

## The appropriation of Wesleyan pragmatism and social holiness in Southern African Methodism.

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**Abstract:** *While Wesleyan theology shares many core elements throughout the world, there can be little doubt that it finds rich and diverse application and expression in the many varied contexts in which Methodism has taken root.*

*This paper will present an overview of the application, and unique expression, of Christian Perfection as it has taken shape within Methodism in Southern Africa. Christianity, and in particular Methodism, is a dominant faith perspective in Southern Africa. This phenomenon, it will be argued, is largely due to the pragmatic nature of Wesleyan theology, and its emphasis on social holiness. This research aims to add value to the corpus of global Methodist Theology that tends to be dominated by western theological perspectives. Thus a new perspective on Methodist theology will be given by means of articulating the unique tenets of Southern African Methodist Theology. Insights gained from this study may be of value in similar contexts where Methodist theology is seeking to find a unique, and contextually relevant, expression. Moreover, understanding how Methodist theology is being shaped in the two-thirds world, an area in which Methodism is growing, may give some valuable indicators for the formulation and expression of Methodist theology elsewhere in the world.*

### 1. Introduction.

Wesleyan theology has found rich and diverse expressions within Christian communities throughout the world. Such iterations of Wesleyanism most commonly result from the need to adapt and mould the central theological tenets of Wesleyan theology to address the pragmatic needs and concerns that arise from the context in which the Christian faith has taken root. This paper gives an overview of one such expression, contextual formulation, and adaptation of Wesleyan theology, namely the theological emphases that have characterised the development of this theology in the Southern African Methodist context.

This paper aims to explore the theme of this year's Oxford Institute by considering the relationship between ecclesiology and mission, particularly as these relate to the function and purpose of the Church in participating in God's mission of bringing healing and transformation to society and individuals. Three of the questions posed by the organisers of this year's Institute have informed my thoughts and research. These questions are:

- What have been characteristically Wesleyan/Methodist emphases about participatory mission?
- What "service" does our present age really need?
- What skills or sensitivities are crucial for the church/Christians to develop, if we are truly to serve the present age?

It will be argued here that it is the significant emphasis on social holiness and the ecclesiological approach of Wesleyan pragmatism, as they found expression in Southern African Methodism, that have made the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) such a significant Christian denomination in Southern Africa.

Moreover, it is argued that similar contextual approaches to the Christian faith can make a noteworthy contribution towards both individual and societal transformation, thus allowing the church to function effectively as a partner in the *missio Dei*.

First, the relationship between Christian perfection and social holiness in Wesley's theology will be discussed. Next there will be a brief insight into the social and political milieu of Southern Africa, paying particular attention to the singular most significant struggle that shaped the content within which the central tenets of Methodist theology took expression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Third, having presented insights that sketch this background and context, five seminal examples of Southern African Methodist theology will be presented with the particular intention of showing how the church sought to respond pragmatically to the social crises that dominated Southern Africa in the twentieth century. In particular this section will show how these efforts were interpreted and understood as attempts at achieving the goal of Christian perfection for both individuals and society at large. The paper concludes with a critical evaluation of the relevance and effectiveness of this particular theological emphasis in present day South Africa and makes some conclusions to be considered in the broader context of world Methodism.

### **1. The unbearable and offensive task of working for perfection in an imperfect world - Christian perfection, the grand depositum of the people called Methodists.**

One would be hard pressed to find a Methodist scholar who does not hold that the order of salvation was central to John Wesley's theology. As the following well used quote from 1746 shows, Wesley himself understood quite early that:

Our main doctrines, which include all the rest are three: that of repentance, of faith and holiness. The first of these we account, as were the porch of religion, the next the door; the third religion itself.<sup>1</sup>

For Wesley one particular element of this order shone through more brightly than the others, namely Christian perfection. Wesley believed that Christian perfection was a peculiar emphasis and heritage that had been given to the Methodists by God. In 1789, just two years before his death, Wesley writes in defence of his emphasis on Christian perfection,

This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, Wesley's particular understanding of Christian perfection has been largely misunderstood and forgotten in popular Methodist circles, and particularly so among adopters in the holiness movements in recent history. I am certain that a re-emphasis of Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection would cause similar reactions of disapproval and conflict among the overly spiritualised, highly

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<sup>1</sup> Wesley, J. Letters II, quoted in Rack, HD. *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism*, Epworth press, London, 1989:286.

<sup>2</sup> Wesley, J. Letters VIII, quoted in Williams, C. *John Wesley's theology today: A study of the Wesleyan tradition in the light of current theological dialogue*, Abingdon press, Nashville, 1988:238.

individualised, faith communities of our day, as it did when Wesley himself defended his understanding of this doctrine just before his death. If one truly understands what Wesley meant by the aim and substance of Christian perfection<sup>3</sup>, it comes as little surprise to read the following words from Wesley's sermon on Christian perfection, "There is scarce any expression in Holy Writ" writes Wesley, "which has given more offence than this. The word *perfect* is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them".<sup>4</sup> It was Wesley's emphasis on social holiness and the practical expression of the Gospel in everyday life that first lead to the giving of the name 'Methodist', and it is this same concern that lies at the very heart of Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection.<sup>5</sup> As shown above, Wesley understood that the purpose of 'religion' was to bring a person towards Christian perfection. He writes of true religion, and true holiness (as opposed to false religion and false holiness), that the,

...gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley understood that there is a clear distinction between holiness as expressed in personal piety, and that expressed by social holiness. This kind of holiness, he maintained, is described in scripture (scriptural holiness), expressed in our interaction with others and the world around us (perfect love), and is the ultimate goal towards which we aspire (Christian perfection).<sup>7</sup> True Christian perfection is dependent upon both personal holiness and social holiness. Moreover, we would do well to remember that Wesley emphasised that there can be no "personal holiness" without "social holiness", to use phrases from Wesley's 26<sup>th</sup> sermon. He taught that God cannot simply be honoured in church on Sunday, and then be disregarded in the street, or office, on Monday. John Wesley's sermons and writings are full of references to the fact that true faith must be a balance between "works of piety" and "works of mercy". One's personal holiness must find expression and true meaning in one's social holiness – that is the purpose and content of "true religion".

