

# Historic Shifts towards the Decolonisation and Africanisation of Ordination in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

**Donald M. Williams**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9763-4170>  
University of South Africa  
donwill@telkomsa.net

**Wessel Bentley**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1167-4858>  
University of South Africa  
bentlw1@unisa.ac.za

## Abstract

The doctrine and practices of ordination in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) trace their origins from the Wesleyan Methodist Church. These initially adopted ordination practices proved to be culturally incongruent with ministry in the southern African context, raising the question as to whether the MCSA has made sufficient adaptations in its doctrine and practices to be culturally attuned to its context. Using a theoretical literary study, the article traces the colonial heritage of the doctrine of ordination and defines significant shifts and influences in the decolonisation and Africanisation of ordination in the MCSA. This article argues that while there have been significant changes, the doctrine and practices of ordination require further shifts to represent a truly African church.

**Keywords:** Africanisation; colonialism; decolonisation; Methodist Church of Southern Africa; ordination; presbytery

## Introduction

During his address to the first Conference of the South African Connexion in 1883 of the Methodist Church, the President of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa (WMC), the Rev. John Walton, declared that: “Diversities exist among us in colour, language, and nationality; but we are all one in Christ Jesus. ... The South African Connexion is one; its Ministers and members form a single communion” (Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa 1883, 56). However, this perceived ecclesiastical

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unity was not the experience of the black laity and clergy persons or reflective of the developments that would take place in the denomination in the decades to come.

This article<sup>1</sup> traces the historical development of the ordination of presbyters, the impact of colonisation on the doctrine and practices of ordination and the decolonisation and Africanisation of ordination from the time of the inception of the Methodist witness on southern African soil to the present. In the Methodist denomination, ordination is reserved for those whom the Conference agrees should be set aside to the full-time ministry in this particular form, presently stated as being ordained to the “Ministry of Word and Sacraments” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2016a, 13). With the establishment of the denomination on southern African soil, those aspects of colonialism that did not apply to our context needed to be addressed. The term decolonisation in this article will refer to those processes in dealing with the colonial heritage that specifically impacted negatively on the ordination of presbyters. However, decolonisation needed to be followed by Africanisation, whereby authentic ingredients grown in southern African soil were added to those inherited from the colonial past to be “cooked in African pots”<sup>2</sup> so that the denomination is representative of “an authentic African church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 376). The term Africanisation, as used in this article, is founded on the definition of the Conference of 1992 (Methodist Church of South Africa 1992, 289–296) which states:

Africanisation is a discipline of study and application concerned with the perception and understanding of the Christian gospel, in terms of concepts, symbols, practices and ethos of the African peoples, in relation to the function of the Church in worship, teaching, preaching, sharing of gifts, building the body, evangelism and Christ in the world. (Methodist Church of South Africa 1992, 289–296)

The significance of the adaptations from the colonial past and the relevance of the incorporation of aspects from southern African culture and religion are noted, as well as sounding a warning that this process of Africanisation must not replicate that of the colonial era.

## The Colonial Heritage

The Methodist work in southern Africa was established as a missionary outreach of the Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in England, under the direction of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, with the first missionary, Rev. J McKenny, sent to southern Africa in 1814. The British Connexion determined the structures of its seedling church, set down its policies and made the ecclesiastical appointments to whom

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1 This article stems from a doctoral study conducted at the University of South Africa.

2 The concept of being “cooked in African pots” is taken from the address of the Presiding Bishop to the Connexional Executive of 2006 asking “What it means to be a Church in 21st century Africa?” (Abrahams 2007, 7). This concept is integral to the unpublished doctoral thesis titled, “The Decolonisation and Africanisation of Ordination in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa,” by one of the authors of this article.

the British missionaries ministering in southern Africa were accountable. Every aspect relating to the doctrine and practices of the church, such as the acceptance of clergy persons into the ordained ministry, their training and ordination were determined by the British Conference. These were all closely aligned to the teaching established by the Rev. John Wesley, adopted by the British Conference, and implemented in Methodist work around the world.

