

**THE LOCAL CONGREGATION EMPOWERING THE  
URBAN POOR, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JOHN  
WESLEY'S SOCIAL ETHICS**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the rapidly growing problems of poverty and urbanisation, especially in the contemporary South African context. It suggests that the Christian churches, especially those in the Wesleyan tradition, have a special contribution to make concerning poverty and urbanisation.

John Wesley was at the centre of the Evangelical Revival in England in the eighteenth century as well as the emerging Methodist movement. Besides his roles of preaching and organising, he made significant advances in caring for the poor as well as changing attitudes towards the poor. There is an examination of Wesley's social ethics and how this resulted in empowering the poor.

Case studies of three very different churches within the Wesleyan tradition are examined. One is in the inner city of Pietermaritzburg, one in an informal settlement near Johannesburg and one in a middle class suburb in Cape Town. The particular focus is on methods used by each to provide low cost housing in their communities.

Theoretical models of urban mission for the church in the city are examined. The contemporary context and assumptions of poverty are analysed together with Wesley's social ethics, and his critique of the dangers of wealth and riches. The basic thesis of this study is that the Christian social ethics of Wesley are relevant and applicable in congregations with the will to empower the poor.

## **DEDICATION**

### **FOR ANNETTE**

And in memory of my grandparents,  
Pieter Louis and Adriana le Roux (1865-1943)  
Moody Harold and Mabel Wright (1894-1963)

who also gave themselves to spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.  
It could be said of them, 'We have left everything to follow you.'

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## **DECLARATION**

Unless specifically indicated in the text, this thesis is the original work of the writer

.....  
**HAROLD MARTIN LE ROUX**



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

What is an accurate diagnosis of contemporary society with particular regard to the urban poor? The extent and scope of poverty will be raised shortly. The millions and millions of people presently living in inhumane conditions, is too great even to conceive. Yet urbanisation continues, and the numbers grow daily. The presence of shacks, shanty towns, informal settlements and homelessness have become a reality in both developed and developing worlds. While these expressions are clearly visible, poverty also has another face. David Sheppard wrote in Britain in 1974, that the most characteristic development problem of the whole modern world was the growth of large cities that divide human beings into large definable groups. He believes that the Christian Gospel should both bring hope to those who are enslaved by urbanisation, and 'challenge those who, knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to that enslavement.' He continues to expand on his theme,

A distinctive mark of the mission of Jesus Christ is the 'good news' that is proclaimed to the poor. Today's poor can be described, at least in shorthand form, as the powerless...[the church] has failed to see compellingly enough that the gospel implies involvement in tackling these contemporary enslavements, by word and action (1974:11).

This study aims to examine the present South African context of the church and its involvement in addressing poverty. As John Wesley was an important reformer in the eighteenth century, and (rather against his will) the founder of the Methodist Church, there will be an attempt to analyse what the church today is doing in this respect. There will be a brief review of Wesley's world in the 1700s, and an examination of how the Methodists impacted that society. Wesley taught, and practised, a distinctive brand of social ethics, which contains elements that are relevant today. In

order to illustrate this concept, three case studies of Methodist churches, which are deeply involved with the poor, are given. The intention is that they can shed light on how a local congregation, with limited resources, can make measurable advances in empowering the poor.

Behind, and within, every congregation are values, stories and hopes, which determine the direction that the church takes. There is, therefore, an attempt to define a theology of mission for the church in the city. This will enable a church to engage intentionally, with current issues of poverty and methods of empowerment.

In July 2001 the Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa met in Port Elizabeth. A joint statement issued by the Doctrine, Ethics, and Worship Committee began with the words, 'The need for Change.' It affirmed that Mission is now 'firmly back at the heart of our agenda, and 'there is a renewed focus on balanced and healthy local churches as the best place through which mission needs to happen.' The following sentence marks a milestone in the thinking of the church. 'It is particularly the need to be more mission centred and outward looking, and the greater involvement of the laity in the ministry of the church, that is forcing us to think in new ways about ministry (2001}.

### **Cities and the urban poor**

'The Bible starts in a garden and ends in a city.' Blanchard and Desjarlais observe that most people, whether they like it or not, have an urban future (1989 Videotape). Barrett estimates that in mid 2000 the total world population was 6,055,049,000, or about 6 billion people. Of these 2.9 billion are urban dwellers. It is alarming to note how urban populations have increased over the past 100 years. He gives detailed tables from which the following figures are taken.

	1900	1970	1990	2000
Cities over 100 000	300	2,400	3,400	4,100
Cities over 1 million	20	161	330	410
Urban Poor	100 million	650 million	1,273 million	2000 million
Urban Slum dwellers	20 million	260million	520 million	1,300 million
World Population	1.6 billion	3.7 billion	5.2 billion	6.05 billion

**Table 1: World-wide expansion of cities and population (Barrett 2000:25)**

Definitions and figures will have to be analysed, but if these statistics are even vaguely accurate, then the magnitude of the problem comes into focus. At its simplest, the world has never known such population growth, such total population or such rapid urbanisation. The world has always known poverty, but it seems, never on a scale that affects so many people. Viv Grigg who worked and lived in shanty town barrios of Manila has drawn from the research of Matos Mar and listed the percentage of the urban population living in slums and squatter settlements. Grigg gives the highest ten of a table of 52 world cities below.

	%
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	90
Yaounde, Cameroon	90
Douala, Cameroon	87
Buenaventura, Colombia	80
Mogadisho, Somalia	77
Ibadan, Nigeria	75
Lome, Togo	75
Santa Domingo, Dom. Rep	72
Casablanca, Morocco	70
Nairobi, Kenya	70

**Table 2: Percentage of urban population living in slums and squatter settlements (1992:54)**

What is particularly distressing from an African perspective, is that the cities above which have the highest slum and squatter percentages in the world, are in the continent of Africa, (with the

exception of two). This fact on its own should warrant further research and action by the church. According to this thesis, the church should have a passion for dealing with such poverty and homelessness as part of its ministry in its context.

There is often concern about the sheer size and rate of growth, as well as the poverty of cities, but anti-urban perceptions of cities are also common. Conn notes that there is a stereotype of the city,

The list continues: too much crime in the city, too many poor, too many people. And flowing from these generalizations come the fears. The labels read anonymity, depersonalization, marginalization, secularization. They paralyze Christian initiative to reach cities for Christ, they are stumbling blocks in the way of urban church planting... (Conn 1987:9).

Conn repeats the common perception that, 'God made the country and man made the suburb. But the devil made the city' (1987: 20). In Britain this distaste for the city reached a peak in the Victorian period when John Ruskin wrote,

[cities] become...loathsome centres of fornication and covetousness, the smoke of their sin going up into the face of heaven like the furnace of Sodom; and the pollution of it rotting and raging the bones and souls of the peasant people around them... (*The Cities*: 1997).

Shorter claims that in Africa 'the anti-urban "rural theology" that underlies this missionary history goes deep.' It is one of the reasons why the church still finds it difficult to come to terms with the city. He notes however, that Christianity as a whole has inherited a predilection for the rural areas and a consequent anti-urban attitude. He illustrates the fact that missionaries brought this attitude with them.

The indomitable open-air preacher Father Vincent McNabb OP was once asked to give his opinion about London, the city in which he had spent a major part of his priestly life. 'London?' he queried, 'You mean Babylon-don, my dear!' Babylon, rather than Jerusalem, was the favoured biblical image of the town (1991:59).

At the end of his book, Shorter claims that the younger generation in Africa today displays 'a frenzied urban bias, while the Church struggles lethargically to shake off its toils of anti-urbanism.' He states that both extremes are unrealistic. He continues,

Urbanization is a reality which cannot be wished away. It is a concomitant of human history, human culture and human economic development. In the final analysis, however, it is an unjust reality in contemporary Africa - the producer and product of systematic injustice. Urbanization is not merely an abstraction to be bandied about by sociologists and anthropologists in the learned debate. It is an urgent, life or death issue for all of us - for humanity and for the Church...In other words, it is no good waiting for an urban specialist to drop in to cope with these new problems. We ourselves are usually the only available specialists and it is up to us to confront the gigantic dilemma that urbanization poses in Africa and in the world at large (1991:138).

### **The Methodist Church: history and call to mission**

Although this is not the first time that the church has had to address the issue of poverty and urbanisation, it is facing new challenges, which are difficult to ignore. Methodism was founded in the eighteenth century, in the period leading up to the Industrial Revolution, and its birth pangs in that context were instrumental in determining many of its beliefs and practices. What follows in a later chapter on John Wesley's teachings and ethics is an attempt to illustrate that the founder of Methodism tried to maintain a balance between what would today be called spirituality and social action. At one and the same time he both evangelised and actively and practically responded to the context of poverty in his society. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has entered the new millennium with a fresh call for the church to be involved in mission. In May 2000 it published a summary of what has been called the Millennium Mission Campaign. It calls on Methodist people to 'rekindle the flame of Mission.' The strategy for the campaign is to:

- encourage the Methodist community to a renewed life of prayer, spiritual growth and evangelism.
- Enable every Methodist congregation to be a centre of healing and transformation.



- assist each Methodist society (congregation) to be mission focused, committed to being balm for the wounds of the wider community and to develop a mission-consciousness that embraces the entire African continent.
- call Methodist people to generously support the establishment of a significant Mission Resource Fund that will provide financial resources for the Campaign.
- endeavour to send 2000 mission volunteers into the mission fields of this continent (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2000:1).

In a booklet produced to promote the campaign, a **mission statement** indicates a statement of purpose as, 'God has called the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for Healing and Transformation.' A **vision statement** outlining the goal to be achieved, is listed as 'A Christ-Healed Africa for the healing of Nations.' In order for this to take place a **strategic plan** has been formulated. 'The plan is to resource, empower, and release the Local Church for Mission' (Millennium Mission Campaign 2000:1). In an introduction to the booklet described above, the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Bishop Mvume Dandala relates his own personal experience of how Methodist Mission 'worked for me.'

I am a child of the Mission of our Church. In the 1920s my grandfather came as a miner to Johannesburg. Here he was brought to Christ through the outreach of a Local Church, given a Bible and taught to read. The growth he experienced and the blessing he received caused him to write home instructing my grandmother to 'send the children to Church!' She did. They too found Christ, my father becoming a minister while my uncles went on to other leadership positions in both Church and Society. I am committed to leaving this same legacy to my grandchildren and also to yours. Will you stand with me in rededication to Christ and God's Mission for our Church? Will you pray with me for the Work of God in Southern Africa? I have made my pledge to the Resource Fund. Will you join me in making yours? (New Millennium Booklet 2000:1).

All Methodists are being challenged to give their commitment to this programme as well as financial gifts. In order for this to take place the church has stated that the **four pillars for Mission** are:

1. Growing spiritual depth in our present membership.
  2. Bringing people to Christ and growing new and existing churches.
  3. Working on Justice issues, healing relationships and facilitating unity.
  4. Growing quality of life through human, economic and environmental development.
- (New Millennium Booklet 2000:8).

By Easter 2000 Rev Mike Crockett, who is one of the organisers in the Millennium Campaign, reported that R4 million had already been pledged, and cash in the bank had reached R846 861. He noted that 6000 'Vital Volunteers' had been trained. These are lay people in the churches who had agreed to approach members of their congregations to donate money to the Campaign. He comments,

Many challenges and opportunities for Kingdom growth are opening up to the Church as we enter the new millennium. It's an exciting time to be a Methodist and to grasp the opportunity God has given us to make a difference in our generation that will be foundational in generations to come (Crockett 2000:7).

In *The New Dimension*, Prof. Neville Richardson gives a brief historical overview of the growth of Methodism in South Africa, from its inception in South Africa early in the nineteenth century. He notes that the saying, 'Methodism was born in song' should more aptly be 'Methodism was born in mission' (Richardson 2000:7).

A further indication of the direction being taken by the leadership of the Church, is the fact that there is a renewed commitment to mission. The Joint Statement issued at the Conference of 2001, proposed new models of ministry, with special emphasis on the role of the laity. The first point under the heading of 'The need for change' is 'Mission is now firmly back at the heart of

our agenda' (MCSA nd:1) This is followed by a separate paper listing seventeen 'Exciting new models for mission and ministry in the connexion.'

Whiteside gives more details of how Methodism first came to South Africa. He recounts that in 1806 the Cape became a British colony. When the British flag was hoisted at the Castle in Cape Town,

Henry Martyn, the famous Indian missionary, then on his way to India, was present, and recorded in his journal: 'I prayed that the capture of the Cape might be ordered to the advancement of Christ's Kingdom; and that England, whilst she sent the thunder of her arms to distant regions of the globe, might show herself great by sending forth men to preach the Gospel of peace'. How that prayer was in part answered, how Wesleyan missionaries were guided to South Africa, has now to be told (Whiteside, 1906:35).

He then describes how Barnabas Shaw and his wife were the first Methodists sent to work in South Africa. There was some Methodist activity among soldiers in Cape Town in the earliest days of the British occupation, but no formal congregations were established. There was resistance from the Dutch as well as the Governor, who believed that chaplains had been provided by the government. The Shaws sailed in December 1815, and crossed the South Atlantic as far as Rio de Janeiro to take advantage of the trade winds. They arrived in Cape Town in April 1816 a journey of one hundred and sixteen days! In spite of permission to form a Wesleyan Mission being denied him, Shaw wrote 'that on the following Sunday I commenced without it' (Whiteside, 1906:37).

A few years later, in 1820, Rev William Shaw (who was not related to Barnabas Shaw) arrived in the Eastern Cape with the 1820 settlers and had a vision to establish a chain of missions from the Cape to the present day Maputo in Mozambique. By 1834 six stations had been established in

the Eastern Cape. Veysie has documented this development, as well as some of the results which were produced by these educational institutions. Many of South Africa's leaders including former President Mandela received their initial education at Clarkebury and Healdtown mission schools. Methodists would have been the first in Natal to establish mission work if the person appointed had not died. James Archbell arrived in 1832 and received support of 650 pounds from the Grahamstown area, of which 40 were given by African Methodists. Richardson comments that this serves as an illustration that mission needs money as a necessary partner. There was significant mission growth once an African helper by the name of William Kongo was appointed. In the 1840s Indaleni, near Richmond, was established and evangelism was accompanied by woodworking, ploughing and building skills being taught. Richardson has also brought to light a 'Twentieth Century Fund' established to enable the church to concentrate on the most important programmes. Evangelism was considered the primary concern, but 40% of the fund was to be allocated to missionary advance and 10% given to orphaned children. It is estimated that 200 000 pounds were raised (Richardson, R. N. 2000:7).

In the light of this brief history, Richardson claims that this view of Methodism one hundred years ago should inspire the present members of the church to make similar commitments in the new millennium.

He calls for the following to be prioritised.

1. 'Evangelism at all levels is still our main business...'
2. Education. He notes that by 1950 there were 1281 Methodist primary schools and 26 secondary and high schools. After this the Bantu Education policy of the Apartheid government closed down most of these schools. In the light of the great contribution Methodist schools had made, he asks whether this should not again receive greater attention.

3. Orphaned children were considered needy and requiring care in 1900. As AIDS is advancing at the present time and producing a 'grim harvest' there should be moral education and caring for those affected.
4. Development of women in leadership. Ann Shaw was a worthy example of encouraging women to change their roles in society, and the Methodist women's Manyano movement has frequently been called the backbone of the Methodist church.

### **A Personal Concern**

My own interest was heightened by a trip in 1989 to an international conference in Manila in the Philippines. Travel arrangements included some time in Hong Kong, and in those two Asian cities the challenges, especially in housing, also face South Africa. A subsequent study tour in 1995 enabled me to spend six weeks visiting major Asian cities like Manila, Davao, Taipei, Bangkok, and by contrast, the wealthy city of Singapore. The effects of urbanisation, with particular reference to housing for the poor were very clear. These are not confined to Asia only, as they reach crisis proportions in Africa and other developing areas.

My teaching responsibilities at a seminary in Pietermaritzburg also include an attempt to come to terms with the role of the church in the growing urban complexes in South Africa today. Frequently the familiar pattern is repeated whereby the established churches in the city centres gradually lose members and eventually close.

This is largely due to changes in the nature of the city, resulting in families moving to the suburbs to escape the urban decay.<sup>1</sup> One of the teaching methods used in practical theology is to expose students to a city 'plunge', in which they are encouraged to explore the city at street level. It can be unnerving to leave the comfort and safety of a car, and walk through taxi ranks, informal markets and stations. This enables students to experience at first hand, the conditions in which the poor live and work. Examples of unemployment, poverty, homelessness and other social problems often have a profoundly disturbing effect on sheltered suburban people.

On reflecting on the socio-economic and religious conditions in urban centres, the question occurs whether there have been similarities in other periods of history, and how the churches have responded to these needs. Two brief examples will demonstrate how Christians have reacted to human needs, and poverty in particular. Maynard-Reid quotes the Roman writer Aristides, who described the early Christians to the emperor Hadrian (76-138) in these terms,

They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something, they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger, they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but instead through the Spirit in God ( Maynard-Reid 1997:17).

Stephen Neill notes that the early church practised Christian philanthropy consistently, and there is even evidence of this from some of its enemies. The apostate emperor Julian (332-338) bemoans the fact that the 'manifold exhibition of love in practice' was drawing many to the Christian faith. He writes,

Atheism (i.e. the Christian faith) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the

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<sup>1</sup> There is a quaint church in Durban dating back 100 years. Members moved away to the suburbs and the building was sold to a furniture store. Ironically it was called 'Antiques and Byegones.'

godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but also for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them (Neill 1964:42).

While recognising that there can only be certain common features, the conviction has emerged that it would be profitable to examine eighteenth century England in this light. The evangelical revival occurred in desperate social times in England. The role of John Wesley, sometimes called 'the friend of the poor', and the changing social and religious conditions provide a fascinating study. At the same time, this is not an attempt merely to repeat another historical study which has been done on this period. There is a large collection of studies both historical and theological which have appeared, especially in the last decade. This has caused something of a renewal of scholarly interest in John Wesley. Evidence of this is a new edition of his *Works*, which Rack calls 'magisterial' (1992:xii). It has already begun to appear, but will still take many years to complete.

The question, however, should be raised as to what theological and ethical assumptions were implicit in Wesley's teachings and actions. Marquardt asserts that Wesley's social impetus arose essentially from a precise knowledge of the poor in England. He argues that for Wesley,

poverty's actual basis lies neither in an inscrutable divine decree nor in the unworthiness of those affected by it. Instead, poverty can be traced to clearly recognizable causes. In a frequently preached sermon Wesley made eminently clear to his hearers what it meant to provide for a family on minimum wage. They not only had to eat their bread in the sweat of their faces, often they even had no bread. 'Is it not worse for one, after a day's hard labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength? ...Is it not worse to seek bread by day and find none? Perhaps to find the comfort also of five or six children crying for what he has not to give!' (1992:31)

The present study sets out to reflect on Wesley's teachings and actions with regard to the poor, and what effect these had on his society. This will focus particularly on their efforts at empowering the poor, and not on general church life or growth. Certain selected churches will be used as case studies in order to analyse how they function as a church in an urban context.

### **Why Wesley?**

Howard Snyder has written a favourable analysis of John Wesley in *The Radical Wesley*. Though a Methodist himself, and one who admires the radical nature of Wesley's innovations and ministry, he is critical of his social and political views. It would probably be fair to say that many scholars are not overly impressed with Wesley, as he was politically conservative, supported the king and also opposed the American Revolution. Snyder acknowledges Wesley's vigorous opposition to slavery, and suggests it may even have been ahead of his time. He further claims that Wesley had deep compassion for the labouring victims of industrialising England, 'but he made no fundamental critique of the free enterprise system.' Thus he says that 'it means that we do not have to buy into Wesley's social and political views in order to appreciate his ecclesiology' (1980:158). This comment will be examined later with the intention of indicating that it is a mistaken view.

My own interest in studying Wesley in this context is for the following reasons.

1. I am a Methodist who has an interest in Wesley and the origins of the church. It is instructive to read history from a missiological perspective, in order to trace what took place in previous periods and for what reasons. There is a very real danger of repeating hagiography, which has



been written by uncritical authors of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1875 the Rev Wakeley wrote,

Mr Wesley was distinguished for boundless benevolence, untiring industry, indomitable firmness, unfaltering courage, unwearied patience, perpetual cheerfulness, seraphic devotion, and heavenly enthusiasm. In him was blended the courage of Luther with the prudence of Melancthon, the zeal of Peter with the affection of John (1875:76).

Needless to say, modern biographers like Henry Rack (1989, 1992) are much more critical in their assessment of Wesley. Nevertheless many Methodists themselves seem to be fairly vague about their own history, and this may provide some helpful insights. In a limited survey conducted in several Methodist churches in Pietermaritzburg, Marshall questioned members about their understanding of some of the basics of their church. He found that there was general ignorance about the major doctrines as well as the history of the church. In fact there were several responses asserting that Wesley lived in the nineteenth century (Marshall 1994: 6). Therefore it may be instructive if Methodists could be reminded of some of their distinctive characteristics, rather than merely adhering to a fading tradition. A further, and possibly more important benefit would be for Methodists to practise Wesley's unrelenting commitment to the poor and introduce more meaningful activities in and through the local church.

2. Gaining some understanding of the worldview of the eighteenth century may furnish some explanations of perspectives of our own contemporary situation. It is often held that evangelicals are almost exclusively concerned with evangelism and spiritual concerns, while ecumenicals concentrate on social aspects of the gospel. David Bosch reflects on his experience at landmark international conferences arranged by the World Council of Churches and the Lausanne Congress for World Evangelization. He found that the respective groups defined themselves and

their task in distinctive ways, as well as in terms which excluded the other's interpretation (Bosch 1981:3-18). Hiebert makes the point that many of the assumptions of modernity have shaped our definition of reality. He argues that the church has come to accept a separation of supernatural and natural realms in which Christianity deals with spiritual matters, science with the material world. By way of example he writes,

Early in the eighteenth century Christians were also leaders in social reform. Evangelism for Jonathan Edwards, the Wesleys and William Carey was a call to repentance from sin and lives transformed by the power of God. They stressed 'service to the soul' and 'service to the body' (1993:65).

In a similar way Myers draws attention to the assertion by Lesslie Newbigin that the separation of physical and spiritual realms explains a wide range of dichotomies that are prevalent in the modern worldview. He writes,

For example, the spiritual world is the area of sacred revelation, in which we know by believing. The real world where we hear, see, feel, and touch is where scientific observation allows us to know things with certainty. Faith and religion are part of the spiritual world, while reason and science provide the explanation in the real world. The spiritual world is an interior, private place; the real world is an exterior, public place. This means that values are a private matter of personal choice, having no relevance in the public square where politics and economics reign. Publicly, we only need to agree on the facts. Sadly, the church has also succumbed to this modern worldview and has allowed itself to be relegated to the spiritual world, while the state and other human institutions assume responsibility for what happens in everyday life (Myers 1999:5).

<b>Spiritual</b>	<b>Material</b>
Revelation and believing	Observation and knowing
Faith	Reason
Religion	Science
Private and personal	Public
Values	Facts
Church	State (Myers 1999:6)

On reflection, it is much easier to identify the particular weaknesses of historical periods other than our own. The unhealthy dominance of the church in medieval times, and many excesses

in the period leading up to the Reformation, stand out in sharp relief. The theological inadequacies and arrogance of Western worldviews at the present time may be tempered by comparison with other periods.

3. The presiding bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Mvume Dandala, has said that

God has called us, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, to a great Mission. This Mission is nothing less than the challenge to rebuild Southern Africa... Mr Wesley was convinced that Methodism was raised to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. We proclaim a saving gospel that is both personal and social (Dandala 1997:6).

There is a concern that the contemporary Methodist Church of Southern Africa is very largely a middle class institution preoccupied with its own parochial interests. A Bishop of that church, Peter Storey, commented on the 'Journey to a New Land' process, that it was a 'bold initiative aimed at re-inventing' the church. He claimed that it was the wish of the church that 'real change, so often blocked by bureaucratic conservatism and institutional inertia would happen this time' (1996:1).

There are also several trends which are a cause for concern. Hendriks (1995:41) completed a national survey in South Africa on the growth or decline of churches over most of the past century. He has shown that there was a decline among White and Coloured Methodists of 19% and 32% respectively between 1980 and 1991. For all Methodists there has been a steady decline from a peak of just over 20% of all Christians in 1921 to about 11% in 1991. He further notes that there is a 'major shift' away from the black mainline churches (which would include Methodists) to the African Indigenous Churches. Any Methodist who is concerned for the future

of the church, would look for reasons for the decline in membership and the best way of planning for the future.<sup>2</sup>

4. In a recent book on Christian spirituality, Trevor Hudson devotes a chapter to 'Growing into Christlikeness.' He appeals for the gospel to show itself in hospitality, loving one's enemies and what he calls the action of doing good. He describes the great Wesleyan Revival and its effects.

As John Wesley preached men and women into the Kingdom, he simultaneously challenged them to bring an oppressive and decaying society into conformity with that Kingdom...Commenting on their efforts ...Bishop Peter Storey points out: '...[the] first co-operatives, the beginnings of social work, the liberation of slaves, the emancipation of labour, popular education, the Trade Union movement; all these and more were established by the spiritual descendants of Wesley' (1995:143-144).

This is the one of the major themes which occur in this study, and is a pertinent reminder of the way in which Methodist churches impacted society in the eighteenth century.

5. Ultimately poverty, locally or world wide, is not just a passing concern or a minor social inconvenience. The Archbishop of Cape Town Njongonkulu Ndungane writes, 'The most pressing issue of our day is the need to eradicate poverty. Just as the abolishment of slavery was an imperative for Christians in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, so I believe Christians approaching the turn of the century need to adopt as their decisive agenda the final eradication of this scourge of our times' (1997:2). On another occasion he quotes from the Declaration of War on Poverty. 'The war on poverty and inequality is South Africa's greatest challenge. Eradicating poverty is essential to consolidate the gains of our new democracy. It is a precondition for social justice, peace and security' (*Mail and Guardian* 13 March, 1998, p23). In addition one could add that

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<sup>2</sup> In a survey of the 1996 census, Hendriks shows that the Methodist Church increased its market share between 1991 and 1996. Previously many break away groups were classified as AICs, but were now more correctly included in the category of 'Other Methodists.'

poverty forms one of the most persistent themes of God's concerns in Scripture. Latin American liberation theologians like Gutierrez (most notably in *The Power of the Poor in History*) have drawn attention to this neglected subject.

6. In studying Wesley, one needs to investigate the way in which he practised and reflected on what today might be called 'Christian social ethics.' This could lead to finding a way forward for what Marquardt calls 'pressing contemporary social problems' (1992:11). Marquardt states that he concerns himself 'with working out some of the essential elements of the interdependence between Wesley's social activity and his theory of social ethics' (1992:15). This should enable one to reflect critically on his social ethics within his historical period.

7. This study will also try to evaluate how closely Methodist churches, with a special focus on those engaged in work among the poor, presently adhere to the principles of Wesley. The issue of working *with* the poor is a complex one. The church as an institution (with notable exceptions) has often sided with the powerful and rich, and neglected the poor. In South Africa Cochrane in (*Servants of Power*: 1987), has shown how many churches in the course of the twentieth century sided with imperialistic and apartheid structures.

In recent decades relief organisations in many countries have tried to raise the awareness of the public with regard to widespread poverty and suffering. During this period there has also been a growing divide between the rich and the poor nations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Terminology is difficult in this regard. Some words are condescending or inaccurate. There is no perfect solution as some authors refer to 'first world/third world, developed/less developed or North/South countries.'

The real issue is that relief work, or development, on its own is no solution in the long term. David Korten (1990:1) begins his book with the words, 'We have a problem' and observes that the 1980s was a time of growing recognition that the world was in a state of 'profound crisis.' This world is a world of 'dehumanizing poverty, collapsing ecological systems, and deeply stressed social structures' (1990:1). Global crises of this period were 'poverty, environmental failure and social justice.' He argues,

these three crises relate directly to three areas of development failure: justice, sustainability and inclusiveness. These failures demonstrate that the systems by which we manage our relationships with one another and with our natural environment are not working. Past approaches to development have, in too many instances, exacerbated the problem. Failure to acknowledge and correct the sources of this failure during the decade of the 1990s will most surely turn the 21<sup>st</sup> century into a global nightmare (1990:11).

While recognising that the Church has problems of its own (in the field of development), Marylee James believes that a process of transformation could begin to take place if 'the leadership could be taught a methodology for facilitating the mobilisation of church members, and of mediating between them and the remote social structures of their society' (James 1992:82). Further she states that 'the local church is the key to the active role of the Church in development', and with the right leadership, 'the local church has few limits in terms of its ability to become an agent for social and economic change' (1992:83). It is hoped that this study will provide evidence of how this has taken place, and continues to do so. Even though the church may not enjoy the popularity of earlier times and may find declining interest, it is still one of the agencies best positioned to impact society as a whole. A recent country wide research project on the youth of South Africa, has shown that among the young people (ages 16-35 years of all races), the highest percentage (16%) belong to churches and sports clubs. The next highest category of membership is to political parties, which is listed at 4% (CASE 2001:50).

On the local level the Methodist churches in the Metropolitan Circuit of Pietermaritzburg formed a City Mission in January 1994. This was an attempt 'to provide a relevant city ministry to people in the city of Pietermaritzburg. Its main thrust is that of the Church's Mission and Outreach to the disadvantaged, poor, needy, marginalised and unemployed communities.' It aims to be broadly ecumenical and include the participation of all denominations. It has started by beginning or co-ordinating projects such as a feeding scheme, shelter for the homeless, education centre and many more. There is usually great enthusiasm in the early stages of a project, but it will need to be self-critical if it is to sustain itself in the future and achieve its goals.

Other local churches also have programmes in place, which are designed to alleviate poverty and deal with other chronic social ills. An example in Pietermaritzburg is the Gateway Project, which is supported by some twenty mostly Charismatic churches. They have taken over a disused jail, in which they provide a shelter for the homeless, a number of skills classes and a pre-school. Subsequently a pregnancy and crisis counselling service has been opened.

In the following chapter some Methodist projects, which are engaging with the poor, will be examined. Hopefully this will provide models for churches in cities, which are grappling with ways of providing more effective services. Marquardt examines Wesley's social ethics and concludes,

From the first, though not consistently, the Methodist classes had this twofold aim: to help individuals gain a new identity and consciousness of worth, and to provide a starting point for social activity within and beyond the classes themselves. The democratic ground rules learned in these classes would later make a large number of Methodist lay persons into leading personalities of the labour union movement and political reform movements (1992:137).

Methodists remind themselves that from 1738 John Wesley spent the next fifty three years preaching. He averaged fifteen sermons a week, and although he stayed within the Anglican Church all his life, he reached many more people who were outside the churches. By 1784, three hundred and fifty six Methodist chapels had been built. In the census of 1851 the Methodists realised that they were failing to reach the people in the cities. The Methodist Conference of 1854 expressed concern to 'penetrate the neglected masses of heathenish population of our large cities' and decided upon 'reviving the Home Missionary spirit of Methodism' (*The Cities* 1997:36).

Snyder calls John Wesley 'one of the great innovators of church history;' and speculates about the influence that Wesley could have on the church at the present time.

Perhaps the church today can learn new things from John Wesley. People, even the born again-kind, are notoriously weak at holding together paradoxes which belong together - like the Spirit and the Word, the private and the social, or 'things old and new' (Mt. 13:52). Yet true renewal in the church is always a return, at the most basic level, to the ideal of the church as presented in Scripture and as lived out in a varying mosaic of faithfulness and unfaithfulness down through history. John Wesley represents an intriguing synthesis of old and new, conservative and radical, tradition and innovation that can spark greater clarity in today's new quest to be radically Christian (1980:3).

It is the contention of this study that Methodists, following the guidelines laid down by their founder, could have significant and radical effects in contemporary South Africa, and beyond.



The central thesis of the study 'The Local Congregation Empowering the Urban Poor, with Special Reference to John Wesley's Social Ethics'

The central question this study attempts to answer is: how can local congregations, especially those which follow the Wesleyan tradition, formulate a mission theology which will practically contribute to empower the poor in the cities of South Africa at the present time.

The hypothesis of this study is: Wesley developed effective means of intervention by the church in the eighteenth century, and these principles can be appropriate to meet South Africa's pressing contemporary needs.

In order to address the central question, Wesley's main themes will be examined, and three case studies of social projects by Methodist communities will be investigated. Four theories of mission will be critically analysed, and models which congregations adopt will be described.

## **CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

### **Introduction: The eighteenth and twenty first Centuries in contrast**

Is there a link between the pre-revolutionary eighteenth century Europe, and contemporary South African at the beginning of the twenty first century? Many would say not. What framework can be used to find any correlation in such different epochs of history? It is difficult even to suggest any parallels between these two historical periods, due to the dramatic changes which have occurred in the intervening centuries. This thesis will investigate what possible affinities may exist, and more specifically analyse what guiding principles the early Methodists adopted in their congregational life and work as well as how these may relate to contemporary South Africa.

### **Social conditions in eighteenth century England**

#### ***The political state***

Henry Rack introduces his book on John Wesley by saying that it is no easy matter to think oneself back into the England of his day. The population in 1701 was estimated to be 5.1 million, 5.8 million in 1751 and, more accurately, 8.7 million in 1801 (due to the first national census). In 'pre industrial' England most people still lived in rural areas or villages. The larger towns like Norwich (30 000) and Bristol (20-22 000) were far behind London, which was exceptional with a population of about half a million in 1700 (about 10% of the population of the whole country). Before the emergence of large factories many craftsmen worked from their

homes or small workshops. England relied heavily on agriculture, which in 1700 provided 40% of the gross national product.

The landed aristocracy and gentry were the real holders of power in the eighteenth century. English society was hierarchical with the upper ranks, middling ranks and lower orders. People were expected to obey their superiors and recognise that God appointed their position. But Rack notes that the eighteenth century was 'punctuated by riots against high corn prices; low wages in the textile industry; turnpike roads; Papists, Methodists and Dissenters; and sometimes against the political violations of "the rights of the freeborn Englishmen"' (1992:7). He also quotes Porter as saying that the century was kept in a state of relative control and equilibrium due to three factors. These were the strength and resilience of the social hierarchy, the possibility of movement up and down the hierarchy, as well as the ruling class' efforts to gain consensus in society by influence, persuasion and religion, though ultimately by force if that was necessary. So although there was a *relatively* open social structure, and especially for those with money (compared with Europe), Rack notes that real difficulties emerged when one approached the boundaries of a higher social rank. 'Land always remained the route to power in this society' (1992:6).

Certain significant features of the seventeenth century should be noted as these impacted on the times in which Wesley lived and worked. Many of the incidents listed below cannot be seen as a comprehensive summary of these times, but do however, point to the influential role of the church in society. The year 1665 marked the Great Plague which was the last major outbreak of bubonic plague, but which killed some 68 000 people. In 1666 the Great Fire of London destroyed much of the city, and a new city emerged. In 1670 Charles II with the help of Louis IV of France tried to make England a Catholic country again. In 1672 Charles issued a

Declaration of Indulgence which suspended all laws against Catholics and Non conformists, but parliament withdrew it and passed the Test Act which further excluded Catholics from all official employment. Charles managed to rule the country without calling parliament to convene as Louis IV provided him with personal funds.

In 1685 James II succeeded his brother as king and also tried to make England Catholic, and used ruthless measures. Opposition even came from the Church of England which held the belief in the divine right of kings. In 1688 the Archbishop of Canterbury and six bishops were acquitted of libelling the king because they had petitioned him not to require that his Declaration of Indulgence be read aloud in every church. In what became known as the 'Glorious Revolution,' both parties and the leaders of the Church invited William of Orange, who was considered the defender of Protestantism in Europe, to intervene. In 1689 an Act of Toleration was passed which gave all Christians, except Catholics and Unitarians the right to worship and build churches. (These were only granted in 1829 and 1830 respectively).

In 1703, against this turbulent religious and political background, John Wesley was born. He died in 1791 and during his long life, he had dealings with many of the national figures in both church and state. He frequently caused controversy and conflict because of his outspoken views and unconventional activities. In 1714 George I (ruler of the German state of Hanover) became king of England 'knowing not a single word of English.' In 1721 Sir Robert Walpole became chief minister and wielded great influence for over twenty years. In 1727 George II came to the throne. In 1715 and 1745 there were attempts by the Jacobites (those loyal to James) to restore the Stuarts by force. They failed and the Hanoverians remained in power. John Wesley therefore entered a society which had experienced considerable tension in the political realm. These tensions surfaced even within the elder Wesley's home. Samuel and Susanna were both

Tories, but Samuel accepted William of Orange as king, whereas Susanna saw him as a usurper. This occasioned a conflict within the marriage as Susanna refused to say 'Amen' to Samuel's prayer for the king. Rack (1992:48) describes how two strong willed people could not agree and eventually separated for some months. Not long after, the king died and the couple were reunited. Rack observes that 'the fruit of the union should have been John Wesley's birth.'

