the dignity of Queer persons, cursing them for sinful behaviour, very often thundering against same-sex relationships from the pulpit in very public displays of rejection, and barring clergy from blessing any kind LGBTQIA+ relationships. It is widely acknowledged that these ecclesiastical and social recriminations have resulted in violence and harm to the dignity, personhood and bodies of LGBTQIA+ persons.

By way of an extreme but all-too common example, Queer South African national "Banyana" footballer Eudy Simelane (1977–2008) was brutally murdered on April 28, 2008, at the age of 31. Simelane was a gender activist in KwaThema, Gauteng. A new brutality was coined in South Africa called "corrective rape" which became a phenomenon across South Africa, where men and women are viciously sexually assaulted in a mistaken belief of "curing" them from homosexuality. It's a consequence of the intersection between violence, heteronormative-patriarchal myth, and the rejection of persons for their sexual orientation and identity choices that is often driven by religious support for the violence. Current research has drawn a line causally connecting these factors.

The South African government has initiated an intervention strategy for the scourge of GBV across the country.[9] Then South African Justice and Constitutional Development Deputy Minister John Jeffery noted, "Our real challenges are in implementation and *in changing societal attitudes* in our communities" [my emphasis] (2021).

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[8] Cf. Duncan, G.A. 2021. Hated Without a Reason – Contending With Issues of Human Sexuality in a South African Ecclesial Context: A Case Study, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(4), a6347.
[9] Cf. https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/spate-attacks-lgbtqi-community-sa, accessed on 19 December 2024.

On Transgender Day of Remembrance, 20 November 2024, Transgender Europe (TGEU) reported that between 1 October 2023 and 30 September 2024, 350 trans and gender-diverse individuals were reported murdered world-wide, marking an increase from the 321 cases recorded the previous year. In South Africa, four cases were recorded in this same period: Jo-Ann Isaks, 27 (Upington); Karabelo Pudumo, 18 (Kimberley); Thabang Mmelusi Maboela, age unknown (Johannesburg); and Clemmy Hadebe, 22 (Johannesburg).[10]

A recent Human Sciences Research Council report published on the 10 December 2024 highlights the rampant epidemic of gender-based violence in South Africa.[11] The South African Institute of International Affairs notes [12] that, "Religious institutions seem to perpetuate the hate crimes experienced by queer individuals. In extreme cases, religious leaders have advocated for killings and hateful crimes to be committed against those in the queer community." (2024) It cites the specific case of Pastor Oscar Bougardt who has now been prosecuted for contempt of court for illegal comments he made.[13]

Professor G. Duncan (2021) notes how generally the Ecumenical Churches have all had similar struggles in accommodating the Queer community at their tables. Almost all the Churches are still entangled in these conversations about human sexuality, even while the sands have shifted right under our feet. Churches that have affirmed the centrality of justice in their missional agenda have simply failed to make any headway, instead becoming bogged down in questions about schism (Duncan, 2021).

My contention is the Church landscape in South Africa has again become "a site of struggle" for inclusion and diversity-affirmation, while all too often religious patriarchy freely asserts that there is no room at the table for Izitabane.

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[10] Cf. https://www.mambaonline.com/2024/12/19/south-africa-lgbtiq-rights-watch-november-2024/, accessed on 15 December 2024.

[11] Cf. https://www.dsti.gov.za/index.php/media-room/latest-news/4495-new-report-highlights-the-stark-reality-of-gender-based-violence-in-south-africa

[12] SAIIA. 2024. https://saiia.org.za/youth-blogs/hate-crimes-against-members-of-the-lgbtqia-community-in-south-africa/ , accessed on 16 December 2024.

[13] Pastor Bougardt is reported to have said, "We need ISIS to come to countries that are homosexual-friendly. ISIS, please come rid South Africa of the homosexual curse". The pastor was found in contempt of a court order barring him from saying any anti-gay slurs. Cited on J Campbell, "South African Court Delivers Blow to Religious Defense of Hate Speech," Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-african-court-delivers-blow-religious-defense-hate-speech.

THE UCCSA

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa is a relatively small denomination that has suddenly grown significantly in numbers. This is due mainly to organic growth, with the recent incorporation of the Congregational churches of Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2023. The UCCSA is contextually an African Church.

Congregational in polity and ecclesiology, the UCCSA represents the merging in 1967 of the Congregational Union of South Africa (CUSA), the London Mission Society (LMS) churches, and what was called the Bantu Congregational Church (BCC). Later on in 1972, the churches aligned with the Disciples of Christ (USA) were also incorporated (Briggs).

Although classically "Congregational" in ecclesiology, the UCCSA has grown into a Presbyterian structure in its polity. This is partly due to the emphasis on the Regional Council structures made up of multiple congregations whose representatives meet quarterly. A geographical collection of Regions make up a Synod. The other important factor driving the Presbyterian structure is geo-politics. The UCCSA covers multiple national states in the SADC Region. Often, these states have dissimilar laws. Thus, the Synods generally align with national borders (Briggs 1996, UCCSA 1986).

COVENANT SPACES

Despite these challenges, progressive Christians continue to advocate for a grand vision of inclusion.[14] The Church again has an opportunity to hear the pain of the marginalised and rejected, and to be an advocate for those who find themselves on the fringes within society and within the Church. The author locates himself in this liminal space. I consider myself an ally of the Izitabane community as a cis-gendered Minister Ordained in the UCCSA.

Most of my colleagues in the Church hold to a high view of the Bible. However, Briggs (1996, p.52) points out in his discussion of magisterial versus ministerial authority, that the UCCSA accords magisterial authority solely to Christ Jesus.

Briggs emphasizes that biblical authority is necessarily restricted and particular. Briggs is not a literalist and argues strongly that "the letter may never have precedence over the Spirit." (1996, p.52).

[14] Palm, S and L. Gaum. 2021. Engaging Human Sexuality: Creating Safe Spaces for LGBTIQ+ and Straight Believers in South Africa, in Journal Theologia 3 (2), November 2021, p.162-182.

I see in this that openings exist within my own Denomination to have the hard conversations and theological reflections and missional praxis regarding being "open and affirming" within the context of our Covenant.[15] Covenant spaces do exist within the hegemonic heteronormative matrix that envelopes much of the Church landscape.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

In South Africa, liberation discourses have morphed into the more general designation of Contextual Theologies. This is a repository that holds a number of discourses, for example, African and black theologies, liberation theologies, womanist/feminist theologies, queer theologies that are all historically connected. Contextual theologies have mushroomed as we have recognised increasing numbers of social intersections within demographics. I discuss "Queer theory" as a transgressive, progressive and contextual trend in our society. South African society itself is still transitioning through seismic shifts politically, socially, culturally, and in consciousness (McKaiser 2012, p.19)[16].

THE LANGUAGE OF IZITABANE AND STABANISING

Within this changing social landscape, the Church is confronted by the contemporary lived realities of people.

Language is especially important as an analytical tool for reflecting upon and engaging with these new realities. No doubt, critical questions will arise for the reader about the new terminology I'm using, *viz*. of *Izitabane* and *stabanising*. An important reason for using specifically Queer language is the transgressive power it affords, according to Davids, Mtyila, Sithole, Van der Walt (2019, p.4).[17]

These four researchers discuss the colloquial language formulation of Izitabane and argue for the appropriation *Nasi lesizitabane* or *lezizitabane*, meaning 'here come the Queers' in isiZulu. *Isitabane* (singular) or *Izitabane* (plural) or simply *Zitabane* are derogatory terms often used in derision.

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[15] The terminology of "Open And Affirming" (O&A) is well-known in our sister Denomination in the USA, the United Church of Christ. Cf. https://openandaffirming.org/ona/how/covenants/.

[16] McKaiser, Eusebius. 2012. A Bantu in My Bathroom: Debating Race, Sexuality and Other Uncomfortable South African Topics. First Edition. Randburg: Bookstorm Publishers.

[17] Davids, Hanzline, Abongile Matyila, Sindi Sithole & Charlene van der Walt. 2019. Stabanisation. A discussion paper about disrupting backlash by reclaiming LGBTI voices in the African church landscape. Johannesburg: The Other Foundation.

Davids, *et al*, note how "the term Isitabane originates from conceptual engagements with intersexuality and articulates something of the understanding of intersex people as people who possess both sexual organs traditionally associated with being a female or male." Izitabane language comprises broad terms referring to any person who does not conform to heteronormative orientation and gender identity.

ALLYSHIP

In addition to the normalising of Queer language, another important component of contextualizing theology is allyship. I discuss how allyship creates spaces for wrestling with the embodied experiences and lived realities of human life in a shifting terrain. One of the chief ways that the Church can become more relevant to contemporary society is through the vital mechanism of allyship.

A THEOLOGY FROM BELOW

This research paper is also an affirmation of Queer liberation theory within the religious and theological ecosystem. The epistemological commitment of Liberation Theology is "from below" (West, et al, 2017). Therefore, if the Church is to fruitfully engage with Izitabane it needs to take seriously the lived experiences and languages of Izitabane (Duncan, 2021).

The Church also needs to engage with itself historically. I aim to show that the nuances of an historical-critical reading of Scripture, hermeneutics, revelation, tradition, reason, experience and culture (following Macquarrie 1977, p.12) are faithful to the novel impulses of the Reformation of 1517. In a very real sense, the Reformation itself was a Queering process for the emerging Reformed Church. I say this since the Reformation represented a throwing off the mantle of Papal authoritarianism. Thus, the very term "Protestant" carries with it something of the transgressive character of the Reformation.[18]

A RITUALISED MEAL FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The Eucharist is a ritualised meal that has been pared down into a symbolic pageant that embodies the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is one of two sacraments in the Reformed Church. The other sacrament is the rite of Baptism which is traditionally a person's entry into the fellowship of the church by public affirmation of faith.

[18] The History Channel website makes this point well. See: https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/martin-luther-posts-95-theses, accessed on 10 March 2024.

The reader who is familiar with the Reformed tradition will likely ask why I have chosen to employ the term "Eucharist" rather than the more familiar "Holy Communion" that was favoured by Calvin. I acknowledge that the question is an appropriate one to ask. Historically, the root verb of 'Eucharist' is derived from the Koine Greek εὐχαριστέω (transliteration: *eucharisteó*) meaning *to be thankful*. Eucharist therefore captures something of the celebratory subtext inherent in the pageantry of the Lord's Supper. *Thanksgiving* is a noteworthy nuance on the theological meaning of the meal.

Since the Reformation, terms like the *Lord's Supper* or *Holy Communion* are more commonly used in the Reformed tradition[19]. These terms emphasise the covenantal and communal aspects of the sacrament, aligning with the Reformed focus on the relationship between God and the gathered community of believers. Thus, Reformed theology rejects the doctrine of transubstantiation and emphasises a spiritual presence of Christ with us rather than a physical transformation of the elements. Furthermore, Reformed worship tends to place its emphasis on the proclamation of the Word (preaching) as being central to the worship experience. The sacrament is a confirmation of the Word preached, rather than itself being the central act of worship. Reformed tradition also emphasises simplicity of worship.
The post-Reformation shift towards more simple language constructs therefore leads the UCCSA to avoid terminology considered opaque and ostentatious.

For these three chief reasons, the word Eucharist to describe the Lord's Supper is less common in the Reformed tradition. This perspective delicately shifts focus away from terms like Eucharist, which might be perceived as prioritising the sacrament. Since the *Eucharist* is associated with transubstantiation in the Catholic Church, the Calvinist tradition has tended to subtly eschew using the word in favour of other terms.

Nonetheless, post-1960, since the Second Vatican Council, commonly known as Vatican II, that took place from 1962 to 1965, a new era of Ecumenism emerged. In this new period of ecclesiastical *glasnost*, it has become more acceptable to use the word Eucharist, particularly in Ecumenical contexts, since it recaptures the sense of celebration, even though Reformed theology still emphasises covenant and communal meanings entrenched in our theology of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

[19] Briggs maintains that the UCCSA makes no substantive distinction between these three terms (1996, p.161).

I opted to use the word Eucharist in its broadest ecumenical context precisely because it sustains the overt symbolism of celebration. Eucharist captures an essence of the sacrament that seems obscured by more plain terminology.

Briggs makes almost a passing comment on the corporate nature of Holy Communion in the Congregational understanding that deserves more attention than he gives it. He says very simply, "The Lord's Supper is always a corporate act" (1996, p.173). In the hyper-individualised context of the Twenty-first Century [20] using the word 'Eucharist' emphasises the inherent corporate character of the Lord's Supper. Briggs concurs with my assessment. I therefore defend my use of the term Eucharist throughout this paper, both from a historical and a theological point of view. The corporate quality of the Eucharist is a key element in Covenant theology, and I therefore argue for preserving it for the theological gravitas it affords us in our discourses.

JUSTICE IN HUMAN SEXUALITY THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES

The UCCSA has intentionally positioned itself as a Justice Church since the inception of its Pastoral Plan for Transformation in 1994. [21] Duncan references a key idea of Walther Brueggemann, a Congregationalist, "In biblical faith, the doing of justice is the primary expectation of God, for God is indeed a 'lover of justice' [from] Ps 99:4" (1986)[22]. It is theologically correct and in historical alignment that the UCCSA today identifies itself as a Justice Church. Emerging within the socio-political context of apartheid South Africa and that racist state's fraught relationship with the "frontline states", the UCCSA rightly positioned itself as anti-racist. The Church quickly realised that Womanist Justice was aligned with being anti-racist and therefore women were received into Ordination very early on in the UCCSA. We have more recently recognised the centrality of Eco-Justice in the on-going story of faith.

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[20] See: Djihed, Cheraifia and Azzeddine Bouhassoun. 2020. Personal Identity and Postmodernism: Between Narcissism and Individualism. Published in Afkar wa Affak, volume 7, numéro 2, année 2019, accessed on 9 August 2024 at https://dspace.univ-temouchent.edu.dz/handle/123456789/3859

[21] The Preamble to the UCCSA Constitution holds that, "God's purpose will not, however, be fulfilled until all barriers are broken down, and all the people of God accept one another without reservation as brothers and sisters redeemed through faith in Christ and incorporated into the one family of God." (2013, p.1).

[22] In Duncan, G.A. 2021. Hated Without a Reason – Contending With Issues of Human Sexuality in a South African Ecclesial Context: A Case Study, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(4), a6347, Duncan discusses Brueggemann, W. 1986. Micah 6:8: What does the lord require of you? But to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? in W. Brueggemann, S. Parks & T.H. Groom (eds.), To act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly: An agenda for ministers, pp.5–28, Paulist Press, New York, NY.

The UCCSA has been slower to adopt the perspective that Gender Justice sits squarely on that same trajectory. Despite its articulation of the priority of justice, the UCCSA still adopted a traditional position on SOGIE-SC at its 1999 General Assembly in Gaborone. This incongruence arising from these conflicting positions is one of the main concerns emphasised in this dissertation. We cannot merely *say* we are a Justice Church; we also have to express it in our praxis in terms of all the key themes represented by the idea of Justice.

A COVENANT FRAMEWORK FOR SOGIE-SC LIBERATION

A useful instrument to shift the needle towards a more inclusive stance on Human Sexuality might be the Doctrine of Covenant that is present in Congregational theology. This idea of Covenant, along with its theology of Eucharist, will be explored below as a way of fostering greater inclusion of people within the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

Therefore, this paper is a qualitative research dissertation that explores SOGIE-SC inclusion through the epistemological framework of Liberation Theology. I employ the methodology of Systematic Theology to investigate the contours of eucharistic theology in the UCCSA, and draw some implications for re-imagining Covenant, Community and Communion. The research paper concludes with a contemporary example of what such an eschatologically inclusive Eucharist might look like, as a vision for the future of the UCCSA.

1.2 The Structure of the Study

The first chapter covers the customary rubrics for a research paper. I define the parameters of the study, offer insights into the background and research rationale, present a problem statement and research questions. I conclude this chapter with a discussion on the relevance of the study to the academy. The second chapter explores issues related to Queer theory and what it means to *stabanise* the Eucharist using the theoretical framework of Liberation Theology. The third chapter explores the concepts of Eucharist for Congregationalism. I will examine the contours of "Eucharist" as understood theologically and systematically within the Reformed tradition of the UCCSA, and how that relates to the Covenant traditions of the Church, and the praxis of the community of faith.

In the UCCSA, the constructs of Covenant and Eucharist are so closely related that we recite the Covenant together each time we Break Bread in celebrating the Eucharistic sacrament. (Briggs 1996, p.23).

In chapter 4, I consider the re-imagining of Eucharist for the church in 2024. Here, I discuss the intersections between a Congregational view of Eucharist as a Realised Eschatology[23], the imperatives it presents to us from Liberation Theology, the self-identity of the UCCSA as a Justice Church, and re-imagining Eucharistic praxis.

In the process of revisiting a Congregational interpretation of Eucharist we can re-imagine new understandings and implications for the community of faith. The reader may notice that I intentionally omit placing the article before the word *Eucharist* at certain points. I do this with a nod to the innumerable ways that Eucharist can be celebrated. By omitting the article, I seek to acknowledge this diversity of practice within Christendom. There is no one 'right way' to celebrate the Eucharist. Precisely how we celebrate Eucharist is determined largely by our respective historic faith traditions. Therefore, in the final chapter, I offer some key strategies for how we may navigate these important issues of creative and radical inclusion.

This is a qualitative research study only. I have had no formal engagements or interviews with individual members of the Church. However, I know personally almost all the UCCSA people mentioned in various places in this paper and they have my abiding respect even when there are areas of theological divergence. Many of the people here have been my personal mentors, colleagues and friends, and through their written legacies I continue to engage with them theologically and in missional praxis through the spiritual and public witness of the Church.

[23] An important note here: Realised Eschatology is a theological framework that interprets biblical prophecies about "end times" (or the fulfillment of God's kingdom) as having already been inaugurated in the present, as opposed to something that is entirely in the future. Realized eschatology argues that these events have already begun to occur through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Some key ideas include, that the kingdom of God is already present, and believers can experience facets of divine reign in their lives right now, even without losing a future dimension of it. Realised eschatology views the "end times" or "last days" as having begun with the first coming of Christ. Realised eschatology is focused on the spiritual aspects of salvation, eg. forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the transformation of believers' lives. Realised eschatology is seen in New Testament hermeneutics, particularly in Mark and John, emphasising that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus. Realised eschatology accents that the experience of God's reign is already partially realised and can be experienced in this present embodied life.

In Chapter Three therefore I explore the contours of Congregational theory, polity [24] and praxis regarding key theological concepts related to the study and as uniquely understood in Christendom in the discipline of Systematic Theology, *viz*. Covenant and Holy Communion. These are foundational theological doctrines for the UCCSA. What I hold before the Church is to discern what faithfulness to our inclusive Covenant might mean for us in 2025.

The UCCSA is a progressive Church in many respects and was amongst the first Denominations to adopt the Challenge to the Church set out in the 1985/6 Kairos Document. Prof Steve de Gruchy, a UCCSA Minister, maintained that "the UCCSA is on the left side of the Ecumenical Church" (1997, p.2). It is therefore within this overall context that I decided to reflect upon our common faith as Congregationalists and to investigate the intersections of faith, praxis, and Eucharist. De Gruchy rightly locates the political leaning of the UCCSA and therefore the lens of Liberation Theology is entirely appropriate for this study.

1.3 Background and Research Rationale

I was a theological student during the precursor years of the new South Africa. We lived through the unbanning of our organisations in 1990, the capitulation of De Klerk, the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet bloc, and the independence of Namibia all within the rapid pace of a handful of years.

The UCCSA's Pastoral Plan for Transformation was conceived during this tumultuous era. It was entirely premised on the principles of Liberation Theology and attempted to implement a greater missional witness. The sands of society and faith were shifting underfoot with a new political dispensation and the arrival of post-apartheid South Africa in 1994.

This new dispensation of freedom also birthed South Africa's new Constitution, and its guardian, the Constitutional Court. "Freedom" was a new buzzword. We coined a term for children born post-apartheid, as "born-frees". This Constitution even pledged freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender, amongst other demographic intersections.

[24] What we call our Ecclesiology.

Amidst this terrain, the UCCSA has struggled with matters of human sexuality since the mid-1990s. Back then, prominent social justice advocates in the UCCSA, the likes of Prof. Bonganjalo Goba, Prof. Steve de Gruchy, his father, Prof John de Gruchy, and Rev. Roxanne Jordaan, *inter alia*, opened a conversation about human sexuality via the Theological Commission of the UCCSA General Assembly. With their collective urging, the 1999 Assembly in Gaborone the Church affirmed that "homophobia is a sin",[25] and yet the same Assembly also voted to prohibit clergy from officiating at same-sex blessings of any sort.

Meanwhile, lawyers and the Izitabane community envisaged the recreation of new laws allowing same-sex marriage, for the Church this was still completely anathema. Civil Unions (same-sex marriages) finally became legal when South Africa enacted in its Parliament the Civil Union Act No. 17 of 2006. However, the Department of Home Affairs split the Marriage Act into parallel Acts rather than revising the Marriage Act as originally directed by the Constitutional Court. The promulgation of the Civil Unions Act was problematic not least because it adopted the language of apartheid, *viz*. "separate but equal" and "parallel streams".[26]

The Marriage Act 25 of 1961 should have been amended to accommodate Civil Unions as directed by the Constitutional Court in its ruling. The Department of Home Affairs has never fully explained why it adopted a "separate but equal" remedy instead [27].

The consequence of this two-stream policy is that it made it possible for Churches to prohibit its clergy from conducting Civil Unions. Civil Unions now fall under a separate regime from the Marriage Act, and for officiants there is an entirely separate application and solemnizing processes. Some Churches, like the UCCSA, went the extra mile and even prohibited blessings of same-sex relationships.

[25] Assembly Minute 1999, UCCSA.

[26] The most common model of marriage in South Africa are those solemnised under the Marriage Act 25 of 1961, which is referred to as a civil marriage. This is entered into only between a man and a woman. Couples now also have a second option, to be married under the Civil Unions Act of 2006, promulgated mostly to solemnise same-sex unions and may also be entered into also by mixed-sex couples. The Civil Unions Act also distinguishes between a Civil Union marriage and a Civil Union partnership. A third model in South Africa is the Customary Marriage Act 120 of 1998.

[27] It is a common belief that the South African state's Department of Home Affairs intended to amend the existing Marriage Act 25, as directed by the Constitutional Court, however, there was a severe objection from religious communities who opposed same-sex marriage, and the DHA opted for a parallel system. See, for instance: https://pink-book.co.za/wedding-tips-ideas/marriage-officers-contracts/civil-union-vs-civil-marriage/

There appears to be an inconsistency between the claims of being a Justice Church and the UCCSA 1999 Gaborone Assembly Resolutions on human sexuality.

This leaves the Church with a quandary: can we affirm that the UCCSA is "a Justice Church" if we still prohibit the full inclusion of *Izitabane* members in marriage, partnerships and blessing ceremonies for Izitabane relationships? I therefore decided this is a research problem that can add a guiding voice to the wider conversation in the Church. It seemed to me that Eucharist theology and praxis lends itself to the narrative of inclusion, and I wanted to reflect deeply on this question.

1.4 Problem Statement and Research Questions

The problem-statement at the centre of this research paper can be set out in the following way: Is the praxis of the UCCSA regarding Izitabane persons consistent with the liberationist and redemptive theological implications of the Eucharist?

I am using the See-Judge-Act progression as the methodology for this paper. The first task aims to "see" the SOGIESC landscape in South Africa in 2024 where I discuss the issues of Gender and Human Sexuality through the lens of Queer theory and Liberation theology.

The second task in the progression is to "judge" and asks, "How does the UCCSA articulate its theology of Covenant and Eucharist?" This is the domain of Systematic theologians where I will grapple with formulating key concepts and developing a theological and missional praxis for the contemporary witness of the Church.

The third task relates to "act" and asks, "How can the UCCSA develop a more inclusive Eucharistic experience within local congregations that confers full recognition of personhood on Izitabane persons – and indeed, upon all its members?"

Here, I suggest ways expressing open and affirming community solidarity with those who are the Other.

"Otherness" is a concept developed and articulated by Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) in her seminal feminist work, The Second Sex (1949).[28] She taught that "otherness is a fundamental category of human thought" (de Beauvoir 1949, p.xvii). Otherness is often the lived experience of Izitabane in church and society, expressed for example in "othering" and sin-labelling and rejection, and in the violence of "corrective rape" of Izitabane in our society.

