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# The Liturgy of Conversion

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Evangelism Praxis in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town

by

Martin Mostert



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Theology at Stellenbosch University.*



Promoter

Professor Johan Cilliers

Department of Practical Theology  
University of Stellenbosch  
Stellenbosch, South Africa

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# Abstract

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The problem addressed is why the Methodist Churches of Cape Town do not expand vigorously through evangelism and conversion. The hypothesis is that a careful listening to church leaders and observation of the Methodist Church should establish a clear understanding of the current theory and praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town and then, by bringing Wesleyan writings and the thought of relevant theoreticians into critical conversation with those findings, it should then be possible to establish helpful “best practice” criteria for effective evangelism.

This abductive reasoning is tested in various ways. Firstly, ethnographic data was assembled through interviews with eleven Methodist ministers currently working in Cape Town. They were both men and women, representing various South African ethno-cultural backgrounds and age groups. These interviews are transcribed and subjected to ethnographic analysis. The general outlines of a contemporary Capetonian Methodist theory of evangelism and conversion emerges. At this point the ethnographic process of iterative discussion is suspended, for reasons of manageability.

The second data source is John Wesley’s *Journal* which is also subjected to ethnographic analysis. Arguments are made for the *Journal* to be granted greater weight in the interpreting of Wesley’s life and work by the Methodist Church. A parallel Wesleyan theory of evangelism and conversion emerges.

In synthesising a grounded theory from these sources, the theory of a “liturgy of conversion” is developed. Agreements and disagreements between the two sets of data are discussed and the liturgy of conversion theory is then aimed at conceptually extending the locus of ordinary, regular liturgy to include the alternatively faithed in spaces between the churches. Based on Wesley’s model, conversational contact with those with other faith commitments is then proposed as becoming part of the ongoing, geographically seamless “work of the people” (*leitourgia*). I argue that liturgical processes that occur inside church buildings can also happen outside of them, and that conversions to Christian faith is unlikely if Christians do not attempt to persuade the alternatively faithed to consider converting to it.

“Evangelism” is distinguished from “evangelisation”. The ministers mostly seem to view “evangelism” as the formation of Christian disciples to live in ever-increasing conformity to Gospel values. I refer to this as “evangelisation”. However, this study is confined to a subsection of that process, which I refer to as “evangelism” – the persuasion and decision making that initiates the convert into the road of “evangelisation”. I limit my focus to the conversion experience that energises the subsequent process.

The issue of the ethics of persuasion turns out to be critical, due to manipulative and coercive tactics used by many Christian communicators. A model of ethically responsible, culturally relevant persuasion is developed, and applied to the processes of a liturgy of conversion.

Lastly several pragmatic possibilities are suggested for enabling and enhancing persuasive liturgical contact between the churches and those in their surrounding micro-cultures. Numerous further questions are raised about the process which would require further investigation and testing through the praxis of individual Methodist churches.



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# Opsomming

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Die probleem wat ondersoek word, is hoekom die Metodistekerke van Kaapstad nie meer dinamies uitbrei deur middel van evangelisme en bekering nie. Die hipotese is dat 'n noukeurige waarneming van kerkleierskap en die Metodistekerk 'n duidelike begrip van die huidige teorie en praxis van evangelisme in die Metodistekerke van Kaapstad sal bevestig. As ons Wesleyaanse geskrifte, die denke van relevante teoretici en hierdie bevindinge in gesprek met mekaar bring, behoort dit moontlik te word om "beste praktyk" kriteria vir doeltreffende evangelisme te bepaal.

Hierdie abduktiewe beredenering word op verskeie maniere getoets. Die eerste databron is etnografiese data wat bekom is deur middel van onderhoude met elf geordende Metodistedominees wat tans in Kaapstad in die bediening staan, insluitende mans en vroue, wat verskeie Suid-Afrikaanse etnies-kulturele agtergronde en ouderdomsgroepe verteenwoordig. Die onderhoude is getranskribeer en onderwerp aan etnografiese analise. 'n Algemene oorsig van 'n hedendaagse Kaapstadse Metodisteteorie van evangelisme en bekering begin na vore kom. Etnografiese iteratiewe gespreksprosesse moet noodwendig hier prysgegee word weens hanteerbaarheid.

Die tweede databron is John Wesley se dagboek (*The Journal of John Wesley*) wat ook etnografies ontleed is. Die argument word gemaak dat hierdie dagboek meer gewig behoort te dra in die Metodistekerk in die interpretasie van Wesley se lewe en werk. Die benadering lei my na 'n parallelle Wesleyaanse teorie van evangelisme en bekering.

Om 'n gegronde teorie vanuit hierdie bronne saam te stel, word 'n teorie van "liturgie van bekering" ontwikkel. Ooreenkomste en verskille tussen die twee datastelle word bespreek en die liturgie-van-bekeringsteorie beoog om die lokus van gewone, gereelde liturgie konseptueel uit te brei om sodoende ruimte te maak vir diegene met 'n alternatiewe geloofsisteem in die gebied tussen en buite kerke. Binne die Wesleyaanse model word gesprekke met alternatiewe gelowiges gesien as 'n deel van die voortdurende, geografies onbegrensde "bediening van die mense" (λειτουργία). My argument is dat liturgiese prosesse wat binne kerkmure plaasvind, ook plek het in die wêreld daar buite, en dat bekering tot die Christelike geloof onwaarskynlik is as Christene nie probeer om die alternatiewe gelowige te oortuig om bekering tot Christendom te oorweeg nie.

"Evangelisme" (evangelism) is onderskei van "evangelisasie" (evangelisation). Die dominees sien "evangelisme" meestal as die vorming van Christendissipels om meer en meer te voldoen aan evangeliese waardes. Ek verwys hierna as "evangelisasie". Hierdie studie is egter beperk tot 'n onderafdeling van die proses, waarna ek verwys as "evangelisme" – die oortuiging en besluitneming wat 'n bekeerling oorspronklik lei tot die pad van "evangelisasie". Ek beperk my fokus tot die bekeringsondervinding wat dan die daaropvolgende proses inisieer.

Die manipulerende en dwangtaktieke wat tans gebruik word deur baie Christenkommunikeerders maak die kwessie van die etiek van oortuiging van kritieke belang. 'n Model van eties verantwoordelike, kulturele relevante oortuiging is ontwikkel en toegepas op die prosesse van 'n "liturgie van bekering".

## **The Liturgy of Conversion**

Ten slotte word verskeie praktiese moontlikhede voorgestel om oorerdende liturgiese kontak tussen die kerke en dié in hul omliggende mikrokulture te verseker en te versterk. Verskeie verdere vrae word gevra oor die proses, wat verdere ondersoek en toetsing sal vereis van die praktyk in individuele Metodistekerke.

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I would like to dedicate this to the memory of my sister Linda – I wish you could have read it.

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## *Acronyms and Abbreviations*

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MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
YMG	Young Men's Guild (also known as "Amadodana")
Journal	John Wesley's Journal – JM Dent "Everyman" 1922 edition in 4 volumes
44 Sermons	John Wesley's Sermons on Several Occasions: – Epworth 1944 edition
39 Articles	39 "Articles of Religion" of the Church of England
Homilies	"Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches" of Church of England



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# Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1. *Background: an auto-ethnographic<sup>1</sup> introduction*

I grew up in a Methodist Church in Cape Town. I was sent out in mission to Thailand from that church for thirteen years, and I have returned to South Africa and now work in the same Church: Claremont Methodist Church.<sup>2</sup> Since I was already attending there when I was still *in utero* I consider myself definitely an insider in the Methodist Church of Cape Town!

Ever since a heartfelt conversion experience when I was 17, I have had a keen interest in communicating the Gospel to people on the fringes and beyond the boundaries of the formal church. It is an interest – an obsession - which has taken me to work as a pastor-evangelist in Namaqualand, as a street pastor-preacher in cities in South Africa and England, thirteen years as a Church Planting missionary in Thailand with the Associated Churches of Thailand denomination, and, most recently, twelve years as a Missional Activist working once again from my home church with a focus on the urban area surrounding our church buildings in Claremont, Cape Town. My interest in church-outsiders seems to have intensified over the decades. As part of my growth in faith I discovered the writings of John Wesley<sup>3</sup>, the founder of Methodism, which have been deeply influential in my life. However, through observation of many Methodist Churches in many different settings, I have come to realise that some of Wesley's emphases no longer seem to deeply influence the ethos of the Church. In particular, Wesley's urge to reach those beyond the doors of the church seems to have become a peripheral interest, the domain of a very small number of Methodist Christians.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Narrative ethnography", say Gubrium and Holstein, "directs us to the talk, interaction, and going concerns that both inform and shape stories in society" (2009, p. 25). This speaks to a complexity of narratives and narrators, and in the case of this research, a great deal of the data comes into view through my eyes. How reliable my vision is has to be factored into how reliable my conclusions are – especially in those areas in which the knowledge emerges from me telling narrative about the situation of the Methodist churches in Cape Town, a process known in some circles as "auto-ethnography", which Sally Denshire argues "...demonstrates the potential to speak back (and perhaps differently) about professional life under prevailing conditions of audit culture so as to make and remake ethical relations in contexts of professional practice" (2013, p. 9)

<sup>2</sup> Babbie & Mouton would read my use of personal experience in this introduction as an example of scholarly-historical narrative, the "comprehension of meaning of text or action through interpretation" (2001:502).

<sup>3</sup> In particular his *44 Sermons* (Wesley, 1787) and *Journals* (Wesley, 1827-1; 1827-2; 1827-3; 1827-4).

<sup>4</sup> One illustration of this is the gradual loss of prominence given to hymns that directly address those who do not yet have faith in Christ. In the succession of "official hymnbooks" the percentage of rhetorically evangelistic hymns falls from 18% in the 1876 collection, to 7% in the 1933 collection, down to a low of 5% in the 1983 (latest) collection. Another thought-provoking anecdotal illustration

## The Liturgy of Conversion

Evangelism and Conversion have a formal, written presence in the liturgy<sup>5</sup> of the church; “conversion” is found, couched in standard pietistic terms, in our official statement of faith (cf. MCSA, 2014, pp. 1.8.1 - 1.8.2), our hymns & songs<sup>6</sup>, in our preaching and liturgical prayer (cf. MCSA, 1975, pp. A17,A21, A25-26 ,A34, A39, B21, B27, B35, D4, G8, G12).

Nevertheless churches appear to be either growing extremely slowly, remaining static in membership, or actually falling dramatically in numbers.<sup>7</sup> Further, Methodist Churches apparently draw new members mostly from the discontented fringes of other churches – through what seems like an inter-church flow of believers; or else new growth comes from a biological increase - via Methodist pregnancies rather than through conscious conversions to faith in Christ. In fact I have grown up in a church where its leaders, over the years, have often expressed anxiety over its steady decline in numbers and energy.

A striking example of this erosion of evangelism and conversion from the public discourse of the Methodist Church is regularly played out in the quarterly disciplinary meetings of the Methodist Local Preachers. In the local preachers’ meeting we still ask each other “questions of examination” laid down by John Wesley in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – one of which is “Does the meeting recommend the opening of any new preaching place?” (MCSA 1991:257). We never do, and I have grown tired of suggesting Wynberg Station. People have stopped laughing and I am only half joking, anyway! I have invited other preachers to join me at the pavement chapel I run on Wednesday afternoon and evenings (where I sit at a table with two chairs and a sign saying “pray/gebed/umthandazo”). But at the point of writing

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comes from a recent conversation I had with a Methodist minister about these studies – he queried whether Wesley had been at all interested in evangelism (private conversation 2012-06-11)!

<sup>5</sup> Liddell & Scott give the meaning of *λατρεία* and *leitourgia*, the two most significant words in the NT for worship (apart from *προσκυνησις*) as basically “service”. (Liddell & Scott, 1889, pp. 467-468). Manson points out that “the implication is that worship and service are essentially one” (1988, pp. 730-732).

<sup>6</sup> Hymn 691 in *Hymns & Psalms: a Methodist & Ecumenical Hymnbook* (our current official hymnbook) has a verse with these lyrics: “Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;/ Why do they roam?/Love only waits to forgive and forget;/ Home, weary wanderer, home!” (1983)

<sup>7</sup> In a conversation with the current Statistician of the Western Cape region of the Methodist Church, Rev Zamani Sikupela, on 2017-07-18, I discovered that many Methodist Ministers resist giving the annual statistics they are supposed to, for a number of reasons. This culture of reportage-avoidance means that it is difficult to establish exactly what is happening in the denomination. However, he was of the view that the Xhosa culture church in Cape Town is most probably increasing in numbers as new members arrive from the Eastern Cape rural heartland of the church; that the Coloured-culture (mostly Afrikaans speaking) Methodist churches are slightly in decline, and that the formerly white, English-speaking churches are sharply in decline. Nationwide, the official reading of the situation is that the church declined in membership between 1995 and 2014 by 38% (MCSA, 2016). I am not able to ascertain on what statistics that figure is based. In 2001 the national census put the number of Methodists in Cape Town at 303,785 (Stats SA, 2017). This far exceeds the number of Methodists recorded as official members, as indicated by the official figures of the church which put the membership of the Methodist Church in the Cape District (comprising the Western and Northern Cape) in 2016 at only 68,537 (MCSA, 2016). This is down from the 2001 figures of 303,745 (MCSA, 2011) – a fall of 77%. Although these are not necessarily accurate figures, the struggles of financing staff and maintaining properties that are on the agenda of all business meetings do make them generally credible.

this none of the preachers have ever joined me in even such a mild evangelistic contact opportunity.

This on-going sense of dislocation between the tradition and the current praxis of the church - with regard to evangelism and conversion - leads me to wonder whether my own evangelistic agenda has not perhaps actually blinkered me. Perhaps my biases prevent me from seeing valid evangelistic activity, perhaps done in different ways to what I expect. Perhaps there are evangelistic responses to postmodern and post-colonial urban contexts that I am failing to take into account in my negative assessment<sup>8</sup>. It is quite possible that there is an alternative understanding of evangelism which I am not picking up on, but which is a culturally and contextually effective re-working of old ideas. On the other hand, perhaps it is as it seems – any evangelism reference in the liturgy of the church has become a vestigial, archaic remnant<sup>9</sup>.

Either way, however, it struck me that perhaps there are ways in which the Methodist Churches might fruitfully re-engage with the work of John Wesley. My experience of reading Wesley's journals and sermons - finding spiritual enrichment, and a clear challenge to live out a life of compassion, with a particular interest in the poor and marginalised - leads me to wonder whether the apparently abandoned "Wesley Gold Mine" (cf. Osmer, 2008, p. 153) cannot perhaps be reopened, and some old seams profitably reworked. Wesley, after all, worked in a socially turbulent era for Great Britain. It could be that the shared contexts<sup>10</sup> of the two times and two places mesh sufficiently across two and a half centuries to suggest new and fruitful avenues and agendas for evangelism in a post-modern and post-colonial world. It could be that Wesley's impatience with a static church that had become unconcerned with the plight of the poor could be a bracing word for an organisation that has perhaps grown old and slow (cf. Adizes, 1998, pp. 2-9).

Another area of interest is that the Methodist Church exists in several very different cultural forms in South Africa, three of which are strongly represented in Cape Town<sup>11</sup>. My

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<sup>8</sup> It is not immediately clear to me that when an author assumes that post-modernism is *the* key to understanding the contemporary context of the church [e.g. Gibbs and Coffey in their book *Church Next- Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (2000, pp. 33-37)] that s/he is giving appropriate attention to the variety of global contexts in which the church finds itself. I attempt in this study to develop a more contextually nuanced model of reading local church contexts [see 3.2.1 below].

<sup>9</sup> "Archaism", as Adam points out, is a word freighted with pejorative meaning in contemporary theological discourse. As he cogently reasons, however, concepts are not false just because they are old. The past is not scientifically irrelevant just because it is the past – if it were it would involve the logical fallacy of disqualifying anything the moment it was stated! (2004., p. 70).

<sup>10</sup> A cursory survey throws up such similarities as crushing poverty (Wesley, 1746, pp. 1748-01-17; 1750-11-02) (Mostert, 2014, p. 113), intoxicant substance abuse (1746, pp. 1750-04-30) (Mostert, 2014, pp. 140, 148), emerging democracy (1746, pp. 1747-07-01; 1751-01-31) (Mostert, 2014, p. 109), and out of control violence (1746, pp. 1750-05-20) (Mostert, 2014, p. 142)

<sup>11</sup> I will refer to these three cultural groups by their background majority language groups – Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa, abbreviated as A,E and X respectively

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experience as a local preacher, (which in the Methodist tradition has come to mean a lay preacher who actually travels around amongst local churches, preaching in many different cultural contexts), is that there are major cultural differences in evangelistic style and action. Although I might be an insider in the Methodist church in Cape Town in one of its cultural manifestations, I find that I am definitely a cultural outsider in others. That has certainly been my observation. Perhaps the evangelism of different embodiments of Methodism might fruitfully inform each other's praxis?

Yet another source of dissonance arises from my active involvement in teaching the subject of evangelism through sermons, lecture courses at colleges, and through discipling of people actually reaching out to others in spaces beyond the church.<sup>12</sup> I consider myself a public liturgist<sup>13</sup>, enacting an aspect of the church's service to God by serving others through evangelism (Saunders & Campbell, 2000, p. 104). As part of this teaching process I habitually conduct an informal liturgical test on those I instruct. Early on in proceedings I ask participants to grade liturgical activities of the church from least important to most important: preaching and hearing the word; prayer – adoration, petition and intercession; sung worship; confession and absolution; giving and consecrating money; fellowship with other Christians; personal and corporate study of Scripture; Communion and baptism; service to the poor; prophetic challenge of societal evil; and evangelism.<sup>14</sup> People usually grade evangelism in at least the top four (possibly influenced by the fact that I, as a teacher of evangelism, am perceived of as likely to want it to be up there?). Once they have graded the elements of liturgy, I then ask them to circle those elements of liturgy in which they have actually personally participated during the last week, then the last month. Service, prophecy and evangelism are often, amongst the whole range of culture and age groups, painfully absent from the actual liturgical activity of the participants. This difference between a very high aspirational value and an apparently very low operational value<sup>15</sup> given to evangelism has been a major stimulus to my thinking. I have done extensive reading to try and understand

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<sup>12</sup> I have taught courses on evangelism at the Bible Institute of South Africa, Cornerstone Institute (Cape Town), and at churches of various denominations both in South Africa and Thailand.

<sup>13</sup> I intend to interact extensively with the idea of "public-ness" in our Methodist liturgical praxis – we call what we do "public worship", but it appears to be largely private in actuality. For instance, Saunders comment on the usual practice of the liturgy as being "...too often linked to the private confines of the church, where it happens out of sight of the world" (Saunders & Campbell, 2000, p. 35).

<sup>14</sup> My own view is that none of these categories stands alone – they are all aspects of one integrated "missional liturgy" of a church that has "...intentional...direct involvement in society." (Bosch 1991:373)

<sup>15</sup> Augsburg (1986, p. 170) points out that we must "...be aware of the contradictions between ... stated and practiced value systems" in bringing people to emotional stability and healing. In that sense this research sets out to be a therapeutic theological exercise.

the springs of what seems to be an almost universal passive resistance<sup>16</sup> to actual and ongoing engagement with people outside Christian circles on the subject of faith in Jesus<sup>17</sup>. The Methodist church seems to lack any urgency with regard to evangelism.

I entered this research process with many unanswered questions arising from these experiences and observations. Is this resistance a response to inappropriate behavioural models – that people would be deeply embarrassed to actually evangelise in the ways they have seen other people evangelise? Or is it the result of inadequate theological models – that evangelism should be done by religious professionals, perhaps, or that evangelism is best left to silent demonstration by good works done by Christians? Could it be that cultural modes effect the lack of evangelism – that evangelism is best performed by a chanting procession, perhaps; or that people ought not to speak to strangers in public? From a sociological point of view, how much does the concept of duty towards outsiders threaten group coherence? Where could one find a sociological locus of unity in an aspect of liturgy that focuses on those who do not belong to the group? Is evangelism a function of solidarity amongst fanatics – a badge of membership for a self-perceived elite? How does the safety offered by group adherence interfere with risky moving beyond a group? Do group members perceive that a threat is posed to group stability and power structures by the possible influx of a flow of strangers? Do perceptions of class limit evangelistic strategies to richer-to-poorer options? From a psychological perspective, what is the role of natural defence mechanisms in hindering evangelism? How do racial-category valuations of people groups excuse and promote non-contact in wider social settings? Why do marginally psychotic people often feel so at home “evangelising”? Is it possible to expect people with unresolved Christian-identity issues to participate in evangelism? From the point of view of rhetoric theory, what does it take to persuade conversion-change on matters of faith? Where can one draw the line between persuasion and manipulation? How helpful are limited conversion-theology approaches like Four Spiritual Laws (Bright, 1965-2013), EE3 (Kenedy, 1970) or Two Ways to Live (Jensen, 1977)? What style of evangelism persuades best in different macro-cultural and sub-cultural settings? Is the problem of church shrinkage not due to a lack of evangelism at all, but to a concatenation of other social factors?

Paolo Freire envisioned knowledge emerging “...only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry humans pursue in the world, with

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<sup>16</sup> In Carson, Butcher & Coleman (1988, p. 233) “Passive Resistance” is defined as a psychological countermeasure involving behaviours such as “procrastinating, forgetting, rolling the eyes, being obstructionist, being stubborn and being intentionally inefficient.” It seems that a lot of this behaviour is evident with regard to evangelism!

<sup>17</sup> This way of phrasing the problem reveals a certain “defining script” of the concept of evangelism running in my head. I have tried to both embrace and critique my own strong presuppositions in this study.

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the world, and with each other.” (1970, p. 53). Considering this nexus the practice (liturgy) of the church, evangelism, and conversion, has become exactly such a restless, hopeful process for me.

### 1.2. Problem Statement, Aims & Hypothesis

#### 1.2.1 Problem Statement

Arising from these reflections, my “point of punctuation” (Osmer, 2008, p. 202) is: *Why do the Methodist Churches of Cape Town not expand vigorously through evangelism and conversions? We used to. But now we don’t. Is this inevitable, or desirable, or are there any ways of returning to a more expressive and conversion-rich way of being the church?*

#### 1.2.2 Aims

My aims – which will delineate the shape of my research and argument – consist of four intentions.

- ❖ *To discover what the ministers of Methodist churches in Cape Town understand by the concepts of “evangelism” and “conversion”, and what their churches are doing with regard to evangelism and conversion.*
- ❖ *To understand why the ministers think in these ways, and to understand why the churches behave in these ways.*
- ❖ *To establish a critical framework (a “grounded theory”) for evaluating evangelism praxis in the light of the Wesleyan tradition and the input of the ministers I interview.*
- ❖ *To affirm effective evangelism practices, and to formulate some possible effective, contextually viable evangelism practices for inclusion in the liturgy of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town.*

#### 1.2.3 Hypothesis

*A careful listening to church leaders, and observation of the Methodist Church, should enable me to gain a clear understanding of the current theory and praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Bringing Wesleyan writings, and the thought of relevant theoreticians, into critical conversation with these findings should then enable the development of helpful “best practice” criteria for effective evangelism.*

Lesslie Newbigin notes that “there are no rules for framing hypotheses. It is much more a matter of intuition and imagination....later...intelligence and analysis and experiment confirm

(or invalidate) the intuition” (1989, p. 31). Hughes also notes the tentative nature of this “abductive” process by pointing out that “...abduction is a process of reasoning which can be compared with an ‘informed guess’ or by ‘a backwards movement from the consequent to the antecedent’ (2003, p. 35). I am grateful to the vastly more experienced “theoretical poets” in the faculty of theology at the University of Stellenbosch who agreed that the hypothesis I framed was likely to lead in a helpful direction.



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# **Chapter 2. DEVELOPING AN INTERPRETATIONAL & STRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY**

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Babbie & Mouton consider that "...the beginning point of any research project should be the question you want to answer" (2001, p. 490). The question I want answered is "*Why do the Methodist Churches of Cape Town not expand vigorously through evangelism and conversions?*" My preliminary "answer", my hypothesis, is that "*a careful listening to church leaders and observation of the Methodist Church should enable me to gain a clear understanding of the current theory and praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Bringing Wesleyan writings, and the thought of relevant theoreticians, into critical conversation with these findings should then enable the development of helpful "best practice" criteria for effective evangelism.*"

Newbigin argues that when it comes to intellectual pursuits, which would include answering the research questions which I have posited, "...at every stage there has to be a personal commitment to probe and explore, and at every stage we have to rely on tools, instruments, which we have to trust while we use them." (1989, p. 35). My first task, therefore, is to assemble a set of trustworthy tools to probe the concepts of evangelism and conversion in the Methodist churches of Cape Town, in order to thoroughly test my hypothesis.

## **2.1. NARRATIVE THEORY as a research tool**

Lesslie Newbigin argues that everybody who reasons - lawyers, doctors, physicists, theologians, everybody - frames their reason in terms of a story, emplotting their argument into narrative and establishing it through metaphors. There is no such thing as the so-called "naked truth". "It would seem to be proved beyond doubt that human beings cannot live in the rarefied atmosphere of pure rationality as the post-Enlightenment world has understood reality." (1989, p. 213)<sup>18</sup>. Walter Fischer would concur (1987, pp.11, 65), as would Alasdair MacIntyre: "What each observer takes himself or herself to perceive is identified and has to be identified by theory-laden concepts" (1981, p. 79).

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<sup>18</sup> Even Francis Bacon, the quintessential enlightenment philosopher, uses stories: he introduces us to Scylla and her barking monsters, the instance of a statue, and the river of time, in the first five pages of his *Great Instauration*.

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Testing my hypothesis involves examining narratives of ministers and theologians, and framing a narrative of my own. But can reliable cognitive insights be gained from conversations with Methodist Ministers? Osmer suggests that by attentive listening one is indeed able to “discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations [and] contexts” (2008, p. 4 and throughout the book). These “patterns and dynamics” would then enable one to interpret the episode/situation/context, arrive at normative conclusions and finally to make pragmatic applications. This would constitute a program of operationalisation of knowledge, positioning the researcher perhaps in the old role of “inventor and improver” (Bacon, 1620, p. 3).<sup>19</sup>

Against this, Derrida, as a postmodern theorist, would insist that narrative can only generate interstitial meanings, transient constructs without either predictive value or legitimate scope for operationalisation: “The appearance of expression is rigorously new”, he says in *Margins of Philosophy* (1982, p. 163). Derrida would deny that knowledge can be “used” in further applications. For him, true knowledge has seen a radical deconstruction of formal categories of explanation, leading to the “domination of metaphysics by the present<sup>20</sup>” (1982, p. 131). “Identity” is mysteriously unknowable; alterity is the pervasive nature of reality.

But in academic research we have not as yet fully entered any such transcendent postmodern moment of presence (*dasein*). I am formally contracted and obliged to produce enlightenment-style “utility-knowledge” in my research. Osmer in fact describes the process of research as leading towards “...the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable” (2008, p. 176). This does not seem to be philosophically far removed from Bacon’s 17<sup>th</sup> century project of “invention and improvement”. But Derrida’s deconstructionist challenge does not necessarily force us into choosing for or against obtaining operationalisable knowledge from studying narrative. It has been suggested that he can be read as a voice alerting us to the fact that my conclusions will be best if they are drawn tentatively and with an eye to their being tested, and read as a challenge to appropriate humility (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 9). Supporting this line of thought, Porter and Robinson conclude their critique of Derrida by arguing that “...to affirm the ambiguity of meaning and the perpetual movement between possibilities is not so much to embrace nothingness, as it is to embrace an attitude of openness to the other” (2011, p.

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<sup>19</sup> A case may be made out that whilst internationally accredited Universities might discuss postmodernism, their system of doctoral research requirements still quite strictly follow the paths of Bacon’s enlightenment thought. According to the official requirements for this research, Steyn and Bucholz determine that “The dissertation shall reflect original research by candidates into one central and cohesive problem” (2016, p. 2)

<sup>20</sup> Which in context means something like “meaning does not derive either from the past or the future, but from where we are in this instant of present time”. The “present” is doing the deconstruction of history-&-teleology-based metaphysics. Derrida writes epigrammatically: one has to constantly “break his codes”.

211). There is perhaps no ultimate reason why meaning should have no historical or teleological determinants. So perhaps Hughes' judgement should be applied here: "In place of modern dualisms...we need not a monism of either or any kind, but a dialectical approach giving importance to both identity and alterity" (2003, p. 61)

Gubrium and Holstein take "...an agnostic position vis-à-vis ontological matters, focussing instead on what is subjectively treated as real without needing to resolve philosophical issues" (2009, p. 29). So I assume, along with them, that stories are "...continuously unfolding accounts, whose extensions move in many directions" (2009, p. 228) which "... are assembled and told to someone, somewhere, at some time, for different purposes, and with a variety of consequences" (2009, p. 10). Within the ambit of this study my focus would have to widen too much if I were to argue from first principles for a position in the field of philosophy of meaning.

Gubrium and Holstein's position is that stories are constructed socially and therefore are best understood if their social-constructed nature is taken into consideration. Within those constraints meaning *is* intended and communicated, since the "...substance of stories and the circumstances of storytelling supply the categorical and moral horizons of narrative reality" (2009, p. 16). Thus "If human experience is viewed as narrative, our stories become ourselves; narratives structure who we are as meaningful beings in the world." (Stromberg, 1993, p. 15; cf. Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p.15)

### **2.1.1 Narrative and Meaning**

It appears that all human beings communicate through telling and listening to stories – "...the narrative impulse is part of our very being because we acquire narrativity in the natural process of socialization" (Fisher, 1987, p. 65). The stories might vary in complexity and sophistication, but even the most technical scientific communication is narrative in form (cf. Merton, 1973, p. 8). Hughes says that "...following Ricoeur's massive exposition thereof we can hardly now not understand that our apprehension of *the meaning of temporal passage* derives from our *capacity for 'emplotment'*" (2003, p. 165), referring to such insights as: "I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 2)

Gubrium and Holstein argue that everybody is at a narrative remove from this raw reality (Ricoeur's 'mute temporal experience') – nobody (in this case neither the Methodist ministers, the literature sources, nor I) has an unfiltered and objective data stream. Citing the work of Amia Lieblich they argue that "...we do not have direct access to experience, but rather our sense of who and what we are, as well as the character of our social worlds, is constructed by formulating these into stories" (2009, p. 19). From their perspective,

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experience makes sense to the person who is making sense of it through a process of linkage between events/objects/states (2009, p. 55). This results in a process of meaning-making that "... transpires in particular circumstances and puts into play the available resources for constructing stories." (2009, p. 57). Lucie-Smith notes that "...there is no such thing as a freestanding statement: every assertion... is a view from somewhere and reflects the narrative unity of the person's life; every view is part of a narrative." (2007, p. 49)

This does not necessarily plunge us into complete relativism. Stories are not insulated from each other, because they are also the medium of our interaction with other human beings. And so "meaning" is always open to scrutiny and debate. The same raw data of experience can be viewed in different permutations; alternative interpretive weight can be given to different perceptions; different selections of the perceptual data-stream can be selected; and so one interpretive story can be weighed up against another. "...narrative invites argument and engagement," says Lucie-Smith, "and does not shut them off; it is a form of argument, rather than a denial of argument." (2007, pp. 28,29,75)

Hughes adopts a stance on meaning that he forges out of debate with Derrida and others: Derrida never allows similarity to signify, only dissonance/difference/ alterity/unknown; but this doesn't get us closer to a theory of meaning than the old certainties of congruence/sameness did. The "apotheosis of difference", as Hughes calls it (2003, p. 84), might be theoretically defensible and philosophically desirable – but it can only analyse: it can never, by its own principles, construct any meaning. It is only of application in a meaningless universe, as a means of describing infinite variety.

So it is at this point that theorists part ways – for some theorists their deepest instinct might be that all meaning is incoherent<sup>21</sup>. For others their deepest instinct is that the apparently meaningless cosmos is on the brink of becoming meaningful – who say, with Newbigin, "...stand here with me and see if you don't see the same pattern as I do." (1989, pp. 11, 59). No ultimate reason which satisfies both debating parties can be given for either stance – one has come down to an investigative faith-commitment and choose one path or the other to pursue.<sup>22</sup>

Working from a stance in which he has chosen the option of meaningfulness, Hughes says: "I...incline to the view that a triadic conception of semiosis offers our best chance of understanding the mysterious process which is the construction among us of this which we

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<sup>21</sup> "...we will not listen to the source itself in order to learn what it is or what it means, but rather to the turns of speech, the allegories, figures, metaphors, as you will, into which the source has deviated, in order to lose it or rediscover it – which always amounts to the same" (Derrida, 1982, p. 280)

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre's chapter on "Nietzsche or Aristotle?" covers this ground better than I could (1981, pp. 109-120).

call meaning.” (2003, p. 30). Fisher, as I have noted, argues that this meaningfulness can emerge because humans shape their worlds through narrative (cf. Fisher, 1987, p. xi); story meets story and shared meaning comes into existence.

Meaning, in this understanding, is conveyed by signs (such as language; or in a more complex form, stories). Hughes follows Peirce in his definition of “a sign”: “...a sign, or representamen, as something that stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign” (2003, p. 97).

Lucie-Smith says that one function of narrative is that it enables us to get a critical distance from the context in which we are embedded (2007, p. 134). As such it becomes the medium of conversation between one human and another. He points out that the “... story is a distancing device: asking us to listen to a story, the author asks us to enter a world that is familiar, perhaps, but not our own world; in other words to think about things at one remove....the story presents me with the challenge presented by universal values, and asks me how my own story typifies those universal values” (2007, p. 187). A story is always a plea or demand for its hearer/s to find the same meaning in the data that have been emplotted<sup>23</sup> as the storyteller. Stories are apparently always told with persuasive intent.

If meaning is being narratively “fabricated”<sup>24</sup> in this way then it is plausible that “clues about the ways in which reality is categorized can be obtained from the language of religious discourse itself.” (Wuthnow, 1992, pp. 47-48). All of which seems to validate my project of framing a narrative about telling a story about stories: the interviews with Methodist ministers and John Wesley’s *Journal* have something to signify, and I in turn have a story to tell.

### **2.1.2 Narrative and Theology**

Theology shows all the hallmarks of this framing of meaning through narrative. Lucie-Smith’s view is that “A narrative theology is one that starts not with abstract first principles, but with a particular story; it is inductive rather than deductive. The story it examines is found, or ‘embodied’, in a community’s tradition, and is usually taken to sum up or encapsulate the community’s beliefs about itself, the world, and God. Moreover, the story is rooted in the

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<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur explores the Aristotelean concept of emplotment in his book *Time and Narrative*: “The mimetic function of narrative poses a problem exactly parallel to the problem of metaphorical reference. It is, in fact, one particular application of the latter to the sphere of human action. Plot, says Aristotle, is the mimesis of an action” (1984, p. 2).

<sup>24</sup> I am using “fabricated” epigrammatically here, in the sense of “constructed, given a form”. Lucie-Smith uses a similar strategy with “fiction”: “...fiction in the best sense of the word, namely that which is made ... a reflection of the truth as we experience it.” (2007, p. 129)

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community's particular experience of itself, the world and God." (2007, p. 1). But by this measure no theology can be anything other than "narrative". Lamin Sanneh and others have shown that there is no culturally disembodied, transcultural, immutable, mythically "scientific" ur-theology (cf. Sanneh, 1989, pp. 121, 251; Schreiter, 1985, pp. 93-94).

This is entirely appropriate, considering that the primary datum for Christian theology is very like a story-book. A strong case can be made for reading the Bible as a narrative comprised of diverse literary forms rather than a system of propositions<sup>25</sup>. Lucie-Smith points out that "... divine revelation, rather than being seen as a set of abstract principles, ought to be seen as an event and understood as narrative: in other words, the story of Exodus, the subsequent story of the Chosen People, the story of Jesus, his death and resurrection, these are the substance of divine revelation. Furthermore, it is precisely through narrative that God reveals himself to us, and narrative is his chosen means of communication." (2007, pp. 1-2). The telling of persuasive narrative, (which I will argue is at the heart of evangelism) is undeniably an important theme in the New Testament (cf. Green, 1970, pp. 48-77). Treating the Bible ethnographically, a careful coding would reveal that the writers apparently wanted to communicate significant data about this subject within the larger narrative of the work of God through Jesus. Since that is the case, evangelism is (or ought to be) an "essential dimension of the total activity of the church" (Bosch, 1991, p. 412).

So, from a narrative theory point of view, the entire edifice of theology could be seen as narratives about Biblical narrative in the light of cultural context (cf. Oduyoye, 1986, pp. 52-55). From that viewpoint, my starting theological narrative would be "Methodist". However, it is notoriously hard to define what "Methodist Theology" is. Wilson posits that the defining nature of Methodist theology is that it has a radically inquiring stance, and never has been – and never will be – in a settled position on anything (2011, pp. 14-17). He derives this from Wesley's expectation of diversity of thought, and his radical toleration of a diversity of conclusions, and the need for "approximate" theologising (Wesley, 1787, pp. v-vii). Wesley undeniably did preach a unique tolerance for opinion based on sincere personal opinion (1827-1, pp. 500, 552; 1791, p. 79; 1760a, p. 446)<sup>26</sup>. As to what "Methodist Theology" has become over the past two centuries, in terms of the official constitution of the Methodist

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<sup>25</sup> Hays, (referring to the New Testament), puts it like this: "The unity that we discover in the New Testament is not the unity of a dogmatic system. Rather, the unity that we find is the looser unity of a collection of documents that, in various ways, retell and comment upon a single fundamental story." (1996, p. 193). LaCocque and Ricoeur, speaking of the interpretation Old and New Testaments, say that "... it is the same trajectory...that unfolds from one textual ensemble to the other." (1998, p. xiv)

<sup>26</sup> This is well illustrated by the impasse Wesley experienced once in speaking to somebody who was flatly opposed to his opinion, but "quite sincere". He wrote: "I find no persons harder to deal with than these. One knows not how to advise them. They must not act contrary to their conscience, though it be an erroneous one. Who can convince them that it is erroneous? None but the Almighty" (1827-4, p. 79)

Church of Southern Africa, the church is broadly speaking “evangelical”<sup>27</sup>. (MCSA, 2017) The specifically “Methodist” character of the institution is derived, officially, from *Wesley's Notes on the New Testament* and his *Forty-four Sermons*. This has given rise to an apparently *laissez faire* approach to theology amongst Methodist ministers, for whom “The *Notes on the New Testament* and the *Forty-four Sermons* are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist Preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the Gospel of Redemption and to ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of Salvation” (MCSA, 2017).<sup>28</sup> Current South African Methodist theological training at the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary sets out to prepare ministers for precisely such an open-to-context theological journey<sup>29</sup>.

It is important to note that this broad-mindedness of Wesley did not entail what he would have called either “speculative latitudinarianism” (the sort of “indifference to all opinions” that he considered to be “the spawn of hell” (Wesley, 1787, p. 453).) or “practical latitudinarianism” (radical unconcern with any particular form of doctrine/worship). He encouraged people to form strong opinions based on a clear reading of scripture, and then hold to them strongly - but with the rational option for change if change proved logical<sup>30</sup>. The nature of John Wesley’s theology should perhaps be seen as more ordered and intentional than it has characteristically been portrayed<sup>31</sup>. Outler argues that “Wesley’s refusal to define ‘doctrinal standards’ too narrowly was a matter of principle: it was in no way the sign of an indecisive mind” (1991, p. 23). Wesley considered himself an orthodox Anglican, teaching standard Anglican doctrine with only a few distinctive emphases (cf. 1827-1, p. 1:224; 265;

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<sup>27</sup> The official wording is: “The Doctrines of the Evangelical Faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds, are based upon the Divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These Evangelical Doctrines, to which the Preachers of the Methodist Church, Ministerial and Lay, are pledged, are contained in Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament* and his *Forty-four Sermons*”. (MCSA, 2017)

<sup>28</sup> The Section on Doctrine the Official Website of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is 362 words long (MCSA, 2017). The same section in the Assemblies of God official website is more than 2,500 words long (The General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2010)

<sup>29</sup> This is set out in the mission statement of Seth Mokitimi Theological Seminary: “To form transforming leaders for church and nation by providing the spiritual formation, academic and practical training required to develop skilled Methodist ministers of integrity, faithfulness and excellence...Our mission statement gives expression to our conviction that transformative leadership is vital if Southern Africa is to achieve its full potential and become a region that is fully healed, reconciled, able to address critical challenges, respect the dignity and basic human rights of all people, and deliver the essential and humanising services that characterise societies at their best – a vision of transformative leadership” (SMMS, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Wesley’s sermon on the “Catholic Spirit” is a fascinating exploration of how to hold convictions with academic rigour, spiritual intensity, and humility (1787, pp. 442-456)

<sup>31</sup> The major theme in the collection of Albert Outler’s *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage* is that John Wesley was a highly effective “folk theologian”, with a consistent rationale for empowering ordinary people to think theologically in terms of Scripture and life (cf. Outler, 1991 pp. 2-48).

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1791, p. 445). He saw the original impetus of Anglicanism as an attempt to do what he was again trying to do – to restore “primitive Christianity” for his times (Outler, 1991, p. 149; cf. Hammond, 2014 [title]) – even if it was a determinedly idealised version<sup>32</sup> of the faith and lifestyle of the Christians of the early centuries (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 174). In this he was involved in what is arguably the central task of the church; establishing, in Rahner’s words, the “...sacramental foundation of Christianity as an ontological imitation of the earthly life of Jesus.” (1968, p. 123)

Outler is often quoted as analysing Wesley’s hermeneutic as a four-element process based on Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience (1991, pp. 21-38). Outler himself was rather ambivalent towards the success of his “Wesley quadrilateral” as a slogan – he had to work against his theoretical creation living a life of its own apart from the knowledge of Wesley’s work<sup>33</sup>. For instance, it was not meant to be a “quartet” of equal partners – Scripture was always the “pre-eminent norm” in Wesley’s thought – Outler was proposing a Wesleyan *hermeneutic*, i.e. the way Wesley interpreted *the Bible*. (1991, p. 25). When he referred to the “bible” he intended the comparing of related passages. The tradition Wesley cited was specifically the tradition of modelling the life of the church on the “ontological imitation” of the Gospels, whether by the early Fathers or the Cranmer. In addition, by “experience” Wesley meant specifically the experience of forgiveness and the new birth, within a matrix of awakened spiritual sensitivity and energy, along with an overflowing love for one’s fellow humanity!<sup>34</sup>

As I develop my grounded theory I develop a local theology of a “liturgy of conversion” in conversation with Methodist ministers which interrogates the match between the way the church *is* and the way it *wants to be*. I interrogate the way the John Wesley tells the story of the relationship between God’s community and the communities of the alternatively-faithed, and run that alongside the way the Methodist ministers theologise about evangelism, conversion and liturgy. I consider the metaphors (cf. Torres, 2009, p. 65) used with regard to praxis and generally apply ethnographic principles to my interpretation of the data.

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<sup>32</sup> Wesley complains in “summarising” a history of the early centuries by Dr Cave that it was “...a book wrote with as much learning and as little judgement as any I remember to have read in my whole life; serving the ancient Christians just as Xenophon did Socrates, relating every weak thing they ever said or did.” (1746, p. 174). Although this sadly shows that Wesley was not above suppressing data to make a point, it does illustrate his passion for restoring patristics to the current theological conversation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. (The Wesley edited text of Dr Cave’s work is available at Cave, 2011)

<sup>33</sup> Outler writes plaintively “The term ‘quadrilateral’ does not occur in the Wesley corpus – and more than once, I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use, since it has been so widely misconstrued” (1991, pp. 35-36)

<sup>34</sup> What is particularly interesting is that this concept has become one of the two major notional vehicles, along with the concept of John Wesley’s “Four Alls”, (coined and popularised by F. W. Fitzgerald in a book for children, *The Roots of Methodism*, published in 1903), for Wesleyan theological memory amongst the ministers I interviewed [cross reference ch.3]

I am biased towards a Christian narrative reading of history (and all stories). Within my Christian worldview, (schooled as it is by the Hebraic vision and Aristotle's sense of history (cf. MacIntyre, 1981, p. 147)), one thing follows another, and the two are neither simply linked in a cause-effect procession, nor only arbitrarily in sequence. Things, including narratives, mean something because they are part of a cosmic story. Lesslie Newbigin considers that the best way to read the Bible is as an "interpretation of history": he quotes a Hindu friend of his as recognising the Bible to be "a unique interpretation of universal history, and, therefore, a unique understanding of the human person as a responsible actor in history" (1989, p. 89). Faith is faith in an interpretation of events according to which God creates, makes plans, and executes plans<sup>35</sup>. Along with Newbigin (1989, pp. 90-91) I believe I inhabit a story, I relate to the narrator, and I am required to act according to the author's mandate in order for my life to be meaningful.

My methodology is thus ineluctably *narrative*. I treat the interviews and items I read as if they are not random data sets - *as if* they have potential for narrative unity which I am then tasked to understand and interpret to others. Newbigin would call this one of the areas where "there is an intuition that a kind of rational coherence lies behind apparently incoherent data." (1989, p. 59). The tool I apply (cf. Newbigin, 1989, p. 35) in this instance is the principle of narrative coherence/dissonance *vis a vis* the John Wesley narrative, and a narrative reading of the context of the Methodist churches in Cape Town. My conclusions need to be read in the light of that presupposition. The most I can do is to reason accurately within my chosen framework<sup>36</sup>. Further developments will have to emerge through dialogue with others about my conclusions (cf. Newbigin, 1989, p. 48).

This brings us to an important homiletic point. Fisher works on the assumption that "... the narrative paradigm approaches [narrative]... rhetorically, as a mode of social influence" (1987, p. 90). Narration, as it has to do with the engagement of others in considering truth, is the field of homiletics – the "poetic construal of an alternative world" (cf. Brueggemann, 1989, p. 7). A core concern of homiletics is the rhetorical question: "meaning to what end?" The classic formulation of the *telos* of rhetoric is "to teach, to delight, and to persuade"

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<sup>35</sup> My definition of "God" could therefore be said to be narratively theistic: JHWH revealing himself through the unrolling story of the covenant community.

<sup>36</sup> Newbigin says that "...circularity is the mark of all fundamental thinking. One can stand outside the circle, declining to accept the starting point. But then, if one is to make any sense of things at all, one has to work in another circle." (1989, p. 94). Fisher reasons that "Evaluation inherently involves tautology....Therefore my concern is not to avoid circularity; it is to increase the diameter of the circle that contains good reasons. The circle can be expanded by broadening the concept of good reasons to allow more instances of reasons and values to find their place within it. Then clear criteria will be needed for their assessment. The result should be a more useful circle." (1987, p. 106)

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(Cunningham, 2004 title; cf. Lloyd-Jones, 1971, pp. 271-273). Boyce takes the argument one step further, that the New Testament itself, (and hence, by inference, any biblical preaching) has as its rhetorical goals “persuasion and adherence” (2004, p. 202). Osmer would describe this as the thrust of the continuum of descriptive, theoretical, normative and practical communication - the “shaping of events towards desired goals” (2008, p. 10).

Lucie-Smith captures the complexity of my narrative-theological endeavour by noting that “... the word ‘narrative’ leaves room for interpretation, for narratives command allegiance at different levels, and human beings can hold several narratives simultaneously without experiencing contradiction, if these narratives are held at different levels” (2007, p. 88). There are many levels of theological narrative that need to be read together to help to find a solution to the shrinking influence of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town. In order to manage that complexity I have drawn heavily on a field that specialises in narrative: ethnography.

### 2.1.3 Narrative, Ethnography and Grounded Theory

Ethnographers routinely use a narrative model for deriving cognitive insight from the raw material of their interviews and observations (Atkinson, et al., 2001). Ethnography is primarily based on recording and interpreting narratives, and is applied to both oral and written texts, “...grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of a particular social or cultural setting on the basis of (although not exclusively by) participant observation” (cf. Atkinson, et al., 2001, p. 4). This narrative basis has been expanded to include many other narrative sources of insight: “...a very diverse repertoire of research techniques – analysing spoken discourse and narratives, collecting and interpreting visual materials, (including photography, film and video), collecting oral history and life history material and so on.” (Atkinson, et al., 2001, p. 5). This makes ethnography particularly suitable for my purposes as I interpret multiple strands of narrative data.

Ethnography as a sub-discipline of Cultural anthropology (Atkinson, et al., 2001, p. 1), provides the conceptual tools I need to analyse stories told about evangelism, conversion and liturgy. Geertz coined the phrase “thick description”, referring to heavily detailed field observational recordings. The idea is to gather enough data to get a comprehensive picture of a cultural phenomenon (1973, p. 3); and also to collect data that might conceivably challenge one’s preconceived expectations of what one is going to discover – an inductive source to balance one’s abductive research plan [1.2: p.6].

Ethnographically useful stories are obtained by listening to story-tellers. And the most natural way to hear story-tellers is by happening to be around on occasions when stories are told, not necessarily to the ethnographer, but with the ethnographer as a welcome audience. This

comfortable and relatively unobtrusive way of becoming part of the community one studies is known as “participant observation” (cf. Emerson, et al., 2001). A lot has been written about ways and means of lessening the impact of cross-cultural strangeness, mitigating negative influences/ outcomes, and non-exploitative gathering of knowledge (cf. Murphy & Dingwall, 2001; Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 519-548). Cultural anthropologists are at the forefront of a movement advocating cultural sensitivity and respect, which finds expression in many fields in our times (cf. Lydersen, 2014). However, the association of ethnography with the global enterprise of commercial academia throws up several problem areas and unintended consequences (cf. Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, p. 340). Nevertheless, ethnography through participant observation has become the norm for cultural anthropological field work (cf. Kraft, 1996, p. 12).

My “Methodist insider” status makes me in some ways an ideal participant observer amongst the ministers, with the additional potential for auto-ethnographic contributions and clarifications. Due to my role as a life-long member and local preacher I have a formal opening to all the Methodist churches – even those that are culturally quite distant from me. I have a comfortable, unexceptional reason for being in any Methodist church evoking stories about evangelism and conversion.

However, one of the key understandings developed in the area of ethnography is that the researcher does not come from a culturally neutral observation point (cf. Merton, 1973, p. 122), an idea that militates against the enlightenment myth of the neutrality of science “...as a self-validating enterprise which was in society but not of it” (Merton, 1973, p. 268). There is a great deal in this research process that stems from my own concerns and interests. Rambo goes so far as to say that “...all scholarship is ultimately a projection of one’s own personal predicaments” (Rambo, 1995, p. xii).

Another way in which I skew the investigation into liturgy, evangelism and conversion is that I am an active participant in each of the interviews – I effectively participate in *producing* the data, even before getting to the point of analysing it. Those who study qualitative research agree that the involvement of the researcher in the creation of the data-stories is inevitable – but also necessary (cf. Heyl, 2001). There can be no story to consider if the story-teller is not engaged by the story recorder. It is not ethical to garner stories without the storyteller’s knowledge. On the negative side, the potential pitfalls are numerous: a biased researcher records selected stories of a self-selected pool of informants/co-researchers. The resultant product is pre-filtered, and then the researcher re-filters it in developing a grounded theory, which in turn is controlled by the research hypothesis.

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There are some ways of mitigating these negative affects. I have attempted to correct for bias by spreading my sample base as widely as I could across gender, age and race categories. Also, by publishing peer-reviewed research, I am submitting to wider scrutiny of every aspect of by procedure and findings. In the wider academic realm there ought to be enough checks and balances to ensure that at least no harm is done. However, we only ever live and work in this social world of ours with approximate meanings (cf. Hughes, 2003, p. 30). The closest we can get to authentic storytelling about the storytellers is to inhabit their world with them (cf. Kraft, 1996, p. 12). In terms of narrative ethnography theory, “narrative work envisions the subject behind the storyteller to be an agent who skilfully crafts stories in response to the communicative demands of everyday life” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 41). This “skilfully crafted story” has become a window of insight into my subject: the evangelism praxis of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town.

A crucial task of is to apply these theoretical tools to establish a credible interpretive narrative (theory) of what the opinions of Wesley, and the ministers of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town, mean for the life of the church with regard to the liturgy of conversion<sup>37</sup>. Ethnography has just such a process: “grounded theory”. “Grounded theory methods consist of flexible strategies for collecting and analysing data that can help ethnographers to conduct fieldwork and create astute analyses”, explain Charmaz and Mitchell (2001, p. 160) The two judges of the “astuteness” of the analysis are the academic network on the one hand, and the co-researchers on the other<sup>38</sup>. Their evaluation of the research can conceivably differ considerably! Charmaz and Mitchell envisage a process where “The logic of grounded theory involves going back to data and forward into analysis then returning to the field to gather further data and refine the emerging theoretical framework” (2001, p. 162). That process cannot be advanced very far through a PhD thesis, but it can be meaningfully begun. It is vital that I build “...systematic checks into both data collection and analysis” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 162).

It is important for the nimbleness and adaptability of the process to note that there is no one-size-fits-all theory. Grounded theory is always intended to be a new theory, “grounded” in the specific data of a specific context, by “... taking a fresh look and creating novel categories and concepts” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 162). And grounded theory is ideally collaborative, assembled by researchers and subjects/co-researchers who “...hold

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<sup>37</sup> I will develop this concept more fully. What I mean by “liturgy of conversion” is something like “the formal and ritual processes facilitating and celebrating conversion to Christian faith”.

<sup>38</sup> In the case of a theory for communicating with the alternatively faithed, of course, the most important opinion as to the effectiveness of the theory would be that of those who were persuaded to consider conversion to Christianity within the context of an application of the grounded theory principles. But these important judges are not formally part of the research process, although they are in my understanding the ultimate arbiters of its value.

worldviews, possess stocks of knowledge, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions in the presence of the other.” (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 162).

For the purposes of this research I developed this interpretive matrix from Gubrium and Holstein’s work (cf. 1.1.1.1 Appendix A]. This enabled me to approach the data of the interviews and John Wesley’s *Journal* with a critical (especially a self-critical) eye.

### **Ethnographical Sources for a Grounded Theory**

So narrative ethnography sets out to analyse and learn from the stories told by people about their lives: it “directs us to the talk, interaction and ongoing concerns that both inform and shape stories in society.” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 25) It classically records oral narratives through interviews and other techniques (Atkinson, et al., 2001, p. 5). However, communities often also produce and maintain their own narratives, often in written forms<sup>39</sup> (Schreiter, 1985, p. 63).<sup>40</sup> Such documented narratives have a particular range of significances for the community that uses them, because they find what Osmer says is valid: “good practice from the ...past can serve as a normative model offering guidance to contemporary congregations.” (2008, p. 153). The written narrative both shapes the community as it is shaped by the community (cf. Osmer, 2008, p. 14). Ethnographers find that their understanding of a community is enhanced by both studying the documents and studying the ways that people relate to their own “sacred narratives” (cf. Schreiter, 1985, p. 80). In terms of my research plan I have two main story-lines that I read together: besides the stories told by the ministers – captured in the interview process – I intend to draw a significant written ethnographic source into the process of meaning making: the story told by John Wesley in his *Journal*.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Leslie Witz gives an interesting exposition of something very similar to this in her chapter *Beyond van Riebeeck*, which explores the way that the van Riebeeck “diaries” have been used in school textbooks over the years (Witz, 2000). With regard to sources other than written ones, Oduyoye explores the way in which songs become vehicles for expressing and exploring the perceptions of the ancestors in Africa as they might relate to contemporary contexts (including a consideration of Ntsikana’s Great hymn, which is still sung with great enjoyment by Xhosa Methodist congregations (MCSA, 1926; cf. MCSA 1986, pp. 45-55)

<sup>40</sup> Before the relatively recent surge of Ethnographic research, for instance, most investigation of World Religions was based on the sacred texts of different faith communities. Religions that had no such texts were regarded with thinly veiled disdain as impossible to study. A typical example of that attitude is on view in the 1896 book *De Wetenschap van den Godsdienst* where the animistic, non-literate religions of the world are categorized as “uncivilized” on a lamentable scale for global religions of “uncivilised”, “half-civilised” and “civilised”. The decisive criterion seems to have been the presence or not of written sacred texts, and the “quality” of any such texts (Lammers, 1896, pp. 79-124).

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted in this context that I do not treat the Bible narrative in this study – this is not for its lack of importance, but in order to keep the scope of the study within reasonable bounds. An

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### ***The Narrative Stream of the Interviews with Ministers of Methodist Churches***

Wuthnow considers that “an emphasis on symbolism and discourse offers a way of identifying observable, objective materials for analysis” (1992, p. 32). The recorded conversations between the ministers and me generate insights into evangelism and conversion – “materials for analysis”- that I could obtain in no other way. And it is not only raw facts that have become available for analysis: “...the reality in view is about both the substance of stories and the activity of storytelling” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 15). They are of value both for what is said and what is not said, which elements were used to assemble the narrative and which were discarded (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 10)<sup>42</sup>, and for the emphases and priorities placed on material by my co-researchers. I came to this study with an interest in seeing whether or not (and if so, in what ways) evangelism was included in the ministers’ story of the church.

The interviews provide narrative data on the churches, garnered by me as a participant observer in a narrative process. They are of necessity somewhat artificial, and a lot more could have been learned if there had been time for an iterative discussion of the questions and other issues that were raised.<sup>43</sup> But as I have established, all ethnographic data has limits to its objectivity and completeness. From an ethnographical point of view they constitute a data point from which I would expect further argument and analysis might proceed.

### ***The Narrative Stream of John Wesley’s Journals***

Lucie-Smith observes, helpfully, that “tradition is a sort of conversation or dialogue over time: it is ‘an historically extended, socially embodied argument’” [quoting Alasdair MacIntyre [1981, p.222] (2007, p. 27). Appeal to tradition does not deny argument/rationality: rather, it extends the conversation backwards in time into records that have a significant impact on the present context.

At this point I need to argue for my use of John Wesley’s *Journal* as an appropriate source for analysing the situation regarding evangelism and conversion in the Methodist Churches

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adequate treatment of the Bible narratives concerning evangelism, conversion and liturgy would take at least another two hundred pages. I hope to work on that area after completing this research.

<sup>42</sup> An important illustration of this concern for what “might have been left out of the story” is the feminist observation that half of history seems to be missing from the record. Oduyoye points out that “Feminism has become the shorthand for the proclamation that women’s experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human” (1986, p. 121).

of Cape Town. As I have indicated, the *Journal* is not formally included by the Methodist Church as one of the core documents for establishing the Church's unique character. In fact the *Journal* seems to be side-lined in the tradition – partly, I suspect, because of the difficulty of reading narrative through the lens of conventional academic theology and ecclesial practice. For reasons that will become clear as we proceed, I think that this has been a mistake. My argument is that Methodists have possibly been functionally deprived of an important part of their heritage, and that an ethnographic reading of the *Journal* might provide critical insight for attempting to resolve some of the current issues of the church.<sup>44</sup>

Lucie-Smith reasons that: "To the question 'Why are we doing this?' or 'Why ought we to do this?' the answer will be contained in the traditional story that constitutes the heart of the community's identity, rather than simply an argument based on abstract principles." (2007, p. 7). Senn argues that sometimes the data available for addressing current issues in a tradition have been submerged over time, but "where there is memory, there is the possibility of retrieval" (1997, p. 7). For various reasons I came into this study with the strong suspicion that this particular strand of the "traditional story that constitutes the heart of the community's identity" has been effectively redacted from the record<sup>45</sup> - or perhaps simply damned with faint praise.

The documents of the founding generation impact the development of the organisation in subsequent generations, through a process of what Johnson refers to as *anamnesis*: "a recollection of the past that enlivens and empowers the present" (Johnson, 1999, p. 125). The New Testament documents are one such corpus (cf. Johnson, 1999, pp. 125-149). The Creeds of the Patristic period and the "Rules" of the monastic orders serve a similar function in the institutions whose development they guided (cf. Francis, 1221; Dominic, 2002). Calvin and Luther both left impressive manuals for the guidance of the future church – both of them were prolific writers and both created catechisms for the guidance (in their particular emphases) of the masses (cf. Calvin, 2008; Luther, 2017). Revival and re-structuring of all these movements has characteristically been predicated on a new reading of such foundational texts (cf. Johnson, 1999, p. 126). It seems that a reworking of the foundational texts of Methodism might be very helpful in sharpening ecclesial focus and praxis, and for an appropriate revival and restructuring of the Methodist Church in Cape Town.

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<sup>44</sup> Neither the *Forty-Four Sermons* nor the *Notes on the New Testament* present the same compelling picture of a liturgical life on disputed terrain that we see in the *Journals*.

<sup>45</sup> C.S. Lewis tells with relish how one had to cut the pages of a new book in the early 1900s, as the books were bound and sold with some pages still unparted. A copy of the four volumes of John Wesley's diaries dating from the 1920s that came into my hands had pages that had actually never been cut – they had demonstrably occupied shelf space but never been read. No minister ever advised me to read the *Journal*. I stumbled on it by myself.

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John Wesley's *Journal*, treated as a foundational document/narrative, is a powerful statement of his expectations of his fledgling movement. He writes in the preface to the August 1738-November 1739 extract that "What I design...is openly to declare to all mankind what it is that the Methodists (so called) have done and are doing now – or rather, what it is that God hath done and is still doing in our land" (Wesley, 1990, p. 3). He is telling an alternative story to the story being told in the press of his time concerning the Methodists. He edited the journals himself for publication in regular tranches during his lifetime, which speaks to a pedagogic intentionality – Wesley wanted to achieve certain educational/motivational outcomes through the publication of his *Journal*.<sup>46</sup>

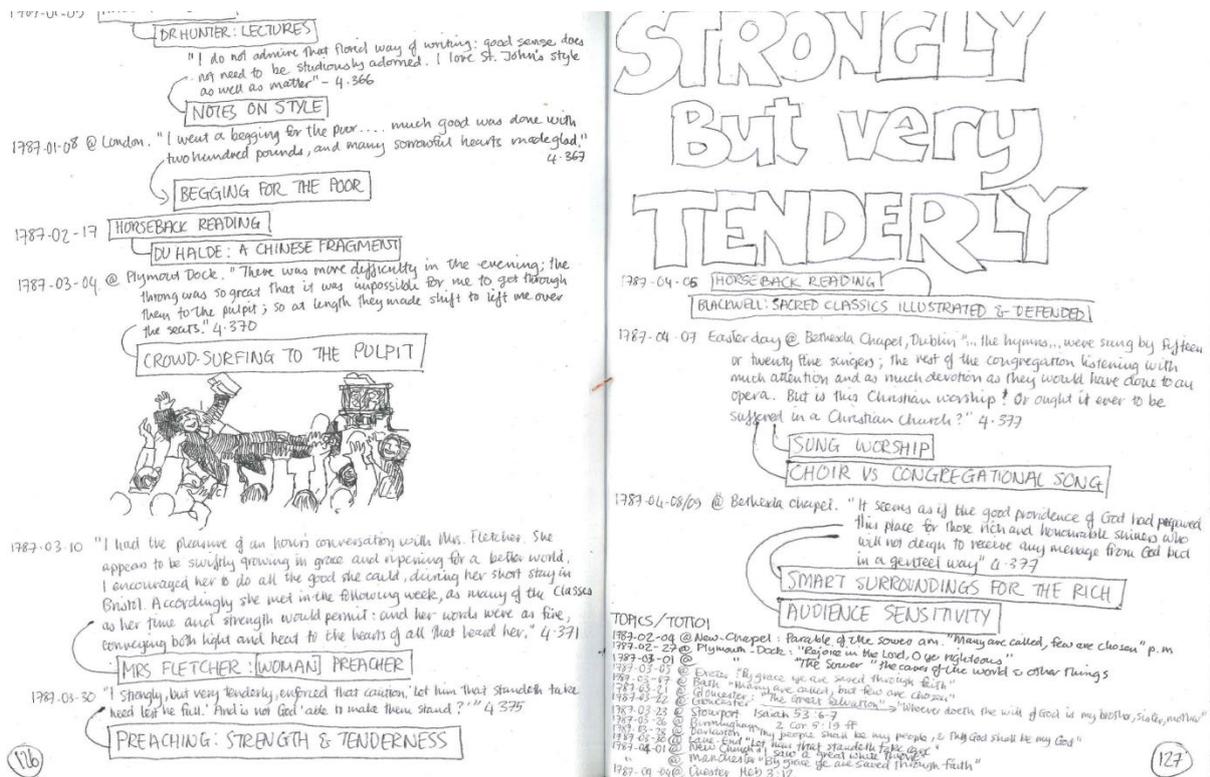


Figure 1 Sample of Coded Pages of Wesley's Journal

My reading and coding of the *Journal* over several years has thrown up all the categories I refer to in the title of my thesis: The church; liturgy; evangelism; conversion (Mostert, 2014, pp. 11,35,50,55,89,105). It has not only occasionally thrown up these categories, but frequently dealt with them – these are not mere side-issues of a long life. It seems promising, therefore, to treat the *Journal* as an ethnographic narrative to read alongside the ethnographic narrative of the Ministers of the current manifestation(s) of the Methodist

<sup>46</sup> We also have his parallel shorthand private diaries – never intended for publication but which have subsequently been deciphered (cf. Wesley, 1988)<sup>46</sup>. These are vital for a critical historical understanding of Wesley and his times, but not, I would argue, in the same category as his intentional communication through the *Journal*'s publication.

Church in Cape Town. There are both contextual congruities and contextual discontinuities. It seems only right, if the canon of the founding documents of the Methodist Church were to be expanded to include an evangelist's travel diary, to consider in what ways the Methodist people might now still be evangelistic travellers!

The *Journal's* self-conscious paralleling of the book of Acts is a strong statement that Wesley expected this movement of awakening and discipleship to continue along the trajectory of the church in Acts (cf. Wesley, 1827-1, p. 75). If the Methodist church considers itself Wesleyan, then this story should be expected to have its due influence in the ongoing trajectory of the Methodist Church (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 181; Wilson, 2011, pp. vii, 18). John Wesley's *Journal* presents us with a compelling story of the life of a pastor and evangelist. It shows the method by which he lived, and which earned his movement (along with several other similar awakening movements of the time) the derogatory title of "Methodists" (cf. Outler, 1984, p. 5; Simon, 1921, p. 87).

John Wesley loved the emerging natural science method (1827-2, pp. 36, 83, 485), and was endlessly interested in experimental outcomes. He experimented with the possibility of surviving without eating meat (1827-2, p. 2). He experimented until he found the optimum number of hours he needed to sleep, and then stuck to that all his life (Wesley, 1986, p. 325). He recorded experiments with drinking beer or milk as a cure for cholera rather than the abstaining from liquids (1827-3, p. 485). He experimented with waiting for a specific sense of divine leading before saying anything about Christ to others on a journey (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 83-84, 313). He experimented with meeting times (1827-3, p. 78), places for gathering people (1827-3, pp. 103, 114, 163), shapes of building best conducive to preaching (1827-3, pp. 71, 263, 471), and whether mild electrification had any health benefits (1827-2, pp. 245, 355). It therefore seems entirely plausible that he believed that he was making effective progress, through personal trial and error, observation and evaluation, in formulating the code of conduct best fitted for effective formation of Christian Disciples (1827-3, pp. 238-239). One way of reading his journals is to read them as the report of a life-long experiment in living according to a Methodist formula. Another "experimental outcome" of his lifestyle might be the impact that preaching had on a religiously sleepy population. One of his observables was the preaching of the Word of God and its effects in different contexts. One might even refer to his lifetime of preaching as an "experiment in preaching".

In short, it seems to me that the *Journal* is full of material that has suggests "experiments" the contemporary Methodist Church in Cape Town might make. It entices a reflective re-reading.

### ***Narrative, Aesthetics & Meaning***

## The Liturgy of Conversion

Written and spoken words are *not* the only meaningful texts that can produce helpful insight if exposed to ethnographic narrative scrutiny (Schreier, 1985, pp. 62-63). The architecture and decoration of buildings is significant. The use of doors and windows sends a message of openness or privacy that is potentially significant. The medium of art for public presentation of the gospel is another. I am strongly inclined towards the consideration of verbal and visual aesthetics, and will return to that in my fifth chapter<sup>47</sup>. As Hughes points out, “The deep and implicit kinship between the arts (visual and acoustic) and worship lies precisely in the ‘boundary pressing’ iconicity of the former.” (2003, p. 169). In my research I have paid special interest to the concept of boundaries, of inside vs. outside dynamics of community. I have found that visual arts do “press” conceptual boundaries in every way. As Gubrium and Holstein point out, “...an everyday aesthetics of narrativity operates on its own terms, in the nooks and crannies and reflexive considerations of lived experience. An everyday aesthetics attends both to standards and to the operating conditions in relation to which standards are applied.” (2009, p. 200).

### 2.1.4 Narrative: Post-Structuralist and Critical Social Theory Perspectives

The Methodist Church of Cape Town has not become what it is today by accident. For good or ill, choices were made and decisions were promulgated by Conferences over the years. Subsequently further corroborative decisions were made, certain emphases espoused, certain directions abandoned. We are what we have been becoming. That is the nature of institutions (cf. Adizes, 1988, pp. 2,3). Since we are dealing with the church as a social institution which in some ways is very like any “secular” institution (cf. Kraft, 1996, pp. 129-131), it seems appropriate to use insights from those who have specialised in institutional studies.

If the aim of a post-structuralist analysis is to “...strive to expose the taken-for-granted assumptions and internal contradictions of established regimes of power and knowledge to make room for alternative voices and new forms of knowledge” (Osmer, 2008, p. 75), then I would say that my research has a strong post-structuralist bent. It seems possible that the “regimes of power and knowledge” of the Methodist church might indeed be displaying internal contradictions with regard to evangelism. In addition I am not aiming to construct a “comprehensive guide” to evangelistic praxis, a “law of evangelism” but rather a helpful grid of principles which would need to be given contingency in micro-localities (Osmer 2008:74-5). I would also see my research as embodying aspects of critical social theory, which has

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<sup>47</sup> I have not been able to push the research in this project very far into the comparison of Wesley’s sentimental and pragmatic aesthetic and the varied aesthetic outlooks of the Methodist ministers. I will have to defer that to a later project, perhaps entitled something like *Wesley’s Lost Octagon*.

as its purpose to "...critique and transform society, providing guidance to emancipatory movements and praxis" (Osmer, 2008, p. 77; cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 33-39). I believe that a good case can be made for evangelism of a certain sort being a truly emancipatory praxis (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 420), or indeed an instance of what Bryant Myers might call "transformational development" – "positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually" (1999, pp. 2-3)

Applying a narrative ethnographical approach to my research seems to offer good potential for uncovering these holistic processes. Gubrium and Holstein go on to say: "narrative ethnography directs us to the talk, interaction, and ongoing concerns that both inform and shape stories in society" (2009, p. 25). Approaching my data from this approach will mean that I will expect to find that "post-structuralist literary criticism provides a useful concept for orienting to the complex relations between narrative work and narrative environments" (2009, p. 185).

"...meaning is not transferred directly from writer to reader but instead is mediated by meanings or codes suggested to the writer and the reader by other texts", write Gubrium and Holstein (2009, p. 186). I anticipate being able to mediate meaning in this way by reading the texts of the interviews and Wesley's *Journal* together. The apparent incongruity of trying to compare an essentially oral source to a written source need not be a disqualification either, in my judgement, since "Narratives need not take the form of written texts to be intertextually influenced or influential" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 187)<sup>48</sup>.

### **2.1.5 Narrative: a working definition**

The working definition of "narrative" that I derive from these considerations is:

*narrative is the socially conditioned, intentional ordering units of experiential data in a semiotically meaningful matrix, in verbal or other media, in order to teach, delight and persuade.*

### **2.1.6 Conclusion: Narrative at Every Turn**

I am telling a story about people telling a story about telling a story. Knowing that narrative theory can generate helpful knowledge, and understanding how narrative can be used in different permutations and applications, is a conceptual tool that will enable me to cope with

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<sup>48</sup>Schüssler Fiorenza helps us to understand that "...critical pedagogy aims for the self-understanding of the biblical scholar as a public, transformative, connected or integrated intellectual who is able to communicate with a variegated public with the goal of personal, social and religious transformation for justice and well-being for all" (2007, p. 256)

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the mass of different story lines that I am trying to draw together in an emplotment of a liturgy of conversion.

