

# “TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE, OUR CALLING TO FULFILL”: A DIFFERENT CHURCH FOR A DIFFERENT WORLD

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*Power in itself is not evil. It is the gift of God given to every person and every society. The corruption of power through the selfishness of man, resulting in the deprivation of power from his fellowman, is evil. Churches and church members denying their participation in power structures are prone to become instruments of oppression by overlooking the magnitude and depth of the sinful selfishness of man which seeks to entrench itself in the structures of society.<sup>1</sup>*

*The people of all the nations will be gathered before him. Then he will divide them into two groups. . . . [He will say to the righteous people,] . . . “Come and possess the kingdom which has been prepared for you. . . . I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:32-40 TEV)<sup>2</sup>*

I write as an African and a Christian of Methodist heritage who hails from South Africa. I am adamant that I shall win a space for Africa’s contemporary plight, not as a beggar or an apologetic, but as one who has proudly sought to remain true to a Wesleyan

heritage and faithful to a theology that calls us to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith. Yet as I survey the experiences of poverty, pain, and disease of my country and the continent of Africa, I admit to the need for transformation of our polity and practices both as church and as citizens of the world in which we live. Ironically, the social, religious, and political institutions that silenced my ancestors are now calling on me to reflect on service and vocation.

The theme of the twelfth Oxford Institute constrains me to draw on the values, principles, and vision of a different world—one cruelly denied and removed from my forebears—in essence, a world in which their humanity cried out for affirmation. Yet this moment awakens within me the need to celebrate my heritage, partially as a descendant of a resilient slave-settler community and partially as one with a mixture of blood from the near-extinct Khoi and San—blood that continues to course through my veins. I speak as one brought up on the Cape Flats of Cape Town, having lived and grown up in the shadow of Table Mountain. The Flats is not the privileged part of Cape Town but a territory of deep inequity of land and resource distribution. Cape Town—that tip of Africa still today referred to by Nguni speakers as Koloni, the colony. The legacy of British imperialism and colonial domination is still hard to shake off in contemporary indigenous language and even democratic South Africa.

Ironically, Britain commemorated two hundred years of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in March 2007. Herbert McGonigle<sup>3</sup> argues that this anniversary should have a special significance for the Wesleyan Holiness people around the world as “the father of the Holiness movement,” John Wesley, was one of the dominant voices against slave trafficking and certainly upheld the work and motivation of the abolitionist William Wilberforce. Just as many scholars, economists, and leaders of civil society unambiguously argue that global economy and neoliberalism fuel a different form of slavery, so too would it be necessary to unpack and analyze words and phrases such as “serve the present age” and “fulfillment of one’s vocation” in our context of a “global village.”

After roughly two-and-a-half centuries of economic growth following the main thinkers of the Enlightenment who believed in the

essential equality of humanity and the ability of societies in all parts of the world to share in economic prosperity, I believe that God’s future lies in a different world: a world in which all can begin to flourish through respect and dignity, irrespective of race, culture, gender, language, or sexual orientation. The burning question that remains unanswered, however, is, How do we “serve the present age” and fulfill our vocations when the outcomes of economic globalization and neoliberalism are being defined by an ever-increasing gap between rich and poor, the ongoing impoverishment of Africa, and the resultant degradation of our biosphere? How do we exercise leadership from church and society when the edifices of power within the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO), impose policies and prescriptions that negate Africa’s democratic sovereignty? I want to believe that the “present age” is bound up with God’s future and that our salvation—similarly linked—lies in our vocational and mission choices that promote mutual coexistence, the flourishing of humanity and healing for God’s world. The eschatological question then, is, How will we be true—even unconsciously so—to the vision of a different world portrayed in Matthew 25, where God is the center of our attention in work and ministry to the marginalized, impoverished, alienated, and diseased of our nations and world?

Charles Villa-Vicencio, a Methodist theologian, pointed out during a time of apartheid-entrenched national security that Wesley’s doctrine of perfect sanctification holds the key to a broader Wesleyan perspective, an acknowledgment that God’s activity of social transformation includes human participation. The ultimate meaning of sanctification, said Villa-Vicencio, is to “pursue this broad theological horizon . . . [that] could assist us to become co-creators and active partners with God transforming South Africa.”<sup>4</sup> Such was the vision of the service and vocation of a “different church for a different world” then; and I believe it holds good for us now. Therefore, just as Pliny the Elder believed that Africa always offers something new, I offer this exploration of service and vocation for a different church in a different world as the vocation for justice, peace, and human equity—some virtues the current

architecture of world power appears to be unwilling to consider or incapable of delivering. But it is to that transformed age—the age of God’s future already present in our midst in the lives and experiences of the poor, marginalized, and dehumanized—that this present age needs seriously to focus its mission and vocation. For God is to be found nowhere else.