While the primary intentions of the British Conference and the instructions to the missionaries included the raising up of indigenous clergy in the different mission fields, the experience of the African people was very different. Together with the colonial doctrine and practices relating to ordination, was the colonial mind-set that included the supremacy of the European culture, their sense of superiority over the indigenous people and the rejection of many of their traditional values, religious beliefs and cultural practices that “were regarded as heathen and a hindrance towards acceptance of the gospel and civilization” (Ketshabile 2012, 123).

In the colonial heritage, the issues relating to racial practices caused the greatest dissension in the southern African context. While the roles of the indigenous workers were essential to the outreach work of the missionaries, the colonial narrative led to restricting the roles of the indigenous workers to that of interpreters, evangelists and local preachers. Another hallmark was the reluctance to ordain black presbyters to the ministry of Word and Sacraments (Balia 1991, 4–28)<sup>3</sup> as it is indicated that only the Revs Jacob Links, Clement John, Charles Pamla, the brothers James and John Lwana and Boyce Mama were ordained before 1879.

A decisive shift, leading to the initial increase in the number of black preachers to be ordained, was sparked by the visit of the Rev. John Kilner of the WMMS (Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society) in 1879. Kilner became aware of the racism that restricted the ordination of the black preachers and limited what pastoral ministries they were permitted to perform. Following his intervention and their acceptance by the Native Quarterly Meetings, Kilner “authorized the ordination of over fifty evangelists whom they had failed to advance” (Pritchard 2013, 157). The reluctance to ordain black presbyters, sadly, continued after the formation of an independent South African Connexion. Consequently, between 1883 and 1930, only 28 of 178 ordinands were born or grew up in South Africa, with the majority coming from abroad.

A significant development arose from the colonial narrative, namely the creation of parallel structures and practices based on racial segregation. The academic training and formation for the ministry were conducted at racially separated institutions, even on different continents. While the white probationer ministers were trained in England, training institutions such as the Native Theological Institution at Healdtown (1867 to 1880), Lesseyton (1883–1921), the South African Native College at Fort Hare

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3 See also Millard-Jackson 2008, 33-36.

University (1921) and Bollihope (Cape Town) (1931–1940) were the places of training for the black probationer ministers (Cragg 2013b, 59–60).

Presbyters were stationed according to their ethnicity to circuits defined racially, termed “Colonial” and “Missionary” circuits (Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa 1883, xiv). The practices of holding racially separated Ministerial Sessions in each District was compounded by the African District Meetings (Synods) having “limited agendas and European officials offered little by way of freedom and no opportunity for self-governance” (Beukes 2014, 38). The race of the presbyter was a determining factor at which ordination service a presbyter was ordained during the annual Conference (Cragg 2013a, 27–29), as well as the stipend, allowances and benefits received by presbyters. The patriarchal and paternalistic perspectives present in indigenous southern African cultures contributed to the continuing exclusion of women from the presbyteral ministry and, thereafter, a reticence in appointing them to serve in leadership positions.

It must not be assumed, however, that these developments went unchallenged. Frustration grew among the black members involved in Methodist outreach work. Consequently, black clergy began leaving the Methodist work. Nehemiah Tile, who resigned in 1884 following his political involvement in the lives of the Tembu people, then formed the Thembu National Church (Madise and Taunyane 2012, 6), the forerunner of the emerging Ethiopian movement, a milieu that enabled “Africans to discover God from their own perspective and from their culture” (Mdingi 2015, 41). Mangena Maake Mokone resigned in 1892 to become part of the Ethiopian Church movement arising from the “lack of promotion for African ministers, lack of brotherliness of white ministers, unequal stipends and a desire to manage their own affairs” (Millard-Jackson 2008, 39).<sup>4</sup> James Mata Dwane’s resignation in 1895 was precipitated by the WMC’s insisting that the funds he had raised abroad for a college to educate indigenous preachers were to be handed over to the WMC (Balía 1991, 75–76). He also believed that “an overwhelmingly white Conference was treating him differently on racial grounds” (Cragg 2013a, 31).