### *The misery of the lower classes*

It would be easy to gloss over the tragedy of this topic. However, a reminder of the depth and anguish of social conditions of this period should be considered. Poverty was widespread but varied from one area to another and depended on the size of the annual harvest. The number of poor increased significantly during the century as the so-called Industrial Revolution progressed. Marquardt (1992:19ff) describes something of the state of living conditions of the poor. Most had no schooling or training, and because of their movement towards the cities and towns, were no longer part of their traditional communities which would at least have provided some support from local parish structures. Housing was catastrophic, there was no medical care and there were very high birth and mortality rates. (John Wesley was one of seventeen children). One of the major causes of poverty was the dispossession of the rural lands and the expropriation of fallow land. All this favoured the property owners. This in turn made it impossible for the small and part-time farmers to compete on equal terms. There was also growing industrialisation as well as the rigid stance of the authorities and the traditional attitudes of property owners. After 1760, this process increased rapidly causing even greater unemployment, which in turn depressed industrial wages. To add to these difficulties steam engines and other labour saving inventions replaced the work that had been done in many small household businesses. This meant that growing numbers of independent craftsmen, like the peasants before them, fell into the insecure

fate of depending on wages. In addition working hours were long and conditions degrading, including the use of child labour. At this time, and well into the nineteenth century, public measures regarding the poor were governed by the almost unaltered poor laws of the Elizabethan era (1598). Marquardt quotes Kuczynski who summed these up as,

All persons able to work must be compelled to work when they are found unemployed, the youth among them placed in apprenticeship. The handicapped and the sick are cared for at public cost in poorhouses, where they too are to work insofar as they are able (1992:20).

There was also an attitude which viewed poverty itself as a fault, and which carried a stigma of divine punishment. So the poor were blamed for their own condition. Wesley refused to believe this. After visiting many of the sick he wrote in his *Journal*, 'so wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, "They are poor, only because they are idle"' (Bready 1939:249). Frequently crimes resulting from poverty became better known than the misery of the poor, and indignation replaced sympathy. At times these frustrations boiled over into riots and violence. This was met with strong reaction from the authorities who broke up demonstrations, arrested the ringleaders and sent some of them to the gallows. Marquardt concludes that the wealthy were concerned with securing and maintaining property, and increasing income. 'The basic motive behind all public measures was to maintain the existing order' (1992:21). Bready also refers to the publication of Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*, in which he writes, 'To make society happy, it is necessary that great numbers should be wretched as well as poor' (1939:31).

Bready gives detailed descriptions of the criminal laws of the day and the fact that 'not only adults but children of both sexes enjoyed the liberty of being hanged for no less than 160 violations of the law' (1939:127). Charles Wesley's *Journal* records an occasion when he preached in a jail to 52 prisoners waiting to be hanged, among them a child of ten. One could

elaborate about the barbarous penal code and the fact that hangings were conducted in public. The prisons too amounted to little less than places of deliberate torture. Other excesses of the period were rampant such as drunkenness, in the so called 'gin age', and the many perverted practices of cruel sports like bear baiting and cock fighting.

Marquardt states that historians are generally agreed that the judgments of the church at the beginning of the eighteenth century are 'unequivocally negative.' The moral and religious decline is illustrated by the fact that feasts were ignored, daily worship was neglected and Holy Communion infrequently observed. Hempton puts it even more starkly, 'The grand old Church of England seemed in danger from nothing but its own inertia' (1984:31). Marquardt concludes that 'in spite of the many efforts of individuals and of some philanthropic societies, neither state nor church could comprehend or relieve the increasingly urgent and sizeable problem of poverty' (1992:21).

One is reminded that the Church of England in the eighteenth century was the established church, that the bishops held powerful positions in church and society. The rules by which society was to function were stipulated by the church. For example, in the mid sixteenth century, during the reign of Elizabeth, everyone was required to attend church on Sundays and Holy days or be fined a shilling for every absence. Between 1660 and 1667 about 2000 Non Conformist clergy were turned out of their parishes, and were forbidden to come within five miles of their former parishes. If more than four persons assembled for worship without using the Prayer Book, they were liable to punishment. A Non Conformist could also not be a member of a town council. A person was not permitted to preach out of doors. As late as 1685 the Scottish Parliament introduced the death penalty for all people who attended or preached at open air services.

Semmel notes a quotation by Roe dating from 1768, which proposed legislative power to 'cut out the tongues' of field preachers (1973:179).

The prevailing theological climate was one of Deism. There was strong disapproval of anything which smacked of 'enthusiasm,' or what would be called fanaticism today. Wesley caused something of a scandal with his unconventional preaching (often outdoors), as did the zealous groups of people who followed his teachings and example. As will be shown, this was not merely a new ecclesiastical form, or an attempt to engender greater piety by rejecting current Anglican practices. It was rather a confrontation of current attitudes to the poor, and the society's paralysis in responding to critical social needs. It was also a severe critique of the civil state of the day.

### ***Did Methodism save England from revolution?***

It is evident that social conditions in England were in dire need of radical reform. It is pointless to speculate on what would have happened in England, if it had experienced a revolution similar to that which occurred in France in 1789. Many historians have suggested that Methodism did indeed prevent a revolution from taking place in Britain. This thesis is commonly presented, and probably best summed up by the French historian Elie Halévy. Semmel writes in his introduction to his translation of Halévy, that his view is that 'England was spared the revolution toward which the contradictions in her polity and economy might otherwise have led her, through the stabilising influence of the evangelical religion, particularly of Methodism' (1971:10). Bready quotes Halévy as saying that 'it would be *difficult to over-estimate* the part played by the Wesleyan revival.' He makes the claim that Methodism brought the Dissenting sects, then the Establishment and finally secular opinion under its influence. '[W]e shall explain



by this movement...what we may truly term the miracle of modern England, anarchist but orderly, practical and businesslike, but religious and even pietist' (1939:179).

Kent has expressed some frustration at the apparently endless debates started by Halévy, on the basis that comprehensive social theories of Methodism had been superimposed on inadequate local research. Hempton quotes Kent as saying, 'The study of late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Methodism as a national movement has ceased to pay dividends, and references to Halévy should be sternly avoided' (1983:11). Hempton acknowledges that many scholars have often rushed into the debate of whether Methodism made people more radical or less. He argues that the Halévy thesis is far from buried, and correctly so, as new scholarship is producing evidence of numerical strength, social structure and political significance of the early Methodists. For example, he notes that a survey of records in the Macclesfield area, have shown that 56% of members were women, half of whom were unmarried. He raises questions about the social significance of chapel communities in a woman's life. He also points to the fact that in the nineteenth century, 'the well known institutionalisation of Methodism brought the movement more firmly into the male world of professional ministry, chapel finance, business meetings and local courts' (1983:13). In the final analysis however, he concludes that 'Methodism, with all its diversity, made a profound impact on national life, especially in the nineteenth century' (Hempton 1983:12).

### **A comparison of some features of the eighteenth and twenty first centuries**

It is obvious that with the advent of a new millennium, there will be radical differences in almost every respect from the eighteenth century. How does one distinguish and understand the distinctive features of the present age? Bosch has written extensively on the changing

'paradigms' that have occurred in the history of the church. Although he is primarily concerned with paradigm shifts in the theology of mission, he provides valuable insights into the periods of the church since the time of the New Testament. He follows the analysis proposed by Hans Küng who suggests that the entire history of Christianity can be divided into six major paradigms, (the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity, the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period, the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, the Protestant [Reformation] paradigm, the modern Enlightenment paradigm and the emerging ecumenical paradigm). According to this model, the period in which Wesley lived could be placed somewhere between the 'Protestant (Reformation) paradigm' and the 'modern Enlightenment' paradigm (Bosch 1991:182). Bosch argues that 'In each era the Christians of that period understood and experienced their faith in ways only partially commensurable with the understanding and experience of believers of other eras' (1991:183). These eras have a far deeper influence upon society than the mere externals such as technology, buildings and modern living. He indicates just how different the world is now in relation to earlier periods of history. For example he claims that the medieval cosmology was structured in the following hierarchical order: God, Church, King and Nobles, People, Animals, Plants and Objects. Because the order was 'divinely constituted,' human beings had to maintain that particular order. So God willed serfs to be serfs and lords to be lords. The point here is that, with the West passing through the age of revolution, God was removed, the church was eliminated as a factor 'validating the structure of society' and the real power of kings and nobles destroyed' (1991:263). Examining these epochs is vital according to Bosch. He argues,

We do not do this for 'archaeological' purposes, that is, just to satisfy our curiosity about the way the past generations perceived their missionary responsibility. Rather, we do it also, and primarily, with a view to getting a deeper insight into what mission might mean for us today. After all, every attempt at interpreting the past is indirectly an attempt at understanding the present and the future. So, one important way for Christian theology to explore its relevance for the present is to probe its own past, to allow its 'self-

definitions' to be challenged by the 'self-definitions' of the first Christians (1991:183).

Bosch, writing towards the end of the twentieth century, maintains that Christianity in the West has lost its favoured or dominant position amidst the strong pressures of secularism and pluralism. These are some of the results of the Enlightenment, when 'more and more people have discovered, originally to their surprise, that they could ignore God and the church, yet be none the worse for it' (1995:15). Because of the important role of reason, science and philosophy, Bosch notes that 'religion lost the function it had in an earlier era - that of explaining the world' (1995:18). He goes on to assert that because there are no universal norms, people may live as they please. Choices are limitless and everything depends on personal choice. The thinking behind this is that, because there is no absolute value, all values are to be seen as equally unimportant. Another approach is to say that as there is more than one value, all values are to be appreciated. Bosch quotes Lyotard who affirms that because there is no metatruth, everything becomes arbitrary. Lyotard says, 'I define "postmodern" as incredulity toward meta-narratives' (Bosch, 1995:22).

But this does not merely remain in the dimension of philosophy. It emerges too in the daily experience and expectation of people who want 'to enjoy their football matches, rock festivals, television programs, holidays and parties - all of which they "deserve" after a hard day's work. Sacrifice, asceticism, modesty, self-discipline, and the like, are not popular virtues.' (1995:57)

What is the mission of the Church at the beginning of the twenty first century, and how has it developed and been moulded by the previous generations? This is particularly pertinent, with special reference to a time of revival of religion (mostly outside of the West), as well as immense

social fluctuation and upheaval. Verkuyl has written penetratingly about the role of missiology as a discipline. He asserts that the task of missiology in every age,

is to investigate scientifically and critically the presuppositions, motives, structures, methods, patterns of co-operation, and leadership which the churches bring to their mandate. In addition missiology must examine every other type of human activity which combats the various evils to see if it fits the criteria and goals of God's kingdom which has both already come and is yet coming' (1978:5).

Bosch notes that mission is more than, and different from, recruitment to our brand of religion. Rather it is alerting people to the universal reign of God. Christians in the past have been tempted to follow two approaches, both of which should be avoided. The first is to try to establish a Christian society. This is because Western Christianity has been dominant in Europe for over a thousand years. The Church expected the kings of states to submit to it. After Constantine, 'Christendom' was the accepted term for the church, which gradually grew to encompass almost all of Europe, and then was taken to the new colonies. The second approach is withdrawing from public life altogether. Bosch warns that we could be seduced into concentrating only on the 'religious' aspect and leaving the rest to the secular world. 'This is, after all, in keeping with the Enlightenment worldview: religion is a private affair, its truth claims are relative and have no place in the public sphere of "facts"' (1995:34).

Applying this to our present study of Wesley and his contribution to the evangelical revival, we note certain key themes recurring in Wesley's preaching and writings. He opposed the mysticism of William Law who had deeply influenced him. He rejected the 'quietism' of the Moravians, and although he remained in the Anglican Church all his life, he parted company with the Church of England on its lack of a full commitment to justification and sanctification. This was particularly in relation to expressing the Christian life in the way in which Hulley summarises Wesley's whole ethical theory. That is 'to be, and to do' (1988:63). He certainly

broke new ground in his age, especially with regard to his concern for the poor and marginalized of society. The unruly behaviour which Wesley's preaching caused is well recorded. On several occasions his life could have been in danger. He persisted in spite of all the opposition and violent responses which he experienced. There are close parallels in modern society in South Africa as well. Dandala writes,

One of our churches in one of our cities recently decided to start a soup kitchen. It was in a posh suburb. They did only three things: to give a cup of soup and a slice of bread and to pray together. You cannot believe the manner in which the entire suburb rose against this church. Their attitude was: 'How can you bring the riffraff of South Africa to our doorstep' (1997:3).

Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens* has challenged many of the assumptions of Christendom. With Newbigin, they claim that it is time for the church to recognise 'that it is in a missionary situation in the very culture it helped to create' (1991:421). It is a mistake to assume that Western, Northern European Christians had succeeded in fashioning a 'Christian' culture. Their Christianity had taken on aspects of being a 'civilizational religion.' This resulted in trying to force God's kingdom into being, by making the worship of God unavoidable. Another element of this process was to make Christian convictions available 'without conversion or transformation.' They therefore make the call for the church to recognise its status as a sojourner, or to see Christians as 'resident aliens.' Consequently they conclude that much culture Christianity is idolatrous and pagan. (This they illustrate by quoting at length from the call to prayer by former President Bush prior to the war with Iraq).

In trying to devise a theology, which would be appropriate for modern urban metropolises, Bakke records how eighteenth and nineteenth century revivals resulted in social action, which

produced relief and reform movements. But for almost a century, many evangelicals have fallen into the trap of dividing life into spiritual and secular concerns. He notes that

those who preach that we should only save souls, preach, and plant churches without getting involved socially in society are really doing two things; one admitting to the irrelevance of the gospel over large sections of modern life and, secondly, tacitly supporting the socially sinful status quo. Neither fulfils the biblical vision of transformed societies and model cities that we glimpse in Is 58, 65... (1989:11).

These are the some of the insights and criteria which will be used to reflect on the past and to analyse how the church relates to the contemporary world in what Bosch calls a 'critical hermeneutic' of the present context, especially the spreading urban complexes, where the majority of residents are poor.

### **CHAPTER 3: JOHN WESLEY'S SOCIAL ETHICS AND ACTIONS**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter it will be argued that John Wesley initiated a movement which placed the concerns of the poor at the centre of his ethics and his actions. He also tirelessly encouraged his followers to practise what he called 'social holiness.' It could appear that what follows is merely a listing of good 'works' in which John Wesley and his Methodists were involved. In some senses this is true, as the impact of the Revival and the rise of the Methodist movement had a major impact on the life of the people of England. Many examples will be given, which will indicate that though the end results were fairly modest by national standards, they prompted and then raised levels of social consciousness and moral responsibility.

Bunting contributes to a discussion on ethics in the modern world. He illustrates his argument with reference to a Biblical reference of Samuel who was instructed to anoint a King from among the sons of Jesse. All seven were rejected and the youngest, David, was appointed because, 'man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Sa. 16:7). He indicates that from the earliest times we are introduced to 'a moral distinction between appearance and reality, between an outward self and an inward self which is the true self; and we are cautioned that it is the inner self which is of primary importance (2000:236). He claims that this emphasis on the moral significance of the inner character is important. First, stress on inner character rather than on outward action has led to what he calls the 'virtue ethics' school. This has led to a restructuring of ethical theory in the modern period. Therefore the stress on duty and obligation from Hobbes to Rawls is rejected in favour of a stress on character. He claims that this promises to open up a new 'agenda for philosophical ethics.'

The second point is that an emphasis on inner character is important because of the widespread conviction, in Christian circles, that Christian ethics is a virtue ethic. Stated informally, it is claimed that there are biblical and theological foundations for the claim that character is the primary focus in Christian ethics. The moral perfection of Jesus and His role for believers as master and guide, the centrality of the doctrine of sanctification, the stress on the communal nature of the moral development of the believer: the existence of these and other themes has convinced some recent writers that Christian ethics is a virtue ethic (2000:237).

There will be a further consideration of this thesis at the end of this section which deals largely with the practical actions of Wesley and the early Methodists.

### **Relevance today?**

What possible application can this have in South Africa today? There have been frequent challenges regarding John Wesley's relevance to our contemporary context. Mmutlanyane Stanley Mogoba, the past Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, addressed this issue in a sermon at the Church's Conference held in Umtata in 1994. He spoke on the topic of 'Wesley's new birth for our new South Africa.' He recounted the new birth experiences of St Paul, Martin Luther, Charles and John Wesley. John Wesley, whom he calls 'this conservative revolutionary,' started a movement which grew by leaps and bounds. Yet he claims that at its heart was the 'ordinary gospel.' Magoba speaks of the power that was unleashed after Aldersgate (where Wesley had his 'heart warming' experience in 1738) and what resulted from his life's work. It included 'a ministry of 53 years, travelling 250 000 miles on horseback; and 40 000 sermons preached.' Magoba then presented a challenge to his church which was embarking on a programme of renewal,

The Journey to a New Land process is at heart the longing and commitment of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa and its people to be transformed in order to offer transforming ministry to our context - a new South Africa and a renewed sub-continent. The key word here is transformation. This is another word for 'new birth.' A change from weak, helpless sinners to forgiven people with power to revolutionise our Church and our country (Magoba 1994:49).



Lest it be thought that this is just another call for a church to be revived, Magoba speaks of Wesley as the one who 'touched the lives of poor people, ordinary neglected working-class people. He brought good news of salvation not only to those who needed it, but to those who needed it most' (Magoba 1994:48). Later, he speaks directly to the issue being considered here.

It is fair perhaps to ask what Wesley did that could be of relevance to us in the new South Africa. The following litany of his mission, will, I have no doubt, give readers some idea, nay, some inspiration, for what the Church of Jesus Christ should be doing in our beloved land. Maldwyn Edwards suggests Wesley practically discovered the poor: 'His life was one long crusade in the cause of the poor, and he encouraged his followers to follow his example' (1994:50).

He then lists some of the significant contributions which Wesley made in his efforts against poverty, injustice and slavery. These are well known, and have been given extensive treatment by several scholars like Bready, *England before and after Wesley*, Marquardt's *John Wesley's Social Ethics* and in South Africa, Aubin de Gruchy's *Beyond Intention - John Wesley's Intentional and Unintentional Socio-economic Influences on 18th Century England*.

Rack, however, provides a word of caution about ascribing too much credit to John Wesley's influence on social reform. He believes it

is in fact difficult, if not impossible to believe that such complex movements as the eighteenth-century rise of philanthropy and the early nineteenth-century campaigns for protective legislation could have sprung up from the efforts of one religious group, still less from those of a single individual ... Since he was an instinctively benevolent 'friend of mankind' and especially of the poor and suffering there is nothing surprising about this. It was poverty and the related question of wealth which most excited his concern, leading him to practical action as well as to one or two excursions into what contemporaries called 'political economy' (1992:360).

Having made this point, Rack proceeds to enumerate the areas in which Wesley led the way by example in his attitude of 'private charity.' This began from the earliest times when he was still a member of the Holy Club at Oxford. It continued all his life and Wesley describes how as a Fellow of Lincoln, he was able to live on 28 pounds a year. As his income increased he gave the rest away. Later in life, due to proceeds from his publications he found that he had 'unawares become rich' which caused him to give the profits away. Marquardt provides an interesting insight into his attitude to money and his refusal to build up large savings. In 1753 John Wesley's health deteriorated to such an extent that he thought he might die, and retired to the country for several weeks to treat his 'consumption.' True to his 'methodical' nature he composed his own epitaph:

Here lieth the body of John Wesley, a brand, not only once, plucked out of the fire; he died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of his age, leaving (after his debts were paid) not ten pounds behind him, praying - God be merciful to me an unprofitable servant (Heitzenrater 1995:187).

The significance of this passage in the present discussion refers to his claim made almost ten years earlier that 'if he died with more than ten pounds in his pocket, he should be considered a thief and a robber' Heitzenrater (1995:187). This is consistent with the well known injunction in his sermon, *The Use of Money*, to 'gain all you can, save all you can and give all you can' (*Works* VI: 126). Not only is he critical of saving (hoarding) money, but he takes a very strong position on the misuse of wealth. Even a cursory glance at the index to Wesley's sermons under the heading of *Riches* provides some indication of his opposition to what he calls 'riches' for example,

'the evil of desiring,  
not to be trusted in,  
how to be employed,  
not to be hoarded but given to the poor,  
present many hindrances to holiness,  
danger of, (several entries)

tendency of,  
injurious effects of,  
among Methodists,  
danger of, to Methodists' (*Works* XIV:490).

Rack observes that Henry Moore estimated that 'Wesley disposed of 30 000 pounds in his lifetime' (1992:361).

Having acknowledged Wesley's injunction regarding money, Willard takes issue with Wesley and his solution to wealth (that is, to give it away). He calls this suggestion 'deeply flawed.' Willard suggests that Wesley's proposals are simplistic, and that he did not understand the possibility of Christian teaching and discipline, which could produce people who would be capable of holding possessions and power, without being corrupted by them. He continues,

But surely he must have known that no one loves and trusts money more than those who have none. And certainly he knew that 'If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing' (1Cor. 13.3,NIV). Giving alone cannot secure a proper relationship to God (Willard, 1988:197).

Certainly most scholars would agree with this comment, as would Wesley himself. Giving away riches could never in itself secure a proper relationship with God. A more complex question is raised regarding an ethical response to trying to eradicate poverty. No one would suggest that giving away money and riches would ultimately provide a lasting solution to the phenomenon of poverty in any society. Simply providing relief to the poor, however generous and noble, is unlikely to make significant changes to the structures which cause poverty in a society. In spite of these assertions, Wesley made a major contribution to the alleviation of poverty in its various expressions. In addition, he prompted a 'culture of

compassion and relief' among the Methodist societies. To some extent too, he provided initial steps towards empowering the poor, as will become evident from what follows.

### **Expressions of John Wesley's social ethics**

Aubin de Gruchy (1993:33) has described in some detail, the way in which John Wesley was motivated by his concern for the poor, to engage in acts of service to alleviate their condition. These included personal as well as the communal efforts of the Methodist 'societies.'

#### ***Distribution of clothes***

As early as 1740 Wesley was instrumental in organising a scheme for the distribution of clothes to the poor. He writes, 'we distributed, as everyone had need, among the numerous poor of our society, the clothes of several kinds, which many who could spare them had brought for that purpose.' (*Works* 1:291) It is unlikely at this stage that he had any comprehensive plan to address the fundamental causes of poverty or that he intended to adopt measures which would bring widespread relief to the poor. Having said this, it should be noted how his concern for the poor spilled over into practical action and how he enlisted the help of others too. He writes,

I reminded the United Society, that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many were sick and ready to perish: That I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not alone, sufficient for these things; and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart, 1. To bring what clothes each could spare, to be distributed among those that wanted most. 2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick. My design, I told them, is to employ, for the present, all the women who are out of business, and desire it, in knitting. To these we will give the common price for what work they do; and add, according as they need. Twelve persons are appointed to inspect these, and to visit and provide things needful for the sick. Each of these is to visit all the sick within their district, every other day: And to meet on Tuesday evening, to give account of what they have done, and consult what can be done further (*Works* 1:309).

### *Care of widows*

Wesley was also touched by the plight of widows who were unable to care for themselves, or who had no family or friends to provide for them. He rented two small houses and ensured that they would be homes that were warm and clean. These became known as the Poor House. He writes that they 'took in as many widows as we had room for, and provided them with things needful for the body.' He goes on to add that he himself as well as other Preachers who are in town 'diet with the poor, on the same food, and at the same table... So that it is not in vain, that, without any design of so doing, we have copied after another of the institutions of the Apostolic age. I can now say to all the world, "Come and see how these Christians love one another!"' (*Works* VIII: 265). Funding for this project was to come from offerings taken at the Society as well as contributions from the Bands. It appears however, that they were not able to sustain the support and the 'Poor House' did not last long. This provides a parallel with Ubunye Housing, which faces an ongoing crisis of making ends meet. The development agencies would use the term, 'lack of sustainability.' It indicates also that no relief work can survive without adequate and continuous funding.

Not everything Wesley started was an immediate success. He wanted his followers to practise the form of communal living he admired in the early church. The reference above about following the early church, shows his pleasure at Methodists eating together, and demonstrating the love which they had for one another. That system, however, did not last long. His early views on preferring celibacy were also modified in time. Rack notes that in his period at Oxford 'he had been influenced by some of his friends to see celibacy as best for the holy life, and at a later stage for many years he believed that marriage (for sexual reasons)

was incompatible with perfection (1992:81). It is well known that Wesley married late in life, though it was a very unhappy union.

### *Medical assistance*

With regard to medical treatment Wesley was concerned that the poor were at a severe disadvantage because of the cost of medicines and the difficulty of ordinary people being able to have access to medical treatment. He was very critical of some doctors. 'Physicians now began to be had in admiration, as persons who were something more than human. And profit attended their employ, as well as honour; so that they now had two weighty reasons for keeping the bulk of mankind at a distance, that they might not pry into the mysteries of the profession.' (*Works* XIV:310). Later he asks if the medical profession has not taken to producing 'dangerous' and 'compound medicines' that it 'was scarce possible for common people to know which it was that wrought the cure' (*Works* XIV:311). Once again he presents an argument on behalf of the poor by inquiring,

'But are there not books enough already on every part of the art of medicine'? Yes, too many ten times over, considering how little to the purpose the far greater part of them speak. But, besides this, they are too dear for poor men to buy, and too hard for plain men to understand. Do you say, 'But there are enough of these collections of receipts.' Where? I have not seen one yet, either in our own or any other tongue, which contains only safe, and cheap, and easy medicines. In all that have yet fallen into my hand, I find many dear and many far-fetched medicines, besides many of so dangerous a kind as a prudent man would never meddle with (*Works* XIV:312).

The result of this was that Wesley published a book of simple remedies called *Primitive Physic* which went through twenty three editions before he died, and which appeared in its thirty-second edition in 1828. Marquardt (1992:29) comments on Wesley's 'comprehensive and well organized publishing program,' in order to supply 'his' poor people with books. Regarding *Primitive Physic* Marquardt says that it (along with Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of*

*Christ*) was made available to almost every family '... and in spite of its many peculiarities, it rendered a valuable service to those who could not afford a physician' (1992:58). Because of unhygienic living conditions, poor nutrition and scant knowledge about maintaining good health, many of the poor fell into the hands of what Wesley called 'quacks' (1992:28). Marquardt adds that the regular and well organised ministry of visiting the sick was not sufficient. The city of London was divided into twenty-three districts, and each district was entrusted to the care of a pair of visitors who visited every sick person three times a week. As they were not able to cope with the demand, Wesley decided to dispense medicines and treat simple illnesses. He writes in 1746,

I mentioned to the society my design of giving physic to the poor. About thirty came the next day, and in three weeks about three hundred. This was continued for several years, till, the number of patients still increasing, the expense was greater than we could bear: meantime, through the blessing of God, many who had been ill for months or years, were restored to perfect health (*Works* II: 39).

In 1747 he was able to report that

Upon reviewing the account of the sick, we found great reason to praise God. Within the year, about three hundred persons had received medicines occasionally. About one hundred had regularly taken them, and submitted to a proper regimen: More than ninety of these were entirely cured of diseases they had long laboured under. And the expenses of the medicines for the entire year amounted to some shillings above forty pounds (*Works* II: 81).

Wesley was pleased that he had seen such a good response from people who were in such need of medical help. He was able to say that 'many lives have been saved, many sicknesses healed, much pain and want prevented or removed' (*Works* VIII:263). There was however, an unresolved matter regarding the poor.

But I was still in pain for many of the poor that were sick; there was so great expense, and so little profit. And first, I resolved to try, whether they might not receive more benefit in the hospitals. Upon the trial, we found there was

indeed less expense, but no more good done, than before...I saw the poor people pining away, and several families ruined, and that without remedy (*Works* VIII: 264).

In order to find a solution, Wesley 'thought of a kind of desperate expedient.' This entailed providing medicines to people himself. He argues that he had studied anatomy and 'physic' for many years from the time that he gone to America, as he had expected that he would have to provide some medical assistance there, to those who had no doctor. He reports that he took into his 'assistance an Apothecary, and an experienced Surgeon; resolving at the same time, not to go out of my depth, but to leave all difficult and complicated cases to such Physicians as the patients should choose (*Works* VIII: 264). It should be added that there was no charge made for any of the medicines.

There is an interesting comparison to be made with conditions in contemporary South African society with its health care needs. Wesley writes that in five months about five hundred people were treated, and 'I did not regard whether they were of the society or not.' The costs incurred were just over forty pounds. He says that they continued this and saw more and more success. Considering that he was living on about 28 pounds a year, this would have amounted to considerably more than his annual stipend. It is not feasible to draw direct comparisons with conditions in this century, but this must have been a significant financial burden for the struggling Methodist societies to bear. Although not directly within the scope of this study, medical services in certain areas of South Africa are reaching the point of near breakdown. From the earliest times, many missionaries incorporated education and medical services in their work at the mission stations. Bennett records that Rev D E Carr used his medical knowledge when he was stationed at Ingwavuma in 1916 and from 1917 to 1924 at Threlfall Mission at Kosi Bay (Garrett, nd. 51). In 1930 Medical Missions were launched in the Eastern Cape and a hospital opened at Shawbury. Here Dr R D Aitken, was appointed as



the first qualified medical doctor, by the Methodist Church of South Africa. A second hospital was opened at Mt Coke in the Ciskei, and in 1937, the SA Medical Council recognised this hospital as a Training School for Registered Nurses. There followed a long period until the early 1970s, in which the Methodist Church provided training and medical services at hospitals and clinics in various parts of the country. The sad ending to this period of service came as the Apartheid government decided, primarily for political reasons, to take over the mission hospitals from the churches. This introduced a more inefficient provincial administration, increased red tape and unreasonable controls from 'Pretoria' where permission was needed for the smallest detail. It also removed a significant service of compassion, which the churches had offered to the poor in undeveloped areas. A medical practitioner,<sup>4</sup> who worked in several mission hospitals, has called this step 'a major disaster'. In the present situation of worsening medical services, especially with the growing HIV/AIDS crisis, several local churches have begun to open clinics and health care services for those who cannot obtain help elsewhere. Two examples are Hillcrest Methodist Church near Durban, which runs a clinic and a school, and Edenvale Methodist Church in Gauteng, which is opening a hospice for those who are dying of AIDS.

### *Loan funds to the poor*

As the Methodist movement grew, the task of co-ordinating the work of the societies became more complicated. In 1744 Wesley had tried to bring about economic reform by proposing that each member should bring all they could spare 'until we can have all things in common.' This weekly contribution should go into a 'common stock.' In 1746 he developed a new way of economic assistance in London asking his friends to give to a 'lending stock.' Fifty pounds

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<sup>4</sup> For personal reasons this person has asked to remain anonymous.

was collected and two stewards of the society dispensed loans of up to twenty shillings to those who needed 'a present supply of money' for purposes 'to carry on their business.' This scheme would save them from lenders who would demand interest at rates which would be considered extortionate, and thus compound their difficulties. Heitzenrater notes that members of the society who borrowed money in this way signed, with a co-signer, to repay the amount within three months. In the first year some two hundred and fifty people were helped in this way. In 1767 the loan fund was increased to one hundred and twenty pounds and the numbers of borrowers significantly increased. By 1772 Wesley had managed to increase the capital amount for the lending stock and was able to lend five pounds, up substantially from one pound. Heitzenrater suggests that this was not only due to inflation, but also 'is one indication of the higher level of entrepreneurial involvement of those Methodists who were seeking temporary assistance in their small businesses (1995:251). Marquaardt adds that the basic capital which came from Wesley's own savings, was handled by administrators, and he received no profit from them (1992:29). As promising as this may have been, there were problems with the system. James Lackington was considered to be a success story as he, at the age of 26, had borrowed five pounds to start a business as a bookseller. His business took off and he increased his stock five fold within six months. He went on to make a fortune, and deGruchy quotes Thompson as saying that his bookstore became the largest second hand bookstore in London, if not the world (1993:74). Heitzenrater adds that within two years 'he left the Methodists.' Lackington seems to have felt that Wesley was 'charitable to an extreme' and that on occasions gave ten or twenty pounds to needy tradesmen (1995:252). In the current situation money lenders, sometimes called 'loan sharks' have started any number of outlets by lending money to the poor at exorbitant interest rates. Other abuses such as taking away lenders' identity books, and compelling them to sign up for compulsory life policies are common.

In contrast, Wesley and others tried to get people out of debt, at a time when there were many opportunities to lose money. Wesley railed against the gin trade, and large scale gambling. Bready speaks of the 'gambling mania' of this era. It has frequently been described, though often the tyranny of its grip is but little understood. The Government raised vast sums by popular lotteries: even the building of Westminster Bridge (1736) and the founding of the British Museum (1753) were financed chiefly by this means (Bready 1939:155). He also quotes Trevelyan who describes 'the society of the day as "one vast casino"' (1939: 157). It is noteworthy that the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa submitted a statement to the Conference of 2001. The statement condemned state sponsored gambling as 'exploitation and economic injustice' (MCSA nd:1) It further issued a paper which called gambling 'legalised corruption and the big lie.' Significantly it links its objections to gambling to a concern for the poor.

That is why we, The Methodist people say...

The empty promises of the gambling industry are deeply unjust and unacceptable exploitation of the poor.

We must cry for the creeping impoverishment that gambling is causing and mourn that many people, especially children, go unfed, poorly clothed, inadequately housed and uneducated while the gambling industry gets richer.

The Governments of Southern Africa are wrong to encourage a culture of corruption and greed at the expense of the poor by endorsing the growth of gambling in Southern Africa through lotteries and granting casinos, especially in or near where masses of people are poor. (MCSA: nd: 1)

### ***Publications***

Rack makes a rather critical comment on Wesley's contribution in this area. He says that the difficulty 'in estimating Wesley's achievement as an author and editor is the fact that he so frequently fused (or confused) the two functions' (1992:346). He notes that in spite of the relaxed contemporary standards regarding using material from other authors, he was 'remarkably cavalier' in his borrowing. Notwithstanding, he produced extensive reading materials. Nevertheless he embarked on a life long effort to publish material, which would be helpful to his Methodist preachers and others. In 1745 he made an appeal to the Conference that he could 'travel less in order to write more.' The answer that was given was, 'As yet it does not seem advisable.' Heitzenrater mentions that the Minutes listed several specific topics which John Wesley was asked to address. He continued to write about a dozen items a year such as *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*. He also abridged and published several tracts of the works of Jonathan Edwards, William Law and many others. In 1746 the Wesley's consolidated about sixty three items previously published, consisting of biography, devotional writings, hymns and journals. This was to become the Wesleys' 'Work,' which would help them to defend their position on numerous topics and extend their ministry. Heitzenrater sums up this aspect of their work.

The wide variety represented in their own tracts, as well as their collected libraries, is a good indication of the breadth of their concern for the mind, body and soul of the people. It was, however, only one facet of an emerging organizational network that could offer spiritual nurture, physical assistance, leadership training, and other support services for those in connection with the Wesleys (1995:157).

Currently Methodist lay preachers and candidates for ordination are encouraged to read and study, by using theological colleges, universities and distance education opportunities. It is a vexed question whether lay Methodists today, have a respectable level of Biblical and

theological knowledge, and understanding for the demands of being the church in a modern, secular society. It has however, been pointed out that biblical knowledge examinations and certificates are still popular in many African congregations.

### **John Wesley: Introspective individualism or social reform**

There has been a common perception that Wesley was primarily interested in the individual's soul and that a social and ethical dimension is lacking in his theology. Villa-Vicencio writes that a quest by Methodists for their Wesleyan roots 'is not necessarily an exercise in romantic escapism or parochial self-indulgence.' He attempts a critique in his *Towards a Liberating Wesleyan Social Ethic for South Africa Today*. But he allows other interests, besides a fair analysis of the historical facts to override his conclusions. As an example he quotes with approval Bonino's observation, that Wesley's anthropology is 'incurably individualistic,' and that social relations are for Wesley 'simply a convenient arrangement for the growth of the individual. It is the soul that finally is saved, sanctified, perfected, rather than the person as a whole, let alone society' Villa-Vicencio (1989:97). He does concede that from Wesley's vast array of writings it is possible to counter any general statement on Wesleyan thought and practice. And although Wesley insisted that he knew no holiness except social holiness, Villa-Vicencio chooses to present his bias in favour of a parody. He writes,

But, and at times in spite of, Wesley's theological qualifications to the contrary, the picture of an eighteenth century Methodist as an agonising introspective individual in spiritual torment before God, clinging to moralistic absolutes in a world seen to be undetermined by sexual laxity, the abuse of alcohol and human pride represents only a slight caricature of the Methodist saint (1989:97).

Is this in actual fact a balanced presentation, of Wesley or other Methodists? This surely is more than a 'slight caricature' together with Wesley being 'an introspective individual' as

Villa-Vicencio portrays him. Regarding Wesley's role as a social reformer, Rack is of the opinion that it is difficult if not impossible to believe that the complex rise of philanthropy in the eighteenth century, can be ascribed to an individual (in the person of Wesley) or one religious group (like the Methodists). He suggests that they simply did not have the numbers to cause a groundswell of social change. He is, however, prepared to acknowledge that though he personally did not initiate or organise any major reform, yet it 'was poverty and the related question of wealth which most excited his concern, leading him to practical action as well as to one or two excursions into what contemporaries call "political economy"' (1992:360). He then lists some features of Wesley's lifestyle. He and Methodists collected for the poor as part of their regular discipline. Rack says that he acted 'instinctively' to cries of dearth and unemployment. In 1741 he urged the Society in London to bring clothes and money for needy members. In 1744 Wesley went around in person begging for the poor. He had done this earlier in 1740 to help those who lacked help under the Poor Law. Rack continues,

In 1772 Methodists were said to be involved in founding the 'Christian Society' for the poor, and in 1783, at the age of eighty, Wesley begged round Bath for the poor. Though the Methodist poor were perhaps a special concern, as among the Quakers, plenty of help was given to the poor at large. Charity was an accepted part of Christian duty, not least in the eighteenth century, but it was sometimes taken to extremes by Methodists, as in Wesley's case. A man who sold his clothes to feed the poor was understandably regarded as mad (1992:361).

