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A critical rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 as an inspiration for a leadership of liberation within the MCSA

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Editor's Declaration

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that I have proofread and edited the following thesis using the Windows 'Tracking' system to reflect my comments and suggested corrections for the student to action:

A critical rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 as an inspiration for a leadership of liberation within the MCSA by Harry James, a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Theology in the Graduate Programme in Biblical Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
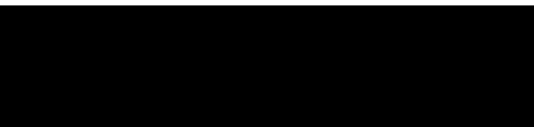
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Above all, I want to thank God, who welcomes our wrestling with our faith and the Biblical text. I thank God for God's self-revelation through this journey of engaging critically with the Bible. I am humbled by God who is not offended when we approach the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion, but, instead, patiently encourages us to journey through our crises of faith to places of maturity.

Abstract

This dissertation explores a leadership model which is potentially liberating for followers on a socio-economic level, specifically within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). The study uses the tri-polar model of exegesis as a theoretical framework to facilitate a critical rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. The ideo-theological lens employed involves exploring how we say to the poor, the least of society, that God loves them. A liberation hermeneutic is an approach that seeks to link theory and praxis to liberate the oppressed. This dissertation explores Methodism's British and South African roots and the MCSA's structures. Five areas of socio-economic oppression within the MCSA are identified. These are stipends being a site of socio-economic oppression, a preferential option for the rich, avoiding others' suffering, the shackles of property ownership, and the allure of the prosperity Gospel. Through rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7, six insights about the oppressive nature of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership are identified. These are that 1) the entire leadership structure was oppressive; 2) they refused to practice accountability; 3) they devoured resources; 4) they had no respect for the law or for what is just, reasonable, or right; and 5) Yahweh continues to transform and liberate; therefore, the oppressive late pre-exilic Judahite leadership came up against Yahweh's justice and judgment and became the victims of revolution. Finally, a leadership of liberation is defined as a leadership that has the ultimate goal of liberating and transforming followers to realise their full humanity through motivating, inspiring, and encouraging followers. They aim to create paradigm shifts by influencing followers to embrace shared values, beliefs, and goals to pursue the greater good or higher social dividend. Liberation leaders show empathy for their followers and are considerate of the individual and community. They focus on values, morals, and ethical leadership. Liberation leaders oppose the oppressive status quo through being effective, efficient, focusing on change, being proactive, and embracing accountability to others and God. They serve followers by elevating them through involving and empowering them.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

"I hear a lot of talking about the church speaking truth to power, of course it must. I think it is much easier for the church to speak truth to power than for the church to speak truth to the church. We have to speak truth to the church."

Peter Storey (2019)

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide the background to this research and my reasons for undertaking this study. I provide a brief introduction to the research on socio-economic oppression within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) and a short overview of the literature I have found relevant to this research, which I discuss in more detail later in this dissertation. As part of this introductory chapter, I also introduce the topic of leadership since oppressive leadership is an issue I address in my research. Following the introduction of the various topics that I explore further in this research, I provide an explanation of the tri-polar exegetical model, which is the framework I employ, and a discussion of the methodology that I follow in conducting this study. I conclude this chapter by providing a brief overview of the structure of the rest of the dissertation.

1.2. Background to the research problem

I am a probation minister within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). Over the past few years, I have noted, with concern, instances of oppressive leadership in business, public offices and in the church, and their devastating effects upon the poor and marginalised. My concern has led me to explore possible solutions to breaking the yoke of such leadership, especially within the MCSA. There are numerous examples of leaders in the secular world who use their office to take advantage of people and exploit the vulnerable for personal gain. For example, American ex-President Trump's withholding funding to the World Health Organization potentially cost people their very lives (Fabian & Du 2020). Within my South African context, too, there have been exploitative and corrupt leaders. Such leadership is not restricted to the political environment. Business leaders have been equally complicit (Mavuso 2020). As a result of corrupt leadership and money stolen from state coffers during the administration of former president Jacob Zuma (2009-2018), it was necessary to set up the

Zondo Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate the depth of corruption, theft, and fraud in transactions between governmental departments, organisations, and the private business sector. Consequently, in addition to the billions of Rands that were misappropriated by corrupt officials and business leaders, the Zondo Commission has cost South African taxpayers over four hundred million Rand as of November 2019 (Chothia 2019). Had it not been for corruption, these costs and the money which was misappropriated could have been used to uplift the poor, the marginalised and the vulnerable.

The church is not immune to corrupt and exploitative leadership. For example, the self-proclaimed prophet, Shepherd Bushiri, and his wife have been accused of being involved in illegal financial activities (News24 2019). This is not a new phenomenon, but one which alarmingly appears to be on the increase (Miya 2018; Parkinson 2019). The socio-economic exploitation of congregations by MCSA ministers has become an area of concern (Storey 2004:82). As a member of the MCSA, this, too, is my concern (as mentioned at the beginning of this section). I have personally witnessed a Methodist minister who conducted a pre-offertory message on how tithing unlocks the treasury of heaven to encourage people to give more. His message is not in keeping with Methodist doctrine and appears to be purely an attempt to manipulate people into giving more money.

In desiring to address the issue of oppressive leadership within the MCSA from a Biblical studies approach, I wrestled with the following question, namely, what insights can be gained to address exploitative leadership within contemporary MCSA contexts from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus?

In attempting to answer the above question I identified three sub-questions which can assist in answering the main question. Each sub-question is explored in a separate chapter. The sub-questions are:

1. What are the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts? This question will be discussed in chapter 3 when I deal with the contextualisation pole of the tri-polar model of exegesis. In chapter 3 I examine the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts as the context to which the Biblical text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 is appropriated.

2. What insights can be gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus? I aim to answer this sub-question in chapter 4 when I exegete the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 using a liberation hermeneutical approach.

3. How can these insights, if any, address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts? This final sub-question is explored in chapter 5 when I appropriate the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. Chapter 5 will also be the space within which I attempt to answer the main question.

I now provide a brief overview of some of my findings in respect of the various elements of this research. These will be discussed in more detail in the respective chapters of this dissertation.

1.3 Socio-economic oppression within the MCSA

Before I embarked on this research it was necessary for me to examine what research had been done and what scholarly work is available regarding exploitative leadership, particularly within the MCSA. In chapter 3 I deal in more detail with contemporary leadership contexts within the MCSA. However, I will at this stage briefly discuss some of the documents relating to MCSA leadership contexts as part of my introduction. I discuss these documents to highlight that there are situations of socio-economic exploitation within MCSA leadership contexts. Thus, for example, the MCSA (2020a) passed a resolution calling for transparency in the payment of ministers' stipends and allowances. The resolution was necessary because some ministers receive disproportionately large payments while other communities are unable to pay their ministers even the basic stipends. Storey (2004) shows that division along economic lines has become quite widespread within many Methodist churches even though Methodist origins held a preferential option for the poor. It appears that socio-economic oppression has become systemic within the MCSA (Olivier 2005). Vermeulen (2005) is one of many MCSA voices that challenges the financial models being used. The Doctrine Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) (2007) has called for a restructuring of ministers' payments in line with principles of justice and mission. Foster (2008) and the Church Unity Commission (CUC) (2019) have acknowledged the reality of the prosperity gospel, and have warned against its allure, especially in the ever-increasing contexts of desperate poverty and marginalisation. As a Biblical scholar,

I turned my attention to the Biblical texts in search of a solution to the question of socio-economic oppression within the MCSA.

1.4 Zephaniah and the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership

Biblical examples of prophetic criticism against socio-economic oppression by the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership occur in numerous books, such as Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Amos and Isaiah. In my struggle with exploitative leadership, I was particularly drawn to Zephaniah 3:1-7 because it explicitly addresses leadership which is corrupt and exploitative. I approach this text specifically from the perspective of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus which I discuss in more detail under my theoretical framework and methodology. There is a fair amount of scholarly work on Zephaniah. To explore where any gaps may exist within the literature, I provide a brief overview of the main scholarly works here as part of the introduction and discuss them and others in more detail in chapter 4. In 1.7 below I discuss some of these gaps and how this research addresses them.

To understand the context of Zephaniah it is necessary to determine the dating of Zephaniah's oracles. Bruce, Brueggemann, Frethem, and Petersen (2005:322) place the oracles of Zephaniah before the reforms of Josiah (c 622 B.C.E.) since many of the accusations which are made against Judah were addressed in Josiah's reforms. Achtemeier (1986) holds a similar view and sees Zephaniah as part of the Levitical-prophetic reform group which gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reform and Deuteronomistic writings. Included in this group, according to Achtemeier, were Jeremiah and later the author/s of trito-Isaiah. Petersen (2002) points out that a possible exilic redaction occurred in chapter 3:9-20 which speaks of restoration after punishment. Bullock (2007:9) confirms the dating of Zephaniah to the Neo-Babylonian period and submits that all the oracles were spoken before Josiah's reforms and may have even influenced the reforms.

However, as pointed out by Bullock (2007), dating the time of a prophetic oracle is not always possible due to the lapse of time between the prophetic event, the rhetorical event, the recording, compilation and possible redaction thereof. Tuell (2016) puts forward the idea that the composition of Zephaniah occurred over a period of time. He discusses the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, situating them within the twelve Minor Prophets. He divides the composition history of Zephaniah through two pre-exilic stages, an exilic

Deuteronomistic redaction, which relates to a redaction of the composite books of Hosea, Amos, Micah and Zephaniah, and then further post-exilic additions.

In evaluating the applicability of Zephaniah to my research I explored some interpretations of Zephaniah. Of particular note for me is Han (2011). He reviews the use of Zephaniah across the millennia. He reviews references to Zephaniah in literature from the Qumran community to the reformation and to modern times. Han also reviews the use of Zephaniah in art. He concludes that Zephaniah, though not necessarily as popular or held in the same esteem as other prophets by Christian scholars, nonetheless has played a vital role in Biblical interpretation across the centuries. Han points out that Zephaniah has much to teach the church about being the church of the poor and for the poor (Han 2011:95), thus illustrating the suitability of Zephaniah to a liberation hermeneutical approach with a socio-economic focus. The MCSA can also therefore benefit from interrogating Zephaniah 3:1-7, given Methodism's original preferential option for the poor.

1.5 Socio-historical context of Zephaniah

The literature on Zephaniah needs to be read against the socio-historical context and setting of Zephaniah 3:1-7. To better understand this context, it is necessary to examine the socio-historical context of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. As we have seen in 1.4, Zephaniah would most likely have been written during the period of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom starting during the reign of Josiah from 640 - 609 BCE. I focus specifically on Josiah's reign, as this appears to be the period covered by Zephaniah's oracles (Zeph 1:1). Sweeney (2001) details the Deuteronomistic history, which forms part of Zephaniah's context. Understanding Deuteronomistic history is important since Zephaniah, as part of the Levitical-prophetic reform group, gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reforms during the reign of Josiah (Achtemeier, 1986). Sweeney (2001) argues that there was a Josianic exilic (our canonical texts), and a Hezekian edition of the Deuteronomistic history. He demonstrates that Josiah was the hoped-for Messiah. However, with Josiah's death, the texts were redacted to point toward a future Messiah.

Authors such as Ackroyd (1973) and Ristau (2005) examine the details of the Chronicler's narrative to determine ideologies and themes present within the Chronicler's narrative. Thus, for example, the Chronicler portrays kings as being instrumental in maintaining cultic worship (Ristau 2005:86). Ackroyd (1973:200) argues that the Chronicler views history from a theological perspective and emphasises the rightness of Josiah's own attitudes apart from the

discovery of the law. He submits that the Deuteronomist's agenda was the centrality of the law and reordering life during the exile around it. Examining themes and ideologies apparent within the text aids in doing a social analysis of Zephaniah's context which is a necessary part of liberation theology. I therefore explore these themes and ideologies in more detail later in the dissertation.

As part of examining the social-historical context and oppressive leadership during the context of Zephaniah, I found Nakanose (1993) helpful. He takes a radically different view on Josiah than most mainstream scholars. Nakanose uses sociological exegesis to understand the social system of the Biblical context. He contends that the celebration of the Passover appears to be a novelty in the monarchical era and that the Deuteronomistic tradition changed the Passover from a family celebration to a Temple celebration. He argues that there is a movement in Josiah's reforms to centralising worship of Yahweh around the Temple cult. Josiah's recentralisation of worship would not have been fully accepted by all people, especially those in rural areas. The peasants' wealth base was impoverished through them needing to bring their produce and surplus to Jerusalem for celebration of the Passover and other centralised worship activities. Where they were unable to travel with their produce, this would have needed to be sold and then other supplies purchased closer to the Temple. Moving their surplus and produce to Jerusalem, incurring further expenses in travel and taxes due to the centralisation of worship in the Temple, resulted in the monarchy and ruling elite accumulating land and wealth whilst impoverishing the peasants' wealth base. Nakanose therefore submits that 2 Kings 22:3-7 confirms the exploitation of the poor by the rich through economic systems (c.f. Zephaniah 1:11-13). The exploitation of the poor by the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership is explored further in chapter 4.

1.6 Leadership

As part of examining leadership within the MCSA contexts and to explore a leadership of liberation, I found it necessary to examine literature dealing with leadership theory in general. Herbst (2014) reviews the literature on leadership and identifies five main generations of leadership theories. These are the trait theory, style or behavioural theory, situational or contingency theories, transactional leadership theory and transformational leadership theory. Ahmed, Nawaz, and Khan (2016) classify the development of leadership theory into slightly different categories. The development of leadership theory which these authors delineate are

the great man theory, trait theory, process leadership theory, style and behavioural theory, transformational, transactional and laissez faire leadership theory.

Scarborough (2010) deals with transformational leadership. He defines Christian Transformational Leadership as leadership that declares a Biblical or Christian foundation or is specifically directed to the church. He holds that a leader's vision, character, persuasiveness, and ability to strategize guarantee that he or she will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals. Miller (2009) identified the correlation between empathy with action with other known leadership dimensions. She concludes that a transformational leader needs to display consideration (listening), understanding (empathy), and action (love).

Khoza (2011) investigates leadership specifically within the African context. His focus is on the relationship between the individual and the social collective and proposes that a holistic approach to leadership is necessary. Khoza uses African humanism, Ubuntu, as a compass to investigate what transformational leadership looks like in Africa. He holds that Ubuntu can integrate all the ideals of leadership including ecological concerns. Ubuntu, according to him, calls for coexistence in synergy. Servant leadership in the African context is discussed by Ngunjiri (2017). She argues that servant leadership within the African context includes, *inter alia,* empowerment and care of others, healing and reconciliation, humility and spirituality.

Kurtulmuş (2019) discusses the dark side of leadership. The author contends that the assumption is that leaders are ethical and moral and as such contribute to the good of the organisations and society. However, where this is not the case, such as leaders who have personality disorders and other psychological or moral deviations, the dark side of leadership comes to the fore and damage is caused to organisations and society.

1.7 Identified gaps

In this section I note some of the gaps in the literature which this research will assist in addressing. Firstly, Zephaniah is not an extensively used text, especially within the MCSA. Outside of the Methodist Church, theologians such as Boda (2012) have approached Zephaniah from a feminist hermeneutic and Han (2011) has examined it in the context of the poor. Secondly, Methodist theologians such as Setiloane (1986) and Mosala (1993) have approached Biblical interpretation from the perspective of Black and African theologies, whilst Meeks (1989), also a Methodist theologian, has examined political economics in the light of the

doctrine of God, but outside of the African context. This study will therefore add value to Biblical studies by contributing to an exegesis of Zephaniah from a specifically liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus and appropriating this interpretation to MCSA leadership contexts.

1.8 Theoretical framework and methodology

As mentioned earlier, I want to approach the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 specifically from the perspective of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. Liberation theology readily uses various tools from the social sciences to analyse and understand the socio-political and economic conditions of the poor, marginalised and oppressed (Phan 2000:44), including the social structures and processes which keep people oppressed. A liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus is therefore useful in interrogating both the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership as reflected within the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 and contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. I will conduct my analysis within the framework of the tri-polar model of exegesis. In using the tri-polar model I hope to find a solution to the problem of socio-economic oppression within contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. In this section I will discuss the theory and scholarly views on my particular theoretical framework and methodology. After discussing the theory, I will indicate how I apply the framework and methodology respectively to this research.

1.8.1 Theoretical framework

As mentioned, I use the tri-polar exegetical model as the theoretical framework for this research. West (2016) discusses various approaches to Biblical interpretation and affirms the applicability of the tri-polar exegetical model to Biblical scholarship, especially within the African context. In other literature, West (2018) discusses the tri-polar exegetical model holding that, whilst most traditional and Euro-American exegetical models focus on two poles, namely context and text, the tri-polar acknowledges that there is a specific ideo-theological appropriation that happens when reading a text to influence and transform the context. This builds on the work of Draper (2015), who successfully argues that the tri-polar model of exegesis is a contextually relevant method of doing African contextual hermeneutics. The tri-polar exegetical model recognises that each reader approaches a text from a specific location and with specific viewpoints (Draper 2002:18)

I need to therefore overtly identify the ideo-theological lens with which I approached the text under the distantiation pole of this research. As has been indicated, my concern is MCSA leadership which exploits followers within a socio-economic context. My aim with the research is to explore leadership which is potentially liberating to followers. The ideo-theological lens that I use in approaching the text and my context is thus a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. Even though my ideo-theological lens is overtly identified as the lens with which I approach the text, I submit that my ideo-theological lens is not restricted to my reading of the text. I wish to contend that my ideo-theological lens inevitably colours how I approach my context and the dialogue between the text and context.

In chapter 2 I establish and discuss my ideo-theological lens. I then move onto a discussion of the first pole of the tri-polar exegetical model. The first pole, called the contextualisation pole, consists of a discussion of the contemporary context to which the research relates and is the focus of chapter 3. The context which I discuss under this pole is contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. I focus on the contemporary MCSA leadership context because it is the context in which I find myself and the context my research discoveries aim to address. The focus of the discussion under the contextualisation pole is an investigation into situations of socio-economic oppression and exploitation of members of the MCSA by its leadership.

The second pole, which is the distantiation pole, I discuss in chapter 4. Chapter 4 focuses on the Biblical text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. The exegesis of the text is done through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus which is the ideo-theological lens with which I approach the text. It is in this pole where most of the socio-analytical tools available to liberation theology are employed to analyse the social setting of the context of the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. Marxist and materialist approaches offer helpful social analytical tools which I make use of to interrogate the social context/s during the period of Zephaniah's oracles. Marxist and materialist tools of social analysis allow for a critical approach to the text through the use of a hermeneutic of suspicion. Through employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, I have attempted to interrogate the unconscious beliefs and worldviews held by those from the context of Zephaniah to determine the dominant ideology operative within the text.

The third and final pole of the tri-polar exegetical model, which is the subject matter of chapter 5, is the appropriation of the text to the context. It is what Draper calls the "fusion of horizons where the historical subjectivities of the reader and the text meet" (Draper 2001:152). It is

under this pole that the dialogue between my context, being the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts, and the text occurs. It is under this pole that insights gained from reading the text through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus are applied to leadership contexts within the MCSA to explore a leadership of liberation.

Having established the framework of this research, I now wish to elaborate on the methodology which I have employed in doing the research.

1.8.2 Methodology

The tri-polar exegetical model recognises the role the reader plays in the interpretation of a text. It is the reader's ideo-theological orientation which facilitates the dialogue between the historical text and the context of the reader. The reader's ideo-theological orientation "enables the production of meaning and hence transformative praxis" (Draper 2015:13). It is therefore necessary to review the background and methodologies in liberation theology since these shape the methodology I use in approaching this research. Liberation theology and liberation hermeneutics provide the analytical tools I need to refine and apply my ideo-theological lens with which I approach the text within the framework of the tri-polar exegetical model.

I discuss liberation theology is more detail in chapter 2. At this juncture I merely wish to outline the salient features of liberation theology's methodologies. Gutiérrez (1973) pioneered liberation theology. For him, theology is deeply linked to praxis and must side with the poor, the exploited, the alienated, and the economically prejudiced. Gutiérrez (2015c) argues that it is necessary to interrogate all aspects of our socio-economic structures to determine which create and maintain unjust inequalities among persons and thus break friendship with God. As argued by Moylan (1991), a liberation hermeneutic requires that one combine hermeneutics of suspicion with hermeneutics of recovery. One must, therefore, not only critique the text and the context, but also examine the emancipatory possibilities of the historically oppressed. In approaching social analysis and to get to the cause of a particular situation, liberation theologians use various tools such as dependency theory, Marxist and materialist approaches, philosophical analysis and psychological introspection. According to Phan (2000), this tendency to seek the root causes of all forms of oppression and to analyse them within their historical context remains an influential aspect of the methodologies of all types of liberation theologies.

Since my research relates to socio-economic oppression, I use a liberation hermeneutic with a specific socio-economic focus that will allow for an interrogation of the social structures both within the text and the MCSA context to determine what structures create and maintain socio-economic oppression and explore how leadership praxis can become more liberating for followers within the MCSA.

Liberation theologians readily use Marxist and materials tools for their social analysis. Lawrie (2005) argues that there are various Marxist readings and post-Marxist or ideological critical readings. These all fall under a hermeneutic of suspicion which is the approach to the text in this study.

The method I employed in approaching this study aims to answer the research questions I raised in the background section of this chapter. I therefore analysed contemporary MCSA leadership contexts and exegeted Zephaniah 3:1-7 through a lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. Finally, I facilitated a dialogue between the context and the text within the framework of the tri-polar exegetical model. In analysing the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts, I engaged with resolutions, articles, and studies which constitute the corpus of the MCSA's connexional documentation. I explicitly viewed these through the lens of socio-economic oppression of members of the MCSA by its leadership. Part of my methodology was to investigate the underlying leadership praxis employed by these leaders and compare and contrast this with principles which aid in a leadership of liberation.

In rereading the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus, I make use of, *inter alia*, Marxist and materialist tools to undertake the social analysis of the context of the text. The use of Marxist and materialist tools for social analysis is in keeping with liberation methodologies that use various tools to get to the root causes of situations (Gutiérrez 1973:22; Phan 2000:46). The text is analysed from the perspective that it forms part of the ideological superstructure because the written word is the primary method of conveying the dominant ideology of the ruling class and has been written from a social situation for a social situation and is embedded in society (Lawrie 2005:191).

My approach employs the usual questions asked of texts in socio-historical analysis, such as who writes? Under what circumstances? For whom? And why? However, it is acknowledged that authors are not independent, neutral creators of meaning and it is, therefore, necessary to

inquire as to the class position and interests of the author and the audience. As a means for conveying ideology, the meanings and values attached to texts cannot be taken at face value. I thus needed to investigate how the text is rooted in its ideological context by analysing the unstated presuppositions behind the text and the silences within it. I also needed to examine what social relationships, institutions, and practices the text assumes (Lawrie 2005:193). I have chosen to read the text from the perspective of the poor and oppressed (West 1993:82). In the distantiation pole, I use the Biblical text as a primary source and consult commentaries, and archaeological and historical studies as secondary sources.

In the final phase of the study, I appropriate the text for the context. I therefore look at how the relationship of the text to its context speaks to us and our relationship with our context, specifically the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. My methodology, in keeping with liberation hermeneutics, also investigates how our praxis can be changed through the rereading of the text to develop a leadership of liberation.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the background that led to this research. I have introduced my preliminary findings on the various topics which I discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters. These include oppression within the MCSA, the text of Zephaniah, the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership and leadership theory. I have set out the theoretical framework and methodology I employ in this research. Since I am using the tri-polar exegetical model, I have structured this dissertation in such a way that each chapter deals with a separate aspect of the tri-polar model. In chapter 2 I therefore discuss my ideo-theological orientation. In chapter 3 I explore the contextualisation pole and aim to answer research sub-question one, namely, what are the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts?

Chapter 4 is the distantiation pole of the tri-polar model where I exegete the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. The aim of chapter 4 is to answer question two of the research sub-questions being: what insights can be gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus? In chapter 5 I appropriate the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the current MCSA leadership contexts as I answer the final research sub-question of how insights gained in re-reading Zephaniah 3:1-7 can address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts. Thereafter I conclude this

dissertation in chapter 6 where I discuss the conclusions of this research, the lessons learnt from the application of the methodology and my experience in conducting this research.

This overview of the various chapters concludes this introductory chapter. In chapter 2 I examine my ideo-theological lens with which I will approach the text. As mentioned, this will focus on Liberation theology with a socio-economic focus. I discuss my ideo-theological lens in chapter 2 because, even though it predominantly affects how I approach the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 under the distantiation pole in chapter 4, it nonetheless colours my entire research.

Chapter 2 – Ideo-Theological Orientation: A Liberation Hermeneutic with a Socio-Economic Focus

"The hope for life before death"

N.T. Wright (2018)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the ideo-theological orientation used in this dissertation. I am approaching Zephaniah 3:1-7 from the perspective of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. By acknowledging my ideo-theological perspective I aim to create the space for authentic dialogue between the text and my context since, as Draper (2015:20) states, no reader is entirely neutral. Similarly, it is naïve to believe that there is a single objective ideology within any Biblical text.

As intimated, each reader brings their point of view to bear on the text, and by reading the text from their own perspective, readers have used the Biblical text as both a weapon for liberation and a tool of oppression [1](West 1995:118). This paradoxical use of the Bible was clearly illustrated in the struggle for liberation under the apartheid regime in South Africa. The then government used the Christian scriptures to justify apartheid with the backing of the Dutch Reformed Church, while other churches, including the MCSA, opposed apartheid using the very same scriptures. The above example then illustrates that people view the Biblical text from their perspective and then draw their own conclusions on what a Biblical text may mean (Mesters 1983:3). My ideo-theological orientation will, therefore, inevitably affect how I read the text to influence and transform my context (West 2018:248), which is why it needs to be clearly laid out before I analyse either the text or the context.

I will, therefore, commence this chapter with a discussion of the basic tenets of liberation theology. I will then discuss the methodologies and hermeneutical approaches used in liberation theology, focusing on Marxist and materialist approaches since these are the social analytical tools most popular with liberation theologians. I will conclude the chapter by

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[1] It is of interest to note that it is not only the Bible which is a site of contention; other scriptures, such as the Hindu scriptures, are also a site of struggle between the oppressor and oppressed (Melanchthon 2009:199).

discussing leadership theory to lay the theoretical groundwork to explore a leadership of liberation later on in this dissertation.

