

**THE IMPACT OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY ON METHODISM
IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH REGARD TO
THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION:**

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THE IMPACT OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY ON METHODISM IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH REGARD TO THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION:

(Summary)

There is potential for a schism, within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) today, between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists, who struggle to find common identity and vision.

A question that needs examination is whether it is possible to develop an authentically, uniting Southern African Methodist Theology within the current Institutional structure of the MCSA. For this to become possible, some key areas of discussion are highlighted in this paper, such as the training of ministers and the MCSA as Institution.

This paper attempts to enter into conversation between Fundamental and Liberation Methodism using the Doctrine of Christian Perfection, '*the Grand Depositum*' of Methodism, as a point of reference and develop an epistemological framework based on Wesley's 'quadrilateral' of Scripture, reason, experience and tradition.

This paper takes as a standpoint the need for an authentically Southern African Methodist theology, which is both uniting and transformatory, in order for the MCSA to fulfil its vision of "A Christ Healed Africa for the Healing of Nations."

Key Terms:

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, The Doctrine of Christian Perfection, John Wesley, Liberation Theology, Reformed Theology, Fundamentalist Methodism, Liberationist Methodism, Inculturation, African Theology, Wesley's Quadrilateral.

**I declare that The Impact of Liberation Theology on
Methodism in South Africa with Regard to the Doctrine of
Christian Perfection is my own work and that all the sources
that I have used or quoted have been indicated and
acknowledged by means of complete references.**

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Chapter One:

Introduction:

There is little doubt that there is a potential schism developing within Methodism in Southern Africa (MCSA), primarily between those whom can loosely be termed Fundamentalist Methodists, who advocate a return to a more 'pure' form of Methodism, promoting a return to Wesleyan doctrinal roots and those who may loosely be termed Liberationist Methodists, tending toward unifying Methodism with theologies which have common ground with liberation theologies. (More will be said about these streams later in the paper.)

Schisms are not new, Wesley was asked the question:

“Do you not entail a schism upon the Church? That is, is it not probable that your hearers after your death will be scattered into all sects and parties, or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect?”¹ - a question, which has in many senses turned out to be prophetic for Methodism worldwide.

Schisms, however, are found at various levels in the life of the church universal, they have also been a part of the life of early Methodism in South Africa.

¹ Cracknell :2005: 249

The reasons for schisms are varied and distinct definitions are difficult and complex and these difficulties are particularly relevant in terms of early Methodism in Southern Africa. Millard in her examination of the causes of schisms in the Ethiopian type churches points out that these churches started the first break aways from mission churches. Ethiopian-type churches are, as opposed to the Zionist-type churches, those Africanist churches which broke away from the mission churches of the mainline denominations to reclaim African self government. The Ethiopian Church became the foundation for the “Ethiopian movement”, which because of its later connection with the American-based African Episcopal Church was considered “anti-white” and was treated with fear and suspicion by government officials and white leaders of the churches. This view was unfair and these Independent churches then became known as “separatist churches”, a term considered derogatory by church members today.² A view that sees these churches as the forerunners to liberation theologies may be more accurate. Xozwa states: “there was a time in South Africa when the "ETHIOPIAN PROBLEM" was discussed with interest and almost with anxiety, not only by missionaries, but also by politicians, scholars, and others interested in the welfare of the country. This occurred in the years after the Boer war of 1899-1902, and in the days of the Zulu rebellion of 1906. It was then feared that the Ethiopian movement was an African political underground movement aiming at ousting the white man from South Africa, or at least, that it might establish a pan-African National Church which would cause harm by hampering the

² Millard: 1995:1

Evangelization of the Africans.”³ But, at the same time, Van der Spuy cites that “the Ethiopian styled churches retained a strong desire to keep Western connections and therefore their desire was not to discard Scripture, tradition or experience rather to develop an African framework from which to formulate an African ontology.”⁴

Nevertheless, the definitions of these churches are also difficult as Pass asserts that the term African Instituted Churches (AIC) generally means “churches in Africa, by Africans and for Africans”.

There are alternative terms, such as Africa Independent Churches, African Initiated Churches and African International Churches, all maintaining the same definition as AIC’s and they refer to churches that emerged outside of mission churches and independent churches instituted as a result of the work by “classical missions”. Classical missional churches are also then in need of being defined: they are missionary organizations of “mainline churches” from Europe and North America. The term “mainline churches” is often used for the Catholic Church, and for the churches coming from the main-stream of the Reformation.⁵

These views are in themselves papers on their own but few would deny today that these movements have much in common generally with Liberation Theologies of today, particularly with regard to their methodology and liberative intent. As Millard ⁶ puts it: after a time the secessionist church often modified both structure and

³ Xozwa: 1989: 3

⁴ Van der Spuy: Chapter - Reformed African Indigenous Church in Kitshoff M.C,1996, African Independent Churches Today: 107

⁵ Paas 2006: 140

⁶ Millard : 1995: 11

teaching to provide an African emphasis. The leaders of the Ethiopian churches gave a strong African leadership.

Reasons for the schisms generally accepted by writers on the Ethiopian churches are, amongst others, lack of responsibility for Black leaders, resentment of white-enforced discipline, which may be present in a Black mission church for a long time before the moment when the potential independent church leader decides that it is no longer possible to accept the status quo.

This paper does not contend to argue the complexities of the AIC's but rather to point toward the struggles for African cultural identity within the MCSA and to highlight that these struggles are not new and despite, for the most part, being side tracked by the 'greater' imperatives of fighting apartheid, remain one of the areas of potential schism within the MCSA today.

With regard to theological influences of schisms, Millard⁷ argues that the Ethiopian churches have largely retained the organisational structure and doctrine of the churches from which they seceded. After a time, the secessionist church often modified both structure and teaching to provide an African emphasis. The leaders of the Ethiopian churches gave a strong African leadership. Accordingly, reasons for the schisms were: (a) Desire to be independent of the mission authority; to be responsible for running their own church affairs. (b) Racial prejudice, with positions of authority being kept in the hands of the white missionaries. (c) Resentment of church discipline. (d) Lack of pastoral care

⁷ Millard :1995 : 6

and insensitivity on the part of the missionaries. (e) Desire for status. (f) Wish for a tribal church, which retained African cultural identity.

However, also more general factors which led to the schism. These include reaction to colonialism with the resultant breakdown of tribal structures and authority and missionary involvement in the colonial government. Traditional Black leaders who lost status in this way sometimes found leadership opportunities again within the hierarchy of an independent church with its Black leadership.

At the risk of covering ground which has been well dealt with, Balia⁸ records the story of a Methodist convert Mokone who after a long struggle finally broke away from the church because of the clear dualism between white and Black in the Methodist church. Accordingly, Mokone laid out in a letter to George Weavind, a statement that was to come to be known as the Founder's Declaration of Independence. Balia cites the list as follows:

1. Our district meetings have been separated from the Europeans since 1886. Yet we were compelled to have a White chairperson and secretary.
2. Our district meetings were held in a more or less barbaric manner. We were just like a lot of Kaffirs before the landdrost for passes. While what the White man says is infallible, and no Black can prove it wrong. This separation shows that we cannot be brothers.

⁸ Balia:1991:52

3. The wives and children of Native ministers have no allowance from the Society whatever. Only the Whites have it. This is no doubt one of the reasons for the separation of the district meetings.
4. The Native ordained minister is of no use to his people. He cannot exercise his rights as a minister or be placed in a position of trust as one who is a fellow labourer in the Lord. However, the candidate of the Whites will be placed over the Black man as superintendents.
5. Native ministers get from 24 pounds to 50 pounds per annum, while the White ministers get 300 pounds per annum.
6. In the Transvaal, no Native minister has the right to use the Mission property, movable or immovable. All the Whites are supplied with ox wagons and furniture from the Society.
7. It is a great shame to see the homes of Native ministers and teachers. A stable is preferable. At Waterburg, I was obliged to build my own house, and at Makapanstad, I spent 3 pounds and twelve shillings on the house for reeds and skins, etc.
8. The Native minister holds class meetings and prayer meetings, visits the sick, prays for them, preach, bury and teach school, while the White minister's work is to marry, baptize and administer communion. They will never go to visit the sick or pray for them, and when they die, your Native minister must go to bury your own people. This is not Christianity, nor

brotherly love, nor friendship. If this is true, then White ministers are unnecessary among the Black people.

9. The White ministers do not even know the members of their circuits. They always build their homes one or two miles away from the congregation.

10. No Native minister is honoured among the White brethren. The more the native humbles himself, the more they make a fool of him.

11. We have been in the Wesleyan Ministry for 12 years, and not one of us has received the Minutes or the Annual Report. We are simply ignorant of our own work. We are called “Revs” but are worse than the boy working for the missionary, for he will now and then see the missionary notices. What advantage is to be obtained by remaining in this Society?

12. As Principal of Kilnerton Institute, I was not esteemed as one who belongs to and has any say in the school, and no one would tell me anything about it until I hear it from someone else not in any way connected with the Institution. 13. When a student is sick, the poor nigger will be sent for to come at once to the classroom, shivering under his blanket. He is then asked in tin-classroom what is the matter, and is then told that he is lazy, not sick, and to hurry and get better. The boy who speaks rather straight will be considered a bad one. If all this is so, where is justice? Where is brotherly love? Where is Christian sympathy? God in heaven is witness to all these things.

(1.1) Provisional unwrapping of the problem-setting of this paper

The importance of these statements above for this paper is found in two areas:

(1) Some of these struggles are still to be found within Methodism in Southern Africa today.

(2) Some probing questions are raised by schisms and potential schisms with particular reference to their impact on theological development in general, such as:

(a) Can (should) a theology be kept in “cotton wraps” or is a theology centred on a context and/or time period?

(b) Can theology be labelled or assigned to specific categories?

(c) Is it possible for a Doctrine to be limited to one particular form?

But the main question, which this paper seeks to examine, is whether an authentic uniting Southern African Methodist theology is possible?

Whilst it is not in the scope of this paper to enter into a full dialogue with regard to Methodism and Liberation Theology respectively, which are potential papers on their own, it will attempt to examine this question within a framework namely: Methodism in Southern Africa using the Doctrine of Christian Perfection as a point of reference to facilitate their interaction at the same time examining how John Wesley’s theological method, asserted by Outler as

a quadrilateral of Scripture, reason, tradition and experience, despite difficulties of being misconstrued, can “nonetheless, remain to be a helpful aid for understanding Wesleyan thought?”⁹ In other words, can this ‘quadrilateral’ possibly provide a potential way forward for the development of a uniting theology in the MCSA?

Whilst “the term ‘Wesleyan quadrilateral’ does not appear in the writings of John Wesley,”¹⁰ Hulley asserts that Wesley “principally uses four authorities’ viz. Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. Sometimes he appeals to one only, sometimes to several of them when discussing an issue or settling a point.”¹¹

Wesley’s quadrilateral here taken to mean:

Scripture - *the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments)*: Tradition - *the two millennia history of the Christian Church*: Reason - *rational thinking and sensible interpretation*: Experience - *a Christian's personal and communal journey in Christ which finds itself as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit*.

A caution needs to be noted here: as this paper focuses on Methodism in Southern Africa, it has the potential to become self-serving. It is therefore the intention of this paper to offer an epistemological framework, which may be ecumenically relevant.

⁹ Outler: 1980: 9

¹⁰ Bevins:2008:11

¹¹ Hulley: 1988: 4

There is little doubt that the main concepts in the title of this paper namely Methodism in Southern Africa, Liberation Theology and the Doctrine of Christian Perfection are potential papers on their own and therefore at the outset it may be useful to assert that not all questions that arise from this dialogue may be dealt with extensively in this paper. However, attempts will be made to facilitate effective discussion around the main questions this paper raises. This is not an attempt to avoid potential issues raised, but rather to make this a workable paper.

In light of this, certain elucidations need to be made:

The problem settings of this paper are found around the following oppositional pointers set on continuums loosely facing each other. This papers task is to interrogate the space between these pointers with purpose of arriving at provisional solutions in each of the following sub-problem settings:

(1.1.1) The first sub-problem setting can be formulated as that of Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists.

In the current world, within nearly all church traditions, groups have been found which on one hand are taking stock of the qualitative aspects of their own brand and the historical roots from which they emerge. This tendency in the Methodist world amounts to that of a harking back to pristine Wesley and Wesleyan tradition. On the one hand, Methodists in new settings are

faced with their own cultural and societal experiences tend to move away from the British European contextually bound Wesleyan experience.

The intrinsic problem within this problem setting is that of how texts, theories, natural processes, human history and doings are approached. The way Scripture is viewed, used and applied in people's church and life worlds are central to this problem setting.

It is, however, not a different problem than the question of how Wesley and earlier Methodist history read as well as their reading of their societal; contexts and Scripture.

A provisional solution in this regard may be to highlight that the essential differences between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists, within the MCSA, are found in their respective theological methods. However, in this sense, both need to be reminded of Wesley's theological method, an examination which focuses on the term experience and its relationship within Wesley's quadrilateral as a possible way forward.

(1.1.2) The second sub-problem setting can be formulated around the notion of Church regarding the negativity of schisms and the potential positive character of break aways:

Are all schisms within a certain ecclesial tradition been viewed as negative? Is the underlying assumption of the negative view of schisms not carried by a supernatural high church overload of the concept of what a church is purported to be? On the one hand are break away differentiations, say

within Methodism, not adhering to a low church community of faith principle in which the cultural and temporal aspects of peoples contextual experience are more expressly and in an empowering sense been given a place.

A provisional solution in this regard may be to assert that Scripture needs to be examined in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit. Is the Spirits work, and by implication, Gods plan for groups of theologians, church members and fellow Christians to be determinedly separated and are these separations then to be determined by amongst others, cultural differences? Or is it that humankind has self determined these separations?

The dynamic differentiation within the MCSA which entails a slightly different view of the church than the extreme supernatural character of the church on the one hand, as well as a slightly different view of the church than the extreme cultural and societal induced character of a church found with a breakaway mindset, should be embraced in terms of the unique contribution which the MCSA can make within the ecumenical family as well as help define, if any, the '*grand depositum*' for which the MCSA has been raised up.

(1.1.3) The third sub-problem setting is formulated around the notion of faith in the sense of faith as happening above experience and faith as an expression of experience:

This problem-setting covers two approaches to faith and belief: Firstly, a view of faith happening supernaturally from above and outside experience. Faith touching and covering all experiences like oil on the surface of water is the mainline protestant approach. Luther and Calvin operated with the view of faith been, on the one hand, very close to grace and thus touching and covering all human experience, while on the other hand, faith is to be found in a position adjoining other fields of experience.

Secondly, faith been viewed as intranaturally and intrinsically part of experience as a mode, field and facet of experience.

A provisional solution to this problem-setting may be found in Wesley's concept, much like Liberation Theology, that whilst God is indeed God of history as found in Scripture, there also exists the possibility that God is also active and in attendance in the present. Thus, in this understanding, can experience be seen to influence and impact faith?

(1.1.4) The fourth sub-problem-setting is formulated around the notion of the Holy Spirit's work of renewing sanctification, as purity and perfection and uniqueness and excellence:

Firstly, the Holiness tradition in Methodism operates with the notion of Doctrine of Christian Perfection. In many instances though not in all, a

Doctrine of Perfection is undergirded by a strong dualism between faith and spirituality on the one hand, and communal and social life on the other.

Secondly, 20th century liberation and liberative types of theology has been moving in the direction of the uniqueness and quality of excellence of people's overall societal and cultural experience.

A provisional solution to this problem-setting may be found in an examination of the necessity for liberative assertions, processes and theology in the first place. In other words, with regard to the MCSA in particular, is it possible that the church's inability to deal adequately with domination issues such as colonialism, cultural oppression, racialism and the oppression of women has facilitated liberative movements within the MCSA? This seen in the light of the MCSA's self proclaimed status of 'one and undivided.'

At the same time, an examination of the MCSA's dealing with the issue of religious experience, found in Wesley's theological method, as part of an ontological framework may be helpful in this regard.

(1.2) A working definition of the term 'Theology':

Whilst recognising the varying definitions of the term theology, this paper takes the term to mean a dynamic relationship, between a person or group of people, a context and Scripture, which is not reserved for academic purposes alone, but is found wherever and whenever people engage their

faith, with the purpose of understanding the Word and work of God in the world.

This definition encompasses views such as De Gruchy's who asserts that there is a difference between 'studying' theology and 'doing' theology¹². Here he makes the distinction that 'studying' theology is learning from textbooks and listening to lectures but 'doing' theology embraces an engaging theological reflection in particular contexts and situations.

This view also differs from the views of theologians such as Madges, who asserts, firstly, that theology is not reserved for the Christian faith alone and, secondly, that theology is a dynamic conversation involving a person, a religious tradition and a contemporary situation¹³. This paper asserts, firstly, that theology is essentially a contemplative engagement with Scripture within a context and therefore embraces those who seek understanding within the Christian faith. Secondly, theology is not reserved for a person alone but may include contemplative reflection on Scripture by a community of people.

(1.3) A working definition of John Wesley's Theology

This paper acknowledges John Wesley, "offered no creed or catechism for his people to follow,"¹⁴ and further "his uniqueness of thought is evident in the

¹² De Gruchy :1994:2

¹³ Madges: 1998: 28

¹⁴ Bevins: 2008: 2

way he was able to use his theological method to get his people to theologise for themselves.”¹⁵

Yet Wesley’s theology is in line with Reformation theologians such as Luther and Calvin with regard theological method of Scripture, reason and tradition but different in the area and place of religious experience in theology.

In many senses, Wesley was Lutheran in his insistence that the doctrine of justification be key; Roman Catholic in his conviction that a life of holiness was essential and indeed possible; Eastern Orthodox in his belief that faith confessions can be a means of grace; Reformed in his understanding that believers will continue to battle sin until their death; Anglican in that he expected God to work in the sacraments to mediate grace and Pentecostal in his assurance that life in the Spirit would yield visible fruit, either personal or corporate.

Therefore, all his (Wesley) theological assertions are open as he was to persuasion not essentially because of empirical uncertainty but rather because of his bringing into play experience within his theological method. It is perhaps in part for this reason that Wesley was concerned for Methodism not to become a dead sect because his followers would move away from experience as part of the ongoing theological development.

It is here, in the MCSA in particular, that Liberation Theologies have influenced the move back to focus on experience in its theological method.

¹⁵ Bevins: 2008: 2

No in depth study of Wesley's theology can deny that his convictions lack the neat order necessary to place them in systematic order and therefore it is important to take into account the spirit, context and themes thorough which his formulations flow. Beck sites some difficulties with defining a Wesleyan theology in the British Connexion, that "some of us, perhaps all, have inherited doctrinal standards, which in some sense or another lay down a norm. For British Methodism they include the first four volumes of John Wesley's *Sermons* and the *Notes on the New Testament*. Wesley chose them himself and laid them upon posterity. Whether that was a wise decision is open to debate, for they are hardly specific enough to serve as a test of authentic Methodism."¹⁶

This view does not entirely do justice to Wesley's theology. Because of his openness; his theology must be taken in large segments rather than small pieces. Wesley wrote a lot more relevant material than is often suggested and referred to by those who would use his formulations for theological assertions. For example, Wesley's ideas on Christian Perfection encompass his 'complete' theological argument. As '*the Grand Depositum*' for Methodists then to speak of Christian Perfection is to embrace all of his theology because ultimately, like the Puritans, his theology maligns the absence of experience. In this sense he moves away from any type of Formalism.

Wesley's work cannot be divided into neat systematic sections and is often cited as ambiguous. However, it takes an astute reader to discern his

¹⁶ Beck : Chapter – A Retrospect in Meeks, 1985, The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition 215

complete theological ontology, which in some cases, like his journey with Christian Perfection, was never completed. Woods asserts that to seek for an epistemology for Wesley is ostentatious in a sense because Wesley's concerns were more practical whilst he remained, as he declared, a man of *homo unius libri*¹⁷, the Bible. For example, with regard to formulations around the Doctrine of Perfection, Wesley continued to reflect on his understanding of this particular Doctrine until his death. His theological 'openness' has often with some justification, been used as arguments for major theological shifts. For example: in the ongoing debate of Wesley's understanding of salvation, Grassow argues that Wesley never changed his view of salvation to one of social salvation although it may be that these changes can be seen as fundamental theological shifts: "Late in life John Wesley changed his mind. While *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura* were still central to Wesley's doctrine of justification, Wesley noted that faith 'is only the handmaid of love', and that the goal of the Christian life is holiness, 'the fullness of faith', which means devoting the whole self to God and the neighbour in love."¹⁸

Yet, at the same time, Grassow concedes that these shifts in Wesleyan thought must not be seen as a move from salvation by faith to salvation by changing social order to which there is a proclivity among some writers: "Wesley's holiness was social only in as far it impacted on the personal life

¹⁷ Woods: 1975: 48

¹⁸ Grassow : Chapter - John Wesley: Salvation and Political Activism in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 92

and relationships of the individual.”¹⁹ Hence, in terms of this paper, some guidelines appear for the importance of experience rather than reason and tradition in Wesley’s quadrilateral.

This paper attempts to formulate assertions in keeping with the spirit with which Wesley formulated them and not just use them for specific arguments. Theology, in general, and specifically Wesley’s theology, by his own theological method, “is not intended to be exacting, very much the same way as disciplines such as psychology or philosophies are not exacting disciplines.”²⁰ Overall, they deal to a large extent with meta-physics and therefore use scales or degrees of probability as much as theology uses interpretation in order to make assertions. Very few theologians would claim their work to be definitive. If this is not the case then there is good chance that theology would lose its ability to engage and will be reduced to an ‘opium of the masses’ (Marx). Wesley offers a way forward as he includes experience in his theological method.

Balcomb puts it this way, “Neither pietistic nor critical approaches to theology honour the character of experience nor the central realities of life to which experience testifies.”²¹ His assertion is taken to mean that theology which is not cognitive of possibility and diversity of religious experience is often, on the one hand, alienating and on the other, stagnating.

¹⁹ Grassow : Chapter - John Wesley: Salvation and Political Activism in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 92

²⁰ Capra:1991:44

²¹ Balcomb: 1998: 11

So, laying down a definitive definition for Wesley's theology will be a disservice to his unique contribution and to the theological conversation in general.

(1.4) A Working Definition of the term Liberation Theology:

This paper recognises that Liberation Theology, despite the risks of doing so, has tended to be divided into different schools of thought, namely The Latin American Experience, Black Theology and Feminist Theology. As with any attempt to place the general term theology in 'boxes' or frameworks for the sake of definition or ease of use, there are risks. One of the risks is *labelling*: meaning to in most cases, confer upon that thing a set of values, create a norm or assign to a category. This is generally done in a critical manner. For example, one of the areas of struggle within Wesleyan theology in general today is found with the labelling of his theology as Armenian (Storey) yet at the same time cognisant of his(Wesley's) links with the Reformers (Za Bik).

However, with regard to theology, labelling has a risk in that it implies a conferring. In other words the label has to be imparted, particularly for 'new' theologies like Liberation Theology, which whilst open to critical examination like all other theologies, has found and still finds itself, struggling for recognition.

For example, there is a strong call within Methodism in South Africa for theological formations, which have an African flavour. To quote the Presiding Bishop's address to the Connexional Executive 2006, "I once more

make a salutary call for our theology to be homebrewed cooked in African pots.”²²

A question remains whether Methodists in Southern Africa can do so effectively without using Wesley’s theological method. This theological method will need to include a dynamic interaction with Scripture and the African context or experience with reason and tradition of lesser significance.

This paper asserts Liberation Theology has the potential to inform theological diversity and plurality in a way which impacts and develops all theological thought. For example, Cecil Ngokovane, in his article, *The Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Origins and Development of Black theology* asserts that “Black Theologians need to stop justifying themselves and formulate theology from their Black perspective” ²³ and this includes formulating an ontology for their cultural practices.

Some important assertions for this paper are that, firstly, the three different streams of liberative theology within the MCSA be placed under the umbrella term, Liberation Theology. Secondly, Liberation Theology be seen as an authentic reflection on God revealed in Scripture from the perspective of a particular experience, in this case the African context.

²² New Dimension: October 2006: 6

²³ Ngokovane: Chapter – The Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Origins and Development of Black Theology in Maimela & Hopkins, 1989, We Are One Voice : 35

(1.5) Three Key Points for this paper:

Given the statements above, this paper then seeks to examine Methodism in Southern Africa and the impact that Liberation Theology has on a particular doctrine, that of Christian Perfection. In order to create space for discussion later in this paper, a brief overview of (1) Methodism in Southern Africa, (2) Liberation Theology and (3) The Doctrine of Christian Perfection follows:

(1.5.1) Methodism in Southern Africa (MCSA):

Methodism in Southern Africa (MCSA) has had, since its measured introduction in 1795, an interesting and in many ways diverse development and in more recent times, claims to advocate a voice for the oppressed. The reality, however, is surprisingly removed from this claim. In other words there is often a contradiction between the MCSA's claims and its ability to fulfil those claims.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs and they vary from theological to practical implementation of church policy. Factors, such as diverse understandings of Wesley's teachings between so called Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists (mainly due to the fight against apartheid and the sites of delivery of theological education namely the Federal Theological Seminary at Alice in the Eastern Cape and Rhodes University in Grahamstown); the Church's call to witness over decades of changing social and economic contexts; the impact of colonialism on cultural development and the structuring of the Movement as an Institution

all play a significant role in the Churches struggle to be relevant in the changing 'new' South Africa.

The scope of this paper is to examine the development of theological thought in the MCSA, specifically with regard to the Doctrine of Christian Perfection, to examine its inclusion/exclusion and how (if at all) Liberation Theology has challenged the MCSA to fulfil its unique calling and to offer an epistemological framework going forward based on Wesley's theological method.

Methodism in Southern Africa offers a unique perspective into the following:

(1) Western, or so called First World, theological understanding and expression in a different historical context to which it was originally formulated.

(2) The question of what happens to a church or evangelical movement when 'liberation' from oppressive structures has come to pass i.e. can Liberation Theology still offer a evangelical mission focus or will there need to be a theological shift?

(3) Are 'doctrines', essentially a Western development, sacred ground, or has the time come that they should be looked at with different understanding?

Much has been written in this regard but this paper hopes to offer some relevant views on the Doctrine of Christian Perfection and Liberation Theology, specifically with regard to their relationship and impact on the MCSA and the Doctrine of Christian Perfection in particular.

A good place to start then, as the scope of this paper's title is broad and has the potential to lose its way, may be to look at the development of Methodism in the Southern African context i.e. how Methodism developed from a very 'mobile,' essentially evangelical movement with little structure to a more Institutionalised Conference, having a Presiding and District Bishops. At the same time, this paper will attempt to reflect how the movement evolved from a strong mission focus during the early missionary years, to a stronger 'liberation theology' during the struggle against apartheid, and finally to the current theological attempts to shift to a new missional focus.

In other words, has the MCSA been consistent in its theological development and if not, what were the contributing factors to the perceived inconsistency?