Thus the point can be made that Wesley understood that God's great plan for Methodists was to live out, and proclaim, Christian perfection as the purpose and content of true religion. The aim of this true religion was to form the church, and the individual Christian, to participate with God in the work renewal and transformation in society. Moreover, Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection is fundamentally rooted in social holiness. Henry Rack argues that Wesley's balance between personal piety and social holiness took shape as a response to the context in which Wesley lived. The needs of the poor and disenfranchised in 18<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on Wesley's use of terminology regarding Christian perfection please see Forster, D. *Wesleyan Spirituality: An introduction*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2001:4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Wesley, J. quoted in Cox, LG. *John Wesley's concept of perfection*, Beacon Hill press, Kansas City, 1968:11.

<sup>5</sup> For a thorough and insightful discussion of the broader elements of this argument see Baker, F *Practical divinity – John Wesley's doctrinal agenda for Methodism* < [http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan\\_theology/theojrnl/21-25/22-01.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrnl/21-25/22-01.htm)> accessed 20 July 2007, 21h34.

<sup>6</sup> Wesley, J. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Pref. 5. Quoted in Baker, F. *Practical divinity*.

<sup>7</sup> See Forster, D. *Wesleyan Spirituality: An introduction*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2001:4-5, and Attwell, A. *What Wesley believed and taught: The essentials of Wesley's theology*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 1994:4.

England lead him to formulate clear and pragmatic strategies for social development, upliftment, and reform, whilst his experience within the Church of England lead him to emphasise the need for personal piety.<sup>8</sup> Naturally one cannot divide Wesley's theological emphases rigidly into one of these two areas, however, they do serve as helpful categorisations in understanding the pragmatic development of Wesley's ministry and theology in relation to Christian perfection.<sup>9</sup>

From its inception Methodism had been an evangelical movement, seeking to share the Gospel with all, and particularly so with the intention of emphasising the need to strive to honour God by seeking to attain Christian perfection throughout the world. In other words, central to the Wesleyan evangelical thrust is the understanding that this particular understanding of Christian perfection is part of God's desire and plan for all persons throughout the world. The result is that this evangelical emphasis carried early Methodists throughout the world and transplanted this core theology into new contexts with different challenges and opportunities from those faced in Britain.

## **2. Struggle, opportunity, and new life – planting the seeds of Methodism in Southern African soil.**

Methodism came to South Africa soon after Wesley's death. Balia reports that the first record of a Methodist preacher in Southern Africa was that of a soldier of the 72<sup>nd</sup> regiment of the British army, George Middlemiss, who had been stationed in the Cape of Good Hope to secure British interests there in 1805 as a result of the war between Britain and France.<sup>10</sup> Middlemiss soon gathered a small group of Methodists in the Cape around himself. The work quickly grew. By the time Sergeant Kendrick, a class leader and lay preacher, arrived in 1812 the congregation numbered 142 persons, of which 128 were of British descent and 14 were of mixed race.<sup>11</sup> By the time the 1820 settlers arrived in the Cape, many of whom were Methodists, Methodism was already well established in Southern Africa.

Missionaries were despatched from England to establish and spread Methodist work throughout the sub-continent. They did this with great courage, sacrifice, and faith.<sup>12</sup> Most notable among the Methodist missionaries of this era are Barnabas Shaw (working the Western Cape and Namaqualand), William Shaw (who established a chain of mission stations up the eastern coast of Southern Africa), and James Archbell (who worked in the interior and Natal regions of Southern Africa).<sup>13</sup> By

<sup>8</sup> Rack, HD. *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism*, Epworth press, London, 2002:381-450.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed and thorough discussion on the development of Wesley's understanding, and adaptation, of personal piety and social holiness within early Methodism please see Heitzenrater, RP. *Wesley and the people called Methodists*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995:165-180, 199-241, 261-280. Moreover, Richardson wrote a succinct and clear account of the balance between personal piety and social holiness in the African context, see Richardson, NR & Malinga, P (edd). *Rediscovering Wesley for Africa*, Education for Ministry and Mission Unit, Pretoria, 2005:161-172.

<sup>10</sup> Balia, D. *Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa*, Madiba Publications, Briardene, 1991:14.

<sup>11</sup> Mears, WG. *Methodism in the Cape*, Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, 1973:6.

<sup>12</sup> A superb account of early Methodist missionaries who lost their lives in Southern Africa is written by Jackson, J. *Methodist South African martyrs – are they also saints?* Unpublished paper presented at the Theological society of South Africa annual meeting, 2007, John Wesley College, Kilnerton.

<sup>13</sup> It is not necessary to discuss the details of the work of these missionaries in this paper. This topic has been well covered elsewhere. In particular it would be worth reading Attwell, A. *The Methodist*

1860 there were 132 Methodist ministers and missionaries in Eastern Cape and Natal, and their combined congregations numbered around 5000 members. From the very beginnings Methodist work was multiracial, and whilst some other churches and mission organisations concentrated almost exclusively on one racial group (either working among the white settlers, or indigenous African peoples), the Methodists established joint works. In part this led to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa having more black members than any of the other mainline denominations.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, de Gruchy notes that at the same time the Methodist Church became the largest English speaking denomination in the country.<sup>15</sup> Methodism continued to spread throughout the nineteenth century. During this period the theological emphases of the church remained pretty much the same as those of Methodists in Britain since the church itself was seen as a mission church reporting to the British Conference and seeking approval for any new work in Southern Africa.