The South African Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church “exercised its jurisdiction and carried out its functions subject to the stipulations made by the British Conference” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2016a, 22) until the year 1927, when the Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa was established as an independent and autonomous body. 1932 saw the establishment of the denomination being renamed as the Methodist Church of South Africa and then as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to reflect that the denomination functions beyond the borders of the Republic of South Africa in Botswana, Eswatini (Swaziland), Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia.

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4 See also Balía 1991, 69-72 for a fuller explanation of his complaints and reasons for resigning.

The picture that emerges going into the 20th century is that the claim of the President of the Conference, Rev. John Walton, at the first Conference in 1883 of the newly established Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa, that “we are all one in Christ Jesus. ... The South African Connexion is one ...” (Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa 1883, 56) would not reflect the experience of the black presbyters within the Connexion and its practices and these would continue to impact the Methodist denomination negatively for many years to come.

## Significance of the 1958 Conference Statement for the Decolonisation and Africanisation of Ordination

As 1994 can be cited as a seminal year in the transformation of the South African nation, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)<sup>5</sup> can speak of the 1958 Conference statement (Methodist Church of South Africa 1958, 202) as a similarly defining moment when the processes of decolonisation and Africanisation were set firmly in motion. Admittedly, fairly recently, terms like decolonisation and Africanisation have been employed more formally, but the shifts we identify in the MCSA post-1958 are congruent with what we understand these terms (more importantly, actions) to mean. The Conference, meeting in a time of political upheaval arising from racial discrimination and the separatist policies of the South African Government, declared that the Methodist Church of South Africa “should be one and undivided” (Methodist Church of South Africa 1958, 202). The relevant portion of the 1958 Conference statement reads:

The Conference, in prayer and heart-searching, expressed its conviction that it is the will of God for the Methodist Church that it should be one and undivided, trusting to the leading of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition. We believe God is calling us to an increasing implementation of this policy in our Connexional, District, and local life and work, for to be a Christian Church means to be a fellowship in which differences of race and language are transcended by our brotherhood in Christ. (Methodist Church of South Africa 1958, 202)

As in 1883, the Methodist denomination declared its intention to be “one and undivided” but this time did so emphasising that this was not already attained and that God’s intention was for the denomination to implement this policy at all levels. This commitment to being racially “one and undivided” averted schism within the denomination, would firmly set the denomination on the road to decolonisation and also to the possibility of proceeding from decolonisation to Africanisation in ordination. The renewed commitment was affirmed during the Obedience 1981 Conference promising “before Almighty God and each other that we will henceforth live and work to bring into reality the concept of an undivided Church and a free and just Southern Africa” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa n.d.). This objective was reiterated regularly

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5 The Methodist Church of Southern Africa will henceforth be referred to as the MCSA.

thereafter, for instance at the Mission Congresses of 2004 and in the Charter of the Mission Congress of 2016 (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2017, 3).

## Historic Shifts Relating to the Decolonisation of Ordination

Using the description of decolonisation as those processes in dealing with the colonial heritage that specifically impacted negatively on the ordination of presbyters, some of the important historical shifts specifically related to the decolonising of ordination, post 1958, will now be mentioned. Those specifically related to the colonial heritage of race and ethnicity impacting on persons in leadership and structures of the denomination, are to be noted. 1964 saw the election of the first black person, Rev. Seth Mokitimi, to serve as the President of Conference (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2020, 374). This position was again filled by an African person, Rev. Mvusi, in 1973 and, significantly, black presbyters have been serving as the Presidents of Conference/Presiding Bishops<sup>6</sup> from 1987 to the present.