Itumeleng Mosala examines Wesley from the experience of social and political deprivation in South Africa. He considers Wesley's theoretical and ideological framework, and claims that as a conservative his perspective was dominated by the 'paternalism of the ruling classes in relation to the dominated classes.' He continues,

The fact that Wesley emphasised 'social holiness' and criticised 'solitary' religion did not alter the individualistic conservative politics behind his theology. A good example of how the politics of his ideological background

constrained the possibilities of his theology can be found in his doctrine of humanity. For Wesley, the human person is an isolated individual capable of being reduced to its soul. The sanctification of this individual consisted of 'spiritual awakenings, and movements, and actions and states of a religious and moral type.' Something of the bourgeois ideology of social upward mobility is implicit in this concept of salvation. It is not impossible in our context for some to ask: So what is wrong with that? Therefore let us answer that what is wrong with this is that it takes the status quo as given, rather than as the result of historical movements of the dispossession and displacement of the now poor members of society. For this reason the ideological baggage of Wesley's theology presents enormous difficulties for the economically and socially deprived people of South Africa (1989:89).

One can understand how Mosala arrived at these conclusions in the height of the Apartheid system, but he brings to his subject themes which are a product of a later construct. Rack observes that England in the eighteenth century was a very hierarchical society, though not a 'class' one in the Marxist sense. He notes that 'The language of 'class' does not appear before the 1790s. Contemporaries spoke rather of 'degree', and 'rank.' They did not think of self-conscious economically-based classes engaged in mutual hostility. People tended to think more in terms of associations by trade, religion, region, family ties and political faction (1992:5,6). And in spite of Wesley's 'no politics' rule, Rack asserts that Methodism was seen as subversive, not counter-revolutionary. The behaviour of preachers as rivals of the clergy, and societies as dividers of parishes seemed as a threat to the established church. He states,

The image of Methodism as a counter-revolutionary bulwark against the *status quo*, a quietener of the lower orders, originated as a defensive propaganda exercise by the Wesleyan leadership against renewed suspicions of this kind in the 1790s, and as a warning to some of their own followers (1992:380).

Mosala's views also do not stand up to historical scrutiny or to a survey of Wesley's writings. Himmelfarb mentions that though there may have been a measure of a 'self-help' ethic in Methodism, 'there was also a social ethic of some significance.' She mentions too that Wesley advised his stewards not only to help the poor, but also to consider their feelings. 'Put yourself in the place of every poor man, and deal with him as you would God should deal with

you' (1984:32). When Anglican churches were closed to Wesley, he preached in the open in order to reach the greatest number of the poor. He assured clergymen that he would not be in competition with them. 'The rich, the honourable, the great, we are willing...to leave to you. Only let us alone among the poor' (1984:33).

A few comments to conclude this survey may be appropriate. John Wesley was not perfect, and many of his rather high-handed ways must have irritated his leaders, as they would anyone today. Taking this into account, as well as many of his other idiosyncrasies, does not warrant him being falsely represented or ignored. One could well ask if much contemporary opinion of Methodism and John Wesley is historically simplistic. As a result the picture which emerges, is one that is one-dimensional and rather misleading. Many of the writings referred to, lack a real sense of history as well as an analysis of the complexity of the questions involved. It is therefore, the intention of this study to argue that the Wesleyan tradition deserves to be understood in its historical context, and retrieved for our own. It should not be swamped by the hegemony of popular and uncritical writings of this time. Surely Hempton is correct when he writes,

Above all the aim is to look at political problems from as many directions as possible in order to understand, if not condone, the actions of the main participants...In the generations after the French Revolution churchmen of all persuasions were operating in unchartered social territory...All one can do is to restore the colour and texture of religious debates and personalities at a time when religion was important to people, and reapply Edward Thompson's words, to rescue the Methodists 'from the enormous condescension of posterity', not least of its historians (1983:18).

## **Social Ethics**

'Social ethics' is a tautology - all Christian ethics are social ethics' (Hauerwas:1989: 6).

Sondra Wheeler writes in a similar vein when she says it is a misreading to speak of John Wesley's 'social ethics.' 'Because both of the distinctions implied in that term - the distinction



between social and personal ethics...are alien to Wesley's thought and life.' In addition she argues that,

Enlightenment philosophers, desperate to avoid the bitter religious and ideological conflicts of the preceding two centuries, sought to relegate religion to the realm of the private and personal. But Wesley thought this kind of compartmentalization, however well intentioned, was fatal, and it was something he preached against throughout his life...Wesley knew nothing of our modern distinction between evangelism and social action because the only gospel he had to preach was the good news that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has come near to us....This is the context [of] Wesley's constant work with the poor and despised of the earth, and his involvement in the societal problems and controversies of his day (1998:132).

In the previous chapter an attempt was made to describe briefly the prevailing social conditions in England in the eighteenth century. Amidst the rather lukewarm efforts of the state church, and what Marquardt describes as a 'society that almost totally denied the burning needs of the poor,' there was a significant contribution of the 'religious societies.' They had emerged at the end of the seventeenth century, and were mainly concerned with the personal lives of members and their conversations and observances of strict rules. Their religious activities centred around prayers from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, as well as regular celebration of Communion as was the practice of high-church Anglicans. In addition these groups began to undertake social tasks like supporting the poor and caring for the sick as well as prisoners. These societies were open only to Anglicans and not to Dissenters.

...they focused on liturgical and devotional practices; their basic motif, to which even social work was entirely subordinate, was holiness, in the sense of ecclesiastical-ascetic piety. Nevertheless, these societies clearly contrast with an inactive state church and a society that almost totally denied the burning needs of the poor...The very character of their piety meant that ultimately even their devoted care for the poor was only the means of their own sanctification (Marquardt 1992:22).

Of particular importance, and taking the nature of a larger body, was the formation of two societies which grew beyond the confines of a local circle. These were the Society for

Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in 1698 and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in 1701. Many more (including mission societies), which do not concern us here, were formed in the period that followed.

It is well known that John and Charles Wesley formed a circle, which became known as the 'Holy Club' while they were at Oxford. It should be seen in the light of the religious societies described above. The purpose of the Holy Club was 'for the study of the classics and of the New Testament and for the cultivation of piety.' In this quest they read Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor and William Law, and discussed them as well as examining their lives. In addition they also began to take on social tasks like visitation of prisoners and poor families as well as helping in a school for underprivileged children. With regard to the group's motivation Marquardt suggests that on the one hand Wesley tried to imitate Jesus and the fulfilment of his commands, and on the other 'striving of blessedness through commitment to the higher goal of the salvation of souls' (1992:25). It should be noted, however that Marquardt agrees with the opinion of Loofs and quotes him regarding the Holy Club. 'It is not work for others that they held in view as their aim; their own devout egoism was determinative for them' (1992:144). Marquardt also reminds us of Wesley's words regarding his motivation for going to Georgia to work among the Indians. 'My main motive, to which all others are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul (1992:26)

After the Aldersgate experience Wesley underwent an 'ethical conversion,' as Hynson describes it (1984:36). No longer is there an attempt to do good works as a means of pleasing God, and thus earning favour, but the effects of knowing God and a sense of having received justification, now result in a release of social service as gratitude. Marquardt quotes Cameron

in summing up the difference in motivation (which Marquardt calls 'of crucial significance') when he writes,

Whereas the earnest University Students undertook their regime of self-denial and 'social service' as steps on the way to justifying themselves in God's sight, the later Methodists undertook the same steps out of joyous assurance that their sins were already forgiven, not out of their own desert, but of God's grace. They were not the roots, but the fruits of salvation. They sprang not out of anxiety for self, but out of compassion for others and love for God (1992:192).

This motivation, together with Wesley's unique doctrine of perfection, formed the basis of his social ethics. As early as 1739 Wesley was able to write of the balance between personal religion and social holiness.

Solitary religion is not found [in the Gospel]. 'Holy solitaires' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than 'holy adulterers.' The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection...And in truth, whomsoever loveth his brethren, not in word only but as Christ has loved him, cannot but be 'zealous of good works.' He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them....And at all opportunities he is, like his Master, 'going about doing good' (Wesley in his preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems, 1739).

Hulley points out that the phrase 'religion is loving God and man' or similar, appear again and again in his writings. Recognising that this position of 'loving God and man' must necessarily have ethical consequences, he expresses 'surprise' that theologians and ethicists have not seen more generally that he is 'vitally concerned with ethical issues in his writings' (1988:1). Hulley illustrates that this emphasis is not just of passing interest, but was a central feature in his work. In 1745 he wrote,

I want, I value, I preach the love of God and man. These are my 'favourite' tenets (if you will have the word) 'more insisted on' by me ten times over, both in preaching and in writing, than any or all other subjects that ever were in the world (*Letters* II:49).

About thirty years later he repeated these themes,

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 neighbour; 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.' (*Works* VI: 498).

Rattenbury makes it even more specific when he writes,

His emphasis on the duty of love to our neighbour is one of the most startling features of his teaching, and a love that does not act and serve was not what Wesley meant by love. A vital feature of holiness - perfect love, he calls it - is love to the neighbour - that is, social service (1938:228).

Far from trying to put his social ethics into practice in solitary fashion, Wesley gave expression to the social nature of the gospel in his remarkable organisation of groups.

### **John Wesley's strategy of using small groups**

Assuming that Wesley had brought a new dimension of moral concern and a practical expression of service for the poor, it could be argued that he used distinct methods to convey this through the Methodists society at large. It may have been discovered on the way and may not have been carefully calculated before he started. But as with many of his innovations he formalised them to serve a greater purpose.

How did Wesley put into practice these ethical concepts? Many writers are willing to concede that Wesley was not known primarily as a systematic theologian. However his great concern was for scriptural holiness to be spread throughout the land. In the minutes of *Several Conversations between the Rev Mr Wesley and Others*, there is an unambiguous commitment

‘Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.’

Henderson recounts how Wesley, in what he calls the ‘religious morass’ of the eighteenth century, set about his task. At the time when he returned from America and had undergone his heart warming religious experience at Aldersgate Street, he was thirty five years old, single and an ordained priest in the Church of England. He had been a tutor at Oxford and a leader of a group of students who gained the nickname of the ‘Holy Club.’ Henderson suggests that at this point he had a difficult choice to make. He could either aim at reformation from the top down, among the intellectuals and aristocracy or he could take his message of holiness direct to the common and unchurched working class people.

In many respects the decision was made for him and may not have been the result of a planned course of action. George Whitefield who was a member of the Holy Club and one of Wesley’s former students had begun preaching to large crowds, often outside of church buildings. He soon gained the reputation of being an ‘enthusiast’ and because of the response of thousands of followers it was feared that there might be unrest and rioting. In February 1739 he made his first excursion into Bristol’s Kingswood slums. The numbers grew rapidly and soon reached several thousands.

Henderson quotes Whitefield as being so moved by their response that

Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus who was a friend of publicans, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (1997:26).

At this time Whitefield announced that he was to go to Georgia in North America just as John and Charles Wesley had done. Whitefield felt confident that John Wesley should succeed him as the leader of the field preaching. Wesley was at first loath to take on this task as he had firm views about doing things decently and in order... 'I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church' (Henderson 1997:27). Shortly after this Whitefield introduced him to field preaching. He writes that he 'submitted to being more vile' and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.' His first sermon was to about 3000 people and his text was on the passage, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor' (Is 61.1).

Whereas Whitefield had developed the practice of field preaching (often to thousands of listeners) it was John Wesley who organised the movement and brought it under systematic management. He was not content to leave those who had been 'awakened' to chance and so instituted small groups for growth in discipleship. These groups of about 12 people were later called 'classes' and formed the backbone of the Methodist reforming movement into the next century. The use of small groups was not original as even John Wesley's father, the Rev Samuel Wesley had had some experience of small groups in his rectory. The small groups, **collegia pietatis** were also an important feature of German Pietism, and Philip Spener had encouraged the formation of small groups for fellowship, prayer and the development of piety as early as 1675. In England there was something equivalent in the formation of the 'societies' like the Society for the Reformation of Manners (1691) and the SPCK (1701). It aimed to bring 'pious books and catechisms' to the public but especially to the poor.

John Wesley, his brother Charles, George Whitfield and several others had been members of the 'Holy Club' while they were at Oxford. The Club's rules called for strict personal

discipline, a rigorous devotional life and significant work among the poor (Shaw 1997:138). Given the demands of the growing numbers of people who were being reached through open air preaching, Wesley devised an approach which stemmed from his pragmatism. Shaw believes that Wesley had four underlying convictions regarding the making of disciples. These were

1. the necessity of discipleship,
  2. the necessity of small groups for discipleship,
  3. the necessity for lay leadership and
  4. the necessity of making holiness and service the double goal of discipleship
- (1997:141).

So convinced was Wesley about the need for discipleship that he wrote in his journal in 1743 that 'I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow' (1997:142). So came about the formation of **societies**, not as a substitute for the local church, but to encourage godliness, prayer, exhortation and watching over one another and helping one another. Members were not required to belong to a particular denomination. The only requirement was 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.'

A smaller group (of about 12-20) was the **class** which Shaw calls the 'most basic small group structure of a Methodist society.' They were led by a layperson, and met once a week in the evening for mutual confession of sin, and accountability for growth in holiness. Money was also collected for the poor. So strict was the system that tickets were issued quarterly to admit members to the love feasts and the next quarter's meetings. If members did not satisfy the requirements, they were not given tickets.

Another smaller group was the **band** which consisted of about 5-10 men or women who met for pastoral care and mutual accountability. They had strict rules and asked probing questions about their daily life, temptations and sins. The select societies were specialised small groups which were designed to produce future leaders. It is interesting to note that there is considerable interest in reviving some of these structures in churches today. Peter Wagner and others who are not Methodists simplify the whole system and suggest that the church today should consist of the **celebration, congregation, class and cell**. (That ranges from a group of possibly thousands, as at a conference, a normal congregation which may consist of several hundred, a class of about twelve, to a cell of maybe three or four people).

Heitzenrater argues that the religious societies attacked the problem of immorality on a personal individualistic basis (1995:21). Henderson compares Whitefield and Wesley. Wesley's fruit remains. Whitefield reportedly reviewed Wesley's life's work and said, 'my people are a rope of sand' (1995:30). The most obvious conclusion is that he may have retained many of his followers if he had had a system like Wesley's to retain them.

#### ***Evaluation of Wesley's small group method***

In contrasting some of John Wesley's contemporaries, like George Whitefield, Shaw argues that Wesley's great idea was a simple one. 'The church changes the world not by making converts but by making disciples' (1997:136). In a letter to his father as early as 1734, John Wesley wrote 'My one aim in life is to secure personal holiness' (Shaw 1997:139). There are frequent reminders that Wesley was not original in his insistence on small groups. Shaw comments that 'What was unique was the intensity with which Wesley perfected the small group structure in order to create the radical disciple' (1997:143). Henderson makes the point



that Wesley came to realise that 'the primary function of spiritual/educational leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally' (1997:137). He uses this to contrast the way in which Luther boldly proclaimed the 'priesthood of all believers' in the sixteenth century, but that never seemed to become a reality in the Protestant church. Wesley managed to mobilise almost the entire membership of the Methodists in the ministry of the congregations. Henderson believes that this is a reflection of St Paul's writings to the church at Ephesus where he placed the emphasis that God had given apostles, prophets and evangelists to serve in the church. Within the Methodist structures there were what he calls 'dozens' of official positions, such as stewards, class-leaders, band leaders, exhorters, trustees, sick visitors, helpers, preachers, booksellers and many more. This ensured that the ministry was divided among the entire congregation. Henderson affirms, 'This concept of leadership alone was revolutionary enough to set Methodism apart from the other sects which practiced a one-person ministry' (1997:138).

The origins of his convictions regarding small groups probably date back to his childhood. In 1712 when Samuel was in London for a Church Convocation his wife Susanna began holding what she called 'enlarged family prayers' in the kitchen of the rectory at Epworth. Henderson traces the influence on John Wesley's thinking about small groups to the French nobleman de Renty. He was so impressed with his model that he abridged de Renty's biography from 358 pages to 67 and constantly encouraged his preachers to follow de Renty's example. De Renty 'viewed Christian service as the context in which personal holiness developed' (Henderson, 1997:50). Henderson believes that Wesley adopted this approach rather than other views, which held that Christian service, would be the eventual outcome of a quest for personal holiness. Henderson claims that Wesley also was influenced by the Moravians in a crucial respect, that of the experience of personal conversion. His own experience at Aldersgate is

well known and Wesley frequently referred to this experience as '*anno mea conversionis*' (1997:57). Henderson comments that 'conversion became the stock-in-trade of Methodism, its primary and fundamental method, upon which an elaborate instructional system would be built' (1997:58). If there is a temptation to become too admiring of Wesley's genius in establishing the classes, there should be a reminder that Wesley more or less stumbled on the idea as a result of what Watson calls his 'pragmatic approach' to new situations. He traces what he calls the genesis of the class meeting to a very mundane occasion which had the task of trying to clear a building debt. Wesley appointed leaders who would collect weekly contributions toward the debt and those of each class would meet together once a week. Snyder observes that although the groups provided a sense of *koinonia*, their primary function and purpose was discipline (1980:38).

Henderson notes that the class system was in place by 1742 and that under Wesley's personal leadership continued with little change for the next fifty years. He describes the categories of Methodist structures in the following terms. The society is called the 'cognitive mode' as it was the place which was given to cognitive instruction. The class meeting is called the 'behavioural mode' as this was compulsory for any Methodist and became 'the tool for the alteration of behaviour' (1997:96). Wesley required that the *Rules* should apply to all and required that members do no harm, should avoid all known evil and practise helpful aspects known as the *means of grace*. Henderson notes that in addition to the above, the 'affective mode' is catered for in the Band. He describes the environment of these homogeneous groups as 'ruthless honesty and frank openness, in which members ought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions and affections. It could be said metaphorically that the society aimed at the head, the class meeting for the hands and the band for the heart' (1997:112).

Snyder estimates that by the time Methodism had reached 100 000 members at the end of the eighteenth century, the movement must have had 10 000 class and band leaders with perhaps a larger total of other leaders. Many of these were women which prompted Bebb to call Wesley 'the most outstanding feminist of the eighteenth century because he provided women with opportunities for leadership available nowhere else' (Snyder, 1980:63). Snyder also draws attention to the frequent dearth of leaders in the church and he points out that Wesley put one in ten or maybe even one in five into significant ministry and leadership. More important is the fact that these were not educated or wealthy people, but labouring men and women. He quotes the disdain and mockery heaped upon Wesley by his critics including Augustus Toplady (author of 'Rock of Ages') who accused his system of lay preaching as 'prostituting the ministerial function to the lowest and most illiterate mechanics, persons of almost any class, but especially common soldiers, who pretended to be pregnant with a "message from the Lord"' (1980:64). This system of bands and classes lasted well over a hundred years although Snyder observes that where they survived they tended to lose their vitality and became legalistic or moralistic. In Britain attendance of a class was a condition of membership until 1912 (1980:62).

It is tempting to romanticise the place of small groups, which Wesley instituted as well as to place too much emphasis on their role as places of discipling, pietism and personal growth. A corrective may be given in the writings of Marquardt who states that the Methodist groups did not have the task of making an other-worldly existence easy or possible. Rather he points out that from the first these classes had a twofold aim:

to help individuals gain a new identity and consciousness of worth, and to provide a starting point for social activity within and beyond the classes themselves. The democratic ground rules learned in these classes would

later make a large number of Methodist laypersons into leading personalities of the labor movement and political reform movements (1992:137).

On the basis of the above, it could be argued that an essential feature of the implementation of Wesley's social ethics, was his formalising of small groups into the regular structures of the Methodists.

### **Small groups in the Methodist Church**

Whiteside, writing in 1906 on the history of the 'Wesleyan Methodist Church in South Africa,' describes the growth of the church among African people by African evangelists in a revival in 1866. This fact is important as the history of churches is frequently recorded in terms of European missionary activity. Charles Pamla preached extensively in the Eastern Cape and visited many towns. Whiteside describes how hundreds of people, generally in the open air, knelt and prayed for forgiveness.

There was the beginning of the harvest, when careful examination was made of each case of conversion, the taking down of names, the grouping into classes for spiritual instruction and the selection of class leaders. These were the general features of the services at every station, and at the end of the series it was reported that about 6000 natives had entered into new life in Christ' (1906:272).

This pattern has continued well into the twentieth century and is still practised at the present time. Sundkler in his *Bantu Prophets*, tries to analyse leadership patterns among churches in Africa. He refers to the 'rank system' within the churches and draws attention to the lay element of the Church as an evangelising force. He identifies the Methodist Church as overcoming strong authoritarian tendencies enforced by Jabez Bunting in England in the nineteenth century. He claims that the strongest cause for this more 'democratic' tendency was

probably the Methodist class organisation, which more than anything else accounts for both the strong hold of the Methodist Church over its individual members, and the role of the laity within the Church. In the Protestant Church in Africa, sociologically speaking, this class organisation of the Methodist Church has been the most important and successful attempt to create an in-group, a close, personal relation between individuals within the greater organization of the Church' (Sundkler, 1960:136).

He then goes on to describe the growth of the Methodist Church in various parts of South Africa. However he notes that the 'Methodist tradition with its class leaders, stewards and so on, is democratic in principle.' It is interesting to note his comment, that in the independent Churches these democratic principles are re-aligned and transferred into autocratic categories. (1960:138). This deserves further research as the independent churches have grown rapidly since Sundkler reported these findings.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the basis of the findings of the 1996 census, Hendriks points out that 'some 10,7 million South African Christians (35,5%) belong to the AICs, and that the Zion Christian Church is the largest denomination in the country with 3,9 million members (2001:47). This is particularly remarkable because the growth of the AICs occurred in a very short space of time. Hendriks shows that in the twenty years between 1970 and 1990 the AICs increased from 17% to over 35% of the total population (2001:58).

It is also noteworthy that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa still retains class meetings, which are described in the section on membership in the 'Laws and Discipline.'

As membership in the Church involves Christian community, it is the duty of all members in the Church to seek to cultivate this in every way. The weekly Class Meeting, which has been modified to include Home Bible Study and Fellowship Groups, has from the beginning proved to be the most effective way of maintaining a sense of community, as well as learning in Christian experience. It is intended to provide Christian community and instruction (2000:17).

Members should have their names entered into a Class Book and be under the Pastoral care of a Class Leader. They are expected, as far as possible, to contribute to the funds of the Church and to do some form of Christian service' (Laws and Discipline 20). Ross Olivier in *'The Next Step'* has listed 'strong small group and fellowship life' as features of growing churches (1996:68). It appears that this will be made a priority in the future.

### **Small groups outside Methodism**

It could be argued that at the present time, there is a rediscovery of the value and function of small groups. The names may well have changed and churches may not consciously look back to a Wesleyan heritage. It could be argued that the dynamic of the small group as a method of fellowship, growth and accountability has been rediscovered. One can only speculate on the reasons for the staggering growth of Alpha groups around the country and in many countries of the world. According to the *Alpha News*, courses offered have grown from 5 in 1992 to 12,710 in 1999. Even more dramatic is the increase of so called 'cell churches' which have reinvented most of Wesley's structures, although they may have changed the terminology.

Another aspect worth investigating is the contemporary trend towards small group activities in various churches, especially in the West, but also in the Catholic Church in Latin America. Escobar, writing in 1987, refers to the rapid growth of base church communities and suggests that in their formal aspects, they demonstrate a 'striking similarity' with the New Testament pattern of congregational life' (1987:32). In South Africa, Hirmer and Prior, writing in an attempt to encourage churches to become a 'creative local church,' encourage small groups in 'Gospel sharing groups' as these are instrumental in building community.

Henderson (1997:127) has examined John Wesley's class meetings as a model for making disciples. At the end of his study he asks why Wesley's system was so effective. He suggests that his strategies, principles of leadership and instructional aids really depend on what he calls the 'foundational level...of underlying principles.' These are

1. Human nature is perfectible by God's grace
2. Learning comes by doing the will of God
3. Mankind's nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals
4. The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured
5. Human progress will occur if people will participate in 'the means of grace'
6. The gospel must be presented to the poor
7. Social evil is not to be 'resisted,' but overcome with good
8. The primary function of spiritual/educational leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally

## **Wesley and his work among people on the margins of society**

Christine Pohl turns to Wesley to illustrate his concern for the poor and his ability to offer hospitality. Some of the benefits of meeting in often modest homes were 'opportunities for intense personal interaction, relationship building and oversight of new believers' (1999:54). This was extended to shared meals, and 'love feasts' as an attempt to copy 'the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity.' In addition Wesley opened homes for widows and the infirm. He writes that he as well as the other preachers who are in town, eat with the poor 'on the same food and at the same table.' Pohl argues that his blending of poor and weak persons with influential leaders was an attempt to emulate early Christian understandings of hospitality.

More than that though, is her reference to Victor Turner's analysis of liminality, marginality and inferiority (1999:106). She claims that in the area of hospitality hosts should be threshold or bridge people. She calls these 'crucial dimensions' of marginality and liminality, without which relations between hosts and guests 'often serve the more conservative function of reinforcing existing social relations and status hierarchies' (1999:107). Turner himself refers to van Gennep's rites of passage as 'rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age' (1969:80). Turner further adds that the attributes of liminality or 'threshold people' are necessarily ambiguous,

'since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate status and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial (1969:81).



His studies of tribal societies showed that neophytes entering initiation rites were often presented as possessing nothing, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property or position. What results is that among them there develops an 'intense comradeship and egalitarianism.'

Mathias Zahniser follows van Gennep's and Turner's framework to explain how initiates make a transition from one clearly defined position in society to another. He claims that all cultures have such rites and that these include three phases. These are *separation* from the old status, *liminality* (from the Latin 'threshold') because it is transitional and *reintegration* as this reincorporates the initiates into fully fledged members of society. Zahniser further points out that the liminal phase of a rite of passage is a '*chaotic* time 'precisely because it abolishes all socially sanctioned identities, statuses and roles' (1997:94).

However this chaotic time, the 'non structured character of liminality, "anti-structure" can be a positive one as well. Zahniser identifies creativity as one. New things are possible because little is taken for granted. Another benefit is what Turner calls a sense of *communitas*. He suggests that throughout religion and literature there are frequent references 'in which normative and ideological *communitas* are symbolized by structurally inferior categories, groups, types, or individuals...' (1969:121). He believes that this applies to St Francis who established a Rule for what he considered the total '*via fratrum minorum*.' He explains, 'I have stressed the importance for liminars - as persons undergoing ritualized transitions may be termed - of doing without property, structural status, privileges. Material pleasures of various kinds, and often even clothing.' He continues, 'In all this, Francis appears quite deliberately to be compelling the friars to inhabit the fringes and interstices of the social structure of his time, and to keep them in a permanent liminal state, where, so the argument of this book

would suggest, the optimal conditions inhere for the realization of *communitas*' (1969:133). Turner also finds examples of this method of creating *communitas* in other religions.

Zahniser applies this concept to John Wesley and his bands and classes of Methodists, who passed through the stages of liminality and *communitas*. It is not possible in this study to trace these trends in detail, but it is pertinent to show how John Wesley himself acted out these elements of liminality and marginality. Outler (1981:56) quotes from Wesley's journal to show how he was frequently told that he would not be welcome to preach in a church again. He writes, 'I preached at St Lawrence's in the morning and afterwards at St Katherine Cree's church. I was enabled to speak strong words at both, and was therefore the less surprised at being informed I "was not to preach any more in either of those two churches." Two days later he preached at Great St Helen's and records that afterwards he was told, "Sir, you must preach here no more"' (Outler, 1981:56).

Needless to say, Wesley was unable to maintain the sense of liminality among his own followers and frequently complained of Methodists moving up the social scale. A further factor to consider, is that the generation of Methodist leaders who followed Wesley, did all they could to prove their allegiance to the king. One is reminded of the remark made by (the 'Pope' of Methodism) Jabez Bunting that he 'hated democracy as he hated sin' (Rack, 1992:370). This indicates further how nineteenth century Methodists became more conservative than Wesley himself had been, and also the great desire to gain respectability and good favour with the government. All this proves too how the sense of liminality was reduced for the security of institutional respectability.

Willard notes that Wesley's lament over prosperous Christians was nothing new, as this too had occurred in Geneva under John Calvin. Nevertheless, Wesley continued to preach and write about the evils of wealth. Willard describes the anguish which he felt.

'I am distressed! I know not what to do!' He even suggests that 'true, Scriptural Christianity has a tendency, in process of time, to undermine and destroy itself.' It begets diligence and frugality, which make one rich. Riches, in turn, 'naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive to Christianity' (1988:196).

Willard is quite critical of Wesley's rather blanket condemnation of wealth. He suggests that it is even possible to romanticise poverty by identifying it with simplicity, which may not be true.

This removal of the idea of poverty from the reality of poverty is what allows it to be romanticised among all groups of Christians - and even permits a certain 'poverty chic' to flourish in some quarters of secular society. Wesley, though no advocate of vows of poverty, listed his deceased preacher's possessions as one shilling and fourpence, in addition to his clothes, linen and woollen stockings, hat and wig. All of these together were not sufficient to meet the funeral expenses, which amounted to one pound seventeen shillings and threepence. Certainly this minister often knew want, and his self-sacrificing manner of life is not to be despised as a virtue or as a discipline. But he did not lack for status within his society or for reliably regular provisions of food and shelter that he did not own (1988:204).

Hauerwas in his *Peaceable Kingdom*, argues that there is a prior question to 'What ought I to do?' It is 'What ought I to be?' If one begins by asking about the correct actions which ought to be done, there is the danger of assuming that moral situations 'are abstracted from the kind of people and history we have come to be' (1983:116). Rather he argues that

The 'situations' we confront are such only because we are first a certain kind of people. In fact, the very idea that ethics should be primarily concerned with 'quandaries' and the kind of decisions we ought to make about them reflects our current understanding of ourselves as a people without a history. 'Situations' are not 'out there' waiting to be seen but are created by the kind of people we are (1983:116).

These insights are helpful in our examination of attitudes towards the poor, or other moral questions, which the churches face in the present postmodern context. Wesley's ethics then seem to be central in his preaching and writings. Rack makes the point that Wesley resembled Luther, more closely than Calvin, in that he gave the greatest attention to the way of salvation. If Luther emphasised justification, then Wesley focussed more on sanctification. Rack further points out that Wesley preached only one sermon on the Trinity, which as a doctrine, was under attack in the eighteenth century. His view was that it should be believed in accordance with its basis in Scripture. But Wesley was not primarily a systematic theologian. Rather, he was a practical theologian intent on reforming the nation. Rack says,

What did matter was doctrine concerned with personal salvation as the achievement of holiness to the point of perfection. This can be seen most clearly not so much in formal treatises, or even sermons and conference pronouncements...but rather in a host of short, sometimes aphoristic summaries in his pastoral correspondence. Here he cut away all lesser matters to emphasize with great simplicity what was of ultimate concern. As he wrote in his Sermons his concern was first to distinguish 'formal' from 'heart' religion and second to make clear the need for 'faith working by love' to those already converted. In the letters he says: 'Aim still at one thing - holy, loving faith, giving God the whole heart.' We should concentrate on two points 'Christ dying for us' and 'Christ reigning in us.' 'The end of the commandments is love...let this love be attained, by whatever means, and I am content, I desire no more' (Rack, 1992:382)

This emphasis on love is a recurring theme in Wesley's writings and one which dominates his approach in ethics. Christians should be concerned with 'all inward and outward holiness.' Therefore, all personal habits, stewardship and commitment to values, as well as social actions are an integral part of the life of people who make claim to be followers of the Christian way. Wesley himself writes in his *Journal*

The fundamental doctrine of people called Methodists is, Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the true faith; the faith which works by love; which, by means of the love of God and our neighbour, produces both *inward and outward holiness*. This faith is an evidence for things not seen; and he that thus believes is regenerate, or born of God; and he has the witness in himself. (Call it assurance, or what you please) (Vol Three 1760-1762, p24) Italics added.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of Wesley's social ethics*

After a consideration of the essential elements of John Wesley's social ethics, Marquardt draws together his conclusions regarding their strengths and weaknesses. He suggests that the greatest weakness was his conservative view of the state. 'The state and especially the king were elevated above any criticism seeking to attack anything more than the individual, the negative, or the peripheral' (1992:133). The origin of these attitudes has been analysed, but does not concern this discussion. Marquardt is surely correct in pointing to a further aspect of this point which has contemporary equivalents.

In addition, the representatives of republican movements, who conflicted with the state church because of their political convictions, appeared godless and hostile to Christianity, thus making it even easier for Wesley to take sides in favour of the existing order (2000:133).

A further consequence of Wesley's not allowing his preachers to address political issues meant that they necessarily became supporters of the king and government of the day. Such a position made church representatives uncritical of a society which worked counter to the Methodist movement's dynamic, which was formed for the very purpose of changing that society. An issue related to this was what Marquardt calls his rejection of structural changes in society. Although Wesley did denounce many aspects of societal wrongs like the deprivation of farmers by land enclosures, the conditions of the poor, of prisons and many others, he did not attempt or succeed in having them legally and institutionally established or assured. Had he in fact worked in that direction it would have forced him to be aligned with the reform movements from which he had distanced himself. The exception to this is his opposition to the slave trade, where he actively supported Wilberforce in his efforts to abolish slavery by introducing legislation in parliament. One wonders why he could not have sought similar allies in the political realm to deal with so many of the other social evils which he opposed all his life.

Lastly Marquardt critiques Wesley for his 'defective knowledge of causal connections.' He writes,

Wesley's advice for fulfilling major social tasks frequently makes it apparent that he did not perceive the deeper connections of political or economic developments. Thus in many cases his proposed solutions sound naïve and superficial. This lack of knowledge was caused by his political bias and insufficient leisure time to study such problems and acquire

necessary information, as well as general unavailability of appropriate research and publications. The careful observer should understand this deficiency and guard against hasty conclusions (1992:135).

By way of strengths, Marquardt proposes four complementary concepts each of which provide their own inner tensions.

### ***1. Faith and Works***


Wesley was aware of the danger of returning to a 'works-righteousness' of medieval Catholicism, which had to such an extent determined Luther's doctrine of justification. Nonetheless Wesley assigned works a higher rank without losing the Reformation character of his soteriology. Thus

'works were always subordinate to faith or the working of God's grace and could never acquire a meritorious function; on the other hand, they essentially belonged to faith as its necessary consequence, so that there could be no faith without works... (Marquardt 1992:135).

Marquardt adds that this preserved ethics from becoming a 'mere appendix to dogmatics' and faith would bring forth good works as its fruits.

### ***2. Love and Reason.***

As Biblical moral law holds an obligation for the Christian, its chief content is love, and as social challenges cannot be answered by specific biblical instructions, it becomes incumbent upon the individual to apply the commandment to love in conjunction with rational reflection. Marquardt says that this point can hardly be overestimated.

 Love for others, born from experiencing God's unlimited love, creates the preconditions of social involvement: social sensitivity, solidarity in community, and compassion for others. Love awakens the conscience to unlimited responsibility for others, regardless of their religious, moral or social character. To the universal human rights expounded by the Enlightenment, love gives the practical power to transcend the boundaries of race, nationality, and social stratification, and to recognise all persons as recipients of loving gifts. Love also contains the potentially revolutionary element of egalitarianism, which has led historically to Methodism's connection with the labour movement and political liberalism... Rational reflection gives the mature Christian the ability to recognise and perform what is ethically commanded in the situation that confronts him or her

without resorting to a comprehensive catalogue of casuistic instructions (1992:136).

### **3. *Individual and Society***

Wesley expected the individual to experience renewal in justification and sanctification. From there, the transformed person should gradually transform society. The new convert was not snatched away from a set of social connections to cultivate piety away from non-Christian influences. Rather converts were sent out to witness to their faith and show love to all. Marquardt adds that the Methodist groups did not try to make for other-worldly existence, but the 'practising of manners of social conduct, and setting in motion effective measures of assistance' (1992:137). He also reminds us of the Methodist classes and their twofold aim, namely to help individuals gain a new sense of worth, and to provide a starting point for social activity both in and outside the classes themselves.

### **4. *Praxis and Theory***

Marquardt concludes,

With appropriate scholarly hesitance, it may be asserted that Wesley was the greatest social reformer of his time because he succeeded in bringing socio-ethical theory and praxis into a close connection that served to advance both. His theory almost always operated independently when he allowed social problems to be posed; and despite its limited potential, his theory became so effective because he knew how to translate it into practical measures (1992:137).