Methodism has had a significant impact on theological thought in Southern Africa. From its first introduction, Methodism was essentially a mission movement and tracing its theological development is difficult if not impossible. However, there are some indications that may allow deductions to be made with regard to its theological development bearing in mind the early struggles as noted previously in this paper. Millard alludes to this by asserting that there were certain factors, which favoured the spread of the

Methodist ethos.²⁴ The guidelines for behaviour by the preachers were laid down by the Missionary Society:

A preacher had to concern themselves with personal piety and allow the Bible to be their *homo unius libri*. Secondly they were to maintain the frame of mind that they were by choice and on conviction, Methodist Preachers and therefore before receiving new members they were to be satisfied as far as possible that the potential convert wanted to be acquainted with the religion of Christ and obey it. From this, it can be reasoned that early missionaries proclaimed a strong Wesleyan (English) theology and this gave them a mobile, focused proclamation (*kerygma*) freedom. However, this freedom was undergirded by a strong, but limited, Western styled institutionalisation, which gave the Missionaries, chance to reflect critically and fulfil the didactic responsibilities of the Movement. Without this combination, it is highly unlikely that Methodism would have spread as rapidly and as securely as it did. The current crisis in the African evangelical movement highlights the need for freedom and a strong, but unrestrictive, institutional structure completing the didactic function of a church or evangelical movement. Tienou maintains that the cause of theological malaise in the African evangelical movement today is largely due to proclamation (*kerygma*) without reflection. He argues that this has led to fragmentation (schism) within the evangelical movement in Africa,

²⁴ Millard: 1989: 190

“preventing the working together on a common theological agenda.”²⁵ Some similarities can be drawn to the past schisms that have taken place within Methodism in Southern Africa.

Let us look briefly at the potential schism within the MCSA, without going into too much detail. Its causes and influences will be dealt with throughout this paper.

Southern African Methodist writers, such as Storey and Hulley, in particular, have attempted to raise awareness regarding Wesley’s theology, particularly in light of its own liberation motifs, and both have interpreted certain aspects of Wesley’s doctrines and contextualized them. This, in itself, is a difficult task, given that Wesley’s context and his theological method were very particular. However, there remains a distinct lack of writing from within the MCSA from Black theologians and particularly from ordained women. The reasons for this are varied, but perhaps one of the greatest is the distinct lack of in depth Wesleyan teaching for training ministers, and in fact, may be one of the major contributing factors to the lack of understanding and implementation of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection in particular.

At present, in a five-year probation period, Methodist Training Ministers, spend very little time on Wesleyan studies and very little contemplative reflection on any Wesleyan doctrines. A major concern is that a large

²⁵ Tienou: 1998: 4

majority of Methodists, both lay and clergy, have thus become ignorant of their Wesleyan roots. As a result, those within the MCSA who either advocate Wesley as 'purely' a Liberation Theologian or advocate 'pure' Methodism are able to do so with little opposition. Not only does this lay the foundation for a breakdown of common vision and purpose, it affects the didactic function of the MCSA and is a very real deep theological crisis, not only for the Ministers themselves, but for those they are responsible for, in terms of proclamation and teaching.

For the Fundamentalist Methodist, one of the main fears regarding the Liberationist Methodist's desire to change structures may lie in the notion that such 'liberation' serves only as a temporary interval from the real concern for a sanctified life. In fact, according to the Fundamentalist Methodist, Liberationist Methodists make little reference to the change of the individual at all. On the other hand, Liberationist Methodists may be frustrated by the notion that whilst Fundamentalist Methodists claim a sanctified life, their support, directly and indirectly, of theological methods which stifle cultural identity are both alienating and un-Biblical.

It is important to note, however, that Wesley, aware of the change in Methodists during 18th Century England, as they were freed from their moral and economic oppression, was concerned that they would then join the ranks of the growing, economically stable middleclass and that there may have been a tendency to drift from the doctrines which, advocated by

the Methodist ethos and, by implication their religious experience, would be altered in some way.

This serves to challenge both Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists with the question of what to do when the oppressed are in fact 'liberated.'

Currently, within the MCSA, there is very little written about post-liberation Methodism in general and particularly from the Black and Feminine perspective. A case in point here is found within the MCSA as it seeks in a post-apartheid era to redefine its understanding of the term mission.

(1.5.2) Liberation Theology in the MCSA

There is little doubt that both Liberation Theology, as defined above, and liberation tendencies (schisms) have had a significant impact on the MCSA.

At present, within the MCSA, there are generally two significant approaches to Liberation Theology: Firstly, as asserted previously, ongoing attempts to place Wesley as a Liberationist; and secondly, resistance to a uniting Methodist theology, from a shrinking but determined Wesleyan Fundamentalist stream, whose voice tends to be quieted by the vast majority who advocate a purer form of liberationism.

As was previously stated, there is a general trend in theology which seeks to place Liberation Theology into three distinct fields namely: Latin American experience (the poor), Feminist Theology (women) and Black Theology (Black people). This argument may be based, among others, on the view that

liberation theologies are more movements that attempt to unite theology and socio-political concerns than a new school of theological theory.

At its broadest understanding, Liberation Theology arose in the third world, specifically in Latin America, where it was recognized that one's view of God and His action in the world could be profoundly altered by one's praxis or experience of life. In this understanding, for example, the God of the wealthy is rather different from the God worshipped in the barrios or slums of the major cities in such countries as Peru or Brazil. The idea that one's view of the Scriptures is shaped by one's location in life, has also for a long time, taken firm root in certain groups in the United States, and specifically among Blacks and women. Therefore for some like McGrath it is has "become more accurate to speak of Liberation Theology in the plural, for theologies of liberation find contemporary expression among Blacks, Feminists, Asians, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans."²⁶

It must be noted, once again, that it is not a simple task to label any theology and specifically Liberation Theology into three classic 'streams' under one broad definition. Part of the reason for this is the differences within each stream. For example, Black Theology itself has two distinct streams, with their own unique voices, namely Black Theology in the United States and Black Theology in South Africa. For example, Hopkins asserts that "Black Theology in the USA and in South Africa share similarities and

²⁶ McGrath: 2001:115

differences.”²⁷ Moreover, it is precisely these differences, which pose problems for the unifying under one banner the different streams of Liberation Theology.

Another difficulty is the internal struggles within theologies of liberation. Hopkins highlights the struggle within Black Theology as a theology of liberation, “Black women shoulder a disproportionate burden within the liberation movement and within the Black church. Yet their voices are silenced and their leadership potential stifled by their male ‘comrades’, preachers and theologians.” ²⁸

This view is reinforced by the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. In his address to Connexional Executive in 2006, he posed the question that, even after thirty years of ordination of women in the Church, there are so few women in senior leadership positions within the Church and draws attention to the fact that there are very few churches, halls, pre-schools and institutions named after women. This has led to Methodists being called to “get their house in order.”²⁹

This paper recognizes that Liberation Theology, however perceived generally, challenges theology toward paying particular attention to context or experience and whether it is possible to move to the application of theological truth using a given historical situation as found in Scripture,

²⁷ Maimela: 1989: xi

²⁸ Ibid: xiii

²⁹ New Dimension October 2006

towards discovery and formation of theological truth out of a present context without negating experience, tradition, reason or Scripture.

Early schisms, as asserted earlier, with Ethiopians style churches have much in common with the current Liberation Theologies as the essence of their struggle was to do with the oppression of their experience i.e. culture, religion and racial equality. This view is made possible because liberative and Liberation Theologies, both past and present, requires participation in the everyday struggles of the oppressed. Put another way, Liberation Theology holds up the brokenness and pain of oppression as a hermeneutic for Biblical interpretation and whilst the early schism did not enjoy the same empirical framework as Black Theology, Feminist Theology and the Latin American experience of today, they remain nonetheless linked with the liberation from oppression.

Liberation Theology, however, does not seek as much to replace current hermeneutics but to complement them. As Boff argues that political theologians will have to provide themselves with a sufficiently developed critical awareness of society in order to gradually be able to withdraw from the grossest naiveties, unmask current ideologies, appraise theoretical 'novelties – in a word, 'get a solid idea' of the socio-historical conjecture in which we are situated.³⁰ Even more than a critical awareness, it would be preferable for political theologians to possess a (critical) science, whose

³⁰ Boff: 1987:60

theoretical domain will enable them to be genuine producers of knowledge rather than simply consumers.

What about Liberative and Liberation Theologies within the MCSA?

A study of liberative movements in the MCSA offers a unique opportunity:

- (a) To examine the three major key liberation theologies under one “umbrella” alongside liberation struggles of the past, which arose before the current schools of Liberation Theology and
- (b) Highlight some questions related to post -“liberation” concepts in general.

Although Ferm argues, “one characteristic of Third World Liberation Theology has become increasingly more obvious: there can be no single overarching Liberation Theology, for the obvious reason that historical situations differ vastly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and anyone interested in understanding and evaluating Third World Liberation Theology must be on guard against simplistic caricatures,”³¹ the argument in terms of the differences between African theology and South African Black Theology, that “from the writings of both Africans and Blacks of the diaspora, African Christians have learned how colonialism drained African societies of their very essence, trampled African culture underfoot, undermined African institutions, confiscated its lands, smashed its religions, destroyed its

³¹ Ferm: 1986:100

magnificent artistic creations and wiped out extraordinary possibilities,”³² is still valid and in terms of the search for a uniting Methodist theology, one part of the solution, particularly in the MCSA, may tend to lie with a unifying of these varying theologies rather than in the diversifying of them.

Within the MCSA, there exist theologians who “fall under” each of the generally accepted streams of Liberation Theology namely: a voice for the poor; Feminist Theology and Black Theology. Whilst each of these theologies is by no means complete, there remains a dialectical relationship between them but Kapolyo sounds a warning to Symbiotic Methodists, (those who seek to unify the Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism), “much of Africa, where Christianity appears as a veneer thoroughly affected by the original African core values... this I believe, is the reason why so often the church in Africa has been compared to a river two miles wide but a mere two inches deep!”³³ This is an admission of the failure of African Christianity to root into the foundational or deep cultural level of the host cultures on the African continent. Instead it has adopted surface cultural changes, such as singing Christian hymns (for a long time these could only be Christian if they were in the traditional Western linguistic forms and idiom), meeting on Sundays, reading the Bible, adopting “Christian” names, forms of dress, taking communion, undergoing baptism and so on.

³² Martey: 1994: 8

³³ Kapolyo: 2005:42

In addition, he goes further to assert that one thing that stands out strongly in the African perspective on human nature is the sense of community.

Nevertheless, there is a warning here too: the obvious strength of community is often seen as in competition to the family by the church and he argues that in this case, the church will lose out. Which in terms of this paper, raises questions around the structure of the church as an Institution and whether in the African understanding, church can, or should, adopt a Western style or whether Wesley's Connexional model will be more helpful particularly in terms of the MCSA.

It is perhaps here that the church and particularly Methodism as introduced to South Africa with its strong colonial links of the past, has to find a particular relevance to the politically liberated indigenous African people.

Liberationist Theology in Methodism may sound a move away from oppressive structures, but it is in essence undergirded by desire for African culture and philosophies to be liberated from, amongst others, first colonial missionary influences and second Western institutional influences.

It must however also be stated that a simple move in this direction is by no means straight forward as much of 'traditional pietistic Methodism' has been lost in the struggle of non-white South Africans to be free from political and social oppression. The struggle has led to divisions and counter tactics.

For example, Balia, when discussing the formation of the Black Methodist Consultation, cites in spite of the Methodist Church consistently professing

itself to being '*one and undivided*'³⁴ since the advent of National Party rule in South Africa (1948), the Black experience of this unity was peripheral. The scars of these understandable tactics still run deep in the MCSA today, but "while the BMC (Black Methodist Consultation – dealt with later in this paper) was founded as a response to '*White power arrogance*' in a church that professed itself '*one and undivided*', its origins may also be traced to the great awakening of Black people in a period of organized Black resistance and struggle."³⁵

However, it is interesting to note that the BMC still today is not recognised officially within the MCSA structures and yet may possibly be the one vehicle, which could significantly continue the struggle for cultural and theological identity.

(1.5.3) The Doctrine of Christian Perfection:

Few would argue, that this is one of the more familiar of Wesley's doctrines. Scholars like Kingdon and Outler would affirm that this doctrine of Scriptural Holiness, Perfect Love or Christian Perfection, forms the foundation of Wesley's theology, ethics and lifestyle. "Let your soul be filled with so entire a love to Him, that you may love nothing but for his sake. Have a pure intention of heart, a steadfast regard to his glory in all your actions. For then, and not till then, is that mind in us, which was also in Christ Jesus, when in every motion of our heart, in every word of our tongue,

³⁴ Laws and Discipline : 2008: Appendix A

³⁵ Balia: 1991:86

in every work of our hands, we pursue nothing in relation to him, and in subordination to his pleasure; when we too neither think, nor speak, nor act, to fulfill our own will, but the will of Him that sent us.”³⁶ In a shorter definition of Christian Perfection, Wesley uses the recurring theme of “love of God and neighbour” to explain his thinking.

However, it must be stated from the outset that, whilst there are arguments surrounding the merits of Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection, he was certainly influenced by other schools of thought and this doctrine is not entirely a very Wesleyan concept. For example: George Croft Cell highlights Wesley’s view on Perfection within the Reformation Tradition whereas R.N. Ledger emphasizes Wesley’s dependence upon Catholic traditions of holiness. Peters offers a more pragmatic view, asserting that “Wesley’s view on Perfection came from his intense concern with experience and that it was this concern, which shaped his view more than any tradition.”³⁷

It must also be stated that any in depth study of Wesley’s understanding of this doctrine will leave no doubt that Wesley himself was at times not at all able to fully emphasize his own understanding. For example, in Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*³⁸, the series of questions and answers, whilst well thought out and intelligibly answered, are on their own not entirely convincing. Wesley seemed to at times struggle to make his point. Cox asserts that “Wesley’s contribution to the concept of Perfection is not

³⁶ Wesley : Works XI : 368

³⁷ Peters: 1985:11

³⁸ Wesley: 1968: 51

without its sceptics.”³⁹ However, Wesley has been cited as a proponent of the ideas of Perfection, and therefore this paper asserts that whilst there may have been other influences, Wesley’s work places his views as leading with regard to the doctrine. Nevertheless, the question remains: if it is to be returned to and remain part of the life of the MCSA, then how can it be more fully understood and taught?

However, there is a need for caution in this regard, as Williams highlights two factors that need to be noted:

(a) With regard to any examination of Wesleyan doctrine, there is a concern for the impact on the ecumenical movement. He asserts that there is a serious procedural difficulty. There is a risk that by simply going back to investigate the Methodist tradition, Methodists may become so attached to it that they will be determined to preserve it at all costs and so will become less open to hear the word that God is speaking to us through the other churches. In his opinion, this is perhaps the greatest challenge that is confronting the ecumenical movement today and he goes further: Great as this challenge is, however, “we must still recognise that it is only as we speak from our full family traditions that the true richness of the ecumenical dialogue can result.”⁴⁰

On this point, the Methodists have some homework to do. Methodists have witnessed that in various parts of the world the representatives of other

³⁹ Cox: 1964: 18

⁴⁰ Williams : 1960 : 13

traditions were able to present a clearly defined position, while they were unable to give a clear answer when asked for the Methodist position on doctrines such as the ministry. If Methodism is to make her contribution to the ecumenical dialectic, she must first grapple seriously with her own traditional viewpoint.

(b) With regard to an area of Wesley as a theologian: “We enter into an area of popular misunderstanding. We hear it said that John Wesley was not concerned with theology. We hear one of his favourite Scripture texts ‘Is thine heart right as my heart is with thy heart? . . . If it be, give me hand’, used to infer that Wesley was interested in sin -rather than doctrine. We hear his oft repeated, ‘The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. . . We think and let think’ used as though Wesley was indifferent to doctrinal differences.”⁴¹

Although Wesley’s theology cannot be classified as systematic, he may be seen as an academic scholar with a pastoral heart combined with the ‘*grand depositum*’ of experience in his theological method. It was this combination which made him search the Scriptures and at the same time want to bring the experience of God to the lives of people using reason and tradition as support legs to his method. He engaged with the Scriptures, applied them to his life and with the context within which he found himself, used tradition and reason as further sources of authority. It may be brave to assert that his dairies and writings are infused with the constant

⁴¹ Williams :1960 : 14

movement of the Spirit, yet admittedly, it is perhaps this very thing, which places a difficulty on his work as a systematic theologian and particularly his understanding of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

However, it is understood that there are many parts of his ethos that are relevant for Methodism and particularly for the MCSA today and in particular to this paper because Wesley's quadrilateral of Scripture, reason, tradition and experience has the potential to form an ontological framework for a uniting, authentic, Southern African Methodist theology.

Chapter Two

A Brief Examination of the Development of Methodism in Southern Africa

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa assumed its name on January 1, 1931, when the three branches of Methodism in Southern Africa, the Transvaal and Swaziland District of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Great Britain, the Primitive Methodist Missions in the Union of South Africa and the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa united and by private Act of Parliament became the Methodist Church of South Africa.

The church is today called the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), because the Methodist Connexion includes not only the Republic of South Africa, but also Mozambique, Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana. It belongs to the tradition of the English-speaking churches and is a member of the South African Council of Churches. It fought against apartheid, although for the most part its Black membership was more involved than its white membership.

Apartheid shaped the MCSA in ways that have been painful to its membership and congregations. In particular, the enforced removals of sections of the South African population along racial lines, under the terms of the Group Areas Act, destroyed congregations and separated Christians from one another. It must be noted that while the efforts of white Methodists

to improve the situation of Black and 'coloured' Church members needs to be acknowledged, change came about chiefly through the joint efforts of organisations such as the BMC, which had made it possible for Black Methodists to enter leadership positions.

In 1991, a time of great visioning in the MCSA, to the point where the members of the MCSA laboured to keep up with the demands of seeking a common vision, the MCSA was administered by eight white and five Black chairpersons. There still was no ethnic balance in the distribution of positions of authority, but the situation was an improvement compared with the past, when it was common practice at most Methodist synods to elect whites as chairpersons and Blacks merely as vice-chairpersons. Even when a Black president was in office, there was disappointment among the Black membership. During the 1988 MCSA's annual conference, Otto Mbangula complained that even after a number of Black Presidents and a couple of Black chairmen, Black membership had not seen much improvement. The question arose whether a Black president could serve Black interests while presiding over a predominantly white executive body. Mbangula and others saw the need for a fundamental change in structures that were designed to support white supremacy on one side and Black subordination on the other.

Equal power in church government was still mentioned as a sore point by some Black members in the mid 1990s, although the second convocation of

the MCSA in Johannesburg in September 1995 gave final approval to radical changes in national, regional, and local church government. This meant that changes were supposed to be on the way. The theoretical ground had been laid, but the practical changes did not always happen immediately.

The tasks of the contemporary MCSA are manifold. As the Black membership reaches a position of greater power and influence, questions about the handling of African traditional identity within the context of the MCSA often arise. Discrimination against women was, and still is, another aspect of the MCSA that needs work.

Before examining MCSA theological development, it is important to note that for some, “theology divides, and mission unites,”⁴² and it is seen none more so than in development of theology in the MCSA. However, theology and church as Institution are inseparable. The didactic work of the MCSA is unfolded in the church as Institution and this is made all the more strenuous by the union of African and Western concepts of reason, tradition, experience and Scripture.

Methodism has played and continues to play a significant role in the formation of the church universal in Southern Africa and because of the changing political and social contexts in which it found itself, is inseparably connected to the formation of the socio-political history of South Africa.

⁴² Za Bik : Chapter - Challenge to Reformed Theology: A Perspective from Myanmar in Willis & Welker, 1999, Challenge to Reformed Theology – Tasks Topics Traditions: 75

It may be appropriate, before continuing this chapter, to assert that defining an authoritative term Methodism in general is not straight forward. Beck asks, “How is authenticity to be judged? Which elements of what we believe and do are to be recognized as truly Methodist, the genuine thing, and which are not?”⁴³

However, for the sake of this paper, the term, Methodism, will refer to ‘Methodist heritage’ and in terms of the MCSA, as brought by the early missionaries to South Africa.

The origin of the MCSA is grounded in an essentially “evangelical”⁴⁴ missionary movement and has since its introduction in the late seventeenth century, found itself witnessing in an ever changing social and political climate. As with other parts of the African mission field, evangelism went hand in hand with the forcing of cultural changes. Runyon asserts, that the aim of Wesleyan missionary theology, at least in the context of the early days, was “to convert individuals to Christ as well as to the world of the European, and consequently, to a certain extent, to a reconciliation with the ruling colonial power.”⁴⁵

But evidence of this form of evangelism and their influence in the early schisms, is proof that this was never going to be easy for the early missionaries or the grass root pioneers. For example, Balia recounts that “surrounded by a predominantly *'heathen'* population, they (the early converts)

⁴³ Evans: 2001:40

⁴⁴ McGrath: 2001: 582

⁴⁵ Runyon: 1981: 10

found themselves in a dilemma. While desirous to invite all men and women to *'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'*, they were at the same time anxious not to be *'unequally yoked together with unbelievers'* who often regarded them as traitors.”⁴⁶ Clearly, the emergence of a cultural identity crisis was already evident here.

However, the historical development of the MCSA is well documented and the interest for this paper lies in the journey of the movement from essentially an evangelical missionary movement to its current self-claimed status of a 'one and undivided' Institutionalised structure. Specifically focusing on the impact that liberation theologies have had in the theological development of the MCSA. Whilst it remains a complex, if not impossible task to isolate specific theological patterns within the MCSA and its long history, Theilen provides a possible way forward in her work on women in the Methodist Church in South Africa by acknowledging that literature on early Methodism in England and America is accessible in large quantity, “but fewer written materials are available on the history of Methodism in South Africa”⁴⁷ and therefore proposes that oral history, despite risks, also be taken into account.

Well documented are the struggles of the MCSA with the church's divisions along racial lines. Hulley calls attention to the fact that the MCSA became aware that although it was crusading against apartheid, “it was itself still

⁴⁶ Balia: 1991: 35

⁴⁷ Theilen: 2005:32

guilty of that which had developed in society. Its policy had been to try and bring the races together and it introduced various measures to do so.”⁴⁸

These struggles of cultural oppression and signs of colonialism are evident even in a casual study of the Minutes of Conference of the MCSA, particularly pre-1980’s and are evident in the writings of scholars such as Mears and Millard.

Thus given the tremendous epistemological and empirical difficulties of laying down a definitive, systematic development of theological thought in the MCSA, this paper forwards an attempt to examine the MCSA’s theological development and to highlight certain influences amongst others, which may have shaped Methodism in Southern Africa. This paper’s methodology seeks to use a combination of theological statements and the historical journey of the MCSA, recognising that identifying specific theological developments are difficult, that historical reflection runs the risk of relativism yet the importance of a unified way forward for the MCSA necessitates this methodology.

After a reasonably measured start, the spread of Methodism gained momentum with the introduction of the 1820 Settlers in the Cape. Theilen argues that in the historical beginnings of Methodism, one discovers a number of historical rules and regulations, habits and beliefs which she believes are still of importance in the MCSA today. “The Church's focus on mission, evangelization and on leading a moral and pious life along Wesleyan

⁴⁸ Hulley :Article : An Interpretation of John Wesley’s’ Doctrine of Christian Perfection in Theologia Evangelica: 1990: 115

values, underlines the importance that the founder of Methodism still has. There is no doubt that theologies formulated in early mission days continue to affect the contemporary Church.”⁴⁹ There remains however a question as to their extent and how they are expressed.

Attwell argues that early Methodist missionaries played important roles in the evangelical annals of South Africa, “penetrating the hinterland years before the Great Trek and more importantly won thousands of souls.”⁵⁰

However, a question remains whether Wesleyan theology in the MCSA retained its focus on evangelism, as understood in the European sense of the individual, and if so, how effectively. Historically, early Methodism in South Africa, because of its focus as an evangelical movement, also spread to countries like Mozambique by the commitment of saints such as Robert Mashaba. Millard highlights the grass root movement led by pioneers such as “David Magatta, James Archbell and William Kongo”⁵¹ and accordingly emphasises that there were three centres which facilitated its grass roots (mainly through migrant labour converts who became local preachers) Methodist growth in South Africa namely: (a) in Cape Town around the Second British occupation; (b) the grass roots pioneers around Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape and (c) the migrant labourers who went to Natal.

⁴⁹ Theilen : 2005: 33

⁵⁰ Attwell : 1995: 3

⁵¹ Millard: 1989 : Article: Grass roots Pioneers of Transvaal Methodism in *Missionalia* 17: 188

Given that Christianity in South Africa today, as a percentage of the population, has increased from 46.7% (of 6 million people in 1911) to 79.8% (of 44.8 million in 2001), membership of the Methodist denomination dropped from 10.3% to 7.3% respectively⁵², questions arise as to the current nature of the Methodist witness and the influences which give rise to this state of affairs. While these may be numerous and varied, this paper will attempt to focus on the influences which directly and indirectly have some bearing within the MCSA's theological development.

The historical development of Methodism in Southern Africa, whilst important and difficult to separate from its theological one, is necessary to the theme of this paper and therefore much will be done to hold the two together in a dynamic tension.

Because isolation of theological content in the life of the MCSA at any given time may be difficult, if not impossible, to lay down definitively, it remains at least fair to state that the initial teaching of early Methodism in Southern Africa was based on that which was brought by Wesleyan missionaries such as Barnabas Shaw. Attwell states that "the beginnings of Methodism are inseparably linked with John and Charles Wesley."⁵³

This is taken to mean that Methodism in South Africa is by association linked to these two founders of Methodism and their theology. Whether or not this means that the early missionaries and grass root pioneers taught or

⁵² SA Government: Statistics SA:2005/6: Christian Handbook: Wits University Library

⁵³ Attwell : 1995: 1

were able to teach Wesley's order of salvation, *ordo salutis*.⁵⁴ (Williams argues that "to be true to Wesley, we must present his theology through the order of salvation")⁵⁵, effectively will no doubt remain under speculation. However, there is little doubt that Methodism right from the outset found itself in a 'liberating' role. For example, Edmunds, amongst others, highlights the engagement of the early white pioneers such as Barnabas Shaw, who "fought slavery in the Cape and his attempts to give dignity to the released slaves in 1834."⁵⁶ However, whether this was purely as part of a sanctified life or part of a basic compassion for fellow human beings, will remain under speculation.

It seems, then, that Methodism in South Africa and socio-political reform, much like in her English birthplace, are inseparable. Yet not all scholars agree to the depth and theological scope of such involvement. Villa- Vicencio argues that the Wesleyan Missionary Society instructed its missionaries against political involvement: "We cannot omit, without neglecting our duty, to warn you against meddling with political parties or secular disputes. You are teachers of religion; and that alone should be kept in view."⁵⁷

Accordingly, this meant in effect, support for colonial policy, albeit it of a tacit nature.

On the other hand, an evangelical zeal for the souls of the damned was indeed a priority for all missionaries. In the words of Philip, in *Researches in*

⁵⁴ Williams: 1960: 40

⁵⁵ Ibid: 40

⁵⁶ Edmonds : 1936: 27

⁵⁷ Villa-Vicencio : 2005: 54

South Africa 1828: “it is the incalculable worth of the human soul which gives to missionary labours their greatest importance... it is to this principle that we are to trace the philanthropy, the energy, and wisdom, which have given rise to Bible and Missionary Societies... and were this spirit extinguished, ignorance and barbarism would speedily resume their wonted empire.”⁵⁸

However, the juxtaposition of liberative and evangelical emphases; how they came to be and what impact they have had on the MCSA’s theological development, are not easy to define but some questions are raised in this regard:

(1) Can the development of Methodism in South Africa be separated from its English theology as formative in its early development? (2) When English Methodist theology engages with a different context, in the case of this paper, Africa, what impact does it have and is it sustainable in the sense of being unchangeable from its original form?