The holding of racially separated Ministerial Sessions of Synod, introduced in 1869 (Cragg 2011, 95), was challenged and discontinued in 1948 (Methodist Church of South Africa 1948, 44). The practice of holding ethnically separated ordination services was corrected in 1968 when two ordination services were held, both being multi-racial, and so introducing unified ordination services. The colonial practice of differentiated stipends according to race was discontinued in 1973 (Methodist Church of South Africa 1973, 103–104), 90 years after the MCSA had become an independent Conference in 1883.

Similarly, the practice of holding separate Ministerial and Representative (lay) sessions of Synod and Conference continued until 1995, when the Conference resolved that “Conference and the Synods will meet in one unitary session of laity and clergy” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1995, 310). This resolution had implications for the presbyteral and diaconal ministries, resulting in all matters relating to their acceptance, training, advancement and ordination no longer being the preview of the Ministerial Sessions but the General Sessions of Synod and Conference. The theology of ordination now also incorporated a greater contribution by the laity in the selection, formation and ordination of presbyters.

The Conference of 1991 approved that “with the approval of the Presiding Bishop, ordained Ministers from other Christian denominations may be invited to assist” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1991, 31) in the laying on of hands at the ordination of a presbyter and in doing so recognise the validity of the ordination of presbyters by other recognised Christian denominations.

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6 The title of the President of Conference became that of the Presiding Bishop in 1990, as also that of the Chairman of the District to the Bishop of the District (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1990, 1).

## Williams, Bentley

A significant development in the decolonisation processes relating to the work and functioning of presbyters in the local circuits, was the introduction in 1976 of geographic or non-racial circuits. Racially separated societies close to each other were re-aligned into a united circuit with the specific intention of becoming racially integrated entities. More black presbyters were appointed as superintendent ministers of circuits, superintending both white and black presbyters as well as black and white congregations. The domination of white clergy and white superintendents was curtailed as black superintendents were granted the same status and responsibilities as their white colleagues. Discrimination in leadership roles on the grounds of race was now something of the past.

Another significant development in the decolonisation processes related to the issue of patriarchy and gender discrimination in that ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments was reserved for male persons. The significant shift formalised in 1976 was that of the ordination of women as presbyters. Up until then, women who felt God's call to the full-time ministry were denied this privilege and required to candidate for the Deaconess Order, to the ministry of "full-time pastoral service" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 369), but not to the presbyteral ministry of Word and Sacraments.<sup>7</sup>

This prohibition, together with objections and calls to oppose the ordination of women presbyters based on a patriarchal and conservative interpretation of Biblical texts, particularly the teachings of the Apostle Paul, formed the basis of arguments against the ordination of women. These factors are evidenced in the wording of the resolution of the 1966 Conference to investigate "that women be admitted to the Ordained Ministry, provided that a study of the Biblical and Theological implications concerned reveal no objection to such a move" (Methodist Church of South Africa 1966, 209).

While all the District Synods were not "in favour of opening the ministry to women" (*Dimension* 1972, 1), the Conference of 1972 accepted the principle of the ordination of women (Methodist Church of South Africa 1972, 66), leading to the ordination of the first woman presbyter, Constance Oosthuizen, in 1976. Oosthuizen had served as a deaconess for nearly 18 years. Her ordination was followed by that of Rev. Dorothy Spink in 1978, along with the first black woman, Rev. Nikiwe Mavis Mbilini, being ordained in 1985. Both Spink and Mbilini had served as deaconesses before their ordination to Word and Sacraments (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla 2015, 186). The colonial theology of ordination no longer discriminated against women on the grounds of their gender. Serving as a presbyter was no longer the sole preserve of male persons.

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<sup>7</sup> Deaconesses, now known as deacons, are ordained by the imposition of hands and prayer to the ministry of Word and Service as distinct from presbyters who are ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Consequently, they are not permitted to officiate at the sacraments. Deacons are accountable to the Conference in a similar manner as presbyters.