There is an African saying that goes “until the lion and the elephants write their history, the hunters will always remain the heroes”. Methodist missionaries were certainly not free from the imperialistic and colonial ideas that were so central to nineteenth century Christian mission in Africa.<sup>16</sup> However, even at this early stage there was a clear and strong emphasis on the need to engage not only in the proclamation of the Gospel, and the fostering of personal piety, but rather to engage in the work of social transformation and development within the mission communities. Naturally some of the attempts at social transformation and development had a decidedly Western, and even blatantly colonial, slant to them. However, the emphasis on social holiness in these early years included such projects as:

- The establishment of schools, and the translation of the first complete Bible into an African language (1859).
- Offering medical care to all, and the establishment of hospitals.
- The establishment of homes for orphans and senior citizens.
- The development and publication of Christian literature.

As is the case with every church, the social and political climate of the day played a significant role in the development and appropriation of Methodist theology on African soil. The most significant, and disturbing, social and political changes began to take effect in Southern Africa during the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Many scholars would

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*church*, Methodist Publishing House, Cape Town, 1995:3-6, for a succinct historical overview of Methodist mission in Southern Africa.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffmeyer, JW & Pillay, GJ (edd). *Perspectives on Church history: An introduction for South African readers*, Haum Publishers, Pretoria, 1991:253.

<sup>15</sup> De Gruchy, J & de Gruchy, S. *The Church struggle in South Africa: 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. SCM Press, London, 2004:14.

<sup>16</sup> Please refer to De Gruchy, J & de Gruchy, S. *The Church struggle in South Africa: 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. SCM Press, London, and Prozeky, M. *Christianity in South Africa*, Southern book publishers, Bergville, 1990, for a critical insight into the work of the various denominations and mission organisations in Southern Africa, and the effect that this work had on the social fabric and general mindset of Southern Africans.

<sup>17</sup> It would not be possible to chart all of the significant shifts in society and politics in Southern Africa in a study of this scope. For an insightful and scholarly account of the social and political trends from the first colonies at the Cape through to the dying days of Apartheid in South Africa please refer to Sparks, A. *The mind of South Africa*, Ballantine books, New York, 1990.

agree that the rise, implementation, and eventual demise of the racial ideology of 'apartheid' was by far the most significant social and political force that the church had to contend with in Southern Africa during the twentieth century.

Apartheid (an Afrikaans word meaning 'separateness') is a system of ethnic separation in which persons were classified into racial groups, mainly being Black, White, Coloured (persons of mixed race), and Indian. These race groups were separated from one another geographically akin to the Indian and First Nation reserves of the United States and Canada, and the aboriginal reserves in Australia. Cunningly, this ensured that black citizens, who are the majority population group in Southern Africa, did not have a right to vote in 'White' South Africa (even if they lived there) since they were only eligible to vote in their 'independent homeland'. The Black independent homelands were the most remote, least arable, and least economically viable tracts of land in Southern Africa (mainly due to their remote location). Implementing this system from the early 1940's meant that many native South Africans were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands, the land itself was expropriated and either put to use by the government or sold to White South Africans. In order to maintain this system of segregation, and force black persons to remain in the Black homelands, Black South Africans were systematically by various means. Economically they were disenfranchised through job reservation (meaning that certain jobs and professions were not open to Black South Africans), Bantu Education (where persons were educated to do nothing more than unskilled and manual labour), health care, civil service, and even freedom of movement were all curtailed for Black South Africans. The violent and systematic implementation of this evil had considerable and damaging effects on Southern African society as a whole, and particularly on the individual South Africans who suffered under it. The effects of Apartheid are likely to be felt for many generations to come.<sup>18</sup>

In the process of conducting this research I found that the Methodist Church made statements, protested, and worked against apartheid in many ways between its formal adoption in 1948 and its downfall in 1994. Every copy of the minutes of Conference in this era contained evidence<sup>19</sup> of the Church's struggle to undermine the false theology that supported, and evil consequences that resulted from, the apartheid system.

Richardson notes just how influential and significant this ideology of systematic oppression would affect the church when he writes that,

...the church under apartheid was polarized between 'the church of the oppressor' and 'the church of the oppressed'. Either you were for apartheid or you were against it; there was no neutral ground. Given the heavy-handed domination of the minority white government, those who imagined themselves to be neutral were, unwittingly perhaps, on

<sup>18</sup> Please see the following wikipedia article for a basic, accessible, introduction to the history of Apartheid < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid>> accessed 17 July 2007, 22h41. Please see the following wikipedia article for a succinct outline of the crimes of apartheid < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime\\_of\\_apartheid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_of_apartheid)>.

<sup>19</sup> In order to establish this information I simply read the address of the President (later Presiding Bishop) to conference, the resolutions, and the reports to the British Conference (when the Southern African conference still reported to Britain) from the Minutes of Conference for each year between 1948 and 1994.

the side of apartheid. This complicity was especially true of those Christians who piously ‘avoided politics’ yet enjoyed the social and economic benefits of the apartheid system... While young white men were conscripted into the South African Defence Force, many young black people fled the country to join the outlawed liberation movements that had their headquarters and training camps abroad. What could the church do in this revolutionary climate? And what should Christian theology say now?<sup>20</sup>

It is in this social context that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa sought to bring about Christian perfection, God’s perfection that is free from oppression and subjugation, God’s perfection that celebrates diversity without dividing, the perfection of being graciously united with God and with all the people whom God loves, God’s perfection of a society that reflects the values of God’s Kingdom.

What was required was a measure of flexibility that allowed for an interaction between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, an approach to faith that recognised and celebrated the truth of who God is (personal piety), yet was expected to enact God’s will for individuals and society (social holiness). Accordingly, Attwell can affirm that, “Methodism seems peculiarly well-adapted to meet the spiritual and social needs of [a] changing Africa...”<sup>21</sup>

##### **5. Five important markers in the journey to the new land, and beyond. A theological evaluation of Christian perfection, as social holiness, in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.**

Our Wesleyan heritage has allowed Southern African Methodists to face one of the most dehumanising and destructive systems of abuse in our time – the sin of Apartheid. Storey is correct when he notes that John Wesley said little about the great obsession of Southern Africa – race.