### *THE HISTORICAL LEGACY OF AN ENSLAVED CONTINENT*

In the same way that South Africa’s apartheid framework spawned systems of “separate development,” privileging one group over another, premised on the lie that separate development and developmental equity were the same, so it appears that global capital has privileged, and continues to privilege, the West and its allies against Africa and the rest of the two-thirds world. I am of the firm conviction, therefore, that similar dynamics and much more are at work in an age that I have no hesitation in labeling “global economic apartheid.”<sup>5</sup> The extent of this apartheid is, however, far more devastating, and you will hear me describe how nations and continents, and especially Africa, have fallen and continue to fall into slavery as a result of the current global economic system and its rules that extract—and have extracted for hundreds of years—more than they plow back.

Despite the political victory of Wilberforce and the antislavery act, descendants of enslaved forebears in the two-thirds world still experience unparalleled systems of control, domination, and disempowerment by the wealthier nations. For this reason it is safe to say that slavery has mutated into a multiplicity of structures that fetter people and keep nations in bondage today. While two hundred years ago its form was the inhuman, brutal, and forced removal of people from their lands of birth, its form in the twenty-first century targets those same continents in order to maintain political and economic dominance. The structures that disguise contemporary slavery may appear successful, but they continue to discriminate. Joerg Rieger puts it succinctly when he argues that despite the challenge for Methodism to remain “relevant and centered” in the twenty-first century,

we are sucked into the powers that be, which are now defined by global capitalism—an economic system that marginalizes large parts of the population and where inequality is becoming more severe. We witness a new system of slavery that is more heinous and cruel than what Wesley could have imagined—more cruel than the European and American slave trades ever were, since people are becoming more and more commodified.<sup>6</sup>

The question arises, *How did this happen?* The answer is that slavery has mutated over the past five centuries, and what we call economic globalization today is the contemporary version of slavery.<sup>7</sup> But while slavery of two hundred years ago reduced humanity to a tradable commodity on the global market because of a black skin, contemporary global economic expansion makes every human being expendable, and therefore, the continent of Africa becomes the most vulnerable and expendable, especially when the economy assumes a divine rationale. Patrick Bond says—and I agree with him—that Africa is to a large extent a centuries-old “looted continent.” In a contemporary affirmation of Walter Rodney’s analysis of the underdevelopment of Africa by Europe, Bond recognizes the colonial advantage of trade by force, deception, rape, theft, and pillage that define the Western world’s patterns of political and economic relations with Africa. Bond says,

Africa is a continent looted through slavery that uprooted and dispossessed around 12 million Africans; land grabs; vicious taxation schemes; the nineteenth-century emergence of racist ideologies to justify colonialism; the 1884–85 carve-up of Africa in a Berlin negotiating room, into dysfunctional territories; the construction of settler-colonial and extractive-colonial systems—of which the apartheid, the German occupation of Namibia, the Portuguese colonies and King Leopold’s Belgian Congo, were perhaps only the most blatant—often based upon tearing black migrant workers from rural areas (leaving women with vastly increased responsibilities as a consequence); Cold War battlegrounds—proxies for US/USSR conflicts—filled with millions of corpses; other wars catalysed by mineral searches and offshoot violence such as witnessed in blood diamonds and coltan; societies used as guinea pigs in the latest corporate pharmaceutical test . . . and the list continues.<sup>8</sup>

To illustrate my point on turning an African country into a “slave economy,” I turn to a newly defined democracy such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has sought close ties and guidance from South Africa in (re)building its democracy. On June 29, 2007, the DRC put together its first national budget and announced a total budget expenditure framework of about \$2.4 billion. This amount is equivalent to the sum spent by the United States in less than two weeks for the occupation of Iraq. How, under conditions devastated by two wars in which 3.5 million people died, can a nation rebuild itself with this kind of budget? By comparison, France, which, like the DRC, has a population of around 60 million, has a budget of \$520 billion, in other words more than two hundred times the Congolese budget. The subsoil of DRC is referred to as a “geological scandal”—a treasure of mineral resources—and the country’s agricultural land is incredibly fertile, but the IMF believes that this is an appropriate budget, especially as its officials await debt repayment slightly in excess of 50 percent of that budget. We await DRC parliamentary reactions and the reactions of civil society to the IMF’s subversion of democracy by riding roughshod over any people’s participatory process ushered in by democratic elections.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that although the slave trade was abolished in England by an act of Parliament two hundred years ago, human bondage and social and economic injustice still remain a major issue. Slavery and its legacies have been critical in shaping the cultural history of the modern world. We cannot escape the fact that much of Britain’s wealth—many cities filled with cathedrals, palaces, and corporate houses—is built on an unjust system that extracted millions of Africans from their homeland as chattel to supply the slave labor market. Much of what is seen in England is the result of the slave trade and slave-based industries that supplied raw materials from the colonies to sustain the British Empire. As Wilf Wilde says in his commentary on Mark’s Gospel, “Before we can Make Poverty History, we need to understand rather more of the history of how poverty has been made.”<sup>10</sup> How is it that a biblical commentary, which is at the same time a political and historical commentary, becomes a necessary contribution to Christian social thought and practice? The issue is that British, American,

and European versions of colonialism require a modicum of honesty in understanding how they allowed Africa to remain underdeveloped and continue to do so in different ways today. It is, as Wilde insists, a matter of an honest and faithful telling and retelling of your history to your children and children’s children of how your ancestors benefited from the wealth, labor, and resources of my immediate and past ancestors. The legacy of an enslaved continent is ongoing enslavement and Western economic ascendancy through international financial institutions.