However, the acceptance of women to the presbytery did not mean that this would lead to equal opportunities for both male and female presbyters. Women presbyters now experienced marginalisation through a reticence to appoint them to positions of leadership at both circuit and district levels as well as being marginalised in their circuits as a result of patriarchy. These sexist practices were in contravention of the doctrine of ordination which does not distinguish between those in leadership positions on the grounds of gender or prevent women from fulfilling their roles as presbyters.

A Women Ministers' Consultation was introduced in 1993 to provide a platform where women presbyters could support one another and promote the work of women in the MCSA (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1993, 294). The Consultation continues to meet annually with the declared purpose of being "called to encourage and empower women in and for the ordained ministry" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2016b).

It is to be noted that feminist theologians contributed significantly to the cry in challenging patriarchal cultural attitudes that prevailed, demanding gender equality in the MCSA and for reinterpreting the texts on which their exclusion was based.<sup>8</sup> The voices of Western feminism with the emphasis on "the rights and the equality of genders and the rights of women to make choices and decisions on their own" (Malinga 2018), as well as those of African feminism that "takes into consideration issues of race and issues of economy" (Malinga 2018), were clearly heard within the MCSA. Their constant appeals and resolutions were directed to the Conference demanding an end to paternalism, discrimination and the stationing of women in poor rural circuits where they do not always receive their monthly stipend.

In response, the Conference has taken numerous decisions relating to the continuing patriarchy and discrimination against women presbyters in their appointment to circuits and positions of leadership. The Conference of 1992 resolved that "all structures within the Church should include at least 40% women" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1992, 340) and "that all new documents, reports, publications, liturgies, prayers, songs, hymns and sermons use inclusive language" (1992, 341). Further resolutions were adopted instructing that "at any given time there should be at least five women Bishops within the MCSA" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2019a, 84). Consequently, in 2020, the Rev. Purity Malinga is serving the denomination as the first woman Presiding Bishop and two other women presbyters, Yvette Moses and Charmaine Morgan are serving as Bishops of their particular Synods.

In summary, the commitment to the 1958 statement that the Methodist denomination "should be one and undivided, trusting to the leading of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition" (Methodist Church of South Africa 1958, 202) was being realised in the decolonial shifts that were taking place by eliminating the divisive and racist practices of the past. Decolonisation was gaining momentum within the MCSA.

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8 Authors include Lebaka-Ketshabile 2016, 1-7; Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) 2012, 205-216; Mkhwanazi (2014); Mudimeli (2011); and Whitby 2016, 1-10.

However, what was required was not only to de-link ordination from the colonial paradigm but also to re-link ordination into the southern African culture, heritage, knowledge sources and religion. The plea was for decolonisation to lead to the Africanisation of ordination.

### Significant Shifts Associated with the Africanisation of Ordination: Striving to become an Authentic African Church

To become “an authentic African Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 376), a shift from the dominant Euro-centric narrative to an African narrative was critical to the Africanisation of the MCSA and for the church to reflect on its existence, ministry and mission on the African continent. The matter of Africanisation was a topic of extreme relevance for the denomination and was informed by numerous sources and influences.

The annual Conference of 1992 dealt extensively with the subject of Africanisation (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1992, 289–296), as also did the Journey to the New Land Convocation in 1993 and the Conference of 1994 that issued a wide-ranging statement indicating that Africanisation would have implications for “Worship ... Teaching ... Preaching ... Sharing the Gifts ... Building the Body ... and Evangelism and Christ in the World” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 246–250). Guidelines for dealing with the possibility of “cultural clashes between traditional values and institutions on the one hand and Christian values and standards on the other hand” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 247) were also identified, as also was the need for liturgy development.