It has also been argued that Wesley possessed a lively gift of observation which he used in his extensive preaching journeys, and that he gained unique insight into the severity and multiplicity of social problems which existed in his time. This resulted in him prompting others to see these situations and to try to analyse their causes. Although he may not have succeeded in these ventures he started 'humanitarian waves' which led to reforms beyond what he himself had thought possible.

Overall Wesley's ethic which began with the universal love of God that repudiates any religious heightening of social abuses, and with the rational analysis of any situations that provided the necessary motivation and concrete suggestions leading to practical consequences, must be seen as influential and helpful beyond Wesley's own time. It also provides stimuli worthy of consideration for ethical reflection today and situates

comprehensive social responsibility in the conduct of Christians and non-Christians alike (Marquardt 1992:138).

In reviewing Wesley's ethics it should be noted that he did not strive to be a lone reformer. The comparison has already been made between Wesley and Whitefield. Both spent their early, formative years in the Holy Club at Oxford, before going to serve in America. Both were powerful and sometimes dramatic preachers who drew crowds, which could number thousands. Yet Whitefield's sad comment about his followers being a 'rope in the sand' illustrates his lack of lasting results and organizational skill. In this regard Wesley was particularly gifted. It also indicates Wesley's concentration on the church – on the societies, and what could be achieved through them. The eventual results, which would be gained by his painstaking nurturing of these sometimes unruly, and recalcitrant groups of people called Methodists, show that his ethics produced a lasting achievement through the communities of faith. It is now over two hundred years since the death of Wesley, and the activities of Methodists should be assessed. This follows in chapter five in selected case studies of Wesleyan related churches:

Ubunye Free Methodist Church which provides affordable rental housing  
 Claremont Methodist Church building houses for residents of Khayalitsha.  
 Ivory Park Methodist Church with its range of empowerment projects.

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF WESLEYAN SOCIAL THOUGHT AND ACTION

In this chapter, dealing with the essential features of Wesley's social ethics, certain recurring themes may be identified as key characteristics of Wesleyan social thought and action.

These are:

1. Wesley was a religious and social reformer as well as a thorough organiser.
2. He demonstrated a passion for the poor, and encouraged projects with the poor.
3. His social-ethical thought and action were grounded in his understanding of sanctification and Christian love.
4. Wesley expressed strong views and clear principles on the use (and abuse) of money.
5. He believed the Church to be an agent of God's activity in the world.



6. Small groups were regarded as a necessary instrument in Methodist churches, with particular regard to incorporation and growth.
7. Wesley believed that the Church should be located first among the poor and powerless [so that 'religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be from men' (Works III:178)].

These characteristics will serve as criteria for the evaluation of accounts of contemporary theory and practice, which follow in the forthcoming chapters.

It is clear that it is not possible to transplant Wesley directly into the present day context and that direct prooftexts from his works are inapplicable. It is being proposed that there can be creative ways of relating Wesley's principles from the eighteenth to the twenty first century. Some recent examples of urban mission are analysed as sources for reflection and implementation.


## CHAPTER 4: A THEOLOGY OF URBAN MISSION FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

*'The whole world is the theatre for the display of divine goodness, wisdom, justice and power. but the church is the orchestra, as it were, the most conspicuous part of it.'*

(John Calvin in Plumer, 1975:13)

The position taken in this chapter is that the local church, or congregation, is one of the most appropriate and effective agents for significant social change in society. In the following chapter there will be a description of three case studies, undertaken by local churches. This will focus on efforts at providing housing and jobs for people who live in very poor conditions. Claremont Methodist Church in Cape Town is attempting to enable Khayelitsha residents to build their own homes, while the Ubunye Free Methodist Church in Pietermaritzburg has founded a housing project for low cost renting. Ivory Park Methodist Church offers a range of social services, including the creation of jobs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wesley motivated individuals and 'societies' to participate in the maturing or 'perfection' of the self, as well as in transformation of the corrupt elements of his social world. It is important to note that these people were not educated professionals from the higher classes but ordinary, often poor, lay men and women. In many respects, the churches listed above share a similar constituency, although the church in Claremont is much more middle class.

### **The Mission of the Church**

 An earlier chapter of this study cites Verkuyl as proposing that the task of missiology is to investigate scientifically and critically what presuppositions, motives, methods, patterns of co-operation and leadership churches bring to their mandate.<sup>6</sup> It should also examine every other type of human activity which combats evil to see if this fits the criteria and goals of the

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<sup>6</sup>A broad account of the purpose of the church can be seen in Jesus' summation of the law: 'Love God' and 'love neighbour' as oneself. (Mark 12.28ff) This will be developed in the course of the present chapter, with particular reference to the mission of the church in the city.

Kingdom. In a word, we will explore how the church understands its mandate, and also how it is able to co-operate with other agencies, which are active in common areas of interest and activity.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin tells of an incident in his ministry when he was visiting the city of Madras. Its population of three million was growing by about 100 000 each year. Only about 7% of the city was Christian, church members believed that they were pleasing to God as the churches were growing and new buildings were being erected. But they were guilty of an 'old illusion.' Newbigin recounts his conversation with several elders after a service. His question was what function that church performed. The answer was given that, 'it caters for the needs of its members.' I said, "Then it should be disbanded." Rather his contention is that the business of the church is to be 'an effective sign, instrument, and firstfruit of God's purpose for the whole city' (1994:33). He explains that the church should be a sign which points people to something, which is beyond their present horizon, and can provide guidance and hope at the present time. It is an instrument, although not the only one, that God can use to bring healing, liberation and blessing. The church also acts as a firstfruit in which people can have a real taste of the joy and freedom God intends for all. In response to the question of how this is likely to take place, Newbigin affirms that no one will listen to evangelism unless it is seen to come out of a fellowship that cares. He concludes that a good way to describe the mission of the church is to say that it is 'hope in action' (1994:39).

Richardson, in a discussion of the ethics of character and community, argues for the 'centrality of community.' He quotes Hauerwas who says that for him, the church is distinctive and should be able to read the signs of the times and recognise what God is doing in the world. 'The church is a social ethic...Put starkly, the first social ethical task of the church is to be the church.' For the South African context Richardson applies this concept by suggesting that 'Christian ethics must

first engage itself in the creation of a more Christian church *in order that* simultaneously it might be an effective catalyst in the development of a national life more in keeping with the gospel' (1994:98). The point here is that the church should not *primarily* follow the secular (political) agenda. Just as the church was previously faced with the policy of apartheid, the church in South Africa now has to focus on reconstruction, on nation building and especially on meeting the challenge of poverty and its effects. Does the church now simply and uncritically adopt the Government's Reconstruction and Development Programme, or the Growth Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR) which replaced it. Does this not lead to the assumption that the government will somehow provide all the needs of society? Richardson writes, 'The social involvement of Christians should be primarily the working out of their role in the ongoing story of Jesus Christ and the expression of their belonging to the church as Christ's serving community in the world' (1994:97).

Hauerwas and Willimon warn against Constantinianism with its comfortable alliance of church and state. They warn against the common assumption 'that there is no way for the gospel to be present in our world without asking the world to support our convictions through its own social and political institutionalisation. The result is the gospel transformed into civil religion' (1990:81). They propose a more radical approach and suggest that we need to rethink what constitutes a successful ministry. Their proposal is that we should 'live as a colony of resident aliens within a hostile environment, which, in the most subtle and deadly of ways, corrupts and co-opts us as Christians...we need to be the colony of God's righteousness' (1990:140). This raises problematic questions with regard to the relationship between the church and the society of which it is part. There is an ongoing tension, and the church cannot expect the state or its organs to fulfil the task of the church. That model can only be expected to operate in a post Constantinian Christendom. This is not to imply, however, that the church is in a constant state

of antagonism with the state. In fact, it will be suggested that the state can appropriately be approached to provide support and funding for projects undertaken by the church on behalf of the poor in society.

David Bosch points to some disturbing features of contemporary society in his *Believing in the Future – Towards a Missiology of Western Culture*. He observes that we live in a 'post' era. He writes, 'Küng depicts the contemporary world as post-Eurocentric, postcolonial, postimperial, postindustrial, postsocialist, postindustrial, postpatriarchal, postideological, and postconfessional' (1995:1). This conviction may appear too sweeping an assessment, but he presents a strong case for taking this stance. After examining the legacy of the Enlightenment and the characteristics of a postmodern age he arrives at his conclusions and sees this new situation as presenting the Christian Church with unprecedented challenges. After careful analysis he concludes by suggesting that the Western church needs to take seriously the challenges which it faces at the present time. His two final suggestions seem particularly apt. First, the church in the West will have to be primarily a ministry of the laity as it will be more credible if it comes from outside the 'guild of pastors.' He stresses:

only in this way will we begin to bring together what our culture has divided, the private and the public, for the lay members of the church clearly belong to the public and secular world, whereas the pastors belong to a separate, 'religious' world (1995:59).

Secondly our witness will only be credible 'if it flows from a local, worshipping community' (1995:59). Bosch emphasises this point and quotes Hauerwas and Willimon by saying, 'Christians are sitting on a gold mine called the church, but unfortunately the very categories we

have been taught as Western Christians make it difficult for us to notice that it is gold' (1995:60). This bold proposition should be taken seriously if the local church is to believe in itself.<sup>7</sup>

Hauerwas and Willimon argue that the church has been misled by a type of theological rationalisation which exalts the role of the individual. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount is all about the 'formation of visible, practical, Christian community' (1990:76). This emphasis is not just for the sake of community but, they argue, because the church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ. So Christian community, 'life in the colony, is not primarily about togetherness. It is the way of Jesus Christ with those whom he calls to himself' (1990:78). Consequently for Christians, the church is the 'most significant ethical unit.' The following quotation indicates their basis for ethics within the church.

In a sense, the traditional designation of 'social ethics' is a tautology. All Christian ethics are social ethics because all our ethics presuppose a social, communal, political starting point - the church. All our ethical responses begin here. Through the teaching, support, sacrifice, worship, and commitment of the church, utterly ordinary people are enabled to do some rather extraordinary, even heroic acts, not on the basis of their own gifts or abilities, but rather by having a community capable of sustaining Christian virtue. The church enables us to be better people than we could have been if left to our own devices (Hauerwas and Willimon 1990:81).

A central assumption of this thesis is that members of a church are able to bring about significant social change. Further, it is argued that John Wesley provided a dynamic model for this in his time, which is worthy of serious consideration by the church today. Caricatures of Wesley as a mere pietist forget that he urged Methodists not to retreat into individualised forms of piety as the Moravians and William Law were encouraging their followers to do. Wesley wrote in his *Sermon on the Mount IV*,

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<sup>7</sup> The criticism is sometimes made that the church which Hauerwas envisages does not exist. A response to this might be his example of a congregation in South Bend Indiana to illustrate the 'gold' that is to be found in a rather ordinary church (1988:111-131).

I shall endeavour to show, that Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary religion, is indeed to destroy it...When I say, this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but it cannot subsist at all, without society, - without living and conversing with other men. (*Sermons on Several Occasions*: 237).

A few pages later he writes,

Ye Christians are 'the light of the world,' with regard both to your tempers and actions. Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of the heaven. As ye cannot go out of the world, so neither can ye stay in it without appearing to all mankind. Ye may not flee from men; and while ye are among them, it is impossible to hide your lowliness and meekness, and those other dispositions whereby ye aspire to be perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Love cannot be hid any more than light; and least of all, when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labour of love, in beneficence of every kind. *As well may men think to hide a city, as to hide a Christian; yea, as well may they conceal a city set upon a hill, as a holy, zealous, active lover of God and man* (*Sermons on Several Occasions*: 243). Emphasis added.

### **Historical precedents and current arguments**

Does the Church have the right to interfere in society? Archbishop William Temple begins his book *Christianity and the Social Order* with this very question. There is frequent resentment at efforts by the Church to make a contribution in the field of politics or economics. Temple shows that there is a generally held assumption that the Church holds little influence in areas outside purely religious subjects, and that that is the way it ought be. He illustrates this by alluding to the incident in 1926 when a group of bishops tried to bring a solution to the Government, coal owners and striking miners. Prime Minister Baldwin 'asked how the Bishops would like it if he referred to the Iron and Steel Federation the revision of the Athanasian Creed; and this was acclaimed as a legitimate score' (1942:7). In spite of lapses when the Church lost its way, history affirms that the Church has had an ongoing and important moral effect in society. Temple shows that during the eighteenth century, 'theology and the direct relation of the soul to God, were alone regarded as the Church's concern.' This could not last, and Temple claims it

was John Wesley who had the effect of bringing the Church back into politics. '...his revival had that effect. The abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself were political projects; but they were carried through by Evangelicals in the fervour of their Evangelical faith' (Temple 1942:9). Temple reviews what he calls the stages of recovery of 'the interference of religion with the affairs of public life.' He notes that the claim of the church to be heard in relation to 'political and economic problems is no new usurpation, but a re-assertion of a right once universally admitted and widely regarded' (1942:9).<sup>8</sup> In South Africa this principle has had a somewhat stormy passage. It can be traced throughout the colonial period, from the 'interference' of certain missionaries on the frontiers, to priests branded as 'political' in the Apartheid era and most recently in the new democracy.

According to Budde most studies in ecclesiology have been predominantly theological. He believes, however, that there is another dimension which ought to be considered. That is the branch which concerns itself with theories of the church, the nature of its mission, 'its understanding of internal and external authority, and its self understanding as a community with criteria for membership, participation, and inclusivity.'

It is interesting to note how Budde illustrates his theories by showing how these manifest themselves in practical application. After studying interactions of economics and religion, especially regarding the Catholic Church, he concludes:

1. The workings of the capitalist world economy and changes within the Catholic Church make it plausible to argue that world Catholicism (led by the Latin American and other Third world churches) will continue to develop in anti-capitalist directions.

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<sup>8</sup> It is acknowledged that Temple's positive espousal of a Christendom model is at odds with the explicitly anti-Christendom views cited in this section, such as those of Hauerwas and Yoder.



2. The churches in core countries (typified by the Catholic Church in the United States) are poorly placed to respond in ecclesial solidarity to the anti-capitalist critiques and challenges of their Third World coreligionists, who now compose the majority of members worldwide in the Catholic Church (Budde 1992:30). These are pertinent comments in the light of patterns of church growth, decline, and social influence. Church historians will watch developments in the Catholic Church in the West and in the developing countries very closely to test this hypothesis.

Some foundational works have explored the social implications and impact of competing ecclesiologies. One such book is Troeltsch's seminal study *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1931,1949). He identifies two primary groups in church history, the 'church' type and the 'sect' type. The church type makes few demands on its members, and views itself as universal in scope and open to all. It has an accommodationist approach to secular institutions and culture, and a reliance on rigid hierarchical norms of authority. The sect type is more communal, and these are intense groups committed to a more rigorous practice of Christian ideals; they are often indifferent or hostile to secular authorities and culture, and do not accommodate themselves to the state or society. Membership in sects is voluntary (unlike the church type which relies on infant baptism and ascriptive identification) and authority is often democratic and egalitarian. Sects may engage in political activity, but it is usually left more to the church type, and they often resist the incursions of secular power, try to protect themselves from it, and demonstrate a general tendency to support the social, political and economic status quo.

To illustrate this point it may be helpful to refer to an incident described by Hauerwas. He was asked to address a college graduation ceremony at Goshen College in 1992. This particular

college is supported by the Mennonite Church and is proud of its tradition of holding a pacifist position. In contemporary society it would probably continue to demonstrate aspects of the 'sect' type. In his speech Hauerwas indirectly refers to the sectarian nature of the Mennonites and their 'otherness' in relation to society at large. The following quotation indicates some of the themes which have been mentioned above.

I knew, for example that when I spoke at this assembly there would not be an American flag present. You must remember, however, that this was a hard-won absence. The powers embodied in that flag are hard to resist. That you may be able to resist them is the result of the sacrifices made by your mothers and fathers in the faith. But those accomplishments require equal, but perhaps different, sacrifices from you, as you must learn how to live as a people constituted by the practice of forgiveness (Hauerwas 1994:87).

Budde also refers to H R Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture* in which he provides five patterns of Christianity in interaction with secular culture. He believes that the sect type of church is very closely aligned to the 'Christ against Culture' category. According to Niebuhr, sects try to live out perfection in the midst of worldly sinfulness. He also sees them as avoiding political life and being privatised in their concerns (Budde, 1992:31).

It should then, come as no surprise to observe that Troeltsch places early Methodism firmly in the group of 'sect type' churches. He speaks of the founding of Methodism as

one of the most important events in the later history of Christianity. It marked the renewal of orthodox Christianity in a quite individualistic accentuated form; ...and was one of the means by which the English world was rendered proof against the spirit of the French Revolution...Methodism, like the Moravian Church...was an attempt to leaven the life of the National Church with the influence of smaller groups of genuine and vital Christians...For the primary aim of Methodism was not to gather devout lovers of Christ into small fellowship groups, but to awaken the masses, which, under the influence of an 'enlightened' Church and the pressure of industrial capitalism, had become indifferent, dull and coarse' (Troeltsch 1949:721).

In an earlier section there is a fairly detailed description of Wesley's social teachings and actions which are based on what Marquardt calls the 'Principles of Wesley's social ethics.' He goes on to elaborate on what he calls the 'renewal of the individual' and then the 'renewal of society' during the height of the eighteenth century (Marquardt 1992:119-132). Troeltsch concludes his sociological analysis of Methodism by asserting that it

gained its victories in the middle and lower classes, among the miners and in the industrialised towns. To the middle and lower classes it brought a new sense of the sacredness of personality; it appealed to the popular imagination, and awakened a devotion which found expression in a most self-sacrificing charity...It had brought the impulse of personality and individuality into the life of the masses, who were being brutalised by the industrial system, and with its charity it helped them in their distress (1949:724).

Hauerwas interacts with the positions outlined above and believes that Yoder's classification is more helpful than Niebuhr's typology. Yoder distinguishes between the activist church, the conversionist church and the confessing church. He claims that the activist church is more concerned with building a better society than with the reformation of the church. The conversionist church believes that no amount of tinkering with the structures of society will counter the effects of human sin. The confessing church is a radical alternative. It rejects the individualism of the conversionists and the secularism of the activists. The confessing church 'finds its main political task to lie, not in the personal transformation of individual hearts or the modification of society, but rather in the congregation's determination to worship Christ in all things.' He then notes that the confessing church seeks the '*visible church*, a place clearly visible to the world, in which people are faithful to their promises, love their enemies, tell the truth, honour the poor, suffer for righteousness, and thereby testify to the amazing community-creating power of God' (1989:46).

One can continue to produce similar definitions of the role of the church, but where do such communities exist? Is this all theory, and does one merely open oneself to the charge of 'pie in the sky'? Balcomb has made a comprehensive study of the South African churches' involvement, or lack of it, during the Apartheid years. He notes the significance of the 'distinctiveness' of the church and comments that 'the existence of such a visible community could indeed be a powerful political witness in society' although he questions the existence of such a church (1993:187). In the same sense, the present study would like to examine certain local churches, with all their weaknesses,<sup>9</sup> to illustrate how humble communities of believers can live, in Hauerwas' terms, as 'resident aliens.' This requires that the church needs the renewal of what he calls 'intelligible theological discourse.' This comes about as the church awakens from the comfortable life as a 'civilizational religion' and as Christians recover their status as 'resident aliens.' In his context he says rather pointedly, 'The task is to disengage from the Constantinian habits that have led us to confuse America with God's salvation' (1991:419).

How in practical terms is the church able to take such a step? Richardson provides helpful insights in his analysis regarding the struggle that this has produced in the last few decades. He notes regarding the social responsibility of the church, that there has been a 'widely-held axiom' in ecumenical circles that 'the world writes the agenda for the church.' This view was most prevalent in the 1960s, and has deeply influenced the social and political thinking of the member churches. But he calls on support from Ramsey and Hauerwas to show that the church must speak for itself, even though it listens very carefully to the experts in various fields. Richardson concludes,

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<sup>9</sup> For Hauerwas there is no 'ideal church.' For him the theologian's task is to identify the 'gold' in the actual local concrete church 'of parking lots and potluck suppers'. (In *The Peaceable Kingdom* 1983:100).

Indeed it will often be essential for the church to turn to such experts in order to inform itself in areas where it believes it should be exercising its responsibility. The point is the church must itself decide upon those areas and evaluate the information it receives according to its own criteria. *For social ethics to be Christian it is the church that must evaluate the world, not vice versa* (1994:269 *Italics added*).

Richardson draws on Hauerwas to show that the church is not a 'social ideal' for society at large, but that it can be a catalyst for a vision in society. For him the church's role is distinctive and vital for the common good. Richardson quotes Hauerwas as saying,

...the most lasting contribution the church can contribute to the contemporary political community is not to make more statements about political issues - that is, to try to become an explicit force - but its most important political function is to be itself. This does not mean that it should not be concerned about particular issues, but such issues should be handled in a way that reflects the fact that the ground of the church consists in being the people of God. For it is such a people who can, through their diversity, find unity in their one Lord. It is only as we experience community, in fact, that the possibility of our visions for political community will be expanded beyond the conceptual limitations in which we are now encased (1994:265).

Hopefully, such an enterprise can take place within the present South African context, as churches resist societal pressure for the church to carry out extraneous political and social objectives. By supporting and engaging in projects which the church considers worthwhile on its own terms, however, it can then both demonstrate its worshipping faith, as well as its commitment to social empowerment of its neighbours in the transformation of society.

### **Challenges to the church in the city**

In the introduction to this study an outline was given of some of the most pressing needs of the growing metropolitan areas in South Africa. In this section there will be a consideration of some of the most pressing challenges facing churches in urban areas. However, as a starting point, it will first be necessary to try to clarify theological and missiological principles to be used by the church in the city. The claim could be made that the city, the urban metropolis, requires a new paradigm of mission which the church has never before had to face on the same scale.

The first point to be made is that cities present a new challenge to the church. J.J. Kritzinger says that the Church in its mission is concerned about cities for three reasons. These are, because people live there, because the city poses immense problems for people, and because the cities represent the growing edge of the world. He quotes statistics that indicate the rapid growth of cities around the world, including Africa. (Reference was made to this phenomenon on pages 1-2 of this study). During the past 25 years Africa's urban population has exploded by 347% (1995:201). Shorter claims that in Africa in 1970 there were only seven cities of more than 1 million people. If present trends continue in the twenty first century, there will be 95 such cities, and five of them will have populations of over 5 million people. Even more alarming for the church, is the finding of a survey which was conducted in Nairobi in 1986, which showed that only 1% of clergy had received specific training for ministry in a city (Shorter 1991:8).

Maluleke considers the challenge of mission in the black urban township in South Africa. He identifies certain common features which are a 'hangover from a typical colonial industrial revolution...an aspect of a multifaceted programme of "people control" and land dispossession... [they were] places of hiding, and even "refuge"...and as time went by, townships became "home" to many people' (1995:167). In spite of crime and alienation, there are still elements of creativity and innovation. How is the church to respond to these challenges? Maluleke believes that the church is 'basically anti-urban in disposition' and because it is uncomfortable with township life, 'the township church has landed in limbo' (1995:173). This may be one of the reasons why there is a discernible movement away from the mainline churches to the African Indigenous Churches. After presenting his findings of a survey of denominational trends in South Africa from 1911 to 1991, Hendriks draws several conclusions regarding the future of churches. One of these is, that **'in the coming millennium the church will be predominantly**

**an urban church.** The inner city and the squatter camps, as well as the upper echelons of society will be mission fields in the new era' (1995:49, *Emphasis added.*) This will require considerable revision of the way in which mission has been done in the past. It will also mean that the churches will have to re-deploy their resources from their traditional areas. Churches have in the past concentrated on the rural areas, and the historic 'mission stations' sometimes with their glebe lands<sup>10</sup> attached, are now a source of anguish and uncertainty.

Sundkler notes, in an historical review, that urbanisation was largely determined by the mines, such as those on the Rand, the Copper mines in Zambia and Shaba in Congo. The results were that hundreds of thousands of men moved to the cities while the women remained in the home village. With regard to role of women in the churches he says that it was of 'fundamental importance: they were the church-goers and they looked after the work of the church and often its worship. The period witnessed positive, though sometimes unsuccessful, attempts by missions to care for men on the mines' (2000:609).

Another important factor to consider in South African demographics, has been the effects of the Group Areas acts dating back to the turn of the century. Davenport traces this tragic legislation which aimed at restricting the number of Africans living in towns or 'White' areas. He notes that

[I]n 1952 Parliament enacted the notorious 'Section Ten' provisions, which denied the right to live in an urban area to any African who was not born there, male or female, unless he had either lived there continuously for fifteen years – lawful holidays excepted – or served under the same employer for ten. The law, as enforced, could and did split husbands and wives if only one of them qualified; but it was less effective as a means of excluding blacks from town than the Government hoped... (1987:556).

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<sup>10</sup> 'Glebe lands' is the term used for land, usually in rural areas, previously acquired as part of mission development and still held by the church today, particularly the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

This was compounded by systematic forced removals of thousands of people from so called 'black spots.' These people were often consigned to barren spaces of land without any facilities in the deep rural 'homelands.' One report claims that 'an estimated 475 000 people were removed from "Black spots" between 1960 and 1983' (May 1998:21).<sup>11</sup> May goes on to describe how apartheid legislation profoundly affected the course of urbanisation in South Africa which resulted in

- 'urban sprawl on the edges of cities such as Durban and East London;
- the 'export' of poverty into rural areas...
- 'double rootedness' with households having more than one homestead, and migrants having more than one household' (1998:24).

John de Gruchy comments not only on the physical displacement of these people, but also the sheer suffering and existential anguish, which they experienced. He suggests that there has been a 'growing disillusionment with Christianity amongst younger blacks, a turning away from faith to atheism.' He quotes a poem, part of which follows, to show the poignant and disturbing cry of those affected.

What I see in Egoli  
are tall buildings  
smart cars  
well dressed people  
a whole scene  
that has no place for me  
no place for my wife  
no place for my children.

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<sup>11</sup> Another estimate puts the figure at 3,5 million who were moved, many of them under some measure of duress, between 1960 and 1982 (Davenport, 1987:445).



Lord Jesus, where are you?  
 Are you in those smart white offices  
 those smart white houses  
 those smart white churches?  
 They think you are.  
 They talk about you the whole time...

De Gruchy (1987:107).

Kritzinger reflects on the possibility of a post-apartheid city, and submits that such cities will only come about very slowly. In the meantime apartheid has left behind a baleful legacy for the churches in contemporary South African cities. He proposes that there are four areas which need to be addressed. These are the housing backlog, shattered family life, a breakdown of law and order, and continuing poverty (1995:207). The present study will attempt to address only one of these, that is housing, to show how churches can be involved in facilitating the provision of housing.

### **Creating a theology of mission for the urban church**

After working for more than twenty years in the city of Chicago, Bakke says that in order to survive in urban ministry, one needs to create survival strategies. He suggests 'the most important is the development of a world view - an understanding big enough to see what God is doing in the urbanisation of his world and the internationalisation of his cities' (1987:62). As part of this exercise he began to reread the Bible with a view to seeing what he could find regarding people in their contexts. He took the Hebrew and Greek words for 'city' in the Bible, and found they are 'mentioned some 1200 times and refer to 119 different cities.' His conclusion is that any place can be sacred, as God is present and at work there. Thus he believes that the Bible is not 'anti-urban.' He also affirms that there is a relationship between the presence of

believers and the preservation of places. So the message of Jesus about being 'salt of the earth' could equally apply to the penetration of Christians into urban settings. He concludes by stating that 'The first chapter of the Bible shows God creating the material universe and the last book shows him recreating and cleaning up the world' (1987:84). De Gruchy says something similar,

The biblical vision of the church is not only that of a living organism, but also of the People of God participating in God's transforming purposes in society (1987:131).

He observes, however, that in order for this to take place, it requires pastors, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who will be prepared to proclaim God's Word here and now, however hostile and unresponsive the situation. If this does not take place, he quotes Barth as saying, the church makes 'a habit of coming to the scene too late, of entering the fray only when its opinions no longer involve any risk and can no longer exert any particular influence' (De Gruchy 1987:86). With this in mind, it is essential that the church develop a theology of mission that could be used in the present context. What follows, is an attempt to provide a framework for a local congregation to consider how it could embark on projects, which would demonstrate its commitment to social change in its community. There will then be an attempt to reflect on case studies mentioned earlier which may show what can be done in a local situation, and secondly to analyse what theological principles have been applied.

### **Specific examples of a theology of urban mission**

What follows is an attempt to explore and critique various models of mission in the city. The assumption is that the church has a calling to be active in all parts of the world, including areas that are often viewed as complex, difficult or dangerous.

John de Gruchy reminds readers that the words 'crisis' and 'contextual' suffer from what he calls 'overexposure,' especially in the South African scene. Nonetheless he affirms that the

research and reflection, which may emerge from a particular historical and concrete situation, can have universal significance (De Gruchy 1987:14). He then quotes Catholic missiologist William Burrows in summing up this position.

Aside from concrete social, material, and historical contexts, there exist only abstract principles. One of the problems in thinking about the church has been the tendency to consider it universally and abstractly, without coming to grips with the contextual factors that give flesh to its mission in concrete historical and cultural situations. To decontextualize anything is to rob it of what makes it either interesting or important, and any attempt to deal with the church from universalistic perspectives makes it difficult to come to grips with important contextual factors which intrinsically affect the church's mission (De Gruchy 1987:14).

## **Models**

The first model to be considered is one that could generally represent what missiologist David Hesselgrave calls 'Conservative Christians.' The second is a 'social analysis' position portrayed by Holland and Henriot, and the third a more multi-disciplinary approach proposed by Charles van Engen. The fourth is an incarnational model proposed by Grigg. While the first two do not specifically address urban contexts *per se*, the principles proposed will illustrate how the methodology of each affects the actual content and forms of ministry.

### ***Model 1***

Hesselgrave spent twelve years as a missionary in Japan before returning to the United States to teach missiology. He contends that most conservatives place the Church 'at the heart of the divine purpose for the present age and view growth as one of its major responsibilities' (1980:19). It should be noted that Hesselgrave uses 'Church' in the upper case to describe 'that body which is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is composed of all true Christian believers, and of which Christ is the Head.' He distinguishes this from the 'church,' which refers 'to any duly constituted local body of Christian believers who corporately

attempt to worship, witness, and serve in accordance with the Word of God.' This then leads him to spell out his thesis,

The primary mission of the Church and, therefore, of the churches is to proclaim the gospel of Christ and gather believers into local churches where they can be built up in the faith and made effective in service, thereby planting new congregations throughout the world (1980:20).

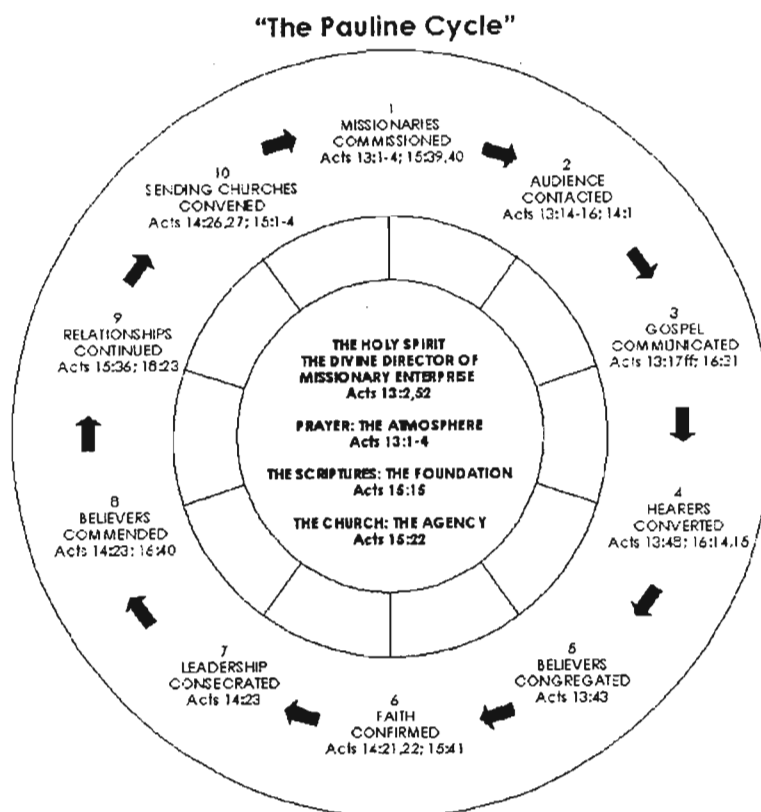
He then appeals to Christians to be faithful to the great commission as found in Mt 28:16-20.

After this he reviews the success of the apostle Paul in establishing churches over a wide area in the Mediterranean world. It is his contention that Paul was singularly successful because he considered preaching and establishing churches as his 'primary task.' In fact other dimensions of 'good works' were secondary to this task. He makes this very clear.

The Biblical record leaves no room for thinking that either Paul or the members of his team were basically engaged in raising the living standards, ameliorating social conditions, imparting secular knowledge, ministering to medical needs, or dispensing aid from previously established churches. There can be little doubt that allegiance to Christ on the part of converts in churches entailed some of these effects as by products...But Paul's primary mission was accomplished when the gospel was preached, men were converted, and churches were established. Obedience to the Great Commandment to love one's neighbour was part of the commission to teach all things Christ commanded. But good works were the fruit - not the root - of Paul's mission (1980:29).

Therefore he affirms Donald McGavran's definition that mission is 'an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the good news of Christ and persuading men to become disciples and dependable members of his Church' (1980:41).

While admitting that one should not try to imitate the methods of the apostle Paul too closely, Hesselgrave has extracted from the book of Acts what he calls the 'logical elements' in Paul's master plan of evangelism and church development. He arranges these into diagrammatic form by placing ten points around a circle. Each point is accompanied by several references from the book of Acts.



**Figure 1: (Hesselgrave 1980:59)**

The elements in the master plan as evident in the diagram are:

1. Missionaries Commissioned
2. Audience Contacted
3. Gospel Communicated
4. Hearers Converted
5. Believers Congregated
6. Faith confirmed
7. Leadership Consecrated
8. Believers Commended
9. Relationships Continued
10. Sending Churches Convened (1980:58).

Hesselgrave is the first to ask if these steps are not too obvious or contrived to be really helpful. While admitting that there is nothing sacrosanct in his formulation, he believes that this, or a similar outline, accurately reflects the practice of Paul. He also urges his readers to apply these principles in the contemporary world, whether in 'home' or 'mission' contexts. He also states that Paul employed a strategy which gave priority to certain cities, like those which were on trade routes, or which were important centres of Roman administration and influence. When a church had been planted in a city he suggests, with Roland Allen, that the surrounding areas were now the responsibility of that church. That meant that he would be able to move on to another city and repeat the exercise. Therefore he seemed to choose a 'target city' for missionary expansion in a surrounding region.

Another dimension of Hesselgrave's argument is of particular interest to this thesis. Hesselgrave calls this the 'sociological significance of cities.' He claims that cities are focal points of change, and that ideas which emanate in the cities, spread downward and outward to the countryside. While recognising that not all cities are the same, he believes that they present the greatest opportunities for establishing churches. Some reasons proposed, are that people in cities are more open to change, there is a concentration of resources, and there is great potential for significant contact with surrounding communities. However, his emphasis is to affirm not so much the place, but the task. One could say that his position is summed up in his statement, 'The task was that of proclaiming the gospel and planting churches or aiding those who were doing so' (1980:138).

### ***Evaluation***

This should be done when the other models have been presented so that there can be greater opportunity for comparison and contrast. A comment at this stage is to observe that the emphasis

is on evangelism, and the planting of new churches. Any aspect of social responsibility and action is purely incidental, and is a result of evangelism. As was noted earlier it is what Hesselgrave calls the 'fruit,' not the 'root' of the enterprise. In fairness to him, it does not do justice to his work to describe it in such a short passage. He has expounded for a whole chapter on each of the sections, which here have received only one line. In another work, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, he takes particular care to ensure that the Christian message is communicated effectively in different cultural settings.

One of the problems in this approach is the failure to research and describe the context. It appears that this model can be used equally well in any city of the world, almost regardless of whether it is in an informal settlement or a middle class suburb. There is also no mention of the needs of the people who will be addressed and the sole focus appears to be on the planting of a church. This approach also shows little appreciation for Wesley's 'social religion,' and his repeated emphasis on the obligation to love God and man(kind).

### ***Model 2***

Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, authors of *Social Analysis – Linking Faith and Justice*, take a radically different approach. They were both involved with the Center of Concern based in Washington DC, which is engaged in research and social analysis, religious reflection and public education around issues of social justice. Their starting point is what the Pope (John Paul II), has called 'an inescapable crisis of modern civilisation.' In this they follow Gibson Winter in his assessment of our present age, which he characterises according to a 'mechanistic root metaphor at the cultural foundation of modern civilisation.' They elaborate,

In essence, since the rise of modern autonomous science, whether mediated through the free market of the capitalist system or the centralized state of the communist system, or a combination of both, industrial civilization has been constructing itself in the model of the machine. This model flows from the

thinking of seminal figures like Bacon, Newton, Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, etc (1986:xvi).