### *GLOBALIZATION, ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION, AND THEIR DISCONTENTS*

Globalization is generally accepted as an ongoing process of human, political, and international development. On the whole its effects, as they may relate to technological and scientific advances, are relatively benign and often beneficial with regard to social and political relationships. Economic globalization, on the other hand, is driven by a conglomeration of powerful nations, multinational corporations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. This system, says Rogate Mshana, program executive of the World Council of Churches, has

widened the gap between the rich and the poor and has increased absolute poverty in the world (3 billion people living on less than two dollars a day and 1.2 billion on less than one dollar a day). Inequality is vivid, with 5% of the richest earning 144 times more than the poorest 5%. Twenty per cent of the world population owns 80% of the global wealth. In Africa, 65% of the inhabitants live on less than one dollar a day and as many as 87% on less than two dollars a day. . . . The environment is being mutilated and the earth is groaning. . . . The top 20% of the global rich is responsible for 53% of global pollution. . . . UNDP warns that this will affect the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because poverty will not be halved in 2015, but 2147.

Mshana adds, “In the context of Africa, primary education will be delivered, not in 2015, but in 2130. That is 115 years late. . . . The

elimination of avoidable infant deaths, not in 2015, but in 2165. That is 150 years late.”<sup>11</sup>

Carmencita Karagdag, however, does not distinguish between globalization and economic globalization because, for her, the economies, ecologies, and life-support systems of the South, including Africa, have suffered “massive ruin.”<sup>12</sup> Globalization, understood as a political project based on neoliberal ideology in order to keep the South in bondage to the North, is not value free. Of deeper concern, however, is the symbiotic link drawn by Karagdag between “globalization, the abuse of human rights through militarization—especially in Iraq—and the global ideological and faith relationships that cement partnerships in sustaining empire.”<sup>13</sup>

The issue is not the claim that global capitalism has become the most successful economy to deal with human development in the world. There is a grain of truth in such a claim, but economic globalization is problematic for the manner in which it distances the wealthy from the poor and concentrates wealth in the hands of a few while impoverishing many and rendering many more redundant, unemployed, or unemployable.<sup>14</sup> A more disconcerting problem posed by global capital expansion is its all-pervasive, religious-like, “dogma” of principles often referred to as “economic fundamentals,” such as “belt tightening” or “structural adjustment programs.”<sup>15</sup> I reject out of hand this confusion of religious morality with neoliberal economics and give it attention later in this essay. The truth is that these mantralike assertions have caused confusion and promoted economic and political advantage for the wealthy nations. In so doing, global economics has become the invisible pillar of contemporary slavery.

## *TOWARD ECONOMIC AND GLOBAL JUSTICE*

Ulrich Duchrow has warned us for some time now that the projected outcomes of a global, neoliberal capitalist economy are loss of life support for future generations and death if there is no U-turn immediately or in the short-term future.<sup>16</sup> Clearly the challenge that poorer nations face is not “starting the engine of the economy

and approaching take-off for economic growth.” If it were that simple, the African economies would have been soaring by now. Since global economic systems are human by design, they can be, need to be, and should be challenged and corrected for deficiencies. The deficiency of this death-inducing economy<sup>17</sup>—both realized and to be realized if it continues unfettered—is sufficient to take up a *kairos* challenge to our faith.

In the article “Political and Economic Wellbeing and Justice: A Global View,”<sup>18</sup> Duchrow raises the importance of “demythologising economics” by arguing that capitalism has to a great extent influenced people and interest groups by using the complexity of economics as an ideological “veil.” In the midst of the triumph of capital and the collapse of Marxist-socialism in the 1980s, Duchrow grappled with biblical models such as God’s option for the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, poverty and wealth in the modern era, and the use of countervailing force against capital. For Duchrow, the ecumenical concept of “responsible society” was inadequate to deal with the ascendancy of capital. Justice, for him, as for Mr. Wesley, consists of using church communities for economic alternatives such as projects that lend money without charging interest for profit; promoting production cooperatives on church-owned land; forming networks with countervailing forces; creating pressure from below to raise alternatives for the provision of basic needs; enabling people’s participation in economic decisions; and holding in view the rights and needs of future generations.

We now turn to the African concepts of justice that complement our search for economic justice, signs for a different church and a different world.

### *UBUNTU/BOTHO IN ECONOMIC JUSTICE: ECONOMICS WITH A HUMAN FACE*

Insofar as the neoliberal economic framework uses market mechanisms to apportion value to the resources and goods that enable life, says Puleng LenkaBula,<sup>19</sup> theological scholar and recently appointed vice president of the South African Council of Churches, it unwittingly perpetuates the hegemony of the market

over and above other life-giving principles and values such as Botho/Ubuntu justice. *Botho* is a Sesotho word that encompasses personhood and humaneness, which roughly translated means that “a person is a person because of other persons.”