The contribution that Black Consciousness philosophy and Black Theology of liberation played in moving from decolonisation to Africanisation and the Africanisation of ordination in the MCSA, cannot be underestimated. These emphases by Methodist presbyters, including Revs Gqubule (1974, 16–23), Mgojo (1977), Setiloane (1986) and Mosala (1986, 175–199), who drew from the wells of authors outside and inside of southern Africa, were “an attempt by black Christians to grasp and think through the central claims of the Christian faith in the light of black experience” (Mgojo 1977, 28). Mtshiselwa (2016, 1–19), also a Methodist presbyter, clarifies the concepts stating that: “The philosophy of black consciousness insists on redressing the effects of the oppression of black people in South Africa, which is based on race, while the black liberation theology calls for the liberation of the oppressed people” (Mtshiselwa 2016, 3).

The influences of Black Consciousness and Black Theology took root amongst Methodist presbyters, particularly those in academia at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa (Fedsem). They, in turn, influenced the thinking of the Methodist probationer ministers under training (Richardson 2007, 140) as well as the

leadership structures of their respective denominations, including the MCSA, by asserting “increasing pressure on the churches” (De Gruchy 1997, 164).

One of those influenced while studying at Fedsem, was the Rev. Ernest Baartman who, in May 1975, invited a number of black Methodist ministers to a consultation at St John’s Methodist Church in Bloemfontein to “reflect on the ministry of the church from a Black perspective and, more particularly, to assess the role and contribution of Black people in the leadership structures of the church” (Balía 1991, 88). Their concerns were that the decision-making processes in the MCSA were in the hands of predominantly white clergy in a church which professed itself one and undivided, that black presbyters and laity were experiencing racism and exclusion from the leadership structures of the church and that a Eurocentric epistemology dominated the thinking of the church (Kumalo 2009, 41–43).

Following their deliberations, the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) was established for “the Transformation of the MCSA into a truly African Church (in character, doctrine, ethos, identity and practice) by challenging and equipping Black Methodists to contribute meaningfully, actively and intelligently in the MCSA given the context of Africans” (Black Methodist Consultation 2015, 2). At the heart of their cry was the introduction of an African epistemology, the incorporation of African customs, for African persons to serve in leadership positions, an end to discriminatory practices against black clergy persons and that the church’s theological praxis and theological training were no longer to be based on Western theological models but contextualised in our African situation.

Numerous authors<sup>9</sup> affirm the success of the BMC in bringing about changes within the MCSA and the Order of Presbyters. They emphasise their influence in the appointment of black presbyters as superintendent ministers and bishops, leading to the appointment of black presbyters as the Presiding Bishop, General Secretary, convenors of committees and Directors of Units; the President and Dean of Chapel at the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and the Chairperson of the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the MCSA. Their efforts contributed to the breaking down of discrimination in the stationing of ministers on the grounds of race and gender and for a single venue for the training of ministers.

The challenge of the BMC regarding racially separated institutions for the training and formation of presbyters, was embraced by the Conference of 1989 declaring that “the existence of segregated institutions for the training of our ministry compromises our unity and retards ideals of Justice and Reconciliation” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1989, 283). The opportunity to begin a racially inclusive formation based on an African epistemology arose with the closure of the Federal Theological Seminary in Pietermaritzburg in 1993 and its move to Kilnerton, Pretoria, to be known as John

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9 Authors include Balía 1991, 87-92; Forster 2008, 421-422; Grassow 2015, 1-3; Kumalo 2009, 31, 42-43; Madise 1999, 63; and Mtshiselwa 2015, 1-4.

Wesley College. This move, together with the introduction of the 3-phase formation programme for probationer ministers<sup>10</sup> and the forthcoming closure of the theological faculty at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, provided significant stimuli for a major shift in the unified and integrated formation of presbyters to minister in our African context. Probation was now set at five years and requiring two years of circuit work, of which “at least one of these years every Probationer shall be stationed in a Circuit which affords the opportunity to minister in a cross-cultural situation” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1993, 16). In terms of the new policies on formation for ordination, training was now multi-cultural and multi-racial from the time of candidature to ordination in preparation for ministry in a multi-cultural church.