2.2 Basic tenets, history and methodologies of liberation theology
2.2.1 Basic tenets of liberation theology

Gutiérrez (1973) pioneered liberation theology. For him, theology is deeply linked to praxis and must side with the poor, the exploited, the alienated, and the economically prejudiced. Gutiérrez holds explicitly that the exploited must be liberated at the expense of those who maintain the status quo or abuse structures of power for their own agendas (Gutiérrez 1988:65). Liberation theology invokes the process through which those who are oppressed find ways to overcome their social and political oppression and reclaim the dignity that they have been denied (Andiñach & Botta 2009:2). As is clear from the above statement, liberation theology is concerned with praxis. "*Doing* the truth brings us to stand with people who live in poverty" (Müller 2015c:138, emphases added). This approach to theology originated from the commitment of Christians within social and political struggles who were attempting to minister to the needs of those facing these social and political situations of oppression (Andiñach & Botta 2009:2). Liberation theology is born out of the question: how do we say to the poor, the least of society, that God loves them? (Gutiérrez 2015a:6).

Those who suffer under situations of oppression also ask how the Christian faith can meet their needs *in* their situations of oppression. Actual liberation from suffering and oppression is, therefore, the primary concern for liberation theologies. Theology is consequently a "second act" that follows the commitment for liberation (Andiñach & Botta 2009:3). In seeking liberation, liberation theologians incorporate sociology and politics as instruments to analyse and transform social reality (Andiñach & Botta 2009:3). From a socio-economic point of view, liberation theology opposes a capitalism that oppresses and exploits the poor, and it proposes a socialism where all people are able to actively participate in the economic system and where all countries can participate in the global economic system (Müller 2015b:68). Liberation theology is not only concerned about freedom *from* but also freedom *for*, this is because freedom *for* gives freedom *from* its fullest meaning (Gutiérrez 2015b:114).

2.2.2 Methodologies in liberation theologies

2.2.2.1 Methodology in analysis of social contexts

Liberation theology relies on three steps in its approach to analysing social contexts. Firstly, Christians seek to actively participate in God's praxis of liberating humanity. Secondly, there is a critical and rational analysis of society and the causes of poverty. Finally, as a consequence of the critical reflection, there is the action for the transformation of the status quo (Müller 2015a:21). It is necessary to interrogate all aspects of our socio-economic structures to determine which ones create and maintain unjust inequalities among persons and, thus, breaks friendship with God (Gutiérrez 2015b:96). Liberation theology, therefore, quite readily interrogates the Christian tradition to determine and change those structures and beliefs within the Christian tradition that have contributed to oppression and bondage (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:45). An example of one such tradition is that Christians have often been led to believe that they are to passively accept suffering and oppression and that this is God's will (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:46). Liberation theologians question this and see Jesus as the liberator of the oppressed. He opposes unjust systems not through violence or military power, but through active ministry, steadfastness, suffering love, and reliance on God. We are called to partner with God in opposing oppression (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:49). However, this approach is not always popular as was expressed by Bishop Dom Helder Camara who said: "When I ask people for bread to feed the poor, they call me a saint, when I ask them why the poor are hungry, they call me a Communist" (Camara in Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:46). Liberation theology is not new theology but a new way of engaging with theology as a critical reflection. The theological critical reflection of liberation theology occurs in three modes: social-analytic criticism, a hermeneutical systematic reflection, and a practical-pastoral reflection and application (Müller 2015b:65).

In approaching social analysis to determine the cause of a particular situation, liberation theologians use various tools such as dependency theory, Marxist and materialist approaches, philosophical analysis, and psychological introspection. The tendency to seek the root causes for all forms of oppression and to analyse them within their historical context remains an influential aspect of the methodologies of all types of liberation theology (Phan 2000:45). Liberation theology is always connected to the context in which it originated. Therefore, it cannot generate a universal one size fits all approach, since this would result in liberation theology losing its emphasis on praxis and becoming a theoretical approach (Müller 2015b:60).

2.2.2.2 Methodology for analysis of Biblical texts

When it comes to Biblical texts, liberation hermeneutics requires that one combine hermeneutics of suspicion with hermeneutics of recovery (Moylan 1991:44). Therefore, one must not only critique the text and the context, but also examine the emancipatory possibilities of the historically oppressed as contained within the text. Liberation theologies make use of cultural criticism, social-historical methods, and literary analysis in interpreting texts. However, to this is added imagination, intuition, and emotion to balance the scientific approaches so that a richer reading of a text becomes possible (Isasi-Díaz 2009:195).

Latin American liberation hermeneutics uses the exodus event as its orientation point. Croatto (1973) holds that the exodus was not only an event in Biblical history, but rather the foundational event of everything else that follows (Andiñach & Botta 2009:4). When scholars began to question the facts of events in the Biblical narratives based on archaeological and other scientific discoveries, the door was opened to new methods of interpretation. Since the texts may not have been a literal reflection of the facts, it became necessary to analyse the ideologies that underpinned the narratives to better understand the social and political realities that gave rise to the narratives. Thus, it became possible to deconstruct the texts and seek their material base and the social and ideological context in which they emerged (Andiñach & Botta 2009:5). Liberation theology, therefore, engages with the social sciences to first understand the reality of the contemporary context and the reality of the context of the Biblical text.

2.2.2.3 Linking theory and praxis

Once the reality of the contemporary and historical contexts have been understood, liberation theology commits to the struggle to modify reality to overcome the injustices suffered by the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed (Andiñach & Botta 2009:6). A major impact on Gutiérrez and, therefore, liberation theology, was Paolo Freire (1970). Gutiérrez sees Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as an example of theory and praxis linking together to liberate the oppressed (Gutiérrez 1988:111). The Gospel's overall message is one of a preferential option for the poor which is displayed in Jesus' attitude to the rich and the poor (Isasi-Díaz 2009:195). For Freire, his Christian faith meant being faithful to Jesus and, therefore, imitating His love and concern for those who were poor and oppressed (TEEC 2006a:102). Jesus' call to love God, others, and ourselves (Matt 22:37-39) motivated Freire to integrate his spirituality with the need to fight social injustice. Freire did not only strive to uplift the poor and the oppressed, but he also fought the socio-political structures and factors which keep people in oppression

(TEEC 2006a:100). Freire integrated the Marxist understanding of the need for social reform and change of the oppressive social structures within his spirituality. However, he did reject, as has Gutiérrez (2015a:6), the notion that social class and struggle were an essential feature of society. Freire, therefore, developed a human liberation spirituality which, in love, opposed the injustice of the social structures which oppressed the poor.

Marxist theory holds that often, as a result of a lack of schooling, the oppressed are unable to compete against the ruling class of society (Lawrie 2005:192). Freire, therefore, focused on educating the poor to liberate them from accepting oppression as the natural order of things (Aman 1984:435). He worked towards getting people to realise and develop their full humanity by empowering them (TEEC 2006a:107). I mention Freire's approach to liberation because it fits well with John Wesley's approach to social holiness (discussed in more detail in chapter 3) which incorporated uplifting the poor and marginalised through, *inter alia*, education. Freire's spirituality led him to fight (non-violently) to release humanity from oppression and poverty. He influenced liberation theology's orientation around the importance of praxis (Aman 1984:437).

Freire's spirituality was focused on God (theocentric), God's desire for all humanity to be liberated (Luke 4:16), and God's desire that all become fully human. Indeed, the starting point of all liberation theology is its strict theocentric and Christocentric nature (Müller 2015a:27). Freire focused on Jesus' example of opposing those who oppressed others and reaching out to the marginalized. For Freire, personally, his spirituality was not centred on himself but was altruistic; he had a concern and a love for the poor and oppressed. However, to realise one's full potential and humanity, as Freire desired, people sometimes have to place their own needs above those of others. This suggests that a danger exists within liberation theology that it could lead to a spirituality that is ego-centric and has a love for power, a danger that Gerstenberger (2009:84) notes and to which we must pay attention, especially when dealing with situations of leadership. He points out that when we analyse historical attempts at liberation, we must acknowledge that our attempts are shamefully insufficient and that often liberators themselves become oppressors. He concludes, therefore, that our liberation hermeneutics must be self-critical for it to become successful liberating praxis (Gerstenberger 2009:84).

2.3 Development and contextualisation of liberation hermeneutics

As liberation hermeneutics began to be more widely used in different contexts, Christians who formed part of indigenous groups began to understand that liberation hermeneutics allowed them to see not just the class struggle, but also themselves as an oppressed people who were also suffering oppression by their class-mates (Andiñach & Botta 2009:6). The Bible as a tool of the oppressor was now used against the oppressor to liberate the oppressed through nurturing their hopes and dreams (Andiñach & Botta 2009:7). Liberation theology has thus, over the years, come to be used in various settings and contexts to bring liberation from different forms of oppression. These include socio-economic oppression, racial oppression, and gender oppression. In confronting such manifestations of oppression, liberation theology has appropriated different liberation hermeneutics in different contexts. My focus will be on the South African context where liberation theologies have been used by, inter alia, Black theology, African theology, contextual theology, and feminist theology.

Black theology, as a form of liberation theology, has increasingly seen a shift in its hermeneutical approach. Initially, there was a hermeneutic of trust in the Biblical text. However, this has changed, and now there is increasingly an introduction of Marxist historical materialism in what has been labelled the second phase in Black theology's hermeneutical approach. This shift in hermeneutical approach has arisen from an understanding of the ambiguous ideological nature of the Bible itself (West 2009:20). The shift is necessary because Black theology sides with the oppressed and powerless. South African Black theology has contributed significantly to liberation theology globally by having traced the origins of oppression to its root cause of power and the oppression of people within the economic base of society (West 2009:26). Nowhere is this more aptly illustrated than in South Africa where there is such a wide spectrum of economic inequality.

Another impactful contribution from South African liberation hermeneutics is contextual theology. Contextual theology arises from the desire to do theology explicitly and consciously from within the context of the actual lived reality and experience of the oppressed in South Africa. It starts, therefore, from the fundamentally political nature of life in South Africa. Contextual theology also seeks to recognise the myriad manifestations of oppression that exist within the South African context. These have been identified as racial oppression, gender oppression, and oppression of the working class (West 2009:28). Contextual theology has been used extensively within what has become known as Contextual Bible Study (CBS) (West

2009:30), which takes seriously the call to read the Bible from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed.

In addition to those already mentioned, other liberation hermeneutics, such as confessing theology, African women's theology, and HIV-positive theology have also arisen in South African situations where liberation from oppression has been sought. Therefore, the refusal of theologians to relinquish the church to the powers of racial discrimination and death, and the resistance to allow these forces to control Biblical interpretation led to the emergence of confessing theology[2]. Using the Bible as a source for the liberation of those who are HIV-positive has given rise to HIV-positive theology. As in all aspects of oppression, the Bible has been both a problem and a solution in seeking dignity for those who live with HIV/AIDS (West 2009:37).

A central feature of using Biblical texts for liberation remains the struggle to oppose the macro-economic and macho-patriarchal systems. These systems constantly attempt to usurp the Biblical texts to continue to foster oppression and retain the oppressive social and economic systems which keep people in bondage (West 2009:37). The work of liberation hermeneutics continues to be done; however, it is not always under the label of liberation theology. Many hermeneutical approaches, such as Black, African, African women, local, cultural, contextual, feminist and HIV-positive theologies, all of which focus on liberation can be labelled as post-liberation hermeneutics (Arias 2009:231).

Liberation hermeneutics arises from the interplay of various interrelated emphases. These include the choice of perspective, the perception of God, social analysis, the choice of theological tools, and the understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis (West 2009:15). The central aspect of liberation hermeneutics is that it makes a determined conscious choice to exercise a preferential option for the poor (West 2009:16). This option is the theological starting point from which liberation theology commences its social analysis, namely an analysis of the social contexts of the poor themselves. Questioning the perception of God within liberation hermeneutics is not related to the existence of God, but rather to

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[2] Confessing theology, as a branch of liberation theology, arose when the South African Dutch Reformed Mission Church fought for what they saw as the truth of the Bible and distanced themselves from the Dutch Reformed Church and its support of apartheid (West 2009:31).

whether God is on the side of the oppressed or the oppressor. Therefore, liberation theologies search for the true God to identify and overcome the false idols (West 2009:16).

Social analysis within liberation theology is done by understanding that the world is divided, and that conflict exists between the oppressed and oppressor. Theology and social analysis are done within this framework of a divided society and analyses the areas of conflict and struggle (Mosala in West 2009:16). Specifically, within African liberation theology, a multidimensional analysis of the relationship between oppressed and oppressor is undertaken. The analysis takes into account race, gender, and culture (West 2009:17). In understanding the emphasis on the relationship between theory and praxis within liberation theologies, it must be noted, as previously mentioned, that theory is a so-called "second act". The primary focus of liberation theology is the practice of action and reaction (West 2009:18). It is within these contexts of oppression that liberation theology's hermeneutic of hope is manifested. Liberation theology expresses hope in the God of life for our time and proclaims hope to the world in the moments we live through (Gutiérrez 2015b:114).

2.4 Social analytical tools in liberation hermeneutical approaches

Jonker (2005) and Lawrie (2005) review a comprehensive list of various Biblical exegetical approaches, methods, and theories. Of relevance for this study is their discussion of Marxist approaches to the text. Even though liberation theologians use various tools such as dependency theory, Marxist and materialist approaches, philosophical analysis and psychological introspection, liberation theologians view social analysis and Marxism as almost synonymous, mainly because Marxism is the only viable scientific alternative to bourgeois social science (Aman 1984:428). Gutiérrez (1973) himself is open to using a variety of tools in approaching social analysis to get to the cause of a situation, including Marxist approaches (Gutiérrez 1988:21). Initially, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a re-evaluation of liberation hermeneutics because it relied on Marxist principles. However, there has been a renewed increase in the number of scholars, for example Harvey, Horsley, and Žižek, who merge post-Marxist thought and Biblical interpretation under the umbrella of liberation theology (Jennings 2009:148). Liberation theology's social-analytical inquiry does not accept Marxism as a wholesale ideology but instead uses some Marxist concepts in its social-analysis. These include Marxism's theory of dependence, its understanding of the connection between theory and praxis, and the understanding that human beings shape their history and are subjects

within the social process (Müller 2015b: 76). These and other Marxist concepts will be discussed in more detail below.

2.4.1 Marxist and materialist approaches

Marxist and materialist approaches typically use a dialectical methodology in social analysis. The dialectics may, however, be operative at various levels within a text. Therefore, those that are explicitly apparent from the text cannot provide sufficient information to do a comprehensive dialectical analysis. The dialectical analysis aims to expose the text's historical rootedness and determine the materiality of the text. As with liberation theologies, Marxism interprets a text from a deliberate choice of active engagement with praxis. Marxism views interpretation not only as analysing a text but also as influencing reality through the mere act of interpretation. The interpretation of texts influences reality because the text is a material aspect of society and its interpretation contributes to society's material aspect. Interpretation of texts influencing reality becomes even more manifest because of the commitment to action. Therefore, this approach naturally leads to theologies of liberation often using Marxist and materialist models in their hermeneutical approaches (Lawrie 2005:200).

2.4.2 Background and theory of Marxism

Marxist theory is complex and has had various developments and off-shoots over the decades. It is well beyond this dissertation's scope to provide a comprehensive discussion of Marxist and materialist theories. However, I will discuss the essential concepts necessary to use Marxist and materialist tools to do social analysis as part of the liberation hermeneutical approach with a socio-economic focus of this dissertation. Marxist theory was developed by Karl Marx and aimed to chart the history of oppression, struggle, conflict, and change within society (Aman 1984:437). Charting the history of oppression, struggle, conflict, and change within society can only be undertaken when the causes of conflict in any given society have been explored, which is what Marxism seeks to do. Marxist theory is not only concerned with a theoretical understanding of conflict, but its proponents, instead, also wish to bring about change within society to eliminate conflict (Lawrie 2005:189). Marxism employs a broad range of approaches and readily uses any tools at its disposal to analyse social contexts and bring about change. Since textual analysis is an important aspect of society, Marxism has been used as a tool for interpreting texts. It is necessary to understand certain concepts in Marxist theory (see 2.4.2.1) before applying a Marxist approach to Biblical texts.

2.4.2.1. Basic concepts in Marxist theory

Marxist analysis understands social phenomena not as timeless and universally applicable, but rather as operating within a specific **historical** context. Historical context is also something which is essential within liberation theology since it is within history that God reveals God's self and God's word reaches us within our involvement in the unfolding of history (Gutiérrez 1988:32). Liberation theology and Marxism, therefore, share this common starting point of acknowledging that human life exists within a particular historical and social context and condition (Müller 2015b:65). To understand the history of a specific society, Marxism uses **dialectical analysis**. **Dialectical analysis** is a method that identifies the core contradictions and tensions which exist in any particular society (Lawrie 2005:189). These contradictions and tensions provide the key to understanding a society's history as a process based on the complex conjuncture of elements and the developments and interactions within that society. Society must, therefore, be studied as a complex whole. Marxism is also not interested in a purely **theoretical** approach but views theory as both serving **practice** and bringing about change itself. Liberation theology, like Marxism, is also not interested in a strictly theoretical call to help the poor but desires to transform society in practical and concrete ways (Sayer 2015:10). The rejection of a strictly theoretical call to help the poor is visible in Marxism's embrace of the fact that we are all actors in history. In searching for a theory to analyse conflict, one should become involved in the struggle against oppression (Lawrie 2005:190).

Marxist theory does not begin with abstract notions but rather with what is tangible. The understanding is that people produce to meet their basic **material** needs. As a result, Marxism is described as **materialism**. However, Marxism understands that material interactions and relationships have a specific history and that engagement in production changes the material world and the people involved. People are determined by their history and environment, but at the same time, when people engage in activity, they produce their material existence and their social relationships within which they live, thereby transforming their environment, social history and themselves (Larrain 1983:20). From a material engagement in productive labour, people develop a spiritual side. However, this does not lead Marxists to have an interest in people's spiritual being but rather in their history. For Marxists, the spiritual side remains rooted in the material world. According to them, no idea or God comes from outside the historical process to add to material human beings but, rather, collective human action and thought is the power that has the potential to change society (Fuchs 2020:20). This is a point of significant divergence between Marxism and liberation theology. While remaining rooted

in the material world, liberation theology, unlike Marxism, believes that human beings are not merely the product of their material condition, but are instead created and called by God (Müller 2015b:65). Yet, Marxism assists theologians in avoiding falsifications of the Gospel, which result when Christians over emphasise the spiritual and supernatural aspects of the Gospel and neglect to focus on the physical complexities of the world around them (Aman 1984:429). Unlike a dualist view of life, liberation theology does not want to wait for the next world to see liberation but wants it to manifest in the here and now (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:45).

Productive labour for the Marxist is **social labour**. Individuals in isolation would hardly meet their own basic needs, but as new production methods developed so new social relationships developed. Modern individuals are, therefore, the product of **social relationships**. Social determination, however, does not negate individuality. It is social order that types people into binary opposites. Once social order and individuality are no longer framed as opposites, people can express their individuality as social beings. Marx holds that people can only come into their own as individual social beings in a socialist society since equality will eliminate the social contradictions which ideology creates (Larrain 1983:44).

Revolutionary social dialectics, **mode of production**, and **class struggle** are integral concepts within Marxist and materialist interpretations. Productive social labour has always involved struggle and contradictions. Initially, this was through the battle with nature for survival which was won through the social organisation of labour. Following on this was the domination of one group of people over another. The dialectic of employer and employee, master and servant, oppressor and oppressed, arose. The concept of dialectics in Marxism implies a specific type of interaction. It is an interaction that involves tension, antagonism, and ultimate revolutionary change because it involves social contradictions which can effectively be destroyed (Larrain 1983:136). According to Marxist theory, dialectics involves one pole (the thesis) confronting another pole (the antithesis) in an intense tension. This tension remains until it is resolved into a new state (the synthesis). There can never be a peaceful coexistence, nor can the tension between thesis and antithesis ever be resolved through minor changes since this only creates either more or less oppression or transference of some people from one group to the other. It is only when there are no oppressed that there will be no oppressors. For this to be achieved, there needs to be a wholly new revolutionary ordering of society (Lawrie 2005:190).

According to Marxism, revolution occurs as a norm through violence. Violent revolution occurs because the more advantage a system of oppression holds for the oppressor, the more disadvantage it holds for the oppressed. Therefore, there is a correlation between how tightly the oppressor will cling to a system and how strongly the oppressed will oppose such a system. At this point, there is also a divergence between Marxism and liberation theology. Liberation theology does not accept that social conflict must be promoted as a method of change in society and thus does not accept that there is a programmed class struggle (Gutiérrez 2015a:4). Liberation theology believes that liberating actions usually occur through self-help groups, accepting responsibility, volunteer service, and joining organisations aimed at change. Only in extreme situations does conflict result in armed uprisings (Müller 2015b:64). However, this does not detract from the fact that liberation theology is a conflictual theology (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:44). Liberation theology, like Marxism, is also not interested in one class replacing another class, where the oppressed class merely becomes the oppressor (Müller 2015b:68).

The **economic base**, which is the society's **mode of production**, determines the nature of such a society. According to Marxism, all social phenomena are ultimately dependent on and determined by the economic base. A society's **ideological superstructure** is made up of the society's laws, philosophies, religions, art forms, and other "products of the mind" (Lawrie 2005:191). These do not descend from some independent spiritual dimension or the realm of pure thought but are rather products of the base. However, the ideological superstructure is not merely a reflection of the base, the dominant ideology often mystifies the actual reality at the base, but this mystified image remains an expression of the real tensions at the base. The dominant ideology in a society is the ideology that serves the ruling class by protecting the status quo (Larrain 1983:25). Marxism is aware that a ruling class's ideology is not merely a fraud committed by them to protect their position. Often, members of the dominant ruling class sincerely believe their ideology. Since they were brought up within this ideology, they are a product of their ideology and class position. The conditioned belief in the dominant ideology becomes the ruling class's **false consciousness**, which becomes the lens through which they view the world. Since they also control the means of intellectual production, it may well appear to all members of society that the dominant class's ideology is the intellectual world. One of the bondages that liberation theology seeks to liberate people from is their own blindness. As such, it is in this aspect of false consciousness that liberation theology can assist in freeing

people from their ideological prejudice and blindness. Liberation theology also seeks to liberate the oppressors from their anxiety and need to control and manipulate (Müller 2015b:74).

2.4.2.2 Marxist and materialist interpretations of texts

Literature, especially religious literature, is part of the ideological superstructure. The written word is the primary method of conveying the dominant ideology of the ruling class. Yet, texts are material objects, and therefore their production is part of the productive social labour. From a Marxist point of view, texts are a form of communication and emerge from a community or social context and take place as social processes for a particular social situation (Fuchs 2020:149). Since Marxist interpretations hold that the meaning of a text emerges within a specific concrete historical and social context, a Marxist interpreter would first need to locate the text within its historical context. Therefore, Marxists use socio-historical analysis as a starting point for their interpretation of Scripture. A Marxist approach utilises the questions asked in a socio-historical analysis of texts. Consequently, the questions asked of the text are: Who writes? Under what circumstances? For whom? And with what purpose? (Lawrie 2005:192).

However, in a Marxist approach, it is acknowledged that authors are not independent, neutral creators of meaning. Therefore, it is necessary to inquire as to the author's class position and interests; this is true of the audience as well. A Marxist approach asks: Who within a society has the leisure to write? How is the society structured to stimulate the production of certain types of texts? Who controls the publication and distribution of texts? How is the consumption of texts institutionally regulated? (Lawrie 2005:191). Since texts are the means for conveying ideology, the meanings and values attached to them cannot be taken at face value. A text is not innocent, and the problem they appear to present may be a deceptive point of departure for the interpreter. The ideological agenda of Biblical authors is often to attempt to blur or cross class divisions (Gottwald 1993:10). Sociological analysis therefore attempts to plot the contours of class and class consciousness based on when and how they are expressed or ignored within the text (Gottwald 1993:10). A Marxist reading therefore attempts to reveal how a text is rooted in its ideological context by investigating the unstated presuppositions behind the text and the silences within it. The other of the antithesis often appears indirectly and reading between the lines is necessary. Texts may assume or reinforce certain social relationships, institutions, and practices such as slavery, feudalism, capitalist production, or a hierarchical class system (Lawrie 2005:193). It is because a text may be silent about these factors that reflecting upon

them may reframe the interpretation of a text. Thus, a Marxist reading attempts to hear the silent other's voice within the text. Hearing the other's voice within the text and facilitating dialogue is also an important facet of liberation theology (Gutiérrez 2015b:117).

At this point, it must be acknowledged that, as with all interpretations that take history seriously, Marxists interpretations do contain an element of speculation since not all data is available for any given historical context. Marxist approaches now recognise that ideological products, such as texts, bear a complex relationship to the dominant ideology and the economic base. Therefore, one needs to account for far more than merely class interests and take into account the forces and relations which contribute to both the superstructure and production (Boer 2002:113). Questions that enquire into the creation of the text and the convergence of various factors, such as economic, political, and ideological factors, need to be explored when interpreting a text. A caution from liberation theology is necessary at this point, namely that the social sciences' value must not be overestimated. As valuable as the social sciences are in understanding socio-economic conditions, they are in their infancy (Gutiérrez 2015a:4). Any social-scientific understanding of a social context is subject to ideological interpretation. In acknowledging my ideo-theological approach in this research, I am attempting to create transparency and allow for the interrogation of my call to action, and my interpretation of the socio-economic context of both my context and the context of the text.

2.5 Leadership theory as a social science and analytical tool

2.5.1 Leadership theories

To develop a leadership of liberation I need to examine how leadership impacts followers and vice versa. In this section I will, therefore, give a short overview of the development of leadership theory and how leadership theory has developed to take cognisance of the various influences that impact leaders and followers alike. This discussion will allow for an analysis in chapters 3 and 4 of how leadership affects the followers' socio-economic situation.