There is evidence to suggest that in the development of Methodism in general and particularly in the MCSA, these questions are raised, particularly with regard to the inclusion/exclusion of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

⁵⁸ Philip: 1828: XI

(2.1) The MCSA and Wesleyan Theology

Can the early development MCSA be linked to its Wesleyan Heritage particularly its theology? At first glance, the answer to this question seems straightforward. However, on closer examination this may not be so clear-cut.

There is little evidence to suggest that the theological teachings of the early Methodist missionaries were not in line with their British counterparts, but at the same time, the use of grass root converts for preaching and evangelism, the early disparities of training between European and African ministers and the early resistance to cultural oppression as found in the early schisms, raises questions as to effectiveness of Wesleyan heritage within the MCSA as a whole.

In this regard, Millard concurs with Villa-Vicencio in that the “Wesleyan Missionaries were governed by a strict code of conduct set out in the *Instructions to Missionaries* (ITM).”⁵⁹

Amongst other rules of conduct, was the instruction to focus on the conversion and instruction of ignorant, pagan Black and coloured people and to enforce upon these said pagans the knowledge of Christianity and the experience and practice of its doctrines. In Methodist terms, this would be taken to mean the road to Christian Perfection (full sanctification), based on Wesley’s order of salvation.

⁵⁹ Millard : 1991 : 104

Turner points out that “Wesley considered Methodists to have the same doctrines as the church universal but the doctrine of full sanctification was the “*grand depositum*” for which God had raised up people called Methodists.”⁶⁰

Therefore, it seems that the early missionaries administered by the Rules of Conduct would have taught Wesleyan heritage.

What is not clear, particularly early on in Methodism in South Africa, is whether African converts effectively ‘evangelised’ and were willing and able to fully absorb the European religious experience.

An open question remains whether Wesley himself would agree with the early missionaries strategy to enforce an essentially European religious experience on African hearts.

Therefore, the question of commitment to pure Wesleyan heritage, in this sense, by early missionaries and their converts remains unsure. This question of commitment to Wesleyan heritage remains today. Storey raises this question as he poses the question: *Why be a Methodist if you are not Wesleyan?*

“Many people who go by the name ‘Methodist’ might have some difficulty answering this question. In the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), that would include clergy as well as laity. When, as a Bishop, I interviewed clergy applicants from other denominations, seeking to establish why they wanted to transfer into the MCSA, most of the reasons they gave had little to

⁶⁰ Turner : 2005: 2

do with what it meant to be Wesleyan; that was not central to their concern.

They wanted to come to us because we were bigger, or because of our stipends or appointment system, or because of the way we organised ourselves. These things attracted them far more than our Wesleyan emphases, about which they were often quite ignorant. Perhaps we have not worked at communicating those emphases as well as we should have.”⁶¹

He goes on to stress that the typical theological influence in too many Methodist congregations today is “a cross between a kind of ‘interdenominational’ Evangelicalism and neo-Pentecostalism, with a dose of Fundamentalism for good measure.”⁶²

Dickson asserts, with regard to the Doctrine of Christian Perfection, that, on the one hand, they (the early missionaries and pioneer converts) gave much attention to Christian Perfection, “personal journals and letters witness to their having been very conscious of this teaching that is part of the Methodist heritage, and indeed to this day, at Synods and Conferences, the ministers are regularly asked whether they continue to preach “our doctrines.” The answer has always been in the affirmative.”⁶³ Yet, he argues, that the edge of this teaching has been blunted by the fact that, at worst, the church has tried to separate its members from life as they know it in the particularity of their circumstances, and at best, has pretended not to be aware of its members' involvement but “the truth of

⁶¹ Storey : 2004 : 11

⁶² Ibid : 11

⁶³ Dickson: Chapter : The Methodist Witness and the African Situation: in Runyon, 1981, Sanctification and Liberation : 198

the matter is that Methodist preaching and teaching have not seemed to constitute a potential force for change in the context of Africa.”⁶⁴

Without doubt, these two statements should raise serious questions for all Methodists. Another question may be: what has happened to ‘fundamental’ Methodism in the MCSA.

Dickson is helpful: “if we are Methodist we are either shaped by our Wesleyan roots and heritage, or we may have no shape at all. Therefore, it is important for us to be familiar with that heritage... A further question is whether that heritage speaks with any relevance to the context of Southern Africa in the 21st Century.”⁶⁵ However, the exact nature of the Wesleyan heritage, particularly in the MCSA, remains an important key to the formulation of an authentically uniting African Methodist theology and will be dealt with later in this paper.

Nevertheless, Millard alludes to another reason to conclude that early Methodism in Southern Africa’s theology would have been consistent with its British counterparts and accepted readily by local peoples is that “Methodist missionaries, particularly those in the Transvaal, unlike their Anglican and Presbyterian counterparts, who are often referred to as the advance guard of the Colonialism, influenced new converts by their piety and devotion.”⁶⁶ In addition, these Methodist missionaries, unlike their Settler counterparts, such as Anglicans and Presbyterians, found no difficulty with African converts preaching and teaching on their own without

⁶⁴ Dickson: Chapter : The Methodist Witness and the African Situation: in Runyon, 1981, Sanctification and Liberation : 198

⁶⁵ Ibid : 201

⁶⁶ Millard :1989 : Article – Grass roots Pioneers of Transvaal Methodism in Missionalia 17: 191

supervision. Ironically, this practice may arguably have led to the birthing of Southern African liberation theologies long before the term Liberation Theology was coined.

However, rather ambiguously though, the early missionaries were bound to some of the Methodist Missionary Societies rules of engagement with indigenous people (not only in Southern Africa but as a rule for all its mission work around the world) contained in the ITM. Part of these rules encouraged personal piety at the detriment of engagement with official political arrangements. It is equally ironic that these rules would inadvertently influence the MCSA in the debate on the value of personal piety versus 20th century liberation and liberative types of theology. This debate, not new in the MCSA, partly laid the foundation for the schisms of the past and is very much part of the MCSA journey forward today.

Methodism, perhaps because of the challenging nature and strong sense of asceticism in the Methodist way of life, (mostly garnered from Wesley own strict lifestyle), would have, in all likelihood, ensured the preservation of Wesleyan teaching. However a strange observation, when studying the development of Methodism in South Africa, is that it does seem that most recorded work in this regard focuses on white ministers, particularly in the early years, and very little emphasis is placed on grass roots pioneers or Black ministers. The Black experience in this regard has understandably tended to be more political in nature than their white counterpart's. Theilen puts in this way, "Methodism in the twentieth-century witnessed further

secessions and an increasing separation of its members along racial lines. Parts of the Black and the white membership struggled against racial discrimination during the apartheid era. However, the majority of the white Methodists stayed within the limits.”⁶⁷

In other words, it seems that Fundamentalist Methodism, aligned directly or indirectly to colonialism and cultural domination, has for the most part tended to be resistant to in-depth or significant socio-political emphases. Whereas Liberationist Methodism has generally been totally the opposite with strong emphases on socio-political reform.

However, the overall impact of these liberative emphases remains an open question, whereas the impact of Fundamentalist Methodism is easier to identify. For example, in an examination of Minutes of Conference ⁶⁸ with regard to the training of Ministers:

From 1901-1902, ministers were required to study Wesley’s sermons as follows; Whites -1st years – Wesley Sermons 1-30 and 2nd years - Wesley Sermons 30- 44: Natives (as they were then referred to) - 1st Years – Wesley Sermons 1-10 and Wesley Sermons 10 – 30 to be completed by their fifth year. From 1905 onwards white probationers only had to do Wesley’s sermons 1-30 in their fourth year and Natives – still 1st year – Wesley Sermons 1-10 and Wesley Sermons 10 – 30 to be completed by fifth year. In 1909, Wesley’s Sermons for the White exam disappeared and the requirements for Candidate Ministers did not have Wesley Sermons either.

⁶⁷ Theilen : 2005 : 32

⁶⁸ Minutes of Conference from 1901 to 2003

Then Wesley Sermons appear as part of the training programme in 1930 but are removed again in 1931. They surface again in 1933 as follows two cycles of selected Wesley Sermons 1, 39; 10-12, 14, 15, 34, 35 & 39.

At present in the MCSA, the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit (EMMU) requires one stream for Ministers in training and the part of the curriculum deals with WESLEY STUDIES 2007.

Of interest are the resources to be consulted:

Wesley, J. Sermons on Several Occasions (Forty Four Sermons) (London: Epworth Press, 1944) [Sermon 1: “Salvation by Faith” (1738): Hulley, L.D. Wesley: A Plain Man for Plain People. (Woodstock: Methodist Publishing House, 1987): Grassow, P.S. “Salvation and political activism”, in Malinga, P. & Richardson, N. Rediscovering Wesley for Africa. (Silverton: EMMU, 2005): Storey, P. And Are We Yet Alive? Revisioning our Wesleyan Heritage in the New Southern Africa. (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2004). Chapters 5 & 6 and The Mission Charter of the MCSA (2005), (Mission Unit, Methodist House).

As can be noted here, the Western influence is seemingly overwhelming to a point where the MCSA’s training of ministers today seems to be in a catch twenty two because it is neither ‘fundamental’ nor open to African influences.

To stress this point, in other Southern African counties, the early training and influence of Western thought on ministers was no less rigorous for prospective members as in early South Africa. For example, Rev. Nemapare

remembers his preparation, "for my preparation for membership, to become a full member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, we had to recite Matthew 5, The Beatitudes, the Apostles creed; we had to recite the Ten Commandments and we had to say 'yes' to all that is required by the Wesleyan Methodist Church."⁶⁹

This investigation raises two areas of interest for this paper namely:

(1) In early Methodism, the dual streams for training ministers, White and Black, highlights Western cultural domination.

(2) The slow move away from potentially in depth Wesleyan studies has placed Methodist theological development at a disadvantage.

Questions are then raised as to the general impact early Methodist training had on the development of Methodist doctrine. In light of this, Millard poses the question: "What has Wesley to say to Southern Africa?"⁷⁰ One of the areas of influence is highlighted as Millard cites Charlotte Maxeke, a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa: "The early missionaries in this country knew what they were doing. ... They lived with us. They taught us in our Sunday Schools. They led us and we knew that we had to follow in their steps because they were living the right lives."⁷¹

No doubt, the early missionary's influences brought different understandings of Christianity to Africa, but in reality they were also faced with contextual challenges, which they were not always ready to embrace. Part of the reason for

⁶⁹ Moss : 1994 : 5

⁷⁰ Millard – Chapter – Re-Appropriating Wesley For Africa in Malinga and Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 133

⁷¹ Ibid: 134

this is that the implications of experience, (where it was pursued), as part of a theological method in the Southern African context were largely formulated around Western understandings, often at the expense of any African contribution.

For example, a persistent theme within the MCSA has been the understanding that “to be a Wesleyan is to take all of Wesley seriously, not just his warmed heart. Without detracting from Aldersgate, it is necessary to point out that Wesley's followers down the years have probably made much more of it than he did. His journal entry for that day makes it clear how much this experience meant to him, but he seldom refers to it again. Yet the Methodist people in general tend to focus on little else. It is erroneous to separate this one moment in the total life story of Wesley.”⁷²

But in terms of Wesley's contribution, this statement reinforces the view that Fundamentalist Methodists are not clear on his quadrilateral, as a unique contribution to theology. And whilst Liberationist Methodists are themselves also not clear in Wesleyan terms, their insistence on experience as a theological tool has the potential contribute significantly to a way forward for the MCSA.

Nevertheless, although there is little evidence to suggest otherwise, it must be assumed that the early grass roots pioneers of Methodism followed as closely as possible Wesleyan doctrines, but just how they were understood, in light of African experience, remains an open question.

⁷² Storey: 2004: 14:

Historical investigations confirm that the MCSA retained an evangelical institutional polity and the growth patterns were significant, but what is difficult to determine, with any accuracy is the particular theological developments especially with regard to the Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

(2.2) Wesleyan Methodism in an African context:

Because theology can be understood as a dynamic relationship between people or groups of people, a context and Scripture, there is no doubt that it is difficult for a theology not to be influenced by different historical contexts. The extent will depend much upon various factors such as: the initial response from the context towards the theology and the didactic influence on the theology and the context itself. In other words, one must be careful, in the light of Wesley's quadrilateral, not to expect English experience to be the same as African experience.

Almost right from the outset, the MCSA encountered unjust political and social conditions, for example; Barnabus Shaw and the early missionaries fought the emancipation of slaves.

This in itself may have been part of the reason that Christian Perfection, as a doctrine, hardly, up to that point, understood fully by Methodist Missionaries, needed to develop along different lines to their English counterparts.

In other words, in a context, which faced growing racial tension, full sanctification as part of Methodist theology needed to be formulated within a socio/political epistemological framework. The MCSA's lack of engagement

with apartheid in general, is an indication of the majority within the MCSA to go along with colonialism, and by implication, Fundamentalist Methodism.

Currently, within the MCSA, there are two main, although not exclusive, methodologies to the formulation of theology: (a) those theologians who are desirous of a return to, but are mostly unacquainted with Wesleyan heritage, mainly because of the exclusion of intensive Wesley studies in the training of ministers. (b) Those who are influenced by liberative and liberation theologies.

It remains difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish exactly which parts of Wesley's order of salvation received attention and which not, but that does not mean that all Methodists practised and taught complete Wesleyan doctrines.

Theilen, alludes to a factor may give rise to doubts cast on the extent of English Wesleyan teaching in the early MCSA: "from 1823 onwards, Shaw was also engaged in the mission of the Xhosa subsequently, the Wesleyan denomination gained adherents among the indigenous population. Among the newly Christianised were a number of men who would function as lay preachers and evangelists, carrying Methodism further on. Allowing lay people to administer in religious affairs certainly added to the enormous success of the Methodist's mission that in time superceded all of the other Christian missions in the Cape Colony."⁷³

⁷³ Theilen : 2005: 55

However, the use of lay persons, notably less 'educated,' particularly with regard to the subtleties of Christian Doctrine, for proclamation and teaching creates a strong case that a strong Methodist ethos may, inadvertently, whilst furthering the saving of souls, give grounds for a theological shift from English Methodism and this state of affairs continues to play a significant role in the MCSA today.

Further frustration was caused by the fact that Black preachers were treated as subordinates. Setiloane, refers to the white clergy's mistrust of their Black colleagues when he states: "the missionaries could not trust the African converts to preach and teach without their supervision because they could never dissociate Christianity from their Western culture and civilization."⁷⁴

This in itself gives rise to questions regarding the ability (because of the white missionaries' fear of the possibility of Methodism developing in an African manner) of early converts to engage with Wesleyan doctrines.

It seems then, even in early Methodism, unequal treatment must have felt even less acceptable to the majority of early converts because of the MCSA's tradition of ethical doctrine and its policy regarding the ministry of laity demanded an equality of rights and recognition of a different experience to the European one. According to Theilen, "it was the frustrations among talented Black preachers eventually that led to

⁷⁴ Setiloane : 1986: 79

secessions from the mother church.”⁷⁵ Here she concurs with the establishment of the Independent Churches, whose breakaways were not limited to the MCSA: “In 1892, another Methodist minister, Mangena Mokoni started, together with about fifty others, the Ethiopian Church in Pretoria. Mokoni received further evangelical support from the Reverend Jamas Mata Dwane who left the Wesleyan Church in 1896 and eventually became the head of the Ethiopian movement.”⁷⁶

Another secession in the 1930s is described by Sundkler: “the Bantu Methodist Church or the "Donkey Church" founded on the Rand in 1932-3 is one of the most spectacular secessions in recent times ... The interesting point about it is the role of the broad mass of urbanized church people in the upheaval. There was an unmistakable nationalist spirit, which fired leaders and followers with enthusiasm for the break, as well as dissatisfaction with the financial policy of the Mission. Within a year of the formation of the new Church there was a split into two main sections, the Bantu Methodist Church and the Bantu Methodist Church of South Africa.”⁷⁷

These early exchanges point to the first signs of ‘liberation’ theology in the MCSA long before Liberation Theology was defined and, although the grounds for early schisms are generally portrayed as leadership issues rather than theological ones, there was without doubt a strong sense of desire for Christianity to be relevant for the African context. Due to the ongoing

⁷⁵ Theilen : 2005 : 56

⁷⁶ Ibid: 57

⁷⁷ Sundkler : 1961: 203

pressures of colonialism and the subsequent fight for political freedom, the theological issues of African religion and spirituality have been of secondary importance until now.

The formation of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) should be mentioned as an important part of the MCSA's history. Ernest Baartman initiated the BMC in 1975 to improve the situation of Black members in the Church. Up to that point, seventy-five per cent of the memberships of the MCSA were Blacks, but they were excluded in the same proportion from the decision-making courts of the Church. At the time, the Methodist Church was composed of twelve districts, with ten being in the hands of white chairpersons and only two in the hands of Black Methodists. 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. Its 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 and at the same time to insist on the validity of African cultural values and the African Christian experience.

The formation of the BMC highlights the entrenched frustration and desperation among Liberationist Methodists who strived for an intervention. Yet at the same time, the establishment of the BMC points to

a desire of both Fundamentalist Methodists, who accepted its presence, and Liberationist Methodists not to separate along cultural lines.

Whilst Black Methodists in the MCSA could no longer accept that Black Methodists were at no time equal to white Methodists, it's interesting that the establishment of the Independent African Churches gave an opportunity to follow up on African religious patterns, to rebuild a communal solidarity and to restore traditional tenets of African cultures. The choice to establish the BMC highlights a desire within the MCSA to find a common identity. In other words, had not the BMC been birthed, it is possible that a schism may have, at that time, been inevitable.

The BMC continues to be a part of the life of MCSA today indicating that there is still a strong belief in the need for reform and it remains one of the main indicators of the potential schism. However, the BMC has the potential to lead the move towards a common uniting theology as it influences the training of ministers, the election of office bearers, the stationing of ministers. The level and extent of these influences may be debatable but their presence is not.

Whilst the African Independent Churches and the BMC served as a platform for political activities, such as “the Tembu political protests in the 19th century or the protests against apartheid from 1948 onwards,”⁷⁸ rather ambiguously, these early liberation issues were not reserved for racial bias

⁷⁸ Theilen : 2005 : 59

only. Women had to struggle to be heard. A brief examination of the history of the MCSA shows that preaching and other church positions were in the hands of men, whether Black or White. Although Black men have succeeded in attaining leadership positions in the Church since the 1960s, women are still dramatically underrepresented in both lay and ordained positions.

In reality, situations in the MCSA do alter depending on whether they concern Black, 'Coloured' or White women, as Black congregations tend to be traditionally more male-dominated even though men may be in minority as far as membership goes. Therefore, overall, the lack of influence in church matters is an unacceptable reality for women who represent about 70 per cent of the Church's total membership.

However, although women did not occupy official church positions, they have always been a major part of the Methodist Church - not just in numbers - right from the beginning of Methodist mission in Southern Africa.

In the early mission days, Black women, who were living at the edges of their African societies for various reasons, converted to Christianity before men did. With their acceptance into the Christian 'civilization', they hoped to improve their social positions. Men, on the contrary, did not necessarily have the need to convert as their authority was generally unquestioned in African societies and hence points to another indicator of the underlying cultural influences in

the MCSA and the need for inclusion in its theological development going forward into the 21st century.

Another important factor of Methodism being introduced to an African context is that for South Africans of European background, particularly those of Settler and Dutch descent, it was the usual thing to be Christian.

However, “Blacks converted to Christianity for various reasons, including better acceptance into the modern world, protection during the frontier years of the 18th century and to obtain economic, social, medical and educational advantages, since social work, medicine, nursing and education were largely sponsored by Christian missions and churches.”⁷⁹ Therefore, Blacks converted, not in the European sense, but in terms of their own experience.

This dichotomy of church membership affected all aspects of early church life in the MCSA and paved the way for a strong liberative and liberation theological development.

It was only after 1948, that white English-speaking theology in Southern Africa, the MCSA to a large extent included, truly and fully began to develop its dual heritage of evangelical spirituality and concern for basic civil rights. Villa-Vicencio explains the beginnings of anti-apartheid theology as follows: “although not wedded to a volk, its influence has been strengthened by the wealth and prestige of the English churches and also of the English universities, where theologians have been prominent in departments of

⁷⁹ Theilen : 2005: 60

religious studies. It has used historical criticism, a traditional staple in English biblical scholarship in South Africa, to develop an anti-apartheid theology.”⁸⁰

In addition, while on one hand, Villa-Vicencio criticises the role of English-speaking churches during colonial times, he states on the other hand, “English-speaking churches, especially the Anglican Church, have consistently and relentlessly opposed the racist system of apartheid.”⁸¹ He detects the ground of this opposition in a spirit of liberalism, British paternalism and largely in the presence of Black converts and ministers.

In this understanding, the opposition of the English-speaking churches reflects South African liberalism, both at its best and at its worst, because it demands both equality before the law and yet conformity to certain imposed standards of western individualism and achievement.

Thus, the attack of the English-speaking churches on the Afrikaans speaking government was certainly not grounded in an ideology of egalitarianism. “Whilst it was rather a reaction to the entrenchment of racial and economic divisions and separation in every area of existence”⁸², there remains the question, albeit overridden till now by the struggle for political freedom, of the struggle for cultural identity in the MCSA. This remains a painful and difficult part of the MCSA’s life together today. The

⁸⁰ Villa-Vicencio : 1984: 59

⁸¹ Ibid : 62

⁸² Theilen : 2005 : 61

formulation of a uniting authentically Southern African theology is thus needed to allow the MCSA to fulfil its calling to 'A Christ Healed Africa for the Healing of Nations.'

Another issue that needs to be emphasized once more is the power struggle between the English-speaking and the Afrikaans speaking white South Africans. Although the English-speaking population rejected, to some degree, the theology of apartheid, they also gained advantages through the racist system. A few individuals in the English-speaking churches fought fiercely for equal rights for their Black, fellow Christians, but mostly the opposition was limited to verbal condemnations of apartheid at annual conferences and in pastoral letters. The white church leadership was for the most part out of touch with the anti-apartheid movement. Thus, the English-speaking churches, in general, whatever their ethnic backgrounds, missed out on being a prophetic alternative voice for all Christians in Southern Africa. This failure of the English-speaking churches was due to their inability to define and condemn fundamental structures of exploitation and control in their parishes, as well as a reluctance to give up the advantages derived from their ethnic background.

During the apartheid era, within the MCSA, there was a sense of unity between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists, the extent is debatable, but the reality not. During this time, not much attention was paid to divisive

theological and confessional issues, which are now surfacing within the MCSA and these struggles, although present from very early on, laid the foundations for the present 'denominationism' between Fundamentalists and Liberationist Methodists.

De Gruchy, commenting on the rise of ecumenical denominationalism within the churches of post-apartheid South Africa, sees the origin of denominationalism in a social reality rather than in a theological one. And because of the threat of rifts for denominational reasons, he stresses the importance of an ecumenical church, "important is the unity between the church and its witness, and between ecclesiology and ethics is fundamentally important for the ecclesiological future of the SACC (South African Council of Churches). Otherwise the SACC will simply become another NGO (Non-Governmental Organization,) or welfare organization, rather than a vital expression of the Church of Jesus Christ."⁸³

The same cannot be said for the MCSA's denominationalism. The existence of the tension between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodist is indeed a theological one. The '*grand depositum*' of the MCSA may very well be the development of a uniting authentic Southern African Methodist theology but the question to be examined is whether this will be made possible without using Wesley's quadrilateral as a theological method, particularly focusing on the term experience.

⁸³ De Gruchy : 1995: 165

Chapter Three

An Understanding of Methodism in Southern Africa Today

There can be found, despite the risks of relativism and subjectivism, within Methodism in Southern Africa today, various theological emphases or 'streams', though they are difficult to define and separate precisely.

For the sake of discussion in this paper, in terms of the MCSA, these theological emphases will be divided into three general 'streams' namely:

(1) Those loyal to the roots and essence of Wesleyan Methodism as handed down from John Wesley namely Fundamentalist Methodists.

The main criteria, amongst others, for this stream, is an unfastened adherence to the teaching of Wesley's order of salvation and the view that Western culture and context are critical to the implementation of Wesleyan teachings. In other words, in most cases, those suffering, directly or indirectly, from a hangover from colonial oppression and who negate African cultural identity as possible religious experience. This stream can be identified mainly in their methodological and theological formulations especially with regard to concepts such as mission and evangelism.

(2) Those who advocate strong liberative and liberation theological emphases, namely, Liberationist Methodists.

The main criteria for this stream is found in the search for an liberating ontological expression of Christianity. The notion that "salvation isn't something otherworldly...it is the communion of men with God and the communion of men among themselves. It embrace s all human reality,

transforms it and leads it to its fullness in Christ”⁸⁴ and “sin is a historical reality... a breach of the communion of men with each other.”⁸⁵

In other words, this stream has at the centre of its theological method, experience. In the terms of the MCSA, oppression, social, gender, cultural identity and political are ontological tools. However that does mean that Scripture, tradition or reason are negated.

(3) Those that place both Fundamentalist and Liberationist theology together, namely Symbiotic Methodists. These views are brought about essentially by the dynamic tension between the two and these views are often compounded by uncertainty around vision within the MCSA. This stream has the at its core a desire to keep the status quo.

There is little doubt that each of these ‘streams’ is a potential papers on its own and an in depth examination could easily detour the main question of this paper, because it is for the most part “evident that the social, cultural, and political context of Wesley's theology is vastly different from that of the liberation theologies; it is equally evident that the thought-forms and language of Wesley are quite different from those employed by the liberation theologians and are, indeed, perhaps quite unintelligible to the Christians among whom they have done their thinking and writing.”⁸⁶

Therefore this paper will focus on a dialogue with Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism within the MCSA.

⁸⁴ Gutierrez : 1971: 152

⁸⁵ Ibid: 152

⁸⁶ Davies : 1965 : 65

(3.1) Fundamentalist Methodism

Attwell ⁸⁷ maintains that Methodism has always been missionary in character both in England and abroad. It was by its nature a movement within the established church.

These are two fundamental concepts of Methodism, which are foundational, both theologically and in Methodism's unique witness and structure.

Without these tenets, there is a possibility that an Institution may be built which will at some point move its clergy and people alike away from the MCSA's '*grand depositum*.' Methodism in Southern Africa offers a unique theological method and therefore the training of its ministers and the MCSA as Institution are two areas critical to the growth and development of the Methodist theological method.

Methodism for the Fundamentalist Methodist is essentially about the individual and their response to God's love as a foundation for their praxis or action. "It must be remembered that as "Methodism (in Britain) spread, Methodists were taught not only to use the "instituted" means of grace as they pressed toward holiness, that is, the Lord's Supper, prayers, Bible reading, fasting and "Christian conference" or fellowship, but also to use what Wesley called the "prudential" means of grace. Among these latter was "visiting the poor" in which Methodists would discover "grace." This focus was always essentially on the individual and the individual's experience. The very essence of a 'methodical' commitment by the individual to their spiritual

⁸⁷ Attwell : 1995 : 2

development is one the significant keys to understanding that, for Wesley, the growing toward perfection was an individual's journey, even though there may be those who co-journeyed along the way.

Traditionally speaking then, this understanding is fundamental to English Methodism and recent scholarship has shown that Charles Wesley also expressed his brother's commitment to "works of mercy," which he considered to be as certainly means of grace as were the "works of piety". In other words, to be merciful was not merely a matter of the "imitation of Christ," but truly established an arena for divine encounter. "Therefore, Charles Wesley saw Methodists as called to live out the faith and love they experienced as "vessels, instruments of grace".⁸⁸

This being said, defining or advocating a definition for Methodism in general is difficult, because of its theological method, and even more so in the MCSA, which it can be argued, never really had a grass root, uniting theology for the majority of its members. It has always been tempered and influenced by Western ideas of theology.