If we in the Church are to keep growing spiritually, deepening our theological commitments, thickening our practice of community, broadening the implications of our Covenant, re-imagining our experience of Eucharist, and learning, unlearning and relearning, then deep and intentional reflection on our faith is vital. What is meant by "stabanising", or "Queering" is to step into the lived experiences of Izitabane persons, to stand in solidarity, and to gain a perspective on faith and praxis through the intersectional lens of those who are Izitabane, African, Christian, and Congregational.

1.5 Relevance of the Study Within The Academy: Gender, Theology, Praxis

Issues of Human Sexuality and Gender are unlikely to recede from the faith landscape any time soon simply because Churches have struggled to arrive at a clear determination. In this liminal space of uncertainty, homophobic narratives have begun to swirl around that are promoted by populist agendas and American culture wars that we in Africa are exposed to via the media. It has resulted in a crisis of witness for the Church at large. I am part of an ecumenical activist group trying to open safe spaces for Izitabane in Churches. Izitabane members of this group report being uncertain if they are indeed welcome in faith spaces in spite of the "open to all" slogans often claimed by church bulletins and notice boards.

This uncertainty and indecision often results from these foreign agendas imposing themselves onto Africa. Leah Buckle, writing on the Stonewall webpage narrates how colonialism has - and continues to play out, through African homophobia in the post-colonial era. [29]

[28] See: Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory in The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p.314.
[29] Buckle, L. October 2020. African Sexuality And The Legacy Of Imported Homophobia, published on https://www.stonewall.org.uk/news/african-sexuality-and-legacy-imported-homophobia, accessed on 15 August 2024.

In a similar vein to Buckle, Dr. Kwaku Kusi-Appiah argues that "homosexuality is as African as it is Universal."[30] Here he contends that, "Homosexuality existed in Africa long before Don Diogo de Azambuja of Portugal set foot on the African soil (Elmina, Ghana) in 1482."

Kusi-Appiah cites the significant comments of Botswana High Court Judge Michael Leburu's 2020 judgement striking down anti-se sex laws in that country, where the justice declared that, "… the anti-sodomy laws are a British import… and were developed without the consultation of local peoples."[31] These are the kind of narratives that the academy deserves to place into Queer public discourses. Writing in 2012, South African Rhodes scholar and public figure, Eusebius McKaiser, disputes that same-sex relationships are 'un-African'. In a pointed and excellent 2012 article titled "Homosexuality un-African? The Claim Is An Historical Embarrassment" McKaiser challenges the a-historical, revisionist notions by arguing that erstwhile colonial masters should rather be charged with "teaching Africa how to codify homophobia."[32]

This crisis of witness is also due to the diversity of hermeneutics, experience, cultural impacts, and theological commitments present in Churches. The strongly promoted 'homogenous unity principle'[33] (HUP) is at work in many congregations, despite the firm repudiation of homogeneity in the UCCSA. I also believe that churches have finely tuned sensibilities about which topics it deems suitable for the church, and sexuality is not one that sits comfortably on the agenda in faith spaces. Churches are wrestling (and in many instances, squirming) with a perennial issue that doggedly remains on our ecclesiastical radar.

Rev. Prof. Graham Duncan, of our partner Church in the UPCSA, notes some common themes in discussions on human sexuality for the ecumenical Churches, at least those willing to grasp this nettle.

[30] Kusi-Appiah, K. March 2024. Stop Blaming The 'Mzungu': Homosexuality Is As African As It Is Universal, published on https://blackottawascene.com/kwaku-kusi-appiah-homosexuality-is-as-african-as-it-is-universal/ accessed on 21 August 2024.
[31] Ibid.
[32] McKaiser, Eusebius. October 2012. Homosexuality Un-African? The Claim Is An Historical Embarrassment, published on https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/02/homosexuality-unafrican-claim-historical-embarrassment, accessed on 21 August 2024.
[33] The homogeneous unit principle refers to a group of people who have ethnic, linguistic, social, educational, or vocational similarities, what we today call intersections, that became a key theory of the Church Growth Movement, largely theorised by Donald McGavran in his 1970 book, Understanding Church Growth and Eddie Gibbs. The HUP was a significant driver of the unravelling of the Church Growth industry as people pushed back against homogeneity with a vision of a more diverse and inclusive Church.

Duncan (2021, p.3) sets these out broadly as: trying to offer an inclusive approach that accommodates all perspectives; an acknowledged imperative to be pastoral; a recognition that homophobia is a sin; acknowledging a diversity of viewpoints on human sexuality; recognising the resolute lack of agreement regarding biblical hermeneutics; acknowledging a pastoral praxis that eschews involvement with Izitabane persons; a persistent tactic that speaks *about* rather than engages with; and a divisiveness resulting from the issues. [34] Thus, on the one hand, churches know they want clear guidance from their respective ecclesiastical authorities, and yet they are aware of the potential for schism over the issues of Human Sexuality and Gender. Duncan has summarised the essence of traditional ecclesiastical discourses on sexuality, even though I have rendered his thoughts in my own words. Some more recent pronouncements by ecumenical churches have superseded these leitmotifs by affirming a more traditional narrative.

This study falls within the fields of Gender, Health & Religion in the Department of Philosophy, Classics and Religion, at the University of Kwazulu-Natal. One of the gaps that exists in current research is that baptism is often assumed to be the central concern of Christian anthropology and ecclesiology, which I do not dispute. However, the literature is silent on the place of the Eucharist in this conversation. I think a deeper discussion and greater clarity and clearer appraisal of Eucharistic praxis in the UCCSA could help us discern a more wonderful anthropology and ecclesiology.

Eucharist is one of the central themes addressed in my study. I pursue a call for stabanising the Eucharist with a view to bridging the divide between Church resolution and praxis through a Theology of Covenant. These considerations and this task speak to the centrality of our Congregational approach to inclusive Covenant, embodied community, and lived Eucharistic praxis in the UCCSA.

Therefore, this study becomes an urgent enquiry at this historical juncture when many Churches across the ecumenical spectrum are wrestling with the full affirmation of Izitabane members within their covenants, as per Thyssen (cf. Thyssen 2020, p.1).

[34] Prof. Graham Duncan explores similar themes for the UPCSA, who in July 2024 suffered a divisive discussion on human sexuality at its Executive Commission meeting in Pretoria. See further: Hated without a reason – Contending with issues of human sexuality in a South African ecclesial context: A case study. In HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(4), a6347.

In the second place, whilst many Churches are grappling with human sexuality and gender, South Africa is an unsafe place for Izitabane [35]. Izitabane persons in society are at high risk of being victim to extreme violence, to the terrible scourge of "corrective rape", and to murder[36]. West and Van Der Walt (2019) reference the brutal murder of South African woman footballer, Eudy Simelane, who was murdered in KwaThema, South Africa, because she was an out Queer person. Placing the targeted violence that Izitabane are subjected to in South Africa into mainstream research also adds to the body of voices speaking out in solidarity and in protest the violence so often visited upon Izitabane persons. People of faith need to find their moral voice to speak against the violence Izitabane are subjected to in our mostly patriarchal society.

Writing on the website South African History Online, Dixson Pushparagavan [37] quotes Sanders (1997, p.105). "The SA Constitution states that: 'No person shall be unfairly discriminated... on one or more of the following grounds... colour, sexual orientation...'"

The South African Constitution (1996) is well-regarded internationally[38] for its Bill of Rights that grants statutory protections against unfair discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. Yet, South Africans remain at extreme risk of violence to their person and psycho-social harm to their human dignity. Charles Webster[39] references the harm done to Izitabane that is habitually supported and abetted by widespread Christian bigotry towards LGBTQIA+ persons. Stabanising Christian theology is an urgent imperative that for many individuals is brutally a matter of life-or-death.

[35] Human Rights Watch, based in New York City, reported on documented cases of at least 20 Izitabane individuals killed in South Africa between February and October 2021. Many of these victims were beaten or stabbed to death, and it appears they were targeted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.
[36] See for instance, Van Der Walt, C and G.O. West. 2019. Queer Theologies: Becoming the Queer Body of Christ, in Concilium. Edited by Stefanie Knauss and Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez. London: SCM Press. See also Gerald O. West, Charlene van der Walt, and Kapya J. Kaoma, When Faith Does Violence: Re-imagining Engagement between Churches and LGBTI Groups on Homophobia in Africa, Johannesburg: The Other Foundation, 2017.
[37] https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-lgbt-legislation, published 17 December 2014, updated 01 December 2020, accessed on 3 June 2023.
[38] See for instance, Govo, N and T. Muguti. 2023. Constitutionalism and Leadership Renewal in the African National Congress: Lessons for Other African States. In Chari, T, Dzimiri, P. (eds) Military, Politics and Democratization in Southern Africa. Advances in African Economic, Social and Political Development. Cham: Springer Publ.
[39] Webster, Charles. 2019. How should Biblically-based Homophobic/Hate Speech be treated in South Africa, legally and socially? Unpublished master's dissertation, UKZN.

The significance of a study of the theological implications of Eucharist in the Southern African context are that it locates Izitabane God-talk in the contemporary social, religious and ecclesiastical discourses. Normalising the linguistic appropriation and curating of Izitabane language is a key outcome. In a similar way as the use of the transgressive "Queer" terminology in Western discourses, so this study appropriates the use of Izitabane language as a transgressive and disruptive language for South African discourses.

In the process of revisiting and unpacking the theological constructs of liberation, community, covenant, inclusion, embodiment and Eucharist, I hope to show opportunities for authentic community, deeper covenant, greater inclusion, and transgressive embodiment in the context of Eucharist. It is important that there is a practical outcome that expresses the key ideas framed in the paper. I anticipate that I will suggest an example what an inclusive and embodied and re-imagined and stabanised Eucharist liturgy looks like. My interest therefore is to offer the UCCSA a vision of stabanising worship, work and witness. That also means where we practice and experience Eucharist *with* Izitabane rather than speaking *to* - or speaking *for*, we may speak *with* (Duncan 2021, p.5).

This study of UCCSA ecclesiology and Eucharistic liturgy attempts to analyse Eucharistic praxis within the South African church landscape, of which the UCCSA is but a part. The intention is that this study may stimulate the new reflections on the implications of Eucharist for embracing Izitabane - and even in the broader South African ecclesiastical landscape.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

My study reflects specific established academic approaches. There are two key theoretical frameworks that undergird my research. These theories are set out as follows:

In the first place, Liberation Theology, which was theorised largely based on James Cone's seminal work on the intersection of theology and the struggle for racial justice, particularly through the lens of Black Theology. Some of his key ideas are that God is on the side of the oppressed, especially in the context of systemic racism, and the role of the Church in social justice in expressions of faith, particularly coming from the First Testament prophets, and that salvation is inherently collective rather than individualistic.

Latin American theologians followed on from Cone, emphasising the preferential option for the poor, social sin and structural justice, connecting motifs of liberation and the kingdom of God, an historical-critical reading of Scriptures allied with praxis, and relying on Marx's social analysis for theoretical grounding on class struggle and economic oppression. A South African iteration of Liberation Theology is often called Contextual Theology, as noted elsewhere in this study. The most well-known expression of Contextual Theology often incorporates Contextual Bible Study. These discourses utilise the SEE-JUDGE-ACT progression.

The second key theory employed here is Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectional Theory[40]. This theory focuses on the ways that identities form the basis of power distribution within society. Intersectional theory is a framework for understanding how various social identities — such as gender, race, class, disability, sexuality, and others — interact and intersect in ways that create unique and complex systems of privilege, oppression, and disadvantage.

Intersectional theory therefore provides a critical lens through which to examine the social structures and power dynamics that perpetuate gender and sexual inequalities through heteronormative discourses, systems and shaming actions. It applies also to the ecclesia as a longitudinal subset of society and where society is often reinforced and buoyed by religious narratives. For example, this can be seen in the widespread popularity of "complementarian" ideology. [41] It is critical to recognise the intersectional character of oppression, marginalisation and othering of persons and groups, and to acknowledge that the experience of gender and sexual identity oppression is shaped by several social categories such as religion, race, class, sexual orientation, language, *inter alia*.

The UCCSA officially adopted sex-equity and seeks gender-parity on all its committees, but most certainly the views 'in the pew' are far more conservative. I note elsewhere here that all elected committees of the UCCSA are meant to maintain a 50% sex-parity plus one youth member, where appropriate. Officially, the UCCSA does not support complementarian ideology, yet that does not often translate well down to the congregational level.

[40] Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. Stanford Law Review, Vol. 43, No. 6 (July 1991), pp. 1241-1299. Published By: Stanford Law Review. Accessed on 23 July 2024.

[41] Complementarianism is a theological-ideological outlook in some denominations of Christianity and other religions, that women and men have different but 'complementary' roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life, and religious leadership. Often it is expressed in terms of hegemonic male power.

I have heard it stated by church members that "the husband is the head of the house" (sic). Often, gender, and particularly 'gender roles', are uncritically prescribed and assumed to be a divine given. This narrative is supported by the masses of complementarian ideology available in the common Christian bookstores that mostly overwhelms any critical analysis and progressive views on gender and equality. In addition, often these 'roles' that are culturally prescribed are predicated upon gender and sex (Van Der Walt and Davids, 2022). There are other ways of allocating domestic or relationship roles that may be more equitable, for example, rather than a sex/gender base we could instead use tasks as the basis of allocation. The question, "what needs to be done and who is the best person in the circumstances to do it?" is different to "which role should the male or female play?" The former opens the possibility of a non-gendered and more equitable solution to the question.

The progressive view that gender is a social construct is seldom critically analysed at congregational level. Without a doubt, there is some recognition in the church of the intersectional nature of oppression, marginalisation and the othering of persons and groups. I would like to see more theoretical work being done in this area for the UCCSA. However, I recognise also that a thorough critical analysis of the unequal distribution of social power is lacking in the church. One hopes that more exposure to feminist studies during theological training will have a greater impact on the UCCSA, especially as more women enter the Ordained ministry. The transgressive character of Izitabane theology is able to undermine the heteronormative assumptions that so readily underpin church theology. [42]

It is unfortunate that the conservative churches curate complementarian ideology through the major Christian bookstores, who themselves might also be complicit. Such bookstores are, after all, profit-driven enterprises. The ultimate consequence however is that the populist materials lay people have access to are often those with a conservative bent and promote oppressive ideologies like complementarianism.

My second theoretical foundation is Intersectional Theory, which emphasises that these categories given above intersect and interact with each other, leading to unique and complex forms of oppression for individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. Izitabane individuals are not homogeneous but encompass a broad range of intersections.

[42] The Kairos Document in chapter 3 proffers a Critique of Church Theology, p.15.

This is precisely why the Church should endeavour to speak *with* rather than about marginalised people. The power differential between those with a voice, those with power, and those with money in the church - and those without, who consequently lack power, is significant. R.W Connell[43] suggests that masculine power is not merely personal but is also systemic in character.

Connell[44] expands the work of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)[45], who developed the concept of "cultural hegemony." Gramsci noted Marx's notion that "the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class," and the dominant class is predicated upon economic power.[46] Gramsci coined the term "cultural hegemony" to refer to how the ruling class maintains its dominance not primarily through force or coercion, but rather through the willing, "spontaneous" consent of the ruled. One key reason why the early Connell was criticised is because she failed to adequately account for the intersections that encompass people. She has subsequently given more consideration to intersectionality in gender power relations.

In a similar vein, Connell uses the term "hegemonic masculinity" to refer to the pattern of practices that allows men's dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). Connell sees many kinds of masculinities but argues that there is always one that is dominant over the rest, one that 'others' people in a gendered hierarchy.

Of course, by 'hegemonic' Connell does not imply that dominant masculinity is uniform or fixed, but rather, that it is the kind of masculinity that is socially dominant (2002, p58). Primarily, Connell is concerned with the changing patterns of 'hegemony' - the dominance of patterns of masculinity over others.

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[43] Raewyn Connell, is an influential Australian sociologist best known for her work in gender studies, particularly her concept of hegemonic masculinity. This concept examines the ways in which certain forms of masculinity dominate over others and contribute to systems of gender inequality. Connell, who is transgendered, has had a profound impact on understanding the social construction of gender and the dynamics of power, privilege, and identity.

[44] Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory in The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p.360.

[45] Gramsci, A. 2011. Prison Notebooks (Volumes 1, 2 & 3) edition published 2011, translated by Callari Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York City: Columbia University Press.

[46] The Encyclopedia.com notes that, "In some ways, 'hegemony' was Gramsci's way of elaborating the actual working out of Marx's famous dictum, 'the ideas of the ruling class are always the ruling ideas.' In Gramsci's formulation, hegemony accounts for how domination is exercised apart from coercion and force. See more at: https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/italian-history-biographies/antonio-gramsci, accessed on 22 August 2023.

Significantly, Connell locates "hegemonic masculinity" at the social level and in the public sphere and not solely within interpersonal dynamics. Thus, she recognises the gendered character of amongst others, workplaces, bureaucracies, educational institutions, and ecclesial communities.

Worryingly, and despite various efforts, the UCCSA landscape is still gendered and unequal. One consequence of this is an ecclesiastical aversion to the full acceptance of Izitabane persons in church spaces. Anglican Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, laments, "We reject them, treat them as pariahs, and push them outside of the confines of our church communities, and thereby we negate the consequences of their baptism and ours. We make them doubt that they are the children of God, and this must be the ultimate blasphemy." (Tutu 2006, Forward).[47]

This certainly applies to the UCCSA also. Two clergy were suspended for three months each in the early 2000s for officiating at same-sex blessing ceremonies. This was prior to the 2006 Civil Unions Act, therefore at that time same-sex marriages were still illegal. Clergy under the threat of punitive measures, or as we say, "magisterial discipline" (Briggs 2006, p.51)[48] are a sure indication that the Church has not dealt well, pastorally, with the issues of Human Sexuality. Perhaps we too have "negated the consequences of our Baptism."

Social conflict theory and hegemonic masculinity theory provides a framework for understanding how power, inequality, and conflict shape gender relations within society and in the ecclesia. These theories emphasise the importance of recognising and addressing gender-based inequalities and the need for social structural change to achieve a more equitable and just society. The same is true for the Church. Pillay and Jakobsen (2022, p.2)[49] show that the consequences of heterosexism that Tutu speaks about are rooted in hegemonic masculinity and are expressed in heteropatriarchal normative actions, behaviours and perspectives, and these often lead to violence.

[47] Desmond Tutu in the Foreword in Alexander, Marilyn Bennett and James Preston. 2006. We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. It is available online at https://www.anglicannews.org/news/1996/04/text-of-archbishop-tutus-foreword-to-we-too-are-baptised,-a-new-prayer-book-for-lesbians-and-gays.aspx, accessed on 26 November 2023.
[48] See also in Briggs. 2006. P.61 and the UCCSA Manual of Constitutions and Procedures 2009, p.48.
[49] Jakobsen, Wilma and Miranda N. Pillay. "Re-membering Tutu's liberation theology: Toward gender justice from theo-ethical feminist perspectives." Anglican Theological Review 104 (2022), p.330-340.

1.7 Research Methodology: See-Judge-Act Approach

This research employs Liberation Theology as a methodological lens, utilizing the See-Judge-Act framework as an analytical tool. Liberation Theology's emphasis on contextual reflection, social analysis, and action provides a critical foundation for engaging with issues of gender and sexual diversity in ecclesiastical contexts. The See-Judge-Act methodology, rooted in ethical and theological traditions, enables a dynamic reflection-action process for understanding and addressing systemic issues within the church. This section outlines the analytical steps of the methodology and their application in this study.

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SEE-JUDGE-ACT

The See-Judge-Act methodology finds its origins in Aristotelian ethics and Thomistic philosophy, particularly in the virtue of prudence. The modern formulation is attributed to Belgian Catholic priest, Fr. Joseph Cardijn, who popularized it as a tool for social reflection and action. This methodology was later incorporated into Catholic social teaching by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* (1961). Jesuit priests Joe Holland and Peter Henriot further developed its application in their influential text *Social Analysis* (1980; updated 1983), establishing it as a cornerstone in ethics, social justice, and pastoral work.

THE SEE-JUDGE-ACT PROCESS UNFOLDS IN THREE STAGES:

1. SEE: Appraisal of the Existing Situation

The first stage, See, involves observing and describing the lived realities of a particular community or context. In this study, the focus is on the social and ecclesiastical experiences of Izitabane (a term referencing queer individuals) within the church. This stage aims to uncover and critically describe the systemic discrimination, indignity, and violence faced by Izitabane members.

3 KEY ELEMENTS OF THE "SEE" PROCESS

Lived Experience. Seeing is an essential first step to an analysis of what we experience in life. In SEE, we draw on the real lived experiences of Izitabane members to uncover the intersections of social, ecclesiastical, and personal contexts.

Phenomenological Perspective. Grounded in John Macquarrie's (1977) insights into Phenomenology, the descriptive task involves understanding the intentionality of lived experiences — how Izitabane individuals perceive and engage with their realities.

Recognition and Visibility: The act of "seeing" is not merely observational but an ethical imperative to acknowledge the humanity, dignity, and presence of marginalized communities. This visibility is essential for locating structural injustices and fostering a sense of worth and belonging. This stage is deeply descriptive, situating the study within the broader socio-political and ecclesiastical contexts that shape the lives of Izitabane individuals. Seeing also refers to the act of Eucharist, and our relational experiences of breaking bread. It is helpful to describe what takes place.

2. JUDGE: ANALYTICAL AND ETHICAL REFLECTION

The second stage, JUDGE, involves analysing the situation in light of ethical principles, theological frameworks, and values. This step does not imply condemnation but rather critical evaluation and discernment. It engages with the questions: What is happening? Why is it happening? What does justice demand in this situation?

The application of judge in this study has four main components.

Theological Analysis: Reflecting on the theology of Covenant and Eucharist to uncover their liberative potential for greater inclusion of Izitabane individuals. This involves examining how these theological constructs can serve as frameworks for justice and dignity.

Contextual Questions: Asking critical and pastoral questions about the intersection of gender, sexuality, and ecclesial practice.

Ethical Assessment: Using the lens of Liberation Theology, which emphasises systemic sin and structural violence, to assess the underlying causes of exclusion and oppression.

Analytic-Diagnostic Process: Drawing on tools from Liberation Theology, including the hermeneutic of suspicion, to interrogate power dynamics and hidden ideologies that perpetuate injustice.

This stage moves beyond description to critique, providing a robust ethical and theological analysis of the challenges faced by Izitabane individuals in the Church.

3. ACT: DECIDING ON AN ACTION PLAN

The final stage, ACT, focuses on formulating and implementing practical and actionable responses based on the insights gained from the previous stages.

In this study, the action phase involves creating a liturgical and theological response to the perceived exclusion of Izitabane members in the full life and benefit of church membership.

Goals of the "Act" Stage:

- Liturgical Innovation: Developing a new, inclusive liturgical drama for celebrating the Eucharist, emphasizing its redemptive and embodied potential for gender and sexual diversity.
- Reconstruction and Imagination: Re-imagining the Eucharist as a space of hope, healing, and inclusion for marginalized communities.
- Sustainable Change: Advocating for systemic change within ecclesiastical structures to embrace a more inclusive theology and praxis.

This stage emphasises transformation — both at the individual and systemic levels—as a response to the analytical insights of the “See” and “Judge” stages.

6 CORE COMMITMENTS OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN THIS METHODOLOGY

The See-Judge-Act framework is underpinned by six core commitments of Liberation Theology, following Gerald West (2017).

1. Grounding faith in the lived experiences of communities within specific socio-political and gendered contexts.
2. Upholding a preferential option for the poor and marginalised.
3. Recognising sin as structural and systemic in nature.
4. Identifying the systemic causes of violence and exclusion.
5. Affirming the agency of individuals and communities to enact change.
6. Utilising social analysis as a tool for identifying and addressing systemic injustice.

These commitments inform every stage of the methodology, ensuring that the research remains rooted in justice, liberation, and transformative action.

CONCLUSION

The See-Judge-Act methodology offers a reflective and actionable framework for addressing the ecclesiastical and social exclusion of Izitabane members. By engaging with their lived experiences (See), critically analysing systemic injustices (Judge), and proposing transformative responses (Act), this research seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and liberative ecclesial praxis.

Liberation Theology's commitment to social analysis, systemic change, and human dignity makes it an appropriate and robust methodological lens for this study.