According to LenkaBula’s study, four elements of Botho/Ubuntu are of importance in its link with the economy. First, humaneness is about relationships and cooperation. A human being is shaped by cultural, genetic, historical, biological, and social relationships, not mechanical ones that may allow for competitiveness and individualism. Second, it is about respect and empathy for others and indicates a worldview that is sensitive to the ecosystem and leads to a communal responsibility for the sustenance of life. Third, it is about the deep interconnectedness of life and nurture of earth as a value that links to justice and fairness in the use of resources. Fourth, it links justice and economy, best described by the idiom: “all members of the family share the head of a locust.”<sup>20</sup> This Setswana proverb indicates that in a precarious economy—as in times of drought—the African does not have to wait for abundance but understands that however little there is, it is worth sharing. The study highlights that sharing should not be limited to individuals, but it should extend to public and private management of national resources. The study further states that this concept is also a warning to governments set on neoliberal and capitalist monetary and fiscal policies.

### WESLEY’S “EVANGELICAL ECONOMICS” AS ALTERNATIVE TO ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

In the biblical and Wesleyan sense, I am arguing that the only forms of justice that Wesleyans ought to recognize are God’s justice and justice for the poor. Wesley’s concern for people on the margins of society, the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned as well as his commitment to “a journey downward” to create a new world *with* the poor, on *their* terms and in *their* places, is well documented.<sup>21</sup> He undertook, for instance, to distribute a considerable amount of his income to the poor and to practice what he called “begging for the poor,” whereby he solicited from the prosperous what the poor

needed. Wesley had a “holistic concern for the wellbeing of all God’s creatures’ mind body and soul”; that was the reason for his medical clinics, meals for the poor, interest-free loans, orphanages, and schools.<sup>22</sup>

Theodore Jennings indicates that Wesley’s evangelical economics addresses four main issues: the demystification of wealth, a preferential option for the poor, a protest against injustice, and stewardship as the redistribution of wealth.<sup>23</sup> Suffice it to say, however, that Wesley lived what he professed: that the gospel of Christ knows no religion but social religion; no holiness but social holiness. Some may say this is overplayed, but to distill the Wesleyan option for the poor in an “evangelical economics,” let us examine Wesley’s sermon “The Use of Money,” frequently dismissed as an apology for primitive capitalism. Randy Maddox assists us here admirably in reminding us that the injunction to “gain all you can” merely stated the assumption that one should enjoy social responsibility in the manner one acquires property, capital, or the means of production. The injunction to “save” relates to an approach to self-denial in the use of resources that doesn’t lead to waste and the indulgence of luxury. The command to “give” renounces the accumulation of anything beyond one’s basic needs and advises the redirection of surplus possession to meet the needs of one’s neighbor in want.<sup>24</sup> This understanding of stewardship is contrary to the economics of accumulation and greed. It is the heart of Wesley’s evangelical economics. For him the criterion for every action was “how it was going to benefit the poor.” For this reason he contended that visiting the poor was a means of grace alongside offering public prayer and partaking of the sacraments.

Wesley’s economic ethic was more than an ethic of decision or personal choice. The Wesleyan tradition of practical living, homiletics, and theological treatise portrays a model of “holiness of heart and life” that, as early as the age of Enlightenment, refuses to separate the realms of life into secular and sacred or into the public and the private. Peter Storey makes the point that “John Wesley made the revolutionary discovery that you could not really be a Christian unless you engage with the poor of the earth” and further defines a Wesleyan Christian as “one who has made an intentional option to stand with the poor and marginalized of society,

against the principalities and powers that hold all such in bondage."<sup>25</sup>

So far, so good, but how do we explain the earlier Methodist leadership of the 1960s and 1970s and—certainly until the late 1990s in South Africa and Africa—failing to come to grips with the nexus between faith and politics and faith and economics? I am not suggesting that we take a reconstructed eighteenth-century theological treatise and develop a twenty-first-century reaction to the global economic malaise. What I am suggesting is that we recognize that the poor are caught in a trap of death and despair orchestrated by people who are supposed to be regulating global economics—a life-and-death matter.<sup>26</sup> Their very dignity is being impaired by economic globalization that marginalizes and excludes them. In the same way that theology undergirded the slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so also much of our current theology by omission or commission must plead guilty to collusion with the purveyors of global capital.

For this reason it is salient to turn to Wesley's General Rules, written in 1734, in which he prohibited "the buying and selling of the bodies and souls of men, women, and children, with the intent to enslave them." In "Thoughts upon Slavery"<sup>27</sup> published in 1774, he attacked the institution of slavery by affirming the dignity and human rights of Africans. Besides appealing to the Christian conscience of those involved in the slave trade, he cited human decency, natural law, and justice as reasons enough to abolish slavery. For Wesley, true Christianity was characterized by love of God and neighbor, and for this reason slavery was inhuman and unjust.