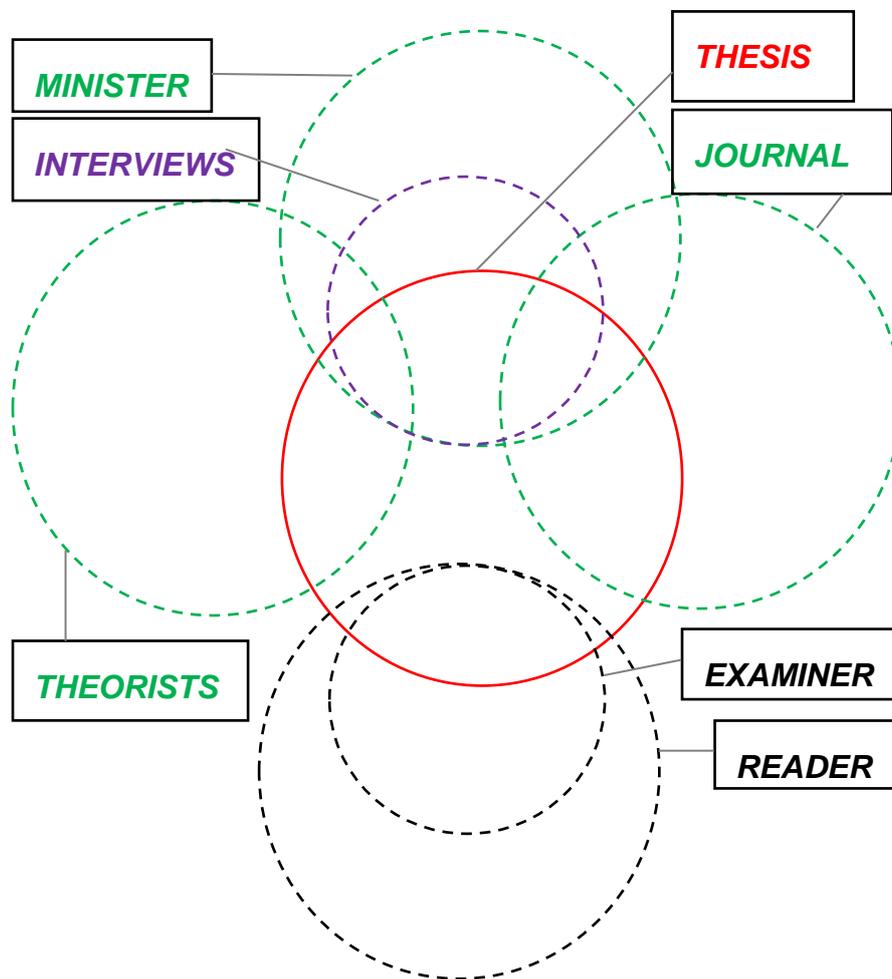


Figure 2 Intertextuality Matrix of my Thesis (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 185)

## 2.2. LITURGICAL THEORY as a research tool

*“Whatever the personal journey to conversion (and hospitality to the stranger demands respect for a great variety of ways to conversion), the movement to public identity in Christ is made up of public acts. Restoring the public process of conversion within the metaphor of hospitality to the stranger is a critical resource for enlivening public life in and outside the church.” (Keifert, 1992, p. 93)*

The starting point of most considerations of liturgy appears to be that it is an internal concern of the church, a formally structured and repeated social activity “played out” between pastor,

congregant and God. It involves words spoken and sung, and ritual actions, all performed in a sacred space. Senn speaks for many when he defines liturgy as "... what Christians have performed in their public assemblies.... not only prayer but ritual<sup>49</sup>...[which] has to do not only with what a community does before God but also with what the members of a community do in interaction with one another (cf. Senn, 1997, p. 3; Firet, 1977, pp. 300, 324; Hughes, 2003, pp. 1-2; Danneels, 2003, p. 7).

Many consider liturgy as the Church's *major* concern, the "fuel and goal of missions" (Piper, 1993, p. 11). The alternately faithed may, if they choose, go out of their way to witness it happening. However, their inclusion/comment appears not to be a concern of liturgists: "...the liturgy is not all that unappealing to the unchurched if it is celebrated in a compelling way," Senn notes in what seems to me a lamentably off-hand reference (1997, p. 692). As noted previously, I am culturally embedded in the Methodist church. But my critical awareness of what the church is in a multicultural context has been strongly formed in and by my thirteen years of experience of working in the Thai church. In that context the Christian Church is an extremely tiny minority, disregarded and despised by those inhabiting the reigning Buddhist worldview; a church that has never been in a Constantinian, "Christendom" relationship to the state.<sup>50</sup> The vision of the church as a network of believing communities, suspended in a matrix of space-between-the-churches inhabited by the alternatively faithed, has been etched into my consciousness.

I am seeking to understand how liturgy of the Church relates to a world from which people might potentially be converted<sup>51</sup>. As such I need to develop a reliable theoretical tool for probing my narrative sources. What I am looking for is a theory of liturgy that copes with Christians expressing and promoting the core values of their faith, and that allows for celebration and education in the truth amongst its church adherents, but that also allows for the questioning, unconvinced presence and interaction of the alternatively faithed.

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<sup>49</sup> Keith Pecklers makes an interesting point when he says that "...what makes ritual work is precisely the fact that ritual is repetitive behaviour; one doesn't have to think about what one has to do next because we know what to do" (2003, p. 178). Although this perhaps puts people in danger of what Hughes would have called "routinization" (2003, p. 173) or what Brueggemann might call "prose flattening" (1989, p. 1), it seems to me that perhaps churches generally don't "know what to do next" when it comes to conversion of the alternatively faithed, and that we might profit from liturgical guidelines.

<sup>50</sup> In fact, the Buddhist religion occupies that space, and it would be a fascinating subject to explore the comparisons and contrasts between Christendom and "Buddhendom"!

<sup>51</sup> It seems reasonable that those who are being invited to share the liturgical life of the church have an opportunity of observing and evaluating the ritual and rhetoric of the church before committing themselves to the community of Christians. If so, then the issue of access arises. Do outsiders have easy access to observation of the so-called "public liturgy"?

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### 2.2.1 The Field and Focus of Liturgics

The “normal science” (Storer, 1973, p. xxviii) of liturgics provides a tool that gives a range of theoretical concepts for discussing the issues related to the topic that I anticipate encountering.

*Liturgical theory explores liturgy as the expression of the life and mission of the church.* John Mbiti defines liturgy amongst African peoples as “the worshipping expression of the people of God” (1986, p. 92), worked out in prayer and sacraments with dancing and singing, intensely emotional, physical, corporate and spiritual. Senn, working from a more North Atlantic Rim cultural stance, says that “...liturgy (*leitourgia*) is the public work performed by a particular community under the leadership of its liturgists (*leitourgoi*) to enact its view of reality and its commitments.” (1997, p. xiv). For Senn, liturgy expresses meaning through a variety of media, actions as well as texts (1997, p. xv). He goes on to say that “The liturgy is the activity in which the life and mission of the church are paradigmatically and centrally expressed” (1997, p. 4). It seems, then, that for Senn Christian liturgy consists of ritual words and actions that are seen by the participants as worshipfully embodying the essential truths of their relationship to God (cf. 1997, p. xiv). In his book, *Worship as Meaning*, Hughes describes the archetypical liturgy as a cycle of five elements: constitution; approach; word; sacrament; and closure and dismissal (2003, pp. 168-169) – all designed to bring worshippers safely into the presence of an utterly holy God and then usher them safely out again, “*creating sanctuary* for people overwhelmed by ordinariness, in trying to *generate sacral spaces* as genuine alternatives to mundanity” (2003, p. 252). Many different forms might express the different elements, but they all need to be in place for a meaningfully complete liturgical cycle.

For Hughes, liturgy enacts the whole theological nature of the church in microcosm. He explains his insistence on the term “theology”: “*The insistence on ‘theology’ is to ward off the suggestion that the study of liturgy is simply a rubrical, historical or textual affair.*” (2003, p. 226). Hughes argues that liturgy deals with core issues of meaning construction (2003, p. 63). And from a missiological-homiletical point of view, Mbiti, Senn and Hughes all agree that everything the Church intends to mean it also intends to play out in its liturgy.

*Liturgical theory explores how liturgy ushers Christians over barriers.* Hughes expresses this quest for meaning as the story of people being empowered liturgy to relate to a transcendent God and make sense of their own transitory existence: “Every act of worship...assumes or represents some ‘virtual frontier’ across which the divine-human transaction which is worship is undertaken.” (2003, p. 148), and later, “Liturgical meaning is effected at that extremity of what we can manage or comprehend as human beings...it is both the terror and the ecstasy

of coming to the edge of ourselves” (2003, p. 276). Liturgy is particularly significant when the people of God, personally and/or corporately, experience the liminal conditions of life. Wuthnow says: “Religious teachings characteristically serve to shelter the individual from chaos – from a reality that seems to make no sense – by providing explanations for suffering, death, tragedy, and injustice” (1992, pp. 18-19).

*Liturgical theory explores how liturgical meanings are conveyed (or not).* Liturgical theorists are therefore concerned that liturgy remains (or becomes) meaningful to its participants. Hughes notes that “...the entire constellation of significations called a service of worship could only be meaningful for worshippers, individually and collectively, to the extent that these meanings were capable of being joined to, or set in relationship with...the worshippers’ ‘lifeworld’” (2003, pp. 1-2). For Mbiti, one problem with liturgy in Africa is that the mission-culture liturgies fail to fit with this “lifeworld” of African peoples (Mbiti, 1969 (1989), p. 226) – meaning is not encoded in readable signs. Another problem Mbiti has with meaning and liturgy (on the other hand) is that the more vibrantly indigenous liturgies of the African Initiated Churches seem to have poor theological content – the signs are readable, but the content is weak. In 1969 he wrote that “...the church here now finds itself in the situation of trying to exist without a theology” (Mbiti, 1969 (1989), p. 226). If the liturgy enacts the “life and mission of the church”, it seems essential that all its participants know – or come to know - what they are doing and why. Senn considers that “...the church must provide what people lack in order to offer meaning for their lives: a narratable world – a worldview that provides coherent meaning and a way of enacting it” (1997, p. 698). Liturgical theorists therefore consider that liturgy has a homiletic function.

*Liturgical theory explores how God and his people relate.* Liturgy has what are considered to be its “proper participants”: God; and the people of God. Senn says “...the celebration of liturgy is meant to be primarily a symbolic activity....[and] the role of symbols... is to provoke an encounter between God and his people.” (1997, p. 795). Liturgy is examined by various theorists as the conversation or interplay between God and the people who worship him with some level of faith and knowledge.

From the point of view of this research it is important to note that God is formally acknowledged as an active participant in the Liturgy. The liturgy without an active God could hardly be considered to be a functional liturgy. One of the proper fields of investigation of liturgics is what God does and how he does it in relationship to the worshipping Christians (and, I would suggest, the non-worshipping alternatively faithed people of the world).

*Liturgical theory investigates the nexus of communal, individual, and personal in liturgy.* The boundaries of that interchange are difficult for humans to assess. Liturgy opens people up to

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a range of individual experiences, and a range of communal experiences, all of which are experienced personally. Liturgics enables the analysis of cultural liturgical performances in terms of their wholeness or incompleteness. It helps us read the personal/corporate balance, and measure the cultural helpfulness of liturgical strategies (cf. Oduyoye, 1986, pp. 40-41).

*Liturgical theory explores the nature and function of liturgical space.* Liturgy also has its “proper” place: the church building. Liturgists seem to assume that liturgy requires Christians to forgather in a Christian-controlled space – a church building or similar, usually a specific structure, usually roofed and walled. Some African Initiated Churches, like the *Shembe* church, insist on outdoor gatherings. But the space is still very much controlled by the Christian worshippers (cf. Sundkler, 1948, 1961, p. 187; Griffin, 1995, p. 4).

This sacred geography is an integral part of the full expression of worship: “...iconic liturgical significations of ‘boundary’ or ‘frontier’, and then of the Other which lies beyond the frontier...will thus necessarily be heavily impregnated not just with spatial, temporal and movement *imagery*, (which it is), but with *actual, physical* movement and directionality.” (Hughes, 2003, p. 153). Liturgics thus concerns itself with space and boundaries, and particularly issues of liturgical control and choice of certain spaces. Coupled with that is an assessment of power and control – and the question of whether a neutral venue is possible or even desirable for a liturgy of conversion. Somebody always lays claim to any territory, and often there are competing claims for space<sup>52</sup>. From the perspective of this study, then, the scope of life from a Christian perspective is divided between “church space” and “the space between the churches”. It is of interest to this study to see if liturgics can offer insights into liturgy in space not controlled by Christians.

### 2.2.2 The Liturgical Logic of Jesus’ Whip

A significant missiological reading of the clearing of the temple incident is that Jesus cleared the liturgical space of the court of the gentiles at the temple so that it could be used for its intended purpose: a place near to JHWH for people not formally considered part the Jewish nation. The place allocated to the *goyim* had been filled with the (necessary) commerce for worship by insiders (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-17)<sup>53</sup>. If the logic of liturgy is that it is for the insiders and their god, then one can – and must – use all

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<sup>52</sup> This seems to be a universal aspect of human nature. People jockey and fight for control of the inhospitable polar regions, the oceans and their resources, and even the moon.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Wright describes the notion of the temple-clearing as prophetic sign of God’s imminent removal of the temple as an obstacle to the salvation of the nations (2006, p. 509). I have not been able to fit in a proper study of the New Testament documents in areas relating to my thesis – apart from this brief sally into the New Testament I will be building my argument exclusively on the ways in which Wesley and the current ministers relate to Scripture. I will leave a more complete study of the Scripture to subsequent studies.

available space for it. But Jesus seems to have had a different viewpoint – the space allotted to the gentiles ought to be available for the gentiles because the liturgy was intended to include them, albeit distantly (cf. Keifert, 1992, pp. 59-63). The worship by the people of God was intended to result in actual human beings turning up in Jerusalem to worship. Jesus seems to have a missio-teleological understanding of worship (cf. Wright, 2006, p. 509).

I suggest that a missiological<sup>54</sup> adjustment to our way of understanding liturgy might help the Methodist church in Cape Town to overcome its issues with formalism and shrinking adherence. And, in doing so, it might also turn out to be very helpful to myriads of people who find themselves on the outside of the defensive boundaries of the Church looking in. There are a number of issues that I kept in mind during the research

*Firstly, Does Liturgy Express the Mission of God with regard to the Alternatively Faithed?*

Studies of the crisis of membership and social influence of urban churches mostly seem to deal with the mismatch between the liturgical forms expressing the culture of previous eras, and the need for the church to “catch up” with the current postmodern, post-Christendom culture of its adherents. A typical example is Marva Dawn: “The difficulty for churches is to find worship practices that invite boomers to experience the truth of God without the self-absorption that distorts it” (1995, p. 113). Hughes, and others, insist that for liturgy to be meaningful it has to reflect the culture within which it is enacted (2003, pp. 1-2; cf. Keifert, 1992, p. 139ff). The theory seems to be that if the liturgy of the church is authentically inculturated, then alternatively-faithed people from the postmodern, post-Christendom communities in which it exists will feel at home in it, and be inclined to remain in it or re-join it. Although inculturation is undeniably an essential dimension of evangelism, the possibility that those who are completely foreign to the Christian worldview might come to join the people of God in their liturgy is only given a token nod. Marva Dawn, in her crusade to restore intelligence to a “dumbed-down” liturgy argues for a revitalisation of Christian faith and “effectiveness” of witness “to the world around us” (1995, p. 4 et passim). But she does not show how the one relates to the other. The existence of a culturally aligned liturgy does not necessitate members of that culture (other than currently associated church members) aligning themselves to it in turn. There needs to be a mechanism of meeting, persuading and choosing, which I suggest is the work of evangelism, and in particular, the liturgy of conversion.

I would tend to argue that the reigning paradigm of liturgy does not anticipate the actual presence of the alternatively-faithed, does not invite the alternatively faithed, and makes few

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<sup>54</sup> The logical necessity of missiology is that it deals with the interplay between the Church and the world of the alternatively-faithed – as Bosch puts it, both a “yes” and a “no” to the world (1991, pp. 10-11).

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attempts to include the reality of the world outside Christianity<sup>55</sup>. The general culture within which the church is embedded is co-inhabited by many who do not share Christian faith commitments, and worship-culture appears to fail to include them, even conceptually. It appears that not only do Christians communicate badly with their Christian constituency (through failures of the valency of our inherited symbol system) – they have also scrubbed the liturgy of any reference to those who do not share the Christian faith<sup>56</sup>.

And this could only have been done by avoiding the liturgical logic of Jesus' whip. A theory of liturgy that includes the alternatively-faithed in its vision, in my opinion, is more likely to help a church that is struggling to survive amongst alternative faith options. The relationship between general society and the church in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town is not one in which the general society threatens the church. Rather, it is one in which general society is simply unaware that the church has anything to say to it, or of any meaningful contribution the church might make to public life.

*Secondly, can the liturgy be a vehicle of meaning to the alternatively faithed?* Let God be God, according to the Scriptures and the creeds. I am not pleading here for a liturgy that accommodates to a concept of easy universal acceptance. I am content that Christian faith should be portrayed as being a demand for sole allegiance to God through faith in Christ. As Hughes comments, we are not asking for the basic tenets of Christianity to become palatable – only comprehensible: "Liturgical meanings need to be both recognizable (identifiable) from within the condition of modernity and yet be clearly different from the prevailing axioms of secularism" (2003, p. 63). I am not arguing that the crucifixion be softened in its brutality or the resurrection in its cataclysmic significance. However, it is not clear to me that such culturally appropriate liturgical adjustments are likely to convey such raw meaning to anybody except those already in intimate contact with the church. I am concerned that people are perhaps not making ultimate, exclusive commitments to God partly because they do not understand that he could require such a counter-cultural thing of them.

- Part of the problem with an exclusive liturgy – a liturgy reserved for the use of insiders - is that it most likely conveys the meaning of "private truth" to outsiders<sup>57</sup>.

Liturgy seems like something only partially glimpsed through an open door or a

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<sup>55</sup> Keifert argues for liturgy to be crafted with the "stranger" always in mind. I would take issue with his proposed "level playing field" being only on the premises of the church, where it is unlikely to be accessed by the alternatively faithed. He entertains the odd notion that both "home" and "away" matches are both played on a home field (1992, p. 99) – and he does not envisage a visiting team.

<sup>56</sup> It appears that the churches do indeed do what Hoekendijk said they should not: they "obstruct, complicate and sabotage" access of outsiders to the grace of God (1964, p. 99).

<sup>57</sup> The Muslim government of Malaysia understands the importance of this. Churches must, by law, display a prominent sign at the entrance to their premises that "Muslims are not allowed", and Bibles have to be labelled "not for Muslims" (cf. State Government Malaysia, 2011).

rapidly flicked TV channel (Leonard, 2003, pp. 27,30). And, if it is not made available to the alternatively faithed, liturgy has no opportunity to mean anything to them<sup>58</sup>.

Meaning, as Ricoeur argues, happens between people, or between a person and a text (LaCocque & Ricoeur, 1998, p. xi). If the one party (the stranger) to our “intentional interpretant” (that strangers are welcome) is absent, then the “effectual interpretant” is “we strangers are not welcome there” (cf. Hughes, 2003, p. 147)

So the answer to the question, “does liturgy mean anything to the alternatively faithed?” is probably that we don’t know, because they are not present when liturgy happens. The liturgical logic of Jesus’ whip is that “public” worship needs to be open to public view in such places as they can be expected to participate in it, question it, and learn through their interaction with those with whom they share the experience.

*Thirdly, would the alternatively faithed be able to read the signs of liturgy?* During the prayer time of a Xhosa-language Methodist service the door to the church is formally closed and a door-steward makes sure that nobody enters for the duration of the prayers. For those inside it carries the meaning of the uninterrupted sacredness of the moment. An outsider *might* understand that; but then again, perhaps she/he might read it as a sign of prohibition and exclusion.

However, if something is signified by one party, it *can* potentially be comprehended by second party. For the sake of this study I will follow Hughes in his assessment that “...there is meaning when, or because, people mean things” (2003, p. 67).<sup>59</sup> But not every outsider will want to engage in the interpretive process: “Successful semiosis, a meaningful transaction of meaning...depends upon the ability [and Fisher would say, the *willingness* (1987, p. 92)] of both producer and recipient to bring their respective interpretants sufficiently close for their mutual satisfaction” (Hughes, 2003, p. 185). Who are the recipients of Liturgical communication? I would argue that the alternatively-faithed need to be included as intended recipients, as they inevitably bring their interpretant into alignment/dis-alignment with the transmission of meaning. Anybody from outside with the desire to read the liturgy should be able to start the questioning, conversational process of developing a “communicational interpretant” (Hughes, 2003, p. 92). My paradigm here is the crowds of derisive or deeply receptive coal-miners and tin-miners who came into contact with the

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<sup>58</sup> Even if Liturgy is intended as an education of lay-people to perform their “liturgy after the liturgy”, (including separate ministry of evangelism to the alternatively-faithed), the absence of evangelism as part of the liturgy seems to mean that the lay-people have to be educated in evangelism separately from the liturgy. As Ion Bria points out in his *The Liturgy After the Liturgy*, “an extreme abstraction and lack of contact with human reality and the physical universe are entirely contrary to the spirit of the liturgy” (1996, p. 28). And yet liturgy does indeed appear to be abstracted from the world and its people, and, as the song says, “the things of the earth grow strangely dim”.

<sup>59</sup> The discussion of how meaning means anything, and whether it does or not, cannot be fully debated here.

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liturgy of the church through Wesley's preaching. Perhaps the liturgy is not unreadable because it is too culturally distant or too sacred – *but because it is too private*.

*Fourthly, can Christian liturgy carry the alternatively faithed over the barriers between them and God?* Liturgists argue that liturgy has a pedagogical function that moves people deeper into its meaning, and thus into an ever-deepening understanding of the "life and mission" of the church. Senn, as I have noted, considers that through liturgy the church provides "a narratable world" for its participants (1997, p. 698). The logical problem I see is where does this process begin? Evangelism (or evangelisation), as we shall see, is legitimately defined as a process. If so, then where in this process does a person in the process of conversion meet with liturgy? Is the liturgy meant to be kept a secret for the alternatively faithed until they come to believe in Christ? Or is the liturgy a sort of test for a convert – if they are willing to attend church on Sunday, they may receive an important message from God to decode?

If one assumes that one is dealing only with Christians and their children, then it is easier, because it is obvious that every worshipper would then have been brought up within a Christian liturgical matrix.<sup>60</sup> But in these times of rising secularisation and falling numbers in the churches, it would be questionable to assume that the old Christendom situation still obtains<sup>61</sup>. One must assume that the church is more and more faced with the issue that growth will not happen except through conversions from some or other alternative faith. So then the question of *where* the contact between the alternately-faithed and the Christian liturgy might conceivably happen becomes more crucial.

If, in addition, the liturgy carries such a large freight of Christian meaning, and if that meaning is potentially accessible to the alternatively-faithed, then logic dictates that involvement in the liturgy can and should be instrumental in the bringing of the alternatively-faithed over the same barriers between mundane and transcendental as the insider people-of-God (Keifert, 1992, p. 93). Outsiders, exposed to the genuinely public liturgy of God's worshipping and gospel-narrating people, should presumably be being converted and becoming members of the new community. But they manifestly are not doing so. Is this because the liturgy is incomprehensible to them, or are they not being exposed to the liturgy, or both, or neither?

Hughes says that "...effective representation of 'entrance' will continue to need ... an *act* of movement from one place to another ... and some significant degree of distance to cover" (2003, p. 158). Arising from this idea of a "distance" which needs to be physically crossed in

<sup>60</sup> In the Service for the Baptism of Infants, the congregation promises to "maintain the common life of worship and service so that he/she and all the children among you may grow in the grace and in the knowledge and love of God and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord" (MCSA, 1975, p. A9)

<sup>61</sup> My research for this thesis has highlighted an interestingly large variation of "Christendom-like" functionality in the church in Cape Town [3.2.1: 85].

order for anything to be meant (liturgically), I strongly suspect that we are confronted with two distances in two directions when we meet as Christian worshippers. Before us is the great and awesome mystery of the unseen God, the wholly other. But behind us is the mystery of the alternatively-faithed world, also unseen under the current liturgical dispensation, also calling us to symbolic interaction. The church is perched between the Chaos of God and the Chaos of the World. For the most part, our liturgical strategy seems to only allow us to cope with the one journey and apparently ignores the other, which then nags at our consciousness and begs us to explore it. I do not think, however, that Hughes goes far enough. When leaving the liturgy celebrated in the church, one is not necessarily leaving the “space and time” of the liturgy (2003, p. 160). If one does so, then there can be no talk of a “liturgy of conversion” (or even the “liturgy after the liturgy”), because the unconverted have no place in liturgical space. It seems that in the same way that there is a procession into the church building in order to constitute the liturgy of worship, so there ought to be a procession into the world to constitute the liturgy of conversion. But is this a legitimate demand to place on the concept of liturgy?

*Fifthly, doesn't worship necessarily exclude the alternatively faithed from interacting with God and his people?* I believe the easy assumption of worship being the domain of only two parties - God and his people - does not take the uncontainable nature of God properly into account. If liturgy sets out to signify the whole truth about God, then this truth – of God who exists beyond the boundaries of the liturgical community – needs to have its proper words, music, sacrament and action. One intention of this study is to explore the possibilities for such a liturgy.

*Sixthly, does the liturgical space have to be under the sole control of Christians?* Presumably not. God is famously one of the parties of worship who can constitute the “place of liturgy” wherever he chooses. Liturgical literature seems to tend to confine its interest in locality to buildings, and Hughes shows how important a dedicated, physical, sacred space might be for satisfactory iconic representation of the reality of a Holy God, drawing on the imagery of tabernacle and temple (2003, pp. 148-170). Jesus, in clearing the court of the gentiles, can be seen as demonstrating a counter-consideration of how people might find themselves unduly deprived of access to God by being denied access to a Christian-controlled space. Psychologically, I believe this lies behind the puzzling insistence of Christians referring to what appears to be “private worship” as “public worship”. When liturgists talk of ‘liturgical

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movement” and “liturgical geography”, they seem to be only envisioning movement of Christians into and within space controlled by the Christians<sup>62</sup>.

In Cape Town, where the easy ownership of land and buildings is beyond the means of the majority of Methodists<sup>63</sup>, this needs to be part of our concern in terms of liturgy. Sometimes the true liturgy of God’s people must be able to happen in temporary or disputed geography. Another cultural-geographical issue is the African spirituality strand of ad hoc worship – for many African worshippers it feels most appropriate to worship the God of Creation out in amongst his created things<sup>64</sup>. John Mbiti observed that “...evidence shows that African peoples worship God at any time and in any place, and that there are no rules obliging people to worship at a given time or place.... African peoples turn to God at any time and whenever the need arises” (1969 (1989), pp. 71,72). This is certainly borne out by my experiences of spontaneous liturgy in African countries<sup>65</sup>, and raises interesting questions about the cultural appropriateness of limiting liturgy to the confines of Christian-controlled buildings. It seems that a helpful theory of liturgy therefore should at least be expanded to include the potential for “off-site”<sup>66</sup> liturgical performances.

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### 2.2.3 Liturgy as the Work of the People

Graham Hughes’ narrative model of liturgy is a helpful backdrop to this discussion. In his book *Worship as Meaning* he describes the liturgy as the telling of a story that takes participants into the presence of God, keeps them there, and then leads them safely out and

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<sup>62</sup> Senn in his book *Christian Liturgy - Catholic & Evangelical* (1997) never references the building in which the liturgy occurs as such – but he nevertheless never treats the issues which liturgy would encounter on disputed territory. Keifert, in his section on “sources for worship planning” (1992, p. 143), assumes that the liturgant is in place to make all the executive decisions about what will happen.

<sup>63</sup> In 2001 the national census put the number of Methodists in Cape Town at 303,785, of which 161,165 were black – which means that 16 years ago 53% of the members/affiliates belonged to the lowest earning sector of Cape Town society (Stats SA, 2017). It should be remembered that the statistics kept by the church are in disarray, as noted earlier, but if the trends reported earlier have been holding true then that percentage will by now be much higher, despite the 77% apparent decline in numbers overall.

<sup>64</sup> As so poignantly illustrated by Vincent Donovan in his description of mission to the Masai, where he convened conversation groups under different trees in different regions of his parish in Loliondo in Tanzania (Donovan, 1978).

<sup>65</sup> Random experiences have been: a passing bus literally rocking on its springs as people sang a hymn; a full-blown service of worship on another bus, complete with hymns, prayers and sermon; unself-conscious singing of a hymn at full volume by a teenager whilst walking alone between buildings with a pleasant acoustic; fervent prayer being offered to God at the slightest invitation...

<sup>66</sup> On 2017-02-26 the entire 11.00 a.m. Shona-language service at Church Street Methodist, relocated to Mfuleni to do an outdoor service, along with drums and Methodist regalia; this despite the unstable xenophobic situation obtaining at the time in the informal settlements of Cape Town. Their plan is to do outdoor worship services wherever there are significant populations of Shona people living in Cape Town.

back into our everyday world. (2003, pp. 148-183). This “boundary crossing” narrative is enacted in four rites – a convocationary rite, the service of the Word, the rite of the Eucharist, and a dismissal rite (2003, pp. 168-169).

Senn articulates a more standard definition of Liturgy: “Liturgy (*leitourgia*) is the public work performed by a particular community under the leadership of its liturgists (*leitourgoi*) to enact its view of reality and its commitments.” (1997, p. xiv). I find it particularly important that he focuses on this idea of “enacting its view of reality and commitments”. He expresses this equally forcibly a few pages later: “The liturgy is the activity in which the life and mission of the church are paradigmatically and centrally expressed” (1997, p. 4). He asserts that this liturgy plays itself out between God and the Christian community.

*“Liturgy is what Christians have performed in their public assemblies.... liturgy is not only prayer but ritual. Ritual has to do not only with what a community does before God but also with what the members of a community do in interaction with one another. It is a pattern of behaviour that expresses and forms a way of life consistent with the community’s beliefs and values.” (1997, p. 3)*

The root meaning of liturgy (*λειτουργία*) is “the work of the people” (Jonker, 1962, p. 25). Mostly it seems to have come to mean “the sacred work in which the laity are permitted to participate under the guidance and control of the liturgant”, with strict control of who says what, when; and a strict demarcation of roles for liturgant and laity in a sort of dance of responsibilities, a usage which apparently developed very early in the life of the early church. Jonker traces this back to the Didache 15:1 and The Letter to Clement 44:2 (1962, p. 27; cf. van der Watt & Tolmie, 2005, pp. 772,713)<sup>67</sup>.

For the sake of this study I want to revisit the “work of the people” idea. If Bosch is correct when he envisages a postmodern shift to mission becoming a shared work of the “whole people of God” (1991, pp. 467-473), and if Senn is correct when he defines liturgy as enacting the core values and processes of the church (1997, pp. xiv,3), then it seems reasonable to assume that every duty or activity expected of the laity could legitimately be read as liturgical, and any activity (such as evangelism) that notionally involved both Christians and God in terms of expressing some “core value and process” of the Church, would constitute “liturgy”. Claver, in his activist’s introduction to Karl Rahner’s concept of the “Liturgy of the World” argues that “What God is doing in the world – that is the liturgy Rahner speaks of and we his people must respond to it in a similar liturgy. Christian liturgy must

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<sup>67</sup> Bria, writing from an Orthodox standpoint, has an even narrower definition of liturgy: “In the ancient vocabulary of Christian worship it refers specifically to the celebration of the Eucharist, under the ministry of a consecrated priest, on Sunday, the day of the Lord” (1996, p. 1).

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partake of that Liturgy of the World, must in fact be acting out of that same Liturgy<sup>68</sup> (2003, p. 148). Bria, from a Greek Orthodox viewpoint, sees evangelism as part of its “liturgy after the liturgy”, although by that he seems to indicate something that is not quite “proper” liturgy – a second tier liturgy, perhaps (Bria, 1996). It seems that on the face of things there is no *prima facie* case for limiting liturgy to the confines of the church building or space under the control of Christians. And yet liturgical theorists seem to live with a *de facto* disjuncture between what happens in church and what happens in the world. Marva Dawn is typical of this: “...our worship”, she says, “must be such that it nurtures the kind of welcoming character that will reach out to the unsaved with the gospel” (1995, p. 126) – the liturgy reaches out, apparently, whilst staying at home. This begs the question as to exactly what in the liturgy (as it stands) encapsulates and promotes this welcoming character towards the “unsaved”? And further, in what ways does it encapsulate and promote the intentional persuasion of people outside the circle of Christian firelight to consider converting to the Christian faith?

Neither does there appear to be any case for limiting the role of the clergy-liturgant to a role limited to space controlled by Christians. A theorist like Ian Stackhouse, in an exposition of the gifts of the Spirit in Ephesians 4, apparently sees no irony in somebody gifted as an evangelist being completely absorbed in preaching to Christians, equipping them in the content and implications of the Gospel message (2004, p. 261).<sup>69</sup> – the question arises as to what this continuously equipped laity is supposed to do with the emerging capacity for evangelism? As modelled by the evangelist, would they not tend to expend their energy on Christians? Or is the teacher somehow absolved from the usual expectation of having to practice what s/he preaches in this instance? For the purposes of this study I am going to assume that the leaders of the Christian community do indeed have a direct personal responsibility for direct personal contact with those who are of an alternative faith in order to persuade them to consider the person and claims of Christ. Otherwise they would be avoiding Christian duty that they enjoin on others, which most people would legitimately struggle to accept. I will also assume that the capacity for liturgical action is not mystically shorn from liturgants as they leave the sanctuary of the church building.

For my purposes Outler expands the concept of liturgy in a helpful direction when he refers to “...our spirit’s hidden hunger for the sacramental hallowing of all levels and orders of

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<sup>68</sup> Rahner’s definition of liturgy seems to be a reduction – liturgy is what God does, and he can do it either in the church or in the world. On this view Christians (and presumably also the alternatively faithed) are reduced to passive spectators. I would argue that if God is acting completely independently of human participants (which he may), then it is not helpful to talk of liturgy. Liturgy happens when people are swept up in a relational interaction with God through symbol and ritual – until that happens no liturgy can be said to have occurred.

<sup>69</sup> Stackhouse draws here on Guder’s work *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Guder, 2000).

Christian living” (1971, p. 51)<sup>70</sup>. Does he mean that Christianity by its very nature turns converts into makers of liturgy? Or does he imply that what we do on Sundays is insufficient meet our craving for a life that is liturgically meaningful? Or does he mean that all humanity secretly craves meaningfulness ritually woven into the fabric of life? Whatever the case, what seems clear is that liturgy-making is a satisfying human activity that ordinary people want to be part of, because of an innate need for ritual. “All rituals promote psychological and social integration”, maintained Benjamin Ray, arguing from a “Durkheimian” point of view (1976, p. 78). The flip side of that is that all “psychological and social integration” requires some form of ritual, an approach taken by Stromberg where he interprets conversion stories as integrative ritual (1993, pp. xi-xiii). And that in turn would mean that liturgical performance is not repugnant to contemporary humanity *per se*<sup>71</sup>. Contemporary people might reject *ancient* rituals, but they might also then require *contemporary* ones<sup>72</sup>. Or perhaps the recovery of ancient rituals might make more sense in a post-modern than in a modern milieu. This pleads for further research.

#### 2.2.4 Liturgy for Outsiders: Minority Opinion

All this seems to indicate that there might well be a valid liturgical connection between the Christian and the alternatively faithed in the space between the churches. And yet who writes about the liturgical presence of the church in the world?

There are a minority of liturgists who do: Esser<sup>73</sup>; Hoekendijk<sup>74</sup>; Saunders & Campbell<sup>75</sup>; and of course, John Wesley. They are all plainspoken exponents of the right of the alternatively faithed (and secularly-placed) to hear the public Gospel in public. The liturgant’s place is in a liturgical “dance” with the laity, and wherever they are dancing s/he should theoretically be

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<sup>70</sup> A sentiment well expressed in Horatius Bonar’s 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn, which culminates in the verse “So shall no part of day or night /From sacredness be free /But all my life, in every step /Be fellowship with thee” (Methodist Conference Plymouth 1982, 1983, p. 792).

<sup>71</sup> Rambo thinks they are. He refers to the “... quest for the sacred and the experience of the holy, the yearning for transcendence, and the human desire for interaction with the supernatural pervade human history” (1995, p. 32).

<sup>72</sup> A possible indication of this is the piling of flowers at the scene of terror attacks in European cities, or the informal crosses erected at the roadside in South Africa where fatal accidents have occurred.

<sup>73</sup> Esser is a charming essayist whose writings were collated after his death in s’Gravenhage in 1885: he argues with passion for the need of “*straatprediking*” (street preaching) and records more than twenty years of experience in convening street liturgy – I have translated it into English but do not really anticipate much call for it (Esser, 1886).

<sup>74</sup> Hoekendijk is a much later Dutch author, but whose work has a similar “let us get out there” theme. Bosch cites him a great deal. Hoekendijk has the quixotic notion that the church should turn itself “inside out” (Hoekendijk, 1964). I laboriously read it in Dutch before I discovered a handy (but humourless) English translation by Isaac Rottenberg (Hoekendijk, 1966).

<sup>75</sup> Saunders and Campbell follow the diarist approach of Esser and Wesley in recording sermons and occasions of public liturgy in building up a case for allowing church-outsiders, and specifically the homeless of Atlanta, access to the “word on the street” (Saunders & Campbell, 2000).

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dancing too<sup>76</sup>. I shall return to this issue when examining attitudes of ministers to the sending of their congregants into lives of evangelism lived in between churches.

If Hughes is correct that liturgy involves "...the terror and the ecstasy of coming to the edge of ourselves" (2003, p. 276)[cf.2.2.1] then it seems reasonable to me that such edge moments, when they happened in the spaces between the churches, would generate liturgical responses (expressed, perhaps, in terms other than Christian). As Pargament argues, ""Events do not simply happen. People create, anticipate and plan for events in ways to enhance significance....Negative events are no less constructed than positive events." (1997, p. 95). And that meaning-enhancing significance is the domain of ritual, where actions carry a freight of meaning<sup>77</sup>. And if Christians were present with the alternatively faithed, they would be in a position to share the edge moment, but interpret it differently – which would result in a dialogue regarding liturgical responses. Alternatively, the very meeting of liturgical worlds might in itself generate an "edge experience" for both Christian and the alternatively faithed, with the potential for reflection and even conversion<sup>78</sup>.

### 2.2.5 Liturgy: a working definition

As I sift through the data and try and frame a comprehensible narrative of the evangelism of the Methodist churches in Cape Town, I therefore use the following summary definition of liturgy:

*Liturgy is the complex of ritual words and actions, spoken and enacted both inside and outside of the sacred precinct, by members of the believing community, in the presence of both God and the alternatively faithed, that reflects and articulates the core values of the Christian community, and which socialises both existing and prospective members into the ethos of the church.*

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<sup>76</sup> Sibusiso Pewa's master's thesis on dance in worship deserves to be more widely read (Pewa, 1997); dance is much more than a metaphor in Cape Town Methodism.

<sup>77</sup> An interesting example of this might be the phenomenon of the "Bucket list", popularised by the movie (The Bucket List, 2007). It could be read as a ritual preparation for death. Significantly it is certainly not restricted to those who have received a medical estimate of the time of their death – it is embraced by the young as a ritual means of giving significance to life in the face of the ultimate meaninglessness of death – there are websites devoted to the concept, perhaps the *memento mori* of our times (cf. bucketlist.org, 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Conversion can happen in any direction of course, as Rambo notes so helpfully (1995, pp. xi-xii).

## 2.2.6 Conclusion

If liturgy expresses the “life and mission” of the church, and if one aspect of that is that Methodists consider themselves to be “no longer their own, but God’s”<sup>79</sup>, then it seems Methodist Christians are called to live all of life liturgically. It would seem impossible to draw a liturgical line under one experience (in a church building, for instance) and then go on to some area where God’s writ does not run (secular life) and the “work of the people” (*leitourgia*) is not called for, or called for to a lesser extent or with different intention. The rituals might change, but every Christian (and here I intend no distinction between “Clergy” and “laity”) can and ought to be a liturgant amongst the alternatively faithed. A “liturgy of conversion” can potentially address this crucial area of Christian self-understanding and enable the alternatively faithed to interact with the Christian worldview.

## 2.3. CONVERSION THEORY as a research tool

My problem statement identifies the issue of conversion as key in understanding the current situation of the Methodist churches in Cape Town. Why do the Methodist Churches of Cape Town not expand vigorously through ... conversions? [1.2.1: 42]. The church is technically composed of those who serve their neighbours and bring them to believe in Jesus – at least as far as the rubrics for Confirmation and the Baptism of Adults is concerned (MCSA, 1975, pp. A24, A39): so the question is, why are so few of the neighbours of Methodists converting to Christian faith? Perhaps a more sharply defined concept of what this “conversion” consists of might help Churches to take concrete steps towards creating the conditions under which it might more readily occur.

### 2.3.1 John Wesley and Conversion

One of John Wesley’s dominant metaphors<sup>80</sup> for conversion is the new birth, “that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life” (1787, p. 520), “...a vast inward change, a change wrought in the soul, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, a change in the whole manner of our existence...: (1787, p. 175). But this is not the only metaphor he uses – other key concepts he expounds in the Forty-Four Sermons are awakening from

<sup>79</sup> The reference is to the annual Covenant Prayer prayed by every Methodist in the Covenant/*Nqophiso* Service: “I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal” (MCSA, 1975, p. D10).

<sup>80</sup> Wesley picked out a selection of sermons (mostly his own) which he felt provided a sufficient representation of his theological emphases (1787, pp. v-vii). These were published as a single volume and later given the role of preserving for posterity the core theological concerns of the Methodist movement. He included three sermons on the New Birth in his official doctrinal collection of 44 Sermons – one each on John 3:7, John 3:8, and John 3:9 (1787, pp. 514, 162, 174)

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slumber (1787, p. 20), finding the way into the Kingdom (1787, p. 73), the first-fruits of the Spirit (1787, p. 85), being adopted (1787, p. 96), the witness of the Spirit (1787, p. 111), the circumcision of the heart (1787, p. 151), and entering through the narrow gate (1787, p. 351). About 20% of his self-selected collection of sermons concerned conversion in some way – its necessity, nature and effects. What people desperately needed, in Wesley’s view, was a “vast inward change”, not simply attendance at the liturgy of the church<sup>81</sup>.

Wesley preached a constant stream of sermons with the settled intention of awakening, converting and establishing a “converting lifestyle” through a restless search for unreachable perfection (1787, pp. 457-480).

### 2.3.2 Conversion as Change

Whether one relates to Wesley’s rhetorical tactics or not, it is clear that he saw change as an essential and ongoing need for humanity in the process of the full restoration of the Kingdom of God (1787, pp. 73-84). For him, the process of conversion had not fully come on line until there was a signal change: the sign of “rebirth”

Barth (whose neo-orthodox approach seems to share an attitude similar to that of Wesley’s - and mine - towards the normativity of the New Testament) likewise sees conversion as an ongoing process of change throughout life. For Barth, conversion neither consists of a single event in the life of a Christian, nor a series of events that somehow punctuate the Christian life (1958, p. 560). But he does consider that there must be a point at which the human being wakes up to the reality of God and the call of God to conversion (1958, pp. 554, 558).

Although he contrasts his point of view to that of “the Methodists” (Barth, 1958, p. 567) , it seems to be actually very close to John Wesley’s schema of awakening, conversion and perfection in holiness<sup>82</sup>(cf. Wesley, 1787, pp. 20ff, 162ff, 457ff).

Newbigin also understands conversion as thoroughgoing change, urging that “...the conversion for which Jesus calls, and which the Spirit now effects in those who turn to him, is a radically new way of understanding: it involves at the same time a demand for total self-surrender and the gift of utter security. It involves both calling and promise, demand and gift, at the same time. And it concerns the whole of life....There can be no muffling of the call to

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<sup>81</sup> Referring to the objection that according to the rubrics of the Anglican church one was considered to have been born again at baptism as an infant, he says, “The question is not, what you was made in baptism (do not evade); but what are you now?” (1787, p. 172) For Wesley, baptismal privilege was easily lost: “How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners? What think you? Are these now the children of God?” (1787, p. 172). And lest you thought that you were safely respectable, Wesley shuts the door on you too: “Mine and your desert, as well as theirs, is hell! And it is mere mercy, free, undeserved mercy, that we are not now in unquenchable fire.” (1787, p. 172)

<sup>82</sup> It does not appear that Barth interacted directly with John Wesley’s thought – he seems to have developed his ideas about “Methodism” from what it had become in his time.

conversion, but equally there can be no limiting of its range, no offer of ‘cheap grace’ which promises security without commitment to that mission for which Jesus went to the cross” (1989, p. 139). Unless great issues of change are at stake, there can be no proper talk of “conversion”; conversion is not only change, it is obvious change<sup>83</sup>. It might indeed occur incrementally over a long time, but the end of process needs to be a characteristically radical change from the place from which it consciously began<sup>84</sup>. For Barth one of those changes is from private to public life: “when we convert and are renewed in the totality of our being, we cross the threshold of our private existence and move out into the open” (1958, p. 565).

Rambo induces from his wide-ranging inter-religious study of “conversion” (both from and to Christianity, and from and to other positions of faith), that in the Christian traditions, “... conversion needs to be radical, striking to the root of the Christian predicament.... a vortex of vulnerability.... given that human beings are capable of infinite self-deception and ... [their] proclivities are often anti-God, [they] require change that is foundational and pervasive.” (1995, p. xii). Changing metaphors, he calls conversion “... a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment and involvement.” (1995, p. 2)

Rambo’s list (or rather matrix) of possible areas (intellectual, religious, emotional, social, and praxis-oriented) where this conversion-change can be seen to have taken place enables one to consider the vast range of human life that is potentially liable to this tumultuous change (1995, p. 2):

- ❖ *No faith – faith commitment*
- ❖ *Change in religious faith-system affiliation*
- ❖ *Change of subsystem/orientation within a larger faith system*
- ❖ *Haphazard superstition – faith in a deity*
- ❖ *Rote & ritual mediation of God – spontaneous apprehension of God with or without rote and ritual*
- ❖ *Threatening, punitive deity – loving, supportive deity*
- ❖ *World as evil – World as sacred*
- ❖ *From self-immolation to personal dignity*

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<sup>83</sup> In our age where commercial advertising constantly erodes the force of language by hyper-hyperbolisation, “conversion” has come to mean almost any slight change of preference, as in “I don’t drink cappuccino anymore: I’ve totally been converted to lattes.”

<sup>84</sup> It is important to my argument as it develops later that conversion can be understood as starting before the person who converts is conscious of the process at work, tapping into Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace (cf. Wilson, 2011, p. 58).

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- ❖ *From hedonism – responsibility*
- ❖ *From selfishness – justice*

All this paints a picture of quite unusual personal, interpersonal, social and political change. Not all theorists have seen it in this way; Stromberg, for one, restricts his definition of conversion to “intensification”, and studies it as such. He works on self-reported conversion experiences, and analyses them from a purely psychological point of view as “identity construction” (1993, p. 1). I will return to that later [2.3.5: 47]. For the moment, it seems that there is consensus that conversion has to be about change. In studying evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town, I need to track whether such radical change processes are at work, and how they might potentially come about.

### 2.3.3 Conversion as Process

I have touched on this in the previous section, but would now like to bring the idea of “process” into the foreground.<sup>85</sup> Barth considers that we have a tendency to sleepiness/sloth throughout our lives which requires God to keep on prodding us (1958, p. 560). Barth defines “sin” as a fatal slothfulness from which we need to be roused (Adam, 2004.) (1958, pp. 553-558). In the process of conversion we will have interludes of sleepiness, although for Barth we can only “start off” once.

Mbiti gives a cultural-anthropological view of conversion from the study of cultures that value process. It is essential to consult Mbiti because of the fact that Cape Town is in some ways a typical African city – full of African peoples with all the issues of post-coloniality and globalisation on show:

*“...when adults take the decision to embrace the Christian faith, conversion is clearly a process. Many individuals may give dates and occasions for their conversion. But that would only mean dating a particular experience or event along the road to conversion. Large gatherings for evangelistic preaching, as well as healing sessions, tend to create an atmosphere which encourages apparently dramatic experiences of conversion. But rarely, if ever, is an African converted immediately upon hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ for the first time. The message takes time to find its way into the psychological constitution of the individual, into the social and cultural taste of the community, and into the religious depth of the people. There has to be*

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<sup>85</sup> As with the study of any complex aspect of human experience, the conceptual boundaries between related-but-different areas of the model we use will tend to be blurred (Bosch, 1991, p. 368).

*a time of incubation, for the individual and the community, before the hatching takes place.” (1986, p. 128).*

Mbiti’s image develops the metaphor of “new birth” by changing species - mammalian to avian – and powerfully illustrates the secret inner growth of the Gospel through an apparently dormant incubation process that inevitably takes time. And Mbiti alerts us to a major issue neglected by conversion theorists who work from within a North-Atlantic-rim paradigm (De Groot, 1952, pp. 118-179): conversion is often best understood as a social event, with all the personal-social interplay appropriate to each specific culture/sub-culture. Rambo, although he is conspicuously Western, actually expresses the social complexity dimensions of the process quite well: “Conversion,” he says, “is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations....” (1995, p. 5). His matrix model of the forces/issues involved in conversion is thought-provoking: “A stage model is appropriate in that conversion is a process of change over time, generally exhibiting a sequence of processes, although there is sometimes a spiraling effect – a going back and forth between stages....[it] is not only multidimensional and historical, but also *process orientated*...conversion is approached as a series of elements that are interactive and cumulative over time.” (1995, pp. 16-17). Where I would differ from Rambo, taking the lead from Mbiti, would be that Rambo seems to envision only an *individual* being “encapsulated” in a community, whereas I think that it is essential to have a model that specifically acknowledges that sometimes a conversion might be a *communal* change from one worldview to another, as well as into the community of the church. I have redrawn Rambo’s diagram here (1995, p. 17):



Figure 3 Rambo's Conversion Matrix (Rambo, 1995, p. 17)

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### 2.3.4 Conversion as the Quest for Meaning

So Christian conversion can be expected to be something more than a change of preferences or brand-commitment. It is a strong, self-aware transition at the level of worldview commitments. The consequence of this change in the inner world of communities and individuals is that life is experienced as being significantly more meaningful (cf. Barth, 1958, p. 564). And as Pargament points out, the “enhancement of significance” is one of the most deeply satisfying of human emotions, something for which humans will literally make life or death commitments (1997, p. 198). “Religious conversion is one of humanity’s ways of approaching its self-conscious predicament, of solving or resolving the mystery of human origins, meaning, and destiny,” says Rambo (1995, p. 2).

The domain of “origins, meanings and destiny” is dealt with by anthropologists in their study of world views (Kraft, 1996, pp. 51-68; Luzbetak, 1988, p. 252ff). Any change in these areas is a change at the deepest level of concepts and commitments (cf. Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, pp. 41-42).

### 2.3.5 Conversion as a Change in Personal-Social Identity

Social scientists all agree that “identity” (national, regional, tribal, communal and individual), is a key category for understanding humanity (cf. Stromberg, 1993, p. xii et passim; Augsburg, 1986, pp. 79-110). A person or community that converts always experiences a change of identity (Rambo, 1995, p. 31). Lucie-Smith, commenting on Augustine’s conversion, notes that it “...was a change in narrative, self-understanding and identity.” (2007, p. 151). And this narrative-identity is always constructed in relationship with regard to God and with regard to God’s people<sup>86</sup> (cf. Rambo, 1995, p. 102; Barth, 1958, p. 556).

One of the conversion and identity issues Rambo has drawn our attention to is the amount of socio-cultural distance that is required for the convert to assume her/his new identity. The greater the cultural distance between the new identity and the former identity, the greater the energy required to cross the gap. This can be represented in a graph (1995, pp. 13-14):

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<sup>86</sup> And, I would suggest, with regard to the people who still hold the worldview one has just converted from.

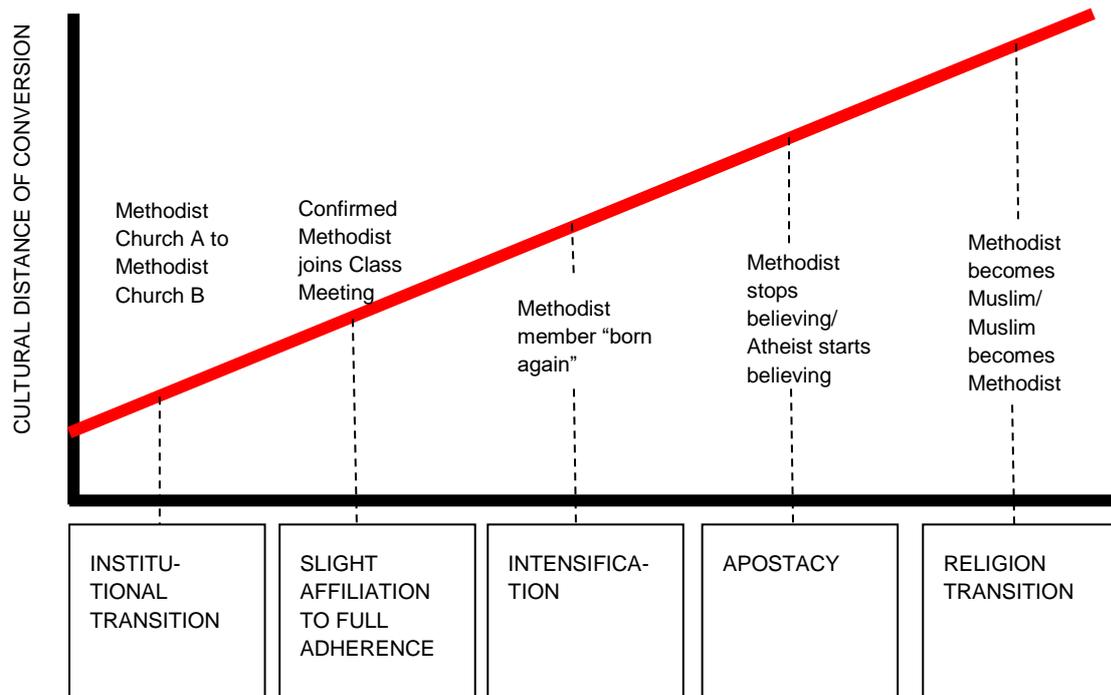


Figure 4 Cultural Distances Crossed in Conversion (Rambo, 1995, pp. 13-14)

Mbiti adds the important insight that the new identity is not completely divorced from the former identity. "... nobody comes into the Christian faith with a religious vacuum and nobody can sweep out every trace of former religious background. The Christian faith, with its biblical background, in effect finds a certain number of common or similar religious elements in the African convert, with Jesus Christ as the central point of departure." (1986, p. 128). The new identity has to enhance meaningfulness for the convert or converts. Lucie-Smith makes the same point: "People may well rely on narrative in their self-understanding, but they may feel the pull of conflicting narratives. In addition, the narrative that constitutes their self-understanding may be, in important aspects, incoherent, a narrative that is in the process of becoming rather than one that is fully formed" (2007, p. 144)

Another layer of complexity is added to the formation of new identity in conversion by considering that the "...process of conversion is a product of the interactions among the convert's aspirations, needs and orientations, the nature of the group into which she or he is being converted, and the particular social matrix in which these processes are taking place" (Rambo, 1995, p. 7). Mbiti observes that "...while there is a place for individual conversions ... the community experience of the faith is very meaningful since the individual is very much part of the wider community. In the traditional African setting, the individual cannot meaningfully embrace the Christian faith while others in the family, or in the community, do not do the same" (1986, p. 129).

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One can see how this might be applied to the Methodist Churches in the multi-cultural milieu of Cape Town in order to generate helpful insights. Where are the churches expecting to find and gain converts? What cultural distances are proving to be a challenge? How does somebody with unresolved issues of identity and significance stand to experience conversion in a Methodist context? If you are culturally a Christian and develop the need for deep-level integration, are there ways of converting and yet remaining a Methodist, or is one necessarily bound to convert to some other community-granting social group like another church, a gang, a sports club, or a political party? If identity formation is truly so key in the development of identity, what are the Methodist Churches of Cape Town expecting in terms of cultural distance to be crossed by converts? Are they anticipating anything other than intensification of identity by a few Methodists?

### 2.3.6 Conversion as Gift

Rambo begins his study of conversion by making this auto-ethnographic observation: “I believe that conversion requires the intervention of God to deliver me from the captivity that I perceive ensnaring me” (1995, p. xii).

This sense of needing outside intervention is described by Karl Barth as an “awakening to conversion” (1958, p. 553ff). Barth posits that we are by nature in a deeply sleepy (slothful) state (1958, p. 554), from which we are powerless to awaken ourselves. He insists that an awakening must come from God (1958, p. 555), not our circumstances, and certainly not our own efforts (Barth, 1958, pp. 555-556). Barth considers that one reason that we cannot awaken ourselves is that the sleep we are in is actually spiritual death (1958, p. 555), and so God’s “jolt” is the equivalent of miraculous resurrection. It has to come from outside; and it has to be an act of God (Barth, 1958, pp. 554,556). John Wesley emphatically shared this view (1787, pp. 20-31). It is important to note that social and psychological studies of conversion can only be silent about this point of awakening (cf. Stromberg, 1993, p. 14). They can point to factors that seem to be present when conversion happens (cf. Stromberg, 1993, p. 15), but they cannot offer a reason why one person or community will experience conversion, while another will not - even when the same elements are apparently present for both.

There is something inscrutable here. A Christian might explain conversion to faith in God as an act of grace. But what is in operation when a person converts from Christianity to Atheism? Or when an Akha village takes a council-led decision to become Christian, summarily appointing an arbitrary person as “village pastor”<sup>87</sup>? One can observe the ongoing conversion-process (in Barthian terms), and one can describe a matrix of processes that

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<sup>87</sup> In 1999 I visited an Akha village in Northern Thailand and had this conversation with the pastor.

pertain to it (Rambo, 1995, pp. 13-14), but one cannot observe the actual tipping point.<sup>88</sup> From MacIntyre's point of view, conversion (like ethics) is open to being analysed as a sociological phenomenon; but although it might be *explicable*, it is not *predictable* (cf. 1981, pp. 93-95).

### 2.3.7 Conversion as Acquiring Agency

Barth says about conversion that "...as [people] may lift up themselves they acquire and have here and now, in all their lack of freedom, a freedom to do this of which they avail themselves." (1958, p. 554)<sup>89</sup>. A common theme in the self-reported accounts of conversion is the miraculous acquisition of agency by the convert (cf. Stromberg, 1993, pp. 101-106). Although a lot of effort is put into encoding the gospel message by the evangelist, Rambo notes that "...there is a continuum between the convert's agency and the advocate's agency in conversion" (1995, p. 44). The agency of the convert appears to be key to both the start and the continuance of the conversion process.

Although conversion is read, theologically, as something initiated by God, as a gift, it is also characteristic of Wesley's thought to think of humans as not being passively overwhelmed in an irresistible process, their agency subsumed in a wave of God's power. Barth, too, in his consideration of conversion, pays particular attention to what converts *do* once they have been awakened by God. He sees the ongoing conversion process as one in which humans are fully empowered to "lift themselves up" (1958, p. 559ff) once they have been woken up. Rambo follows this line too in his evaluation of the agency of the convert: "...many (indeed most) converts are active agents in their conversion process." (1995, p. 44). That was certainly John Wesley's position (1787, pp. 554-565). Lucie-Smith makes the same assumption, based on his reading of Augustine: "The human being is capable of 'turning' (*conversio*), capable, rooted as they are and difficult though it may be, of refashioning their spirit through a change of their old life: *mutatione veteris vitae resculpimus spiritum nostrum*<sup>90</sup>. Again, they are capable of turning to something that is not themselves, that lies beyond the things that constitute themselves: *convertisti te ad aliud quod tu non eras*<sup>91</sup>" (2007, p. 134).

I am aware that this takes me into the heart of the Calvinist-Arminianist debate. But for the sake of this research I intend to bracket that issue too, for pragmatic reasons. The point that

<sup>88</sup> The reference is to Norman Gladwell's concept that the cultural and emotional pressure for change builds up over time and then is released suddenly (Gladwell, 2001).

<sup>89</sup> Coming from the doyen of neo-orthodoxy, this stance appears to me to be astonishingly close to Wesley's standpoint on the balance between free will and evangelism (cf. Works, 1985, pp. 413-421; McKormick, 1991, p. 39; Outler, 1991, p. 191).

<sup>90</sup> Tr. "changing our old life we reshape our spirit"

<sup>91</sup> Tr. "converting yourself into something else which you had not been"

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I wish to take from this reflection is that after experiencing a conversion, converts usually report that they are empowered to work towards fulfilling their own values, freed from moral paralysis.

### **2.3.8 Conversion: working definition**

So this brings me to a place where I can frame a working definition of conversion:

*Conversion is a meaning-enriching, identity-(re)defining, and commitment-shaping process of change in worldview, initiated by God, described by converts, and experienced by converts in a social context; a process which enhances the meaningfulness of the convert's life, confers a social identity, and enhances their agency.*

### **2.3.9 Conclusion**

Reading the various narrative data of my research in the light of this definition should enable me to appreciate more fully the situation with regard to conversions in the Methodist churches of Cape Town, and develop insights that might enrich the praxis of the church.

## **2.4. EVANGELISM THEORY as a research tool**

Since I have raised the issue of evangelism along with conversion in my title, another tool I need is a working definition of evangelism. David Bosch positions evangelism as one of thirteen elements of a postmodern paradigm of mission that he understood to be emerging amongst the churches of the world (1991, pp. 409-420), thus showcasing it as a key area for contemporary missiological debate. Bosch argues that the evangelistic strand of the emerging paradigm of mission may be seen as:

*"...that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to this world and its powers; embracing Christ as Saviour and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace and justice on earth; and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ" (1991, p. 420).*

For Bosch, evangelism is aimed at facilitating a radical conversion process similar to that which I have outlined – the “radical reorientation” of life. He also raises the issue of community conversion alongside the possibility of individual conversion. And he places evangelism in the context of a far-reaching four-element discipleship program.

### 2.4.1 John Wesley as Evangelist

John Wesley was one such a radically converted person, and one of the radical changes that he grew into and developed throughout his life was an insatiable compulsion to proclaim the Gospel. One example can stand for a myriad:

*“Early in the morning we left Manchester...fully determined to lose no opportunity of awakening, instructing, or exhorting, any whom we might meet in our journey” (1827-1, p. 86)*

This entry, from very early on in John Wesley’s published *Journal*, can be read as programmatic for his life – he set out to “awaken, instruct and exhort” anyone he came across. He was a man who had something to say and was ready to go out and find an audience to hear it. Outler argues that although Methodists traditionally refer to John Wesley’s so-called “Aldersgate experience” where he felt his heart “strangely warmed” as his point of conversion<sup>92</sup>, it might be more helpful to think of his taking up Whitefield’s challenge of street preaching as his true point of transformation (cf. Outler, 1971, p. 19). Whatever led up to it, Wesley became a man with a missional mandate to boundary-disregarding rousing of sleepy humanity to the reality of God. People needed to realise the breaking in of the kingdom, learn about its implications, and be challenged to live in accordance with that knowledge.

“So that I might not lie idle” he writes on one occasion, describing the waiting period in Cork for a fair wind to take him back to England “I went down to the beach and began preaching to as wild, unpromising congregation as ever I saw in this kingdom” (1827-2, p. 423). The thread that runs through all his work is a restless communicating of the Word of God and its implications in churches and in public places, to vast crowds, to small groups, and to individuals<sup>93</sup>.

The emphasis that the *Journal* adds to the Wesleyan tradition – missing from the *Forty-Four Sermons* and the *Notes on the New Testament* - is that John Wesley considered active

<sup>92</sup> No Methodist reader is likely to need this footnote, due to the fact that the Methodist Church world-wide devotes one Sunday every year to recalling the incident where John Wesley experienced forgiveness of sin as a personal reality – Aldersgate Sunday (cf. Wesley, 1827-1, p. 102).

<sup>93</sup> Wesley did not use the word “evangelise” – nobody did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But he used a great many words for “communication”. Bosch points out that the cluster of words related to the Greek *εὐαγγελιζειν* was not taken into use in English until the late nineteenth century (1991, p. 409).

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proclamation of the Gospel essential inside churches, yes, *but also in the spaces between the churches*. Failure to preach in either arena would have been unthinkable.

*“What marvel the Devil does not like field-preaching! Neither do I; I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, an handsome pulpit; but where is my zeal, if I do not trample all these under foot, in order to save one more soul?” (Wesley, 1746, p. 460)*

It was an ongoing theme that Wesley returned to throughout his life: the spaces between the churches need preachers as much as the churches themselves.

### 2.4.2 Evangelism Addresses People of Faith...Alternative Faith

People who are not Christians, who have no commitment to Christian values or beliefs, do not have an empty worldview. Newbigin points out that “the ‘secular’ society is not a neutral area into which we can project the Christian message. It is an area already occupied by other gods.” (2008, p. 48). We may not treat people as inferior or irrelevant because they differ from us: and a corollary of that is accepting that they have a worldview that is as adequate as possible for them, held with deep faith commitments with regard to what they see as the basic realities of existence. As Kraft defines it, these are “...the basic assumptions, values and allegiances in terms of which people interpret and behave” (1996, p. 11). People live lives that are meaningful within the ambit of these ultimate commitments. Newbigin urges us to “ask about the relation of the gospel to all who live by other commitments, whether they are called religious or secular.” (1989, p. 173).

So it seems to involve a certain level of disrespect to refer to people who find themselves in such a situation *vis a vis* the Christian faith as “non-Christians” or “non-believers” – in the same way that many people were denied independent identity and agency under apartheid legislation by being classified as “non-white”.<sup>94</sup> The Bible does use the phrase “unbeliever” as a category boundary-marker, but in our contemporary situation exclusionary discourse is likely to be unhelpful; for somebody who has other-than-Christian faith commitments, after all, it is the *Christian* who is the “unbeliever”. I therefore prefer to use the term “*alternatively-faithed*”<sup>95</sup> when I refer to those whom I believe should be significant conversation partners in any discussion of evangelism.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> In his book *Walking with the Poor* (2011), Bryant Myers cleverly refers to the poor and the *non-poor*, thus effectively using the linguistic conventions of power against the powerful. (2011, p. 63)

<sup>95</sup> This is a stylistically ugly neologism: but I think it is worth using it in order to maintain respectful valency of different faith positions.

<sup>96</sup> This raises what seems to be a methodological flaw in my research-plan. How can I talk about the *alternatively-faithed* if I am not talking to them? Is it possible to bracket them pending future research, while I focus exclusively on one side of a quintessentially two-sided issue? I came to see that it would

Under this heading I also assume that people who hold to *Christian* worldviews that are different from each other are also “alternatively faithed” to each other. So much energy is expended by Christians on vilifying other Christians, attacking and “defending the faith” in sometimes the most unedifying displays of not-so-thinly veiled hatred and fear, that I suggest that it is important for the church to develop a more robustly charitable outlook towards alterity. If Christians cannot love Christians, how can they love those who identify themselves as something else? But this is also important in that some Christians seem distressingly fast asleep to the personal and social implications of the Gospel that washes over their heads Sunday by Sunday – they hold the Christian faith in an alternative way. So I will use this term to describe those who, although they might share my Christian, even Methodist, culture, nonetheless hold that it is sufficient to be culturally affiliated to a church without feeling a need to be awake towards God.

### **2.4.3 Evangelism as an Encounter between Christians and Alternatively-faithed People**

“*No conversion occurs without encounter,*” maintains Rambo (1995, p. 86). Experience has taught me that it is essential to articulate this. Christian people seem deeply isolated, physically, emotionally and intellectually, from those who inhabit other worldviews. And yet, as Newbigin observes, “It is a striking fact ... that almost all the proclamations of the gospel which are described in Acts are in response to questions asked by those outside the Church.” (Newbigin, 1989, p. 116). It seems to follow that Christians need to be consciously and consistently present to the alternatively faithed if they intend make themselves available to be asked any questions. Waiting for somebody to ask a question might possibly be a defensible strategy for evangelism; but not being present to either provoke or answer such questions is not.

However, some people treat evangelism as if it was simply another function of communication within the sphere of Christians – a “back to basics” message every now and again, perhaps, just to make sure the whole congregation is on the same salvation page and that any visitor might perhaps not “slip through the net”. For Kenneth Wilson, an appropriate application of the Methodist theological insight that the blessings of the Gospel are “...not

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make this study too extensive to include a whole new set of data. I have already noted that I have to exclude key players: Ordinary people in the congregations; those involved in missionary education; ministers of other denominations involved in Cape Town churches. Further culturally specific investigation needs to be done into the attitudes and insights of the alternatively faithed from different sub-cultures in Cape Town: including perhaps such groups as white Afrikaans; Xhosa urbanites; LGBTQI community; English post-moderns. For the sake of this investigation I confine myself to a single cadre of conversation partners – the Methodist ministers.

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something to be hugged to oneself, silently, but to be enjoyed, shared and explored with others” is that the Church must be “...welcoming, inclusive, caring and concerned not just for its members but for the whole world of God’s creation” (2011, p. 81). Once again, contact with the alternatively faithed is predicated on their willingness to enter and share Christian space. That might indeed be part of the evangelistic task of the church, but it does not seem to be the logical limit of it.

Rambo expresses the difficulty this way: “Trajectories of potential converts and available advocates do not often meet in such a way that the conversion process can germinate, take root, and flourish.” (1995, p. 87). An evangelistic theory that is likely to be of use in a situation of diminishing Christian influence in society needs to articulate clearly that the “proper place” of evangelism is amongst those who do not attend Church on Sundays, and also, perhaps, who do not attend “evangelistic events”.

### **2.4.4 Evangelism as Agreement-to-Talk between Christians and Alternatively-faithed People**

Walter Fisher argues that communication between people cannot happen unless certain preconditions are fulfilled: sharing a common symbol system, “some degree of trust”, willingness to communicate, belief that this communication is a good thing, and an interest in/expectation of “the attainment or advancement of truth” (1987, p. 92). It seems therefore logical that evangelism needs to be such a dialogue, voluntary from both sides. If that holds true then the “phenomenon of meaning” is “...the underlying power which holds proposers and recipients in their collaborative task”. (Hughes, 2003, p. 201).

It seems reasonable that the same process of meaning-construction that Hughes observes in the making and performing of liturgy exists as the Christian worldview is placed for reflection next to the worldview of the alternatively-faithed. The “...meaning-making, meaning-grasping act [is] an action in which two or more elements of the known world are comprehended (‘grasped together’) so as to yield a way of seeing the world differently.” (2003, p. 80).

But the only true way of reflecting on the comprehension of “two or more elements of the known world” in order to “yield a way of seeing the world differently” is if representative adherents/inhabitants of two worldviews interact on equal terms with each other about their shared experience (cf. Bosch, 1991, pp. 483-489; Keifert, 1992, p. 80). For any worldview change to happen there needs to be a process of reading experience through two possible worldview lenses (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 474ff): otherwise we are merely dealing with second-hand outsiders’ reports on somebody else’s profound inner reality.

Discussion, argument, dialogue – "...a form of communication in which persons mutually engage in and constitute a transaction and the message that emerges from it" (Fisher, 1987, p. 25) - these are essential to understanding the nature of evangelism that facilitates conversion to Christianity. The nature of a liturgy of conversion is likely to demand a different approach to communication than that generally used inside church buildings.

#### **2.4.5 Evangelism as Communicating a Story**

Hughes states the obvious when he says: "...there can be no reception if there has been no proposal" (2003, p. 197). If nothing is sent out with the intention of communicating, then nothing can be received. Evangelism cannot be simply the "passive witness" of a good life well lived. The data about God only becomes part of the "shared symbol system" (cf. Fisher, 1987, p. 92) of the Christian and the alternatively-faithed once the story has been told.

Newbigin explains the need for a new story to be placed under discussion in evangelism:

*"...the logic of mission is this: the true meaning of the human story has been disclosed. Because it is the truth it must be shared universally. It cannot be a private opinion. When we share it with all peoples we give them the opportunity to know the truth about themselves, to know who they are, because they can know the true story of which their lives are a part" (1989, p. 125)*

I will argue later that evangelism needs to shake itself free from its bondage to being a pocket-theology of salvation, consisting of either a set of proposals to accept or a set of steps to take. Evangelism as modelled in the gospels might be better understood as the telling of a certain story, and such "a persuasive story and character ... must be true to the past, celebrate cultural values, provide a heightened perception of the people, and be presented with consummate skill." (Fisher, 1987, p. 156). As I have noted above, communication has not happened until the message has been allocated a place of significance *by the recipient* somewhere in their consciousness [2.1.1]. This brings us into the field of what Bosch would have meant by evangelism needing to give people a "valid opportunity" perceiving that they have been challenged to change (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 420). And I would argue that the most appropriate way to ensure that there is a shared interpretant is if the Gospel is delivered in the mode that it was originally delivered – as a narrative. Narratives provide a great deal of flexibility in communication, but once the two parties in the process of evangelism-communication have the same story under discussion, the process of communication has begun. Some "communicators" might be deeply disturbed by the approximations and vagaries of interpretation that are liable to take place through the use of narrative communication, but it could be argued that the neat, formulaic delivery of a well-

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conceptualised theory of conversion might be equally approximately received – but without the advantage of the deliverer of the formula being aware that his/her formula has been construed in a radically different way to what was intended. The advantage of story-telling is that everybody involved is aware of the need for the negotiation of approximations. In addition, formulae are easily forgotten, especially if they are not comprehensible in terms of the world view of the recipient. But an artfully told story<sup>97</sup> is unforgettable and will continue to lodge in the recipient's consciousness, potentially generating insight throughout his/her life; Jerram Barrs argues that "Questions and stories work together...long after they are heard, because they engage a person so fully" (2009, p. 65).

### 2.4.6 Evangelism as an Invitation to a Community by the Community

Since I am looking into liturgical aspects of conversion, and since liturgy is a communal aspect of faith, I must inquire as to how evangelism can be viewed as a communal activity<sup>98</sup>. Newbigin considers that the task of the congregation is to "continue the mission of Jesus" as they "confront men and women with the ultimate issues of human existence" (1989, p. 122). In missional terms (from the perspective of Bosch's paradigm) that must include evangelism. If evangelism is to be seen, as I have discussed, as a story that is willingly, even eagerly, discussed between Christians and the alternatively faithed in a place not necessarily controlled by Christians, a question arises: how does this "conversation" arise? The alternatively faithed are unlikely to enter Christian space to initiate discussion on what they see. Merely by giving people permission to join us in our liturgy (by being welcoming (cf. Keifert, 1992 - title) the Church is not making itself genuinely available to the alternatively faithed. The answer must be that Christians emerge from their buildings into the space between the churches.