They would prefer to see society as a *work of art* and suggest that this is a more constructive root metaphor. From this would flow a social and religious principle, that of the 'social and spiritual creativity of rooted communities networked in solidarity' (1986:xvi).

They are critical of both the 'classic Left' (while challenging social destruction it 'cuts itself off from the religious root of creativity') and the classic Religious Right, which they believe does not understand the prophetic side of the divine 'and winds up defending the very social destruction that the Left fights against' (1986:xiv). In their view it is sad when people of good will from both sides, do not see one another's gifts as being complementary. Therefore there is sadness that those in the peace movement do not recognise the 'powerful explosion of spiritual energies from the charismatic and evangelical movements.' At the same time these very people 'develop analyses and alliances aimed at fighting the justice and peace movement' (1986:xv). The authors believe that the 'most important single step' is to ensure that the cultural and theological reflection should be rooted within the mainstream of the Christian community, that is, the laity, or the People of God, which includes all Christians. Much of their book explores the meaning and application of 'social analysis.' The authors define social analysis as

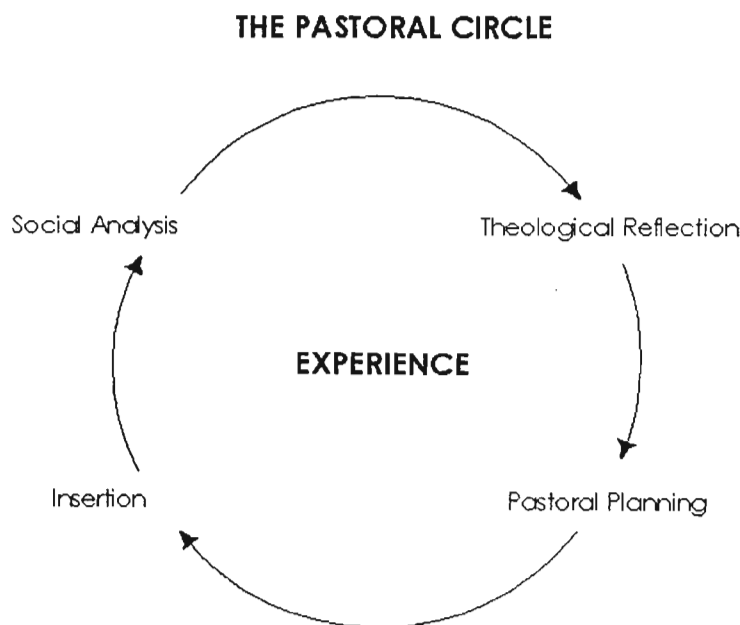
'the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. Social analysis serves as a tool that permits us to grasp the reality with which we are dealing - 'la realidad' so often referred to in Latin America (1980: 14).

In practical terms this could mean that the reader should imagine being in one of the difficult positions described. This could be working as a director of a community organisation to improve housing conditions in an old north-eastern city. Because poor minority families are being displaced, some response is needed. This could be in the form of a demonstration at the



offices of the get-rich-quick agents. Another approach could be making a careful study of the key economic factors of the movement of people back into the city, and thus encouraging churches and synagogues to institute housing programmes and the provision of housing co-operatives for the poor. Clearly what the authors are suggesting is a call to 'seeing a wider picture,' which would result from doing social analysis, and this is what they call 'an integral part of the ministry for social justice' (1986:3). While acknowledging that it is possible to do social analysis in an academic way, their preference is for what they describe as a 'pastoral approach.' This consists of what they call the 'pastoral circle.'

This circle represents the close relationships between the four mediations of experience: (1) insertion, (2) social analysis, (3) theological reflection, and (4) pastoral planning. This circle is frequently referred to as the 'circle of praxis,' because it emphasises the on-going relationship between reflection and action...It is related to what has been called the 'hermeneutical circle,' or the method of interpretation that sees new questions continually raised to challenge older theories by the force of new situations (1986:8).



**Figure 2: The Pastoral Circle (Holland and Henriot (1986:8))**

There are two explanatory comments which should be made. First, the role of *experience* is primary. This does not mean 'raw' experience, as if it exists in a vacuum. Experience is always mediated by the interpretations we place upon it, and the moments or elements are the four points on the circle shown above, starting with the point of insertion. Secondly, the entire process needs

to be located in an atmosphere of celebration, and infused with an ethos of prayer. This provides a time of discernment, openness, liturgy, song and music. It means that the more intellectual elements of analysis, reflection, and planning are continually grounded in experience. Celebration and prayer make the pastoral circle genuinely human and spirit-filled and give the struggle for linking faith and justice new meaning, new life (1986:10).

What follows are chapters on social change and what the authors refer to as 'The Development Debate,' models of development and the implications for social justice. More will be said of this topic at a later stage. The book ends however, with a section on what is called 'A Practical Methodology.' This answers the question of how one 'does' social analysis. What follows is a detailed description of how a person could study an area in a systematic way, as opposed to a more impressionistic manner. Social analysis is based on a carefully constructed series of questions in questionnaire form which would give any researcher a very thorough knowledge of a community. In order to help those who do not necessarily have the skills to complete such an undertaking they have also provided a set of ten questions which could be regarded as a 'simpler approach.'

These are:

1. What do you notice about our situation here today? What are people experiencing?
2. What changes have occurred in the past twenty years? What have been the most important events?
3. What influence does money have in our situation? Why?
4. Who makes the most important decisions around here? Why?
5. What are the most important relationships people have here? Why?

6. What are the most important traditions of the people? Why?
7. What do people want most in life? Why?
8. What will things be like in ten years if they keep going in the same way? Why?
9. What are the most important causes of the way things are today? Why?
10. What did you learn from all this? (1986:102).

In considering these questions, it appears that one of the churches described in the case studies, (the Ubunye Free Methodist) Church followed a fairly similar approach to that described above. It may not have formally applied the social analysis model of Holland and Henriot, but it certainly made searching enquiries in the community. Questions were asked about the greatest needs in the area, and what it was that people were most concerned about. The answers given, provided the direction for Sheffield and his colleagues to embark on the social housing project. He describes how they,

began analysing and discussing community issues that were of significant concern to the majority of residents. Issues were brought forward to the larger congregation for discussion and interaction. Four issues kept rising to the surface: housing, employment, women's safety and civil cooperation (Sheffield 1998:36).

### ***Evaluation***

As with the previous model, it will be necessary to compare the elements of each once they have been completed. The social analysis model is deeply influenced by the social sciences and has a major interest in issues relating to justice in society. The authors have a Catholic background, and adopted some of their terminology from Latin American scholars. One can note here that the emphases in the first two models are fairly diverse. The first has an emphasis on evangelism and church planting, whereas the second focuses more on justice issues, and on how to make people aware of root causes of some of the injustices that the church needs to confront. Having noted these emphases, a question arises about evangelism and the planting of churches. There appears to be an assumption that the church exists, but there is not much effort given to the development

of the community of faith. Hesselgrave, and Holland and Henriot, appear to be at different ends of the spectrum.

### *Model 3*

Charles van Engen presently teaches missiology at Fuller Seminary in the United States. He was previously a missionary in Latin America, and has written extensively on the theology of mission.<sup>12</sup> He was prompted to write on urban mission after the riots in Los Angeles in 1994. A group of doctoral students met with him for forty weeks and worked through the issues that were raised. It was their aim to 'build a holistic approach that centred on an integrating idea or theme in the midst of the complexity of urban factors' (1994:244).

Why construct a theology of mission especially for the city? Because of the complexity of working in a megacity like Los Angeles, it was felt that people often enter the city equipped with urban sociology, but carry with them the baggage of a theology designed for rural Europe. These people also often are involved in what he calls 'micro-ministry' which deals with individuals and their needs in the city. But they fail to address the entire system or the presence of systemic evil. On the other hand others are doing research in 'macro-studies' in sociology, anthropology, economics, politics and religion - but they seldom seem to get down to the level of the streets and the people in the city.

Van Engen proposes that a theology of mission for the city should be a multi-disciplinary enterprise. It should be concerned with the basic presuppositions and principles, motives, message and strategy of mission. It should also 'give us new eyes to perceive our city, inform

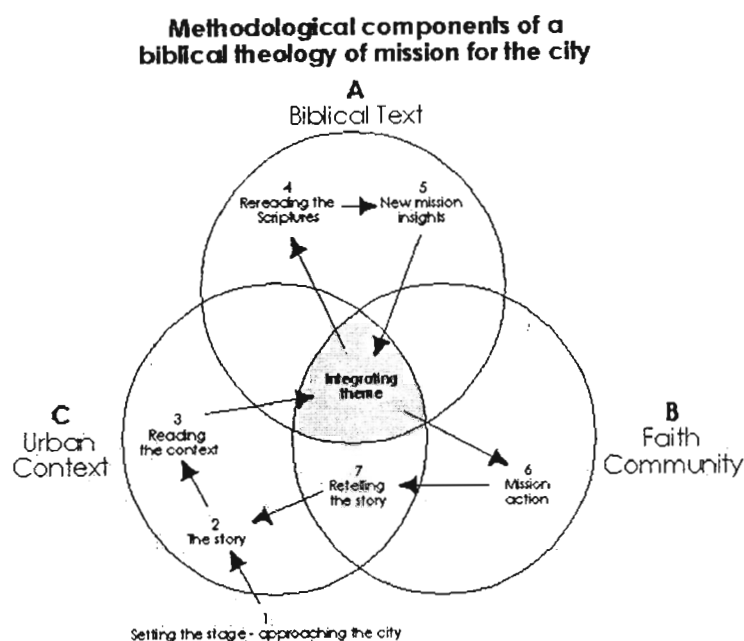
our activism, guide our networking, and energise our hope for the transformation of our city.’ However the churches in the city lived in profound tensions as they struggled to be viable missional communities. To illustrate the scope of reflection and action that the churches were being challenged to do, Van Engen writes.

The church is not a social agency - but is of social significance in the city. The church is not city government - but God called it to announce and live out his kingdom in all its political significance. The church is not a bank - but is an economic force in the city and must seek the city’s economic welfare. The church is not a school - but God called it to educate the people of the city concerning the gospel of love, justice, and social transformation. The church is not a family - but is the family of God whom God loves. The church is not a building - but needs buildings and owns buildings to carry out its ministry. The church is not exclusive, no better, not unique - but God specially called it to be different in the way it serves the city. The church is not an institution - but needs institutional structures to effect changes in the lives of people and society. The church is not a community development organisation - but the development of community is essential to the church’s nature (1994:248).

He therefore proposes that a theology of mission for the city, should be depicted by three interlocking circles. The first is **theology**, which is informed by the Biblical text. The second is the **community of faith** and thirdly the **urban context**. If one proceeds through this method the theology of mission should result in informed action. At the same time mission should transform one’s reflection.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, *The Good News of the Kingdom* 1991, and *Footprints of God: A Narrative Theology of Mission*. 1999.



**Figure 3: Diagram of circles (Van Engen:1994:253)**

Van Engen suggests devising a methodology, which can be summarised by the following:

1. Setting the stage, approaching the city
2. Entering (C) the urban context to hear the **story** of city residents. Insights from narrative theology are used.
3. Reading the context. This entails examining a new 'hermeneutic of the city.'
4. The reader now moves into circle A (the Biblical text) to reread the scriptures, a critical hermeneutics which raises new questions in the light of what is seen in the city.
5. New mission insights are gained in the light of the previous step.
6. Mission action takes place as the person now moves into the third circle B, (the faith community).
7. Retelling the story. Here the person is able to examine the process of 'praxis.' What action should result, after these steps have been followed?

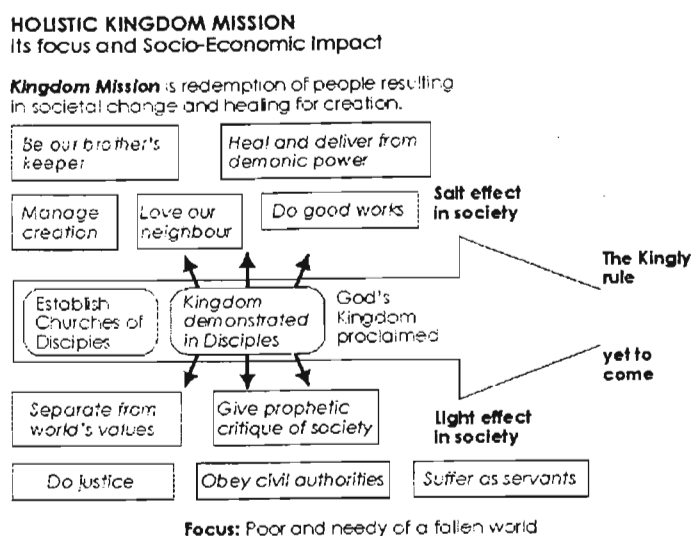
It is noteworthy that van Engen appears to have tried to incorporate elements of the previous models without actually mentioning them specifically. He is at pains to deal with the Biblical and theological aspects, but does not start with them, as he intentionally wants to begin in the urban context with people's stories, and develop a narrative theology. . Once this has been done, he uses these insights to reread the Scriptures with the view of allowing them to be interpreted more contextually than if they were merely seen as an ancient Bible book. As this process unfolds, the church is able to plan and activate programmes which have been shaped by the model under discussion.

It is possible that the Ivory Park Church described in the case studies, and situated in an informal settlement, has adapted this model and used parts of it. It is also very likely that many churches may not study and adopt such sophisticated theological foundations for their activities. Nevertheless, any form of theological reflection which analyses the values held by the congregation, as well as examining its 'story' can only be encouraged. In the 1980s James Hopewell made a detailed study of this phenomenon, which enables congregations to see themselves as they are. This material will be described later in the present chapter.

#### ***Model 4***

Viv Grigg lived and worked in the squatter camps in Manila, and other cities in Asia and Latin America. He is originally from New Zealand, but worked among the poor by living among them. He has founded a group called 'Servants,' which calls for volunteers to move into areas in which poverty is rife. This incarnational approach has been implemented in many cities, though it is extremely demanding and often dangerous. Grigg believes that churches often become absorbed with their own affairs, and fail to reach out to the poorest of the poor. His standpoint is determined by his conviction that the central theme of any urban theology should have the

Kingdom of God as its basis, and the focus should be on the poor. This is especially the case in third world countries where up to 70% of a city's population may live in informal housing. Though more complicated than the other models, Grigg provides the following helpful diagram:



**Figure 4 (Grigg)**

It is evident from this diagram that Grigg has tried to formulate a model which is broader and more comprehensive than those which have been examined above. A particular feature which he includes, is an emphasis on the Kingdom of God. He affirms that 'Kingdom mission' is 'redemption of people resulting in societal change and healing for creation.' There is a strong emphasis on issues of oppression and poverty, and how these should be addressed. He proposes that one should examine the example of Jesus in his response to poverty. He notes that 'Jesus was involved in dealing with it. He incarnated himself in it. He became one of the oppressed poor' (1992:161). Grigg also draws attention to the presence of what he calls 'demonic power,' as well as healing for creation, which are not dealt with by the other authors. This opens up complex and interesting possibilities his discussion of this model by pointing out that for theological reflection as well as practical application, which coincide well with the purpose of this study. Grigg concludes there is interplay between several



disciplines, and that issues of urban poverty should not be reduced to the religious or spiritual only. He argues

Whether the organizations are economic, political or religious, the key to change among the poor is multiplication of small organizations. Economically it is the multiplication of small cooperative ventures. Politically it is movements of small cells of totally committed cadres. Spiritually it is the multiplication of small churches or fellowships knit together in a web-like movement. Each of these empower the poor, enabling them to begin to take their own destiny into their own hands (1992:162).

### *Evaluation of models*

A few general points should serve to introduce an evaluation of the models which have been discussed. The first two, by Hesselgrave and Holland and Henriot, do not deal as specifically with cities as does van Engen. Notwithstanding, there is nothing by way of a disclaimer by the authors, which would suggest that any of the models should not be applied in an urban context. In this regard the methodologies proposed by van Engen and Grigg appear to be most appropriate for our purposes in this study.

### **Hesselgrave**

Although Hesselgrave has written extensively, and is widely followed as something of an expert in the field of cross-cultural communication in some evangelical quarters, his analysis seems somewhat limited. He tries to be biblical in his approach, and therefore produces many proof texts from the book of Acts to support his ten step model. One senses, however, that the ten steps were decided on in advance, and then the book of Acts scoured for supporting verses and proof texts. It is not possible to give a detailed critique of each point, but comment on the first should suffice. He begins by noting that the missionaries were commissioned in Acts 13, but he does not comment on the composition of the church in Antioch, which must surely be worthy of

attention as a very significantly cross-cultural church in the first century Mediterranean world. One needs to ask for example, if this fact would not be very relevant to the type of church which this mission group would expect to establish in its evangelistic efforts in new cities. This point deserves more than a mere passing comment in response to some proponents of the Church Growth School. McGavran in *Understanding Church Growth* consistently argues that the most effective churches are homogeneous – and that they have New Testament support for this position.

Hesselgrave's ten-step model refers exclusively to the process of evangelism and the growth of the churches. Earlier we drew attention to the fact that he believed 'good works' were the result of Paul's efforts, and not what he calls the 'root.' One cannot but conclude that Hesselgrave reads the book of Acts rather selectively, and that as a consequence, the church's task is too narrowly defined. Social issues and contextual factors, of which there are many, are not even mentioned. In these same chapters, did Paul not have major conflicts with the Roman authorities in various cities, as well as almost continuous tensions with Jews who lived in these areas? Our conclusion must be that Hesselgrave's ten steps cannot satisfy a more critical reading of Acts, or an historical and sociological study of the church in the first century.<sup>13</sup> This weakens the force of his argument and provides little guidance for contemporary mission work.

### **Holland and Henriot**

Whereas Hesselgrave started with the Bible, the 'text', these authors start with the 'context.' Their starting point, which they announce openly at the beginning, is a concern for social justice. Their assumptions are that the church is well known in society, and that it should be at the

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<sup>13</sup> Such as, for example, Wayne Meeks *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. 1983.

forefront of working for change. Evangelism is not a priority, the church is often guilty of collusion with unjust social structures, and orthopraxis should take precedence over orthodoxy. The authors openly borrow from liberation theologians like Segundo, and the experience of the poor and oppressed forms the basis for action and reflection.

This approach has deeply challenged many of the Western presuppositions of the church, especially in the third world. Holland and Henriot have given the church a significant tool for analysing society, and spurring the church to engage more meaningfully with the great disparities between the rich, and the poor and oppressed. This is a clear reminder of what has been called a 'preferential option' for the poor. Therefore it is an approach which cannot but have significance for a study such as this.

A comment needs to be made regarding the method employed by the pastoral circle. Its strength lies in the fact that there is a point of insertion, which then allows the process of theological reflection and pastoral planning to proceed. If one follows the questionnaire, there would be a wealth of information gained about a particular community. But Holland and Henriot provide very little guidance with regard to the process or content of the theological reflection and pastoral planning. If Hesselgrave errs on the side of too much text, and insufficient notice of the context, Holland and Henriot probably err at the other end of the spectrum - too much context and inadequate text, or Biblical insight.

### **Van Engen**

Van Engen has the advantage over the other two models that have been considered, in that he writes most recently, and has had the benefit of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the models described above. He, with Hesselgrave would consider himself an evangelical, but as

we have noted, their starting points, methods and conclusions are radically different. Van Engen, like Holland and Henriot begins with the context, in this case the urban area of Los Angeles, which had suffered disastrous riots in the early 90s. After hearing the 'story' of residents, the pastor is now able to enter into the world of the 'text' with new understanding and sensitivity. This then leads to new mission insights, rather than producing pre-digested formulae (as with Hesselgrave). Finally, the process is not complete until the faith community or congregation has been included in the mission action which will follow.

This model has many advantages because it is multidisciplinary, and takes seriously the benefits of the social sciences, the biblical text, as well as the life and narrative of the congregation. It also calls for a more serious commitment to the contextual reading of the scriptures, which is done in a communal setting.

### **Grigg**

This model is probably the most demanding and uncomfortable to implement, especially for middle class churches. It changes the focus from personal conversion and the growth of the church, to the harsh realities of the poor, their struggle for survival, and the kingly rule of God announced by Jesus. Grigg himself feels that there has been a 'great misconnection' and failure on the part of the church's mission to the poor. Some reasons he gives are:

- 1) Mission leaders have failed to 'foresee both the immensity of urban growth and the fact that most of the urban growth would be in squatter areas' (1992:14).
- 2) He believes that mission approaches have tried to implement the 'trickle down' theory. He claims that this theory 'works no more in the kingdom than it does in the

economic realm. This strategic mistake lacks support both in biblical exegesis and in sociological analysis, and has already been completely refuted (1992:14).

- 3) His third point on economic disparity between missionaries and the poor are best expressed in his own words.

Depending on affluent and high-powered programmatic approaches, the mission force has been out of touch with the realities of the third-world poor. A missionary living on \$2800 per month in a western-style house and sending his children to a westerners' school while trying to reach people who live on \$200 per year is like a B-52 bomber attacking guerrillas (1992:15).

For these reasons, the model proposed by Grigg, has far greater challenge and relevance to many churches in South African urban areas. There is also greater attention given to both aspects of churches establishing disciples, and to the demands of socio-economic survival strategies. It would appear that of our three case studies, the Ivory Park Methodist Church is attempting to following this model most closely, and that it is meeting many community needs, as well as running a growing church with its normal programmes.

The models described above provide a theological framework, which characterises the values and philosophies of ministry and mission that a particular congregation has adopted. Hopewell has done extensive research into different congregations (of varying denominations) from a more sociological perspective. Every congregation is unique, but there are broad features which enable a researcher to classify it according to criteria which Hopewell proposes (1988:17). This will enable a person to determine which churches fit into particular types, and whether it is important for a congregation to operate in any of the models which will be examined in the next chapter.

### **Hopewell's categories of congregations.**

The theories of mission at the broad conceptual level, which have been discussed above now need to be applied and earthed in more specific ways. If a local congregation is to proceed in an effort to be the church in its context, how does it start? In what ways can it assess its methodologies and effectiveness? This depends largely on how a local church understands its identity, its sense of calling and commitment to service, both among its own members as well as those in the community. These perceptions and 'style of life' (Webber 1964:113) are not limited to a particular denominational background or theological persuasion. The Catholic Church in South Africa initiated a 'Pastoral Plan' during 1990, because of what Connor calls 'the gravity of the social situation and the need for it to reappraise its mission after the Second Vatican Council' (1991:38). The Church of the Province of South Africa declared the 1990s to be a Decade of Evangelism, and the Millennium Campaign of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa has been noted. Often the emphases of the leadership of the mainline churches, however well promoted, do not assist local congregations to perceive their own particular self-understanding and calling in their context. Many churches have adopted 'mission statements' and 'vision statements' in order to try to sharpen their focus and draw their members into a shared understanding of the way forward. The work of James Hopewell is helpful in a consideration of the mission dynamic of local congregations.

James Hopewell spent several years as a missionary in West Africa in the 1950s, before returning to the United States. Although his training was in comparative religion and Islam, he felt himself increasingly drawn to study the dynamics of Christian congregations. In a year's sabbatical he spent his time as a participant observer in two Protestant congregations (a Baptist and a

Methodist) in a small town in Georgia. His interest was aroused by questions which always emerge in congregational life. He was interested to know why churches very often stayed the same size in spite of ambitious plans and programmes designed to make them grow. He also asked why congregations tolerate radical preaching, but rebel at the idea of making minor changes in the positioning of furniture in the church, such as a pulpit? John Bowden writes in the introduction to the book that,

His basic argument is that all congregations have a complex of stories, both the story of the congregation and the stories of individuals, which interact on one another. To begin to understand a congregation one has to become aware of these stories, to read the congregation as though it were a book (Hopewell 1988:xvii).

Hopewell argues that as a congregation comes into being it constructs a *narrative* which gives it its identity. It has a distinct and unique culture even though it may be only a block or two away from a neighbouring church. He believes that the story of the church represented in its beliefs, work, and everyday activities also gives account of God's intention for those members of the community of faith. He also affirms that even in trivial activities in the life of the congregation, the church's story was a channel, which conveyed something of the mission purposes of God to establish *shalom* in the world.

Hopewell claims that as common as they are in several traditions, 'congregations have never dominated the totality of the world's local religious organisations.' Human groups more often express their faith through other corporate forms. Thus the congregation is not 'as inevitable' as church members might assume. He defines a congregation as, 'a group that possesses a special name and recognised members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practised worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of

conduct, outlook, and story' (1988:12). Thus a congregation differs from a family at prayer, and the congregation is not synonymous with a particular bond of a family relationship. Nor is it totally identified with a political group and remains distinguishable from patterns of civil religion. Hopewell then sets out to show that congregations are 'thick gatherings of complicated actions', and though each one is distinctive, it incarnates in its peculiarity 'the worldly message and mission of Christ' (1988:17).

One of the most helpful suggestions which he offers, relates to his analysis of churches and the way he describes categories of congregations. He calls this 'househunting'. In the same way that a family might examine a house in which they would like to live, so churches can be studied and categorised using four symbols or models. He calls these **contextual, mechanical, organic and symbolic**. He writes,

To consider seriously the capacities of either houses or local churches, in other words, is to view them as textures, mechanisms, organisms and means of signification. While all four perspectives are in play in any single instance of inquiry, one of the four generally dominates (1988:19).

It will prove instructive to examine the qualities of each one of these as they explain to a large degree, so many distinctive features of individual congregations.

### ***Contextual approach***

The contextual approach was dominant during the 1960s with the growth of what he calls 'troubling inquiries' by sociologists who probed the local church as a social organisation. There were 'theological hesitations' during this time about the church in its congregational form. Many efforts resulted in groups studying the congregation in its relationship to its environment. A North American World Council of Churches working group made it clear that it was intent on using a contextual approach. It noted,



Instead of starting from the church and the problem of “what is the true church?” why not start our investigation in the world, especially where attempts are being made to respond to the agenda of the world? (1988:21)

Hopewell points out that such an approach deliberately and thoroughly avoided examining the internal operations, processes and symbolic structures of a parish. It was therefore committed to turn outward, to study the larger environment of the context in which it found itself. A logical conclusion of this method would show less interest in understanding mission as the conversion of people to a doctrinal position, or the gathering of new members to a church. Hopewell states that, the appeal to contextual studies in churches waned rapidly in the 1970s. Many people were discouraged by loss of membership and financial support, and scholars began to assert that the local church was livelier than many thought. This led to a greater interest in an analysis of the mechanistic qualities of the local church. Although Hopewell’s studies have their focus in North America, one can see clear parallels in the ecumenical churches in South Africa during that time. This coincided with the rise of protests against Apartheid, new radical student movements and experimentation in alternative forms of worship as well as questions relating to the form and structure of the church. The theological scene in South Africa at that time was dominated by the evils of the (Apartheid) context. This resulted in, for example, the formation of the University Christian Movement as an alternative to conservative Christian groups on university and college campuses around the country. The Churches too, were perceived as being reactionary and irrelevant in their context. Houston quotes Basil Moore writing in the *Methodist Churchman* of 1 September 1968,

Some of the students show no interest in the Church because they find greater relevance outside of it. Some have dropped out of church-going because they are bored, or the style of worship and instruction just does not touch their problems...It has been clearly seen that if these students are to be reached or retained by the Church then a new style has to be found...Here we are involved in a student revolt. These new forms of worship are revolting against the imposed, out-dated worship and artistic forms (quoted in Houston, 1997:29).

It is significant to note that a Methodist minister, Mark Stephenson, who works in the Inner City Mission in Cape Town, has begun to advertise in *The New Dimension* what he calls a 'Contextual Check-up for your Church.' This list asks if a church is experiencing,

1. Declining or static membership
2. An increasing average age in the congregation
3. Deteriorating and under-used buildings
4. A shortage of money resulting in ongoing minor or major financial crisis
5. Increasing difficulty in finding people to take on responsibilities
6. A decline in prestige
7. The failure of traditional activities
8. An increasing tendency by members to look back and glorify the past
9. A spirit of discouragement and criticism which breaks unity, and causes conflict in the congregation
10. Unrealistic expectations of leadership
11. Newcomers don't seem to stay
12. A growing dependency on commuter members (Stephenson, 1998).

The advert closes with, 'If you see this happening in you Church call THE CHURCH DOCTOR,' with a telephone number. Although Stephenson calls this, a 'Contextual Check-up' it does in fact not meet the criteria mentioned by Hopewell above. This questionnaire is not so much concerned with the state of the world, or the immediate context, as with the inner state of the congregation. It would probably be fair to say that it fits more accurately into the next category, which Hopewell describes, and which follows below.

Were Wesley's societies classified as following a contextual approach? It could be argued that Wesley and his leaders were intensely aware of the context in which they were living. Having made that point, Wesley would certainly not have allowed the 'world to set the agenda' for his societies. In many respects he was 'against' the world, resisting with all his strength some of the influences he considered harmful and potentially destructive to the community. He was also very vocal in his criticism of the (evil) practices which oppressed the poor.

### ***Mechanistic Approach***

Houses can also be viewed as mechanisms. They provide certain functions like the provision of shelter, protection, water and light. Before buying a house a person would ask advice from an engineer to inspect the structure and its ability to resist the elements. There is (relatively) less interest in the context or neighbourhood than in the actual building. To relate this parallel to a congregation, it introduces a greater interest in the internal operation of a local church than in its environment. The church would be aware of its social and cultural context, but would focus more on the effectiveness of the programme. There would be greater emphasis on the numerical growth of the church. This approach has largely come to be expressed in the Church Growth School, which has gained a significant following both in North America, as well as in other parts of the world, including South Africa. Hopewell says that the local church 'is here viewed as a mechanism with the capacity for greater or lesser efficiency in doing the work of God' (1988:24). These approaches operate according to rational principles, and churches can expect to grow if they follow programmes, which are proposed by the leading thinkers and practitioners of the *Church Growth School*. This movement was largely developed by McGavran who reflected on the experience of his long career as a missionary in India. His *Understanding Church Growth* has proved very popular, first being published in 1970, and then revised in 1980 and again in 1990 (by Peter Wagner). It became the definitive exposition of church growth philosophy, and was widely used at Fuller Theological Seminary, which became the centre of this new field of study. McGavran and Wagner make use of mechanistic images such as dynamics, catalysis, mobilisation, size, priority and order. Wagner states that a church can grow if it displays 'seven vital signs'. Hopewell notes that whereas the contextual approach saw the saving activity of God primarily in the world at large, this school understood God's salvation to occur in 'individual souls' (1987:25). Hopewell also draws attention to the fact that church growth science is only one of the ways that is used to measure a congregation as a 'machine.' The method most

‘relentlessly employed’ is the annual report which provides data regarding membership, money and the activities of the previous year. These statistics can be compared with previous years, and on the basis of this information, new plans can be devised for the future. Hopewell notes that mechanists are not opposed to the interpretations advanced in other approaches, but ‘to them the primary need of churches today is the rationalisation of congregational process and the animation of social will to achieve results’ (1988:26).

Wagner frequently draws the comparison between the state of a church and a person’s health.<sup>14</sup> In this analogy a congregation can develop a sickness that needs to be cured, or it will die. This approach has become popular to the extent that there has been a plethora of articles and books on ‘Church Health.’

In *Leadership* (1997) a series of articles follow under the heading, ‘What does a Healthy Church look like?’ It asks what signs indicate that a congregation is both free of disease and ‘spiritually fit.’ What follows in the article are nine contributions by various pastors of American churches who propose their prescriptions for a healthy church. This is followed by a questionnaire entitled ‘20 Questions to Determine Your Church’s Health.’ One of the contributions may serve as a sample of the different suggestions for ‘growing a healthy church.’ Spader and Mayes write,

‘Six foundational aspects of ministry are crucial to creating an environment for (healthy) growth.’

1. Create an atmosphere of love
2. Build a relational ministry
3. Communicate Christ clearly
4. Build a healthy ministry image
5. Mobilize a prayer base
6. Communicate the Word. (Spader and Mayes 1997:38)

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<sup>14</sup> See especially his *Your Church can be Healthy*, Abingdon 1979.

One needs to note here that the approach described above, which is clearly very popular, pays little attention to the social context of the city or country. It also has only an indirect and minimal interest in social responsibility to the needs of society. There appears to be an unstated assumption in these churches, that once people join the church and exercise their role in church and society, there will inevitably be a change in that society, as more and more people become Christian. One could categorise this group as concentrating first on evangelism, and then social action. In fact McGavran spells it out in stark terms as he quotes Hunter who says,

I address those in the Church whose 'holy bag' is Christian social action - peace, food, reconciliation, justice....wherever, anywhere in the world over the last 19 centuries, when the Christian Movement has emphasized disciple-making, two things have happened....We have made some new disciples and planted some churches and have had a social influence out of proportion to our numbers. But, whenever the Christian mission has neglected disciple-making and concentrated on the other facets of Christ's work, we have not made many disciples or planted many churches and have not had much social influence either! *Our social causes will not triumph unless we have great numbers of committed Christians* (McGavran 1980:26).

The implication of this teaching is the inevitable dilemma, which creates a dichotomy between evangelism and social action. The next step then is to ask which one has the higher priority, or which should come first. This has led to the tragic parting of the ways between the Ecumenical and Evangelical churches over the past century. Each has chosen what it has considered a priority. It will be argued later that the fundamental division that has taken place, has been due to an inadequate understanding of the mission of the church.

The use of John Wesley and others as examples, serves to illustrate that when the mission of the church is correctly conceived and applied, this unnecessary dichotomy should not occur, nor is there need to choose between one or other of these aspects of mission. In Wesley's context he was certainly very active in ensuring the efficient working of the societies. He spent much of his energies in visiting societies, and enquiring after their state. His particular strengths of

organisation led him to create structures which would encourage lay participation, preaching and being 'stewards' of various types for the good of the people, especially the poor.

### *Organic studies*

A congregation can also be viewed as an organism, a living entity growing to maturation. Hopewell's househunting analogy would relate not so much to how efficiently it works, but more to whether it enlivens and harmonises its occupants. Hopewell asks, 'Is the place conducive to good relationships? Does it aid the development of a happy home?' (1987:26). For churches which follow the organic view, the local church is a gathering of strangers, and because people have difficulty in dealing with the diversities which exist among them, they struggle to find an identity. Therefore three elements would characterise these groups;

- 1) In a parish they recognise that the differences which exist among them can be overcome by the potential of fellowship.
- 2) They use methods of organisational development and
- 3) All members are encouraged to participate equally in the congregation's ministry.

There is therefore greater stress on community, and the disparate parts of the whole, work together, not to achieve uniformity but lively and vital interaction. There is also a strong value placed on all members contributing, sharing, and building relationships. This implies a democratisation of the leadership patterns of a congregation, which may previously have been under the control of the clergy. In this model the church may not necessarily grow in size and efficiency, but certainly in its communal interaction.

Hopewell acknowledges his dependency on Stephen Pepper to suggest these root metaphors for understanding the world. In this hypothesis,

A congregation in an organicist world has a different sort of mission: it uses its corporate life as a prototype of the world process. Accepting the heterogeneity of its members, the congregation takes upon itself a synthesizing activity for the world at large and strives to develop a paradigmatic fellowship, a foretaste of the ultimate community of all humanity. Eschatological vision rather than scientific treatises reveals the organicist world. Both the world and the kingdom to come, occur in microcosm in the local church. In an organicist hypothesis the part discloses the whole. The life of a single parish stands for the ultimate fellowship, the *koinonia*, that all people will have among themselves and with their God (Hopewell 1987:200).

It has been difficult to identify local congregations, which fit this model. It could be argued that in the Apartheid era in South Africa, everything militated against the very concept of heterogeneity, especially in the church. The government of the day, did everything in its power to force separation of racial and cultural groups to maintain their individual identity and separateness. This included pressure to worship and form congregations along racial lines. By and large this ideology proved effective, and many denominations followed the enforced demographic changes taking place, resulting in churches being composed of only one cultural group. De Gruchy recounts how in the 1950s, the Apartheid government began to deport foreign missionaries and clergy who were opposed to its policies. He speaks of the 'first major crunch' in church-state relations being the formulation of the Native Laws Amendment Bill in 1957. This would have made it very difficult for Black people to attend worship in 'White areas.' In his now famous response the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Geoffrey Clayton, wrote to Dr Verwoerd saying, 'we feel bound to state that if the Bill were to become law in its present form we should ourselves be unable to obey it or counsel our clergy and people to do so' (de Gruchy 1979:61).

This stance taken by the leadership of Anglican Church, referred to above, as well as some other organisations continued to oppose and resist the stream of propaganda for 'separate development.' Many local churches, which historically had been racially mixed, saw their

continued existence as a message in itself, and a witness that Black and White parishioners could worship and live together. In these cases the congregation would have found within itself a dynamic which portrayed the very essence of what the church meant, and this was a continuous encouragement to members to persist in holding out against the hostile external forces.