However, a Methodist ethos is easier to define, and as was seen from the discussions above, the early training and structure of the MCSA for the most part provided for a closer model to Methodism's Wesleyan roots than is evident today.

⁸⁸ White : 2005 : 215

The impact of the struggle for political freedom on the majority of the MCSA has without doubt influenced the church with regard to some of the fundamental doctrines such as the Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

For Fundamentalist Methodists the basic premise remains, individuals need to come to salvation by accepting the offer of Christ as Lord and Saviour and “good works” follow. At the same time, little is made of experience as part of the MCSA’s theological method.

(3.2) Liberationist Methodism

Here the theological focus is on liberation motifs, on the past liberative movements, the search for an authentic African Methodist theology, Black Consciousness, Black Theology and Feminist Theology.

The early emergence of this stream is not easy to distinguish, because right from the outset, within the MCSA, those not aligned to Western theological thinking struggled to find their place in the missionary movement, often accepting Fundamentalist views simply to get by and /or because they were forced to do so.

As was stated earlier, early on in the developing MCSA, those who could no longer stand Western supremacy in the church structures left, some to start their own churches, mainly because their experience was oppressed.

In later years, a more conscious Liberationist Methodism began to emerge, helped by other movements such as the Black Consciousness movement.

However, Liberationist Methodism today tends to be quite ambivalent. For example: in the MCSA, movement toward equality for women is slow -

especially in Black communities, though some changes have been made as women are increasingly being asked to function as Local Preachers (lay people trained to preach), Society and Circuit Stewards.

The MCSA has long recognized that special efforts will have to be made to drastically change the status of women in the church. Accordingly, for example, the Synod of the Cape of Good Hope District recommends, in its *Report to Conference* in the year 1994, that an official document expounding the Theological and Biblical basis for the ordination of women be produced and distributed to ministers. Furthermore, the Doctrine Committee “recognizes the serious attitudinal problems of prejudice and bias against women ministers ... and recommends that the Conference appoint a committee to identify harmful attitudes and actions with regard to women ministers and to formulate a constructive way of dealing with them.”⁸⁹ This remains an ongoing struggle in the MCSA today.

One of the main manifestations of conflict between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists is in the understanding of the term evangelism, mainly because of its traditionally accepted focus on the individual.

In this sense, evangelism remains connected to a Western religious experience and in many ways the MCSA has lost a great deal. Religious experience cannot be connected to one culture (in this case, Western European), otherwise a rich possibility to ‘experience’ the Gospel from a

⁸⁹ Report to Conference: 1994

culture other than our own, is lost. In other words, the world theological in conversation, in a sense, suffers.

For Liberationists, the word evangelical is for the most part related to Protestant Theology —‘evangelical’ is used to designate the emergent Protestant movement, especially its Lutheran wing, over against what has come to be known as the Roman Catholic Church. Here the word evokes the themes of the great "solas" of the Reformation— *sola Scriptura*, *sola Christe*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*—and seems intended to convey a bibliocentric and Christo- centric expression of faith, with special emphasis on such themes as an Augustinian anthropology (or some other variety of the doctrine of "bondage of the will"), an "objective" view of Christ's atonement, a forensic concept of grace, and especially the doctrine of justification by faith. In this context, “evangelical means, roughly, ‘Protestant,’ and so it is used in much of the world.”⁹⁰

Liberationist Methodists in the MCSA, however, hold this understanding of evangelism with suspicion, as stated above, very much because of its connotations to colonialism in all its places of influence and more so because African people understand that they need to define what salvation means from an African perspective. In other words, Liberationist Methodists, whilst tending to, up to this point, ‘go along,’ (to larger or lesser degree), with the colonial influenced Fundamentalist Methodism, may today have the opportunity to reflect on theological concepts from an

⁹⁰ Dayton : 1985 :144

African perspective, which is mainly community rather than individual focused and bring them to the theological conversation, which in many senses, encapsulates a more wholesome view of society and therefore the role of community in theological development.

(3.3) Symbiotic Methodism

This is the most difficult stream to identify with any precision.

The criteria for this stream is where both Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism co-exist and are very hard to separate. Wesleyan doctrines are often interpreted to fit liberative and liberation theological motifs and vice-versa.

For example: Storey calls Methodism an “outcomes based theology.”

Accordingly, for him, the Methodist movement, at its best, offered, and should still offer, “an authentically scriptural, radically transformative, intentionally practical way of : *doing* the Gospel , *practising* being disciples, *becoming* more like Jesus, *living* the great commandments of God and *finding* healing in our own lives and in God’s world.”⁹¹

One difficulty with the way this view is presented, is that the point of reference here may be taken to be more in line with Fundamentalist Methodism, whilst it professes to convey some Liberationist concepts as well. However, a closer examination may reveal that these ‘ways’ of doing, practicing, becoming, living and finding are based on Western European

⁹¹ Storey – Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 17ff

understandings and are not inclusive of African cultural identity or experience.

(3.4) The MCSA Today

Without meaning to avoid Symbiotic Methodism, this paper, for the sake of the problem settings raised, will focus on the dialogue between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism.

In this regard, one of the current challenges for the MCSA is to examine whether the Wesleyan theological concepts, Prevenient Grace, Justification by Faith and Full Sanctification, have a place in the radical transformation of African communities.

In the life of the MCSA today, it is often difficult to define exactly a uniting theological stream. Presently it seems there is a tendency to be irresolute in this regard and this in turn has the potential to raise further frustration in the MCSA and amongst clergy in particular.

For the Fundamentalist, this may stem from the perception that the Bible is being 'watered down.' This may be seen, for example, the recent move to establish the Methodist Evangelical Renewal Movement (MERM) within the MCSA. MERM has the following as part of their founding statement:

"Turning our attention in detail to the state of our Church we are deeply troubled by the slide, over the last half-century or so, into an increasingly low view of the Bible and a belief (prevalent among some Methodists) that that the Bible does not reflect God's eternal purpose and plan for us today.

This has resulted in: a theological ambivalence in our Church; a lack of acceptance on the part of some that the Bible contains any eternal or absolute truth; we no longer have any clear sense of a 'Methodist Theology'; and our Church seems to be more concerned with 'keeping the peace' than standing for truth. This trend is often reflected in the training of our Ministers and the apparently increasing inability or unwillingness by the structures of our Church to give a Biblical and prophetic lead."⁹² Whilst this group does not represent the entire feeling of Fundamentalist Methodists within the MCSA, this move does highlight a feeling of frustration by some Methodists.

For the Liberationist, frustration from the questions of cultural identity, amongst others such as stationing procedures, leadership and ordained women, are still not being dealt with adequately.

In terms of being 'one and undivided' a clarity of teaching and understanding of Wesleyan doctrinal precepts has the potential to facilitate a common vision and identity. Storey asserts: "Of course Methodists do have a theology. It is, in the main, not original. It is the faith once delivered to the saints. We are orthodox, with our beliefs rooted firmly in the classic creeds."⁹³ This is a statement for the most part indicative of the strength of Fundamentalist Methodism influence in the MCSA. And this despite the fact that Liberationist

⁹² Methodist Evangelical Renewal Movement : 2008: Founding Statement found at website: www.merm.co.za

⁹³ Storey: Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You're Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson : 2005 ; Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :25

Methodists may feel separated from the formation of the creeds and most theological development in general, mainly due to its European Western nature. For example, this separation is captured in part by Mbete, as he describes an anonymous African prayer, “Baba, sicela ukhuti usithethelel amacala ethu yize singenawo. Njengoba wazi nawe ukhuti akusithina esibulele lo mlungu (uJesu), owayezele ukuzofela abantu bonke emhlabeni. Lo mlungu wabulawa ngabanye abelungu ngokumbethelela esiphambanweni. (Father, please forgive our sins although they are not really ours. You yourself know that it was not us who killed this white man (Jesus), the one who came to die for all people of the world. This white man was killed by other whites by nailing Him to the cross.)⁹⁴

This separation experience is not only to be found in the MCSA, but is in fact a worldwide struggle for Methodism which falls within the broad term ‘mainline’ church. The simplicity of assuming that because a church or denomination belongs to a particular ‘lineage’ of theological development and that such theology is definitive, can be both, painful and alienating, to those within that particular denomination who are not at ease with that simplicity.

The simplicity of ‘ecumenism’ has the same difficulties.

Storey argues that the MCSA’s emphasis falls in a tradition that stoutly defends and declares the “*allness*” of God’s grace. For him “Wesleyans refuse to permit legalism and the in-born bias toward exclusion to trump God’s grace.”⁹⁵ However the arrogance of European Western experience within the

⁹⁴ Mbete : 2006 : 19

⁹⁵ Storey: Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :29

MCSA has a lot to answer for in terms of its simplicity in suppressing African experience. For example, a question may be raised as to whether the MCSA, as part of the World Council of Churches, can be satisfied that it has done enough to encourage the AIC's, in particular, to become part of the ecumenical family. Perhaps the MCSA's unwillingness to deal with cultural identity issues within its own ranks has a significant influence in this regard.

However, dealing with ecumenism is no easy task and is particularly relevant for the MCSA and its work regarding cultural identity. Williams highlights some of the difficulties and the impact that concentrated ecumenical desire can have on a denomination by asserting, "The present ecumenical situation reflects this dilemma. Recognizing Christ in one another, we have joined in the mutual covenant of the World Council of Churches but so far, we have been unable to move on from engagement to marriage. We are required to seek to do away with the obstacles to our marriage that lie in our divided traditions but we are also required to search those traditions to discover any dowries that can be brought to the life of the one family."⁹⁶ In this sense, has the MCSA desirous of acceptance in, and fearful of exclusion from, the 'ecumenical' family, failed to engage and embrace the AIC's?

This kind of challenge has always been and realistically always will be at the heart of the question of 'denominationalism' both for the church universal and within the MCSA in particular.

⁹⁶ Williams :1960 :2

For example, Storey argues that “in Wesley’s day various forms of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination were rampant, averring that a sovereign God had already determined the eternal future of us all. This aspect of Calvin’s teachings was an anathema to the Dutch theologian James Harmens (known by his Latin name Jacobus Arminius). Wesley also shared the Arminian view that there was a definite role for the human will - a genuine free choice - in responding to God’s offer of free grace in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁷

In this regard, it must be remembered that Wesley’s theological method, not necessarily his differences around issues such as predestination, was at the heart of his well documented difficulties with the denomination of his ordination and his subsequent establishment of the Methodist movement.

Once again, a question needs examination: has the MCSA’s determination to be ‘ecumenical’ been strongly influenced for the most part by Fundamentalist Methodism?

Fundamentalist Methodists generally do not believe they are programmed robots of a sovereign God, but that God, in God’s sovereignty, has chosen to respect our freedom to accept or refuse God’s offer. However, such theology can only exist in its fullness in an evangelical movement whose members understand salvation as pertaining to the transformation of an individual through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This puts them in line with the ecumenical movement but what about Liberationist Methodist’s influence?

⁹⁷ Storey Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan?: in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :30

Because Liberationist Methodism tends toward a strong sense of community, the desire to be part of the ecumenical family is a natural extension of their theological development. However, for the Liberationist Methodists, the question of including the AIC's remains and perhaps should be perused.

With regard to ecumenism, Williams is helpful: "It is not only a question of Methodism's legal position, however. It also seems reasonable to assume that the message she was given at the time God raised her up has peculiar significance when we ask whether Methodism has been entrusted with a particular word, God would have us say to the Church."⁹⁸ The '*grand depositum*' in terms of ecumenism has very much to do with Wesley's theological method and has the potential to play a significant role in the development of a uniting authentic Southern African Methodist theology.

Another question, with regard to ecumenism, that needs further asking: What of the AIC's who broke away from Methodist structures? How has the MCSA engaged in ecumenical conversation with them? It may be argued that the AIC's have abandoned the doctrines of their missional church, even though studies have shown that that is not the case. However, this paper asserts that one of the reasons that MCSA theologians are perhaps reluctant to engage the AIC's, is both the lack of a clear understanding of their own theological method and the desire to be part of the 'ecumenical' family.

⁹⁸ Williams : 1960 : 9

In may be well to remember that Methodism was forged in struggle, and owes its beginnings, not to academic theorists, but to courageous pioneers with a passion for mission.

Accordingly, this is also the MCSA's heritage, "we need to be reminded of heroic men and women who brought Methodism to our shores and hinterland. They too placed their complete trust in God and would not rest until this sub-continent had heard the Good News."⁹⁹

However, whilst early Methodists, both in Britain and South Africa, as asserted previously, were remarkably effective in devising flexible and appropriate strategies to spread the Gospel and build the movement, the schisms between the MCSA and AIC's left an unresolved question as to the impact of colonial Methodism on African spiritual teachings.

In South Africa, the grass root pioneers gave the development of Methodism a platform for prolific growth. At the heart of the early spread of Methodism was a desire to tell of the Good News and win souls. As Attwell asserts, that one thing is certain: "When the full story of the Methodist Missions in Southern Africa is finally told, it will be of heroic proportions."¹⁰⁰

However the pain of colonial domination remains and there is a need to include the AIC's as part of the ecumenical family.

⁹⁹ Storey : Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You're Not A Wesleyan?: in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :40

¹⁰⁰ Attwell : 1995: 6

The theological method of Methodism allowed for a structure which was vital as the epic revival in 18th Century England needed a strong yet flexible structure able to cope with growth.

In other words, the growth of the movement, built on Wesley's quadrilateral as theological method, in many ways determined the structure.

The Wesleyan insistence on "Connexionalism" - the governing of the entire movement (later to become a denomination) by one Annual Conference - set Methodism apart from other denominations which are organized either on diocesan or congregational lines. Connexionalism gave maximum flexibility in the disposal of personal and financial resources. It also helped to ensure uniform policy and practice. Many modern Methodists forget how significant the differences are between the Connexional system and congregation-based polity. Methodist ministers are never members of a congregation, or 'Society'. Ministers 'in Full Connexion' hold their membership with the Conference - that is their 'congregation', - and therefore cannot be 'owned' by the local community they are serving for the time being. Neither are they paid directly by their congregations, but by the Connexion, so that they are free to be faithful in their proclamation without fear of financial sanctions, even when their message may be unpopular locally. This position is founded in the strength of holding Scripture, tradition, reason and experience in a unique theological method.

Another difference is that Methodist ministers are *sent*, not called, “without these, ‘prudential’ (as distinct from ‘instituted’) means of grace, the renewal led by Wesley could never have taken root as it did.”¹⁰¹

Early Methodism in Southern Africa spread and developed rapidly, fostered by a theology of personal transformation and an Institutionalized structure which allowed the establishment of Methodist Missions, the use of laypersons to preach the Good News, to the establishment of educational opportunities. Because it was essentially a movement within the established church, it had flexibility, but later struggled to maintain the evangelical zeal, as this “became more difficult as institutionalization had its fossilizing effect. The Methodism of the 20th Century in Southern Africa became much more staid and inflexible.”¹⁰²

During this time various attempts were made to hold the flame such as The *Renewal Commission* of the 1970; *Obedience*’81 and *Journey to a New Land* of the 1990. All of these attempts at transformation took their inspiration from Wesley’s own commitment to always make structures subservient to the mission of the church.

Within the MCSA today, there is still debate around ‘personal’ gospel and ‘social’ Gospel.’ Storey argues that there is “only the *whole* Gospel, expressed

¹⁰¹ Storey : Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 45

¹⁰² Storey : Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 40

both personally and socially.”¹⁰³ The ‘whole’ gospel here taken to mean, that the believer is called to both an evangelical personal faith – “Love the Lord your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”¹⁰⁴

And at the same time the believer is called to liberate the oppressed from domination of every form – “Love your neighbour as yourself.”¹⁰⁵

However, what is not clear in this argument is what, within the MCSA today, terms such as mission and evangelical mean.

In other words, is the mission of the church evangelical Wesleyan or liberative social?

The reason for the importance of the question is that there seems to be a common thread, namely, the search for a common vision and understanding of the MCSA and its unique calling by God and within the broader ecumenical family. Who are they? By what are they defined and to what are they called?

The search for a common vision is even more important as the MCSA faces the 21st Century. Hudson argues that “in the 18th century, Christian

¹⁰³ Storey : Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 42

¹⁰⁴ The Holy Bible: NIV : Mark 12: 30

¹⁰⁵ Ibid : 31

spirituality was expressed in two principal traditions: the monastic/meditative tradition and the missionary tradition.”¹⁰⁶

Part of the fear of Liberationist Methodists in the MCSA with regard to common vision has to do with both that personal salvation has to do with a pseudo-monastic life and the perceived loss of cultural identity.

And for Fundamentalist Methodists the fear of a spirituality which has to do with the changing of structures and less to do with personal salvation, means the perceived loss of tradition and the ‘watering down’ of Scripture . Whether the social/personal debate around the Gospel “is seen as a non-event,”¹⁰⁷ it remains a point of struggle within the MCSA and will continue to influence the potential for a schism between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists.

In Wesley’s writings, one gets the sense that there was a fusion of these two elements, personal piety and social responsibility. However, mainly due to the absence of a definitive systematic theology, the extent may be determined by the lens, which is, applied , in the case of this paper, Liberationist or Fundamentalist.

This paper will examine areas such as the development of liberative and Liberation Theology in the MCSA and the impact of its struggles with cultural identity, race and sexism on the Doctrine of Christian Perfection before asserting a possible way forward toward the formation a common

¹⁰⁶ Hudson : Chapter – Wesleyan Spirituality in Malibga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 98

¹⁰⁷ Storey: Chapter – Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You’re Not A Wesleyan? in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 40

authentic uniting Southern African theology using Wesley's theological method.

Chapter Four

Liberation Theology in Methodism in Southern Africa

There may be critique of this paper for combining the different streams of theology which seek to address the oppressed, namely Black Theology, Feminist Theology and Liberation Theology and for aligning the AIC's with these liberation theologies under one umbrella, Liberation Theology.

And whilst there are risks such as relativism, Ferm forwards one of the most common views regarding generalising liberative and Liberation Theologies by asserting, "one characteristic of Third World Liberation Theology has become increasingly more obvious: there can be no single overarching liberation theology, for the obvious reason those historical situations differ vastly in Africa, Asia and Latin America."¹⁰⁸

For example, it is imprudent to judge African and Asian forms of Liberation Theology in terms of Latin American models.

The reasons for this are twofold:

Firstly, to make Latin American Liberation Theology *the* norm entails elitism to which African and Asian theologians have rightfully objected.

Secondly, Latin American Liberation Theology itself manifests a wide-ranging variety of interpretation with writers such as

¹⁰⁸ Ferm : 1986 : 100

Gutiérrez, Alves, Miranda, Sobrino and Couch.

At the same time, an evaluation of African and Asian Theology in the light of criteria taken from the 'Latin American experience' is perhaps the most common error made by both friends and foes of Liberation Theology.

However, whilst historical situations differ, there is enough common ground in terms of the liberative and Liberation Theology's methodology of examining Scripture in light of the oppressed whether it be economic, sexism, racialism or the need for a cultural voice, for them to grouped together under a broad collective umbrella for this paper:

(a) A united Liberation Theology has the same potential for challenge to the theological conversation as Wesley's theological method had on mainstream theology of his time .

(b) To avoid attempts, directly and indirectly, to sideline the important issue of the need for uniting authentic Southern African Methodist theology and at the same time allow the MCSA's unique witness, particularly the liberative and Liberation Theology of the MCSA to express itself in the development of theology in Southern Africa.

(4.1) The MCSA's Unique Witness

At the risk of being alienating, the question of whether the MCSA and Methodism in general have a potentially unique witness is an important one

and one worth examining, particularly in terms of seeking a uniting theology.

The MCSA's potential, unique, liberative and Liberation Theology witness is, in many senses, distinctive for various reasons including:

(a) Within the historical development of Methodism in Southern Africa there have been moves by oppressed people for 'liberation' long before Liberation Theology as a distinctive theology emerged. And whilst it could be argued that these movements or 'theologies' have no place within the broader definitions of the term Liberation Theology today, there are characteristics of a liberative methodology which allow for those historical movements to be aligned with the broader understanding of Liberation Theology;

(b) Within the MCSA there exists side by side the three broader 'streams' of Liberation Theology namely, Feminist Theology, Black Theology and those aligned with the poor;

(c) Whilst the context of the MCSA differs from other parts of the world, the emphases, methodologies and spirit of liberation is of sufficient theological importance within the life of the MCSA to place it within the broader categories of Liberation Theologies.

Davies poses an important question: "Is it possible to claim for ourselves allegiance to the theology of John Wesley—as Methodist ministers in Britain and elsewhere are required each year to assert that they believe and preach "our doctrines"—while embracing a theology of liberation? Or is it necessary to make a decisive choice between two conflicting schools of theology, while, of

course, admitting that the later type may have been influenced in some ways by the earlier?"¹⁰⁹

The devolvement of liberative concepts, whilst not immediately recognised as such, within the MCSA, took place almost from the very beginning when Methodist missionaries first encountered African soil. Balia asserts that it has been established that the reaction of Africans to European missions is one of the more important factors contributing to the formation of independent church movements. "The reactionary element features far too prominently for it to be relegated to the background."¹¹⁰ Scholars, such as Neil, also conclude that at the heart of this whole movement, directly or indirectly, will be found the sin of the white man against the Black. It is because of the failure of the white man to make the Church a home for the Black man that the latter has longed to have a Church of his own. Accordingly, it may be concluded, that whilst Blacks were not, and are not today, seeking Christ outside the 'White' churches, they were certainly in search of '*a place to feel at home*' where there would be no discriminatory practices in terms of their culture and where they would be free to assert their leadership and identity. The Black experience in the MCSA was virtually the same. "The rules and regulations of the British church were simply laid down without due consideration to the African cultural heritage."¹¹¹ And this raises questions as to the long-term

¹⁰⁹ Rupp : 1965 : 64

¹¹⁰ Balia : 1991 : 86

¹¹¹ Ibid : 95

effectiveness of Fundamentalist Methodism domination in Africa in the 21st century.

In this regard, an important part of the discussion in terms of Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism is found in the understanding of evangelism.

(4.2) African Liberation Evangelism

As was stated previously, Methodism was essentially an evangelical movement, (a term used to refer to reforming movements, especially in Germany and Switzerland, in the 1510's and 1520's, but now used of the movement, especially in English-language theology, which places especial emphasis upon the supreme authority of Scripture and atoning death of Christ)¹¹² Thus at its narrowest sense, evangelism plays an important part in the term 'evangelical,' as the word comes from the Greek word for 'Gospel' or 'good news': *εὐαγγέλιον* - *evangelion*. In the broader sense then, to be evangelical would mean, for most adherents, the authority of Scripture and the need for personal conversion.

But in Africa, Black converts did not necessarily come to conversion as understood in the European evangelical sense. For example, Dickson asserts that "the pattern of evangelism employed in the early days of Methodist missions in Ghana contained certain contradictions that to this day have

¹¹² McGrath :2001: 582

not been fully resolved.”¹¹³ Contradictions in this sense taken to mean African converts came to accept the Christian faith for reasons that were different to the Missionaries’ understanding. These contradictions are important for this paper because they resonate in the MCSA and are highlighted below:

Firstly, the avowed aim of the Methodist Missionary Society was to foster an indigenous ministry in the mission areas, and an institution for this purpose was set up in Ghana within seven years after the arrival of the first missionary from England in 1835. However, though the candidates selected for training were Ghanaians, the ministry that emerged was not, strictly speaking, indigenous, since the aim of the training was to make the Ghanaian Methodist minister (or assistant missionary as he was called originally) a copy, as much as possible, of the English missionary. A similar ethos was applied in Southern Africa, as was seen earlier in this paper. The idea of training ministers and the structure, formation in the early MCSA, was too develop the local converts in Western understandings of the Christian faith.

Secondly, there was the tendency to link the Christian message of new life to the necessity that the converts separate themselves from their traditional life

¹¹³ Dickson : Chapter : The Methodist Witness and the African Situation: - in Runyon, 198, Sanctification and Liberation: 195

Thirdly, the gospel of grace, which was preached with such dedication and enthusiasm in the early days of Ghanaian missions, went hand in hand with the missionaries' insistence upon the observance of a great body of rules and regulations based on Western culture.

And the fourth contradiction was the tension between the spiritual and the secular felt by the missionaries, a dichotomy unknown in African culture. However, the question whether the Missionaries were equipped to deal with the African context also remains.

These contradictions are aligned with general colonisation policies, and by association, the role of the MCSA as a developing church in Southern Africa. Boesak asserts, "Reformed scholars like Ntoane, Templin, and Adonis do not hesitate to show that the original settlers went to South Africa, not for religious purposes, but for economic reasons. The Boers saw the Khoi-Khoi primarily as a source of labour. For the first hundred years of the European settlement, it was assumed that adherence to the Christian faith made a slave eligible for emancipation. Because the profit motive dominated, however, the intent of this concept was subverted. Boers feared that to let one's slaves hear the Christian message would mean a loss of valuable labourers."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Boesak : 1995: 45

“Consequently, in practice, it became common to deny the subjected peoples any instruction in the Christian faith so as to ensure continued service of the slaves or Khoi-Khoi.”¹¹⁵

Thus the driving force was domination as Goizueta, in his examination of Dussel's work on a paradigm for economic Liberation Theology, asserts that “domination (as understood in the global economy of today but parallel to the economic domination of colonialism) as a category, then, must be able to account for not only economic, but also political, cultural and ideological oppression because all are mutually implicit and organically related (because *human*) aspects of one historical reality of domination. The liberation struggle must encompass all these dimensions, while according tactical precedence to some over others in given historical situations.”¹¹⁶

It is no wonder then, that when converts sought liberation from their oppressive situations, they joined the MCSA and accordingly that liberative motifs easily and naturally became part of the life of early Methodists converts. Whilst some of these motives may originally have been of a more subtle nature, they later developed into more formal motives of liberation, along with a world-wide conversation and the decade of the 1970s liberation theologies moved from the periphery of theological attention to its core.

¹¹⁵ Templin: 1984 : 80

¹¹⁶ Goizueta : 1988: 50

Building on the earlier forms of resistance, such as schisms, Boesak identifies the root cause for Liberation Theologies in Southern Africa, as “white missionaries were harbingers of capitalist exploitation and prime movers in the expansion and consolidation with white political power, which used and defended colonial violence. Therefore, ‘the process of ‘conversion’ should be regarded as violent, as it constituted the initial phase in the European subversion of African societies.”¹¹⁷

The impact and importance of this oppression of African traditions cannot be regarded as a mere passing phase in ecclesial history. “This Eurocentric impingement upon indigenous culture contributed to the physical, mental, and religious repression of Black people. Theologically speaking, this version of missionary endeavour is very different from the scriptural notion of the *missio Dei* to which the church is called... Consequently, African Christians found themselves in such a serious dilemma that a break with the churches became inevitable, a break signifying their spiritual torn mission control. . . . This freedom has allowed them to Africanize the Church.”¹¹⁸

Thus, the liberation struggle of Africans constituted a resistance to the concepts, born of the Reformation and Protestant movements, as they were seen to further the aims of colonialism in Africa.

This was true of the MCSA today, as cited earlier in this paper, that “the Black experience in the Methodist Church was virtually the same. The rules and

¹¹⁷ Boesak : 1995 : 35

¹¹⁸ Ibid : 37

regulations of the British church were simply laid down without due consideration to the African cultural heritage.”¹¹⁹

However, Balia does concede along with De Gruchy, that Calvinism in Southern Africa needs to be ‘revitalized’ as a theology of social criticism and transformation is appropriate.