In this discussion of the liberationist and redemptive theological implications of the Eucharist, the SEE-JUDGE-ACT methodology is a beneficial paradigm. Therefore, I deem it appropriate to make use of the See-Judge-Act model of analysis.

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Chapter 2. Stabanisation: Queer Theory and Theology

2.1 Introduction

Queer theory is a multidisciplinary framework within academic and cultural studies that critically examines, and challenges societal norms, assumptions, and attitudes related to gender and sexuality. Often, it analyses the operative power relations within a society. It emerged as a response to traditional models of understanding gender and sexuality, seeking to deconstruct and disrupt these norms in order to highlight the complexity and diversity of identities and experiences. Queer theory questions the binary understanding of gender and the heteronormative assumptions underlying our understanding of human sexuality.

Queer theory is a qualitative academic framework and critical perspective that emerged in the Social Sciences over the past 40 years within the post-constructionist fields of gender studies, cultural studies, theology, and other disciplines. In this chapter, I unpack queer theory discourses as an overview, which forms part of my methodological seeing.

2.2 Terminology

Another matter that is often left unspoken is about the LGBTQIA+ acronym. Whilst the Church often speaks about “homo-sexuality” and “same-sex sexuality” it can be easy to lose sight of the all the letters in the acronym. When we singularly use “homo-sexual” or “gay” we are making yet others unseen by subsuming them into one hold-all category. Our language must acknowledge the full range sexual orientations and identities, and not perpetuate the marginalization of any person or group.

In their 2024 book, Embracing Queer Family, authors Nia and Katie J. Chiaramonte say, “Just like you, we come to this book with our own distinct experiences. We recognize that our story may not look like your story, and it’s unlikely our circumstances may match yours. We think this is a good thing. It’s time we stopped loading all LGBTQIA+ experiences all into the same basket, both in our own minds and in the narratives we tell society. Honoring the reality that no two people find themselves in the exact same way is a great first step in understanding and trusting each other.” (Chiaramonte, 2024 p.xii).

Here they make the point that people and couples and indeed families are made up of individual diversity, and we should resist the temptation to lump everyone's experiences into one communal box. This is an excellent point. Not all Izitabane experience their lives in exactly the same way. We should acknowledge the diversity-within-diversity.

Within faith spaces in South Africa, one important conversation is the marginalization of the Izitabane community. In our society we are grappling with the implications of a progressive national Constitution, juxtaposed with a long history of racial and political oppression and repression. However, Churches have struggled to get out of the starting blocks, and a number of Christian denominations have not progressed much on same-sex and gender issues in a decade or two.

The UCCSA has had this conversation on the table at its highest court (the General Assembly) since about 1997. Professor Duncan also laments the slow pace of these developments in one of our closest ecumenical allies, the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (UPCSA) (Duncan 2021, p.2). He observes about the Church Unity Commission (CUC), "Perhaps, it is worth noting at this point that the issue of human sexuality was exercising the mind of all of the mainline denominations in South Africa at this time,"[50] (2021: p2) which for the UPCSA, this was around 2003. This was two decades ago. Similarly, the UCCSA has been stuck on these issues since the mid-1990s. Neither the UPCSA nor the UCCSA are anywhere near a mature resolution of these issues. At least, the UCCSA did explicitly acknowledge way back in 1997 that homophobia is a sin. (Gaborone Assembly Resolutions, 1997).[51]

Slowly, Izitabane-identifying people are claiming a voice and a place in this society and in the Church at large. It has been a great help that Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu put his considerable affirming voice to the issues, as Pillay and Jakobsen remember' his stand against ecclesial heteronormativity.[52]

[50] Duncan, G.A., 2021, 'Hated without a reason – Contending with issues of human sexuality in a South African ecclesial context: A case study', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(4), a6347.
[51] At this point, the UCCSA also prohibited clergy from blessing or solemnising same-sex relationships.
[52] Pillay, M and W. Jakobsen. 2022. Re-membering Tutu's Liberation Theology: toward gender justice from theo-ethical feminist perspectives in Anglican Theological Review 00(0), pp 1-2.

I come at this study as a member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa – UCCSA. The UCCSA has its roots as an historic mission church with a specific Reformed flavour, ethos and social commitments in the African context. In our ecclesiology, we have a distinctive take on the Church as existing for others, as located within a specific and discernible socio-political context which has a necessary bearing upon its worship, work and witness. Through exploring this distinctive theology, this study considers how such re-imagining of Eucharist may indeed be a *stabanising*; and consequently, worth investigating, and asking how it provides insight into contemporary conceptions of the Eucharist particularly in light of the often 'othering' experiences of those who are *Izitabane*.

In this paper, the question I am raising is whether the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) is consistent in its welcome of Izitabane church members. For in UCCSA we welcome Izitabane members to the Eucharist but without affirming them in other ways, for example, with marriage blessings or even recognition of such relationships as an embodiment of love. Also, we have still not tested whether *stabanised* clergy will be affirmed in the UCCSA.

I also give some attention to the practice of allyship[53] and solidarity as it operates in the Covenant structure. I would like to see congregations becoming safe spaces, not only for further brave and vulnerable conversations but also for more authentic community.

2.3 Queer Theory

Patrick Chen argues that queer terminology is an umbrella term, "that refers collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning, and other individuals who identify with non-normative sexualities and and/or gender identities." (Chen, 2011: p3). Queer theory is widely understood to be transgressive (Chen, 2011: p3). A pick of social scientists follows below, where I explain some seminal concepts of a range of scholars.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her foundational book "Epistemology of the Closet" (1990: p68), explores the history of the closet as a metaphor for hiding one's non-normative sexuality.

[53] See for example this discussion on Allyship, https://iam.org.za/pride-month-2024-how-can-i-be-an-ally-in-my-church/, accessed on 14 May 2024.

The closet represents a space of secrecy and concealment, but also a place of potential revelation. She argues that the closet is a central structure in the lives of queer people, profoundly shaping their experiences and relationships.

Sedgwick outlines several axioms about sexuality that challenge conventional wisdom. These include the idea that people are not universally or inherently heterosexual or homosexual, and that the meanings and expressions of sexuality are culturally and historically specific. She discusses how societal anxieties about sexuality shape our cultural and intellectual history. For Sedgewick, intersectionality is a significant factor in identity, although she does not use that specific term. Sedgewick instead argues that sexual identity cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in relation to other social and cultural factors, like race, class, and gender.

Marcella Althaus-Reid's (2000) work is concerned with exploring the intersections of theology, sexuality, and social justice, particularly within the context of Latin American liberation theology. Althaus-Reid argued that traditional theological frameworks often marginalise or exclude LGBTQ+ individuals and fail to address the realities of their lives (2000). In response, Althaus-Reid sought to develop a queer theology that centred on the experiences and perspectives of marginalised communities, challenging heteronormative and patriarchal structures within both religious institutions and society at large.

Her book, Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics (2000) presents a radical intersection between theology, liberation and sexuality. Althaus-Reid introduces the concept of "indecent theology". This stands in opposition to "decent" (by which she means traditional) theology that aligns with hetero-normative sexual and gender archetypes. Indecent theology seeks to expose and critique the ways in which mainstream theology upholds systems of oppression and exclusion. A key thought in her liberation theology paradigm is the idea that ‘indecent’ means transgressing the sexual imagination of Western theology. She self-describes her book, “as a “multidisciplinary approach and drawing on Sexual Theory, Postcolonial Criticism, Queer Studies and theologies, Marxist Studies, Continental Philosophy and Systematic Theology.” (2000: p7). Her portrayal of marginalized voices becomes progressively more helpful in understanding the context of her theology.

Adrian Thatcher asserts that in theological discourses on gender, “essentialism” is the view that human beings are created by God as two natural and distinct sexes, *viz*. female and male, a condition that is immutable, with each sex being made for the binary other sex. (2011: p20). He rejects this essentialist view. In "Liberating Sex" (1993), Thatcher challenges traditional Christian views on sexuality by emphasising the positive aspects of sexual expression, promoting mutual respect and consent, advocating for inclusivity, reinterpreting biblical texts, and integrating love and justice into sexual ethics.

Thatcher proposes five key reforming arguments (1993: pp8-11), *viz*. that sexuality as a gift from God rather than a source of shame or sin; the importance of mutuality and consent; a greater inclusivity and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and identities; a reinterpretation of biblical texts related to sexuality; and the integration of love and justice. When justice, love in action, informs and guides our attitudes and approaches to human sexuality then we are reflecting the ethical stance of Scripture.

In framing sexuality as a gift, Thatcher seeks to move away from traditional Christian teachings that often associate sex with guilt and immorality; and argues for a more compassionate and just Christian sexual theology that respects individual autonomy and diversity.

Judith Butler, in her seminal 2006 text, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, where the core argument is that gender is not binary but is a spectrum of constructed identities which has no simple link to biological sex. Her key contribution to the epistemology of gender and identity is the idea of the performative character of gender, and the rejection of essentialism. Butler argues that “Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed…” (1988: p519).

Butler argues that gender is not an inherent or fixed identity but rather something that is continuously performed and reiterated through social practices and norms. According to Butler, gender is a repetitive and stylized performance that is both constrained by social expectations and capable of subverting them, hence “performativity”. Butler reasons that gender constructs follow from cultural ways of socialisation and are a stylised combination of repetitive actions which give form to a gender identity.

In this way, gender is performative, being the cumulative effect of "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds…" (1988, p.519).

Patrick Chen (2011) argues that queer theory challenges and deconstructs traditional understandings of gender, sexuality, and self-identity by examining how societal norms and power structures shape these concepts. For Chen, queer theory challenges the normative assumptions within heteropatriarchy that essentialises gender.

Following these authors, when I use the term "gender" in this paper, I do so to identify socio-cultural constructions of what is to be a woman or a man, rather than to refer to biological differences or sex. Queer theory is concerned with the curating of cultural power through society via gender and sexuality and aims to destabilise hegemonic power by means of visible, embodied critique.

Thus, queer theory makes the unseen seen, or as Thyssen puts it, "it unearths that which receives minimal attention." (2020, p.4). This fact of being seen, for Patrick Chen, is the consequence of the erasing of boundaries in queer theory (Chen 2011, p.6). Disapproving of essentialist notions of gender and sexuality, Chen affirms Foucault's argument that by essentializing ontology – in this case queer being, society exercises control over groups by classifying people according to being.

Michel Foucault [54]was a French social theorist and philosopher known for his influential work on the history of sexuality. His theories of sexuality challenged traditional views and opened up new avenues of inquiry into knowledge, power, and identity, especially the intersection of sexuality and power. Foucault contended that sexuality is not just an innate and fixed aspect of human existence but is deeply intertwined with systems of power and social control. In his seminal work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explored how Western societies have constructed and regulated sexual norms and practices over an extended period of time.[55]

[54] See Foucault, M. 1976. The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction. Translated from the French by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books. Foucault suggests that the history of sexuality is usually viewed through the lens of what he terms "the repressive hypothesis", that is, for Western middle-classes any foray into pleasurable endeavors is expressly forbidden, and more, actually repressed outside of the strict confines of marriage.

[55] One of Foucault's key ideas is the concept of "biopower," which refers to the ways in which modern states and institutions govern populations through techniques of surveillance, regulation, and discipline. He examined how

In a 1983 interview with James O'Higgins[56], Foucault shares his appreciation for John Boswell's queer methodology, saying, "the rejection by Boswell of the categorical opposition between homosexual and heterosexual, which plays such a significant role in the way our culture conceives of homosexuality, represents an advance not only in scholarship but in cultural criticism as well." Here, Boswell is indicating something significant about the ontology of sexuality. All sexualities lie on a spectrum without them being binary counterparts.

In Foucault's The History of Sexuality, his chapter on "The Incitement to Discourse" deals less with sex and sexuality itself, and more on the multifaceted effect of language and social discourses about sexuality. As if to humorously emphasise the importance of language, Canadian Margaret Atwood quipped in Surfacing (1973, p.106), "The Eskimos had fifty-two names for snow because it was important to them: there ought to be as many for love." [57]
It's a clever way for Attwood to say that language matters!

Michael Warner[58] is a literary critic, cultural theorist, and scholar known for his work on the intersections of literature, culture, and sexuality. In particular, he is recognised for his contributions to queer theory and for his exploration of the ways in which power and knowledge shape sexual identities and practices.

One of Warner's key concepts is that of "heteronormativity," introduced in his book "The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life." Here, heteronormativity refers to the social and cultural norms that privilege heterosexuality as the standard or "normal" mode of sexual expression, while marginalising or stigmatising non-heterosexual identities and practices. Warner's analysis of heteronormativity has been highly influential in shaping understandings of sexuality and identity within queer theory and in cultural studies.

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discourses of sexuality have been used to control individuals and shape social order, highlighting how power operates through practices of standardisation and the classification of individuals into "normal" and "deviant" sexual categories. Foucault also introduced the notion of "discursive formations," which accentuates the role of language and discourse in shaping knowledge and social reality. He argued that the social discourses of sexuality are productive and not merely descriptive, but that they actually shape our identities and experiences.

[56] O'Higgins, James, and Michel Foucault. "II. Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: An Interview with Michel Foucault." Salmagundi, no. 58/59, 1982, pp. 10–24. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40547562. Accessed 3 Jan. 2023.

[57] https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/margaret_atwood_387475, accessed on 22 November 2023.

[58] Warner, M. 2000. The trouble with normal: sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lauren Berlant[59] was an influential cultural theorist and scholar known for her work in affect theory, feminist theory, and critical studies of intimacy and citizenship. She was particularly renowned for her analysis of the complexities of everyday life and the intersections of power, emotion, and politics. Berlant's "Cruel Optimism," where she refers to the ways in which people invest in fantasies of a better life or a better future, even when those fantasies may be harmful or unattainable. Berlant is celebrated for her profound insights into the complexities of contemporary life and her contributions to critical theory. There is a close relationship between queer theory and queer theology. The latter follows on from the former in that it is transgressive, challenges colonial heteropatriarchal normative constructs, confronts hegemonic patriarchy, and enables LGBTQIA+ people to be 'seen' (that is, have their presence and personhood acknowledged) in ecclesiological discourses.

The Kairos document (1985) places justice at the core of Christian social values, but it also urges the Church to ask, "what kind of justice is envisaged?" (ICT 1985, p.57) If we transpose the same critique to considering the inclusion of Izitabane in the Church, we may also imagine placing justice at the centre of the conversation and asking, "but what kind of justice?" Queer theology claims a space within the Church landscape so that Izitabane members may be acknowledged as full and essential participants of the ecclesia.

Queer social theory and queer theology are at the cutting edge of current socio-anthropological discourses. Wilcox argues that the appearance of queer theory in theological discourses is an indicator of how queer theory has become mainstream. (2021, p.23). With this in mind, I have elected to *not* use inverted commas when using queer terminology in this paper because I want to normalize Izitabane language. Izitabane and stabanising is language I will explain below.

This paper is intersectional in character, by design. *Intersectionality* (1989) is a term coined by critical race theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw[60] to describe an approach to social theory and analysis that intersects lines of social power and agency, like race, gender, age, class, caste, skin color, sexuality, ability, religion, language, nationality, and the like.

[59] Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory In The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p335.
[60] Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory In The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p338.

These distinctive lines are not solitary or parallel. Instead, they intersect so that an analysis of race, *inter alia*, is deeply impacted also by gender, etc. The consequence is that someone's experiences as Isitabane are always qualified by that person's experiences as a Muslim, Christian, being black, South African, cisgendered, and so on.

South Africa is a jumble of micro-societies, often with very traditional religious underpinnings that intersect with very traditional cultural mores. Critiquing the rainbow nation concept, Eusebius McKaiser, writes, "We have an almost pathological yearning as South Africans to be Archbishop Desmond Tutu's (in)famous rainbow nation," (McKaiser 2012, p.155). At the nexus of these often-divergent conversations are faith communities struggling with the language and lived experiences of the marginalized. "In South Africa," McKaiser (2012, p.157) opines, "We are spatially, geographically, linguistically, culturally, and ideologically divided,"

Dorothy Smith[61] is well known as an originator of Standpoint Theory. Smith uses the notion of standpoint to emphasize that what one knows is affected by where one stands in society. This implies that we begin relating to the world from our lived reality, from our place in the world as we truly experience it, and with the perspective of our past experience of the world. Here, Smith's argument is that no person can have a completely objective knowledge of the world, and that no two individuals can have exactly the same perspective.

This is why it is important for the Church to talk with others, especially those who are marginalized, and to avoid as far as possible, talking *about* people, which often has the effect of objectifying people. This is exactly the reason for reclaiming the language of Izitabane in faith spaces. Dion Foster correctly suggests, "When we listen to people who are engaging the issues that impact upon their lives (racism, sexism, gender-based violence, poverty, sexual exclusion) in relation to the Bible, a whole new world of meaning opens up." (2023, p.10). The point here is for the Church to listen to the other; and to speak with the other.

[61] Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory In The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p341.

Some faith communities attempt to ignore the conversation to include the marginalised. This is one critique of liberation theology. The Kairos Document (1985)[62] in part critiques State Theology and Church Theology on the basis of the words they apply, like "Law and Order", "communist", "reconciliation" and "non-violence", to name a few.

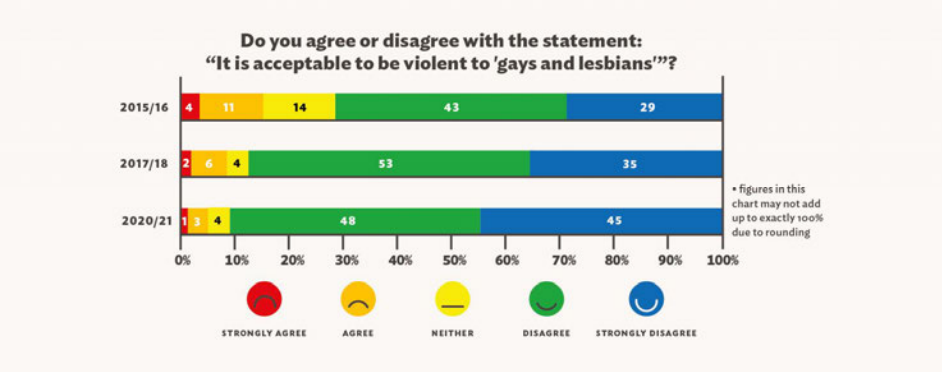
Others try to dominate social discourses by speaking more loudly *at* others. Few faith communities seem to be safe spaces where the marginalized can speak in enabling ways.
The result is a religious landscape that often speaks past people or avoids safe conversations. We need to say emphatically in faith communities, "language matters." Izitabane in South Africa are also subject to high levels of social and physical violence. This violence can be systemic in nature, or personal. Annah Moyo-Kupeta, director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, famously calls violence South Africa's "12th official language".[63] Mark Heywood makes the case that South Africans suffer from an epidemic of violence resulting from "chronic, acute and complex traumas" as a nation.

Selina Palm (2019, p.2) explains how church-violence against vulnerable people in church spaces continues amidst a deluge of media reports. Robert Vosloo (2019, p.5) in his commentary on the link between prophetic witness and weakness (here he considers 'weakness in the sense of vulnerability), writes tellingly about "prophetic performativity" where Churches respond publicly to allegations of abuse. In Church spaces, Izitabane also continue to be subject to life-destroying violence.

Interestingly, the GCRO Survey of 2020/2021 shows that 4% of Gauteng residents agree that violence against Izitabane is *acceptable*, whilst the 2015/2016 survey shows that figures as 14%. [64]

The survey graphic is reproduced below:

[62] The 1985 Kairos Document was produced in the anti-apartheid movement by church activists, critiquing the Church under apartheid by employing the lens of liberation theology, what we called "contextual theology".
[63] Mark Heywood's editorial in the Daily Maverick media, "South Africans in a rage – can we work together and overcome the trauma within us?" where he argues that "South Africa exhibits all the symptoms of a society going through an undiagnosed breakdown brought on by concurrent acute, chronic and complex traumas," published on 07 Mar 2023. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-03-07-can-south-africans-work-together-and-overcome-trauma-within-us/ accessed on 14 July 2023.
[64] https://news.uj.ac.za/news/gcro-releases-findings-of-gauteng-quality-of-life-survey-2/ Accessed 22 November 2023.



Whilst I might hope this represents a softening attitude, nonetheless, the same GRCO Survey suggests, "Day-to-day life of LGBTQ+ individuals remain challenging, especially because of socio-cultural prejudice towards norms deviating from heteronormativity." [65]

The socio-political landscape has changed with democracy. South Africa is one of only six countries in Africa to provide expansive protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Botha, *et al* 2020, p.325). "On 30 November 2006, South Africa… became the fifth country in the world (and the first country in Africa) to legalise marriage between two people of the same-sex under the Civil Union Act"[66]

Despite legalisation, South Africa's GCRO 2016 study revealed that over half (55%) of Izitabane fear SOGIESC discrimination against themselves, and that 44% of respondents have actually experienced discrimination in their everyday lives during the last two years. In a seminal text, "When faith does violence - Re-imagining engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa," West, Kaoma and Van Der Walt note that: "African church theologies are not neutral, they are heteropatriarchal." (2017, p.16) They argue that a hermeneutically superior biblical theme to emphasize is one that "privileges the experience of marginalized communities."

Again, the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that same-sex marriage was to be legal within the bounds of South Africa. The Court found that, "Section 9 (3) of the Constitution expressly prohibits unfair discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

[65] https://www.gcro.ac.za/outputs/vignettes/detail/protection-lgbtq-rights-across-africa / accessed in 4 November 2023.
[66] See: https://www.sa-wedding.co.za/same-sex-marriages-in-south-africa/, accessed on 7 October 2023.

The Constitution reads: "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth."[67]

This judgement represents a landmark social and legal shift in South Africa. Ultimately, on the 1st December 2005, the Constitutional Court ruled that it is unconstitutional to deny LGBTQ+ people the right to marry. Regrettably, it came after a long legal battle against the Department of Home Affairs. It's bizarre that the same State apparatus that legally curates the Constitution has an arm of state that went to court to fight this amendment in law. The respondents, Marié Adriaana Fourie and Cecelia Johanna Bonthuys fundamentally changed the South African legal landscape in South Africa. The court ordered South Africa's Parliament to amend existing legislation within 12 months.[68]

South Africa became the fifth country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage, after Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Canada. South Africa is also the first African country to do so. Across Africa where Izitabane people are often persecuted, activists in South Africa have won important legal victories, including the right to adopt children and to inherit from their partners' wills.

According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), same-sex relations are legal in only 22 of Africa's 54 countries.[69] South Africa remains the only African state where same-sex marriage is legal. Comprehensive protections against sexual orientation discrimination exists in three African countries, *viz*. Angola, Mauritius and South Africa and some protections are enacted in Botswana, Cape Verde, Mozambique and Seychelles.[70] A raft of African states have decriminalized same-sex acts.

[67] Constitutional Court judgement as found at https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2005/19.pdf and accessed on the 19 February 2023.
[68] https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/court-approves-same-sex-couples-right-marry, accessed on 13 August 2023.
[69] International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). See https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2019.pdf, however, there have been some changes since 2019. Accessed on 30 March 2023.
[70] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-lgbt-lawmaking-idUSKBN27C2XQ/, accessed 12 April 2023.

2.4 LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Liberation theology is a socio-religious political movement that emerged primarily in Latin America during the mid-to-late 20th Century, seeking to address social, economic, and political injustice via a Christian commitment to social transformation. It emphasizes the liberation of marginalized and oppressed people, especially those living in poverty, and seeks to challenge systemic inequalities and structures of socio-political power.

Some key elements of liberation theology as argued by Gerald West includes a statement of God's *Preferential Option for the Poor and Marginalised*: At the heart of liberation theology is the idea of "God's preferential option for the poor." This principle asserts that the Gospel advocates for the marginalised, exploited and oppressed. Liberation theologians believe that the church must prioritise the needs and struggles of the poor and work to alleviate their suffering, through community action. Wilma Jakobsen weaves a common struggle for women priests and Izitabane in Germond and de Gruchy (1997, pp.69-76).

The next element is praxis, which refers to the integration of faith and action. Liberation theologians emphasise that faith must be put into action through practical efforts to transform society. This involves actively engaging in social and political struggles to bring about positive change for the oppressed. Eucharist is the key terrain where theology meets praxis in the Community of faith.