In many independent (and Charismatic) churches great efforts are made to introduce smaller units within a single congregation. The intention is clearly to increase a sense of cohesion and belonging. These are given different names, but most would classify themselves as 'cells' and together they constitute a 'cell church.' These groups which consist of 12 to 15 members are intentionally designed to provide the dynamics of a small group, whereby members can experience friendship, fellowship, and answers to personal needs much more easily than in a large and impersonal congregation. It is interesting to note that this is a rediscovery of an early Methodist institution, the Class Meeting, into which Wesley directed people who responded in some way to his preaching. Now, as then, these groups are led by laypeople. Wesley insisted that people who responded to his preaching should join class meetings, and the strict order of meetings and rules reflect his emphasis on what Hopewell would call the organic approach.

It could also be observed that the small units, which characterise most congregations of the African Indigenous Churches (AICs), fulfil a similar role, but this is not the major focus of this study.

### *Symbolic studies*

Hopewell describes another perspective of viewing the church in what he calls a discourse, 'an exchange of symbols that express the views, values, and motivations of the parish' (1988:28). This focuses on the identity of the church. To return to the househunting analogy, Hopewell



argues that the search is made to find a home that reflects the identity of the family and which would express the self-understanding of the occupants and their relationship with the world. He writes,

When househunters contemplate the symbolic language of a potential dwelling, they look at a quality different from its neighborhood, efficiency, or familial appropriateness. They ask: What, in any circumstance, does this place say about us? What does it express about our values and the way we engage the world (1988:29)?

This could also be compared to what pastors sometimes call the ‘personality’ of a congregation. Here one looks for significant motifs or themes which when repeated by church members ‘sanction the world view, ethos, and praxis of the parish’ (1988:30). Hopewell claims that organicists and symbolists do have in common a focus on internal community, but organicists ‘advocate a social process that develops a future community not now realised.’ For the symbolists however, ‘the task is a search among existing cultural data to discover the matrix of the community already existing’ (1988:31). Over an extended time another feature emerges, namely, the signals which convey the culture of a church. Here one would take note of not only verbal signs, but also such things as gestures, touches and physical arrangements. Hopewell concludes his analysis by stating that the congregation is ‘unexpectedly complex’ and cannot be understood without ‘an exploration of the textural qualities that tie it to its larger context...and the observation of a congregation’s symbolic interaction discloses its identity and web of meanings’ (1988:32).

Hopewell proceeds to analyse congregations according to the models described, which he personally prefers, as he believes that this approach has not received sufficient attention. He states that an emphasis on narrative is ‘overdue.’ This use of story is needed to ‘round out’ an understanding of the local church (1988:50). In order to discover something of this dynamic he

includes in an appendix a worldview test, which he believes will allow him to classify a congregation according to the answers that are given. He reacts to the customary approach of analysts who use typical contextual descriptions of churches, like 'urban, middle class,' which they consider to be more precise. However he would prefer narrative, as it is 'sufficiently intricate to explain the congregation's constitutive power, and sufficiently comprehensive to link congregational events and meanings' (1988:50). As mentioned previously Hopewell spent a year in two churches researching how a local congregation operated. He interviewed members of the churches, but found that people were reluctant to share with him, as he was considered to be the theological expert. He expected members to overwhelm him with information, but found that this did not happen. He notes that in a local church, 'members participate in religion more readily than they explain it' (1988:68). The question is then raised regarding this 'participation.' Can it be encouraged, or strengthened or brought to a deeper level of maturity? Can members be trained in various aspects of their faith?

Questions like these, led researchers to conduct a massive research project undertaken among 11,122 adults in 561 congregations in six major denominations in the United States.<sup>15</sup> The results were published in 1990 after a comprehensive three and a half year study, which examined the effectiveness of Christian Education in churches. Roehlkepartain and Benson note that at the heart of the study was 'an in-depth survey that examined the faith, loyalty, religious biography, congregational life and the dynamics of Christian education programming' (1996:24). The study was designed in consultation with leaders of the participating churches, and surveyed the opinions of laypeople, Christian Education teachers and pastors. One of the primary aims was to examine the 'faith maturity' of a congregation. In order to assess this rather abstract concept,

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<sup>15</sup> Conducted by Search Institute, a non-profit research and resource development organisation based in Minneapolis, Minnesota USA.

thirty eight indicators were identified and put to the respondents. The indicators were grouped under eight major sections. The Faith Maturity Scale proposed that a person with a mature Christian faith is one who

- A. Trusts and believes
- B. Experiences the fruits of faith
- C. Integrates faith and life
- D. Seeks spiritual growth
- E. Experiences and nurtures faith in community
- F. Holds life-affirming values
- G. Advocates social change
- H. Acts and serves (1996:25).

Results of the questionnaires have been classified into four 'Faith Types.' These relate to the extent to which congregants have been able to develop a balanced faith. This depends firstly on the degree to which a person has been able to grow in relationship to God, a 'vertical relationship.' This is defined as a 'life-transforming relationship to a loving God.' The second element is a 'horizontal' dimension of faith, defined as 'a consistent devotion to serving others.' On the basis of this framework, the researchers developed four faith types and reported their results under the following categories, and the percentages of congregational members in each type.

Undeveloped faith	36%
Horizontal faith	22%
Vertical faith	10%
Integrated faith	32%

(Roehlkepartain and Benson 1996:25)

The authors have noted the implications for congregational life, and especially the role of Christian education in the churches which participated in the project. The authors conclude that whatever weaknesses existed in the survey and the methodologies used, the levels of maturity in mainline churches are seriously deficient. The results show that only 32% of congregants have an 'integrated' faith, and that the largest single category of people display an 'undeveloped' faith. This emphasises their call for churches to engage in more comprehensive programmes of education and development.

The analysis proposed by Hopewell is a fairly complex endeavour, and should be explored with insight and sensitivity, as each congregation has a dynamic of its own, and should be encouraged to develop according to its needs. It would appear that something similar has been instituted by the Catholic Church in South Africa, in its reflections on the Pastoral Plan. One would expect that any major initiative in church renewal would emanate from 'the top' or from the upper hierarchy of the church. In order to consider the Bishops' Pastoral Plan, the Catholic Theological Society of Southern Africa prepared a series of articles, which were later published in book form in 1991. These examine God's plan of salvation, community and transformation of the world. In reappraising the Church's mission, Connor observes that at first the process of pastoral planning seemed a fairly straightforward task, which was primarily an administrative one. It would entail making the church run more effectively, as there were several uncoordinated initiatives which had arisen in the mid-1980s. These were competing with one another for attention, time and personnel as well as funding. Connor adds,

But once pastoral planning actually got underway, it became apparent that a serious reappraisal was required of the Church's whole purpose and how that should be accomplished in Southern Africa. Instead of simply drifting and making ad hoc responses, the Church has consciously decided to become a Community Serving Humanity (1991:48).

What follows in his book are fifteen essays designed to encourage parishes to take the Pastoral Plan seriously and begin to reflect and experience the call to greater community. Decock makes the point that the official Catholic position is that God does not just work in hidden ways in the lives of individual believers, 'but that this salvation is realized in and through a visible community' (1991:61). He quotes from a text prepared for the First Vatican Council (1870) which emphasises the hierarchical nature of the Church, 'But the Church is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights. It is a society of unequals...' However he shows how Vatican II wished to get away from this 'clericalist' view of the Church, and lists some of the deep changes adopted which encouraged the development of lay ministries.

It would seem that such a comprehensive review and examination of not only the structures of the church, but also its very life and calling are similar to some of Hopewell's suggestions regarding the church from a symbolic position. Connor and others expressed the hope that this programme would begin a process of transformation within the Catholic Church.

According to Ward (1998) the RENEW programme started in 97 parishes in 1992 has produced encouraging results. By 1998 there were 2400 people still meeting in small groups. The focus has been refined under the acronym ECHO, which stands for Education, Church, Hope and Outreach. A further development has been the use of ecumenical materials with the adoption of the Alpha course. This twelve-week course of outreach and training sessions for lay people originated in Anglican circles in England, and has spread to many parishes throughout the world. To suit local conditions, two additional video programmes geared particularly for Catholic audiences, have been added and are being used.

Van Engen has written extensively on the missionary nature of the church, and calls local churches, 'God's Missionary People' (1991:24). He also quotes Newbigin as saying that the congregation should be viewed as the 'hermeneutic of the gospel.' He continues,

How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe and live by it' (van Engen 1991:32).

In many respects Wesley's approach in the societies could be termed symbolic as he tried to establish the identity of the church. Many of his institutions would have been in reaction to those in the church of England. His use and training of lay preachers, leaders and women would have raised an important signal for all to see. The care and work among the poor who were despised in society, sent out a clear message of what values were held dear among the Methodists.

Van Engen also refers to a study done in ten congregations by Roozen, McKinney and Carroll. They devised a model which reveals four different methods of demonstrating their missional orientation. These are,

- 1) The congregation as activist
- 2) The congregation as citizen
- 3) The congregation as sanctuary
- 4) The congregation as evangelist (van Engen 1996:100).

One could also mention the models for the church which Avery Dulles has proposed in *Models of the Church*, namely Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald and

Servant. Inevitably there will be duplication and overlapping of concepts as different authors search for the best way of portraying the church. Together these makes interesting contrasts with the model proposed by Hopewell in his categories of contextual, mechanistic, organic and symbolic. It allows one to study a local congregation and attempt to classify it according to the most appropriate model. Our concern here is to study congregations in the light of the material presented so far, with a view to measuring how true they are to being the 'church' in every way, but especially how they are to taking up the challenge of poverty. This is one of the reasons why the focus of this study has been on Wesley and the Methodists as they grappled with a growing number of societies, which were in constant tension with the Church of England. They were gradually taking on the form of a new denomination (more among, and with the poor), however much they resisted the idea of forming a breakaway church.

Looking back on the history of the Methodists, one questions in which model or models these early societies would have been classified. It may sound simplistic, yet be realistic to suggest that to a great degree the early Methodist society probably exhibited elements of each approach listed by Hopewell; that is contextual, mechanistic, organic and symbolic. In the contemporary context, the case study method of analysing churches attempts to uncover some of the dynamics and identities of these congregations, with particular reference to their emphasis on the poor.

## **CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDIES**

### **Introduction**

The following Case Studies have been selected from among certain churches that displayed a common interest in the provision of housing, and job creation as part of their ministry. This emphasis may not be a priority among most congregations, nor does it imply that housing and job creation are the most urgent or important social needs in South Africa at this time. The progress in the provision of housing and jobs created does, however, represent a relatively straightforward task to measure. In addition the government of South Africa embarked on an election promise to provide a million housing units within a five year period following the first democratic elections held in 1994.

The case studies span different parts of the country, and very divergent churches have undertaken the projects described below. The churches, all happen to be within the Methodist or Wesleyan tradition, and are therefore influenced by principles established by John Wesley. A further disclaimer should be added, that there might well be many churches, Methodist or other, where more significant progress has been made in these areas, or other aspects of development. The churches that have been selected in this study have been easily accessible for research and there has also been some personal involvement in each one at different times.

It should be obvious too, that the projects described are far from perfect and have attracted criticism, as well as normally expected operating difficulties. In spite of these qualifications, it is suggested that the case studies which follow, provide some instructive insights into the life of congregations and how they understand their sense of calling and commitment to being part of the Church in South Africa at this time.



Waymire and Wagner (1980:10ff) have drawn attention to the need to focus on certain prerequisites before analysing a church, although their focus is more specifically concerned with how churches grow. These relate to national and local factors of the **context** of a church. In the studies that follow, it is clear that all the churches are in South Africa at the beginning of the new millennium. Each church varies considerably in its local context as one is in an inner city area in Pietermaritzburg, one is in an informal settlement in Gauteng, and one in an upper middle class area in Cape Town.

Another dimension concerns the national and local **institutional factors**. These factors relate to the leadership structures of a congregation and how decisions are made. They also refer to the level of autonomy a local church enjoys, and how a minister falls under the authority of a bishop. Each congregation or society also forms part of the 'Connexion' of the Methodist Church.

(This refers to the fact that the Methodist Church maintains a national church structure which uses centralised decision making through the bishops and presiding bishop, and that affects all congregations in the 'connexion').<sup>16</sup> There would also be priorities proposed by the leadership of a church, such as the Millennium Campaign of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The Free Methodist Church has also identified priorities, namely to establish multi-ethnic congregations in the urban centres of South Africa.

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<sup>16</sup> Methodist terminology often uses 'society' for the local congregation. A 'circuit' consists of a number of societies in a geographical area which fall under care of a superintendent minister. Several circuits together make up a district, which meets in an annual synod and is under the oversight of a bishop (originally a chairman). The districts together make up the Connexion, which meets as a Conference under the presiding bishop (originally a president). All bishops, some ministers, together with lay representatives meet in an annual conference of the connexion, which composes all districts. The South African connexion includes churches in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique and Swaziland. Ministers can therefore expect to serve anywhere in the connexion.

The intention of the next chapter is to examine distinctive features of churches established by John Wesley in the eighteenth century, and reflect on principles and practices of the early Methodists. Many similarities remain, such as local churches being referred to as 'societies.' Other traditions, like the use of 'classes' have largely fallen away, although the place of small groups is being re-introduced, and sometimes hailed as a 'new' pattern in the churches.

## **Case Study 1: Ubunye Church and Community Ministries**

### ***Origins***

Dan and Kathleen Sheffield are Canadians who came to South Africa in 1994, although they spent a year teaching at EBSEMSA (Evangelical Bible Seminary of SA) in 1991.<sup>17</sup> Previous to that they had assisted with their church's mission work in Egypt. Dan is an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church, and Kathleen is a registered nurse who is developing resources for women affected by domestic violence. He was the minister of the Ubunye Church in Pietermaritzburg, which is situated in a somewhat run down part of the city near the railway station. The church was started in 1991 in outbuildings at the back of the house occupied by the Sheffields in Berg Street. The purpose was to be intentionally urban and non racial.<sup>18</sup> When the local church was founded the goal was to form a congregation of about 150-200 people who could support a minister.

In 1997 attendance averaged 50-60 people, 80% of whom lived within walking distance of the church. About a third of the congregation are children and teenagers. The congregation is made up of professionals, students, trades people, hawkers and domestic workers. The worship service usually lasts about an hour and a half, with English and Zulu being used. Services are informal

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<sup>17</sup> Renamed 'The Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa' (ESSA) in 2000.

with participation and prayers by members. Once a month communion is served and this is followed by a communal meal for the whole congregation.

### *Description of the area and its needs*

It is estimated that the city blocks, which are the area of concentration, cover approximately one square kilometre, with a population of over six thousand people. Victoria Road to Church Street, and Pine Street to Chapel Street, would roughly define the limits of their focus. The area is culturally mixed, with Zulu speaking people making up about 40% of the total. Other groups are Whites (30%), Indian (15%), Coloured (10%) and Africans from other areas or countries (5%).<sup>19</sup> The Sheffields estimate that the community consists primarily of singles and single-parent families whose average age is under 35. There are about 15 churches within a ten minute walk, but they tend to serve traditionally White members who usually live outside the area. Some of these churches have been in the city for about one hundred and fifty years, with roots going back into the origins of the city. It was agreed that worship and church services should be multi-cultural and that several languages should be used.

One of the first tasks undertaken by the leadership (all of whom lived in the community) was to conduct a survey of the needs of the people in the area. It emerged that four issues were dominant: housing, employment, women's safety and civil co-operation. In April 1995 a pilot housing project was begun. At this time, there was a 3 bedroomed house next door to the church in Berg Street, which was being occupied by about 20-25 people. A shebeen<sup>20</sup> operated in the

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<sup>18</sup> The Free Methodist Church, with its headquarters in the USA, has been working in South Africa for over a hundred years in traditional mission activities. It is strongest in rural areas, and also has churches in Zimbabwe, Moçambique and Malawi as well as countries in central and East Africa.

<sup>19</sup> Percentages are approximate estimates by the Sheffields, in the absence of official figures.

<sup>20</sup> A South African 'Speakeasy' or unlicensed, illegal public house.

back yard, electricity had been cut off and only a trickle of water was available. There were frequent disturbances and the police were often called to restore order. Eventually the municipality ordered that the residents should be evicted. The owner of the house, a Muslim investor, was approached and asked if the church could manage the house and pay the owner directly. This was agreed to and repairs and cleaning were carried out. The house opened again and the first residents were a single mother and three sons who were attending the church. A strict set of rules was agreed to which ensured that rents would not be exploitative, the house would be kept clean and there should be no drinking of alcohol and no violence.

### ***Goals of the church***

The goals of the church were formulated with the intention of incorporating themes contained in Isaiah 58:6-12 into the church. These include responding to the needs of the poor, resisting injustice and oppression, and building a credible reputation in the community. The stated goals are:

1. to develop a multi-cultural, worshipping congregation of earnest Christians and God-seekers.
  2. to grow this congregation through Christian presence and ministry which is rooted in the community.
  3. to develop and administer social ministries which correspond to the relevant needs of the community.
  4. to aid in the development of a sense of neighbourhood in our geographical home.
- (Sheffield 1998:5)

Further research showed that in the city of Pietermaritzburg with a population of about half a million people, there was no shelter for abused women. A member of the congregation is a family and marriage counsellor at FAMSA (Family and Marriage Society of South Africa) and raised the awareness of domestic violence and the need for emergency accommodation for victims and their children. The Sheffield's became actively involved with this NGO, in providing support for abused women who have little protection from the police or the courts.

### ***The Ubunye Housing Project***

Although government assistance for buying a house is available to people who earn less than R3500 per month, the realities of the system are that delivery is extremely slow, and this provision does not cater for the poorest segments of society. This is because even the most modest loan and subsidy requires repayment which these people, who do everything just to survive, simply cannot afford. People who are domestic workers, hawkers or street vendors cannot even afford the expenses involved in the state housing programme. There appears to be little on offer in the area of social housing, and very few are making rental housing available. In order to meet these very real existential needs, and taking into account the reasons listed above, an independent trust was established by the church in 1996. A building called *Holmdene* in Pietermaritz Street, formerly used as a residential hotel, was bought. It is immediately adjacent

to a busy taxi rank in West Street, which serves the major transport routes in and out of the city. This is about a block away from the church and manse. The building was renamed *Ubunye* (unity) and it was envisioned that it would provide a place of housing for the poor, a shelter for abused women and an enlarged venue for the church services. It currently houses about 150 people. Depending on the size of the room and the facilities available, rents vary between R150 and R450 per month, with the average being about R250 per month (1998 figures). A residents' association has been elected which meets regularly to deal with matters of concern to the residents. Initially, when the church took over the facility of sixty rooms, there was severe overcrowding of the building. The electricity had been disconnected, security was minimal, and prostitution and a shebeen were operating. Gradually these elements moved out of their own accord as they became aware of the changed circumstances that were being instituted. *Ubunye* presently employs a handyman and a cleaner from among its own members for essential maintenance and general upkeep of the facilities.

The shelter for abused women opened in early 1997.<sup>21</sup> It is incorporated within the premises of *Holmdene* and has been used consistently as women are referred, or urgently need a place of protection. Ministerial candidates, who are studying at EBSEMSA, staff the shelter, called *The Haven*. A church member serves as a full-time housemother and lives in a flat adjoining the shelter. NGOs, social service agencies and government departments provide specialised counselling and treatment. In the first year of its operation an average of eight women and children per month occupied the shelter. It is presently funded through grants and donations, but when the housing complex is more established, a budget will be allocated from rental income.

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<sup>21</sup> Previous attempts at providing a shelter for abused women in Pietermaritzburg had failed, and in 1997 there was no other shelter for this purpose.

### *Funding*

The building was bought for R450 000 and fairly major repairs had to be done to upgrade the buildings. As no bank or financial institution would provide a bond for what was perceived to be a high risk investment, money was borrowed through church and mission agencies overseas. The trust made enquiries from local government sources about the possibility of acquiring funds from RDP<sup>22</sup> or other sources. After many delays, a grant of R793 000 was awarded in August 1998 by the KwaZulu-Natal Housing Board. This will be used to pay back the overseas loans and make some alterations and improvements at Ubunye. A pre-school facility and place of worship are envisioned as funds become available. On Sunday 6 September 1998 a celebration service was held outdoors at the back of the housing complex to celebrate the granting of the funds. About 120 people attended a communion service, followed by a meal for residents and guests. The property adjoining the housing complex came on the market, and the leadership of the church decided to buy it, in order to expand the number of rooms available, provide office space as well as giving residents some badly needed garden and recreational space.

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<sup>22</sup> Reconstruction and Development Programme established by the South African government to redress economic imbalances of the Apartheid era.

### *Rationale of the Ubunye Church*

Sheffield holds up certain key principles which inspired and guided the way in which the Ubunye church and housing operation has developed. These principles concentrate on the of priority of a faith community, a multi-cultural approach, a concern for women, the impact of a small church on the inner city, and the role of the pastor.

1. Because he was given a mandate to establish a viable church within a period of four years, Dan Sheffield decided to begin with establishing a worshipping community before providing social services. He states,

our group, not being an NGO with its own communal support and workers who have homes in existing congregations, felt the need to develop a worshipping congregation that would support spiritually and practically our involvement with the community and its concerns. (Sheffield 1998:10)

In spite of this statement, it was not very long before the church became involved with providing accommodation in the house next door to the church. It may have taken place partially by design and partially through force of circumstances.

2. The leadership of the church chose to adopt a multi-cultural approach because of the context of South Africa, which has by and large practised apartheid in the church as well as in society. It was felt that a different model was needed, particularly in the evangelical section of the church.<sup>23</sup> Another reason was that the surrounding neighbourhood was multi-ethnic and that a church of this nature would be most appropriate. Finally, the composition of the leadership was multicultural. 'The present leadership of the church represents two racial groups, four languages and five cultural groupings.' (Sheffield 1998:11)

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<sup>23</sup> The apathy and lethargy of the South African 'evangelical churches' in the face of the gross social injustices of Apartheid have been well analysed in David Walker's *Challenging Evangelicalism*.



3. Sheffield has made the point that the church has 'a bias toward women with children in our rental allocation policy.' This is based on the conviction that women form a large and visible presence in the community, but do not enjoy commensurate levels of power and access to services. If the church is to be concerned for the oppressed and powerless, then 'women in South Africa represent the new face of gender-apartheid.' In addition, the Free Methodist Church has ordained women for over a century and has 'an undergirding theology regarding the equality of women.' (Sheffield 1998:11) It is seen as important that this fact can be demonstrated to other evangelical churches, which hold a different position. The church also tries to recognise the role of women in the church, and this is shown by the fact that in Ubunye church there is an ordained woman minister and seven ministerial candidates, including three women.

4. Because of the limited resources within such a small congregation the church has decided that the priorities should be focused outward. They do not have a traditional approach to children's ministries or to adult discipleship. Another feature is their commitment to networking with other agencies who specialise in specific areas. As a result, close co-operation has developed with social service agencies particularly in relation to women who are victims of domestic violence. A concern is that the minister is presently funded from outside sources, and the congregation will need to grow to a sufficient size in order to cover not only the ministry operating costs, but also the expenses of supporting a minister.

### ***Future plans***

There is a clear understanding on the part of the leadership of the church that the Sheffields would not be available on a long term basis. Therefore the priority for the future has been to develop leadership both for the housing programme and shelter, as well as the pastoral oversight

of the church. There are also needs for further consolidation within the housing complex in order to include a venue for the worship centre.

As noted above, in 1998 the church bought the large old house adjoining the Ubunye project. It has relieved pressure on the staff, who now have office space and an administrative centre. The house is also to be used for a crèche during the day. As the house was situated on a large stand it was decided to build a worship centre at the back of the house. This would provide a building that could seat 250 people as well as offices for the church. It would also make it possible for the church to relocate when the Sheffields sold their mission house, as the church was meeting in an outside building.

On 30 November 1999 the Sheffields returned to Canada after completing their term in Pietermaritzburg. The church arranged that Rev Ron Zeiner should act as the pastor until such time as a permanent replacement could be found. The church board has continued to pursue the acquisition of an old hotel in the city centre with a view to renovating the building and transforming it into more units for social housing. An approach has been lodged with the Provincial Housing Board to provide housing for a further 200 people. In July 2000 the Rev Luzuko Mdubeki was appointed as the new minister and was to be assisted by a student minister in the running of the church. At his own request, however, Rev Mdubeki soon stood down in order to concentrate on his teaching duties at the Union Bible Institute. In September 2001, his assistant Bheki Mchunu took over as the minister of the church.

### ***Evaluation***

By any account this is a remarkable project for so young and so small a church. The benefits are obvious and on inspection the place has a positive and wholesome atmosphere. Mrs Zondi, a

longstanding resident, spoke at the opening celebration in 1998 and emphasised the great improvements which have occurred since the church took over the housing complex. When the Sheffields left the country, there was relative stability in the housing project, but it was not long before residents began to default on their rent. There was some hesitation regarding what action should be taken. This lack of income placed great stress on the budget and it was not always clear how to proceed. The Provincial Housing Board withheld some of the outstanding funds, which had been promised and this resulted in further financial hardship. Certain residents were asked to pay their rent and arrears or leave the premises. Some of these believed that because the Provincial Housing Board had provided funding they would not be responsible for paying rent. In spite of every attempt to convince residents to the contrary, there was no improvement. Eventually the Board decided to take legal action to have these residents evicted. By April 2001 there has been no further progress and the steel structure, which forms the basis of the new church, had not been completed.

These struggles to make a housing complex financially sustainable are very similar to Wesley's 'Poor House' which was established to care for indigent widows. It started off well, but proved difficult to sustain over time due to lack of financial resources. (This is described in more detail in chapter 3).

A final note may be added with regard to the leadership of the church and housing complex. It is clear that the project has suffered setbacks as a result of frequent changes of pastors. Pastor Mchunu is the third pastor (in 2001) since the Sheffields left the church in 1999. It goes without saying that specialised gifts, and extraordinary patience are required to run a church as well as a housing project which depends on government grants and the accompanying bureaucratic processes.

## Case study 2: Khulani Housing Project

### *Background*

This project is concerned with the provision of houses, which residents may build themselves or buy from a contractor. It is situated in the Western Cape at Khayelitsha, one of the large informal settlements close to Cape Town. It is a project undertaken by the Khayelisha Methodist Church and the Khayelitsha Development Forum together with the Claremont Methodist Church.

Claremont Methodist Church in Cape Town, was founded in 1904 and served a residential community which stretched from the railway line towards the mountain. There were also Methodist churches established in Wynberg to the South and Rosebank to the North. With the implementation of the Group Areas Act in the 1960s, most Coloured people living in the areas surrounding the Claremont Church, were forced to move to other areas, usually on the Cape Flats. As the (mostly White) suburb of Claremont developed, the business sector expanded and old houses were bought up and replaced by large scale shopping complexes. An upmarket mall with cinemas, restaurants and departmental stores now surrounds the Church. The congregation attracts many students and young professionals, and draws its membership from areas beyond the immediate environs of the church. In 1998 the church had 480 members on the church roll, with weekly attendance being approximately 450. There are four services each Sunday, together with several cell groups which meet during the week. A large and lively youth group operates on a Friday evening, as well as on a Sunday morning. The church would probably be described as a mainline congregation with some charismatic features. At the time of gathering this material, the resident minister was the Rev John Stack, who was assisted by a pastor, Grant Hopkins. Hopkins went to further his studies in the UK in 2000 and was replaced by a former member of the congregation, Paul Cameron, who was given the responsibility of providing leadership for the cells in the church. The church also employs a youth pastor, a full time administrator, and a part-

time secretary. In 2001 Rev John Stack moved to Durbanville church and Rev Mark Wiemers, previously of Kempton Park, took his place.

### *Social impact ministry*

Ties between the congregations of Claremont and Khayelitsha go back several years. These were strengthened in the early 1990s, when John Stack made regular visits to the home of Rev Otto Ntshanyane. In discussion they felt that there should be some activity which could address the socio-economic needs of the surrounding communities. As a result the Claremont church formed a group called the *Social Impact Ministry*. Its mission statement noted that SIM was to be a cohesive part of the broader ministry of the church and responsible for one of the components of the Claremont Church's vision. (These are social impact, spiritual gifts, mission, evangelism and prayer.) It adds,

‘...we will endeavour to initiate, facilitate and support projects aimed at addressing the socio-economic needs (which include housing, skills development, job creation, health care and education) in these communities’ (Johnson 1998:1).

A set of guiding principles were formulated which stated that prayerful consideration would be given to all issues, and that the focus would be on the ‘facilitation rather than on the provision of upliftment.’ Consultation with the community would be central to any decisions being made, and all issues would be open to negotiation. Every effort would be made to achieve full transparency, effective stewardship and accountability. Delivery of houses should be guided by these principles. Because the church sees this project as a ministry, it has stressed that building and sustaining relationships is an essential part of the project. As the potential of the SIM is so vast it was agreed that the primary goal would be to assist the Khayelitsha Methodist Church in partnership with the Khayelitsha Development Forum. Initially the project would be restricted to the Harare area within the larger Khayelitsha.

### *Project management*

An Executive was formed which consisted of eight members - two Harare town councillors, two members of the Harare community, two members for the Harare Methodist Church and two members of the Claremont Methodist Social Impact Ministry Group. At Claremont the Social Impact Ministry Group consists of the minister in an ex officio capacity as well as six highly qualified members in areas such as finance, building, administration and fund raising. The members have assented to a statement which says, 'We have no interest, whether in personal or business capacities, in the proposed housing project.' It was also agreed that a Section 21<sup>24</sup> Company Not For Gain should be formed. This ensures greater financial accountability, and means that it will need to be audited annually by a firm of chartered accountants.

### *Progress*

In September 1995 meetings were begun at the Khayelitsha Methodist Church. These were intended to open communication channels between the two churches, and gain a common understanding of what was to be achieved. A questionnaire in Xhosa was distributed to all potential homeowners at the church. This was designed to ascertain the amount people could pay, the type and size of homes required and whether people would be able to supply their own labour. About 200 of the 1000 were returned. Some of the findings indicated the monthly income of housing applicants.

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<sup>24</sup> In the South African legal system this provides for a company to be established which will not be subject to income tax, but which is required by law to be audited each year. Many NGOs and welfare agencies use this method for small businesses and projects.

Income	% of applicants
Less than R800	41
Between R800 & R1500	29
Between R1500 & R2500	29
Between R2500 & R3500	1
Total	100

The largest group (69%) were in the age ranges of 35-55 years (Johnson 1997:Annexure 1).

Other tasks undertaken were to find out details of the home buyer's subsidies, and consult the building technology unit of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the University of Cape Town. It was also discovered that most potential homeowners do not possess title deeds to the land which they occupy. It appears that an engineering group has expressed its willingness to handle the administration of the transfer of land from the Council to the residents.

On 28 March 1996 a draft document was presented to the Khayelitsha Development Forum, and the project was approved in principle. It was felt that meeting the needs of the Khayelitsha Methodist congregation was a correct approach, rather than trying to find some other system of allocation for the whole community. A non profit organisation called the Development Action Group, with a full time staff of 20 was consulted and their assistance and expertise secured. They have had considerable experience in development, housing and urban management in the Western Cape. They have produced the basic design of a house which has taken into account the suggested requirements of residents. These include aspects of functionality, aesthetic appeal and affordable cost.

In August 1996 a basic design, including a breakdown of costs and monthly repayments, was presented to a group of 70 members of the Khayelitsha congregation. These were favourably

received. A summary of the design would be a 36 square metre structure of concrete block construction with a corrugated iron roof. There would be a bathroom, open plan kitchen, living area and a bedroom. Electricity would be included. Total cost: R24 035, including a plot at R9700. A 42 square metre 'vibracrete' building was donated and erected on vacant church owned land in Harare. This would be used as an administrative centre for the housing project.

Total monthly cost if monthly income is:	
Less than R800	R230
Between R800 and R1500	R272
Between R1500 and R2500	R323
Between R2500 and R3500	R400

**Table 3: Monthly cost to households of proposed design (at 20% for 20 years.**

(For the poorest households, the State subsidy is expected to cover approximately 70% of total building costs).

A 42 square metre vibracrete building was donated and erected on vacant church owned land in Harare. This is used as an administrative centre for the housing project.

On 29 June 1997 an 'Authorisation of the contract as embodied in the working document' was signed by members of the Khayelitsha Methodist Church, the town council of Harare, the community of Harare and the Claremont Methodist Church.

In March 1998 Marc Johnson, a project manager with considerable experience in commerce, was appointed by the Claremont church, and was to be supported by donations raised by the Social Impact Ministry. He was to oversee the process, consult with local community leaders and facilitate negotiations with local government housing departments, builders and financial



institutions. He would also have the function of working alongside a local project leader from the community. A community name for the project, **Khulani** (Grow) was chosen.

In July 1998, it was reported that the Synod of the Western Cape Methodist Church had pledged its full support to the project. This means that resources of the wider church will be available.

A presentation was made to a member of the Provincial Housing Board. It was well received and would then be submitted to the Chairman. A large accounting firm committed R1000 per month to sponsor the project on an ongoing basis.

The design of the show house took longer than anticipated, due to the extensive consulting processes, and as at September 1998, had not yet been finalised, thus preventing the first show house being built. The first house commissioned for Mama Keva was completed in April 1999, and dedicated in an impressive ceremony. In order to speed up the building of houses SIM advertised extensively in the Claremont Church. Houses began to be built more quickly and a goal of 25 houses was set for 1999, including a 'Blitz Build' in which five houses would be completed in six days, (15-21 November). In order for the programme to continue to grow, additional staff, Nobesotho Hibana and Mbulelo Ncedana, were appointed. Fund raising projects were instituted which ranged from sponsorship from some corporate groups, a golf day and an evening of chamber music. The church began by including an insert into its monthly newsletter, but in the first quarter of 1999 started to publish a separate monthly newsletter entitled SIM Kunye, (meaning 'together' in Xhosa). This was used to advertise the activities and recruit volunteers for each new project. There was a steady flow of helpers and students from overseas who had heard of the progress being made. Dave Weld, the vice president of Habitat for Humanity for Washington DC, wrote enthusiastically on his return to the United States.

In Cape Town, the SIM staff introduced me to their partners in the Khulani Project and to Mama Keva, the proud owner of the first Habitat home in Cape Town. They got me into the action, digging the foundation of Mama Rebecca's home alongside a contingent of eager volunteers from UCT. Here in Khayelitsha, amid the sub-human shacks and narrow dirt alleys that surrounded our work party, I was struck by the centrality of God to all the plans and hopes for a new South Africa. Indeed, how else will the immense sufferings, divisions and injustices of this beautiful land be overcome?... And it was equally clear that Habitat's faith-based, community oriented, reconciliation-minded approach to home building could, and should, impact South Africa at a national level. Anyone witnessing the scene that morning in Khayelitsha would surely have been overcome by hope for the future in South Africa... I returned home with a message of inspiration about the example of our South African brothers and sisters. With all the turmoil and suffering of apartheid, people of faith are playing a vital role in reconstructing the country. Habitat's growing role as a force for renewal and reconciliation in South Africa inspires not only South Africans but also those of us here in DC who believe that social justice is intimately a part of Christian faith. So, God bless and keep building! (Weld 1999:4)

## Evaluation

The length of time the project has been running shows how slow progress is. This is partially due to the fact that legal, bureaucratic, and community hurdles need to be overcome. It is also reflected in the housing delivery programme of the RDP and other similar schemes. Housing obviously depends on land availability, or redistribution. The recent events in Zimbabwe relating to 'land invasions' as well as those which have drawn particular media attention in South Africa, as happened at Bredell<sup>26</sup> in July 2001, highlights the frustrations many people experience in acquiring land and housing. (It is significant that the highly publicised land

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<sup>26</sup> In July 2001 an illegal and highly publicised 'land invasion' took place in Bredell, near the Johannesburg International Airport. Hundreds of people converged on open land, with the encouragement of the Pan African Congress. Plots of land were 'sold' for R25, and many shacks were erected in a matter of weeks. When served eviction orders, the people refused to move. Emotions ran high and the issue was debated in Parliament. Eventually the shacks were forcibly taken apart, and the people moved to other informal housing areas.

occupations which occurred in Bredell, are less than thirty kilometres from Ivory Park, which is the subject of the next case study which follows.)

Differing cultural perceptions of land and housing in one community can also add to delays in implementation. Writing from his experience in the United States of trying to provide housing for the poor in the sixties, Lyle Schaller draws several conclusions from the experiences of churches engaged in what he called the 'Churches' War on Poverty.' He makes the point that even a 100% loan does not mean that the church will not have to subsidise the project. He says the lesson is perfectly obvious and that 'Good intentions and a 100% mortgage are not acceptable substitutes for a good economic feasibility study' (1967:50). A second fundamental need is the 'lesson of good management.' Thirdly he believes that though there are a few exceptions, most experiences in the North American context show that the local church is not the most appropriate religious organisation for sponsoring a housing project. This is because most congregations do not have the necessary resources, and the fact that a housing venture 'usually diverts a congregation from its primary tasks...and often creates unexpected demands for time, money, energy, and leadership which produce disrupting tensions within the church' (Schaller 1967:50). Rather, he believes that a denominational or interdenominational agency is the most appropriate organisation for operating a church-related housing project.

In spite of these adverse factors, the Claremont Church has tried to work very closely with the host church and community so that there is a real commitment to partnership. Further, the synod of the Cape of Good Hope District has adopted the project, and it is hoped that this will enable Methodists throughout the district to own and participate in the programme.