He submits that while Calvinism has often been blamed for the ills of Southern Africa, it should be re-examined and qualified. In reaction to Afrikaner Calvinism, which is not necessarily the most faithful representation of the theology of John Calvin, two streams of Calvinist protest eventually emerged during the twentieth century, namely, a confrontation of traditional Afrikaner Calvinism within Afrikanerdom itself and Black Calvinism as radical critique. “Indeed, the Word of God has become the source of prophetic critique unmasking the pretensions of racism and injustice.”¹²⁰

Liberation Theology’s insistent questions in the MCSA have instigated a re-evaluation, not only of traditional understandings of Christianity but of the function and methods of theology. While apartheid and the struggle against all forms of oppression seems to have occupied a large portion of the MCSA theological development, the liberation of women and the emerging concern for cultural identity have begun to dominate the MCSA’s witness.

¹¹⁹ Balia : 1991:87

¹²⁰ Ibid : 89

In the MCSA today, the three streams of Liberation Theology are represented and, in spite of their obvious differences, whilst sharing a common methodological approach, are much part of the life fabric of the MCSA. For example, their primary task is not to rationalize and justify doctrine and church practice but to ask questions based on the Biblical vision of the Kingdom of God.

One of the areas of greatest challenge in this regard are the questions relating to African traditional customs in the context of the MCSA. This challenge has influence on the MCSA's way forward. For example: discrimination against women often related to cultural practices, was, and still is, another aspect of the MCSA that needs to be addressed.

The training of ministers and, by implication, the advancement of ideas, such as the peculiar affinity between Wesleyan theology—especially Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, the movements for social change and in particular Wesley's theological method can have a significant impact on the formation of a common vision and theology. For example, it may be argued that when Christian Perfection becomes the goal of the individual, a fundamental hope is engendered that the future can surpass the present, at the same time, the same may be said for Christian Perfection in terms of communities.

A question facing the MCSA today is, how, in Southern Africa, with its need to be rid of colonial influences, it can allow a development of Methodism unique to Southern African Methodists?

Without doubt, there are no easy answers, and simple solutions should be approached with caution. For example, Mathibe asserts that, “Wesley considered ‘conversion’ as a ‘sign of authentic faith’ not as an ultimate goal to be achieved.”¹²¹

The idea here, that “in John 4 - the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus at Jacob's well. After having a theological discourse with Jesus, verses 19 - 25, the Samaritan woman could not keep the good news to herself, rather ‘she went back to (her) town’ (verse 28) and gave a testimony of her encounter with the Messiah. By so doing, ‘many Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus.’¹²²

The interpretation of this text, in this case, relies heavily on the general understanding that Christian evangelism as understood and taught by the Fundamentalists is not the only form of evangelism found in Scripture.

Watanube puts the tension this way:

“In countries where biblical narratives are less well known, biblical exegesis and its application to relevant situations are not easy. People experience Bible stories as quite as strange as Greek or Egyptian myths. Those

¹²¹ Mathibe in New Dimension July 2007: 3

¹²² Ibid : 3

countries usually have their own classical traditions, and often the educated anno-fete the ancient books as codes of national ethics. Consequently, biblical exegesis is confronted with such traditions. When the Western material civilization still seemed to be superior, those who sought material prosperity took an interest in the Bible as the spiritual basis of Western civilization. But once the non-European countries successfully developed their own material civilizations, many lost interest in the Bible. We see this in present-day Japan, for example. Nations whose self-confidence increased with rising nationalism now regard the Bible as equal or even inferior to their own classics.”¹²³

‘Liberation’ in the MCSA is still much needed. In many senses and apart from the oppressed, the need for liberation of the cultural soul for so long veiled and sidelined by the critical need for social and political oppression, would much be part of the theological development of MCSA and the Doctrine of Christian Perfection in particular.

¹²³ Wanatube : Chapter - Reformed Theology in East and West in Wills & Welker : 1999 : Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions: 44

Chapter Five

Christian Perfection

The Doctrine of Christian Perfection, whilst not unique to Methodism, stands for Wesley as the '*grand depositum*'¹²⁴ of Methodism. However, there are many objections to this doctrine, some of which come from Methodists themselves.

Before dealing with some of them, it may be practical to look at Wesley's own experience of what has come to be known to many Methodists as principal evidence of this doctrine.

In the days preceding Wednesday evening 24th May 1738, Wesley experienced a "continual sorrow and heaviness in my heart."¹²⁵ There was in a sense of deep concern for his salvation. Wednesday, May 24.—"I think it was about five this morning that I opened my Testament on those words, 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature' [II Peter 1:4]. Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words, 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God' [Mark 12:34]. In the afternoon, I was asked to go to St. Paul's. The anthem was, 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. Oh, let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If Thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? For there is mercy with Thee; therefore shalt Thou be feared. O Israel,

¹²⁴ Wesley : Letters VIII : 238

¹²⁵ Wesley : Works VI: 64

trust in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his sins.”¹²⁶

Later that evening, he continues, “I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”¹²⁷

On the 25th May, Wesley awakened and “Jesus, Master, was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon Him and my soul waiting on Him continually. Being again at St. Paul’s in the afternoon, I could taste the good word of God in the anthem, which began, “My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another.”¹²⁸

These events, and the capturing of them by Wesley, laid the foundation for the two-part principle of his understanding of Christian Perfection, namely, faithfulness and experience.

For many Methodists, there is a tendency to focus on the event of Wesley’s warmed heart, sometimes to the extent that Wesley’s experience becomes their own. At the same time, Wesley’s deep desire to be assured of his

¹²⁶ Wesley’s Journal V : 64ff

¹²⁷ Ibid : 65

¹²⁸ Wesley’s Journal V : 57

salvation does not often receive much mention. Wesley states, “with regard to my own behaviour, I now renewed and wrote down my former resolutions. To use absolute openness and unreserve with all I should converse with. To labour after continual seriousness, not willingly indulging myself in any the least levity of behaviour, or in laughter; no, not for a moment. To speak no word which does not tend to the glory of God; in particular, not to talk of worldly things. Others may, nay, must. But what is that to thee? And, to take no pleasure which does not tend to the glory of God; thanking God every moment for all I do take, and therefore rejecting every sort and degree of it which I feel I cannot so thank Him in and for.”¹²⁹

Although much has been written, by scholars such as Cox, Chadwick, Richardson and Williams, in regard to Wesley’s ideas on this doctrine, in these words of Wesley are captured a two principle aspects of his understanding of the Doctrine of Christian Perfection, namely, experience and faithfulness.

(5.1) The Doctrine of Christian Perfection

The Doctrine of Christian Perfection, whilst mostly neglected by many Methodists today, still remains one of the most important parts of Wesley’s order of salvation and is critical to understanding his theology in general. For all Methodists, the absence of this doctrine as part of everyday life should be questioned most vigorously, as Wesley himself defined it as “a

¹²⁹ Wesley’s Journal VII : 66

peculiar heritage given to Methodists in trust for the Church.”¹³⁰ Richardson poses the question this way as he asserts that “Christian perfection, also known as scriptural holiness, perfect love, and full sanctification, is the most characteristic of John Wesley's teachings, yet what has become of it today? How often do we hear of it in sermons or meetings in our churches? If we have no place for it can we still claim to be Methodists in any valid sense of the term?”¹³¹

Although there are objections to the Doctrine of Christian Perfection, which “spring readily to mind, and there are many obvious arguments for the discarding of this doctrine.

“Some arose in Wesley's own lifetime....”¹³² such as:

- (1) The word ‘perfection’ and its potential negative connotations.
- (2) The doctrine of salvation by works.
- (3) Is perfection attainable in this life?
- (4) Doesn't Christian Perfection give rise to religious elitism?

An important objection today, within the MCSA, might centre on the question whether the doctrine has been allowed to develop in an African sense.

These objections may be amongst others, however, one of the problems associated with these specific objections is that Christian Perfection may be

¹³⁰ Williams : 1960 :167

¹³¹ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World, in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :161

¹³² Ibid : 162

better understood with an application of a two-part principle of experience and faithfulness.

Admittedly, even so, Wesley's teaching on this doctrine was notoriously open to misunderstanding.

What, then, did Wesley mean when he urged the early Methodists to attain 'perfection'? In order to consider, for this paper, what the Doctrine of Perfection is, it may be helpful to examine it in the light of what it isn't, particularly within the MCSA.

(5.1.1) The Silent Doctrine:

It is difficult to find the Doctrine of Christian Perfection consistently part of Methodism today and in the MCSA in particular. There may be many reasons for this state of affairs in the MCSA, but this paper will forward three.

(1) The Doctrine of Perfect Love is firstly not an exclusive Wesleyan concept. As was stated earlier in this paper the some influences have been cited as Reformed, and others as Catholic. However, if Wesley is to be taken seriously at all with regard to this doctrine, it has to be taken into account in light of his complete order of salvation. In terms of the MCSA, the influences such as; the struggle for political freedom and the current time given to Wesleyan studies for training ministers today, it is not surprising that this doctrine has largely become silent.

(2) Methodism, as it came to South Africa, found itself, directly and indirectly, part of the colonial movement. Methodism has been influenced in the main by struggles against apartheid, which included cultural, social and political domination. These struggles must have impacted on the development of doctrines.

Some of these struggles have been referred to earlier in this paper and the exact impact and extent of these struggles on Methodist theology is open to question and difficult, if not impossible, to prove with any accuracy.

However, given the definition of this paper for the term theology, it seems that doctrines and confessions of faith are also open to influence either directly or indirectly. The MCSA, as has also been stated earlier in this paper, for the most part sought to maintain its core teachings based on European ontology but faced with a different context to 18th Century England, the shape of Methodism in Southern Africa needed to differ from its roots in England. Martey, further highlights the difficulty of a theology being unaffected by context, by asserting the complexities of separating African Theology and Black Theology because “although they have both come out of the same womb, are not identical” mainly because of their differing “histories, emphases and functions.”¹³³

Thus in terms of the MCSA, certain doctrinal tenets have remained silent while others have remained part of the doctrinal life of the MCSA, Christian Perfection being one of the silent.

¹³³ Martey : 1994: 1

(3) The current movement for ecumenical 'oneness,' on the one hand and to avoid internal 'denominationalisation,' on the other, by the MCSA, has facilitated a movement away from those parts of Methodist epistemology which may cause tension within the ecumenical and the MCSA family. That is to say, that the Doctrine of Christian Perfection has always had its critics even in Wesley's time. Richardson puts it this way; "doesn't Christian perfection give rise to religious elitism and spiritual snobbery?"¹³⁴

Without retracing in great depth the work done in the past around this Doctrine, Wesley himself lays one of the most important reasons for his development of this doctrine. These words can be taken to precede his development and lay a basis for understanding his engagement with Christian Perfection:

"In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's 'Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying.' In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil."¹³⁵

Thus, Wesley lays the groundwork for the first of the two-part principle in his framework for this doctrine, namely, faithfulness.

¹³⁴ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :162

¹³⁵ Wesley Journal III : 115

(5.1.2) A Question of Faithfulness:

In Wesley's words above, he lays the foundation for a 'living faith.'

In this sense, in a living faith, the divine image of God may be understood as righteousness. The Greek word for righteousness is *dikaiosunē*, in this sense, faithfulness. Thus to be restored to the divine image of God is to be restored to faithfulness.

The prime example of faithfulness found in Scripture, is Christ going to the cross for the sins of the world. And it is this *dikaiosunē* which is imputed to the believer (Romans 3:22.)

The inward and outward signs of this faithfulness then, as found in John Wesley's two-part principle of faithfulness and experience, are to the means of grace or *good works*, both inward and outward, toward attaining Christian Perfection.

These two parts for Wesley are unshakable and in this sense experience and faithfulness moves a believer beyond the average concept of piety. Wesley's definition of Perfection supports this: "by 'perfection' I mean 'perfect love' or the loving of God with all our hearts, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks."¹³⁶ In other words, a living faith. Thus the 'formalism' of Wesley's 'Methodism' (the early Holy club) in a sense completed with his Aldersgate experience and for him full sanctification was something granted by the grace of God in the same way as justification is. He was however careful that his understanding of Christ's

¹³⁶ Wesley : Works XIV : 321

saving action on the cross did not surpass “the Spirits work in our hearts.”¹³⁷

And it precisely here, that Methodists struggle with their heritage. For Wesley, the restoration of faithfulness, as found in the Reformed concepts of justification of the believer, is taken further by his understanding of full sanctification or Christian Perfection. It stands as essentially a break from Reformed trilateral method of theology, namely Scripture, reason and tradition.

In this sense, faithfulness and experience moves the believer to a living faith.

Martin Foss ¹³⁸ defines perfection in this way: “Wherever a thing is found adequate to the idea that we have of it that thing is perfect.” Thus a believer in perfection is one who is faithful and experiences God and goes on to further perfection.

Interestingly, the African understanding of a living faith has close correlations with this idea of faithfulness. Thus Perfection in African terms may rather be expressed as state of being – at one with God (who is the Creator) and with fellow human beings as understood from the term *Ubuntu* (A traditional motto: *I am because I belong*). Sin then, is understood in the light of those things which reject this way of life, such as domination, racism, sexism and competition.

¹³⁷ Oden : 1994: 209

¹³⁸ Foss : 1946 : 8

However, Ubuntu also needs to be taken further. Van Niekerk is helpful: *“I am because we are because I am because the physical-organic cosmic environment is and because God is.”*¹³⁹

There are of course some problems with this view of faithfulness:

(1) That faithfulness will be confused with faith.

However, there is a difference in understanding of faith as to faithfulness.

(a) Faith has close links with concepts such as belief, confidence, trust and reliance and “faith is commitment, a pledge or promise to carry out certain responsibilities.”¹⁴⁰

(b) Faithfulness is closer to concepts such as moral integrity, wholeness, soundness and sincerity.

The concept of faithfulness then presupposes a force or forces (sin) which would undermine faithfulness. Those forces Scripture refers to as being of humankind’s own making.

Faithfulness forms part of the state of perfection, loving God in a way which is not reliant on good works, but rather a natural extension of the faithful life to God, His people and His Created order.

(2) The question of faithfulness being related to experience.

Denominations such as the Pentecostal movement may understand ‘experience’ solely as work the Spirit in the life of the individual.

¹³⁹ Van Niekerk: Chapter – Sense Making Views, Approaches, Patterns and Orientations in Unisa Tutorial Letter 501/2008 : 37

¹⁴⁰ Madges:1998: 18

Cox asserts that Wesley, at first sight, fits in the “Classical Protestantism – where the final authority on faith and order is the living word of God.”¹⁴¹

But Wesley read widely, studied and embraced subjects such as logic, medicine, history and literature, “in order to become a more effective servant of God.”¹⁴²

In this sense, is it not then possible that cultural identity may also be part of the journey to becoming better Christians, having a living faith?

However, Christian Perfection, as a living faith, comes into line with Wesley, who understands that faithfulness is attainable by all but at the same time, “experience is a free gift of grace.”¹⁴³

In Christian terms this has to do with the “subjective life implanted in the soul”.¹⁴⁴ In this sense, perfection is a way of life for the believer as taught by Wesley. Experience is a natural fruit of this way of life.

In other words, in Wesley’s understanding, good works, for example, are not separated from a living relationship with Christ, which is always moving the believer to a deeper faithfulness and experience. Experience is a grace-borne fruit of this faithfulness, which may or may not be the same for each person.

(3) Wesley’s theology, particularly his concept of perfection, may seem for many to be far too challenging and thus un-obtainable. Wesley’s writings in general shows, that there are levels of faithfulness as indeed there are levels

¹⁴¹ Cox 1964: 23

¹⁴² Ibid: 24

¹⁴³ Cox : 1964 : 113

¹⁴⁴ Ibid : 113

of understanding. For example, not every student in a given classroom is going to connect with the given curriculum; however, that does not stop them from attending the lectures or gaining a pass or fail. Richardson states that, for Wesley, “There are two positive requirements for salvation to take place - God's loving initiative, and our willing response.”¹⁴⁵ Here Wesley disagrees with Calvin in that humans, when saved, are merely the passive recipients of God's sovereign election. Further salvation is God's gift and God's achievement, yet it cannot happen without human response.

In this sense, then, salvation has to do with the returning to a faithful relationship with God. However, for Wesley, there is distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is what God does when humanity responds to His offer in Christ. The effects of sin, in this sense, unfaithfulness, are removed, and, especially in that most vital and central of all relationships, the relationship with God. Faithfulness as the divine image in humankind is restored and in this new way of living the believer's motivation, decisions, actions, and behaviour are new.

There is also the question of perfection being gradual or instant. “Wesley sees salvation as both instant and gradual.”¹⁴⁶

Wesley does not agree with the Moravians, that it is all complete in an instant. Justification, yes, but sanctification takes time because there are forces, both seen and unseen, which seek to break faithfulness.

¹⁴⁵ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :165

¹⁴⁶ Ibid : 165

Therefore, full sanctification is in itself is a journey, a way of life.

It is on this point, more than any other, that Wesley was misunderstood.

Perhaps that is the reason why there is a need to look at Wesley's idea of perfection from another angle.

Wesley's theology calls for the need to try to understand the sentiments contained in his assertions rather than apply rigid definitions. It is here that the Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists may enter a dialectical relationship.

For example, Bonino examines Wesley's concepts of Christian action in the light of the Reformers attempts to reject all dichotomies between justification and sanctification and asserts that the realm of Christian action for Wesley was in line with Luther's idea that faith as prerequisite to justification and sanctification is then the product of an active Christian lifestyle.

But in terms of the specific contents of such an active Christian life, "Wesley does not seem to have invented a great deal, but rather has synthesized the ascetic, philanthropic, and devotional exercises that the best literature of his time could provide."¹⁴⁷

In other words, Wesley was not concerned with how to please a wrathful God, but with how to be totally dedicated to him. Consequently, for Bonino, "Wesley gained from Luther a doctrine of 'sanctification by grace through faith.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 166

¹⁴⁸ Bonino: Chapter : Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification From a Liberationist Perspective; in Runyon, 1981, Sanctification and Liberation: 52

Holiness, for him, continues to be the goal, both of redemption, and of the Christian life. Faith must be preached because there is no other way to enter this realm of sanctification.

Clearly, here can be seen the idea that Liberationists whilst wanting to link Wesley's social action as grounds for a relationship with social gospel, have to also acknowledge that Wesley, in line with Reformers, also taught justification by faith as a prerequisite to Christian action. In other words, that all action without spiritual rebirth (justification) has no grounds with salvation for the believer.

Without understanding the underlying sentiment of Wesley's perfection as faithfulness and experience, there are bound to be questions of ambiguity, by acknowledging that the believer can be both perfect and imperfect at the same time.

Richardson cites some of his more enthusiastic followers, such as those in Otley, Yorkshire in 1760, "saw only the perfection, which they believed they received instantaneously and in its totality - God had no more to give them. Yet Wesley had to clarify his emphasis on Christian perfection and remind them of the gradual aspect of salvation."¹⁴⁹ And faithfulness and experience, (Christian Perfection) are gradual in the life of the believer.

¹⁴⁹ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa :166

It does seem that there are continuous debates around perfection on specific concepts of both "arrival" and "pressing on". For Wesley it is a journey from justification to full salvation.

In this sense, faithfulness and experience are never complete but always a way of life. As Wesley asserts: "Christian Perfection does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations," rather he envisages the gradual nature of perfection as a series of ascending steps.

However, as Richardson asserts, Wesley also introduces another subtlety. Each of the steps has its own degree of fulfilment, its own perfection. "These perfections are not reliant on human degrees of measurement but rather on careful interpretation of the Scripture as it pertains to human behaviour."¹⁵⁰ A key distinction here in Wesley's thinking concerns full sanctification. As the person returns to faithfulness, they are given new motivation to stop doing certain things and to start doing others, "our will, which was inclined against God, is now inclined towards God."¹⁵¹

This is to have purity of intention. Wesley's usage of text from I John 5: 18 "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin..." leads Richardson to assert : "by justification we have been set free from the guilt of sin; by sanctification we are in the process of being set free from the power of sin."¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 164

¹⁵¹ Ibid : 167:

¹⁵² Ibid : 168

Thus, Wesley's idea is not a twofold nature of salvation, rather that faithfulness and experience (Christian Perfection) is ongoing from justification to sanctification and is never ending.

The whole salvation process moves the believer towards the Christian goal which is well described in an early sermon as: "that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness of both flesh and spirit'; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so 'renewed in the spirit of our mind,' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.'"¹⁵³

There is no faith by good works here, as in Wesley's understanding, human beings by themselves are incapable of faithfulness and experience.

Therefore, God by His grace, can only initiate justification, the restoring of faithfulness. In addition, only by God's strength can the believer accomplish a life of faithfulness and experience, full sanctification. Again, it is here that Methodists have, in many senses, lost sight of their particular heritage.

Sangster puts it this way: "There was one doctrine of John Wesley's - the doctrine of Perfect Sanctification - which ought to have led to a great and original ethical development. However, the doctrine has not grown; it seems to remain just where John Wesley left it. There has been a want of the genius or the courage to attempt the solution of the immense practical questions, which the doctrine suggests. The questions have not been raised

¹⁵³ Wesley : Forty Four Sermons : Sermon XIII

- much less to have raised them effectively, indeed, would have been to an ethical revolution which would have had a far deeper effect on thought and life, first of England, and then of the rest of than was produced by the Reformation of the sixteenth century.”¹⁵⁴

For some the rejection of this doctrine has theological as well as other implications such as socio-economic aspects.

For example, Jennings writing of the Methodist Movement and its present failure to realise the intention of its founder, has underlined “a continued movement of Methodist people away from the socio-economic guidelines taught and practised by John Wesley.”¹⁵⁵

De Gruchy, asserts that, “in some quarters Methodist people have been embarrassed by Wesley's political conservatism, his loyalty to the king, his apparent opposition to democracy and his focus on the spirituality of the individual rather than the transformation of the unjust structures of society. Hence, there is clearly a need to rediscover the socio-economic ethic of Wesley as he expressed it and lived it not only to correct misconceptions, but also to clarify the centrality of its position within his theology. Wesley's socio-economic ethics cannot be viewed as an addendum to his theology but must be seen as an integral part of his understanding of Scriptural Holiness.”¹⁵⁶ For De Gruchy, Wesley’s starting point is not with a clearly

¹⁵⁴ Sangster: 1984: 16

¹⁵⁵ Jennings : 1990: 1ff

¹⁵⁶ De Gruchy : 1993 : 3

aimed systematic theology but rather with the basic needs of the people he encounters.

Scholars, like Outler, argue that the central clue to understanding Wesley's economic analysis lies within the Christian ethical tradition. The formal premises of "his (Wesley's) economic doctrine rest partly on medieval notions of just price and general welfare; partly on the then current mercantilist theories of money and wealth. Yet his appraisals of this domain of man's life - the relationship between economic and moral values, between individual and society - are based on a clear, firm concept of the Christian stewardship in ordering of human affairs, in obedience to God's righteous rule in the lives of men." ¹⁵⁷

Wesley's heritage of faithfulness and experience, (Christian Perfection) has much to do with the liberating of the believer to a way of life in which their faithfulness is manifest in experience or the visible signs of upliftment, encouragement and mutual consideration of the entire created order, which then leads them on to further faithfulness.

These views may be valuable in a certain sense, but Methodists need be careful not to lose the specific heritage of Wesley's theological methodology namely Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. In this sense, experience being significant in Wesley's methodology.

¹⁵⁷ Outler : 1980 : 238

(5.1.3) A Question of Experience:

There is a dramatic irony when it comes to discussion on the term 'religious experience' and Wesley.

There are many views on what the term means and much has been written on the subject. Without going where others have been before, one expression of the term experience is found in the Reformed view that experience is directed solely towards confessions of faith such as found in the creeds and developed liturgies and tradition.

Pre-Aldersgate, was this was also true for Wesley? Being a churchman of the Church of England, it was more than likely that he found expression of his faith in the church's faith confessions, even though he seemed to want to take this further, as with his Holy Club at Oxford.

Mainstream theology at the time saw experience, particularly of God, as only found only within religious context. In other words, little was made of religious experience as part of the overall human experience and pre-Aldersgate, Wesley seemed in line with these views.

Much has been made about Wesley's Aldersgate experience. Some have cited it as his 'conversion.' Smith, in his comparison of Wesley and Edwards's religious experience, poses the question as to the relationship between their respective theologies of conversion. Of importance for this paper, in Smith's

analysis, is that Wesley “grounds conversion in the atonement provided by Christ.”¹⁵⁸

Thus, whilst experience became one of the most fundamental aspects to Wesley’s theological journey, in his journal of 1739, a year after Aldersgate, he asserts that he is still “not a Christian.”¹⁵⁹ Therefore questions remain as to whether he considered Aldersgate as his moment of conversion.

Whilst some conversations, in this regard, have at times tended to focus on the influences such as Wesley’s desire to feel an assurance of his salvation, the influence of his mother Susannah Wesley and Pietistic influences, one thing which had a highly significant influence on his search, was the faith of the Moravians during a storm onboard the ship when he was returning from America. In other words, a faith which, in the midst of great difficulty, would still praise God. Pre-Aldersgate, for Wesley, such a faith is alive in a person who is, completely given over to God.

The irony is that Wesley’s Aldersgate experience placed Wesley, in terms of his faith, somewhere where he had never been before. Reading into the power of his experience, was enough to alter his faith perception and at the same time, his experience placed him outside of mainstream theology of the time.

In Wesley’s words, “Now, God requireth of a Heathen to believe, ‘that God is; that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him and that He is to be sought by glorifying Him as God, by giving Him thanks for all things, and by

¹⁵⁸ Smith :Internet Article : 2008: 5

¹⁵⁹ Wesley: Journal I:170

a careful practice of moral virtue, of justice, mercy and truth toward their fellow creatures.”¹⁶⁰ This is clearly to him, more than a moral way of living or a duty bound existence. It is a profound shaping of a believer, based not on experience alone but balanced and held accountable by Scripture, reason and tradition.

And this is one of the most important keys to understanding his unique contribution to the development of Methodist methodology, and also to theological development in general.

This may be part of the reason why scholarship is finding renewed interest in Wesley’s theology today.

Where scholarship in general have tended to focus solely on his concepts of justification and sanctification without going further, much of Wesley is lost.

For example, “When Wesley teaches the basics of salvation, he makes it clear that while the holiness and good works that make up sanctification do not in themselves save us, they are an integral part of the salvation process.”¹⁶¹

These good works should not be limited to social responsibility alone but earnestly seeking God in every possible way i.e. “Wesley’s practices such as getting up early in the morning to pray, read the Bible and fasting constitute good works and therefore they can lead to a deeper working of faith.”¹⁶²

These are meditative good works, part of faithfulness.

¹⁶⁰ Wesley: Sermon 1 in Forty Four Sermons

¹⁶¹ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 164

¹⁶² Cox : 1964 : 92

In other words, there is a particular frame and temper of soul, a sobriety of mind, without which the Spirit of God will not concur in the purifying of human hearts. "It is in our power, through his preventing and assisting grace, to prepare this in ourselves: and he expects we should, this being the foundation of all his after works."¹⁶³

Therefore, justification by faith, the *leitmotiv* of the Reformation, remained for Wesley a fundamental component of salvation, but the role of justification, in his understanding, provides a foundation of grace for the actual transformation of the person, either directly to indirectly by experience, ultimately within and outside of religious confessions and that is, according to Wesley, the Divine intention.