I shall argue that this movement should be pastor-led<sup>99</sup>. If all life is liturgical for a Christian [2.3.3: 39-40] then the same liturgant who leads internal liturgical practice should logically be leading external liturgical practice as well. Guder moves us in this direction, where the pastor is moved conceptually from the centre of a bounded-set church to the periphery of a centred-

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<sup>97</sup> Hoekendijk says that "in order to regain freedom and flexibility in our witness...we must become completely at home in the strange new world of the Bible, so that we can move about in it with assurance and so that we can concretise and articulate shalom always in different ways in different situations" (1964, pp. 28 - my translation)

<sup>98</sup> Working against the popular image of the evangelist as an antisocial predator.

<sup>99</sup> Hoekendijk disagrees: for him, the pastor can only be present to the world in disguise as a lay-person, never in his/her clergy persona (1964, p. 63). Yet why should anybody be constrained to conceal their identity in the context of a secular city, I argue? And doesn't the example of clergy as clergy only when in retirement from the world send an incorrect separatist message to both church members and the alternatively faithed?

set church – leading the church from the centre of a covenant community situated on the boundary of church and world (1998, p. 210). This does not envision the pastor as a lone actor inviting outsiders to join the rest of her/his flock inside the sacred enclosure (1998, p. 214). It sees the most highly committed core of the people of God being the people of God who relate to the alternatively faithed (1998, p. 208).

This in turn does not envision a situation where a solitary outrider of the alternatively faithed might be cornered, encircled and brow-beaten by a powerful group of Christians. In my view that<sup>100</sup> is still doing evangelism *inside* Christian-controlled space, even though none of the sacred furniture might be present. A more promising approach seems to be aiming for a situation where social power is balanced – where neither side has cultural ascendancy, or, perhaps preferably, where the Christian presence is there in a slightly weaker cultural presence: as guests in the space controlled by others<sup>101</sup>.

#### **2.4.7 Evangelism as Ethical Persuasion**

Evangelism is persuasive communication. We expect the discussion of this story to persuade people to see things the same way we see them [2.1.1: 12]. If narrative is always persuasive, or “rhetorical” in intent, then telling the story of the Gospel is by definition attempting to influence another party. If evangelism is minimally read as *εὐαγγελίζειν* – “announcing good news” – then the intention at very least is to persuade people that this news is indeed *good*.

It is important to note<sup>102</sup> that the concept of evangelism needs to be broader than simply “witness”, although it can never cease to be “witness” (cf. Barth, 1958, p. 812). Nevertheless, it is important to note that witness itself is a socially acceptable and powerful mode of persuasion: a witness bears witness in order to persuade others that her/his version of events is what truly happened. In terms of evangelism one event that has really occurred to which the witness bears witness is that one finds the Good News to be true, and truly good. Fisher, I have noted, holds that any narrative is a form of “a *mode of social influence*” (1987, p. 90). What is widely touted as the primary mode of evangelism – witness through “doing good” only – can then only be partial witness – as if the eyewitness could not or would not testify at the trial. This is not to deny the importance of quietly “doing good” - one issue here, raised by the metaphor, is that spoken witness (or at least “adequately signed” witness),

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<sup>100</sup> On view every Sunday morning near the Claremont Taxi rank, for instance. A group of street people is promised food, and then submerged by a group of singing, praying and shouting Christians.

<sup>101</sup> As noted, Liturgists typically do not deal with the issues of liturgy that might arise if the liturgy was enacted on territory not under the control of Christians.

<sup>102</sup>In my research interviews and general interaction with the Methodist Churches in Cape Town, the “base position” on evangelism seems to be that it ought to witness by deeds and ought not to witness through words.

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exposes the witness to cross-examination in terms of evaluating her/his character and competence. As such the integrity of the life of the witness corroborates the truth of the story s/he tells [2.4.5 ]<sup>103</sup>. But there must be a spoken word.

But as Wesley admits, evangelism is an uncongenial occupation [2.4.1:]. The “commodious room” and the “soft pillow” beckon all God’s children. Being in a position of weakness, cultural discomfort, low-status, and being open to rejection through disdain or hostility, is, psychologically, enough to explain why evangelism is not a cherished project in many churches. In addition, it is a truth universally acknowledged that “...the majority of target populations reject new religious options.” (Rambo, 1995, p. 87). Which means that “...seeking proselytes is extremely difficult and discouraging work” (Rambo, 1995, p. 88). Which in turn means that when churches *do* turn their hand to evangelism, there is a temptation to either give up very soon, or to accelerate the “success” rate through unethical means: “...it is indisputable”, says Rambo, “that in order to foster religious involvement and commitment, even well-intentioned people can and often do deliberately manipulate others through careful deployment of emotional rewards and punishments” (1995, p. 105).

Rambo cites the work of Lofland and Skonofd in proposing certain “conversion motifs” – intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive (1995, pp. 14-16). I would argue back from his observation on Christians’ tendency to manipulate that “coercion” can be applied through all of those other motifs as well. Coercion is not only limited to the horrors of the Spanish inquisition or the compulsion by parents of sulky teenagers to attend church on Christmas day.

For example, Rambo notes how in terms of what Lofland and Skonofd might refer to as the “affectional motif”, “...both liberal and conservative Christian groups create encapsulated worlds of their own. Within those bubbles their beliefs, actions and experiences have special meaning and value. Outside those spheres, however, it is often difficult to communicate unique spiritual concepts, much less affirm their validity and value. In the conversion process, a potential adherent is invited and/or persuaded (some might say coerced) into these self-contained worlds in order to begin or strengthen the process of conversion – not unlike the African missionary stratagem of isolated compounds” (1995, p. 104).

On the other hand, where does one draw the line between persuasion and coercion? With regard to “encapsulation” Rambo reflects that “...although it sounds sinister, encapsulation is a procedure employed to some extent by everyone who wants to teach something new....If

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<sup>103</sup> The professor in C. S. Lewis’ book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* points out that Lucy’s character as a truth-teller should count for believing her unlikely story, rather than Edmund’s more plausible narrative, on account of Edmund’s settled character as a liar up to that point. The character of the witness encourages people to give their witness a hearing (1950, pp. 54-57), even if they might be “...confused by the absurdity of our message” (Hoekendijk, 1964, p. 27).

to change people it is necessary to control the flow of information, the issue is not *whether* but *how* people use encapsulation<sup>104</sup>...” (1995, p. 104). I will argue for a position with regard to the ethical boundaries of coercion/persuasion, but for the present it must be noted that a definition of evangelism must specifically exclude the unethical use of persuasive forms. As Newbigin observes, “when coercion of any kind is used in the interests of the Christian message, the message itself is corrupted” (1989, p. 10). It seems to me that if we conduct our persuasive communication in a neutral zone, or better still a location under control of the alternatively faithed where Christians are only admitted on sufferance, the options for the alternatively faithed to escape manipulative compulsion will be much higher, and therefore the integrity of the agency of those who *do* convert to Christianity will be under less suspicion. Evangelism exponents should generally become more credible.

### **2.4.8 Evangelism as the Work of God**

We need to be clear whether God wants his church to persuade the alternatively faithed to change allegiances and choose to join the people of God. Is this something that God desires, or is evangelism an exercise in public relations and building of religious market share? If it *is* a Gospel-mandated function of the church then we need to cope with excesses and the unsurprising presence of corrupting side-motivations. As we also have to do with the impulse to serve others, which often turns out to have unfortunate side-motivations of pride and power-mongering, patronisation and infantilisation of aid-recipients (cf. Myers, 1999 p.66).

And we need to be clear in what ways evangelism is the “work of God”. Do we mean that it is the domain of God alone to persuade people to change their faith allegiances? Or do we mean that evangelism is part of the work to which God calls his church to participate? If we incline more strongly to the former position, we will be much less inclined to attempt to persuade anybody. If we incline towards the second position, we might tend to over-estimate the significance of our contribution.

The work of God is of necessity opaque to categories of analysis, but it is an essential theological consideration. If the church expects God to bring about conversion in those distant to him, then they have authority to participate in evangelism. If God is not expected to be changing hearts or waking people up, then the church has no warrant to evangelise, and in fact it would be entirely appropriate to have a moratorium on mission in place. In this work I am going to assume with Newbigin and Bosch that there is such a warrant for persuasion – that it is “...not an optional extra but a sacred duty” (Bosch, 1991, p. 413)

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<sup>104</sup> The university system of lectures and tutorials is perhaps the classic expression of encapsulation – formerly known as “matriculation”.

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### 2.4.9 The Scope of “Evangelism”.

Bosch, as mentioned, places evangelism as one aspect of the mission of the church. Outler places evangelism as the ongoing realisation of the truth of the gospel in the life of the convert, from persuasion through to education, mission and social concern - what I would prefer to think of as “evangelisation” - facilitating the growth of Christians with reference to the norms and values of the Gospel (cf. 1971, pp. 23-25). It seems to me that by doing this Outler tacitly conflates “evangelism” and “discipleship”. It cannot be denied that the Gospel must continually shape and reshape the life of the Christian. But then where can we find space to address the particular issues faced by those who are being asked to consider joining the Christian community and those who are inviting them to do so? I would tend to place evangelism as the ground-work of discipleship, but not the entire process, which would give little scope to address the particular issues of presentation, persuasion and acceptance of the Gospel.

At this point I need to emphasize that in order to avoid the traps of unethical coercion, in my view evangelism is not the persuasion of people to *believe*. If one has a high view of the action of God in the process of conversion, then it would be dangerous to try to fill the role of persuading another person to have faith in God. The evangelist takes a humbler place in the process – the task of persuading them to consider the implications of the story of the Gospel. In this view evangelism is simply telling a story, which, if true, would have certain implications, one of which would be faith in the God of the Gospel, and another of which would be faith in the events of the Gospel. Evangelism, as I see it, is then a witness to a Christian’s faith in a story, and an invitation another human being (or group of humans) to ponder whether they didn’t see the same truth in the story as the witness did.

Westerhoff suggests that “...there are as many definitions of ‘evangelism’ as there are definers” (2008, p. 235) – which creates a proper sense of proportion for anybody attempting to define the topic. Westerhoff argues that it is helpful to speak of a three-fold system: evangelism, evangelisation, and catechesis, in order to focus one’s attention without getting distracted by issues that are not proper to any of the three tasks in hand. “Evangelism” he defines as “proclaiming the gospel of God’s salvation through word and example to those who [do] not know it or [have] not accepted it. The object [is] to attract people to the church with its good news concerning God’s reign” (2008, p. 235). “Evangelisation” he defines as “...a formative process of initiation through participation in and the practice of the Christian life of faith” (2008, p. 236). And then he defines “catechesis” as “...the intentional, lifelong process by which Christians are made, fashioned, and nurtured” (2008, p. 236). All three processes call for the application of the truth of the Gospel, but each process has a different intention with regard to where the conversation partner is and where the conversation

partner moves to. Westerhoff writes his article to make the “case for evangelization” (2008, pp. 235, title); my intention here is to make the case for what he calls “evangelism”, viewed through Westerhoff’s lenses: this helps me to steer a course between the competing definitions of evangelism I encounter in this study<sup>105</sup>.

#### **2.4.10 Evangelism: working definition**

David Bosch has been my starting point for investigating evangelism. But I need to bring Bosch’s narrative into conversation with narrative theory. To start with, the appropriate “deed” of evangelism, (the “word” element of a putative “liturgy of conversion”), seems to be the production of a meaningful story in the company of an alternatively-faithed person or people (cf. Richardson, 2000, pp. 17-29). The fear of this happening without love or respect perhaps comes about because we are not used to operating holistically (cf. Myers, 1999, pp. 134-136). Evangelism in its proper place in the matrix of Christian mission will always be loving, respectful action; it will be, as Bosch envisions it, evangelism “in word and deed”. From one point of view, the speaking of the Gospel message is one of the important loving “deeds” that we are called to.

If narrative becomes the essential mode of evangelism, then we should look at Gubrium and Holstein’s criteria for narrative adequacy (2009, pp. 199-223). Adequate evangelism would need to ring true with experience, be compelling and entertaining, and be appropriately paced – morphing in all these criteria in order to be adequate/valid in differing socio-cultural contexts (in fact from conversation to conversation!). This last concept would line up with Bosch’s concept of “validity”: the “offer” and “challenge” is not valid until it is perceived by the alternatively-faithed to be a valid offer and challenge.

And I would also argue, with Wesley and Rambo, that evangelism needs to usher people into a search, or process, in which they discover the force of the challenge/invitation (Rambo, 1995, p. 56). Bosch’s definition leaves out this crucial interstitial moment, this pause at the crossroads deciding which sign to follow.

The other factor I would like to bring to the casting of a definition which seems to be missing from Bosch’s definition is something Barth emphasises [2.4.8]: the power of the Spirit of Jesus actively searching for the lost and meeting them with gifts of grace and faith to move

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<sup>105</sup> Bosch comes down on using “evangelism” for “activities involved in spreading the gospel” and “theological reflection on these activities” (1991, p. 409); and he uses “evangelization” for the “process of spreading the gospel” and “extent to which it has been spread” (1991, p. 409). Westerhoff’s definitions are more useful to me because Bosch is manifestly concerned with the communication of the Gospel to those who are distant or resistant to it, whereas the views of the ministers of the Methodist churches might be suspected of lacking that dimension.

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towards him at each new cross road. The evangelist is in some senses only the sign that evangelism might be in the process of happening.

So, in close conversation with Bosch using some of his elements verbatim and inserting and adjusting elements that extend my agenda - I will use the following definition of evangelism as a guide:

*Evangelism is the work of the Spirit of God through the people of God in the contextual narration of the Gospel through adequately communicative signs, in social connection with the alternatively-faithed, to invite, without coercion, every human being to seek the truth about God as set out in the Bible Narrative, and to invite every human being to pursue that quest until they receive the gift of faith that enables them to live liberated, humble, just, and peaceful lives in community with those who are also disciples of Jesus Christ.*

### 2.4.11 Conclusion

I have chosen to focus in this survey of evangelism on communication leading to the “moment of awareness” of conversion by the convert. In the interests of manageability a discussion of the ongoing “evangelization of converts” needs to be deferred at this point. My focus here is defined and limited by my subject, the dearth of people consciously entering the Methodist church “through evangelism and conversion” [1.2.1]

## 2.5. PRAXIS THEORY as a Research Tool

I need clarity about what constitutes authentic action, particularly as I will aim to make suggestions for putting into practice in the life of the church. With my concern to investigate the “praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town” and in order to discover “best practice theory for effective evangelism” I need to develop a tool that will allow me to evaluate what “effective” means in the context of evangelism.

The place that seemed obvious (to me<sup>106</sup>) to start was with the theory of Paulo Freire. Freire says about “praxis” that “reflection – true reflection – leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection...otherwise, action is pure activism.” (1970, p. 48). I am setting out to ensure that evangelism should not be relegated to the

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<sup>106</sup> For many years I have been consciously “Freirean” in my understanding of the teaching/learning dynamic, particularly because of my interest in the pedagogy of those shut out of the formal educational processes by economic considerations.

domain of “pure activism”; or if it has, to contribute to retrieving it for the praxis of the church by subjecting it to “critical reflection” once again.

Ortega places the concept of “praxis” in a wider frame of reference than Freire – that of universal history, itself a familiar theme to Christians (cf. Newbigin, 1989, pp. 66-79):

*“There are ... three different moments which are repeated cyclically throughout the course of human history, in forms each time more complex and rich: 1. Man feels himself lost, shipwrecked upon things; this is **alteracion**. 2. Man, by an energetic effort, retires into himself to form ideas about things and his possible dominance over them; this is taking a stand within the self, **ensimismamiento**, the **vita contempliva** of the Romans, the **theoretikos bios** of the Greeks, theory. 3. Man again submerges himself in the world, to act in it according to a preconceived plan; this is action, **vita activa**, praxis. Accordingly it is impossible to speak of action except in so far as it will be governed by a previous contemplation; and vice versa, the stand within the self is nothing but a projection of future action” (1968, pp. 187-188)*

This almost sounds like a description of conversion – “lostness”, contemplation and energy, resulting in meaningful action in the world... And in fact both Ortega and Freire do use religious terminology very freely – perhaps they recognise the dynamic of conversion in Christians, even if they might doubt its divine provenance<sup>107</sup>. Or perhaps it was a tactical concession to the typically religious outlook of those amongst whom they worked. What emerges is a concept of ethical, considered action taken on the basis of responsibility towards the whole of humanity throughout history. Praxis means not only to act, but to act thoughtfully; and not only to act thoughtfully, but to act meaningfully. Thus “there is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis....to speak a true word is to transform the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 68). From this perspective evangelism could be (or at least become) praxis too. Bill Taylor version of praxis is that Christians are called to become “reflective, passionate and globalized practitioners” (Taylor, 2000, p.521).

From a theological perspective, Louw considers that there are three aspects of praxis to bear in mind for any work done in the field of practical theology - what the

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<sup>107</sup> Freire talks about “conversion” to the poor (Freire, 1970, p. 42), involving a “rebirth”(p. 43), a rescue from a “burning building”(p. 47), and a “vocation”(p. 48). He contends that “love”, “humility”, “faith” and “hope” (pp. 70, 71, 71,72) are key operational necessities, along with a capacity for critical thought (p. 73). He references “dying in order to be reborn” (pp. 113-114), “salvation” (p. 127), “demons” (p. 128), even “witness” (p. 157).

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values and intended purposes of an approach, attitude or action are; what ought to be done in fulfilling those purposes, and what practical steps should be recommended to achieve one's purposes in the right way<sup>108</sup> (cf. Louw, 2008, p. 72). Wherever there needs to be liberation it would seem that one needs thoughtful, reflective practitioners who are open to thoughtful, reflective scrutiny on the part of their conversation partners – in this case a balance of scrutiny between the Christian and the alternatively faithed.

So, since I have undertaken to examine the “praxis of evangelism of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town” [title], I need to probe not only the evangelism activities of the church, but also the thinking that lies behind what is done, and the way the ministers and John Wesley understand evangelism to impact on the meaning of the church in the world.

## 2.6. CONCLUSION: A Liturgy of Conversion

This then is a summary of the theoretical tools I use to analyse my data: a certain view of narrative; a certain approach to liturgy; a certain understanding of conversion; a certain evaluation of evangelism, and a particular definition of praxis. I develop all these ideas further through my research, but these are the avenues of investigation that run through the entire work.

David Bosch argues that “Evangelism may never be given a life of its own, in isolation from the rest of the life and ministry of the church” (1991, p. 412). This insight, combined with my argument so far, makes it seem reasonable to combine my definitions of liturgy and conversion into a definition of “Liturgy of Conversion”:

*Liturgy of Conversion is the complex of ritual words and actions, spoken and enacted both inside and outside of the sacred precinct, by members of the believing community, in the presence of God and the alternatively faithed, which reflects and articulates a meaning-enriching, identity-(re)defining and commitment-shaping process of change in worldview, initiated by God, described by converts as enhancing the meaningfulness of life, conferring a social identity, and enhancing their agency, and experienced by them in a social context; and which socialises both existing and prospective members into the ethos and praxis of the church.*

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<sup>108</sup> What he refers to as the teleological, deontological and pragmatic dimensions of praxis (2008, p. 72).

## 2.7. STRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY

If my interpretational methodology is my toolkit for this research, my structural methodology needs to be my blueprint, my constructor's manual. I intend to approach this task roughly following the research structure outlined by Richard Osmer<sup>109</sup> (Osmer, 2008), who suggests that there are four essential tasks for a researcher to accomplish.

### 2.7.1 The Descriptive-empirical Task

Osmer identifies the first task as “priestly listening”, or finding out what is going on – “gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts” (2008, p. 4). I judged that the use of qualitative research was most likely to deliver the sort of data that would enable me to achieve my research aims [1.2.2]. Osmer observes that qualitative research “seeks to understand the actions and practices in which individuals and groups engage in everyday life and the meanings they ascribe to their experience.” (2008, pp. 49-50). This involves listening to people's narratives, and creating a persuasive explanatory narrative from what they say or write. I have noted how Lucie-Smith argues for the use of a “true fiction” (2007, p. 129) [2.1.1:12].

My first task was to conduct interviews<sup>110</sup> with Methodist ministers in Cape Town. Schüssler Fiorenza argues (in a related theological field) that transformative theoretical praxis “...requires the articulation of a theoretical and practical framework for overcoming the division between scholars and church leaders, between ‘expert’ readers and the ‘common’ reader, between scholarly interpretation and popular interpretation.” (2007, p. 240). Although it would be disingenuous to claim theologically trained ministers as “common” readers, an argument could be made that they are considerably more “common” than academic theologians. I maintain that my research moves at least one step closer to bridging Schüssler Fiorenza's “division”.

I had to make a choice as to whose narrative to listen to in order to make sense of the state of evangelism in the Methodist churches of Cape Town. The people with theological training who are in a position to influence the mass of un-theologically-trained Christians are the

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<sup>109</sup> Osmer's schema allows for the vagaries of research necessities. As I have gone along his neat formula has been panel-beaten into a shape that does not fully adhere to his original model.

<sup>110</sup> I interviewed 11 ministers from each culture background, paying attention to what Babbie & Mouton describe as “quota sampling” (2001:167-8) – men and women from each of the culture groups (except no Xhosa woman minister – she was posted out of Cape Town before I could interview her). According to the 2011 Yearbook & Directory of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, there were 67 ministers available for interviews in the greater Cape Town area (2011:B52-58): so 11 ministers would constitute 16% of the potential data set, which is lower than I would have wanted in terms of the integrity of the findings. But it must also be noted that obtaining interviews was not straightforward and met with active resistance at times.

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ministers of the churches. Since they are formally tasked with the pastoral leadership of the churches in their care, I judged that they would be the respondents most competent to answer questions about the theory and practice of evangelism in Methodist Churches (cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 236). I used anthropological techniques to develop a rich matrix of data, a Geertzian “thick” description of reality (cf. Geertz, 1973; Osmer, 2008, p. 54; Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 270-280) – which constitutes “ethnographic research” according to Osmer’s pattern (2008, p. 51). Gubrium and Holstein consider that “Interviews may be characterized in general as intentionally designed attempts to activate or incite narratives” (2009, p. 45). Under the time-constraints of academic research, these interviews produced as close an approximation to unforced story-telling as I could get (cf. Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 47).

Citing the work of Lila Abu-Lughod amongst Bedouin people, Gubrium and Holstein note that “Through distinctive themes and plotlines the compositional by-products of individual story-tellers could be used to trace the form culture took in the community” (2009, p. 86). I considered that in the same vein I would be able to draw insightful conclusions from studying the different narratives about the culture of evangelism and liturgy of the different churches.

My first task, then, was to develop a question schedule [1.1.1.1 Appendix A] that adequately stimulated input from ministers, and which was sufficiently free from my own biases to allow for the production of accurately representative data (cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 233-256; Pearson, et al., 2003, p. 237). David Bosch discusses evangelism as an element of an emerging paradigm of mission (1991, pp. 409-419), and I modelled my question schedule on his definition of evangelism. This questionnaire fully endorsed by the Ethics Committee of the University of Stellenbosch. Part of the development of this question schedule was an initial small-scale pilot study of three different Methodist ministers from different cultural backgrounds.

After approval by the Ethics Committee, I set out to interview Methodist ministers, intending to develop a comprehensive picture of the theory and practice of evangelism in the three major culture groups represented in Cape Town Methodist Churches. From an analysis of these recorded and transcribed responses (cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 356-358). I did indeed learn a great deal about the culture-contextual challenges faced by the churches, and gleaned many ideas about possible “best practice” criteria for evangelism. Involving the ministers in the research brings the voice of ministry practitioners into conversation with the academy (cf. Weathers, 2004, p. 50), thus furthering Schüssler Fiorenza’s project of bridging the expert-voice/common-voice gulf.

A second consideration is that I have functioned as a “participant observer”. As a Methodist Local Preacher I was in a unique position to attend and observe churches in action in different contexts. I have an open door to any public gathering of the Methodist Church, and to any attempt to communicate with outsiders. I attended many church services, sometimes as a preacher, sometimes as a congregant – and found that the annual “Seven Words from the Cross” service was the most evangelistic of Methodist events – at least in rhetoric<sup>111</sup>. This has given me a participant-observer’s insight into the way the minister’s theory influences the actual evangelism, and ways in which local church cultures and traditions affect the process in turn (cf. Osmer, 2008, pp. 54,60-61; Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 56,293-300; Kraft, 1996, pp. 12,76). One unavoidable affect factor in the interview process might be that the ministers would pay more attention to theological issues in evangelism than he/she might otherwise have done. But I do not think that it would be ethical to sneak in anonymously – which would in any case be impossible in many situations, since I would stand out clearly because of being a known Local Preacher!

As a result of these experiences I have been able to develop a grounded theory [2.1.3; Chapter 1]. I have followed Charmaz and Mitchell’s process, which involved coding and comparing data, developing potential categories and testing the categories against the data, and finally integrating the categories into a theoretical framework which then went through several layers of revision (2001, p. 162).

In the third place, I have treated John Wesley’s *Journal* as an ethnographic record [2.1.3: 21; Chapter 1]. This publication occupied for his times much the same place in the public space as blogs do in ours - a self-aware recording of the minutiae of life with the intention of communicating to as broad an audience as possible. Wesley “...wrote for publication and, especially at first, for substantially defensive reasons.” (Ward & Heitzenrater, 1988, p. 39). He published small edited tranches frequently (Ward & Heitzenrater, 1988, pp. 26, 40-41), and Ward and Heitzenrater consider that “The longer Wesley’s journal continued, the more like a newspaper it became.” (1988, p. 40).

Ward and Heitzenrater point out how the *Journal* was “largely devoted to self-justification”, especially in the earlier entries (1988, pp. 24, 37, 38). They posit that “...the Journal .... had the aggressive intention of changing the religious situation by authenticating a particular kind of religious appeal” (1988, p. 29). The net-result was an important auto-ethnographic

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<sup>111</sup> This service happens on Good Friday every year. The churches in the circuit unite in one of the church buildings to hold a three-hour liturgy from 12 noon to three o’clock, during which seven ministers each preach a sermon on one of the seven “words from the cross”. This is billed as the great annual evangelistic event of the year, but although there are many sermons and much choral music, I have not noticed any obvious conversion experiences happening at them. I have recordings of many sermons but was not able to include their transcriptions in this study.

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account by the leader of a reform movement: “In one of its aspects Wesley’s *Journal* was a collective biography of the early Methodist movement.” (1988, p. 36), which “...enabled the ordinary Methodist of his day to form an impression of how the religious society to which he belonged had come into being and what its leader was about...” (1988, p. 42).

This means that readers can now expect to find a certain argument for a certain sort of lifestyle in the *Journal*, and analysing that intentionality is the task of ethnography, too. I applied a similar ethnographic method to the *Journal* as I did to the interviews, and out of this developed a strong second strand of data. My task has been to restate that argument as it relates to liturgy, evangelism and conversion, formulated in the context of British society in the 1700s, and see whether it has potential for significance for Methodism in Cape Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Fourthly, I investigated statistical data with a view to establishing an appropriate demographic analysis. Research into records of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Census results and similar resources give a quantitative dimension to my research. This has been “unobtrusive research” (cf. Babbie & Mouton, 2001, pp. 394-398) and has validated my concern about the current lack of growth in the Methodist church in the region. It has also helped me to produce a more realistic demographic profile of “the Methodist Churches in Cape Town”. As I noted above this was a necessarily incomplete and approximate process, given the shambolic state of Methodist Church statistics [cf. p.2]

### 2.7.2 The Interpretive Task

In order to answer the question “Why is this going on?” Osmer suggests that the second task of a researcher is to draw on “theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring” (2008, p. 4). Osmer’s second chapter (2008, pp. 79-128) deals with the interdisciplinary task of locating, evaluating and choosing amongst theories in order to develop a set of tools to enable the researcher to understand research data, whilst being fully aware that “...theories help us understand and explain certain features of an episode, situation or context but never provide a complete picture of the ‘territory’” (2008, p. 80). David Bosch models the same modest attitude. Writing about defining “evangelism”, he urges us to realise that “...it is important that we should not delineate the content of our evangelism too sharply, too precisely, and too self-confidently....there is no universally applicable master-plan for evangelism....we can only witness in humble boldness and bold humility to our understanding of that gospel” (1991, p. 420). Theoretical reading in the fields of sociology, cultural anthropology, communications theory (rhetoric), psychology, and education has allowed me to develop an appropriate set of critical tools with which to interrogate the data produced by my qualitative research.

Ethnographic ground principles alert me to take care to scrutinise and note the biases with which I might have come to this task [2.1.3].

One of my concerns then has to be the particular realities of Cape Town. In approaching any issue in a major city of the world (and although it is relatively tiny compared to, say, Bangkok<sup>112</sup>) one has to factor in the forces of globalization (cf. Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, pp. 320-323; Conn & Ortiz, 2001, pp. 209-210; Bakke, 2002). The Global Culture with its drive to enforce conformity is coherent and rapacious – but globalisation, with its concomitant ideology of postmodernism and neo-liberal economic theory, is not the only force at work – Schreier explores the ways in which local forces meet global forces in a variety of permutations (1997, pp. 1-27). In addition to this, the sheer pressure of diversity makes it ingenuous to generalise too easily about *any* city. In their study of urban realities Hiebert & Meneses say “...we need to use both micro and macro approaches – both helicopter and street level views – to help us understand this great, complex, and confusing thing we call a city.” (1995, p. 261) In that spirit of acknowledgement of complexity I have tried to establish a more flexible, nuanced story (model) for interpreting the urban context of Cape Town [3.2.1].

An important point to note is that certain significant issues that characterise globalisation are not necessarily new; the issues faced by the contemporary church in the city might be seen from one perspective as only scaled-up versions of the issues faced by the Church in Cities down the ages (Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, pp. 257-259). Speaking in rebuttal of “postmodernism” being an adequate category for analysis, Hughes says that many of the “marks” of postmodernism have been present since the enlightenment, and adds: “...this is scarcely a new condition in itself; only in its proportions” (Hughes, 2003, p. 51).<sup>113</sup> This opens up the possibility that the eighteenth century city life of John Wesley, shaped as it was by the initial stirrings of modern industrialisation, might well have significant lines of continuity with Cape Town and its twenty-first century hyper-modernisation.

### 2.7.3 The Normative Task

The next phase of the research process, according to Osmer, is to articulate a clear opinion as to “what ought to be going on....using theological concepts to interpret particular

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<sup>112</sup> Based on 2013 figures (the 2016 Stats SA Community Survey websites do not give data other than the general graphs they choose to publish) Cape Town has a population of 3.74m people, who are still divided - according to old apartheid era categories - into Coloured (42.4%), African (38.6%), White (15.7%), Indian/Asian (1.4%), and “other” (1.9%). Sample suburb demographics – which would tend to affect membership profiles in Methodist churches which are established there – are Langa (99.1% African), Bonteheuwel (94.3% Coloured), Khayelitsha (98.6% African), and Claremont (64.1% White, 16.8% African, 11.1% Coloured, 4.8% Indian/Asian, and 3.2% “other”.) (Angus, 2014) Bangkok has a population of around 9.617m “registered inhabitants” (World Population Review, 2017)

<sup>113</sup> Hughes argues that we are merely in the most recent phase of modernism. For Hughes, “the clearest indicator ... which ties our age back into the modern paradigm seems to ... be its steadfast repudiation of religious conviction as a source of meaning.” (cf. Hughes, 2003, p. 51).

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episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from ‘good practice’” (2008, pp. 4,130-132). This is essential for genuine debate to happen – I have to put my ideas out there in a clear enough way for anybody to be able to critically evaluate them. My two main sources of qualitative data, read in conversation with each other, yield certain guidelines for what I posit as the best practice for evangelism<sup>114</sup>. In doing this, the normative task has generated what I trust are coherent principles to address the issues of context and culture in the praxis of evangelism.

Osmer starts his process of norm construction by suggesting that researchers apply “theological interpretation” by which he means “...the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations and contexts” (2008, p. 131). This theological journey started with John Wesley and David Bosch, given my church and mission background. But many other theological theorists have important insights into the issues involved in church and evangelism. I have turned my mind to this in the first part of this chapter.

A key task in this regard is that I attempt to position evangelism as a part of the liturgy of the church, rather than a peripheral, optional activity for a small and marginalised group of Methodists. I have attempted to show how evangelism has in the past been a major liturgical element of Methodism, and how it could become so again<sup>115</sup>. I see this as an attempt to reclaim a formerly distinctive element of the Methodist Church. I defend my view of evangelism as “normal” liturgy, although I suspect that a definition of liturgy that locates evangelism as one of the obligatory acts of the church’s service to God will seem surprising to some ministers<sup>116</sup>.

In fact there have been some significant disagreements between what I think and the general trend of the thinking of the ministers. Where these clashes emerged I have attempted to come to terms with the differences in a respectful and insightful way. I have tried to negotiate recommendations based on views that have been challenged and changed during the research process. However, the research process has resulted in certain clear counter-proposals to elements of current evangelistic praxis. But there have also been some

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<sup>114</sup> The concept of “best practice” is taken from the field of management science. It refers to a frequently scrutinised and upgraded set of benchmarks or criteria that are likely to produce the best results in a particular field (Bogan & English 1994). For instance, the American and British Heart Associations’ “best practice” for CPR has recently been updated to 30 compressions per 2 breaths (Field et al. 2010).

<sup>115</sup> This has involved an attempt to re-invest the concept “Liturgy” with its original meaning of “the work of the people”, by investing evangelism with the power of what Saunders & Campbell refer to as “liturgical direct action” (2000:103).

<sup>116</sup> Observation and conversation have given me anecdotal evidence to suggest that many ministers regard the “proper place” for corporate evangelistic activity to be inside church buildings. Evangelism in the territory of outsiders is seen to be the sole preserve of church members in their private capacity. I have tested this through the interview process.

areas where I strongly approve of what I have found, and where new vistas of understanding have opened up for me. Such discoveries have informed my recommendations as well.

A major reflexive issue that I perceived in this process was that I might come to conclusions that are unrealistic, unattainable, and ultimately useless. This is where I hope that my history of personal involvement in evangelism, along with my current involvement, has kept me reasonably objective. I am under no illusion: there will be no magic formula that automatically persuades people to consider putting their faith in Christ, and no universally effective technique that mobilises Christians to persuade others to consider converting to Christianity. I have not been seeking some mystical Wesleyan philosopher's stone, either in history or theory. What I have done is to outline an approach to evangelism that takes the infinite variety and mutability of contexts into consideration in generating constantly evolving, effective evangelistic strategies by local churches in their own local contexts. I have read as widely as possible around the issues involved in evangelism, conversion, and liturgy – which has still only involved a fraction of what is available. Here, as Osmer suggests, I have chosen my "...own stance on metatheoretical issues in dialogue with perspectives currently available." (2008:58), sifting through "...a variety of theories and [discerning] those that offer the best arguments and will be the most helpful..."<sup>117</sup> (2008:101).

A key theological interlocutor has been John Wesley; a prodigious producer of "journals, sermons and other writings" (cf. Outler 1987), and he had very decided metatheoretical views on evangelism and conversion. I have been deeply influenced by Wesley in my own missional career, and I have read amongst his works extensively already; so once again, I need to acknowledge a bias. It could conceivably be anachronistic to expect contemporary African churches to take cognizance of an 18<sup>th</sup> century English preacher of awakening. But I hope that by looking back into the origins of our tradition I have able to highlight some important clues for the revitalisation of Methodist evangelism praxis.

Another source for developing theological norms has been an investigation of relevant sociological and cultural anthropological theory. I agree with Osmer that it behoves theology to "...[listen] carefully to other disciplines and [learn] from them" and even to "...revise traditional beliefs or practices in the light of their insights" (2008:165). Thung points out that sociology questions "...the implicit models of society, the intuitive but untested notions of social phenomena which are concealed in many theological explanations" (1996:341) – which seemed to me to offer hope for helpful insights into investigations into the evangelism/conversion question. My attitude towards cross-disciplinary dialogue is best

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<sup>117</sup> Osmer has a useful section on evaluating competing theories, by 1: identifying their root metaphors; 2: identifying the disciplinary perspectives of the theories; and 3: identifying and evaluating the central arguments of the theories (2008:114-128)

## The Liturgy of Conversion

described as “transversal”, which Osmer defines as having a “...fluid and dynamic understanding of the relationship between the disciplines”, in particular understanding the other disciplines “...as networks that transverse one another and share the common resources of rationality” (2008:172).

Osmer suggests that an ethical framework is vital when considering norms; he draws on Ricoeur, Gadamer and Browning to show how a researcher might develop ethical norms along the lines of a “practice-theory-practice” model (2008:148-9), which proceeds from a cognitive dissonance in praxis (in my case the lack of growth through evangelism and conversions), goes on to develop appropriate normative theory, which is then tested in continued praxis. This is the next important step in developing norms. He describes how Ricoeur posits three steps to this development of normative theory: identifying the community ethical norms (which define the cultural identity of a community); identifying the universal ethical principles used by the community to validate its ethics; and by exercising *phronesis*, the wisdom to apply these ethical norms to specific cases (cf. Osmer, 2008, p. 149).

My question schedule investigated the “practices, narratives, relationships and models” (Osmer, 2008, p. 149) of three main different culture groups, represented by eleven individual pastoral practitioners. The recorded conversations gave me data on the ethics of evangelism from different individual and cultural viewpoints; and my respondents give me a lot of help with the *phronesis* required to make adequate judgements. Some of the ethical issues concerned the process of persuasion, which guided me in shaping ethical norms for a liturgy of conversion.

The third step in Osmer’s methodology for developing norms is to locate examples of “good practice”, which then serve as benchmarks for the practice of others. I have been able to derive these from insights from my respondents, my study of John Wesley’s praxis, and my reading. For Osmer, “...good practice is more than a model – it is epistemic. It yields knowledge that can be formed only through participation in transforming practice” (2008, p. 153). I have established a research-informed personal vision of what good practice of a liturgy of conversion might look like.

The net result of this three-fold evaluative process is a set of culture-adaptable recommendations for how the liturgy of the Methodist church might be enriched by evangelism in action, on and beyond the church premises. With its strong reliance on qualitative data, I do not intend the norms I develop to be “...imposed from the outside” but rather to develop from a conversation on appropriate norms emerging “...out of transforming

practice and [speaking] to those engaged in such practice” as part of the “...reflection by the entire community to gather the practical wisdom of all” (Osmer, 2008, pp. 159-160).

### 2.7.4 The Pragmatic Task

Osmer’s fourth “task” of practical theological research is “...determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the ‘talk back’ emerging when they are enacted” (2008, p. 4). After developing guidelines for best praxis in evangelism, I then take up the task of suggesting appropriate actions and communicating them: either the continuation of effective practices already in place, and/or the introduction of culturally and contextually effective strategies that might help local Methodist churches to evangelise and grow through conversion-growth once again. Osmer refers to this process as developing “rules of art” which he defines as “open-ended guidelines that provide direction in carrying out an activity but require the creativity, skills and good judgement of the performer in a particular context” (2008, p. 227). In chapter six I have developed what I consider to be such useful “rules of art” for evangelism [6.2].

## 2.8. Conclusion: Toolkit & Blueprint

Using these tools in order to construct this research according to this blueprint has been the work of all my spare time for the last five years. Every part of it cries out for further work, further research, further reflection, further insight. Now comes the task of the reader: I am grateful for the careful and critical consideration that this investigation will receive.

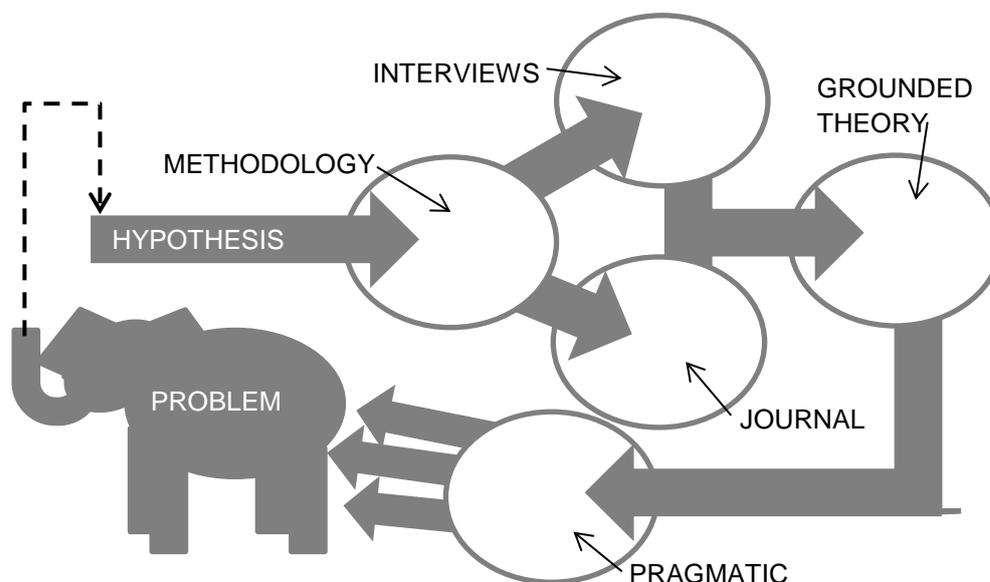


Figure 5 Outline of Research Plan



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# **Chapter 3. ANALYSING INTERVIEWS WITH MINISTERS (descriptive/empirical)**

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*“Stories are not only told in interviews, but they also wend their way through the lives of the storytellers” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, p. 2)*

In order to test my hypothesis<sup>118</sup>, I went to the Ministers of the Methodist Church in Cape Town asking about evangelism, conversion and liturgy. I came away with a mass of recorded story-telling about story-telling. Making sense of what I have heard involves, in turn, telling a story about this story-telling. Fisher argues that “all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories – symbolic interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture and character” (Fisher, 1987, p. xi). By exploring these “symbolic interpretations” through a close reading, and comparing and contrasting what I find with my working definitions of narrative, evangelism, conversion and liturgy, as established in chapter 2<sup>119</sup>, I am able to build towards a grounded theory of what a Liturgy of Conversion might look like in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town.

Hughes says that “people for the most part shape their meanings from the stocks of meaning available to them” (2003, pp. 6-7). I assumed on that basis that I would be able to work back, from the stories told to me by the Methodist ministers, to their “stocks of meaning”. And part of the purpose of this study is to explore the potential “stocks of meaning” stored in the *Journal* of John Wesley, that might be available to ministers in the service of establishing the contours of a liturgy of conversion. I will take a closer look at John Wesley’s *Journal* in this regard in chapter four, but first it is important to put the interviews I ran with Methodist ministers in Cape Town under the ethnographic microscope.

The writing of Gubrium and Holstein (2009) is very helpful in performing this task. They propose a sort of narrative grid, questions that if answered are likely to unlock the narrative meaning of stories. As I worked through their book *Analyzing Narrative Reality*, I made a

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<sup>118</sup> “A careful listening to church leaders, and observation of the Methodist Church, should enable me to gain a clear understanding of the current theory and praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Bringing Wesleyan writings, and the thought of relevant theoreticians, into critical conversation with these findings should then enable the development of helpful “best practice” criteria for effective evangelism” [1.2.3]

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note of their line of questioning and cast it into an interpretive matrix of my own [cf. Appendix B].

Using my working definitions of liturgy of conversion and evangelism to identify topics, plots and themes in the interview data has posed something of a challenge. In terms of liturgy, my questions were not sufficiently well grounded in liturgical theory when I originally set them (and had them approved.) This is partly due to relying too heavily on David Bosch's definition in their formulation – he does not pay any particular attention to liturgical issues in his definition (Bosch, 1991, p. 420)<sup>120</sup>. This does not mean that certain very helpful insights into the nature and limits of liturgy in the thinking of the Methodist ministers did not emerge; but I have only been able to establish relatively sketchy contours in this study. My working definition of conversion similarly assists me in probing my interview data for corroboration or refutation – but again, only preliminary outlines of the contemporary Methodist understanding emerge. This is, I would argue, enough for the preliminary findings of this study, but further specific research would obviously be needed in this area. Nevertheless, despite this weakness in my research plan, a distinct institutional view of the issues under investigation does appear to emerge.<sup>121</sup>

### **3.1. Interviews with Ministers: Ethnographic Reading**

As I suggested in chapter 2 [0], since the interviews have generated such a great deal of data for analysis, the ethnography approach is perhaps the best way to approach the task. The Methodist ministers are not a homogenous group: they come from four socio-cultural groupings, and they are both male and female. They are of different ages, and have been through different training regimens to end up in the Methodist ministry. In terms of wider cultural demographic, it would perhaps seem unreasonable to even consider treating them as a socio-cultural entity. However, they do all occupy leadership positions in one single institution. It seems reasonable to expect any institution to have its own corporate culture (Graham & LeBaron, 1994, p. 52). What I was looking for, then, was a range of opinion on the themes of evangelism, conversion and liturgy. I was seeking, also, for any signs that might indicate some sort of liturgy-evangelism-conversion correlation in ministers' thinking. And lastly, I was looking for interplay between the story of John Wesley and the contexts within which the ministers plied their trade.

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<sup>120</sup> This is one of the reasons I found it necessary to widen his concept of "viable opportunity" to "adequately communicative signs" – to include a consideration of issues of liturgy/ritual in the communication process

<sup>121</sup> By the time I realized this I was too far committed to the research path that I had originally set out to include an additional set of questions. I have depended on John Wesley's *Journal* and my literature survey to find other theorists' insights into developing a more consciously liturgical basis for evangelism.

## **3.2. Interviews with Ministers: Plotting Evangelism and Conversion in the Methodist Church in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cape Town**



What emerged from my application of Gubrium & Holstein's interpretive matrix (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009), in quest of an ethnographic analysis (Atkinson, et al., 2001, pp. 321-491), is a multi-braided narrative with interwoven story-lines<sup>122</sup>.

<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/440578776019522791/>

### **3.2.1 A Story-line of a Complex Environment**

*"...the need for a rationale [for evangelism] – and the kind of rationale needed – is always shaped by the church's location in the social and cultural currents of its time and place, and by its character and life within those currents." (Hunsberger, 2008, p. 59)*

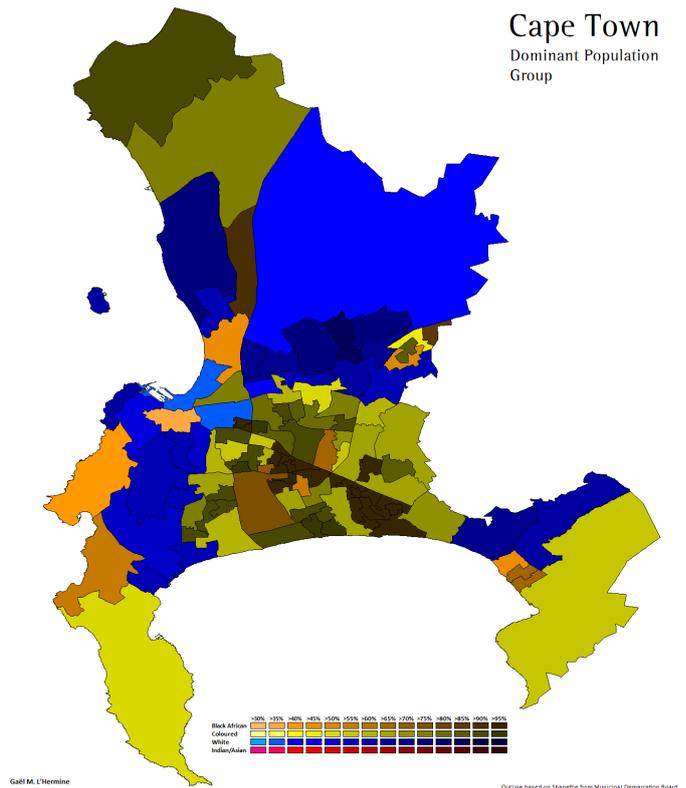
The Methodist Church needs a theory of evangelism that can cope with a city that is both Mannenberg and Constantia; both Ilitha Park and Hanover Park; both Rugby and Sea Point; both Cape Town central and Philippi; both Imizamo Yethu and Khayelitsha Site C – and all of them together.

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<sup>122</sup> I recognise that my sample set is too small for me to be able to draw settled conclusions from my data. The most I can do is develop the beginnings of a narrative about the narratives – each "conclusion" I draw is intended to constitute in itself a plea for further conversation, study and corroboration/falsification. However, because my tentative conclusions are in fact drawn from real data, they should be taken seriously as possible avenues for further study.

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The Methodist Church exists locally within highly diverse urban contexts. The descriptions that ministers gave of their congregations painted an interesting peninsula-wide<sup>123</sup> demographic. Some congregations cater to a variety of different culture groups, albeit through the medium of English [FE006 0746; FE004 3716]<sup>124</sup>. MA002 refers to six languages spoken by regular attendees at a 70% white middle class suburban church - English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, seSotho, Shona and Chichewa<sup>125</sup> [1535; ME005 1323; FE004 0950; MX003 2624]. MA001 even references a young Jewish man's involvement [1846]. Other churches are completely monocultural [MX003 2624; ME005 1323]. Some Methodists are too poor to afford even public transport, whilst others drive cars [MX003 2624] and those cars in themselves are an indicator of socio cultural diversity in their range from ageing ford hulks to top end Mercedes Benz and Jaguars [ME007: 4528]. Some congregations have a high average educational level and some a very low average level [ME005 1323, MX008: 0458]. The church is diversely located in the leafy suburbs, the resettled Cape Flats<sup>126</sup>, the Apartheid-era “native yards”, and the informal settlements. The Ministers I interviewed reflect this cultural spread – Afrikaans, English, Xhosa and Zulu, men and women.



The church is very differently adapted to different micro-cultural contexts. In the informal settlements it maintains the shape of the traditional rural Methodist Church [ME005 1549]. In the resettled housing zones the mood is sometimes more traditional, but often quite

Figure 6 The dominant population groups in different areas of Cape Town: (World Elections, 2016)

<sup>123</sup> Cape Town is built on a peninsula – a wide, formerly submerged “neck” which now connects a mountainous former “island” (including the famous Table Mountain) to the mainland. The local press and inhabitants in general refer to the entire metropolitan area as “the peninsula”

<sup>124</sup> I previously cited statistics that suggest that areas that were monolithically “white” under apartheid era segregatory laws have since become the most multi-cultural, whereas previously zoned “coloured” and “black” areas have tended to maintain their predominant racial demographic profile.

<sup>125</sup> Shona and Chichewa indicate that their speakers originate in Zimbabwe and Malawi respectively.

<sup>126</sup> On the Cape Flats there are many churches serving people who were relocated under apartheid legislation in living memory. Usually the church buildings in the areas from which people were forcibly removed were not demolished, (due, presumably, to vestigial Christian scruples), and some churches in what then became white suburbs have been aggressively kept going by their members – what I think of as “struggle churches” [MX003 1714].

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Pentecostal [MA002 4016, 4110; MX003 1507]. In an area where there is a trendy “artisanal” vibe, and people with cars “prefer to walk to church”, there is a very new-age-sympathetic atmosphere [ME001:1551]. Some ministers were still new in their postings and in the process of initial learning [FE006 0055; MX003 0100]. Other ministers had been on site for longer and were able to give more detailed analyses of their congregations and congregations’ contexts.

People from all these different socio-cultural groupings share the meta-identity of “Methodist”: the assessment<sup>127</sup> on the wealthier churches helps pay for the cost of the poorer churches; ministers are “shared” between churches (one high-income congregation is twinned with one low-income congregation); all of the churches send representatives to meet together at quarterly meetings to discuss shared concerns; and each of them is answerable to a centralised disciplinary conference.

But it became increasingly obvious that my experience as a “Methodist insider” did not mean I could understand all the complexities of the Methodist Church in Cape Town without help from many co-researchers. My personal experience, though quite wide, could contribute only in a very limited auto-ethnographic way. The cultural diversity within this single “bureaucratic culture” – the Methodist Church – mirrors a highly complex urban society in its own ecclesial complexities (cf. Kraft, 1996, pp. 404-405). Not only are there major culture block differences, but there are also age-cohort and other subcultural differences that are expressed in different forms of the Methodist Church in Cape Town<sup>128</sup>. The ministers broadened my view of the Methodist Church by giving me insights from their different micro-cultural contexts.

### **The Complexity of Culture in Cape Town: An Interpretive Matrix**

*“All groups are embedded in particular environments, and these environments profoundly influence the ways that members behave toward one another and the rewards and costs they experience”*  
(Levine & Moreland, 1995, p. 422)

The ministers I interviewed are mostly all aware of the challenges posed to the church’s existence in a contemporary urban setting [ME001-0500; MA002-0212; MX003-0350; FE004-0253; ME005-0903; ME007-0204; MZ009-0427; FA011-2930; ME012-1139], and seem to be grasping for an appropriate identity for their churches within the reigning

<sup>127</sup> The “assessment” is an institutional tax (based on attendance and income [MA002 0739]), levied on all Methodist churches on a sliding scale. In effect the wealthier churches thus sponsor the poorer churches.

<sup>128</sup> For instance FE006 describes her church as being a church of the elderly [FE006:0055]; FA011 presides over a church amongst the very poorest of Cape Town’s people [FA011: 4303].

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plausibility structure as what Newbigin refers to as "...the church for the specific place where it lives, not the church for those who wish to be members of it..." (1989, p. 229). Analysis of the interviews suggests a model for understanding the cultural matrix in which the Methodist Churches of Cape Town conduct their affairs, their "particular conditions" and "particular context" (Bosch, 1991, p. 420). But none of the ministers seemed to have a capacity to analyse and articulate the challenges they face in the midst of they seemed to see as the vast and nebulous urban complexity – when pushed to speak about what the perceptions of those outside the circle of Christianity might be, they had very little to say.

Much work has been done on the impact of postmodern culture on contemporary Christianity (cf. Bosch, 1991, pp. 349-362), but arising from these conversations modernism does not seem to me to be the only existential position within which and against which the church experiences itself. "Post" implies that the current worldview is predicated on a particular context that is "Pre" – something has passed away (or is in the process of passing away) and something else is taking its place (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 185). The popularity of formulating one situation as "post" another situation<sup>129</sup>, however, seems to be generally in line with the usual (modern/enlightenment) principles of scientific historical analysis, where we are all considered to be operating in a situation that is evolving from and conditioned by its previous history, and where the creation of a coherent "macro-narrative" that gives each "micro-narrative" its due consideration is the ultimate goal (cf. Elphick, 1997, p. 2). As I have negotiated my way through different conversations, it seems to me that there are several significant "previous" conditions that predicate and condition our current cultural context in Cape Town, and from which the contexts in which the churches find themselves are evolving. Some of those which I picked up are: Modernism; "Ruralism"; Christendom; Colonialism; Uhuru; Evangelism, and Wesleyanism.

### Post Modernism

The global phenomenon of "postmodernity" affects all the cities of the earth; it is a dominant reality in any urban context (cf. Smith, 2002, p. 261), simply because it is the reality of the global elite. Churches operating in cities, even modestly sized cities like Cape Town, are one of the numerous interlocking social entities that are influenced by this worldview (cf. Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, pp. 158-162). Bosch points out that "postmodernism" is most useful if used as "...a heuristic notion, as a search concept" since the term "...'post' looks backward and forward at the same time" (1991, p. 531). The engagement with "the postmodern condition" is so widespread that it would seem that anybody with a theological degree would

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<sup>129</sup> Hoekendijk, in his cheerfully iconoclastic work, analyses his contemporary Dutch society in the categories of "post-Christian", "post-church", "post-civic", "post-personal", and "post-religious?" (punctuation of the author) (Hoekendijk, 1964, pp. 60-69).

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find it important to engage with how much postmodernism impacted on the church in its local context. However, only one of the ministers I interviewed used it as an interpretive category [FE004 0253, 2703, 3445]. There were few hints of the ministers using this as a “heuristic” category in formulating their response to the culture in which they are embedded. For instance, in the answers to question ten where we discussed issues that outsiders found attractive or repulsive, there was no mention made of even such a well-worn category as “suspicion of metanarratives”.

From a critical discourse point of view, this seems to be a very significant lacuna. I shall return to this when I outline my grounded theory.

### **Post-Ruralism**

One reason that “postmodernism” is not comprehensively helpful in understanding the situation on the ground faced by Cape Town churches is that for many Capetonians life is not primarily fashioned by it – perhaps not even modernism/enlightenment. MZ009 expresses this quite poignantly:

*“...for you to be able to win me over, come and level with me, come and understand where I come from with my beliefs, because I am a person that is coming from KZN, Zulu community, it was the culture that brought me<sup>130</sup>, that nurtured me, that made me to be what I am .... So if you want to understand who is this person that you are dealing with....a little bit of my background would help you. And then you would be able to make sense of what you are saying to me, based on your beliefs, because I would have told you my belief, which has formulated the person that I am” [MZ009: 3841]*

For many people in and around Methodist churches in Cape Town their experiences are shaped by recent migration from rural areas – notably the Eastern Cape [ME005: 0903]. The church – and its evangelism – needs to be understood within the context of a flood of recent arrivals desperately crammed into the existing squatter camps or creating new ones [MX003: 0507; FA011: 4415. And in their new, stressful environment the old ways of doing things sometimes have no place, sometimes even being seen as illegal by the authorities [MX008: 1343].

Once rural people arrive in an urban centre they are inescapably influenced by the influences of global urban culture, particularly with relationship to economy, government and

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<sup>130</sup> I have not edited the grammar or spelling of any of the material quoted from the transcribed interviews: the language usage directly reflects the way English was used in the conversations.

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education. But they come to that with a distinctive rural worldview and social skill-set that conditions all their experiences and perceptions. Their understanding of society has been shaped by clan-dominated, traditional villages [MX003:1800] and a church in which people function by strict social rules in a fixed number of clearly defined social roles [MX008:1343]. Individuals have nothing but this rural worldview to enable them to cope with a new situation where all the old certainties underpinning their social identity have been removed. And they are plunged into a range of demands that their way of seeing things has never had to cope with previously. Now they have lost their rural certainties whilst still being in the process of acquiring a worldview adequate for urban realities – potentially overwhelmed by the search for shelter and security; the search for employment; the search for community; and the search for spiritual meaning and belonging (cf. Dawes & Donald, 1994, pp. 2-6). The only thing that is substantially similar to what it was in the village is perhaps the Church.

And so the shape of Church-in-the-city is inevitably influenced by these realities: sociologically speaking, Church is potentially the major source of integration for these dislocated people, a place of setting up relationships and a focus for communal strength in the chaotic new situation. Hiebert and Meneses describe this integrative role for the church when they observe that "...the church must learn to live in the city and speak its language, but it must never sell its soul to the urban worldview" (1995, p. 358). The author of *Gang Town* – in quest of a "secular theory of conversion", ironically notes that religious establishments are the place where people seeking a life-giving integration into society are finding a place of conversion (Pinnock, 2016, pp. 265-267). Methodism in the rural heartlands of the Eastern Cape is very widespread, historically deeply entrenched, and very much a part of the cultural fabric of contemporary Xhosa people; Hodgson says about the early days of Christianity in the Eastern Cape that "...the first generation of Christians, needing to replace a sense of belonging that had been supplanted or lost, became as fiercely loyal to their new denominations as they had been to their clans" (1997, p. 85). Originally it filled the spiritual void engendered by the turmoil of colonisation, and especially by the societal collapse that followed the wake of Nonkosi and the cattle killing (cf. Hodgson, 1997, pp. 81-82). It was carried into the distant hills by lay evangelists and Bible-women (cf. Sundkler, 1948, 1961, p. 136; Hewson, 1950, pp. 67-70), and it has become part of the tribal identity of a very large percentage of the amaXhosa<sup>131</sup>. For many people, to be Xhosa is to be Methodist.

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<sup>131</sup> According to *The Joshua Project*, the amaXhosa make up the largest African membership amongst all denominations in South Africa, and the Methodist has a particularly large percentage of amaXhosa members (Jenkins, 2008).

This deep rural history is experienced by people as something very significant in terms of identity. It is experienced as a positive influence; one that has for generations established identity in opposition to the official identity-categories of apartheid ideology (cf. Bank, 2015). If you ask a recent migrant to the city where they live they will usually reference their home village rather than their residential suburb.

### **Post Christendom**

It is a truism that “Christendom has collapsed” in the technically advanced, formerly Christianised North-Atlantic-Rim nations<sup>132</sup>. Christianity is becoming less and less significant as a philosophical datum of civil society. This global phenomenon is particularly advanced in the global West, which, due to globalisation processes, would include segments of contemporary Capetonian society<sup>133</sup>. In this view, we can no longer assume that those we move amongst have a Christian worldview, especially those most immersed in global economic or educational institutions. The Church has become for many only one of many social units in civil society, and Christianity has become only one of many religious worldviews available to human beings.

What did the ministers make of all this? Apparently nothing much. None of the ministers used “Christendom/post-Christendom” terminology. And none of them addressed the issue of anybody in the communities they are embedded being irrevocably alienated from Church influence by a radical secularisation of society. Only one of the ministers even specifically located the context in the 21<sup>st</sup> century [ME001: 1310]. They seem to expect to be dealing with, at most, people who have lapsed in their church attendance, but who have been “born in a Christian home” [ME007:3527]. FE004 could possibly have given the headline quotation: “By and large, if I look at my community [referencing the community around the church community], they all believe they’re Christians” [FE004: 0253, cf. 13:34]. People were unlikely to see a sudden intensification of Christian religious involvement as the result of

<sup>132</sup> Christendom, to cite Bosch, was the unified worldview from Constantine through to the Enlightenment in which it was “...difficult to differentiate between political, cultural, and religious elements and activities” (1991, p. 275). However, starting with the scientific doubt of the Enlightenment and culminating in the current postmodern era, the state/church cultural and religious bond has been broken, leaving the church largely bereft of its former social influence. Hoekendijk, writing in the 1960s, lampoons the former status quo by referring to “*Christendommelijkheid*” (a pun on the lines of Christendom-ness/Christian-dumbness) (1964, p. 178). The term “post-Christendom” was already in vogue in the 1990s, and has since been appropriated to describe the emerging socio-political global scene that had no formal adherence to Christianity, and to interrogate the situation of the Church on the margins rather than at the centre of socio-political power (Murray, 2004, p. 19).

<sup>133</sup> Boshoff and Fourie – taking the coordination of local and international wheat prices as the prime indicator - trace the beginnings of South African globalisation (most clearly seen in the port cities of Durban and Cape Town) to the 1870s – Cape Town has apparently led the country into economic, educational and medical globalisation (2015, p. 14).

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“conversion” – they were more likely to self-interpret it as a “coming back” to church [FE004: 0343]. The ministers apparently experience themselves as living within a larger community who consider themselves “culturally Christian” [ME005: 2239]. On the flip side of that, the ministers all expressed a certain amount of aggrieved frustration that people with no other sign of commitment to the Christian cause nonetheless expected them to perform “rites of passage” rituals for them at birth, marriage and death [MA002: 1314; ME005: 1225; 2239; .MZ009:1433; FA011: 5924 ]. The most distressing manifestation of this appears to be the way in which confirmation seems to signal the end of regular Church participation rather than its beginning for most young Methodists [FA011: 3233; 3335; see 3.2.5 below]. It seems to be a shared experience that ministers find themselves as custodians of a tradition in the capacity of ritual leaders rather than facilitators of a dynamic discipleship movement [MX003: 4431; MX008: 0204; 0803; 3233] – one minister graphically complains that being a minister is like being a dentist, an expert only consulted when necessary, and otherwise shunned [ME007: 1533]. Many ministers commented on the fact that many people who otherwise showed no interest in the Christian faith did seem to want to pay their religious dues by occasional attendance at the major festivals of the year, Christmas and Easter [ME001: 2130; MX003: 2108; FE004: 1705]. One minister even considers the primary “point of attraction” that outsiders might find is the fact that the Methodist church is such a stable, dependable pillar of tradition that one can always find it when needed for those funerals, weddings or baptisms (and even the occasional “ordinary” church service) that society seems to require [MX003: 10927].

All this points to a condition that is more like active Christendom than post-Christendom – or at any rate seems to indicate that the drift from Christendom into post-Christendom is not very advanced. The Church appears to have a strong cultural valency – and people seem to live their lives in a ritual cycle of baptism-confirmation-marriage-baptism-funeral. One possible contributing factor perhaps needs to be noted here is that for communities formerly excluded from national political processes under apartheid, the church was an important element of peoples’ lives lived in resistance to oppression<sup>134</sup>. Minister FA011 still appears to wield considerable socio-political power on behalf of the disenfranchised in her wider community, as she describes her story of her role in re-opening a local school that had been closed by the educational authorities [FA011: 10529 – 11209]. ME007 is happy to be closely associated with the local police forum [ME007: 0121, 4310] – although the relationship is not as “Christendom-bound” as that of the official police chaplains that he mentions [ME007: 1836]. As a result, I do not believe that local people have felt uniformly oppressed by the

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<sup>134</sup> An interesting topic for research might be something like “Ambivalences of Christendom and Memories of Apartheid”.

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way in which church and state have been somewhat aligned – rather they have experienced the church as perhaps the one voice speaking on their behalf in the corridors of power. This makes the transition from Christendom to post-Christendom a less culturally pressing issue for I think the majority of Capetonian Methodists.

I shall return to this issue as I draw the threads of my grounded theory together in chapter four – where I shall consider whether post-Christendom categories are unnecessary for considering the liturgy of conversion in the Methodist churches of Cape Town, or whether they do indeed need to be used in context-specific analysis of local cultures. In the meantime, we look at another issue that emerged from the interviews was the importance of understanding apartheid and colonialism

### **Post Colonialism/Apartheid**

The issues of colonisation did not go away when the colonial system was officially dismantled. Post-colonialism in the West is the enjoyment of profit and development advantage from the colonial years; post-colonialism in Africa and other formerly colonised territories of the world is experienced as the long recovery from injury (cf. Mashau, 2014, p. 193; Methula, 2014, p. 109). Post-colonialism in South Africa has a particularly difficult narrative, as external colonialism merged seamlessly with the internal colonialism of apartheid (cf. Andrew, 2015, p. 15). The lasting patterns of entrenched privilege/privation are nowhere near being resolved – “...coloniality outlives colonialism” (cf. Snyman, 2015, p. 268).

The current discourse of decoloniality – the resistance to this persistent structural successor of colonisation - draws on the work of theorists such as Anibal Quijano (Quijano, 2010). The rising generation of intellectuals argue that the work of decolonisation has hardly begun, and are beginning to engage more explicitly with the entrenched power imbalances in “post-colonial” society (cf. Langa (ed), 2017).

Once again, this major current social and theological issue does not seem to be at the top of the ministers’ minds when it comes to analysing and interacting with their congregations and wider communities. Everything they do is predicated on a society that finds itself in a post-apartheid situation. But the de facto segregation of the church into coloured-Xhosa-white fragments is something which they operate in without comment. Mention is made of the infamous Group Areas Act when speaking of a coloured congregation that meets weekly in a church building that used to be the centre of a thriving coloured community – an area which was “sanitised” for whites only by the apartheid government, but whose church was left untouched due to some vestigial religious scruple [MX003: 1714]. However, the ecclesial

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issues faced by a church like this in a community like this with a history like this do not apparently feature highly in thoughts on evangelism and conversion. Black people still apparently experience themselves as “silenced” in white suburbs [ME005: 3513]; the suggestion of coloured people having the self-confidence to evangelise in a wealthy white suburb is apparently disturbing and “unwise” [FA011:12003]. None of the ministers cited residual issues from colonisation and apartheid (related to Church connivance with state) as issues that might be offensive to the alternatively faithed. The ministers all live and minister in a city landscape shaped by inequalities entrenched by apartheid – on the one hand one minister disdains R10,000 as being too paltry a sum for meaningful consideration in terms of evangelism [ME007: 5945]; on the other a minister finds himself agitating for the establishment of a public library in a resource-starved community [MX003: 4720].

There are some hints, however, that a wider political consciousness does inform the pastoral concerns of some of the ministers. Two ministers referenced the #feesmustfall issue [FE004:2703; MZ009: 3210]. One minister seemed to have tried to grasp the nettle by running a session on “white privilege”, (which, incidentally, actually *did* attract outsiders into his church building!) [ME012: 1139], while another minister thinks that a good way for spending a windfall R10,000 earmarked for evangelism would be to spend it on banners for use in silent protests outside politically and socially significant court cases [MA002: 10222]. MX003 makes some bitter comments about the corruption and rapacity of ANC ward councillors [MX003:3725], along with critical remarks about those in power who use their influence to enrich themselves [MX003: 5908]. MZ009 could well be the spokesperson for this way of understanding the implications of ministry that is in touch with the wider world: “Whatever happens to our community, our kids, it affects us, because at the end of the day we are going to suffer as a result of what is happening in our country” [MZ009: 3210]

This too, then is an issue that must be addressed in the framing of my grounded theory. But a related issue is what I think of as the “post-Uhuru” phenomenon.

## Post Uhuru

The glory days of liberation are a recent memory for South Africans. People recall vividly where they voted in 1994 and what they felt like. This is a supremely happy romantic memory for everybody who recounts it.<sup>135</sup> But a new generation has arisen, and although they call themselves the “born-frees” (cf. John, et al., 2015), the euphoria of freedom seems

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<sup>135</sup> Except for some; one old white lady I once spoke to in Port Elizabeth referred to the “Good old apartheid days” quite un-self-consciously.

to be dissipating. By Post Uhuru<sup>136</sup> I refer to the reality that independence from Colonial rule has morphed into a new range of experiences for people in Africa – in my study specifically for Capetonians. A notorious recent incidence of this was when the government spokesperson, Jimmy Manyi, referred to a “surplus of coloured people” in the Western Cape (Graham, 2011)<sup>137</sup>. In South Africa the post-Uhuru condition can perhaps be epitomised by the rise of the Economic Freedom Fighters political party with their sharp rhetoric against the ANC as a failed liberation movement (Nemakonde, 2017). One popular expression of these disappointments is the plethora of “service delivery protests” (Nleya, 2011).

Another core reality of the post-Uhuru social context in Cape Town is the influx of migrants from the rest of Africa (cf. Johnson & Altbeke, 2011). Neither the city itself nor the role of the church in the city can be grasped without an understanding of this socio-political reality. People are finding living conditions in many parts of the continent simply too difficult (cf. Ngomane, 2010, pp. 17-18). South Africa, for all its economic issues, is a magnet for people hoping to survive and better themselves. The promises of Uhuru have not been fulfilled, and the new poverty of Africa is a truly desperate reality (cf. Ramphele, 2016). The dream of Uhuru was the return to simple days of peace and plenty, with independent land ownership for all and scope for cultural leisure – with the cities available for the young and adventurous to explore and prosper in. The reality is international debt, multinational corporations’ rapacity, and the urban slums (cf. Moyo, 2009, pp. 29-47). In my understanding “Post-Uhuru” widens the scope of concern from the local concerns of South Africans in their post-liberation struggles to include these “other-than-South-African” peoples, for whose sake, presumably, the Methodist Church also exists.

As with other heuristics for interpreting the urban landscape, the ministers seem to live within the issue without being able to articulate its dimensions and the impact it might have on Church functions (such as evangelism). People from many of our continental neighbours have become regular attendees at (usually) the Sunday morning English language service. There are people from Zimbabwe, Malawi, DRC, and Nigeria [MA002: 1535; MX003: 2500; FE004: 1425; ME005: 1323; FE006: 0746; etc.]. FE004 reckons that 20% of the morning congregation at her church are from the DRC, and she has taken to reading a French liturgy with them [FE004: 1425]. ME012 notes that the Sunday School at his church consists mostly of migrant children [ME012: 1704]. MX008 notes that what he calls a gradual “filtering in” of Africans from elsewhere in Africa [MX008: 2401]. For the most part, however, the ministers only seem to have been able to register this massive new urban reality because it has

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<sup>136</sup> *Uhuru* is the Swahili word for Freedom, a catchphrase in the Mau Mau and other East African Liberation movements (Mazrui, 1967).

<sup>137</sup> As my friend and colleague Sydney Witbooi once commented, “We are not white enough to be white, and not black enough to be black.” (personal conversation c. 1990).

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walked in the door. One gets the impression that if it had not been for the importunate behaviour of these new neighbours in coming to church they might not have been noticed.

The implications of this new reality are beginning to become clear. Starting with the traumatic xenophobic attacks in 2008 when the Methodist Churches (along with others) opened their doors as refuges for the displaced [ME012: 1532], there has been an accelerated attendance of Christians from the countries North of South Arica, specifically at the English speaking services, due to the use of a comprehensible language, and possibly also a warmer welcome. One church hosts an organisation that runs workshops specifically for African diaspora migrants [MA002: 2529]. Some ministers are even conflicted, feeling that they are not able to reach out to the growing communities of migrants in their neighbourhoods adequately [FE004: 3745; ME007: 4438]. This phenomenon will have to be figured into the grounded theory of evangelism and conversion that emerges from this study.