A significant step in the decolonisation and Africanisation of ordination was taken when the Conference of 2005 resolved that “John Wesley College be relocated to Pietermaritzburg as an autonomous member of the Cluster of Theological Institutions” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2006, 77). Significantly, the institution was to become known as the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in recognition of the first black President of Conference. In keeping with the intention of presbyteral formation by the MCSA, the Mission Statement of the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary 2019) reads: “To form transforming leaders for church and nation by providing the spiritual formation, academic and practical training required to develop skilled Methodist ministers of integrity, faithfulness and excellence” (Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary 2020, 1). The colonial vestiges of separate and differing formations for ordination according to race were now something of the past and continue to the present.

The Africanisation process included that remedial measures were taken by the Conference to correct the impact of the historical discrimination in remuneration and stationing of black presbyters. The Stipend Augmentation Fund was established in 2007 to augment the stipends of those who were paid the least “to bring them up to a minimum overall income package” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2018, 149), with 39 ministers benefitting in 2018, to the sum of R1 709 239.00 (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2020, 215). A similar intervention was the establishment of the Supernumerary Reserve Fund (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2013, 81) to supplement the pensions of those presbyters who were previously disadvantaged.

An important shift in the Africanisation process was to incorporate aspects of southern African culture into the doctrine and practices of ordination. An example relates to the management and decision-making processes of the Conference and their impact on presbyters. These include the roles of consultation, active participation and reaching consensus in decision making for the benefit of the greater community in African

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10 Phase 1 would concentrate on spiritual formation and begin equipping probationer ministers for ministry in the MCSA. Phase 2 would include formal theological education and Phase 3 was the period of preparation for and the ordination of a presbyter (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1993, 16-17).

culture. Consequently, with the abolition of the Ministerial Sessions of Synod in 1995, presbyters repeatedly requested the formation of a formalised structure at which matters specifically related to the acceptance, formation and accountability of presbyters, and at which doctrinal matters could be considered. In response, the MCSA (in 2018) introduced the annual Presbyters' Convocation that meets before the annual synods and reports to the synod, a concept in keeping with the holding of an *imbizo*<sup>11</sup> in southern African culture.

Another example relates to the African cultural concepts on inclusiveness and communalism with the commitment of the MCSA to the de-clerification of ordination by emphasising the denomination's commitment to the doctrine of every member ministry—the priesthood of all believers. The inclusion of the commitment of the MCSA to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is included in every *Yearbook* from 1999 (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1999/2000, 2) to the present (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2020, 2), emphasising that every baptised person is an accredited minister of Jesus Christ and that the ministry of the ordained is neither more important nor superior to that of the laity.

And lastly, the inculturation of African culture into the ordination service has taken place to ensure that the ordination service represents a truly African experience. This has been achieved with the introduction of elements into the liturgy that include the use of traditional musical instruments such as whistles, bells and the “*biti*,” a small pillow that helps provide the beat. Hymns and Bible readings are multi-lingual and songs in the vernacular with times of celebration in song and dance in a traditional African manner being evident. Other additions are the inclusion of the African concepts of holism and communalism with the introduction into the ordination liturgy of the portion titled, Recognition of our common ministry and reaffirmation of baptism, declaring: “Ministry is the work of God, done by the people of God. Through baptism, all Christians are made part of the priesthood of all believers, the church, Christ's body, made visible in the world” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2019b, 6) and the commitment to this shared ministry with the Lay President participating in the ordination service but not in the laying on of hands.

In summary, the commitment of the MCSA to the 1994 resolution to “promote the development of an authentic African Church” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 376) has brought significant shifts in Africanising the doctrine and practices of ordination and moving from decolonisation to Africanisation. The ongoing matters that need to be considered are to evaluate the comprehensiveness of the shifts that have taken place in the Africanisation of ordination and the dangers of the Africanisation process.

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11 According to the Oxford Living Dictionaries (n.d.), an *imbizo* is “a gathering, usually called by a traditional leader.”