For Wesley, justification restores people to God's favor; sanctification, to God's image. Part then of the process of full sanctification has to do with the care of creation as a vision of the kingdom of God, "a qualitative change in human existence is the divine objective in the process of reconciliation."¹⁶⁴ And religious experience for Wesley was, by grace, part of full sanctification or Christian Perfection.

The question in this regard remains: whether meditative good works – (religious and non religious) experience, are the fruit of sanctification and therefore one of the main elements of the condition for growing faith.

Alternatively, is it not possible that good works should rather be seen as both meditative and social responsibility?

¹⁶³ Wood : 1899: 186

¹⁶⁴ Ibid : 187

For example, in the case of meditative good works alone, there may be the potential for becoming insulated from the world. But combined with engaging with an oppressed context, may lead to deepening of one's faith on another level and at the same fulfilling one of the main tenets of Christian Perfection namely loving one's neighbour.

Wesley describes the faith through which we are saved as: "productive of all good works and all holiness"¹⁶⁵ Good works and holiness are the products of Christian faith, they are not optional extras. For Wesley, "there cannot be full salvation without sanctification. Equally, the good works that are essential to sanctification are understood only in the context of God's work of salvation.

There is no salvation by works here."¹⁶⁶ There is equally no salvation by social gospel either.

Wesley seems to struggle with the idea that "Justification by faith alone places one in a position to know that one is saved."¹⁶⁷ Pre-1738, he felt that he did not have a full faith, in other words, he understood an assurance of his faith within religious faith confessions but not fully so. It was only when he experienced Aldersgate that he felt a sense of completeness in his faith.

Which in turn, lead him to further faithfulness and experience.

This would be consistent with his idea that there are degrees of perfection and that he had achieved the ultimate perfection possible in this world.

¹⁶⁵ Wesley : Sermon I in Forty Four Sermons

¹⁶⁶ Richardson : Chapter – Christian Perfection in an Imperfect World in Malinga & Richardson ,2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 164

¹⁶⁷ Cox :1964 : 77

However, one gets the sense that Wesley struggled to put his experience into theological terms. This is not strange and is consistent with the work of the Spirit as found in the Scriptures: “The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are children of God.” (Romans 8:16). For Wesley it meant a complete submission to the will of God and was reflected in his good works, which were up until that time, both complete and incomplete.

Some may take this to mean that at rebirth (justification), a believer receives the Spirit and therefore can be assured that they (a) have the Spirit and (b) will know that assurance even though they do not experience it. This, however, remains, as it did with Wesley, a cognitive argument, until the moment that they feel a definitive movement of Spirit, which may or may not be similar to that of Wesley’s experience.

There is no doubt that this view causes many problems for the church as institution, and indeed for theology as an academic discipline because Christian Perfection has been labelled a doctrine yet given the assertions above, a ‘doctrine’ of the Spirit may be more appropriate.

Therefore, can perfection be taught? Or on the other hand, can it be explained, why some people may experience this perfection and others don’t?

What is clear, is that Wesley felt a warming of the heart and in that moment the two part principle came together in what has come to be understood as a moment of Christian Perfection which is captured in the words of the hymn,

“fast bound in sin and natures night” to “my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee.”¹⁶⁸

One difficulty with this view, for those that do not have Wesley’s form of experience, is that it would be attributed to a lack or incompleteness of faith.

(a) This stands in total contradiction to the very ideas of Christian Perfection and the two-part principle, which is founded in God’s grace. In other words, faithfulness and experience are both mutually non-interchangeable and we are perhaps then headed for a statement that says – sanctified by grace through faith.

(b) The term experience today has developed and questions such as whether “God is also directly involved in experiential fields outside the experience of the field, mode and dimensions of faith,”¹⁶⁹ are at the forefront. In many senses, Liberation Theology has contributed to this understanding.

In this sense, the focus is on grace that leads the believer to experience the fullness of God, where doubts, guilt of sin and fear are transformed by God’s grace into an assurance, which cannot always be fully explained, but definitely felt.

Thus, the sensing of this assurance is by God’s grace and not a prerequisite to faith but rather a fruit of faithfulness.

¹⁶⁸ Wesley: Hymn and Psalms : Number 216

¹⁶⁹ Van Niekerk: Chapter – Faith as a Field, Mode or Dimension of Daily Experience in Unisa Tutorial Letter 501/2008 : 65

Given Wesley's journey as laid out in his diaries, this view makes sense because the believer does not always feel the powerful movement of the Spirit at conversion.

Again, many will struggle with this argument, because it stands against ideas of God's faithfulness to every person and not the 'elect', who have experiences such as Wesley. However, full sanctification is not a perquisite for salvation, but stands as way of life for the believer.

Wesley himself was aware that some went onto deeper experiences of God, but for him these experiences were always by God's unmerited favour (grace). At the same time, outward visible signs of dedication or faithfulness were available to all.

For the most part, to Southern African Methodists, there is not a clear understanding of the implications of this two-sided view. There may be many causes such as a fear of 'idolising' Wesley, placing Methodism outside the ecumenical family or the 'need' for action (praxis), asserting that faithfulness as social action alone.

What is clear in the MCSA since 1900, there has been a steady move away from in depth teaching on Wesley's theology and particularly his order of salvation. Whilst the reasons are always clear, there should be cause for concern for the MCSA, because notwithstanding and appreciating the root causes namely the historical struggle of Methodists with each other, with apartheid and with the African cultural context, the MCSA needs to question

whether a return to Wesley's methodology will allow for the development of an authentically uniting Southern African Methodist theology.

In order to do this, there are many parts of the Methodist heritage which need to be revisited, like Wesley's theological method (his quadrilateral), but in terms of this paper, the following two critical attitude shifts are highlighted:

(a) A break with the dominance of Fundamentalist Methodist thinking within the MCSA needs to take place:

There is little argument what Wesley thought, at least in part, was in line with the Reformers, in that man was incapable of any action towards holiness. Therefore Wesley's understanding of God centres around an understanding that God is the supreme innovator and that humankind in their sinfulness are incapable of saving themselves and certainly of saving others. His understanding of Christian Perfection is under girded by the view that it all rests in Christ.

However, the African concept of God is radically different to this view as Mbiti states: The African ontology is basically anthropocentric: "God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; it is as if He exists for the sake of man.

Similarly, the comment exists for the benefit of humans and their well-being. Even the so-called African traditional religions are not religions in the classic

European sense of the word, but are the sum of the religious acts of *abantu*, whose object may or not be God.”¹⁷⁰

These different understandings of God remain at the forefront of the tension between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists.

Ironically, it is not the question of whether God exists, but rather, how God is perceived by humanity which is the key here.

Is it not possible then for Fundamentalist Methodists to allow space for Liberationist Methodists to develop their understanding, and in so doing, enrich the theological development of the MCSA? An attitudinal change may be possible when both Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodist accept that experience, both inside and outside of faith confessions, are in fact, possible and indeed, probable.

(b) In the issue of faith versus works:

At the root of this tension are African and Western understandings of humanity. For the Liberationist Methodist human beings are not inherently evil and sinful. At some place within humankind is goodness. This may be seen in the actions of unbelievers who do good deeds. But what distinguishes such good works from that of the believer, is that they have no reference to God and therefore cannot be seen as believer's works.

A key ingredient here is faith. For the Liberationist Methodist, it may a futile exercise to try to establish whether it occurs instantaneous or gradually.

¹⁷⁰ Mbiti ; 1969 : 42

For the Liberationist Methodist, it may be possible that contrary to Western understanding, there are other ways in which faith is made alive in the believer.

For example, as found in the concept of Ubuntu.

In some senses, this motto can have social implications but to stop there would be to lose the essence of Ubuntu.

Ubuntu may be seen as not merely an African response to the Cartesian motto *cogito ergo sum*, (I think therefore I am), but may be understood in the light of an anthropocentric view of God.

An attitudinal change may be that for both Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists, on a horizontal experiential continuum, God and humanity remain key to the formation of faith. The tension arises from where God and humanity are placed in relation to the concept of faith.

In this sense, the Fundamentalist Methodist places God first, then faith, then humanity. The Liberationist Methodist places humanity first, then faith and then God.

Fundamentalist Methodist:

God _____> Faith _____> Humanity

Liberationist Methodist:

Humanity _____> Faith _____> God

The key to this attitudinal change is to realise that both Fundamentalist and Liberationist are on the same continuum, the only difference is where one is placed.

What is highlighted here, with regard to the concept of faith, whether Fundamentalist or Liberationist Methodist, is that faith is always transforming the life of the believer and that is the work of experience, either inside or outside religious faith confessions. At the same time, using Wesley's quadrilateral will enable faith to grow according to the will of God. Here, faith is key. If Christ's righteousness, *dikaiosunē*, (*faithfulness*) is imputed upon those who came to faith in Him, then, so too, is imputed a concern for justice, "works are essential to faith and are a remote condition for sanctification, but the immediate condition is faith."¹⁷¹

A way forward here may be found in the view that Wesley's intention is not to pose exclusivity with regard to experience, but rather to encourage Christians to strive toward being the best Christian they possibly can, living in love.

In other words, Wesley's understanding is that "Christianity is not Christianity unless it is aiming at Perfection."¹⁷²

And in this sense, Christian Perfection is a living faith.

Cox is helpful here: "in the static understanding, a vision of perfection is held before the believer in order to allow them to feel perpetually ashamed of themselves and ultimately convince them that they are always to fall short of

¹⁷¹ Cox : 1964 : 96

¹⁷² Flew : 1934 : 398

what they believe. Whereas on the other hand, the dynamic view, cures the guilt and releases a power which removes the causes of sin.”¹⁷³

This living faith may be close to the African understanding of faith. “For this reason it is more accurate to speak not of African religions but African spirituality, a living faith.”¹⁷⁴

This concept, more than anything else, is perhaps what Wesley attempted to convey in his ideas of Christian Perfection.

¹⁷³ Cox :1964 : 107

¹⁷⁴ Kapolyo : 2005 : 126

Chapter Six:

The Uniqueness of the Methodist Witness in Southern Africa

The title of this chapter will no doubt lead to questions such as: Is there anything unique about the Methodist Witness in South Africa? In addition, what contribution does the MCSA have to make to the general theological conversation?

Wainwright argues that no particular Christian tradition is any longer able to reflect, live, and act in isolation from the other ones. They are all called to transcend their own embodiment of the Christian faith by stretching out towards the universal dimension and significance of the Christian gospel encompassing all times, situations, and traditions. “This universal dimension, in turn, becomes real and relevant in its concrete manifestations in specific cultural, socio-political and, I believe, also confessional/denominational contexts. There is thus a necessary interrelation between the particular and the universal, and this in more than a geographical sense.”¹⁷⁵

This raises the question of Methodism’s unique witness and ongoing contribution to the theological conversation.

This question is complex and is not reserved for the MCSA, but finds ground common in worldwide Methodist circles.

¹⁷⁵ Wainwright : Chapter – Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation in Meeks, 1985, The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition : 93

Becks puts it like this: “let us first turn to the word ‘Methodist’ which reminds us that we are engaged in an exploration of our common identity. We are trying to state who we are. Though almost all of us are representatives of the Methodist Wesleyan tradition, which is a much more complex fact than we sometimes recognize.”¹⁷⁶

Cracknell suggests that scholars like Albert Outler put the view that Methodism might have to learn to see itself as “an evangelical order of witness and worship, discipline and nurture” set firmly within “an encompassing environment of catholicity.”¹⁷⁷

Rupp argues that what is needed urgently in Methodism is the reunion of the churches, as most Methodist churches throughout the world are fully committed to losing themselves in a larger Christian unity.

This can certainly be said of the MCSA today, however, the influence of Liberation Theologies on the theological development of the MCSA need to be taken seriously, as they often have the potential to offer a view on what it means to be a Methodist, particularly in Southern Africa.

Some things need to be said in this regard:

(1) The title and the content of the chapter is not meant to incite a spiritual elitism but rather the opportunity for Methodists to revisit their particular heritage.

¹⁷⁶ Beck : Chapter – A Retrospective in Meeks, 1985, The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition : 213

¹⁷⁷ Cracknell :2005 : 270

(2) It is without question that the MCSA values its role within the ecumenical family, recognizing that “we are representatives of Methodist/Wesleyan traditions; that is, we belong to distinct churches and communities, each of which has its own version of that tradition. And these different versions of the tradition have been formed, not only by our common historical origins in the life and work of John and Charles Wesley and our common possession of their writings, but by our very different subsequent histories, from the end of the eighteenth century to today.”¹⁷⁸

(3) The claim of uniqueness recognizes that the MCSA has its own shortcomings, however it has a unique role to play within the ecumenical family.

(6.1) A Comprehensive Liberation:

The Methodist witness in the context offered by Southern Africa is unique in that up until now it has dealt with a constantly changing political and social context.

A context that has a past, but more importantly, future challenges of cultural identity, racial integration, the plight of the poor who make up the vast majority of the population and the struggle of women for their rightful place within varying, but essentially, culturally patriarchal societies.

Most of these issues can be directly related to the past policies of colonialism and apartheid but, at the same time, are challenges arising from a new political and social dispensation in Southern Africa.

¹⁷⁸ Beck : Chapter - A Retrospective in Meeks, 1985 The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition : 214

Of particular interest to this paper, in this regard, is the question of leadership within the MCSA. A question, which remains to this point unanswered, is whether the current leadership, strongly influenced by the struggle for political freedom on the one hand and desirous to maintain the *status quo* on the other, is capable of finding a uniting theology to deal with not only the questions raised formerly in this paper, but also the question of a stagnating membership.

In other words, the MCSA needs to define a uniting, authentically unique African Theology, which will influence two critical areas within the MCSA namely (a) the structure of the MCSA as Institution and (b) the training of its ministers.

Richardson poses a question and, at the same time, highlights the crucial nature of ministerial training in his article, *Ministerial Training and Theological Education in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: Has it hit the Wall or is there a Road Ahead?*

He asserts that “the term ‘struggle’, which became a cliché in the campaigns for political liberation in Southern Africa, seems now to apply accurately to the enterprise of educating and training ministers and other leaders in the Christian church, not least the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA).”¹⁷⁹

Therefore, there may be cause for Methodists in general and specifically in Southern Africa to seek a common uniting theology for its own development and relevance, but also, as has been stated in previous chapters, the MCSA has a

¹⁷⁹ Richardson: Ministerial Training and Theological Education in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: Has it hit the wall, or is there a road ahead? Missonalia Vol 35 2007: 1

vital role to play in the development of Southern Africa and its peoples. In this sense, a role in the uniting of a nation, which was previously divided.

A question that needs asking then is : How relevant is cultural identity becoming in the development of MCSA?

Another way of asking this question may be: How significant is the development of cultural identity, specifically with regard to the potential it has for causing a schism with the MCSA, and what impact would the schism have in the broader context of South Africa?

In terms of the problem setting of this paper, are cultural differences reasonable grounds for a schism? The problem as it now arises is, if cultural identity is grounds for separation in the MCSA, then how does that affect the understanding and potential for the nation needing to be united.

Pasztor is helpful, as he argues, that for the Reformers, the catholicity of the church was taken for granted and was considered fundamental. The theological enterprise they were undertaking was regarded and carried on as the function of the Catholic Church. It affected “orthodoxy” as well as “orthopraxis,” i.e., the life of the whole church and not only that of a local community. For this reason, it was catholic theology, “later generations seem to have forgotten or, perhaps unintentionally, distorted the conviction and attitude of the Reformers when they acted upon the dubious premises according to which doctrinal or structural differences — however important they may have been — justify leaving their church and setting up a new one.

History has shown that the doctrinal differences in churches of the Reformed family were mostly of a secondary nature.”¹⁸⁰

In terms of the MCSA, this point also holds true. The issues of tension in the MCSA are primarily not ones based specifically on doctrinal issues, but rather on the impact of colonialism in all its facets on society and particularly on African ‘religious’ and cultural identity.

Put another way, it can be argued that the formation of doctrines in the MCSA have until this point been heavily influenced, directly and indirectly, by colonialism (Fundamentalist Methodism) and the struggle for political freedom (Liberationist Methodism). The critical question in this regard may be whether either of these holds the potential for a uniting theology?

This paper asserts that what is needed now in the MCSA is an authentic Southern African Methodist theology, which considers amongst other issues, the cultural identity of all its members.

So then, what has the MCSA to offer in this regard?

(6.1.1) A Theology of Praxis:

Storey asks: “what does it mean to be Wesleyan Christian?”¹⁸¹

For him Methodism should offer an authentically radical, transformative and intentionally practical way of doing the Gospel - *practicing* being disciples, *becoming* more like Jesus, *living* the great commandments of God and *finding* healing in our own lives and in God’s world.

¹⁸⁰ Pasztor : Chapter - Catholicity of Reformed Theology in Wills & Welker, 1999, Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions: 130

¹⁸¹ Storey : 2004: 17

Much like Beck,¹⁸² who understood that the original concept of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies was that of a gathering of Methodist scholars to be influenced by the lives of John and Charles Wesley and the beginnings of Methodism in order to recover something of a Methodist or Wesleyan identity. However, in his experience, the meeting changed from being a gathering of Methodists discussing theology, to being a gathering of theologians discussing Methodism.

That is to say, that whilst Methodism is able to hold its own in terms of theological discussion, the difference from other denominations, is that Methodism has in a sense, practical ways of expressing the Christian faith. These practical ways are not founded solely on tradition, as has come to be the norm for the MCSA, but are expressed more fully in experience.

This paper asserts that experience, in Wesley's quadrilateral, was not only unique to the Methodist expression of faith in 18th Century England, but remains key to the formation of uniting theology within the MCSA today.

It seems that within the two main theological streams in the MCSA, namely Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodist, there are in essence little or no differences in the area of 'studying' theology; rather their differences may be found in 'doing' theology.

Storey asserts that while "Wesley could hold his own among the best of them and enjoys increasing respect today as an ecumenical theologian, he saw little point in filling people's heads with bodies of doctrinal knowledge unless

¹⁸² Beck : Chapter – A Retrospective in Meeks, 1985 The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition, : 213

those doctrines issued in transformed living. For Wesley, this was the ultimate test of all doctrine. You could say that Wesleyans have an *outcomes-based theology*.¹⁸³

There are a few difficulties here, especially with regard to the MCSA:

(1) Without appropriate input there can be no authentic outcome.

Richardson puts it this way: “While the development of ‘in-service training’ (the placing of training ministers in ‘cross-cultural contexts for their first year, following that, one year at Seminary), has improved the quality and effectiveness of non-residential study, there can be little doubt that the past four decades have seen a clear decline in Methodist theological education and ministerial training. Certainly the capacity of our theological institutions has declined dramatically.”¹⁸⁴

In other words, has the MCSA’s training of ministers improved the ‘doing’ at the cost of the ‘studying?’ Can there be outcome with no input?

Another question this raises, is whether, in terms of theological development within the MCSA, this is sustainable in the long term?

(2) For the Liberationist, as Gutierrez puts it, “theology is the critical reflection on praxis.”¹⁸⁵

In other words, theology must be a critical reflection on themselves, on their basic principles and the formation of doctrinal concepts follow. This statement alone may seem to stand in contrast to Wesley’s ideas of

¹⁸³ Storey : 2004 : 17ff

¹⁸⁴ Ricahrdson : Article: Ministerial Training and Theological Education in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: has it hit the wall, or is there a road ahead? 2008: 2

¹⁸⁵ Guitirez : 1973: 6

Scriptural Holiness. Wesley's methodology, in terms of Gutierrez's idea of reflection may differ from the Liberation theologians, as the main part of his quadrilateral is Scripture with reason, tradition and experience secondary. In other words, for Wesley, Scripture informs praxis, although arguably Wesley was in a sense also aware at times of the need to act first and then to contemplate.

Is it then possible, given that theology is dynamic, that experience, as part of the theological method, may now hold the key to unlocking within the believer the moving away from a meditative faith which has a fossilising effect on mission?

Another way of saying this, may be that Wesley understood that salvation did not start and end with justification but that the believer needs to move on, to become perfect.

There is little doubt that in the MCSA today, critical reflection on Scripture, which in turn informs praxis, still forms the main part of the life of the Methodist. However, there remains a constant tension between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists in this regard.

A question may be raised as to whether, like Wesley, the MCSA is in fact concerned that men, women and society are being transformed into the likeness of Christ, both in their understanding of and the living out of that understanding according to *Sola Scripta*.

In order for this to happen, and to avoid the trap of relativism, Wesley's quadrilateral may be helpful.

Storey quotes Duke Divinity School Geoffrey Wainwright: “Ladies and gentlemen, dial is our confession.” In other words, “This is what Christians have confessed for 2000 years. This is not to argue about. Before you begin to assert new theological trends, you should know what the church lived and taught for many centuries before you were thought of.”¹⁸⁶ This certainly holds true in both senses for MCSA today.

Some critical areas to address this problem may be:

- (1) Methodist training ministers need to have the opportunity to study (without fear) other cultural identities (not merely be placed in a different cultural environment without adequate preparation as is the practice today).
- (2) A uniting Southern African theology will help to overcome the obvious problems of finance, which has the potential to influence the quality of education for ministers.

Richardson, highlighting the ecumenical training partnerships and comparing ministerial training in 1967 to that in 2007, is helpful: “There was also significant financial benefit to the churches and universities in this co-operative arrangement in the sharing of human resources. In the South African context, the historic universities have always been state universities, financed by the central government. Each university student is subsidised, especially by way of the salaries of the academic staff being paid by the state. The Methodist Church was later to make good use of this opportunity in its partnership with Rhodes University.

¹⁸⁶ Wainwright quote in Storey : 2004: 18

By contrast, seminaries that stand alone pay dearly for their autonomy – some may call it isolation. They must pay the full cost of the education of their ministerial students, from physical facilities and living expenses to the salaries of academic and support staff. This was a burden that was to weigh heavily on ministerial training in Southern Africa in future years. In summary, then, the early partnership between churches and universities in the education and training of ministers opened up rich benefits – financial, educational, and ecumenical.”¹⁸⁷

Therefore, it may be that a clearer understanding and implementation of Wesley’s quadrilateral, will enable Methodists to be relevant and critical in the light of Scripture.

The uniqueness of Methodist witness in Southern Africa therefore needs to continue to be undergirded by a dualism of ‘study’ and action’ (doing) for this is its strongest legacy.

(6.1.2) “A Merging of Faith and Works”:

Wesley’s concepts of faith are not new.

In many respects his views have much in common with the Reformers, in searching for understanding of what it means to be Christian. Hudson asserts that in the 18th century, Christian spirituality was expressed in two

¹⁸⁷ Richardson : Article : Ministerial Training and Theological Education in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: has it hit the wall, or is there a road ahead? Missionalia Vol 35 2007: 2

principal traditions: the monastic/meditative tradition and the missionary tradition¹⁸⁸.

For Wesley there was a fusion of these two elements. Personal piety and social responsibility went hand in hand. This widely accepted view has given rise to the debate between faith and works. However, Wesley was always clear that works of piety devoid of mercy are empty. He also knew that works of mercy that are not grounded in piety soon come to naught.

Therefore, a similarity can be drawn in the creative tension between faith and works. “Wesley identified this tension as the key to authentic discipleship and “the genius of Wesley’s pastoral direction of the Methodist societies came from his ability to facilitate the keeping of this tension between what God does for us and what we do for God. He knew that grace was opposed to earning but it was not opposed to human effort.”¹⁸⁹

In terms of the MCSA, this tension has largely been redefined, as can be seen, amongst others, in three key areas:

(a) In 18th Century Methodism, “the Class Meeting was a masterstroke of organization. Inspired by a sea captain with the limited goal of raising monies for the Bristol chapel, the idea of placing all Methodists in small, accountable groups was seized upon by Wesley as the ideal instrument to nurture new converts and grow mature Christians.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Hudson : Chapter – Wesleyan Spirituality in Malinga & Richardson , 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 98

¹⁸⁹ Hudson – Chapter : Wesleyan Spirituality in Malinga & Richardson, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 101

¹⁹⁰ Storey : 2004: 21

In this sense, this structure was highly effective in building a disciplined, Christ centred, accountable, movement.

However, in most Methodist Societies in the MCSA Connexion today, Classes meet briefly after a Sunday service. This in itself is understandable as many of the class members have to travel great distances, often on foot, to get to worship on a Sunday morning and therefore find it difficult to meet during the week. Nonetheless, until now, little has been done, with regard to Wesley's intention with Classes, to grow spiritually. The current classes, in most cases, meet to collect the 'pledge' (a giving system where the amount required to retain membership by the individual is pre-determined by the Leaders Meeting.)

This situation has occurred for many reasons, but has not been helped by the MCSA's move toward a more Institutionalised church. The cost of running such a 'top heavy' structure has exacerbated the already tenuous situation regarding the meeting of classes to collect money, rather than focus on spiritual growth. This is in total contrast to the idea Wesley had for his class meetings. Storey asserts that this structure was so effective in building the movement, that "the Communist Party imitated it to great effect in the 20th Century in the form of their 'cell' system."¹⁹¹ It was this system, in the main, for Wesley, which facilitated the road to perfection. Accountability was the key to the Class meeting and the fruits of his perfection were evidenced

¹⁹¹ Storey : 2004: 30

in an individual's Christian action, both in the life of the individual and in works of mercy.

Christian Perfection in the MCSA, has for many years, as was asserted previously, been influenced by the struggle for political and social freedom within the MCSA. Thus, the Methodist emphases of personal growth have been seriously influenced by concepts of liberation. Storey asserts, "Methodism was forged in struggle, and owes its beginnings, not to academic theorists, but to courageous pioneers with a passion for mission. This too, is our heritage in South Africa. We need to be reminded of the heroic men and women who brought Methodism to our shores."¹⁹²

Nevertheless, at the same time, this statement does little to reflect on the theological influences of the political and social struggles. In other words, there is a distinct difference between the 'struggle' of evangelical missionaries and the liberation 'struggles' for cultural, political and social freedoms.

Thus, it seems, that the uniqueness of Methodism in South Africa is not only found in the academic classroom, but rather in its ability to awaken its members to a life of struggle against the oppression of sin, both in the individual and in the social and moral arenas of life. The Class meeting was designed to help facilitate this.

(b) Early Methodism, both in Britain and South Africa, was remarkably able to be flexible and adopt appropriate strategies to spread the Gospel and build the movement. Open-air preaching was one example. Undertaken unwillingly

¹⁹² Storey : 2004: : 32

by Wesley, at the urging of that prince of preachers, George Whitfield, 'field-preaching' grew to be his most potent weapon in reaching the unlettered, un-churched masses.

This was unique and cost effective, but was also theologically effective. Wesley's was not on buildings or Institutional structures, rather on the growth and development of believers. This is not to say that Wesley himself was 'liberated' from the structures of the Institutionalised church. He remained a faithful churchman until his death. Change in structures and work within them came second to the transformation of the believer.

(c) Wesley's Connexional structure in 18th Century England highlighted, albeit it indirectly, the concept of how an Institutional structure can affect a church's mission work.

The early mission strategies, unique to Methodism, and in particular to the MCSA, were seriously affected and influenced by the training of ministers and the institutionalisation of the MCSA.

Storey asserts: "The Wesleyan insistence on 'connexionalism' - the governing of the entire movement (later to become a denomination) by one Annual Conference - set Methodism apart from other denominations which are arranged either on diocesan or congregational lines."¹⁹³

The idea in this model is to facilitate mission by freeing up local societies (churches) from potential 'stuckness' such as laborious meetings and the common slowness of decision making as affects development of the society. In

¹⁹³ Storey : 2004: 22

other words, to allow the energy of the local church to be spent on a missional focus.