Herbst (2014) embarks on an extensive discussion of what she calls the dark side of leadership, which is the manifestation of negative leadership due to, *inter alia*, various personality disorders of the leaders (see 2.5.5 below). In the process, she reviews the literature on leadership and identifies five main generations of leadership theories. These are trait theory, style or behavioural theory, contingency theories, transformational theories, and servant leadership (Herbst 2014:14). Ahmed, Nawaz, and Khan (2016) classify leadership theory's

development into slightly different categories. They embark on a comprehensive overview of the explanations, classifications, theories, and definitions of leadership in contemporary literature. They classify much of the organisational and social research of leadership styles and behaviours. The development of leadership theory, which these authors delineate, is the great man theory, trait theory, process leadership theory, style and behavioural theory, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership theory (Ahmed, Nawaz, and Khan 2016:1).

I will mainly be focusing on transformational leadership as a basis for exploring a leadership of liberation because, despite the existence of other leadership theories, it remains an extremely relevant and vital theory of leadership (Ahmed, Nawaz & Khan 2016:7). Early leadership theories, such as the great-man theory and the trait theory, focused on the qualities that distinguished leaders from followers. Later leadership theories, such as transactional, transformational, and skills theory, took into account other variables that influenced leadership, such as situational factors and skill levels (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube 2015:7). By taking these and other variables into account, transformational leadership theory incorporates a far more comprehensive understanding of leadership than previous theories and models (Northouse 2013:201). There are also large areas of overlap between more recent proposals of leadership styles and transformational leadership (Anderson & Sun 2017:76), thus confirming the continued relevance of transformational leadership theory. Examining the characteristics and effects of transformational leadership to analyse both contemporary MCSA leadership and the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership allows for a more critical engagement of leadership. It also avoids the pitfall of merely investigating or providing a description of a leader's traits, qualities, and behaviours (cf. Bogenschneider 2016:4). Analysing transformational leadership's characteristics and traits will help identify where leadership has the potential to be liberating or socio-economically oppressive.

2.5.2 Transformational leadership theory

Transformational leadership has been defined (in the Christian context) as:

> "leadership that declares a Biblical or Christian foundation or is specifically directed to the Church, it holds that a leader's vision, character, persuasiveness, and ability to strategize guarantee that he or she will be influential (or transformational) to achieve shared goals" (Scarborough 2010:78).

Bass (1999) argues that the transformational leader's task is to ensure that the interests of the organisation and its members are aligned. In contrast to the transactional leader who practices contingent reinforcement of followers, the transformational leader inspires, intellectually stimulates, and is individually considerate. Transformational leadership may be directive or participative, requiring higher moral development. Furthermore, women leaders tend to be more transformational than their male counterparts. The influence of women in leadership has also come to the fore in Rowe (2014), who, after examining the texts referring to the Kings of Judah from 931 BCE to 586 BCE, proposes that maternal influence leads to leaders being ethical. However, because he accepts the texts at face value and is not overtly critical of them, coupled with the fact that he views references to the king's mother as indicative of maternal influence, suggests that his conclusions are open to criticism.

Nell (2016) focuses on justice and leadership and considers what constitutes a just leader. He then uses that definition as a lens through which to view the life of Beyers Naude. The author argues that being a just leader means doing the right thing, engaging in just relationships that are characterised by justice, and then having the character trait of habitually doing the just or right thing. Miller (2009) identified the correlation between empathy and action with other known leadership dimensions that have been previously identified in leadership research. She discusses these correlations to identify more of the spectrum of behaviours that enable transformation to be an aspect of the relationship between the leader and others. She discovered that leaders appeared to be more empowering when they were perceived to be acting out of empathy. Empathy is a vital element of transformational leadership. The transformational leader needs to display consideration (listening), understanding (empathy), and action (love) (Miller 2009:56).

2.5.3 Leadership in African contexts

Since I am reading the text from an African context and appropriating it to an African context, I think that mentioning some specific aspects of leadership within African contexts is important. Khoza (2011) uses the label of 'attuned leadership' to describe leadership which is transformational within African contexts. He employs African humanism as contained within the philosophy of *ubuntu* as a compass. *Ubuntu* is derived from the Nguni phrase *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means that a person is a person through other persons (Khoza 2011:439).

A pivotal aspect of transformational leadership within African contexts is the understanding of community. Khoza argues that leadership orchestrates complexity. Using the metaphor of an orchestra, he says that attuned leadership allows individuals to perform together as a cohesive unit (Khoza 2011:15). According to Khoza, a leader pursues a destiny that reflects collective yearnings (Khoza 2011:19). He argues that learning is a pivotal part of leadership since it breaches silos and creates a shared vision (Khoza 2011:23). Learning as an aspect of leadership is something that Freire would readily have agreed with.

However, the communal nature of leadership does not remove individual identity or responsibility. The philosophy of *ubuntu* holds that individuals and communities are not stripped of their individuality or uniqueness, but rather that they all coexist in synergy with each other (Khoza 2011:116). According to Khoza (2011), the understanding of personhood as expressed within the philosophy of *ubuntu* involves relationships. *Ubuntu* does, however, change the focus of leadership. Masango (2002) holds that a leader is an agent of the people. In Africa, a leader is viewed as a servant of the clan, tribe, community or group (Masango 2002:708). Ngunjiri (2017) discusses servant leadership within the African context. According to the author, servant leadership embraces a servant model. She argues that servant leadership within African contexts includes, *inter alia,* empowerment, and care of others, healing and reconciliation, humility, and spirituality. Leadership is, therefore, earned by consistently demonstrating competency, compassion, justice, and wholeness. Therefore, an effective leader is a person who is always caring, supportive, and not controlling (Masango 2002:710). African leadership should focus on promoting love, truth, freedom, peace, reconciliation, justice, and right relations in the world (Masango 2002:713). These aspects of servant leadership are consistent with transformational leadership and liberation theology.

An understanding that right relationships are an important element of leadership then leads to another critical aspect of leadership within African contexts, which is accountability. Accountability of leadership is expressed in the understanding that stewardship is vital for leadership. Legitimate deliberation and explaining reasons for a course of action are required as this ensures that there is, in fact, accountability. Ethical deliberation is a framework for reflective behaviour. Within the African traditional village system, there was an exchange of energy between leadership and followership, which created a platform of mutual accountability (Khoza 2011:256). Leadership responsibility includes calling for reflection and evaluation whenever appropriate. The accountability for an African leaders' success was held by the

whole community (Masango 2002:713). Applying these themes would develop a community willing to be led, and a leader who is bonded to and accountable to those they lead. In Africa, leadership became a function shared by all villagers or community members, rather than a leadership vested in one person (Masango 2002:710).

For Africans, the whole of creation is sacred. There is, therefore, an understanding within African contexts that the wholeness of life is important (Pato 2000:97), an understanding which is supported by Khoza (2011). He proposes that an all-inclusive, cooperative model of sharing resources is needed to save the planet within the contemporary social and environmental crisis. Consequently, a holistic approach to leadership is vitally important, and Khoza (2011) submits that *ubuntu* can integrate all the ideals of leadership into such a holistic approach (Khoza 2011:25). Liberation theology too embraces a holistic, non-dualist view of life.

2.5.4 Key characteristics of transformational leadership

At this juncture, I will summarise the salient aspects of transformational leadership that come to the fore based on the above overview of transformational leadership, especially within African contexts. Transformational leadership elevates followers' motivation and morality, involves followers, empowers, and serves followers; transformational leaders motivate, encourage, create paradigm shifts, inspire, and induce followers. Transformational leadership deals with shared values, beliefs, and goals, and there is an importance attached to values, morals, and ethical leadership, the greater good or higher social dividend. Transformational leadership is about change, being proactive, effective, and efficient. Transformational leaders are empathetic, consider the individual and individuality as well as the community. Accountability is essential, and a holistic approach to leading is necessary. These transformational leadership characteristics are consistent with and supportive of liberation theology since the effect of exercising transformational leadership that displays these characteristics would be the empowerment and realisation of followers' full humanity, which is an objective of liberation theology.

2.5.5 The negative side of leadership

Finally, I wish briefly to mention the fact that leadership has a negative side since this is an aspect that is focused on within the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7, and negative leadership is what gave rise to this study in the first place. Kurtulmuş (2019) discusses this dark side of leadership. The author contends that the assumption is that leaders are ethical and moral and, as such

contribute to the good of the organisations and society. However, where this is not the case, such as leaders who have personality disorders and other psychological or moral deviations, the dark side of leadership comes to the fore, and damage is caused to organisations and society (Kurtulmuş 2019:2). The manifestation of the dark side of leadership is clear from situations of socio-economic oppression of followers by leadership. The discussion in this section on leadership theory, its development, essential characteristics, and its dark side provide useful insights into the effects, both positive and negative, leadership can have upon followers and *vice-versa*. Leadership can thus be a tool for either liberation or oppression. These insights into leadership and leadership's effects on followers will be employed in the analysis of leadership within this dissertation's contextualisation and distantiation poles. The aim of using these insights is not only to analyse the current and Biblical contexts of leadership but also to assist in exploring a leadership of liberation in the appropriation pole of the tri-polar model used in this dissertation based on the rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed my ideo-theological approach. I have discussed the background to liberation theology, focused on the different theologies which make up liberation theology, and provided an overview of the various methodologies and hermeneutics employed in liberation theology. I have also examined the use of social-analytical tools, especially Marxist and materialist approaches in the interpretation of texts. In concluding the chapter, I have briefly discussed the role leadership can play within a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. Having dealt with my ideo-theological choice in this chapter, I will turn to the contextualisation pole in the next chapter and discuss situations of socio-economic oppression of people by leadership within the MCSA.

Chapter 3 – Contextualisation: MCSA Leadership Contexts

"I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out."

Wesley (1787)

3.1 Introduction

Having dealt with my ideo-theological orientation in chapter 2, I will now apply it to my context. This chapter makes up the contextualisation pole of the tri-polar exegetical model. In this chapter, I undertake an analysis of the leadership situations within my current context and specifically the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. I will focus on situations of socio-economic oppression and manipulation by leaders. The chapter will aim to answer research sub-question one, which asks what the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts are. I will begin examining these contexts by discussing oppressive leadership and leadership's exploitation of socio-economically vulnerable persons. To understand the MCSA leadership contexts, I will also discuss the leadership structures within the MCSA. Thereafter, I will explore the roots of the Methodist tradition of socio-economic liberation as this is necessary for an understanding of Methodist doctrine, spirit, and discipline. Before concluding the chapter, I will undertake an in-depth exploration of contemporary areas of concern that either have caused or can cause socio-economic oppression within the MCSA.

3.2 Oppressive leadership

3.2.1 Oppressive leadership within secular society

As indicated in chapter 1, there are continual reports in the news and social media of leaders throughout the world exploiting or causing harm to people. I have cited the example of President Trump of the United States of America withholding funding to the World Health Organization, which could potentially cost people their very lives (Fabian & Du 2020). There are numerous other examples of leaders in the secular world who use their office to take

advantage of people and exploit the vulnerable for personal gain and agenda. Within my South African context, there have also been exploitative and corrupt leaders. Even during the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, there have been those who have used their positions of power to enrich themselves illegally through the diversion of funds that were earmarked for life-sustaining equipment for the socio-economically oppressed and vulnerable (Chabalala 2020). Such leadership is not restricted to the political environment. Business leaders have been equally complicit (Mavuso 2020). As a result of corrupt leadership and money stolen from state coffers during the administration of former president Jacob Zuma (2009-2018), it was necessary to set up the Zondo Judicial Commission of Inquiry to investigate the depth of corruption, theft, and fraud in transactions between governmental departments, organisations, and the private business sector. Consequently, in addition to the billions of Rands misappropriated by corrupt officials and business leaders, the Zondo Commission has cost South African taxpayers over four hundred million Rand as of November 2019 (Chothia 2019). As of the date of writing this dissertation, the Zondo Commission is still busy with its investigations and thereby increasing the costs of this Commission. Had it not been for corruption and exploitative leadership, the costs of the inquiry and the misappropriated money could have been used to uplift the poor, the marginalised, and the vulnerable.

3.2.2 Oppressive leadership within the church

As also indicated in chapter 1, the church is not immune to corrupt and exploitative leadership. For example, the self-proclaimed prophet, Shepherd Bushiri, and his wife have been accused of illegal financial activities (News24 2019). Ministers are accused of defrauding their congregation members and taking advantage of their positions to enrich themselves (Insurance Chat 2020). The prevalence of ministers being involved in unethical conduct is certainly not a new phenomenon, but alarmingly it appears to be on the increase (Miya 2018; Parkinson 2019). Leadership has undoubtedly become toxic when congregation members kill each other to secure leaders in positions of power (Mokoali 2020). The socio-economic exploitation of congregations by MCSA ministers has also become an area of concern (Storey 2004:82). As a member of the MCSA, this is my main area of focus and concern. I have personally witnessed a Methodist minister who conducted a pre-offertory message on how tithing unlocks heaven's treasury. His message is not in keeping with Methodist doctrine and appears to be purely an attempt to manipulate people into giving more money. In section 3.3 below, I discuss the structures within the MCSA and how ministers benefit when the congregation gives more money to the church.

3.2.3 The South African socio-economic context

I find it abhorrent that ministers and preachers manipulate the Gospel for personal benefit. However, this is made even worse when one considers most communities' socio-economic situation within Southern Africa. Many people live in poverty and in conditions where many of their basic physical needs for nutrition and housing are not met. The failure to meet these basic socio-economic needs is aggravated by greed-driven corruption on all levels of government, private sector businesses, and churches. The disparity between the rich and the poor is growing at an alarming rate (Vermeulen 2005:169). Unemployment is also a considerable concern resulting in homelessness, a drain on resources, and increased crime. We live in a socio-economic reality where the rich oppress the poor and employees are not valued for their intrinsic worth but for what they can add to their employers' profit margins. Traditional family structures are breaking down because of migrant labour and HIV/Aids (August & Müller 2011:6). Current social relief is vastly inadequate to meet the extent of the need for assistance within the country and is unsustainable (World Bank Group 2018: xxvi). Considering these factors that are part of many communities' daily reality, the idea that church leadership becomes another site of socio-economic oppression is a travesty. A place where people long for liberation and empowerment has become a place where there is death and disempowerment.

3.2.4 Poverty

At this stage, however, I want to acknowledge, for the sake of balance, that poverty is not only a socio-economic issue but is also a spiritual and psychological issue. Liberation theology acknowledges that poverty is a complex and multifaceted reality (Gutiérrez 1988:22). Our attitudes and attachment to money and the lack thereof also contribute to socio-economic oppression. Broadly there are four defined stages of poverty (TEEC 2006b:61). The first stage of poverty is being unemployed, where poverty is a way of life. This often leads to a sense of desperation and powerlessness. Generally, at this level, the person believes God is not concerned for them as they are too insignificant (TEEC 2006b:61). Secondly, there is being employed, but expenses always exceed income, and a feeling of hopelessness manifests. People at this level often have an idea about God being about rules and laws (TEEC 2006b:61). Thirdly a simple, debt-free lifestyle is adopted, and the person views God as the centre of their lives and builds a relationship with God (TEEC 2006b:61). Finally, there is the level of being called to embrace holy poverty like the mendicants. At this level, the person has embraced a life of contemplation either in or separated from the world (TEEC 2006b:61). Many members of the

MCSA would find themselves at either level 1 or 2 of these four stages of poverty because of the high level of poverty within South Africa (World Bank Group 2018:xx). It does not take much imagination to see how those on levels 1 and 2, who are the most severely economically oppressed, can easily be manipulated by spiritual leaders because of their desperation and possible misunderstandings about the nature of God. See, for example, tactics of televangelist Todd Coontz who proclaims that God has called him as a 'financial deliverer' and pressurises viewers to donate specified amounts as 'seeds' invested in their future (Baker 2019).

3.3 Structures of leadership within the MCSA

3.3.1 Classes, societies, circuits, synods and the connexion

To understand how socio-economic oppression and exploitation may occur within the MCSA, it is necessary to understand how the MCSA is structured. This will allow for an understanding of the levels of leadership within the MCSA. The core of the Methodist movement, as started by John Wesley and his brother Charles in the eighteenth century, is the class meeting (Nyobole 2006:139). The class consists of a small group of Methodists, usually no more than 12, who meet weekly. A class leader runs the class. Therefore, a class leader is the first tier of leadership within the Methodist Church and is effectively the heart and soul of Methodism. The class members belong to a local community or congregation called a society within the Methodist Church. Societies consist of the members of the Methodist Church who meet weekly. The society is run by the leaders' meeting which consists of the leaders of that society. The leaders are mostly lay persons, but the leaders' meeting is overseen by a minister (MCSA 2016:85). The executive functions of the leaders' meeting vests in the society stewards. The members of the leaders' meeting and the society stewards are thus the next tiers of leadership.

The societies within a geographical area form a circuit. A circuit also has a leadership structure, which consists of lay leaders and clergy. A number of circuits then form a synod (previously referred to as districts). The synod leadership structure consists of a synod executive that is comprised of the Bishop for that synod, a secretary, and lay leaders. The main decision-making body at synod level is the annual general synod. As is clear from the structure of the synods, there are various leadership positions within each synod. There are currently 15 synods within the MCSA (MCSA 2020b). All the synods together form the connexion. The connexion is led by the connexional executive, which consists of the Presiding Bishop (PB), a secretary, and other leaders, both clergy and lay. The ultimate decision-making body at the connexional level within the MCSA is the annual conference. The MCSA, together with other Methodist

connexions across the globe, form the World Methodist Council. Responsibility for the administrative functions, leadership coordination, and governance of the MCSA vests in the Methodist connexional office (MCO). The MCO operates under the direction of the annual conference and the leadership of the PB (MCSA 2020b). The PB's office has oversight over all the units within the MCO and synods.

3.3.2 The organisations

In addition to the structures mentioned in 3.3.1, there are various committees, organisations, and units within the MCSA. Of importance for my discussion on leadership are the Wesley Guild, the Young Men's Guild, and the Women's Manyano. These are independent organisations within the MCSA with their own constitutions. These organisations aim to promote spirituality and do mission work. Each of these organisations is also structured in a manner parallel to the MCSA structure, and therefore they have leadership at the society, circuit, synod, and connexional levels.

The importance of discussing the structures within the MCSA is to note the various tiers of leadership. Leaders at these various levels are accountable but, by and large, operate independently and are responsible for those they lead, whether that is a class, society, or organisation. Lay leadership has always been a feature of Methodism. Even from its inception as a movement within the Church of England, John Wesley appointed lay preachers to preach and care for the societies. Class leaders were and are still lay members. As can be gathered from this brief analysis of these structures, there is ample opportunity and need for leaders, both lay and clergy, within the MCSA. This then results in opportunities for positive leadership to grow, empower, transform, and liberate people. However, at the same time, there is ample opportunity for people to be oppressed socio-economically and manipulated by negative leadership within the MCSA. The risk of socio-economic oppression is especially true when dealing with the organisations. These organisations focus on fundraising, ostensibly for mission work. However, they place enormous pressure on their members to contribute to their annual missional fundraising drives known as *Rhona.*

At this juncture, I must discuss the background of the MCSA and John Wesley's focus on the poor since this will put into perspective the mission focus of the MCSA and its organisations and why fundraising is a core focus of the organisations. It is vital that we understand the past

and how it has shaped the present to analyse the present to determine how it will shape the future (Kumalo 2009:1).

3.4 Wesleyan tradition of socio-economic liberation

3.4.1 The start of Methodism

John and Charles Wesley and fellow students at Oxford University started meeting regularly in 1729 to grow spiritually and hold each other accountable for their spiritual growth. This group continued to grow, and John Wesley would go about England preaching, with people being converted in response to his preaching. Wesley's aim was never to start a new church but rather to start a renewal movement within the Anglican Church (Kumalo, 2009:3). Part of Wesley's methodology was to place new converts within groups to ensure their continued nurture, growth, and accountability. These small groups were called bands (Hulley 2006:25). Bands were designed to be a place of confession and accountability within a small group. As Methodism grew, structures needed to become more formalised to meet the needs of the movement. In 1742 there was a meeting of the Bristol society members to discuss how to pay the societies' debts. A suggestion was made that class leaders be appointed to collect dues from the members. This initiative was adopted, so class leaders were initially appointed solely to collect the members' dues. However, Wesley immediately saw the benefit of class leaders having pastoral oversight of the class members. As a result, the class system became a structure to nurture discipleship and spiritual growth (Watson 1991:43). In organising people into classes and societies, Wesley created a structure that allowed for ordinary people to hold offices of leadership as leaders, stewards and local preachers (Hulley 2006:30).

3.4.2 Social holiness

For John Wesley, the central focus of ministry, in fact of the Christian life, is love, both love for God and our fellow human beings. For him, love needed to be practical. As a preacher, he would, therefore, not only preach the Gospel but also take care of the people's physical needs by providing them with food and clothing (Hulley 2006:79). Our Christian duty then, according to Wesley, is our duty towards God and our duty towards humanity. For Wesley there was, therefore, no distinction between the spiritual needs of people and their physical needs. He did not compartmentalise his Christian faith into spiritual and physical, but instead embraced a holistic view of the Christian life. This holistic view of Christianity also pushed Wesley to not differentiate between one's private spiritual life and one's engagement with social issues. For Wesley, Christianity was not separate from the world around us and thus personal piety and

acts of social justice were inseparable. Wesley therefore did not see Christianity as a private faith but instead declared that Christ knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness. His view on the social nature of Christianity is captured in the preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, where Wesley says that 'Holy Solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the Gospel than 'Holy Adulterers' (Wesley & Wesley 1739: viii). For Wesley, the fundamental understanding of social holiness, also called 'Scriptural holiness', was love for God and our neighbours (Matt 22:37:40), reflected in the way we live and care for other people. According to Wesley, we are not called to be solitary Christians who live lives of secluded piety, but, instead, we are called to spread God's love through active engagement with society and opposing those things which oppress people and keep them in bondage. Wesley said that those who love God would have a burning desire within them to love others and show God's love to them (Hulley 2006:80).

The desire to love others and show God's love for them was visible in Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, who not only engaged in acts of piety but also acts of mercy.[3] They would care for the poor, teach orphans, and visit those in prison (Heitzenrater 2013:44). This care for others grew in Wesley over the years and was a hallmark of the early Methodists. Wesley started loan societies, medical help, and Strangers' Friends Societies. In Wesley's day, there was a massive disparity between the rich and poor. People did not have adequate access to health care or financial resources, and many were illiterate. Wesley aimed to restore the poor's dignity and set them free from bondages such as alcohol, gambling, lethargy, and debt (Kumalo, 2009:5). This desire to liberate the poor and restore human dignity is also a driving motivator in liberation theology. For Wesley, it did no good for Christians to live holy lives and ignore those who are poor and in need around them. In fact, Wesley would go so far as to say that you cannot live a holy life unless you care for the poor and needy (c.f. Jam 2:14-17).

This focus on meeting people's spiritual and physical needs led to Wesley expanding his rule of life, one which Methodists still follow, from merely doing no harm and refraining from avoiding all evil, to doing all the good we can, in all the ways we can, to all the people we can (MCSA 2016:26). Wesley's focus on the poor almost bordered on the obsessive. Thus, at the age of 82, he went from house to house in the middle of winter, begging money to buy food

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[3] Acts of piety relate to spiritual disciplines in worshipping God whilst acts of mercy refer to those acts of charity and care for others.

and clothing for the poor, which resulted in him becoming severely ill (Hulley 2006:89). As with liberation theologians' praxis of social analysis to understand the causes of poverty, Wesley also investigated the causes of poverty, holding that, in his context, the causes of poverty were distilling, taxes, and luxury (Heitzenrater 2013:219). While Wesley's social analysis was not as refined as modern-day theologians', noting the similarities confirms the validity of investigating the underlying causes of oppression and analysing the structures that keep them in place.

3.4.3 Money and wealth

One may well think that Wesley was opposed to money, but this is not the case. Wesley specifically encouraged Methodists to earn all they can. He also encouraged them to save all that they can (Oosthuizen 2012:170). Wesley did not mean by saving all you can that you put money away into a savings account or investment. Instead, it was directed at not spending money on unnecessary or luxury items. His concern, however, was that wealth would erode Christianity. He expressed this as follows:

> 'Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency in process of time to undermine and destroy itself? For wherever true Christianity spreads it must cause diligence and frugality, which, in the natural course of things, must beget riches. And riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity. Now if there be no way to prevent this, Christianity is inconsistent with itself, and of consequence cannot stand, cannot continue long among any people; since, wherever it generally prevails, it saps its own foundation' (Wesley in Jennings 1990:135).

To avoid wealth eroding Christianity, Wesley encouraged Methodists not only to earn and save all that they could, but also to give all that they could (Jennings 1990:135).

3.4.4 Methodism as a liberation theology

Wesley is an example of a leader who embraced a spirituality that restores dignity to people and transforms society. William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army and a former member of the Methodist Church, expanded on Wesley's spirituality, which was concerned with and pursued social holiness by adopting a spirituality which aimed to restore God's purpose for humanity (TEEC 2006a:103). While Freire's spirituality (discussed in chapter 2)

was under the label of liberation theology, he, like Wesley and Booth, was concerned with the humanisation of those who had been dehumanised. However, Wesley did not endorse social revolution and, on this point, Wesley and Freire's, and other liberation theologians' spiritualities differ markedly. Wesley believed that society's transformation would occur as a result of the transformation of people's inner lives rather than through civil revolution (Kumalo 2009:6). Freire pushed for change in the social structure by educating the oppressed so that they would be able to remould their world (TEEC 2006a:104). Freire, Booth, and Wesley exercised their spirituality in order to oppose and fight injustice. However, unlike many liberation theologians, Wesley remained obedient to the powers in authority and would not revert to the level of disruption or revolution. For Booth, too, fighting social injustice did not mean revolution but rather meant walking in purity and grace.

I have discussed these leaders to highlight the broad spectrum that liberation theologians embrace and how their spirituality and theology overlap. Even though some are not called liberation theologians, such as Booth and Wesley, their spirituality clearly has a liberation focus. Like most liberation theologians, Wesley had a pragmatic approach to theology. He was first concerned about people's daily lived experiences in his context rather than any systematic theology (Kumalo 2009:7). Therefore, even though the label of liberation theology as pioneered by Gutiérrez is relatively recent, the understanding of liberation as an agenda of the Gospel has been around substantially longer.