A further, telling point, seldom expressed in Wesleyan theology, is the power of the story of an African person's struggles for freedom and dignity. A specific example is "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano," which confirms the doctrine of Christian perfection, especially the overlap of "works of mercy" and "works of piety," vibrantly alive in the last days of Wesley's personal life. It is this identification with the struggles of the marginalized, this solidarity with a slave's quest for human freedom, that motivates his writing, six days before his death on March 2, 1792, to encourage William Wilberforce to press on, in his crusade to abolish slavery within the British Empire and America.<sup>28</sup>

The injunction "to serve the present age, our calling to fulfill," in the face of global capital expansionism and debt is one of the biggest challenges this century faces. We are reminded that it is only as we hear the cries of the vast majority of debt-ridden, impoverished humanity and act in solidarity with them, especially in our understanding of the means of grace, that we have a chance to eradicate poverty and overcome its attendant forms of neocolonial slavery. John Wesley radically influenced theology and ethics more than two hundred years ago. Can his theologians, preachers, and people, two centuries later, do the same in the face of global capital expansionism and its "doctrines" of neoliberalism?

### *TOWARD AN AFRICAN AND WESLEYAN THEOLOGY OF GOD'S ECONOMY FOR LIFE AND FOR THE FUTURE*

Methodism in South Africa, from an organized and institutional perspective, has frequently wrestled with its heritage in contexts of apartheid and more recently in a post-apartheid democratic South Africa.<sup>29</sup> Itumeleng Mosala, a Methodist and black liberation theologian, reflecting on Methodism in the context of an apartheid state of emergency, suggests that Wesleyan theology—if it stands for social emancipation—will need to make its location amidst the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized in South Africa a theological priority. He therefore called for a dynamic revision of the doctrine of Christian perfection by challenging Methodism to "take seriously the discourses of the struggle of oppressed people."<sup>30</sup> I suggest that this challenge remains relevant today within the context of global capital expansion and its resultant slavery on the African continent and elsewhere. Our vocation to "serve the present age" therefore challenges us to understand the heart of the doctrine of sanctification—Wesley's standard of excellence, Christian perfection—by which the gift of grace in Christian life is to be measured through the voices, stories, and characters on the African continent that seek to redress such imbalances of wealth and power distribution.

I now offer three African and Wesleyan reflections that may significantly enhance our attempts at working toward alternatives to economic globalization. I hope to present a theology with a human

face rather than a theology of mere intellectual engagement, theology for living rather than a theology for books.

*1. THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET CAMPAIGN AND THE BASIC INCOME GRANT COALITION AS EXAMPLES OF LIVING THEOLOGY*

The People's Budget Campaign (PBC) was conceived in 2000 as a joint campaign critically to engage the South African government on its budget choices and fiscal allocation. The three founder stakeholders are the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the South African Council of Churches (SACC), and the South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO). The churches' participation is defined by the search for economic justice and a pro-poor budget, advocating that governments spend more and more wisely on the social needs of the poor in order to redress the apartheid legacies of economic and social inequity. The Basic Income Grant Campaign is a sibling of the PBC and similarly advocates for poverty eradication by engaging government in the formulation of comprehensive social security policies, including a guaranteed minimum income, especially for the nearly 20 million South Africans who live on less than two U.S. dollars a day. These campaigns are accountable to church, labor, and civil society constituencies in South Africa.

In the vexed context of South Africa's integration into the global economy and its current guise of global capital expansion, Keith Vermeulen, working within the People's Budget Campaign and the Basic Income Grant Coalition, challenges us to revisit our Wesleyan heritage.<sup>31</sup> He interrogates various assumptions of neoliberal market economy and uses his understanding of Mr. Wesley's "means of grace" and "salvation by faith" to advocate on behalf of communities in South Africa that still bear the legacies of apartheid inequity. Interpreting our Methodist heritage from the underside of history, Vermeulen forces us to look at critical questions:

If we are saved by grace through faith to do good works as co-creators with God (Eph. 2:8-10), how is it possible to hand over an economic order to "the invisible hand of market forces"? Does not such moral distortion of market economy pose a clear challenge to the Creator's sovereignty as well as a subtle leverage for claims to

divine inspiration of the current market economy? To what extent has a market economy that encourages the privatization of rights and social assistance encouraged the people called Methodists to renege on the option for the poor as an integral part of Wesleyan service through the means of grace? Has the “theology” of a market economy not contributed to an unnatural widening of the distances already promoted between the secular/sacred and public/private realms so rigorously held together in Mr. Wesley’s life of Christian perfection? If we believe that Wesleyans promote the evangelical injunction of salvation and a divine-human partnership for the good of a renewed earth (Eph. 2:8-10), how do we then justify a distinction between salvation and the call on the saved to exercise stewardship over resources intended for the good of all creation, especially if such stewardship is a forbidden practice in a market economy?