The current struggles of institutionalisation within the MCSA, in this regard, as they oscillate between the effectiveness of tri annual and annual conferences, are perhaps signs of the lack of common and uniting understandings of evangelism and mission, essentially between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists, on the one hand, and a 'liberation' hangover from the struggles against apartheid and colonialism on the other.

A return to Methodist institutional roots may not be possible unless clarification of these terms is dealt with sufficiently. However, what is central to the MCSA and its relevance to its members today, is the notion that for Wesley that structures were crucial, but subservient to mission.

(6.1.3) A Combination of Lay and Clergy:

Another unique feature of Methodism is the use of laypersons and clergy in proclaiming the gospel.

In early Methodism in Southern Africa, the power of indigenous preachers drawn from the ranks of early converts made significant contributions to the evangelic mission.

Storey cites, that some of the most effective Methodist preachers (today known as Local Preachers) in the earlier years were "Black converts who did

not pause to seek permission, but preached out of the authority of their life-changing experience.”¹⁹⁴

Much in the same way as Class meetings, Local Preachers in many Methodist Societies have formed power bases for inner church political action. And as result, Local Preachers are often held with suspicion by ministers serving in those Societies.

The question that needs examination, in this regard, is how much this state of affairs is exacerbated by the liberation struggle. For example, one of the main reasons forwarded for the need of a Presiding Bishop, (a station of one ‘chief’ Bishop created in the MCSA,) is to bring clarity on the Presiding Bishop’s standing as leader of the MCSA in meetings with government officials.

However, the most disturbing aspect of institutionalism remains the impact of a very expensive structure on the very poorest of its members. A common opinion, particularly among the poorer societies in the MCSA, today is that the MCSA has now become a church for the wealthy.

(6.1.4) “Uniformed Missionaries”:

One of the most enduring and visible signs of Methodist identity in Southern Africa are the uniformed movements, such as the Women’s Manyano, Wesley Guild and the Young Men’s Guild. These uniformed movements played a part in inculcating a sense of identity and solidarity for Methodist converts in Southern Africa. Much like the BMC, as stated above, a uniform

¹⁹⁴ Storey : 2004: 21

set people apart as believers and allowed, in the case of women, who were and still are to certain extent silenced, a platform for silent or verbal statement.

These uniforms, as with the BMC, for the most part undergird a need for African cultural expression and are therefore, in many senses, theological statements.

The uniformed movements are also places of refuge, essentially for the struggle against apartheid, however, a question remains today of their ability and willingness to remain true to the building of unity within the MCSA and further as the evangelical tool they originally started out to be.

One reality of the impact institutionalisation has been, in contrast to the flexibility of Methodism's early organization as evangelical movement in South Africa, one which has had a fossilizing effect. The MCSA of the 20th Century in Southern Africa has become much more staid and inflexible and even the uniformed organisations have not escaped.

The attempt to reconcile Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists and the need for a uniting theology, which allows the MCSA to face the future, is complex but critical to the MCSA's witness.

Attempts have been made to rediscover the uniqueness of the Methodist witness. Storey¹⁹⁵ highlights, amongst others, the struggle for the MCSA to gain greater awareness of its English theological roots as seen in the Journey to the New Land 1991, which called for a deepened spirituality for all the people in the life of the MCSA; attempted to direct the life and

¹⁹⁵ Storey 2004: 24ff

mission of the MCSA toward mission rather than maintenance; the rediscovery of “every member ministry” or “the priesthood of all believers”; a commitment to fully express what it means “to be one so that the world may believe”; a re-emphasis on servant-leadership and discernment as the MCSA’s model for leadership and decision-making and the setting free of the ordained ministry for their primary vocation of preaching, teaching and spiritual guidance.

But his assertion that these initiatives “met with much institutional resistance”¹⁹⁶ which caused them to falter, is only partly accurate, as the full impact of the tension between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism is highlighted and continues to this day.

Each of these issues raised above are potential papers on their own, however, the key here is that the issues of Institutionalisation and training of Ministers for the ‘mission’ of the MCSA are deeply theological ones, deriving from the experience of colonisation, cultural identity, the struggle of for political and social liberation.

Put another way, in terms of the discovery of what Methodist witness and mission means in the ‘new’ South Africa, the MCSA should pause to reflect on the mistakes of the past, especially with regard to cultural identity, in order that Southern African Methodists can themselves define a truly authentic Methodist ethos and if the MCSA is to avoid a repetition of mistakes made in

¹⁹⁶ Storey 2004: 26

the past, white Methodist theologians can no longer prescribe what it means to be Christian in Africa.

Chapter Seven

A Way Forward:

The statement ‘finding an authentic uniting Southern African Methodist theology’ is a brave one.

Firstly, the historical influences which arose from the journey to political freedom, for both Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists in Southern Africa, as well as the ongoing struggle for cultural liberation within the MCSA are, in a sense, compounded by the world struggle for Methodists to find their identity. Secondly, it may be argued that the theological development that currently exists within the MCSA, whilst not yet able to be fully uniting, is in fact an authentically Southern African Methodist theology.

Thirdly, in terms of Wesley’s quadrilateral, there is a possibility that the differences between Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodist’s understanding of the terms experience, tradition and reason cannot be overcome.

Fourthly, the move to isolate rather than unite Liberation Theologies, have the potential to weaken the very concepts of praxis (doing), partly due to potential stagnation found in absorbed theoretical reflection (studying).

However, the term ‘authentically Southern African theologies,’ gives a face to a movement that attempts to indigenise and inculturate theology in Africa for Africans.

Generally, this movement “has sought to demonstrate the value of the African religious heritage and to build bridges between African heritage and the Christian faith.”¹⁹⁷

And whilst theologians, Reformed ones in particular, may find the term inculturation difficult, because for them, culture, just like all created things, is a quality broken by the power of sin, Crollius’s interpretation of inculturation namely: “the integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and causes innovation within this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal,”¹⁹⁸ is helpful.

This struggle is not new. For example, Gassmann in discussing the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Lima Peru, January 1982, highlights that they decided to launch a new study project under the title: ‘Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today. “For them the focus on the Nicene Creed was justified by using the argument that it is the most widely accepted symbol of faith in both Western and Eastern Christianity, that it was in early church history an expression of the unity of the church, and that it has been received by many churches as an expression and summary of the fundamental articles of faith. Arguably,

¹⁹⁷ Paas: 2006: 158

¹⁹⁸ Crollius : 1982: 54

these facts support the claim for the basic significance of this Creed for the ecumenical task of manifesting the unity of Christ's church.”¹⁹⁹

In the MCSA today, a similar study project, with regard to the inculturation, would not only be helpful and long overdue, but in line with Wesley and a tiny handful of friends who held the first Methodist Conference in 1744.

There were three items on the agenda: What to teach? How to teach? What to do?

Those men also were engaged, like many Methodists today, in a search for identity. They were engaged in controversy with, amongst others, issues on important doctrinal assertions. They were attacked by detractors. They were working, for the most part, separately and needed to know where they stood, and where those who might join them would be standing too.

However, the questions they asked were intensely practical questions. They were about doctrinal issues surrounding justification, quietism and the established church, but they had a missionary slant.

It was not: “What to believe?” But : “What, and how, to teach, and what to do? How to regulate the common life of those who respond to the teaching?” And “these were men under compulsion: they had been taken over by a deep conviction of the grace of God and were under obedience to live out its implications and proclaim it for others.” ²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Gassmann: 1994 : 94

²⁰⁰ Beck : Chapter: A Retrospect: in Meeks, 1985, The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition :209

So then, can the teaching and life of John Wesley contribute to the struggle of post apartheid MCSA and what it means to be a Christian in South Africa today?

Some scholars, such as Storey, may argue that the key to a Methodist reawakening in Southern Africa may be found in Wesley's ideas of holiness. "This is where we have the crucial divide from both Luther and Calvin. For them holiness can only be *imputed*, that means, by grace God regards us as holy, even though we are not. For Wesley, holiness is *imparted*, that means, by grace God makes us holy, where once we were not."²⁰¹ This statement, taken in this light, may awaken faith by works. But in reality can only be understood in the complete sense of Wesley's theological method namely his quadrilateral.

In other words, holiness on Wesley's terms is both *imputed* and *imparted*. Imputed by justification and imparted by faithfulness and experience (full sanctification). It is possible then, that the issue here is not so much on about salvation, but about becoming more Christ-like, and thus to experience the full potential of our relationship with God. Thus, full sanctification encompasses both justification and sanctification. And full sanctification is so much more than simply a question of good works. In terms of the MCSA, can this theological development continue to be 'camouflaged' under the auspices of socio-political awareness only? The

²⁰¹ Storey : Chapter : Why In the World Would You Want to be a Methodist If You're Not A Wesleyan? in Richardson & Malinga: 2005: Rediscovering Wesley for Africa: 15

potential for a schism is by no means over and is very much a latent reality in the life of the MCSA today.

Evidence of this may be found, at the risk of reading too much into statistics, in the development Christianity in Southern Africa. “Whilst Christianity in South Africa, as a percentage of the population, has increased from 46.7% (of 6 million people in 1911) to 79.8% (of 44.8 million in 2001), membership of the Methodist denomination dropped from 10.3% to 7.3% respectively. This decline cannot be attributed only to the estimated 815 000 Whites, of which, at least, 180 000 are Methodists, who have emigrated as a result of not being able to find work in South Africa. Many Methodists, as much as 900, 000, have left the Church to join the African Independent Churches or Zion Christian Church, both having experienced phenomenal growth in recent times.”²⁰²

So again, the question arises: What does Wesley have to say to Methodism in Southern Africa today and particularly with regard to the issue of cultural identity?

This paper will attempt to look at some key areas, which may provide a way forward. But first of all:

Is the search for an authentic uniting Southern African Methodist Theology valid?:

There can be little discussion of authenticity with regard to Southern African Methodist theology without recognising the influence of colonialism on

²⁰² New Dimension: June 2007 Edition

African cultural and religious 'ontology' on the one hand, and the development and impact of liberative and liberation theologies on the other. These influences are highly complex but at the same time closely linked. Antonio, in his examination of inculturation cites:

"I simply want to posit 'Colonial Christendom' as a complex and largely positive relation between colonialism and Christianity."²⁰³

The obvious, albeit speculative, question arises: would liberative and liberation theologies have developed in the MCSA had it not been for colonialism?

Whilst Fundamental Methodists and others may argue this point, the influences of the struggle for African theological freedom underlie many current decisions of the MCSA.

For example, one of the unofficial reasons cited currently within the MCSA for plans to move the John Wesley College from Kilnerton to Pietermaritzburg, is the influence of Reformed Theology, (namely, those institutions where Methodist training ministers have access to for further academic studies which the MCSA does not provide at present.)

In a sense, this state of affairs highlights the struggle for a uniting theological development in the MCSA and, at the same time, points to the MCSA's understanding of a unique witness in Southern Africa.

So, how then can there be a way forward to avert any potential schism within the MCSA?

²⁰³ Antonio :2006:12

Perhaps some parallels can be drawn, with regard to the need for theology to be dynamic, between Reformed theology and Wesleyan theology.

As has been highlighted earlier in this paper, there is an ecumenical drive within the MCSA. A question arises: can this drive potentially have a fossilising effect on the essentially evangelical methodology of Methodism, particularly in Southern Africa?

Jurgen Moltmann's words draw attention to part of the intention of Reformed theology and by implication the 'stuckness' that has taken place within Reformed theology. "Reformed Theology is reforming theology and the question, 'what is Reforming Theology?' is asked repeatedly by theologians."²⁰⁴

This is typical of Reformed Theology, for, unlike Lutheran theology with its *Book of Concord*, it should be grounded in confessional statements laid down finally, nor is it based on a tradition of infallible and irreformable papal doctrinal decisions, as is Roman Catholic Theology. It is grounded in the "reformation of the church 'according to the Word of God' attested in Holy Scripture which is to be confessed anew in each new situation....Reformed Theology is, as its name testifies, nothing other than reformatory theology (*Reformatorsche Theologie*), theology of permanent reformation."²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Moltmann : Chapter: *Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda* in Wills & Welker : *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions*: 1999: 120

²⁰⁵ Ibid: 121

The parallel to this view of Wesleyan theology, few would argue, is that the importance, for Wesley, is that theology does not only live in the past and on definitive doctrinal assertions, but is dynamic and able to move a believer forward to perfection. Experience, in Wesley's quadrilateral, is key for theology to remain dynamic.

If the intention of Reformed Theology is to constantly reform and Wesley's theology is seen as dynamic, then the impact of liberative and Liberation Theologies in Methodism were precisely for that purpose: to move the MCSA to a place of reform (embrace the future.)

However, the MCSA, now stands in a new era.

It is now when questions, such as the authority of Scripture as understood to be relevant for all cultures; the critical examination of church tradition, recognising that African tradition has a role to play in the development of the church; the broadening of the understanding of the term experience in the sense that Western experience is not the only relevant form of experience and the application of reason to sensible interpretation, are to be intentionally dealt with.

In light of this, it is no easy matter to find a way forward and the road is filled with obstacles and challenges.

This, however, is not something unique or new to Methodism.

De Gruchy asserts, “the major challenge with which Christians of all traditions are confronted today, is the struggle for “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.”²⁰⁶

In this sense, this does not mean that the potentially divisive confessional issues of the past are no longer of theological consequence and not in need of resolution. Nor does it mean that the challenge presented to Christian faith by post-Enlightenment has been laid to rest. On the contrary, there is a fundamental connection with the struggles with post-Enlightenment heritages.

In terms of the MCSA, the challenges that Liberationist Methodists pose focuses, not on the development of theologies or their methodology or empirical attributes alone, but on the human oppression and suffering to which they respond.

These challenges are, amongst others, poverty, racism, sexism and cultural dominance, all of which are challenges to all who call themselves Christians and all of which are a worldwide challenge to the Church.

In addition, “this challenge differs qualitatively from the challenge presented to Reformed theology by other historic confessional theologies.”²⁰⁷ If one is to look further, then Wesley’s views on predestination, for example, challenged theology not to change fundamental symbols of faith, nor commitment to the public sphere, but like much of Liberation Theology’s challenge to theology

²⁰⁶ De Gruchy : Chapter : Toward a Reformed Theology of Liberation: A Retrieval of Reformed Symbols in the Struggle for Justice in Willis & Welker: 1999: Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions : 103

²⁰⁷ Ibid: 106

today, “rather to express that commitment from the perspective and in the interests of those who are the victims of oppressive power.”²⁰⁸ In this sense, these are similar to some oppressive theological tenets of the Church of England during colonialism.

The search for an authentic Southern African Methodist theology is without doubt complex, however part of the answer for this paper may be found in an examination of some key areas:

(7.1.) Liberating Hermeneutic:

Wesleyan theology, as with Liberation Theology, and theology in general, should be understood as essentially an attempt to restate the Biblical message within ever-changing historical contexts and thus their concern, though their method may differ, is primarily hermeneutical.

For Fundamentalist Methodists, Scripture and its interpretation is the first act. The life of the believer is thus mapped out and Scripture governs all facets of life.

For the Liberationist, the interpretation of Scripture is the second act, the first being the context of the oppressed or, in other words, a liberating hermeneutic must recognize the dilemma of the oppressed and, in the case of the MCSA, work within an epistemological framework which finds its place in social and cultural injustices.

²⁰⁸ De Gruchy : Chapter : Toward a Reformed Theology of Liberation: A Retrieval of Reformed Symbols in the Struggle for Justice in Willis & Welker: 1999: Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions : 108

A new, albeit well entrenched and enduring, dilemma today for the MCSA has to do with cultural domination and the legacies of colonialism.

Whilst Fundamentalist Methodists may forbear the idea that some areas of the theological process may precede others, such as context preceding Scripture, they may need to be reminded that the foundation of their epistemological framework has similarities to those of the Liberationist.

In other words, Wesley's liberating hermeneutic was primarily with regard to the institution namely the Church of England. Wesley brought new dimensions to the theological conversation, but at the same time, his theological method opened the way for experience to be an authoritative source for understanding the Word and work of God.

Wesley's method was revolutionary and liberating in its time but with time many Methodists have gradually replaced Scripture as 'institution.' In other words, in many Methodist congregations today, Scripture remains authoritative, but tradition and reason have gradually taken a back seat and experience has almost been thrown out all together.

It must be stated, once again, that for Wesley, Scripture was the primary source of authority, but his matrix of reason, experience and tradition was used extensively for interpreting the work and Word of God.

Thus, when Wesley speaks of "tradition", he does not merely refer to ancient Church Tradition and the writings of the great theologians and Church Fathers of days past, but also of the immediate and present theological

influences which contribute to a person's understanding of God and Christian theology.

Tradition in this sense may include such influences as beliefs and values and is mainly used when referring to church or religious tradition.

It may also include the instruction of one's family and upbringing, also various beliefs and values which one encounters outside of 'religion', which may or may not have an effect on one's understanding of Scripture.

In this sense, African cultural identity in the MCSA, as was shown earlier in this paper, was and still is oppressed. But is, at the same time, part of a person's or community's experience.

A question then is: how can Wesley's theological method liberate the cultural identity of the MCSA?

On the one hand, in the MCSA, as was cited previously in this paper, there is a call from the Presiding Bishop of the MCSA to discover a grass roots African Methodist theology. The interpretation of this statement may be that this theology should be an ongoing search not for only for identity, but for a uniting and sustainable way of Methodists in Southern Africa being together.

However, the struggle with the statement's language, namely African Methodist theology, suggests exclusivity. Perhaps the term Southern African Methodist theology may be more inclusive and accurate.

Nevertheless, the search should not call for compromise between the two different streams within the MCSA, but should be for an authentic

epistemological framework in which the key theological understandings of both streams are continually engaged.

Only Southern African Methodists can do this for the MCSA, because Southern African Methodist's face a unique context.

Moreover, in the MCSA, theological development has and always will consist of 'doing' in dynamic tension with 'studying.'

In this sense, Lewis is helpful as he describes an encounter with an pilot during a talk on theology as the "science of God,"²⁰⁹ that he gave to the Royal Air Force. "I've no use for all that stuff. But mind you, I'm a religious man too. I know there's a God. I've felt Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's why I don't believe in all your neat little dogma's and formula's about Him."²¹⁰

The key in Lewis's understanding in this encounter, is likening theology to a map. A map based on "the experience of hundreds of people who were really in touch with God."²¹¹ A map, in his view, which has the potential to move a person from experience to a connection with God, Christian tradition and Scripture.

In this sense, experience is never on its own authoritative. In the interaction of Wesley's quadrilateral, Gunter is helpful, "whether we are aware of it or not, doctrinal assertions and assumptions inform almost every pronouncement we make the moment we move from the actual reading of

²⁰⁹ Lewis: 1955: 130

²¹⁰ Ibid: 130

²¹¹ Ibid: 131

the text. The question is not whether we have doctrine, but what kind of doctrine do we have?”²¹²

This is, in essence, at the ‘heart and soul’ of Methodism.

Methodism was never intended for the classroom only.

For example, Storey asserts, “that those who advance an uncritical *Africanisation*, forget how difficult and costly it was for the MCSA to separate itself from, and reject some significant elements of its historic white English culture, because the faithfulness of the MCSA’s witness against white domination involved escaping from those imprisoning elements.”²¹³ However, as has been argued in this paper, mending this separation is far from complete.

Olivier asserts about the Methodist witness that “...it is African truth because it is universal truth. It is appropriate for Africa because it is appropriate everywhere. It is true for our time because it is true for all time.”²¹⁴

But this is where difficulties arise in the MCSA.

Storey argues that “the Gospel stands above all cultures and the sixty million Methodists around the world who embrace Wesleyan teaching do so, not primarily, because it fits their culture, but because it speaks the Gospel word of challenge to all cultures, including their own, holding out the promise that every culture can be radically transformed to be more like that Gospel.”²¹⁵

²¹² Gunter : 2005 : 62

²¹³ Storey : 2004: 84

²¹⁴ Olivier: Chapter: The Wesleyan Heritage Planted on African Soil in Richardson & Malinga, 2005, Rediscovering Wesley for Africa : 5

²¹⁵ Storey : 2004: 85

It seems that there is an impasse here.

For Liberationists and Fundamentalists alike, cultural identity may be the ‘new’ oppressor. For example, for the most part it seems Fundamentalist Methodists are happy that the Gospel is above all cultures because in their opinion, their culture is ‘more’ in line with the Gospel. Therefore, in their understanding, other cultures are in need of reform.

Liberationist Methodists, on the other hand, may feel that such an ‘attack’ on their culture is a continuation of ‘colonialism.’

Without going into too much detail, cultural development may be seen as the by-product of consistent behavior.

In other words, culture, (from the Latin, *cultura*, stemming from *colere*, ‘to cultivate’,) generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Cultures can be understood as systems of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another.

Williams asserts that culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation.

Culture has been called “the way of life for an entire society.”²¹⁶

As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, and norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief. Cultural

²¹⁶ Williams : 1976: 87ff

anthropologists most commonly use the term 'culture' to refer to the universal human capacity and activities to classify, codify and communicate their experiences materially and symbolically. Cultures have developed over centuries, and like theology, are dynamic. Therefore, it is questionable whether it is sensible or possible that a culture can merely be changed because it's a good idea or even for religious conviction?

Barth is helpful, "whether as creators, as beneficiaries of culture, we all participate in it as persons responsible for it. We can exercise no abstinence towards it, even if we want to."²¹⁷

Without doubt one of the most serious challenges to theology today is the place of domination in all its forms such as racism, sexism, cultural identity and the world ecological crisis.

However, understanding the sources of domination is not an easy task. The most common view is that domination is related to power as domination, or the capacity to dominate.

This taken to mean that there are perceptions that power is a possession, that it is applied only externally, and that it is occasional and discretionary. This concept of power as a possession lends itself to a quantitative, zero-sum analysis, as if power could be stored like money in the bank--and more power for one party would mean less for another. When one then thinks of this view of power, in terms of its occasional, discretionary and external

²¹⁷ Barth: 1961:51

exercise, one might imagine parties locked in conflict, each seeking to overcome or resist the other or to negotiate a balance of powers.

Pasewark, in contrast to this view, depicts power not as potentiality or actuality, nor as internal or external, but as “the communication of efficacy at the borders of encounter.”²¹⁸

His redefinition focuses on encounter and relates power to each of the usual polarities while refusing to centre it in either.

Power is, ethically speaking, aimed at the widest, deepest communication of efficacy.

Nonviolent action, for example, then can allow more expressions of power than violent conquest can. While this analysis of power is broader in scope than political analysts tend to be, it has political implications.

Leaders and political systems, for example, may have their power diminished by people's resistance and withdrawal of consent, which takes away efficacy.

In other words, the impasse between Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists may not necessarily be one built on the desire for power as an external possession of the divine truth, as is the current perception. But rather one which centres on the issues of the efficiency of communicating God's work and Word in the world. A world in which different peoples have different ways of living and ultimately, for this paper, is Christian Perfection

²¹⁸ Pasewark, 1992, 336

not about communicating how a person or community can understand God's work and Word in world?

It must be noted that the essence of the Liberation Hermeneutic is to build on the rich tradition of theology not to replace it. This then has much in common with part of Wesley's theological method.

In this sense, Wesley's ideas of Christian Perfection, namely faithfulness and experience, find a resonance with Liberation Theology. Wesley was not a liberation theologian in the strictest sense, but his method stood and still stands for the reforming of what it means to be a child of God.

In this he is much a 'liberation theologian.'

Put another way, Wesley's hermeneutic is liberating, in the sense of moving a believer to a place of Christian Perfection.

Thus, the question arises: can Wesley's hermeneutic possibly enable the MCSA to find a uniting authentically Southern African Methodist theology?

The answer is complex and this paper seeks to offer a potential epistemological framework which may provide a way forward.

Due to the length of this paper, the methodology will be to identify some key areas, namely, religion and spirituality, learned ministry and liberation through grace.

(7.1.1) Religion and Spirituality

It is difficult to find a definition of African Religion and Spirituality. This is not unique. There as many variations of Western Christianity as well as

cultural identities. One of the most common and general understandings of the term 'spirituality' is the relationship of a person or a community to God. This is perhaps one of the most critical areas of communication efficiency between Fundamentalist and Liberation Methodist in the MCSA.

Mosala cites, that in order to understand the relevance of African traditional religion, one must comprehend the significance of culture; "To speak of a people's religion is to speak of their history, and to speak of their history is to speak of their culture."²¹⁹

African traditional religions in many ways reflect the point at which the historical development of the Africans was arrested and halted. One of the basic problems, he observes, was that early missionaries "theologized according to their own cultural frames of reference."²²⁰

However, part of the MCSA's struggle today lies in the formation of an authentically Southern African Methodist theology.

Without doubt, integrated liberation motifs will continue to play a part in the life of the MCSA as much as fundamental ontology will continue to seek to maintain the status quo particularly in terms of resisting cultural identity.

As membership wanes and the MCSA faces future institutional challenges, including the training of ministers and asks of it role in a new political and social dispensation; a question should be posed and engaged with much

²¹⁹ Mosala: 1986: 64

²²⁰ Ibid : 65

vigour: What is to become of Methodism in Southern Africa and particularly the Doctrine of Christian Perfection?

The answer to this question is complex, but a starting point involves examining some key areas:

(a) African scholars for the most part struggle with what they refer to as the Western term, 'religion.'

For Kapolyo, this term is probably misapplied to sub-Saharan Africans. For them there is no word for religion. "There are words for 'praising God' (*ukulumbanya Lesa*), 'serving God' (*ukubombela Lesa*) and 'thanking God' (*ukutotda Lesa*), but there is no word for religion."²²¹

Mbiti admits that defining African religion is not an easy task, "For Africans are notoriously religious . . . religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it."²²²

Guma asserts that, Africans (Black) in their religious practice believed and continue to do so, that religion is nothing more than human beings' spontaneous awareness and response to a Living power, 'Wholly Other' and infinitely greater than him/herself (or any other creation), a *mysterium tremendum et fascians*, a Power mysterious, because though unseen, yet it is present and urgent. "To an African, this Power mysterious was and is and shall always be present. All things come into being through this Power and without it nothing would have come into being; it is this Power mysterious, which invokes that which is divine in human beings,

²²¹ Kapolyo :2005: 125

²²² Mbiti: 1969: 19

seeking to reconcile the fallen nature and bring it back into a living communion with self and everything around. It is this communion which reveals the presence of this Living Power which is the source of all created things.”²²³

And in this sense, religion is related to culture in that African traditional religion is not a thing of the past; it affects the lives of many, even of those who would deny that it influences their lives. Dickson argues that, “though traditional culture *has* been affected by various forces such as western literary education, money economy, industrialization, Christianity, Islam, and so on, there is a greater inclination among the literate classes now, than perhaps thirty years ago, to identify with African traditional culture.”²²⁴

According to African tradition, religion is fundamentally the channel or medium through which human beings relate to the ONE who was from Ancient of Days; umvelinqangi-motlhodi, (the source of being); hlahlaha - (whose origin) macholo is not known; through whom humankind and deity are linked and spiritual relationship is established. For Africans, religion cannot be placed into a systematic category separated from other entities in life.

For Kapolyo, things like migrations, similarity in kinship systems, wars, famines, witchcraft eradication movements, intertribal trade all combined to ensure cross-fertilization of ideas and practices, but this recognition does not

²²³ Guma : 1997: 4

²²⁴ Dickson: Chapter : The Methodist Witness and the African Situation; in Runyon : 1981: Sanctification and Liberation; 205

amount to a promulgation of a religious system, which can be systematized around a particular theme.