3.4.5 Structures as instruments

As can be seen from the above brief discussion on John Wesley's theology and approach to Christianity, it becomes apparent that the Methodist heritage is steeped in what has become known as a preferential option for the poor (Storey 2004:40). John Wesley was inspired by God to lead a movement that rekindled and revived what it means to be a Christian. Various factors made Methodism as effective a movement as it was in spreading scriptural holiness across England and other parts of the world. These, which now form part of the MCSA's heritage, were open-air preaching, class meetings, lay preachers, and the abundance of hymns written by John and Charles Wesley. All these factors, along with the connexionalism of Methodism, ensured a strong, dynamic, resource-rich, and sound movement. However, it is crucial for MCSA members to remember that none of these structures or organisations were an end in themselves; rather they were subservient to the greater goal of Christian mission (Storey 2004:23). Wesley was not inflexible but was prepared to adapt and incorporate new strategies.

Thus, he asked questions such as, "Is it Christian? Does it work?" when exploring new ways of doing and being a church. If these questions were answered in the affirmative, Wesley would readily incorporate new strategies or structures into the Methodist movement.

3.4.6 A balanced spirituality

Methodism aims to encompass all that is required to be a Christian while keeping the various disciplines and practices of discipleship in balance. Thus, at the annual synod conferences, Methodist ministers are asked questions that focus on them continuing in their pursuit of personal and social holiness (MCSA 2016:189). Methodist doctrine follows Wesley's insistence on maintaining a balanced blend between passion and intellect, love and discipline, personal and social religion, and faith and works. As Storey (2004:46) states:

> A Wesleyan Methodist is one who grows from Baptism, through the experience of a warmed heart into a life of disciplined love for God and neighbour expressed in acts of devotion and worship, compassion and justice and is willing to be held accountable by fellow believers. **Further, they take an intentional option to stand with the poor, the marginalized against the principalities and powers that hold people in bondage**, witnessing to the Gospel by word and deed" (my emphasis).

This balance eliminates the risk of migrating toward doing only what we find comfortable and neglecting those aspects of being a Christian that might go against our natural inclinations. This is a powerful aspect of Methodism since it avoids the trap we all so easily succumb to, namely becoming a 'holy club' by neglecting our neighbour or becoming so focused on outreach that we are little else than a social benefit organisation. The importance of this aspect of Methodism for this research is that even, though there is a strong focus in Methodism on raising money for the poor, personal piety, spirituality, and accountability have always been at the heart of the Methodist movement. When we lose sight of this balance, socio-economic exploitation by leadership within MCSA contexts can become a reality because leaders lose their sense of ethics and accountability.

3.4.7 A rich liberation heritage

As the MCSA, we are in the fortunate position that our heritage not only includes the work of Wesley, but also of the early Methodist missionaries and those who have gone before us. Thus, the use of indigenous preachers and the establishment of schools by the early Methodists in

South Africa have created a rich Methodist ethos of social upliftment and education (Gqubule 2006:80). Wesley saw education as liberating and empowering, and thus early Methodist missionaries started mission schools in South Africa. The apartheid government, through its Bantu Education Act of 1953, severely impacted the mission schools' ability to continue providing quality education to Black South Africans, something they had been doing since their arrival in South Africa (Kumalo 2009:16).

Education is one example of the Methodist heritage of liberation; this heritage is not only a historical artifact. The MCSA has been influenced by liberation theology and, in turn, many within the MCSA have adopted liberation theology within their ministry. There are numerous examples of leaders, since the arrival of Methodism in Southern Africa in 1816, who have continued to transform and liberate people. We therefore have a legacy of liberation theologians, such as Ernest Baartman, within the MCSA. Baartman founded the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC), which gave Black ministers a space to reflect on the contribution of Black people to the leadership and ministry of the MCSA (Kumalo 2020:8). Another Methodist who sought liberation was Dr. Simon Gqubule, who, like Pablo Freire (discussed in 2.2.2.3 and 3.4.4), viewed education as a means for liberation. Gqubule advocated in 1972 for the opening of all universities in South Africa to all people from all over Africa. He believed that this would result in liberation for both black and white South Africans (Kumalo 2020:37).

During apartheid and especially following the Sharpeville massacre, where the police opened fire on black protestors and killed sixty-nine people, the MCSA took a stand against the apartheid government and sided with the poor and oppressed (Kumalo 2009:15). Other examples include the important resolution which shaped the direction of the MCSA of 1958 that declared that the MCSA to "be one and undivided" (MCSA 2016:239); the setting up of the Renewal Commission in the 1970s which aimed to bring changes to the entrenched institutionalism of the MCSA by looking at issues such as women in ministry, a stipend equalization fund and integrating racially separated circuits; the call to obedience to God in 1981 and the work of The Black Methodist Consultation which facilitated black ministers stepping into positions of leadership in what was then a white dominated arena. The Christian Institute (CI), which was founded in 1963, responded to the apartheid government's policies by creating a space to respond theologically to the oppression of apartheid. They introduced and incorporated many liberation theologians' work into their approaches and theology. These

liberation theologies and the CI influenced many Methodist ministers, among them Rev. Charles Villa-Vicencio, who recognised the liberating resources which are present within the Christian tradition (Kumalo 2009:20). Another Methodist minister who became a foremost liberation theologian within the South African context was Itumeleng Mosala. In the 1980s Mosala became involved with the Black Consciousness Movement and later, after the 1994 elections, accepted a position working for government. He held firm to his conviction to remain involved in these organisations even in the face of opposition from within the MCSA, because he saw his involvement in organisations outside of the church as an extension of the ministry of the church to stand on the side of the poor and oppressed (Kumalo 2009:144).

Another example of liberation theology's influence on Methodism is the story of the Central Methodist Mission in Durban. In the 1980s, the ministers at Central Methodist Durban, Rev. Dr. Norman Hudson and Rev. Mike Vorster, exercised their ministry under the influence of liberation theology and the belief in God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed, which underpinned Latin American liberation theology (Kumalo 2009:67). They believed that Central in Durban needed to become an activist-church which responded to the political climate nationally. They engaged, therefore, in critical opposition against the apartheid government. They and other Ministers who used this approach defined their ministries as bringing the liberating message of the Gospel to bear on the forces which oppress people (Kumalo 2009:68). Unlike some of their predecessors, Hudson and Vorster did not take sides with the oppressor by remaining silent in the face of injustice (Kumalo 2009:70).

Unfortunately, even though the MCSA is a church whose leadership should be focused on liberation and social upliftment, the example of Central Methodist Durban is an exception rather than a rule. There are clergy and laity who still hold to the belief, as did many white South Africans during apartheid, that "our job is to preach the Gospel and not to get involved in politics" (Hudson 2009:74).

3.5 Situations of socio-economic oppression within MCSA leadership contexts
3.5.1 Introduction
As has been indicated previously, the MCSA, like all other churches, is not immune to leaders who take advantage of their communities. In this section, I will be discussing various documents relating to MCSA conference resolutions, papers and articles, and other written sources relating to socio-economic issues that call attention to situations or potential situations

of socio-economic oppression within the MCSA. Part of this discussion will include an evaluation of whether the measures proposed by various MCSA interest groups were appropriate and led to liberating people or whether the situations of economic oppression remain. The situations of socio-economic oppression identified in this section will be the context to which I will apply the insights gained from rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7. The application will be done in chapter 5 under the appropriation pole following the rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus in chapter 4.

3.5.2 Stipends as a site of socio-economic oppression

A resolution passed by the MCSA (2020a) called for transparency in the payment of stipends and allowances to ministers. This resolution is necessary because some ministers are receiving excessive amounts, while other communities cannot support their ministers financially. The disparity between what ministers receive based on their location and their congregation's ability to support them has long been an issue within the MCSA. The state of affairs is captured by Storey (2004:75) when he highlights the fact that those ministers who labour among the poor and marginalised communities are paid far less than their colleagues who minister in the more wealthy and affluent societies. To understand how this disparity occurs, it is necessary to explain briefly how stipends are paid to ministers within the MCSA.

Each circuit within the MCSA is levied an amount that they are required to pay to the MCO every month. The amount levied is then divided between the various societies within a circuit based on how many ministers they have. The amount levied is called an assessment and covers the cost of the minister and additional administrative expenses of the MCO pro-rata between the various circuits[4]. The cause of the disparity in stipend payments is, therefore, twofold. Firstly, those societies and circuits who can afford to pay their assessments can generally pay their clergy additional amounts and allowances. Secondly, those ministers who labour in poor societies and circuits sometimes do not get paid their stipends from the MCO because their congregations cannot pay their assessments to the MCO every month. Therefore, those

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[4] Currently the assessment per minister is R27 700,00 (MCSA 2020a:191). However, in addition to this amount the society needs to pay supernumerary fund contributions, supernumerary fund reserve/church reserve contributions, extraordinary affliction grants, furlough allowances, removal reimbursements and provide accommodation for the minister.

ministers who follow the Gospel call and John Wesley's example to minister to the poor and needy are effectively punished when it comes to remuneration.

In response to this inequality in the payment of stipends, the Doctrine Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) of the MCSA drafted a proposal in 2007 for consideration by the MCSA. Amongst other things, DEWCOM affirmed:

- That the stipend debate is about Connexional holiness before it is about finance.
- That the present stipend system should change to favour justice and mission.
- That non-payment of ministers should never be tolerated.
- That parity/equality does not mean 'sameness'.
- That scripture calls us to embody the values of both freedom and fairness in our economic systems.
- That we share Connexionally in proportion to our relative wealth for the common good of all.
- That 'gifts' be permitted on condition that all monies are declared through the MCO.
- That any new system will only work if it is based upon trust, truth and transparency.
- That any new system needs to be sensitive to our African context of enormous economic disparities.
- That our stipend system be constantly critiqued in the light of Jesus' teaching and example.
(DEWCOM 2007:2)

DEWCOM, therefore, called for the present stipend system to change to one that can creatively hold together the values and principles of fairness and freedom while remaining open to the Gospel challenge to continually live generously and sacrificially (DEWCOM 2007:11). This led to creating a stipend augmentation fund that attempts to ensure that all ministers receive a minimum stipend at least. However, the system of stipend payments has not been sufficiently addressed to date and there remains inequality and disparity in the payment of ministers within the MCSA because affluent churches continue to pay their ministers additional stipends while those ministers who labour in areas which struggle run the risk of not even receiving the minimum amounts due.

3.5.3 A preferential option for the rich

The financial needs of the MCO and the MCSA have resulted in the MCSA no longer being a church for the least, the poor and the marginalised. Rather, in attempting to ensure sufficient funds are available to cover all the administrative costs and clergy stipends, we have become a

church that ministers to those who have (Storey 2004:72). As Storey (2004:72) points out, South Africans are divided between those who have some sort of financial options, such as employment or a place to stay, and those who don't. Fifty-three percent (53%) of South Africans fall into the category of having some sort of financial options. The other 47% live in abject poverty (Storey 2004:72). Since many MCSA societies are located in the townships and suburbs, most of the resources of the MCSA are being used to minister to the "haves", whilst the MCSA does not reach those who live in abject poverty with the Gospel. This state of affairs is completely contrary to our Methodist roots and the example set by the Wesleys and early Methodists. However, this phenomenon is not only limited to Southern Africa; Methodist churches in the United States of America (USA) have also found themselves no longer being a church of the poor. They are uncomfortable being called a church for the poor. In an attempt to be authentic and acknowledge the reality of their own wealth, they have wrestled with relabelling their ministry. The United Methodist Church (UMC) in the USA has thus journeyed through calling their outreach "mission alongside the poor" (Macquiban 2002:160) to now calling it "ministry with the poor" (UMC 2017).

Not only are the MCSA's resources deployed for the more affluent, but the MCSA regularly withdraws resources from communities that can no longer afford to pay for a minister. There are many cases of societies within the MCSA that used to be relatively affluent and had a resident minister ministering to their needs who no longer have one. This resulted because, as the economic situation within South Africa deteriorated and the dynamics within certain areas changed, these societies became less and less able to pay the monthly assessments required by the MCSA. *The Laws and Discipline of the MCSA* provides that where a circuit does not meet its assessment or other financial commitment for 3 (three) consecutive months it shall lose control of its finances, the choice of ministerial assistance and may even be amalgamated with another circuit or disbanded (MCSA 2016:112). Inevitably what happens is that the ministers of societies within a circuit which cannot contribute to the circuit assessment are moved elsewhere leaving the society without a resident minister. A documented example of such a society is Durban Central Mission which I have previously mentioned in 3.4.6 and will discuss in more detail below. In my home circuit, we had two societies, namely Davidsonville and St Mark's, which had their own buildings and used to have resident ministers. However, both societies within that circuit reached a point where they could no longer afford a minister. These then have to cope as best they can with local preachers and clergy from other societies within the circuit who come once a month or once a quarter to administer the Sacraments. During

2020 I assisted at Estcourt Methodist which is another society that used to have a resident minister but was unable to afford the assessments. Since around 2018 they have been relying on student ministers from the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) to assist them. Needless to say that, with many of these societies, the spiritual life and vibrancy of the community often suffers with fewer and fewer members. If their membership continues to drop, they eventually are no longer categorised as societies but rather preaching places which often then shut down entirely after limping along as best they could for years.

Not all societies that do not have resident ministers deteriorate. Some have actually flourished without a minister. This is often because the reprieve from having to pay assessments allows them to become financially stable. With good lay leadership and financial resources they are then able to engage in outreach ministries. One such example is Central Methodist Mission in Durban referred to above. Kumalo (2009) documents the history of Central Methodist Mission from its establishment with the arrival of Rev Archbell in 1842. One of the purposes in documenting the history of Central Methodist Mission was to present some lessons for the future for the MCSA that were learnt through the experience of Central Methodist Mission (Kumalo 2009:vi). From 2004 the congregation was without a minister and had a debt of R2,6 million which was owed to MCO (Kumalo 2009:102). From 2004 to 2006 Kumalo was appointed to minister on a part time basis at Central Methodist Mission. During this time he helped the lay leadership develop plans and strategies which aided the church in growing numerically and resulted in them paying off their debt (Kumalo 2009:111). Through documenting the history of Central Methodist Mission and his personal experience of being involved with the church, Kumalo learnt value lessons which we need to take note of. One such lesson is the danger that ministers resort to a consumer ethic and attempt to manipulate money from affluent members instead of encouraging them to see themselves as stewards of resources for the entire community (Kumalo 2009:137). Another lesson learnt is that people become hesitant to give if they do not trust the leadership and there is no transparency and accountability of how money that has been collected was used (Kumalo 2009:130). As church leaders, we will do well to remember that from a liberation theology perspective power lies in the hands of the people; the people are the church, not its hierarchy and hierarchical structures (Kumalo 2009:25).

The situations discussed above indicate that the MCSA finds itself in a position where it is meant to be a church for the poor but is, instead, a church for the wealthy. Societies are forced

to pay fairly heavy assessments to the MCO for the 'privilege' of having a clergy in their midst. When they can no longer afford these assessments, the MCSA effectively abandons them. The MCSA's response to those who cannot afford a minister is a far cry from Wesley's call for Methodists to not "only go to those who want you but to those who want you most" (MCSA 2016:182). The question then also needs to be asked as to what this community has to show for the many years of investment that they have made into the MCSA? Are we transforming, empowering, and liberating communities, or are we merely divesting them of resources?

3.5.4 Avoiding the suffering of others

Economic division within the MCSA is not limited only to the clergy. Storey (2004:73) shows that division along economic lines has become quite widespread within many Methodist churches even though Methodist origins held a preferential option for the poor. He labels this phenomenon which allows for the poor to be discriminated against by the wealthy the *Dives syndrome*[5]. The syndrome manifests itself when those who come from poor and oppressed backgrounds manage to find themselves in a situation of prosperity and turn a blind eye to the impoverished situations from which they came. This is not a new phenomenon or one which is specific to any particular race group. Storey uses the example of the poor white Methodists of the 1920s who ignored the poor once they had become prosperous. The same, according to Storey, is happening within black communities. Since more and more previously disadvantaged black people are becoming financially prosperous within the post-apartheid democratic South Africa, a tendency for discrimination has risen within black township churches. In other words, this discrimination takes place along economic and not racial lines. An example of this was also seen at Central Methodist Mission in Durban where three distinct services were held catering for different socio-economic groups. One service catered for young black professionals and the afternoon service was comprised mostly of lower middle-income people (Kumalo 2009:83). Storey (2004) cites instances where congregation members of township churches who find themselves in diverse socio-economic communities experience division within the church because informal settlement shack-dwelling congregants are told that they have no place worshipping with the house-owning class (Storey 2004:73). This is a situation that shockingly seems to be regarded as acceptable by certain Methodist clergy. When some Methodist ministers attempt to confront these injustices and reach out to those who are

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[5] From the parable of the rich man (*dive* in Latin) and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and it describes the phenomenon of the wealthy not noticing the poor around them.

on the margins and to minister to the poorest of the poor in informal settlements, they are reprimanded and cautioned against it by their colleagues (Storey 2004:74).

The segregation along socio-economic lines is aggravated by the fact that those who are in positions of comfort generally lack compassion for those who live in oppression and poverty. Nevertheless, when we encounter those who suffer, and especially if we spend time with them, then we experience their suffering and there is a likelihood that we will be transformed as a result of this encounter (Hudson 1999:22). Such transformation is aptly demonstrated within liberation theology which arose as a result of theologians wanting to minister to the poor and the oppressed whom they encountered. Wesley would certainly have agreed with this understanding since, according to him, the rich have such little sympathy for the poor because they seldom visit them (Jennings 1990:55). However, it remains more comfortable to avoid encountering our own inner poverty and pain and the suffering of those around us. Similarly, many who come from backgrounds of poverty and oppression shun any encounter with those who may remind them of their pain. Those, especially males, whether black or white, who have managed to improve their lot financially, generally avoid a journey 'downwards' to encounter the poor and the oppressed (Storey 2004:74). Our self-centered inclinations therefore make it easier for us to keep a separation between the wealthy and the poor.

It is not only the poor that are avoided. Christians in general have a tendency to shy away from socio-economic and political issues. This reticence was aptly demonstrated during the apartheid era when, in the 1980s, charismatic churches within South Africa invited tele-evangelists to speak in their churches. Many of these tele-evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, Robert Schuller, and Oral Roberts dismissed the protest against apartheid and preached messages which diverted attention from the social issues and the Gospel mandate of liberation (Kumalo 2009:25). MCSA ministers who continued to preach against the heresy of apartheid lost members, mainly in the white suburbs, to the charismatic churches that avoided engaging with social issues (Kumalo 2009:25). Since the MCO needs the wealthy's income, leadership is hesitant to challenge these attitudes of separation and division along economic lines, just as ministers were hesitant to preach about political and racial issues in the 1980s.

3.5.5 The shackles of property ownership

Olivier (2005) points out that socio-economic oppression may well have become systemic within the MCSA. The MCSA, as of 2004, had a property portfolio of three billion rand (Olivier

2005:6). The concern here is not so much the fact that the MCSA has such a vast property portfolio. Instead, there is enormous pressure placed on members to raise funds to maintain the properties, pay ministers, and cover other administrative costs in running the MCO. Something seems questionable in this situation. Olivier (2005:6) also argues that the amount spent by the MCSA on missions is minimal compared to its property holdings. If the MCSA raised income to empower and liberate the oppressed, marginalised and poor, it would undoubtedly be in line with liberation theology and John Wesley's approach to money while bringing much needed alleviation to those who are suffering. However, needing to raise money to maintain overhead structures is oppressive and contrary to liberation and certainly contrary to Methodist roots.

Of particular concern on the point of structures being oppressive and exploitative is that the MCSA acknowledged this fact in 1993 and confirmed that God's transforming power can release people from bondage to structures and enable us to celebrate people in all their wide variety (Kumalo 2009:32). As part of an initiative to revision the role of the MCSA in the changing political landscape of South Africa, the MCSA called for a convocation in 1993 naming this revisioning process *Journey to a New Land* (Kumalo 2009:30). As part of this process, the MCSA covenanted to, *inter alia*, renew their structures to serve both the mission of the church and its people; to channel their resources in ways which affirmed their call to unity and urged the MCSA societies to engage in development programmes (MCSA 1993:373). At the same conference, the MCSA affirmed that their focus was wrongly on maintenance at the expense of mission and declared that they were serious about addressing this problem by changing the MCSA structures (Kumalo 2009:34). One has to question how much of this has materialised over the last 27 years. While acknowledging that there has been enormous change in certain aspects of the MCSA's structures, such as conference and synod agendas being more inclusive of women and youth, and incorporating racial equity, the failure to fully implement the transformational process as outlined by the MCSA's *Journey to a New Land* (Kumalo 2009:38) has left situations of socio-economic oppression entrenched, as described in this chapter. Much therefore still needs to change before the goals aspired to are fully realised.

This is not to say that property ownership is bad, *per se*. The initial reasons for acquiring property were mostly for empowering and liberating people. The property was initially acquired to build mission stations (Gqubule 2005:74). These would generally include schools, clinics, and community empowerment programmes. An excellent example of this is the sub-

division of land in the Edendale area around 1866 by the Methodist Minister Rev. James Allison, which he sold to black people in exchange for labour. This was a radical and liberating praxis and use of land for the era (Kumalo 2009:57). Therefore, the ownership of property can be a tool in liberation; however, under the current socio-economic situation within Southern Africa, the MCSA's property holding may be a tool of oppression rather than liberation. Therefore, what was once a tool for empowerment and liberation has now become a tool of oppression and bondage. Property ownership inherently contains this duality. As Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us." (UK Parliament 2021). This reality was witnessed within Methodism as early as the late 1800s. Following the rapid spread of Methodism in the former British colony of Natal and the establishment of mission stations, the Methodist focus changed from being mission orientated and establishing new mission stations to maintenance and maintaining what was already there (Kumalo 2009:61). Kumalo (2009) comments that, after this initial growth, Methodist mission work can be described as modest at best and is actually in decline.

3.5.6 The allure of the prosperity Gospel

There may, however, be some resistance to the MCSA releasing itself from the shackles of property ownership even though Wesley was quite clear that structures were there purely to serve mission. If structures no longer serve mission, the structures must be changed or abandoned. This need to retain property is especially problematic when we measure success by capitalist society's standards. When prosperity is seen as God's approval and poverty as inconsistent with the Gospel, the trappings and oppression of capitalism and wealth become all too apparent.

Vermeulen (2005) is one voice within the MCSA who challenges the capitalist financial model. According to him (2005:161), free-market capitalism increases the gap between the rich and the poor. As Vermeulen righty points out, Methodists need to align themselves not with the wealthy, prosperous, land-owning elite, but rather with the poor, marginalised, and dispossessed (Vermeulen 2005:160). The problem with trying to align ourselves with the poor, marginalised, and dispossessed is that there may well be resistance from the more affluent MCSA congregation members themselves. There are probably multiple reasons for this resistance, but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to analyse them. However, one reason is that, as indicated earlier, those who were previously disadvantaged are not readily willing to engage with the oppressed and suffering. Many followers are therefore quite happy to follow

ministers who do not expose them to others' suffering, even if those ministers may be more focused on enriching themselves rather than liberating their followers. Following a minister who facilitates the avoidance of suffering whilst highlighting the attractiveness of prosperity and ties it to the Gospel can therefore become rather enticing to members. Foster (2008) and the CUC (2019) have acknowledged this phenomenon and warned against the allure of the prosperity Gospel, especially in the ever-increasing contexts of desperate poverty and marginalisation. The allure of the prosperity Gospel has not bypassed the MCSA and its leaders. As was mentioned in the background (1.2), some Methodist ministers embrace ideas from the prosperity Gospel churches to encourage and manipulate their members to give more money.

Capitalist and free-market theory has either excluded theology from the private market or used certain concepts of God to justify positions of control and dominance (Meeks 1989: 55). However, the neo-Pentecostal prosperity Gospel incorporates understanding financial prosperity and wealth as part of God's blessing on God's followers. The understanding of the prosperity Gospel is illustrated by Van Wyk (2019), who analyses how neo-Pentecostalism, which embraces a prosperity Gospel, enabled former president Jacob Zuma to behave in a defiant manner without shame. According to Van Wyk (2019), the prosperity Gospel requires its followers to consume conspicuously without shame since this is believed to be a sign of being a blessed Christian. The focus on conspicuous consumption results in flamboyant leadership that focuses on the accumulation of wealth which becomes an ethical issue when the accumulation of wealth and shameless consumption becomes the Gospel's ultimate *telos*.

The proponents of the prosperity Gospel have taken an aspect of the Torah and used it as a tool of socio-economic oppression and manipulation. As a central theme within liberation hermeneutics, the Exodus event depicts Yahweh as the Economist who leads the household of God out of the household of bondage (Meeks 1989:89). The Torah depicts Yahweh's liberative action when it emphasises that the tithe is the mechanism through which those who are in need are to be provided for (Meeks 1989:84). The tithe is designed to provide for the most vulnerable (aliens, fatherless and widows) and for those who serve (the Levites) (Deut 14:29). Therefore, I find it abhorrent for church leaders to use the tithe concept to enrich themselves and use passages such as Malachi 3: 6-12 to promise financial blessings for those who tithe and a concomitant curse for those who do not.

3.6 Conclusion

I have shown in this chapter that socio-economic exploitation by leaders within the church and outside the church is a very real concern and a reality that plagues our society. I also pointed out in this chapter that Methodists are not opposed to money; instead, we need to use money to empower and liberate followers. The structures in the MCSA facilitate various levels of leadership for both clergy and laity. These numerous opportunities for leadership create the potential for leaders to liberate their followers. However, they can also create the potential for leaders to exploit their followers, especially at a socio-economic level, since there is enormous pressure to collect money to fund the MCSA's structures. I demonstrated that it has become a readily acceptable norm within the wider church for leaders to manipulate and exploit their followers to fulfil their ambitions. Methodist ministers have proven themselves equally susceptible to this trap. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the MCSA has leaders who are transformational and liberate followers, that we are reminded of our Methodist roots and understand the call of the Gospel to liberation and social holiness.