The word ‘racism’ had to wait until the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be invented, indicating how long the European world remained supremely unconscious of any pathology in its attitude to people of colour. Nevertheless, Mr. Wesley did have passionate things to say about slavery, the most brutal expression of that pathology.... In his opposition to this most degrading of all racist practices Wesley moved from simply seeking the conversion of the slaves, and the amelioration of some of the horrific conditions under which they laboured, to joining those, led by the Quakers, who were working for the total abolition of slavery itself.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Richardson in Jones, GL, Hutter, R, Ewell, CRV. *God truth, and witness*. Brazos Press, Michigan, 2006, 231-232.

<sup>21</sup> Attwell, A. *What Wesley believed and taught: The essentials of Wesley’s theology*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 1994:4.

<sup>22</sup> Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:77.

Wesley was public about his opposition to slavery, in his 1744 pamphlet *Thoughts upon slavery*, he not only denounced those who justified slavery on the grounds of European superiority, but said that they were even less civilised than their victims the slaves. More pointedly in relation to the Southern African context, it is clear that Mr Wesley had some apparent sensibilities about the tyranny and evil of racism. Storey records that in his famous letter to William Wilberforce in 1791 he refers to the racism of the colonial legal system commenting that, “it being a law in all our Colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this!” Storey goes on,

When Wesley said that liberty is “the right of every human creature as soon as he breathes the vital air,” there is little doubt that in his mind, this genuinely embraced *every* human creature, regardless of race.<sup>23</sup>

Millard agrees with Storey’s conclusion that Wesley maintained that liberty, and of course dignity, are the rights of every living person regardless of class or race. She makes this point by citing not only Wesley’s words, but by explaining his attitudes towards slaves and his work among the poor and the sick, as examples of how Wesley sought to bring about social transformation in both America and Britain during his ministry.<sup>24</sup> Hulley makes the further point that Wesley not only addressed the practical needs and concerns of the everyday person that he encountered through his ministry, rather, he also sought to address the structures and powers of his day directly; thus he aimed not only to alleviate the plight of the needy, but also sought to address the oppressive structures that caused such needs to arise in the first place.<sup>25</sup> Of course this heritage of practically addressing both the needs of persons, and the abusive and oppressive structures in society, carried through the development of Methodism in the years after Wesley’s death, remaining important in the new contexts into which Methodism was planted as a result of missionary work in places like Africa, Asia, and the Americas.<sup>26</sup>

This groundwork of social engagement, and practical care, laid a firm foundation from which Southern African Methodists could work against the system of Apartheid. The threat of apartheid had loomed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British introduced the system of ‘pass laws’ that restricted the free movement of Black Southern Africans within the colonies. Jan Christian Smuts, who became the

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<sup>23</sup> Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:77-78.

<sup>24</sup> See Millard (now having the married name Jackson) in Richardson, NR & Malinga, P (edd). *Rediscovering Wesley for Africa*, Education for Ministry and Mission Unit, Pretoria, 2005:140-144.

<sup>25</sup> Please refer to Hulley, a South African Methodist’s, discussion of Wesley’s views on war, human rights and revolution, in Hulley, LD. *Wesley: A plain man for plain people*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2000:91-105.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on this development I would suggest three sources: first, for a Southern African perspective please see Grassow, PS. *Salvation and political activism*, in Richardson, NR & Malinga, P (edd). *Rediscovering Wesley for Africa*, Education for Ministry and Mission Unit, Pretoria, 2005:87-96. For a truly superb, and scholarly, account of this emphasis in both Britain and America please see Rack, HD. *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism*, Epworth press, London, 1989:381-449, 471-488. For a further perspective on developments in Methodism in Latin America and South Africa after Wesley’s death please refer to Maddox, RL. *Rethinking Wesley’s theology for contemporary Methodism*, Kingswood books, Nashville, 1998:169-196. Finally, there is the exceptional work by Heitzenrater, RP. *Wesley and the people called Methodists*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1995:261-280, 311-316.

Prime Minister of South Africa in 1919, was however the first persons on record to use the word ‘apartheid’ in a speech in 1917 to describe this system of racial and ethnic separation. Under this system Blacks and Coloureds were not allowed onto the streets of towns in the colonies of the Cape and Natal after dark, and they had to carry identifying pass documents at all times, showing that they had both reason (e.g., fixed employment), and permission, to be in the town. This system ensured that 93% of the population were relegated to 13% of the land. The privilege given to White South Africans through access to better education and job reservations meant that by the time the Nationalist Party campaigned for the 1948 elections there was little doubt that the White voters would support their system of White privilege and preference over their Black countrymen. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was the first significant challenge to the structure of Southern African Methodism.

### **5.1. ‘One and undivided’ 1958 – a movement from above. The MCSA’s stand against the structural sin of racial segregation.**

Up to this point in Southern African history the Methodist Church had been a single denomination in which Black and White Methodists studied together in Methodist schools, worshipped together in Methodist Churches, and ministered together in Methodist communities. Naturally there were some exceptions where conservative communities sought to align themselves with the ‘petty apartheid’ ideologies of separation according to race, but on the whole the MCSA was a racially integrated single denomination (in principle at least).<sup>27</sup> However, the ‘group areas act’ of 1950 and the ‘separate amenities act’ of 1953 not only made this unity difficult (due to geographic separation), but also made it illegal for Methodists of different races to meet and worship together. The Methodist church was facing significant pressure both from conservative, mainly white, members within its ranks, and from the Nationalist government to segregate along racial lines, thus having separate churches for Black Methodists and White Methodists. Many other denominations had already done so, and some others had been segregated from their missionary beginnings.<sup>28</sup>

In response to this pressure the minutes of the Conference of 1958 record the following:

Like other parts of the life of our country, the Church is facing choices which will determine her future development, and in particular the choice between unity and division. The Conference, in prayer and heart-searching, expressed its conviction that it is the will of God for the Methodist Church that it should be *one and undivided*, trusting to the leading of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Storey does note that the Methodist history before this time, and after it, would be filled with stories of “both honour and shame”. Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:78.