## An Evaluation

It is to be noted that the MCSA is today closer, but not having realised the statement by the President of the Conference in 1883 relating to presbyters and the ordained ministry of the MCSA that “Diversities exist among us in colour, language, and nationality; but we are all one in Christ Jesus ...” (Wesleyan Methodist Church of South Africa 1883, 56). The colonial vestiges of ethnicity are no longer determining factors in the training, ordination, stationing and appointment to positions of leadership in a decolonised doctrine and practices of ordination. Women are now ordained as presbyters and the impact of patriarchy, inherited from both colonial and southern African cultures, are being addressed, as also measures to ensure the equitable appointment of women presbyters in circuits and to leadership positions within the church.

The contributions of Black Theology, the influence of the Black Methodist Consultation and Black Feminist theologians and the significant adaptations in the formation and stationing of presbyters have all played significant roles in decolonising and Africanising ordination and its practices in the MCSA. The continuing commitment of the MCSA to the 1958 statement that the church “should be one and undivided” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1958, 202) and the 1994 resolution to “develop new models of ministry which will facilitate the emergence of an authentic African heritage and spirituality” (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 1994, 376) are also significant contributions to be noted. Another is the transformed formation processes of probationer ministers, with the formation programme that included a compulsory appointment of every probationer to a cross-cultural setting as part of their formation, which are significant markers on the journey to Africanisation.

However, as far-reaching as these shifts have been and knowing that adaptations to the thinking, expression and doctrinal formulations relating to ordination are acceptable in Methodist doctrine and polity, it would be an illusion to believe that the MCSA is a truly African church or that the doctrine and practices of ordination are being sufficiently “cooked in an African pot” using ingredients grown in African soil.

There are still features relating to ordination in the MCSA where further Africanisation needs to take place. One example relates to the actual ordination service. An evaluation of the present ordination service is that it “lacks expression of being a church in Africa to one that is more of an expression as a church in Europe or in the West” (Sifo 2018). An examination of the 2019 Ordination service (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2019b, 1–16), indicates that, firstly, the liturgy and ritual of the ordination service remain closely aligned with the service inherited from the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1883. While including portions in vernacular languages, these are translations from English and lack a contextualised expression familiar to African culture. Secondly, the colonial dress code of the bishops and presbyters gives the impression that the service is taking place in Europe and not in Africa, with everyone similarly attired in cassocks, clerical collars and with the bishops wearing stoles. Thirdly, few symbols and rituals

drawn from southern African culture are evident, together with (fourthly), little connection with those who have gone before, the living dead.

Admittedly, the MCSA is continuously working on liturgies and practices that reflect more clearly its southern African context. The MCSA's Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Commission, a sub-committee of the MCSA Conference, is tasked to do just that and have already recommended several innovative forms of worship that are more contextual. It would be imperative for the MCSA Conference to look intentionally how both the understanding and its celebration of ordination reflect a more African expression.

As the colonial ecclesiology left many scars on ordination and the ordained ministry in the Southern African Connexion, there are dangers in the Africanisation processes that could also impact negatively on the doctrine and practices of ordination into the future. Processes need to be put into place to ensure that the multi-cultural dimension of the denomination, as reflected in the statements of 1883 and 1958, are realised.

## Conclusion

When comparing the colonial heritage relating to the doctrine and practices of ordination from that being presently experienced in the MCSA, significant shifts have taken place in the Africanisation of ordination. The commitment of the MCSA to be an authentic Christian Church situated on the continent of Africa and fulfil the mission of the Methodist people "to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation" (Methodist Church of Southern Africa 2020, 2) is unquestionable. It is clear that in terms of its practices, the MCSA has indeed made great strides in decolonising and Africanising its understanding of the ordained ministry to Word and Sacraments. The work, however, is not complete and we wait with anticipation as the doctrine of ordination, slowly "cooked in African pots," starts yielding tastes and flavours that will make its practice and expression distinctly African while including Western ingredients, while feeding the continent for the purpose of healing and transformation.

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