As I discussed in this chapter, socio-economic oppression by leaders of followers is not always done because of malice but, can arise as a result of various reasons. Some of the reasons that have been explored are selfish ambition, the need to meet pressure by the MCSA and MCO for the payment of assessments, or the need to merely survive. The possibility of socio-economic oppression of followers by leaders within the MCSA can also occur through the dilution of Methodist doctrine with a neo-Pentecostal prosperity Gospel.

At this point, I will not be exploring any solutions to the instances of socio-economic oppression by leaders within the MCSA. The purpose of this chapter has been to highlight the prevalence and reality of such oppression. In chapter 5, when I appropriate the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the MCSA leadership contexts, I will be exploring an application of a leadership of liberation to the MCSA leadership contexts. However, before this can be done, I will undertake a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to explore a leadership of liberation with a socio-economic focus that can be appropriated for the MCSA leadership context. This will be done so that situations of socio-economic oppression of MCSA members by ministers do not occur or are at least curtailed.

Chapter 4 – Distantiation: Rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7

"Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid."
Zephaniah 3:13 (NRSV)

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 consists of an exegesis of Zephaniah 3:1-7 using the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. It constitutes the distantiation pole of the tri-polar exegetical model employed in this dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to answer the second research sub-question, namely: what insights can be gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus?

In order to read the text through my chosen hermeneutical lens it is necessary to analyse the historical context and setting of the text in question. I will therefore begin this chapter with a discussion of Zephaniah's historical context and setting, followed by a social-historical analysis of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership. In approaching the social analysis, I will refer to other texts which also have bearing on this study. These will include, *inter alia*, texts from the book of Jeremiah and 2 Kings 22-25 since they, like Zephaniah, reflect on the context of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom from c. 640 BCE – 587 BCE. Following the socio-historical analysis of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom, I will turn my attention to the text of Zephaniah itself with specific focus on Zephaniah 3:1-7. I undertake the analysis of Zephaniah and the book's social historical context to determine the ideological superstructure, social relationships, economic base and mode of production operative within Zephaniah's context.

After completing the social analysis, I will discuss some of the insights gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from the rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through my ideo-theological lens. At this point, I wish to reiterate the main facets of my ideo-theological approach to the text which were discussed in detail in chapter 2. My ideo-theological choices include the fact that I will read the text from a liberation hermeneutic perspective, employing

a hermeneutic of suspicion and also a hermeneutic of recovery. I have also chosen to read the text and undertake the social analysis in solidarity with the poor.

4.2 Socio-historical analysis

4.2.1 Context and setting of the book of Zephaniah

In this section I survey the opinions of some scholars, *inter alia*, Childs (1979), Bruce, Brueggemann, Frethem, and Petersen (2005), Achtemeier (1986), Petersen (2002) and Bullock (2007), to draw some conclusions on the dating of Zephaniah, especially Zephaniah 3:1-7, so as to determine the book's context. Generally, with Old Testament books, there is a fairly wide gap between the historical context of the actual writing/completion of the book and the setting of the narrative as contained within the text. This is especially, but not exclusively, true of the historical books, such as the Pentateuch. However, as will be seen from the discussion on the dating of Zephaniah, apart from some redactive additions, there is not as wide a contextual gap between the book's setting and context as might be the case with other texts. The prophecies of Zephaniah are set during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640 - 609 BCE) (Zeph 1:1).

Childs (1979:458) holds that Zephaniah consists of genuine, late pre-exilic oracles to which post-exilic material has been added. The majority of scholars, according to Childs (1979:458), are of the opinion that the pre-exilic material is dated during the reign of King Josiah (640–609 BCE). Childs places these pre-exilic oracles before Josiah's reforms (Childs 1979:458). Confirming Childs' view, Bruce et al. (2005:322) also place the oracles of Zephaniah before the reforms of Josiah since many of the accusations which are made against Judah were addressed in Josiah's reforms. Achtemeier (1986) holds a similar view but only in respect to Zephaniah 1 and 2. She maintains that chapter 3 is from after the fall of Assyria and the failure of Josiah's reforms. She does, however, see Zephaniah as part of the Levitical-prophetic reform group which gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reform and Deuteronomistic writings. Included in this group, according to Achtemeier, were Jeremiah and later the author/s of trito-Isaiah. Petersen (2002) concurs with Achtemeier's dating of Zephaniah. However, he points out that a possible exilic redaction occurred in chapter 3:9-20 which speaks of restoration after punishment.

Bullock (2007:197), who holds a similar view as Childs and Bruce *et al.*, confirms the dating of Zephaniah to the Neo-Babylonian period. This period started with the coronation of Nabopolassar as King of Babylon in 626 BCE. The Neo-Babylonian kingdom was firmly

established through the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 612 BCE and lasted until the Persian Achaemenid Empire in 539 BCE when Cyrus, the Persian king, invaded and conquered Babylonia (Anderson 1988:470). Bullock (2007:205) refines his dating of Zephaniah's oracles and comes to a slightly different view to that of Achtemeier and Petersen. After reviewing the scholarly views on the dating of Zephaniah's prophecies, he contends that a post-Josianic reform date is unlikely. He submits that all the oracles were spoken before Josiah's reforms and may have even influenced the reforms. Bullock (2007:38) points out that dating the time of a prophetic oracle is not always possible due to the lapse of time between the prophetic event, its retelling, recording, compilation and possible redaction. Welch (2013:484) supports the view that Zephaniah is dated during the reign of Josiah by reading Zephaniah 2:4 as a specific oracle against the Philistine city of Ekron. He contends that the historical dating of the book's composition as post-monarchal needs to be revisited. Welch submits that, in light of lexical and literary criteria, the composition of Zephaniah is in the 7th century following Ekron's rise to economic prominence as the region's primary producer of olive oil. He argues that the prophecies are not *ex eventu, i.e.* made after the destruction of the Philistine cities by the Babylonians in 604 BCE, but were actually made before the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Philistia. Welch's (2013:484) contention that these prophecies were not made after the fact supports my view that Zephaniah's prophecies were made during the reign of Josiah as claimed in the book itself (Zeph 1:1) and some oracles possibly predated the Josianic reforms.

Tuell (2016) suggests that the composition of Zephaniah occurred over a period of time. He discusses the books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, situating them within the twelve Minor Prophets. He examines both the synchronic and diachronic relationships between these texts and uses drama as a conceptual framework to engage the changes in narration within these texts. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is relevant to note the various contexts within which Tuell places the composition of the text of Zephaniah. He divides the composition history of Zephaniah into two pre-exilic stages, an exilic Deuteronomistic redaction (597/87 BCE – 538 BCE), which relates to a redaction of the composite books of Hosea, Amos, Micah, and Zephaniah, and then further post-exilic additions.

In light of the arguments of the various authors, it appears that the common view, and the one which I support, is that most of the oracles in Zephaniah were made during the reign of Josiah

and pre-dated Josiah's reforms of 622 BCE. To this certain exilic additions were made with further post-exilic redactions especially in chapter 3:9-20.

4.2.2 Social context of the book of Zephaniah

Before analysing the text itself it is necessary to analyse the social context of the book of Zephaniah as this assists in better understanding the text and its possible meaning within its context. Even though the dating of the book of Zephaniah is difficult to determine conclusively, I will undertake an analysis of the social context based on the premise that most, if not all, the oracles criticising the Judahite leadership were uttered in some form during the late pre-exilic period starting with the reign of king Josiah (640 – 609 BCE). Some reference will also be made to the exilic period since possible redactions of the book occurred during the exilic period. In analysing the social context of the book, I will also make reference to other texts which can shed light on the historical context of Zephaniah. The socio-historical analysis which I undertake in this section consists of an examination of the material and economic base of the society, its mode of production, social labour, and social relationships. I also analyse the text to identify the core tensions which existed in the late pre-exilic Judahite society (Lawrie 2005:189). Other aspects of the society which I examine include the tensions and possible revolutionary overturns, class struggle, the ideological superstructure, and the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. The social analysis is necessary to reclaim the text and use it for liberation of those who are oppressed. However, a proper social analysis cannot be done without first undertaking a socio-historical analysis. In order to undertake the socio-historical analysis it is necessary to gain a picture of what the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom looked like and understand the relevant historical events of that era.

4.2.3 The historical context of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom: 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles[6], and Jeremiah

4.2.3.1 Time-line of the kings of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom

I am including a time-line at this point so that the flow of events and chronology of the kings is clearer when I discuss these further in 4.2.3.2 below.

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[6] Chronicles is a later post-exilic text and I deal with its dating and relevance to this research in 4.2.3.2.

640 - 609 BCE	- Josiah (2 Kings 22-23:30)
609 - 609 BCE	- Jehoahaz – Josiah's son (23:31 – 23:33)
609 - 598 BCE	- Eliakim (Jehoiakim) – Josiah's son (23:34- 24:5)
598 - 597 BCE	- Jehoiachin (Jehoakim's son) (24:6 – 24:12)
597 BCE	- First Deportation to Babylon - (24:16)
597 – 587 BCE	- Mattaniah (Zedekiah) (Jehoiachin's uncle) (24:17- 25:7)
587 BCE	- Destruction of Jerusalem and second deportation – (25:1-22)
587 BCE	- Gedaliah appointed Governor (25:22)

(Petersen 2010:1001)

Figure 1 - Time-line of the kings of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom

4.2.3.2. The Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's accounts of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership

I will begin this section by discussing the reign of Josiah and his reforms as found in 2 Kings 22-23 because, as stated earlier, many of Zephaniah's prophecies are set within this time-period (Zeph 1:1)[7]. In this section, I predominantly review the position of mainstream scholars in analysing Josiah's reign. In 4.5 I apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to the text and submit a more critical assessment of Josiah's leadership.

In 622 BCE the Deuteronomistic tradition surfaced. It was centred on the discovery of the law and Josiah's reforms (Gottwald 1985:138). Sweeney (2001:23) details the Deuteronomistic history as contained in the books of Kings, arguing that it evaluates Josiah's reign. Sweeney

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[7] The period under consideration is described in archaeological periods as Iron Age IIc and Iron III (Gottwald 1985:57)

(2001:25) argues that there were at least three editions of the Deuteronomistic history, namely an exilic edition written during the exile, a Josianic edition written during Josiha's reign, and an earlier Hezekian edition written during Hezekiah's reign (Sweeney 2001:170). He demonstrates that due to Josiah's reform programmes extending into the north, the belief arose amongst the early Deuteronomistic writers that he was the hoped-for Messiah who would reunite Judah and Israel politically and religiously through centralised worship at the Jerusalem Temple (Sweeney 2001:10). However, with Josiah's death, the texts of the Deuteronomistic history and the prophetic books dealing with Josiah, such as Isaiah, Amos, and Zephaniah, were redacted during the exile to point toward a future Messiah (Sweeney 2001:315). An example of such redaction is the inclusion of trito-Isaiah which points to Yahweh as the righteous monarch of Israel as opposed to any Davidic king (Sweeney 2001:321). In addition to the Deuteronomistic history as contained in 2 Kings, I wish to examine Chronicles because it allows for an engagement with the Chronicler's theological reflection on the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership through an examination of the ideologies and themes operative during the period of the Chronicler (520 BCE - 160 BCE). There are various differences between the Chronicler's account of the Judahite history and that of the Deuteronomist. One such example is the description of the death of king Josiah. If Chronicles and the books of Kings shared the same context, then a simple comparison between the Deuteronomistic history and Chronicles would have assisted in identifying the core contradictions and tensions which may have existed in the late pre-exilic Judahite society. However, since they do not share the same context and Chronicles is dated much later than the Deuteronomistic writings (see below), the comparison becomes more complex. Yet, I submit that there is still enormous value in comparing the Deuteronomistic history with Chronicles because it allows for a broader understanding of the shift in ideologies within the Judahite community following the exile. Understanding this shift and the new ideo-theological focus of the post-exilic community aids in identifying those ideologies which were operative in the late pre-exilic Judahite community. The comparison can also help identify which ideologies may have been in their infancy during the pre-exilic period and then developed during the exilic and post-exilic periods. Comparing the two accounts also aids in sifting out what may have been possible exilic and post-exilic redactions to the Deuteronomistic and other pre-exilic writings. Determining which writings are genuine pre-exilic compositions is particularly helpful for this research as it sheds light on which ideologies were operative during the context of Zephaniah. The comparison between the Deuteronomist and Chronicler helps identify the views held about the Judahite leadership before the exile and how these views changed during and after the exile. Comparing the

Deuteronomistic traditions with the Chronicler also assists in analysing the history of change within the Judahite society which, as mentioned earlier, is part of Marxist and materialist social analytical tools used in liberation hermeneutics.

Scholars generally agree that Chronicles was composed over a period of time during the post exilic period (Tuell 2001:5). Composition occurred somewhere between 520 BCE and 160 BCE, with the general consensus being the fourth century BCE (Botta 2010:239). Ristau (2005:4) examines the details of the Chronicler's narrative to determine ideologies and themes. An example of one such theme is that Josiah belongs to an Ancient Near Eastern character type identified as the restorer or consummator of order. This is exemplified in Josiah's strict adherence to the law. Ristau (2005) also holds that the kings in Chronicles are portrayed as instrumental in maintaining a Covenant relationship with Yahweh and the Temple cult; they are not idealised but are examples rather than models (Ristau 2005:90). Ackroyd (1973:27) also argues that the Chronicler has specific ideologies and themes. For example, he holds that the Chronicler, viewing history from a theological perspective, emphasises the rightness of Josiah's own attitudes apart from the discovery of the law. He submits that the Deuteronomist's agenda was the centrality of the law and reordering of life during the exile around it (Ackroyd 1973:200).

Other scholars, such as Kalimi (2009), have taken a redaction-critical approach to Chronicles. Kalimi argues that the Chronicler interprets the Deuteronomistic history and his other sources. He does so by clarifying those sources that need clarification by replacing uncommon words, omitting unclear idioms and phrases, bringing other texts into harmony, and sometimes providing explanations (Kalimi 2009:184). Jonker (2007), taking a different interpretive lens to the text, i.e., methodological insights from social psychology, depicts Chronicles as reforming history. He uses the presupposition that literature is closely related to self-understanding and that Chronicles, as reforming history, forms a bridge between past and present. Olanisebe (2017), through the use of narrative criticism, discusses the qualities of leadership and followers as expressed in the narrative of Josiah which are essential for democracy and specifically a sustained democracy in Nigeria. He makes the point that, until recently, the Chronicler has suffered the misfortune of being considered historically inaccurate. However, he cites scholars who have demonstrated that the Chronicler possessed historically accurate information outside the Deuteronomistic materials. Olanisebe quotes Rosenbaun who summarises the views of Eissfeldt and Mayes who argue that, in addition to the

Deuteronomistic history, the Chronicler was privy to historical sources such as copies of official documents, memoirs, and official lists of various types which he may have completed from oral tradition and studies of his own. Moreover, he had access to temple archives and official court histories of Israel. Olanisebe thus contends that the accounts of Josiah, both in the Deuteronomistic history and Chronicles, are historically verifiable and accurate though written at different periods, for different purposes and in different contexts.

Tuell (2001:3) supports the view that the Chronicler most likely used the Deuteronomist history, which would have been available to him during the post-exilic period, as his source. He argues that the Chronicler is interested in the Temple and its liturgy, hence his emphasis on Hezekiah and Josiah (Tuell 2001:5). Tuell (2001) proposes that the Chronicler is concerned with scriptural piety, that he is concerned with the activity of God in the ordinary everyday life and, quoting Jerome, says that the Chronicler is interested in the meaning of the whole of sacred history. Tuell (2001:233) further emphasises that in Kings, Josiah is *the* reformer. However, in Chronicles, Hezekiah is *the* reformer and Josiah is merely a reformer in the line of many. There is also an emphasis on the roles of the priests and the Levites in Chronicles.

4.2.3.3 Understanding kingship within the context of Kings and Chronicles

One theme which arises throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles is an evaluation of the kings of Israel, and Judah in particular. It is therefore helpful to turn to an understanding of kingship within the context of Kings and Chronicles since this will assist in evaluating what the Deuteronomist and Chronicler view as good leadership. Their respective evaluations can aid in exploring a leadership of liberation which is an objective of this dissertation. Some scholars have attempted to extrapolate an understanding of what constitutes good leadership from the Old Testament narratives. Thus, regarding kingship in general, Ko (2018) evaluates the institution of the monarchy within Israel and concludes that the requirement of kingship in Israel is that the king should rule under the guidance and governance of Yahweh. This aspect of kingship in Israel corresponds with a transcendental perspective of leadership (Usue 2006:636). Since Josiah's reign is the starting point of Zephaniah's prophecies, it is necessary to evaluate Josiah's leadership and determine whether Josiah's leadership was exercised under the guidance of Yahweh. Nelson (1987), focusing on Josiah's leadership style in particular, uses narrative criticism to demonstrate Josiah's piety before the book of the law is found. Josiah implements reforms notwithstanding promised destruction, acting out of love for God rather than self-interest. Ogunkunle (2012) also examines Josiah and argues that cases of moral and

religious decadence indicate a lack of the fear of God. He submits that Josiah acted out of his fear of God and that fear of God helps one do well and shun evil (c.f. Prov 1:17). However, Ogunkunle does not elaborate on what the fear of the Lord is. Katho (2001), analysing Josiah's character, shows that Jeremiah uses Josiah as an example of good leadership, saying Josiah ate and drank but also did justice and righteousness, judging the cause of the poor and needy (Jer. 22:15-16). Katho (2001:154) concludes that knowing Yahweh made Josiah a good leader.

As mentioned in the beginning of this discussion on the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's accounts of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership, I have deliberately discussed the voice of conventional scholars. My reasons for doing this was to lay the foundation from which to engage with a liberation hermeneutical analysis and also to identify what aspects of kingship and leadership have been regarded as ideal. At this juncture, however, I will highlight some aspects which start laying the foundation for a liberation hermeneutical interpretation which will be done in more depth in 4.5.

4.2.3.4 A liberation hermeneutical view of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler

Katho's (2001) view (discussed in 4.2.3.3 above) that a good leader eats and drinks yet still does justice when they know God is congruent with Gutierrez's assertion, in reading Jeremiah's condemnation of oppression and injustice against the poor (Jer 22:13–17), that to know God (orthodoxy) is to do justice (orthopraxis) (Gutierrez 1988:173). The discussion of both the Deuteronomist and Chronicler's accounts of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership brings to light the fact that there are ideo-theological differences between the approach of the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler. Analysing the political and ideological differences between the Deuteronomist and Chronicler has led scholars such as Brueggemann (1983) and Mosala (1989) to identify that there are two covenant traditions operative within the Biblical text. These traditions are the Mosaic-covenantal tradition, which is revolutionary, and the Davidic-covenantal tradition, which is focused on maintaining the status quo (Mosala 1989:120). The Deuteronomistic history, with its central focus on the law, is part of the Mosaic-covenantal tradition and this forms part of a revolutionary tradition. The Deuteronomistic history focuses mostly on the religious reforms of Josiah. However, the book of Deuteronomy also prescribes various socio-economic and political administrative reforms needed to ensure transformation (Gottwald 1985:371). The Chronicler's focus on the other hand is on the Davidic covenant and therefore is status quo orientated. In Chronicles, the focus is on the kings who maintain the Davidic-covenant. Thus, the Chronicler views Josiah as being righteous and therefore pleasing

to Yahweh. The difference between the Deuteronomist and Chroniclers focus assists in analysing the ideological focus of each tradition and accounts for the differences encountered in the narratives as found in Kings and Chronicles. It is these differences which will aid in identifying aspects of the ideological superstructure and other social aspects which assist in social analysis.

4.2.3.4 Jeremiah's account of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership

My reason for examining the dating and authorship of the book of Jeremiah is because, as indicated earlier, one theory relating to the authorship of Jeremiah is that the prophet Jeremiah authored the book and he, with the author/s of trito-Isaiah and Zephaniah, was part of the Levitical-prophetic reform group which gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reforms and writings (Achtemeier 1986:62). Other theories hold that the book of Jeremiah was expanded as part of the Deuteronomistic writings during the exile and therefore does not reflect the voice of the prophet Jeremiah (Leuchter 2006:2). The authenticity of the authorship of the book of Jeremiah is, however, generally accepted by the majority of scholars since they agree that the prophet Jeremiah is behind the traditions in the book of Jeremiah. However, the editing of the book of Jeremiah is complex and may have come under the hand of many editors (Brueggemann 1991:8). Scholars disagree whether the prophet Jeremiah is behind the traditions found in the book, or these traditions ensued from the scribal work of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, or came about as a result of Deuteronomistic redaction (Leuchter 2006:2). I support the view of Achtemeier (1986), however, that Jeremiah is behind the traditions of the book and that he formed part of the Levitical-prophetic reform group which gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reforms and writings. If this is indeed the case, the book of Jeremiah can shed light on the revolutionary ideo-theological movement present during the later pre-exilic Judahite kingdom. Examining the ideo-theological viewpoints from Jeremiah will therefore assist in analysing the ideo-theological themes prevalent in Zephaniah.

Brueggemann (2007:43) discusses the theology prevalent within the book of Jeremiah. He shows that Jeremiah is a composite book reflective of different voices that attempt to make sense of the theological crises which the exile brought to the people of Yahweh. There is a sense in which the theology brings people to the abyss since there is no clarity within the book itself whether there will be a continuity of Jerusalem and the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites.

Terblanche (2016:149) argues that the author of Jeremiah proposed the enactment of distributive justice, particularly in passages such as Jer 34:8-22. He shows that distributive justice goes beyond the mere defence of the poor and oppressed, arguing that distributive justice is aimed at the redistribution of social goods and power. Terblanche proposes that the author of this text inspires visions of a counter-community where the debt slaves should be released from bondage in order for them to pursue a new life. This too links into the understanding of Marxism that revolution is inevitable if oppression continues, which it clearly did in the circumstances of Jeremiah 34. According to Bracke (2000:48), there is little to doubt that events as are described in this passage did in fact occur. He sketches a scenario where slaves may have been released during the siege but, when the Egyptian army approached and the Babylonians temporarily withdrew, the slave owners may once again have re-enslaved the slaves thinking the threat of destruction had passed (Bracke 2000:48). Jeremiah 34 is therefore an example of an instance of oppression and assists in interrogating the struggle between oppressors and oppressed within the Biblical context and setting of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom. It also assists in understanding the presupposed socio-economic structures which may be present within the text of Zephaniah.

Jeremiah and his contemporaries attempted to be irritants to change the ruling classes' unjust practices. They did not try and revolt directly against Judah's leadership, however, but relied on the invasion of Babylon to overturn the status quo (Gottwald 1985:404). It is necessary to notice that in its final form the book of Jeremiah has a definite pro-Babylonian bias and Babylon is cast in the role of Yahweh's agent (Brueggemann 1991:6). The deportations of Judah's royalty, state officials, priests, military officers and artisans probably constituted around 5% of the population, therefore a large portion of the Judahite populace remained in Judah, but they were freed from the ruling class elite (Gottwald 1985:423). My reading of the text in this light is contrary to the mainstream view that the exile to Babylon was negative for all. Reading against the mainstream view is part of approaching the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Viewing the exile as an act of liberation for the poor of the land does not exclude the fact that some Judahite leaders were also pro-Babylonian or that life, for those left in Jerusalem, remained difficult because of Babylonian oppression and taxation. Their liberation was not a complete liberation and some form of oppression did unfortunately remain.

4.3 Some historical interpretations of Zephaniah

In this section, I will briefly review the reception history of the book of Zephaniah by examining some interpretations of Zephaniah over the years. I do this for two reasons. Firstly, I wish to avoid the pitfall of merely repeating what has been done before. Secondly, I wish to use other scholars' interpretations of Zephaniah to help shape, where I feel it is appropriate, my own rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7. I allow previous interpretations to help shape my reading by applying a hermeneutic of suspicion to both the text of Zephaniah and its interpretations. The scholars cited in this section examine Zephaniah's response to socio-economic oppression which is helpful when appropriating the text to the context in chapter 5.

Han (2011) reviews the use of Zephaniah across the millennia. He demonstrates how Zephaniah was contextualised for contemporary situations by the Qumran community and commentators during the first century CE, especially with regard to his opposition to foreign cults (Han 2011:93). The early church interpreted the fact that Zephaniah's utopian state included Gentiles as evidence that Zephaniah's oracles of restoration were a reference to the life and death of Christ since Christ welcomed Gentiles into God's kingdom (Han 2011:94). During the Reformation, Luther, Calvin and other reformers appropriated Zephaniah's promise of restoration and renewal of people who were previously corrupt as motivation that all people can be restored and renewed (Han 2011:94). Han also reviews the use of Zephaniah in art. He concludes that Zephaniah, though not necessarily as popular or held in the same esteem as other prophets, such as Micah and Isaiah, has nonetheless played a vital role in Biblical interpretation across the centuries. Han points out that Zephaniah has much to teach the church about being the church of the poor and for the poor because of Zephaniah's focus on justice, opposition to oppression and exploitation, and belief in equality between the rich and the lowly (2011:95). Zephaniah's focus thus illustrates the suitability of Zephaniah to a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus.

Using a feminist approach, Boda (2012) examines the use of the phrase "Daughter Zion" in the Minor Prophets. He concludes by showing that there is a shift in the rhetoric in the book of the Twelve. This shift occurs in the conclusion of Zephaniah. The shift is from a tone of judgment to one of salvation. Boda submits that "Daughter Zion" emerges as the key figure commissioned to announce this new era of salvation. The literature by Boda and Han clearly indicate that there is a propensity within the text of Zephaniah to hear the voice of the oppressed and marginalised which is helpful for a liberationist reading.

This inclusivity of the marginalised may well be as a result of Zephaniah's roots, which may be African. This is the submission of Rice (2019:31), a view which West (1993:62) also holds. Rice discusses the genealogy of Zephaniah as contained in Zephaniah 1:1. He argues against the objections that King Hezekiah could have been the great-grandfather of Zephaniah. He submits that the name of Zephaniah's father, Cushi, inevitably suggests a man of Cush, or a Cushite. Demonstrating that there were close ties between Ethiopia and Judah, Rice proposes that Cushi's mother (Gedaliah's wife) could have been an African (Rice 2019:28). Rice further contends that this argument is supported by Zephaniah's preaching which includes not only judgment but also salvation for Ethiopia (Zeph 3:10).