<sup>28</sup> Please refer to de Gruchy’s detailed chronicle of such developments in De Gruchy, J & de Gruchy, S. *The Church struggle in South Africa: 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*. SCM Press, London, 2004:1-100.

<sup>29</sup> *Minutes of the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of South Africa*. Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town, 1958:202.

This radical stance, often referred to as the church's resolution to be 'one and undivided', has seldom been remembered within its original theological context. Because of the overbearing power of Apartheid it has most often been seen primarily as a social response to the political abuses of the day. However, the context within which this statement took shape was fundamentally linked to the Southern African Methodist understanding of Christian perfection, that is, what it means to strive to live as God intended, the kind of holiness found in scripture, and to strive to in perfect love, in spite of the pressure of government laws from without, and personal prejudices from within. The minutes of Conference record:

We do not pretend that there are no difficulties; barriers not only of prejudice but of real difference will have to be subordinated to the love which the Holy Spirit implants in our hearts. But this will be an expression in life of the message for which Methodism was created, the message of Scriptural Holiness and Perfect Love, whereby we follow our Lord in stretching out our hands to all men [sic] that they may be saved from all evil, and may be brought into the unity of the household of God.<sup>30</sup>

The members of Conference were then instructed to find ways of loving the nation, but not the nation's sins, asking that each person support their denomination, yet without falling into the trap of denominational prejudices.

This resolution was a truly significant and courageous one, not only for its time, but also certainly for the decades to come when the pressure to segregate would increase manifold. Storey notes that in the decades that followed there were many more such statements and resolutions from the Church, however, they were also matched by practical and intentional attempts at radical inclusiveness in the face persecution and opposition. Among these are the *National Youth Leadership Training Programme*, a multiracial training program for youth leaders that had an intentional focus on dealing with issues of prejudice related to race, gender, and economic status. For adult Methodists there were the *My Brother and Me* programmes that were initiated to break down stereotypes and facilitate engagement around issues of race in the light of the Christian gospel. Programmes such as these not only helped to facilitate engagement among individual Methodists from different race groups, they also helped to keep the dream of a single united Methodist Church of all races alive in the Southern African Methodist psyche.

One of the most vivid examples of how 1958 statement of intention was applied in a local Church context was the exemplary struggle of Peter Storey between 1956 and 1981 to work against the Nationalist Government's forced removal of coloured people (mostly Methodists) in Cape Town. The multiracial congregation, Central Methodist Mission, in Buitenkant Street, was significantly disrupted by the forced removals. The Church naturally opposed the removals in every possible way. Yet when the removals were eventually enacted in 1966 the congregation decided to remain united in spite of the forced removal. Ministries of care and support for those who had been removed were set up. Transportation was arranged to bus the

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<sup>30</sup> *Minutes of the 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of South Africa*. Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town, 1958:202.

congregants the many miles from the settlement areas to the Church so that multi-racial services and meetings at the Church could continue unabated. A plaque was put on the front of the Church, facing the busy Green Market Square, that read:

All who pass by remember with shame the many thousands of people who lived for generations in District Six and other parts of this city, and were forced to leave their homes because of the colour of their skins. Father forgive us...<sup>31</sup>

It was during this period that the some stark theological divisions began to surface within the mainline denominations in Southern Africa. While the Methodist church maintained the principles of unity and inclusiveness at its highest levels, and drew attention to it in their official statements, this was sadly not the case in most local congregations, and also not adequately reflected in the leadership of the denomination.

The major theological divisions in the church would later be defined in the Kairos document as **state theology** that offered a "theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism... It does [this] by misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes."<sup>32</sup> **Church theology**, which was largely characteristic of the theology of the Mainline churches (Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Lutherans). This theology rejected apartheid in principle but did not do much to formally reject it within the structures of the Church or within society.<sup>33</sup> And then finally **prophetic theology**, a theology that sought a return to scripture, understanding that the Bible has clear guidance for Church and society in the face of the oppressive apartheid system. Prophetic theology called for repentance, conversion and change.<sup>34</sup> This theology had at its centre a message of hope:

The people need to hear it said again and again that God is with them and that 'the hope of the poor is never brought to nothing' (Ps 9:18). Also, while the oppressors must be called to repentance, they must also be given something to hope for. At present they have false hopes... Can the Christian message of hope not help them in this matter?<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, the 1958 statement had set the tone for the Church to work pragmatically, through the vehicle of social holiness, towards the Christian ideal of scriptural holiness and perfect love. Yet, while the top structures of the Church officially addressed the evils of apartheid and opposed the state, there were very few congregations on the local level that were truly racially integrated, or directly fighting

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted from Theilen, U (nee Möllhoff). *Gender, race, power, and religion: Women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Post-apartheid society*. Doctoral Thesis, Philipps-Universität Marburg 2003:33.

<sup>32</sup> *The Kairos document: Challenge to the Church*. Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eerdmans publishers, Grand Rapids, 1986:3.

<sup>33</sup> *The Kairos document: Challenge to the Church*. Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eerdmans publishers, Grand Rapids, 1986:9.

<sup>34</sup> *The Kairos document: Challenge to the Church*. Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eerdmans publishers, Grand Rapids, 1986:17-26.

<sup>35</sup> *The Kairos document: Challenge to the Church*. Rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Eerdmans publishers, Grand Rapids, 1986:26

against government led segregation. This led to the next significant marker in the development of social holiness in the MCSA, that is, the formation of the Black Methodist Consultation in 1975.