Another comment should be added regarding the socio-economic status of the host church. As mentioned previously, Claremont Church is a middle class congregation, which has a long

tradition of having competent professionals as members. Included in this category is a former Town Clerk and many other influential (and relatively wealthy) people. This is in contrast to the other two churches being considered in the case studies in this chapter. While relatively wealthy churches have many advantages of personnel and resources to draw on, it is apparent and equally noteworthy that two poor churches have been able to achieve so much in their projects.

### **Case study 3: Ivory Park Methodist Church**

Ivory Park is an informal settlement east of Halfway House and about 20 km north of Johannesburg. It was established in the early 1990s when the then Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA) expropriated 700 hectares of land from the farm Kaalfontein. This was in order to try to relieve the overcrowded conditions in the notorious Alexandra Township, as well as to accommodate informal settlers and domestic workers living in backyard shacks. It was intended that the area should be for those who had incomes of less than R600 per month and who would have no access to urban amenities. In 1993 the Midrand town council began to administer Ivory Park on behalf of the TPA, although it had no part in the planning and development of the township. When it became clear that Ivory Park was becoming a permanent feature of the area, the council decided to become involved. In 1997 it was estimated that about 300 000 people lived in Ivory Park (Kumalo 1998:5).

#### ***Ivory Park Methodist Church***

The Rev Phillip Shongwe, while stationed at the Alexandra circuit, founded the Methodist Church in 1992. He started Ivory Park as a preaching point and visited the area once a quarter to administer communion and encourage the Young Men's Group to organise meetings ('revivals') in the streets. An emerging congregation met at a small shack owned by a Mr Gudla. In 1995 the Rev Keith Bailey of the nearby Halfway House Methodist Church supported the

establishment of a church in the Ivory Park area. The Alexandra/Johannesburg circuit bought a house at Ebony Park which was to be used as a mission house.

In 1996 a student minister was stationed at the circuit and a mission house was bought for him. In 1997 Rev Sox Leleki served the church which had grown to about 130 members by the time he left. The Rev Simanga Kumalo was appointed as resident minister for a five year term at the beginning of 1998. He had recently completed a BTh. Honours at the University of Natal majoring in Practical Theology, and had a particular interest in the church in urban situations.

### *Physical conditions of the area*

Kumalo writes,

Most of the stands are leased to the community members by the town council. However, a large number of squatters have also made their homes in the area. Although there are some small brick houses in Ivory Park, the majority of people live in small shacks constructed from corrugated iron, wood and cardboard. Dirt roads wind between the shacks - the two primary modes of transport is taxis and feet, although some of the residents do own cars. Communal toilets and taps are distributed through the area. Most shacks have electricity (which is not always legally acquired), but paraffin lamps and candles are also widely used (1998:5).

According to Kumalo, unemployment in the area is extremely high although some individuals have started small businesses, ('Spaza shops') which sell fruit, vegetables, chickens, meat, ice cream, and cooldrinks and alcohol. As the streets are full of able-bodied people who are unable to work, they become bored and frustrated. 'Lack of employment and recreation has contributed to the high crime rate - mugging, rape, burglaries and hijackings are common occurrences' (1998:5). There are also about 6 000 families in Ebony Park, 5 000 in Phomolong, 1 800 in Mayibuye and 600 in Klipfontein. The church in these areas has been described as 'minimal' and in Mayibuye and Klipfontein there is no church at all.

Kumalo recounts how the church struggled with the task which lay before them. He reflected on the situation of Nehemiah in the Old Testament where there was a need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In identifying the church with Nehemiah, Kumalo states that 'we have become aware of the pain and suffering in Ivory Park and allowed ourselves to be touched by it to the extent that we have made the decision to become personally involved in the process of rebuilding (1998:11).

For Kumalo the social problems described above were more than simply the lack of employment or housing or food. There was also a lack of relationship between the local congregation and those of the neighbouring congregation from the nearby middle class Calvary Methodist Church in Midrand. There was an attempt to bring these groups together in a weekend in September 1998. This entailed ten people from Calvary 'crossing the gulf between the rich and the poor in the country.' Each person from Calvary spent the weekend with a host from Ivory Park. The results were described as 'powerful,' and lasting relationships were formed, which would enhance the process of working together. A social worker from Calvary Methodist, Lisa Broekman, recounted initial hesitation about staying in an informal settlement, but later confirmed that it had been a 'powerful experience.'

In searching for ways to bring about transformation in the community, or being salt and light, Kumalo says that the church came to realise that 'the biggest problem in Ivory Park is no longer the poverty and unemployment but that people do not believe in themselves. They have lived through a long process, which has stripped them of their dignity, and of their ability to act independently and on their own behalf. As a result they have lost the belief that they are able to do this on their own' (1998:13). The outworking of this position meant that the church was now

to try to involve local people in development projects as well as building up their confidence, self esteem and dignity. Questions were asked as to how this could be implemented.

These issues were raised in the context of an ongoing church programme which consisted of a Local Preachers' organisation, Women's Manyano, Young Men's Guild, Wesley Guild (for young people) and Sunday School. There was also a Ziklife Burial Group, which was started at the beginning of 1999 with 10 members, and had grown to about 30 members at the end of the year.

### *Self employment projects*

Kumalo calls these 'ministries' of the church (1999:15), and are undertaken in partnership with the neighbouring Calvary Methodist Church, although it is not clear how this works in practice.

Nehemiah Pre-school: The annual report of the church calls this 'a roaring success' (1999:15) as it ended 1999 with 43 children and two teachers who have received training. At the end of 1999 10 pupils celebrated in a graduation ceremony.

Candle Project: This is a project which produces a 'Peace Hope and Justice Prayer Candle.' It is surrounded by barbed wire and in the note which accompanies a candle, purchasers are invited to light the candle each day and pray for a 'particular situation of struggle and pain in the world.' Throughout 1999 this project struggled as there were few orders. However in October a large order for 500 candles came from the United States. The project employs twelve previously unemployed people from Ivory Park. Each candle is sold for R30, of which R25 goes to the worker.

Other projects: These include a sewing project, a mission shop for donated clothes, a car wash and an employment project. Val Pauquet, editor of the *New Dimension*, visited Ivory Park to see what was being achieved. She describes the conditions of the residents and then says,

Replicating the response of the One whom they serve, Christians from the Ivory Park Methodist Church in partnership with Calvary Methodist Church, have identified and addressed some of the staggering needs of the 300,000 residents of this informal settlement. These include the provision of pre-schools, child-care facilities, IT training, a candle-making project - which has generated R60 000. Of any profit made, 80% goes to the workers. Today they support a staff of twenty, twenty two community workers depend on their projects for survival. Of those who have been involved twenty four have found jobs... For him (Kumalo) there is no tension between providing both spiritual and social needs, but he feels that this balance is not sufficiently addressed during training for ministry.

In taking Christ to the community we need to have some strategies like setting a target that by 2002 we see at least 1000 members becoming financially independent. It's not about creating dependants, but unleashing people. We've made the gospel a sleeping pill by telling people not to worry, that God cares. We need to give permanent solutions backed by the Gospel, otherwise we are NGO's (*New Dimension*, 2000:7).

## EVALUATION

What has been described above, are the efforts of three churches to be faithful to their calling as churches, and be active among the poor in their society. In each one there are complex sets of interconnected factors, which determine the ministry objectives of these congregations. Consequently, there are many questions to be raised regarding what has been described in these selected urban churches.

- 1 What is the political and socio-economic context in which the church is situated?
- 2 What are the prevailing values and attitudes of a society regarding the poor, and how effective are the church's efforts at making significant changes?



3 What is the self-understanding of the congregation with regard to its mission and calling, with particular reference to its pastoral role, as well as its work with, and among the poor?

4 How can a theology of mission be developed for the urban church?

5 What are the essential distinctives of John Wesley's social ethics, and what methods did he institute to empower the poor?

6 What insights can be gained from ways in which the church cared for the poor in previous historical periods, especially at the time of the founding of the Methodist Church in the eighteenth century?

Many social ills such as housing and unemployment are conditions related to poverty. Actual levels of poverty in Africa and South Africa are dealt with in Chapter 6. Causes of poverty may vary from one context to the next according to differing historical and political contexts. This study does not attempt to describe the actual causes of poverty, but focuses more on the response of churches (especially Methodists) in the eighteenth and twenty first centuries.

John Wesley and his early Methodists discovered appalling evidences of poverty in their day. They did not possess the tools for detailed social analysis and therefore responded in the most immediate and spontaneous way that they could. Although it may be tempting to suggest a close correlation between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries with regard to urban poverty, the issues are more complex than would appear at first sight. This is reflected in the consideration of various theologies of mission in chapter 4.

The case studies reviewed earlier are intended to give some insight into the types of projects that churches have adopted as part of their ministry in their communities. They are not meant, in themselves, to be definitive field research projects. Recognising these limitations, certain elements may be identified which could give indications of Wesleyan principles being at the core of the planning and development of the three projects.

In the chapter dealing with the essential features of Wesley's social ethics, certain recurring themes were identified as key characteristics of Wesleyan social thought and action. These characteristics bear repeating at this point:

1. Wesley was a religious and social reformer as well as a thorough organiser.
2. He demonstrated a passion for the poor, and encouraged projects with the poor.
3. His social-ethical thought and action were grounded in his understanding of sanctification and Christian love.
4. Wesley expressed strong views and clear principles on the use (and abuse) of money.
5. The Church is seen as an agent of God's activity in the world.
6. Small groups are regarded as a necessary instrument in Methodist churches, with particular regard to incorporation and growth.
7. Wesley believed that the church should be located first among the poor and powerless so that 'religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be from men' (*Works III:178*).

Even though they would all regard themselves as 'Wesleyan,' it has not been an easy task to draw direct parallels to the congregations mentioned above with the most consistent elements of Wesley's theology. It can be demonstrated that the churches referred to have implicitly, if not explicitly followed these principles. All three churches have committed themselves to working with the poor. While none of the leaders go so far as to claim to be 'religious and social reformers,' all three share a strong conviction that their limited contribution can both serve the poor as well as begin a process, which will reverse the critical need for housing. Ubunye (under the direction of Dan Sheffield) has probably been most articulate and concise in stating that their mission is to reach people with the 'life-transforming gospel of wholeness and reconciliation to be found in Jesus Christ.' These core values reflect well the principles of Wesley's social ethics, especially points 2 and 3 above. In each of these projects the church concerned may be seen as 'an agent of God's activity in the world (point 5). As for point 7 the Ubunye housing scheme and to a lesser extent the Ivory Park scheme, may be seen as the church 'located first among the poor and powerless.' By contrast, the Claremont housing project, for all its merits, is indeed a case of resources going 'from the greatest to the least.'

It must be noted though, that the Claremont church uses a portion of its tithes, derived from members to support the work. All the churches described in the case studies, depend on outside funding. Ubunye was granted a large sum from the Provincial Housing Board, Ivory Park is dependent on the neighbouring church at Halfway House, and Claremont has created ties with Habitat for Humanity. As noted below, funding for development, which is sustainable, is almost impossible, although Kumalo has largely succeeded in making some of the projects (like the candle making) profitable.

Small groups do not feature prominently as an outstanding feature of the churches involved. The churches contain small groups as part of their structures, but it would not appear that they are used in any significant way, as Wesley's classes and bands were directly instrumental in visiting the sick, or collecting for the poor.

The issue of money has been raised. It is obvious that the congregation at Claremont is relatively (much) wealthier than the other two. The other two congregations, especially Ivory Park is racked by unemployment and therefore does not have anything like the disposable income of Claremont. By applying Wesley's injunction to gain, save and give all that one can, there would be very little left if all the congregation at Claremont gave away their 'excess.' It is clear that among the (relatively) wealthy at Claremont, there are those who would prefer to use their wealth to provide for the success of project described earlier.

Having made these assertions, there remains for the Church, (and the churches described in the case studies), the uncomfortable dilemma of what constitutes a viable definition of long term development. It cannot be a simplistic method of economic growth, or the provision of housing, however attractive that may appear. Davidson and Rankin believe that church involvement in development is being hampered by a lack of clear cut definition and direction among church leaders. They argue that while it is easy for individual Christians to act constructively in a development context, it is much more difficult for the institutional church to engage meaningfully (1992:6). Their conclusion may be seen as affirming the Wesleyan characteristics and extending them for the modern reader. They propose the following as a way forward for the churches that engage in development projects:

- \*The church needs to have a clear understanding of the complexities of development, and not merely react, but respond to human needs.
- \*The church should avoid the trap of perpetuating paternalism and dependency.
- \*The church needs to gain access to skills, capacity and resources if it is to aim at sustainable development.
- \*The church needs a practical policy and strategy on development.
- \*As a landowner, the church needs a policy and action with regard to distributing its resources to landless people.

From the above it becomes clear that churches in general, and the three churches considered in the case studies above, have not clearly formulated a policy and strategy regarding involvement in development issues. This is not to disregard progress that they have made or to discount the results of their work. What is being proposed is that in addition to their theological and humanitarian motivations, there ought to be further reflection and conceptualizing of how the local congregation engages in 'works of mercy' or development projects for long term sustainability.

Bosch describes well the feelings of ambiguity which many people feel about the church. He writes

We now recognize that the church is both a theological and a sociological entity, an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty. Looking at itself through the eyes of the world, the church realizes that it is disreputable and shabby, susceptible to all human frailties; looking at itself through the eyes of the believers, it perceives itself as a mystery, as the incorruptible Body of Christ on earth. We can be utterly disgusted at times, with the earthliness of the church, yet we can also be transformed, at times, with the awareness of the divine in the church (Smith 1968:61). It is *this* church, ambiguous in the extreme, which is "missionary by its very nature", the pilgrim people of God, "in the nature of" a sacrament, sign and instrument (*Lumen Gentium* 1), and "a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race" (*Lumen Gentium* 9) (Bosch 1991:389).

The task of missiology and practical theology is to examine and analyse not only the outward activities of the local church, but also the assumptions and theological foundations both stated

and implicit in the daily life of the local congregation. To what extent is the church the ‘gold mine’ that Hauerwas suggested it could be? Amongst the ‘parking lots and pot luck suppers’ is a community of believers who are trying to be faithful to the high calling of expressing the love of God among themselves and to those in a broken world. In an earlier chapter, three case studies were given which illustrate how diverse congregations were engaged in their service to the poor, with particular emphasis on the provision of housing. In order to study and classify each congregation according to a type, there could be a matrix which would categorise each one according to the models which have been proposed. It could be placed in a format that would assist other congregations to analyse their own particular style and expression of ministry and ‘mission orientation.’ The models of congregations in the left hand column are proposed by Hopewell (1988), ( Roozen et al in van Engen1991:140), (Dulles, 1987:34). It goes without saying that there could be many others.

Church as:	Ubunye	Ivory Park	Claremont
Categories of Hopewell (1988)			
contextual		x	
mechanistic			x
organic			
symbolic	x		
Categories of Roozen et al in van Engen (1991			
activist		x	x
citizen			x
sanctuary	x	x	
evangelist	x	x	x
Categories of Dulles (1987)			
institution	x	x	x
mystical Body of Christ			
sacrament		x	
herald	x	x	x
servant	x	x	x

This table could be viewed as something of an arbitrary classification, largely based on an outsider looking in, and trying to make an informed assessment. Ideally each congregation should analyse its own strengths and weaknesses. As Hopewell suggests, each church has its own story, which should be recovered and appreciated. Each congregation should also have the opportunity of doing an exercise to determine its unique and positive characteristics. This would enable it consciously to position itself, and determine its particular contribution in society. It could focus on how it views itself, whether in the role of ‘servant’ or any other one of the church types listed.

Wesley would not have used these categories in his description of the church. They do, however, provide a helpful tool in viewing a congregation from the outside or trying to position a particular church according to these types. John Wesley would probably have found himself most comfortable with Dulles’ categories, though he was most certainly an evangelist from Roozen’s list. It is also clear from so much of what has been noted about Wesley’s reaching out to the poor, that his understanding of the church would be that of servant. He concludes his list of marks of a Methodist by writing, ‘Lastly. As he has time, he “does good to all men:” unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies.’ (*The Character of a Methodist*: 16).

## CHAPTER 6: EMPOWERING THE POOR

*'The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them anytime you want.'*  
(Mk 14.7)

This verse on first appearance would suggest an almost casual and uncaring attitude on the part of Jesus, especially as the other gospel writers do not include the clause *'and you can help them anytime you want.'* (Mt 26:11, and John 12:8) These verses about the poor have an echo of the injunction in Deut. 15: 11,

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

These are not isolated words but appear in the context of other instructions in the preceding verses about not being 'tightfisted or hardhearted' and that persons should lend freely to fulfil the needs of the poor. Within the same passage (verses 7-10) is the further reminder,

Be careful not to harbour this wicked thought: 'The seventh year, the year for cancelling debts, is near,' so that you do not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. (Deut. 15:7-10)

In this study it is not possible to give a comprehensive survey of the Biblical positions on poverty. Many have already been written and, with reference to the South African context,

Walker has produced a detailed word study on poverty of both Old and New Testaments. At the end of his second chapter Walker summarises his findings.

1. The poor are those who are deprived of life's physical necessities and subjected to social and political oppression.
2. Within South Africa the experience of poverty is related to the policy of apartheid coupled to this society's history of economic oppression, which have together exploited and victimized especially the majority black population.
3. In the bible poverty and oppression are major themes. Through the terminology used and the way in which various sections of scripture speak to the issue, the poor in the bible appear as those who suffer material deprivation often because of the oppression to which they are subjected.
4. The biblical view of poverty must not be robbed of its concrete relevance by attempts to spiritualize its meaning. Nor must the original meaning of 'the good news for the poor' be lost by emphasis on later universal understandings. Conservative evangelicals have often been guilty on both these scores, by spiritualizing biblical references to poverty and by neglecting the original context in their interpretation of the gospel
5. The discussion of poverty within this chapter has, I believe, established that it is a crucial category both for understanding the reality of our South African context and for establishing what a Christian response to this situation should be (1990:116).

The title of this chapter has been chosen deliberately, even though the concept of 'empowering' has become something of a cliché and has lost much of its meaning, because it has been used so often. Nonetheless, scholars who have been directly affected by disempowered communities have studied the issue of poverty with new urgency. Linthicum begins his book *Empowering the Poor*, with a very telling quotation from Origen, to substantiate this position.

[The poor are said to be] the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity. But Jesus does not leave them that way. Out of material you would have thrown away as useless, he fashions [people of strength], giving them back their self-respect, enabling them to stand on their feet and look God in the eye. They were cowed, cringing, broken things. But the Son has set them free (1991:iii).



Origen observed that in his experience in the third century, Christians of humble backgrounds were making a significant contribution to the living conditions of the poorest people in his society. Not only was relief provided, but also they were fashioned again into people of respect and honour. They were *empowered*. They were no longer dependent on charity given by others, but were able to provide for themselves. This has been a notable feature of Christian community through the centuries, with the establishment of hospitals, schools and other agencies of empowering. John Wesley's contribution to the alleviation of the poor in his context has been documented in an earlier section (chapter 4). There, some of his projects were described, such as feeding the poor, collecting of clothing, dispensing of medicines and many more. These were founded on a firm basis of his preference for working among the poor, to the extent that he was known as the 'friend of the poor.' The point is well made, however, by Marquardt who claims,

Wesley's most important contribution improving the poor's quality of life lay neither in these individual projects (however exemplary), nor in his extremely beneficial comprehensive educational efforts. Instead, it lay in the changed consciousness that this now notorious preacher began to engender both among the affected poor and the higher strata of English society (1992:29).

What follows, is an attempt to show that in the contemporary South African context there is an urgent need both in church and society to adopt again these commitments to the poor.

### **Conventional responses to poverty**

Few topics generate more contentious debate than an analysis of poverty, and asking questions like, who is responsible for poverty, and how poverty can be alleviated. Kenneth Leech lambastes the Duke of Edinburgh who presented a speech to the Charities Aid

Foundation in 1994. He accuses him on going along with the 'conventional response to poverty.' His contribution to the debate was 'utterly appalling, and his simplistic view of poor people was absolute nonsense' (1998:106). Leech believes that churches should examine and critique this 'conventional response' to poverty very strongly. What follows is his summary of five 'views' which are characteristic of this approach.

The view that poverty is not connected to wealth. Tawney's comment – that what thoughtful rich people call the problem of poverty is what thoughtful poor people call the problem of riches - has been forgotten. Today, poverty has become severed from justice, and is seen as an accidental oversight, an unfortunate occurrence, rather than an inevitable result of certain approaches to, and understandings of, social and economic life.

The view that the poor are poor through their own intrinsic defects. Poverty is seen in terms of personal pathology... So now we are told that homeless people enjoy being on the street.

The view that it is the Church's task to care for the poor but not to raise questions about why they are poor... This has already led to a new version of the soup kitchen, food pantry, elastoplast role for the Churches. It is vital that they do not accept it as an adequate model of Christian practice.

The view that the poor are not actually doing too badly anyway, that they share in the rising prosperity of the population. By a clever use of general statistical observations, detached from their context, the impression is given that poverty is not a serious problem, and its elimination is only a matter of time. This more than anything, leads to what has been called 'a nation in denial,' and once this process of denial has really set in, it perpetuates itself.

The view that, at the end of the day, poor people do not matter very much, If individuals are valued consumers, customers and units of labour, but not as persons, then people who do not fit these labels, no longer count. Thus dies the human future (1998:106).

From a harsh and ruthless business perspective comes an approach which quite self-consciously proposes self-interest as the means of creating wealth. The assumptions behind this argument are that in the creation of wealth, there will be a resulting 'trickling down' of the benefits of the newly created wealth.<sup>27</sup> Stephen Mulholland presents his views on the creation of wealth as follows:

We care for, protect, improve and cherish what we own. It may not be an admirable human trait but it is a fact of life. What a market-oriented system does is to capture this natural desire for self-improvement, through what Adam Smith described as an 'invisible hand.' The result is that those who seek their own improvement achieve an end, the general betterment of society, which was never their intention (2000:1).

The article by Mulholland is entitled 'Serve yourself and you will serve society.' He cites Adam Smith as being quite blunt about not having any pretensions of altruism. He believed, 'I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good.' Mulholland takes this reasoning to its conclusion when he encourages business people to work for themselves.

Those bold, young entrepreneurs of the New Economy who, in South Africa as in other countries, have created vast wealth for themselves and for society, did not set out to help their fellow people. They set out to get rich. But in doing so they have created hi-tech jobs for millions and, through their products and services, made life better everywhere (2000:1).

This claim is rather exaggerated, and somewhat arrogant. The task of this study is, however, not to engage primarily with the business or even the government sector, but more specifically the churches. This is easier said than done and requires much deeper analysis than has been done previously. Myers comments on what he calls, 'the old welfare system' in the United States, and how it was flawed because it bred dependence and disempowerment among the poor. The fundamental basis of the system was that it was based on patronage where the

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Simpkins and M Lipton address the issue of the 'trickle down theory' in South Africa, and conclude that wealth does not trickle down.

recipients were treated as 'clients' and the professionals who delivered services had all the power and resources. According to Meyers, 'The worst thing the churches can do is to become opportunistic in the "poverty industry"' (1999:32).

### **The extent of poverty in Africa**

Tokunboh Adeyemo of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa considers the continent and the problems which it faces. He then asks the question, 'Is Africa cursed?' He claims that Africa has natural, energy, human resources and spiritual blessings. While reluctantly acknowledging these benefits, there are such horrendous plagues, wars and poverty that the presence of 72% of the world's gold and 70% of its diamonds seem almost inconsequential.

David Kasali lists some of what he euphemistically calls 'challenges facing Africa today.'

These

include power struggle, tribalism, and ethnicity, war and arms race, refugee problems, economic decline, population increase, poverty, urbanization, modernity and identity crisis, structural injustice, Islam, environment and education. Our thesis is that God is concerned with both the spiritual and physical needs of the people. Therefore, the Church has a moral and biblical obligation to seek to address the above issues to make a lasting impact in the social fields (1998:3).

One questions why Kasali lists Islam in the same category as economic decline, population increase and poverty. It should also be noted that there is no mention of gender issues in his list of Africa's woes and the position of women as usually the most disempowered. It is obvious that almost all the items he listed will have direct and serious consequences on poverty levels in Africa. It is not possible to provide comprehensive statistics of the extent of Africa's poverty. Several indicators however, provide evidence that Africa cannot feed its people. This is the result of many inter-related factors like low per capita income, and the fact that GDP for African countries grew on average by 4,2% from 1965 to 1980. Between 1980 and 1989 it declined to an average of 2.1%. Between 1960 and 1990 agricultural production

increased by 2% while the population growth was 3.1%. One of the most alarming features of the African continent is the increase in population. This has increased from 210 million in 1960 to 490 million in 1991. It was expected to reach 700 million by 2000, but it seems that the AIDS 'wild card' will certainly decimate large portions of the population. What is relevant to the study here is that rapid population growth and deaths due to AIDS, are certainly going to produce even more desperate levels of poverty. Kasali quotes Adedeji who claims,

the picture that emerges is horrendous; Africa would become even more economically dependent than it is at present; its economy would be more open and exposed. The region would require more food imports and more food aid to feed its teeming populations; over 90% of all its capital goods requirements would be imported, and critical intermediate goods, such as fertilizers and cement, would be imported. On the social side, the deterioration in the quality of social services which has already begun, would accelerate. Access to education, health, potable water and electricity would be available to a diminishing minority; famine, riots and crimes would escalate. In brief life would be short and brutish (1998:12).

One could provide many more indicators of poverty in a particular country. In South Africa for example, the labour market shed 500 000 jobs over the first four years after the 1994 elections, and unemployment rose by 6% in 1997 (*The Natal Witness* October 9, 1998:7). Another factor frequently mentioned in news reports, is the huge debt burden which South Africa and other countries carry. RICS estimates that the debt for South Africa stands at about R311 billion, which translates into approximately R2100 for every man, woman and child. It is also in this context that Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane has said, 'Debt repayment has become an important mechanism for transferring wealth from developing countries to the financial giants of the Northern Hemisphere (RICS August 2000:2).

Another aspect of poverty which aggravates an already critical situation is the extreme imbalance between rich and poor. This is well known and it will not be necessary to repeat here

the details relating to the Gini coefficient referred to by Wilson and Ramphele (1989:111) indicating that South Africa has one of the highest rates of income disparity in the world. This, surely, is a sharp challenge to South African churches. Also very unhelpful is the lavish and extravagant lifestyle of many public figures, including politicians and 'community leaders.'<sup>28</sup>

Craig Blomberg surveys the trends of spending and asks what a truly *Christian* response should be. He quotes Suter who claims that Wesley's epigram of 'Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can' has been replaced with 'Money will solve all your problems,' and 'Go with the flow to make the dough.' Another factor, which has impacted the world, has been a period following the Second World War when there were unprecedented rates of economic growth in the West. Whereas many would have been sympathetic to Wesley's position regarding wealth, after the sufferings and poverty of the preceding years, there were now new forces of wealth accumulation and spending. Blomberg looks for some benchmark against which comparisons can be made. Writing in the United States he says,

...it is astonishing to see what Westerners spend their money on. A survey of expenditures in the late 1980s and 1990s demonstrated that Americans spent annually twice as much on cut flowers as on overseas Protestant ministries, twice as much on women's sheer hosiery, one and a half times as much on video games, one and half times as much on pinball machines, slightly more on the lawn industry, about five times as much on pets, one and a half times as much on chewing gum. Almost three times as much on swimming pools and accessories, approximately seven times as much on sweets, seventeen times as much on diets and diet-related products, twenty times as much on sports activities, approximately twenty times as much on soft drinks, and a staggering 140 times as much on legalized gambling activities. And in 1995 worldwide expenditures for advertising, designed largely to convince us that all of these and similar items are necessities, amounted to \$385 billion. As for church construction, between 1984 and 1989 American Christians spent \$15.7 billion. Suter (1989: 640) puts it

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<sup>28</sup> A report in Time notes that singer Elton John spent \$57 million in two years. His comment was, I don't have anyone to leave my money to. I'm a single man. I like to spend money' (27 November, 2000:92).

pointedly: In its most dramatic and obscene form, the question is whether labour and resources of the Third World nations should contribute more to the opulence of America's cats and dogs than to the elementary good health of Third World humans (1999:19).

### **Questioning assumptions concerning poverty**

There are assumptions about poverty, whether explicitly or implicitly stated. They ought to be brought to the surface and carefully examined by means of searching questions. Who are the poor? Where do they live? Why are they poor and what are the characteristics of their poverty? What are the measurements of poverty and what assumptions are made in debates about poverty? Senator Mark Hatfield who writes from a position of power in the United States Senate, critiques much of what are generally accepted positions on poverty.

Several economic assumptions have...been regarded as gospel since the time of the Reformation and Enlightenment. First, nature is generous, able to yield the necessary new wealth and resources continually. Second, the individual's pursuit of self-interest leads to the social good. Third, the goal of economic order is constant expansion... Fundamentally, we are still living with the same world-and-life view we inherited from the beginning of the modern age (1980:20).

Jayakumar Christian has called his book on this topic, *God of the empty-handed*. He writes out of the Indian subcontinent and argues that many discussions in the past have been based on single-variable analyses of poverty. He says,

The focus has either been on resources and income, calorie intake, literacy, structure or other such variables. Further, poverty was considered essentially a matter for measurement and analysis. It was assumed that by reducing the complex phenomenon of poverty to numbers, the policy-makers, managers of development and politicians could 'compare, reduce and control' poverty (1999:19).

Christian is well aware of, and rejects Western (secular) attempts to provide a rationale for development, which goes beyond the relief stage. David Korten has developed well-known strategies for action by NGOs working among the poor. These move from welfare, community development, sustainable systems to people's movements, where the desired

outcomes should be liberation and transformation. Although Christian does not refer directly to Korten, his conviction is that there is inadequate attention paid to the wholeness of life, which includes contextual factors as well as dimensions of spirituality.

Christian goes into some detail with poverty and power and powerlessness. He also develops a model of 'Principalities and Powers and poverty.' But before he addresses these, he considers four groups of churches in India as case studies, and their attempts to work among the poor, and what assumptions each one holds. Though our primary concern is poverty in Africa, it will be instructive to consider poverty assumptions which originate in the non Western world.

### ***1. The Evangelical Churches of India which employ the 'Church Growth model.'***

Assumptions: this paradigm sees poverty as the result of bad habits, and wasteful spending. Drinking is abused as people are frustrated, because they are unable to provide for their families. Improvements will consist primarily of behavioural and moral change. Though the caste system is not encouraged, it is not seen as a barrier to people becoming Christians as conversions take place with a minimum of social dislocation.

### ***2. The Mainline Model***

This is represented by the Church of South India. A congregation in this church is working in a lower caste Hindu community, and runs a school in partnership with a Christian relief and development organisation.

Assumptions: Poverty is the result of ignorance and a lack of education. As children were excluded from higher caste schools, it became evident that children would be denied access to



resources. Some of the action taken by the church was to organise bank loans for buying livestock. A local resident noted that for worship he went to the church, but for help he worked through the political parties.

### *3. The Pentecostal Model*

These churches are characterised by a deep desire to reach the unreached and focus on the poor. Because Jesus was seen to be with the poor, the poor are more than just a 'responsive audience.' The church studied draws people from all castes, but predominantly from the poor. The church has a great emphasis on relationships and preaching and teaching.

Assumptions: Poverty is seen as a lack of faith or belief. 'Since they do not believe in the Word, they do not have hope in life and their fatalistic mindset is not transformed.' (1999:102). Consequently the church encourages the poor to look to God as the giver of all blessing. The Pentecostal model defines transformation as behavioural, moral and value change - and includes finding employment, release from debts and getting assistance from the government. This model affirms the 'materiality of salvation.' Poverty is also seen as the devil's control over a whole village, and there is therefore a need to 'tie the devil before going to any village.'

### *4. The Action Group Model*

This fellowship is not related to a particular church, but has links with a development agency. It is a fellowship where 'all brothers and sisters are equal.' Their strategy is to try to model the biblical description of the Kingdom of God. Members engage in both micro and macro issues in the community, and the simple lifestyle is practised. This approach has worked well and they are replicating this model elsewhere.

Assumptions: Poverty is the result of structural inadequacies. All sinful structures are a result of sin and result in exploitation. Therefore the Kingdom of God offers an alternative system of righteousness. Members are actively encouraged to participate in politics. One person said that unless Christians dominate the political field, there would be no salvation. Christian comments that the leaders make a call for 'socialistic spirituality.' The community sees this group as being on their side and has confidence in dealing with issues of powerlessness in their context (1999:103).

### Contemporary debates on poverty in South Africa

Writing in South Africa, Hammond asks 'What causes poverty?' He argues that all causes of poverty can be explained by personal sacrifice, slothfulness, calamity and exploitation. In his view 'unbiblical worldviews' underlie poverty in the third world. He believes

The fatalism and re-incarnation beliefs of **Hinduism** and **Buddhism**, where the material world is not perceived as real and difficulties are understood as a result of the deeds of a previous life ("my Karma is bad") are paralysing to progress. The **Animist** worldview which sees man at the mercy of outside forces - the spirits - lead people to be shackled by superstition and fear. The fatalism of **Islam** is also not conducive to productive planning and innovation (1998:3).

Under a heading of 'Poverty in History,' he states that the 'key question' to be asked about the disparity between rich and poor individuals and societies is not 'How did this man/society become poor?' as poverty is the 'natural condition of man.' The more correct question should be, 'How did anyone become rich?' He then elaborates on his theory that famines were commonplace before the Industrial Revolution, but improved methods and agricultural techniques led to greater production of food. He then concludes that, 'It is an observable fact that the most efficient economies in the world are based upon private ownership of property, honest

money, free enterprise and a Christian work ethic' (1998:4). He then deals with the question of whether colonialism is responsible for poverty in Third World countries, many of which are 'definitely in a shocking mess.' His response is, 'the problems in the Third World are not primarily political or economic. The problem is false religion and the resultant pagan philosophies/worldview. The solution is therefore also primarily religious - the world needs to be converted to and disciplined in the Christian Faith (1998:4).

It could be asked why attention is given to such an unsophisticated and simplistic analysis of poverty. The answer is fairly straightforward, as Hammond represents a large group of conservative readers who clearly support this approach. Hale has researched Baptist (and other churches) in South Africa and called his book 'South African Baptist Social Ethics' with a subtitle of 'The Captivity of the Church in a Multiracial Society.' He shows (especially in the Apartheid era) what wide support Hammond and other leaders of 'Right-wing Organisations' enjoyed, such as the Christian League, Frontline Fellowship, and United Christian Action. Baptists Ed Cain, Peter Hammond, Francis Grim and a Methodist, Fred Shaw, led these. One would not expect much sympathy for the poor, or action in their interest when Hammond writes, 'Poverty is a consequence of the Fall (Gen3: 17-19).' The remainder of his paper on poverty is devoted to listing the evils of socialism and informing readers that 'socialism is legalised theft. It is institutional envy...[t]he socialist doctrine of economic equality requires the stealing of property and the prohibition of economic freedoms' (1998:5).

It seems clear that this approach, and the underlying assumptions will not stand up to close scrutiny and critical analysis. Therefore a more thoughtful (and compassionate) theological response to poverty is called for. This thesis points to John Wesley as having made such a response in his context.

### John Wesley and the place of the poor

The response of the church today to the challenge of poverty can surely, be inspired and instructed by Wesley's response. It is clear that Wesley was not an armchair theologian, who merely speculated about causes, or the assumptions underlying poverty. Wesley developed deep insights, and had extensive experience of the poor in the eighteenth century. These are emerging again as a challenge to the churches which take poverty seriously.

While it may not be possible to extract a full listing of all of John Wesley's references to 'the poor' in his writings, one can now find some indication of his emphases with the aid of new technology. A computer search of the complete *Works of John Wesley* reveals the number of times a word is used in all of his writings; journals, sermons and letters. Such a search reveals for example that the word 'God' appears 12,693 times, Jesus 1388 and Holy Spirit 579 times. It would be very risky to try to draw any conclusions from these numbers alone. This is especially true as the word 'poor' can be used both as an adjective and a noun. Nonetheless a listing of word frequencies is interesting, and the very least that can be deduced, is that Wesley in all his sermons and writings constantly brought the needs of the poor to the fore.

God	12693
Jesus	1388
Holy Spirit	579
Church	2582
Love	3936
Grace	1612
Holy	1895
Holiness	831
Poor	1448
Poverty	69
Naked	192

Works of Mercy	118
Works of Piety	39

Maddox has written a carefully considered paper, which asks why Wesley's followers today have seen such fragmentation and departure from the original principles of its founder. If Wesley's understanding of ministry and mission expressed itself in a 'wholistic' manner, why has it lost this dynamic at the present time? His major thesis is that Wesley 'understood the means of grace (and particularly the works of mercy) to contribute to Christian holiness and wholeness' (2001:38). This is in the light of his stated purpose of spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land. Maddox suggests some reasons for these developments which will be dealt with below. He claims that later Methodists have reduced engagement in ministry to the poor to a matter of 'duty.' He claims that understanding these historic dynamics, helps one to understand something of the present situation, which Wesley's followers face in contemporary society. He elaborates,

I believe it helps explain why the many exhortations offered to our contemporary churches to recover the specific dimension of ministry to and with the poor seems so often to have little lasting impact. Put briefly: this dynamic is that later Methodists (and contemporary western Christians more broadly) have reduced engagement in ministry to the poor to a matter of 'duty', losing Wesley's deeper appreciation for its essential contribution to our own spiritual formation (2001:40).