Liberation theology, following Paulo Freire, emphasises the importance of understanding the social, cultural, and economic context in which theology is developed. This means that theological interpretations are related to the lived realities of the people. The ontology of Izitabane means they live with their embodied Queerness without ever being able to throw it off. Althaus-Reid insists that embodied Queerness is a site of contextual struggle.

Liberation theology encourages critical examination of faith perspectives in the light of social and economic realities. Theologians analyse Scripture to uncover their implications for social justice and to challenge interpretations that might support oppressive systems. This study is one part of critical reflection on the embodied context of Izitabane. Liberation theology identifies structural injustice and systemic oppression as the root causes of poverty and suffering, as opposed to privatised and personal notions of faith. It addresses itself to the underlying social, economic, and political power structures that perpetuate inequality.

The Eucharist is a fundamental structure within the life of faith. If marginalised people are accepted in silence but not fully accepted, it implies they are not truly seen in the Community. They are not being seen is the antithesis of community, of the Eucharist.

Drawing on Marxist social analysis, Liberation Theology often employs the language of class struggle, to describe the conflict between the powerful-wealthy and the poor. It sees Jesus as a champion of the oppressed and frames the struggle for liberation as a continuation of his mission. The struggle of all marginalised people, whether by race, gender, sex, age, or given sexuality is common between them. It is the same struggle, as Jakobsen argues in Germond and de Gruchy (1997, p.76). One of the serious criticisms of the book “Aliens in the Household of God,” by Germond/de Gruchy is the lack of black representation amongst the contributors. It’s a serious oversight in the South African socio-ecclesiastical landscape. Nonetheless, it was a significant prod to the Church towards Izitabane inclusion.

Liberation Theology emphasises the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of socio-economic status. Where human dignity is violated by the hegemonic structures of exploitation and oppression, the movement seeks to restore it through social transformation. In a fundamental way, the refusal to fully accept Izitabane in the UCCSA is a matter of not recognising the full human dignity of Izitabane.

To love and to be loved is a fundamental human right and need. Being able to establish loving, caring, mutual relationships is an essential part of what it means to be human. And to find fulfilment in them. Barth (1961, 1971) and Moltmann (1964) have argued that this human faculty reflects the imago Dei within us. Barth addressed the human need to love and be loved within his theological framework, in his influential work "Church Dogmatics."

Barth's theology emphasises the centrality of God's love in understanding human existence and relationships and community. For Barth, human beings are created by God for relationship, and this relational aspect of humanity reflects the divine image. He emphasises that love is not merely a human emotion or sentiment but is fundamentally grounded in the divine nature of God. Barth argues that God's love is freely given and unconditional, and it forms the basis for all genuine human love.

Barth also acknowledges the human need for love and community, which he sees as rooted in our created nature and our longing for communion with God and others. He emphasizes that true human fulfilment is found in loving and being loved within the context of genuine community and mutual care. It is an expression of the divine trinitarian idea of community. In the same way, for Briggs, participating in Eucharist unites us to one another, as to Christ (Briggs 1996, p.173) For example, he concludes the chapter by asserting, “The Lord’s Supper is always a corporate act.”

Liberation theology rejects passive acceptance of the status quo and advocates for active engagement in social justice efforts. This might include advocating for land reform, workers' rights, equitable distribution of resources, and policies that uplift the poor. In this paper, I am arguing for a fundamental shift in orientation, for the Queering of the Eucharist as a transgressive affirmation, to effect ecclesial change. Along with advocates of critical theory, many proponents of Liberation Theology critique the impacts of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism upon marginalised localities. They challenge the role of powerful nations and global corporations in perpetuating poverty and inequality in the Global South/Global East. The critique of imperialism is also a fundamental critique of male heteronormativity, hegemonic social power, class divisions, and the marginalisation of the Other. It speaks to the hegemonic and toxic domination of brown and black bodies.

Lastly, we can say that Liberation Theology often seeks to bridge intersectional divides, uniting Christians in the common pursuit of justice and social transformation. Izitabane inclusion is also a bridge that is built by our participation in the Eucharist.

Briggs reminds the UCCSA that the Eucharist is always expansive, always ecumenical, always bridges human divides. It is in its truest sense a ‘thanksgiving’. Referencing CH Dodd, Briggs confirms that Eucharist principally carries an eschatological element. Celebrating the Eucharist therefore is always with an “until he comes”. Briggs notes, “This eschatological emphasise has been the warp and weft of the Lord’s Supper from the moment of its inauguration…” (1996, p.176).

Liberation theology has evolved over time and has been met with both support and criticism within the Catholic Church and beyond. It continues to inspire individuals and movements that work for social justice and the empowerment of marginalized communities.

This is also what the Eucharist does for us, it inspires, aspires, and unites us in an embodied, physical way. For the UCCSA, Liberation Theology provides a core motif for its own program of witness. The entire Pastoral Plan for Transformation was predicated upon Liberation Theology themes and praxis.

Since the church ultimately rests upon the foundation of Scripture, the Ujamaa Centre[71] of UKZN sets out six key commitments within liberation theology that are required as hermeneutical indicators for Contextual Bible Study (CBS). The first is Community, implying that the beginning and end goal of Contextual Bible Study is community. CBS brings people together. The first Latin American experiments in liberation praxis were organised around what were termed Base Christian *Communities*. The ideal location for reading the Scriptures is in community (West, Kaoma, Van Der Walt, 2010). This corresponds with how we believe the different biblical books are themselves the products of their communities.

The second theme highlights is critical analysis of our shared lived experiences and the ways in which that intersects with the text. Ujamaa Centre underscores that Contextual Bible Study is collaborative and is therefore located within a dialogical process. It argues that Contextual Bible Study is a transformative resource that impacts change for the immediate social landscape. It contends that our hermeneutics is embedded in many layers of context. Finally, there exists a contestation, a dialectical struggle with the text, that forms an important socio-theological process towards transformation. Here we see that whilst the Bible is a foundational resource for the ecclesia, its hermeneutics remains nonetheless contested. Liberation Theology, linked to Contextual Bible Study, is itself transgressive. The Bible can be stabanised. When we engage with it "from below" the Bible can become a resource that provides a liberative paradigm that can shift us from marginalisation to a redemptive focus.

This shift from marginalisation to redemptive actions, from the periphery to the centre, from the fringe to the heart, is significant because globally, Izitabane persons live under the constant threat of violence and harm. This threat of violence simmers right under the surface of society. International research has clearly shown that the continuing marginalisation, oppression, white-washing, and rejection of Izitabane causes harm.

[71] See: Ujamaa Centre for Community Development & Research. 2015. Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual, p.7.

The 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health[72] conducted in the USA by the Trevor Project[73], reveals "that 45% of Izitabane youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year." The same study shows that "nearly 1 in 5 transgender and nonbinary youth attempted suicide, and LGBTQ youth of colour reported higher rates than their white peers."

In a corresponding question, the survey also found that amongst "LGBTQ youth who felt high social support from their family reported attempting suicide at less than half the rate of those who felt low or moderate social support." There can be no doubt that the widespread rejection of Izitabane youth particularly, causes harm.

The Trevor Project survey is significant because it surveyed "nearly 34,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24 across the United States, with 45% of respondents being LGBTQ youth of color (sic) and 48% being transgender or nonbinary, our fourth annual national survey is one of the most diverse surveys of LGBTQ youth ever conducted." The Trevor Project concludes that, "the experiences of young LGBTQ people, a marginalized group consistently found to be at significantly increased risk for suicide because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society." [74]

Research roundly confirms the harm that relentless rejection of Izitabane youth causes. Ryan and Huebner, *et al*, also find that LGBT "youth who come from highly rejecting families are more than eight times as likely to have attempted suicide than LGBT peers who reported no or low levels of family rejection" (Ryan, Huebner, *et al*, p.348).[75]

The authors of this study show a causal link between parental and caregiver rejecting-behaviours and find resultant negative health complications in LGB youth and bisexual adults. John Shore, in his interview with Charles Robbins, head of the Trevor Project, clearly shows the social, personal, physical and psychological harm that LGBTQ+ youth suffer. [76]

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[72] See: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/#, accessed on 22 April 2024.
[73] The Trevor Project supports LGBTQ+ youth at risk of self-harm.
[74] See: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/#, accessed 1 May 2024.
[75] Ryan, C, David Huebner, Rafael M. Diaz, Jorge Sanchez. 2009. Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in white and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults, in Pediatrics 123(1), p.346-52.
[76] See: Shore, J. 2017. Gay Teen Suicides, Bullying and Christianity: A Talk with the Trevor Project Director (citing Massachusetts 2007 Youth Risk Survey), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-shore/a-talk-about-gay-teen-sui_b_745912.html, accessed on 14 May 2024.

A study by Shrader, *et al*, clearly shows their American participants who were classified in the LGBTQ+ identity group were more likely to suffer from severe psychological trauma.[77] Here in South Africa, Charles J Webster[78], cites John Stuart Mill's "The Harm Principle"[79] which holds that the actions of individuals should be limited only to prevent harm to other individuals. Webster articulates three principles that establishes whether harm has been caused, following Mill.

Webster concludes that what he refers to as "Biblically-Based Homophobic Hate Speech (BBHHS) is hate speech (per legal definitions) aimed at the LGBTQI+ community, based on a particular interpretation of some key biblical texts." [80] Webster concludes that Biblically-Based Homophobic Hate Speech does indeed cause real-life harm to Izitabane people.

Similarly, Gunda[81] finds that *homophobia* is largely driven by religious communities, arguing that, "Southern Africa, like the rest of the African continent, is grappling with the increasingly visible reality of homosexual and bisexual women and men, as well as transgender and intersex people." Gunda defines *homophobia* as "a term used in a generic sense to mean the irrational hatred of all forms of sexual or gender diversity, including homophobia, transphobia and biphobia." [82] She continues, "Homophobia in all its forms is a major challenge in the region. And many churches are hotbeds of homophobia."

Speaking of colonial Christianity as an expression of Victorian-era discourse, Gunda argues that Christianity, "…has been especially reactionary about sexuality and gender, promoting, with rare exceptions, a heteronormative and puritanical Victorian concept of sexuality as inherently dangerous and sinful and of male and female roles as fixed and hierarchical." [83]

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[77] See: Shrader C-H, JP Salerno, J-Y Lee, AL Johnson, AB Algarin. 2024. Mental Health Impact of Multiple Sexually Minoritized and Gender Expansive Stressors Among LGBTQ+ Young Adults: a latent class analysis, in Journal of Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[78] See: Webster, C. 2019. How should Biblically-based Homophobic/Hate Speech be treated in South Africa, legally and socially? Master's Thesis, UKZN.
[79] See: Mill, J.S. 1859, On Liberty, Chapter 1, pg. 18, where Mill articulates the 'Harm principle' in his 1859 essay, On Liberty. Mill suggests that the only time personal agency may be morally opposed is in the interests of self-defence of personal autonomy. Cf. https://gutenberg.org/files/34901/34901-h/34901-h.htm
[80] See: Webster, C. 2019. How should Biblically-based Homophobic/Hate Speech be treated in South Africa, legally and socially? Master's Thesis, UKZN, p.10.
[81] See: Gunda, MR. 2017. How the Stigmatisation and Bullying of LGBTI People is Driven by Churches, in The Huffington Post, on 31 January 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/silent-no-longer_uk_5c7e961ae4b078abc6c10daf
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

Gunda cites the work of Ugandan legal academic and gender activist, Sylvia Tamale[84], contending that settler Christianity tagged numerous formerly socially acceptable sexual practices in Africa "as *deviant*, *illegitimate* and *criminal*" by means of conversion campaigns and acculturation efforts. In other words, colonial missionary Churches prescribed which sexual behaviours were acceptable and which were not. Therefore, we may conclude that it is not SOGIE-ESC behaviours that are a foreign import into Africa, but rather it is homophobia that is a foreign import. This is a perspective that breaks open the homophobic myth that Izitabane "is un-African".

2.5 Contextual Theology

Contextual liberation theology seeks to address the social, political, and economic realities of specific cultural contexts, particularly those marked by oppression and marginalization. Contextual Theology emerged in South Africa through the work of the Institute For Contextual Theology (ICT) and the Young Christian Workers (YCS) movement. It was a response to traditional forms of Church Theology (Kairos Doc 1995, 1996) that were often seen as abstract or disconnected from the concrete struggles of people living in marginalised communities, particularly in the context of political oppression. Contextual liberation theology emphasizes the importance of engaging with the lived experiences of oppressed groups, such as the poor, the marginalised, and the colonised, to develop theological reflections and practices that are relevant and empowering to them. It draws on insights from liberation theology, which emerged primarily in Latin America in the 20th century, but contextual liberation theology extends this approach to diverse cultural contexts around the world.

Some of the key features of Contextual Liberation Theology may include contextual analysis which is a commitment to the current context, involves analysing systems of oppression and privilege that shape people's lives and experiences. Liberation praxis is an emphasis on action-reflection, that seeks to transform oppressive structures and promote justice and liberation for marginalised groups. This may involve grassroots organising, advocacy, and solidarity particularly with oppressed communities.

[84] See: Tamale, S. 2014. Exploring the Contours of African Sexualities: Religion, Law and Power, in the African Human Rights Law Journal (AHRLJ) Volume 14, No 1, 2014, pp150 – 177.
Cf. https://www.ahrlj.up.ac.za/images/ahrlj/2014/Chapter%20Tamale_2014.pdf

Liberation theology is interdisciplinary. Theologians draw upon on the insights from various disciplines, including theology, sociology, anthropology, and political theory, to develop holistic understandings of oppression and liberation.

Another focus area is hearing the marginalised voices in society, especially in a context of oppression. This may involve amplifying the voices of women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other oppressed groups whose perspectives have been historically disregarded within traditional theological discourse. Therefore, contextual liberation theology seeks to create theological frameworks that are rooted in the realities of people's lives and that contribute to the struggle for justice and liberation in diverse socio-political realities. It is a dynamic and evolving approach that continues to be developed and adapted in response to changing social, political, and cultural realities.

Melissa Wilcox has written widely on the intersection of religion, gender, and sexuality. Her work repeatedly challenges established understandings of religious beliefs and practices by examining how Izitabane individuals navigate and negotiate their identities within religious contexts. Her research sheds light on the complex and often diverse ways that religious traditions engage with issues of gender and sexuality.

One of Wilcox's key areas of focus is Queer and transgender studies within the context of religion. She has explored how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate religious spaces, identities, and communities, as well as the ways in which religious traditions engage with issues of gender and sexuality.

Wilcox asserts, “Queer and transgender studies in religion are not rarified fields, even when they engage in complex and dense theory. They’re eminently accessible to interested non-specialists, and they’re widely applicable to everyday situations in which many of us find ourselves regardless of how we understand our gender, our sexuality, and our own religious practices and beliefs.” (Wilcox 2020, p.10) [85]

[85] Wilcox, Melissa M. Queer religiosities : an introduction to Queer and transgender studies in religion. Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield.

2.6 Izitabane Zingabantu Ubuntu Theology, Liberation & Eucharist

The kinds of psychological and physical violence unleashed upon Izitabane by colonial heteropatriarchal hegemonic power is quantifiable, as I have shown above. Therefore, in view of the harm visited upon Izitabane people, Izitabane Zingabantu Ubuntu Theology, Liberation Theology, and Eucharist intersect in various ways in response to such violence and harm. Particularly in their shared focus on justice, inclusivity, and the affirmation of marginalised communities. There are various points of convergence.

The first essential motif they have in common is justice, which forms the core ethical value of Izitabane Theology, Liberation Theology, and the Eucharist. Biblical narratives associate the cry for justice as a fundamental feature of God's interactions with humankind. Between these three, there is also the emphasis on Liberation. Izitabane Theology, Liberation Theology and eucharist are all focussed on liberation of the marginalised from oppressive structures. Eucharistic ritual is rooted in the Passover meal, recalling the moment of liberation for the Hebrew people ensnared in slavery in a foreign land.

Izitabane Zingabantu Ubuntu Theology focuses on the liberation of LGBTQIA+ persons from societal norms, constructs, hegemonic patriarchal power, and the religious teachings that oppress this marginalised group. Liberation Theology too, emphasises liberation from all forms of micro-aggressions and structural oppression, including racial, economic, social and political constructions. Izitabane and Liberation Theologies advocate for solidarity with the poor and all marginalised groups, and Eucharist is intended to inclusively draw in all those on the margins. They are reminders that "God is on the side of the oppressed" and of "God's preferential option for the poor".

In both Izitabane Zingabantu Ubuntu Theology and Liberation Theology discourses, Eucharist is seen as a symbol of radical inclusivity. The Eucharistic table is open to all, regardless of age, social status, gender, or sexual orientation. This reflects the idea of generous inclusion. An essential element is also the breakdown of barriers. Both Izitabane and Liberation Theologies challenge traditional barriers to participation in the Eucharist. They emphasise Eucharist as a meal that breaks down social hierarchies and welcomes all to the table of God's grace.

Izitabane Theology and Liberation Theologies also recognise the intersectionality of oppression. Persons can face multiple forms of marginalisation simultaneously. This intersectional approach informs their understanding of justice and the Eucharist as potential spaces of healing and empowerment. Finally, both Queer theology and liberation theology affirm diverse, non-binary identities. They transgress the notion of a single, normative identity and celebrate the diversity of God's creation. We see this celebration of diversity reflected in the understanding of the Eucharist as a safe space where the multifaceted identities within the community of believers can be celebrated.

Izitabane Theology and Liberation Theologies are open and affirming of Izitabane members, inclusive of Eucharistic practices that affirm those on the margins of the ecclesia. Some churches that embrace Queer theology and liberation theology have inclusive Eucharistic practices. This might include pronouncing blessings on same-sex couples during the Eucharist, affirming Izitabane identities in prayers of intercession, and using inclusive language during the Eucharistic liturgy.

Izitabane Theology and Liberation Theologies stand in solidarity with the marginalised in Eucharistic praxis. In some Liberation Theology contexts, the Eucharist is celebrated with a focus on solidarity with the poor and marginalized. For example, churches might incorporate elements of economic justice into the Eucharistic liturgy, such as prayers for economic empowerment or the sharing of resources with those in need.

In summary, the intersection of Izitabane Theology, Liberation Theology, and Eucharist revolves around themes of justice, inclusivity, and the affirmation of diverse identities. These perspectives challenge traditional norms, celebrate diversity, and emphasise the Eucharist as a symbol of radical inclusion and solidarity with the marginalised.

2.7 Allyship

I now turn my attention to what it means to be a Queer ally. I consider myself an ally of the Izitabane community. In part, this arises from my personal historical experience of Apartheid, where race was pathologized, where black people were held to be sub-human and socially, psychologically, politically, and personally oppressed, sans personhood, human and political rights, and dignity.

The denial of humanity, of true personhood, of civil liberties, were key social constructs and mechanisms for Apartheid tyranny. This is also true in how society and religion often view Izitabane. An important concern in this paper is to take a stand against the false delimitation and denial of Izitabane personhood. Allyship activism provides pressure from within and breaks the 'us/them' dichotomy that is often present in faith communities.

Reflecting on my personal positionality, I am an ally because I have a close family member who identifies openly as bisexual and who has come out to family and friends. Our familial connections are strong and loving. Our mutual family bonds unite us inseparably. It seems to me that many colleagues in the church who have shifted from a homophobic stance to being more 'open and affirming' have done so when a family member has come out. I have noticed this is particularly true when a daughter or son has come out with a non-binary sexuality. Perhaps the discomfort people may feel is less when the issues are closer to home.

When reflecting on my own positionality for this paper, I remembered my mother once revealed to me that my second name was given because of her close friendship with a long-term gay couple, Graham and James, who worked in her firm. In addition, growing up in a mixed-race area in Cape Town, I was aware of the Queer sub-culture in our community. This was a social space of acceptance for gay men especially, in what was termed "the Chlora Community" (the mixed-race community that had been segregated by apartheid laws). Here, an entirely new language was used amongst the initiated. Words like "Chlora, Moffie, Queer, Susie," were used and everyone in the sub-culture understood the meanings. Some of these terms were reclaimed words that had previously held a pejorative meaning.

I realised how significant these early experiences were for me. Apartheid damaged many people, and yet these often-sheltered spaces of freedom and welcome we created within communities. My own socio-historical positionality is South Africa in 2023. I was a youth in the turbulent anti-apartheid eighties. There, I interacted with the broad range of civil society in UDF structures, including Izitabane lobby groups. We were all fighting for political and personal freedom. In 1987, I engaged in a conversation at a political event with an Izitabane activist. That conversation impacted my outlook completely, as a cis-gendered male. I discovered not only that this Izitabane person believed that homophobia was an equivalent moral crime to racism, but she was also a fellow Christian.

Within the South African context, both assertions are extremely significant and valid. Later, after the democratic revolution of 1994, Izitabane human rights were explicitly incorporated into the SA Constitution.

Allyship is an important role in the social support of Izitabane people [86]. What is allyship and why is it relevant to stabanisation? The importance of allyship in the context of SOGIESC discourses is that allies can play an advocacy role different to a gender activist. It's one thing for to stand up to oppression, but when it is an ally of Izitabane who stands up against it, then the possibility of change can be accelerated in a society. Allyship represents a social norm that is changing or that has changed. I recognise this even as a cis-gendered man. The Human Rights Campaign defines allyship as, "A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies, as well as those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community)." [87]

According to Washington and Evans in *Becoming An Ally* (1991, p.195) in the broadest sense, an *ally* is "a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in their personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population." [88]

In *Becoming an Ally*, Washington and Evans (1991) have outlined four basic levels of allyship: awareness, knowledge/education, skills, and action. These levels are not necessarily linear, as a person may continue to learn and develop new skills while they also are engaged in allied behaviours (i.e., action). "In the most general sense, an *ally* is "a person who is a member of the dominant or majority group who works to end oppression in their personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate for, the oppressed population." [89]

Allies to racial, religious and ethnic minorities have been remarkably effective in promoting positive change in the dominant culture, and only recently has their instrumental position been extended to the area of sexual orientation.

[86] See more about Allyship at IAM: https://iam.org.za/pride-month-2024-how-can-i-be-an-ally-in-my-church/
[87] Cf. https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms updated on 31/5/2023 accessed on 12 November 2023.
[88] See Evans, Nancy J. and Jamie Washington. 2013. Becoming an Ally: A New Examination, in Readings for Diversity and Social Justice - Edition 3, edited by Maurianne Adams, 2013. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
[89] See: https://www.hrc.org/resources/establishing-an-allies-safe-zone-program, accessed on 12 January 2024.

In recent years we've seen more and more LGBTQ+ Ally organizations strive to make the culture of a campus or workplace more aware and accepting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and Queer individuals". Being a gender ally suggests being a friend to gender diversity and aligns us with Izitabane. Gender allyship effectively means actively supporting and advocating for individuals of all genders, and particularly in the context of religious bigotry, judgment, and social rejection due to diverse gender identities.

Frances E. Kendall is a diversity consultant and author who has written extensively on issues of privilege, racism, and allyship, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*.[90] She believes that the importance of allyship is the project to create a more inclusive and equitable society by recognizing the importance of dismantling traditional gender norms - and promoting respect for fluid and diverse gender identities.

Some Key Aspects Of Being A Gender Ally

Gender allies continually reflect on their own biases, assumptions, and behaviours. We actively work to unlearn harmful beliefs and attitudes that may perpetuate gender stereotypes or discrimination. Gender allies may do the work to educate themselves about various gender identities, expressions, and the issues faced by gender-diverse individuals.

This includes learning about appropriate terminology, experiences, and the broader social context in which gender diversity exists. Gender allies do the work to listen to the experiences and concerns of gender-diverse individuals, and they amplify their voices and perspectives. They avoid speaking over or dismissing lived experiences that are different from their own. However, allies can destigmatise people or an issue, especially where people may be shamed for various reasons.

Gender allies make the effort to be respectful of individuals' self-identified gender identities and pronouns. We create inclusive spaces – especially religious spaces - where people can express themselves authentically without fear of judgment or discrimination. Allies stand up against gender-based discrimination, harassment, and exclusion.

[90] See: Kendall, F. 2006. Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race, accessed on 19 June 2024.

They use their privilege to advocate for policies and practices that promote gender equality and create safe and inclusive environments for everyone. Allies also question and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes that contribute to discrimination and inequality. Allies actively work to break down these norms in their actions, conversations, and interactions. Allies strive to create welcoming and safe spaces where gender-diverse individuals can be themselves without fear of shame or harm. This can be in workplaces, schools, social circles, and other community settings.