## **5.2. The formation of the ‘Black Methodist Consultation’ 1975 – a movement from below. The MCSA’s stance for a Church that reflects the true nature of Southern African society.**

The next radical movement towards social holiness in the Methodist church of Southern Africa was the formation of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) by the Reverend Dr Ernest Baartman in 1975. More than 75% of the membership of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is black, yet by the early 1970’s the leadership of the Church did not reflect this reality. Black Methodists were largely excluded from the decision-making processes of their Church, of the 12 districts in the MCSA at that stage 10 were led by White Methodist Chairmen, and only 2 by Black Methodist Chairmen.<sup>36</sup> This legacy of White leadership had arisen out of the Missionary movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The time had however come for the MCSA to come of age and to come under the leadership of African Christians. Theilen explains the purpose in the formation of the BMC:

The BMC’s mission was to ensure that white domination was progressively reduced and the entrenched hierarchy transformed. The BMC also saw the need for political life in the church. It’s [sic] membership was open to both clergy and laity. Further the BMC laid the ground for a necessary self-examination, for a “Black awareness”; its aim was to undo any psychological oppression born out of existing structures.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst Black Methodists were never officially unequal to White Methodists, the reality was quite different on the ground, and in fact still is today.<sup>38</sup> What the BMC has done for Methodism in Southern Africa is truly significant. First, they have engaged in the process of bringing the Church to more adequately represent and reflect the voices of Black South Africans. The MCSA currently has 9 Black Bishops (of which 1 is a woman), and 3 white Bishops. Second, they have helped to re-appropriate the values, tradition, and religion of Africa in the Methodist Church again. Sadly, missionary imperialism often sought to eradicate elements of African tradition and religion – seeing these as barbarous and heathen practises. The BMC has significantly helped the MCSA to reinvent itself as an African Christian denomination, through education, publication, and the presentation of the value and necessity of Black and African theologies. The richness of this

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<sup>36</sup> Theilen, U (nee Möllhoff). *Gender, race, power, and religion: Women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Post-apartheid society*. Doctoral Thesis, Philipps-Universität Marburg 2003:28.

<sup>37</sup> Theilen, U (nee Möllhoff). *Gender, race, power, and religion: Women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Post-apartheid society*. Doctoral Thesis, Philipps-Universität Marburg 2003:28.

<sup>38</sup> The current debate on equitable stipends in the MCSA, as well as the stark reality that a black Methodist minister will serve on average 3000 members, and 12 societies, whereas a white Methodist minister will serve on average 350 members and a single society, show that there are still very different standards for Black and White Methodists.

tradition for Christianity in the world cannot be underestimated.<sup>39</sup> Third, the BMC has ensured that politics (often viewed by ‘church theology’ as the ambit of the state) were dealt with as part of the agenda of the church.

The BMC still exists as a formidable and respected movement with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. What is important to note in the context of this paper, however, is that the BMC was formed as a movement within the Church that sought to honour God by being both black and African in a Church that was largely controlled by White liberals in a nation that faced massive oppression at the hands of conservative White Christians. We should never forget that the large majority of Nationalist government officials were active members in Dutch Reformed Churches<sup>40</sup>, and that approximately 80% the ordinary white South Africans that kept the system of apartheid in power for over 40 years declared that they were Christians of one form or another. Yet, from within the Church arises this movement that seeks to work against the sin and evil of segregation, the lie of false representation, and work towards a truly African Church that is representative of its African members, both black and white.

The critical work of social holiness, as undertaken by the BMC, lead in large part to the next milestone in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’s appropriation of Christian perfection – Obedience ’81.

### **5.3. ‘Obedience’ ’81’ – a movement from with. The MCSA’s radical stand for costly and painful shifts power relations and cultural adjustment in the church.**

During the height of the violence and oppression of the late 1970’s, after the deaths of so many in the 1976 student uprisings, and the rising temperature of the armed struggle for liberation, Methodists of all races, ages and genders, gathered for the most representative consultation ever held in the church up to that point. This gathering was in open defiance to the prevailing powers and was a further pledge to unity.

Storey writes of the gathering,

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<sup>39</sup> For a detailed discussion of this please see Forster, DA. *Validation of individual consciousness in strong artificial intelligence: An African theological contribution*, Doctoral Thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria 2006:chapters 5-7. And, Forster, DA. *Identity in relationship: The ethics of ubuntu as an answer to the impasse of individual consciousness* (Paper presented at the South African science and religion Forum – Published in the book *The impact of knowledge systems on human development in Africa*. du Toit, CW (ed), Research institute for Religion and Theology (University of South Africa), Pretoria, 2007:245-289).

<sup>40</sup> It is no secret that the apartheid system received explicit theological support through the official statements of the Dutch Reformed Church. See *Human relations and the South Africa scene in the light of scripture*, NG Kerk Boekhandel, Cape Town, 1976. Of course many of the predominantly English speaking Churches in the South African Council of Churches had denounced the ‘false gospel’ of apartheid in 1962, and it was finally declared heretical by the Ottawa declaration of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982. See the following work for a complete discussion of these processes: De Gruchy, JW & Villa-Vicencio (edd), *Apartheid is a heresy*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1983.

This time they acknowledged how difficult it was to achieve [unity], and how painful togetherness could be, requiring significant shifts in power relations and much cultural adjustment.<sup>41</sup>

The outcome of this engagement was the *Message of Obedience '81*, in which the theology, and cost, of true transformation was clearly understood<sup>42</sup>:

When we spoke and wept, argued and agonised, [God] was there. He met us in our hurt and anger, humility and shame. Because God in Christ was in the midst, he brought us to repentance. He opened our eyes to the wounds we inflict on each other by our insensitivity, bitterness and fear.