### Post Wesleyanism

Albert Outler's life work was restoring Wesleyan studies to current Methodism. He argued that "...even in a revolutionary age, the past is still prelude to the future....our freedom for that future depends at least partly on our present self-understanding in the light of our traditions and corporate experience, since these control our perspectives" (1991, p. 190). I have been particularly interested to discover how much the study of Wesley does "control the perspectives" of the ministers of the Methodist churches in Cape Town. My next chapter will look in greater depth at Wesley's *Journal*, but first I needed to get some sort of idea of which Wesleyan concepts are current in the self-awareness of the Methodist ministers

Because of my suspicion that Wesleyan categories of thought might be somewhat sparse, I used a different tactic in my interview process: I specifically probed for insights the ministers might have from John Wesley with regard to the issues of evangelism and conversion. The results are extremely interesting, and I have annotated the references and sources in the following table.

**Table 1 John Wesley References in Interviews**

Reference/allusion	Interview #
Moravians' joyful example	MA002: 2826
Georgia failure	MA002: 2826
Aldersgate	ME005: 2016; ; FE006: 1239; 1917; 2540; FA011: 13026; MX008: 2125; MZ009: 3521; ME012: 4825; MA002: 5809
Evangelism and Wesley	ME001: 0133; MA002: 4219
Four Alls	ME001: 0615; 2810; 3821; FE004: 2224; ME012: 2330; ME005: 3020;
Preaching on his father's grave	ME001:2834
World is my parish	MX008: 1806; ME001: 4944; MX003: 10308; ME012:

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	4240
Resentment over parish boundary issue raised by contemporary church	MZ009: 4959
World is my parish Wesley "quoted Martin Luther King" ☺	MZ009: 4948
Wesley getting to where the people are	ME001: 4805; MZ009: 4959; MA002: 3025; FE004:4634; ME005: 3757; MX008: 3001; FA011: 13131
Visiting the poor is good for your soul	MX003: 3646
Heckling	ME005: 2040
Wesley's being outside a rebuke to our lack of being outside	MX008: 3001
Scriptural holiness	ME001:2810; MA002: 3025;
Quadrilateral	ME001: 2930; MX003: 10328
Salvation by faith	ME001: 3012
People who desire to be saved from their sins	ME012: 3622
Wesley on grace	MX003: 5306; ME007: 3800; 5532; MZ009: 4022; MX003: 5153
Perfection in love	ME001: 2810; FE006: 3557; ME005: 3032
Universal love	ME001: 3012
No holiness without social holiness	ME001: 3749, ME005: 2716; 3032; MZ009: 3340; FA011: 11045; MX003: 5408; MX008: 2441;
Do all the good you can by all the means you can	FE006: 2033
Do no harm, do all good, love God	ME001: 2952; MZ009: 2828
Use of money	MX003: 3746; 4542; ME007: 2041; FE004: 3031; ME012: 3212
Sermon: you must be born again	FA011: 1952
Wesley's early morning prayer	FE006: 3356
Wesley baptised with fire of Spirit	FA011: 13026
Wesley's love, hunger & zeal for God	FA011: 13131
Spiritual Occurrences of John Wesley	FA0011: 0705
Wesley & medicine	MX003: 10328
Wesley & reading	MX003: 10328
Wesley as an example of a loving man	MX003: 11030
Wesley as real and not wearing a fancy robe	FE004: 4634;
Lady Huntingdon & equality	FE004: 3127
Acceptance of the unaccepted NB for Wesley	ME005: 3813
Focus on the poor	MX003: 3646; MX008: 2918; 2939
Class meetings	ME007: 4026; ME012: 4856
Give me a hundred preachers who fear nothing but evil and love nothing but God <sup>138</sup>	FE004: 2224
I don't fear Methodism ceasing to exist but that it will – as a dead sect	FA011: 12321
Wesley as a non-dry, interesting communicator	ME007: 5501
Wesley as rebel against establishment	ME007: 5501; FA011: 13026;
Wesley as outspoken and condemnatory	ME012: 4750
Horse-riding and walking as cheap transport	MX003: 10328
Getting thrown off horse not sign of being mistaken cf. #feesmustfall people	FE004: 4656

<sup>138</sup> From a letter from Wesley to Mather in 1777: "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God, and I give not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, they alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the kingdom of Heaven upon Earth" (Letters 6:272).

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No special value in Wesley, not relevant to today	FE004: 4008; ME007: 3100; ME012: 3201;
Wesley “not opposed to slavery” (?)	ME007: 3845
Wesley in era of mediaeval torture – message of grace as alternative strategy ☺	ME007: 5652

In each of questions five to ten in the interviews I tried to specifically engage the ministers in thinking about their *logos* and *praxis* of evangelism in terms of Wesleyan categories. The result was an interesting spread of connections with the Wesley tradition, with some important common threads. But it does not appear that Wesley is a natural referent for their thinking: in each of the six questions, Wesley references usually only emerged under specific prompting on my part. In fact, three of the ministers that could be thought of as the most postmodern, given their general responses, specifically denied the relevance of Wesley to their ministerial task [FE004: 4008; ME007: 3100; ME012: 3201]. Another minister, also potentially more likely to be influenced by postmodern sensibilities, seems to characterise all that he thinks of as archaic and irrelevant as “Wesleyan” [ME001: 0530]<sup>139</sup>.

However, the ministers still have a large deposit of Wesleyan lore. There was strong consensus that Wesley’s life was concerned with evangelism [ME001: 0133; MA002: 4219; ME001: 0615; 2810; 3821; FE004: 2224; ME012: 2330; ME005: 3020]. The dynamic for his ongoing concern with the salvation of others was universally agreed upon to be his conversion experience at the Aldersgate Road meeting [ME005: 2016; FE006: 1239; 1917; 2540; FA011: 13026; ME012: 4825; MA002: 5809]. Most of the ministers specifically alluded to the radical nature of Wesley’s locus for evangelism: in the market places, amongst the people and not only (or even primarily) in church buildings [ME001: 4805; MZ009: 4959; MA002: 3025; FE004:4634; ME005: 3757; MX008: 3001; FA011: 13131], with a particular interest in and focus upon the poorest of the poor [MX003: 3646; MX008: 2918; 2939; ME005: 3813]. This emphasis was balanced, in the ministers’ view, by an extremely strong understanding of Methodist Christians’ social responsibility to those in need around them [ME001: 3749, ME005: 2716; 3032; MZ009: 3340; FA011: 11045; MX003: 5408; MX008: 2441], and a robustly practical approach to people living out their faith in the realities of everyday life, as illustrated by the surprisingly large number of references to Wesley’s sermon on the use of money [MX003: 3746; 4542; ME007: 2041; FE004: 3031; ME012: 3212]. I will return to this list of Wesley references again, but for the purposes of analysis it seems to me that although there is a general knowledge of Wesley’s life and thought, it appears to be much like the concepts of post-modernism and post-Christendom – at hand, but not consciously operationalised into any sort of coherent “heuristic” for use in

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<sup>139</sup> Interestingly enough, one of these ministers exhibited two of the most surprising of non-historical evaluations of John Wesley: that Wesley had remained detached from the issue of slavery, and that Wesley had been a contrary voice to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Inquisition [ME007: 3845; 5652]. The question inevitably arises as to whether the ministers are rejecting Wesley, or only a caricature of Wesley.

understanding the Methodist tradition in relationship to the Methodist Church in its current cultural incarnations. This is a further issue to be followed up as I develop my grounded theory.

It seems clear that the ministers understand that Wesley was highly active in the spaces between the churches, in touch with ordinary people who did not necessarily relate to the culture of the church. But it also seems that this knowledge does not affect their framing of praxis. Post-Wesleyanism seems to translate into what I suspect John Wesley might have characterised as post-evangelism

### **Post-Evangelism**

Evangelism, which the ministers agree was undeniably an obsession of John Wesley, does not appear to be a major operational characteristic of many of the Methodist churches led by the ministers I interviewed. Many of the ministers responded to my first question, a request for stories about evangelism in action in their communities, with a frank declaration that there were not many (or any) incidents of evangelism that they could recall [ME005: 0146; ME007: 0039; MZ009: 0258]. In this area I incline to take issue with David Bosch's view that evangelism is a significant element in the emerging paradigm of post-modern Christianity – at least as far as I can see from the data I am able to derive from my interviews. The idea that the Gospel should progressively change the lives of church members – what I have defined as evangelisation – is strongly punted. But the idea of evangelism as a “challenge” to “all people, everywhere” to “radically re-align their lives” does not seem to be an active pre-occupation of most of the ministers I interviewed. In fact, attempts to persuade the alternatively faithed to consider converting to Christianity seem to be distinctly unpopular. FE004 says that a view of evangelism framed in terms of John Stott's categories of “presence, proclamation and persuasion” was irrelevant to contemporary church and culture [FE004: 0150]. She goes on to reject the value of even using the term “evangelism” [0814; 2105], and equates evangelism directly with being offensive [4546].

But a few of the churches could hardly be categorised as “post-evangelism” churches; MA002 and FA011 are notable examples of churches where the ministers seem to be highly committed to evangelism (of a certain type). In terms of Bosch's understanding of the untidy nature of paradigm changes in the life of the church, this is not unexpected (1991, p. 188). But some sort of “evangelism paradigm shift” seems to be more advanced in the communities of other ministers, who seem to have drifted in a direction that sharply limits

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evangelism, either through losing a liturgical place for it in more conservative settings<sup>140</sup>, or losing a philosophical place for evangelism in more post-modern settings<sup>141</sup>. It is unclear how long this situation has obtained in the churches affected by it, or what the reasons are for this reduced or absent dimension of evangelism might be, but it seems reasonable to characterise many of the Methodist churches in Cape Town as generally occupying – or tending to occupy - a “post-evangelism” position. The ministers seem to think of church in terms that specifically exclude persuasion-oriented evangelism; which in turn would seem to justify characterising the church as existing in a position of flux between some former state where evangelism was normal, to another in which it is becoming (or has become) a “non-norm”. I will return to the issue of evangelism later in this chapter and then again when I develop my grounded theory.

### Conclusion

These categories can only be a preliminary sketch in understanding the complexity of the city landscape in which the “Methodist Churches of Cape Town” exist. I have deliberately looked at both general social categories (postmodernism, post-ruralism, post-Christendom, post-colonialism/apartheid, and post-Uhuru), as well as specifically Methodist issues (post-Wesleyanism and post-evangelism) – trying to catch something of the complexity of a theological institution in its sociological milieu.

I suggest that what might make these categories more helpfully adaptive is that they can be read in different permutations. A church culture might not have significantly moved from the “pre” to the “post” condition on one index, and yet on another it could have made an almost complete transition. Or a church community might not show any significant movement on one or more of the indexes. As Bosch noted, applying paradigm theory to social categories is always going to be somewhat inexact, since although the majority of a population might have migrated into the new paradigm, significant numbers might well continue in the old paradigm by dint of applying certain social strategies (1991, p. 188). As a result, a church that might still operate as a colonial-era entity could also have transitioned to post-

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<sup>140</sup> MX003 considers that anything and everything the church does is evangelism, celebrating communion, attending church on Sundays, or doing hospital visitation; drawing the conclusion that any engagement by any church member in any church activity is direct involvement in evangelism [MX003: 4052]. This definition of evangelism prevents any enquiry into whether any evangelism in terms of persuading the alternatively faithed to consider converting to Christian faith is happening or not [MX003: 2325].

<sup>141</sup> For ME001 evangelism is not intended to be about our message of good news for others, but the encouragement of others to tell us the good news about their situations and then celebrating that with them [ME001: 0133]. FE004 feels this ambivalence about whether the Christian Good News is intended for those who have alternative faith systems [FE004: 3745].

evangelism and post-modernism. A post-apartheid church could be operating in a largely ruralist, Wesleyan paradigm, etc.

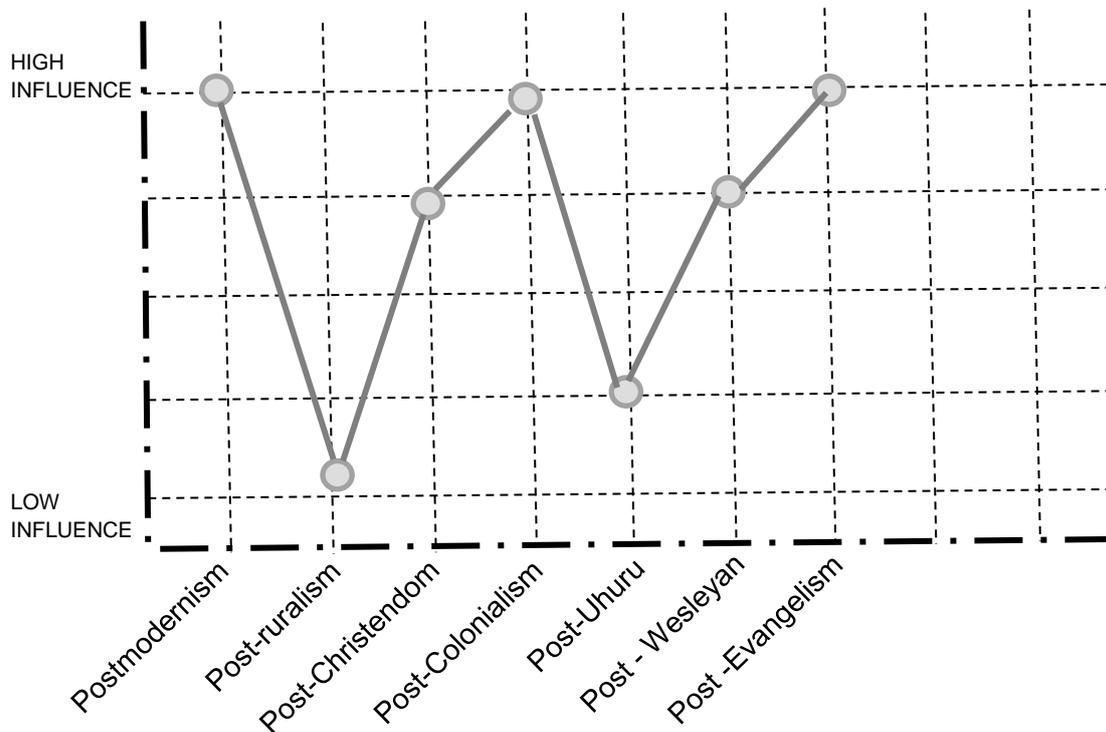


Figure 7 Sample Analysis of Random Methodist Church by Urban Socio-cultural Categories

One commonality in all these different options for analysis is that the cultural world of Cape Town is in extreme flux, and all the changes in outlook are contingent upon the need to change and adapt to emerging urban realities (cf. Pargament 1997). Rural life morphs into urban life, and the settled politics of the past are being completely overhauled. The liberators

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are now being questioned<sup>142</sup> and the reality of liberation itself is being brought into doubt in public discourse (cf. Malikané, 2017). The relationship of our local world to the global world is not at all clear. Different narratives are offered by different branches of government and opposition parties; different stories are put forward by different sectors of civil society. The Gospel of the great television evangelists is full of healing and prosperity, but there it seems that the religious transaction that used once to involve conversion and commitment is perhaps now settled with a donation of money (cf. Ihejirika, 2009, p. 22)

Further research would obviously be necessary to test the usefulness of this model. But in the meantime the Methodist Church, like any other social institution, has to cope with ordinary people living through extraordinary transitions. The story of Cape Town, as told by the ministers through the lens of their own experiences, suggests that a complex model with multiple variables is likely to be the most helpful in coming to terms with any particular micro-locality.

### 3.2.2 A Story-line of “Church” – Narrative Ecclesiology

The interviews with the ministers generated a good deal of ecclesiology. Although the interview schedule was not designed to directly probe ecclesiology, the conversations on evangelism and conversion generated much insight into how the ministers think about the churches they are tasked with leading.

#### Three Methodist Churches

I have constantly struggled with confirmation bias in this study, with the temptation to mine the data to establish my opinions which have developed over a lifetime of involvement with these churches. But one thing that seems indisputable is the “cultural trinity” of the Methodist churches in Cape Town. The ministers often use this as a category of discernment. As noted above in [1.1], the Methodist churches exist in these culturally-bonded forms in many of the different urban contexts of Cape Town. The first of the triad is those Methodist Churches that consist mostly of recently rural congregants, the Xhosa language *amaWesile* congregations. These tend to present as churches that form a bulwark of tradition against the eroding influences of the city, which are mostly read as drugs, gangsterism, and a party-lifestyle [MX003: 1219; FE004: 3531; ME005: 0620; FA011: 2815]. They have a vigorous inflow of people whose rural roots are Methodist [ME005 0903]<sup>143</sup>. These churches are characterised

<sup>142</sup> For instance, the opposition Democratic Alliance has developed an easy domination of the Cape Town Metropole – an embarrassment in many ways to the reigning ANC party which was the leading force in the liberation from apartheid.

<sup>143</sup> This is not to say that Xhosa culture and language churches are necessarily churches amongst the poor. MX008 describes a congregation whose societal level is such that the main the reason people

by a strong adherence to formal liturgies<sup>144</sup>. People recite and sing a slightly modified version of the 18th century Anglican liturgy. They also sing a small selection of translated Wesley hymns, with a few indigenous contributions<sup>145</sup>. ME005 says what any Methodist minister or preacher knows – in these communities “...you can do anything you like so long as you follow the order of morning prayer. When you’ve finished that you can preach for a week, have group work, or you can do drama, but you *must* follow the *liturgy*. You’ve got to have *siyakudumisa*: the *te deum* must happen” [ME005: 1611]. Methodism here has the structures of Methodism from the 18th century still apparently in place – plus extra layers dating to the missionary era in South Africa. The authority-lines of minister to local preacher to society steward to class leader to member-in-good-standing are still robustly intact. In addition there are the uniformed societies – the Local Preachers’ Association, the men’s and women’s Manyanos, as well as a formal choir. The church has a very hierarchical, tribally structured social pattern, expressed through the membership of these uniformed societies and a strong maintenance of the class-system<sup>146</sup> as the base level of church discipline and control [ME005: 2207]. Their process of encapsulation of converts is in reasonable working order – a clear path opens up before one if one is converted. The pathway to honour is clearly demarcated, and at all points one has clearly delineated social roles. However, I think it might be a mistake to assume that the situation is simple. Many who call themselves members of these Methodist Churches seem to be finding that the force of urban life has placed them in a place where they need more dignity-affirmation of identity – a place to be counted as equals in a globalising world<sup>147</sup>. The children of rural migrants to the city, and poor people in general, are typically educated in the cities *in order* to adapt to global, urban, culture as quickly as possible. They now find themselves in a world where the cultural certainties of their parents and grandparents are eroding [see 3.2.1 above][FA011: 4303].

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leave his Xhosa-culture congregation is that they buy houses and want to worship closer to where they live and work – a quintessentially yuppie concern [MX008: 0708]. But the majority of Methodist Xhosa churches do indeed exist amongst the poor [ME005 1414].

<sup>144</sup> It needs to be remarked that the liturgical observances of the amaXhosa are nothing like the typically weak and attenuated liturgical observances found, for instance, in a white-majority high Anglican or Catholic church, where muttering and whispering are the characteristic mode of expression amongst the congregation. Liturgical Methodism amongst the amaXhosa is a full-voiced, unapologetic, and physically energetic affair.

<sup>145</sup> One notable Xhosa-written hymn is Ntsikana’s Great hymn (MCSA, 1926, p. #20), one of the earliest examples of mission-independent Christian hymnody (Hodgson, 1997, p. 72).

<sup>146</sup> Ironically enough the “class system”, originally intended by Wesley as a voluntary and egalitarian group existing for the free association of self-aware sinners [4.2.4], has become the expression of the entry level “social class” for new members.

<sup>147</sup> The reference is to sociological analysis of virtue as being dependant on either “honour” or “dignity”, where in honour-based societies one has virtue due to one’s social status, and in dignity-based societies one has virtue due to one’s personal worth (cf. Campbell & Manning, 2016, p. 719), [cf. 5.3.2]

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The second triad of the Methodist Church in Cape Town is that of the urbanised poor and working classes – urban people with historic roots in the city, speaking Afrikaans, mostly, who often find themselves locked into the crime-ridden communities of the Cape Flats, with relatively small prospects of working their way out into the economic freedoms of the middle class<sup>148</sup>. These are traditionally urban peoples for the most part, tracing their presence back to the founding of Cape Town in the 1650s. However, some of these churches do have large populations of recently urbanised – and hence more post-rural than historically urban - people from Namaqualand. In these churches the hierarchy works itself out along the line of Minister to Society Steward to Local Preacher to Congregant. These churches have a stronger “evangelistic rhetoric” [MA002: 4037; FA011: 0249, etc.], but are nevertheless only breaking even in terms of numbers [FA011: 3233], with a strong exodus of their young people to the gang and drug culture on the one hand [MX03: 1219; 4902; MZ009: 0734], and alternative urban lifestyles on the other [FA011: 3432, MX003: 1404; 1930]. But ministers working in this context seem to depend on a relatively high returnee rate of people in their middle to older years [FA011: 3432; MX003: 1049, 1219; 1404<sup>149</sup>; MZ009: 1433]. These churches are also characterised by strong group cohesion (although factionalism is an issue that challenges their integrity [FA011: 5339; MX003: 1830]). The formal catechetical/ encapsulation program seems to be very problematic in these churches, which is in turn demonstrated by a generally stagnant growth profile [MX003: 1049; MZ009:1342<sup>150</sup>]. As far as I have seen, the class-system with its rules (e.g. about needing to attend class-meetings and pay one’s “penny” otherwise face banning from taking communion [cf. MX003: 4431]) has been abandoned. They are still singing the Wesley hymns with fervour – although typically their repertoire is much reduced.

And the third of the triad is the ailing, white, English-speaking part of the Methodist Church that is rapidly aging and declining in numbers [MA002: 0739; ME005: 0747; ME012: 0818<sup>151</sup>]. These churches seem to share the same problem of failed confirmation with all the

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<sup>148</sup> Many of these people come from formerly prosperous families and are in well paid jobs or running businesses of their own. But for many so-called coloured Methodists the realities of life are harsh [FA011: 12003].

<sup>149</sup> MX003 indicates that there is an expectation that the youth will mostly take an extended sabbatical or *rumspringa* from the Methodist church after confirmation: “People will often say, “No .... there’s a drop, but they are going to come back, you know, they want to explore” [MX003: 1404].

<sup>150</sup> MZ009 here is careful to explain how an apparent drop in numbers is not actually a drop in membership – just that many people are on a lifelong journey that takes them away from and then back towards church membership.

<sup>151</sup> ME001 completely sidesteps the question of increase/decrease in church numbers – ME001: 0948. One suspects that the church is not growing numerically, but would need further data to settle the matter. FE004 is in a situation where the numbers have been dramatically cut over the disastrous tenure of the church’s two previous ministers [FE004: 1219]. ME007 claims that numbers are stable, whilst at the same time explaining how numbers have fallen – an interesting approach to answering the question [ME007: 0527].

other Methodist communities [MA002: 4202; FE004: 4512], sharing a heartache over wayward children who seem alienated from the life of Christ [ME007: 2200]. The hierarchy runs from Minister to Society stewards to Congregants, with the Local Preachers considered as a sort of parachurch group. Clerical dress is de-emphasised; the atmosphere is often studiously informal and congregants are often not dressed to show status [FE004 recoils at the suggestion that she might have worn her dog-collar to a church fete [FE004: 4209]. Class-meetings in the Wesleyan style are unheard of; although a small percentage of the congregation in many churches meets informally in small groups with other church members once a week on a week night. Instead of reliance on the baptism-confirmation process to facilitate discipleship, a great deal of emphasis seems to be given to the need to establish these small groups for intimate fellowship as part of an effective discipleship process<sup>152</sup>. Membership of small groups is entirely voluntary (and not universal) [ME001: 0133; MA002: 0928; 4738; FE006:0220; ME007: 4026; ME012: 0547; 0649; 0802; 4856]. But although these churches are apparently trying their utmost to use the best available theory of discipleship, they seem, nonetheless, to be moving along a similar path of decay to the general trajectory of the affluent formal protestant churches of the North-Atlantic rim countries (cf. Chaves & Eagle, 2015, p. 3).

### **Bible-Narrative Roots of the Methodist Church in Cape Town**

The rather abbreviated ethnographic approach I have taken can only produce a snapshot of the data available. But with regard to the Bible my questionnaire was specifically aimed, in part, at uncovering how the *Logos* informed the *logos* of the ministers: “what do you teach with regard to evangelism?” was the headline for question 5, with a follow up question on “What do you preach?” Similarly, question 8 specifically asked about “...the most important issues involved in conversion”. And I believe that these questions did unlock important attitudes to evangelism and conversion, and did show how the thinking of the ministers was shaped by Scripture. I have tabulated the direct references to Scripture below.

**Table 2 Bible References in interviews**

Interview Reference (A list of numbers refers to the incidences of that concept in the interviews in numerical order)	Subject
5+60+19+7+7+7+13+2+11+66+19=216(90+60+66)	God
2+14+14+7+3+6+5+8+0+56+12=127(71+56)	Jesus
0+0+20+0+6+13+2+18+1+2+17=59	Christ
2+0+5+0+0+0+0+0+0+21+5=33	Holy Spirit
FE004: 0530	Metanoia

<sup>152</sup> ME001, ME005, FE006, ME007 and ME012 – all of them ministers at English-speaking, formerly white Methodist churches – make no reference at all to confirmation classes as having a role in conversion. Perhaps they have conceded that the institution no longer fulfils its catechetical intention?

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FA011: 11850	God walked with Adam and Eve
ME001: 3217	Sabbath keeping
FA011: 11330	Ark of the presence
FA011: 12901	Such a time as this
MA002: 3749	Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly
0+5+0+0+0+0+1+0+2+1+0=9	Justice
MX003: 5238; ME005 2716; 3032; MX008: 2441; MZ009: 3413; FA011: 5122;	Holiness (social holiness)
ME001: 2810; MA002: 3025	Holiness (Scriptural holiness)
ME005: 0457	Gospel of John
ME001: 0133; FE006: 1019; ME012: 4335; FE004: 0800;	the Kingdom of God
MX003: 3840	God so loved the world
ME005: 0620	Christ the only way
FA011: 5831	Pearls and pigs
FA011: 2815	Saved
6+0+0+2+2+1+0+0+0+12+10=33	
FA011: 2815	Born again
0+0+1+0+0+0+0+0+0+6+0=7	Born again
ME005: 1640	Love your neighbour
ME012: 4652	Woman taken in adultery
FE006: 1318	Sermon on Peter
MA002: 3505	If you love me obey my commands
FE004: 0438	Convicting people of sin
MA002: 2633	Washing feet
MX003: 3605; FA011: 11213	The cross/death of Jesus
FE006: 2124;	Easter – Jesus is alive/resurrection
FE006:2124; 3356 FA011: 0904; 11149;	Jesus is alive and present
MX002: 0452;0530; MX003: 0648; ME005 3032; 3323; FE006:2550; ME007: 0424; MX008: 1106; MZ009: 3521; FA011: 2502; ME012: 0407	Experiencing Jesus
MX008: 2743; MX003: 4542	Matthew 28
ME005: 1640; MX008: 1106; FA011: 5018; MX003: 4323; MX008: 1203; MA002: 4900; FA011: 12901	Make disciples
ME005: 3235; FA011: 11850; ME012: 3952	You shall be my witnesses
ME012: 4500	Damascus Road
ME001:0515	New creation
MA002: 0550; ME012: 2550	Gifts of the Spirit
ME005: 0643	Confess your sins
ME001: 2237; ME012	Fruit of the Spirit
MA002: 3233	Priesthood of all believers
MA002: 4235	Paul: I give my life every day over to him
ME007: 4026	Awakened to God's word
FA011: 11507	I planted, Apollos watered
ME012: 3350	Led by the Spirit
7+12+16+7+3+8+6+1+5+37+16=122	Love
1+0+13+0+1+1+12+0+6+10+2=4	Grace

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0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0=0	Compassion
10+2+2+1+4+2+1+5+2+3+18=50	Faith
0+0+0+4+5+1+1+2+5+4+4=26	Sin/sinned/sinner/sinful
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+1+0=1	Evil
2+1+0+1+0+0+2+0+0+7+0=13	Bad
16+1+12+5+2(not good)+2+3+3+10(1xnot good)+2=55	Good
0+0+0+1+2+0+2+0+0+3+1=9	Wrong
1(1)+2+1+3+0+1+3+1+2+4+1=19	Right
0+1+0+0+1+0+1+0+0+4+0=7	True
0+0+1+0+0+0+3+0+0+8+0=12	Truth/truthful
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+3=3	Guilt/guilty
FE004: 0438; ME005 2805; ME007: 3845; MX008: 2131; ME012: 2429	Forgive/Forgiven/Forgiveness
0+0+0+2+1+0+1+2+0+0+1=7	
ME005: 2136; 3650; FA011: 3644; ME012: 2140; 2550; 4535	Hell
0	Judgement (of God), God as Judge
ME007: 5036; MZ009: 4810; FA011: 12901	Judgemental
MX003: 5153; MZ009: 4022; FA011: 11330	Prevenient grace
12+0+6+7+1+0+0+0+2+1+1=30	Transform, Transforming, Transformation, transformational...
4+13+14+12+19+6+14+19+10+10+6=12	Convert, converting, conversion, converted
0+0+0+0+0+0+1+2+1+4+0=8	Lord and Saviour
ME001(4); MA002(2); MX003(2); MX008(2); FA011(3)	Word
ME001(2); MX003(3); ME005(2); FE006(1); MZ009(1); FA011(9); ME012(1)	Bible
ME001(3); MA002(1); MX003(3); ME005(1); FA011(3);	Scripture
ME001(2); MA002(5); FE004(1); ME005(6); ME007(3); MX008(2); MZ009(2); FA011(2)	Gospel
14+20+37+21+41+17+18+29+13+23+23=256	Evangelise, evangelism, evangelisation, evangelistic, evangelist
FE004: 2042; ME005: 0530; ME005 1754; FA011: 2343; 2939; 5606; ME012: 2740	Relationship with Christ
MA001(3);	Experience
3+10+8+4+9+3+4+8+10+11+11=81	Members, membership

The ministers generally seem to show a high regard for the Bible as normative for Christian life – MA002 considers that his very identity as a Christian is constituted by “Scriptural holiness”, Wesley’s characteristic description of the principle<sup>153</sup>: “Wesley lived by God’s Word, scriptural holiness. And that need to be our identity” [MA002: 3025]. ME007 describes conversion as “awakening to God’s Word” [ME007: 4026]. FA011 has an almost fundamentalist veneration of the Bible as written by God himself – although she is in many

<sup>153</sup> I explore this in my analysis of Wesley’s *Journal* [4.2.4].

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respects an outrider in terms of hermeneutics [FA011:11718]<sup>154</sup>. Methodist ministers are demonstrably not proof-texters, but their reflections do seem to be full of theological reflection on the biblically-normed essentials of a faithful Christian life. They all seem to have a tacit respect for the Bible, and although they had relatively little to offer by way of specific Scriptural referencing for the issues of conversion and evangelism<sup>155</sup>, they showed a generally unquestioning intention of basing their ministries on the precepts of the Bible. Even ME001, who is so provocatively *avant garde* in his opinions, nevertheless leads people in Bible studies, because of a desire that people be "...exposed to the Word, the written Word" [ME001: 0632].

Several of the ministers agreed that the "Kingdom of God" was the main hermeneutical key for understanding our times and the purpose of the church [MX001: 0133; FE006: 1019; ME012: 4335; MA002: 5003; FE004: 0800]. There were two main ways the ministers seemed to approach this. One was that God is at work in the world, and we must follow in his footsteps, discovering what he is doing and then celebrating and participating in it [ME001: 0133-0510 (an exposition of evangelism as "discovery of the hidden Kingdom"); MA002: 0550 (an exposition of the *Missio Dei* as discovery of God's purposes); ME012: 4335 (where the Kingdom is viewed as something people have simply to be persuaded to realise is all around them already)]. What this seemed to mean in the ministers' minds was that it was not incumbent on leadership to plan methodically for the sake of the Kingdom. This Hermeneutic of the Surprising Kingdom [ (Illich, 1974, p. 7) cited in (Bosch, 1979, p. 59)] showed up in various ways. For ME005, the benchmark conversion story was of a woman who came looking for a Gospel of John because of some mysterious inner prompting to seek the way of Christ [ME005: 0457]. FE004 recounts the story of a surprise transfer of allegiance of one family to the church due to the unexpected influence of a community fete [4209]. MX003 cites the arbitrary attendance of outsiders at home visits, whom he then invites to share in the Lord's Table celebration [0353]. ME001 revels in stories of things that happen unexpectedly in the immediate geographic locality around the church – "...you've got to get the community around your church, and not having this sort of shit of people coming in from suburbia or whatever [1436] – even if for him evangelism consists of people doing yoga or practicing music or running a social media course in the church building. The idea seems

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<sup>154</sup> FE004 and ME007 were the two ministers who used the fewest of the Word/Bible/Scripture/Gospel words, but I would not say that this means that they are not working from a broadly evangelical stance. FE004 exhibits a capacity for nuanced hermeneutics in her exegesis of "metanoia" [0438-0702]. Given her extreme reluctance to speak in conventional categories – she says "... you take a risk coming to me because I am not going to give you traditional, down the line answers" [1035], I suspect it might be a mistake to read her "word count" as a disavowal of the Bible.

<sup>155</sup> Only one minister referenced the "flagship" conversion story of the New Testament, Paul's Damascus road experience [Acts 9:1-19 - ME012: 4500]. Acts 1:8 was the only other citation of the Book of Acts [ME005: 3235; FA011: 11850; ME012: 3952] – it did not seem that the book of Acts influenced their thinking heavily when thinking about evangelism.

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to be that the Kingdom of God is a mysterious entity or force that plays out in the world with no particular reference to the church.

The other approach to understanding the Kingdom was the apparently contradictory idea that the Kingdom of God is something that Christians are called to “build” or “actualise” in the world [One minister equates evangelism with an active “building the Kingdom” [FE006:1019]. Another, wishing to avoid using the word “evangelism”, prefers to think of people coming to “bring about the Kingdom of God on earth” [FE004: 0743]. This seems to be the “minority view; and it appears to see the duty of the church as the establishment of a sphere of Christian influence in society through its existence and activities. I would need much more specific conversations to disentangle the significance of these issues to the ministers and in the light of the issues of evangelism and conversion, and I will return to this issue again in chapter four, as I try and establish my grounded theory.

Another strong strand of biblical reference amongst the ministers appears to be that discipleship is (notionally) the main mode of existence and growth of the church [ME005: 1640; MX008: 1106; FA011: 5018; MX003: 4323; MX008: 1203; MA002: 4900; FA011: 12901; MX008: 2743; MX003: 4542]. The ministers seemed uninterested in talking about evangelism as persuasion to consider faith; they wanted to discuss the task of evangelisation, which I have defined as “facilitating the growth of Christians with reference to the norms and values of the Gospel” [2.4.9]. Very few of them had anything to say directly about persuading people to consider converting to the Christian faith, other than as a negative assessment of manipulative and counterproductively offensive techniques. They seemed to regard evangelism as an embarrassing relic from a former era of the church, misapplied to a new cultural context for which it was irrelevant or worse [see below 5.2.1]. It appears, then, that the proper domain for the minister is considered to be as a discipler of disciples, empowering and enabling ordinary members to grow in their faith. As part of that growth the ministers appear to expect that the “ordinary members” of their congregation will do the work of persuading people in their secular pursuits to convert to Christianity [3.2.6].

A third widespread emphasis, embedded in every conversation and apparently a key interpretive category, is the “love/grace” strand of the Scriptures. One gets the feeling that the ministers might not want the church to be the church if it was not a community of love and grace; ME007 puts it like this (after an improbable - but telling – anachronistic historical juxtaposition of Wesley’s era with the era of the inquisition) “... the church... is supposed to be a place of grace, not a place of punishment in the name of justice” [ME007: 5631]. The judgement of God is definitely not on the evangelistic agenda of the ministers – they only reference “hell” as a category of thought they are not prepared to use, and which they believe ought not to be part of the church’s communicative vocabulary [ME005: 2136; 3650;

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FA011: 3644; ME012: 2140; 2550; 4535]<sup>156</sup>. And interestingly, not even one of the ministers references the Judgement of God in the conversation about conversion. The reference to “holiness” seems to be reserved for the context of their understanding of “social holiness”, which for them universally means holiness worked out as part of a compassionate and just engagement with the world between the churches [ME001: 3749, ME005: 2716; 3032; MZ009: 3340; FA011: 11045; MX003: 5408; MX008: 2441].

They are definite and articulate on love and grace [there are 168 love/grace references in the interviews – although only one actual scriptural citation (John3:16) [MX003: 3840]], and they are extremely strong on the requirement of Christians to act compassionately to their fellow human beings, whether or not they share the same faith commitments. An articulate expression of this can be seen in my conversation with MA002

*“Remember there is no Gospel unless you’re part of the social Gospel. And for me part of justice and service is very important. The old department of the Methodist Church: Christian Citizenship Department – that is the face of the church. We cannot do justice unless we evangelise; we cannot evangelise unless we do justice. Micah 6:8 - live justly, do mercy, walk humbly. We cannot do it, we can’t do it without the other. We can’t love God and hate neighbour, we can’t hate neighbour and love God. So that of justice and service and evangelism goes hand in hand in hand. It’s not two entities for me.”*  
MA002: 3749

There are many more observations to be made. The ministers mostly draw their normative scripture references from the New Testament. They tend to avoid formulaic expressions like “saved” and “born again”. Their reference to the role of Scripture in the process of evangelism and conversion is also slender [Table 2 Bible References in interviews]. They do, however, tend to place a high value on transformation [3.2.6]. They reference “faith” relatively infrequently and somewhat ambivalently [Table 2 Bible References in interviews]. However, in my formulation of a grounded theory I will confine myself to the three areas that have been emphasised by the ministers: the themes of love, kingdom, and discipleship to show how these can be expressed in any liturgical formulation of the Church.

## The Liturgical Rhythms of Life

*“... [concerning conformation services] people come there because it’s just you know some party, I believe, and I tell...it’s a party – it’s new*

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<sup>156</sup> The three occurrences of “hell” in ME001 are only as expletives.

*clothes, it's this big hype; they're going to get confirmed. That's in our context – that's what I know. And it's true, I can say it from growing up I know it's been like that all these years. And very few, even if our confirmation service says 'Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?' 'Yes' they answer, 'Yes I'm going to serve the Lord' but it doesn't mean anything. Some of them really are seriously are not saved..." [FA011: 3335]*

Table 3 Liturgy References in the Interviews

reference	Subject and frequency
ME001(7); MA002(9); MX003(9); FE004(5); ME005(1); FE006(4); ME007(8); MX008(0) ; MZ009(4) ; FA011(7); ME012(13)	Sunday 67
ME001(9); MA002(19); MX003(13); FE004(8); ME005(3); FE006(4); ME007(3); MX008(3) ; MZ009(4) ; FA011(27); ME012(5)	Church (building) 98
ME001(60); MA002(89); MX003(49); FE004(38); ME005(17); FE006(22); ME007(41); MX008(19) ; MZ009(39) ; FA011(99); ME012(28)	Church(Institution/ community) 501
ME001:1310, 3611; MA002: 0258, 1150(2); 1314(2), 3329(3); 5524; 5651; MX003:1714(2); 1930; 4323; 4542; 10927; 11140(5); FE004: 1219(6); 1811; FE004: 1219; 1417; 2911; ME007: 5800; MZ009: 1433; FA011: 0720; 0904; 1010; 1113; 1312; 1513(2); 1612(3); 1727; 1836; 1952; 2131; 2242; 2343; 2502(2); 2558(5); 4209; 10026; 10226(2); 10529; 10630(5); 13428 (2); ME012: 4240	Minister 39+32
ME001(5); MA002(12); MX003(8); FE004(4); ME005(9); FE006(3); ME007(3); MX008(5) ; MZ009(10); FA011(10); ME012(11)	Member/membership 80
ME001(2); MA002(4); MX003(6); FE004(3); ME005(1); FE006(1); ME007(1); MX008(1); FA011(9); ME012(1)	Leader/leadership 29
1+0+0+2+1+0+2+0+0+4+0	Local preacher10
ME001(0); MA002: 3329; MX003(0); FE004(0); ME005(0); FE006(0); ME007(0); MX008(0) ; MZ009(0) ; FA011(5); ME012(0)	Believer 6
FA011: 5831	Unbeliever 1
ME007: 0424 (non-church-goer); 1553 (non-church-goer); 3527 (non-church vs. fully committed)	Non-member/non-Christian/non-church-goer 3
ME001(0); MA002(6); MX003(4); FE004(5); ME005(4); FE006(3); ME007(5); MX008(2) ; MZ009(17) ; FA011(11); ME012(2)	Community (outside) 59
8+4+2+5+0+1+0+3+1+3+10+6	World (alternative to church) 43
ME001(3); MA002(2); MX003(0); FE004(0); ME005(1); FE006(0); ME007(1); MX008(0) ; MZ009(0) ; FA011(5); ME012(0)	Neighbour/neighbourhood/neighbourly 12
ME001(2); MA002(2); MX003(8); FE004(2); ME005(2); FE006(0); ME007(4); MX008(3) ; MZ009(2) ; FA011(1); ME012(0)	Society (outside – not "Methodist Society") 26
ME001(1); MA002(4); MX003(7); FE004(1); ME005(5); FE006(1); ME007(0); MX008(1) ; MZ009(2) ; FA011(1); ME012(8)	Outsider/outside 31
ME001(1); MA002(0); MX003(0); FE004(0); ME005(1); FE006(0); ME007(0); MX008(0) ; MZ009(0) ; FA011(0); ME012(0)	Strangers 2
ME001(3); MA002(1); MX003(6); FE004(0); ME005(11); FE006(7); ME007(2); MX008(2) ; MZ009(4) ; FA011(5); ME012(5)	Experience (as factor in faith) 46
ME001(0); MA002(2); MX003(0); FE004(0); ME005(2); FE006(0); ME007(0); MX008(0) ; MZ009(0) ; FA011(16); ME012(5)	Feeling/feel (factor in faith) 9+16
ME001(6); MA002(0); MX003(5); FE004(0); ME005(0); FE006(0); ME007(9); MX008(3) ; MZ009(9) ; FA011(3); ME012(5)	Worship in church building 40
0	Worship elsewhere 0
0+0+0+1+1+0+2+0+0+0+0	Liturgy/liturgical 3
FE004: 1442; ME005 1506; ME007: 4310	

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ME007: 1326	Ombadesho
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+1+0+0+0	Communion/Lord's supper/Lord's table in church building 1
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0	
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0	
0	Communion elsewhere
1+5+4+1+1+0+3+0+2+34+8	Prayer in church building 25+34
0+5+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+7+1	Prayer elsewhere 13
2+1+0+0+0+2+2+0+0+1+2	Hymnody in church building 10
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0+0	Hymnody elsewhere 0
4+3+7+15+4+2+7+4+3+27+5	Preaching/sermon in Church building 54+27
0+0+0+0+3+1+0+3+2+6+0	Preaching/sermon elsewhere 15
2+0+4+0+0+0+0+0+1+1+1	Bible Study 9
ME007: 0910;	Offertory/collection
FE004: 4209; ME005: 2207;2239	Uniforms & vestments
2+1+0+4+4+0+4+1+0+1+1	Christmas 18
ME005 2239	Good Friday
1+1+1+1+2+1+0+1+0+0+1	Easter 9
0+0+0+0+0+0+0+1+0+0+0	Ngqopiso/Covenant Service
0+0+5+0+0+0+0+0+0+0; MX003:0238	Harvest Sunday
0+0+0+1+0+1+0+0+0+0+0	Local Preacher's Sunday
FE004:1530:	
0+0+0+0+1+0+0+0+0+0; ME005 2016	Aldersgate Sunday
0+2+2+9+1+0+0+0+3+12+0	Baptism/baptising/baptised 17+12
0+1+11+1+0+0+0+2+8+18+0	Confirmation, confirmed, confirm 22+18
5+1+0+0+0+0+3+0+0+0+0	Wedding/marry/married 28
1+0+0+1+0+1+5+0+3+8+0	
1+5+1+1+1+0+6+0+0+12+0	Funeral/bury/buried/burial 34
0+3+0+1+2+0+0+0+0+1+0	
. MA003: 3605 crossed sticks; FE004: 4209 dog collar (not worn);	Symbols

The ministers take great care and interest in crafting a liturgical experience in church on Sunday mornings [ME001 0631, 2237, 2525; ME012: 0547]. This Sunday vs. The–rest-of-the-week liturgical cycle certainly seems to be taken as the norm by the congregation members [ME002 0137; FE006 2545, 3134 ME007: 5301; MZ009:1342; FA011: 5339; ME012: 0437]. Many congregants seem to take the reasoning a step further - some respondents portray many of their congregants as living their lives according to a minimalist liturgical rhythm. For some it takes the form of only attending church formally at Christmas time, or perhaps at Christmas, *Ngqopiso*<sup>157</sup> and Easter [ME001: 2130; MA002: 1314; FE004:

<sup>157</sup> *Ngqopiso* refers to the characteristically Methodist annual service of dedication to God, in English referred to as the “Covenant Sunday”, introduced by John Wesley, and perhaps the greatest unique characteristic of the Methodist Church. It is greatly venerated even by churches which have lost most

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1705; ME005 1157; ME007: 0910; MX008: 0803; FA011: 0757 (who relates how as a child she was in a family that celebrated both the Muslim and Christian holy days); ME012: 1400]. In addition, for many there is a tenuous life-long connection with the church through the medium of the rite-of-passage sacraments. MZ009 describes this evocatively: parents attend church until their children are confirmed, when they (and their children) stop attending. Then, when the children are about to be married, they attend church briefly, until the wedding, after which they leave. Then the new generation of parents attend church during pregnancy, until the baptism of the baby, after which they cease to meet until either they bring their children to Sunday School, or about the time of their children's confirmation...after which they again cease to be involved until retirement, when they re-join in preparation for their funeral [MZ009: 1433; cf. ME005 1157; MX003 1049, 1404; 2216; MA002 1314; ME001 2130]. ME005 refers to this return of the retirees as "an insurance policy type attitude that there will be somebody to bury me when I die" [1225]. And FA011 is downright sarcastic about how children solemnly declare their faith in Christ in the Confirmation service and then "nicely" disappear from church life [FA011: 3432].

In this view, the "good Christian life" is apparently seen by many Methodists as a life of sacraments of transition, rites of passage (cf. Kraft, 1996, pp. 208-209). The sacraments are like mooring rings on a harbour wall – vestigial signs of Christianity that seem to show that a Christendom-paradigm is in play (cf. Murray, 2004, pp. 200-206). Life is lived, perhaps, on the ocean of secularism, or in the cult of the ancestors, but the Church is still seen by many as the harbour for the soul. I shall return to this issue of the apparent ineffectiveness of Confirmation in achieving the converting lifestyle the ministers desire to see.

Because this is not the sort of life of Christian discipleship that the ministers envision [3.2.5]. But it is apparently all that some people are willing to give to the service of God. This being the case, one of the key elements of the responsibility of the church in the minds of the ministers seems to be the importance of the church "being there when needed" [ME001 0133, MA002 0258]. FA011 goes so far as to use the Acts 1:8 Jerusalem-ends-of-the-earth scale to "prove" how her church and its work must happen in her near neighbourhood [FA011: 11850]. In this view the church appears to be a locus for the liturgy which is a witness, or a signpost, *to those that have left it*. And the message on the signpost is that all of life should and could be lived under the eye of God. "People must know that there is a church" [MA002: 2633].

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of their Anglican ritual identity. In the Xhosa community it is one of the truly great holy days, alongside Good Friday and Easter, and far more important than Christmas. If one attends no other service in the year, one attends *Ngqopiso*.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### Shrinking Numbers? No Panic.

Most ministers acknowledged that numbers in long-established churches were down on 20 years ago, and that the membership numbers trend was generally downwards [MA002 0739; MX003 1049; FE004 1219; ME005 0747; FA011: 5339; ME012: 0818]. But sometimes, at the same time, some of them tended to claim that numbers in the last five years had been stable or even increased [MX003 1049; FE006 0405; ME007: 0527; MX008: 0526; MZ009:1631]. Numbers in more marginal, newly established areas like some informal settlements, are apparently bucking the trend by being modestly on the rise [ME005: 0747; 0815]. The overall impression is that there is no need to panic – the Methodist church is achieving its objectives within healthy (enough) membership parameters<sup>158</sup>.

By and large the Methodist ministers seem to hold the view that numbers are stable enough and the situation is not critical [FE006 0430]<sup>159</sup>. One minister dismissed the question of number of members out of hand as irrelevant [ME001 0948]. Most ministers seemed to feel they are doing the best they might be expected to in the situations they find themselves. I listened to many interesting and inspiring stories of small triumphs and ongoing struggles. For the most part the ministers did not seem to be consumed by a sense of crisis<sup>160</sup>. They seemed to feel that the work the churches are doing, and the functions the church is performing, are acceptable *as they are*. There is no apparent ambition to “*expand vigorously through evangelism and conversion*” [1.2.1]. So it appears that part of my problem statement is not felt to be a problem. ME005 in fact cynically suggests that the only motivation for evangelism might be a fear of losing numbers so catastrophically that evangelism might be considered as a last-resort option for preventing the church shutting down [ME005: 0956]. The ministers do not give any sign of expecting or fearing that such a situation might develop.

Ministers portray themselves as shaped into certain roles by the structures they inhabit (cf. Gubrium & Holstein, 2009, pp. 16, 46-47, 110, 129, 151, 162, 174, 196, 176). They have sermons to preach [ME001 2257; MA002 2826; MX003 3259; FE004 2042, 3252; FE006], pastoral care to perform [MX003 0238; ME001 3611], hospital visits to make [MX003 0238] and Bible studies to lead [MX003 0353, 3259; ME001 0133; FE006 0220; MZ009: 2507;

<sup>158</sup> A good illustration of this is a minister who describes how an evening service closed down at his church, after a long period where “... the preacher would sit in the pew while the worship team played, and then we’d swap places” [ME007: 1344]. He would not have mentioned this had I not probed.

<sup>159</sup> However, when I consulted the official membership figures, a different picture emerged: The Methodist Church of Southern Africa appears to have suffered catastrophic decline of 38% between 1996 and 2014 (MCSA, 2016).

<sup>160</sup> An outlier on this issue is ME005, who predicts the demise of one suburban church based on the trend of its shrinking membership [0747]

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FA011: 5831; ME012: 0547]. They have confirmation candidates to confirm [MX003 0700, 3840], leaders to train [MX003 3840, 4323, MA002 0928] and weddings [ME001 4023; ME007: 0121; MZ009:1433], funerals [MX003 3100; FA011: 0057; ME007: 1553] and baptisms to officiate at [MX003 4558; ME005 1157; FE004: 4209]. They are ordained to “the ministry of the Word and Sacrament and pastoral oversight of the people of God” (MCSA, 2014, pp. 20, para. 1.39), and this is how they fulfil their duties. Possibly as a result of this particular view of ordination they seem to feel that if they are in position as minister, then their church is sufficiently resourced to completely fulfil its obligations and continue its responsibilities towards God and towards the church members. It is existing in the world in the way God intends it to.

So it seems fair to ask whether this sense of self-sufficiency, and lack of a sense of crisis, potentially limits the concern of the ministers for the alternatively faithed, at least with regard to evangelism. I will return to this later.

### **Membership: by Faith or by Custom?**

It is also worth noting that the ministers appear to not be reading the story of their ministry in terms of people’s *faith or un-faith* in the Gospel message. Symptomatically, they refer to their people as members/people/folk, sociological categories, and hardly ever as believers [only six times altogether – five of which are attributable to FA011 [Table 3 Liturgy References in the Interviews]. The issue with those who are reluctant to attend church more than occasionally appears to the ministers to be one of motivation; a puzzle of a lack of commitment, and not specifically a puzzle of lack of faith. There are only four references to the alternatively faithed in terms (albeit negatively) of their faith position [FA011: 5831; ME007: 0424 (non-church-goer); 1553 (non-church-goer); 3527 (non-church vs. fully committed)]<sup>161</sup>. MX008 catches the ambivalence they feel when he says: “You know, it’s quite difficult to say that people have been converted. Because most of the people, especially in the black context, they just sit and ask for a class meeting to be there, or ask for a class leader. So you are not sure whether just want to belong to the church or whether that person has just been converted” [MX008: 0204]. It seems that, arising from this culture-bonded socio-religious view of church-membership where the “truly spiritual” has become too hard to discern, the ministers cut the Gordian knot by casting the problem of a shrinking church as a sociological problem with no particular faith component<sup>162</sup> [MX003: 0648; 1049;

<sup>161</sup> So few references to those with alternative faith commitments arising in 11 hour-long interviews discussing evangelism and conversion is remarkable, and highly significant.

<sup>162</sup> I acknowledge here that a faith-related issue is always also a sociological issue. But it appears as if the ministers are minimising the spiritual or religious components of the issue of church membership.

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1616; 2010; ME012: 1458]. This would make the issue of falling numbers amenable to solutions such as marketing strategies [ME001: 0133; ME005 1933; FE004: 5046;] and educational initiatives. The most passionate pedagogue is MX003, who seems to place complete faith in correct teaching to right the wrongs of the church: "...I want to take it back to the teachings. I blame the teachings. The teachings from the confirmation class; I blame the teachings, the constant teaching ...from the class meetings. I blame the teachings" [MX003: 4323]. He is not alone. Several of the ministers, when asked how they would spend R10,000 for an open-ended "evangelism" project, advocate some sort of remedial training course [MX003: 11429 (unsurprisingly); FE006:3714; MX008:3456].

A logical extension of this is that those who are not affiliated with the church are apparently never assigned a faith position of any kind – it seems as if the ministers are carefully avoiding any decision-making about the faith position of outsiders. It also seems that they are avoiding an important category for understanding the people around them – that all people have some or other faith commitment, and Christianity is the articulation of one such faith commitment [2.4.2]. They desire people to belong to the community, or at least to activate their nominal membership. They also long for a thorough-going and continuous transformation of their members [0]. But they seem to dance around the issue of faith and conversion. The neighbourhood/community/society seems to be seen as something akin to the water in which the church-fish swims: necessarily present, largely ignored, and whose role is too transparent to analyse. I strongly suspect that not acknowledging this critical aspect of the humanity of the alternatively faithed means that they cannot be helped to consider the Christian faith.

This apparent "de-problematisation" of the difference in faith between the Church and the Other-than-Church will need to be interrogated as I assemble my grounded theory. In the meantime, the next important issue to tackle is the locus where the ministers envision that liturgy taking place.

### **The Locus of Liturgy is the Church Building**

MA002 has an evocative phrase: if we are given a bowl of water, we cannot choose whose feet to wash – in fact, we are to "wash whatever feet that comes in" (sic) [2633]. But those feet have to "come in". Methodists have apparently retreated from the street, or only engage in occasional sorties to clutch hold of people and draw them immediately back into the church. Christians are expected to expend much of their energy in Christian activities, performing the service of God *inside* the "house of God" or even "sanctuary". ME001, for all his frequently cavalier approach to social norms, expresses a rather traditional romantic expectation that people will find "...a sense of otherness within the sanctuary" [ME001

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0632;]. Any foot-washing (or evangelism) that might take place happens in Christian-controlled spaces. Although word-frequency counts are highly problematic as indicators, I do think that the nearly 600 references to “church” do in this case give a plausible indication of where the focus of the ministers lies. All the words that I could think to count which had reference to the world between the churches combined (Community; World; Neighbour/neighbourhood/ neighbourly; Society; Outsider/outside; Strangers) only had 171 references when added together [Table 3 Liturgy References in the Interviews]. Given that the conversations were specifically about evangelism and conversion, I find this a very evocative piece of data<sup>163</sup>. The ministers seem to struggle to think about those who are not already at least culturally part of the church.

All the ministers seem to have a binary model of liturgy. Liturgy (liturgy proper) happens inside the church building; other forms of service to God through compassion to the world (lesser liturgy) happen in secular geography. ME001’s fantasy evangelism project<sup>164</sup> happens in the church premises [10015]. MA002 uses the premises of the church evangelistically in various ways<sup>165</sup>. MX003, as we have seen, sees everything the church does as evangelism [0238-0507]; FE004 would spend the fantasy R10, 000 on advertising of church services and courses [5304], and finds running a fete on church property a good evangelistic opportunity as it draws people in to attend the church [FE004: 4131] (even if the new church attendees turn out to have been members of another church). ME005 would spend the donation on training of converts in low-literacy areas [4227]. FE006 would spend half of the donation on courses for “deepening spiritual life” [3714]. ME007, MX008, MZ009 and FA011 all would spend their money on church-centric operations; and ME012 would just give his R10, 000 away to somebody else in an evangelistic ministry who would use it on creating a church-space of his own [ME012: 5120].

The ministers were insistent that the church, as a community physically present in a physical location, embodies and communicates the gospel. For ME001 the church is “a place of rootedness and presence” that “connects with the neighbourhood...and the broader surroundings” [0145], and the church building should induce a “sense of the other” [0632]. MA002 has a special “open chapel” through which to connect with passing foot-traffic [0258] – and MA002 also wondered if the church were to disappear if anybody would miss it [2529]. For this minister it was important that the church be connected in a meaningful, organic way

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<sup>163</sup> The caveat here is that I did ask many questions that stirred up responses about the behaviour and attitudes of Christians. But even so, I expected questions about evangelism and conversion to bring those inhabiting the other-than-Christian world into greater prominence.

<sup>164</sup> My last question concerns a fantasy project where the minister is asked to consider what s/he would do with a R10,000.00 gift earmarked for “evangelism” 1.1.1.1Appendix A].

<sup>165</sup> MA002, by contrast, shows strong tendencies to connect with those outside. I constantly try to modify my evaluation and commentary to indicate that I am dealing with trends and not uniformity.

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with its community. MX003 considers that the celebration of the “table of the Lord” is in itself evangelism [0353]. FE004 considers that a church that is itself transforming will draw outsiders into the transformation process [2105]. The ministers seem to believe that the church - by its presence alone - somehow encodes a Gospel message that is decodable by the alternatively faithed. This is reflected in many of the other ministers’ conversations: ME007 frames conversion entirely in church/non-church categories: “... the main conversion happens almost by osmosis it seems in this community rather than by the radical “I was not a church-goer and now suddenly I am” [ME007:0424]. Senn might almost be a spokesperson for them when he says: “The gospel is not proclaimed by stating propositions; it is proclaimed by the acts of preaching and ministering sacraments.” (1997, p. 31). Senn also says that “the fundamental meaning of liturgy is that it is the public work of the church in which [amongst other functions] the gospel of Jesus Christ is publicly proclaimed” (1997, p. 41)<sup>166</sup>. By running a church with a liturgy that proclaims the truth of the Gospel, in a context that is technically open to any who might want to attend, the ministers seem to be convinced that they are in fact being sufficiently “public”.

The gospel is to be proclaimed through sermons and sacrament amongst the community of the Faithful. If an alternatively-faithed individual manages to break through all the social and physical barriers within which the Church might cocoon itself, then they ought to be able to readily find the truth that will set them free. Keifert says “...Sunday morning worship has become a moment of evangelism whether Christians like it or not – indeed, whether they are prepared or not. The critical question is thus not whether we will choose to do evangelism but whether the challenge of evangelism that is thrust upon us is being effectively met.” (1992, p. 2)<sup>167</sup>. The helpfulness of Senn’s definition combined with Keifert’s theory of hospitality to the visiting stranger lies in the attitude it demonstrates: Methodist churches preach the gospel to anybody who attends their services. I believe it has significant power in explaining the responses of many of the ministers to the questions about evangelism. The Church *is* evangelism by its mere existence. MX003 might be an extreme voice for this – a church is 90% involved in evangelism because 90% of its membership is involved in church activities [MX003 4052, 5522], but essentially this view that the whole enterprise of Church is both evangelism and evangelisation [2.4.9].

However, it seems to me that this amounts to the functional exclusion of the alternatively-faithed, who cannot be expected to enter a demarcated Christian space without

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<sup>166</sup> While I agree that the gospel is not only “proclaimed by stating propositions,” it appears that the concept of the Gospel becoming the gospel when it is communicated publicly to the alternatively-faithed has eluded Senn.

<sup>167</sup> I applaud Keifert’s sentiments, and agree that our liturgy should be comprehensible to people who might wander into our buildings. However, the reality on the ground is that few alternatively faithed people attend local Methodist Churches.

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psychological discomfort, or without some advanced level of interest (or extreme level of desperation). The “core values and commitments” [2.2.1] can be (and are) expressed in isolation from the alternatively faithed. It is a liturgical model of an isolated community and cannot meaningfully communicate to Christians any duty or even compassion towards the alternatively-faithed – other than the urging of compassionate meeting of the needs of outsiders.

But it is significant to my argument as it develops that many ministers already apparently incorporate a ritual of physical provision for the hungry into their Sunday liturgy, which seems to demonstrate integrity for a church that exists amongst the poor. The ministers tend to place a strong emphasis on the need for congregation members to share their bounty [ME005: 2631 MX003 3259; FE004 2105; ME005 1708; FE006 1019]. ME007 makes a very *liturgical* connection when he ponders “...maybe making a thing of feeding the hungry, for example, and proclaiming the Gospel message at that feeding opportunity, saying “We’re doing this because Jesus fed the five thousand” [ME007: 10307]. Ministers in a context of urban poverty seem to be already inclined to expand the classic parameters of liturgy to include an actual modelling of the precept of compassion for the hungry. ME012 has a distribution of groceries as a part of the regular liturgical rhythm of the church, via a “blessing box” [ME012: 1704]. This is perhaps a natural development of the much down-played liturgy of the poor-fund, a collection instituted in Wesley’s time, taken up after the monthly communion service, and used for the relief of the poor [MX003: 11140; ME005: 3856; MX008: 3239; 3300; MZ009: 0335; ME012: 5021]. It was the word enacted. The “blessing box” and other initiatives seem to be a liturgical inclusion of the poor as human participants in the liturgy, not just an expression of duty towards alleviation of poverty in an impersonal way.

The liturgy has apparently found a place in itself to “express and form” a loving concern for outsiders and aliens “consistent with the community’s beliefs and values” (Senn, 1997, p. 3). The church does indeed value a “concern for the outsider”, at least in terms of the outsider perceived as “outsider to wealth” (i.e., the “poor”). My concern with a liturgy of conversion is whether there might be a similar concern for the alternatively faithed, who might be understood as being an “outsider to faith”. For this to be the case it seems that there needs to be a reflection on the status of the alternatively faithed with regard to the worshipping community. And there should presumably also be some liturgical process that addresses the needs of the alternatively faithed in the same way that the needs of the poor are met.

However, as chief liturgants for their communities the Methodist ministers appear to have no set words assigned to the convocation of the alternatively-faithed, no proper time-and-place to speak the Word to them, no rite of grace for them and nobody to send on any quest for

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truth or service – none of Hughes’ elements of liturgy are available [2.2.1]. This seems to be a counter-missional state of affairs, and yet it is important to recognise it for understanding the struggles that Methodist Ministers have with evangelism. They apparently have no option but to do evangelism amongst the evangelised, in church buildings, on Sunday mornings. I will return to this point as a key part of a grounded theory.

### 3.2.3 A Story-Line of Compassion as the Off-Site Liturgy of the Methodist Church

As I noted above [3.2.2] the “service of the people” onsite and “service of the people” off-site seem to have independent lives. The difference is that in the world of Sunday liturgy there is worship, preaching, prayer, sacraments, and community – but no alternatively faithed people; and in the world of Monday there are many alternatively faithed people and there is much shared community, but no word, worship, prayer, or sacraments...

What the data seems to indicate is that all the churches are punching above their weight when it comes to social engagement. In the table below I have recorded the different types of social ministry engaged in by the various churches whose ministers I interviewed. There are many Methodist Christian people lovingly serving and caring for those who need help. This is a major strength of the churches in terms of connection with the world around them, and the ministers often-repeated mantra of “no holiness without social holiness” seems to govern many of the off-site activities of Methodist Christians (although used in a context different to its original intention) [MX003: 5238; ME005 2716; 3032; MX008: 2441; MZ009: 3413; FA011: 5122]. This semi-liturgical “work of the people” makes the world a friendlier, more compassionate place [MZ009: 2828].

**Table 4 Varieties of Social Engagement Ministries Mentioned in Interviews**

Description	Reference
Poor Fund	MX003: 11140; ME005: 3856; MX008: 3239; 3300; MZ009: 0335; ME012: 5021
Open chapel	MA002 0258
Feeding scheme/Soup Kitchen	MX003 0100, 0507; MA002 2500, 2529; ME005 2136; FE006 1735; ME007: 10307; MZ009: 0258; FA011: 10403; ME012: 3002; MX008: 1715; MX008: 2605
Friendship with Home for Mentally affected	ME001 0808
Street Preaching	ME005 0620 FA011: 12003 ;
Church Coffee Morning	ME001 2432
Table Talk jumble sale, fete	ME001 1122
Prayer sofa	MA002 2500
Workshops for refugees	MA002 2529
Brigades	MX003 4052
Reading Club	MX003 4052
Library initiative	MX003 4720

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Public protest	FE004 2755
Clothes to hospital patients	FE004 2755 ME007: 3322
Drug rehabilitation donation	FE004 2925
HIV babies home donation	FE004 2925
Pavement vegetable gardens	ME005 2508
Crisis intervention (fire, flooding)	ME005 2601
Intervening in Wife-beating situation	ME005 2631
Donations to NGO working amongst homeless	FE006 1735
Computer upskilling program	FE006 1835
Home for pregnant prostitutes	ME007: 2731; MX008: 1531 (reference to the same institution);
Old age home	ME007: 3131
Informal police chaplaincy	ME007: 1836
Uniforms for poor school children	ME007: 3322

Methodist churches which draw congregants from a general population where starvation is a possibility seem to be much more likely to run soup kitchens. Ministers, although acknowledging contemporary theories of social development [MX003: 0214], nevertheless find that, until there is some overall poverty eradication governmental policy in place, people need to eat, and they need to eat today, every day. As Stan Saunders comments dryly in *The Word on the Street*, “justice is important, but supper is essential” (2000, p. 156). Only somebody who is really, really sure of where the next meal is coming from could even begin to think of minimalizing this issue<sup>168</sup>. In urban contexts where the pinch of hunger is not felt directly, the response seems to be still willing and generous, but purposefully distant [ME005 2508; ME012: 3002]: “Sometimes I get the feeling that some folk are giving more than out of their excess, a lot more actually giving things that they are going to sacrifice something to give that ... so the response is there’s a real heart that feels the anguish and pain of others, but a reluctance to physically engage outside of...it’s almost like a discomfort? Or a comfort within...I’m not sure” [ME012: 3101].

As noted, the ministers have a lot to say about the compassion ministries of their churches – it almost seems that they feel that it is the compassion shown to their surrounding communities validates their existence; MA002 puts this need to be meeting needs dramatically: “... the idea is part of the faith of the church, is what we live by is that if our church were to disappear from this space tomorrow, will the people miss this building ....” [MA002: 2529]. In terms of “need”, poverty is the great reality of the world between the churches, from the viewpoint of the ministers. The great “bad news” of our society is the fact

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<sup>168</sup> Which is not to deny the urgent need for the church (as the church of the poor) also to address macro-economic and political issues relating to the poor. Myers refers to Christians needing to combat a societal predatory force, a “...campaign of deception and domination through the political, economic, social, and religious structures of the world by subverting them in the pursuit of their intended missions” (Myers, 1999, p. 122).

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that people need food and clothes, and often do not have the resources to buy them. This cannot be in any way trivialised. Life is desperately hard for the poor, and the poor make up a desperately high percentage of our population<sup>169</sup>. The Ministers see what is really there, and their congregations are extensively engaged with this societal issue.

The simple fact of the need seems enough justification to call forth compassionate service. In addition, the ministers seem to glory in the fact that their help is given with no strings attached – there is no compulsion to convert either before or after receiving food aid.

Ministers are quite specific about that. FA011 says about soup kitchens run by her church members: “we don’t want to have a church service all the time because that’s not right...you know first they listen to the Word and then I give you food – I hold you hostage while you...you can’t go anywhere because you’re waiting for the food. So basically I discourage them to do that...” [FA011: 10403].

The table above makes it clear that many Methodist church members make commitments to serve a need: soup kitchens, a reading club, donating of clothing to a hospital. Some make an attempt to empower people through helping: teaching of technical skills, access to computers, etc. The ministers seem to be alive to developmental issues [MX002 0214; ME007: 10025]. The churches appear to be centres of emergency action on behalf of the poor – which the poor find essential in the context of the ongoing horrors of poverty.

As noted above, this work is done over and above the core liturgical work of the church. Even though, as I have noted, there are some attempts to draw the threads together in proto-liturgical ritual, there seems to be little organic connection between the Sunday *service* and the Monday *service*. It appears that, by and large, on Sundays one is called to serve God apart from humanity, and then on Mondays one is called to serve humanity apart from God - the service one is to render in the world of the week, as we have seen, is expected to be cryptically Christian. The fact that in showing mercy the congregation members meet up with those who do not share their faith perspective is regarded as irrelevant. The showing of mercy is something that Christians must do irrespective of the faith position of those served.

Disinterested compassion is a truly lovely trait. And in terms of my argument, what this shows is that the churches are not only open to sacrificial contact with those who are not part of the church community, but that they have many members who sacrificially devote themselves to such endeavours. There is no question raised by the ministers as to the propriety of spending time and effort in a cause that does not directly enhance the day-to-day welfare of the church. The churches are already compassionately active in the spaces

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<sup>169</sup> In 2015 over 50% of South Africans were living below the poverty line (Grant, 2015)

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between the churches. I shall return to this when I draw out the threads of my observations in my grounded theory.

### 3.2.4      A Story-Line of a Move to Multiculturalism

There are interesting signs of the Methodist Church slowly becoming more multi-cultural within its own sphere, and the breaking down of some of the formerly strict boundaries between races which is part of South Africa's sad apartheid legacy [see 3.2.1 above]. This is a highly significant breaking down of dividing walls, but it is the barriers that exist *within* our divided Christian world that are in view here. As people from other parts of the continent filter into South African society some of them seem to find a home in formerly white, English-speaking Methodist communities: people from Zimbabwe, Malawi, and the DRC, mostly [ME001 1931; MA002 1535; MX003 2428; FE004 1425; ME005 1323; FE006 0746].

Apparently what draws them is the mixture of denominational familiarity/continuity, the use of a language they understand, and a more multicultural environment. It takes a hardy soul to be the only Malawian in an otherwise 100% Xhosa congregation! [ME005 1414].

But it is not only inside the congregations that diversity is becoming more normal. FE004 reflects extensively on how she and her church might be expected to react to the new reality of her suburb being home to large expatriate African communities. She describes her experience as follows:

*“You know [nearby major shopping area road] has got these stalls with the immigrant stall-holders and whatever. And I’ve walked among them and I’ve thought, “O Gosh these people need Jesus” and then I’ve thought “You know what? These people are really happy the way they are”. And for me to go and stand there and start hammering them and saying “You need Jesus” is just to miss the point. I haven’t really figured out, but I think I will figure out in the next couple of years the way to do it” [FE004: 3745].*

It is interesting to note that this reflection on the possible connection between church and the spaces between the churches arises from personal immersion in the situation where the alternatively faithed are themselves “at home”. This story seems very important. Another minister who notes this diversification of the city is ME007, who notes the presence of Somalians, Nigerians and Zimbabweans who are living and working in the vicinity of his church buildings, but with whom his church has no functional capacity for evangelism contact [ME007: 4438]. This is an issue that needs interrogation as we look at the concept of a liturgy of conversion.

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### 3.2.5 A Story-line of a Disappointing Church

Although the ministers seem proud of the social connection their churches have with their different local societies, at the same time many of the ministers display a gnawing resentment at the underperformance of their congregants. ME002 cites the enneagram to explain why such a small percentage of congregants do such a large proportion of the social mandate of the church [ME001: 3323]. In fact, the ministers all have some observations on the frustration of people attending church but not seeming to be really whole-hearted about their involvement, whether inside the church or beyond its formal orbit. MA002 laments that "... I need to be honest: it is a very tough society or setting, where the people almost have lost the love and passion for Jesus. And it's almost like they find themselves in a groove of obligation" [MA002: 0530]. Their disappointment finds an outlet in four significant directions.

#### **"Too Many Old People"**

Most of the congregations described by the ministers are characterised by having a majority of elderly members [ME001: 2011; MA002: 2000; MX003: 2108; FE004: 2427; ME005: 0747; FE006:0930; ME007: 0527; MZ009: 0258; FA011: 4303]. The ministers seem to perceive this as crippling the church. For MX003 the elderly constitute a pastoral responsibility, rather than corporate people-power [MX003: 2108]. FE004 feels that "...all the older white and coloured people have this kind of old-fashioned Christianity..." that locks them into a former paradigm of doing church that is not helpful for the rising generations [FE004: 2427]. For ME005 the greatest problem of the elderly congregation is that they are simply dying off, and mortality will end the life of the congregation [ME005: 0747]. MZ009, on the other hand, complains that any of *his* old people who are still mobile are not free to do much for the church because they are too busy [MZ009: 0258]. FA011 has the sad problem of the elderly getting addicted to drugs in their old age and spending all their social grant on their habit [4709]. Lewis Rambo's insights on the church in decline resonates with many of these stories about aging congregants.