Therefore, gender allies network with and support gender-diverse individuals and organisations working for gender equality and equity. This may be participating in solidarity marches, fundraisers, educational events, and other forms of activism.

Dr Nancy Freeborne offers three compelling reasons why allyship can be important.[91] She argues that "allyship helps promote positive social change," and suggests that "those in the LGBTQ+ community would be helped by [having] allies," and that "social support changes the neurobiology of both the receiver and the giver." Being a gender ally is an ongoing journey of learning and growth to improve our allyship. Thus, allyship is not a one-time action but an on-going commitment. Gender allies consistently strive to improve our understanding, behaviour, and support for gender-diverse individuals.

A gender ally strives to be an open-minded listener, in friendship, who is willing to both talk and listen where appropriate, who recognises personal boundaries, and is able to join with other in a common purpose, who believes that all persons regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression should be treated with dignity and respect. An ally takes on an empowering role in a community, particularly as it relates to responding to homophobia or transphobia.

In the final analysis, being a gender ally means actively contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and just society where people of all genders can live authentically and thrive without fear of discrimination or marginalization.

[91] See more at https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-of-community/202405/supporting-lgbtq-friends-and-family-as-an-ally accessed on 7 May 2024.

2.8 Summary

Stabanisation, using the lens of Queer theory and liberation theology, provides a helpful intersection for contextualising SOGIESC experience in South African society and Church. Assuming an inherent and essential equality of all people, Schneider [92] argues, "In general, Queer theory seeks to disrupt modernist notions of fixed sexuality and gender." (2000). Furthermore, employing colloquial language makes Queer theory more accessible. This was highlighted for me in a recent conversation with a colleague, who said to me without any prompt, "I myself have used the term 'Isitabane' even though I know it is a derisive word." Whilst we are mere acquaintances, having a common language for the topic under discussion immediately opened more vulnerability and understanding between us.

Allyship is also an effective way of supporting those who are marginalised in the ecclesial landscape. Allyship offers the possibility of solidarity and inclusion, even though I am on the outside of a lived experience. It enables one to offer broad support to those who may feel they have no voice, or that raising their voice has become exhausting. Allyship is therefore also an expression of covenant solidarity. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, "solidarity" is defined as, "unity of purpose, interest, or sympathy." [93]

Finally, allyship is an expression of empathy. Empathy may be defined as understanding, compassion, identification. Empathy is the ability to understand at an emotional level what someone else is experiencing and relate to what they are feeling. Expressing empathy helps one to connect with one's own emotional gauge. Empathy is expressed in cooperation and helping behaviours. Empathy also enables us to develop social networks of support around ourselves. Cognitive empathy helps us to understand what someone is thinking in the crisis they are facing; somatic empathy helps us identify with someone's physical reaction to a crisis, and affective empathy helps us to recognise what the other may be feeling on an emotional level and respond appropriately.

[92] See: Adam, A.K.M. (ed). 2000. Laurel Schneider in Queer Theory, in The Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation. Nashville: Chalice Press, p.206

[93] The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by Harper Collins Publishers, accessed on 20 April 2024. https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=solidarity

Chapter 3 - The Eucharist in the Church

3.1 Introduction – The UCCSA as an Ecclesial Formation, "A Justice Church"

What follows in this chapter of the research is the Systematic Theology section. My colleague, Rev. Peter E. De Villiers[94], citing Routley, argues that Congregationalism is "a covenantal order of Christians historically derived from the Puritan movement of the English Reformation." (De Villiers 1998, p.4). In other words, each local congregation exists in Covenant relationship with every other Local Church who all together form geographic Regional Councils, who in turn are Covenanted into relationship with other Regional Councils to form a geographic Synod, and then each Synod exists in Covenant with other Synods, to form the Denominational structure (following Thomas Hooker[95]).

Yet, the organizational structure is not hierarchical; instead, it is flat, often depicted as concentric circles around each other, with each successive outer layer being more representative of the inner circles. Thus, our ecclesiology is flat like a spider's web, each linked via Covenant to all the others. Every second year, a representative General Assembly is held for making strategic, administrative, ministerial, financial, and theological decisions for the Church. Both clergy and lay people are represented in all Courts of the Church.

The UCCSA is committed to 50% male-female representation plus one youth member in all its Courts. Historically, the UCCSA takes demographic representation extremely seriously. For example, the Yearbook of 1968, includes a report to the Assembly of the UCCSA by the Task Force on the Nature of Congregationalism. It states that the Church "is compelled to reformulate its faith as it encounters new situations at each critical stage in its history."[96] We have identified that our "new situation" compels us to balanced gender representation at all levels of the Church. The UCCSA has a very proud history in southern Africa of social justice.

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[94] Cf. Routley, E. 1961. The Story of Congregationalism, London: Independent Press, p9.

[95] Thomas Hooker, of Hartford, Connecticut, USA, in 1645, sets out the idea of Covenant as one of three core principles of Congregationalism, with the other two: God as its "efficient cause, the one who brings the church into being"; the cloud of visible saints who make up the church as its "material cause", and the Covenant for its "formal cause" that "provides the shape of the church." These three fundamentals comprise the gathering of a church, according to Hooker.

[96] UCCSA Year Book 1968, p.11

We have nurtured prominent ecclesiastical personalities[97] over the years and have shown up in key moments in our social and ecclesial history. I mention but a handful of illustrious members and leaders here. The Nobel Peace Prize alumnus, *Inkosi* Albert J.M. Luthuli Mvumbi (1898-1967), after whom the Groutville Congregational Church is named, is one such person. He is also famous for being elected the president of the African National Congress in 1952.

It would be remiss of me not cite the inspirational ecumenist, pacifist, missionary, and UCCSA General Secretary for over two decades, the Rev Joseph Wing (1923-1992). Even whilst being a British missionary, Wing played an immense role in the Church Struggle in South Africa, actually being one of the first Church leaders to sign the Kairos Document of 1985, as de Gruchy notes in Spirit Undaunted.[98] The anti-apartheid activist, Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati (1925-2015) was a founding member of the Federation of South African Women FEDSAW and a leader of the 1956 Women's March on the Union Buildings was also a UCCSA member. For a smaller denomination, the UCCSA has punched above its weight regarding the public witness of the Church under apartheid.

Highly regarded sociologist, church historian and international Bonhoeffer scholar, Rev Prof John de Gruchy (1939-) is a UCCSA member of considerable standing. De Gruchy is a former Chairperson of the UCCSA. John's son, Prof Steve de Gruchy (1961-2010), formerly Director of the Moffat Kuruman Mission and Dean of the School of Theology at UKZN, played a crucial role in developing the UCCSA Pastoral Plan For Transformation in the 1990s, along with Rev Dr Desmond Van Der Water (CWM) who was UCCSA General Secretary at the time. Feminist activist, Rev Roxanne Jordaan, social entrepreneur Rev Dr Robin Petersen, and Rev Prof Bonganjalo Goba are counted amongst numerous other scholars, academics, and social activists in our UCCSA family. This small denomination has consistently produced significant, progressive voices in the theological landscape of southern Africa.

Congregationalism is historically a deeply rooted theological tradition that exhibits not only prominent social activists, but also public theologians of some repute.

[97] Ibid. http://www.uccsa.co.za/history.html, accessed on the 19 December 2023.
[98] De Gruchy, SM. 2005. Spirit Undaunted: The Life and Legacy of Joseph Wing. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, p12.

Joseph Small, an American Congregationalist, examines the tensions that perpetually exist between ecclesial unity and a diversity of views as he unpacks three disputes between the Pharisees and Jesus in the Marcan gospel. Small reminds us that, "Unity, diversity, and tension: These fundamental realities of Christian faith and life mean that the church (sic) always struggles within itself over the shape of faithfulness." (Small 2001, p.58)[99].

I agree with his assessment here. This is precisely the dilemma that sits at the core of this research project. We are grappling with "the shape of our faithfulness." We have identified that the shape we are committed to is justice.

We are beholden to our Covenant, however, unless the Church is "always reforming" it risks preserving a Covenant with a God who was, and not with a God who *is*. A living faith expressed in a living Covenant must embody freely and generously, all the people of that Covenant. To do so, helps us shape the form of our faithfulness.

3.2 An Open Table

One key area of inclusion is in the foundational story of the Church, *viz*. Eucharist. In Christian tradition, Eucharist is centred around a ritualised meal. UCCSA theologian, Roy Briggs, calls Eucharist "a Sacrament..." (1996, p.161), asserting that for the UCCSA the Eucharist is itself an act of Covenant (1996, p.161). Members are called to the table to affirm our requisite unity with Christ - and with one another in him.

The Eucharist is an embodied act of Reenacting, Remembering, Receiving, Reclaiming, Rejoicing, Reconciling, Restoring/Renewing, Rededicating, and Re-Imagining within an eschatological community, according to the official Confirmation manual. (UCCSA 1987, p.81). Eucharist expresses our unity in community, and the only qualification for participation in the Eucharist is Baptism, (UCCSA 1987, p.83). An important consideration is whether admission to the Eucharist confers the *full* privileges of participation in the church, or not.

[99] Small, J. D. 2001. "Who's In, Who's Out?" in Theology Today #58, pp.58-71. Princeton Theological Seminary.

Eucharist expresses our unity in community, and the only qualification for participation in the Eucharist is Baptism, (UCCSA 1987, p.83). Therefore, an important consideration is whether admission to the Eucharist implies the full privileges of participation in the church, or not. It is in *community* that we learn to show one another agape love.

Most Congregational documents refer to *Holy Communion* as the preferred terminology, with its Reformed roots in Calvin. We use the term *the Lord's Supper* which harks back to the Non-Conformist roots of Congregationalism. We use the terminology of Eucharist. This comes from the New Testament Greek, "*eucharistein*" which literally means '*to give thanks*'. (Briggs 1996, p.161). Although the New Testament uses the Pauline term "the Lord's Supper" (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20, When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper…") the use of *eucharistein* is biblical and historical.

In the original Greek gospels, Jesus uses a version of the word while celebrating the last supper. In Luke 22:18-19, the New Revised Standard Version Anglicised, Jesus says, "for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks [εὐχαριστήσας – *eucharistēsas*], he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" (Luke 22:18-19). We also see the word Eucharist used in the ancient document, the Didache, in this context, "Celebrate the Eucharist as follows: Say over the cup: 'we give you thanks.'

Chapter Nine of the Didache addresses itself to the Eucharist:[100] "Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks this way. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever… And concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever (sic).

[100] See: https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/didache.htm accessed on 15 June 2024.

“But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist, unless they have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord has said, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs."[101]

Congregationalists believe that God’s love is perfect. Jesus found ways to model this agape love to those in his community. He washed the disciples’ feet, forgave sins, and ultimately, he was put to death by the powers of empire who rejected his agape love and acceptance of all others. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for. Community is the place where we learn how serve others, as Christ taught us. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13).

Therefore, the Church proclaims that it has an Open Table, in other words, any baptized person present is welcome to participate in the Eucharist celebrated at any time. This openness provides the context for inclusion.

3.3 Eucharist in the Church

Matthew 26:26-28, rendered in the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, says, “While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”[102]

We can see correspondences between the Old Testament narratives and stories of Eucharist. Genesis 14:18 tells the story of Melchizedek. When Abram returned from his victory over King Chedorlaomer of Elam, he encounters Melchizedek who blesses Abram. "Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High …"[103] Bread and wine were commonly consecrated by priests. The story is referenced in the New Testament Book of Hebrews, in Hebrews 7:2.

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[101] The English translation is by Roberts-Donaldson and is a great asset where they provide the text of the Didache. https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/didache.htm accessed on 22 March 2024.
[102] Footnote [a]: Matthew 26:28 Other ancient authorities add the word “new” with covenant.
[103] Genesis 14:18 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised. “God most High” is the translation of ‘El Elyon’ in Old Testament Hebrew.

The shedding of covenant blood is described in Exodus 24:8, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, as “Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”
These are same words that Jesus uses in the eucharistic tradition.

The Spring harvest in the Old Testament consisted of grains and is symbolised by wheat, just as the Autumn harvest is symbolised by grape wine and olive oil. In Leviticus 23:12-13, we find the Torah unites bread and wine with the priest, and with the sacrifice of the lamb.

Interestingly, 1 Sam 21:6 refers to the bread of Presence in the temple. “So, the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.” This is also the symbolism we find corresponding to Exodus 25:30, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, “And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always." Jesus says in Matthew 28:20 "I am with you always."

Briggs (1996, p.170) draws an essential connection between the Passover and Eucharist. Referencing the Interpreters Bible, he notes how the Hebrew word ‘*zikkaron’*, derived from the root ‘*zakhar’* (to remember). “*Zikkaron*” has a similarly forceful intensity of bringing the past into the present. The Interpreter’s Bible uses a remarkable turn of phrase, viz. it speaks about zikkaron as “contemporizing the past.”[104]

3.4 The Reformed Backdrop

Protestants now call it “Reformation Day”. On the 31 October 1517, the eve of All Saints, Dr Martin Luther, Professor of Moral Theology at the University of Wittenberg, nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the chapel door of Wittenberg Castle. Luther presented the bishop with his paper titled, “The Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences.” This act lit a fuse that has reverberated around the world for five hundred years.

[104] See: Buttrick, G.A, et al (eds). 1981 Edition. The Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 2, p19. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

It is very important to set the scene and to establish some key insights of Reformed thought. The sale of indulgences was a key concern for Martin Luther in 1517. Luther's Reform movement took root in Europe and began to spread. The Reformers adopted a 5th Century impulse of Augustine's, "*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*"[105] (Moltmann).

This idea refers to the widely held conviction in the Reformed Protestant tradition that the Church must continually re-examine itself to maintain the integrity of its policies and practice. Discussing the meaning of "*reformanda*", [106] Koffeman cites Barth: "God works through his Word and Spirit together. From this perspective, church polity has, according to Barth, to meet four criteria. It has to be a law of service, it has to be liturgical, living, and exemplary." (Koffeman 2015, p.4). This is a tantalising peek into the Queering of the church through Barth, who naturally would not have expressed it in this way! We are given Reformation license to re-imagine our praxis through successive ages and contexts of the Church's lived reality.

The Protestant Church was born out of schism that rent the Roman Church down through the centre of Europe. Out of schism, the French theologian and Reformer in Geneva, John Calvin (1509–1564), stepped into Church History and ignited the idea of what has come to be known as the Reformed tradition. Calvin was a key leader in the development of the ideas that gave rise to various Reformed, Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

In 1620, the Reverend John Robinson stood on the quayside at Leiden, The Netherlands, to bid farewell to the 'Independent' pilgrims bound for New England. In his celebrated sermon to some of his congregants preparing to embark on a ship called "Speedwell", Robinson declared to those gathered on the deck: "For I am very confident the Lord hath more Truth and Light yet to break forth out of his Holy word."[107]

Those driving the Reformed movement confirmed and honed their credo, "*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*."

[105] The Latin can be variously translated; I like this meaning of: "the church must always be reformed"
[106] Koffeman, L.J. 2015. '"Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda" Church renewal from a Reformed perspective', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 71(3), Art. #2875, 5 pages.

[107] Briggs, D. R. 1996. A Covenant Church. Gaborone: Pula Press.

This watchword suggests that the Church, when faced with contextual ethical struggles is called to respond in a way that is faithful to the novel prompting of the Holy Spirit.

In the following four hundred years after 1517, key themes emerge from the recognition of the need to reform. I want to situate my Systematic study within the broad landscape of Reformed perspectives on ecclesial context.

Let's now zoom in to a more granular level of contextual ethical concerns. One key way in which the Church pivoted is on the institution and practice of trans-Atlantic slavery. Whereas some provided ostensible biblical support for slavery, the practice began to be challenged by a vocal and well-organised Abolitionist movement. John Coffey [108] describes how the Abolitionist movement was given momentum by Puritan religious fervour to see the slave-trade ended (2007, p.109). The Church in its theology, policy formulations and praxis has called itself to reform in the spirit of the Reformation, against the slave trade and ownership of Other bodies.

The Church's influence in the Anti-Slave Movement, as well as the Abolitionist Movement is well-documented. Even today, through its mission-partner, we have embarked upon the "Onesimus Project" in the CWM Legacies of Slavery (LOS) 2023 Programme[109].

The Legacies program seeks to address the roots factors of racialised inequalities and injustices within the CWM family of Churches and in the wider world, and to seek reparations and forgiveness. This focus was embraced in recognition that the roots of racialised inequalities and injustices were also embedded within the missionary heritage of mission societies like CWM's forebear, the London Missionary Society (LMS) [110].

The shift away from slavery is a key moment in hermeneutics and praxis. The call now is for a pivot away heteropatriarchy towards a more inclusive, open and affirming stance.

[108] See for example, Coffey, J. 2007. Evangelicals, Slavery & the Slave Trade: From Whitefield to Wilberforce, in ANVIL Volume 24 No 2.
[109] For more info, see here: https://www.cwmission.org/programmes/the-onesimus-project/
[110] We have noted earlier that the LMS is one of the founding constituents of the UCCSA.

The women's suffrage movement of the early-Nineteenth Century was yet another moment of *kairos*.[111] In the West, Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" 1949[112] translation represents key shifts in the emancipatory discourses of women. Second, Third and Fourth Wave feminists have consistently pressed the Christian Church to greater recognition, inclusion and participation by women at all levels of the ecclesia.

Women have demanded to be ontologically seen, acknowledged, and to share in the liberative impulses of the Feminist movement, via, through, and in, the Church.

What this all shows, is that Reformed theology has over hundreds of years been forced by context to "keep on reforming," from slavery to feminism to gender-affirming stances. The present-day context of the growing social acceptance of Izitabane, and the Church being confronted with Izitabane members amongst its ranks, has presented another contextual pressure point to re-imagine a fully inclusive and embodied new community. In some ways, in acknowledging that homophobia is sin, the Church has also begun to concede that some of its own anti-Queer rhetoric has directly led to harm for the Izitabane community and some of the violence directed at Izitabane bodies.

3.5 The South African Church Landscape

I must also acknowledge that all the ecumenical Churches are wrestling with SOGIESC issues and struggling to find a helpful, healthy, sex-positive, and life-affirming way into the future. The Church Unity Commission (CUC) participating Churches, eg the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, the Church of the Province of South Africa, the UCCSA, and the Moravian Church, have not arrived at a definitive, consensual position on SOGIESC issues.[113]

[111] Kairos Theologians. 1985. The Kairos Document. Johannesburg: ICT,the word 'kairos' implies a moment of opportunity to act.
[112] Appelrouth, Scott and Laura Desfor Edles. 2007. Sociological Theory In The Contemporary Era: Text and Readings. Pine Forge Press/Sage Publications Co, p.316.
[113] MCSA. 2016. Methodist Book of Order. Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, p225. For instance, the Methodist Church says, ""The MCSA seeks to be a community of love rather than rejection."

The NGK[114] had decided at its Synod to allow same-sex relationships, but due to financial pressure from members, it then withdrew acceptance at the following 2016 Synod. In 2019, legal proceedings were brought against the NGK by the Reverend Laurie Gaum, his father Dr Frits Gaum, and eight members of the NGK, in the Pretoria High Court to have the 2016 decision set aside and declared unconstitutional. The Pretoria High Court found that the NGK Synod was in breach of the Constitution.

Judges Sulette Potterill, Joseph Raulinga and Daisy Molefe handed down the judgment, in which it found that the church's 2016 policy was unlawful and invalid, and set it aside. It was widely reported that the Court found it was discriminatory practice to exclude members of the church based on sexual orientation from full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms that the church offered.[115]

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has affirmed sexuality as a divine gift. (DEWCOM (2003, pp.21-24)[116] as do most of the CUC denominations. Some of these denominations, like the UCCSA, also affirm that "homophobia" is a sin. Beyond this, the only agreement seems to be a lack of definitive conclusions about the diversity of human sexuality. Within the body of the ecumenical CUC, the Churches are all confronted with the same questions and contextual landscape, yet there is no common response to issues presented by Izitabane members of the Church. Therefore, within the range of Ecumenical Churches in South Africa we are still struggling with issues of human sexuality with little clarity being offered to members. Many of us in the Church felt that trying to find definitive consensus on human sexuality and gender would be impossible to achieve, given the sensitive nature of discussions of sexuality generally in the church. Having no clear stand was once a better option because the danger was that we would resolve at General Assembly and land the Church on the conservative side.

[114] See an overview of the story and these issues in Van der Riet, Louis. 2023. Reforming Narratives On Human Sexuality In The Dutch Reformed Church, in Stellenbosch Theological Journal 9(3).
[115] See for instance, https://www.news24.com/News24/same-sex-marriages-dutch-reformed-churchs-decision-diminished-gay-congregants-integrity-court-20190308, accessed in May 2024.
[116] A 2014 discussion paper titled "A Profession of the MCSA's Unity and Diversity Within the Context of the Church's Conversation on Same-Sex Relationships" that was adopted by DEWCOM, Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee Of The Methodist Church Of Southern Africa. Wessel Bentley, a Methodist Minister, A decade of the same-sex debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (2001-2011) makes the point that discussing the broad spectrum of SOGIESC diversity under one single umbrella is unjust in that it denies the diversity, the complexity, and nuances inherent in the SOGIESC landscape.

This strategy to stay in the grey failed for a key reason: since there is no definitive Church position - except that "homophobia is sin" and that clergy may not bless any relationship that is not one man and one woman, the people of the Church consistently take their lead from the conservative USA. This is the voice they hear in the media, on TV, in Joy Magazine, and on social media. It is an anti-Izitabane message consistently reinforced by foreign media.

Therefore, the time to re-visit the conversation is upon us. Clarifying exactly where the UCCSA has a disconnect between its self-definition as a Justice Church and its inability to make a definitive declaration to be a fully Open and Affirming Church is a critical area of research at this juncture. The ghastly laws being promulgated in parts of the African continent have put the spotlight on the awfulness of criminalizing same-sex relationships, even with punishments amounting to capital punishment.

In order to protect the UCCSA's widely-acknowledged public witness on social issues in South Africa, we need to land ourselves on the right side of history in regard to Izitabane, gender-positive and sex-positive issues.

In addition, when the law prohibiting same-sex marriage changed under the curatorship of the Constitutional Court in 2006, it thrust the issue into the Church's consciousness when church members across denominations demanded clarity on the Church's stance on human sexuality and particularly on same-sex relationships. The UCCSA does now need to take the lead in the Church once again, as it did with endorsing the Kairos Document, for the sake of justice.

3.6 Eucharist: Doctrinal Perspectives

Eucharist in the Christian faith, and by implication in the UCCSA, is a ritualised commemoration of Christ's "last supper" with his disciples and friends. Eucharist (from the Koine Greek *eucharistia,* means "thanksgiving") is the central act of Christian worship and community covenant for the ecumenical and Reformed Christian Churches. Briggs suggests this harks back directly to Calvin, who defined a sacrament as "*verbum visibile*" (a visible word). Eucharist and Baptism are the two sacraments most clearly found in the New Testament (Briggs 1988, p.31). The UCCSA offers an Open Table of extravagant welcome to all. We are very particular about an open table, and no one may be prevented from Communion. Not even a Judas.

The Table is the place where we come to Christ and it is a location of reconciliation. Briggs presents the Table a place of Re-enacting; Remembering; Receiving; Reconciling; Restoring and Renewing; Re-dedicating; and Rejoicing (1996).

“Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. '” Luke 22:19-20 (NRSV). In the UCCSA, the memorial (*anamnesis*) aspect of Eucharist is a significant understanding of the meaning of Eucharist. Remembering in this way recalls not only the words of tradition, but also invokes the presence of Christ in the words spoken and the actions repeated.

Below follows a brief overview of different approaches within the broad Christian Church towards Eucharist. This enables us to see the differences and convergences of the UCCSA in relation to other faith formations.

Eastern (Greek) Orthodox on Eucharist:
We noted earlier that the Eastern and Western Church split between Rome and Constantinople in 1054 CE. The Eastern Rite, or the Greek Orthodox position, officially called Orthodox Catholic Church[117] is that the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the elements (*epiklēsis*) is an essential part of the Eucharist. The central mystery of Eucharist is seen in the prayer invoking the Spirit. The Eastern Church holds that the mystery that occurs in the bread and wine is a sacramental change implied by the term *metabolē*.