If the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it (Ps. 24:1), how do we accept an economic order based on scarcity and therefore inequitable distribution? And even if we practically must accept that market economics is the dominant economic model and that we are duty bound to participate therein, how do we deal with the growing inequity between rich and poor, developed and developing nations, and with its related problems such as debt, disease, and death? Can we find any biblical or theological justification for the idea that an economic order and globalization are value free? Recall Jesus’ words that we can’t serve two masters: God and mammon.

World Methodists would do well to attempt to address these questions as we seek to confirm our vocations and “serve the present age” by interrogating the assumptions that underlie global economic expansion and neoliberalism. Further considerations for engagement would be the nature of alliance building and cooperation with other sectors of civil society, the ecumenical movement and organized labor, like the call for debt cancellation, advocacy, and economic reforms as espoused by the Jubilee movement.

These activities are examples of how Wesleyans can make relevant Wesley’s catholic spirit. We need to extend our understanding of Wesley’s “parish” because challenging the order of global economics that denies life and degrades our humanity involves tasks

that Wesleyans need to engage in order to be clear about the alternatives for God's economy. This, in my understanding, is what "evangelical economics" offers. Neoliberalism must not be allowed to define our vocation or the nature of our service in the world.

## 2. *UBUNTU/BOTHO: SALVATION FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM*

We have already addressed the issue of Ubuntu/Botho in the context of economic justice in a global market economy. Suffice it here to add that the concept of Ubuntu/Botho can contribute to the vision of a life-affirming, just, and sustainable economy. This sense of human belonging, identity, and quality of relationships is further enhanced by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu when he refers to Ubuntu as "the essence of being human [which] embraces hospitality, caring about others, willingness to go the extra mile for the sake of another." When we add to these values the value of sharing, we may extend the depth of Wesley's catholic spirit by recognizing and co-opting the African way of life as Christian and Wesleyan and vice versa.

Perhaps it is the quality of Ubuntu in Mr. Wesley that has allowed Methodism to flourish on the African continent. If we accept this natural symbiosis, we will understand LenkaBula's connection of Botho/Ubuntu economics with an African and Wesleyan quest for a sustainable global economy and God's future economy. LenkaBula argues that Botho/Ubuntu is the basis for morality, cooperation, compassion, and communalism and, when embraced, enhances our ability to work toward the ideals of a more just society and world. Embedded in the concept are fundamental values and notions, such as solidarity with the vulnerable and marginalized, communal responsibility for the sustenance of life, and propensity to share with the less privileged rather than to promote an acquisitive society. Even in the midst of the scarcity, hardship, and degradation that Africans experience and continue to endure, LenkaBula believes that "Ubuntu has remained as a life, ethical, and social resource which African people continue to utilize for their sustenance. It is an ethic which provides a commendable schema of values to survive . . . despite colonialism, apartheid, wars and conflicts."<sup>32</sup>

When the chips are down and the ravages of a global economy based on consumerism, greed, and the extraction of every resource for profit hit home, it will not only be the African who is degraded of human status. Human degradation, on a global scale irrespective of where we come from, will be the reality. It is perhaps then that all may recognize the salvation qualities of Ubuntu—the heart of sustenance for African resilience—and that it has much to offer the twenty-first century, the rest of the world, and of course, the Wesleyan traditions and heritage.

### 3. WESLEY'S CATHOLIC SPIRIT AND THE OLIVE AGENDA

In more ways than one, big business and the global economy have assumed the role of promoting a “green agenda” by developing a culture of supply and demand on an abundance of resources, be it fossil fuels for energy or the supply of privatized water and global agribusiness for food. On the one hand, the assumption is that the earth's resources can best be exploited for the provision of human need while such provision may also generate a surplus of cash or profit. The scientific communities and the United Nations are in agreement that this model contributes to global warming and climate change and does *not* contribute toward sustainable development. I suggest that Wesleyans take heed of Wesley's inclusive and cooperative spirit for enhancing the dignity of humanity. For if our spiritualities and theologies do not contribute to the enhancement of human dignity and learn from Ubuntu, they may not be worth the effort. The recognition of cooperation with all God's people—the “household of God” (*oikos+mene*)—is integrated into the warm heart and extended hand. Integrated into these concerns would be the law of the household, the economy (*oikos+nomos*), based on the understanding that God is the ultimate owner and steward of the resources of the cosmos. The recognition that this household—“the people of God”—is called to care for creation and maintain its use for future generations is its ecology (*oikos+logos*). The ecumenical agenda has great benefit for taking on board the olive agenda defined by Steve de Gruchy in his address to the 2007 SACC National Conference, which featured the theme “Behold, I Make All Things New.”<sup>33</sup>

In his address, de Gruchy proposes an “olive agenda” (that will take the “brown agenda” with its focus on poverty and the “green agenda” with its focus on the environment) to integrate economics with ecology, peace with justice, health with prosperity, democracy with tolerance that together hold a vision of God’s economy. “What should be clear,” says de Gruchy, “is that while both [brown and green agendas] are fundamentally right, taken in isolation from the other, each is tragically wrong—and thus we must restate our . . . concern to integrate economy as *oikos-nomos*, and ecology as *oikos-logos* in search of sustainable life on earth, *the oikos* that is our only home.” I want to suggest that, taken in the spirit of Ubuntu/Botho, de Gruchy overstates his case. Neither is wrong, even in its own esteem.