Timmer (2016) holds that there are political paradigms in the book of Zephaniah which are expressed in what Timmer refers to as Zephaniah's utopian eschatology. He submits that analysing Zephaniah's utopian eschatology can shed light on Zephaniah's contribution to political thought and the religious issues raised by the prophet (Timmer 2016:311). He submits that Zephaniah envisions first the destruction of those who do not worship Yahweh followed by the transformation and purification of those who do, both Israelite and non-Israelite. There is also the understanding in the book that those who do not worship Yahweh will turn to the worship of Yahweh. He continues with a political analysis of Zephaniah's vision of a diverse global unity. This utopian state must, however, be ushered in with a violently destructive process. Unlike many of the interpretations referred to earlier in this section, Timmer takes what looks like a purely eschatological vision and makes it politically relevant for today by describing a remoulded, heterogeneous political state with a homogenous religious system (Timmer 2016:331). The contemporary political relevance of Biblical texts conforms to the praxis of liberation theologians who are concerned with the lived reality of the poor and oppressed, and see Zephaniah as initiating an understanding that the focus of the liberating work of the Messiah is the poor (Gutiérrez 1988:246). Zephaniah's state does not overtly involve hierarchy or kings. Timmer (2016:324) contends that Zephaniah's envisioned state corresponds to a multi-state model, with a relative lack of centralisation, but who are subject to an ultimate power. He concludes by demonstrating how the utopian state of Zephaniah was a radical departure from what had been normative for Judah's history and ideology. I believe that Timmer's analysis lays a foundation upon which one can explore similarities between Zephaniah's envisioned future and a liberation ideology. Exploring these similarities assists me with this study because it allows for an analysis and comparison of the leadership within

Zephaniah's utopian state with principles of liberation theology in developing a leadership of liberation for the MCSA.

Focusing particularly on Zephaniah 3:1-8, Nogalski (2010:526) highlights the fact that the oracles against Jerusalem are part of the broader oracles against the nations which are contained within the rest of the book of Zephaniah. VanGemeren (1990:174) confirms the fact that Zephaniah 3:1-4 contains judgments against the leaders of Judah. These judgments are situated within the framework of the judgements against other nations. Setting Judah's judgment within the framework of those against other nations highlights the universality of Yahweh and the need for a universal worship of Yahweh (VanGemeren 1990:177). This understanding that Judah is not exempt from the judgements against other nations and that they too are accountable for violation of Yahweh's justice is also present in the literature of Achtemeier (1986:84). Zephaniah 3:1-7 is thus focused on Judah, but not distinct from other nations but rather as equally guilty of failing to act in accordance with Yahweh's decrees. This is an important factor since it means that there is no distinction between the Judahite leadership and those from other Ancient Near Eastern nations. The histories of oppressor and oppressed and the struggles for power are thus similar.

The late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom experienced, to greater or lesser extents, the influence and domination of various empires. These started with the Assyrian empire, followed by some independence during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah (Brueggemann 2000:585). During the reigns of Jeoahaz, Judah was subject to Egyptian rule followed by Babylonian domination during the reigns of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 23 & 24). As discussed in 4.2.1, the book of Zephaniah was written over a period of time starting with Josiah's reign (640 BCE), and was therefore written within the context of colonial rule. Thus, the book of Zephaniah, along with Nahum and Habakkuk, were useful to later generations of Jews who continued to struggle under foreign domination, domestic injustice and religious disloyalty (Gottwald 1985:391). The book is therefore useful for all peoples who suffer from oppression of one sort or another.

I now turn to the text of the book of Zephaniah because analysing the text and the structure of the book of Zephaniah helps provide additional insight into the ideologies prevalent within the text of Zephaniah and the context of Zephaniah. Identifying these ideologies assists in completing the social analysis of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership.

4.4 Analysis of Zephaniah 3:1-7

4.4.1 The text

As I turn to analysing the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 it is helpful to first read the text. I am, therefore, including the text at this point in the dissertation. I am setting out the Hebrew text with the literal translation from the *Hebrew-English Interlinear ESV Old Testament* as I find it helpful to explore the literal *verbatum* translation of the Hebrew text together with the *NRSV* translation thereof which follows after the Hebrew text and its literal translation.

1 הוֹי מֹרְאָה וְנִגְאָלָה הָעִיר הַיּוֹנָה
woe one-being-rebellious and-being-defiled the-city the-oppressing

2 לֹא שָׁמְעָה בְּקוֹל לֹא לָקְחָה מוּסָר בַּיהוָה לֹא בָטָחָה אֶל־אֱלֹהֶיהָ
not she-listens on-voice not she-receives correction in-Yahweh she-trusts not to God-of-her

לֹא קָרֵבָה:
not she-draws-near

3 שָׂרֶיהָ בְקִרְבָּהּ אֲרָיוֹת שֹׁאֲגִים שֹׁפְטֶיהָ זְאֵבֵי עֶרֶב
officials-of-her in-midst-of-her lions-of roaring ones-judging-of-her wolves-of evening

לֹא גָרְמוּ לַבֹּקֶר:
not they-leave to-the-morning

4 נְבִיאֶיהָ פֹּחֲזִים אַנְשֵׁי בֹּגְדוֹת כֹּהֲנֶיהָ חִלְּלוּ־ קֹדֶשׁ חָמְסוּ
prophets-of-her fickle men-of treacheries priests-of-her they-profane what-is-holy they-do-violence

תּוֹרָה:
law

5 יְהוָה צַדִּיק בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה עַוְלָה בַּבֹּקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר מִשְׁפָּטוֹ
Yahweh righteous in-midst-of-her not he-does injustice in-the-morning in-the-morning justice-of-him

יִתֵּן לָאוֹר לֹא נֶעְדָּר וְלֹא־ יוֹדֵעַ עַוָּל בֹּשֶׁת:
he-puts to-the-light not he-is-missing but-not knowing unjust-one shame

6 הִכְרַתִּי גוֹיִם נָשַׁמּוּ פִּנּוֹתָם הֶחֱרַבְתִּי חוּצוֹתָם מִבְּלִי
I-have-cut-off nations they-are-in-ruins corners-of-them I-have-laid-waste streets-of-them from-no

עוֹבֵר נִצְדּוּ עָרֵיהֶם מִבְּלִי־ אִישׁ מֵאֵין יוֹשֵׁב:
one-going-on they-have-been-made-desolate cities-of-them from-no man from-there-is-not one-inhabiting

7 אָמַרְתִּי אַךְ־ תִּירְאִי אוֹתִי תִּקְחִי מוּסָר וְלֹא־ יִכָּרֵת מְעוֹנָהּ
I-said surely you-will-fear me you-will-receive correction then-not he-is-cut-off dwelling-place-of-her

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־פָּקַדְתִּי עָלֶיהָ אָכֵן הִשְׁכִּימוּ הִשְׁחִיתוּ כֹּל עֲלִילוֹתָם:
all that I-have-appointed against-her however they-do-early they-make-corrupt all-of deeds-of-them

(Blair 2014:1977-1978)

The *New Revised Standard Version* translates the passage as follows:

3 **¹**Ah, soiled, defiled, oppressing city!

² It has listened to no voice; it has accepted no correction. It has not trusted in the Lord;

  it has not drawn near to its God.

³ The officials within it are roaring lions; its judges are evening wolves that leave nothing until the morning.

⁴ Its prophets are reckless, faithless persons; its priests have profaned what is sacred, they have done violence to the law.

⁵ The Lord within it is righteous; he does no wrong. Every morning he renders his judgement, each dawn without fail; but the unjust knows no shame.

⁶ I have cut off nations; their battlements are in ruins; I have laid waste their streets so that no one walks in them; their cities have been made desolate, without people, without inhabitants.

⁷ I said, 'Surely the city will fear me, it will accept correction; it will not lose sight of all that I have brought upon it.' But they were the more eager to make all their deeds corrupt.

4.4.2. Structure of the book of Zephaniah

As I move from having discussed the historical setting and context of the book of Zephaniah, to focusing on the text it is helpful to examine the internal structure and divisions within the book. Examining the structure helps determine when a particular passage may have been written or redacted since a departure from the structure may, but not necessarily, indicate a later redaction. Examining the structure can also assist in highlighting specific emphasis of the author or redactor. These insights can then shed further light on the social historical context of Zephaniah.

Diagrammatically the structure of the book of Zephaniah looks as follows:

I.   Introduction (1:1)

II.   Announcement of judgment against Judah, Jerusalem and all the earth (1:2-2:3)

    A. Judgment against all the inhabitants of the earth (1:2-3).

    B. Judgment against Judah (1:4-13).

    C. The character of the Day of the Lord (1:14-2:3)

        1. Day of wrath (1:14-18).

        2. Day of repentance (2:1-3).

III.   Announcement of judgment against Gentiles and Jerusalem (2:4-3:7)

    A. Judgment of Gentiles (2:4-15).

        1. Judgment against Philistia (2:4-7).

        2. Judgment against Moab and Ammon (2:8-11).

        3. Judgment against Cush (2:12).

        4. Judgment against Assyria (2:13-15).

    B. Judgment of Jerusalem (3:1-7).

        1. Indictment against Jerusalem (3:1-4).

        2. The Lord's judgment against Jerusalem (3:5-7).

IV.   The restoration of Israel and the nations (3:8-20).

    A. Restoration of the nations (3:9-10).

    B. Restoration of Israel (3:11-20).

        1. The remnant (3:11-13).

        2. The joy of the remnant (3:14).

        3. The ruler of the remnant (3:15-17).

        4. The vindication of the remnant (3:18-20).

(Wenstrom 2016:73[8])

Sweeney (1999) commences his discussion on the structure of the book of Zephaniah with an analysis of the classical understanding of its structure postulated by Childs. According to Childs, the book has a tripartite structure which is typical of most prophetic literature (Childs 1979:459): threats against Judah (Zeph 1.2–2.3), threats against the nations (Zeph 2.4–3.8) and promises of restoration (Zeph 3.9-20). Sweeney discusses the problems that arise in attempting to interpret Zephaniah and other prophetic books. This includes the question of whether the tripartite structure was part of the prophetic books themselves or whether it is the product of later readers who imposed their theological views and understandings upon the text (Sweeney 1999:121). Sweeney surveys various scholars' exegetical approaches to the book of Zephaniah and concludes that in exegeting Zephaniah there is an interaction between diachronic concern of the formation of the book and the synchronic concern for the literary structure and interpretation of the book as a whole. He submits that including the literary context of the book of the Twelve (i.e., the twelve Minor Prophets) adds immense value to both the diachronic and synchronic concerns in interpretation. He concludes by stating that:

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[8] I use Wenstrom's (2016) structure since I find that it provides a brief and clear outline of the structure of the book of Zephaniah.

Future research on Zephaniah will need to address all three concerns, that is, the role of Zephaniah within the Book of the Twelve, the final form and message of the book as a whole, and the reconstruction of the words of the prophet in relation to the setting of the late seventh century BCE. In addressing these questions, scholars must be fully aware of the influence of theological concerns, such as the dichotomy between universalism and particularism or the stereotypical tripartite pattern of judgment against Israel/Jerusalem, judgment against the nations, and restoration for Israel and the nations, in the interpretation of this paradigmatic prophetic book (Sweeney 1999:140).

These are important factors to be taken into account when exegeting the text from a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus as I am doing since they shed light on the ideologies at play within the text

Zephaniah follows the usual pattern found in other prophetic books of judgment against Judah (1:1 -2:3), against foreign nations (2:4-3:8) and oracles of the salvation of Judah (3:9-20) (Gottwald 1985:393). The text which I focus on, namely Zephaniah 3:1-7, does not fit neatly into the overall structure of the book since it is situated within the oracles against foreign nations. The twist of placing these oracles here, in my opinion, emphasises the specific judgments against Judah in 3:1-5 and would have had the effect of enhancing their impact upon the Judahite audience through an unexpected turn in the flow of the narrative. The overall structure of chapter 1 of Zephaniah consists of judgment against the nations and then Judah. Judgment against the nations is repeated in chapter 2, followed by chapter 3 opening with judgment against Jerusalem and her rulers. From Zephaniah 3:8 restoration is promised to the nations and then to the remnant of Israel (see diagram in 4.4.2.2). I submit that the structure of the book places emphasis on the judgment against the late pre-exilic Judahite rulers since this is the climax of the judgment passages after which the emphasis moves towards restoration and the ruler of the remnant.

The judgements against other nations were supposed to be a warning for Judah to self-reflect and correct (Gottwald 1985:393). Renewal will only come from being humble and lowly. If one reads verses 1-7 in the broader context of Zephaniah 3:1-13, the pattern is clear. There is the denunciation of the Judahite leadership, followed by judgment and then restoration. It is necessary to note, however, that restoration only comes after punishment. Chapter 3:1-4 deals

with the corrupt status quo of the Judahite leadership. 3:5-13 lays out the path to restoration. Verse 5 lays the foundation of this restoration, which is Yahweh's righteousness. Verses 6-7 details how Yahweh has dealt with other nations and then from verses 8 to 13 the reader is directed to wait for Yahweh's future action (Sweeney 2001:196). Yahweh's future action consists in Yahweh pouring out Yahweh's wrath which will cause the nations to recognise Yahweh's power. All will turn to Yahweh, the arrogant will be removed from Jerusalem and the humble and poor remnant of Israel will find refuge in the name of Yahweh (3:12). The actions of Yahweh will result in a utopian state where there is no deceit, where the people will have access to basic necessities and live in peace (3:13). I will be exploring some avenues to assist in leading to restoration in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

At this point I also wish to note that the structure of Zephaniah 3:1-7 forms an *inclusio*. Thus, the denunciation starts with referring to the city (1) and concludes with referring to the city again (7). This, I submit, emphasises the fact that the judgment is against the entire city's leadership. This aspect will also be discussed further when dealing with modes of production and economic base below. As mentioned earlier, the structure of Zephaniah indicates that the author's main focus is the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. The passage and the structure therefore reiterates and confirms the data from the social-historical analysis which indicates that the oppressive nature of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership had reached a crises point and that the inevitable outcome was revolution.

4.4.3. Examination of the leadership within Zephaniah 3:1-7

In this section I wish to briefly examine what Zephaniah 3:1-7 seems to portray about the late Judahite leadership and their conduct since understanding the leadership and their conduct contributes to a better understanding of the social-historical context of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership.

4.4.3.1 The leadership

The leadership that is targeted in this passage are the officials or princes (שַׂר), judges (שֹׁפֵט), prophets (נָבִיא), and priests (כֹּהֵן). It covers a broad spectrum of the ruling elite. It includes what in today's terms would amount to the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. We can thus see that Zephaniah's oracles are against the entire leadership structure, not just certain individuals or offices.

4.4.3.2. The acts of the leadership

In the passage the prophet condemns various activities of the ruling elite. These include oppression of the vulnerable (3:1); refusing to listen to others (2); and devouring everything, with a complete lack of an understanding of sustainability (3). This reflects a similar attitude of shameless consumption which was referred to in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Other problematic behaviour which is dealt with by Zephaniah is the faithlessness and recklessness of the prophets (4). The priests are accused of doing violence to the law (4). I suggest that doing violence to the law would refer to the twisting of the Torah for personal gain[9]. We see that the leadership is shameless (5), unteachable (7) and corrupt. Once again. Similarities are seen in ministers who use the Gospel to manipulate congregants. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

4.5 Rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7 using a hermeneutic of suspicion

As mentioned earlier, the views of Josiah's leadership discussed in 4.2.2 take the text at face value and do not approach the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion. A hermeneutic of suspicion is necessary in approaching the text from a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. In this section I will employ a hermeneutic of suspicion to do the social analysis and examine the material and economic base, mode of production, social labour, social relationships, revolutionary overturns, class struggle and ideological superstructure at play within the context of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom.

To accomplish this I firstly turn to Nakanose (1993) who takes a radically different view on Josiah to most of the scholars referred to in 4.2.3.2. Even though this is an older text, it provides valuable insight into this study. Nakanose uses sociological exegesis to understand the social system of the Biblical context. He contends that the celebration of the Passover appears to be a novelty in the monarchical era and that the Deuteronomistic tradition changed the Passover from a family celebration to a Temple celebration (Nakanose 1993:6). He argues that there is a movement in Josiah's reforms from a pure worship of Yahweh to centralising worship around the Temple cult. He submits that this movement reinforces the view of the Chronicler that the book of the law was discovered subsequent to reforms having started and not, as the

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[9] As discussed in 3.5.6, the Torah depicts Yahweh's liberative action when it emphasises that the tithe is the mechanism through which those who are in need are to be provided for (Meeks 1989:84). There is thus a very real sense in which the Torah is violated when used for any other purpose, which appears to be the case in Zephanaiah 3:4.

Deuteronomist portrays, that the discovery of the book of the law led to the reforms (Nakanose 1993:19).

Nakanose suggests that Josiah's centralisation of worship followed from two historical precedents. Firstly, from an understanding of the Davidic group who held the belief that the loyalty of the king to Yahweh was Yahweh's desire and, secondly, from Solomon's entrenchment of the centralisation of worship around the Temple cult (Nakanose 1993:81). Josiah's recentralisation of worship would not have been fully accepted by all people, especially those in rural areas. The peasants' wealth base was impoverished through them needing to bring their produce and surplus to Jerusalem for celebration of the Passover and other centralised worship activities. Where they were unable to travel with their produce, these would have needed to be sold and then other supplies purchased closer to the Temple. Moving their surplus and produce to Jerusalem, incurring further expenses in travel and taxes due to the centralisation of worship to the Temple, resulted in the monarchy and ruling elite accumulating land and wealth whilst impoverishing the peasants' wealth base. Nakanose (1993:49) therefore submits that 2 Kings 22:3-7 confirms the exploitation of the poor by the rich through economic institutions (c.f. Zephaniah 1:11-13).

Gottwald (2001) also contends that power in ancient state-type societies, such as the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom, was entirely centralised and opposed to the community of the people of the land. There would therefore be definitive class divisions between the subjects and the ruling elite. West (2011) examines the economy of the Ancient Near East using a model which draws on a Marxist economic analysis. He concludes that, from the Ancient Near East to the Greco-Roman period, the normal economic model was one of a tributary mode of production which was administered through a city-state political system (West 2011:513). The understanding that the monarchy and the leadership in the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom exploited the poor and oppressed is developed by Boer (2015). Boer uses the Soviet modes of regulation as an economic model, not only to navigate the tensions between a capitalist and socialist model, but also as a means to analyse and deal with the issues of class and economic exploitation. Boer defends the thesis that the entire Ancient Near Eastern economic system relied on tribute as the means of extracting surplus from the labourers for the ruling elite (Boer 2015:155). He suggests that the people of the land would have eventually resisted the oppression of the ruling-class and that an overthrow of government would have had benefits to the poor and exploited. The effects of the rise of the monarchy in ancient Israel resulted in

political centralisation, social stratification, shifts in land tenure and effects on foreign trade, diplomacy and war (Gottwald 1985:323).

Focusing specifically on 2 Kings 23-25, Brueggemann (2000) comments on the fact that the demise of the last five kings of Judah is set in the context of imperial power. The kings of Judah are the victims of the dominant world powers of Egypt and then Babylon. This is not unlike the fall of the Northern kingdom to Assyria. However, what is important to note is that Brueggemann emphasises the fact that the Biblical narrative is not narrated in a vacuum but is set within a context where *Realpolitik* operates (Brueggemann 2000:570). The political landscape and the power dynamics at play within the text, its setting, and its context is an important aspect of my study since a Marxist reading relies heavily on understanding power dynamics.

From this brief analysis it can be concluded that the **material base and mode of production** rested mostly in the cultivation of land. However, the ownership of land in Ancient Israel shifted under the monarchy from being family- and tribe-based to becoming owned and controlled by the ruling elite (Mosala 1989:158). **Social labour** and **social relationships** consisted mostly of the rich landowners exploiting the poor and the working class to produce. Those who were producing in the rural and outlying areas were forced through centralised worship and taxes to relinquish their surplus to the rich city dwelling elite. When exploring the tensions which exist within the text itself, we immediately become aware of the tension which exists in the two covenantal traditions of the Davidic and Mosaic covenantal traditions. The Deuteronomistic history, as stated in 4.2.3.4, was focused on the centrality of the Mosaic-covenant and was revolutionary, wanting the Judahite society to return to the principles of justice as contained within the Deuteronomistic law. Thus, the Deuteronomist redacted the texts by providing explanations and comments on the reasons why the kings of Judah were seen as either good or bad; these had to do with whether they kept the covenantal law or not.

Revolutionary overturns can be discerned in the Biblical texts when the struggle between the ruling elite's desire to maintain the status quo and revolutionary overturns which push for change are both present within a particular text (Brueggemann 1983:314). As discussed in 4.2.3.4, the Deuteronomistic history calls for a change to the status quo by focusing on the covenantal law which prescribes various socio-economic and political administrative reforms needed to ensure transformation (Gottwald 1985:371). Since Zephaniah belonged to the

Levitical-prophetic group which gave rise to the Deuteronomistic reforms and writings (see 4.2.1) one would expect to come across revolutionary overturns within the text of Zephaniah. I submit that contradictions between the status quo and revolutionary texts are evident within the text of Zephaniah; for example, when the acts of the city and its rulers are compared to the just acts of Yahweh, there is judgment against the status quo. The leadership's failure to uphold the Mosaic-covenant is clearly portrayed as the ruling elite are juxtaposed against Yahweh's righteousness and justice.

In a situation of domination by imperial forces it is difficult to speak of a uniform **dominant ideology**. Generally, in these situations various elements of older ideological patterns become reactivated and reinterpreted based on the needs and interests of different groups (Lawrie 2005:195). Nonetheless, the ideological superstructure at play during the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom is that the rulers and the kings, in line with the Davidic-covenant, believed that they had a right to centralise worship and rule in Yahweh's stead and therefore had authority form Yahweh (c.f. Jer. 22 and Nakanose 1993:81). The working classes, and the poor and marginalised had to accept these ruling elites' authority without question. It is against this ideology that the Deuteronomist pushes when they compare the actions of the ruling elite to the standards laid down in the Mosaic Law.

The ruling class ran the risk of losing power under foreign rule. In the face of a possible invasion, they may therefore have co-opted the working class and oppressed them in their attempt to maintain or regain political power and privilege. Other groups would have tried to secure their own power bases when faced with the possibility of foreign domination. These may have included a priestly-theocratic movement with its power base in the Temple service. This group would have wanted to use the Temple as a source of influence and wealth creation for themselves. There may have also been other groups, for instance a middle-class group which did not form part of the ruling elite which would have benefited from some form of destabilisation of the power base of the existing ruling elite. This group would most probably have consisted of merchants, officials, wisdom teachers and even some landowners. These may not have suffered under foreign rule and could well have benefited by the increased trade and other socio-economic opportunities such as improved status for cooperating with the foreign powers. Wisdom teachers may have benefited from the opportunities for new teachings and landowners would not have welcomed a destructive war of liberation (Lawrie 2005:196).

Modern Marxist and materialist approaches acknowledge the fact that not all conflicts can be reduced to class struggle and a struggle purely between the working class and the ruling elite, but rather that there is a complex relationship between the ideological products of a society and the dominant ideology and the economic base (Lawrie 2005:197). It is recognised that even in Ancient Near Eastern societies, society had developed complicated ideological formations which operated independently but simultaneously. We therefore need to recognise more than just class struggle and interests in interpreting texts (Lawrie 2005:197). So, for example, the utopian features of the book of Zephaniah need to be recognised and accounted for. The opposition between oppressor and oppressed is recognised immediately. The opposition of oppressor and oppressed is not changed or resolved in any idealistic way in the pericope of Zephaniah 3:1-7. It is clear from the rest of the book that only a revolution can change the praxis in Jerusalem and create a change in the dynamic between oppressor and oppressed. A change in praxis is necessary for reconciliation. The dynamic between oppressors and oppressed is explicitly portrayed as the dynamic between injustice and justice or human rulers and Yahweh.

The **class struggle** that thus comes to the fore is between the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalised on the one hand and the ruling elite, who owned the land, stripped the poor of any surplus and exploited them, on the other. According to Boer (2015), when leadership is oppressive of the people and exploits them for personal gain, a revolution will eventually arise and overthrow the ruling class (Boer 2015:134). This revolution may have come overtly from the Babylonians conquering Judah; however, it may well be that many in the city of Jerusalem surrendered to or even sided with the Babylonians, especially those of the working class and the oppressed (cf. Jer 38:17-18). This is especially likely in the face of the fact that the poorest were left in Judah to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil (2 Kings 25:12). This siding with the invading forces may in and of itself have been instrumental in the fall of Jerusalem. It must also be remembered that the social revolution model of Israel's emergence in Canaan is based on the hypothesis that Israel consisted mostly of Canaanites who revolted against their overlords by joining a small group of invaders from the desert (Gottwald 1985:272). The pattern of social revolution may well have repeated itself with the overthrow of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. We can see that for the poorest in the land the exile into Babylon was an act of liberation because they now had access to the means of production which they were most likely denied during the reign of the Judahite kings.

4.6 Insights gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus

At this point I wish to focus on five insights which I gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from my rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7. I will discuss these insights in more detail in chapter 5 when I appropriate the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts.

4.6.1 The entire leadership structure is oppressive and exploitative

Firstly, the text highlights the fact that the leadership as a whole was oppressive and exploitative. Class differences are not really eliminated; they are confirmed and entrenched within the passage. The dominant ideology imposes itself in and through language. The author, who might be subjectively innocent, uses expressions and terms that show clearly how in Zephaniah's society there was a clear differentiation between leadership and the people. This is the dream of the advantaged classes: a harmony, a "peaceful coexistence" at a spiritual level, in which people still "know their place" (Lawrie 2005:196). The passage may therefore be seen as paternalistic rather than liberating because it allows for leadership of officials, judges, prophets and priests. The oppressive and exploitative practices of the Judahite leadership created a clear class distinction and struggle.