Interestingly, a key difference in the Eastern Church is the formal use of leavened bread for the host. “In the Byzantine tradition the rising of the leavened bread is symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. Moreover, the use of leavened bread emphasizes that the Eucharist is something more than the Jewish Passover.”[118]

In the Hebrew Old Testament, “manna” (seen as a divine gift to the people) is a symbol of God’s provision in times of need. This could be a physical or physiological need like hunger, as we see in Exodus 16/17 (cf. Deuteronomy 8), or it may be spiritualised, as in Psalm 80:4f.

[117] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Eastern-Orthodoxy#ref64105 accessed on 15 December 2023
[118] https://east2west.org/sp_faq/leavened-and-unleavened-bread/ accessed on 1 February 2024

In the New Testament, Jesus is identified with bread (manna), spiritual food as a divine gift. This is a central motif in the New Testament, see for example, John 6:35 and 1 Corinthians 10:16f. Christ himself is both the gift of God and spiritual sustenance.

Similarly, wine in the Old Testament is s symbol of blessing and peace (*shalom*). In the New Testament, there is continuity in this symbolism (see for example, 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ?")[119] The gospels employ the same symbolism (Cf. Luke 22:20, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, "And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.) The UCCSA Confirmation Training Handbook makes the point that, "Past and present somehow coalesced; it was Passover, and it was real. This is what a 'memorial' in the Hebrew sense accomplished." (1986, p.82).

Catholics on Eucharist:

The Roman Rite focusses on the ritual *Massa*, ie. Holy Mass, and on sacrifice, and on the physical transmutation of the elements of the Mass.[120] The Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation* emphasises a change in the substance of the bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ whilst maintaining the appearance of bread and wine. The Western term *transubstantiation* occurs only after the 17th Century. The Roman Catholic Church uses unleavened bread for the host to associate Eucharist more closely with the Passover.[121]

Lutherans on Eucharist:

Lutherans, following Martin Luther, view the Eucharist as *consubstantiation*. This is really a "sacramental union", the Lutheran doctrine of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ *in* the Eucharist. Lutherans hold that during the celebration of the Eucharist the true body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. In effect, this means that the substance of Christ's body and blood *coexists* with the substance of the bread and wine in a mysterious way. Arguing that the Lutheran notion of Eucharist includes fellowship, thanksgiving, remembrance, anticipation, and is a means of grace, Prof Carl Volz (1997, p.12) writes that for Lutherans, "Holy communion has an essentially social character; it is the national meal of the new Israel. It is as baptized members of the Christian community

[119] Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16, NRSV.
[120] https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/336/#zoom=z, pp333-356, accessed on 31 August 2023.
[121] https://east2west.org/sp_faq/leavened-and-unleavened-bread/ accessed on 1 February 2024.

that individual Christians receive communion, not only for the strengthening of our faith but also that we may grow in fervent love toward one another." [122]

Consecration of the elements is viewed as a means by which Christ is truly present for the forgiveness of sins and spiritual nourishment of those who participate in faith. Lutherans place an emphatic emphasis on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but do not embrace the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Lutherans acknowledge the mystery of the sacrament, preferring a certain ambiguity about the exact nature of Christ's presence.

Baptists on Eucharist:

Baptists are a diverse group and do not have a unified doctrine on the Eucharist across all Baptist groups.[123] Baptist polity is congregational, and therefore there is a wide divergence of practices.

Eucharistic doctrines may vary among different Baptist denominations and even individual congregations. However, some common tendencies exist in Baptist theology related to the Lord's Supper: Baptists hold to a symbolic or memorial view of the Lord's Supper. Thus, the bread and grape juice are seen as symbols representing the body and blood of Christ. Baptists emphasise the symbolic nature of the elements, and therefore most often only use grape juice. Eucharist is believed to be an ordinance [124] – "a symbolic observance but not a sacrament". No sacramental transformation of the elements into the literal body and blood of Christ is believed to take place.

Eucharist is incorporated in obedience to the command of Christ within the context of a worship Service. Since Baptists hold to the priesthood of all believers, everyone can serve each other at communion, hence, the passing of the bread and juice around the room. Many Baptists practice an "open communion", inviting all baptised believers to participate in the Lord's supper, regardless of denominational affiliation.

[122] Volz, K. A. 1997. Holy Communion in the Lutheran Confessions, Word & World. St. Paul: Luther Seminary.
[123] https://www.stjohnsbaptistvb.org/what-baptists-believe-about-communion/ accessed on 2 February 2024.
[124] Ibid.

Anglicans on Eucharist:

Greg Goebel affirms that for Anglicans, the Holy Communion goes by many names, *viz*. the Mass, Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, or simply, Communion.[125] Anglicans hold varying beliefs regarding the Eucharist, reflecting the diverse theological perspectives within the tradition. Many Anglicans affirm the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, though the understanding what this presence means can vary. The term "real presence" signifies the belief that Christ is truly present in some way during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Anglicans often emphasise the mystery of the Eucharist as a sacrament. The Eucharist is viewed as a means of grace, conveying spiritual blessings to the participants through the consecrated elements.

Presbyterians on Eucharist:

Presbyterians, as a Reformed tradition, generally hold to a theological view of the Eucharist that can be described as the "spiritual presence of Christ." Many Presbyterian traditions affirm the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, but they understand this in a symbolic manner (Duncan, 2003, p.389).

They believe that, through the Holy Spirit, Christ is truly present in the elements of bread and grape juice.[126] Presbyterians emphasise the memorial (*anamnesis*) aspect of Eucharist, viewing it as a commemoration of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. The act of partaking in the Eucharist serves as a remembrance of Christ's atonement and a celebration of the new covenant established through his blood.

Presbyterians reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Instead, Presbyterians affirm a spiritual presence while maintaining the symbolic nature of the elements. Some Presbyterians hold to the view of *receptionism* (or 'conduitism'), suggesting that the efficacy of the sacrament depends on the faith and spiritual disposition of the participant. In other words, individuals receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper through their faith and in the reception of the elements in a worthy manner.

This sweeping brushstroke overview brings me back to the UCCSA.

[125] https://anglicancompass.com/what-do-anglicans-believe-about-holy-communion/ accessed on 1 March 2024.

[126] See: Duncan GA. 2003. Presbyterian spirituality in southern Africa. Scottish Journal of Theology. 2003;56(4):387-403. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 23 October 2003.

Congregationalists on Eucharist:

Congregationalism, as a form of Protestant church governance, emphasises structure and decision-making within the church rather than specific doctrinal beliefs.[127] Consequently, there is a diversity of beliefs about Eucharist among Congregational churches. Some common trends or perspectives found in Congregationalist churches regarding the Eucharist include the symbolic view. Many Congregationalists, like other Protestant traditions, hold a symbolic or memorial view of the Lord's Supper. They see the elements of bread and grape juice as symbolic representations of Christ's body and blood, and the act of partaking is a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. (UCCSA 1986, p.77)

Congregationalism often places a strong emphasis on the freedom of individual conscience and interpretation of Scripture. Thus, congregations may allow for a certain amount of diversity of beliefs about the Eucharist among their members. Jesus left Christians with a sacralised meal. “Do this to remember me,” he said by tradition, as he broke bread. The brokenness of the world, his broken body, our broken lives, our social divisions, and fractured minds, bodies, and societies are symbolised in that one metaphor: breaking bread. Torn bread is a startlingly blunt symbol. Brokenness, vulnerability, and marginalisation are powerfully embodied in it and exemplifies the call into the heart of Christian community.

Jesus spent his much of his life living in community. He was born into a society of Hebrews in the Middle East. During his ministry he created another, more select group made up of people who loved God and wanted to learn more about authentic living. In each of his communities, Jesus set the standard for living graciously with and for others. He taught us to do the same, and to be a new community of faith. Centered in this community is Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion. The bread is “set apart for this holy use and mystery” and the cup is held aloft with the words: “Take, eat/drink, this is my Body given for you. This is the Cup of salvation.”

The Reformed tradition subscribes to an ethos of ongoing reform, always becoming more and more this alternative community of faith. “*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*” (Latin for "the church must always be reformed") was an axiom popularized in 1947 by Karl Barth, ostensibly drawing on a saying from Augustine of Hippo.

[127] See: UCCSA. 1986. Pilgrimage of Faith: Confirmation Training Handbook. Johannesburg: UCCSA, p.77

The Reformation conviction expressed as "*Ecclesia semper reformanda est*" refers to the idea amongst Reformed theologians that the Church must continually re-examine its contextual faith and praxis. Sometimes, the expression is abbreviated to "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*" (that is, the Church reformed, always reforming). This emphasises the present-continuous nature of critical self-examination for the Church as it responds to contextual realities. "Reform" does not mean simply throwing out the old, but it does imply that as society evolves so the Church needs to express itself in new ways.

Since Christ was broken for the world, so are his followers broken for each other. Whilst the meal suggests Middle Eastern hospitality and community, broken bread and poured wine contrasts this hospitality with violent imagery. We conceive of our entry point into Christian faith as being baptism, in the UCCSA. In baptism, we receive the gift of Spirit, or we "witness to the fact that salvation is God's action" (UCCSA 1986, p.76), puts it. In baptism we receive the divine pledge that God will not forsake us, baptism signifies the once-off act of Christ, and baptism makes us a member of the Covenant community. Baptism is the welcoming, cleansing, sign, and seal of our Covenant into Christ.

However, we celebrate two sacraments in the UCCSA. Whilst baptism is foundational, nonetheless, baptism cannot be detached, severed, or divorced from the sacrament that sustains the whole people of God. In the context of an ecclesiology that is mostly predicated upon infant baptism, it is the eucharist that sustains the Covenant community. Christ began his ministry by being baptised himself. He ends his ministry with a memorial commandment to continue his ministry in the world. Baptism initiates us into the ways of the historical Jesus, the Logos, but the Eucharist sustains us in the ministry of Christ, the Mythos.

Therefore, we are correct to emphasise baptism, but we also need to carry forward the mystical sense of communal Covenant, spiritual connection, and Holy Communion, accentuated in the Eucharist. Baptism signifies entry, Eucharist signifies covenant, connection, and *Communion* in Christ. This is why I elected to use Eucharist as the peg for stabanisation. I am not intending to either disregard or dismiss baptism. I view Eucharist re-imagined as the metaphor for the possibility of a new community of inclusion. There is in any event, a common motif in the Church's sacraments, viz. a ritual remembering of the Lord's death and resurrection. For Briggs, two central themes irrevocably unite them (1996, p.172).

These are: faith as the context of both baptism and Eucharist, and 'not forgetting' (*anamnesis*) the Lord's death and resurrection. There is no single English word that captures the breadth of meaning in *anamnesis*. It carries with it the sense of intentionality and calling an event to mind as to bring it into the present.

The way we practice the Eucharist in the UCCSA is epitomized in the actions following Christ our Lord, viz. taking, thanking, breaking, pouring and giving. For the UCCSA, Eucharist is always recognized fundamentally as a meal. Whether we have elaborate pageantry or whether we simplify our Eucharistic liturgy what must not be lost is that Eucharist represents the earliest tradition of the Church, the practice of sharing a meal. We emphasize the collective action, the communal hospitality, the community meal, and "*anamnesis*" – not forgetting. This provides context for the celebration of *Eucharist*, "thanksgiving".

Jesus brings blessings and woes together when he says, according to the Lukan witness, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man." Luke 6:22, NRSVA.
The same text says, *makarios eimi hotan anthrōpos miseō hymeis, ho kai hotan aphorizō hymeis kai oneidizō kai ekballō ho hymeis onoma hōs ponēros ho hyios ho anthrōpos*. (From the SBL Greek New Testament)

The implication is clear: true community begins in brokenness. We believe breaking bread is an entry point into deeper and more authentic and inclusive community (Briggs 1996, p.174). This understanding places the Eucharist at the heart of Christian community, and it locates Covenant at the core of that heart. This, then, is the research problem explored. It seeks to unpack the implications of the Eucharist for embodiment of Christian community, covenant, and inclusion of those at the margins. This study sets out to explore the distinctive contours of Christian community, with reference to the doctrine of the Eucharist, as practiced within the UCCSA. Being the centre of the new eschatological community of Christ, Eucharist is always placed at the very centre of the church's worshipping community. The Table is placed dead centre on the altar to signify and emphasise this understanding.

The UCCSA sees itself as a contextual Church, according to Steve de Gruchy (1997, p.2).

This is confirmed by UCCSA academics in the South African theological landscape: Joseph Wing[128], Roy Briggs, Roderick Hewitt and Desmond Van Der Water. The UCCSA has been on the forefront of some crucial historical socio-political struggles.

It stood at the forefront of the theological rejection of the rationale for apartheid and was often on the frontlines of resisting state oppression, beginning with a repudiation of slavery in the Cape with Van Der Kemp, its support for the Kairos Document, the theological defence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and the testimony of the UCCSA before the TRC by Prof John de Gruchy and Rev David Wanless.

The UCCSA adopted the missional Pastoral Plan For Transformation, in response to the Kairos Document's Challenge to the Churches. The UCCSA lent support to the anti-colonial and independence movements across Southern Africa. It was also a major driver of the Ecumenism project in Africa.

The Reverend Margaret Constable writes in Spirit Undaunted, of her Ordination in 1964 to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in the Congregational Union of Southern Africa - CUSA[129], along with Dr Unez Smuts and the Reverend Audrey Gregg (de Gruchy, S and D. Van Der Water 2005, p.147). These outstanding women clergy were amongst the first women to be Ordained in the Church in Southern Africa. In this respect, the UCCSA was far more advanced down the road of women's liberation than many others.

These trends and movements were hugely beneficial to the Church by drawing in and Ordaining women clergy. It represents a significant reforming of the church. The winds of change were blowing across the globe.[130] In much the same way, new winds of freedom sill blow today. The challenge for us is whether we can set our sails to the wind so that we enhance the integrity of our public witness and also land on the correct side of history.

[128] The UCCSA was amongst the very first Churches to sign the Kairos Document when it was initially published, (see de Gruchy & Van der Water, 2005: 76).
[129] On 3rd October 1967, the CUSA drew four strands of missionary Congregationalists together to form the UCCSA, viz. Bantu Congregational Church, London Missionary Society, and CUSA. The fourth strand, the American Board Mission of the Disciples of Christ, joined up in 1972.
[130] The "Wind of Change" speech was made by British Prime Minister, Macmillan, to the Parliament of South Africa on the 3rd February 1960, after spending a month in Africa in visiting British colonies. The speech takes its name from a line embedded in it: "The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact."

The winds of anti-colonial independence were blowing and once again the Church was required to adapt to a new socio-political and cultural context. This was true around the world, especially for the colonial Churches, who had to respond to the new sense of freedom, anti-racism, black consciousness, and nationalism in the former colonies. The UCCSA, in drawing together four missionary strands of Congregationalism in Southern Africa thus became both a non-racial and a multi-national Church. This act of formation was significant for crossing national boundaries and as an act of subversion of apartheid's racial divisions.

The UCCSA is a modest denomination of a mere one million members in South Africa. Yet, this denomination of modest membership and adherents has made substantial impacts on some of the most significant socio-theological issues of our time: Congregationalists in the form of Johannes van Der Kemp, an early missionary, opposed slavery in the Cape. Recently, we have made similar steps in calling for global reparations for the slave trade, as we noted above.

The "sexual revolution" of the Sixties presented yet another major social shift. It was a movement predicated on reproductive health rights. In 1946, the United Nations formally established a Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) to promote women's rights, [131] and it resulted in the Decade of Women (1975-1985).[132] The PBS article, "The Pill and the Women's Liberation Movement" connects the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war movement, and the Sexual Revolution as three intersecting catalysts of the women's liberation movements, saying, "As the 1960s progressed, the women's liberation movement gained momentum alongside the civil rights and anti-war movements."[133] (Undated, accessed on 5 January 2023).

Congregationalists continue to be involved in social justice, joining the broad missional and social gospel movement. "This was an effort to change all of society for the better — to establish the 'kingdom of God on earth' — by campaigning for workers' rights, education and health care for the poor, and clean and accessible cities," says the Congregational Library.[134]

[131] See https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/CSWbriefhistory.pdf accessed on 1 February 2023.
[132] Ibid.
[133] See: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/pill-and-womens-liberation-movement/
[134] https://www.congregationallibrary.org/researchers/congregational-christian-tradition#legacy, accessed on 29 December 2022.

Thus, it is within this historical landscape of "a Church that is always reforming" that it confronts a broad range of ethical issues of our time. Congregationalists have worked for social justice and political independence across seven national states in the SADC region. The UCCSA, at its highest decision-making Court, the General Assembly, has consistently affirmed Social Justice as a key component of its praxis. The new challenge that confronts us today is Gender.

3.7 The Church in Covenant

Covenant Theology is a theological framework that has its roots in Reformed Protestantism and has been influential within certain branches of Christianity, particularly among Reformed and Presbyterian traditions, in which the UCCSA is broadly associated. Covenant theology seeks to understand God's relationship with humanity and the overall narrative of salvation history through the concept of covenants, which are solemn agreements or contracts.

Briggs reminds his readers that Congregationalism has very specific Covenant distinctives. One of the unique features is that Congregationalism is "open-endedness," and according to Briggs this implies an adaptability in our polity that is singularly unique. He says this open-endedness in our doing theology, "…gives our churchmanship the ability, under God, to adapt to changing conditions and their needs, with an ease that no other polity seems to possess – and without in any sense denying any of its fundamental principles" (1996, p.24). We simply must agree formally in one of the courts of the Church to create a practice that is life-enhancing, sex-positive, and gender-positive.

The key covenants often emphasised within covenant theology include what may be called a Covenant of Works. This is illustrated in the Garden of Eden story with *Adamah*. Adam's obedience to God's commandments should have led to eternal life, however, *Adamah's* disobedience is seen as having broken this covenant. Similarly, we may identify a Covenant of Grace where God promises salvation through faith in Christ. This covenant is often seen in Reformed theology as the overarching framework of God's redemptive plan and is fulfilled in the New Testament through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The covenant with Abraham promised blessings to all people through his descendants. The Mosaic covenant, given to Israel through Moses, provided the Decalogue with codified laws, while the Davidic covenant promised a royal lineage culminating in Messiah.

The New Covenant, envisaged in the Old Testament in pericopes like Jeremiah 31:31-34, is often seen as the fulfilment of the previous covenants, but also looks forward. It is established through Christ Jesus and involves the forgiveness of sins, regeneration through the Holy Spirit, and an intimate relationship of believers with God. Covenant theology emphasizes the unity of the Old and New Testaments and sees them as interconnected parts of a single overarching narrative of God's redemptive plan. This contrasts with Dispensational theology, which tends to emphasize distinct eras or dispensations in God's dealings with humanity.

Whilst noting that interpretations of covenant theology can vary among different Reformed traditions, the UCCSA has a very specific alignment with Covenant (Briggs 1996, p.18). One very specific intersection in Congregational theology is between covenant and community.
Community is seen through the lens of the new people of God. It is not merely a worshipping community, a congregation, but an active and living community. It is a community that covenants in Christ to "worship, work and witness together." (Briggs 1996, p.19).
Again, I must emphasise a unique contribution set out in the Ecumenical dialogue that we know today as The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. (JDDJ) This is a theological dialogue principally between the Lutheran Communion and the Roman Catholic Church but has lately come to include disparate Christian formations.

The JDDJ aims to foster respect and mutual recognition of faith and to bridge the 500-year schism resulting from the Reformation of 1517, where both sides accused the other of heresy. The JDDJ agreement signed in 2019 incorporates several traditions, including the Methodist, Anglican and Reformed (20th Anniversary Edition) with Statements included from the 2017 version. The Reformed statement is especially significant for our discussion here.

I quote from it extensively below. "We affirm with the Psalmist that 'The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world, and those that dwell therein' (24:1, KJV). God has entered into covenant with all of creation (Gen. 9:8-12), and God's covenant of grace intends a 'setting right' that is world-embracing — including even political, economic and ecological realities. All of God's covenantal acts are acts of justification and justice. We acknowledge that justice (like justification) is God's work in and among us. Our understanding of justice has been obscured and our enactment of justice hampered by our sin. It is God who will bring the fulfilment of justice.

We understand ourselves to be called even so to join in God's world-transforming work."[135]

Here we can see how the joint Ecumenical-Roman Church places an accent upon justice alongside justification. The proclamation of justification cannot be divorced from the proclamation of justice. The Association document goes so far as to describe the Christian Community as and "agent of justice,"[136] saying, "That both of these meanings are conveyed with the same word reflects the fact that they are profoundly related. The one who is justified by faith is called to act in a righteous way." (Association, Article 16). This has a profound implication for the Church's active opposition to racism, and patriarchy, sexism, genderism, and homophobia.

This ideal has also been lately underscored in the Accra Confession (Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth), saying, "God has brought into being an earth (sic) community based on the vision of justice and peace…. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the 'least of these' (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hosea 2.18ff)' (2004, paragraph 20)." [137]

What is unique from the Reformed perspective here in the JDDJ is the convergence of 'justification' and 'justice' as integral parts of our understanding of justification. Therefore, the Reformed Statement references the Accra Confession as an on-going Confession of God's activity in the world. It affirms that 'justice' is an essentially spiritual dimension of justification.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches, to which the UCCSA is affiliated, says, "Justice is a matter of faith: The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and ecological justice are not only social, political and moral issues, they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church.

[135] Association of the World Communion of Reformed Churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 1999, Article 17, p.7.
[136] See: https://wcrc.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WCRC-Association-to-JDDJ-EN.pdf, accessed on 3 May 2024.
[137] World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) produced the Accra Confession, a statement adopted at the 2004 General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and re-endorsed at the 2010 Uniting General Council.

Being faithful to God's covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices."

This is a significant theological position and affirmation for people on diverse SOGIESC spectrums. "Justice is a matter of faith." A Christian denominational leader is fond of saying, "There's no Jesus without justice." The perspective that our ecumenical partners have adopted, and by association, we ourselves, is that social justice is an issue of faith. Gender justice is a matter of faith.

Justice for sexual minorities is a matter of faith. For Izitabane, justice of personhood is a matter of faith. For people of faith on SOGIESC spectrums, faith is a matter of justice. I want to locate justice at the heart of the central paradigm of Reformed covenant theology of eucharistic community. Our faith traditions lead us there. Our confessions lead us there. Our covenant community leads us there.

The UCCSA is a progressive Church in many respects, as I have shown here: we have Ordained women into ministry since the 1950s; we were the first Denomination to officially sign the Kairos Document of 1985; we have made many Assembly resolutions calling for the end to apartheid, white minority rule, and for an end to economic injustice. We consider ourselves to be an inclusive church (Briggs 1988, p.13) and have resolved to be "a justice Church".[138]

3.8 Izitabane Theology, Liberation & Eucharist

Social conflict theory is recognized as a sociological framework that views the social landscape as an arena of inequality that generates conflict and change. Marxist theorists[139] emphasise the role of coercion and power in producing social order, and highlights the disparities in resources, status, and power among individuals and groups. For Marx, social conflict is generated in the fundamental divide between the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) and the proletariat (workers), and it is this class conflict that drives historical change.

[138] According to the 35th Assembly minute, 09/A/55 of 2009, the UCCSA began to position itself as "a justice Church", after receiving the Report of the Social Justice Team. Recommendation d) was accepted that "the week preceding UCCSA Sunday be observed as Justice Week."

[139] See for example: Orsini, A. 2024. Marxism and Conflict Theory. In Sociological Theory. Palgrave: Macmillan, Cham. Published on 15 May 2024. Accessed on 30 June 2024.

Weber expanded on Marx's work in his "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism."[140] Scholar, Patricia Hill Collins, we noted above, applied social conflict theory to issues of intersectionality. She also developed a theory of the "matrix of domination" where she explored different levels of social conflict, including the personal, community and institutional. This matrix shapes, reinforces and perpetuates intersectional oppressions.[141]

The 39th Assembly meeting in Amanzimtoti in 2017, affirmed support for the Palestinian People in the face of Israeli aggression, it issued a resolution confirming the Christian witness of Earth-keeping, the Assembly took an unequivocal stand against the economic and bureaucratic capture of the South African State under the Zuma administration (Mr Zuma is a member of the Church, but has claimed to be part of a number of church formations).
The Assembly also acknowledged the Herero-Nama genocide inflicted by the then German government between 1904 and 1907 and called for the genocidal actions of German soldiers to be recognized by the German government and for reparations to be made to the Namibian government. (Assembly Resolutions, October 2017).