One practical way of exploring the integrated olive agenda might be for God’s people to develop poverty eradication strategies such as land provision for the poor, together with an exploration of the use of renewable energies—wind, wave, sun—in place of a continual reliance on fossil fuels (coal, uranium for nuclear energy, and even biofuels, which assume the use of earth that in Africa should be dedicated to raising food).

Suffice it to say that in the South African ecumenical agenda the future of God’s newness relies on the philosophy of Ubuntu—and vice versa—as a philosophy for “humaneness” and human dignity. These, holding together the integrity of human development with God’s created order, provide fertile ground for, and in fact the key to, unlocking the contemporary meaning of Wesley’s catholic spirit and the doctrine of sanctification.

## CONCLUSION

The abolition of slavery two hundred years ago is something without precedent in history. Yet the existence of millions of economically enslaved people around the world as a result of economic globalization is a scandal and major challenge for our time. Just as the abolition of slavery was an imperative for Christians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so I believe we need to have the same passion, commitment, and determination of the

abolitionists if we hope to end the slavery created by global economic expansionism in our century.

Many economic and developmental scholars have warned and spoken out over the past decades against the systematic pillage, rape, and looting of the African continent’s resources. They have been ignored or, in the case of Walter Rodney and others, had their lives snuffed out. Are we likely to witness the same denial and rejection of critiques of neoliberalism? Our theological reflection needs to unmask idolatry and remind us that God acts in human history through human activity. I would argue that we as Wesleyans need to develop mind-sets that challenge the doctrine of economic globalization that “there is no alternative” to neoliberal economics. An immediate project that comes to mind is the possible utilization of our Wesleyan resources in a joint effort with like-minded civil society organizations, for the purpose of lobbying our governments for macroeconomic choices that make clear provision of the basic necessities for the poor, marginalized, women, and children in our world. This attempt at exploring a living theology—small and incipient as the People’s Budget and Basic Income Grant Campaigns in South Africa are—does not merely describe the distant suffering of others but integrates faith and works, and presents a model worth emulating on a continental and global scale.

As contemporary heirs of Mr. Wesley, we remind ourselves that our roots are firmly planted in the doctrine of sanctification; for this reason, “we were raised up, to spread Scriptural holiness throughout” our lands and to share in the momentous task of being “co-creators,” agents of transformation for God’s future in this world. It is only as we draw on our heritage and again link faith and works, pietism and social action, spirituality and political engagement that this future of God—a new world of justice, peace, and human security—will become a reality.

My life and ministry have been shaped by the vastness of God’s abundant grace and salvation, which has creatively ebbed and flowed through my Wesleyan and African heritage. I am grateful for these heritages that have brought me to this time and place. I am of the firm conviction that our vocation and service “to the present age” are a call for transformative justice that goes beyond

the fulfilling of rights. It is a moral, ethical, and theological imperative to be in solidarity with the poor while caring for the earth that God has placed in our care. Such a task is irrevocably bound up with discerning God's future, a future that calls us to be a different church for a different world. We live in an age pregnant with hope, where the new is waiting to be born. Our calling is to work together with all humanity to shape this different future.

163. Groves, "Charles Wesley's Spirituality," in Newport and Campbell, *Life, Literature and Legacy*, 446–64.
164. Chilcote, *Wesleyan Tradition*, 32.
165. Epitaph at City Road Chapel, London.
166. Quoted in Charles Robertson, *Singing the Faith: The Use of Hymns in Liturgy* (London: Canterbury Press, 1990), 140.
167. Watson, *The English Hymn*, 16.
168. Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision*, 25.
169. Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger*, 29.
170. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 29.
171. Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 143–44.
172. Richard John Neuhaus, quoted in Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 101.
173. "The Church of Christ, in Every Age," *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983), 804.