4.6.2 Leadership refuses to practice accountability.

The late pre-exilic Judahite leadership placed themselves in a position of entitlement and felt that their leadership is a protected privilege regardless of how they treat their followers. This characteristic of the Judahite leadership is in sharp contrast to the understanding of accountability within transformational leadership, especially in the African context. In the Old Testament, the theological struggle over public power and divine purpose remains focused on the experience and symbolism of Babylon (Brueggemann 1991:13). Yet even Babylon, and indeed all empires, are redeemable, transformable and salvageable for the purposes of Yahweh and can become a place of mercy and righteousness (Dan 4; Brueggemann 1991:15). However, in order for that to happen, leaders must be willing to listen and be prepared to change their oppressive ways. Leaders must acknowledge their accountability. Leadership, just like empire, which is portrayed in the Biblical texts, shows that empire is never autonomous but will always come up against Yahweh's alternative governance (Brueggemann 1991:10). In this sense, all leaders are accountable to the principles of Yahweh's alternative governance.

4.6.3 Leadership devours resources

We gather from the text of Zephaniah that there is a complete lack of an understanding of sustainability. The leaders are described as roaring lions and evening wolves who leave nothing till morning. It is a reflection of the ruling elite exploiting the poor and creating situations of socio-economic oppression. This reflects a similar attitude of shameless consumption which was referred to in chapter 3 of this dissertation when I discussed neo-pentecostal understandings of prosperity.

4.6.4 Leadership abuses the law

The priests are accused of doing violence to the law. I suggest that doing violence to the law would refer to the twisting of the Torah for personal gain. Once again similarities are seen in ministers who use the Gospel to manipulate congregants. The priests of Judah, who are supposed to represent the people before God, are using the law to control and manipulate the people, especially through means of the tithes. This is still happening today as was mentioned in chapter 3.

4.6.5 Yahweh continues to transform and liberate

The final insight into the leadership of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom I wish to mention is that Yahweh continues to transform societies and structures, and continues to liberate people. Despite the exploitative leadership, Yahweh remained righteous and renders just judgments (5). Yahweh desires that the leadership heeds correction (5-6). However, even if leadership refuses to change, Yahweh brings about transformation and leads people toward liberation (c.f. 3:8-13).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has consisted of a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 using a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. Some observations and conclusions were drawn around the oppressive role that leadership played within the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and how this itself may have aided in the destruction of Jerusalem and how the exile led to the liberation of the poorest of the land. In the next chapter I will be applying these insights to the contemporary leadership contexts within the MCSA as identified under the contextualisation pole in chapter 3.

Chapter 5 – Appropriation

"The poor tell us who we are, the prophets tell us who we could be,

so we hide the poor, and kill the prophets."

Philip Berrigan (n.d)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will be the final phase of the tri-polar model of exegesis, which I have used in this dissertation. In this chapter, the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 will be appropriated for my current MCSA leadership contexts. Therefore, this chapter will facilitate the dialogue between the context as discussed in chapter 3 and the text as analysed in chapter 4. This chapter aims to answer the final research sub-question: how can the insights gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts?

In 4.6, I highlighted some insights gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. These were that the entire leadership structure is oppressive and exploitative (Zeph 3:1), the leaders refused to practice accountability (3:2), the leaders devoured resources (3:3), they abused the law (3:4), but they continued to come up against Yahweh's transformative and liberating action (3:5). I will use these insights to engage the five problematic and oppressive leadership situations within the MCSA leadership contexts, which I identified and discussed in 3.5. These situations are stipends as a site of socio-economic oppression; the preferential option for the rich; avoiding others' suffering; the shackles of property ownership; and the allure of the prosperity Gospel. Once I have engaged the insights gained about leadership in chapter 4 with the contexts identified in 3.5, I will apply principles of leadership theory as discussed in chapter 2 to explore a leadership of liberation which can be applied within the MCSA.

5.2 Appropriation of the insights gained from rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the situations of socio-economic oppression within MCSA leadership contexts

5.2.1 Stipends as a site of socio-economic oppression

I discussed the payment of stipends in 3.5.2. I concluded by acknowledging that work had been done in this area by the MCSA to redress the inequality in stipends between ministers. However, I also acknowledged that the system of stipend payments has not been sufficiently addressed. Inequality and disparity in the payment of ministers within the MCSA remains. Affluent churches continue to pay their ministers additional stipends while those ministers who labour in areas which struggle still run the risk of not receiving the minimum amounts due. Members of the various societies and ministers need to be liberated from the constant pressure placed upon them to pay assessments so that the ministers can receive stipends. Members and ministers also need to be liberated from the fear that should assessments not to be forthcoming, the minister will not receive a stipend and eventually the society will be left without a minister.

In appropriating the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to this context, a few things stood out for me. As mentioned, there have been calls by various parties within the MCSA to change the stipend system, which has not been fully addressed. This reminds one of Jerusalem, which, as an oppressive city, has accepted no correction (Zeph 3:1). The issue for Jerusalem's leadership was that they refused to trust in Yahweh and draw near to God. Is the MCSA refusing to trust in God in the payment of the stipends? I wish to highlight two statements from the DEWCOM discussion document on stipends (DEWCOM 2007). These are that DEWCOM affirmed that the stipend debate is about connexional holiness before it is about finance and that our stipend system needs to be constantly critiqued in the light of Jesus' teaching and example (DEWCOM 2007:2). Since Jesus' ministry and teaching aimed to liberate the oppressed (see 2.2.2.1), there are clear correlations between Jesus' teachings and ministry and Zephaniah. Zephaniah's utopian society was one where the oppressor had been removed and all had access to resources (Zeph 3:12-13). Our failure as the MCSA in sufficiently redressing the stipend disparities appears to correlate with Zephaniah's context because we are not heeding the voices that have called for change in this area and thus we are probably not trusting God nor drawing near to God in the area of our stipend payments (c.f. Zeph 3:1). If we are not moving toward holiness and continuously critiquing the system in light of Jesus' teaching and example of liberating the oppressed, then it appears that the accusations laid against Jerusalem by Zephaniah, that the leadership did not accept correction, apply equally to the MCSA.

The MCO, as the administrative unit of the MCSA, also incurs huge overhead and administrative costs (as discussed in 3.5.2). Much of the assessment is used towards paying these costs. I have mentioned in chapter 3 that many societies struggle to pay assessments and eventually, when they no longer can, they are often left without a minister. In 3.5.3 I therefore ask the question of whether we are transforming, empowering, and liberating communities, or are we merely divesting them of resources? Struggling societies do feel that their resources are being devoured. As the MCSA we are adding to the burden of many poor to keep making payments to support structures. Under these circumstances should we not acknowledge that there is a sense in which the MCO is a roaring lion, or an evening wolf, that leaves nothing until the morning (3:3)? Again, I wish to highlight statements from DEWCOM (2007), namely that the present stipend system should change to favour justice and mission, that non-payment of ministers should never be tolerated, and that we share connexionally in proportion to our relative wealth for the common good of all (DEWCOM 2007:2). These ideals expressed by DEWCOM have not been realised within the MCSA. I submit that we cannot share from our relative wealth for the common good precisely because there are structures and offices within the MCSA that devour the resources and leave nothing for the morning.

Ministers who follow the Gospel call and John Wesley's example to minister to the poor and needy are effectively punished when it comes to remuneration because they are either paid less or not at all. The risk of disparity in the payment of stipends can cause serious issues in the faithfulness of ministers in going where God sends. Many ministers have financial commitments and will, therefore, rightly or wrongly, accept stationing based on the stipend they will receive. As ministers within the MCSA, we are called to go where we are sent (by God through the church). However, when we refuse to accept an invitation based on remuneration, then, as ministers within the MCSA, we are moving dangerously close to becoming reckless and even faithless to our call. We then run the risk of becoming like the prophets and priests described by Zephaniah who were reckless, faithless persons who profaned what is sacred (Zeph 3:4).

The issue of disparity of stipends has been brought up as a serious issue within the MCSA. Since change has been prolonged, it appears that the status quo will remain and that disparity in stipends will be the norm. If we accept disparity of payment in stipends as the norm within the MCSA, then do we accept that we know no shame like the unjust in Zephaniah's context (Zeph 3:5)? Are we then following in the footsteps of the late pre-exilic leadership of refusing correction because they had no fear and lost sight of what God had done? (Zeph 3:7).

In concluding the appropriation of the text to the context of disparity in payment of stipends, I wish to summarise the lessons learnt about the MCSA leadership contexts as they relate to stipend payments so that these can be used later in the chapter as I explore a leadership of liberation. In the discussion on stipend disparity, I noted that there appears to be a lack of acceptance of correction. In some situations, resources are devoured and not filtered through to others, ministers run the risk of being reckless and faithless to their call, and the impression is created that there is a lack of fear and shame. We seem to not recognise what God has done in other situations of financial disparity and what God is doing through, *inter alia* DEWCOM, by calling us to create a space of justice, equality, and holiness in the area of stipend payments.

5.2.2 A preferential option for the rich

In 3.5.3 I discussed that because of the financial needs of the MCO and the MCSA, the MCSA is no longer a church for the least, the poor and the marginalised, but, rather, we have become a church that ministers to those who have (Storey 2004:72). Some of the problem areas around this situation of socio-economic oppression that exist in the MCSA were discussed in chapter 3. In my discussion of a preferential option for the poor I discussed that we have not learnt from the lessons of the past; we have failed to listen to the voices of the lay leaders (and some clergy) within the various societies who have constantly requested relief from the burden of heavy assessments (Solomon 2020), and we have not learnt from the examples set by leaders at places such as Central Methodist Mission in Durban who, when they experienced relief from the need to pay for a minister, actually flourished. It was also demonstrated that, when the leadership is not trusted and lacks transparency in how money is spent, people become reluctant to give (Kumalo 2009:130). A further problem which was indicated in chapter 3 around the constant pressure placed on societies to pay the assessments or face the prospect of losing their minister, is that this is a far cry from our doctrine and Wesleyan roots. We are called to engage in social holiness; instead, we are withdrawing from the poor and migrating towards the rich. Instead of engaging in the liberating work of the Gospel, the assessments levied upon societies have become chains of bondage for many societies, especially those societies which consist of the poor and marginalised. If we wish to take the call of liberation theologians seriously, we as the MCSA must free our members from all that holds them in bondage, including assessments.

There are some striking injunctions from Zephaniah 3:1-7, which can be applied to the socio-economic context of the MCSA becoming a church for the rich. As with the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership, the leaders within the MCSA are creating situations of exploitation. Just

as the city was oppressive (3:1), and its officials and judges devoured resources (3:3), the MCSA has become oppressive for some societies and has devoured the resources that those societies once had. It is also my contention that the violation of our doctrine and historical traditions, as contained within our *Laws and Discipline*, is tantamount to doing violence to the law (3:4).

Kumalo (2009) pointed to various lessons that were learnt from his engagement with Central Methodist Mission in Durban (discussed in chapter 3). Kumalo has not been the only voice in speaking out about situations of oppression through assessments. Storey (2004) was quoted in chapter 3 as having similar concerns. The prophet Zephaniah accused the leadership of Judah of not heeding correction or listening to the voice of Yahweh (3:1 & 7). The MCSA leadership must listen to the contemporary prophetic voices, such as Storey (2004) and Kumalo (2009), and take corrective measures to be liberating for its people. Without allowing space for all people, the poor and the rich, the MCSA cannot be a church of liberation. Zephaniah's vision of a utopian state is one where the arrogant are removed and the humble and poor find refuge in the name of Yahweh (3:12). The utopian state will be a place where there is no deceit, where the people will have access to necessities and live in peace (3:13). As was pointed out by Kumalo (2009:130), a lack of transparency causes people to withhold giving. I propose that transparency is essential to ensure that there is no place for deceit within the church. Transparency acknowledges the truth of liberation theology's perspective that power lies in the hands of the people, that the people are the church and not its hierarchy and structures (Kumalo 2009:25). We, therefore, need to move away from divesting people of resources and instead focus on the call to be a church that assists in transforming, empowering, and liberating communities.

5.2.3 Avoiding the suffering of others

In 3.5.4 I discussed the situation of economic division within some Methodist societies along economic lines even though Methodist origins held a preferential option for the poor. The manifestation of the *Dives syndrome* (see 3.5.4) has been regarded as acceptable by individual Methodist clergy who oppose colleagues who attempt to confront these injustices and reach out to the poor and marginalised. In chapter 3, I discussed that there is generally a lack of compassion by those who live comfortably for those who live in oppression and poverty. I also demonstrated that indifference towards the suffering of others is not restricted to purely economic situations of oppression but extends to all forms of oppression. Therefore, there is a

tendency to spiritualise the Gospel and remove it from the realm of the socio-economic and political realities of oppression that are encountered by many. As discussed in 4.3, spiritualising the Gospel runs against the grain of liberation theology and Zephaniah's envisioned utopian society which has contemporary political relevance (Timmer 2016:331).

In Zephaniah's text, we see a similar lack of compassion by the leaders for those who suffer. In fact, it is a lack of compassion by the ruling elite and active oppression which is the core issue within Zephaniah's judgments against Judah. The ruling elite are accused of oppression (3:14), exploitation (3:3-5), and indifference (3:7). The ruling elite's attitude in Zephaniah's context is completely juxtaposed with liberation theology, which is concerned with ministering to the poor and oppressed within their lived reality and changing their reality to bring about liberation and empowerment. Liberation and empowerment of the oppressed was the main focus of Wesley and the early Methodists (see 3.4.2). As mentioned in 4.2.3.4, life was still difficult for those who remained in Jerusalem after the exile, yet there was liberation for the poor from the oppression and lack of compassion of the ruling elite who were removed from Jerusalem. Similarly, Zephaniah's utopian society is one where the proud and haughty have been removed (3:10). Liberation theology also holds explicitly that the exploited must be liberated at the expense of those who maintain the *status quo* or abuse structures of power for their own agendas (Gutiérrez 1988:65)

As ministers and leaders within the MCSA, we must heed the warning within Zephaniah and turn with compassion towards those who suffer and are oppressed. As the MCSA, we need to stop ignoring our roots and doctrine and should turn back to the call for social holiness. In this way, we will align ourselves with liberation theology's call to encounter the poor, show compassion to them, and minister to them in their lived reality of oppression. As the MCSA we need to rekindle our empathy for the oppressed if we wish to reclaim our Wesleyan roots and follow Jesus' example of liberation.

5.2.4 The shackles of property ownership

One of the most significant areas of concern within the MCSA is the size of its property portfolio compared to what it spends on mission (Olivier 2005:6). The MCSA's property holdings are not a site of liberation and empowerment, but, instead, are a site of oppression and bondage. The MCSA is in bondage to its properties and the need to maintain them. This bondage becomes a burden to the societies that need to raise money to maintain these

properties. As with other areas of oppression, the fact that our structures and property ownership is oppressive has been discussed for many years within the MCSA (3.5.5). The MCSA has repeatedly acknowledged the need to use our resources, structures and leadership for liberation and transformation; however, the *status quo* of our structures and property ownership as a site of oppression remains.

In turning to the text and appropriating it for this particular MCSA leadership context, we see that, again, there are similarities between Judah's leadership during the time of Zephaniah and our own MCSA contemporary leadership contexts. These similarities include the reality of oppression, a continual drive to obtain money and resources to maintain the properties and structures, and slowness to take heed of repeated warnings and cries for correction. As mentioned in chapter 3, the problem is not with property ownership *per se*, but rather with the effect that property ownership has on creating socio-economic exploitation of followers. If the property was used for mission and empowering people, then property would be a tool of liberation. Empowerment through property ownership would especially be the case when those who benefited from the property ownership were the least, the poor and the marginalised. However, as matters stand currently, those who benefit most from property ownership are the ruling elite within the MCSA. A good example to follow is that of the Rev James Allison who allotted and passed ownership in the land to those who were labouring on the land (discussed in 3.5.5). In keeping with the praxis of liberation theology, we must firstly determine which structures keep people in oppression and bondage and then change those structures and our beliefs about those structures so that they become tools of liberation instead (c.f. Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:45).

As I discuss in 4. 5, the poorest were left in Judah to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil after the exile (2 Kings 25:12). They therefore had access to the modes of production and material base. Possibly, for some among them, it was the first time that they had free access to these resources. From a liberation theological perspective, it is important that even the poorest among us should have access to the resources, especially the land, owned by the MCSA and not only be burdened with its maintenance. Therefore, we need to come up with solutions to the ever-increasing burden that property ownership is placing on the members of the MCSA. One of the bondages that liberation theology seeks to liberate people from is their blindness, fear, false consciousness, and ideological prejudices. Liberation theology also seeks to liberate the oppressor from their anxiety and need to control and manipulate (Müller 2015b:74). Therefore,

liberation will come when we can release property to others for their empowerment and betterment. It will mean that there is an opportunity for others to benefit from the land and also to release the MSA's leadership from the fear and false security we tend to derive from owning property. The shackles of property ownership are areas where the MCSA must accept correction and not lose sight of all the warnings and pleas that have already been raised (c.f. Zeph 3:7). We must move in the direction of creating spaces where the least are able to pasture in safety (Zeph 3:13).

5.2.5 The allure of the prosperity Gospel

Finally, I want to address the allure of the prosperity Gospel. As discussed in 3.5.6, the prosperity Gospel equates wealth and prosperity with God's approval and blessing. Many who are oppressed and suffer from socio-economic hardships are desperate to escape their cycle of poverty and oppression and therefore succumb quite easily to the allure of the prosperity Gospel and are more readily deceived by those who preach such a Gospel of prosperity. As discussed in chapter 3, the proponents of the prosperity Gospel have taken an aspect of the Torah and used it as a tool of socio-economic oppression and manipulation. As a central theme within liberation hermeneutics, the Exodus event depicts Yahweh as the Economist who leads the household of God out of the household of bondage (Meeks 1989:89). The tithe and the Torah provide the mechanisms through which poverty can be countered (Deut 15:4-5) (Meeks 1989:84). However, instead, the tithe is being used as an instrument of oppression when ministers manipulate and deceive members by promising financial blessings for those who tithe and a concomitant curse for those who do not.

As long as we continue to hold a capitalist economic model as the financial model that guides our dealings within the MCSA, the risk of adopting principles from the prosperity Gospel will remain a reality. A capitalist, free-market economic model will continue to increase the gap between the rich and the poor (Vermeulen 2005:161). Various economic models have been proposed by liberation theologians over the years which attempt to negotiate the tension between equality and liberty (Pottenger 1989:21). Of attraction to me is the model proposed by Vermeulen which holds that public policy and government spending should be directed in such a manner that a social security safety net is created for all, especially the poor and marginalised (Vermeulen 2005:169). There is much to analyse within Vermeulen's and other proposed economic models, all of which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, what I wish to note is that other, more equitable and liberating models are available for exploration. The

MCSA needs to rediscover its roots and allow Methodism's principles to be inculcated into the MCSA, mainly focusing on personal and social holiness, or as Peter Storey phrases it, "we need to repair our foundations" (Storey 2004:57). For the MCSA to return to its Wesleyan roots and align itself with liberation theology, we will need to make radical changes to our attitude towards money and the security it offers us. The need for financial accountability and good stewardship is not an excuse to use the Torah principle of tithing to place heavy burdens on our congregations and manipulate them into giving more, especially for those members who are already labouring under conditions of socio-economic oppression.

In chapter 4 I discussed the fact that the centralisation of worship was used to extract the surplus from the rural peasants. To justify their actions, the ruling elite, together with the priests and other religious leaders, used the regulations around worship to oppress and manipulate the poor and marginalised into complying with the continual demand to offer appropriate sacrifices at the appropriate location, all of which was defined by the ruling elite. Zephaniah, I submit, used the example of centralised worship and the abuse of the Torah to lay the charge against the priests and prophets of being reckless, profaning what is sacred, and doing violence to the law (3:4). Despite their twisting of the law, Yahweh remained faithful and did what is just (3:5). I submit that just because there are apparent blessings and prosperity in some ministries where the prosperity Gospel is preached does not mean that we act per the Gospel mandate. Blessings, justice, and faithfulness come from Yahweh because of Yahweh's character despite the priests, leaders, and prophets perverting the law (3:4-5).

As the MCSA we must re-evaluate what we are preaching and whether we remain faithful to the Gospel mandate of liberation and our Wesleyan heritage and roots of socio-economic liberation and social holiness. As was demonstrated in chapter 3, the prosperity Gospel has become attractive within specific sectors of the MCSA, which can only lead to further perversions of our doctrine. Instead of becoming a place of liberation and transformation, we will remain a place of bondage and oppression. Zephaniah's utopian society is one where no lies are uttered, where deceit is not found, and where all find sufficient food and shelter (3:16). The MCSA must embrace a vision of honest leadership which does not twist or pervert the Gospel but leads people to a place where everyone's needs are met. Economic affluence undermines the Gospel (Wesley [1787]) and is not the purpose of liberation theology. If we pursue economic prosperity for those who are currently economically oppressed, we merely entrench the *status quo* and turn the oppressed into the oppressor. Zephaniah's call is for the

complete removal of the proud, exultant, and haughty and, therefore, in Zephaniah's envisioned utopian state, there exists a measure of equality for all (Zeph 3:11). We therefore need to shift our focus from prosperity for some to meeting the basic needs of all.

5.3 Lessons learnt from the dialogue between the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 and the contemporary MCSA leadership context

The dialogue between text and context in 5.2 above highlights a few lessons from the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership which can be applied to the MCSA leadership contexts. I will briefly discuss these here and then, from these lessons on oppressive and exploitative leadership, move into exploring a leadership of liberation in the next section.

As I have mentioned throughout this dissertation, various people, both laity and clergy, have over the years, raised concerns and expressed distress at the instances of socio-economic exploitation and oppression which is occurring within MCSA leadership contexts. Notwithstanding the fact that the MCSA and its leadership proclaim our trust and faith in God, we remain heavily reliant upon secular capitalist economic models to maintain our structures. I want to, therefore, draw some parallels between the MCSA and its leadership and the leadership of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. There is similarity between Jerusalem and its leadership's failure to heed correction and the MCSA's slowness in heeding correction. Therefore, it appears that the MCSA, just like the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership, is resisting the call to trust Yahweh and draw close to God. As a church and our leadership, we are not prioritising the Gospel call to social holiness and liberation; instead, as mentioned earlier, we are continuing to trust the worldly capitalist and economic models to find security, even at MCSA members' expense.

Another area of overlap between the MCSA and Zephaniah's context is the devouring of resources. As discussed in 3.5.3, Kumalo (2009:137) encourages clergy and laity to refrain from a mindset focused on consumption of resources and instead view ourselves as stewards of resources. However, our congregations' resources are still being devoured in our attempt to meet financial commitments and maintain the structures within the MCSA. The consumption of resources is not sustainable because there is very little being left for future planning and investment in mission (c.f. Zeph 3:3). Not only is there over consumption and devouring of resources, but there are those among us who will go to any length to ensure that sufficient finances are received from our societies to pay the assessments. In the process they even

profane what is sacred and do violence to our doctrine and Wesleyan roots by incorporating doctrines which are not Methodist. It is unfortunate, but it must be acknowledged that many are doing this without shame.

Does the question then need to be asked of where this will lead to if socio-economic oppression continues unchecked? From Zephaniah's context, Jerusalem and its leadership, who held the socio-economically oppressed in bondage, were destroyed. Jerusalem was not the first city to be overthrown and Zephaniah specifically points to the examples of other cities. Yet, Jerusalem and her leaders continued in their oppression of the people. As the MCSA we have numerous examples of churches that lost members or even split because of oppressive behaviour by leadership. Where tension exists and is unresolved some form of revolution seems to be the inevitable outcome. The Reformation is an example *par excellence* of such revolution. The Methodist Church itself was birthed out of the tension between the leadership of the Anglican Church and the Methodist movement which had been on the increase over the years. These tensions also fueled a separation between American Methodism and the British Methodists (Heitzenrater 2013:345). William Booth, discussed in chapter 3, also left the Methodist church and started the Salvation Army because of his frustration with the Methodist leadership. These are examples of forms of revolution resulting from leadership not listening to followers and pursuing practices that were either oppressive or were perceived by followers to be oppressive.

A contemporary example of the MCSA losing members is when a former minister of the MCSA, Mr Rowan Rennie, and a group of his followers left the MCSA (MCSA 2020c). Mr Rennie and his followers offered four main theological reasons for having left the MCSA. These are the MCSA's stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the MCSA's move toward inclusivity of same-sex unions, the MCSA's implementation of a quota system to ensure women are elected to positions of leadership, and the MCSA's alleged failure to address farm murders[10]. Mr Rennie, in a video released on YouTube, says that the MCSA did not listen to their concerns or take their opinions seriously (Rennie 2020). As a result of the difference in doctrinal viewpoints and the MCSA's stance on the issues raised by Mr Rennie, he felt that he and his followers had no alternative but to leave the MCSA and publicly speak out against the MCSA. In a response to these allegations the MCSA has indicated that:

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[10] I am not in agreement with Mr Rennie's reasons for leaving the MCSA or the way in which he embarked on leaving the MCSA; however, the validity of his reasons for leaving the MCSA, or the lack thereof, is not the focus of this dissertation

While it is true that the MCSA, like other denominations, has seen divergent views lead to breakaways and the formation of new churches, this no doubt brings pain to many hearts and indeed to God's heart, as it opposes the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to heal and transform (MCSA 2020c).

The split of Mr Rennie and his followers from the MCSA illustrates the point that when people feel they are not heard it leads to frustration and some form of revolt. It also brings home the fact that in revolution there are many who do suffer pain, and in this instance, it is the congregation members of Mr Rennie's society who decided to remain with the MCSA who are suffering the most as they try and rebuild their society and community.

Oppression, in any form, leads to revolution. The inevitability of revolution is the contention of Marx and Marxism as well as liberation theologians. Even though most liberation theologians do not support a violent form of revolution, a revolution in other ways is sought, such as education and removal of oppressive structures and leaders. Zephaniah was also of the view that revolution was necessary to rid Jerusalem of oppressive leadership to usher in a state where there was liberation from oppression. As discussed in chapter 4, this was partially realised for the poorest of the land after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:12).

In concluding this section, I will summarise the main lessons learnt about oppressive leadership from the dialogue between the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 and the MCSA leadership contexts in this section. These are that oppressive leadership is leadership that refuses to heed correction or listen to the voice of followers. It is leadership that consumes the resources of followers. It will use fear, intimidation, or deceit in meeting its desires and has no respect for their followers' needs. Oppressive leaders do not respect the law or what is just, reasonable, or right. They are arrogant, lack empathy, and see themselves as exempt from the calamities that have befallen others. However, ultimately oppressive leadership comes up against Yahweh's justice and judgment and, therefore, inevitably becomes the victim of revolution. For the MCSA to not be a site of oppression but rather a place of liberation and transformation, we need to heed the lessons learnt and embrace a leadership of liberation. Exploring what a leadership of liberation may look like is the focus of the next section.