This progressivism makes the reluctance to fully embrace Queer members puzzling. In 1999, the Gaborone Assembly Resolution Minute 99/A/34, acknowledges, "… the question should not be dealt with in a purely legalistic manner, but with the pastoral compassion which Christ displayed to all **sinners**." (Assembly Resolutions Minute, 99/A/34, my emphasis).

This Resolution, while seemingly reconciliatory in tone, was profoundly hurtful to many delegates and church members. The association made during the floor discussion and in the final Resolution between same-sex ontology and "sin" was deeply troubling. It is seldom helpful to separate "homosexual acts" from an ontology, however, in this case even that was a struggle for many Assembly delegates.

[140] Whilst Marx's emphasis was on social conflict between owners and workers, Max Weber developed this idea to include social status and party political facets of economic inequality. Weber emphasized that social power could be derived from many sources, not just economic. Georg Simmel regarded social conflict as a normal and necessary part of public life, and that the power of conflict could be harnessed to produce constructive outcomes for society.
[141] See: Collins Hill, P. 1990. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (Routledge Classics) 1st Edition. Abingdon: Routledge.

I know personally and deeply respect the two representatives of the Theological Commission who presented the report to the Assembly floor, Rev Dave Wanless and Prof Bonganjalo Goba. What I struggled with was that ultimately the idea had crept into the report that the *homosexuality* question was about licensing "sin". The notion that same-sex relations were merely an act rather than an ontology had lost the debate for us. And yet, the way the final Resolution was phrased was essentially a win for the progressive side.

In an ironic way therefore, the Assembly resolved:
"We therefore call upon the church: (sic)
1. to acknowledge the pain that is a reality for people on all sides of the debate;
2 to engage in ongoing biblical and theological reflection in the light of clinical study on the subject;
3. to assist pastors and member's (sic) to cultivate attitudes and acquire skills that enable them to minister the grace of God to openly homosexual persons; and
4. revisit with great care its disciplinary codes in the light of the issue of sexuality and sexual orientation." (Assembly Resolutions Minute 1999).

Thus, the 1999 Assembly concluded that, "We affirm our tradition that 'the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from God's word'. The Resolution's Committee Report was accepted by 111 for; 43 against and 11 abstentions. The resolution was passed with a majority vote."

In view of this, I have come to move away from using the word "homosexuality" and to use the term "same-sex" now. Words matter, for they both express our social reality and create it. For all intents and purposes, the UCCSA is socially and theologically progressive in its *mien*. The UCCSA has struggled with the issues of human sexuality since the 1999 Assembly, when a report was tabled by Dr Steve de Gruchy on behalf of the Theological Commission. In 1999 it was reported on to the Assembly floor, as discussed above. In 2016, in the Executive Committee Minute 16/EX/13 of 2016 under the heading:
"3. Homosexuality and Same-sex Marriages the Resolutions Committee noted that "the UCCSA Officers are charged to appoint a Task Team that will prepare a discussion paper on homosexuality and same-sex marriages for consideration…"

The next Minute where the issue of same-sex relationships appears is in the 2017 Executive Committee Minute. Here the Minute records at 17/EX/10 under the General Secretary's Report, at 3. Human Sexuality: "Although the UCCSA has a clear stand on where it stands on the issue of marriage, the church still faces challenges where people call wanting clarity on the issue. *Proposal*: That Revs K. Ndebele, Dojiwe Masuku and Dummi Mmualefe come up with a recommendation on the issue of Human Sexuality. [142]

"Human sexuality has been one of the most topical hot-potato issues for some time now. While the UCCSA has a stand on same-sex marriage and is also committed to non-discrimination, more pressing questions, concerns and challenges are coming up which need to be addressed. We also recognize that human sexuality transcends the homosexual debates.
"The UCCSA being a transnational church, the context of the church is complex and varied. There are cultural and legal considerations to be considered from across the geo-political divide. While debates continue, we have members of our church and the communities who are part of the "sexual minorities" who cannot wait indefinitely.
It is in the light of it is recommended that: "Three discussion papers from different Synods be written and presented for discussion by the church (sic) reflecting divergent positions on human sexuality from across the transnational UCCSA for consideration and decision."

Yet again, a call is made for "discussion papers" on the matter. However, where the Minute affirms "a clear stand" has been taken, *viz*. that whilst the Church accepts all sexual orientations into the ambit of its ministry, the UCCSA nonetheless prohibits its clergy from same-sex blessings, marriages or civil unions, even those that are permitted under law and where the national Constitution of the Republic specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the Bill of Rights in South Africa's Constitution.

There exists a disconnect between the UCCSA's self-description as "a Justice Church" and its unwillingness to allow same-sex couples the benefit of a ceremonial and/or spiritual blessing on their committed relationships. There is no call for relaxing of the requirements of being irrevocably committed, nor for diminishing the mutuality of relationship, nor repudiating fidelity for same-sex marriages.

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The high standard of such essential components of the married relationship remains in force, irrespective of the SOGIESC status of the parties involved. Being Open and Affirming is not an abrogation of high standards for formal relationships. Same-sex marriage as a social construction is not an existential threat to the religious construct of marriage. The call for the recognition of same-sex marriages under the Civil Unions Act of 2006 and/or the Marriage Act of 1961 imposes the same responsibilities irrespective of gender identities or SOGIESC standing. The call for recognising Izitabane relationships is the call for *equality* rather than for repudiation of the bonds of commitment.

When people say that a same-sex marriage is "not true marriage" they usually mean that an ontological construction implies that marriage is between a man and a woman - and they will often follow on to say that "they" are not saying it – God says it. Yet, marriage has changed and evolved over centuries. In the past, shifts have happened from a rigid institution governed by external norms of family and religion, whereas today marriage is largely governed by the state.

Today, marriage is seen more as a personal partnership based on love and mutual goals. Changing gender roles have redefined expectations within marriage, emphasising equality and more shared responsibilities.

In 2024, adult individuals today have far greater freedom to choose whether, when, and whom to marry, and arranged marriages are becoming obsolete in many places. In summary, marriage has transformed from a social contract primarily focused on economic and political stability for the upper classes and has become a more personal partnership centered on love, equality, and shared aspirations, even when cultural and regional differences mean that marriage practices continue to vary widely across the globe. When people claim that "God says marriage must be a certain way," this enables them to deny that a particular view of marriage is a construct that can be altered if we so determine. The theological "factor" of human experience provides us the opportunity to reimagine marriage. Enormous shifts have refashioned what marriage is. We can therefore de-genderise marriage if we so desire it. Marriage is not a fixed construct. We can redeem marriage. It is a matter of justice.

A Eucharistic ecclesia is one that does not merely share bread and wine, for that might otherwise describe a book club or a wine-tasting event.

A truly Eucharistic ecclesia is one that embodies community with intentionality. A Eucharistic community is rooted in love and established in justice. In this way, Eucharist is transgressive. It is Queer. It is Isitabane. The reason for saying this is that the bread and wine signifies that which is broken. A broken loaf can satisfy hunger and shared wine brings joy. In so far as the bread signifies the life of Christ and the wine his blood, his life-force, it is a metaphor for his physical body.

This fully turns the event upside down. The one who nourishes the community does so with his own embodied person. The one who gives life, dies, in this inverted metaphor. He who provides spiritual food gives his own broken body. He who gives wholeness does so by his own brokenness. The one who gives life to others, gives up his own. The one who gives of himself to confer righteousness, is the one who sacrifices himself unjustly. He who redeems, pays the cost of redemption for the other with his own life. The Eucharist is an inversion of how things normally work in the world.
In much the same way, the One who confers peace, calls us to live justly.

Eucharist is a scandalous act where divine injustice leads to human justice. We simply cannot miss the inversion of justice/injustice happening in the Eucharist. It so often happens in the faith community that the marginalised bear in themselves the price of participation in the community.

3.9 Summary

The legalisation of same-sex marriage and Civil Unions has forced Churches to revisit their theology of Eucharist, human sexuality, and Covenant, amongst others. This is a good thing because it helps the Church mature and deepen its Covenant commitments. The UCCSA is a welcoming Church, but stops short of affirming same-sex relationships, and therefore, it does not by implication affirm Izitabane. Briggs affirms that "The Covenant Meal is a sacrament, a visible word." (Briggs 2006, p.161). This visible word affirms our essential unity, oneness, and Covenant inclusion. If we allow everyone Covenant access to the Table, then we also need to affirm the ontology of every person. The Table enables us to be completely and fully the new People of God. The Table is open because it is where God invites us to meet him.

In this way, the Eucharistic Table becomes a place of mystery, of delight, of Communion with Christ and others, of embodied unity, a place of covenant, of forgiving, a place of joy, a place of remembering death-overcome, and a place of *practising* the New Community of God. The Eucharist is an opportunity to meet each other in a very human and vulnerable context. The Confirmation Training Handbook affirms the point that Eucharist is shot through with a sense of 'thanksgiving' and that this remains an essential part of Lord's Supper. (UCCSA 1986, p.83).

The UCCSA Constitution also speaks directly to the sacrament. "The elements of bread and wine refer us directly to Christ's body which was broken, and his blood was shed. Therefore, while his sacrifice can never be repeated, when we break bread and drink the cup, we proclaim his death, and in sharing the bread and the cup we share in his death." (UCCSA Constitution 2004, p.54).

Meanwhile, the Covenant commitments specific to the UCCSA and its understanding of Eucharist lends itself to a greater openness and a re-imagined future. As an ecumenical Church in the Reformed tradition, we take seriously the challenges inherent in "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*". This Reformation concern is a call for Reformed Churches to recognise that reform is an on-going praxis, well expressed by Karl Barth as "the reformed Church always reforming."

Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction – A Realised Eschatology

The New Testament Books of Luke-Acts reveals the following snippet in Acts 2:46-47, in the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." [143]

Eucharist in the Early Church exemplified the embodied practices of a Middle Eastern community sharing a meal, and all the privileges of fellowship and unity and kinship implied in the community eating together. It was indeed the contemporising of the past. We recognise these resonances in Africa too, where eating a meal is a crucial social act. Sharing a meal is much more than filling our appetite for food.

We can extend that idea to incorporate the future, as well. Jesus says, Mark 14:25, New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, "[25] Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'" It was indeed the contemporising of the past *and* the future.

The UCCSA Constitution also therefore characterises Eucharist in *eschatological* terms. It says, "The full meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper can only be seen in terms of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the death and the promise of his coming again. In the meeting at his table to break bread, we do so aware that he has risen and it truly present, and that he makes himself known to us. The remembrance of him is not of one who is dead, but one who is alive and who by his Spirit reminds us of his love and offer us his grace. The Church, gathered to break bread and the share the fellowship of Christ at his table, is also aware that this meal is a foretaste of the future, when through Christ the kingdom of God will be fully and finally expressed."[144]

[143] New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA). New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
[144] UCCSA Constitution. 2009, p.55.

Here we see the distinct theological tendency of the merging of past, present, and future. In the UCCSA, Eucharist takes on this eschatological dimension (Briggs 1996, p.171). Marshall[145] (1978, p.264-9) suggests nine different meanings for the term 'eschatology'. He concludes that the key meaning necessarily consists of the idea that although some of God's purposes are being fulfilled in the present, they have not been consummately fulfilled, and therefore, we can expect even greater realisation.

In the post-War years, CH Dodd, Jeremias, and JAT Robinson, *et al*, developed the theological perspective that we know today as "realised eschatology". Their thesis argued that the assumed prophetic passages of the New Testament are not future-orientated but in fact reference the New Testament era itself. Especially Dodd, proposes that history as well as eschatology is "realized" in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Consequently, the *eschaton* is here now rather than future, and hence, has been "fulfilled." In this view, the eschaton equates to "the day of the Lord" which is the summation of all the divine eschatological purposes. Eschatology is, therefore, already fulfilled in the sense that God's purpose has been completely realized. Ergo, God's promises have been "realised". Today, this is a common perspective.

If we assume that Eucharist is eschatological, that is, where the past and future merge, then Breaking Bread brings the past into the present. Christ is present at the eucharistic Table today, just as he was in the Upper Room. Consequently, the future is likewise brought into the present. When we gather at the eucharistic Table we are celebrating the heavenly banquet in the present. This timeless dimension implies that the perfect is brought into the imperfect.

The Eucharist transmutes into the eschaton. What is imperfect thus transmogrifies into the perfect. This transformation affirms the hope we have. Each time we celebrate Eucharist, we bring more of the perfect into the imperfect. In this way, Eucharist is able realise the eschatological. I'm playing with Dodd here, and reimagining new dimensions of this eschaton, curated through the bread and the wine.

In Eucharist, we are transformed into a new likeness, a new consciousness, a new era where we are healed. The Eucharist is also the place where we find true and authentic community.

[145] Marshall, IH. 1978. 'Slippery words In Eschatology.' Exp.T 89, pp.264-269.

The bread and wine do not transform themselves; they transform *us*. The foundational elements that sustain our bodies now also sustain our spirits. We remain embodied beings. However, instead of remaining disconnected, individuals, at the Table we are united into one body. Whatever our bodies were, now in the community of the Table they are welcomed, accepted, transformed, renewed, healed, united, and we recognise all this.

We now consider the Table Covenant we are called to.

RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT (Post-Communion)

Leader: And now, as one people within the household of God, in the unity of the faith, in the communion of saints, in love and goodwill to all, let us in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, give ourselves afresh to him and to one another in joyous covenant: Promising to walk together with God and with one another in all the privileges and duties of our high calling in Christ Jesus.

Members:
We believe in God, our heavenly Father;
We confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour
We depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
We seek to live in God's presence
According to all God has made known - and will make known to us.
We covenant to worship, work and witness
Together in the fellowship of this church,
For the building up of the body of Christ
And the manifesting of the kingdom of God on Earth

Leader: Almighty God, guide and guard of your people, grant that the Covenant we have made today on Earth may be sealed in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Hymn or Song may be sung:

4.2 A Common Thread: Eucharist, Covenant, Community, Eschatology, Stabanisation

Eucharist provides us with a common meeting place. We can meet in homes or in dedicated worship spaces. The Eucharist is an opportunity for Community. Gathered at the Table we are the People of God. We are one. One Lord. One faith. One baptism.

Sharing our Covenant commitments to love in our hearts, words and actions, we express our deepest faith. Living embodied lives in the world, our Covenant expresses itself in Justice. The Covenant is not just made up of words we recite. They are words to live by.

Our community surrounds us, and it nurtures us. Our community provides a place for meeting each other long the road of life. It is the place where we find support and strength and safety.

Acknowledging the past and hoping for the best future, our eschatology is not a destination but a compass. We each have a story to share. God is in our story. God is also in our future and meets the best version of us there. We do not have to remain where we are. God invites us into the future.

Stabanisation is a way to live fearlessly. Well, sometimes, we do have a lot of fear. And we do have a lot to fear. Perhaps, it is more important to live brave than to live fearlessly. Be brave. Step into who you really are. Be who you want to be. Sometimes we don't want to do that because we fear rejection. Stabanising is an invitation to imagine; to re-imagine. The past is a place, and mostly we do not want to remain there. The future calls. Be brave.

4.3 The Development of Gender Discourses in the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

There are significant conversations that we need to have in the Church. We have often been afraid of the Other. We have feared what the future might be like. The Community of the Church is a sacred space. To be sure, it is not any more sacred than say a forest or the Milky Way, or a beautiful lake. People belong to God, "the Earth and everything in it."

We need to have these significant conversations with each other. One way to start, is to start. The sooner we begin the better.

Secondly, we ourselves need allies as much as Izitabane need allies. We need not be afraid to ask to listen. All good things start when we are prepared to listen. This is why we have the bigger community of the Church.

Thirdly, Church, stop talking *about* people. We need to begin by sitting with the other. We need to start the conversation by listening. See-Judge-Act is more than a methodology. It is a process. We need to see the other and then listen dialogically. We need to be present and do it slowly and intentionally. There are groups, organisations and communities we can invite into our spaces. IAM[146] is an organisation with people just like "us". Let's engage with them.

Fourth, part of being a Listening Church is also being a Learning Church. Learning involves new information, new theologies, new science, and new praxis, but it may also mean un-learning some things. We need to be willing to unlearn.

Fifth, we need a newly minted Theological Commission again. Experience is a rich teacher. Experience interrelates with tradition, revelation, Scripture, culture and reason, and these make up some of the key "formative factors" of theology.[147] Macquarrie draws upon the work of J.G Davies when he argues that, "… theology draws upon the whole range of human experience, and especially in a secular age where many people might disclaim any explicitly religious experience, theologians have drawn attention to what might be called 'religious dimensions' in everyday experience." (Macquarrie 1977, p.6). Sharing the Eucharist brings an awareness of something we are involved in that is bigger than we are.

Thus, ordinary, daily human experience intersects with our theological formulations. The experience of *being* human, of embodiment, of our sexuality, of our gender expression, of culture, and even our SOGIESC [148] informs our theological reflection.

[146] https://iam.org.za/
[147] Macquarrie, John. 1977. Principles of Christian Theology. 2nd Edition. New York: Scribner
[148] SOGIESC is becoming an increasingly common identifier that stands for sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (pronounced "soh-jee-esque"). In the context of human rights law, where the poorly defined and shifting LGBTQIA+ designation has become too unwieldly, SOGIESC has increasingly been adopted. SOGIESC augurs a reframing of sexuality, gender, and human rights that is more universal, precise, and ultimately more inclusive and lends itself as a better instrument for advancing progressive human rights.

This idea corresponds with those of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who suggested that any thorough biblical exegesis must rest upon four pillars, viz, Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.[149] (Boaheng 2020, p.88).

Albert Outler, a Methodist scholar, later coined the term "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" as a summary of Wesley's discourse on the theological and ecclesiastical issues facing contemporary Christianity. [150] In my view, our human bodies, our sexuality, gender expression, our identity as human beings are not self-attributes to be hidden away but are some of the very dynamics that enable us to show vulnerability towards ourselves and to others in community.

I therefore embrace my own brother's full expression of who he is to the world. This personal experience also proves affective to my theology. His authentic expression of himself must also become mine, for this is what full acceptance is. It is not for me to curate his authentic self-identity through the lens of my faith or lived experience, but rather to curate my faith through our relational human experience.

This is also true for friends, colleagues, church members, acquaintances, and companion citizens. Their authentic human experience and self-expressions impacts my faith and the collective faith of the Church community in humanity and solidarity. I am impressed by how Jesus didn't wave a magic wand about the towns and streets, but rather he allowed himself to be impacted by people who engaged with him and made requests of him. Jesus honoured each of their human experiences and he responded with acceptance and compassion. When Jesus effected healing in people, he did so not out of superiority but from a positionality of human solidarity. See for example, St Paul's hymn of humility in Philippians 2:6f where he sets out the key idea of kenotic theology. In much the same way, allyship is not hubris, but is at the very minimum, acceptance, human compassion, and solidarity with another/others.

[149] See for example, Boaheng, Isaac. 2020. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and Contemporary Biblical Exegesis, in Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology, Volume 2 Issue 3, August 2020, pp.87-95. Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/motbit/https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2020091

[150] See: Outler, Albert. 1991. "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley" in Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church, ed. Thomas A. Langford. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, pp.75-88.
(5) (PDF) The Wesleyan Quadrilateral and Contemporary Biblical Exegesis. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344046479_The_Wesleyan_Quadrilateral_and_Contemporary_Biblical_Exegesis [accessed on 13 July 2024].

We can be better allies to one another. In my personal, lived experience and ministry, I have encountered all manner of diverse people. I have tried to cultivate an avid curiosity about people. For those I can engage with, I enjoy learning about them and learning from them. It is partly what makes meeting new people an enjoyable activity and a growing experience.

At the same time, I acknowledge that we have been socialised from a young age to put people into a box, particularly colour[151], sex and age. This is especially true in South Africa, where historically, these three intersections were legally emphasised in law.[152] Thus, ordinary, daily human experience intersects with our theological formulations. The experience of being human, of embodiment, of our sexuality, of our gender expression, informs our theological reflection. In my view, our human bodies, our sexuality, gender expression, our identity as human beings are not self-aspects to be hidden but are some of the very dynamics that enable us to show vulnerability towards ourselves and to others in community. I therefore embrace my brother's full expression of who he is to the world. This personal experience also proves affective to my theology. His authentic expression of himself must also become mine, for this is what full acceptance is. It is not for me to curate his authentic self-identity through the lens of my faith, but rather to curate my faith through our relational human experience.

In the gospel According to John 6:51 as rendered in the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised, Christ says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

[151] I use the word "colour" rather than race, since 'race' has no real scientific definitional value. Race is a socio-political construct. Berger, P & T. Luckmann, 1963, argue this. See also, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/race-is-a-social-construct-scientists-argue/ accessed on 12 April 2024, where four scientists call for a multidisciplinary panel to jettison the term *race*. Professor Audrey Smedley states, "Race is a culturally structured systematic definition of a way of looking at perceiving and interpreting reality." (https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Race, accessed on 11 April 2024, site updated on 9 April 2024). The National Human Genome Research Institute says that "There is more genetic variation within self-identified racial groups than between them." (*Ibid*). In other words, there are greater variations within defined groups than between 'race' groups. Therefore, the term 'race' has little practical or scientific meaning. For a deeper discussion, see for example: http://www.newsweek.com/blogs/lab-notes/2008/02/29/race-and-dna.html; Berger, P & T. Luckmann. 1963. The Social Construction of Reality. New York: Doubleday; and Smedley, A. (1998). "Race" and the Construction of Human Identity. American Anthropologist, #100, pp.690–702.

[152] Apartheid laws discriminated against people and legally placed every individual into a spurious 'racial' category, even grouping residential areas. Similarly, sex designation was accentuated in socialising boy-and girl-children. South African society is very self-conscious about age differentiation between people.

This expresses how foundational the Eucharist is for Christian community in the early church. Ancient Middle Eastern hospitality mores correspond with African attitudes towards mealtimes. Food is sustenance; food is life and therefore it assumes a deeper social and spiritual significance. When such existential concerns are affiliated with spiritual metaphor they become powerful stories.

I am profoundly indebted to the superb work of the late Reverend D. Roy Briggs, a UCCSA Minister, in his seminal work, "A Covenant Church."[153] Over the years, as I have read Briggs more deeply, my respect for him as both a teacher and scholar has grown immensely. I feel privileged that many of the concepts I write about here I have heard directly from him in his mentorship in different training settings. "A Covenant Church" (1996) was based upon a prior work by the same author titled, "The Covenant in the UCCSA" produced in 1988. The first chapter sets out the rubric for the paper.

D. Roy Briggs was commissioned by the UCCSA General Assembly to study Congregational polity, practice and theology. This resulted in a book titled "Covenant Church". For Briggs, the covenanted Church Meeting is the beating heart of the church (1996, p.7). All the members of the UCCSA stand in Covenant relationship with every other member. There are no hierarchies, differentiated statuses, positions, or titles that discriminate between members.

Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament are titled Reverend, and one may be a Moderator, a Secretary, or a President, where these are taken to be *functions* rather than titles. All members stand in equal relationship to every other member. Of course, there are functionaries, roles that certain members are elected to play, but these still exist as equals. Roy Briggs reminds us that we are not a Church of titles representing hierarchies, but rather, our organic structure is flat.

We affirm with St. Paul that the whole Body suffers when one of its parts are considered as "less than". Here, the Apostle employs a typical Hebrew contrasting couplet, insisting that, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26 New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised.)

[153] This 1996 book was birthed by the author from a series of papers that were presented to the Probationer Ministers Retreat held at St Peter's in Rosettenville, Johannesburg in October 1988. It was published as "The Covenant in the UCCSA". There, Briggs first set out his theological foundation of Covenant as a relational theology and subsequently expanded this text into A Covenant Church.

Anywhere, where God's people are considered as not equal, the Church denies its witness to justice. On the other hand, this bold position statement has far-reaching consequences for the UCCSA. The whole of its worship, work and witness can then be evaluated through the lens of justice. If the UCCSA is to be a justice Church, then how it treats LGBTQIA+ members must also be an issue of justice.

I want to be clear that this paper is a research exercise into the documented resolutions and theology of the UCCSA without it denigrating the institution. I affirm my respect for and personal commitment to the UCCSA as the Church I belong to and love. Below, I set out the uniquely progressive outlook of the UCCSA. In many respects, there is much to objectively commend the UCCSA for.

Having said this, I should also assert that the post-reformation era was centered around the idea of "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*"[154] (the meaning here is approximate to "the church reformed, always reforming").