*"In a transitional phase fewer people would be converting...  
Proselytizing, if undertaken at all, would be motivated by a need to protect the institutional status quo, not by genuine religious vitality.  
The early phases of decline would be marked by a reduction in the rates of conversion, and these rates would drop more and more rapidly with time. The number of apostates would increase. Groups seeking to reform themselves would try vigorously to convert new people and intensify the depth of commitment of current members in order to stave off decline" (Rambo, 1995, p. 34)*

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This speaks to my earlier observation that the ministers do not appear to be living with a sense of crisis or impending doom hanging over the church [see 0 above] From their description of the state of their congregations it does seem as if they note any reasons for concern.

Having said that, it is puzzling that the ministers don't seem to believe that elderly people have much role in the vitality of their church. The elderly are depicted as mere consumers of church resources and dictators of the church culture, locking it into unhelpful traditional patterns<sup>170</sup>. It seems that the ministers see their pastoral role towards them as being all about responsibility, without expectation of anything other than a conservative ballast to the life of their communities<sup>171</sup>.

This appears to be another issue (like the confirmation fall-out) in which the ministers seem to be waiting for a solution to the crisis in the Methodist Church to emerge from the current systems and approaches. This is what mainline churches are, so this is what can be expected<sup>172</sup>[ME005 0747, 0956]. And so the ministers appear to be left with a limited range of theological responses to the decimation of the Methodist churches. They welcome those who willingly step into the Methodist World: but it is a world that seems to be inhabited by those in their final stages of life. The minister's task is to run the institution and provide a steady witness in society, and pastoral care to the ageing. But from their accounts the experience seems to be like that of being a sandcastle in the face of the rising tide of secularism and death.

### **“Too few young people”**

The ministers all grapple with the alienation of children and teenagers from the life of the church. They feel that the church ought to be growing at least biologically, but the Sunday Schools struggle to retain the glory day numbers from earlier years: “...There are some younger people with children at Sunday school age, but by no means what it used to be say twenty years ago. Not even close. The Sunday school is about twenty, thirty, forty people

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<sup>170</sup> An instructive illustration is the clash in MX003's church over a Sunday school teacher wearing a “miniskirt” [MX003:1930].

<sup>171</sup> The only minister to buck this trend seems to be MZ009, who recognises that the “grannies” who attend church are a natural conduit to reach the estranged youth of the church, and need enabling MZ009: 2416.

<sup>172</sup> A question arises in this context that I have not been able to fully explore: Can we not read the situation as one in which the elderly of today are those who were happy to acquiesce in the culture of the elderly when they were young? And those elderly, when they were young, had belonged to the minority of the young who had been happy to acquiesce in the culture of their elders in turn. And so on back into the mists of time – with the result being an uneasy survival of 18th century cultural forms in the 21st century. That would result in a sort of self-selecting archaism of the church – and the current apparent detachment of the church from its surrounding culture would be the final stages of an extremely lengthy process of cultural resistance.

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maybe in comparison to two hundred twenty years ago [ME007: 0527. Cf. FE006:0857; MA002: 1535; FA011: 3432; ME012: 1704]. The old model of young parents sitting in a church service while their children attend the Sunday school next door no longer appears to apply.

It is an open secret that churches do not expect to retain children who have been confirmed<sup>173</sup> [MX003: 1507]. FA011 paints a picture of a liturgical practice that has lost its intentional connection with conversion: "...you find people born in the Methodist Church, or you know raised up in the church, go through confirmation, whatever, the whole rigmarole... but some of them actually in the end find the need for something deeper, they feel 'I'm not that close to Jesus, I've got this emptiness'" [FA011: 2815]. It might perhaps even be argued that the church is run in such a way as to *ensure* the annual withdrawal of the older teen age cohort. Ministers do not seem to include this annual exodus as one of the places they lose members (when specifically questioned about loss of members). They seem to regard this as a cultural inevitability – since church is an institution for the old, the story seems to go, young people need to go away whilst they are young, with the option of returning once they have become more adult [MZ009: 1433]. This means that, as ME007 baldly expresses it, "...the young have moved away" [ME007: 0230]<sup>174</sup>.

This painful reality is alluded to but seems to be poorly understood – FA011 expresses this puzzlement evocatively: "... we had on average for a couple of years thirty, thirty three people, children getting confirmed, but the thing is they only come to church when they want to go to confirmation class, So for two years they have to go through this pre-confirmation class and then move on to confirmation. Those two years they will come to church and wharrer, wharrer, but after that they fall through the cracks, and .... The question would be, why?" [FA011: 3321]. However, several of the ministers suggest solutions for the problem. For some it involves a better, more intensive training syllabus for the confirmation classes<sup>175</sup> [MX003: 4323; FE004: 4512; MX008: 1258; FA011: 5018;]. For another it involves seamless involvement of the new confirmees in liturgical responsibilities [MZ009: 1631]. These are all signs that the ministers have not yet lost confidence in the potential of the system. But for some of the ministers the process has become so ineffective in terms of conserving the

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<sup>173</sup> Anecdotally, I can confirm that the drop-away in my age cohort at confirmation was significant and disappointing to me at the time (retention rate of a class of 20 was two); and consulting my 88-year-old mother, the drop-away in her age cohort at confirmation was about the same. So this is a problem that seems to have been brewing for generations: it has become "normal church".

<sup>174</sup> The one congregation to buck this trend is the church of MX008, which has a thriving students' outreach on nearby campuses [MX008: 045].

<sup>175</sup> It is worth noting that some of the ministers find the Alpha brand a helpful resource in reclaiming liturgical significance in this area [MX003: 0648; FE004: 4512] – a point I shall return to as I develop my "rules of art".

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youth that the whole process needs to be revisited [MA002: 4202; ME001: 0946; FA011: 3335].

Whatever the reason, then, this alienation of the youth has resulted in a *de facto* evangelism situation within the structures of the church, according to the ministers. FE004 categorises children's and youth work as "outreach" [FE004: 4857. Cf. FA011: 13606]. Ministers portray the youth as a contested population, and the church that offers the culture best suited to the young will thrive at the expense of others [MA002: 5416; MX003:1507 ("...we compete with them in how we do worship"); FE004: 1359; ME005: 1933; ME007: 1447; ME012: 0918].

What this seems to suggest is that the group of people that the ministers are particularly concerned about communicating the Gospel with – who are perhaps partially "alternatively faithed" - are the younger, culturally affiliated Methodists within in the church orbit. The ministers appear to judge their own achievement of the persuasive, integrative task on the success of their incorporation of the next generation into the ongoing life of the church – in fact FE004 calls her program "Next Generation Leadership" [FE004: 1608]. I shall have to consider the implications of this focus on the institution's youth as I try and develop a grounded theory for a liturgy of conversion.

### **Lack of Commitment**

The primary measure of commitment used by the ministers (and source of disappointment) is attendance at the liturgical service on Sundays. ME001 has got to the point where he regards even attendance at a worship service in itself as a "mind-blowing miracle" [ME001 3150]. MA002 has developed a refined theory of the need to aim at increasing the percentage of overall membership as one of the key goals of successful pastoring [MA002: 0739; 2000]. They are gleeful at the large attendance figures at major festivals [ME001: 2130; MA002: 1314; MX003: 2108; FE004: 1705; ME005 1157; ME007: 1129]. At the same time they are troubled that this level of attendance is so unusual. ME012 poses the problem in this form: "... it's difficult at times to understand the membership because there are a number of folk who I won't see for a while and I'll contact them and there's no particular reason why they're not coming – they're not angry or upset or anything, they're just like that...so we have that..." [ME012: 1400].

Some of the ministers, as we have seen, are defiant or dismissive about their low attendance numbers [see 0 above]; MX008 insists that commitment is more valuable to the church than brute numbers in attendance: "... the church is not a place to come and sit. We don't need seat-warmers. We need people who are here because they have felt their heart strangely warmed so they want to warm other hearts somewhere" [MZ009: 4424]. Ministers frequently report what they see as this endemic "seat-warming" lack of commitment to the

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wider cause of the Methodist Churches. The bulk of the essential *service* of the church seems to be done by a minority of the congregation members, and the ministers are deeply dissatisfied with this. My question about whether some people were more involved in evangelism than others stirred up a lot of reflection on the wider phenomenon of reluctance of the bulk of the membership to be wholeheartedly involved<sup>176</sup> [MA002: 0530; MX003: 2325]

Another area of lack of commitment highlighted by the ministers is the failure to live high-quality Christian lives in between Christian-building-based liturgical events. ME001 appeals to “enneagram theory”<sup>177</sup> to explain why most of the work is done by the minority of the members [ME001 3323]. The ministers are all insistent that the backbone of Christian authenticity is living of a life of extraordinary love towards outsiders [MA002 3233]. On reflection, this could be seen as placing an extremely heavy load of responsibility on the rank-and-file Methodist church goers. If evangelism is their province, and the mode of evangelism is the witness of an extraordinarily loving life, then, since people are not being converted, the ordinary Methodists might feel condemned for living below-standard lives. This seems like closet-legalism.

Ministers are, finally, concerned at the lack of “real conversion”, that the conversion experience is wrongly understood by people as simply coming to church: “...it’s not just about coming to church, but that it’s about your whole being immersed in the love of Christ” [FE006 2545]. Given the emphasis placed on church attendance I find this quite ironic. Despite the importance they accord to church attendance, ministers are not happy that people are coming for tradition’s sake [MX003 1507], or out of a sense of obligation. I will explore the ministers’ evaluation of the signs of conversion later in section 0 below. This is an interesting issue to take into account as I develop my grounded theory of a liturgy of conversion.

### Poorly Integrated

All the diversity on show, and the organizational unity-in-diversity of the Methodist Church, does not mean that the Methodist Church in Cape Town is a well-integrated entity. Ministers find this to be one of the difficulties of their ministry. They themselves are responsible for people from multiple cultures, but their charges do not seem to be warmly committed to each other [MA002 1733; ME001 4150]. FA011 struggles to combat racism amongst her congregation [FA011: 4415]. Elsewhere the most multicultural Sunday Christian gatherings are all basically English-language and white in dominant culture forms [FE004:1530; ME007:

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<sup>176</sup> MX003 offers the surprising estimation that 90% of his congregation are actively involved in evangelism [MX003: 4052]; but one must take his definition of “evangelism” into account – he appears to hold that any Christian activity constitutes evangelism *per se*.

<sup>177</sup> Enneagram theory is a popular personality classifying approach (The Enneagram Institute, 2017)

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0527; ME012: 1704]. What is on view in the interviews with the ministers seems to be a somewhat truncated interculturality: white churches with “some dark patches here and there” as MX008 wryly comments [MX008: 2401]. This is partly due to the fact that the Methodist Church still exists in geo-culturally differentiated congregations. Although segregation was never an official policy of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa<sup>178</sup>, nevertheless monocultural congregations developed as the church existed in (and expanded into) areas that had been rendered monocultural by apartheid policies (cf. Walshe, 1997, p. 385), and they still mostly preserve their apartheid era racial profiles. In fact, the formerly white zoned suburbs are now the ones showing the greatest racial diversity [p.3.2.1], and that is reflected in the churches in those areas, which might perhaps be an encouraging sign that the church *is* in fact capable of responding to demographic changes.

Many Christians from other countries in Africa find that the English language and culture of formerly white congregations is a more congenial place than the more culturally inflexible Xhosa and coloured congregations [ME005 1323; ME007: 1314; MX008: 2319; FA011: 4415]<sup>179</sup>. In addition, there are signs that some people are leaving the more hierarchical, monocultural congregations and starting to attend the formerly white-culture congregations [MZ009: 2134]. This might be another reason these formerly white congregations are showing a much more cross-cultural demographic profile. But aside from some token inclusion of worship songs in other languages, the “base” language and culture appear to be still unchanged [MA002: 1733; ME012: 1828].

The ministers seem to be sensitive to the fact that they only have a limited capacity for matching liturgical Methodism to the diverse cultures they encounter [MA002: 1733; FE004: 3913; ME005 2508; ME012: 0437]. ME012 laments that with regard to creating a more culturally inclusive liturgy for Sunday mornings:

*“... I do try and make a point of saying, particularly at the ten o’clock, but for all our services, make a point of being inclusive as much as you can. So for instance at ten o’clock when I’m leading worship, even though we do not have many in number, I always try and do one song in Xhosa...for me it’s just a way I’ve been trying to get ... I taught them one Swahili song – I’m trying to get more – but I ... we can’t do French and that – it’s too difficult. ...” [ME012: 1828].*

<sup>178</sup> The Methodist church, institutionally, took a radical anti-apartheid stance when the Nationalist Government introduced apartheid legislation after 1948 (Gish, 1985, p. 15).

<sup>179</sup> An interesting variation on the theme of cultural solidarity, running alongside the phenomenon of the Xhosa-culture churches, is the Shona culture grouping that has formed at one of the formerly English-speaking-culture churches (using the same premises, but at a different service time). This has provided a haven for Zimbabwean Shona-speakers, and would appear to fulfil functions of identity-conferal and change-brokerage [5.3.2].

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They are aware of cultural diversity. But generally the reference to diversity is within the international Christian (or even Methodist) family, and generally the way of being diverse is expressed as having separate monocultural services at different times on a Sunday [FE004: 1442; ME007: 1148]. People who are diverse in terms of faith position as well as language and nationality are only observed from a distance beyond the edges of the Christian community. The only way for somebody to enter the church from cultural alterity seems to be if they are already Christian and thus share the basic worldview of the churches. Once again, there seems to be no way of thinking or talking about the alternatively faithed who are different in culture to the base-line cultures of the Methodist congregations. The ministers perceive urban diversity, but it does not appear to form a major part of their thinking about evangelism and conversion, or the potential shape of the church.

### **Conclusion: “The Methodist Church is...”**

It seems that in summary the ministers consider that the Methodist church is a permanent Christian institution that functions as a witness to God in society by providing a visible example of the authentic Christian life of love lived in community, which anybody is welcome to join provided they are able to accept the corporate culture of the specific local community. The Church functions as a place where people learn to be Christians through liturgical involvement: in worship, prayer, preaching, sacrament, and sharing the common life, and then through showing compassion to the world.

### **3.2.6 A Story-line of “Methodist-Style” Evangelism & Conversion**

A certain approach to evangelism emerges: the ministers seem to have well-articulated rhetoric of conversion, without a correspondingly well-articulated rhetoric of evangelism. This plays itself out in different ways across the three culture groups represented in the interviews. The result seems to be an approach to evangelism that displays a certain organizational cultural uniformity, and also displays what appear to be varied cultural specific norms. This is essential to conceptualise as I consider developing a liturgy of conversion; I need to pay careful attention to the ministers’ concepts of the subjects of evangelism and conversion. I asked specific questions about conversion and evangelism, and there were signs of the outworking of their mind-set throughout each interview.

### **Conversion as Transformation/Change**

My working definition of “conversion” – which I needed to have in mind as I developed an understanding of contemporary Methodist thinking in Cape Town – was: *“ a meaning-enriching, identity-(re)defining, and commitment-shaping process of change in worldview, initiated by God, described by converts, and experienced by converts in a social context; a*

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*process which enhances the meaningfulness of the convert's life, confers asocial identity, and enhances their agency"* [see 2.3.8 above] . My interest, therefore, was particularly in the areas of meaning, identity, agency and commitment.

ME001 sets the tone for an understanding of conversion as transformation in my very first interview when he posits the search for "... a moment not so much of conversion as transformation"<sup>180</sup> [ME001: 0632]. ME001 was not alone in wanting to find some other way of talking about conversion; FE004 explicitly says "...I don't ever use the word evangelism or conversion" [FE004 2105], and continues to speak of the different aspects of personal and social transformation in our discussion<sup>181</sup> [see also MZ009: 3521; ME005 2843; FE004: 3303]. But whatever their linguistic preferences, all the ministers indicated that in their understanding, conversion needed to involve profound changes in attitude and behaviour [ME001: 0530; MA002: 4235; MX003: 3508; FE004: 0743; ME005: 0352; ME007: 3527; MX008: 2041; MZ009: 0853; FA011: 2815; ME012: 3350]. So all the respondents agree on a core issue of conversion: change. But what that change might be, and how conversion might happen, turned up a number of different emphases.

### ***Transformed Sundays: Conversion as Church Attendance?***

*"Conversion in the terms of a non-church-goer, a person who would before never enter the doors of a church and suddenly experience Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour – unfortunately we don't have many of those stories." ME007: 0424*

The most obvious transformation that ministers apparently expect or desire is that people start to attend Sunday liturgy, and to take part in various Methodist activities. ME007 gives a snapshot of a particular type of conversion: a person stops keeping themselves away from attending church services - perhaps because they somehow come to have a transcendent experience of Christ, or for some other reason. Both ME001 and FE004 use the same vortex/funnel image to express this, of people sliding down a slope from disengaged with the church to fully engaged with it<sup>182</sup> [ME001: 0133; FE004: 1050]. From that point onwards the only way to develop one's spirituality is by throwing oneself enthusiastically into the program

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<sup>180</sup> It is not clear to me what distinction ME001 has in mind between his proposed term "transformation", and his rejected term "conversion". I guess from the context of the interview that what he means by "conversion" is an antiquated complex of ideas (sin, hell, coercion, fear and guilt, perhaps?) that is psychologically untenable and theologically distasteful. This would require further conversation which I have not been able to have as yet.

<sup>181</sup> FA011 is once again an outlier in this regard – she enthusiastically embraces the use of the word-cluster "convert/conversion", using the word directly, ten times, without feeling the need to interpret it [Table 3 Liturgy References in the Interviews].

<sup>182</sup> What I irreverently think of as the "ant-lion" model.

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of the church. MX003 virtually defines conversion as “commitment to *church*” where others might use “commitment to Jesus” [MX003: 0648; 1049].

However, “normal conversion”, or the “normal Christian Life”, seems to be defined as willing immersion in the liturgical life of the church. MX008 defines effective evangelism in this way: “...the only way that seems to be working for now. Where people will go and look for someone, and convert – not even convert – just guide to the church, and then there will be people” [MX008: 0039]. It can apparently be expected that by submitting to institutional tradition processes, advancing through Scriptural instruction via sermons and Bible study group attendance [MX003 0648], a person can be adequately disciplined, and grow into an adequately devoted Christian. MX003 very matter-of-factly refers to the fact that only two of his fifteen confirmees have a conversion experience, and that the other thirteen are “part of the tradition”[1616]. Most of the ministers seem to feel they are working with a population of church members many of whom fall into this category<sup>183</sup> [ME001: 3312; MA002: 0530; FE004: 2427; ME005: 2207; FE006:3134; ME007: 4703; MX008: 0204; FA011: 3335; ME012: 0437].

Ministers are very careful to not give the impression that they expect some sort of standard experience or level of knowledge, or even a particularly Christian faith-position before new members are allowed to participate in the life of worship of the community. “I don’t say to people ‘Do you understand and believe every element of the Nicene Creed?’ before I’m willing to baptise their babies”, says FE004 [3345]. Ministers are at pains to stress that the liturgical life of the church is open for absolutely everybody<sup>184</sup>. What seems to be the unspoken standard is that potential new members have to buy into a standard of respectability, responsibility and conservative social conformity before they will “feel at home” – people who think of themselves as “decent people” (to use the telling phrase of ME007) [ME007: 5158]. But then it is this group of “decent people”, with different levels of commitment, that the ministers find so frustrating [see above 3.2.5]. “The difficulty we are facing in the church,” says MX008, “is that people are not living their faith” [MX008: 0408].

The question arises as to whether there is an assured path of progression in anybody’s life from “seat-warmer” to “heart-warmer” [MZ009: 4424]. MZ009 and the other ministers all want this – but it seems to be an elusive goal. It seems that the ministers need to develop an operation theory of conversion.

### ***A Transforming Sense of Relationship to God***

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<sup>183</sup> The exception being MX003 with his estimate of active involvement of 90% of his one congregation [MX003: 2325].

<sup>184</sup> Although ME001 does tell a disturbing anecdote of being persuaded to dissuade a homeless man from attending the worship at his church because of his strong unwashed-body odour [ME001: 4408].

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Ministers acknowledge that certain individuals seem to have had some extraordinary experience of the love and calling of God. MZ009 expresses this well:

*“I think [conversion] is the transformation of heart, and then once the heart is transformed, as Wesley says, “I felt my heart strangely warmed”, and it is that experience that me and you are saying we are called, which is an experience that you cannot explain to another person which we are finding too hard. You can try and explain it to somebody else – it won’t make sense. ...so you know what you felt. So I think that once the heart receive that conversion, the mind and the action will just falls into place, because it all comes ... it all start here” [MZ009: 3521].*

Several of the ministers talk about experiences of the ineffable that have deeply motivated some of them, and consider that a conscious experience of relatedness to God through Jesus is a hallmark of a uncontestably converted life [ME005 1754; FE006:1126; FA011: 0757 (a 1,800-word narrative of her conversion and call to the ministry!)]. And most seem to have a typical Barthian conversion-crisis view of the process beginning at a point of realisation [see above 2.3.2]. ME012 articulates this:

*“The Christian faith does require us to respond in some way, to choose to follow Christ, to be Jesus’ followers, so I don’t think everybody’s now saved, ...I do believe that there is ... either a place or a process by which we respond to Christ’s call, and we choose to live the Christ-life” [ME012: 2244].*

Most of the ministers seem to expect that a significant experience of the reality of God is something that should be part of a convert’s experience [MX003 1507; FE006 2124; ME005 2805; MX003 4902]. MX003 calls it “that moment of realisation about the love and grace of Jesus Christ” [MX003: 4902]. ME005 is insistent that “...to be truly converted there has to be an experiential part that says ‘I feel and know that something has changed.’” [ME005: 2827].

A result of this experience of the closeness of Jesus is a responsive commitment to him. People “commit their lives to Jesus” [MA002: 0258; 4110; FE004:0416; 2601; ME005: 0352; ME007: 2927; 3527<sup>185</sup>; FA011: 5500; 11718; ME012: 0649], by which the ministers mean something like a lasting decision to dedicate oneself to the service of God through faith in Jesus [ME005 3713]. ME007 considers that it might be the task of the church to transform “church-goers” into such “fully committed Christians” [ME007: 4845].

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<sup>185</sup> I am almost certain that ME007 was about to say “church-goer”, (he got out a “ch” sound), but then self-edited that to “committed Christian” – this begs the question of what the Christian is committed to.

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Although the ministers acknowledge that conversion in these terms is a functional reality in the lives of some of their members, they seem extremely tentative about what it is and how it happens. Conversion is perhaps seen as something so mysterious that it could not be planned for or even aimed at [ME005 0500]. But another of its signs, besides the sense of connectedness with God, is a deep repentance of sin.

### ***A Transformation of Ethics: Turning Away from Sin?***

As noted above [in Table 2 Bible References in interviews], the ministers are extremely reluctant to frame conversion in terms of sin and forgiveness – but somewhat surprisingly that does not mean they do not think that repentance is not a vital concern when dealing pastorally with people. One minister casts the problem in these terms:

*“The world is so broken. People don’t want to be convicted of their sin. People are not in the state to be able to bear the fact that they are sinners. They need to be able to only hear the fact that they are loved and forgiven. And to insist that they can only be forgiven when they acknowledge – you know what I mean?” [FE004: 0438].*

FE004 seems to suggest that the topic of sin/forgiveness needs to be avoided tactically because people in general are too sinful to be able to *accept* that they might be sinful: also, perhaps, that unless introduced with extreme tact the alternatively faithed might easily jump to the conclusion that the Christian messenger is condemning others for sin while at the same time portraying the messenger as exempt from sin him/herself. The ministers appear to be in a logical bind, though; ME005 considers that for true conversion to have happened “...there needs to be an acknowledgement of sin, a desire to change, repent from it, and an experience of God’s forgiveness” [ME005 2805].

This conflict seems to be expressed also in extreme generalisation when talking about the sort of sinful behaviours or lifestyles that people might be expected to convert from as they convert to Christianity. Their range of specific sin-reference is very limited, heavily featuring a fairly limited range of disreputable sins, notably drunkenness and drug addiction. “Sin” appears remarkably like a breach of middle-class respectability<sup>186</sup>. Socio-political sins are

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<sup>186</sup> ME001 seems to think that “sitting back and doing bugger all” is close to being a major sin [ME001: 3323], as is reckless driving [ME001: 4023]. For MA002 the big sin is disregard for one’s neighbour in need [MA002: 3749] – which is closer home to respectable Christians. For MX003 the sins to change from are perhaps “drugs and gangsterism<sup>186</sup>” [MX003:1219; 4902], judgementalism [MX003:1930]; taking advantage of the poor [MX003: 3100; 5725], stealing [5238] and making false and exaggerated spiritual claims [10706]. For FE004, drink and drugs are the classic sin-labels – or at any rate the first thing that comes to mind when I pushed her to specify some particular sin [FE004: 3531]. ME005 targets “drinking and carousing” as landmark sins people might feel the need to turn from [ME005: 0620]. Alcohol abuse is the top-of-the-mind sin for FE006 [FE006:0310], as is deliberately living by double standards [FE006:3247]. ME007 reads drug addiction as the most obvious example of a sin to

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referred to mostly impersonally, almost as if the members of the churches are able to address such issues from the outside, without being likely to be victims, perpetrators or implicated parties. There are a few references to sin as the sort of thing that might be in the realm of the respectable Christian – ignoring the poor, judgementalism, and selfishness – but the overwhelming opinion seems to be that sin is what bad people do. The sins of Christians appear to be considered as relatively minor flaws which only occasionally taint the goodness of the good people.

I shall have to return to this issue after a close reading of Wesley's *Journals*, because at first glance it seems that this is an area of high divergence between Methodism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Methodism in the 20<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Selfishness Transformed: Energetic Compassion for Those in Need***

*“If you love me, follow my commands’... John 15. ... people that have discovered the joy of Jesus and for God are the people so enthusiastic, and on board, because they’re doing this for Jesus, they’re doing this for God. And I think for me the first point or the starter is get people in love with Jesus again. It’s people to get excited when they wake up to talk to God and every opportunity they have to talk about God. And when they do things within the life of the church they’re doing it for God [MA002: 3503]*

The ministers seem to see this “conversion” as a very clear break between a former mode of existence and a subsequent one, resulting in an intensification of commitment and energy (cf. Newbigin, 1989, p. 13)[MX003: 0648]. The ministers might be ambivalent or vague about what one is expected to turn away from, in terms of sin. But they are very definite about what they are expecting truly converted people to convert towards. A converted Methodist Christian is expected to enthusiastically adopt a “no harm” [ME001 2952] lifestyle, one that avoids destructive behaviours and promotes the general welfare of society [ME005 2855; FE004 3531; MX003 4902]. Ministers are quite clear that if there is not a visible lifestyle commitment to “holiness”, then one cannot speak of conversion: “... conversion for

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be converted away from [ME007: 2927]. ME007 was particularly concerned about socio-political evil that needed its own type of conversion [ME007: 4026]; but he also notes drug-dealing and prostitution as specific sins [ME007: 4600], and judgementalism and arrogance [ME007: 5036], whilst drawing a sharp distinction between decent” people on the one hand and “drug peddlers and murderers” on the other [ME007: 5115]. MX008 is unique in identifying hate and aggression as sins that require change [MX008: 1941]. MZ009 also leads with social sin – in his case gangsterism [MZ009: 0707], but also larger socio-political “challenges<sup>186</sup>” [MZ009: 3210]. He also has a harsh word for Christian judgementalism [MZ009: 4810]. Alcohol is the first to feature on FA011’s list [FA011: 0446], followed by “alcohol and partying” [FA011: 2815], drinking and swearing [FA011: 3141], drugs and alcohol [FA011: 4512]. ME012 nominates “selfishness” as his only specifically mentioned sin [ME012: 3728].

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me is that there's got to be a change, there's got to be a transformation. From selfishness to selflessness" [ME012: 3728]. A transition from selfishness to altruism seems to be a highly significant "conversion marker" in the minds of the ministers. Several of the ministers point to a sense of pleasure and purpose in life that characterises the life of somebody who has converted [MA002 0550, 4219; FE006 2239; FE004 0602]. People who are "converted Christians" – as opposed to "traditional Christians" - are happy to expend great amounts of energy on Christian activities [FE006 2239].

The task of motivating those who have a transformed/transforming sense of a personal relationship to God, and a lively sense of forgiveness of their own sin, then ceases to be a pastoral chore. These determinedly compassionate people are the active core of the church's altruistic activity. Incidentally, however, this altruism is expected to be normally channelled through projects that enhance the prestige of the church. Ministers seem to be truly proud of their churches' capacity to care for the poor and needy [MA002: 3503; 3520]. But the takeaway from all this is once again that the concept of Christians caring for those who are not necessarily part of their congregation appears to be an integral part of the church-image of the ministers. Conversion towards God entails conversion towards others. This could be vital for understanding how a liturgy of conversion might conceivably become more prominent in the life of Methodist churches. If one wants *that* sort of action one needs *this* sort of people.

### **Ongoing Personal Transformation**

*"... once you have accepted Christ you have accepted Christ, you can't be more converted than anybody else. But how you exercise that, how you exercise your conversion. Some will be more committed than others, more passionate than others...I mean I just look at, over the years, some people burn with passion for Christ and others are 'Well, I know him, but he fits into my world' sort of thing" [FE006:2239].*

The ministers, as we have seen, shy away from using the categories of sin/forgiveness in their formulation of what conversion might involve. And they generally prefer to talk of "transformation", which perhaps allows for a less severe judgement on the present condition of the converting person, so that by a process of incremental improvements they might indeed eventually become very good human beings<sup>187</sup>. The transformation envisioned

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<sup>187</sup> It seems that they tend to aim for transformation from "goodish" to better, rather than from "baddish" to "goodish". MX008, for instance, sets great store by somebody becoming a "better person" [MX008: 1941].

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appears to be more like extreme improvement than radical transformation<sup>188</sup>. The ministers often reference Wesley's idiosyncratic teachings on "perfection in love", "sanctification", and "prevenient grace" at this point [ME001: 2810; ME005 3032; MA002: 4235; MX003: 5238; ME005: 2855; 2951; MZ009: 4022; MX003: 5153; MZ009: 4022; FA011:11330; FA011: 11507]. I will need to read this alongside Wesley's attitude towards sin and conversion as I develop my grounded theory.

But whatever they believe about how a person gets there, the ministers acknowledge and appreciate their members having progressed "... into a transformed lifestyle, living in obedience to God [FE004: 3252]. What seems to stamp a conversion as genuine, in the thought of the ministers, is that it leads beyond itself to this process of lifelong transformation.

*"...[conversion] makes a huge difference in my opinion! What changes should be their relationship to God and their relationship to themselves – of course part of it is coming to understand yourself differently....And then it has to be worked out in lifestyle. It has to be some process of sanctification not just justification that's visible. And usually I'll use those as a way to judge whether there has been true conversion" [ME005 2843].*

And this "transformed lifestyle" is typically seen as being made up of multiple small conversions; points of realisation, change and commitment that cumulatively add up to a vastly changed life: ME005 considers that "...sanctification is a growth process and may involve little conversions along the way. So ultimate conversion would be when we arrive in glory, whatever that's going to mean [ME005: 2951; see also ME001: 0530; MA002: 4235; 5238; FE004: 3252; FE006:2239; ME007: 3527 (who uses the exact same phrase: "little conversions along the way"); MX008: 1941; MZ009: 3732; ME012: 3728; 3453]. Another telling image, used by ME007, is that of "osmosis" [cf. 0].

ME007 sketches a process through which the *ethos* of the church is absorbed by ongoing close connection with others who share the *ethos*<sup>189</sup>. Ministers seem reluctant to speak directly of the role of faith in becoming a member of the Methodist church; they are also strangely chary of broaching the subject of "faith" when it comes to conversion. They appear

<sup>188</sup> Although FE006 here does seem to envisage a two-element conversion: a once-for-all element; followed by an incremental-improvement element.

<sup>189</sup> This appears to be a similar approach to the Orthodox Church's pedagogy: "...the restoring of a mystical union with God, a process not completed in this life, is the focus of Orthodox soteriology" [ (Harris, 1996, p. 4), which portrays "...the ascent of the soul in terms of a pedagogic process toward perfection" (Bosch, 1991, p. 198). However, I do not think it would be justifiable to read such liturgical complexity into the stance of the Methodist ministers. I think they mean something like "newcomers pick up the ropes from others as they go along".

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to incline to the view that those who are prepared to join in with the liturgical and social service life of the church will gradually grow into ever deeper “commitment”, and it is unclear whether they mean commitment to the Methodist church or to God, or to both together.

One of the deep impressions left was that conversion seemed to be much less important than the converted life that follows it.

But this ongoing transformative process is not a universal characteristic of the ministers’ congregational members [MX008: 0204; see 3.2.5 above]. As I understand it, this dynamic, ongoing experience of conversion is highly prized by the ministers – but they live with the sobering reality that very few of their congregation members are experiencing the transformation they long to see.

### *The Transformational Work of God in Conversion*

“... my view is that we never find God, but God finds us...” [ME012: 1950].

The ministers all reference the work of God in some way in the conversion of people to Methodist Christianity<sup>190</sup>. God goes before and God comes after. But the impression is distinctly given that the ministers are not competent to talk about the mysterious prior-to-conversion lives of those who are alternatively faithed. This is the area of “prevenient grace”, mentioned by several of the ministers [MX003: 5153; MZ009: 4022; FA011: 11330]. God is at work in outsiders and they are God’s responsibility. A minister’s responsibility apparently only commences when a human being shows interest in the Methodist church. The tacit understanding seems to be that since they cannot tell what God is doing in the hearts of the

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<sup>190</sup> ME001 posits the need for people to experience the moving of God’s Spirit [ME001: 0632]. MA002 reads everything involved in evangelism as being dependent on the missional heart of God, the so-called *Missio Dei* theology popularised by Bosch and others [MA002: 0530] (Bosch, 1991, pp. 370, 389-393) “...mission always proceeds from God, that God always invites us, we never invite God; we always follow God, God never follows us.” [MA002: 2106]. MX003 prefers to reference the Wesleyan doctrine of “prevenient grace” on this issue: God is mysteriously at work in us bringing us to the point of realisation and conversion [MX003: 5153]. FE004 locates the minister’s responsibility as working out what God’s agenda is for each person she interacts with [FE004: 3913]. ME005 tells the mystery-laden story of a woman who had a dream of God which led her to conversion without the intervention of any human agency [ME005:0457]. FE006 also sketches the life of faith as a life of discovery of the God who has been at work [FE006:2334]. Prevenient grace pops up again in my conversation with MZ009; he finds it a helpful conceptual tool to describe the grace that we only catch up to later on, after having had God being active in our life without us realising it [MZ009: 4022]. FA011 is probably the one with the most to say about the hidden workings of God – and she too finds the concept of prevenient grace helpful in describing the God/human relationship that precedes conversion [FA011: 11330]. ME012 favours the concept of conversion coming as people awaken to the reality of God’s presence all around them [ME012: 4335]. ME012 spells it out very clearly: “...we never find God, but God finds us... and so what happens is for me is that the moment of revelation is when we discover that God has loved us all the time, we just know it...” [ME012: 1950].

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alternatively faithed, they perhaps have no business being involved in the conversion process.

### ***The Transformational Work of Prayer in Conversion***

I tried to ask questions that were as open-ended as possible, in order to allow the ministers as much freedom to choose what they wanted to speak about in terms of evangelism. Very, very few of them raised the topic of prayer. Prayer is considered to be a major part of liturgy [2.2.1]; but talk of evangelism or conversion did not spark much talk of prayer. Evangelism *did*, very appropriately, spark a lot of talk about social justice. Practical compassion was also often referenced. But the idea that evangelism and conversion might have any inscrutably spiritual component in which Christians might expect to be involved through prayer was simply not there for the most part. The ministers, in fact, do not appear to be asking God to do his presumably preveniently gracious Kingdom work of nudging people who are alternatively faithed to be converted to the Christian faith<sup>191</sup>. The references to prayer are scarce. Only FA011, with a massive tally of 41 references to pray/prayer, seems to cut a supernatural swathe through the world. Other than that there is much more conscious reference to compassionate care of others than to intercession for their conversion.

I assume that the ministers are prayerful women and men; but there is no direct evidence that they are. In the best construction on this absence (under Wesleyan instruction to think the best of others (Wesley, 1787, p. 451), this speaks to a commendable diffidence about flaunting their spirituality. Other interpretations, though, could see this lack of reference to prayer as indicating a disconnect between the liturgical ministry of prayer and the ministry of evangelism; or perhaps that it speaks to a denial that the conversion of the alternatively faithed is an important topic for Christian prayer. I shall return to this topic via my investigation of John Wesley's Journal when I assemble my grounded theory.

### ***Conclusion: Methodist Conversion Theory***

All the ministers I interviewed, even including ME001 with his radical rhetoric, believe that God can accomplish miraculous changes in human beings, or at least that dramatic change

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<sup>191</sup> MA002 runs an inventive prayer ministry, but the prayer is for what people ask for prayer for, not for people themselves to come to faith in Christ [MA002: 0258]. MX003 references prayer in the context of the believing congregation [MX003: 0838], but no specific focus on the alternatively faithed is mentioned. FE004 does mention a liturgical prayer for the conversion (or, as she puts it, "transformation") of the world through the witness of her congregants [FE004: 2105]. ME007 finds himself encouraging people to pray for their wayward children [ME007: 2200] – although to be perhaps cruelly truthful the concern could be construed as being more about the survival of the child rather than her/his conversion. MZ009 prays with people from house to house in a pastoral way [MZ009: 0530]. ME012 has an arrangement in his church services where anybody who wants to pray can approach a group of appointed intercessors seated in the back of his church – and he reports that some of that prayer has involved transactions of conversion [ME012: 0547].

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can happen. They are always very quick to underscore that such transformation is then only seen to be valid by the evidence of an ongoing process of increasing change in every aspect of life. But their issue is not so much that conversion *can't* happen, but that it *doesn't* happen. Neither the dramatic transformational moments nor the ongoing process of transformation seem to characterise their congregations, and this troubles the ministers. They hope that the long-term involvement of people in church means that they are starting to live a converted life, but they know that for many of their members it is not. Several ministers frankly say that they experience very few people “converting” in whatever form<sup>192</sup>. MX003, for instance, reckons that only two or three of his confirmation class of a dozen claimed to be converted [MX003:1507]. FE004 believes the people are actually “not open to being converted” [FE004:0253]. ME005 says sarcastically that at one of his churches “... very often they would use terms at ME005 suburb 1 like “snatching people from the gates of hell”, although I never saw anyone snatch” [ME005: 2207]. “Conversion and that kind of thing” does not happen at FE006’s church [FE006:0138]. ME007 similarly says that there are no stories of conversions that he can recall [ME007: 0352]. MX008 finds it truly difficult to assess if anybody at all is being converted, barring a few emotional reactions to sermons he has preached [MX008: 0204]. Although she has dramatic conversion stories to tell – her own [FA011: 1010], that of a woman who was killed in a traffic accident immediately after a drunken conversion [FA011: 0346], and another congregation member’s [FA011: 2939], FA011 actually finds it heart-breaking that so few people are actually becoming Christians [FA011: 3335], and that despite her energetic efforts her congregation is shrinking [FA011: 3233]. ME012 says wistfully “...there’s not a lot of story-telling of conversion experiences here.” [ME012: 0407].

In summary, then, I would say that the ministers tend to see conversion *as a miraculous, rare, self-aware inner change which God works in people; it has in some cases a conscious point of conversion, and happens in other cases through a series of conversion experiences, or even in some cases without any conscious conversion experience – and it results in a life-long process of drawing nearer to God and living an increasingly authentic Christian lifestyle.*

The next element of a potential liturgy of conversion is an inquiry into how the ministers attach Christian obedience to the conversion of others: what is evangelism through the eyes of the ministers?

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<sup>192</sup> The exceptions being one of ME005’s churches, which is growing at a rate of “about twenty conversions a year” [ME005: 0747], and MZ009’s church, where he recalls a woman coming to faith after a long struggle with unbelief and cancer [MZ009: 0853].

### **Evangelism as Authentic Witness of the Whole People of God**

As with “conversion”, I deliberately did not prime the ministers with any definition of evangelism – which some did not even notice, while others seemed to feel a little uneasy about – perhaps hoping for some clue from me as to what tack to take in approaching the subject. My thinking was that I wanted to discover what the general pathways of thought were that the ministers functioned with from day to day in their pastoral work. However, I did have my own understanding of evangelism in my mind, which I needed to test against the understanding of the ministers: “ *the work of the Spirit of God through the people of God in the contextual narration of the Gospel through adequately communicative signs, in social connection with the alternatively-faithed, to invite, without coercion, every human being to seek the truth about God as set out in the Bible Narrative, and to invite every human being to pursue that quest until they receive the gift of faith that enables them to live liberated, humble, just, and peaceful lives in community with those who are also disciples of Jesus Christ*” [see above 2.4.10].

ME001 locates evangelism in the arena of the public eye, with the congregation members as visual representations of the life of faith: proclamation happens through this “lived life” He maintains that “... the spirit of life in community for me is trying to live out the message, and proclaim it that way [ME001: 2330]. MA002 has a more social component to his concept of evangelism, with people divided into strategic small groups to engage society at large on socio-political and spiritual issues [MA002: 0137]. But the ministers generally<sup>193</sup> seemed to believe that evangelism was in itself the public life of credible Christians “living out the message” amongst those who live in a world beyond the world of the churches. “We are all evangelists,” says FE006, “and... we evangelise all the time, by how we live” [FE006: 1019]. [see also FE004: 2042; ME005 1640; ME007: 0121; MX008: 0408; 1000; MZ009: 4424; FA011: 5018; ME012: 1950]. This sense of a corporate duty only fulfilled by all the people of God acting in a coherent way in multiple micro-contexts<sup>194</sup> is important to my understanding of a liturgy of conversion, and I will return to this in chapter four.

### ***The Bad News of the World that Shapes the Good News of the Church***

*“... I’m more into public theology – a public understanding of God, and how we in a way make God known in the world” [MA002: 2106].*

It seems to me that our perception of what is wrong must be prior to our formulation – and activation - of responses. The way we see “bad news” will determine how we formulate

<sup>193</sup> MX003 was an exception here; he only seemed to see “evangelism” as existing in and through Christian-controlled activities like worship services and planned outreach events.

<sup>194</sup> By “micro-context” I mean the immediate socio-cultural and geographical context of specific Christian congregations (Rambo, 1995, p. 22)

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“good news”. Since there are likely to be more things wrong with our world than we have resources to address, this involves an element of choice and focus. The ministers find themselves in this triage dilemma: as FE004 points out, “...different people see different things” [FE004: 2703 (speaking in the context of deciding how to interact with the #feesmustfall student protests)]. And so the ministers come up with an interesting range of analyses.

MA002, with his public theology approach, has a more social component to his concept of church, with people divided into strategic small groups to engage society at large on socio-political and spiritual issues [MA002: 0137]. He refines his understanding of ecclesiology by contrasting his approach with that of another Cape Town church: “Some people are saying we’re moving in the direction where **MA002 nearby church 1** are moving into Cape Town? I don’t think so; I think we’re more different. I think they’re more justice, political .... but we’re this side looking more at the social, economic sector [2759] of things, the visibility of the church and that” [2711]. Several of the other ministers share his concern for the structural evils of society. MX003 delivers a stinging attack on the abuse of power by street committees [MX003: 5725]. FE004 reflects seriously on how the church might be involved in student protests against university fees [FE004: 2703], as does MZ009, who says that “... whatever happens to our community, our kids, it affects us because at the end of the day we are going to suffer as a result of what is happening in our country. I want to ....ask the question, ‘Where is the church when kids are *toy-toying*<sup>195</sup> on the road?’ Where is the ministry, our calling?” [MZ009: 3210]. MX003 includes joining public protests as one aspect of his rather wide definition of evangelism [MX003: 0353], and MA002 considers that an evangelistically important way of spending money earmarked for evangelism might be creating placards and banners for making a Christian point of view public outside the nearby court, on issues raised by notorious trials [MA002: 10222]. As FA011 puts it, “We get involved when there’s injustice, we get involved, we try and make a difference, we bring Jesus on the scene. I believe in the ministry of presence, bringing Jesus on the scene” [11149].

A second element of “bad news” is the spectre of hunger. This is a very serious and very immediately bad piece of “bad news”. The good news is that Methodists feed the hungry. From the point of view of the hungry, the Gospel is food, as it should be. MA005 speaks of a congregational initiative to grow free vegetables on the pavements around the church building [ME005 2508]. The grannies at MZ009’s church make sandwiches for distribution to the poor [MZ009: 0258]. FA011 is working in a very poor situation, and one of her church’s

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<sup>195</sup> “*Toy-toy*” is a type of vigorous, stamping dance that is characteristic of public protests in South Africa. MZ009 is talking here about protests against both the student fees and government corruption.

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key contributions to the good of society is the running of soup kitchens [FA011: 10403 – see also MX003 0100, 0507; MA002 2500, 2529; ME005 2136; FE006 1735; ME007: 10307; MZ009: 0258; FA011: 10403; ME012: 3002; MX008: 1715; MX008: 2605]. I have already noted above how important this issue is to the ministers in terms of their understanding of how the church relates to the world around it [see 3.2.3 above].

Another aspect of “bad news” identified by the ministers is socially destructive sinfulness and sin. In some contexts, especially strongly post-rural communities, there seems to be a simplistic tendency to blame the temptations of liquor, drugs and the glamorous life for the falling away of the younger cohort of adults [FA011: 0346]. For a number of ministers this calls out the response of a drug rehabilitation and addiction support group [FA011: 10342]. There seems to be socialisation competition between the Church culture and the Urban Youth culture. Official Methodist youth culture is based on formal traditional organisations, with strong values of moral rectitude and discipline, and cohesion is maintained by, amongst other systems, traditional music. Urban youth culture is focused around contemporary urban music, and the enjoyment of the very pleasures proscribed by the traditional Methodist culture. Sexual promiscuity, drinking, gambling, and anti-traditional lifestyle choices are strongly and specifically preached against<sup>196</sup>. Other social ills that call forth good news responses from the church is abuse of women [ME005 2508], and the general breakdown of family life. Teenage pregnancies call forth various concerned responses; one church runs a nine-bed facility for caring for young women through their pregnancies and childbirth [MX008: 1531 see also FA011: 4709]. ME005 is perhaps unique in his articulation of the relationship between the bad news of sin the good news of faith: “There needs to be an acknowledgement of sin, a desire to change, repent from it, and an experience of God’s forgiveness. To be truly converted there has to be an experiential part. 2827. That says ‘I feel and know that something has changed’” [ME005 2805; see also MX008: 2131]. It became apparent that the link for the ministers between sin, forgiveness, and conversion/transformation did not appear, generally, be a decisive factor in analysing the human condition.

One all-pervasive element of “bad news” is the endemic violence of Cape Town, one of the more dangerous cities in the world, according to assault, rape and murder statistics (cf. Chambers, 2017; Pinnock, 2016, pp. 184-222). ME007 has a particularly strong affinity to working with people swept up in the vortex of crime and violence in society – police, paramedics, victims and perpetrators [ME007: 1836]. But all of the other ministers live

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<sup>196</sup> Whilst attending a Xhosa language church service (2010-04-18) I witnessed a young woman who had fallen pregnant out of wedlock being subjected to a five-minute public harangue by the officiating local preacher. She has not been back.

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amongst the reality of crime and violence<sup>197</sup>. The ministers clearly feel the pain of the broken world in which they live. They visit the wounded and bury the dead [MX003: 2108; ME007: 2559; MZ009: 4515]. They plot and plan approaches to those who have stakes in the business of gang crime<sup>198</sup>. They are restless about the terrible conditions they live and work amongst.

The ministers do not, however, seem to have the same sharp empathy for any sort of metaphysical pain and struggle the alternatively faithed might be experiencing. FE004 considers that the alternatively faithed, in fact, probably are “really happy as they are” [FE004: 3745]. ME007 does interact with the concept of “hunger” - existential emptiness or lack of fulfilment that the Gospel then addresses however it manifests itself [ME007: 1710]. He seems to tout this as the main factor likely to drive people to seek for religious solutions: a reference perhaps to Augustine’s famous conversation with God (Augustine, 2001, p. 5). FA011 acknowledges the possibility of people being on a long, painful journey towards God, and illustrates it in a very Wesleyan way with a detailed conversion account of one of her members [FA011: 2939]. Part of the pain is this sense of lack: “I think it’s a dissatisfaction, or an awareness of an incompleteness of the whole self ..... I think every person in this world sits there some day – whether you’re poor or whether you’re wealthy – there’s some emptiness there, something that says there’s more to life than this.” [FA011: 11230].

One aspect of sin is conspicuously missing from the ministers’ evaluation is that of “personal sin”. Personal sin, individual complicity in the sinful condition of humankind, appears to be largely absent from their thinking. Guilt is only mentioned three times in total. And generally the concepts of true/false, good/bad, right/wrong are not much of a feature of the ministers’ understanding of the metaphysical realities faced by the alternatively faithed [Table 2 Bible References in interviews]. Evil (only mentioned once in all the interviews) appears to be only a social reality, never a personal category. In effect it seems difficult for a generous and respectable church-goer to have any concept of having personally offended God or of having personally fallen short of any standard. Apparently there is no bad news for the socially active church-goer.

The focus of the ministers seems to be on healing pain, and the pain is so great that the option of persuading people to consider adopting faith in Jesus appears to fall into a very low

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<sup>197</sup> I preach occasionally at the Methodist Church in Hanover Park, one of the most intensely crime-ridden areas of Cape Town. It is the only church I know that has a protocol for what to do if gunfire breaks out around the building during a church service.

<sup>198</sup> MZ009 paints a graphic picture of the difficulties facing a minister in some areas of Cape Town: “...those who do the dirty job they are not in charge, most of the time. And there is the one that is ordering the hit all the time; so what we are trying to do is to reach out to that because stray bullets, killing people, it’s terrible. And the reality is that we partly involved as the church. We are affected because some of those kids, their parents are in the church. So we are trying to say ‘Please! How can we best help as the church?’” [MZ009: 0734].

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priority, because the ministers do not appear to consider that the pain of alienation from God is a significant component of the world's pain<sup>199</sup>. With all the horrific social ills and desperation, the ministers seem to have chosen to focus the undeniably urgent physical and social issues as the definitive “bad news” they are called to address in the world. This is not to say that the ministers are not eager to preach and explain the Gospel to people they meet and work amongst – it is interesting, and perhaps significant, to note that there are a range of “bad news” issues that they do not articulate spontaneously. I shall need to address this as I formulate my grounded theory – is there a way of keeping this intensely practical vision for practical good alongside a vision for conversion into God's Kingdom? John Wesley's *Journal* is potentially the most appropriate resource for interrogating this issue further.

### ***The Gospel Message and the Apostle's Creed***

In the light of the ministers' assessment of the bad news, I wondered what the ministers might have to offer as “good news”. What, in their minds, constitutes a distinctly Christian contribution to “making the world a better place” [ME001: 4107; FE004: 2042; ME007 2412]? I probed for the cognitive content of the Gospel in all my interviews, and the results were extremely interesting. I tried to get the ministers to tell me what information they had about conversion – and which they might therefore be expected to want to encode in “adequately communicative signs” (signs of whatever medium) for the alternatively faithed to decode [2.4.10].

The three major things that the ministers seem to want to communicate to people is that God exists and that God loves them, and that God is calling them on a journey. FE006 expresses this well: “I think the discovery that Christ is alive; that we serve a living God. And the discovery that this Jesus loves us” [FE006:2124]. ME012 adds to that the idea of the life-long transformational journey; in his view people must have “...a willingness to follow, and be led by God, by God's Spirit, by Jesus ... and so to be willing to change values ...and, and.... desires .... to become more Christ-like. ...which for me is the life-long journey” [ME012: 3350]. They seem to have a compulsion to insist to any potential new convert that they are entering into a shaping process, a lifestyle of transformation, and that conversion is not instantaneous [see section 3.2.6 above]. They appear to be instructing people to be only moderately changed at first, and to then settle in for the long haul.

In terms of other aspects of the Gospel, FE004 was the most theologically systematic of all the ministers. Reflecting back on the approach she has taken with people wanting to know what the basics of faith might be, she says:

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<sup>199</sup> The one notable exception being FA011, who frequently uses salvation categories in her narratives [FA011: 5924, etc.]

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*“I did say that there was a set of beliefs that we would generally tend to adhere to. Which at that point I think I sort of put down as the Nicene Creed, ... saying that by or large you have to be OK with this. If you’re not OK with this by and large then you’re not going to fit in and you’re not in the right place”<sup>200</sup> [FE004: 3345].*

The liturgy of the Xhosa Methodist Sunday Service invariably contains the *Ndiyakholwa*, (the Apostles’ Creed) (MCSA, 1926, p. 20), so it seemed that this might a clue for my trying to unlock the ministers’ theology of evangelism – perhaps the creed is the unspoken unifying theological centre of Methodist ministers<sup>201</sup>. The Creed, of course, summarises and encapsulates a great deal of material. But through a close reading of the interviews it seems that their understanding is indeed broadly creedal – although, in trying to put flesh on the skeleton, it comes out with more muscle and skin in some areas than in others<sup>202</sup>.

❖ *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*

Despite their preoccupation with the church and church membership, it was assumed that the Gospel was a message about God<sup>203</sup> and what he desires [ME001: 0632; MA002: 0550; MX003: 0353; FE004: 3913; ME005: 0500; FE006:2334; ME007: 3714; MX008: 1000; MZ009: 1002; FA011: 0601; ME012: 1057]. They seem to all feel, quite unambiguously, that they are men and women of God, entrusted with a divine task, and seeking the fullest possible expression of God’s will in their own lives and the lives of their congregants; and, if they were to consider it, perhaps also in the lives of the alternatively faithed.

❖ *I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,*

Jesus (Christ) is named frequently. The ministers are not shy to use his name<sup>204</sup>. For ME001 “Jesus” is only mentioned in the context of liturgy, and MX008 seems to expect that the place of realising the importance of the name is during a sermon in a church building [MX008: 0204]. MA002 and FE004 consider that Jesus to be a person whose fellowship must be experienced [MA002: 0452], in a relationship of reciprocal love [MA002: 3503].

<sup>200</sup> It is interesting to note that the creed is used as a criterion for “fitting in” with a Christian community – not, as Newbigin might expect, as a summary of public truth to be published.

<sup>201</sup> Barbara Glasson, writing in an English context, observes that “Methodists often assume a theology. It is implicit, hidden, hard to spell out ...” (2004, p. 101). This seems to be very much the case with Methodist ministers in South Africa too.

<sup>202</sup> To be fair to the ministers, this research was not constructed to develop a systematic theology. But it is interesting and important to note what top-of-the-mind theological issues lie behind their praxis.

<sup>203</sup> In terms of word-count, “God” is used extremely frequently – 216 times - although we need to query why MA002 (60 times) and FA011(66times) used the word disproportionately more than the other ministers.

<sup>204</sup> “Jesus” is used 127 times (56 times by FA011); and Christ is used 59 times (20 times by MX003). I do not believe that these statistics tell us much, other than that this was a frequent topic of the ministers. Their main usefulness is in alerting us to the fact that some interesting further questions need to be asked.

Martin Mostert ANALYSING INTERVIEWS WITH MINISTERS (descriptive/empirical)

Jesus wants people to commit (or recommit) their lives to this friendship [MA002: 4110; FE004: 2042, 2601]. MX003 longs for a realisation of the uniqueness of Jesus to erupt amongst those who are living lives according to a liturgical rote [MX003: 5009]. ME005 urges his congregants to “embrace Jesus” [ME005: 0352] as part of the process of becoming disciples of Jesus who disciple others to do so too [ME005 1640]. FE006 shares with ME005 and FA011 the sense that her own story of conversion to faith in Jesus is the most important part of her Gospel message [FE006:1126; ME005 1754; FA011: 0757]. ME007 bemoans the fact that people entering into this conscious relationship with Jesus is very rare in his church community [ME007: 0424], and suggests that the very institution of the church might be an obstacle to people experiencing faith at this level [ME007: 5652]. FA011 can apparently not keep quiet about Jesus when talking about any aspect of her life, and is somewhat of an outlier in this regard [e.g. FA011: 0057 etc. throughout the interview]

It appears that many ministers consider the agency of Jesus and the need for a living relationship with him as key to the Christian life. However, for many of the ministers it does not seem to be framed as a message to be communicated by words to those who stand outside the family of faith in Christ. But for all of the ministers Jesus seems to be at the heart of the Gospel spoken amongst Christians and those who are culturally close to the Church.

❖ *who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary.*

All the ministers articulate the word “Gospel” [ME001(2); MA002(5); FE004(1); ME005(6); ME007(3); MX008(2); MZ009(2); FA011(2)] – but there does not seem to be any coherent plan to transmit cognitive content to the alternatively faithed. The two questions that I asked in in the “*logos*” section of my question schedule, from which I expected to get some concrete data on this issue, were questions five and eight: “Do you teach about evangelism? And if so, what aspects do you emphasize?” and “In your opinion, what are the most important factors involved in conversion?”

Nobody mentioned the Divine conception and virgin birth. Very little about Jesus’ earthly life (between his birth and ascension) was mentioned, apart from some references to Jesus’ teachings<sup>205</sup>. According to these references, the cognitive data the ministers might want people to become aware of – in order to convert to Christianity - are all derived from John’s

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<sup>205</sup> The entire Gospel of John (as an independent agent of conversion) [ME005: 0457]; the Kingdom of God [ME001: 0133; FE006: 1019; ME012: 4335; FE004: 0800]; God so loved the world (John 3:16, minus the reference to “perishing”)[MX003: 3840]; ME005: 0620]; Christ the only way (a reference to John 14[ME005: 0620]); Pearls and pigs [FA011: 5831]; Born again (John 3) [FA011: 2815]; Love your neighbour [ME005: 1640]; If you love me obey my commands (John 15)[ MA002: 3505]; The Spirit convicting people of sin (John 16)[FE004: 0438]; Matthew 28 [MX008: 2743; MX003: 4542]; Make disciples [ME005: 1640; MX008: 1106; FA011: 5018; MX003: 4323; MX008: 1203; MA002: 4900; FA011: 12901]; You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:80)[ME005: 3235; FA011: 11850; ME012: 3952].

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Gospel [ME005: 0457]; people need to understand that they must be “born again” [FA011: 2815]; people must know that God loves the world [MX003: 3840]; Christ is the only way (John14) [ME005: 0620]; and the fact that only the Spirit can convict people of sin [FE004: 0438]. It is however by no means clear whether the ministers are actually conceptualising trying to communicate these Bible themes persuasively to alternatively faithed people. Ministers seem to envision, rather, the task of clarifying the faith for the faithful.

With regard to narrative sources from the Gospels, I could only find two references to events in Jesus’ life between his birth and crucifixion: The woman taken in adultery (as a rebuke to the religiosity of the church, rather than an example of how grace works towards a human being) [ME012: 4652]; and how Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (used to urge Christians to welcome and serve strangers) [MA002: 2633].

❖ *He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;*

I could only find two references to the cross and resurrection in all the interviews: the cross as more than just a stick [MX003: 3605]; the fact that Jesus had been crucified and that the minister did not want to be [FA011: 11213]. The skeleton of the creed looks very bony in this aspect.

❖ *He descended to hell.*

There was strictly to be no mention of hell. Not involving Jesus, not involving anybody. Hell was only referred to as something one should not refer to [ME005: 2136; 3650; FA011: 3644; ME012: 2140; 2550; 4535]<sup>206</sup>.

❖ *The third day he rose again from the dead.*

Only one minister talked about the evangelism in terms of resurrection: one solitary mention of the resurrection, arguably the central datum of the Christian faith [FE006: 2124]. The ministers are, however, strong on the fact that Jesus is alive, despite apparently downplaying the Gospel assertion that he died. They articulate an expectation that their congregation members need to feel the real presence of Jesus – they often use the word “experience” in this context [MX002: 0452;0530; MX003: 0648; ME005 3032; 3323; FE006:2550; ME007: 0424; MX008: 1106; MZ009: 3521; FA011: 2502; ME012: 0407]. They appear to be living in a world of an immanent Jesus without considering that much explanation needs to be given as to *why* Jesus might be present, or why he might otherwise not have been present.

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<sup>206</sup> I discount ME001 here, who only uses “hell” as an expletive.

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❖ *He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.*

The reigning presence of Christ with God over all the universe was not a theme visited by the ministers. Nobody mentions the idea that Jesus is either interceding for us at the right hand of God or that he is observing our deeds and attitudes

❖ *From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Judgement was apparently not on the evangelistic menu either. Eschatology was never a strong element in any message the ministers might want to put across. Along with hell and death, the ministers seemed to avoid talking about the long-term view of eschatology, and focused strongly on compassionate duty towards one's neighbour in the present.

❖ *I believe in the Holy Spirit,*

The ministers seem to give the Holy Spirit the same level of attention as the authors of the creed did – the Spirit is there, but too inscrutable to comment on. A word-search is illustrative here: there are only 33 references to the Holy Spirit in the interviews (of which 21 occur in the interview with FA011<sup>207</sup>).

❖ *the holy catholic\* church, the communion of saints,*

As noted above, evangelism is extremely closely connected to church membership in the minds of the ministers: they manifestly believe in the *church*, and that new believers should come to share this view. It is by no means clear that any sense of the vital integratedness of all the churches of the world plays any thinking in their concepts of encapsulation of new converts (or re-awakened former converts). Considerations of the church triumphant never emerged. Only MA002 referred to even cooperation between different communions in the local context [MA002: 2106]. The only other references to the “church universal” appeared to be about competition over members and resources [ME001: 2633; 5155; MX003:1404; FE004: 4209; ME007: 1447; FA011: 5339;] – nothing attractive or persuasive with regard to any good news.

❖ *the forgiveness of sins,*

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<sup>207</sup> FA011 is charismatic (in both senses of the word) and evangelistic, and very articulate – her interview contains more than double the amount of words of even the next most loquacious respondent, and so her contribution tends to skew the sample set. I have no way of ascertaining how many of the Methodist ministers in Cape Town fall into this “charismatic” mould – my sample size is too small. It would require further investigation to resolve that issue.

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Forgiveness of sins is a very rare theme amongst the ministers, probably correlating to their reluctance to talk in terms of sin. The concept is only used seven times altogether, by five of the ministers [FE004: 0438; ME005 2805; ME007: 3845; MX008: 2131; ME012: 2429].

❖ *the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.*

Nobody even mentions resurrection or heaven. The ministers appear to portray a very this-worldly Gospel, concerned with people's needs in this world but not interacting with the "perfect statistic" of death, or concepts of the "new heaven and new earth".

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This all seems to indicate a relatively low theoretical content for the Gospel message. But there is an aspect of what the ministers have to say that cannot be caught in a creedal net. They all display a high regard for testimony, witness, narrative. They expect that the story of faith told by a believer in Christ is the most likely to persuade the alternatively faithed to consider putting their faith in Christ in turn. I shall cover that in the next two sections, which deal with what I think is the ministers' understanding of witness as Gospel.

It seems to me that the unique content of the Gospel is the improbable story of a man who died and then came to life again, which should alert us to the inherent difficulty of the process. Why anybody (including me) should ever believe that is indeed a mystery.

### **Silent Witness**

*"We haven't had any evangelism drives, or tried to do anything offensive, really" [FE004: 4546].*

It became apparent that an issue raised by many of the ministers in terms of my definition of evangelism was that the cardinal Word of evangelism is not a *spoken* word, but the integrity of the Christian life. It is almost the first thing many ministers want to say: that evangelism ought not to use words. The ministers seem to be working with a specifically non-proclamatory model of evangelism. ME012 references the apocryphal Francis of Assisi quotation "Preach the Gospel everywhere you go – if necessary use words" [ME012: 2820] (cf. Stanton, 2012). Any show of aggression is considered unacceptable, and speaking about the Christian faith appears to be defined as aggression. ME001 uses the memorable image of an evangelist as a savage warrior with axe and bow [ME001: 3611]. FE004 raises the spectre of unsolicited knocking at doors to try and locate potential converts, as does ME007 [FE004: 0840, 0950; ME007: 10125]. It seems that, given the apparent avoidance of an "original sin" theology, there is neither any *right* to speak nor any *need* to speak.

David Bosch proposed that evangelism is one of the elements of an “emerging postmodern paradigm of mission” (1991, pp. 409-419)[p.63]. It seems to me that the Methodist Churches of Cape Town do not fit easily into his paradigm. There are a number of considerations that occurred to me as I reflected on the interviews:

- a. *My first observation is that many ministers are reluctant to even talk about evangelism, let alone discuss “talk” as a medium of evangelism.* I struggled to pin ministers down to a diarised appointment, and some appointments were not kept. I was sent to wrong addresses. It was difficult to persuade them to grant me interviews on the subject. Interviewee ME010 (or rather, non-interviewee!), is my paradigmatic case for non-compliance, covering almost every possible tactic for avoiding interaction with me [ME010]. He adopted a patronising stance at our first meeting, emphasizing the power-differential between us, and was disconcerted when this was subverted by some of his colleagues [ME010-2]. He next attacked the entire project on the basis of what he presented as a failure in its scope – a perceived failure on my part to consider the place of liturgy ... which was somewhat bemusing. He used the interesting phrase “I’d fail you on that alone.” [ME010-3] He seems to have been trying to continue his line of resistance by casting himself as teacher to me as pupil, an interesting transactional tactic (cf. Harris, 1967, 1973, p. 47): but what was most interesting was that he was not attacking an actual omission, but one which he assumed would be there, which suggests a complete reluctance to interact with the ideas I had presented. His next move [ME010-5] I find hard to interpret. He asked “What’s in it for me?” I assume he meant that he stood to lose more than he would gain by being associated with the project. But the net effect was to communicate that he considered the project to be manifestly worthless. Next he launched into anecdotes of his ministry which I assume were designed to show me just how unique his ministry was, without either parallel or comprehensibility from the viewpoint of conventional pastoring [ME010-7]. I continued to try and apply rational arguments and reasons, and managed to keep my exasperation well under control, speaking as humbly and as winningly as I could; and eventually, under concerted peer-pressure from the other ministers present (who were happy to be interviewed), he agreed to make an appointment [ME010-9]. Which he then did not keep, with no reasons given – a classic passive aggressive tactic [ME010-10], and not the only time a minister failed to keep an appointment for an interview. On a follow-up meeting at which I tried to re-schedule, he offered me no apology, continued to claim that his ministry was necessarily inscrutable from my point of view, denied the possibility that insights from his ministry could conceivably help anybody else in theirs, and refused to be persuaded to

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participate on any terms. I consider myself fortunate to have got as many as 11 interviews.

- b.** *Secondly, it seems that for the ministers the models of evangelistic speech they know have a medium/message incongruity.* As I have noted, ministers occasionally refer (disparagingly) to the “preaching on street corners” [FE006 1417, 1550] and “knocking on doors” [FE004 0840, 0950]. These are not activities which are a characteristic part of the evangelism program of traditionally white churches: they are part of an old-fashioned approach to Methodism [MX003 10328; ME005 3323; FE006 2550] that is no longer considered relevant<sup>208</sup>. These models of evangelism seem to embody everything that the ministers think evangelism should NOT be: aggressive, narrow, invasive, abrasive, hostile, judgemental, manipulative, uncompassionate, and disinterested in the ordinary struggles of human life. A “street-preacher” or one who “knocks on doors” apparently embodies these undesirable characteristics by definition. (Perhaps naively I assume that “true evangelism” would be whatever was opposite to this – but that was never touted by any of the ministers I spoke with). The ministers make it clear that they will not engage in the discourse they seem to attach to street preachers. *We may not offend anybody by unloving and judgemental words*; the biggest, most implacable taboo appears to be even the appearance of such judgementalism [ME007: 5036; MZ009: 4810; FA011: 12901]. In effect, the ministers could almost be interpreted as thinking that evangelism is one of the most unloving things a Christian could inflict on the alternatively faithed<sup>209</sup> [[FE004: 4546]. It seems that what is at work here is the loss of a sense of the right to speak. Ministers feel somehow too compromised, perhaps, by the history of church complicity with evil structures to expect to get a hearing [FE004: 3716]. They seem to feel they deserve to be ignored.
- c.** *Thirdly, the ministers do not seem to have a plan to speak in the opposite way:* there appears to be no particular method or process to encourage or facilitate conversions. There does not seem to be any vision for evangelism in a contrary mode: gentle, open, respectful, tactful, friendly, grace-filled, non-manipulative, compassionate, and situationally engaged communication of the ideas of the Gospel. While there is marked hostility to a putative “old model” of evangelism, there is little sign of any “new model” of evangelism emerging. Having eliminated evil speech, there does not seem to be any space left for godly speech. Ministers seem largely to agree that evangelism is

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<sup>208</sup> The ministers are strong on what is *not* relevant, but not so strong on what *is* relevant [ME001 1310, 5058; MA002 5258; FE004 0150].

<sup>209</sup> Albert Outler describes the stereotype (what he calls a “distorted image”) of evangelists as “...abrasive zealots flinging their bibles like missiles, men (and sometimes women!) with a flat-earth theology, a monophysite Christology, a montanist ecclesiology, and a psychological profile suggestive of hysteria” (Outler, 1971, p. 34).

insensitive to context by definition<sup>210</sup>. They reluctantly acknowledge Christians' right to evangelism, but seem to feel that there must be a better way of being a Christian in the world [FE004: 0840].

- d. Fourthly, the ministers face a silent revolt on the part of their potential evangelising personnel, the rank and file church member.* FE006 puts it like this: "I think people are scared....when they hear the word evangelism, there's a connotation that I must go out on the street corners and preach and tell people 'Come to Jesus or else you're going to burn'. So I think that that antiquated idea means that people are scared of evangelism" [FE006:1417]. Evangelism has apparently become so snarled in this set of negative perceptions that it is highly unlikely that a minister would be able to persuade any church member to be involved in it, especially since the ministers themselves are not generally showing signs of eagerness to be involved. The element of leadership by example is definitively missing.
- e. Which leads to my fifth impression: we come back to the apparent theoretical default position for evangelism: silent witness* [FE006:1019]. The least offensive position for a Christian to occupy in terms of witness is to silently demonstrate love, and show - through extraordinary compassion - that there is a deep spring of love that they have discovered, and to rely on curiosity about this source of love to draw people into a search which can then be met with explanation and evangelism.
- f. This is defensible, sixthly, because there seems to be no salvation crisis.* God is working in everybody through prevenient grace [MX003: 5153; MZ009: 4022; FA011: 11330]. "Lost-ness" is not mentioned as a category of thought – nobody is apparently considered to be ultimately disadvantaged by non-adherence to the Christian faith. There seems to be an assumption that Methodists have neither the right nor the need to dogmatically assert one metanarrative as being the universally true one. Methodists therefore apparently have no warrant to expand their circle of influence amongst those who do not already adhere to their vision of history. FE004, as we have seen, goes so far as to describe immigrant stall holders being "really happy the way they are" [3745]. There seems to be little interaction with the possibility that those who do not in some way have a strong cultural affinity to the Methodist Church are objects of concern, or might become

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<sup>210</sup> The ministers seem to regard it as a sort of regrettable savagery that takes place on the fringes of their congregation without central approval and apparently without the need of pastoral supervision. The solitary exception is FA011: "We have people that's not saved, that have not gone to churches, their own churches, for many years. What I find is a good place for evangelism is at funerals. I do funerals in the area if the person doesn't belong to our church I grab that opportunity and I don't give it to a local preacher if I can. So I grab those at times of...I don't go as being insensitive for a funeral and start bashing and thrashing people about hell, of course, I know how to be a proper theologian and being true to God's grace and everything, but I never miss that opportunity...to allow them softly, very, very gently to think about life, you know. So then they come to church. I see them, you know..." [FA011: 3644].

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partners in a spiritual journey. This emerged strongly from my final diagnostic question, “If you had R10, 000 to spend on evangelism, how would you spend it?” It seems that Methodist Churches are mostly liturgically exclusionary of the alternatively faithed. Some ministers displayed some awareness of those who were not part of the closed church-culture or close Methodist-culture [FE004: 3745]. But this was accompanied by an apparently highly unformed sociology of culture [see 3.2.1 above]. Very few Ministers interacted with the philosophical and religious realities of those who were not members or near members of their church communities [see 3.2.1 above]. None of them seemed to be able to conceptualise a conversion that brought together people from radically different worldviews into the community of the Christian church.

- g. The ministers seem to be able to avoid thinking or reflecting about what it means if people live by an alternative faith-narrative.* In addition, it seems as if they do not see a link between the rise in alternative faith, and the reality of declining or inactive adherents in their churches – none of the ministers expressed ideas along the lines of an evil will and hostile culture beating against the efforts of the church as a cause for shrinkage in membership: there is no sign of them sensing any competition for allegiance at a worldview level. They do not seem to think in terms of threat categories in this way.
- h. This sense of there being no crisis is deepened, in the eighth place, by the loss of a concept of judgement and hell.* Ministers are apparently not thinking in terms of an approaching eschatological judgement, where some humans will be endorsed by God and others rejected. The denial or de-prioritisation of these biblical themes apparently removes any danger from being “lost”. The only effect of being distant from God, or resistant to God, appears to be the inconvenience of missing out, during this life, on a fulfilling and meaningful relationship with God. Christianity is apparently an advantage for this life only, and only debatably an advantage at that. It is reduced to a cultural choice in a pluralist world. The ministers themselves appear to see no compelling reason to advance to others for putting their faith in Christ, or choosing the path of Methodist Christianity.