5.4 Exploring a leadership of liberation

The discussion on the lessons learnt from Zephaniah 3:1-7 for contemporary MCSA leadership contexts has, to this point, focused on negative leadership and situations of exploitation and oppression. As discussed in chapter 2, negative leadership, also called the dark side of leadership, arises where leaders are unethical and immoral and do not contribute to the good of organisations and society. The manifestation of negative leadership may result from personality disorders or other psychological or moral deviations of those in leadership, their followers, or both (Kurtulmuş 2019:2).

I have extensively explored the dark side of leadership within the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership and contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. I now wish to use what I have explored as a basis from which to answer the question of what positive leadership will look like within the framework of liberation theology. Exploring a leadership of liberation was one of the reasons offered in chapter 2 for discussing leadership theory. In 2.5.4, I summarised the salient characteristics of transformational leadership which, I argued, was a suitable platform from which to explore a leadership of liberation. Transformational leadership is also used as the basis of a leadership of liberation because exercising transformational leadership would lead to the empowerment and realisation of followers' full humanity, which is the aim of liberation theology. I wish to repeat what was said in 2.5.4 since it is pertinent for developing a leadership of liberation[11]. Transformational leadership elevates followers' motivation and morality, involves followers, empowers, and serves followers; transformational leaders motivate, encourage, create paradigm shifts, inspire, and induce followers. Transformational leadership deals with shared values, beliefs, and goals, and there is an importance attached to values, morals, and ethical leadership, the greater good or higher social dividend. Transformational leadership is about change, being proactive, effective, and efficient. Transformational leaders are empathetic, consider the individual and individuality as well as the community. Accountability is essential, and a holistic approach to leading is necessary.

It would, I submit, be proper at this stage to look at the converse of oppressive leadership, which was discussed in 5.3 above, to determine what a leadership of liberation would look like.

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[11] I will be using the terms 'a leadership of liberation', 'a leadership for liberation', or 'a liberational leader/ship' interchangeable within this chapter. All these terms I take to mean a leadership which leads followers in a manner which brings about liberation from oppression. There may be nuanced differences between the different terms used; however, for the purposes of this dissertation which aims to explore a leadership for liberation within the MCSA, these differences, if any, I submit are immaterial.

I will then compare those characteristics that are the opposite of oppressive leadership and characteristics of transformational leadership, as discussed above, to determine what the key characteristics of a leadership of liberation are. I will now take each area of oppressive leadership in turn and examine its converse in light of liberation theology, and the lessons learnt from Zephaniah and leadership theory.

5.4.1 Liberational leaders ensure that good stewardship is exercised over all resources

Liberation theology is opposed to exploitation and consumerism. Its focus is on providing for all and ensuring that all people's basic needs are met so they may live and realise their full humanity. We are called to shift from being mere consumers to seeing ourselves as stewards of resources (Kumalo 2009:137). Zephaniah also points toward the need for security, peace, and provision of basic needs to sustain and ensure life (Zeph 3:13). Provision and security of resources will not happen without good stewardship. We can practice good stewardship by adopting certain characteristics of transformational leaders. These characteristics that we need to adopt are being **considerate of followers' individual** needs, and attaching importance to **values, morals, and ethical leadership.** I also submit that aspects of being **effective and efficient** relate to stewardship and sustainability. A **holistic** approach to leadership also affects stewardship and sustainability since aspects other than personal greed are considered when leading. I wish to also refer to servant leadership at this point. An essential feature of **servant leadership** is the fact that a servant leader places their followers' needs ahead of their own. A servant leader will, therefore, not consume in a manner that is exploitative or unsustainable. **Accountability** can also assist in ensuring good stewardship and sustainability and avoiding exploitation.

5.4.2 Liberational leadership uplifts and empowers followers

I discussed in chapter 4 the fact that oppressive leaders manipulate followers to meet the leaders' personal agenda. As we examine this aspect of oppressive leadership through the lens of liberation theology, we can appreciate how using tactics of fear, intimidation, or deceit to fulfil selfish desires is entirely contrary to liberation theology. Liberation theology seeks to release and liberate people, not continue to keep them in bondage to fear or ignorance. Ignorance or deceit and manipulation of the Gospel are aspects of oppression that education can counter. As discussed in chapters 2 and 3, Paolo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is an example of educating people into the idea that the future can be different, and one does not need to accept oppression and the *status quo*. Education is one way to liberate the

oppressed. Freire's spirituality, which involved education and vision, can be applied by educating people to view a society without corruption and oppression. Through education, people can see themselves as having the power to transform their lives, situations, and environments by taking responsibility to change oppressive structures and cycles. People can be taught that they are not powerless objects but people with dignity (TEEC 2006a:107). Within Zephaniah's context and his vision of a future utopian state, honesty and peace (as opposed to deceit and fear) are the order of the day (3:13). I submit that Zephaniah places the image of a utopian future before the people precisely to educate them that the future can be different, and that oppression need not be accepted. Zephaniah's prophecy of an envisioned utopian state is an example of how educating and providing a vision of a different reality can of itself become a catalyst of change and bring about liberation praxis since, I submit, it would have aided in bringing about the revolution of the exile.

Leadership theory can help provide tools for liberating people from situations of fear, intimidation, and deceit. Liberation happens when leaders **elevate** followers' **motivation,** and **involve, empower**, and **serve** followers. Transformational leaders **motivate, encourage, create paradigm shifts, inspire**, and **influence** followers with **shared values, beliefs**, and **goals**. Shared values and goals are essential because a participatory leadership model helps with empowerment and transparency, which are both aims of liberation and transformation (Kumalo 2009:132). Motivating followers and having shared goals prevents leaders from using fear and deceit to achieve their agendas. When a leader focuses on the followers' needs and practices **individualised consideration**, then manipulation and exploitation are far less likely to occur. I believe that **accountability** is the one feature that will help ensure that leaders do not use fear, intimidation, and deceit. I submit that accountability is a characteristic that will ensure that leaders who liberate embrace humility and avoid the traps of pride and haughtiness (Zeph. 3:11).

5.4.3 A leadership of liberation respects the needs of their followers

Liberation theology, with its desire to liberate, elevate and help people achieve their full humanity, originated from a space of desiring to help others and minister to them. Liberation leaders place others' needs ahead of their own needs as seen from the many sacrifices made by liberation theologians over the years. In a similar vein, Zephaniah condemns leaders for putting their own needs ahead of their followers' and points explicitly to the vision that once oppressive

leadership is removed, people's needs will be met, specifically their needs for peace and provision of necessities (Zeph 3:13).

Leadership theory provides characteristics from transformational leadership that will counter the lack of respect that oppressive leadership has towards their followers and their followers' needs. The characteristics which show respect to followers are those characteristics and actions of transformational leadership that **involve followers, empower** and **serve** them; focus on **shared values, beliefs and goals**; attach importance to the **greater good or higher social dividend;** and show empathy and **consideration for the individual and individuality** as well as the **community**. Once again, **accountability**, especially towards followers, will ensure that the needs of followers are kept paramount.

5.4.4 Liberational leaders respect the law, and what is reasonable, just and right

Liberation theology has a focus on social justice. This is similar to Wesley's focus on social holiness discussed in chapter 3. A leader who focuses on justice and uplifting the plight of the poor and oppressed is unlikely to be oppressive[12]. Zephaniah strongly condemns the flagrant disregard of the law and what is just and sacred by the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. Zephaniah contrasts oppressive leaders with Yahweh, who is righteous and just (3:5).

I again turn to leadership theory to identify those characteristics, which will ensure that leaders will focus on what is right and just. Firstly, transformational leaders focus on **values, morals**, and **ethical** leadership, the **greater good** or **higher social dividend**. Secondly, transformational leadership is empathetic, **considers** the **individual and individuality** as well as the **community.** Thirdly transformational leaders are prepared to be held **accountable** and hold others accountable. A leadership that embraces the characteristics mentioned here will, as a matter of course, be a leader who respects the law and does what is reasonable, just, and right.

5.4.5 Liberational leaders are humble and empathise with others

It was precisely the desire of theologians to free others from the calamities that had befallen them that gave rise to liberation theology. Whether we examine Wesley and his attempt to free people from the social ills of poverty and distilling, or Latin American theologians who work to free people from the oppression of the exploitive ruling elite, it remains clear that there is

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[12] I have discussed the danger of the oppressed becoming the oppressor in chapter 2.

concern for the conditions in which humanity find itself. On two separate occasions, Zephaniah condemns Jerusalem's ruling elite for their refusal to accept correction (3:2 & 7). In verses 6 and 7, Yahweh expresses surprise at the fact that the leaders did not look to the examples of what happened to other nations or tragedies that had already befallen Jerusalem as warnings. The prophet, however, indicates that instead of being a warning, it appears that the calamities of others motivated the rulers of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom to become even more eager to pursue their corrupt and oppressive practices (3:7b). These oppressive rulers are then juxtaposed against the humble and lowly who will make up the utopian society envisioned by Zephaniah. I believe being humble and lowly makes one more sensitive to the plight of others and assists one to be open to correction.

I now turn to leadership theory to explore the characteristics of leadership which encapsulate humility and facilitate taking heed of correction and being concerned about the plight of others. The characteristics which allow for humility, heeding correction and being concerned about others are those of transformational leaders because they **serve followers, have shared values, beliefs and goals** with others**,** pursue the **greater good** or **higher social dividend, consider** the **individual and community, show empathy** and, again, are **accountable.**

5.4.6 A liberative leadership leads in accordance with Yahweh's justice and judgment and becomes the instruments of revolution

In chapter 2 I discussed the revolutionary nature of liberation theology that is not interested in any purely theoretical debate but desires to see practical changes in oppressive situations. In using Marxist and materialist tools for social analysis, liberation theology itself embraces an understanding that there is conflict between the oppressed and oppressor. This conflict can only be resolved when oppression is completely removed. Liberation theology, therefore, partners with Yahweh in Yahweh's commitment to the struggle to modify reality to overcome the injustices suffered by the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed (Andiñach & Botta 2009:6).

As mentioned previously, liberation theology does not accept the position that violent revolution is the only option, but instead that revolution can come through peaceful means and transitions. Liberation theology believes that liberating actions usually occur through self-help groups, accepting responsibility, volunteer service, and joining organisations aimed at change. Only in extreme situations does conflict result in armed uprisings (Müller 2015b:64). However,

this does not detract from the fact that liberation theology is a conflictual theology (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997:44). Liberation theology is also not interested in one class replacing another class, where the oppressed class merely becomes the oppressor (Müller 2015b:68).

However, Zephaniah is insistent that Yahweh's new regime will be ushered in only through the violent destruction of the status quo (Zeph. 3:8). For liberation theologians and Zephaniah, the liberation of people to fully experience what it means to be human is God's desire and mandate. All those who oppose this liberation will eventually find themselves being opposed by Yahweh. Like with the fight against racism and apartheid, the MCSA must engage in the struggle against socio-economic oppression. Change, however, does not come easy. As was seen with the fight against apartheid and racism, wars were fought on the floors of synods and conferences, some members left the MCSA, several clergy resigned, and some had to face the difficulty of continuing the fight for justice and equality from within the Methodist Church itself (Kumalo 2009:65). In bringing about justice and liberation we must bridge the gap between the affluent and the poor. The MCSA needs to appeal to the rich's goodwill to share what they have with the poor until the system is changed and the poor can stand on their own. This principle is suggested by Kumalo (2009), who emphasises that charity and empowerment are not necessarily mutually exclusives and quotes Saint Augustine, who said that "charity is no substitute for justice withheld" (Kumalo 2009:137). The MCSA has a choice, we can either partner with Yahweh in opposing oppression or find ourselves being opposed by Yahweh.

Leadership theory offers some characteristics that may ensure that liberation leaders remain aligned with Yahweh's justice and judgment. These include **serving** followers, pursuing **shared values, beliefs** and **goals**, maintaining **values, morals** and **ethical leadership**, and aiming for the greater good or **higher social dividend**. What will keep a leadership of liberation from becoming oppressive is a constant re-evaluation of the *status quo* by focusing on **change**, **transformation**, and **being proactive**, **empathetic**, **considering the individual and the community**, and practicing **accountability**. On the aspect of partnering with God to bring about justice, a transcendental view of leadership is helpful because it sees leadership as being accountable to God (Usue 2006:636).

5.4.7 Defining a leadership of liberation

I have dialogued between the text and the context through my ideo-theological lens in exploring a leadership of liberation. From this dialogue, several key characteristics have come to the fore.

Before concluding this chapter. I would like to offer my definition of a leadership of liberation based on the insights gained from appropriating the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the contemporary leadership contexts of the MCSA through my ideo-theological lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus:

A leadership of liberation is leadership that has the ultimate **goal of liberating and transforming** followers to realise their full humanity through **motivating, inspiring,** and **encouraging** followers. They aim to **create paradigm shifts** by **influencing** followers to embrace **shared values, beliefs** and **goals** to pursue the **greater good or higher social dividend**. Liberation leaders show **empathy** for their followers and are **considerate of the individual and community**. They **focus on values, morals and ethical leadership.** Liberational leaders oppose the oppressive *status quo* through being **effective, efficient,** focusing on **change**, **being proactive,** and embracing **accountability to others and God.** They **serve** followers by **elevating** them through **involving** and **empowering** them.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer the final research sub-question, namely, how can the insights gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts? I have done this by appropriating the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 to the context of contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. While creating space for a dialogue between the text and the context, I have explored some similarities between Zephaniah's envisioned future and liberation theology. Various lessons came to the fore regarding oppressive leadership and how liberation theology and Zephaniah's context address oppressive leadership. From these lessons and leadership theory I explored some key characteristics of leadership, specifically transformational leadership, which assisted in exploring a leadership of liberation that can be applied to contemporary MCSA leadership contexts. I concluded this chapter by providing my definition of a leadership of liberation. In the next chapter, I will discuss the conclusions of this research. I will also set out the lessons learnt from the application of my methodology and note some of my experiences in conducting this research.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

"Strenuous theological reflection will allow us to
discern critically where we are being led."
Henri Nouwen (1989)

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter of my dissertation I present the summary and conclusions of my research. I also set out the lessons learnt from the application of my methodology and note some of my experiences in conducting this research.

6.2 Summary and conclusions of the research

This study's key research question was: what insights can be gained to address exploitative leadership within contemporary MCSA contexts from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus?

In answering the main research question, I formulated the following sub-research questions:

1. What are the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts?
2. What insights can be gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus? and
3. How can these insights, if any, address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts?

Each chapter of this dissertation dealt with a specific pole of the tri-polar exegetical model which I used as the theoretical framework of this research. I discussed my ideo-theological lens with which I approach the text and my contemporary context in chapter 2. My ideo-theological lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus involved exploring how we say to the poor, the least of society, that God loves them (Gutiérrez 2015a:6). My discussion included the use of Marxist and materialist approaches to social analysis as these are social analytical tools readily used by liberation theologians. Since this dissertation aimed to explore a leadership of liberation, I also discussed leadership theory as a social science and an analytical tool in chapter 2. I concluded that a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus is an approach to Biblical interpretation which seeks to link theory and praxis together to liberate

the oppressed. I also concluded in chapter 2 that, because of the relevance and comprehensive nature of transformational leadership theory, transformational leadership is a valid leadership theory and style to use as a basis from which to explore a leadership of liberation.

In chapter 3 I dealt with the contextualisation pole of the tri-polar exegetical model. I set out to deal with research sub-question 1 of the research which asked what the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts are. After discussing Methodism's British and South African roots and the MCSA's structures, I identified some leadership contexts within the MCSA at society, circuit, synod, and connexional levels. In discussing the structures and leadership contexts with the MCSA, I identified five areas of socio-economic oppression within the MCSA. These are the situation of stipends being a site of socio-economic oppression, the preferential option for the rich, avoiding others' suffering, the shackles of property ownership, and the allure of the prosperity Gospel.

Chapter 4 dealt with the distantiation pole of the tri-polar exegetical model that I used to analyse the context and text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. Chapter 4 aimed to answer research sub-question 2 of the research which asked what insights can be gained about the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. In exegeting Zephaniah 3:1-7, I predominantly used socio-historical criticism to identify the socio-historical context of Zephaniah. I then engaged with a hermeneutic of suspicion to identify the struggles and tensions present both within Zephaniah's context and within the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. Through this process of rereading Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus, I identified six insights about the oppressive nature of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership. These are that 1) the entire leadership structure was oppressive; 2) they refused to practice accountability; 3) they devoured the resources of their followers, especially of the most socio-economically vulnerable; 4) the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership had no respect for the law or for what is just, reasonable, or right; and 5) that despite the corrupt nature of the late pre-exilic Judahite's leadership, Yahweh continues to transform and liberate, and, therefore, the oppressive late pre-exilic Judahite leadership came up against Yahweh's justice and judgment and therefore, inevitably, they became the victims of revolution.

Finally, in chapter 5, which is the appropriation pole, I attempted to answer research sub-question 3. This research sub-question asked how the insights gained from a rereading of

Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus, if any, could address exploitative leadership within MCSA contexts. I investigated this research sub-question by creating space for dialogue between the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7 and the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts as identified in chapter 3. In this dialogue, many similarities between the oppressive leadership of the late pre-exilic Judahite leadership and situations of socio-economic oppression in contemporary MCSA leadership contexts were identified and specific lessons were learnt about oppressive leadership. These are that oppressive leadership is leadership that refuses to heed correction or listen to the voice of followers. It is leadership that consumes the resources of followers. It will use fear, intimidation, or deceit in meeting its desires and has no respect for their followers' needs. Oppressive leaders do not respect the law or what is just, reasonable, or right. They are arrogant, lack empathy, and see themselves as exempt from the calamities that have befallen others. However, ultimately oppressive leadership comes up against Yahweh's justice and judgment and, therefore, inevitably becomes the victims of revolution.

These insights into oppressive leadership helped me explore a solution to the main research objective of exploring what insights can be gained to address exploitative leadership within contemporary MCSA contexts from a rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 through the lens of a liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus. In seeking to meet the research's main objective, I was guided by this research's title, namely, *A critical rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7 as an inspiration for a leadership of liberation within the MCSA.* As part of addressing the main research problem, I therefore explored a leadership of liberation.

Taking insights gained from leadership theory, especially transformational leadership theory, servant leadership, and a transcendental view on leadership, I proposed a definition for a leadership of liberation based on key characteristics that I identified as essential for a leadership of liberation. My definition of a leadership for liberation which can be used within MCSA leadership contexts is:

> A leadership of liberation is leadership that has the ultimate goal of liberating and transforming followers to realise their full humanity through motivating, inspiring, and encouraging followers. They aim to create paradigm shifts by influencing followers to embrace shared values, beliefs, and goals to pursue the greater good or higher social dividend. Liberation leaders show empathy for their followers and are considerate of

the individual and community. They focus on values, morals, and ethical leadership. Liberation leaders oppose the oppressive *status quo* through being effective, efficient, focusing on change, being proactive, and embracing accountability to others and God. They serve followers by elevating them through involving and empowering them.

This research also aided in addressing the gaps I identified in the literature. In 1.7 I identified a few gaps in the literature. Firstly, I identified that Zephaniah is not an extensively used text, especially within the MCSA. Secondly, I submitted that Methodists have approached Biblical interpretation from the perspective of black and African theologies but there has not been an exploration of socio-economic oppression within the African context. This study has therefore aided in filling these gaps by analysing Zephaniah from a specifically liberation hermeneutic with a socio-economic focus and appropriating this interpretation to MCSA leadership contexts.

I therefore submit that the aims of this research have been achieved since I have managed to explore a leadership of liberation which can be applied within the MCSA based on a critical rereading of Zephaniah 3:1-7. Further research will be necessary to interrogate and refine the definition where needed, however this research has provided a basis for a leadership of liberation which can address socio-economic oppression within the MCSA. It is also critical to remember that, as was suggested by DEWCOM in respect of the stipend system, any definition of a leadership of liberation should constantly be critiqued in the light of Jesus' teaching and example (c.f. DEWCOM 2007:2).

6.3 Lessons learnt from the application of my framework and methodology

As discussed in 1.4, I have used the tri-polar exegetical model as the theoretical framework for this research. I, therefore, had to overtly identify my ideo-theological lens with which I approached this research. Once I had identified and explored my ideo-theological lens of a liberation theology with a socio-economic focus, I discovered that attempting to be consistent in applying my ideo-theological lens in this research created challenges but was also helpful. It created challenges because I found myself diverting from it at times, but it also helped narrow my focus. During the research, I struggled to analyse my chosen context, which is contemporary MCSA leadership contexts, and the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7, which is the focus of this research. The challenge arose because one could look at the context and the text from various perspectives or hermeneutical lenses, all of which were valid views. Reframing my

view in line with my ideo-theological lens refocused my analysis and helped me be consistent in my approach.

Another benefit of having identified my ideo-theological lens is that it allowed me to narrow my focus under each pole of the tri-polar model. Thus, for example, within the contextualisation pole, there are a variety of leadership contexts that I could have explored. However, my ideo-theological lens was a helpful reminder to specifically focus on situations of socio-economic oppression and exploitation of members of the MCSA by its leadership. Similarly, within the text and context of Zephaniah, my focus was again narrowed to situations of socio-economic oppression by the leadership of the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom. The tri-polar exegetical model provided a structure to this research and gave direction for answering the main and research question and sub-questions. I found it particularly helpful to allow each pole of the tri-polar model to focus on a specific research sub-question. My approach gave structure and direction for each chapter and ensured that my analysis moved toward answering the main research question.

My methodology in analysing the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts of engaging with resolutions, articles, and studies that constitute the corpus of the MCSA's connexional documentation was challenging. I found that there is no real centralised source of information for matters relating to the MCSA. The *Book of Order* (MCSA 2016) and the various *Yearbooks* provide information that relates to current resolutions. However, there is no indication of previous discussions necessarily on any topic or reference to discussion documents. I, therefore, had to attempt to track some of the developments within specific areas of leadership over the years. Access to other Methodist authors and DEWCOM discussion documents were helpful in this regard. A centralised database of information will be beneficial for future research on the MCSA. Another challenge in investigating the documents of the MCSA was the times within which we find ourselves during the Covid-19 pandemic. The landscape is continually changing, and new challenges are being presented to leadership on all levels. Therefore, there was a myriad of additional documents being produced during my research that I needed to take cognisance of. A last point of frustration in applying my methodology within the contextualisation pole was the lack of records regarding ministers who perpetrated socio-economic exploitation and oppression. There were numerous verbal accounts of oppression and exploitation by leaders but very little documentary record of these instances. Providing sound academic research on what boils down to hearsay was therefore challenging.

My methodology under the distantiation pole worked well because I use the Biblical text as my primary source and scholarly works as my secondary source. However, again the scope and number of scholars is vast. Applying my ideo-theological lens helped keep my focus narrowed and to engage with socio-economic oppression by leadership within the late pre-exilic leadership context. I found it challenging to do the social analysis in line with Marxist and materialist theories. Marxist and materialist analysis is a complex task, and I could barely scratch the surface in this dissertation. All data is not available regarding the late pre-exilic Judahite kingdom and its leadership, and therefore I had to apply some assumptions and imagination to the context. In employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, I was able to interrogate the text in a manner that I have not done before. It provided additional insights and helped me not to merely accept the text at face value but rather investigate what the silences within the text might be saying. The challenge then came in balancing a hermeneutic of suspicion with a hermeneutic of recovery so that the text could be used to provide answers for our current context.

Under the appropriation pole I experienced a certain amount of freedom in creating space for the contemporary MCSA leadership contexts to dialogue with the text of Zephaniah 3:1-7. At this stage, it was essential for me to not just make broad sweeping statements but rather to build sound arguments based on the research and allow the research to lay the basis for the dialogue as opposed to my subjective opinions. My methodology in employing liberation hermeneutics, also required me to interrogate our praxis and investigate how our leadership praxis can change to become a leadership of liberation instead of being a leadership of oppression. In this final phase, the challenge of combining all the research into a practical offering became evident. I feel that the requirement of liberation theology to be concerned about praxis is a helpful methodology to keep the research grounded in the practical lived reality of ordinary people. Yet this aspect of the methodology also proved the most challenging because providing a practical model that can be applied successfully requires far more research than space in this dissertation allows.

6.4 My experiences in conducting this research

In doing this research, I have had numerous experiences which have helped mould and shape my faith, theology, and academic ability. One such experience with which I had to wrestle was my hermeneutical approach to the text. Approaching the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion led me to honestly evaluate the place of Scripture within my faith journey and my relationship

and understanding of God. My wrestle has been intense at times but has forced my faith to mature as I let go of some preconceived ideas I had about Scripture. In the process, I have come to a place where I believe that God does speak to us through the Biblical texts, but often not in the ways we are generally taught. As the Biblical authors recorded their experiences of life and faith and conveyed their ideological viewpoints, whether consciously or not, something of the life of God permeated the texts and still does flow from the texts to our contexts. It is for us to discern these underlying permutations of God's life within the texts. I have come to experience that identifying where life is present within the text is what it means to apply a hermeneutic of recovery to the text.

I also experienced the frustration and joy of realising that the more I explored and analysed, the more there is that needs further exploration and analysis. The conclusion that I draw from all this is that there is still much more research to do on this dissertation's topic. This dissertation's contribution to my personal academic development and scholarly work is limited. The cliché that this research raises more questions than answers certainly does feel appropriate to my dissertation.

Not only has this research been a theoretical exercise for me, but I have had to live through some of the challenges and experiences I have described in the dissertation. In the first month of my stationing out of seminary, while finalising this dissertation, I did not receive a stipend because the circuit I was stationed in was in arrears with its assessments. I therefore experienced first-hand a situation of economic disparity between myself and colleagues of mine who had received their stipends. I have also witnessed the effects that the continual demand for assessments has on socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Therefore, my challenge is to incorporate my research into my ministry by applying and modelling a leadership of liberation in the contexts within which I find myself.

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