##### 5. "To Serve the Present Age, Our Calling to Fulfill"

1. See Wolfram Kistner, "The Power of the Church in the South African Context," in *Outside the Camp: A Collection of Writings by Wolfram Kistner*, ed. Hans Brandt (Johannesburg: The South African Council of Churches, 1988), 8.
2. Today's English Version.
3. Herbert McGonigle, "Celebrating Civil Freedom," [www.lillenasmusic.com/nphweb/html/h201/articleDisplay.sp?mediaId=2378577](http://www.lillenasmusic.com/nphweb/html/h201/articleDisplay.sp?mediaId=2378577).
4. Charles Villa-Vicencio, "Towards a Liberating Wesleyan Social Ethic for South Africa Today," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 68 (September 1989).
5. The first person I heard use the term *global economic apartheid* was the late Dr. Beyers Naude, past SACC General Secretary, founder of the Christian Institute, and dissident Afrikaner cleric. Speaking on the role of the church in postapartheid South Africa and at a conference at UNISA, which preceded the inception of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Dr. Naude warned of the pending economic challenges facing South Africa and especially the international economic system, which he had no hesitation in labeling "global economic apartheid."
6. Joerg Rieger in Joerg Rieger and John J. Vincent, eds., *Methodist and Radical: Rejuvenating a Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2003), 26.
7. The slave trade ended in the second half of the nineteenth century; the process that led to the abolition began much earlier. A combination of factors led to the demise of the slave trade including liberal opposition in Europe and the Americas that saw the injustices and exploitation of slaves. Tropical supplies, however, grew in demand, and in order to meet the supply of European markets, it was more profitable to leave Africans in Africa to be producers for Europe and the United States. See a similar account, for example, in Toyin Falola, *Key Events in Africa: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 26–27.
8. "Against Global Apartheid: South Africa Meets the World Bank," *IMF and International Finance* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2003), 27.

9. Eric Toussaint and Damien Millet, article on the Democratic Republic of Congo, June 23, 2007.
10. Wilf Wilde, *Crossing the River of Fire: Mark's Gospel and Global Capitalism* (London: Epworth, 2006), 119ff.
11. See Rogate Mshana, "Alternatives to Economic Globalization Are Imperative," in A. Bendana et al., *Global Justice: The White Man's Burden?* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2007), 19–20.
12. *Ibid.*, 55f.
13. *Ibid.*, 56.
14. Dr. Molefe Tsele, former general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, in calling for the formation of a Save Jobs Campaign with the Congress of South African trade unions in 2005, highlighted the plight of South Africa losing 70,000 jobs in two years in the clothing and textile workers' sector while, at the same time, the clothing retail trade, through imports, returned booming profits that ironically included retail sector CEOs earning salaries in excess of US\$20 million annually.
15. See, for instance, the useful resource in this regard by John Mihevc, *The Market Tells Them So: The World Bank and Economic Fundamentalism in Africa* (Accra: Third World Network, 1995).
16. See a vivid illustration of the power system of the global neoliberal capitalist economy in Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action* (Heidelberg: Kairos Europa, 1995), 118–19.
17. See also the erudite warning two decades ago by F. J. Hinkelammert, *The Ideological Weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986).
18. See Ulrich Duchrow, "Political and Economic Wellbeing and Justice: A Global View," in *Studies in Christian Ethics: Political Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 61–92.
19. Puleng LenkaBula, *Botho/Ubuntu and Justice as Resources for Activism Towards a Just and Sustainable Economy in South Africa and Africa* (Marshalltown, South Africa: Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation [ESSET], 2006), 19–20.
20. See the Preface by Desmond Lesejane, director of ESSET, in Puleng LenkaBula, *Botho/Ubuntu and Justice*, 3–4.
21. See Joerg Rieger in Rieger and Vincent, *Methodist and Radical*, 27.
22. See Appendix 3, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists: An Exhibit," in Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed., *The Poor and the People Called Methodists: 1729–1999* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 231.
23. See Theodore Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).
24. See Randy L. Maddox, "'Visit the poor': John Wesley, the Poor, and Sanctification of Believers," in Heitzenrater, ed., *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, 59–81.
25. See Peter J. Storey, "Why in the World Would You Want to Be a Methodist If You're Not a Wesleyan?" in Purity Malinga and Neville Richardson, eds.,

*Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: Themes from John Wesley for Africa Today* (Pretoria: Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2005), 23.

26. John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004).
27. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, 3rd ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).
28. See Outler, ed. *John Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 85-86. The letter in full reads as follows:

Dear Sir, Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But "if God be for you, who can be against you?" Are all of them together stronger than God? O "be not weary in well doing!" Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might. Till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it. Reading this morning a tract, wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance, that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress, it being a law, in all our colonies, that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this? That He who has guided you from your youth up, may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of, Your affectionate servant, John Wesley

29. Rustenberg conference 1987; recorded in JTSA and the Methodist Heritage Day document.
30. See Itumeleng Mosala, "Wesley Read from the Experience of Social and Political Deprivation in South Africa," *Journal for Theology for Southern Africa* 68 (September 1989): 87ff.
31. For a full account relating Mr. Wesley's ability to analyze the political economy of his time and its possible implications for South Africa today, see Keith A. Vermeulen, "Wesleyan Heritage, Public Policy and the Option of Poverty Eradication," in Neville Richardson and Purity Malinga, eds., *Rediscovering Wesley for Africa*, 159-74.
32. LenkaBula, *Botho/Ubuntu and Justice*, 24-25.
33. The full text of Steve de Gruchy's address may be found at [www.sacc.org.za/news07/oikos.html](http://www.sacc.org.za/news07/oikos.html).

## 6. Christian Perfection: A Methodist Perspective on Ecclesiology

1. Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" in *Doctrine of the Church*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964).
2. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (hereafter *PACP*) (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966).
3. Percy Livingstone Parker, ed., *The Journal of John Wesley* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 419.