Wesley consistently connected engagement in ministry to, and with the poor, which he usually called 'works of mercy,' to the existence or retention of the sanctified life. Maddox illustrates this by tracing this theme throughout Wesley's writings and throughout his life, from the early to late periods. Thus he quotes from *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), 'by salvation [the Methodist] means holiness of heart and life' as well as the well known 'mark' of a Methodist, that is, of one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart, and one who loves God with all

his strength. Loving God though, is inextricably connected to loving his brother also. Maddox then quotes Wesley,

Lastly, as he has time, 'he does good unto all men' – unto neighbours, and strangers, friends, and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by 'feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison', but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as the ability which God giveth (2001:41).

In his sermon in *The Scripture way of Salvation* of 1765 Wesley argues that both works of piety and works of mercy are 'necessary to sanctification.' In his sermon of 1785, '*On Working Out Our Own Salvation*' Wesley recommends the major means of working out full salvation, 'is faithful engagement in both works of piety and works of mercy (2001:41). Maddox also makes the point, which has already been made in a previous section of this thesis, that Wesley created structures for his movement, which were designed to help the poor as for example, clinics, loan programmes and many others. The small group structures such as classes and bands within societies, were integrally related to achieving the goals which Wesley had set for the emerging Methodists.

What was the rationale for making the connection between works of mercy and a sanctified life? Maddox argues that Wesley would claim that the early Christians at Pentecost were so filled and transformed by the Spirit that they would voluntarily and gladly share their resources with the poor. Wesley longed that Methodists would in similar fashion return to what he considered the biblical pattern of 'holding all things in common.' With time, it becomes clear that he experienced deep disappointment that few, even of his select societies, were willing or able to embrace this voluntary 'requirement'. It seemed self-evident to him that Methodists would follow the call of Jesus to embrace self-denial because, as Maddox describes it, all who claim to be Christ's disciples should embrace lives of self-denial, because self-denial for the sake of the

other was a defining characteristic of Christ's life' (2001:42). This emphasis is particularly highlighted in Wesley's sermon XLVIII, on '*Self Denial*'. The text used is from Luke 9.23 'And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' Wesley urges his audience to want the means of grace so that they 'may go on to perfection.' He does recognise however, that many are weary and faint but states that they have 'forgotten the word of God, - "By works is faith made perfect."' He then asks why people do not continue in works of mercy.

Because he cannot feed the hungry, or clothe the naked, unless he retrench the expense of his own apparel, or use cheaper and less pleasing food. Beside which, the visiting the sick, or those that are in prison, is attended with many disagreeable circumstances... Upon these and the like considerations he omits one or more, if not all, works of mercy and piety. Therefore his faith is not made perfect, neither can he grow in grace; namely, because he will not deny himself, and take up his daily cross (*Sermons on Several Occasions* 1771:688).

With regard to the contribution of the works of mercy, Wesley insists that these works are part of the means of grace together with the works of piety. Maddox even suggests that the works of mercy are placed 'in more immediate relation to forming holy tempers than he does of works of piety.' He believes that Wesley would not have considered setting one above the other in terms of importance. 'However it appears he believed works of mercy make a unique contribution among the other means of grace to well-rounded Christian formation, and that he worried that his followers were neglecting its benefit' (2001:46). This is confirmed on many occasions in the way in which Wesley warns against the use of riches, gaining wealth and the harmful effects these have on the character of the individual. Jennings writes,

Whether in *Journal*, sermon, or correspondence, Wesley did not flinch from what he took to be the clear teaching of the New Testament, that the

acquisition of possessions, the attainment of wealth in any form, must lead to the destruction of faith itself. Far from being the sign of divine favor, the increase of worldly prosperity destroys faith and love and so leads the unwary soul into perdition (1990:36).

Maddox elaborates on this point by referring to Wesley's correspondence with Miss J.C. March. She was a woman of education and wealth, and was active in the Methodist revival around 1760. She had objected to associating with people of 'lower character' but Wesley recommended that the best way for her to 'improve her life and use her health' was to visit the poor. When she objected to this proposal Wesley wrote,

I have found some of the uneducated poor who have exquisite taste and sentiment; and many, very many of the rich who have scarcely any at all. But I do not want to speak of this: I want you to converse more, abundantly more, with the poorest of the people, who, if they have not taste, have souls, which you may forward in their way to heaven. And they have (many of them) faith and the love of God in a larger measure than any persons I know. Creep in among these in spite of dirt and an hundred disgusting circumstances, and thus put off the gentlewoman. Do not confine your conversation to genteel and elegant people. I should like this as well as you do; but I cannot discover a precedent for it in the life of our Lord or any of His Apostles' (Maddox, 2001:47).

In response to her further objections Wesley expresses his concern for her and her ability to mature in Christian grace. Maddox comments on the correspondence above and says, 'Note how his final version is that her lack of willingness to visit the poor will leave her with "lower degrees of holiness" than God desires for her. Wesley clearly saw some virtues in the life of holiness as only available through engaging in works of mercy (2001:47). One could find many other examples to illustrate this point, though one more will show how strongly Wesley felt on this subject. In his *Journal*, he writes, 'I came to London; where, finding a general temptation to prevail, of leaving off good works, in order to an increase of faith, I began on Friday, 6, to expound the Epistle of James, the *great antidote against this poison* (Vol.1 p273). (Emphasis added).



Wesley's attempts to teach and speak of the poor, as well as his efforts to demonstrate visibly his particular outward commitment in this regard have been noted. Not only in life, but also in his death Wesley demonstrated his convictions in the arrangements of his funeral. He gave strict instructions, to the last detail, that he did not want any sense of pomp, nor did he want to spend money which could have been seen as an extravagance. Therefore, it was arranged that his body would be carried to the grave by six poor old men, who would each receive a pound. Rack notes that the chapel was draped in black, the material having been carefully chosen so that it could 'be re-used to provide "decent dresses" for sixty poor women' (1992:533). In order to avoid large crowds, his funeral was held at 5 a.m., though many people still came to the burial ground behind City Road chapel. Wesley's admirers composed a lengthy inscription on his tombstone, which was significantly longer and more honouring than the one he had composed when he thought he was going to die in 1753. Rack (1992:534) suggests that Wesley might have been content with the plain record on his coffin, which simply recalled his Oxford days.

Johannes Wesley AM  
 Olim Soc. Coll. Lin. Oxon.  
 Ob. 2d. die Martii 1791  
 An. Aet. 88.

Instead the following inscription appeared on his tombstone.

This great light arose  
 by the singular providence of God,  
 to enlighten these nations,  
 and to revive, enforce, and defend, the pure apostolic doctrine and practice of  
 the Primitive Church,  
 which he continued to defend, both by his  
 labours and his writings,  
 for more than half a century;  
 and who, to his inexpressible joy,  
 not only beheld their influence extending,  
 and their efficacy witnessed  
 in the hearts and lives of many thousands,  
 as well in the Western world as in these kingdoms,  
 but also, far above all human power or expectation,  
 lived to see provision made, by the singular grace of God,  
 for their continuance and establishment,  
 to the joy of future generations.  
 Reader, if thou art constrained to bless the instrument,  
 Give God the glory. (1995:323)

### **Wesley's warning against wealth and riches**

There is another aspect of this debate which deserves to be mentioned. Not only does Wesley speak of the benefits of engaging with the poor, but he is also outspoken in his criticism of wealth. Many of these references have been quoted previously and need not be repeated. However, it is worth noting the comments of Jennings who goes into great detail in this regard in his section on the 'demystification of wealth.' He shows too, that for Wesley 'It is wealth, then, that is inimical to faith.' This is because Wesley frequently refers to many New Testament passages that warn against the dangers of wealth. Jennings quotes a study done by

Outler which indicates how frequently Wesley's used one of his favourite passages, 1Tim.6:9-10 'for the love of money is the root of all evil.' It is used 36 times in Wesley's sermons, and this figure does not include any references in his *Journal* (1990:223). Jennings reminds his readers that Wesley's pastoral concern for his hearers was not in any way 'otherworldly.' He notes though, that the desire and seeking after possessions and wealth, were seen as serious threats to faith. To make it more relevant to the present age, Jennings adds,

Nor should we forget that he is thinking here not of millionaires, but of what for us is scarcely middle-class status. His experience in the 'care of souls' (and what theologian has ever had more?) convinced him that the New Testament warnings about wealth were all too correct. His message may well have seemed radical in the heyday of mercantile capitalism. How much more is this true in the world of consumer capitalism! (1990:38).

For Wesley, the golden age of the church was in its primitive origins. He was distressed at the effect that Constantine had on the church in the fourth century. It has been noted that Wesley was politically conservative, and was opposed to the American Revolution. In spite of this, he was appalled at the results of Constantine's 'conversion' to Christianity. He mentions this fact several times in his sermons. He argues,

Persecution never did, never could, give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle, patient love, which is the fulfilling of the Christian law, the whole essence of true religion, was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a Christian, and poured in a flood of **riches, honours, and power**, upon the Christians; more especially on the Clergy...(*Sermons* VI: 261-262). (Emphasis added).

Maddox surveys the history of the Methodist Church, more especially that in the United States, and suggests some reasons why it has changed or lost a central dynamic which gave it such impetus and power in the period of the Revival in England, and rapid growth in America. He argues that the 'success' and 'growth' of American Methodism resulted in what he calls

the 'dismounting of the circuit riders.' The effect of this was for them to give way to full-time clergy, and the 'displacement of laity from many of their ministry roles' (01:40). Another significant change occurred with the gradual disappearance of 'accountable discipleship' expressed in the attendance of Methodists in small group structures like the class meetings. A third cause of change, and directly related to the argument being presented here, is what Maddox calls the 'embourgeoisement of Methodism.' It is well known that Methodism started among the poor and the lower social classes. Consequently, it worked more naturally, and was enthusiastically received among the poor, and socially disadvantaged. Maddox claims that within a generation of its founding, the church 'was becoming a middle class church, and was rapidly losing touch with, and interest in ministering to, the disadvantaged' (2001:40).

Recognising these historical causes of change, it seems as though Maddox's major point is more theological, as has been explained above. This is, that the means of grace, in works of piety and mercy, have been separated. Consequently, Methodist churches have inherited an approach which calls on people to fulfill their 'duty' with regard to the poor. Their response has tended to question who has the right to dictate which duties should be fulfilled, and why they should be under obligation to perform some duty when they do not 'feel' like doing it. Maddox concludes,

In all of this what is lost is the sense that activities like ministry to and with the poor are not simple duties, they are also gracious means that God has provided to 'free' us to become progressively the kind of people that we really long to be. I suspect that ministry to and with the poor will become central to contemporary Methodist/Wesleyan sense of mission and practice of Christian life *only* as we recover this richer conception (and *experience*) of the means of grace. And I suspect that this is true in the broader Christian community as well (2001:48).

### Power, poverty and the powers

As has been mentioned earlier, poverty should not only be conceived of in terms of a lack of money, goods or daily calories. Poverty has also to do with power, and the lack of power. Wesley saw this in stark terms. One example from his preaching experiences may illustrate his beliefs and assumptions on which these were based. Writing in his *Journal*, (of May 1764) he records how he left Newcastle, visited Morpeth and proceeded to Holy-Island which had once been the famous seat of a Bishop, but ‘now the residence of a few poor families, who live chiefly by fishing.’ He then crossed to Haddington ‘to a very elegant congregation. But I expect little good will be done here; for we begin at the wrong end: **Religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be from men**’ (*Works* III, 178). Wesley was here demonstrating his belief that as the church in the New Testament moved from small and insignificant beginnings, so the pattern should be set for future patterns of the growth of the church. This is in stark contrast to many mission philosophies throughout history, which have assumed that the way to reach a community is to start at the top. The underlying presupposition is that the leaders of a society, who adopt the Christian faith, will be the cause of the ‘lower classes’ joining the church.

Donald McGavran who spent almost all his life as a missionary in India, reflected on the singular failure of the mission churches to reach the lower castes of Indian society. His books, *Bridges of God* and *Understanding Church Growth*, have argued persuasively that mission **from** the poor of society, is the way that the Christian faith spreads most effectively. He builds a further case for this argument by referring to Toynbee who claims that this is the pattern for the movement of people who have been converted to the Christian faith. Toynbee writes,

Higher religions make their entry into society from below upwards and the dominant minority [the classes] is either unaware of these new religious movements or...is hostile to them...[In the Roman Empire] the philosophies appealed to the middle class...Christianity appealed to the masses (McGavran 1980:284).

In the South African context, Daryl Balia has shown how the Methodist Church grew rapidly as a result of the presence and work of local (African) evangelists. As can be expected, the usual story that has been told, is that of the missionaries to whom great successes were attributed. Balia makes the claim that the history of the Methodist Church has been written 'by a white hand.' One example will prove the point being made. Charles Pamla, the talented African evangelist from the Eastern Cape, had accompanied missionary William Taylor on many preaching trips. Whereas Taylor had done much preparatory work in preaching, Balia states that the remarkable success of the 1866 revival, which he describes as a 'harvest,' could not have been gathered at such a particular time in its unique way without the employment of the "native helpers" (1991:26). Balia comments that Methodists in this generation will become 'passionate servants of the Christian gospel if they choose to emulate more authentically the genius of John Wesley.' He quotes John Vincent who said of Wesley that his

heart went out to those outside, and he championed a movement of common preachers; he became part of a rising of the poor, and stood beside people seeking their liberation; he faced the social and ethical corruption of the times, and developed radical disciplines for Christians alongside it; he went on in faith with those who were with him, and became a pioneer of alternative forms of the church; he heard the gospel happen in new ways all around him, and created theologies of what the Spirit was doing (1991:100).

An interesting parallel could be cited which comes from the early history of the Methodist movement in the United States. One of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church (South) has written a history of the revival in the first half of the nineteenth century and up to

1884. Holland McTyeire describes the origins of Methodist work among the slaves in the South. He says that Methodism has ventured on the evangelical maxim, 'The Lord will take care of the Church that takes care of the poor' (1887:590). He refers to a Dr Capers, who worked in a congregation where the 'black element preponderated and, in a certain sense, had to be carried by the white.' McTyeire quotes him as saying, "Under all the obloquy cast upon them the Methodists were, nevertheless, much esteemed...it was vastly more respectable to join some other Church, and still attend the preaching of the Methodists, which was thought to answer all purposes.' McTyeire then adds,

The rich claim whatever they want, even a fashionable church and a palatable gospel; they can pay for it! But the 'Spirit of the Lord God' must be upon a man – he must be 'anointed' – who preaches the gospel to the poor. In 1845 Southern Methodism had gathered into Church-membership one hundred and twenty four thousand of the slave population; in the fifteen years following, that number had increased to two hundred and seven thousand, exclusive of catechumens (1887:590).

The Civil War and its tragic effects have been recorded, as well as the impact on the churches in both North and South. It has also been a sad reminder that the churches (of the same denominations) of North and South were divided by their loyalty to the political ideologies prevalent in the areas in which they were living. The church became a captive of the dominant cultural and political powers.

Similar examples can be cited from many parts of the world, including South Africa. De Gruchy has provided historical descriptions of how the church came to be divided into mission church and settler church. In more recent times the *Kairos Document* challenged the church to face issues, which had placed it into categories that had clear ideological foundations. These were 'state theology, church theology and prophetic theology' (1987:3-27). Kairos called the church to take action, and urgently. In addressing 'Transforming

Church Activities' it spoke of the 'evil forces' and said that they should be named. 'We know what these evil forces are in South Africa today. The unity and sharing we profess in our communion or Masses must be named. It is the solidarity of the people inviting all to join in the struggle for God's peace in South Africa (Kairos, 1987:29). Expelling the demons of apartheid, however, has not been as quick or straightforward as many had hoped.

In any discussion on power relationships, one should also analyse the relationship between power and the 'powers.' Linthicum asks the question, 'Why are so many urban people poor?' He quotes St Paul and the well-known passages which say that Christians are not just contending against 'flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12). John Wesley himself spoke often of the 'prince of darkness' and also the 'rulers of darkness' (*Sermon 72*, Vol. Six: 374). McAlpine reminds readers of the situation in Germany in the 1930s when Christians were looking for some understanding of how the Nazis could have emerged. He notes that Berkhof's *Christ and the Powers* (1953) is a classic treatment of this topic. He adds that Berkhof argued that the principalities and powers 'are the spiritual dimension of the social, cultural, economic and political structures that govern our existence. They are part of God's good creation, but they have rebelled against God. God's reconciling work deals with them – and may include them' (1991:3). He argues that our theology and practice ought to take them into account.

This fascinating area of study deserves much more attention, with particular reference to the conditions in the cities of the world and of Africa. McAlpine asks for example, where the powers are at work. He suggests that they are at work both in the world and in the church.



For the powers in the world, he gives an example of coffee exports from El Salvador. In 1960 a tractor cost 165 bags of coffee, whereas it cost 316 just ten years later. McAlpine notes that multi-nationals sell infant formula in poor countries where living conditions make it almost impossible to use it properly. He further adds, 'the graveyards of the Third World bear silent testimony to the grip the principalities and powers exercise upon something as basic as baby foods' (1991:15). There are many similar cases which could be cited in the local context, such as expensive medicines and drugs imported from the first world, the demand for cash crops and the careful manipulation of the prices of oil, other commodities and raw materials. The transfer of huge amounts of money by speculators, who are after quick profits, can ruin economies, which are prone to collapse if there are mere rumours of market nervousness.

In 1763 Wesley preached a sermon '*The Reformation of Manners*' which reflects some of his thoughts regarding those who would be social reformers. It deals in part with the suppression of evil and the reformation of society. His text is Ps 94:16, 'Who will rise up with me against the wicked?' Wesley introduces his sermon by saying that God has raised up people and joined them together, to oppose the works of darkness 'that he might destroy the works of the devil.' This he claims is the 'original design' of the church. It is a body of people,

First to save each his own soul; then to assist each other in working out their salvation; and, afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the Kingdom of Satan, and set up the Kingdom of Christ. And this ought to be the continued care and endeavour of every member of His Church; otherwise he is not worthy to be called a member thereof, and is not a living member of Christ (Sermon 52, *Reformation of Manners* Vol. VI: 149).

Wesley clearly believed in the task he proposed to his hearers, and would surely expect Methodists to be involved in the same endeavour today. Later in the same sermon mentioned

above Wesley acknowledges that to persevere in such tasks can be ‘unpleasing work’ unless love overpowers both pain and fear. This cannot be done as a duty or an obligation, but is ‘the Christian love of our neighbour.’ He ends section 8 with his analysis of how the Methodist is to overcome the powers of evil. ‘So both love “hopeth” and “endureth all things;” so charity never faileth’ (Vol. VI: 151).

What of empowering the poor in this Wesleyan mode? Meeks believes that Wesleyan theology in a postmodern age must address questions of power and particularly ‘whether there can be a community that can act morally in relation to creation-destroying power’ (2000:28). He notes that Wesley was, from first to last ‘chronologically and thematically’ concerned with holy living, and was ‘driven’ by the question of what makes holiness possible. Wesley’s whole mission has to do with ‘God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace’ which leads to holiness and consequently to ‘God’s renovation of the world.’ Meeks continues,

God restores to us the image of God, so that, living in the Triune God in history, we may love through grace, even in the face of death-serving powers. This means that a critical Wesleyan spirituality should make sense in the context of the experience of postmodern power. Do the Wesleyan practices of spirituality do more than simply allay the sense of suffering or offer an antidote to powerlessness? How does the work of the Holy Spirit in our practices of discipleship actually change causes of suffering? What difference does life *coram Deo* make for justice and peace in a postmodern world? (2000:29).

Meeks also adds that the difference Wesley’s message offered was that ‘power was already in their midst and accessible to their reception’ (2000:29). This was possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, who created a new humanity in Christ who are joined together in the ‘sanctified gift-giving community.’ All are commanded by God to love, but experience has shown, that that is easier said than done. Therefore, for Wesley, only the grace of God

enables people to love God and one another. In God's economy, God is the generous giver of gifts and power, which create new dignity in those who receive, and in turn give to others.

This emphasis may have been dimmed, or lost, among contemporary Methodists. It has taken a Pentecostal scholar to note that Pentecostals were enticed, and succumbed to practices of racism and other forms of injustice in South Africa. In these circumstances they sought power without considering the mission of God in the world. De Kock illustrates this point by referring to Frank Chikane's treatment at the hands of fellow Pentecostal interrogators. He suggests that this raises important theological questions about empowerment, namely, whether it was the same Spirit who empowered both the victim to endure suffering, and the torturer to victimize. He argues,

However, I have become convinced that Pentecostal power is not merely a vehicle for spiritual enrichment, it is a life-line to a future that is pregnant with the return of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom of God. In this way, empowerment fuels the consciousness with an anticipation of the consummation of the kingdom of God... God's mission, and therefore his purpose for empowerment, is to transform and restore his creation. Throughout human history we hear stories of how God has been restoring creation to his original design and ultimately to himself. This suggests that God's agenda for transformation has a personal and social dimension. God not only transforms individuals in society, but he also transforms society through individuals in order to restore his creation (2000; 110).

He concludes that the new surge of power experienced by the early Christians was linked to the social tasks which they were facing. For them Pentecost began before the upper room, as they no longer looked up into skies, but 'faced their world of need, danger and opportunity. The encounters with the resurrected Christ, which included Christ breathing on them (John 20:20), changed the fearful disciples into people who had power' (De Kock 2000:116).

How does one conclude? Can there ever be a 'conclusion' to issues as complex as the church and the struggle against poverty in post Apartheid South Africa? These realities are part and parcel of urban living in a pluralistic society riddled with horrific inequalities. The history of the church in South Africa is well known, and it has emerged out of the previous century, with a balance sheet not entirely positive.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 1. The enduring value of Wesley's theology and practice

John Wesley, as a radical reformer in the eighteenth century, has left a lasting imprint not only on the Methodist Church, but also on other church traditions, and on society at large. As noted, scholars have not come to consensus in the old debate as to whether Wesley and the Methodists prevented the equivalent of a revolution as occurred in France in 1789. It has been observed, from some of his fiercest critics like E. P. Thompson, that Wesley introduced a new ethos regarding the poor into the England of his day.

At the same time there is a strange reticence among Methodist scholars to acknowledge ways in which Wesley changed the theological landscape. Maddox (2001:38) suggests that there is hypersensitivity of engaging in hagiography, while others have tended to ignore Wesley because he is not among those who wrote 'systematic theology' in the classical sense. In South Africa, authors like Villa-Vicencio and Mosala have tended to pour scorn on Wesley and his strict pietistic views as well as his authoritarian leadership style. He was also a firm defender of the king, he opposed the American quest for independence, and is hardly a model for modern forms of democratic government. After Wesley's death the early Methodists reverted to a much more conservative social position in order to gain favour with the establishment. This has reflected more on Wesley than on their 'selling out' some of his more radical approaches. Writing in South Africa, Peter Grassow believes that Wesley's stance on revolutionary change was ambiguous.

While there is much in his writings that reflects a conservative orthodoxy, there are also some counter themes that provide the framework for developing a contemporary political theology that can empower the poor and marginalized of our society (1998:184).

There is, however, a new wave of interest and scholarship, which is retrieving many of the distinctives of Wesley's theological contribution, with particular reference to his social ethics. The implications of his insistence on 'works of mercy' could have far reaching effects on the life of a church, which has been affected by consumerism in an increasingly globalised society. Meeks refers to the present age as not only being a 'market economy' but also a

‘market society.’ In this society ‘all social goods that must be distributed for life are reduced to “commodities:” food, housing, learning, healing, even the delivery of justice... (2000:26).

Wesley also emphasized that ultimate salvation includes all of creation and not just personal salvation from weaknesses and sinful tendencies. Wesley writes of the way in which Jesus ministered to the needs of sick and suffering people. His point is to demonstrate that Jesus did not merely use the healing he gave as an instrument to deal with spiritual matters. It was in this vein that Wesley insisted on holistic mission, which included his preaching as well as subsidized boarding schools for poor families, free health clinics and medicines and many of the practical ministries described earlier in chapter 3 of this study. Wesley’s writings are increasingly being seen as a mine of information, and further research is producing serious challenges to Methodists and others.

A very relevant priority gained from Wesley is his continuing focus on the poor. This is reflected in his sermons, his writings and in his practices. It is a pervasive and continuous emphasis, which characterized his entire ministry, which extended throughout much of the eighteenth century. As an itinerant preacher and organizer he traveled extensively and was a keen observer of the social conditions of his day. He also had a particular gift of being able to communicate in ways that common people could understand, and who could readily identify with his preaching. The fact that he, though rather reluctantly, became a field preacher with others like George Whitefield, heightened his public profile. It had the effect of both drawing ridicule from the established church, and causing some life threatening situations from antagonistic mobs. When all is said and done, there can be very little argument that Wesley appealed to the disenfranchised masses in Britain like no other church leader in his time.

Wesley has also left Methodists with a radical view of the use of money. In his *Sermon on the Mount VIII*, he expounds the theme of Jesus ‘lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.’ Wesley argues that the ‘Heathens of Africa or America’ obey this more fully than do those in England who have had the benefit of being ‘Christian.’ Wesley does qualify what he means by requiring such a difficult economic demand. He lays down principles which should govern how to avoid ‘laying up treasures.’ These are that a person should not owe anything, that ‘it is our duty’ to provide ‘for ourselves such things as are needful for the body; a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food to eat, and clean raiment to put on.’ Thirdly, there should be

provision for children and for those of one's own household. These are the 'plain necessities of life; not delicacies; not superfluities.' Lastly, Wesley notes that it should not be forbidden to save money from time to time 'for the carrying on our worldly business, in such a measure and degree as is sufficient to answer the foregoing purposes (*Sermon XXIII*). He concludes,

We may now clearly discern (unless we are unwilling to discern it) what that is which is forbidden here. It is, the designedly procuring more of this world's goods than will answer the foregoing purposes. The labouring after a larger measure of worldly substance, a larger increase of gold and silver – the laying up any more than these ends require – is what is here expressly and absolutely forbidden...whosoever, I say, being already in those circumstances, seeks a still larger portion on earth; he lives in an open, habitual denial of the Lord that bought him. 'He hath' practically 'denied the faith,' and is worse than an African or American 'infidel' (*Sermon on the Mount VIII*).

It would be fair to say that an enigmatic dimension of Wesley's theology is that it emerged out of his practice, rather than being a systematic and carefully constructed academic work. He was a theologian for lay people and wrote in common language for people who were active in their daily work, but who also became leaders in classes and the societies, which were founded. Wesley was also pragmatic and was therefore able to adapt his structures and methods to fit in with circumstances as they arose. His small groups or classes evolved both in purpose and structure as the Methodists began to need closer nurturing and direction.

At the heart of his theological position was his conviction that individuals, and therefore societies, were perfectible. Amidst the gloom and desperate social conditions of his time, he demonstrated a strongly held belief that the grace of God was able to overcome the worst elements of human degradation. Wesley, in a sermon preached in 1765, held that from the time of a person being 'born again,' (justification) the gradual work of sanctification takes place. It is then by the Spirit that a person is able to 'go on from grace to grace, while we are able to "abstain from all appearance of evil," and are "zealous of good works," as we have opportunity, doing good to all men;' (*Sermon 43 The Scripture Way of Salvation*.) This is fairly commonly held Christian doctrine. Wesley, however, introduces an element of 'good works' into the dimension of sanctification. This is important because it requires the

individual not to be content with salvation only, or even with sanctification as this usually is understood to consist of aspects of holy living. Wesley argues

9 But what good works are those, the practice of which you affirm to be necessary to sanctification? First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet, receiving the supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditation; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.

10 Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these 'the fruits meet for repentance,' which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed His children to wait for complete salvation (*Sermon 43*).

For Wesley then, salvation was incomplete without good works of mercy. This causes Hynson to say that Wesley 'preserved his ethics from that sort of excessive preoccupation with personal holiness' by insisting on the life of Christian growth. Thus holiness is 'salvation continued' with faith working by love (Hynson, 1984:102). Sanctification means that there is a continuing course of good works and a balance of personal and social concerns. This seems to go a long way in countering the negative assessment mentioned earlier of critics like E.P. Thompson, Villa-Vicencio and Mosala.

Another major contribution Wesley made, was his conviction that the church is an agent of change for God's activity in the world. He accepted and taught the traditional doctrines that the church was the place where the Word was preached, the sacraments administered and discipline exercised. He also stressed a fourth mark of the church, as being community and the holiness of those who constitute the church. This was not to suggest a world denying, private focus on micro issues, but a vision for a transformed world. Wesley thus affirms that Christianity is a social religion that draws others into a social relationship. In his sermon *Catholic Spirit* he argues that 'every follower of Christ is obliged, by the very nature of the



Christian institution, to be a member of some particular congregation or other, some Church, as it is usually termed.’ At the same time he does not insist that every person should have the same opinions as he does. He asks a series of questions in which will indicate an ecumenical relationship. If for example, ‘Is thy heart right with God? Art thou employed in doing “not thy will, but the will of Him who sent thee,” Is thy heart right with thy neighbour? Do you show your love by your works? If these questions are answered positively, he responds with his well known affirmation. ‘If it be, give me thy hand.’ (*Catholic Spirit, Sermon XXXIV*). It is not necessary to repeat here the stress, which Wesley laid on the place and use of small groups as an essential component in the development and life of maturing believers in the church. These have been referred to earlier in this study.

## **2. A personal analysis and reflection on theological, missional and congregational issues discussed**

Having studied Wesley’s social ethics and his activities, certain concluding remarks should be made.

- 1 It becomes apparent that it is all too easy to engage in an exercise of ‘proof texting’ from Wesley. Many of his pithy sayings are well known and are frequently used as a final answer to any debate. The assumption is that an appeal to the authority of Wesley should silence any argument. The summary of his teaching in the sermon on *The Use of Money*, ‘to gain all you can, save all you can and give all you can’ is a case in point. It needs to be argued that while this is a challenge to consider radical stewardship with regard to money, it is simplistic to use this as a standard formula for all occasions in the modern world. It is for that reason that Willard has suggested that Wesley’s maxim should be revised for modern people to read,

‘...*get* all you can; *save* all you can; freely *use* all you can within a properly disciplined spiritual life; and *control* all you can for the good of humankind and God’s glory. *Giving* all you can would then naturally be a part of an overall wise stewardship (1988:217).

- 2 It is evident that there is no easy and direct transfer of Wesley’s thought into the present day without considerable contextualising of his message into the contemporary

situation. By the same token, one cannot expect an automatic repetition of the Evangelical Revival in modern society. It goes without saying that the world is different. People in the eighteenth century had a fear of sin and hell and death, and so responded readily to calls to 'flee from the wrath to come.' As Bosch has shown in his *Believing in the Future* (1995:15) a person in the modern world has come to believe that it is possible to disregard God completely, and still get on with life with no apparent consequences. One cannot simply repeat Wesley's sermons in contemporary society, nor expect unchurched audiences to respond in similar emotional ways

- 3 Many Methodists would stress the need to preach a gospel of conversion, which results in a life of personal holiness and sanctification. Yet there is another complementary strand in Wesley's theology. This has been called the 'social gospel,' and was popularised by Walter Rauschenbusch and others. In many respects this has led to deep divisions both within Methodism and other Protestant churches. Christopher Evans has written a carefully argued paper on what he calls the 'Public/Private Split Revisited.' He makes an appeal that by reinterpreting the (American) Methodist social gospel, there could be a clearer understanding of personal salvation and social holiness.

For Methodist social gospelers this quest to grow in one's faith and to achieve a just social order was, in a true Wesleyan sense, a means of grace. It was an opportunity for humans to actively engage God's grace in a fashion that would serve the present age (2000:172).

For Evans however, there are grave failures in the social gospel. He maintains that the greatest weakness refers to 'its uncompromising triumphalism' (which will not concern us here) and its 'often ambiguous definition of the church.' In the 1920s Harry Ward was the executive secretary of the Methodist Federation for Social Service. In the 1930s he uncritically embraced Marxism, and displayed an 'open hostility to the church as a faith community' (Evans, 2000:173). Evans comments later that 'those who claim the heritage of the social gospel need to see the connection between how the church as a community of worship, prayer and praise is inseparable from the church's commitment to social justice (2000:176). Wesley argues that doing works of mercy are beneficial (in sanctification)

both for those engaged in those works, and for the poor who receive the benefit of the works of mercy.

In a Christian believer *love* sets upon the throne...namely love of God and (other humans)...In a circle near the throne are all *holy tempers*...In an exterior circle are all the *works of mercy*, whether to the souls or bodies of to others...By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real *means of grace*, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed *works of piety*...Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one – *the church* (Sermon 92, *On Zeal*).

Maddox sees in this quotation the assumptions that undergirded Wesley's conviction of the 'empowering and formative impact of engaging in works of mercy on those *offering* help, beyond whatever positive impact there is upon the recipients of the works (2001:44). Wesley's perspective is therefore considerably more radical than simply pleading with people to engage in acts of social service of one kind or another.

How then can a local congregation in the Wesleyan tradition empower the urban poor? At the beginning of this study the central question was asked, how can a local congregation (which follows the Wesleyan tradition) formulate a mission theology which will practically contribute to empower the poor in the cities of South Africa at the present time?

It is proposed that a local church should engage in a process of study, and theological reflection, out of which its praxis could emerge. This could be developed into an action plan for the church, which could be monitored and assessed over a given period of time. The following are put forward for consideration.

- 1 Identify a congregation which is committed to a process of engaging in holistic ministry (by modeling Wesley's example of justification and sanctification).
- 2 Clarify and reaffirm the assumptions and theology of Wesley's social ethics.
- 3 Formulate a clear policy of development for long-term sustainability. The case studies in this thesis, and many others provide examples for theological reflection.

- 4 Engage in an analysis of the urban context in which the congregation is located.  
Consider models of mission classified as:
  - 4.1 evangelistic with a priority of church planting (eg Hesselgrave)
  - 4.2 those practising social analysis (eg Holland and Henriot),
  - 4.3 multidisciplinary engagement (eg van Engen)
  - 4.4 incarnational approach (eg Grigg).
- 5 Examine Hopewell's categories of congregation to determine which would be most appropriate for the local church to adopt as its overarching philosophy of mission (eg contextual, mechanistic, organic, symbolic).
- 6 Reaffirm the congregation's commitment to the poor as a fundamental principle of ministry.
- 7 Determine to engage with the powerless.

Wesley issued a warning (written about two hundred and fifty years ago) concerning the dangers faced by the church as an institution, which is worth considering at the present time.

Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be) that Christianity, true Scriptural Christianity, has a tendency, in process of time to undermine and destroy itself? For wherever true Christianity spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality, which, in the natural course of things, must beget riches! and riches naturally beget pride, love of this world and every temper that is destructive of Christianity (*Sermon 116, Causes of the Inefficiency of Christianity*).

Even within his own life time Wesley observed the effects of hard work which produced wealth, and thereby seemed to reduce the level of commitment on the part of the early Methodists. This age old dilemma is particularly striking where there are glaring differences in levels of income, or no income. Employment cannot be guaranteed and present day Methodists have to grapple with both the effects of unemployment as well as inequalities in living standards.

In his usual provocative way Hauerwas, with tongue in cheek, suggests that Methodists (in America) have strayed from their roots. They thus lose any theological conviction of the radical 'social gospel' as well as the dynamic of their Wesleyan tradition. His satire should not be lost on anyone who follows historic Methodism, which began with a powerful message and Wesley's Christian social ethics.

American Methodism is surely only quite incidentally related to Christianity. (That is not to say that Methodists are without any convictions. Quite the contrary. For now that I am back among the Methodists, I have discovered they do have a conviction. It is that God is nice. Moreover, since Methodists are a sanctificationist people, we have a correlative: We ought to be nice too...) (Hauerwas, 1997:29).

It is said that Methodism was 'born in song.' One of the hymns in the Methodist Hymnbook, although written approximately a century after Wesley's death, is an expression of the 'Social Gospel.' It also sums up very well the vision of John Wesley and the band of, in the eyes of some, disreputable followers with whom he set out on his mission. The motto of that mission was, 'To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.' Wesley would surely affirm these words enthusiastically, and they should energise his modern descendents in the faith.

Where cross the crowded ways of life,  
Where sound the cries of race and clan,  
Above the noise of selfish strife,  
We hear Thy voice, O Son of Man.

From tender childhood's helplessness,  
From woman's grief, man's burdened toil,  
From famished souls, from sorrow's stress,  
Thy heart has never known recoil.

The cup of water given for thee  
Still holds the freshness of Thy grace;  
Yet long these multitudes to see  
The sweet compassion of Thy face.

O Master, from the mountainside,  
Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;  
Among these restless throngs abide,  
O tread the city's streets again

Til sons of men shall learn thy love,  
And follow where Thy feet have trod;  
Til glorious from Thy heaven above,  
Shall come the City of our God.

(Frank Mason North, 1850-1936. *Methodist Hymnbook*)

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