With particular reference to the shape of social holiness that was required in opposition to apartheid, the 'message' of *Obedience '81* noted that,

... every Methodist must witness against this disease which infects our people, our church and our country. We have experienced how hard it is to abandon long-held prejudice and long-felt bitterness, but we have seen God work this miracle. It happened because we continued to search for each other even at our times of deepest division. We now declare to all South Africans that there is a *third way where people who discovered their love for each other, translate it into justice for all*.<sup>43</sup>

The way of perfect love was clearly understood to be the path to justice. Once again, one can see the strong emphasis on Christian perfection as social holiness. The promise that members of the consultation made read as follows: "... Therefore promise before Almighty God and each other that we will henceforth live and work to bring into reality the concept of an undivided Church and a free and just Southern Africa"

Pragmatically *Obedience '81* achieved the aim of further cementing the notion that the Methodist church is one and undivided – even if society was segregated, the church would remain fundamentally one. The *work* of creating unity across racial lines was both costly and difficult, partly because of the powerful laws that restricted movement and forced separation, but also because of the strong psychological effects of almost 300 years of racial ideology that permeated all aspects of Southern Africa society. Storey recalls that

...those congregations that sought to demonstrate Methodist one-ness by deliberately [racially] integrating their memberships were relatively

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<sup>41</sup> Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:78.

<sup>42</sup> Storey discusses the process of *Obedience '81* in his inaugural lecture at Duke Divinity school. The lecture is entitled *Rules of engagement: Faithful congregations in a dangerous world*. Duke University, Durham, 2004:5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:79, emphasis mine.

few, but they were prototypes of a future that apartheid claimed was impossible and had an impact far beyond their numbers of size.<sup>44</sup>

These churches offered not only the reality of God's undivided Kingdom – a Kingdom of perfect love, but also facilitated the acceptance of the fact that the ideology of apartheid was a lie – not only could people of different races worship together, they could flourish together and enrich their common life. Such acts of social engagement, moments of deliberate and carefully brokered discovery, were the building blocks of the new South Africa, long before the end of apartheid had even begun to dawn, these signs of the Kingdom were evidenced in local churches. This was radical protest!

#### **5.4. The 'Journey to the new land' in the early 1990's – a movement outward. The MCSA's decision to reconstruct the Church to help facilitate the birth of the new South Africa.**

The Presiding Bishop's addresses to Conferences from the late 1980's into the early 1990's all began with a note of concern about escalating violence and tension that had beset the country. It was hard to imagine in the late 1980's that apartheid would ever end, and if it did, many imagined that it would almost certainly be as the result of a brutal and bloody revolt. Yet, in spite of those fears there was a relatively peaceful transition to democracy in 1994. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa played no small role in this process. The 1992 Conference, under the leadership of Bishop Mvume Dandala, agreed to the formation of a Church initiated peace force that would help to monitor and quell violence throughout the land.<sup>45</sup> It had become clear that the church had a central and significant role to play in preventing total anarchy and collapse in Southern African society. If the church was to be effective in both eradicating and overcoming the structural sin of apartheid, and also in offering support and care for the increasingly impatient and militant victims of apartheid, it would need to restructure itself to take its members, and the wider society, on this 'journey to the new land'.

What was required was not just another statement of unity and solidarity, but rather a bold and courageous restructuring of the church that could best position the institution to support and encourage its members to make the changes required for renewal and change. As such the Conference of 1993 in Benoni gave four of its eight days to a convocation called the 'Journey to the New Land'. The convocation was once again attended by representatives of all ages, races, and genders. "Listening was a feature of this Convocation, as we sought to hear God's Word and the cry of the community. We listened as Methodists spoke of their pain and their dreams".<sup>46</sup> The Conference's attention in its decision-making was focussed towards:

- The call to be a priesthood of all believers.
- Growth in spirituality evidenced by contextual worship and lifestyle.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Storey, P. *And are we yet alive: Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in the new Southern Africa*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004:79, emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the 110<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*. Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town. 1992:434.

<sup>46</sup> *Minutes of the 111<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*. Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town. 1993:392.

- A return to the values of *ubuntu*, family life and servant mission.

The clear emphasis of the journey to the new land process can be evidenced in these three foci. The issues that were addressed covered both personal piety (i.e., the development and encouragement of contextual African-Christian worship and lifestyle), and social holiness (i.e., the values of *ubuntu*, family life and servant mission).

The call for the priesthood of all believers was an expression of the desire that the Church should be democratic and representative at all of its various levels of governance and ministry. In some sense the desire was that the Church should not reflect the oppressive, disenfranchising, structures of Southern African society, but rather that it should lead the way in equality and transformation. All of the calls were to find their fullest expression in the call to servant mission. It was recognised that the Church had become 'maintenance' focussed (caring only for its own needs, its own members, and dealing only with its own concerns). If the church was to actively participate in God's plan for the renewal and transformation of Southern African society it would need to engage far more actively in practical acts of servanthood and ministry outside of the confines of the traditional church. As an expression of this ideal all ordained Methodist clergy were encouraged to spend one day a week labouring in some form of social or community ministry (e.g., working as a peace monitor, or doing counselling for victims of violence and abuse, monitoring the work of the police, visiting detainees under the security act in their prison cells, and later serving as electoral officials, helping to ensure that all South Africans had identity documents, and engaging in voter education to ensure that intimidation and electoral fraud did not occur).<sup>47</sup>

After the peaceful democratic elections of April 1994 the function and responsibility of the Church had to change from that of a prophetic activism against apartheid, to that of the reconstruction and development of society as a result of the abuses of apartheid. This led to the dawning of a new era, and expression, of social holiness in Southern African Methodism.

### **5.5. The 'Mission Congress' 2004 – the MCSA's stand to deliberately position itself to bring about 'healing and transformation' of both individuals and society to work towards a 'Christ healed Africa for the healing of the nations'.**

Under the leadership of Bishop Ivan Abrahams the church courageously struggled to reposition herself for reconstruction and development. Under apartheid the enemy seemed so obvious, and the goal so clear. However, 10 years after the dawn of democracy very little had changed in Southern African society. Poverty and segregation were still rife. The cause of this segregation now was economic disenfranchisement, a high rate of HIV / AIDS infection, and the slow pace of service delivery by the new government.