Many ministers apparently consider that the witness of an authentically Christian Lifestyle lived amongst the alternatively faithed is in itself an “adequately communicative sign” for communicating the Gospel invitation. Yet, having said all this, inarticulate witness is not the whole story ... many Methodists apparently still have a great deal to say.

### ***Methodists evangelise Methodists***

Martin Mostert ANALYSING INTERVIEWS WITH MINISTERS (descriptive/empirical)

*“So, in the pulpit, it’s always my space, depending on the passage that I ... will talk about those things that brings the Word of God to light, that evangelise the people [MX003: 3259].*

My interviews have highlighted that for the most part ministers seem to be conceptually dealing with either church members, lapsed church members, or members of their wider communities with a strong Christian legacy. FE004 seemed quite disconcerted when I suggested that a Muslim might decide to convert to Christianity – I am not sure if her laughter was from nervousness or that the thought was completely ludicrous. [FE004:0416]; she seems completely certain that anybody setting out on the Christian life will consider themselves as a “returnee” rather than somebody discovering the way of faith for the first time [FE004: 0343]. The “feeder stream” of these converts appears to be those who are culturally close to Methodism. The only source of new members ME001 can name is disgruntled members from a nearby Methodist Church [ME001: 2702]. Although MA002 is very active in evangelism, the new people who join his congregation usually come through some liturgical rite-of-passage scenario – baptisms, weddings or funerals<sup>211</sup> [MA002: 1052], indicating a cultural link with Methodism, or at least Protestant Christianity. MX003 believes that the youth who leave in droves after confirmation will return in adulthood, envisioning an ongoing leave-return cycle that he anticipates will keep the church ecosystem in balance [MX003: 1049 – see also MZ009: 1433]. ME005 describes how the same group of congregants cycle repeatedly through the same evangelistic course [ME005: 0146]. In his growing congregation converts generally come from a church background of some sort [ME005 0903]. ME007 sees himself as working amongst people who are “Christians by birth” [ME007: 0230](The campus ministry he refers to is Methsoc, which in turn generally works amongst Methodist-culture students). For MX008 evangelism consist in getting people to bring friends and relatives to church [MX008: 0039]. FA011 describes how she struggles to communicate persuasively with those who are Methodist in name and live close by to the church building [FA011: 5831]. ME012 locates evangelism as an in-house activity of the church: “... it’s mostly around church Sundays that evangelism happens” [ME012: 0547].

The overarching impression is that Methodists evangelise Methodists. But very few of them “come alive” in any noticeable way, and so the bottom line is completely in line with the national statistics of the decline of the Methodist denomination. Older people die, younger people are progressively alienated; and at the same time only a trickle of even culturally close people are reported as converts.

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<sup>211</sup> I have already established that the liturgical rite-of-passage intended to encapsulate the young is failing to deliver on its intended purpose.

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What then exacerbates this situation is that the ministers generally seem to feel that they may only speak to those to whom they have right of access. And “right of access”, as I have discussed, appears to be limited to those who already broadly share the Methodist faith perspective [MA002 1052; FE004: 3745]. Although some people drift in from other communions [FE004: 4209], and even other religions [MZ009: 0853; FA011: 3737; ME001: 1846], the people who come into Methodist churches and become members are generally those who come from a Methodist background [FE004 1534]. From the ministers’ point of view, “evangelism” seems to be the most efficient mobilisation of available adherents rather than communicating with the widest possible audience. MA002 has a pastoral strategy that is predicated on mobilising a greater percentage of his members [MA002: 0739]. ME007 references the Willow Creek adage of turning “modern church goers into committed Christians” [ME007: 4845] (Mittelberg, 2000, p. 25). A cynical commentator might well be excused for seeing, as ME005 suggests, evangelism as a last ditch attempt to rescue an ailing institution rather than a straightforward exercise of disciple-obedience and compassion [ME005: 0956]. It seems that what this amounts to is that the ministers find themselves working with an ever-shrinking population. The inevitable outcome of that, if it was indeed true, would be the demise of the Methodist Church in the near future.

The ministers are generally articulate and confident-seeming people. But they seem to reserve their confidence for the private sphere of Methodism. There is little sense of a message for the world, and a mandate to communicate confidently and persuasively with the alternatively faithed. The bottom line could well be the sad comment of ME005 on the limitations he experienced to the evangelism at one of his churches: “...Any talk about evangelism would be very quickly shut down by confidence that it was something they shouldn’t be doing” ME005: 0250.

### ***Evangelisation not Evangelism***

*“I think everyone who regularly attends church needs to be evangelised....Some people have had an experience of Christ that has grown cold, and they have become more involved in ritual and tradition than relationship. So they need to hear that call pretty regularly...The harder ones to evangelise are inside the church.”*  
[ME005 3323]

As a consequence of their view on the most appropriate audience for the Gospel, it seems to me that the ministers use the concept of “evangelism” in a specific way. They seem to intend by “evangelism” the formation of Christian life according to the values of the Gospel, rather than persuading the alternatively faithed to consider converting to Christianity [cf. 2.4.9].

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The ministers seem to have a very institutional view of evangelism – more like the Greek Orthodox concept of *paedagogia* **Invalid source specified**. Evangelism appears to be understood as the application of Gospel principles to church attendees in order to enable them to live a more Christ-like life in society. In this view, the Gospel is applied to the lives of those who believe the Gospel. ME001 refers to applying the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-24) to the lives of the congregation as “evangelism” [2237], and I assume he means to intend this pedagogic process. FE004 sees evangelism as being a process of transformation [2042] of Christian disciples [see also MX003 3100].

As we have noted above [3.2.6], evangelism seems to hinge on getting people into the church building on a Sunday, into a small group meeting to discuss discipleship issues, or else into some traditional pastorally-controlled encounter. The ministers seem to feel competent there, but seem to feel relatively incompetent in the world between the churches. This was vividly apparent in the description I previously referred to of the “dislocation” FE004 experienced when walking amongst the stalls of immigrants in the near vicinity of the church [FE004: 3745]. “Outside” is a place of anguish and doubt for her – she describes being uncomfortable. However, once within the orbit of Methodist influence, “normal church”, people can receive instruction through sermons, Bible studies, confirmation preparation, and counselling with a view to advancing their conversion and displaying greater levels of Christian virtue.

This is a marked divergence from the definition I am using, especially in terms of the need to be in social connection with the alternatively faithed. I shall look at this more closely as I assemble my grounded theory [Chapter 1]. In particular, it puts much of the material offered to me by the ministers in the categories of “evangelisation” or “catechesis” as defined by Westerhoff (cf. Westerhoff, 2008) [see 2.4.9 above]. The upshot of this focus on those who are culturally close to Methodism is a marked tendency to confine evangelism to the premises of the church, and to arenas controlled by Christians.

### **Examples of Ecclesiocentric Methodist Evangelism**

As I have shown, the ministers’ main focus seemed to be on adherents: maintaining and enlivening them, or reclaiming lost ones. In order to achieve this there are a variety of models of evangelism available, which are what the ministers would consider as the adequately communicational sign systems in which the Gospel is to be encoded. Bosch insists that evangelism has to be “valid” (1991, p. 420) – which means that he had in mind that there might be “invalid” ways of doing evangelism. Perhaps many approaches to evangelism could in fact fail to use what I have called “adequately communicative signs” in my definition, or fail to be a “contextual narration” in “social connection with the alternatively

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faithed" [1.2.3]. And if this were a game, the scorecard would be: "Church building 75% full, empty seats 25%", or perhaps more realistically, "Church building 15% full, empty seats 85%"<sup>212</sup>. The Church building is the centre of operations [see 3.2.2 above], and ministers judge how well they are playing by what percentage of their seats are filled on a Sunday.

Several models of evangelism designed to increase numbers of people attending church services and activities seem to be in operation, depending on the cultural profile of particular Methodist Church communities.

### *Evangelism as Welcoming People to a Gospel-Rich Liturgy*

*"So in a sense that has been an evangelistic exercise, in that our whole being is based around creating a family which invites people in and welcomes people in" [FE004: 0702].*

Many of the ministers are most at home talking about the evangelistic content and intention of their in-house liturgical services. ME001 refers to Wesley's "four 'alls'" in a context that is entirely located in the church building – using liturgical references to "the Word, the written word", "the Spirit", "fellowship of community", "sense of otherness", "sanctuary", and "worship environment" [ME001: 0632].

There is a "work of the people" (liturgy) considered to be appropriate to the weekday world [ME007: 0121]. But liturgy on Sunday is strongly segregated from liturgy on Monday – they are different duties happening in different environments (MX003: 0353). This seems to be considered axiomatic by the ministers – not consciously done, but simply the paradigm within which they live.

Paradoxically, if you are in church you are treated as if you were a Christian. By entering the domain of the church building you perhaps become an honorary Christian<sup>213</sup>. Indeed, as I have noted, the main indicator of whether or not a person is a Christian is often whether or not they are "committed" to church-going [ME007: 3527]<sup>214</sup>.

The point at which this evangelism connects with the alternatively-faithed is where the alternatively-faithed voluntarily enters the ecclesial zone of influence. This component of evangelism might be represented by theorists like Keifert with his rather odd "home and away fixture" theory (1992, p. 99). Wesley's *Journal* has a lot to say about this dynamic, and my grounded theory will reflect that.

<sup>212</sup> Of course some churches move the goalposts by reducing the number of seats available...

<sup>213</sup> My bright, mathematically and linguistically gifted daughter (a Christian) was given the title of "honorary atheist" by her atheist friends whilst at school – it seems as if we as Christians often do the same to the alternatively faithed with whom we come into connection.

<sup>214</sup> A weak spot in my research is a failure to interrogate this equation of church attendance with conversion more fully.

***The Laity are Responsible for the Church's Evangelism***

*"...my emphasis is that we are all evangelists and that we evangelise all the time, by how we live.... And so my sermons are very much making people aware of the responsibility that we carry, whatever we are doing, whatever the situation or wherever we find ourselves, whoever we find ourselves with – that we are in an evangelism situation" [FE006:1019].*

It seems that the ministers feel somewhat cocooned from the actual world of the alternatively faithed. They seem to consider that responsibility towards those who are not church members, and particularly towards the alternatively-faithed, is perhaps not directly part of their job description. They appear to understand their task (with regard to evangelism) as one of discipling Methodist members to be authentic witnesses to the reality of God in the world outside the church<sup>215</sup> [MA002: 3329; MX008: 1106; FE006:3134; FA011:11845] – FE004 includes that idea liturgically at the dedication of the offering each week [2105]. The minister equips the laity to evangelise [ME007: 10125; MZ009: 2720; ME001: MZ009: 2720; MA002: 3749; MX003: 4323-4648]. ME007 perhaps expresses this the most clearly: "... I always say my lay people are supposed to be the ones who are supposed to be the evangelists, out in the community" [ME007: 0121].

The ministers' responsibility in this regard appears to be to mobilise this evangelising workforce; to let it loose, as it were, on the world<sup>216</sup>. It is quite clear that the ministers consider the laity to be the primary bearers and communicators of the gospel. But if that were actually in operation, then each church should have dozens of highly motivated lay theologians and evangelists persuading people through word and deed, and with specific sub-locally adequately communicative signs, to consider converting to faith in Christ. In which case, the alternatively faithed people of Cape Town seem to be extraordinarily closed

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<sup>215</sup> Hoekendijk refers to the pulpit as the "prompt's corner" – the minister whispers lines to the actual actors (1964, p. 81). I disagree, but this seems to be the general consensus amongst Methodist ministers.

<sup>216</sup> ME001 pictures himself as running a "Pentecostal laboratory" in which people are transformed into more effective witnesses when they leave [ME001: 2237]. MA002 seeks to launch a justice-and-peace-seeking congregation on the weekday world [MA002: 3749]. MX003 longs for people to be roused from their self-interests and limited concerns [MX003: 4542]. FE004 adjusts the liturgy to reinforce a sense of responsibility for the world between the churches [FE004: 2042]. Evangelism should be part of the congregation's "daily lifestyle", according to ME005 [ME005:1640]. FE006 expects her congregants to live in an ongoing state of evangelism [FE006:1019]. ME007 likewise exhorts his flock to effective evangelism in their spheres of influence [ME007: 1541]. MX008 badgers his people to share their experiences of Christ with those they live and work amongst [MX008: 1000]. MZ009 argues that everything he teaches the church to do has an evangelism aspect. FA011 tries to persuade her people to use what is (for her) the less judgemental approach of EE3 when interacting with the alternatively faithed [FA011: 12901]. And ME012 trains his congregants to speak about spiritual things in normal conversational cadence ME012: 1950.

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to persuasion, given the frightening decline of the numbers of Christians. But I have reason to suspect that this approach is not producing this outcome. And I suspect that the problem might be less in the realm of the attitudes of the alternatively faithed, and more in the realm of the attitudes of the putative communicators. The theory sounds good, but somehow there is a fatal flaw. Evangelism does not appear to be happening much at all.

### ***Evangelism as the Minister's Hobby?***

*"...I am also an evangelistic preacher to go out and do missions, campaigns. I've done a few in my home church, a few extended in Surrey Estate, September 2013 I did a weekend Mission in Rehoboth, Namibia. That is my passion, to do week-missions.... So when I've time and if people invite me then if that is where God wants me to be, that is where I go. That is actually my heart' [MA002: 10043].*

An interesting observation I have made in studying the interviews is that despite this theoretical distancing by the ministers of themselves from the task of evangelism, and the "strategic delegation" of this responsibility to their congregation members, they seem to relish the opportunities they have to evangelise the alternatively faithed in such naturally occurring mixed social occasions as weddings, baptisms and funerals. ME007 says tellingly "... I use opportunities such as community police forum, funerals, weddings... as a way to try and hook people into the church, a love for the church" [0121]. It seems to me that there is a hint of rebellion here, almost perhaps that they are saying in their hearts "I am supposed to be a general dispatching troops into battle, but I enjoy putting on an infantryman's uniform and going into battle in disguise every now and then<sup>217</sup>." I cannot possibly verify that from my data, but it does seem to be an issue that needs to be addressed in my grounded theory. Is there room for the minister to have an "evangelism hobby"? Doesn't that send a message that evangelism is supposed to be merely a hobby activity for all Christians? Do the congregants appreciate or resent such initiatives on the minister's part? How does leadership in terms of evangelism and discipleship work itself out in the realm of evangelism? Is there space for leading by example as well as precept? Is the leader dangerously breaking ranks or courageously leading the charge?

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<sup>217</sup> ME001 puts it in his enthusiastic and characteristically salty way: "I think my biggest concern with ... outsiders is that perceptions are incredibly negative among people who are on the fringes or not even on the fringes and who couldn't give a damn, you know. So for me – I thrive on working with people of no faith, who are actually not interested in what we are doing" [ME001: 5058]. In describing the pleasure he gets from being involved in the local police forum as an informal chaplain, and the opportunities it gives him to be an agent of the Gospel in the world between the churches [ME007: 0039]. ME007 makes this interesting statement: "...but that's been my own thing. The church haven't really joined me in that" [ME007: 2731]. FA011's densely narrated stories about evangelism are all stories of her doing what she presumably expects her people to be doing.

***Evangelism as Youth Ministry***

There is no ambiguity in some ministers' minds, apparently, about what youth ministry is for. Evangelism seems to be approved of as an activity aimed at the young and performed by the young. MX003 pins his hopes for the future of the church on the success of his youth program [MX003: 0648]. Older people seem to be regarded as being strangely exempt from evangelism duty – they might have done evangelism courses in their youth [FE004: 0950], but that was then and this is now. And the most appropriate focus for evangelism is considered to be the young themselves<sup>218</sup> - faced with the thought of a R10,000 bonanza to be spent on evangelism, FA011's thoughts immediately turn to a creative way of evangelising the youth in her church [FA011: 13606]. As noted in 3.2.5 above, ministers are deeply concerned about the state of their youth ministries. The response to having an ageing congregation is not to reach out to more of the elderly, or to mobilise and deploy the elderly more effectively, but rather to do something, anything perhaps, to enliven the youth ministry. And if the youth ministry does not attract large numbers of young people, the ministers seem almost to feel that there is not possible any other way forward into evangelism for their churches.

***Evangelism as the Non-verbal Exercise of Compassion***

*"I think [compassionate acts] ARE evangelism. I think for me every action should be motivated in helping people to come to know Christ. For me as a Christian that's what we should be thinking, breathing, eating – helping others come into the relationship and the heart-warming John Wesley experience: so they can KNOW that they are saved from their sin, so they can KNOW that Christ loves them. And so every action, everything in the church, every personal action should be geared towards helping people to come to know Christ as Lord, and to deepen that relationship, so that they become disciples – that it's a long term thing and not just a tourist attraction" [FE006:1917].*

FE006 is the most passionate exponent of the doctrine that loving care equals loving evangelism. As noted above in section 3.2.3 above, service of the world through loving compassion is one of the hallmarks of the Methodist churches in Cape Town. All the ministers I interviewed ascribed to the view that authentic witness consists of loving presence in a hurting world. And conversely, many of them urge extreme caution in the use of verbal persuasion by themselves and their congregants [see section 3.2.3 above]. An

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<sup>218</sup> Ironically, when one talks to teenagers they usually assume that evangelism is the domain of older Christians: I call this the hot-potato effect, with everybody wanting to pass on the responsibility to somebody else. This calls for further research.

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articulated message of faith is apparently not required in most contexts – and is most likely to be counterproductive:

*“But when people claim to have it [all], and say ‘We’ve got this, and you need it, so you must come to us.’ I think people are put off by that, totally. There might be one or two people who are converted by that, who are bad drug dealers and murderers and rapists and that and who suddenly have the epic moment of conversion where they suddenly realise the consequences of their actions – you get that in prison ministry. But you’re not going to get it amongst the general population of people” [ME007: 5115].*

However, ministers do not seem to have a clear idea about how the gospel might become “valid” in different ways to their alienated youth or their uncomprehending secular neighbours, their Muslim workmates or their Methodist fringe members. Although the ministers generally strongly feel that their congregation members are, theoretically, the chief evangelisers of the alternatively faithed world, it is by no means clear how they are expecting the alternatively faithed to be able to interpret the sign of the Loving Christian. Is it a self-evident, high indexical sign, which can be read without much confusion and lead people into an understanding of the Gospel (Hughes, 2003, p. 141)? As I have noted, this unfortunately does not appear to be actually happening. There were no actual stories told of anybody persuading those who were previously distant to Christian faith into consider conversion to faith in Christ through a silent witness. There was only a wistful wish expressed that their congregants would be better, kinder people – on the assumption, perhaps, that more love might result in some conversions.

### ***Discipleship: Evangelism or Evangelisation?***

*“... we’ve got the light about this evangelism it ought to go outside, go to the nations, go to the nations you know and make disciples of all nations” [MX003: 4542].*

We have seen that one of the dominant Biblical ideas in the ministers’ thinking is that of discipleship [see 3.2.2 above]. Several of them, as noted, seem to almost define evangelism as discipleship [MX003: 4542; ME005 1640; FE006:1917; MX008: 1000; MZ009: 2743; FA011: 5924]. The 2014 conference watchword, memorable for its clumsy construction: “TOGETHER: A Transforming Discipleship Movement” (Sifo, 2014) was even referenced a couple of times [MA002: 4900; FE004: 0743]. If people are well disciplined, the argument seems to go, then they will grow spiritually and disciple others in turn – envisaging a quiet spiritual revolution. In this view “evangelism” is seen as “formation according to the principles

of the evangel", what I defined as "evangelisation" in chapter 2 [2.4.9]. This makes it very difficult to talk about what I am specifically interested in investigating in this study – evangelism as persuasion to consider converting to Christian faith. I fully agree that evangelism should not be isolated from evangelisation. I even tend to agree with FE004 that one should not aim to grow at more than 10% a year<sup>219</sup> [FE004: 5211]. However, my issue is: who shall the church disciple? In Westerhoff's understanding, there is nobody to disciple until evangelism has happened<sup>220</sup>. Disciples may emerge from amongst the church adherents the church currently counts as its own, but only if they experience some sort of persuasion to invest time and energy into a growth process. That persuasive input, resulting in a form of conversion<sup>221</sup>, would then be evangelism, by my definition. And besides the diminishing stock of denominational adherents, the only place we can expect *new, previously alternatively faithed* disciples to emerge from is from the other-than-Methodist population of Cape Town. By blurring the lines between the ideas<sup>222</sup> represented by evangelism and evangelisation, ministers might mistakenly think that they are already doing evangelism when they are actually doing post-evangelism ministry: evangelisation. And it would seem that this might contribute to the malaise of the Methodist Churches – particularly the reluctance of the members to be evangelised/discipled. Unconverted congregants are undeniably within their rights to resist expectations to act as if they *had* been converted.

An important function of evangelisation-discipleship is what Rambo calls "encapsulation": the involvement of the new convert in a supportive group of fellow-believers who then enable the full socialisation of the new group-member (1995, pp. 103-123). In the more rural-based and traditional churches, this is formally enshrined in the "class-system"<sup>223</sup> which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Here the goal of discipleship is seen as a deprogramming of people from an affection for "worldly desires", and an effective encapsulation into the community of the church. People come under strong social compulsion to belong to such a group, to meet regularly to confess their sins and give an account of their lives to their class-leader. In more urbanised churches this small-group discipleship sometimes takes place in "cottage meetings" (still operational under that name in some Coloured-demographic churches) [FA011: 5924]. In most Methodist congregations, however, there is a voluntary small-group

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<sup>219</sup> Although in the current state of the Methodist Church in Cape Town, talk of "sustaining a growth rate of 10% per annum" borders on bravado. The church, as we have seen, is shrinking in numbers.

<sup>220</sup> I differ from Westerhoff, who defines evangelism as "attracting people to the church" (2008, p. 239). As I show in chapter 1, I think it more useful to define evangelism along the lines of "persuading people to consider converting to the Christian faith" [2.4.9].

<sup>221</sup> Rambo describes this very well (1995, p. 2)

<sup>222</sup> I do not mind what nomenclature is used: but it seems important that we develop a capacity to deal with the differing challenges of these two areas.

<sup>223</sup> The "class-system" in Methodism is John Wesley's original discipleship system, where small groups of disciples (classes) were instructed to meet together, confess their sins, and encourage each other in the life of faith (Wesley, 1744, 2011).

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system of some sort – often termed “cells” or “life groups”, where Christian lifestyle obligations are intended to be thrashed out in the context of a close and non-judgemental small group of peers [see 3.2.2 above]. The ministers seem to expect that the devotion and commitment to God and the church in these groups will have a trickle-out effect in terms of witness and impact on the world outside the church [ME012: 0649; MA002: 0137].

### ***Evangelism as Teaching: Sermons, Courses, and Franchised “Evangelism” Programs***

The ministers show an apparently robust confidence in their capacity to change behaviour through teaching. They appear convinced that by *saying* something they can influence people to *believe* it and *act* on it<sup>224</sup>. (This is significant to my overall argument, and I will return to it). The ministers obviously believe in the power of the spoken word. They consider that the preached word constitutes an “adequately communicative sign system”, to quote my working definition of evangelism [2.4.10].

Several of the ministers talked extensively about preaching, presenting it as their primary mode of communication. For most of the ministers, it seems that they consider that learning must be happening because they are preaching<sup>225</sup>. For them, preaching is apparently the unquestioned norm. They typically preach once or twice on Sundays, and run a Bible-study or two during the week and apparently expect this level of communication to exert considerable influence in the lives of their congregants. For many of them, “evangelism” seems to be the true application of Gospel demands and insights to the everyday lives of their congregants. There seems to be little thought of the sermon as a possible means of communicating the Gospel demands and insights to those who are *not* in the voluntary Sunday audience. Communication of the Gospel to outsiders is limited to the weekday witness of their congregants.

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<sup>224</sup> MX003 speaks at length about the importance of teaching, especially at the level of the confirmation class – he apparently believes that clearer and better instruction of the confirmation candidates will result in better Christian discipleship from them, including more effective evangelism [MX003: 4323]. ME005 ponders whether the running of some or other proprietary course wouldn't equip and enable his congregation to get down to effective evangelism [ME005: 4105]. ME007 imagines that he would use money given for use in evangelism to sponsor an extensive programme of training in different skills. MX008 interestingly enough talks about the need to teach people not to preach as a mode of evangelism – an interesting thought that bears reflection in developing my grounded theory [MX008: 1000]; he also apparently believes that it would be a good investment to spend a windfall R10,000 on a training course in evangelism for his congregants [MX008: 3456]. MZ009 seems to think that his most influential teaching happens in the Bible study he leads [MZ009: 2507]. FA011 finds herself in the position of having to teach her congregants against racism [FA011: 4415]. And ME012, who considers himself a teacher as opposed to an evangelist, uses his skill to try and empower his people [ME012: 1950]. The ministers also find the sermons they have preached very helpful in clarifying their thinking, and at times self-reference a sermon they have recently preached or that sticks in their memory as significant [FE004: 0533, 3345; FE006:1318; ME007: ME007: 1710; FA011: 0057 (etc.); ME012: 3212].

<sup>225</sup> It is somewhat surprising to hear the defence of a half-hour monologue in these days of multi-sensory communication; but none of the ministers showed any awareness of cultural dissonance, or showed that they felt the need to defend the practice.

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One consequence of this faith in teaching as adequate communication is that the ministers have sought out and been exposed to several proprietary or franchised systems of evangelism teaching. [Table 5 Proprietary Evangelism Training Courses Mentioned in Interviews]. Most of them had been run in the past, passing fashions of varying degrees of popularity.<sup>226</sup> The current popular franchised system appeared to be the Alpha Course [ME005 0146; MX003 0648; FE004 1035, 3345; ME007: 0039; ME007: 0039], which is interestingly, I will argue, somewhat more in tune with my ideas about the liturgy of conversion. The only instance of conversion that MX003 is able to think of is that of a teenager who was impacted by attending an Alpha Course [MX003: 0648]. And FE004 reports that the various courses offered by Alpha have helped her to connect with church outsiders [FA011: 0950; 3449, 4209].

However, some ministers seem to feel that these courses have had little impact, generally, on the life of the church<sup>227</sup>, and I get the sense that their failure to ignite conversions or even cause church attendance spikes might even perhaps have contributed to the ministers' sometimes world-weary attitude towards the subject of evangelism training [ME005: 0146; ME012: 0221]. Could it be that if the expensive "evangelism course", designed by experts and used in conjunction with the ministries of prestigious American or English churches doesn't work, it actually becomes a silent discouragement to the local minister?<sup>228</sup> It is important to note that the ministers have hoped that running courses such as these would have addressed their desire for people to believe in Christ and join the churches. I do not believe that any of the ministers would be opposed to the outcomes I envisage from a liturgy of conversion approach.

Although I would require further specific research, it might even be possible that the ministers have in fact developed their theory of evangelism (as evangelisation) partly through a process of resistance to this "take a course" [FE004 0950] approach to evangelism training. The modern paradigm would have suggested that a problem (decline in church members and social influence) could be fixed by a technological application (a behaviour modification course of instruction). That this has apparently not worked is a further indication that a postmodern condition is emerging, and it seems that the Methodist ministers have

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<sup>226</sup> At my Church I have personally been trained to use the Four Spiritual Laws, How to be a Contagious Christian, and How to be a Lay Witness (cf. Bright, 1965-2013; Mittelberg, et al., 1995).

<sup>227</sup> At my church I only know of one current member who was brought to faith through an Alpha Course, although we ran several courses over several years.

<sup>228</sup> Hauerwas & Willimon deliver a scathing critique of education that disempowers: "Contemporary pastors are chained," they say, "because so much current thinking about the church and its ministry is meant to disempower rather than to empower people" (1989, p. 161). This alerts us to the possibility that globalised education can subvert local education structures.

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being trying to formulate culturally and theologically appropriate responses to the diverse situations they work in.

**Table 5 Proprietary Evangelism Training Courses Mentioned in Interviews**

Course	Reference
Lay Witness	MA002 0212
EE3	ME005 3713; FA011: 12901
Four Spiritual Laws	MA005 3550
Walk Across the Room	FE004 0602
Contagious Christianity	FE004 0602
Alpha	ME005 0146; MX003 0648; FE004 1035, 3345; ME007: 0039; ME007: 0039; ME012: 0050

It is debatable whether the instruction-element of the churches is actually functioning as well as the ministers hope or expect, but that is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, what is clear, (with regard to developing a grounded theory of a liturgy of conversion), is that the ministers deeply desire that the words they speak will have a persuasive influence on those who hear them, and do them good. They are committed communicators, and are in no way opposed to the *principle* of persuasion through speaking words, even though they do not seem to believe in the efficacy of the spoken word in evangelism. A liturgy of conversion approach needs to take this into account.

### **Methodist “Evangelists” and “Biblewomen”**

For some reason none of the ministers referred to the official office of “Evangelist” or “Biblewoman” when talking about their churches: presumably because these are the backbone of Methodist leadership in rural areas of South Africa, not the cities. There is a formal category of “Evangelist/Biblewoman”<sup>229</sup> in the Methodist Churches of Southern Africa referring to a class of ministers with lower education, lower remuneration, and lower authority, who are in a disciplinary structure known as the “Order of Evangelists and Biblewomen” (MCSA, 2014, pp. 164-172).<sup>230</sup> Those ordained to this level of the hierarchy spend their time gathering and establishing Methodist congregants for the Methodist churches in the circuit in which they work<sup>231</sup> (MCSA, 2014, p. 164). Their work is supervised

<sup>229</sup> If you are a man you may aspire to being an “Evangelist” if you are a woman the equivalent, but fractionally lower, status is “Biblewoman”.

<sup>230</sup> “Ordained Ministers” are dealt with right up there on page 29; “Evangelists” are relegated to down near the appendices on page 164 (MCSA, 2014).

<sup>231</sup> The scope of their work is strongly conditioned by their place in the institutional hierarchy: their role is defined as:

“14.2.1 to preach regularly as planned, giving prayer, study and thought to the preparation of the services;

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by a committee, which includes several clergy. The role seems to have been thus somewhat separated from the actual business of evangelism as I have defined it.

In addition, I am inclined to question whether the existence of the “specialist office” tacitly removes the function of evangelism from the purview of the minister by relegating it to the “lesser ranks”. Institutionally, the Methodist Church might conceivably be seen as having entrusted the specific function of evangelism into the hands of those who are less academically and pastorally competent: it seems that if you have a theological degree you are not expected to be counted amongst the evangelists<sup>232</sup>. This status-connected division seems to place evangelism as a less important ministry than the so-called “core” ministries of “Word and Sacrament” (MCSA, 1975, p. G12). Evangelism, in this case too, seems to be subject to what I have called a sort of “hot-potato” effect: evangelism ends up being passed on from higher status to lower status practitioners – from the ministers to the laity; from the adults to the youth; or from the ministers to the Evangelists. This might (perhaps uncharitably) also be seen to simultaneously give the higher status leadership plausible deniability: evangelism is important, but it has been delegated to the personnel most suited to its execution. It appears once more that evangelism is a function that is not widely sought and embraced – at least not in the same way as ministers apparently seek out and embrace the functions of “Word and Sacrament”. I have only met one such Evangelist in Cape Town. I shall return to this concept of “Word and Sacrament” later as I develop my pragmatic suggestions.

### **Evangelism: Public Liturgy Moves**

Not all the liturgy of the Methodist churches in Cape Town plays itself out in a Christian-controlled space. Some Methodist Communities, especially those with strong rural roots, still bridge the gap between Church and World by taking church out into the world and inviting

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14.2.2 to convert unbelievers and bring them into active membership of the Society and the Class;  
 14.2.3 to seek backsliders and to try to bring them to repentance;  
 14.2.4 to visit those who are in any sort of need, especially those who are falling into sin;  
 14.2.5 to equip the people to resist false doctrine, and to promote fellowship among all Christians;  
 14.2.6 to inform the Minister of any who are in need;  
 14.2.7 to encourage Christian work among young people;  
 14.2.8 to be concerned primarily with pastoral work and preaching and not to be involved in the finances of the Church unless specifically requested by the Superintendent;  
 14.2.9 to teach the people to give to the Church as a means of sharing in the work of Christ.” (MCSA, 2014, p. 164)

<sup>232</sup> When I attended a regular Local Preachers’ Quarterly business meeting on 2017-04-06 a young Shona man was sharing his sense of calling to join the Order of Evangelists. He is a very energetic evangelist, and has gathered a young, crowded congregation of Shona speaking Zimbabweans who meet at 11 a.m. on the premises of one of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town. He seems like an ideal candidate for the role, but he faced some stiff opposition to being recommended to go forward in the process of becoming an evangelist. The chief obstacle was that some preachers strongly felt that he should not “waste his time” on becoming an Evangelist, and should rather set his sights on becoming “a full minister of the Word and Sacrament”.

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others to join in with the people of God on the street. Other ministers have a large capacity for interacting with outsiders. These and other “public liturgy moves” seem to be out of step with the majority opinions, sometimes embedded within approaches to ministry that are otherwise fairly conventionally inward-looking. It almost seems as if there might be counter-currents within the churches militating against exclusion of the alternatively faithed.

### ***Spoken Witness: Preaching in Contested Space***

MA002 asserts a need to speak: “...my understanding of evangelism is one of the authors says ‘one beggar telling another beggar where to buy food’” [MA002: 2204]. And he himself says that he loves evangelistic preaching, especially in the context of evangelistic campaigns [MA002: 10043]. FA011 shares this confident and scruple free approach to speaking about faith and persuading others to consider converting to Christianity: “You know, brother, I like, I can preach anywhere, anytime – on the train, whatever! Just tell me before we go!” [FA011: 12003]. The contrast between this approach and the tentative approach of FE004 amongst the Somali traders [FE004: 3745] could not be more marked.

Running alongside the inarticulate witness of the white churches, there is a strand of very vocal witness in the black and coloured churches. Whereas door-to-door evangelism is anathema to ministers and members of the English speaking communities in Cape Town, it is apparently acceptable practice in other communities [MX008: 0050; MX008: 0050; MZ009: 0519; FA011: 11611]. In white congregations members can only be persuaded to speak up about their faith with difficulty. In black congregations people are apparently too eager to speak at times. MX008 lays out the problem he faces:

*“People always want to preach as a form of evangelism, and I always want to tell them, evangelism is not about preaching, it’s about sharing the Gospel. So sharing the Gospel is not about preaching deep sermons, but it is just to share the experience of Christ in your life and let everything to God” [MX008: 1000].*

Preaching out and about in public is still part of the more oral cultures of South Africa, and in Cape Town the art of fine orator is still apparently highly prized<sup>233</sup>. MX003 has a group at one of his churches that distributes food and preaches in a squatter camp [MX003: 0507]. The *Amadodana* consider it to be a sign of manliness to be able to preach a strong message of repentance and faith [ME005: 0250; MX008: 0050]. And many people apparently find this approach appealing and persuasive. Exuberant public singing and prayer perhaps add to the

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<sup>233</sup> From personal observation, when a train preacher breaks out in fiery rhetoric in a crowded carriage, white people glower and turn up the volume on their music; but black and coloured people will often cheer him on.

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texture of life, perhaps bringing a sign of transcendence into the drabness of the life of the poor (cf. Mbiti, 1969, 1989, p. 67). This study has only been able to open a small window on this aspect of Christian communication – it is a field which could do with much serious research. But there is sufficient data in the interviews to suggest that there are large numbers of people who find street preaching an amenable and acceptable discourse. The scruples of the white ministers might reflect the cultural sensibilities and inhibitions shared with congregation members, but that does not mean that this is not an approach worth investigation as I work out my grounded theory.

Mr Clement Summerton, a respected lay leader of a Cape Town Methodist Xhosa-speaking community, reckons that out on the street “is where we ought to be” (personal conversation 2017-03-12). He represents a tradition where the *amadodana*, as we have seen, like to literally march through the streets looking for people to preach a Gospel message to. This consists of tightly grouped singing processions, led by stick-brandishing *amadodana*<sup>234</sup>. Passionate preaching and haranguing of worldly-minded non-participants happens. Then the procession moves on and sweeps up those who have attached themselves to it into the Church building, where there is more singing and more preaching. Emotional preaching pleads for emotional response, and in that way some people experience a personal contact with God and make a commitment to become a Christian under the discipline of the Methodist Church. Further research needs to be done as to whether the people swept up and into the church through such excursions are traditionally connected to the Methodist Church or represent a wider cross section of denominational connectedness (or no denominational connectedness) [ME005: 0328; MX008: 0050].

FA011’s street preaching falls into a similar category to the preaching of the *amadodana* but the cultural paraphernalia are significantly different. In her context outdoor preaching is often quite an organised event, with a hired marquee and chairs, stage, sound-system, band, and pulpit [FA011: 0156], and characterised by passionate singing. Her recollection of the impact of one such highly visible event is instructive: “...I just have memories of sitting on a stone near these flats and watching these people, like sitting in amazement looking I don’t know what I was doing but when I got home my mother gave me a hiding because I was gone for a long time...” [FA011: 1010]. A sophisticated suburban churchgoer might be uncomfortable with the thought of “preaching on street corners” [FE006:1417], but the potential impact of such an event on many church outsiders should not be overlooked in my opinion.

### ***Spoken Witness: Evangelism in Conversation***

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<sup>234</sup> The *amadodana* are otherwise known as the Young Men’s Guild (abbreviated to YMG in Methodist circles), and consist of the unmarried men up to the age of about 35.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

But articulate evangelism is not only concerned with preaching. Many ministers envisage an ongoing Gospel-themed discussion amongst their congregants and the alternatively faithed in the world between the churches. But the ministers have little activity to report, especially seeing as their main metric seems to be whether or not congregants were bringing friends to church. They do not appear to be doing so. ME007 reflects on the apparent failure of his congregants to bring others with them in a poignant passage:

*“As to why? People’s fears? People’s embarrassment? Have they been invited and been turned down again and again and again? Maybe they have made invitations and their invitation has never been accepted? I don’t know...ja....no, they have people around for a braai, and they say, well, we have to see you all, and they say, I can’t come to church because I’ve got these people around for a braai, or OK I’ve got to kick these people out of my house so that I can go to church... We must braai at church!” [ME007: 4845].*

As I explored in an earlier section [3.2.6], the ministers’ main datum for speech is their own experience of the reality and work of God in their lives [FE006:1126]. FE006 expounds this neatly with reference to a sermon she has recently preached:

*“[Peter] could go and tell the story because he had experienced personally – it wasn’t just a head thing, it was a head and the heart thing. Which made the power of story that we can speak with boldness and authority, and we speak with conviction when we tell the story. That it’s not just a theoretical thing. But that it becomes a conviction of our own” [FE006:1318].*

Whether this is dream or reality for the ministers, one thing it does show is that they do have a somewhat tenuous but nonetheless genuine desire for the space between the churches to be full of opportunities for the alternatively faithed to interact with the Gospel realities. My concept of a liturgy of conversion is apparently not so very distant from their own longings. This could prove important when I later consider issues of motivation.

### **Breaking Bread**

Every now and again the ministers recount a story of some or other public liturgy event<sup>235</sup>. The most common is that of food distribution to the hungry, often combined with preaching and prayer. MA002 has a church that distributes food to those who ring the doorbell, and

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<sup>235</sup> Which according to my definitions in chapter I would refer to as liturgy in which a serious attempt had been made to make the liturgy available to the alternatively faithed public [p.65].

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they also go out to give food to people in parks and under bridges<sup>236</sup> [MA002: 2500]. An outreach group in one of MX003's churches takes food to a squatter camp and evangelises people there [MX003: 0507]. When pushed to consider where she would like her church to expand its evangelism, FE004 selects the homeless near her church [FE004: 3745]. ME005 is aware that one of his members preaches at people who get food from that member's soup kitchen [ME005 2136]. FE006's church is cooperating with other churches to open a new soup kitchen [FE006:1735]. ME007 has in mind a liturgical match between Jesus' feeding of the five thousand and a potential feeding scheme [ME007: 10307]. On the negative side, MX008 considers that the churches have "polluted" evangelism by turning it into a popularity contest between which churches turn up in informal settlements with the best grocery bags [MX008: 2605]. MZ009 places feeding the hungry as a cheap and easy "missional" thing for his elderly parishioners to be involved in<sup>237</sup> [MZ009: 0258]. FA011 also has enthusiastic soup-kitcheners, whom she has to caution not to "hold people hostage" with a long sermon before giving them the food they need [FA011: 10403]. And ME012 runs his quiet grocery-shelf on Sundays for those who need to take [ME012: 1704]. As I noted above, these initiatives are an integral part of the ministers' story of the church as a compassionate community [see 3.2.3 above]. For my purposes in developing a grounded theory of a liturgy of conversion it is important to note here that these initiatives have, to a greater or lesser extent, already got accepted liturgical elements: preaching, prayer, and a shared meal, to name a few. And the venue is not in a church building.

### ***Alpha Course***

Another event that could be partially classified as public liturgy might be the running of the Alpha Course. As I have noted, the Alpha course does not generally involve the alternatively faithed, rather finding its major take-up amongst people who are culturally close to Methodism (when it is run in a Methodist Church). But even though the outworking of Alpha seems so often to fall into the evangelisation rather than evangelism category, I would like to reference this particular initiative because of its potential to provide a pathway into evangelism in many situations – it creates the sort of culture adjusted conditions that the ministers perhaps imagine that their Sunday liturgy is trying to achieve: a truly welcoming environment with a reasonable presentation of the Gospel and opportunities for direct interaction.

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<sup>236</sup> Road and rail bridges are prime shelter sites for the homeless in Cape Town.

<sup>237</sup> It needs to be noted that ministers often conflated "mission" with "evangelism" – in my understanding evangelism is merely one strand of mission, following Bosch: "...evangelism...should not be equated with mission.... Authentic evangelism is imbedded in the total mission of the church..." (1991, p. 412).

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Alpha might also a way of speaking the Gospel in a surprising, fresh way to gospel-inoculated church members.

### **Prayer Chapel**

MA002's Prayer Chapel initiative is similar to the Alpha course in relation to the boundary between church and space-between-the-churches. It is worth quoting a story that came up in the interview in full:

*“Open Chapel is that we have a chapel on the premises, which we daily open it to the public. We have notes within the chapel which ask for people to leave prayer requests, and also contact details where the minister get in contact with them. One of the stories of just last week was when somebody put a note in saying “Thank you for this open door, because I just committed my life to Jesus again.” [MA002: 0258]*

I have followed the progress of this chapel with interest since it was initiated by a previous minister, closed by a subsequent minister, and now re-opened by MA002<sup>238</sup>. Few churches would have the resources to run an unsupervised prayer chapel, and the crime situation in most places would make it impracticable. It is, however, an interesting exercise in public liturgy, in that it makes a venue of significant spiritual validity available to the public without exercising direct Christian control. As I look at my grounded theory, this will be an important issue to look at in terms of a liturgy of conversion.

### **Prayer Sofas, Guerrilla Gardeners & Gang Reconciliation Efforts**

MA002 also describes a quirky “Prayer Sofa” initiative, which seems to encapsulate many of the themes of genuinely public liturgy [MA002: 2443]. One of their church members, or a friend from another church, sits on a large sofa they place outside the church, on the pavement. Anybody who wants to be prayed for sits down and tells their story and gets the prayer they need.

On a different note, the planting of vegetable gardens on the pavements near to MA005's church seem like a stroke of compassionate genius<sup>239</sup> [ME005 2508]. It is not clear how any evangelism content might be decoded from this initiative by the alternatively faithed<sup>240</sup>, but

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<sup>238</sup> Everything that can be screwed down has been screwed down, and the heads of the screws have been made un-unscrewable. Brass fittings have been removed from the windows, and the windows themselves have been screwed closed and the screw-heads made secure. Leaving a property open to the public, even within spitting distance of a police station and major court, makes it extremely vulnerable to looting of fittings. Even the wooden pews – which are also screwed down.

<sup>239</sup> The movement of Guerrilla Gardening is an international phenomenon and seems to be entirely in harmony with the mission of the church (cf. Reynolds, 2015)

<sup>240</sup> And in terms of the mission of the church it does not have to. I am not arguing in this research for the monopoly of evangelism over the other functions of the church, but for its restoration.

the idea of arbitrarily using the wide verges of the leafy suburbs to grow food for the hungry poor has an immediate appeal. It is public and creative – whether it lends itself to anything liturgical is quite another story (a “harvest festival” scenario springs to mind!) But it stands as a testimony to the fact that Christians can and do function outside of their church premises, and do things that are not subject to Christian control, for the free benefit of others. This is an important concern in developing a liturgy of conversion.

MZ009 takes us into the heart of the dark world of the gangs, with his desire for negotiating with gang lords who run the drugs and crime syndicates in the area of his church [MZ009: 0707]. It seems to me that here the public liturgy of peace-making approaches the point of pure terror. His concern for the destruction of life and recruitment of “his” children are pushing him on a truly dangerous public path, where the “Gospel of Peace” will get a hearing in a context that is completely outside the control of Christians. The work that many ministers do, in places where only the thin white plastic of their clerical collar shields them from death, is one of the important stories that need to be told about the Methodist Church<sup>241</sup>.

### ***Marching with the Protesters***

Five of the ministers tell stories about civic direct action<sup>242</sup>[0]. This is a significant number in such a small sample set. Obviously they feel the need to be counted as players in civic society. They seem to sense that they as ministers have a symbolic role to play in the public protests that are so important a part of politics in South Africa: they feel that they have a right to be Christian representatives in public discourse. This is an intriguing reality and one which I shall return to as I put together my grounded theory.

### ***Conclusion***

What is particularly significant for my argument as I am developing it, is that again this concept of a public liturgy of conversion is not *institutionally* foreign, even in some of the most post-modern and urban of churches. There seems to be something quintessentially *Methodist* about these initiatives. Some leaders apparently still see that connection with those who inhabit the spaces between the churches is both desirable and practicable, and that this contact can involve elements of liturgical process. ME007 is quite wistful about a different way of doing church when he says “We must braai at church!” as he reflects on disconnection between church and world [4958]. I agree. What I am referring to when I speak of a liturgy of conversion is not an innovation. As I delve into the *Journal* of John

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<sup>241</sup> Other churches share in this borderland ministry, of course. But my focus in this research is only on the Methodists.

<sup>242</sup> “Direct action” is a phrase used in South Africa to refer to mobilising protests against perceived injustices such as lack of sewerage facilities, corruption in leadership and having to pay student fees.

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Wesley it will become apparent that it might well be seen as one survival of an earlier, strongly distinctive aspect of the Methodist corporate culture.

### A Definition of Methodist Evangelism

In the light of these observations, a Methodist consensus seems to be emerging, and I tentatively offer what appears to be a definition of “evangelism” from the perspective of the ministers I interviewed:

*Evangelism is the work of the Spirit of God through the people of God as they demonstrate the love of God through contextually relevant good works, in social connection with those attracted to the Christian lifestyle, in such a way that through the example of authentic Christian love some will be persuaded to join in the community of faith and so come to share the privileges of the people of God.*

### 3.2.7 Conclusion: Crisis, Courage, and Bravado

Ministers seem to be inhabiting the crumbling halls of Christendom: they act as if the Methodist church were guaranteed permanent place on the urban scene in Cape Town, when all around congregations have shrunk and amalgamated, and formerly vibrant Christian communities have sold their premises and gone out of business. Admittedly some parts of the ramparts of Christendom seem stronger than others. The urbanisation-fuelled growth and solidity of the *AmaWesile* sector appears to buck the trend. But perhaps they are only a few generations behind the decay of the currently urbanised sectors – it perhaps only works because so many Xhosa Methodists still inhabit a mission-shaped Christendom worldview. That will probably change fairly rapidly. And also the liveliness of the Xhosa branch of the church does not appear to be passing on to the other sectors of the church – it doesn't appear that white English speaking congregations are getting any coaching from their Xhosa members on running a more powerful liturgy, for instance. And no other sector of the church has such a powerful feeder stream. Urban poverty has a significant impact on even the Xhosa sector of the church: the Church has to economise by sharing one minister between multiple congregations. By all of Adizes' indicators, the Methodist church overall is a dying organisation – apparently low on entrepreneurial energy (Adizes, 1998, p. 348). Under these circumstances, the main aim of the ministers seems to be to try to ensure that the Church is able to preserve its current status and levels of influence. In the early centuries the Church was grateful when the persecutions ceased and they were granted official status: allowed to occupy a niche as one of the legal religions of the empire (cf. Neill, 1964, p. 44). In our times there is once again the sense of occupying a religious niche. But in those days

the church was growing vigorously. In our times it appears to be shrinking and falling away from energy and influence.

The ministers nevertheless mostly do not read the current situation as critical. It appears that they do not envision a future without a Methodist Church in Cape Town, functioning in more-or-less its present form. Many of them are bravely fighting against social evils and desperately trying to stir up their members to deeper commitment to the cause of the Church and the Kingdom. It seems to me that their disconnection from the alternatively faithed is not that they despise those who are not Christians, but that they do not deeply understand them, or appreciate how welcome the Gospel might be if communicated via culturally valid signs. And I strongly suspect that the lack of understanding comes from a lack of conversation, a simple lack of direct contact. We next turn to John Wesley's *Journal* to see if this work offers us any helpful clues for reconnecting with our local contexts.



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## **Chapter 4. ANALYSING WESLEY'S JOURNAL (descriptive/empirical)**

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### **4.1. John Wesley's Journal: Ethnographic Reading**

*“Knowledge of the traditions that have shaped us, for good or ill or some of both, is not a sufficient preparation for the kind of future that will face our children and grandchildren in the twenty-first century – not a sufficient preparation, but a necessary one” (Pelikan, 1984, p. 20).*

Pelikan tells us that It is important to gain a “mature and critical rediscovery of the past” (1984, p. 24) in order to chart a rational course into the future. I have read through John Wesley's published *Journal* and treated it in a similar way to the interviews with the Methodist ministers: coding his entries and looking for the plot-lines of liturgy, evangelism and conversion<sup>243</sup>.

But using similar ethnographic research techniques does not mean that the two sources of data correlate in every way<sup>244</sup>. A major issue in reading these sources alongside each other is the more than 250 year gap between the two sets of data. It might be argued, however, that the use of source documents of the Methodist movement is relevant to the research in hand because of the organic, seed-to-fruit cultural link, mediated by the uninterrupted, ongoing existence of the organisation itself. Jaroslav Pelikan develops an image of speaking with past and future in a partnership across generations (cf. 1984, p. 20). Another reason in favour of reading such an old document together with the contemporary interviews is that although differences between the contexts are very great, there are, as I will show, significant commonalities between the London of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Cape Town of the 21<sup>st</sup>.

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<sup>243</sup> I read through the *Journal* many years ago, long before I contemplated this research. But I re-read it for the sake of this project with a more ethnographic eye [see the accompanying data-stick for my coding work on the *Journal*].

<sup>244</sup> It is not possible now to sit John Wesley down with a voice recorder. And I obviously contributed nothing to the construction of a dialogue with him. However, John Wesley did intend to mean something through publishing his *Journal*, in much the same way that the ministers of the Methodist church in Cape Town meant to mean something by granting me the interviews. And as Fisher puts it, narratives are “...symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create or interpret them.” (1987, p. 58) – so it must be possible to interpret their meanings within a new context.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### 4.1.1 Reinstatement of John Wesley's Journals as a Narrative Resource for Contemporary Methodism

An insight-generating interchange between FE006 and me happened during our conversation:

*MM3341: John Wesley seemed to bring people to this point [of conversion] that we want them to come to – he was like a genius at it. What made him so good at it?*

*FE006:3356: [long pause – 15seconds<sup>245</sup>] ..... Who knows?*

Perhaps John Wesley himself knew? Or, indeed, perhaps he might not have known. But it seemed that a close reading of his writings might generate at least some clues as to why people responded to the message of Wesley and the early Methodists, and entered into such a radically different, counter-cultural lifestyle.

One question that must be asked is whether or not John Wesley's *Journal* constitutes a symbolic world which is significantly shared by the ministers of the Methodist Church? Fisher posits that for communication to occur, participants in the interchange must share a common symbol system (1987, p. 92). I have suggested that one task of my grounded theory might need to be the recovery of this symbolic world for the contemporary Methodist Church [0]. If so, *can* the *Journal* be re-instated?

Outler, writing more than four decades ago, considered that referring back to Wesley was an "obvious choice", because of the "striking similarities between his concerns and ours, and also because ... in his theory and practice of Christian evangelism there is a perennial vitality still available" (1971, p. 15). Jaroslav Pelikan notes pertinently that there is an important distinction between "tradition" - "the living faith of the dead" - and "traditionalism" - "the dead faith of the living" (1984, p. 65). In our current time of crisis in the Methodist church I suggest that it might be helpful to tell a different story, create a different model, for evangelism praxis.<sup>246</sup> And that model might well be more helpful and potentially more powerful if it were to tap into this "living faith of the dead." In this regard Lucie-Smith considers tradition to be "...a continuing narrative over generations, which constitutes an identity" (2007, p. 34). Over the centuries, at times when the Church has recovered its cultural valency, this has characteristically been accompanied by a "return to roots"

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<sup>245</sup> This is an extremely long break for thought (and typifies the hesitancy with which the ministers answered questions about Wesley). We were quite comfortable while the minister reviewed her memories, scanning for clues to answer the question.

<sup>246</sup> Bear in mind that by "praxis" I always intend to mean a cyclical process of reflection and action, reflection and action (Freire, 1970, p. 48)[2.5].

phenomenon<sup>247</sup>. Augustine rediscovered Paul (Augustine, 2001, pp. 155-157). Luther rediscovered Augustine<sup>248</sup> (Bosch, 1991, p. 240). And John Wesley famously rediscovered Luther (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 102). One thing they all seem to have had in common across the centuries was a longing for the type of church life that characterised the church of the New Testament – and so what later generations admired in earlier generations appears to have been in large measure exactly this project of a return to Scripture, accompanied by a sloughing off of cultural accretions that dulled the story, and giving the Bible a more direct application to their contemporary world. Writing about the ferment of reformation towards the end of the Middle Ages, Fernandez-Armesto Wilson writes that “...every renewal, whether local or widespread, was connected with revived interest in Scripture” (1996, p. 31). Analysing the same period in England, Sanneh, in developing his theories of the “translatability” of Scripture, and its capacity to subvert power hegemonies, suggests “... a continuing need for the gospel, in Scripture and tradition, to engage effectively the terms of its cultural milieu” (1989, p. 173). It involved a critical reading of tradition as both foundational and obscurational. A judgement had to be passed on what of tradition was authentic in the light of the New Testament<sup>249</sup>. Augustine did not slavishly imitate Paul – he apparently wanted to relate to God and think about God *in the same way Paul had*; and out of this the genre of introspective autobiography<sup>250</sup> seems to have developed (cf. Singh, 2015, p. 77). Luther, too, was already in an “Augustinian” monastic movement - but there was something about Augustine’s discovery of Paul (obscured in the monastic tradition (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 239)) that intrigued him and led him back to Paul through his recovery of the writings of Augustine. Bosch’s evaluation is that “Augustine had rediscovered Paul for the fifth century; Luther rediscovered him for the sixteenth” (1991, p. 240). And Wesley always had a grudging regard for Luther the reformer<sup>251</sup>, finding the picture of grace and faith drawn

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<sup>247</sup> McGrath, writing on the Reformation era, argues that a longing for bureaucratic efficiency, spiritual authenticity and intellectual integrity – with reference to the New Testament church - were key factors in precipitating cultural change (1988, p. 3). De Gruchy follows a similar track when he advocates the recovery of a truly Calvin-like Christian humanism (2009, p. 229).

<sup>248</sup> “In the development of his theology, Martin Luther turned to the writings and thought of Augustine more than to any other individual source except the Bible” (Augustinians Australia, 2013).

<sup>249</sup> Pelikan describes a pruning process that emerges from the re-appraisal of history: “Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions” (1984, p. 60).

<sup>250</sup> Stendhal of course famously asserts that Paul could not have had an introspective conscience, and by explaining that the apparent introspection of Romans chapter seven was not actual introspection, is then able to say that “...we look in vain for a statement in which Paul would speak about himself as an actual sinner” (Stendahl, 1977). But refuting Stendhal’s claim that Paul would not have had an introspective conscience does not belong to this study. What Stendhal *does* recognise is that at least Augustine *thought* he could understand Paul, even if in Stendhal’s view Augustine must have been mistaken.

<sup>251</sup> Wesley was undoubtedly a “critical reader” of Luther: he never held back on the sternest of criticisms of the great man’s Christian character and attitude to Scripture: he was alive to Luther’s “...rough, untractable spirit, and bitter zeal for opinions” (1827-3, p. 107). He finds that in his

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out of Romans by Luther to be a life-transforming insight. He recorded this debt to Luther in a passage that is perhaps the best-known passage from the Journals amongst Methodists (and possibly frequently the only one):

*“In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death”*  
(Wesley, 1827-1, p. 102).<sup>252</sup>

And so in my opinion the symbolic world of John Wesley does indeed have the potential for recovery. It needs to be a guarded recovery, critical and cautious. And the recovery of the Wesley tradition should be a rational step back through tradition to the Scripture that the tradition is founded on.<sup>253</sup> But it also needs to be a recovery that opens us to the possibility of unique insights from a unique mind.

There are several signs around the churches of a hagiolatry of John Wesley developing. Little statues and plaques in different church buildings<sup>254</sup> give the impression of veneration of a revered ancestor, and one Methodist clergyman I know speaks in portentous tones of “Father Wesley”. But in general all the paraphernalia seem to occupy the same field of attention as the plaques on the walls celebrating the soldiers who died in the world wars, apparently unnoticed in plain sight – perhaps a good example of Pelikan’s “dead faith of the living”. However, what I am aiming at in this research is not the introduction or reinforcement of a sentimental or superstitious cult of Wesley, but a “mature and critical” (Pelikan, 1984, p. 24) re-evaluation of his thought and actions– which contains the possibility of deciding to not repeat or go back to certain aspects of what has happened. However, rediscovery of the tradition can potentially lead to some important *recoveries* (Pelikan, 1984, pp. 23-40). What I

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commentary on Galatians Luther “...makes nothing out, clears up not one considerable difficulty....is quite shallow in his remarks on many passages, and muddy and confused almost on all; [and] that he is deeply tinctured with mysticism throughout, and hence often dangerously wrong” (Wesley, 1746, p. 316). And Wesley seriously opposed Luther’s evaluation of James as an “epistle of straw”, ascribing it to Luther being in a “fury” of “solifideism” (1827-1, p. 185).

<sup>252</sup> The ministers in their interviews referred to this passage nine times altogether, making it one of the major references: my grounded theory needs to pay attention to this piece of data

<sup>253</sup> Interestingly enough, Wesley also cites Augustine in this chain of referencing: “Thou, O God, hast made our heart for thyself; and it cannot rest till it resteth in thee” (1827-2, p. 280; cf. Augustine, 2001, p. 5)

<sup>254</sup> Kenilworth Methodist has a boxed set of porcelain Wesley memorabilia on the wall at the back of the church. Ottery Road Methodist has a bust of John Wesley mounted on the wall.

consider would be most helpful would be a robust interaction with the thinking and example of John Wesley. One of my areas of interest in this research has been to establish whether certain neglected emphases from the 18<sup>th</sup> century might help the Capetonian Methodist Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to produce as strong a connection with those in our communities who are not connected to the Christian faith, and become once more a conduit for conversions into the Christian faith.

## **4.2. John Wesley's Journal: Plotting a Liturgy of Conversion**

Reading the *Journal* over the years has been very formational for my thinking as a reflective practitioner (Taylor, 2000, p. 5). I have experienced it as a spiritually insightful and inspirational narrative; not as a field manual for exactly how to approach the problems and challenges I faced, as much as a story of somebody who had faced similar problems and challenges to me. A close ethnographic reading of this work produces many insights into Wesley's thought, especially as a problem solver in the areas of evangelism and conversion. In my second chapter I have shown how the Methodist ministers raise certain issues with regard to evangelism and conversion in the interviews, and what I am trying to do here is to see whether the same underlying issues were significant for John Wesley, and in what ways he addressed those issues.

What emerges from an ethnographic reading of Wesley is a tightly braided series of story lines, similar to the braided story lines that emerge from an ethnographic reading of the ministers' interviews.

### **4.2.1 A Story-line of a Complex Environment**

John Wesley's ministry, like that of the ministers of the Methodist churches of Cape Town, was played out against a specific set of social conditions, and he was perfectly placed as a horseback observer and recorder of what was going on around him as he travelled around the islands. With this in mind, his *Journal* is an extraordinary piece of writing. His curious mind found puzzles everywhere, ranging from the puzzle of why people who had dramatic conversion experiences subsequently fell away from the faith (1827-2, pp. 243-244, 358), to why the mentally ill should react better to kindness than cruel restraint (1827-4, pp. 222, 226); why drinking a "gallon or two" of ale should aid recovery from dysentery (1827-4, p. 485), to how fast an earthquake travelled across London (1827-2, p. 136). So also, from a sociological perspective, John Wesley paints a picture, as he describes his journeys around England mile by painstaking mile, of a group of nations in uneasy cohabitation of a small archipelago.

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Wesley faced several unique socio-religious factors that warrant a return to Hoekendijkian “post-” categories [3.2.1].

### Post-Reformation Worldview

Enlightenment thought was washing through the conceptual life of the universities. What we see as the “Modern” era from our perspective was of course developing out of the Reformation era in Europe and the Mediaeval era before it. Wesley, as a product of the university system, interacts strongly with the new wave of rationalism sweeping Europe. He read extensively on his travels, with a new book (on religion, science, literature, history, politics or philosophy) always meriting a record in his journals along with sermons preached, difficulties encountered, and interesting social or geographical phenomena observed<sup>255</sup>. And included in his ongoing study, Wesley was also reading all the classics of the enlightenment thinking of Europe – hot off the press. He read Voltaire (1827-4, pp. 15, 140, 295), Rousseau<sup>256</sup> (1827-4, p. 394), Locke (1827-2, p. 357)<sup>257</sup>, and Hutcheson (1827-4, p. 494). He recognised the threat posed by the European atheists, and interacted with their work robustly. On the other hand he was particularly impressed with Bacon, considering him to rate alongside Aristotle, having “...an universal genius applicable to every thing<sup>258</sup>” (1827-4, pp. 341, 415).

Wesley appeared to embrace the scientific method with relish. If you had a problem, you experimented with solutions until you found the best option, and then you vigorously applied that until new data became available – as Bosch notes, in this era one of the hallmarks of thought was that “all problems were in principle solvable” (1991, p. 266). In Wesley’s view, experiments were important because they led to “curious results” which might in future prove to be “highly useful” (1827-4, p. 341) in solving problems yet unencountered. This strand of enlightenment thinking appears to have been deeply influential in all areas of Wesley’s thought; his “experimental” approach<sup>259</sup> to the religious life should, I strongly suspect, not

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<sup>255</sup> He was the master of the one-line book-review, be it a pithy put-down, a qualified approval, or a rare outright recommendation.

<sup>256</sup> Commenting on another author, Wesley condemns him for his “...exquisite want of judgement in so admiring that prodigy of self-conceit, Rousseau; a shallow, yet supercilious infidel, two degrees below Voltaire” (1827-4, p. 15). Rousseau’s book on education he dismisses as “Whimsical to the last degree, grounded neither upon reason nor experience....The advices which are good, are trite and common, only disguised under new expressions; and those which are new, which are really his own, are lighter than vanity itself” (1827-3, p. 394).

<sup>257</sup> He recommends the Bishop of Cork’s “treatise on human understanding” over Locke’s for the study program of his Methodist lay preachers.

<sup>258</sup> Wesley’s English language usage was typical for the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and just a little disconcerting to a 21<sup>st</sup> century eye – I have not tried to adjust his grammar or spelling at any point.

<sup>259</sup> Wesley frequently used the language of “experiment”, “trial”, “proof” and “demonstration” – for example in the introduction to his Forty-Four Sermons he talks about them as being an exposition of

only be seen to be about *experience*<sup>260</sup>, important as that was to Wesley. It should also be about scientific method applied to the life of the spirit (cf. Haas, 1995). Harrison argues that in the Christian literature of the time “we see ... an explicit technical vocabulary beginning to emerge, in which ‘experimental’ becomes more than simply a synonym for ‘experiential’ and in which the virtues of experimental knowledge are contrasted variously with mere speculative knowledge, with book learning, with second-hand reports of particular religious experiences, and with the doctrinal pronouncements of religious authorities” (2011, p. 414). This spirit of testing, improving and adjusting according to new data became, I believe, one of the hallmarks of Wesley’s approach to the issues of conversion and evangelism, and I shall return to this in crafting my grounded theory.

One signal of the change along the mediaeval-reformation axis towards the modern worldview was the change of mind slowly occurring with regard to natural disasters. Destructive natural phenomena had always been considered to be uncanny and ominous, fuelling national anxieties and interpreted as harbinger of divine judgement. The preacher in Wesley recognised these as teachable moments in the life of the nation; describing one frightening, but ultimately not destructive earthquake that hit London in 1750, Wesley’s summary comment is: “How gently does God deal with this nation! O that our repentance may prevent heavier marks of his displeasure!” (1827-2, p. 136) And if there were to be an earthquake, he advised preachers, abandon what you would have preached on and improve the occasion by preaching on a biblical earthquake theme [he supplies a suitable text hit upon by his brother Charles in a subsequent earthquake a few days afterwards (1827-2, p. 139)]. The scientist in Wesley, however, delighted in reporting hard data about earthquakes, floods, or tornadoes (1827-2, pp. 136, 296-77, 299, 323, 375, 376, 391); 1827-4, pp. 16, 157). Thunderstorms could still invoke terror (by violently drowning out the puny rumble of the shaken tin thunder) during a performance of *Macbeth* (1827-2, pp. 313-314), but the reader of Franklin’s latest theories on electricity was also interested in the mechanics of lightning discharge (cf. 1827-2, p. 247), and was puzzled by a lightning strike that could plough up a field and burn the potatoes to ashes (1827-4, p. 264; cf. Bartucci, 2006). Wesley

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“...the true, the scriptural, experimental religion” (1787, p. vi). A sample *Journal* reference would be (1827-4, p. 141)

<sup>260</sup> Received wisdom amongst Methodists is that by referring to “experimental religion” Wesley was simply using language in a way that has changed over the centuries in between his time and ours, along the analogy of how “enthusiasm” in his writings is now best understood to mean “fanaticism” [see for example Josgrilberg (2007, p. 2)]. I would suggest that this perhaps downplays the significance of the Baconian strand of enlightenment thought for Wesley. Others have written on the importance of inductive thought to Wesley – of particular interest is Peter Harrison, *Experimental Religion and Experimental Science in Early Modern England* (Harrison, 2011)

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was perhaps trying to pass on to his Methodist people a capacity to love, value, and wonder at the works of a God whom they no longer had to dread<sup>261</sup>.

Wesley modelled his thought on Bacon's in another significant arena: Bacon serenely inhabited the emerging enlightenment worldview as a believing Christian<sup>262</sup>: he reasoned with Descartes, but regarded the Gospel as legitimate data – which from an atheistic viewpoint is nonsense, but from a Christian viewpoint might be regarded as the essence of faith<sup>263</sup>. Bacon developed a robust Christian critique of pure Cartesian philosophy, and he based it on the principle of radical doubt: “However men may amuse themselves, and admire, or almost adore the mind, it is certain, that like an irregular glass, it alters the rays of things by its figure and different intersections” (1620 (1876), p. 15)<sup>264</sup>. Wesley achieved a similar synthesis. One can see the outworking of this in Wesley's “think and let think” philosophy. Wesley's application of the enlightenment “radical doubt” doctrine was radicalised to the personal level; nobody should believe that they have the complete grasp of the truth because nobody is able to have a complete grasp of the facts<sup>265</sup>. An outworking of this was a deep respect for the integrity of the reasoning of others, and a refusal to submit to arbitrary ideological control<sup>266</sup> (or to exert it). Anyone could, and everyone should, be thinking for themselves. Traditional viewpoints might be true, but they were not in themselves above contemporary intellectual evaluation.

Once one has reflected on this aspect of his worldview, one seems to see it everywhere in Wesley. Everything became a puzzle and a quest for understanding; any process was capable of being probed and weighed against first principles, with a view to changing the way one acted. The appropriate stance to knowledge was one of humble readiness to learn and grow in the light of new data. “But some may say, I have mistaken the way myself, although I take it upon myself to teach others,” Wesley writes. “It is probable many will think this; and it is very possible that I have. But I trust, whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind

<sup>261</sup> Although thunderstorms did continue to play on people's minds. After one particularly violent overnight storm Wesley notes that “...some good was done: for at five o'clock [a.m!] the preaching room was quite filled” (1827-3, p. 103).

<sup>262</sup> Bacon writes in his *Great Instauration* that “God has framed the mind like a glass, capable of the image of the universe, and as desirous to receive it as the eye to receive the light” (1620 (1876), p. 30).

<sup>263</sup> This contrast can never be softened, but in my experience does not have to lead to a breakdown in conversation between the atheistically-faithed and the Christianly-faithed. For Bacon the goal of science was to study the world so that “...the understanding, now cleared up, and purged of all vanity and superstition, may remain entirely subject to the divine oracles, and yield to faith the things that are faith's” (1620 (1876), p. 9).

<sup>264</sup> For a full discussion see Christopher McMullen's article *Bacon, Descartes, God and Science* (McMullen, 2002).

<sup>265</sup> “...we are liable to make mistakes, both speculative and practical” (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 69).

<sup>266</sup> “I must still insist on the right of private judgement. I dare call no man Rabbi. I cannot yield either implicit faith or obedience to any man or number of men under heaven” (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 552).

is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed" (1787, p. vii). Such an attitude must have been very refreshing to those who were feeling oppressed in doctrinaire institutions; and it must have seemed an extremely dangerous line of thought to those who wished to maintain ideological control of their fiefdoms.

### **Post-Agrarian Economy**

As the rise of money took over from the holding of property in the building of wealth, the 18<sup>th</sup> century embarked upon a "...predatory phase of agrarian and commercial capitalism" with the State itself as one of the "...prime objects of prey" (Thompson, 1978, p. 139)<sup>267</sup>, which has an eerily familiar ring in contemporary South Africa. John Wesley spent so much of his time amongst those at the bottom end of the social scale that his writings can be taken as a kind of social thermometer: registering the boiling ferment amongst the poor caused by the machinations of the powerful. This social volatility arose from the fields generated several engines of change that were geared to each other: industrialisation; urbanisation; militarisation; colonisation; education; and scientific investigation.

### **Industrialisation**

Richard Arkwright's cotton gin patent (1775) and James Watt's new efficient steam engine patent (1769) suddenly allowed a single labourer's efforts to be unprecedentedly magnified (cf. Harley, 2013). And in the cotton industry, where physically small people were needed to operate amongst the machines, the labour-value of a child suddenly counted for more than that of a grown man. It seemed like a good idea at the time to John Wesley that children should find employment and "escape poverty" in the new cotton and silk mills (1827-4, pp. 233, 398) – the evils of child exploitation had yet to become apparent. John Wesley's England was full of new ideas for making rich people wealthy, and energetic entrepreneurs were getting very rich indeed, often disguising what later ages would recognise as abuse and exploitation. One calico-printing magnate in Bury, a Mr Peel, with whom Wesley had breakfast one morning, was reputed to have enlarged his personal fortune from five hundred pounds to fifty thousand. Wesley's comment on that was typical of Wesley, but apt: "O what a miracle, if he lose not his soul" (1827-4, p. 400). The potential for souls to be lost in the rapacious pursuit of wealth was high: the social costs of that process had not yet become properly understood. It would have been easy to be cruelly rapacious and yet be considered to be a pillar of social respectability. Wesley might have not fully understood the implications,

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<sup>267</sup> I have preferred Thompson's Marxist social history to any of the Methodist histories of the eighteenth century. Admittedly Thompson discounts any role of religion in the social developments, but at least it is a big, obvious flaw. Methodist histories by contrast seem narrowly sycophantic, and have extremely naïve economic theory.

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but he was in a position to register puzzlement at the state of the urban rich and the interlocked plight of the urban poor – and record it - and thus help to lay a foundation for subsequent observers and reformers.

### *Urbanisation*

Many of the “good ideas for making more profit” extended to farm machinery like seed drills, and horse-powered (soon to become steam-powered) winnowers and threshers (cf. Long, p. 19). As agriculture became inexorably more mechanised, jobless masses moved between the rural areas and the awkwardly increasing urban slums, pulled away from the land by the growing demand for industrial labour, and sent back to the land by actual high unemployment, and so forth. The cities came to display the harsh reality that “Wesley’s England was a wretched contrast between the newly rich and the newly poor, with the growing miseries of the urban ghettos added onto the ancient inequalities of the feudal past” (Outler, 1991, p. 61). Housing was under extreme pressure and slum conditions were inevitable for the rapidly expanding cities (cf. Nevell, 2011).