This perpetual reformative attitude is the key to continuing progressive social witness for the Church. It is a key part of our theological heritage in the Reformed movement, whilst recognizing that there are differing perspectives within the Reformed family. I draw upon this historical theological identity in demanding that our sometimes intolerant, narrow, pathologized Doctrine of Anthropology is to be enlarged to incorporate contemporary scientific insights. The anthropological conclusions of current medical science, psychology, and sociology now needs to be incorporated into our theological determinations and praxis. The Reformation invites us to reform, as an on-going project of our theological reflections.

There are five best practices for SEE-JUDGE-ACT that can aid our ongoing reflection and responsiveness.

The first is that we engage with the people directly affected. As we stated above, the Church must speak with people and not about people. Let's include their voices in every step of the listening process. Secondly, our praxis must be collaborative. In the conversations about sexuality, we must hear from medical and social service experts, Izitabane folks, community leaders, stakeholders, members, and those with a vested stake in Gender Justice.

[154] This theological construct was popularised by the theologian, Karl Barth in 1947. Thus, it was not in itself an article of Reformation theology, but nonetheless it captures a significant impulse of the Reformation movement.

Thirdly, we need to be cooperative. What we learn from people may challenge us to adapt new ways as new information emerges. Sharing a meal builds relationship and therefore is an appropriate setting for being a learning community. In the fourth place, prioritising sustainability enables us to aim for solutions that have lasting impact. Gender Justice will take the Church forward in the same ways that being anti-racist, including women more fully, embracing Liberation Theology and eco-theology have.

Lastly, implementing SEE-JUDGE-ACT creates an enabling environment for evaluation and learning outcomes. Evaluation concludes the Pastoral Circle and provides a foundation for future efforts. This cyclical process ensures ongoing reflection and responsiveness, helping the Church remain grounded in both ethical principles and real-world impact.

4.4 Findings

For ecumenical Churches like the UCCSA who have consistently adopted anti-racist stances, it is vital to make the connection between social justice and the unwarranted harm perpetrated against LGBTQ+ people in churches. The socio-political landscape has changed with democracy. South Africa is one of only six countries in Africa to provide expansive protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation (Botha *et al* 2020, p.325). "On 30 November 2006, South Africa … became the fifth country in the world (and the first country in Africa) to legalise marriage between two people of the same-sex under the Civil Union Act" [155]

"The SA Constitution states that: 'No person shall be unfairly discriminated... on one or more of the following grounds... colour, sexual orientation...'" (Sanders 1997, p.105). This legalisation forced Churches to revisit their theology of Eucharist, human sexuality, and Covenant, amongst others. The UCCSA is welcoming but stops short of affirming same-sex relationships. Izitabane members cannot be married in the UCCSA; same-sex relationships may not be blessed by a Minister of the Church; and no UCCSA Minister may officiate at a same-sex civil union. (Gaborone Assembly Minute, 1999).

[155] See: https://www.sa-wedding.co.za/same-sex-marriages-in-south-africa/ , accessed August 2023.

The full resolution is here: *Resolution no. 34 (see Minute 99/A/34)*

The following resolution was presented by Rev. D. Wanless and Prof. G. Goba:

The Thirtieth Assembly of the United Congregational Church, after much prayer and discussion in our local churches, synods and regions, accepts that the denomination is not of a common mind, and is unable to formulate a unanimous position with regard to the question of homosexuality at this time. In our debates,- we have realised that the question is enormously complicated and diverse, from biblical, cultural and personal perspectives.

Some would have the church condemn homosexual practice as outright sin, and are of the opinion, in varying degrees, that openly homosexual people should not be allowed membership and/or office in the local church. They would also deny ordination to openly homosexual persons.

Others are of the opinion that, while the practice of homosexuality is against scriptural norms, the church has a duty, as the bearer of God's grace, to provide compassionate ministry to people who do not adhere to the perceived biblical standards.

A seeming minority would have local churches be openly welcoming and affirming of homosexual persons and would encourage the church to ordain people who feel called by God irrespective of their sexual orientation.

Our belief is that the question should not be dealt with in a purely legalistic manner, but with the pastoral compassion which Christ displayed to all sinners. Assembly therefore feels unable to adopt the notice of motion sent down to synods, regions and local churches by the 1997 Assembly.

We therefore call upon the church:

1. to acknowledge the pain that is a reality for people on all sides of the debate;

2 to engage in ongoing biblical and theological reflection in the light of clinical study on the subject;

3. to assist pastors and member's (sic) to cultivate attitudes and acquire skills that enable them to minister the grace of God to openly homosexual persons; and

4. revisit with great care its disciplinary codes in the light of the issue of sexuality and sexual orientation.

We affirm our tradition that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from God's word".

The Resolution's Committee Report was accepted by 111for; 43 against and 11 abstentions. The resolution was passed with a majority vote.

At least two dissenting clergy have been disciplined with three-month suspensions for officiating at blessings for same-sex couples. (Central Regional Council Administration Meeting Minute, 2007).

This suggests an inconsistency in how Izitabane members of the UCCSA are regarded and marginalised within the community of the faithful. It is possible that Izitabane are not affirmed in the Church as fully as their access to the Eucharist implies. Thus, the question arises whether Izitabane are really fully welcome within the Covenant. The full inclusion of Izitabane members of the Church is a valuable area of research with implications for our praxis.

A misalignment occurs when some people within the spectrum of humanity are not fully acceptable. *Liberation* is an ontological category and requires that people are not rejected for one aspect of their being, but fully welcomed. If the Eucharist means full acceptance, complete and extravagant welcome, the total inclusion of all people into the body of Christ, then no one may be excluded. Such inclusion, welcome, acceptance is ultimately by Christ.

A magnificent shift in the *stabanising* of society has opened shifts within ecclesiastical praxis too. Re-imagining the implications of Eucharist is an attempt to "*stabanise*" – that is, to Queer, to disrupt and deconstruct, our claims for faithful and authentic community in our contemporary time. This will happen as we reflect critically on what we mean by covenant, community, inclusion, and embodiment as essential components of how the UCCSA understands Eucharist. Jesus says, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces" (Matthew 23:13). Our being in community should not lead us to "close the door" on any person, especially since we understand that all people carry the *imago Dei*.

Out theology of Covenant and Eucharist in Congregational ecclesiology, characteristically opens the door to celebrate and embrace all God's people. For the UCCSA, the conditional inclusion of its LGBTQIA+ members and adherents is a shutting of the door.

This paper is a call for the UCCSA to keep the door open so that we remain faithful to the full implications of our Covenant theology.

Izitabane members cannot be married in the UCCSA; same-sex relationships may not be blessed by a Minister of the Church; and no UCCSA Minister may officiate at a same-sex civil union. (Gaborone Assembly Decision, 1997).

At least two dissenting clergy have been disciplined with three-month suspensions for officiating at blessings for same-sex couples. (Central Regional Council Administration Meeting Minute, 2007).

This may suggest an inconsistency in how Izitabane members of the UCCSA are regarded. It is possible that they are not affirmed in the Church as fully as their access to the Eucharist implies. Thus, the question of Covenant relationships and the full inclusion of Izitabane members of the Church is a valuable area of research with implications for our faith and praxis.

In the face of anger and hatred, may we learn to forgive and so be ourselves forgiven.
(When Prayer Makes News: Churches and Apartheid — A Call to Prayer. 1986 Westminster John Knox Press. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.)

O Lord, we can never fully comprehend the length, breadth, depth and height of your love:
but we pray that that love may so transform us through your suffering as to make us reach out to the despairing and the desperate and work for peace and reconciliation between all people:
for Jesus' sake, hear our prayer. Amen.
(Douglas Bax, in Cry Justice! Prayers, Meditations and Readings from South Africa, by J. W. de Gruchy. London: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1976.)

"It's time to stimulate the imagination of churches everywhere in using and developing this resource for ritual reconciliation. The church, as the body of Christ, the Great Reconciler, must strive to be his shining example of reconciliation."
(From: https://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-2004/fast-feast-insights-process-reconciliation-south-africa)

I make the following proposals in regard to stabanising Eucharist in the Church. Firstly, we do need to acknowledge that Izitabane are already members of the church community. It is imperative that we begin to 'see' who these members are, and who their family members are so that we can offer pastoral support to them.

Secondly, we need to repent and seek forgiveness for marginalising certain demographics in the church, especially Izitabane members, and seek to make amends by hearing from them what they need in each community, what pastoral support they require, and how the church can meet some of their spiritual needs. This is the task of theological reflection that enables us to make an assessment of what we observe and experience in the church.

Thirdly, I suggest pastoral training for pastoral staff in the local church in dealing with Izitabane members specifically and learning how to speak to and minister to them. These kinds of remedial and proactive actions enable the church to move forward, to deepen faith, and to grow in community.

Fourthly, churches can agree with their Izitabane members what community actions need to and can be undertaken. The church can decide whether it is more public displays of support or merely letting it be known they have an affirming and supportive ministry.

Fifthly, the church can begin to grapple more with the language it uses in public statements but also in worship contexts. Language is an important element in stabanising. Language needs to be inclusive and welcoming because how we speak to and about others speaks volumes. Stabanising our language also means that we make Gender a theological issue as much as it is a pastoral matter.

Lastly, I believe that as we mainstream Gender within the church space, so we will generate awareness and interest in it. Sermons, lessons, discussions, prayers and celebrating Eucharist with awareness and intentionality are how we create awareness, and inviting Izitabane members to be seen in the church space, as lay-readers, for example.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The UCCSA's commitment to creating a new community of God is expressed in the celebration of Eucharist. The Eucharist, the Lord's Table, "Holy" Communion is the epitome of our eschatological commitments towards a new humanity, and an inclusive community of all God's people. It is Eucharist that fundamentally articulates God's inclusive "all" to the world and to the Church. Eucharist is less "a balm for sin", and much more a demonstration of the united, new, inclusive, redeemed, and healed humanity that Jesus came to inaugurate.

In the UCCSA, we do not discard the invitation to healing for the sin-sick at the Table. We expand it, to represent both the brokenness of humanity symbolised in broken bread, and the new eschatological community of God's people. Therefore, the intersections of Eucharist, Covenant, and Theological Anthropology are explored specifically focussed on human sexuality. The vision is to stabanise the Eucharist.

Yes, there is a disconnect between the affirmation of being a Justice Church and the prohibition against clergy blessing Izitabane relationships and Civil Unions. It is a necessary witness that the UCCSA affirms that homophobia is sin. We affirm that it is necessary to see the image of God in all people, without stigma or discrimination. It *is* a matter of justice.

In the conclusion of this research paper, it is important to affirm our human bodies. These bodies carry us. They grow with us as we grow. They are the means by which we interact with the world. Bodies are important. Be gender-positive!

Our bodies are important.

Our bodies enable us to act in the world. To go. To do. To be.
To grow. To move. To go fast. To go slow.
Learn to breathe and to live.
We should be world-positive.

Our minds exist within. Bodies are wonderful gifts to us. With our bodies we navigate the world. We are aware. We think. We drink. We imagine.
Our bodies should be mind-positive.
Our bodies also reproduce. Our genes are passed along to each new generation. The circle of life turns. Sex is important. The way our bodies give us pleasure. Developing a sex-positive attitude towards our body is good, right, healthy.
We should be sex-positive.

Our bodies express who we are. How we think of ourselves. How we create ourselves. Our bodies are unique. Instantly recognisable. We should be body-positive. By locating our formative spiritual experience in an embodied meal we have an invitation to be fully present within our own unique, different bodies.

A Review of the Research Question: The Key Argument

The problem-statement at the centre of this research paper can be set out in the following way: Is the praxis of the UCCSA regarding Izitabane persons consistent with the liberationist and redemptive theological implications of the Eucharist?

There are gaps in our praxis. We are not where we want to be. However, if we intentionally set our minds to it, we can identify and close the gaps that exist.

The first question aims to "see" the SOGIESC landscape in South Africa in 2024. Here, I discussed the issues of gender and Human Sexuality from the lens of Liberation Theology. In this nation of South Africa, we have a long way to go. This paper acknowledges that the road to peace is down a bumpy road. However, peace is a choice we can make. Peace with ourselves. Peace with our bodies. With our neighbours. We do not have to remain in our oppressive social and moral conflicts. We can break through to the other side.

The second question in the Liberation progression is to "judge" and asks, "How does the UCCSA articulate its theology of Covenant and Eucharist?" We express our theological commitments by the choices we make. We can choose the way of liberation and push through to new ways of ethical living. Covenant, as expressed in the First Testament prophets of Old, perpetually call us towards remembering, receiving, rejoicing, and resurrecting.

In the proclamation of the prophets, when we remember what we have received from the Lord then it leads us to rejoicing and ultimately to resurrection. In the UCCSA, the Eucharist cannot be fully understood without these essential covenantal elements.

The third question relates to “act”, and asks, “How can the UCCSA develop a more inclusive Eucharistic experience within local congregations that confers full recognition of personhood on Izitabane – and indeed, all its members?”
We can make the Table bigger and longer and wider. Christ is in everyone.

A Proposal for Stabanising the Eucharist

Stabanising the Eucharist provides opportunities to draw people into the fellowship. It creates the sense that people are important if they are included. I do not think it necessary to set out a pride flag or to begin with too overt actions. Those are reflective praxis actions that people will begin to know the time is right. Simply making people feel comfortable in the church space, raising awareness about Gender, allowing Izitabane to be seen in the church space, and using the opportunity and platforms provided by the church to raise awareness.

One action that has been helpful to me is simply sitting with the church deacons and counting all the people who are Izitabane or have children who are Queer, or family members who are LGBTQIA+. This requires great sensitivity and be very clear about why you are having this discussion. This helps people to be seen, as long as care is taken in the process for people to see and not become a gossip session. The goal is awareness, seeing people. This kind of exercise is helpful in merely acknowledging the demographic diversity present in the church. One way we did this was holding an International Day, where we invited all the foreign nationals to share their dress, food, culture and stories. We had thirty-seven nations represented, and suddenly people were saying, “well, I never knew we had members from 37 countries in our congregation!” The question then was, “what needs might these members have, and how do we minister to them?” In another exercise deacons exclaimed, “I didn’t know we had 11 LGBTQ+ members in our church or in our families of the church?” Everyone assumed it was just one particular elder, but suddenly people were seeing who our members are – and the possibilities for connecting more deeply with them. I am sensitive to how fraught this kind of exercise can be.

The liturgical resource below is designed to raise awareness. Careful attention has been given to the inclusive language. The goal is to be intentional about the process of raising awareness, or '*conscientising'*. It would be helpful is the church was able to identify who the members are more generally, first. Who are the resource people in the congregation? Who has some special need? Who is the person who knows everyone? The purpose of this exercise is not to highlight difference but to *acknowledge* difference, and thus care must be taken not to cause discomfort or embarrassment. Developing an overall theme, like "Who is the church?" or "Knowing One Another" could remove the stigma from this kind of discussion.The next discussion point is "how do we acknowledge, draw in or minister to those who might not feel comfortable in this church space?" Here, bringing in a resource team, like IAM organisation could be an ace card.

There are certain caveats, however. The danger is that individuals may feel 'picked on' and so this kind of process needs careful planning, preparation and execution. Don't drop a surprise but advertise well in advance. It is important that people feel included rather than picked out. No person should be asked to reveal more than they are willing, and of course due care should be taken not to make anyone feel embarrassed. I would not use a rainbow flag for example, on the first time doing this. Good preparation is the key to this exercise and hosting a successful liturgical Eucharist.

For those who may be considering coming out to a faith community, here are some questions that could be helpful as you discern the way forward. You may ask yourself, "what do I know about my religious leader?" Then consider whether she or he speaks about openness and diversity from the pulpit, and with what context? How do they handle controversial topics? Who do they quote from the pulpit, who does she or he look to for their own spiritual guidance? Please remember that not every faith space is a safe space for coming out. It is therefore wise to be discerning and seek out allies.

The song by Kees Kraayenoord is beautiful and well executed. A printed card or projected lyrics could be tremendous.
An important action is for people to be engaged with each other, face to face, making eye contact, physically present in the moment. The objective is to break down barriers that divide.

A STABANISED LITURGY

These are the words of welcome as we are invited to the Lord's Table. A diaphanous white or rainbow veil covers the elements on the Table. The people sit in silent reflection as the song is played. If there is a digital screen, the video may be projected.

Song: **God of the Moon and Stars** (Kees Kraayenoord)[156]

God of the moon and stars
God of the gay- and singles bars
God of the fragile hearts we are, I come to you
God of our history, God of the future that will be
What will you make of me, I come to you

God of the meek and mild
God of the reckless and the wild
God of the unreconciled, I come to you
God of our life and death
God of our secrets unconfessed
God of our every breath, I come to you

God of the rich and poor
God of the princess and the whore
God of the ever-open door, I come to you
God of the unborn child
God of the pure and undefiled
God of the pimp and paedophile, I come to you

God of the war and peace
God of the junkie and the priest
God of the greatest and the least, I come to you
God of the refugee

[156] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbcLArwrtN8, accessed on 29 May 2024.

God of the prisoner and the free
God of our doubt and certainty, I come to you

God of our joy and grief
God of the lawyer and the thief
God of our faith and unbelief, I come to you
God of the wounds we bear
God of the deepest dreams we share
God of our unspoken prayer, I come to you

God of a world that's lost
God of the lonely cross
God who has come to us, I come to you
Observe a Moment of Silence.

The Officiant says: “Come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus and you who have failed; you who have been excluded and hurt by your exclusion; you who are afraid and hidden - and you who are known; you called by favoured personal pronouns; and you who seek to embrace all God’s people and to see the divine in the other. Come, for it is Christ who invites us to meet one another here.”

Officiant: The Holy One is here: lift up your hearts!
People: We lift them up to God!
Officiant: The Holy is One: Let us give thanks to God!
People: It is right to give God thanks and praise!
Officiant: The Holy One is revealed as He, Her, They, Them
People: And we come to express our human unity as the one people of God!

Here follows the LGBT pride prayer:
“The People say Together: **Creator God, Holy One, maker of love and source of joy: we give you thanks for the infinite variety of your creation. We bless you that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that we are your beloved rainbow people. Amen**.”

A song may be sung: **Make Me A Channel of Your Peace** (St Francis of Assisi)[157]

Officiant: Peace be with you all!

People: **And also with you!**

The congregation shares in the peace.

The Officiant offers an inclusive prayer:

"God of fierce love and extravagant acceptance and infinite in joyful varieties of expression, you have shown us the rainbow promise of your grace. By Word and Spirit, you create all that is, and you have made us to reflect your image; for you are in us, as we are in you.[158]

"You are the Spirit of boldness and beauty who freely invites us into your divine presence, where there is life and love. We invite you into all the spaces of our lived experiences, as we offer you our joy and our pain, our laughter and our sorrow, our anger and our peace. Christ is embodied within us, where the Holy Spirit makes her home, and leads us in the ways of Jesus. You are faithfully present in all the gravel and sparkle of life, and you are present here with us now. Awaken us to your dream for creation: a world in which every member of the human family is free to flourish, however you have made them.

"Forgive us for the moments we have held back your ever-flowing river of love, dignity, and justice. Remake us into a people eager to see you in the bodies, faces, and expressions of all people. Remind each of us to step out of the shadows of our lives and shine fearlessly and courageously.

"Ignite your Light within us to shimmer like a rainbow through the prism of our bodies and to brighten every corner of this Earth. Holy One, you call each of us 'beloved'. Each of us 'cherished'. Each of us 'desired'. Each of us 'sacred'. And so, we give you thanks now and forever."

People: Amen.

The holy elements of bread and wine are uncovered. They are blessed in prayer:

Officiant: "Blessed are you, God of all creation, for you gather us like a mother hen gathers her chicks, through your goodness we have received this bread we offer you: fruit of Earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life.

[157] Example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8eorCEMIK4, accessed on 29 May 2024.

[158] Adapted from https://samlundquist.medium.com/prayers-for-pride-b6d7cc401c5 accessed on 29 April 2024

People: "**Holy, Holy, Holy. Lord, God of power and might, heaven and Earth are full of your glory: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!**

Officiant: "Gracious God, we recall the love of your Son, Jesus Christ, and proclaim his compassion and peace. On the night in which he was betrayed, he took bread and blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying: 'Take and eat: this is my body given for you. Do this to remember me. No longer do I call you servants, but friends.' When supper was ended, Christ took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, to remember me. For they will know you are my disciples by your love.'"

People: "**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again**."

Officiant: Send your Spirit upon us, loving God, and upon these gifts of bread and wine: make them for us symbols of dedication, solidarity, commitment, unity, service, for you are making all things new. Make us for others the Body of Christ, your gift to the world. Unite us with your Church in heaven and on Earth, as we offer our thanks and praise, our gifts and our lives, all for your honour. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, for we have been anointed to bring good news to the poor and marginalised; to proclaim release for those who are bound, sight for those who will not see your love, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim your favour upon your rainbow people of the world. **Amen**."

In the name of Jesus, our friend, who prays with us, we are bold to call God 'Parent' as Jesus taught us:

People: "**Our Parent in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen**."

The friends gathered form a Love-Circle around the room, standing shoulder-to-shoulder, looking at one another: The people pass the plate from one to another. And then the cup.

Receiving the plate, we say:

"God loves me and accepts me."

At the passing along of the Plate of Bread, we say:
"The Bread of Life: For the healing of us all."

Receiving the Cup, we say:
"We are one body for we share the one cup."

The Sharing of the Cup:
"The Cup of salvation: For the healing of us all."

For those who feel comfortable, with consent, a hug may be shared.

Once everyone has eaten, the Officiant leads the Post-Eucharistic Prayer:
Officiant: "Gracious God, you give us food from heaven, to strengthen our love; we thank you for what you have given and for what you have done: you have united us in the resurrection life of Christ and made us one with all your people; for behold, you are making all things new! Grant that through our works of justice and acts of loving kindness, the perpetual light of your truth will shine in the world: through Christ our Lord. **Amen**."

Then the People can offer prayers, Lamentations, or request prayer. The people pass a tea light to their left and once they have made their contributions are free to pass the candle to the left around the prayer circle.

The People say the Covenant together:
We trust in God, eternally;
we confess Christ in us;
We depend on the guidance of the Spirit;
We seek to live together in God's presence,
According to all God has made known to us and will make known to us.
We covenant to worship, work, and witness together in the fellowship of humanity,
for the building up of the body of Christ,
and the manifesting of the kingdom of God on Earth.

The friends gathered hold hands, looking at one another:

People: "**God bless Africa, Protect our children, Transform our leaders, Heal our communities, Restore our dignity, and Grant us peace. Amen**."

Officiant: THE BLESSING OF RADICAL LOVE
We recognise that the Body of Christ is a suffering Body. We confess that we have sinned against God by dismissing the pain, the hurt and the suffering of parts of Christ's Body.
We affirm the transforming power of Christ that calls us into relationship – suffering with the parts of the body that suffers. The Body Incarnate connects you and me to the heart of God…[159]

"Blessed are your children, God. Blessed are your gay, lesbian, bisexual, children. Blessed are your trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming, and questioning, children. Blessed are your Izitabane children. Blessed are your children who we are learning to name, describe, and know. Blessed are your children who are seen, God. Blessed are those who see. Blessed are those who persevere. Blessed are those who prove to the world each day that diversity is divine.[160]

And may the blessing of God, our Parent, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, fill you, and remain with you for ever. **Amen**.

[*Here, a song may be added, with suggestion, eg. One More Step*]
Hymn: One more Step Along the World I Go
1. One more step along the world I go.
One more step along the world I go.
From the old things to the new
keep me traveling along with you.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.

2. Round the corners of the world I turn.
More and more about the world I learn.

[159] I AM, Liturgy titled The Blessing Of Radical Love. Undated.
[160] Adapted from https://samlundquist.medium.com/prayers-for-pride-b6d7cc401c5 accessed on 2 May 2024.

All the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.

3. As I travel through the bad and good
keep me traveling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
you'll be telling me the way, I know.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.

4. Give me courage when the world is rough.
Keep me loving though the world is tough.
Leap and sing in all I do.
Keep me traveling along with you.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.

5. You are older than the world can be.
You are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
keep me traveling along with you.
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me traveling along with you.[161]

The Service ends with people leaving the circle, remaining to pray silently; or passing along an extra hug.
<ends>

[161] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YquLANPYiRU, accessed on 29 May 2024.

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