Once again the church rose to the challenge and in 2003 adopted the vision of working towards "A Christ healed Africa for the healing of Nations". Clearly this

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<sup>47</sup> *Minutes of the 112<sup>th</sup> annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*. Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town. 1994:389-393.

statement was grounded in the understanding that African Christianity was both valid, and valuable, as an instrument for achieving God's mission in the world. By this mission it was understood that, "God calls the Methodist people to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation". The subsequent mission strategy was divided into four clear areas of development, ministry and growth:

- Spirituality.
- Justice, service, and reconciliation.
- Evangelism and church growth.
- Development and economic empowerment.<sup>48</sup>

Once again the contents and thrust of this initiative struck a strong balance between personal piety and social holiness. Through an examination of the priorities of this mission strategy one can clearly see how the idea of Christian perfection, as social holiness, took on a rich expression in the context of Southern African Methodism. Among the priorities highlighted by the Conference of 2005 were:

- A mission consciousness shaped by the imperatives of spirituality, evangelism and church growth, justice and service, development and economic empowerment.
- The liberation of the laity, to be facilitated by the clergy, that will enable their full participation in the life and witness of the church.
- The revamping of our structures that they may serve our vision, mission thrust and transformation strategies.
- The eradication of racism, prejudice and inequality in institutional life.
- Taking seriously the call to a healing ministry, especially in our response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- A clear understanding of Church/State relations within the socio-political realities of our time, and the jealous guarding of the duty to be ready to speak with a prophetic voice when necessary.

These five milestones in recent Methodist history in Southern Africa display the clear emphasis that Methodism in this part of the world has had Christian perfection as social holiness as chief principles in its theology and ministry. Moreover, it is clear that this emphasis has been used by God in achieving some part of God's mission for the healing and transformation of Southern Africa.

There is little doubt that there is still a great deal of work left to do in Southern Africa, the problems of HIV/AIDS, the collapse of the rule of law and the economy in Zimbabwe, and the slow pace of transformation and change in South Africa still loom large over the sub-continent. However, an approach of social holiness is surely the most God honouring means towards Christian perfection in this context.

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<sup>48</sup> The Mission Unit of the Church published a detailed document entitled *Mission congress 2004: Report on the key outcomes of the Mission congress*, Methodist publishing house, Cape Town, 2004. This was followed by the *Mission charter* that was tabled and adopted by the 117<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Johannesburg. See *2006 yearbook of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*, Methodist Publishing house, Cape Town, 2006:3-22.

## 6. Concluding remarks on our past our future and God's mission for the Church.

Our conference in 2005 was reminded, in a light-hearted manner, of the early Methodist ditty that went:

"As good a church, as can be found,  
Their doctrine is so pure and sound,  
One reason which I give for this,  
The Devil hates the Methodist.  
If Satan could them all destroy,  
The troops of hell would shout for joy;  
I'll pray that God would them increase  
And fill the world with Methodists."

Whilst I would not necessarily agree with the theology of this little ditty, I do believe that it expresses the truth that God still has a mission and a plan for the Methodist Church, here in South Africa, and throughout the world. We were raised up by God for Christian perfection, and clearly the world is not yet perfect, so we still have a role to play.

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is currently the largest mainline denomination in South Africa. According to the 2001 national census 7.3% of Christians in Southern Africa were Methodist, whereas 7.2% are Reformed, 7.1% are Roman Catholic, 5.5% are Congregational, 3.8% are Anglican, and the remaining 48.8% (of the total 79.8% of the Christian population) belong to independent and African initiated Churches.<sup>49</sup> These statistics display that Christians in the mainline Churches of Southern Africa have favoured the pragmatic approach to Christian perfection, as expressed in social holiness emphases of the MCSA. There can be no doubt that the sacrifices, bravery, and faithfulness of previous generations of Methodist mothers and fathers have contributed significantly towards our current freedoms and prosperity in Southern Africa. This pragmatic approach to individual salvation coupled with social transformation has so much to offer our context as we seek to undo the evils of over 300 years of oppression.

This marginal majority, however, is not to be celebrated since it shows a real world decline in membership of 3% since 1911. The fastest growing sector in Southern Africa is the African Initiated Church that has grown by an incredible 48.3% since 1911! These statistics show is that Southern African Christians hunger for African expressions of the Christian faith. They are no longer satisfied with a Church that seems more Western than Africa, and that still seems so out of place in Africa in many of its iterations and policies! The African renaissance is teaching us to appreciate our richness as Africans, and that richness must surely find expression within our faith. As Stone notes "This points to the need to develop and implement

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<sup>49</sup> SA Government, Statistics SA, *The 2005/6 Christian handbook*, WITS University Library, Johannesburg. 2005. These statistics are also available online <<http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/default.asp>> accessed 10 July 2007, 22h09. A theological critique of this data is available in Hendriks, J & Erasmus, J. Religion in South Africa: 2001 population census data. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Vol 121. 2005:88-111.

an African ecclesiology within the Methodist Church to stop the loss and win back the hundreds of thousands who have left the Church”<sup>50</sup>

I would hazard a guess that similar statistics could be produced for two-thirds nations across the world. My conclusion is thus that the Methodist Church must take seriously the need to appropriate and inculturate the central tenets of the Gospel, and of Wesleyan Methodism, in the local contexts in which it finds itself. If it does not do so it will begin to decline as more culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate expressions of the faith rise in prominence. Moreover, if we are to remain a church at all, we must remain true to the reason for which God raised up the Methodist people, that reason is Christian perfection – perfection that is run through with social holiness. So let us be reminded again,

...gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Stone, T. Building the Church, in *The Methodist Newspaper, Dimension*, June 2007:1.

<sup>51</sup> Wesley, J. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Pref. 5. Quoted in Baker, F. *Practical divinity*.