He strongly resists the calling of the collection of ‘traditional beliefs, attitudes and practices’ of African peoples a religion. For him the isolation of beliefs in deities and the whole spiritual side of human existence is a Cartesian creation imposed on a description of African experiences. “The Enlightenment demands classification.”²²⁵

These views make any meaningful dialogue between African and Western understanding difficult, but not impossible.

One possible bridge based on a mutual acceptance that, one of the major weaknesses of Christianity, Liberation Theologies assert, “is precisely because it is ‘a classroom religion’ which is often removed from praxis and therefore African spirituality fits into the inner person, into the deep culture that is the locus of the vision of life, and where it naturally belongs.”²²⁶

For Methodists, who understand the Wesley’s two part principle of Christian Perfection, namely faithfulness and experience, this understanding will resonate strongly, in that Christian Perfection is a way of life, much the same as African Religion is a way being (doing) and a way of learning (studying).

In other words, religion, as subject to human kinds search for God, should as such be the vehicle which allows people to know and find God rather than the object of their search.

²²⁵ Kapolyo: 2005: 114

²²⁶ Taylor: 1963: 22

These views are in contrast to Calvinism's strong need to return to Scripture as the primary and critical source of Christian theology, but in line with Wesley's views on religious experience and his understanding of Christian Perfection.

Experience, as a total concept of a person's life, both religious and non religious, is the key to a life of faith in which a person or community of people will understand the Word and work of God in their lives. After all is that not the divine intention?

The engagement with cultures other than the believer's own, has the potential to unlock new understandings of God's work and Word in the lives of all believers.

(b) Traditional African spirituality does not maintain a dichotomy between spiritual and secular values as no distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for Nature and the Unseen are inseparably involved in one another, in a total community.

Therefore, many Western theological concepts, such as sin of the individual, as understood by Fundamentalist Methodists, struggle to find relevance in Liberationist Methodism, for whom sin is never considered, let alone treated, in isolation.

Contrary to Western Christian practice, sin is treated as part of the person within the context of the community, and in traditional African spirituality, includes both the people alive, and the spirits of the ancestors.

Remarkably, there appears to be almost universal evidence of an understanding of a rift between God and human beings that led to the prevalence of death, loss of happiness, and immortality. Characteristically, the explanation is always in terms of what people did to annoy God, which caused him to withdraw from human society: they disobeyed his word, some event occurred or there was a division between heaven and earth. There is, however, a conspicuous lack of even a hint of a reversal of the tragedy of the separation between God and his creatures in traditional African religion. There is no hint of salvation or Utopia in some distant future.

This is clearly another source of tension between Fundamentalist and Liberation Methodists and simple solutions are difficult.

However, in terms of this understanding, the human/God relationship, in this sense, may be closer to one of *suzerainty*.

In this relationship, a covenant is made between a king and a vassal, in which the vassal finds protection and security. However, “to make a covenant in no way infringes upon the sovereignty of the king. And yet, the covenant is not just an assertion of power over an inferior, as though the vassal were forced into obedience....great attention is given to the king's deeds of benevolence on behalf of the vassal, deeds which evoke a grateful obedience.”²²⁷

Some African scholars such as Guma and Tutu have referred to the term *Ubuntu*. Kapolyo cites in relation to a person, *Ubuntu* indicates “the

²²⁷ Anderson: 1957: 99

presence in one's life of such characteristics as kindness, charity and love of one's neighbour. It thus means the essence of being human, humanness. It describes humans as created by God."²²⁸ As was stated earlier in this paper, Van Niekerk suggests that this term be taken further to include the environment and God. *"I am because we are because I am because the physical-organic cosmic environment is and because God is."*²²⁹

However, African ontology is basically anthropocentric and God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance; "it is as if God exists for the sake of man."²³⁰

As with just about all myths of creation, this term is used to indicate the link between God as creator and provider of what was needed to sustain life. Yet in this view, the universe, including God, is used to explain the fact of *umuntu* (man) as the centre of creation. God although clearly acknowledged as the Creator, is never the centre of creation. Human beings fill the pride of creation and God is imported, as it were, to explain the origins of Umuntu (people). Similarly, the universe exists for the benefit of humans and their well-being.

Ambiguously, this remains one of the most serious cul-de-sacs in the otherwise rich thought and sensitive and religious feelings of African peoples, "it is perhaps here that we find the greatest weakness and poverty of our

²²⁸ Kapolyo : 2005: 50

²²⁹ Van Niekerk: Chapter : Sense Making Views, Approaches, Patterns and Orientations in Van Niekerk , 2008, UNISA Tutorial Letter 501/2008

²³⁰ Mbiti: 1969:92

traditional religions compared to world religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism.”²³¹ And much work needs to be done with regard to finding a common ground between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists in this regard. In a word, African religion has much more to do with Western religion than is often perceived.

Wesley asks, “what is religion then? It is an easy answer, if we consult the oracles of God. According to these, it lies in one single point; it is neither more nor less than love; it is love which 'is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment. Religion is the love of God and our neighbor; that is every man under heaven. This love ruling the whole life, animating all our tempers and passions, directing all our thoughts, words and actions, is 'pure religion and undefiled.’”²³²

In other words, authentic religion is in every sense about understanding God’s work and Word in the world.

The MCSA, free from political struggles, stands as never before in its history, the opportunity to allow Southern African Methodist expression of religion to come from both the Western and African experience.

How that experience is shaped, in the MCSA, has always been from partially traditional African spirituality. Even with the advent of the Black consciousness movement, scholars never intended to separate liberation theologies from African spiritualities.

²³¹ Mbiti: 1969 : 99

²³² Wesley : Works VII : 498

Ferm suggests, “it is important to underscore Boesak's insistence that African Theology and Black Theology should not be separated.” For him, in this sense, Boesak aligns “liberation struggles with the Reformers.”²³³

Dussel, in his exposition of pre-modern to liberation dialectics is helpful in this regard as he suggests that with regard to Latin American Liberation Theology, “a Latin American philosopher or theologian is first of all a Latin American, his or her theory grounded in Latin American praxis, that a methodology of Latin American liberation will be a *Latin American* methodology. That methodology is a second step, following upon an ethical conversion, in justice, to the Latin American other in his and her concrete history. A comprehensive Latin American, liberative, interpretative framework follows upon the open, dialectical liberation *movement* which seeks the liberation of the ‘negated being’ of the Latin American.”²³⁴

Therefore, an inclusive authentic uniting Southern African Methodist theology takes into consideration, amongst others, the significance of Scripture, reason, tradition and experience as part of a comprehensive experience leading to understanding God’s work and Word in the world and a living faith.

²³³ Ferm : 1986: 54

²³⁴ Dussel : 1998: 56

(7.1.2) “Learned Ministry”:

In Reformed churches, which formed Wesley’s background, the education of candidates for the ministry has always been regarded as extremely important.

Since 1559, when Calvin founded the Geneva Academy, the first model of a theological seminary in the Christian world, theological education in the Reformed churches has been kept at a high intellectual level or so it seemed. Wanatube asserts that “seminary students study essentials, amongst which is counted the ability to read Scripture in its original languages.”²³⁵

On the other hand, Medieval theological education was not systematized. Priests were usually promoted from the lower ranks and finally installed through the sacrament of ordination according to the principle of *ex opere operate*.

Accordingly, the sacrament of ordination was believed to have an objective effect. As no education, examination, or public inquiry of the candidate was necessary as preparation for ministry, most priests were uneducated.

In countries where Western missionaries brought the Christian message, including Southern Africa, Christian teaching was confronted with the indigenous classical literatures.

Inevitably, intellectual conflicts between different traditions were the order of the day as Christianity was planted in a new soil. Richardson asserts

²³⁵ Wanatube : Chapter - Reformed Theology in East and West in Wills & Welker, 1999, Toward the Future of Reformed Theology- Tasks Topics Traditions : 44

“(1867-1948) was the missionary era which was characterised by two main interfaces – the interface of cultures between Western Christianity and Africa, and the interface of power between British colonial authority and the loss of African autonomy.”²³⁶

As was seen earlier in this paper, in terms of the MCSA, there remained a dual system of education for training ministers, mainly due to colonial influences, until around the 1980’s. This in itself caused enormous tension and pain.

Richardson cites “the second era (1948-1990) saw the imposition of the notoriously oppressive political system known as apartheid. Overlapping with apartheid was the third era (1960-1990), that of resistance against apartheid, especially in the case of the churches that participated in ecumenical initiatives and structures such as the Church Unity Commission and the South African Council of Churches.”²³⁷

Today, however, in “the emerging post-apartheid era in which the churches are still trying to make sense of their new role in terms of culture, political profile and social influence,”²³⁸ a way forward may be to return to the development of a trained ordained ministry in Wesleyan heritage as well as the incorporation of African religious tenets.

²³⁶ Richardson: Ministerial Training and Theological Education in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: Has it hit the wall, or is there a road ahead? Missonalia Vol 35 2007: 1

²³⁷ Ibid: 3

²³⁸ Ibid :3

A learned ministry is still of importance to the development of theology in the MCSA, however, perhaps what is needed is an inclusive dynamic ministerial training programme, that allows for an inclusive development of ordained missionaries. Vika sums up the problem, “the emphasis on training of ministers for the African context arises from the fact that the majority of our ministers received training that is primarily informed by western models.”²³⁹ In a word, “in the present day it needs constantly to be affirmed that the reason for theological study is not some sort of intellectual ball-game, to be carried on for its own sake, and for mental stimulation. Theologians need to be concerned with the training of men and women to be effective Christian witnesses in varying contexts”²⁴⁰ – colonialism and its impact on theological development in the MCSA has taught that.

A key area for this would be Scripture:

Scripture:

One can never overemphasize the importance of Scripture to Wesley and both Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists in Southern Africa do not differ greatly on this point.

Nevertheless, a point of efficacy in communication between the two may be found in the methodology that is used in Biblical exegesis, the authority placed on Scripture and questions relating to ‘the God of history’ as found in Scripture, and the issue of experience as an authoritative source of theological method.

²³⁹ Vika: Chapter : From Maintenance to Mission in Bentley & Forster : 2008: Methodism in Southern Africa: 67

²⁴⁰ Cracknell & White: 2005 :

With regard to the authority of Scripture, Fundamentalist Methodists may be tempted to place Wesley into the “classical Protestantism” who understand the “living Word of God as recorded in the Scripture that is the final authority.”²⁴¹ However, Wesley’s method, to a large extent, belies that view.

There is a distinction here for Liberationist Methodists in that, like Gutierrez, they see Biblical exegesis as the second act and the historical situation of context, the first. Whilst it seems that there is a serious impasse here, there are several arguments which may be helpful to bring the two closer together.

Firstly, in other theological systems; theology develops logically from a basic theme or a so-called central dogma, for example, in Lutheran Theology the whole system centres on the Doctrine of justification by faith and grows from this principle.

Many may disagree that the central dogma of Reformed Theology is the doctrine of predestination, however since eternal predestination by God seems to precede everything, predestination has been treated before other items of systematic theology from the time of Theodore de Beze onward.

In light of the interpretation of Scripture leading to the formation of doctrines, Meeks asserts, that what was a duly constituted authority in establishing doctrine, was a particularly vexed one in the last medieval centuries and the Reformation period.

²⁴¹ Williams: 1960: 23

“Writing on the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England in 1579-8, Thomas Rogers speaks of the notion of an ‘ordinary power annexed to the state and calling of popes, bishops and clergyman,’ which guarantees right interpretation and right teaching. Luther had argued, along the same lines as Wycliffe, that no such special power is bestowed with orders, and the people of God in their local congregation have the right and the power to judge all teaching. Indeed, it is the duty of a Christian congregation to resist impositions upon them contrary to the teaching of Scripture.”²⁴²

For Liberationist Methodists, there is a dilemma when referring to the authority of Scripture.

“Since African people were not able to read and write in Western terms - not illiterate as described by missionaries, it remains true that they had no knowledge of the Western Bible. It can, therefore be debated that their knowledge of God was based on revelation. Revelation is something very spiritual because it cannot be explained but must be unfolded to be captured and retold through stories (oral tradition).”²⁴³

For them, nothing could be compared to Umvelinqangi. Motlhodi-modimo is the Living Power, the Source of all that is seen and unseen. This is God who is far beyond human comprehension. *KeMotlhodi* (the Source of being) *Hlaahlaha* whose (origin) *ke macholo* (is unknown, Ancient of Days... the *Alpha and Omega*), and taken seriously, African traditional religious practice has absolutely to do with African culture and Christian spirituality

²⁴² Meeks: 1985: 27

²⁴³ Guma : 1997: 6

has to do with missionary teachings. Accordingly, another distinction between Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodism emerges.

Wesley's theology does not assume the construction of a system developed deductively from a set of singular principles as done in Liberation Theology. His theology, whilst not systematic in itself, has a clear hearing, understanding, and applying of the biblical message through exegesis.

Hulley puts it like this: "Wesley uses all four sources of authority to show the various ways in which we may be sure that we are children of God. He used Scripture, traditional teachings of the church, experience — both of the individual and other Christians — and finally the power of reason to reinforce his argument."²⁴⁴

Liberationist Methodists, in this sense, rely much on experience, with Scripture as the second act with tradition and reason of significantly less importance.

A question arises, whether their theological assertions may or may not be enriched by inclusion of the two latter legs?

Williams is helpful as he asserts that at first sight it seems that "Wesley continually subjected tradition and experience to the "written Word of God" but "Wesley was far from being a conservative proof-texter, creating doctrine by pasting together texts from various parts of Scripture"²⁴⁵ , rather Wesley's phrase of *homo unibus* whilst a favorite with him, did not mean that he rejected all other writings as of no value.

²⁴⁴ Hulley : 1988: 4

²⁴⁵ Williams: 1960: 24

Would it be feasible to consider that Wesley may have included culture as part of tradition and experience today?

In countries where biblical narratives are less well-known, biblical exegesis and its application to relevant situations are not easy.

In Southern Africa and in the MCSA in particular, the training of ministers from early Methodism until the present exacerbated this situation. In a study of the Minutes of Conference from 1900 until approximately 1995, it is quite evident that there was a dual system of training for white and Black ministers. This was partly because colonialism saw itself as imparting one way of reasoning, one tradition, one understanding of experience and one way of looking at Scripture.

However, the question of how God reveals Himself and His position in the minds of different people in different contexts remains. In other words, is it correct to talk about God without clear references to Scripture?

Wanatube, quoted earlier in this paper, argues that Protestant overseas missions brought a new self-consciousness to the non-European world, where there were no concepts for “person” or “individual,” the result of the concept of the equality of all people before God. This new consciousness produced a revolution in societies, which had been ruled by convention and superstition.

In a word, looking solely at Scripture as a final authority may not be possible, as the MCSA’s theological journey and Wesley’s method highlights,

if theology is to be most relevant, and able to effectively engage, different contexts and cultures.

(1) Tradition, experience and reason form part of the readers 'lens' and therefore can never be laid aside.

(2) There are significant risks of domination in an attempt to lay aside the things which give a person meaning and place in the world, like culture and tradition. The past journey of the MCSA, as referred to in this paper, stands as a good example.

(3) In terms of the MCSA, religious and cultural domination is found in the form of unfairness and discrimination, thus there is little doubt that Black Methodists held the White Methodists understanding of Scripture with suspicion. If the White man's Bible, understood and exegeted by influences of late medieval Renaissance and then later affirmed by the Reformation, spoke of modern people's self awareness as different from others and separate from the masses, then when confronted by cultures in which a person's self awareness could only come from being part of community, then the efficacy of communication was part of that encounter.

Ferm asserts that one of the real problems in uncovering the native African religions is that a written African Theology has largely been a by-product of the introduction of the Bible by Western missionaries. "As late as the mid-1960s, Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria had chastised African theologians for their failure to relate Christianity to its African context, a charge later reinforced by John Mbiti of Kenya, who has said that 'the Church in Africa is a Church

without a theology and a Church without theological concern.’ Bengt Sundkler had earlier pleaded for an interpretation of Christianity that would be indigenous to the African situation: Theology in Africa has to interpret Christ in terms that are relevant and essential to African existence. A theologian who with the apostle Paul is prepared to become . . . unto Africans as African must start with the fundamental facts of the African interpretation of existence and the universe.”²⁴⁶

A key area here is experience, both inside and outside experiential field, mode and dimensions of faith.

In other words, what is deemed to be a Western experience is not the only kind of experience in which God’s self revelation is made possible. Would it not be arrogant and misleading for any assertion to be made in this regard?

Therefore, Methodism in Southern Africa can no longer rely solely upon Western understandings of faithfulness and experience, but meaningful interaction with traditional African understandings is needed and much work still needs to be done by the MCSA in this regard.

(7.1.3) Liberation through Grace

There will be little argument, for both Fundamentalist and Liberationist Methodists, that for Wesley, grace (God’s unmerited favour) had both individual and social implications.

In this sense, the believer understands what it means to be saved, not by election, but by divine intervention.

²⁴⁶ Ferm: 1986: 28

Thus, the response of a believer to the gift of grace in Christ leads to change, not only in the individual, but also to a change in the way in which they interact with their contexts, in the same way communities who respond to the gift of God's grace may lead to a change in their way of being together. At the same time, there is also a change in the way believers respond to the entire created order. In this sense, Sittler is helpful as he cites that the problem of domination with regard to the worldwide ecological crisis that "the problem cannot be solved by economics, for the disposition to plunder is not an economic problem at all. It is the creation of a lust grown rapacious, and lust and rapacity are problems of the spirit of man, long before they ever become events of economic history."²⁴⁷

De Gruchy argues that, "largely under the influence of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, both twentieth century Reformed and Catholic Theology have rediscovered not only the pity of grace, but also its interpersonal, dynamic character as God's love in Christ restoring our relationship with God in community."²⁴⁸

And Boff cites, "classical reflection on grace did not pay sufficient attention to the social aspect of sin, it did not discuss justification in social structural terms."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Sittler: 2000: 3

²⁴⁸ De Gruchy : 1993: 45

²⁴⁹ Boff :1987: 56

In addition, for De Gruchy, “the word of grace addressed the people of historical struggle and journey; indeed, the Word gave redemptive meaning to that history.”²⁵⁰

In order for the members of the MCSA, as part of a faith community then to find each other, a key ingredient would be an understanding and integration of grace.

What may be needed is a new epistemological framework.

A framework, which does three things:

(1) Does not dismiss or ignore the pain of togetherness of the past. (2)

Facilitates and embraces the freedom that the past theological development has led the MCSA to this point in its history.

(3) Ultimately defines a uniquely Southern African understanding of faith confessions especially Christian Perfection.

This is going to require more than shifts in areas such as stipends, stations and integration. It is not simply a search for a ‘window dressing’ theology but a theological journey which encompasses both the ‘studying’ and ‘doing’ of not only traditional theology, but includes cultural identity as part of theological development.

Wesley’s theological method is a key in unlocking, what may be understood as an impasse.

²⁵⁰ De Gruchy : 1993: 65

A key challenge may be for both Liberationist and Fundamentalist Methodists to reflect what it means to be saved, not by election, but by divine intervention (grace).

It may be possible that this reflection, along with Wesley's quadrilateral, will lead to an understanding that experience is given to every community by grace. That is not to say that such experience is unaffected by the Gospel, but to avoid the risks of domination, that such challenge should be largely determined by reflection by the culture.

It may be possible that this reflection will also reveal that neither Liberationist nor Fundamentalist Methodist have the definitive view and perhaps the time may have arrived in the MCSA to allow cultural diversity to inform a united theology.

Above all, the MCSA needs to be mindful of the structures, theologies, mindsets and cultural tenets which allow and encourage dominance in any form.

Connexionalism as a structure afforded the evangelical essence of Methodism to flourish, free from rigid ecclesiastical pressures. Shannahan asserts, "we also have a lot to bring to the conversation about what the church is, and what it is for. The Methodist emphasis upon 'connexionalism' is an idea whose time has come. Linked as it is to Paul's notion of the church as a single body with many different but equal parts, 'connexionalism' can

help us to step together towards Balasuriya's goal of a Liberation Theology that takes the whole earth as its context.”²⁵¹

In the Methodist sense, structures that tend to allow dominance should be approached with utmost care. For example, the current ever developing hierarchical structures within Methodism afford not only dominance of male over female and rich over poor but also separated Bishops (who are never ordained but serve in title only) over fellow Ministers.

This dominance is afforded at a second more serious cost: the cost to poor communities to have to bear the financial burden of this structure.

Another area of concern is the tendency for the MCSA to see itself as a voice for the poor but in a largely political sense.

In other words: does the possibility exist that the MCSA, rapidly moving toward seeing itself as a significant role player within the essentially political spheres of the country, may be using the poor and oppressed as their ginger group?

This tendency, however difficult for Fundamentalist Methodists, may, on one level, be understandable as a hangover from the political struggle for freedom.

Whatever the institution takes, it should not be neo-political but rather mission focused arising from a uniting authentically Southern African Methodist theology.

²⁵¹ Shannahan: Chapter: Singing Songs of Freedom: Methodism as Liberative Praxis; in Craske J & Marsh C (ed), 1999, Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge, : 33

These places of efficacy of encounter raised in this paper, whilst not the only areas within MCSA today, are foundational issues which if left to their own, will allow the MCSA to continue on a path toward schism.

In this regard, Evans is helpful: "Let us set aside for a moment that image of a human polity, and think of a dispersed community which truly calls on God, is governed by the Holy Spirit, spreads the pure doctrine of the Gospel and is defended amidst dangers by wonderful works of God. In this *coetus* (assembly) power is not fixed in certain persons or a certain group, but is a gift to some; it is a gift of divine light by which they understand the wisdom handed down in the gospel. There is a huge gap (*ingens intervallum*) between this gift and that "magistrate's power" which is attributed to bishops or councils. Those individuals who have the mandate of God (*mandatum Dei*) must speak up against the majority opinion and against errant rulers. Luther dared to do it, "Our congregations (*nostrae ecclesae*), says Melanchthon, follow him rather than *the consensus* of so many centuries, popes and academics."²⁵²

The strength and validity of this view is essentially what Liberation Theologies have brought to the MCSA and combined with Methodism as an evangelical, loosely structured institution, which not only has the fluidity, but also the resources to care for the oppressed will enable the MCSA to fulfil its unique purpose in Southern Africa.

²⁵² Evans : 2001: 83

The words of Storey²⁵³ serve as both a warning and a challenge to the MCSA: ‘the future vitality and relevance of theology depend on the measure of vitality of the church itself, in which the Word and Spirit of God will bring forth people who commit themselves to praise God in doing theology. The life of the congregation needs academic work. The two must grow together. We need much prayer, much work, and much dedication. The most important contribution toward ecumenical discussion and praxis will occur if we go on reforming ourselves.”

Protestant heritage teaches that the church is always in need of reforming and in terms of the MCSA. Liberationist Methodism has helped to begin to liberate the church from the ravages of colonialism and now potentially stands to reform the MCSA in terms of an authentic Southern African Methodism.

The formation of Methodists is the formation of a people of praxis who are set free for mission, apart from one-sided unnecessary theoretical deliberations, and a people who are on the path to Christian Perfection.

(7.2) Towards Perfection

If theology encompasses both studying and ‘doing’ and perfection encompasses both faithfulness and experience, then theological development in the MCSA, as an academic discipline should gear itself towards, firstly laying the epistemological framework from which theologians may examine ‘new’ methodologies, and secondly, allow space for theologians

²⁵³ Storey: 2004: 20ff

to engage with contexts different to their own, in order to ‘do’ theology effectively.

Methodists should no longer rely on ‘sola’ Wesleyan experience (Aldersgate), but understand that Christian Perfection involves both faithfulness and experience. This experience and faithfulness is not solely ethical, nor pious nor cultural alone, but rather a comprehensive understanding of God’s work and Word in the world, revealed to human beings by God’s grace.

In many ways, the Methodist movement was in its beginnings primarily a *renewal* movement as much as Reformed Theology is always reforming theology. Therefore the MCSA should continue this heritage. Luther opened the door to the possibility and inevitability of reform as a vital life force for theology – it is always reforming and influenced by context.

Liberation theology opened the door for theological praxis. Wesley’s theological method is one key to unlocking a way forward for the MCSA. Indeed, one collection of eighteenth-century English devotional writing calls this whole period the ‘age of Wesley.’

In other words, John Wesley stands as the prototype for the quest for God and for holiness in the midst of Enlightenment rationalism. However, the spirituality of Wesleyan Methodism has never been, even in its inception in the Oxford Holy Club, a monolithic entity, and it has begotten over the years a host of adjectives to describe it: mystical, perfectionist, experiential, penitential, and pragmatic.

In some ways, all of these adjectives can be accurately applied to Wesley's original vision for Christian spiritual revival, and some Methodist groups have been able to maintain the creative tension between them. At other times, however, one or another of these aspects of Methodist piety has been lifted up and emphasized to the exclusion of others and has produced spiritual tributaries off the Methodist mainstream as alluded to earlier in this paper. For example, the Holiness movement, with its emphasis on perfectionism, is one example. Cracknell asserts: "The evidence for Methodist piety is abundant."²⁵⁴

In the same way, Christian Perfection needs to be inclusive of both faithfulness and experience, both personal and of others. In a word, the development of Christian Perfection in terms of the MCSA, would need to include both Western and African cultural identities, the experience of womern, men and the poor.

Wesley's evangelic zeal and personal piety enabled the Methodist Movement to engage with 18th Century England and beyond. Coupled with the influences of the colonial dispensation, this is the recipe for a staggering potency that has allowed it to cross temporal social, and geographical boundaries for over two and a half centuries is staggering but the post-modern era has brought questions which can only be answered, particularly in terms of the MCSA, by those who have been radically impacted by colonialism, both Fundametalist and Liberationist.

²⁵⁴ Cracknell :2005 : 250

In this way, the significant part of the power of John and Charles Wesley's spiritual vision is to be integrated seeking to involve all the various facets of human existence in a balanced way.

Epistemologically, using Wesley's quadrilateral, this would mean the recognition and journeying with Scripture, reason, tradition and experience, part of which is cultural inheritance.

In a word, a new Southern African Methodist spiritual renewal would enabled people, who had no stake in the wider society of Africa, to feel a new sense of belonging and of status, and in fact facilitate the authentically Southern African growth of Methodism in Southern Africa and particularly with regard to the Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

The Christian life is not to be lived in solitude. "You must have some companions in the way; for how can one be warm alone?"²⁵⁵ The companionship of the Christian community is a shared experience, which extends to our understanding of our faith but also to the living out of that faith. Schisms have no part in this.

The MCSA, uniquely placed in Southern African society today, has the potential to offer to the ecumenical family a way forward with, not only an understanding of Christian Perfection, but also a significant contribution to the development of the theological conversation worldwide, "for Wesley, God talk is not abstract speculation on God's essence but rather

²⁵⁵ Wesley in Oden, 1988, Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain exposition on his teaching on Christian Doctrine: 37

living and walking in the Spirit. Theology as life in the Holy Spirit is an ordering of one's way of being in the world out of the energies of God's grace; it is 'living toward the end of being fully sacralized.' A perdurable *sensus fidelium* is created by God's preveniantally present grace."²⁵⁶

However Wesley is unpacked, his theological method offers a journey to a living faith, a way of discovery to God's work and Word in the world.

²⁵⁶ Meeks :1985: 121

Chapter Eight

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