A close reading of the *Journal* as a social record indicates that intractable, desperate poverty had become the basic reality for a large portion of the British population. Throughout his *Journal* Wesley noted the poor and campaigned for others to notice them too. The poor were not getting automatic access to the ancient feudal poverty relief of the Church, the so-called “assistance of the parish”, in the newly crowded urban parishes (1827-1, p. 260), and therefore, all through the *Journal*, Mr Wesley becomes a beggar on their behalf (1827-1, pp. 453,460) (1827-4, pp. 267,303, 367). He spoke of them with moving respect and compassion; arriving one day at an open space near Chowden, an extreme poverty hotspot, he describes his audience with a touching eye for detail (unusual in pre-Dickensian England):

*“Twenty or thirty wild children ran round us as soon as we came, staring in amaze. They could not properly be said to be clothed or naked. One of the largest, (a girl of about fifteen), had a piece of ragged, dirty blanket, some way hung about her, and a cap on her head of the same cloth and colour. My heart was exceedingly enlarged, and they looked as if they would have swallowed me up...”*  
(1827-1, p. 416)

The sheer volume of poor people drove him close to despair (1827-2, p. 176), but never over the edge. He ratcheted up the rhetoric in order to change people’s minds. He notably

attacked the dismissive ideology that the poor were poor because of their laziness<sup>268</sup>. But he also called for solidarity amongst Christians. He learned so much himself from this immersion in the life of the poor that he pleaded for all who were wealthy to experience it for themselves: "O why do not all the rich that fear God constantly visit the poor? Can they spend part of their spare time better?" (1827-4, p. 93)<sup>269</sup>.

I shall return to this vision for the poor later, but this brief survey shows that Wesley was working in a society where the poor were a noisy reality in the cities, and where the wealthy apparently needed rousing up to pay attention to their basic human neediness.

Overcrowding also indicated the oversupply of workers for the factories and subsequent unemployment. Wesley recognised the desperation of people to find work, estimating the unemployment rate in London at one stage (in about 1772) to have been as high as 33% (1827-4, p. 117).

Poverty drives the engine of crime. Heather Shore has the interesting insight that "crime might be understood as part of the broader makeshift economy of the poor" (2003, p. 138). The criminal justice system favoured the rich and kept their interests firmly entrenched<sup>270</sup> – those who have much need to keep a sharp eye on those that have nothing; writing about the extensive laws punishable by death, King and Ward found that "Not all of the rapidly expanding sheaf of capital statutes passed by parliament in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries involved property offences, but the vast majority were designed to protect property and to prevent its appropriation" (2015, p. 159) The law was savagely vengeful. Wesley records conversations with felons hanged for such diverse crimes as stealing the lead from a church roof or the velvet from the altar (1827-2, p. 85), and his journals are liberally scattered with sobering descriptions of the final hours of the condemned (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 4; 1827-4, p. 303).

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<sup>268</sup> Reporting on his extensive visiting of sick Methodist members (and vast numbers of his adherents were from the poorest people in Britain) in their homes he says: "I found some in their cells underground, some in their garrets, half starved both with cold and hunger, added to weakness and pain. But I found not one of them unemployed, who was able to crawl about the room. So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection: 'They are poor only because they are idle'. If you saw these things with your own eyes, could you lay out money in ornaments and superfluities?" (1827-2, p. 246).

<sup>269</sup> Wesley's heuristic pedagogy becomes clearly apparent in a related passage: "How much better is it, when it can be done, to carry relief to the poor than to send it, and that both for our sakes and for theirs. For theirs, as it is so much more comfortable [= comforting – ed.] to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals: and for our own; as it is far more apt to soften our heart, and make us naturally care for each other" (1827-3, p. 27). I cannot fault this logic. And Wesley followed it through to the end of his life: in 1785, at the age of 81, he still records: "I visited many of our poor, to see with my own eyes what their wants were, and how they might be effectually relieved" (1827-4, p. 305)

<sup>270</sup> In 1775 only 12% of the hangings in London were for murder, rape and assault, or anything other than "property crimes" (King & Ward, 2015, p. 170)

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In addition, prison conditions – with the prison system supposedly developing as a “merciful alternative” to execution for petty crimes (cf. Vaughan, 2000, p. 9) – were appalling (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 33). The prison system was also in place for the incarceration of debtors – there was no merciful system of bankruptcy yet in place. If you failed to pay debts you could be vengefully imprisoned until somebody paid up for you. If not, you probably died in gaol, or got deported as low-level labour for the colonies. Wesley was involved in this aspect of urbanisation with his customary practical energy. He constantly preached in the prisons, when he was allowed to (1827-1, pp. 161, 193, 471, etc.), up until the end of his life (1827-4, p. 303). He campaigned for debt payments. He visited and cared for those being held in unhygienic and overcrowded cells, and campaigned for the amelioration of inhumane conditions. His reaction after visiting an inmate of Marshalsea Prison was severe: “O shame to man that there should be such a place, such a picture of hell on earth” (1827-2, p. 246); on the flip side he praises the Keeper of Newgate Prison for his hygienic reforms (1827-4, p. 34).

In this milieu the poor had little recourse to civic protection if *they* should happen to fall victim to crime (cf. Friedman, 1995). Wesley modelled a bellicose pushing of the law to its full extent in redressing injury to himself and his Methodists, appealing confidently to “...the Magna Charta, and English liberty and property” (1827-1, p. 212). He demanded that he and his preachers and his outdoor congregations be defended by the law<sup>271</sup> against lawless mobs (1827-1, p. 266). A constable who gets maliciously charged with a false pick-pocketing offence because of “drawing his truncheon” on violent opponents of the preaching gets full support in court, a raft of counter-witnesses, and a not guilty verdict (1827-1, pp. 286-287). Wesley was in the position of being nominally one of the gentry, so he had a certain amount of leverage with magistrates (1827-2, p. 67). A young gentleman who abuses Wesley on the street is forced into an apology by the threat of legal action (1827-1, pp. 489-490). But the net effect might well have been one where increasingly the poor were able to imagine that they too had rights under law. Even though they failed to get a hearing at the Lenten Assizes at Cork in 1750, the multiple depositions brought against Nicholas Butler, a notorious rabble rouser, for destruction of property and public violence, did provoke the magistrate to issue a restraining order, which ended his reign of terror<sup>272</sup> (1827-2, pp. 146-147). “There is law

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<sup>271</sup> Wesley is well aware of his citizen’s rights, and wrote a threatening letter to a magistrate of the aptly named village of Roughlee who had dispatched a mob, (which Wesley refers to as ‘your bloodhounds’), to rough up Wesley and the Methodists, beating and abusing them with sticks and stones: “...are we not to have the benefits of the laws of our country? Proceed against us by the law, if you can or dare, but not by lawless violence; not by making a drunken, cursing, swearing, riotous mob both judge, jury and executioner: this is flat rebellion against God and the King as you may possibly find to your cost” (1827-2, p. 76)

<sup>272</sup> In the early days the Methodists certainly often needed legal redress. On another occasion Wesley records that he was by no means the only target of the rage of the mob: After Wesley had been

even for Methodists” notes Wesley with satisfaction (1827-2, p. 147). It would be interesting to quantify the effect of such a course of action, and it would be interesting to study this further. Cape Town has its share of mob protest and mob violence, and it is interesting to note the similarity in roles played by FA011 and Wesley in this regard. I shall return to that in my next chapter.

Substance abuse in the form of the new scourge of gin was devastating populations, especially in the London slums (cf. Abel, 2001). Annual consumption in England and Wales was about one million gallons in 1700; by 1751 it stood at about seven million gallons (Abel, 2001, p. 402). The rhetoric of the wealthy was that the poor were poor and violent because of the gin; but the truth was probably the opposite – gin was a psychological refuge from the pain of poverty (Abel, 2001, p. 403), and in fact a tool in the hands of the wealthy to disempower them. Gin was not the only source of alcohol in the eighteenth century, and there are other intoxicant substances besides alcohol<sup>273</sup>. But Wesley's issue with intoxicants was specifically with drunkenness, and amongst the poor drunkenness usually would have resulted from drinking gin. Wesley had no issue with alcohol as such – he considered wine as “the noblest cordial in nature” (1827-4, p. 450) and was happy to take a glass of rum in a poor man's home (1827-4, p. 440). He rather approved of ale, as a nourishing, even medicinal drink. His problem was with its abuse. Not that that stopped him from speaking patiently and compassionately with a drunkard (1827-1, p. 479), or laughing affectionately at a would-be heckler falling asleep in a drunken stupor on the neck of his horse (1827-2, p. 307). Wesley was quite happy to speak to people as they were, and it was no hardship to speak to “mixed” market crowds that might contain many very drunk listeners (1827-1, p. 196). But Wesley would only believe that you had been inwardly converted if you could show evidence that you were living a sober life – as many could; Methodism literally had a sobering effect on the poor (1827-2, p. 150). For Wesley alcohol became an enemy if it was allowed to cloud your brain, because he believed that reason had to be fully engaged for anyone to turn to Christ.

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beaten up by the crowd, “Mr Jones....was covered with dirt, and escaped with his life almost by miracle. The main body of the mob then went to the house, brought out all the seats and benches, tore up the floor, the door, the frames of the windows, and whatever of woodwork remained; part of which they carried off for their own use, and the rest they burned in the open street” (1827-2, p. 152)  
<sup>273</sup> Opium was beginning to emerge as a social scourge in China and England, but would only become a major contributor to the addiction scene in the early nineteenth century in England. It was seen as a medicine, and even Wesley used it experimentally for extreme cramps - he records that it “...speedily stopped the cramp but at the same time took away my speech, hearing and power of motion, and locked me up from head to foot, so that I lay like a mere log” (1827-4, p. 265). For a discussion of opium usage in eighteenth century England see Lucinda Ower's thesis, *From Panacea to Problem: the Demonisation of Opium in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Ower, 2012) .

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### **Militarisation**

As a result of the pressures of competitive trade, political manoeuvring, and general incapacity to live in rational co-operation, the nations of Europe were embroiled in war throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>274</sup>. The 18<sup>th</sup> century was extremely precarious for Britain in terms of military threats (not to mention that Britain itself posed a significant destabilising threat to the rest of Europe). War demanded soldiers, and for the generals the natural resource for soldiers has always been the population of poor young men. Three Methodist lay preachers were impressed as soldiers on the grounds of being “vagrant” and not gainfully employed in 1744 (1827-1, pp. 467, 468, 470). Wesley graphically describes life preparing for siege in Newcastle during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion (1827-1, pp. 523-526). The Seven Year War of 1756-1763 duly left its mark on the *Journal* too, as Wesley records both preaching to and praying for English soldiers off to face death: “...and surely the fear and the love of God will prepare them for either death or victory” (1827-2, p. 320) One result of the war was a sudden influx of French prisoners of war, held in subhuman conditions – for whom he also busily organised humanitarian relief (1827-2, pp. 320, 463, 486,504). The next paroxysm was the American War of Independence from 1775-1783, and as always, Wesley found himself involved in the “basement” amongst conscripts and prisoners, and the inevitable widows and orphans (1827-4, p. 59). Wesley died just before the decade of French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) but their menace was already being felt<sup>275</sup>. The threat of war was never far from people’s minds: violence was played out in the microcosm of the highwayman and the mob, and in the macrocosm of the clash of mobilised armies.

### **Colonisation**

*“I remember none in all the annals of antiquity.... plundered the provinces committed to their charge, with such merciless cruelty as the English have plundered the desolated provinces of Indostan”*  
(Wesley, 1827-4, p. 90)

Many groups of people were moving as refugees and economic migrants around Europe and between Europe and the rest of the World (cf. Sturm-Martin, 2014). The move to colonise strategic portions of the rest of the world was just beginning to gather momentum, spearheaded for England by the East India Company in India (cf. Dalrymple, 2015) and the seizure of territory in North America for colony building (cf. ushistory.org, 2017). The prospect of new crops and commodities from East and West and South to fuel the

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<sup>274</sup> Which is perhaps only to say that the century was like any other century – stalked by the spectre of war.

<sup>275</sup> For a fuller treatment of Wesley attitude and reaction to war, see Briane Turley’s article *John Wesley and War* (Turley, 1991).

acquisitiveness of the English merchant class led to the start of an aggressive military-commercial expansion into other people's worlds (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 227-228) (cf. [countriesquest.com](http://countriesquest.com), 2017).

Europe's poor and dispossessed participated in this predatory wave for many reasons. Some were attracted by the promise of becoming the elite of the new colonies and making a personal fortune (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 155). Others were simply desperate to be able to live a reasonably well-fed life (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 227). Still others had no choice in the matter, since the British government started exporting excess debt-prisoners and property-crime offenders in order to bulk up the numbers of British-friendly inhabitants of the invaded lands<sup>276</sup>. Some people left for reasons of ideological persecution in their homelands<sup>277</sup>. And some left with a pipe dream of starting a perfect new society in a completely unsullied environment<sup>278</sup>. Wesley never directly questioned the propriety of colonisation – and as with industrialisation, its dynamics were poorly understood. From his perspective there was perhaps unlimited uncontested space in the colonised territories. But once again, he had his finger on the pulse of the poor and outsider, and was quick to see the start of evil outcomes that would only become more and more apparent over the centuries. And by telling their story he set a precedent for noticing those who were not noticed in the official narratives of nations.

Wesley had himself been, very briefly, one of the pipe-dream migrants. His particular fantasy had been the establishment a New Testament modelled Church amongst previously unchurched people, the First Nations of America – especially the Choctaws, whom he hoped to find "...the least polished, i.e. the least corrupted of all the Indian nations" (1827-1, pp. 34, 42; cf. Hammond, 2014, p. 148). When the realities of colonial life set in, he fled back to England to rethink his life's calling. He came to realise that the colonies wanted clergy as chaplains for the colonists, collaborative agents of colonialization and not missionaries to the First Nations. Oglethorpe, the governor of the Georgia colony refused "...to leave Savannah [its main town] destitute of a minister" Wesley complained (1827-1, p. 39). And the colonists wanted their Church to be a sentimental reminder of life back home, not an experimental laboratory for radical church ideas, first century discipline and baptismal practices (1827-1, pp. 27, 29, 50). The colony was at its core hostile to the First Nations, in direct competition

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<sup>276</sup> Joel Nicholls notes that "the initial ... impetus for settling Georgia in the late 1720's was to provide a haven of relief for debtors languishing in English jails" (2005, p. 1703)

<sup>277</sup> The Moravians that were so influential in Wesley's life are a good example (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 154).

<sup>278</sup> Nicholls again observes that "Georgia was explicitly founded as a (Protestant) Christian colony, but its founders and legal documents alike readily accorded all its new inhabitants a goodly measure of religious liberty. Liberty of conscience was promised to all, and free exercise to all except Catholics" (2005, p. 1771)

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for land and resources – it was not an appropriate platform for the Gospel of peace; in Wesley's gloomy evaluation none of the First Nations was ever likely to want to "be instructed" by a colonist (1827-1, p. 59). And then there was the embarrassment of the religious and moral life of representatives of a so-called "Christian Nation" – Wesley was able to observe directly what the English must seem like through the eyes of others: a "corrupting" force. And in addition, the First Nations turned out to be apparently just as poor material for planting a New Testament Church amongst as the settlers<sup>279</sup> (1827-1, p. 52). Further, many of the other settlers hated, resisted and persecuted him mercilessly, giving him no automatic respect for his learning or cloth, allowing him no room to either experiment or get things wrong – and he was chased back home under threat of lawsuits that he would not be able to win (1827-1, pp. 50-51, 56-57).

So for very personal reasons Wesley was able to see the down-side of the colonial project – to see through the official triumphalist narrative. As his ministry expanded in England amongst the "emigrating classes", his view progressively clarified on issues like governance (1827-1, p. 82), slavery (1827-4, p. 419), trade (1827-4, p. 122), and military depredation<sup>280</sup>.

### Education

Formal education was for the rich; the majority of the population had to get by with what they could fit in to lives shaped by constant labour (cf. Cowan, 2012, p. 232). One way out of manual labour was the acquisition of literacy (cf. Cowan, 2012, p. 270). Wesley would have approved, but he also wanted people to be reading the Bible and thinking about it, and was well aware that thought is shaped by capacity to read. The Word of God needed to become the Word for the people, Tyndale's plough-boy philosophy playing out in a new era; even black slaves were immediately seen as those who could be educated, a somewhat eccentric view for the time (1827-1, pp. 38, 39, 71). And those who could read could then also learn important things like logic and science – Wesley wanted with all his heart to share the wonders he was discovering through reading with those he was pastoring. His incessant one-line evaluations of the books he was reading must have been partly intended to fire up Methodists to read as he did. Since they were not going to be able to afford university

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<sup>279</sup> Wesley was never a man of tact; in one scathing Sunday sermon in Georgia he says: "I summed up what I had seen or heard at Federica, inconsistent with Christianity, and consequently with the prosperity of the place. The event was as it ought: some of the hearers were profited, and the rest deeply offended" (1827-1, p. 32).

<sup>280</sup> Writing on the state of India under the East India Company, Wesley laments: "Was there ever so melancholy a picture? How are the mighty fallen! The Great Mogul, Emperor of Hindostan, one of the mightiest Potentates on earth, is become a poor, little, impotent slave to a Company of Merchants! His large, flourishing empire is broken in pieces and covered with fraud, oppression, and misery! And we may call the myriads that have been murdered happy, in comparison of those that still groan under the iron yoke. Wilt not thou visit for these things, O Lord? Shall the fool still say in his heart, 'There is no God?'" (1827-4, p. 68).

education any time soon, Wesley laboured to bring the university to them, via a library of summarised works in different disciplines (1827-2, pp. 93, 94, 141, 139, 277). He was in some ways well placed to do so, having been a conscientious tutor at Oxford (who actually gave his students lectures, unlike many other tutors (1827-4, p. 78)). In other ways his efforts were slightly over-optimistic; he made a massive £200 loss on his attempt at publishing a home-education course (1827-2, p. 244); but he tried<sup>281</sup>.

Education was so limited, and the desire for it so widespread, that people were ready to exercise great ingenuity in getting some sort of education for themselves<sup>282</sup>. This rode on the back of a pre-Puritan world in which the literacy of the poor had been suppressed, and Bunyan's work and Tyndale's English translation (both banned for decades but surreptitiously printed and widely circulated) had notoriously become the self-education media of the poor. Cowan argues that "There was a long tradition of commoners' literacy in England, often hidden and concealed, stretching back to the Lollards" (Cowan, 2012, p. 14). But there was no systematic schooling for any except the children of the wealthy. Wesley recognised that, and constantly fought to create an alternative education system for the young – showcased by his educational project at Kingswood<sup>283</sup>, which he supervised closely (micromanaged?) all through his life (1827-2, pp. 115, 20; 1827-4, pp. 514-516; p. 444). Wesley, always alarmingly egalitarian, never made the common cultural mistake of dividing the world into the "wealthy and virtuous educated" class against the "poor and criminal uneducated" class<sup>284</sup>. He believed that education or lack of it made no moral difference between people (1827-2, p. 502). He went so far as to hold the countercultural view that a poor young person educated through careful tutoring could become as well educated (in practical terms) as a pampered young gentleman at Oxford or Cambridge (1827-2, p. 10)<sup>285</sup>.

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<sup>281</sup> An endearing trait of Wesley was that he reported fully and frankly on his failed experiments as well as those that had positive results. At the time Wesley finished his basic library, he was so sick that he thought he was dying, and considered this his legacy project – which shows how dear to his heart the library had been (cf. 1827-2, p. 277).

<sup>282</sup> Cowan notes (of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) the "...emergence ... of large numbers of socially-mobile self-educated individuals" (Cowan, 2012, p. 21)

<sup>283</sup> His prescribed reading for scholars at the Kingswood school included Poetry and Biblical Studies, English and Mathematics, and books on Greek history, Hebrew history, Primitive Christianity, History of England, Roman history and Latin. An all-round education for the gentry made available to the poor (1827-2, p. 175).

<sup>284</sup> De Mandeville, writing in 1723, writes disapprovingly of the establishment of charity schools for the poor; in his view they are incapable of reforming the morals of the poor and should therefore be discontinued for the good of society, because "Experience teaches us, that among the Charity-Boys there are abundance of bad ones that Swear and Curse about, and, bar the Clothes, are as much Blackguard as ever Tower-hill or St.James's produc'd" (1732, pp. 182-183). Wesley, for his part, thought that de Mandeville, in terms of "morals", was far worse even than Machiavelli (1827-2, p. 327).

<sup>285</sup> Wesley was hostile to pretence in any form, and apparently detested the monopoly that the universities had on deciding who was or was not learned: "...our Church requires that clergymen be men of learning, and to this end have university education: but how many have a university education

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### **Scientific Medicine**

Socio-sexual diseases ravaged the population with little hope of cure (cf. Weisser, 2017). The health system was in chaos – had never been systematised - and the poor had little access to medical assistance (1827-1, p. 287). Pandemics of smallpox and tuberculosis regularly swept through the crowded slums<sup>286</sup> (1827-1, pp. 271, 286, 291, 339, etc; 1827-2, p. 248). Help was on its way through the development of scientific medicine, but it would take time to make a difference to the poor. The smallpox vaccine was only discovered half way through the eighteenth century<sup>287</sup>. The circulation of the blood was still being debated (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 20). Surgeons still needed to use the corpses of hanged felons to work out how to treat the living (1827-2, p. 90). And received medical wisdom prescribed some unnecessarily dangerous procedures and treatments: excessive bleeding (1827-2, p. 236); the use of mercury (1827-4, p. 508); and the “tapping” [plugging] of dysentery sufferers<sup>288</sup> (1827-2, p. 503).

Into this rode Wesley and the Methodists. They constantly visited the sick, putting themselves at risk, and making public health an issue at the front of their mind (1827-1, pp. 291,486; 1827-2, p. 246; 1827-4, pp. 305-306). They were riskily active in visiting plague-prone prisons (1827-2, pp. 84-90). And on his travels Wesley was constantly meeting the sick, praying for healing *and* freely dispensing the latest scientific advice from his reading in medicine – his constant medical textbook being Dr Cheyne’s *Natural Method of Curing Diseases* (1827-1, p. 362). He experimented with natural remedies for common ills on himself, and reported their efficacy in his *Journal* (1827-2, pp. 71, 360). These were specifically aimed at being cheap and/or naturally accessible, usually rich in such things as warm treacle and nettle leaves<sup>289</sup> (1827-2, pp. 3, 97, 148, 390, 430, etc.). Wesley did the best he could with the knowledge he had to meet the needs of the poor who were sick – in London he set up a free clinic to dispense medicines (1827-2, pp. 1, 21-22, 44). The problem he found with the Chelsea Physic garden was that nobody was able to give out scientific

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and yet no learning at all? Yet these men are ordained! Meantime one of eminent learning as well as unblameable behaviour cannot be ordained ‘because he was not at university’! What a mere farce is this? Who would believe that any Christian Bishop would stoop to so poor an evasion?” (1827-2, p. 502)

<sup>286</sup> He records something that sounds like an influenza epidemic in Norwich: “The first time it was visited with the sweating-sickness, (which usually killed in ten hours,) there died, in about six months, upwards of fifty-seven thousand persons” (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 62).

<sup>287</sup> Smallpox was deadly until the introduction of the vaccine: “...smallpox was probably the single most lethal cause of death in the eighteenth century, accounting for 6–10 per cent of all burials” (Davenport, et al., 2011, p. 1290). After the vaccine became available it dropped to almost nothing by 1840 (Davenport, et al., 2011, p. 1290)

<sup>288</sup> Wesley grimly notes that the patient died two days later.

<sup>289</sup> One sufferer of “the spotted disease” [smallpox? Measles?] was reportedly cured by a diet of wine, milk, apples and plums (1827-1, p. 564) – but Wesley couldn’t make sense of that and regarded the recovery as an act of God rather than a reaction to the diet.

information about the properties of the herbs grown there (1827-2, p. 83). He also became a firm believer in the healing powers of electric-shock therapy, enthusiastically prescribing it as a cure for ailments from angina to arthritis<sup>290</sup> (1827-2, p. 245; 1827-4, pp. 10, 274). Public health was also a big concern – in an age where the nature and function of “microscopic animals” was being debated (1827-2, p. 422), he guessed a causal link between untreated sewerage in the streets and prisons, and the ill health of his congregants (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 54).

### **Post-Restoration Politics**

It had not been many decades since the collapse of Cromwell's Puritan republic in 1660. Vested interests of the gentry and general unpopularity of the narrow moral strictures of the Cromwellians had ensured a subsequent restoration of the monarchy – on terms very much more favourable to the gentry. But the increase in wealth depended on the availability of cheap labour for mines, factories and armies, so the incentive for looking out for the interests of the masses had been minimal.

The rise of the concept of democratic rights and politics that *included* the poor was not very advanced; corruption and abuse of the parliamentary system was under threat by marauders in power. Thompson observes: “That constitutional defences against this oligarchy survived ... at all is due largely to the stubborn resistance of the largely Tory, sometimes Jacobite, independent country gentry, supported again and again by the vociferous and turbulent crowd” (1978, p. 140). The only “voice for the poor” was the boisterous (and, from the point of view of the wealthy, potentially income-threatening) mob, “a crowd which stretched at times from small gentry and professional men to the poor” (Thompson, 1978, p. 144) – and Wesley found himself in the eye of that storm often enough<sup>291</sup>. A small minority of the rich

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<sup>290</sup> He delivers a classic unintentional pun when he writes that electricity as a medicine is “shockingly cheap and easy” (1827-2, p. 245)

<sup>291</sup> Wesley's experiences of being caught up by a mob stirred up by the local gentry to oppose him indirectly illustrates Thompson's point here: the mob were part of the political arsenal of the lower gentry – “The sons of Belial banded themselves together,” recalls Wesley of one stone-throwing mob, “headed by one or two wretches called gentlemen” (1827-1, p. 423). In this instance they tried to use their mob-tactic to silence Wesley and his preachers, and intimidate the early Methodists [ (1827-1, pp. 439-443; 1827-2, pp. 45, 46, 74,75, 108-114, 128, 151-153, 223, 236; 1827-3, p. 504). But there also seemed to have been a sporting component to the mobs – they appear to have vied with each other something like the soccer-mobs of Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: this is best seen in the report of the clash between the Walsall mob and the Darlaston mob in 1743, disputing over who should take John Wesley to face justice, and/or defend him to the death (it was all quite confused, with Wesley himself in the position of the football, and both parties alternately vehemently attacking and defending him by turns). After an eventful night, and several attempts by different parties to escort him safely home, he arrived “having lost only one flap of my waistcoat, and a little skin from one of my hands” (1827-1, p. 441). This chimes with Thompson's analysis of the independent culture of the poor in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: “...they enjoyed liberties of pushing about the streets and jostling, gaping and huzzaing, pulling down the houses of obnoxious bakers or Dissenters, and a generally riotous and unpoliced disposition which astonished foreign visitors” (1978, p. 165). Parallels with the political situation in

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and educated – Thompson calls them a “patrician banditti” (1978, p. 139) - made decisions that often, (perhaps usually), ignored the welfare of the poor.

Wesley, strangely enough, entered and moved amongst the lowest strata of this society with a profoundly conservative mind-set; he was a patriotic supporter of the monarchy<sup>292</sup>, and believed that everybody should pay their taxes. He was a formally educated gentleman trying to speak to uneducated masses – it seemed as if his chances of communicating would be limited. In addition, although he was severe in his judgement of Cromwell as godless and unscrupulous (1827-2, p. 513), he loved the memory of the Puritans’ longing for a theocratic society. One thing that perhaps tipped the balance was that he also held the radical Puritan view that everybody was equal in the eyes of God (cf. McKim, 1980, p. 229) and that society should acknowledge that<sup>293</sup> (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 11; 1827-4, pp. 126, 161, 475). Another factor apparently swinging him towards the people was that he took his message out of the church and inserted it into the public market place, which had up to that point been the political domain of the low-level gentry and their mobs. The backlash was inevitable. The early years of the journal have many reports of Wesley and the first Methodists being targeted by the mobs which appear to have been mobilised, usually, by local gentry. The country gentry apparently considered Wesley’s large gatherings to be a threat to their power – after all, that is what the gentry convened crowds for. Wesley was slandered being an *agent provocateur* for the French/Spanish (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 510-511); absurdly he was frequently denounced as a “papist” (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 219; 1827-2, pp. 92-93)<sup>294</sup>. Moves were made against him under old anti-sedition legislation, against which he had to defend himself legally (1827-4, pp. 415, 484). There were always two crowds, however – the

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Cape Town and South Africa with regard to “direct action” in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century are obvious (Lancaster, 2016).

<sup>292</sup> He saw it as his religious duty to preach Tory patriotism: “Understanding some of our friends here were deeply prejudiced against the King and all his Ministers, I spoke freely and largely on the subject at the meeting of the society” (1827-4, p. 55).

<sup>293</sup> One of Wesley’s favourite rhetorical moves was to point out how the poor acted in a more humane and polite way than “their betters”: “In the evening I stood on one side of the market-place at Frome, and declared to a very numerous congregation, ‘His commandments are not grievous.’ They stood as quiet as those at Bristol, a very few excepted; most of whom were, by the courtesy of England, called Gentlemen. How much inferior to the keelmen and colliers!” (1827-4, p. 139). Wesley’s standard reference to those who considered themselves to be superior but were not was to call them “*so-called gentlemen*”. This was, for him, a logical extension of the classical formulation that all humans were individually accountable to God. It would have played directly into class-resentments of the working classes, and would have helped to make Wesley popular.

<sup>294</sup> Wesley found himself both vigorously persuading Roman Catholics to consider converting to his brand of Protestantism, and vigorously defending himself against being painted as one of them: “I knew not how the warm people would behave considering the stories which passed current among them; Mrs. B. having averred to Mr. M. himself, that Mr. Wesley was unquestionably a Jesuit” (1827-2, pp. 92-93). Even late in his life this accusation was still circulating amongst his opponents: “What amazing ignorance, ... not to say impudence, does it imply for any one at this time of day to tax me with having any connexions with Popery” (1827-3, p. 356)

ordinary townfolk, who found him curiously attractive, a gentleman who endured being pelted with stones and muck to bring them a message where they were; and the gentry's rabble. The mass of ordinary citizens would quite possibly have been hostile to the Landlord's henchmen, anyway. So eventually, after having been the target of the gentry's mob-wrath for long enough, Wesley became the darling of ordinary Britons – somebody standing up to the rough control of the landed classes. This principle of insertion into disputed territory is one that I shall return to in my grounded theory formation.

It is also possible to trace Wesley's attack of the status quo to his quixotic belief that if due process of law and government were followed, the sort of egalitarian society in which nobody was excluded or oppressed would emerge. Two examples demonstrate this: he specially schooled those of his Methodists who were eligible to vote (probably a small number) to not accept bribes for votes, but to vote strictly according to their consciences<sup>295</sup> (the parallels with the political life of 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town are once again interesting to note) (1827-2, p. 24). He also schooled them into accepting the result without rancour if it should go against them, (and we note that a peaceful transition of power is a crucial tenet of parliamentary democracy), modelling this difficult attitude in his own reaction to the defeat of a man he himself had voted for (1827-2, p. 187)

The other example of the quixotic Wesley was his impractical stance against smuggling, not calculated to win friends and influence people along the Cornish coast (1827-2, p. 460; 1827-4, p. 3)<sup>296</sup>. Although it was common knowledge that the political elite were looting the public revenue, Wesley considered that paying taxes was a religious duty for any right-thinking Christian; taxes were intended to even out the disparity between rich and poor, and so it was vital to him that those of his Methodists who had taxes to pay were part of the project and not part of the problem.

## Conclusion

The overall impression we get from studying an insider's view of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is that it was an era of chaos and immense social changes. Eventually the raw data of day-to-day experience would come to be given interpretive categories like industrialisation, urbanisation,

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<sup>295</sup> "I met those of our society who had votes in the ensuing election and advised them, 1. To vote, without fee or reward, for the person they judged most worthy; 2. To speak no evil of the person they voted against; 3. To take care that their spirits were not sharpened against those that voted on the other side" (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 29).

<sup>296</sup> Wesley was implacable: one could not be both a Cornish smuggler and a Cornish Methodist: "I spoke to each of the society in Sunderland. Most of the robbers, commonly called smugglers, have left us; but more than twice the number of honest people are already come in their place: And if none had come, yet should I not dare to keep those who steal either from the King or subject" (1827-2, p. 460).

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colonisation and democratisation, but those categories were not yet available to people living through those processes. Wesley's responses were often early essays in sociological analysis. Unlike the ministers of today, there were no formal categories for these new phenomena; there were no degrees available in cultural anthropology or sociology. And yet he made significantly helpful responses to these great social realities out of the combination of an education in biblical scholarship, an inquisitive mind-set, and a consciousness conditioned by daily contact with the poor.

And in this arena the primary earthly protagonist for the Kingdom of God was the Church of England, a formal church, viewed by many as detached from the real needs of the mass of the people. Many saw it as concerned principally to maintain its prestige and influence, with the chief enticement to corruption being that becoming a priest was seen as a road to social advancement and economic comfort. But I shall follow that lead in detail below as I consider what sort of practitioners the Methodist Church might need to introduce a liturgy of conversion [6.4].

From John Wesley's point of view the radical new demands of the changes in his world required a helpfully integrative image, or set of symbols, that would enable people to function meaningfully as Christians in a new era, as well as cope practically with the demands of a destabilised social juggernaut, as well as mediate what he saw as the core Scriptural emphases. In a time of historic flux he revisited the Christian tradition and promoted a new vision of ancient Christianity for a new age<sup>297</sup>. We might live in a Post-Wesleyan world but we have not escaped the phenomenon of "social problems" that Wesley faced; it could be argued that South Africa has more in common with 18<sup>th</sup> century England, in some ways, than with the currently wealthy countries of the world. And so perhaps there might be great promise in applying elements of Wesleyan approach in our current ecclesial crisis.

### 4.2.2 A Story-line of Daring Orthodoxy

*"...in riding above a thousand miles, I scarce remember any horse...to fall, or make a considerable stumble, while I rode with a slack rein. To fancy, therefore, that a tight rein prevents stumbling is a capital blunder." (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 401)*

The quintessential horseback traveller of the 18<sup>th</sup> century felt he had discovered the secret to riding and reading at the same time; but he might just as well have been writing about his attitude towards theology. A "tight reign" did not prevent mistakes; so give people a loose reign and trust them to try and do their very best in following God. John Wesley built on

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<sup>297</sup> Pelikan puts it like this: "...the history of the Christian tradition is also the history of the critical re-examination of the tradition..." (1984, p. 72)

certain assumptions about the enduring normativity of the Bible as the primary sourcebook for contemporary discipleship (cf. McKim, 1980, p. 228), and an apparently naïve faith that God would guide well-intentioned Christians and keep them from falling into chaotic mis-readings of the text. His main concern was not the working out a finely balanced system of his own theological opinions (which he anticipated should be open to ongoing Scriptural challenge all his life (1787, p. vii). Outler reckoned that Wesley's "refusal to define 'doctrinal standards' too narrowly was a matter of principle." (1991, p. 23), since ...the reduction of doctrine to any particular form of words was to misunderstand the very nature of doctrinal statements" (1991, p. 24). Outler makes the fascinating suggestion that "...before Coleridge or Wittgenstein, Wesley had come upon the secret that language (and the language of religion in particular) is, by its very nature, 'incomplete'" (1991, p. 29). Wesley's main concern appears to have been praxis – using what he was certain of<sup>298</sup> to call people to salvation. *Becoming* saved and then *being* saved was his one great integrated theme<sup>299</sup>. There was nothing inherently heterodox about his thinking on these issues, as we shall see. But Wesley's genius (his fanaticism to his detractors) was that he daringly pushed the limits

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<sup>298</sup> He was, as Outler observes, a man of distinct certainties (1991, p. 23). He did not operate on a principle of uncertainty: he believed that God intends to communicate important truths to humankind through the Bible, and so he was a champion of one making a decision on what God meant through the scriptures and then acting on one's convictions. In the introduction to his *Forty-Four Sermons* he outlines his process of hermeneutics, proceeding from individual study and prayer, through a process of consultation with others, through further meditation "...with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable" (1787, p. vi), to a point of conviction. But one of those certainties was that all human systems of interpretation of Scripture were by definition flawed because they were promulgated by flawed humans (flawed by both sin and human capacities (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 69)). This meant that he was a champion of others' rights to sincere mistakenness (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 500). Trying to fit God's revelation into a universal schema was more likely to lose one in a lifetime of defence and attack of other Christians over trivia than a lifetime of mission and service to the world (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 11). He repeatedly attacks "bitter zeal for opinions" (1827-2, pp. 264, 301; 1827-3, pp. 61, 244) as a key malfunction of Christian discipleship, a fault of which he even accused Martin Luther (1827-2, p. 107).

<sup>299</sup> Disappointingly, few academics write about the salvation/justification aspect of Wesley's teaching – there appears to be a disproportionate focus on holiness/sanctification and social justice – usually with some comment along the lines of "...The gospel that Wesley proclaimed was that God, in love, not only desired to forgive people but also to deliver them from the power of sin and transform them by the Spirit. His goal was that people who responded would become holy people" (Field, 2015, p. 178), and then go on to expound some aspect of critical importance in terms of engaging with the needs of a hurting world. I am in no way suggesting that such research is unimportant, or that such issues are somehow insignificant – it is true to say "not only", but at some stage the aspects of forgiveness and conversion should occupy the attention of the academic study of Wesley's work. In my defence of this thesis Prof Xolile Simon taxed me with the inadequacies of "yes/but" arguments – it seems to me that evangelism suffers extensively from this sort of diminution in academic circles. I am concerned that John Wesley would have found it a strange development from his work, which seems to have had a seamless connection between salvation and holiness, and equivalent stress on both aspects of the life of faith. One might be inclined to wonder if people were not concerned with the Wesley truck without its Wesley engine? One of my concerns in this study is to investigate how the Church in the first place *becomes* the church which then becomes the holy people. There is apparently very little academic interest in that aspect of Wesley's message. Outler refers to Wesley's "...intensely practical concern for the order of salvation in the Christian life. The controlling theological inquiry throughout his life was into the meaning of becoming and being a Christian in all aspects of Christian existence" (1984, p. 13).

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of how these understandings might to be applied in the Church; and how the Church had compromised its biblical heritage and reneged on its “deontological<sup>300</sup>” responsibilities<sup>301</sup>.

Received wisdom was that the priests and the gentry should take responsibility for the wellbeing and direction of the poor: Wesley’s way was to restore agency to the lowest ranks of society. In so doing he would have contributed to realigning power relations in society<sup>302</sup>. One of Wesley’s most audacious moves was to entrust those who were entrustable with responsibility: people needed to be allowed responsibility for their own spiritual wellbeing<sup>303</sup>; they were to be permitted to be responsible for their own theological development<sup>304</sup>; they were to be entrusted with leadership according to their powers (and not according to their gender or official education)<sup>305</sup>; they could be entrusted with communication with the alternatively faithed<sup>306</sup>; and they should be encouraged to look out for one others’ interests, arguably one of the most basic responsibilities of the Christian Church<sup>307</sup>.

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<sup>300</sup> (Louw, 2008, p. 72)

<sup>301</sup> Wesley cites a letter from Edward Willis, who calls Church of England members “sheep that are starved by their own shepherds” (1827-2, p. 328).

<sup>302</sup> And this agency seems to have had, as we should expect, a socially transformational role: his evangelism was missionally valid because it was good news for every bad-news issue faced by the poor. Outler put it like this: “The effect of his movement was to provide a new experience for thousands of faceless men and women – experiences of worth before God, of new dignity and status in intensive small groups, together with unaccustomed leadership roles.... This helped to create a new kind of political creature...” (1991, p. 62).

<sup>303</sup> One of Wesley’s preoccupations in the *Journal* was the need to “save one’s own soul”, a reference to Ezekiel 18 which was apparently extremely formative for Wesley’s thinking: every person is answerable to God personally for their response to God, not conditioned by the behaviour of their parent or child (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 471, etc) – a reference to “saving one’s own soul” occurs about eighty times in the *Journal*.

<sup>304</sup> For Wesley this meant primarily a habitual reading of the Bible. He enforces this throughout his life, one example of which is found in a characteristically clear sermon he once preached, of which he records a summary in the *Journal*: “I showed, concerning the Holy Scriptures, 1. That to search, (that is, read and hear them,) is a command of God. 2. That this command is given to all, believers or unbelievers. 3. That this is commanded or ordained as a means of grace, a means of conveying the grace of God to all, whether unbelievers (such as those to whom he first gave this command, and those to whom faith cometh by hearing) or believers, who by experience know, that “all Scripture is profitable,” or a means to this end, “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works.” (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 279). Wesley saw life in personal eschatological categories – each person would answer personally to God on the Day of Judgement for the way s/he has led her/his life (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 12)

<sup>305</sup> Wesley’s admiration of strong women leaders like Jane Muncy (and like his mother!), and an appreciation of their capacity for ministry, can be read as a socially subversive feature of his *Journal* (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 320)

<sup>306</sup> Wesley’s conviction that non-ordained people ought to be actively involved in widespread preaching in order to achieve God’s purposes was one that he had to work extremely hard to persuade both his followers and his opponents to accept (1827-4, p. 82). But it was key to his understanding of the reality that “God sends by whom he will” (1827-1, p. 549; 1827-2, p. 438; 1827-3, p. 81).

<sup>307</sup> From beginning to end, the *Journal* emphasises the need for Christians to help each other live the Christian life (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 15.; 1827-2, p. 183; 1827-3, p. 50; 1827-4, pp. 38, etc.).

I would argue that it is important for Methodists now to have the fullest possible access to Wesley's writings in order to appreciate exactly how daringly he dealt with the tradition that he inherited, pushing it to its logical limits and finding new trajectories from the old into the new<sup>308</sup>. The appropriate response to the diminution of the influence of the Church now might lie not so much in the processes Wesley introduced, but the attitude towards tradition and context that he modelled.

### **Straightforward Hermeneutic**

What Wesley entrusted to his Methodists was an enquiring attitude towards the Bible and context. The introduction to the *Forty-Four Sermons* gives Wesley's view on how he approached the Bible and how he expected his preachers to approach the Scriptures in turn (1787, pp. v-vii): he expected them to be lifelong searchers<sup>309</sup>. Although he was demonstrably a voracious reader (of authors with whom he both agreed with and disagreed<sup>310</sup>), he considered himself to be *homo unius libri*, a "man of a single book" (1787, p. vi). "O give me that book!" he exclaims, "At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me." (1787, p. vi). Wesley believed that God would guide those who read his word to understand it: through prayer and reflection, through searching parallel passages if necessary, through consultation with other Christians and through research into the appropriate literature. "And what I thus learn, I teach" (1787, p. vi). It becomes clear that for Wesley the Bible was the datum of faith, and he had no suspicions about the possibility of psychological and cultural discontinuities between people writing in the different ages of production of the Scripture, nor any sense of Lessing's "*garstige Graben*" cf. (Bosch, 1991, p. 270) between the times of the biblical authors and subsequent ages.

This highly individual-centred approach to hermeneutic did not mean that Wesley taught anything fanciful, allegorical or strained - although he was often accused in his time of being "enthusiastic" (= fanatical in 18<sup>th</sup> century English (1827-1, pp. 10, and throughout)). His published sermons are always extremely logical, and without much apparent rhetorical

<sup>308</sup> A major part of Albert Outler's life work seems to have been an appeal to both Methodists and people of other Christian traditions to reconsider the importance of John Wesley's thought, not only for its historical importance, but also for its helpfulness in current theological debate<sup>308</sup> (1991, pp. 36-37; 53-54; 73; 94-95; 98; 110; 124; 142; 157; 172-173; 176; 209).

<sup>309</sup> One of his lifelong themes was that Christians should "search the scriptures" (based on the KJV translation of John 5:39) – by which he understood a careful reading and re-reading of the Bible, studying it and listening carefully to sermons (1827-1, pp. 280, 426, etc.). Wesley never expected that he would finally work out everything God had to say through the Bible, or ever fully understand God (a regular biblical exclamation of his was "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" – a reference to Romans 11:33 (1827-1, p. 350; 1827-2, pp. 173, etc.)

<sup>310</sup> The index to the 1922 edition of his *Journal* helpfully records the title of each of the almost 250 works that he read and commented on in his travels alone, what I refer to as his "horseback reading" (1827-4, pp. 550-555).

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ornament. His on-the-street extempore sermons, on the other hand, appear to have been less carefully structured, and more carefully rhetorically tailored to specific audiences<sup>311</sup>. And he had no truck whatsoever with fanciful or allegorical approaches to the Bible<sup>312</sup>. One needn't look for any particular subtlety in Wesley's hermeneutic – he “designed plain truth for plain people” (1787, p. v), he called it as he saw it and left the outcome to God.

Wesley, it needs to be noted at this point, had a straightforward faith in the presence and power of God, and a faith that God was powerfully at work in bringing people back to himself; “God is at work” was an important concept to him (1827-4, p. 75). Evangelism was not the message explaining an absent God. It was the message explaining the current workings of God in the world of politics and nature and the human heart – the Scripture was the key to understanding what God was doing<sup>313</sup>. The Word of God could only be understood in the light of the contemporary actions of God. This conviction of simply riding on the coat-tails of the divine seems to have allowed Wesley infinite adaptability: he was working out God's purposes as he went along, discovering what the Bible and the current situation were revealing about God in an ongoing journey of discovery.

What this straightforward hermeneutic meant for Wesley was that he considered himself (and the Methodists he shepherded) obligated to put the Bible into action in the whole of life – his first instinct was towards a conscientious obedience. He was not inclined to follow the example of many whose ready excuse was that since there had been so many cultural changes since Bible times, apparently awkward requirements could be ignored<sup>314</sup>.

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<sup>311</sup> Wesley assumed he should match text to context; on one occasion he writes “I suited my discourse to my audience, which was considerably increased” (1827-3, p. 331). His occasional comments on this process give us a clear idea of the adaptability of his preaching (1827-3, pp. 368, 389; 1827-4, pp. 379, 380, 390). He also frankly acknowledges when he occasionally mismatches topic and audience (1827-3, p. 468).

<sup>312</sup> “Count Marsay,” he complains of one popular author, “was doubtless a pious man, but a thorough enthusiast; guided, in all his steps, not by the written word, but by his own imagination; which he calls the Spirit” (1827-4, p. 50). He is equally severe on those whose “...false, imaginary inspiration is enthusiasm. That theirs is only imaginary inspiration appears hence, it contradicts the Law and the Testimony [one of Wesley's favourite terms for the Bible]” (1827-1, pp. 170-171). And nor would he ever countenance one of his Methodist flock setting “her private revelations (so called) on the self-same foot with the written word” (1827-1, p. 286), since “If these impressions be received as the rule of action, instead of the written word, I know nothing so wicked or absurd but we may fall into, and that without remedy” (1827-1, p. 319). [See also 1827-1, p. 398; 1827-3, p. 124; 1827-4, pp. 152-153, 456]

<sup>313</sup> He is frustrated at his lack of knowledge of Welsh: “In the afternoon I preached at Llanfehengel, about six miles southwest of Llangefnye. I have not seen a people so deeply affected since we came into Anglesey; their cries and tears continued a long time without any intermission. O that we could declare to them, in their own tongue, the wonderful works of God!” (1827-2, pp. 50-51)

<sup>314</sup> Wesley said unapologetically of himself: “My ground is the Bible. Yea, I am a Bible-bigot. I follow it in all things, both great and small” (1827-3, p. 255). This self-deprecatory comment hides a considerable level of nuance in his approach to Scripture – he was not “bigoted” in the same way as those amongst today's fundamentalists who fail to perceive (or admit) their own hidden ideologies (cf. Young, et al., 2013, p. 110). Wesley's understanding of “simplicity” was carefully positioned so as not to allow for “silliness”: “From Matthew 18:3, I endeavoured to show those who use the word without

### **A Hermeneutic of Honesty: Experimental<sup>315</sup> Religion**

That was where the issue of “experimental faith” came into play. John Wesley reasoned that if the faith one currently had noticeably failed to produce the effects that the Bible claimed that it should have, was the Bible wrong, was one interpreting the Bible wrong, or was one’s faith wrong? What attitudes, actions and ways of thought could one try out in order to resolve these apparent inconsistencies? And what about elements of Christian obedience in the Bible that did not appear to be part of one’s life? Should one not seek to incorporate them in one’s life?<sup>316</sup> And then, what about Christian “dispositions” or “affections” (love, joy, etc.) that were portrayed as a hallmark of the Christian life in the Bible, but on self-examination appeared to be weak or absent in one’s own life? This concept of “affections”<sup>317</sup> was the basis for self-examination for Wesley and the early Methodists<sup>318</sup>.

Wesley’s hermeneutic forbade an easy avoidance of these issues. Conscience reigned supreme for him (1827-1, p. 455). He constantly strove to inculcate frankness, openness,

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understanding it, what Christian simplicity properly is, and what it is not. It is not ignorance or folly; it is not enthusiasm or credulity. It is faith, humility, willingness to be taught, and freedom from evil reasonings” (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 124)

<sup>315</sup> See above 0

<sup>316</sup> A classic example is Wesley’s interaction with the ethics narrative of Matthew 25. In his methodical way he actually set about finding prisoners to visit and hungry people to feed – to the derision, at first, of his sophisticated colleagues at the university (1827-1, pp. 8, 280, etc.). This concern for the stranger, hungry, naked and prisoner was foundational to the Methodist imperative to care practically as spiritual people.

<sup>317</sup> Wesley got to the point in his understanding, early in his career, of maintaining that if one was not truly feeling what one was saying about love, peace, etc., then one had not yet achieved the intended goal of faith. For him, this was the essence of being a Methodist: “the societies in all these parts, walk by one rule, knowing religion is holy tempers; and striving to worship God, not in form only, but likewise “in spirit and in truth” (1827-4, p. 307). His own spiritual journey was marked by this struggle for coherence: “I want [= “lack” – ed.] that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it” he wrote in the depths of his struggle after his failure to re-introduce a “New Testament Church” in Georgia (1827-1, p. 77). This was a characteristic of 18<sup>th</sup> century awakening theology, shared for instance by Jonathan Edwards (Edwards, 1746, p. 23ff.).

<sup>318</sup> If the Bible said that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:8), for instance, why was he afraid to die in a storm crossing the Atlantic, or when scared out of his wits by an American thunderstorm? (1827-1, p. 35). Did he not love God enough? And what was “perfect love”, anyway? Love of God, or love of human beings, or both? And what was the measure of this love? Was it measured by dutiful compliance to rubrics of worship and charity? And could one truly say that one loved if one did not feel particularly loving? What sense did it make to define an emotion by anything other than feeling? This dominated Wesley’s thinking throughout his life (cf. Heitzenrater, 1995, p. 48). Another pre-occupation of his was the issue of faith and salvation: If one was to be saved by grace through faith, what was that faith? How did the belief a disciple might have had compare with the undoubted belief that a devil must have – and yet the devil, fully believing in the power of God and reality of the resurrection, could not be said to be saved? And what are we as humans supposed to be saved from? And how does that salvation work itself out? And so on and on. Wesley did develop a system of answers to these issues, but he always cast his theology in the shape of a quest for peace with God – and that was yet another biblical emotion that one could not have without knowing one had it (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 77; 1827-4, pp. 298, etc.). An important clue to Wesley’s theology is this commitment to ruthless, logical integrity. This was not easily accepted; he complains “How hard is it to fix, even on serious hearers, a lasting sense of the nature of true religion! Let it be right opinions, right modes of worship, or anything, rather than right tempers!” (1827-4, p. 334)

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inner honesty, outward integrity, and lack of pretence<sup>319</sup>. He most notably considered it much better to openly criticise somebody else than to inwardly harbour grudges<sup>320</sup>. Christians, he felt, should search out the hidden springs of motivation in each other, and strive for the deepest possible level of integrity<sup>321</sup>.

In crafting my grounded theory I shall have to consider whether this “straightforward” hermeneutic is still possible – whether it is necessary to ignore the insights into alterity between ages and cultures, or whether there is not some hermeneutical spring that could continue to drive a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the Wesleyan evangelical project.

It was essential to Wesley that there could be no missing or mistaking whether or not one had come to experience “saving faith” and “peace with God”; it was a faith which one could not have without knowing one had it (1827-1, p. 77). An essential part of his quest was the quest for people to be able to honestly claim to know that they were saved.

As I have noted above, John Wesley was concerned with transforming the Anglican Church, not replacing it [4.2.2]. For him the basic line of orthodoxy was self-evident: the doctrines of the Anglican Church were the undisputed norm – he earnestly promoted the Anglican way as the “truest” embodiment of the mythical New Testament church (1827-1, p. 262). His emphasis on personal experience of salvation and perfection in love<sup>322</sup> was an explication of something that was already there *in potentia*, and which merely needed especial explication<sup>323</sup>. This approach was broad enough to include a wide range of opinions on aspects of worship and church governance (which Wesley regarded as peripheral to the main concerns of God). But at the same time he was comfortably, technically, within the bounds of acceptable Anglican orthodoxy. Wesley was often accused of heresy, but never

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<sup>319</sup> Wesley considered “Frankness/plainness of speech” as one of the cardinal virtues, and “reserve” as one of the leading vices. The only way to a life of Christian integrity was to not pretend about personal sin, whether your own or somebody else’s (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 54; 1827-1, pp. 333, 383; 1827-2, p. 97). And personal transparency extended to institutional transparency: “I desire to do all things openly and above-board. I would have all the world, and especially all of our society, see not only all the steps we take, but the reasons why we take them” (1827-4, pp. 197-198) .

<sup>320</sup> Speaking of Martin Luther, he says “But O! What pity that he had no faithful friend! None that would, at all hazards, rebuke him plainly and sharply, for his rough, untractable spirit, and bitter zeal for opinions, so greatly obstructive of the work of God!” (1827-2, p. 107). Wesley expressed satisfaction when somebody would come straight out and tell him when they disapproved of him rather than hiding their true feelings under the guise of politeness (1827-1, p. 141).

<sup>321</sup> This was not code for controlling subordinates by imbalance of openness – Wesley himself expected to be probed in return; for him this was the essence of Christian fellowship – helping one another to live the godly life, an arrangement he initiated at university, refined in Georgia and then submitted to throughout his life (1827-1, pp. 7, 27).

<sup>322</sup> Wesley had to stave off caricatures of his understanding of “perfection in love”. He held that it was: “... the love of God and man producing all those fruits which are described in our Lord’s Sermon upon the mount.” (1827-3, p. 68)

<sup>323</sup> Wesley made a summary of the doctrines of the Church that served as a rough guide for his Methodist societies: “... I began more narrowly to inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is, concerning the much controverted point of justification by faith; and the sum of what I found in the Homilies, I extracted and printed for the use of others.” (1827-1, p. 162)

formally charged or convicted of straying from the confines of the doctrine of the Church of England (cf. Outler, 1984, p. 4). His standard response when accused of heterodox opinion was to cite the Bible, the *Homilies*, and the *39 Articles* (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 58, 162, 224, 384; 1827-4, p. 354).

Within that framework, Wesley could be regarded as the apostle of freedom of conscience. He was scrupulous about allowing anybody from whatever their church affiliation, to be a full member of his connexion<sup>324</sup>. Part of his discipline was that joining a society did not oblige one to leave one's church of origin. He demanded that people develop and hold convictions about doctrine. And as we have seen he certainly held extremely firm convictions himself. But he also demanded that people hold their convictions with scrupulous freedom, and without rancour towards others. In his understanding "doctrine" was one's best shot at comprehending the truth, which of itself – by definition - could never be fully comprehended by any human system. His basic position was that the Bible always referenced something real, and the task of the disciple was to try his/her hardest to follow the lead of Scripture in the most authentic way possible. The rigours of this process were such that the proper attitude to those who disagreed with one was compassion, interest, and conversation - never condemnation. In some ways this is an approach that chimes with postmodern sensibilities in an almost uncanny way...in the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was already a voice for the radical independence of personal conviction<sup>325</sup>.

### **A Hermeneutic of Salvation**

My concern in this research is the idea of conversion, and what it takes to become a Christian. Whatever else Wesley desired, he plainly wanted people to be rescued from sin and reconciled to God – he went to the Bible looking for that, and that is what he found. The *Journal* shows that this was a lifelong preoccupation. For him all of humanity – every nation, culture group, class group, social institution, and every church had only two types of people

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<sup>324</sup> "There is no religious Society under heaven which requires nothing of men in order to their admission into it, but a desire to save their souls. Look all around you, you cannot be admitted into the Church or Society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them, and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on you holding this or that opinion, but they think and let think. Neither do they impose any mode of worship, but you may continue to worship in your former manner, be that what it may. Now I do not know any other religious Society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed, or has been allowed since the days of the Apostles" (1827-4, p. 431)

<sup>325</sup> An appealing footnote on Wesley's value of honesty was that it was repugnant to him that Christians would "over-report" on conversion rates; he complains of one boastful society: "O when will even the Methodists learn not to exaggerate? After all the pompous accounts I had of the vast increase in the Society, it has not increased at all; nay, it is a little smaller than it was three years ago" (1827-4, p. 124). Nor did he convey an impression that he only dealt with great and glorious crowds. He winsomely reports on meagre and dry audiences, even, once, on an occasion when nobody at all turned up to listen to him (1827-3, p. 260).

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in it: the saved and the unsaved – just attending church, even with the most religious of devotion, did not count; Wesley had felt the ambivalence of being devout-but-not-saved for tormenting years<sup>326</sup> (1827-1, p. 84). Wesley earnestly believed that every human being was in danger: a looming eschatological judgment relativised every aspect of human life, and only faith in Christ could change the terrifying threat of eternal damnation<sup>327</sup>.

Arising from this lively anxiety about the welfare of himself and others, Wesley developed an understanding that salvation must be the central concern of human beings with relation to God<sup>328</sup>. Religion that placed anything other than the plight of humanity in the centre of the frame of attention was by definition dysfunctional - a hopeless attempt to “establish one’s own righteousness” (1827-4, p. 278), or to rescue oneself, by being very good<sup>329</sup>. He sometimes referred to this as attempting “salvation by works” – referencing Romans 9:30-32 (1827-2, p. 401). But Wesley had always had an instinct that human behaviour must nevertheless be important to God, along with that change which God alone could bring about within the human heart. But the apparent logic that the harder one tried the better one would become had become crushingly burdensome to him – and he really had tried *extremely* hard. His ruthless self-examining honesty never found himself to be particularly well-improved, or in any way a better Christian. Eventually he found a resolution to the problem through the Lutheran-Moravian vision that God rescues people only and solely through faith

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<sup>326</sup> A telling passage, written after his return from Georgia and before his Aldersgate experience, shows how deeply Wesley felt his own unworthiness: “This, then, have I learned in the ends of the earth — That I “am fallen short of the glory of God:” That my whole heart is “altogether corrupt and abominable;” and, consequently, my whole life; (seeing it cannot be, that an “evil tree” should “bring forth good fruit:”) That “alienated” as I am from the life of God,” I am “a child of wrath”, an heir of hell: That my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, so far from making any atonement for the least of those sins, which “are more in number than the hairs of my head,” that the most specious of them need an atonement themselves, or they cannot abide his righteous Judgment; that “having the sentence of death” in my heart, and having nothing in or of myself to plead, I have no hope, but that of being justified freely, “through the redemption that is in Jesus:” I have no hope, but that if I seek I shall find Christ, and “be found in him not having my own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (1827-1, p. 76) – cf. Philippians 3:9.

<sup>327</sup> The reason Wesley was so anxious about what faith was and whether he had “saving faith” was that he felt that damnation was his due. To give Wesley credit, this understanding was standard in Christianity of the time; but it was rare to find somebody who would take the consequences as seriously as Wesley in terms of trying desperately to get as many as possible to be rescued. Most Christians either tacitly disbelieved the doctrine of hell, or callously relegated the lost to their fate whilst arrogating salvation to themselves as somehow one of the things they deserved.

<sup>328</sup> Wesley writes in the introduction to his *Forty Four Sermons*: “I am a spirit come from God and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing – the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore” (1787, p. vi).

<sup>329</sup> Wesley was contemptuous of any thought that ecclesial or temporal prestige could any way give anybody a salvific advantage. His standard footnote on describing a great leader or a wealthy home was along the lines of expecting that they would have to leave this privilege behind when they answered to God; so he could comment on the architectural glories of Fonmon Castle: “...How soon may the master of this great house too be called away into an everlasting habitation!” (1827-1, p. 437).

– that none of their efforts, even their religious efforts, have anything to do with God's gracious gift; and; incidentally, that liturgical actions were just as much "works" as charity or self-sacrifice<sup>330</sup>, and incidentally, just as offensive to God as drunkenness or "lewdness". And this raised the frightening prospect, common to all preachers of the eighteenth century awakening, that business as usual in the Church might not be enough to in fact achieve the safety of salvation. In our attempt to find a grounded theory I believe that this challenge to the status quo of contemporary religion deserves a closer look as well.

What saved Wesley's vision from being an egocentric quest for personal salvation – and where he parted from the radical pietism of the Moravians - were three considerations: *firstly* was that salvation was not an instant of realisation alone, but a realisation that introduced one to a process of salvation – "salvation and full salvation" in Wesley's formulation (1827-4, p. 292)<sup>331</sup>. *Secondly*, was the sense of culpability and denial of one's salvation if one did not then "deliver one's soul" by sharing the possibility of finding this salvation-path with as many other human beings as one could possibly influence<sup>332</sup>. And *thirdly*, the absolute necessity of making the world a better place in order to reflect the kindly intentions of God to his world<sup>333</sup>. The essence of the Puritan vision, as portrayed so influentially in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* narrative was that the individual left home, family, church and society to follow the heavenward quest<sup>334</sup>. For Wesley the only true way of getting to heaven was by fulfilling the mission for which one had been placed *within* world, society, church and family (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 183). This had the effect of putting the way to heaven within the reach of every person, and especially the poor, as well as integrating pre- and post-conversion Christian life; one was called to "work out one's salvation in fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12), a

<sup>330</sup> Wesley investigated this exhaustively as he recorded the testimony of Moravians on his visit to Herrnhut (1827-1, pp. 114-147).

<sup>331</sup> Although it must be noted that Wesley was very definite about the logical distinction between the two great components of salvation; he held: "I believe justification to be wholly distinct from sanctification, and necessarily antecedent to it" (1827-1, p. 225).

<sup>332</sup> Finding the village of Lead Hills in Scotland had been without a pastor for four years, Wesley comments with customary ascerbity: "... So in Scotland, the poor have not the Gospel preached! Who shall answer for the blood of these men?" (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 450)

<sup>333</sup> Wesley was an idealist, but also a methodical pragmatist; failing the best, he was willing to settle for a temporary approximate: "I question whether a mortal can arrive to a greater degree of perfection, than steadily to do good, and for that very reason patiently and meekly to suffer evil" he writes in his introductory letter to the *Journal*, quoting a letter from his father.

<sup>334</sup> Bunyan writes this advice in his "*Heavenly Footman*", in which he makes it clear that things of this world are only designed to distract and entangle the "runner" – escape is the great imperative: "Take heed that you have not an ear open to every one that calleth after you as you are in your journey. Men that run, you know, if any do call after them, saying, I would speak with you, or go not too fast, and you shall have my company with you, if they run for some great matter, they use to say, Alas, I cannot stay, I am in haste, pray talk not to me now; neither can I stay for you, I am running for a wager: if I win I am made, if I lose I am undone, and therefore hinder me not. .... I give thee notice of this betimes, knowing that thou shalt have enough call after thee, even the devil, sin, this world, vain company, pleasures, profits, esteem among men, ease, pomp, pride, together with an innumerable company of such companions." (1698, p. 14).

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favourite reference of Wesley's<sup>335</sup>. He achieved a practicably workable synthesis between the “*sola fide*” principle of the reformation, and the value of works: the nexus was the mission or purposes of God in this world, beyond the benefit of individual believers.

By ‘rescued from sin” Wesley had a specific schema in mind, clearly laid out in the sermon that gets headline place in his *Forty-Four Sermons*<sup>336</sup>. Through faith in Christ one is rescued from the guilt of past sin, the fear of any consequences of past sin, and the power of sin to rule one’s life – the Methodist goal is a guilt-free, fear-free and destructive-behaviour-and-attitude-free life. And we are not only *saved from sin*, we are *saved for holiness*, which in Wesley’s thinking was a simple, unselfconscious pursuit of doing good in the world, motivated by a conscious love of God and others: a proper understanding of the universal freedom of grace completely undercutting any despising of others for any perceived lesser capacity of doing good.

The universal scope of this salvation is represented by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Sunday School formulation - the “Four Alls” mantra - which still echoes in the consciousness of 21<sup>st</sup> century Methodist clergy<sup>337</sup> (cf. Fitzgerald, 1903). In full, this refers to Wesley’s conviction that *all* people need to be saved, that they can *all* actually be saved, that they can *all* know that they are saved, and that they can *all* be “saved to the uttermost” a reference to Wesley’s interpretation of Hebrews 7:25, by which he defines the saved life as being one that ought to take the disciple on a journey towards complete perfection in love (1787, pp. 457-479). The force of this formulation of Wesley’s thought (which, as an old slogan, now barely seems to carry any power of clarification) originally lay in its easy communication to the masses. If you volunteered as a preacher, you knew how you were expected to preach, where, and to whom. Congregations in turn could expect a certain approach on the part of their preachers – everything in the Bible fitted somewhere into the plan of salvation, and preachers were intended to be busy with communicating with those not yet within the circle of the saved. Wesley’s hermeneutic was foundational for the Methodist Church.

This popularised hermeneutic had two collateral consequences: firstly, it furthered Wesley’s unintended radical democratisation project. If all “men<sup>338</sup>” are equally sinners, and all “men”

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<sup>335</sup> Wesley often came back to this principle; this world was never to be denied or despised in favour of the world to come (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 421) (1827-3, p. 272) (1827-4, p. 199).

<sup>336</sup> *Salvation by Faith, preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford, Before the University, on June 18, 1738* (Wesley, 1787, pp. 1-11)

<sup>337</sup> As I have noted, this 20<sup>th</sup> century mantra is the base line for Wesleyan knowledge for many of the Methodist ministers [Table 1 John Wesley References in Interviews].

<sup>338</sup> In dealing with an 18<sup>th</sup> century author it would get tiresome to note every instance of non-gender-inclusive language usage with disapproval. I wish Wesley had been more attuned to the logical implications of the tangent of democratisation which he espoused.

equally saved, then all people are equal before the sight of God<sup>339</sup>. The logic of this line of thought would have been likely to have given popular theological validation to subsequent labour and feminist movements – especially since Wesley himself followed this logic into promotion of the gifts and abilities of women preachers, nurtured through the open forum given to all at Wesley's love-feasts<sup>340</sup> (1827-4, p. 32). If your only qualification was something given you by God - salvation by faith through grace - then a poor saved peasant had higher ultimate standing than a "poor" lost landlord. Likewise, a saved woman had a voice in the court of God, the Methodist love feast and in the Methodist pulpit, so why not in the wider community? And if a saved slave had more standing before God than a "lost" colonial plantation owner, then that would potentially lead to serious ideological undermining of the burgeoning colonialism movement<sup>341</sup> (cf. Wesley, 1773). Wesley's straightforward hermeneutic, courageously applied, might cause any amount of damage to the *status quo*. In Lamin Sanneh's way of thinking, the translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the 18<sup>th</sup> century poor through Wesley's work was likely to produce social effects of a far wider range than he could ever have envisaged (cf. Sanneh, 1989).

Secondly, if salvation was the hard-fought, cataclysmic, life-giving transition into a life in which one was expected to work that salvation out in love and good works, then the self-

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<sup>339</sup> Wesley wrote within the conventions of his patriarchal age; but he was deeply egalitarian in terms of both class and gender: "...In the afternoon I was desired to meet one of the honourable women, whom I found a mere sinner, groaning under the mighty hand of God" (1827-1, p. 342). He reduces gentry to "mere sinners" without a qualm: "Every night, while I stayed, many of the rich and honourable crowded in among us. And is not "God able, even of these stones, to raise up children to Abraham" (1827-2, p. 256).

<sup>340</sup> Testimonies to the grace of God were encouraged from everybody, and probably constituted the first steps in public speaking for many: "At the love-feast in the evening, many, both men and women, spoke their experience in a manner which affected all that heard" (1827-3, pp. 47, 361). This was part of the counter-culturally positive attitude towards the capacities of women engendered by the example and influence of his mother, whom he reckoned "...had been, in her measure and degree, a preacher of righteousness" (1827-1, p. 386). The Methodist work could be carried forward by women as well as men: "I went to Wells, a considerable sea-port, twelve miles from Fakenham, where also Miss Franklin had opened a door, by preaching abroad, though at the peril of her life. She was followed by a young woman of the town, with whom I talked largely, and found her very sensible, and much devoted to God. From her I learnt that till the Methodists came, they had none but female Teachers in this country; and that there were six of these within ten or twelve miles, all of whom were members of the Church of England" (1827-4, p. 223)

<sup>341</sup> Wesley's attitude towards slavery is unambiguous: "It is a very afflictive confederation, that the rights and liberties of mankind have been so much the object of publick notice, yet the same corrupt principles still maintain their power in the minds of most Slave Holders. Indeed nothing can more clearly and positively militate against the slavery of the Negroes, than the several declarations lately published, with so great an appearance of solemnity, thro' all the colonies, viz. " We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, " that they are endowed by their creator with Certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And " That all men are " by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society they cannot by any compact, deprive or divert " their property, namely the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety" (1773, p. 28). One of the reasons Reitz gives in his defence of the great trek of 1838 (less than 30 years after Wesley's death) was that the missionaries were disturbing the "proper" relationship between master and servant (cf. Reitz, 1899, p. 3).

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scrutiny placed on oneself during the anguish of one's original quest for God would need to be carried out throughout one's lifetime. Wesley held a qualified version of the Calvinistic concept of the "ultimate perseverance of the Saints" – he believed that although one could lose faith and fall away from grace, it was also possible to reach a place of security and freedom from anxiety (1827-1, pp. 158, 430). Wesley knew none of the faith/works dichotomy in thought and lifestyle that came to characterise American fundamentalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He chided Luther for his cavalier dismissal of James (1827-1, p. 185). Loving, self-sacrificial dedication of oneself to the temporal well-being of one's fellow human beings was the most obvious response imaginable to the "glad news of salvation". For Wesley one could hardly claim to be saved if one was not living out a life of sacrificial service to humanity in every way. Many commentators on John Wesley have shown how powerful this hermeneutic of salvation was in motivating people to be involved in societal change<sup>342</sup>.

This is important for my argument, because so much thought and discussion about evangelism has been absorbed by the frequently observed disconnection between evangelism and social concern. Wesley would have been distressed, judging by his *Journal*, to see that this situation had ever developed, and would most probably have set it down to too little evangelism and too incomplete an understanding of conversion. For my purposes I observe from reading the *Journal* that a strong Salvation Hermeneutic *can* potentially lead to a widely compassionate and socially engaged lifestyle – depending on how truly Wesleyan that hermeneutic might be. In fact, if a concern for temporal wellbeing of others does not emerge alongside a concern for the temporal/eternal salvation of people, then it has failed according to the standards Wesley would have applied, because the fruit of faith is love, and if you do not have love it must be that you do not yet have faith.

What we see from reading the *Journal* is that this need for rescue was the lens through which Wesley read scripture – the urgent, desperate search for a way out of a predicament that he felt personally, believed was universal, and which dominated his thinking. Wesley would have been aware of the logic of confirmation bias – he was a student of logic – but still this one single theme controlled his view of the Bible. And yet at the same time it would be wrong to say that he saw that which was not present in the Scriptural narrative, or failed to see other important theological dimensions. But this was his controlling narrative, and as I develop my grounded theory I will need to consider whether a controlling narrative is a helpful concept for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and if so, what that narrative might be.

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<sup>342</sup> A good recent survey in the context of the South African church is Harold le Roux's PhD thesis on (le Roux, 2001)

### 4.2.3 A Story-line of "Church": A Narrative Ecclesiology

As I have pointed out, one of John Wesley's rhetorical strategies was to preach up a simple and attractive vision of a "simple early church"<sup>343</sup>. In this regard he was very pragmatic, as we have noted; he was prepared to try and generate a "best possible" re-creation in contemporary contexts. He was especially interested in re-instituting and establishing what he saw as the basic attitudes of the early Christians<sup>344</sup>. In this process he was not iconoclastic; he had deep respect for the Anglican tradition. In fact, in his view he felt that the Methodist Anglicans were being proper Anglicans, because they were following the Anglican tradition more closely – in terms of the Anglican church itself having originally been an attempt to return to New Testament roots. And he felt that since Methodism was a "revival of primitive Christianity", and since it was happening within the Anglican Church, it was a sign to him of the authenticity of that Church as a vehicle for God's purposes<sup>345</sup>. Wesley abhorred the suggestion that he was a "dissenter".<sup>346</sup>

One gains the impression from the *Journal* of a man who loves his church, its tradition, and its potential. His understanding of Church included more than the minimalist vision of John Smyth and the Baptists (cf. Volf, 1998, p. 138). Wesley did not intend to dissuade people from their inherited modes of liturgy – even though he preached a strongly pro-Anglican-Church line, insisting that his Anglican followers attend their parish church more faithfully than ever<sup>347</sup>. But he firmly believed that it was possible to live in two parallel structures, the Methodist Society and the Anglican Church. He considered that membership of the

<sup>343</sup> The Acts of the Apostles seems to have been paradigmatic for John Wesley in understanding the awakening, and in planning its organisation (1827-1, p. 404). Trying to make sense of the Moravian teaching on conversion, his first point of reference is Paul's conversion and others in Acts (1827-1, p. 89). Accused of being a fanatic, Wesley references Acts to demonstrate that in that case he is in the good company of the Apostles (1827-2, p. 261)

<sup>344</sup> He derived his "plain speaking" theory from a belief that the early Christians were themselves plain speakers; he refers to what he saw as the "...openness, frankness, and plainness of speech, so manifest in the Apostles and Primitive Christians" (1827-2, p. 179)

<sup>345</sup> Reading the *Journal* one does not get a fair idea of just how many non-Anglicans were involved in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Awakening. Although Wesley mentions highly influential actors such as Whitefield and Howell Harris in passing, the story is about John Wesley and Anglican Methodism. To be fair, Whitefield's *Journal* has the same imbalance (cf. Whitefield, 1960).

<sup>346</sup> Wesley was often accused of being a dissenter – a Baptist or Congregationalist – because of his opposition to the status quo of the Church of England. He was always at pains to defend himself: "...the Ordinary of Newgate came to me, and with much vehemence told me, he was sorry I should turn Dissenter from the Church of England. I told him, if it was so, I did not know it: At which he seemed a little surprised" (1827-1, p. 262)

<sup>347</sup> Wesley modelled this by dutifully attending church services at Parish churches even if he was not himself asked to preach (Wesley, 1827-4, p. 364); and he never preached anywhere during the allotted time of the parish church services. A good Methodist went to church as well as chapel (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 39; 1827-3, p. 378). Wesley even dutifully attended the Kirk when he was in Scotland, although it was not to his taste: "I attended the Church of England Service in the morning, and that of the Kirk in the afternoon. Truly "no man having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new." How dull and dry did the latter appear to me, who had been accustomed to the former!" (1827-3, p. 471).

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Methodist movement simply built upon and expanded the minimalist demands of the Anglican tradition: attending extraordinary daily preaching, class-meetings, special prayer events, and through exercising greatly expanded compassion towards others in physical, emotional and spiritual need. He wanted Anglicans to be Anglican Methodists, and Baptist, Congregational and Presbyterians to be Methodists in their own traditions<sup>348</sup>.

### God Meeting Humanity in Ritual and Symbol

John Wesley patently believed that God had sent Jesus into the world to reconcile the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19 was often cited in the *Journal* - Wesley, 1827-2, p. 101; 1827-4, pp. 392, 407, etc.). And he patently believed that the church was intended to mediate the real presence of God to people through ritual and symbol. His conversion experiences (and his experiences in America) had, however, modified his expectations of being able to achieve the full purposes of God simply through liturgical reformation<sup>349</sup>. But one thing he never lost was the belief that the rituals of the church, especially the Service of Holy Communion, had power in themselves to draw people to God, to broker faith (1827-1, p. 227). His understanding was that everything about church – prayer and song and preaching and fellowship – was communicating truth about God with a view to persuading people about the reality of God’s presence. Standing or kneeling or uncovering one’s head were all signs of reverence, signs in which he intended to encode meaning<sup>350</sup>. The music *had* to make sense, with no obscurity – singing for art’s sake was not acceptable; every note of music had to convey or contribute towards conveying an awakening message of faith<sup>351</sup>. Together with

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<sup>348</sup> Wesley always felt that the inner transformation of people was something that was much more significant than their doctrinal formulations, and that wrangling between Christians over interpretations of Scripture was one of the most ugly and enervating of Christian aberrations: “I rode to Painswick; where, in the evening, I declared to all those who had been fighting and troubling one another, from the beginning hitherto, about rites and ceremonies, and modes of worship, and opinions, ‘The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’” (1827-1, pp. 382-383)

<sup>349</sup> Hammond observes that in his career subsequent to the Georgia mission “An analysis of Wesley’s theology post-Georgia reveals...areas of continuity, modification, and discontinuity” (Hammond, 2014, p. 195). One area was discontinuity with strict building-focused liturgical theory, signalled by his reluctant acknowledgement and practice of field preaching: “In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church” (1827-1, p. 184).

<sup>350</sup> Wesley was very intentional (and opinionated) about everything he did: “. I stand whenever I sing the praise of God in public. Does not the Bible give you plain precedents for this? ...I always kneel before the Lord my Maker, when I pray in public” (1827-3, p. 256).

<sup>351</sup> He did, however, love good music: “Such an organ I never saw or heard before, so large, beautiful, and so finely toned; and the music of “Glory be to God in the highest,” I think exceeded the Messiah itself” (1827-3, p. 113). But music had to “make sense”: “I heard “Judith,” an Oratorio, performed at the Lock. Some parts of it were exceeding fine; but there are two things in all modern pieces of music, which I could never reconcile to common sense. One is singing the same words ten times over; the other singing different words by different persons, alone and the same time. And this in the most

his brother Charles he developed a “sung catechism” – a body of theological hymns - that was destined to go on the lips of Methodists into all the corners of the world they might find themselves: in factories and fields, on battle-fields and in markets, in service in the houses of the great, and in the far corners of the colonised world<sup>352</sup>.

In terms of visual imagery, Wesley felt the allure of soaring, awe-inspiring architecture<sup>353</sup>, but he was never wedded to it: architecture might aid devotion, but did not determine devotion. The town cross was as often as not the only visual backdrop to his preaching (Wesley, 1827-2, pp. 65, 67, 68, 69, etc.). But Wesley was ultimately a speaker rather than a demonstrator. He inherited, possibly unrealised, a puritan distrust of ornament and image as potential communicative media for worship.

It seems quite clear that the communication of the Gospel was at the heart of Wesley's understanding of Christian symbolism. But it seems clear also that for Wesley the symbolic world of the church building was not the functional limit of the liturgy. A ruined cathedral in the snow or a town cross were indeed symbolic points of reference, potent loci for liturgy, and particularly for the spoken symbol of the sermon; but any location, no matter how despised it might be in the eyes of the world, might potentially receive an outpouring of the “power of God”<sup>354</sup> through the spoken word.

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solemn addresses to God, whether by way of prayer or of thanksgiving. This can never be defended by all the musicians in Europe, till reason is quite out of date” (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 162). His approach to congregational singing was that people should sing up and mean what they said: “At five I had the pleasure of hearing the whole congregation at the room “sing with the spirit and the understanding also” (1827-3, p. 345). The liturgical role of music was to “stir the passions [i.e. emotions]” (1827-3, p. 352) “...no music is to be heard upon earth comparable to the sound of many thousand voices, when they are all harmoniously joined together, singing praises to God and the Lamb” (1827-4, p. 55).

<sup>352</sup> Hammond points out that the Wesleys' first hymnal pre-dates even the *Hymns Ancient and Modern* of the Anglican Church, and “...was the earliest hymnal apparently designed in part for the use of an Anglican congregation”, and that it was the Wesley hymnody that caused the singing of hymns to become “integral to the emerging revival in the English-speaking world” (2014, p. 106).

<sup>353</sup> Wesley can at times speak extravagantly about architecture: “I scarce ever remember to have seen a more beautiful parish church: The more so, because its beauty results not from foreign ornaments, but from the very form and structure of it. It is very large, and of an uncommon height, and the sides are almost all window; so that it has an awful and venerable look, and, at the same time, surprisingly cheerful” (1827-2, p. 431). He loved Cathedrals, and often visited both ruined sites and still functioning cathedral churches, and commented on their architecture (1827-2, p. 99). Perhaps his most poignant comment is on the midwinter lead-miners' service: “The rough mountains round about were still white with snow. In the midst of them is a small winding valley, through which the Derwent runs. On the edge of this the little town stands, which is indeed little more than a heap of ruins. There seems to have been a large cathedral church, by the vast walls which still remain. I stood in the church-yard, under one side of the building, upon a large tombstone, round which, while I was at prayers, all the congregation kneeled down on the grass” (1827-2, p. 12)

<sup>354</sup> There are many instances of Wesley recording something along these lines: “I preached in a ground near the middle of the town, to a far larger congregation than was expected, on, “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” I believe every one present felt the power of God” (1827-1, pp. 438-439).

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### *The Priestly Service of All Priests*

John Wesley took his ordination as a serious mandate for how he was meant to live his life. As I have noted, he considered himself to be more of a “son of the church” than many apparently pastorally disinterested clergymen<sup>355</sup>. He was inclined to take in earnest what the majority of his clerical peers regarded as trivial or as having been superseded in their contemporary context – earning him the tag of “enthusiast”. One gets the feeling that once cornered by chapter and verse in the official church handbook perhaps the only recourse for many must have been invective. Wesley was a sharp disputant and had the uncomfortable penchant for referring back to the founding documents of the Anglican Church, the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and the *Homilies*, in order to validate some or other point of practice (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 384; 1827-4, pp. 36, etc.). His standard defence against complaints by clergy about his itinerant ministry was that he was only doing his ecclesial duty (by not-so-veiled inference, unlike them) (1827-1, p. 224).

Based on his salvation-hermeneutic of the Bible, in concord with the *39 Articles* and the *Homilies*, as well as the example of his father and mother<sup>356</sup>, Wesley developed a disquietingly radical understanding of the role of the parish priest<sup>357</sup>. A parish priest should be concerned for the salvation of each member of his<sup>358</sup> parish, actively trying to arouse people’s interest in the state of their own souls. In Wesley’s thought, each person within the

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<sup>355</sup> A classic defence of his orthodoxy, despite his unorthodox methods, was his response to the Newgate Ordinary: “Our twentieth Article defines a true Church, “a congregation of faithful people, wherein the true word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered.” According to this account, the Church of England is that body of faithful people (or holy believers) in England, among whom the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered. Who then are the worst Dissenters from this Church? 1. Unholy men of all kinds; swearers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, fighters, whoremongers, liars, revilers, evil-speakers; the passionate, the gay, the lovers of money, the lovers of dress, or of praise, the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God: All these are Dissenters of the highest sort, continually striking at the root of the Church; and themselves belonging in truth to no Church, but to the synagogue of Satan. 2 . Men unsound in the faith; those who deny the Scriptures of truth; those who deny the Lord that bought them; those who deny justification by faith alone, or the present salvation which is by faith; these also are Dissenters of a very high kind: For they likewise strike at the foundation; and were their principles universally to obtain, there could be no true Church upon earth. Lastly, those who unduly administer the sacraments; who (to instance but in one point) administer the Lord’s Supper to such as have neither the power nor the form of godliness. These, too, are gross Dissenters from the Church of England, and should not cast the first stone at others’ (1827-1, pp. 262-263).

<sup>356</sup> Wesley felt himself to be the heir of godly parents and their understanding of the pastoral task – a very particular family tradition of close conversation, connectedness with parishioners, and “plain dealing” with regard to the Christian life – most vividly symbolised by his preaching on his father’s tombstone after having been banned from preaching in his father’s former church (1827-1, p. 378).

<sup>357</sup> This is sharply illustrated by his evaluation of what he considered to be an under-performing priest at South Shields: “There is one here, who takes charge of all their souls; what care he takes of them is another question. It may be he neither knows nor cares whether they are going to heaven or hell. Does he ask any man, woman or child about it from one Christmas to the next? O what account will such a pastor give to the Great Shepherd in that day?” (1827-3, p. 60)

<sup>358</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain women were of course not even allowed to vote yet, let alone become priests.

parish boundaries, whether s/he adhered to the Christian faith or not, was the responsibility of the parish priest<sup>359</sup> (1827-1, p. 337).

This responsibility, in Wesley's view, ought to be carried out by the vicar leading appropriate worship services, preaching and doing pastoral visitation; by generally probing, awakening exposition of the Word of God; and by personal, prayerful application of the Word to individual households and individual souls. Wesley was always ready to acknowledge good preaching when he heard it<sup>360</sup>; and he also highlighted good examples of pastoral care when he met with those<sup>361</sup>. For Wesley, the Church system was, on paper, well suited to achieving what he considered to be the proper ends of pastoring the people of Britain.

The shortfall in this system, Wesley noted, was that, functionally, the parish priest only had jurisdiction over those who were prepared to attend the Church and submit to his care, or those who were obligated to pay tithes. This did not satisfy John Wesley. Under this system, many people were out of reach of the awakening Gospel voice, asleep in their sins, and in acute danger. So given what he saw of as this urgent need for this priestly service to practically reach all people in every parish, he saw his ordination as a university chaplain (one without a particular parish portfolio) as entitling him to reach any people who were, as it were, slipping through the net of spiritual care: the issues which lay behind his well-known observation (in Methodist circles) that "all the world was his parish"<sup>362</sup>. Wesley was also aware of how the old Parish boundaries simply could not cope with the influx of the urban poor.

This radical challenge to the task of being a Priest would have been startling and uncongenial to the many clergy like James Woodforde<sup>363</sup>, whose apparent emphasis in life was to fawn on the local gentry, playing cards with them (cf. Woodforde, 1782, p. 34) and collecting Church tithe-revenue from the Landlord's tenants (cf. Woodforde, 1782, p. 43). In my grounded theory I will be interested to see how the self-image of pastoral responsibility might expand or limit the vision of the church for the world.

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<sup>359</sup> Missiologically speaking, Wesley even considered all the First Nation peoples in America, alternatively faithed as they might be, as being the responsibility of the Anglican parishes in the English colonies.

<sup>360</sup> He quite often heard good sermons and applauded them: "At ten I went to church. Mr. Barlow preached an useful sermon, on, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" and a thundering one in the afternoon, on, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (1827-2, p. 24; cf. 1827-2, p. 97; 1827-4, pp. 337, etc.).

<sup>361</sup> Wesley's obituary of the rev. Grimshaw makes it quite clear what sort of pastoring Wesley considered to be "good practice" for a country parson (1827-3, pp. 84-90).

<sup>362</sup> "I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty, to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation" (1827-2, p. 401).

<sup>363</sup> Woodforde wrote his Journal over approximately the same years as Wesley: his diary was also his account book, but Wesley would conceivably have questioned him for keeping the wrong sort of accounts.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### *The Liturgical Rhythms of Life*

A Sunday spent in prayer, reflection, Bible reading and attending services of worship and preaching was a fundamental datum for living a life of true discipleship in the mind of John Wesley (1827-1, p. 408). He was puritanically strict about “Sabbath observance”<sup>364</sup>. Wesley himself, of course, would usually have a very busy day preaching. Liturgically, the Lectionary roughly governed his output; he would usually preach on one of the set readings for the day (1827-1, pp. 33, 525, etc.), although he was not averse to choosing a perennially favourite topic of his, or one that was much on his mind over a week or so<sup>365</sup>. He was always alert for a “teachable moment”; he would not miss the dread engendered by a storm or other awe-inspiring natural phenomenon<sup>366</sup>. However by and large he preached according to the lectionary. This meant that the High Days of the Church Calendar, Easter and Ascension and Christmas, were part of the liturgical rhythm of his life, whether in church or on the street<sup>367</sup>. In addition, he read the daily liturgical readings privately every day, and his decoded Diaries show how scrupulously his life was shaped by the liturgical flow of the church year<sup>368</sup>.

Wesley also crafted and introduced the great distinctively Methodist liturgical celebration of the Covenant Service, an annual re-affirmation of the congregation’s dedication to God and his purposes (1827-2, pp. 43, 304, 422, etc.). Another new beat to the liturgical rhythm was the holding of late-into-the-night prayer meetings<sup>369</sup>. Wesley was not content with the liturgy already in place – he was open to new forms and occasions to meet the needs of the Methodists’ new-found appetite for the sacred.

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<sup>364</sup> One could get expelled from a Methodist society for “habitual Sabbath breaking”, considered as serious an evil as “cursing and swearing” and “drunkenness” (1827-1, p. 418)

<sup>365</sup> If ever a word-count was significant, the *Journal* records almost 7000 occurrences of the preach/preached/preaching/preacher cluster. Preaching was Wesley’s obsession.

<sup>366</sup> His method was direct – if people felt frightened, they should know what they *ought* to be frightened of: “Soon after I began reading Prayers, the lightning flamed all round it, and the thunder rolled just over our heads. When it grew louder and louder, perceiving many of the strangers to be much affrighted, I broke off the Prayers, after the Collect, “Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;” and began applying, “The Lord sitteth above the water flood, the Lord remaineth a king for ever” (1827-2, p. 313).

<sup>367</sup> At Christmas he would preach a Christmas-related theme (1827-3, p. 392), and at Easter an Easter-related theme (1827-3, p. 363). He writes: “On Ascension-Day in the morning, some of us went to King’s Weston-Hill, four or five miles from Bristol. Two gentlemen, going by, sent up to us in sport many persons from the neighbouring villages; to whom, therefore, I took occasion to explain those words, ‘Thou art ascended up on high, thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them’” (1827-1, p. 197) – a lectionary standard reading for Ascension day.

<sup>368</sup> In his quest for communication he could even find himself preaching on a phrase from the liturgy: “I preached at Allhallows church, on those words in the Service, “His commandments are not grievous” (1827-4, p. 456).

<sup>369</sup> In his practical, methodical way, Wesley scheduled night-time prayer meetings for days nearest the full moon: “We had the first watch-night in London. We commonly choose for this solemn service the Friday night nearest the full moon, either before or after, that those of the congregation who live at a distance, may have light to their several homes” (1827-1, p. 365)

There was, of course, a general hunger for the sacred already present amongst the population at large. As a clergyman he presided over all the expected rites of passage – Christenings, Weddings, Funerals... each of which he used as a further opportunity to communicate his vision of the near presence of God and the urgent need to wake up to him<sup>370</sup>. Wesley always wanted to make more of such opportunities of natural public connection and openness to hearing the Gospel message<sup>371</sup>.

Under the impetus of Wesley's teaching and example, attendance at Holy Communion, which had become traditionally a rather rare indulgence of the hyper-spiritual few, became the hallmark of Methodist Anglicans. The church was often staggered by the numbers of people wanting to communicate during the Wesleyan awakening<sup>372</sup>. Wesley believed that the "primitive Church" had practiced daily communion, and never lost his hankering for the restoration of daily celebration<sup>373</sup>.

Wesley was unselfconsciously immersed in the liturgy of the Anglican church of his time<sup>374</sup>: What we see here is a liturgist who is easy in his skin, fully convinced that the liturgical rhythms of life have a God-ordained role in the economy of salvation. To a twenty-first century eye it might look archaic, but I will consider whether there are not relevant cultural forms of deepening liturgical communication.

### ***The Priestly Service of the Priesthood of All Believers towards God***

The Reformation gave rise to the famous maxim of the "priesthood of all believers", which the formal churches then had to read through specific theological lenses in order to continue

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<sup>370</sup> Funerals were stark reminders of the shortness of life and the need to make life count: "I rode thence to Leeds, in order to preach a funeral sermon for Mary Shent, who, after many severe conflicts, died in great peace. It was one of the largest congregations which has been seen at Leeds; to whom I spoke very plain from part of the Gospel" (1827-3, pp. 68-69)

<sup>371</sup> One way he did this was by encouraging a proper cortege from the house of the deceased to the church, always with one eye on reaching the unreached: "One who had adorned the Gospel in life and in death, having desired that I should preach her funeral sermon, I went with a few friends to the house, and sang before the body to the Room. I did this the rather, to show my approbation of that solemn custom, and to encourage others to follow it. As we walked, our company swiftly increased, so that we had a very numerous congregation at the Room. And who can tell, but some of these may bless God for it to all eternity?" (1827-3, p. 118).

<sup>372</sup> One day at Manchester things got out of hand: "I began reading Prayers at ten o'clock. Our country friends flocked in from all sides. At the Communion was such a sight as I am persuaded was never seen at Manchester before: Eleven or twelve hundred communicants at once; and all of them fearing God" (1827-4, p. 202). His comment on one Sunday in Ireland was: "I desired those of our society who did not go to their parish churches, would go with me to St. Patrick's. Many of them did so. It was said, the number of communicants was about five hundred; more than went there in the whole year before the Methodists were known in Ireland" (1827-4, p. 463).

<sup>373</sup> Occasionally he would have a little token run of daily communion: "During the twelve festival days, we had the Lord's Supper daily; a little emblem of the Primitive Church. May we be followers of them in all things, as they were of Christ!" (1827-4, pp. 38, 96).

<sup>374</sup> In his coded diaries Wesley showed how he used the Liturgy devotionally every day of his life (1988, pp. 312-577)

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with a *de facto* priesthood of male priests. Read in sociological terms, an eighteenth-century vicar had a similar power-differential between him and his congregants to that existing between a pre-reformation priest and his congregation<sup>375</sup>. Wesley was theoretically in accord with the way the Anglican Church had ensured the continuation of the pastoral elite; but he found that his day-to-day dealings with the disenfranchised kicked up serious issues with the ongoing power-relations in the church.

Several of Wesley's proto-revolutionary tendencies have emerged already in this study: the appointment of lay preachers and the encouragement of the leadership potential of the poor; his high regard for women in the saving economy of God; the equality of peasant and Lord in sin and forgiveness; the potential of equivalent education for the poor. Hattersley argues that the "primary purpose" of the Methodist movement was "to make the Church of England more acceptable to, as well as sympathetic towards, the men and women it ignored and neglected" (2002, p. 207). Wesley was intent on giving the church back to the poor, but the project was not universally shared by those who made their livings off the *status quo*. In doing this, Wesley's moves towards democratisation might have owed more to enlightenment thought categories than he probably would have admitted. Certainly, as I have noted [0], if large numbers of the poor stopped feeling guilty, stopped feeling afraid, gained a sense of human dignity and societal value, and became free of self-destructive habits and addictions, then the capacity to control them would become that much more difficult for the elite. The implications of a newly democratised priesthood of all believers would possibly have affected society from the bottom, as the poor found a potent channel to speak and be heard. The *Journal* seems to specifically teach that all Christians were potentially fully integrated into the work of the Gospel. For Wesley the issue of whether or not people heard the message and experienced the wakening power of the Gospel was so central that he was prepared to run insouciantly full tilt at the privileged status of Anglican priests. Outler reckoned that Wesley's honouring of the "common humanity" of rich and poor had several social consequences (whether intended or not). The dispossessed poor "...found themselves sloughing off their shackles of servility, and becoming the available leadership cadre for one of the most effective, least disruptive social revolutions on record" (1971, p. 30).

In terms of the scope of this study I cannot pursue this further – but the *Journal* appears to show the widespread dissemination of radical Christian Humanist ideas. The implication for

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<sup>375</sup> This power-elite was under scrutiny by several intellectuals, as well as under attack by the Baptists and Congregationalists. Justin Champion argues that "This antagonistic discourse, identified as a 'history of priestcraft', can be considered as the first moves in the history and sociology of religion" (cf. Champion, n.d., p. x).

my study is to consider what ideas are being disseminated by the Methodist Church in Cape Town in the twenty-first century.

### ***The Constitution of ad hoc Holy Ground***

It is difficult to describe the sheer volume of “outside-ness” that characterised John Wesley’s ministry, which strikes one forcibly when reading the *Journal*<sup>376</sup>. William Parkes points out that this is reflected in innumerable sites in England that are called something like “Wesley steps”, Wesley tree”, Wesley this-and-that (1992, p. 217). But not many scholars have interacted recently with this aspect of his ideology, at least as far as I have been able to discover<sup>377</sup>. And in the Cape Town context, it seems that there is no scholar who has specialised in the links between Wesley’s instinct for market-place oratory and the instinct for public oratory of many preachers in Cape Town today. The most lively tradition of outside preachers that I know, the Xhosa Methodist YMG, only gets a passing mention in the literature. This is an area crying out for more field research and analysis.

Wesley, however, according to his *Journal*, preached in the market on the lesson of the day in cassock and bands, standing demurely and without embarrassment on a table and attracting listeners by singing a hymn: with a group of fellow travellers, or alone if necessary. He appears to have become as completely at home outside the church as inside it<sup>378</sup>. When he was outside, the only thing missing from the traditional liturgy appeared to be the

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<sup>376</sup> It is important to stress how strong a motif field preaching became in Wesley’s *Journal*; one passage can stand for very many: “My ordinary employment (in public) was now as follows: every morning I read prayers and preached at Newgate [prison]. Every evening I expounded a portion of scripture at one or more of the [Methodist] Societies. On Monday, in the afternoon, I preach abroad [= outside] near Bristol; on Tuesday, at Bath and Two-Mile-Hill [outdoor locations] alternatively; on Wednesday, at Baptist Mills [outdoor venue]; every other Thursday, near Pensford [outdoor location]; every other Friday, in another part of Kingswood [slum outdoor venue]; On Saturday in the afternoon, and Sunday morning, in the bowling green (which lies near the middle of the city); on Sunday, at eleven, near Hannam-Mount; at two, at Clifton; and at five, on Rose Green.” (1827-1, pp. 192-193).

<sup>377</sup> I would be grateful to be directed to some hidden trove of Wesleyan theology of field preaching. In the mean time I am indebted to William Parkes for his 1992 article entitled *John Wesley: Field Preacher* (Parkes, 1992). Sibeko Malika *does* reference the effectiveness of the YMG open air preaching (tantalizingly briefly), but focuses on their music culture and spirituality (Sibeko, 1997, p. 46). Anderson and Otwang manage to publish an entire book on Pentecostal African spirituality without referencing outdoor oratory at all (Anderson & Otwang, 1993).

<sup>378</sup> Wesley was always a clergyman, and always on duty: “I rode in quest of St. Hilary-Downs, ten or twelve miles southeast of St. Ives. And the Downs I found, but no congregation, — neither man, woman, nor child. But by that I had put on my gown and cassock, about an hundred gathered themselves together, whom I earnestly called ‘to repent and believe the Gospel’” (1827-1, p. 433). He was a tiny man, and unashamedly made use of anything at hand to make his voice audible: “None had yet preached abroad in this furious town; but I was resolved, with God’s help, to make a trial, and ordered a table to be set in the inn-yard. Such a number of wild men I have seldom seen; but they gave me no disturbance, either while I preached, or when I afterwards walked through the midst of them” (1827-3, p. 47). This was a development from his initial reluctance to preach outside a church building – George Whitefield had had to persuade him very hard (1827-1, p. 184).

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architecture, and the only thing extra appeared to have been the possibility of either radical disruption or attentive hearing (or both) by people who were not likely to hear him in a church. Wesley was effectively doing “inside church” outside. Whether he preached from a pulpit in a church structure, or whether he preached from the steps of the town cross, nothing appears to be different in his approach. In every aspect of his life, and all through his life, he lived as an Anglican Priest.

That is not to say that Wesley despised preaching in churches: “I love indeed to preach in a church,” he says, “But God can work wherever it pleaseth him” (1827-2, p. 129). John Wesley appeared to consider his preaching-life to be a seamless liturgical whole – he was doing the same liturgical task no matter whether he was in a contested or uncontested location<sup>379</sup>. Although he often preached in parish churches, and more and more frequently in Methodist preaching houses as his career developed, Wesley made it a settled principle of his to seek out the poorest of the poor to preach to them<sup>380</sup>. Heitzenrater cites research that suggests that as much as 10% of Wesley’s preaching (across his lifetime) might have been outdoors (1999, p. 93). Wesley believed that he had a message to offer outsiders that they might not otherwise come across, or go out of their way to hear<sup>381</sup> (1827-4, pp. 442, 450). And conversely, it seems from his *Journal* that he preached in church pulpits because there were some *there* who would never voluntarily hear the message of Salvation anywhere *but* in a church<sup>382</sup>. The common factor was that he was looking for people who were willing to hear and think about what he was saying. At other times, of course, preaching outdoors was simply an issue of logistics, with so many people crowding together to hear what Wesley had to say<sup>383</sup>. But what the *Journal* reveals – and which the *Forty-Four Sermons* and the *Notes*

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<sup>379</sup> Wesley demonstrated a settled conviction that “God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous” wherever he found himself (1827-1, p. 201). He was *not* faking it.

<sup>380</sup> There are many instances like this recorded in the *Journal*: “...at seven I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town; and, standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter; who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred, before I had done preaching; to whom I applied those solemn words, ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities’” (1827-1, p. 374). See also (1827-2, p. 83; 1827-4, pp. 71, 420, etc.).

<sup>381</sup> Wesley always had an eye on reaching more than the self-selected few who would come into an official Christian building. He would typically say something like: “— It being a fair day, I snatched the opportunity of preaching abroad to twice or thrice as many as the Room would have contained” (1827-4, p. 268).

<sup>382</sup> Wesley expresses this neatly: “How wisely does God order all things! Some will not hear even the word of God out of a church. For the sake of these we are often permitted to preach in a church. Others will not hear it in a church: For their sakes we are often compelled to preach in the highways” (1827-2, p. 15).

<sup>383</sup> Wesley was interested in his typical scientific way, with how to tally up the numbers of people in audiences: “In the afternoon, as no building could contain the people, I stood abroad and proclaimed, “There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons

do not – is how Wesley's insistence on and modelling of the importance of "field preaching" was one of his major pre-occupations. He considered that it achieved something that could not be achieved by building-bound liturgical life<sup>384</sup>.

Wesley assumed that God could be sought and found anywhere in God's creation – and so for him it was eminently logical that there was no difference between the space controlled by Christians and space open for debate and contestation, what I call the space between the churches: everywhere was potentially sacred, just as the sacred spaces of Christians could be functionally desecrated by careless and inattentive worshippers<sup>385</sup>. For Wesley the Great Actor in all liturgy was God himself. Humans did not so much evoke God's presence by their liturgy; rather the liturgical life was a series of "means of grace" whereby God condescended to contact humanity<sup>386</sup>. So a basic message Wesley communicates through the *Journals* is that either the world must come to find salvation in the church, or the church should take salvation to be found by the world in the space between the churches. The church was called to "mediate salvation" (cf. Bosch, 1991, pp. 393-400) either on campus or off campus<sup>387</sup>. The message that was entrusted to the church had to be heard, whether or not

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who need no repentance." The hearers (allowing five persons to a square yard) were seven or eight thousand" (1827-4, pp. 323, 464, etc.).

<sup>384</sup> He specifically linked field preaching with the spiritual vitality of his Methodist Societies: "The want of field-preaching has been one cause of deadness here. I do not find any great increase without it. If ever this is laid aside, I expect the whole work will gradually die away." (1827-3, p. 186)

<sup>385</sup> Once again, Wesley had a rhetorical ear for a turn of phrase: "I wonder at those who still talk so loud of the indecency of field preaching. The highest indecency is in St. Paul's church, when a considerable part of the congregation are asleep, or talking, or looking about, not minding a word the Preacher says. On the other hand, there is the highest decency in a churchyard or field, when the whole congregation behave and look as if they saw the Judge of all, and heard him speaking from heaven" (1827-2, p. 77)

<sup>386</sup> Wesley's concept of the religious life was that God wants Christians to do religious things not in order to boost their religious status or improve their moral stature (if that were to be the motivation, they would then be "dead works" ineffective at achieving the very things people were trying to achieve); but so that God can work inner transformation through those modalities – an argument which Wesley develops in his Sermon 12 in the *Forty-Four Sermons* (1787, pp. 134-150): in summary, they are "...outward ordinances, whereby the inward grace of God is ordinarily conveyed to man... whereby the faith that brings salvation is conveyed to them who before had it not" (1827-1, p. 247). Means of grace included, in his thought, such things as meeting together in small groups to help each other live the Christian life (1827-1, p. 185); participating in Holy Communion (1827-1, p. 246); attending church, fasting, using private prayer, and reading the Bible (1827-1, p. 257); listening to preaching (1827-1, p. 279); doing "temporal and spiritual good" to others (1827-1, p. 565); and participating in the annual Renewal of the Covenant Service (1827-4, p. 29)

<sup>387</sup> Wesley was working in the raggedly overlapping edges of the reformation/enlightenment paradigms: he seems to have felt that the church ought to have control over society and salvation, but realised more and more vividly that it was only one player in the drama of salvation. One proof of this was that God was doing wonderfully transformative things in the lives of masses of ordinary people through public preaching; and that seems to have confirmed in his mind that the Methodist movement was the working of God's power and not a human intervention. The only reason for the effectiveness of preaching and prayer, in Wesley's thought, was that the "power of God" attended it (1827-4, p. 217 and numerous occasions), and the proof of the power of God at work was the variety of deeply emotional reactions of people to simple, unemphatic preaching: "The meeting of the society which followed, at which we permitted many others to be present, was exceeding solemn. The power of God

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people realised they needed to hear it; a major problem faced by humanity, in Wesley's view, was that it was asleep in a deadly slumber from which it had to hear a rousing voice<sup>388</sup>.

Wesley frequented the space between the churches. He did not simply travel through that space from one church to another, like an astronaut through the vacuum of space between interstellar destinations. Rather he appears to have consciously inhabited it as a liturgant: even his horse-riding and ship-travelling hours are filled with the potential for speaking the Gospel<sup>389</sup>. He could arbitrarily constitute a place of worship, prayer and proclamation in any place where people would give him a hearing – but he was clear that although he felt the need to preach, he never demanded that people listen to him (1827-4, p. 453; 1827-4, pp. 3, etc.). So he spoke with people about God and the Gospel in such varied settings as a smithy waiting for a horse to be reshod<sup>390</sup>, in a slum or on a hillside (1827-1, p. 416), at a village cross (1827-1, pp. 430, etc.), over a pigsty (with strong regret)<sup>391</sup>, in a town hall (1827-4, pp. 46, etc.), in a corn-exchange (1827-4, p. 99) or – frequently - a graveyard adjacent to a church (1827-2, p. 77).

With regard to this study, and its concern with the apparent loss of cultural valency of the Methodist Church in Cape Town, a feature notable of the *Journal* is how constantly Wesley already in his lifetime had to defend the practice of field preaching<sup>392</sup>. As the Methodists

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fell upon many. I observed one gentlewoman in particular, that wept and trembled exceedingly" (1827-4, pp. 475, etc.). In advocating a salvation that was mediated to the individual directly by God, on or off church premises, he was also attacking the *de facto* control of salvation by the Church. And by broadening the scope of salvation-after-conversion he was both empowering the poor and increasing the power of their cause.

<sup>388</sup> Wesley often records an experience along the lines of this: "I rode to Alemouth, and laboured to awaken a stupid, drowsy people, by preaching, both in the evening and the next morning, in the most convincing manner I could" (1827-2, p. 121)

<sup>389</sup> A classic example was from a day when Wesley got involved in a discussion with a man riding the same way as him: "He then grew warmer and warmer; told me I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him, "No, I am John Wesley himself." Upon which ... he would gladly have run away outright. But, being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side, and endeavoured to show him his heart, till we came into the street of North Hampton" (1827-1, p. 372).

<sup>390</sup> "Before I reached Kensington, I found my mare had lost a shoe. This gave me an opportunity of talking closely) for near half an hour; both to the smith and his servant. I mention these little circumstances, to show how easy it is to redeem every fragment of time, (if I may so speak,) when we feel any love to those souls for which Christ died" (1827-1, pp. 427-428).

<sup>391</sup> "We had a pretty large congregation; but the stench from the swine under the Room was scarce supportable. Was ever a preaching place over a hog sty before? Surely they love the Gospel, who come to hear it in such a place" (1827-2, p. 489)

<sup>392</sup> From about 1750 onwards the *Journal* frequently records entries in which Wesley seems to be having to urge his Methodists to not discontinue the practice (1827-2, pp. 253, 450; 1827-3, pp. 10, 11, 66, 81, 102, 113, 135, 147, 148, 186, 192, etc.). He is at his most acerbic as he argues: "A vast majority of the immense congregation in Moorfields were deeply serious. One such hour might convince any impartial man of the expediency of field preaching. What building, except St. Paul's church, would contain such a congregation? And if it would, what human voice could have reached them there? By repeated observations I find I can command thrice the number in the open air, that I

erected more and more Methodist-specific meeting houses, they apparently quickly lost their appetite for listening to preaching on the streets, or going to the streets to preach. Societies of the saved, mutually reinforcing each others' quest for holiness, seemed to quite rapidly lose a compassion for those who were not yet on the quest. Wesley is obviously irritated with the lack of Methodist love and zeal of a congregation as he asks "What can shake Satan's kingdom like field-preaching?" (1827-4, p. 192). This early loss of enthusiasm for the task that Wesley so valued is an important marker, I believe, for establishing a grounded theory of a liturgy of conversion: the justified do indeed need sanctification, but that seems to be interpreted as permission for the abandonment of the search for the lost. Church effort (amongst the consciously justified) comes to be expended on sanctification issues. The hidden Christian sin of self-absorption apparently rapidly flourishes in the soil of security. But the only feeder-channel in Wesley's conceptualisation of the order of salvation is a stream of people experiencing a justification-style conversion. Wesley seems to have insisted that the church needs to consistently establish *ad hoc* holy ground, and expect to see God meet people there. And it is also important to note that, motivationally speaking, Wesley was not straining himself to be where he did not want to be – he wanted to be where he was. This level of assurance and psychological comfort is interesting in itself, raising questions about how a similar comfort and resolution of aversion issues might come about in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **A Disappointing Clergy**

The *Journal* therefore shows that Wesley had high regard and high hopes for the Church – but it also shows deep disappointments with the way he felt it had failed its mandate. As I have shown, Wesley frequently expresses disappointment with the inner life or the outer workings of the established church. Outler says that "...the eighteenth-century Church of England was a church in the doldrums, thwarted in almost every effort to rise to the challenge of its time and set its house in order" (1991, p. 48). The whole point of Methodism, for Wesley, was that it was intended to be a way in which the Church could reform itself.

As I have shown, Wesley apparently felt content that the "bones" of the Church were good – so his gripe was never with the doctrine or structures of the church, but with its practice. He was never intimidated by rank or title – he expected a priest to live as a priest, no matter what his social status or connections<sup>393</sup>. A lifetime in service of a parish should enable "...a

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can under a roof. And who can say the time for field preaching is over, while, 1. Greater numbers than ever attend: 2. The converting, as well as convincing, power of God is eminently present with them?" (1827-2, pp. 485-486).

<sup>393</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a Bishop still had extremely high political and cultural standing; but Wesley showed a distinct tendency to insubordination: "Mr. Corbett said, he would gladly have asked me to preach, but that the Bishop had forbidden him; who had also forbidden all his Clergy to admit any Methodist Preacher to the Lord's Supper. But is any Clergyman obliged, either in law or conscience,

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man full of faith and zeal” to accomplish a great deal in God’s service (1827-2, p. 395). But Wesley was often not impressed with the general quality of the vicars of the parish churches, and he did not hold back in voicing his criticism.

For Wesley, being a priest meant firstly that a Bishop or priest should in charge of a diocese or congregation should actually reside there (1827-4, p. 206). Wesley profoundly disapproved of the practice of priests living elsewhere on the tithe-income from a distant, neglected parish. For him the quintessential role of a priest was that he be resident amongst his parishioners, visiting them in their homes and sharing their world. He should know his parishioners by name<sup>394</sup> (1827-2, p. 220).

John Wesley constantly rated the priests of the Anglican Church against his standards of godliness. If the priest was intent on persuading people to put their faith in God through Christ and live holy lives, then Wesley pointedly applauded him (1827-2, pp. 218, 391; 1827-4, p. 508). If not, he berated him caustically in his journals for not performing what he considered was his proper function, and for not living an exemplary life (1827-1, pp. 305-306; 1827-2, p. 274). He certainly would make a pointed note in his *Journal* if they actively harassed the Methodists by preaching against them; or if they, for example, stirred up horn-blowing mobs; or, as a clergyman apparently might, drunkenly rode a horse into an outdoor audience<sup>395</sup> (1827-1, pp. 422, 556; 1827-2, pp. 267, 269; 1827, pp. 253, 238, 288). He voiced particular outrage when an Anglican priest did not show energetic concern for the eternal destiny of his flock<sup>396</sup>. One of his arguments for the need of his itinerant ministry was that he could not be said “... to ‘intrude into the labours’ of those who do not labour at all, but suffer thousands of those for whom Christ died to ‘perish for lack of knowledge’” (1827-1, p. 214)

He was also scathing of poor preaching from the parish church pulpit<sup>397</sup> (1827-4, p. 409), although he was equally generous with his praise if he liked what he heard – a “sound”

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to obey such a prohibition? By no means. The will even of the King does not bind any English subject, unless it be seconded by an express law. How much less the will of a Bishop? “But did not you take an oath to obey him?” No, nor any Clergyman in the three kingdoms. This is a mere vulgar error. Shame that it should prevail almost universally” (1827-4, pp. 101-102).

<sup>394</sup> A practice Wesley was already deeply committed to in his early mission in Georgia, and which he followed all his life (1827-1, p. 29; 1827-4, p. 463).

<sup>395</sup> “While I was speaking, a gentleman rode up very drunk; and after many unseemly and bitter words, laboured much to ride over some of the people. I was surprised to hear he was a neighbouring Clergyman” (1827-1, p. 422).

<sup>396</sup> “If the parish Ministers were zealous for God, the Protestants in Ireland would soon out-number the Papists” (1827-3, p. 438).

<sup>397</sup> Wesley was distinctly sarcastic when irritated by poor preaching: “... I heard as miserable a sermon as most I have heard in my life. It might have been preached either among Jews, Turks, or Heathens, without offending them at all” (1827-4, p. 356). On another occasion he derides two

sermon and meaningfully read prayers – and he was frequently very generous about the preaching of others, when they preached “useful”, “plain”, “awakening”, “affectionate”, or “serious” sermons (1827-4, pp. 322, 416, 466-467, 337, 340, 349). A sermon, in Wesley's view, should always aim to be “awakening” in some way, rousing people to the realities of God and the seriousness of their plight<sup>398</sup> (1827-4, p. 12). He was most profoundly disturbed if, as he found on occasion, there was no sermon preached at all: a service without preaching was for him apparently the worst possible dereliction of duty by a priest<sup>399</sup>.

And it was not just Wesley's opinion that mattered. He was struggling with an impatient movement of people who were suddenly realising what a poor job the clergy had been doing – perhaps partly in the light of the clear highlighting of clergy's faults in the *Journal*. They also felt disenfranchised and their experience of salvation was almost universally despised by the official church. It became harder and harder for Wesley to keep the Anglican Methodists within the Anglican church, and his job was made much more difficult by some hostile, callous parish priests<sup>400</sup>.

Wesley noted the temptations of the clergy, especially the minor clergy who were financially dependent on Bishops and other gentry for being allowed to occupy their “livings”. He cites the sad case of the Vicar of Dewsbury, who “...was deeply serious, till he conversed again with rich and honourable men, who soon cured him of that distraction” (1827-2, p. 220). The gentry would have considered the university-educated clergy, including of course Wesley himself, to have been members of the ruling classes. And indeed Wesley had a political theory that was “violently Tory” (Outler, 1991, pp. 49, 53), which would have done him no harm amongst the country elite. But the negative side of this limited access to the corridors of power was that clergy tended to be subservient to civil power (cf. Outler, 1991, p. 48). And that practically meant that the clergy were seen from below as part of the system aligned

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sermons as being “... quite innocent of meaning: What that in the afternoon was, I know not; for I could not hear a single sentence” (1827-1, p. 430).

<sup>398</sup> Such preaching was hard to find in either England or Scotland: “I attended the Morning Service at the kirk, full as formal as any in England; and no way calculated either to awaken sinners, or to stir up the gift of God in believers” (1827-4, p. 75). At another Kirk he laments that “The sermon was very sensible; but having no application, was no way likely to awaken drowsy hearers” (1827-4, p. 279)

<sup>399</sup> On one Sunday he complains that “...we went to our own parish church; although there was no sermon here, nor at any of the thirty-six churches in the town, save the cathedral and St. Peter's” (1827-4, p. 514).

<sup>400</sup> “I fain would prevent the members here from leaving the church; but I cannot do it. As Mr. G. is not a pious man, but rather an enemy to piety, who frequently preaches against the truth, and those that hold and love it, I cannot with all my influence persuade them either to hear him, or to attend the sacrament administered by him. If I cannot carry this point even while I live, who then can do it when I die? And the case of Epworth is the case of every church, where the Minister neither loves nor preaches the Gospel. The Methodists will not attend his ministrations. What then is to be done?” (1827-4, p. 443)

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against the poor. What Wesley demanded of the clergy was that they be awake to the reality of the lives of the majority of their parishioners.

Wesley was disappointed that the clergy should so misunderstand the true nature of their parishioners that they could promote the notion that England was a “Christian Nation”. He often commented on the failure of the British to actually be the Christian Nation they were supposed to be on paper<sup>401</sup> (1827-1, pp. 378, 457, 482). One of the confirmations of his understanding of the universal nature of human sinfulness was his experience of the British nations as promoters of all kinds of vice, high-status and low-status, at home and abroad. In his sarcastic opinion, the North American First Nations “... learned gluttony and drunkenness from the Christians...O who will convert the English into honest Heathens!” (1827-2, p. 246). For Wesley, much of England was in a state of practical paganism (1827-4 p. 265), and one reason was that the clergy were failing in their duties.

### **Conclusion: “The Methodist Church is...”**

This would have been a non-question for Wesley. For him, Methodism was the Anglican Church – the disciplined, Bible-obedient, loving, wide-awake church that it was meant to be<sup>402</sup>. Wesley, despite having set up a *de facto* parallel church structure, never allowed himself to think of his movement as an independent church, although late in life he did begin to see the writing on the wall (1827-4, pp. 462-463). He held to this in the face of increasing pressure from his Methodist congregants and leaders to have done with the inefficient and ineffective structures of the Anglican Parish Church system and to wield the organisational power of the Methodists to subsist as a fully independent church (1827-4, p. 352).

The vision of church that Wesley could not ever relinquish went something like this. The Parish Church, led by awakened, godly Priests, ought to take care of all the human beings inhabiting each of the Parishes, whether they currently acknowledged the legitimacy of the Church or not. That care was to consist of awakening those who were asleep, nourishing those who were awake through word and sacrament, and ensuring that basic social needs were met. Wesley completely endorsed the social role of the priest as being a key part of the socio-political fabric, and to that end was therefore not opposed to the official church tax

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<sup>401</sup> For Wesley the basic distinguishing mark of a Christian country should be that its inhabitants attended services of worship. He was often disappointed: “afterwards attended our parish church. Besides the little company that went with me, and the Clerk and Minister, I think we had five men and six women: And this is a Christian country!” (1827-4, p. 364).

<sup>402</sup> Wesley has to defend his principle of reformation of the Church of England more and more as the *Journal* progresses: “Afterwards I met the society, and explained to them at large the original design of the Methodists, viz., not to be a distinct party, but to stir up all parties, Christians or Heathens, to worship God in spirit and in truth; but the Church of England in particular; to which they belonged from the beginning. With this view, I have uniformly gone on for fifty years, never varying from the doctrine of the Church at all” (1827-4, p. 464).

levied on landowners. The church, in Wesley's view, was intended to be a life-changing player in the life of the nation: much to his distress, it was not. In his view, it needed what Methodism had to offer to achieve its ordained place in God's economy.

An interesting dislocation between the Methodists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the Methodists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the Methodists now have become an "establishment church" in their own right - in some ways very similar to what the Anglican Church was in Wesley's day. A challenge to the development of a grounded theory is to consider some of the implications of this dissonance for the situation in Cape Town.

#### **4.2.4 A Story-line of "Conversion & Evangelism"**

What becomes very clear in John Wesley's *Journal* is something I think of as the "democracy of sin". Wesley evidently truly believed that every human being was equal before God in what he regarded as the ultimate reality of existence: the judgement of God: "the very best people, so called, were as deeply convinced as open sinners" (1827-1, p. 405). For Wesley, conversion meant in part coming to the awful realisation that no matter what one's status in life, before God all were sinners [0]<sup>403</sup>. His base line presupposition was that everybody was in danger of having to face the judgement of God and needed access to the only "remedy for sin". What saved him from being labelled "judgemental" is that he seems to have genuinely felt himself to have been included amongst the sinners, rather than outside of sinful humanity looking in at the depravity of the masses.

This was, however, all standard rhetoric for the day. It would have been unusual to find anyone in Wesley's day, apart from those directly influenced by the atheistic trends of Europe, who would not have glibly agreed that they were "sinners". But Wesley was somehow offering hope and not condemnation, and people must have felt that they were not

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<sup>403</sup> Wesley was at pains to emphasize repeatedly that the line between sinner and non-sinner did not run between the saved and the unsaved, between the church and the world. Christians were saved sinners – still sinners, but somehow rescued by the grace of God through completely non-meritorious faith; sinners who were trying to live up to their calling, but trying and failing; sinners who were pushing onwards towards perfection in love, but who were humbly aware that they had not reached there yet (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 212; 1827-3, p. 67; 1827-4, p. 161); and even the rare sinner who was currently honestly experiencing nothing but love in their heart (1827-4, p. 229). But all people, in Wesley's mind, were cut from the same cloth. One of the cardinal areas he did *not* differ from the Calvinists of his day was in the experimentally verified doctrine of the fall of humankind; his standard preaching was: "I invited all guilty, helpless sinners, who were conscious they "had nothing to pay," to accept of free forgiveness" (1827-1, p. 431). The bottom line is that just because a person might have experienced conversion and might currently be living a very much more sin-free lifestyle that previously, that that did not make a Christian *essentially* better than an unconverted person. The danger of this turning into self-righteous priggery is considerable – it can possibly only be maintained in conjunction with a humble view of one's own unworthiness – a true faith in the doctrine itself - and a compassion towards those who have not yet been able to appreciate the salvation that is available for them – a true faith in the doctrine that one can only be saved at no payable cost.

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being despised under the cover of theology by this little preacher<sup>404</sup>. It seems to me that the *Journal* shows that Wesley understood conversion as the possibility of infinite change; and that the key to change was the communication of a certain message.

### ***Awakening to the Possibility of Infinite Change: Conversion in the Journal***

Wesley's key intention [4.2.1], with all his travelling, counselling, conversation, preaching and organising, was to "awaken, instruct and exhort" people to live lives to the glory of God through faith in Christ<sup>405</sup> (1827-1, p. 87). Wesley expected people to change<sup>406</sup>, and to be able to change – which in many ways would possibly have been a message of hope to those imprisoned in circumstances or addictions that appeared immutable. Wesley expected conversion to be cataclysmic. He expected it to involve an awakening to a quest and a struggle (1827-4, p. 139), perhaps sometimes involving physical writhing and convulsions, which were referred to as "the pangs of new birth" or just "pangs" for short<sup>407</sup> (1827-1, pp. 206, 236-237, 272). He expected it to radically transform all of life, and ultimately lead to a process of refinement leading to perfection in love – the experiencing of nothing but love towards everybody in every situation<sup>408</sup>.

Wesley seems to have had a definite schema in mind when conceptualising the process of moving from being a Christian-faith-outsider to being a Christian-faith-insider (which particularly interests me in this study): "drawing"; followed by "attending the preaching";

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<sup>404</sup> There was seemingly often something cheerful and interesting about what Wesley had to say; there were several situations like this early-morning scenario: "I was waked, between three and four, by a large company of sinners, who, fearing they should be too late, had gathered round the house, and were singing and praising God" (1827-1, p. 436).

<sup>405</sup> It is, however, as I have noted, almost standard in the literature to so underemphasize the attention Wesley paid to the dynamics of persuasion and conversion – to the extent that they almost seem to have been a minor interest of his – even Albert Outler, writing on "Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit", considered that Wesley held that "...conversion is never more than the *bare threshold* of authentic and comprehensive evangelism" (emphasis added) (1971, p. 23). I do not believe that this does justice to the *Journal* narrative; Wesley remained deeply committed to bringing people to this "bare threshold" over his entire career.

<sup>406</sup> The word-cluster "convert/conversion" occurs about a hundred times in the *Journal*. "Justify/justification/justified" occurs about 250 times. And the "sleep/wake" cluster occurs about 300 times. Add that to the "save/salvation" cluster that I looked at in [Table 2 Bible References in interviews], and we have what appears to be a formidable interest in change.

<sup>407</sup> "Pangs" was the 18<sup>th</sup> century word for labour contractions (1827-3, p. 308), so it was the gynaecologically appropriate choice when referring to "the new birth" (1827-1, p. 235).

<sup>408</sup> When Wesley spoke of "perfection" he did not intend perfect religious observance – the goal was an emotional state in which overwhelmed any sinful thought or attitude. He reports on a close examination of two Methodists who claimed to be experiencing this: "I observe the spirit and experience of these two run exactly parallel. Constant communion with God the Father and the Son fills their hearts with humble love. Now this is what I always did, and do now, mean by perfection. And this I believe many have attained, on the same evidence that I believe many are justified" (1827-2, p. 499). He himself never got there; and he only found relatively few Methodists who ever claimed to have done so. It was a goal to draw Christians onwards, and stop them from being content with less than all God had to offer. But by the nature of the case further discussion of this doctrine is beyond the scope of this investigation – it pertains to what I would call evangelisation rather than evangelism.

followed by “awakening/conviction”; followed by “conversion”<sup>409</sup>. He spends a great deal of effort, via his *Journal*, in reflecting on what he considers to be the hallmarks of true conversion (in which he always downplays physical emotionalism, without ever dismissing it as irrelevant<sup>410</sup>). His *44 Sermons* does also reflect on this subject, but it is the *Journal* that shows how important this issue continued to be for Wesley on a day-to-day basis. For the purposes of this study I will am focusing on the first five elements of the salvation process in Wesley's understanding.

Wesley witnessed many, many conversions, and, sadly for him, many “de-conversions”<sup>411</sup>. In the *Journal*<sup>412</sup> his theory of conversion seems to resolve itself into the following schema:

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<sup>409</sup> Speaking of a disappointing response once at Gravesend, he notes that “Many are drawn, but none converted, or even awakened. Such is the general method of God's providence” (1827-3, p. 494).

<sup>410</sup> Wesley always viewed the “physical manifestations” with caution. He did not regard the shouting and falling down and weeping and trembling that sometimes accompanied his preaching in the earlier decades of his ministry as the hallmark of his work (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 380; 1827-2, p. 121). He adopted a “wait and see” attitude to see whether lasting change had happened: “fair blossoms, but will they produce fruit” was his frequent reflection (1827-3, pp. 329, 456, 473, etc.). Involuntary physical occurrences might be of God, but then again they might not be, and needed to be tested against the Scriptures (1827-1, pp. 205-206).

<sup>411</sup> He referred to these as “backslidings” (1827-2, p. 303).

<sup>412</sup> Including many passages like this: “The congregations, in every place, were larger than they had been for several years. Many were from day to day convinced of sin. Many found peace with God. Many backsliders were healed, yea, filled with joy unspeakable. And many believers entered into such a rest, as it had not before entered into their hearts to conceive. Meantime, the enemy was not wanting in his endeavours to sow tares among the good seed. I saw this clearly, but durst not use violence, lest, in plucking up the tares, I should root up the wheat also” (1827-3, p. 73).

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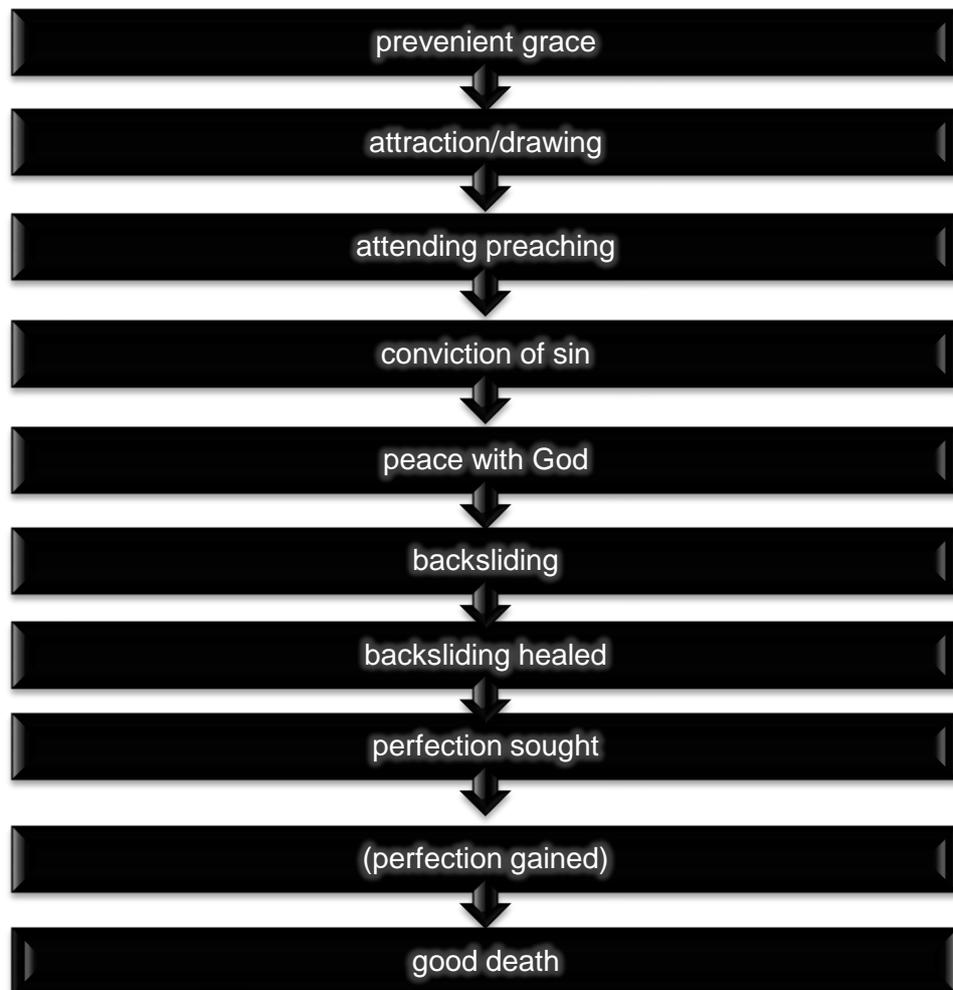


Figure 8 Wesley's Conversion Schema & Life Plan

### *Dimensions of Awakening*

John Wesley does not so much *prescribe* behaviours and attitudes as *describe* the effects of many converted lifestyles. His intensions are undeniably didactic: by his reporting conversions he is (amongst other things) illustrating his understanding of what constitutes conversion. But it is also important to recall that he is drawing from the experiences of an exceptionally large pool of actual converts. As with any diary, one cannot take the *Journal* as proof of what was happening, but the existence of a vast new church emerging shortly after Wesley's death does back up the general veracity of his descriptions<sup>413</sup>. And these signs are what John Wesley says he saw.

<sup>413</sup> One historian puts the numbers of signed-up Methodists in Britain alone at 79,000 in 1791, when Wesley died, ballooning out to 230,000 in 1815 (cf. Hattersley, 2002, p. 410).

*Firstly, Wesley was convinced that feeling was part of the human capacity for reason*<sup>414</sup>.

Under the influence of the Moravians<sup>415</sup>, he came to believe that anybody could expect to experience a mystical union with Jesus, and be able to report heavenly intervention in their life through direct experience<sup>416</sup>. He often described this as the tipping point at which, despite perhaps having heard the Gospel many times before, the man or woman suddenly wakes up to the full meaning of the Gospel – their eyes are opened and they are filled with joy or peace or love, or all of them together (1827-1, p. 564; cf. Outler, 1971, pp. 43-44). Inner changes in “dispositions”, so intractable to human efforts, were for Wesley a sign of the hidden action of God. Since it is “God who justifies” (a favourite reference to Romans 4:5), it must be expected that God should have a mysterious hand in the process<sup>417</sup>. His journals record many “evidentiary” reports of people experiencing what many theologians of the time denied to be a possibility<sup>418</sup>. It was a case-book of a soul-doctor.

Wesley had many ways of talking about this intense sense of connectedness with God; one was one of Wesley's catch-phrases: “communion with God”<sup>419</sup>. This approach of Wesley was forged in a lengthy struggle of his own to find a clear personal faith. Once he was able to break through to the calm waters of faith at the Aldersgate Street meeting he was not willing to stint in his recommending others to pursue the same goal.

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<sup>414</sup> He considered that when dealing with one's own soul, the only way of verification was feeling. Love, faith, patience, hate...if one had them one felt them; if one did not feel them, one did not have them. This was the basis of his pre-Aldersgate anguish: he saw that the Bible called for inner peace, love, faith, etc., but he did not *feel* them, so he must not be saved: “By the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling, I am convinced...” (1827-1, p. 71).

<sup>415</sup> His early encounter with the Moravians was an awe-inspiring benchmark for Wesley; in the middle of a storm at sea on the way to Georgia he had felt completely terrified of dying, but not the Moravians: “A terrible screaming began among the English; The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, ‘Was you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘I thank God, no.’ I asked, ‘But were not your women and children afraid?’ He replied, mildly, ‘No; our women and children are not afraid to die’” (1827-1, p. 20).

<sup>416</sup> A young man overtook Wesley, one day, and as they rode along together the young man struck up a conversation and “... asked me if I had seen Whitefield's Journals. I told him I had. “And what do you think of them?” said he. “Don't you think they are d——n'd cant, enthusiasm from end to end? I think so.” I asked him, “Why do you think so?” He replied, “Why, he talks so much about joy and stuff, and inward feelings. As I hope to be saved, I cannot tell what to make of it?” I asked, “Did you ever feel the love of God in your heart? If not, how should you tell what to make of it? Whatever is spoke of the religion of the heart, and of the inward workings of the Spirit of God, must appear enthusiasm to those who have not felt them” (1827-1, p. 248)

<sup>417</sup> Wesley said, “I believe, neither our own holiness, nor good works, are any part of the cause of our justification; but that the death and righteousness of Christ are the whole and sole cause of it” (1827-1, p. 225)

<sup>418</sup> Wesley often refers to the experiences that people have as “proof” of the reality of the presence of God: “We had such a congregation at four, as I have not seen for many years. And from morning to evening we had abundant proof that God is visiting and redeeming his people” (1827-3, p. 392).

<sup>419</sup> On a trip to Jersey late in his life he reports: “... I had a particular conversation .... with Jeannie Bisson of this town... She seems to be wholly devoted to God, and to have constant communion with him. She has a clear and strong understanding; and I cannot perceive the least tincture of enthusiasm. I am afraid she will not live long. I am amazed at the grace of God which is in her: ... and I doubt whether I have found her fellow in England.” (1827-4, p. 406).

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Secondly, Wesley was insistent that a conversion experience was only a true conversion if it was accompanied by a deep, motivational change away from destructive behaviour and attitudes. “Repent and believe the Gospel” was always one of his stock texts (1827-2, pp. 80, 122, 383, etc.). If love, joy and peace were what one converted *to*, then the “works of the Devil” were what one had to convert *away from* (1827-3, p. 416; 1827-4, pp. 98, etc.). The big enemy, for Wesley, was sin – a barrier between humans and God that could only be broken down through the saving grace of God<sup>420</sup>. But deep, attitudinal change could be expected to happen, and he was happy to retell stories of amazing and unexpected changes in the worst of characters. And Wesley also was able to note how over time the whole character of some neighbourhoods changed due to the dynamic of conversion<sup>421</sup>.

Thirdly, one of the dynamics of change was that Wesley expected his disciples to attend the parish church devotedly – causing logistical problems as people started to turn up for weekly communion *en masse* [0]. Although the separatist movement in Methodism gained strength all through his life, partly fuelled by Wesley’s anti-establishment stance on ordination and local preachers<sup>422</sup>, Wesley himself always strongly advocated for British converts to continue as members of their church of origin. For Wesley the essence of church-going was far more than the cultural-religious habit of a respectable person – it was the chief liturgical vehicle of a life-consuming and life-giving conversion. There were other such liturgical vehicles. Small group meetings, early morning Christian services, nights of prayer, “love feasts” – where testimonies were shared, the attending of outdoor sermons... and these were some of the marks by which Wesley judged the ongoing reality of conversion of his converts (1827-1, p. 482; 1827-3, p. 361; 1827-4, pp. 462-463). The criterion was not so much whether people attended, as whether they found it to be “a blessing” - something that satisfied an inner craving for God. Wesley didn’t just want people to attend church services; he wanted people to relish them and find nourishment in attendance.

Fourthly, Wesley designed a mutual accountability system which specifically monitored the inner reality of every Methodist. Wesley, as I have noted, apparently had a dread of “false”

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<sup>420</sup> Sin was not just the socially disreputable behaviours such as drunkenness, “whoredom”, gambling and violence (1827-3, pp. 467, 510); it included those, for both wealthy and poor offenders, but Wesley felt that God was just as hostile to genteel sins such as unkindness, gossip, pride, anger and frivolity (1827-3, p. 200).

<sup>421</sup> “Formerly we could not walk through this street but at the peril of our lives. Monday and Tuesday I spoke, one by one, to the members of the society. They are now two hundred and ninety-five, — fifty or sixty more than they have been for some years. This is owing partly to the preaching abroad, partly to the meetings for prayer in several parts of the city. These have been the means of awakening many gross sinners, of recovering many backsliders, of confirming many that were weak and wavering, and bringing many of all sorts to the public preaching” (1827-3, pp. 234, 470).

<sup>422</sup> A tendency to build rival meeting places, the so called “chapels” (often in sight of the parish church) also sent a strong message of intended separation, although Wesley decreed that meeting times were never to be set to conflict with service times at the parish church (1827-4, p. 362).

conversion experiences, emotional responses that dissipated and left the erstwhile “convert” perhaps in a worse spiritual predicament than before<sup>423</sup>. He needed a pastoral system to keep a finger on the pulse of the inner reality of so many people. That support and discipline was provided by what was arguably Wesley's greatest organisational achievement – the “class-meeting” system. You were not allowed to continue being a Methodist under Wesley's leadership if you were not prepared to belong to a small group that took the ongoing assault of sin on the human life seriously, and took methodical steps to combat and eradicate the traces of sin from your life (cf. Wesley 1744, 2011). The small groups, originally called Bands, but later in Wesley's life usually referred to as “class-meetings” were set up with rules for discipline<sup>424</sup> (cf. Wesley, 1827-1, p. 91).

Only a small percentage of the vast crowds that Wesley drew to his preaching joined these classes. On one occasion at Wednesbury, having preached inside and outside to thousands of people over six days, only 129 people signed up for the rigours of Methodist discipleship (1827-1, p. 411)<sup>425</sup>. The classes were intended to be a safe place for sinners to confess their sins and get encouragement – but there were limits. In March 1743 Wesley conscientiously records Methodists expelled from the Society for such unresolved and rebelliously held sins as cursing, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness (lots of those), selling alcohol, brawling, wife-beating, habitual lying, evil-speaking, idleness, and frivolity (1827-1, p. 418) – if there was no deep behavioural change on a long-term basis, Wesley sent you back to join the unrepentant: from his point of view you were obviously not taking the process seriously enough<sup>426</sup>.

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<sup>423</sup> If conversion was not coupled with a clear intellectual grasp of what the issues were, he was reluctant to accept it as valid (1827-1, p. 409). Yet he understood that in the early days after conversion a convert was more likely to remain a disciple of Jesus if s/he had support and discipline. One did not have to be perfect, but one did have to show willing.

<sup>424</sup> “That it may be more easily discerned whether the members of our Societies are working out their salvation, they are divided into little companies, called Classes. One person in each of these is styled a Leader; it is his business, 1. To see each person in his class once a week; to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort them. 2. To receive what they are willing to give, towards the expenses of the Society; and, 3. To meet the Assistant [minister in charge] and the Stewards once a week.” (1827-3, p. 433).

<sup>425</sup> Calculating from Wesley's estimated audience number of 5000 people, I get a 0.5% “discipleship rate”. Wesley was getting vast audiences, but he saw his core work as accumulating these few serious-minded adherents.

<sup>426</sup> This did not amount to excommunication as such; anybody was completely free to re-join, but they had to demonstrate they were happily serious about living a holy life. Since Wesley's Methodists were mostly Anglicans, people debarred from a class were still within the Church, although they were then the objects of evangelism and prayer with a view to their awakening and conversion once again.

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Class-members had to undertake to be open to correction and examination by each other<sup>427</sup>: The five “prescribed questions” outline a process of extreme transparency<sup>428</sup>. Constant personal and communal vigilance and transparency was the price one had to pay for advancing in holiness, because for Wesley there could be “no holiness without social holiness”<sup>429</sup>, by which he actually meant that without sharing the project of continuing salvation with others there was little likelihood that one would succeed<sup>430</sup>.

*Fifthly, unconditional compassion was considered a major hallmark of a Methodist Christian convert, alongside the quest for growing holiness*; in his *Journal* accounts Wesley modelled the sort of methodical intensity he expected from his disciples. In his *Rules for the Band Societies* of 1744 he legislates that Class members ought “Zealously to maintain good works; in particular....to give alms of such things as you possess, and that to the utmost of your power.” (1744, 2011, p. 4), pursuant to which they should live lives of “diligence, frugality, and self-denial” (1744, 2011, p. 4). Wesley modelled his charitable and developmental engagement with the poor through many recorded instances. He describes his experiments with a lending stock<sup>431</sup>, a free clinic and a free pharmacy<sup>432</sup>. He was deeply concerned with education for children and adults (1827-2, pp. 64-65, 94, 201, 367, etc.). He also noted and praised significant compassionate actions such as the founding of a free accident rescue association (1827-4, pp. 114-115), and the humane treatment of people in

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<sup>427</sup> “To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly the true state of our souls, with all the faults we have committed in thought, word or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.” (1744, 2011, p. 1).

<sup>428</sup> : “What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?...What temptations have you met with?... How was you delivered?...What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?...Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?” (1744, 2011, p. 3).

<sup>429</sup> Wesley had written that “holy solitaries 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” (Wesley & Wesley, 1839, p. viii). What he meant was that nobody could grow spiritually without spiritual company. He was not at that point arguing about having a social conscience. It was, however, essential to holiness to have a strong social conscience, which Wesley enforced vigorously elsewhere, but, ironically, not in the context of this phrase.

<sup>430</sup> “I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an Apostle<sup>430</sup>, without joining together those that are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection; and the consequence is, that nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever” (1827-3, p. 145)

<sup>431</sup><sup>431</sup> “I finished the little collection which I had made among my friends for a lending-stock: It did not amount to thirty pounds; which a few persons afterwards made up fifty. And by this inconsiderable sum, above two-hundred and fifty persons were relieved in one year” (1827-1, p. 555; 1827-2, p. 44; 1827-3, p. 275).

<sup>432</sup> “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 expense of medicines for the entire year amounted to some shillings above forty pounds” (1827-2, p. 44)

mental institutions<sup>433</sup> and prisons (1827-4, p. 33). He noted housing conditions (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 246) and the state of the employment market (1827-3, p. 208; 1827-4, p. 117). Wesley expected that conversion would be a conversion towards generous “usefulness”<sup>434</sup>, and he was often not disappointed.

*Sixthly, converted people evangelised others* – verbally persuading them through “holy conversation” to rethink their current lifestyle and choose to put their faith in Christ<sup>435</sup> (1827-2, p. 250). This was not so much specifically commanded by Wesley as taken to be the cultural norm of the new movement. He demonstrates with considerable force in the *Journal* that it is indeed possible to live a life which incorporates an ongoing appeal to all around one to wake up to the reality of God (1827-4, p. 158). Noting his own natural disinclination to speak to strangers about the way of faith (1827-1, p. 71), he deals with specific objections to speaking out on God’s behalf<sup>436</sup>. He shows countless examples of how everyday life throws up opportunities to persuade people to consider faith in Jesus. The logic of his position is that if one has received something good, one is obligated to share it, and not keep it to oneself<sup>437</sup>.

So, to summarise, the *Journal* paints a picture of a certain sort of conversion. Conversion was firstly about a confluence of reason and emotion – it was an emotional reaction to a set of ideas about God. However, this feeling was only valid if it resulted in a real inner movement away from sin, a pleasure in attending church services, and an openness about one’s true inner state, spoken out in the security of a class-meeting. Conversion was truly conversion if converts experienced love and compassion for others, and acted on that impulse. And a true convert would automatically share the blessing s/he had found with others. This is important data to return to as I develop my grounded theory.

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<sup>433</sup> “I spent an hour with Mr. Henderson at Hannam, and particularly inquired into his whole method; and I am persuaded there is not such another house for lunatics in the three kingdoms. He has a peculiar art of governing his patients; not by fear, but by love. The consequence is, many of them speedily recover, and love him ever after” (1827-4, p. 222).

<sup>434</sup> “usefulness” was one of Wesley’s terms of praise: one was useful to one’s neighbours; a sermon was meant to be useful. The foundational principles of his Oxford “Holy Club”, based on Matthew 25, were apparently valid throughout his ministry (1827-1, pp. 7-9)

<sup>435</sup> An important thing to note about a Methodist’s life in her obituary was that “She was an eminent pattern of calm boldness for the truth, of simplicity and godly sincerity” (1827-2, pp. 38-39).

<sup>436</sup> Wesley even notes the results of a couple of experiments he made with following the advice of those who promoted a theory of only speaking out if God specifically prompted one to. The result? He just kept himself to himself and everybody thought he was a fine gentleman; not particularly “useful” to anybody (cf. Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 83-84).

<sup>437</sup> Wesley records one conversation where this plays out very clearly: “I had a long conversation with Mr. —, upon the nature of true religion. I then asked him, why he did not endeavour to recommend it to all with whom he conversed. He said, “I did so once; and for some time, I thought I had done much good by it. But I afterwards found they were never the better, and I myself was the worse. Therefore now, though I always strive to be inoffensive in my conversation, I do not strive to make people religious, unless those that have a desire to be so, and are, consequently, willing to hear me” (1827-1, p. 33).

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### *Agents of Awakening*

As I have noted, Wesley considered that since we are “saved by grace through faith”, God graciously provided many “means of grace”, or agents, which gave people a chance to exercise the required faith. For somebody who was immersed in the life of the church, the sacraments themselves were one such means of grace. But Wesley was also concerned with those who were peripheral to the life of the church, or for whom church attendance was a rote performance with little meaning. His main modes of agency appear to have been the Bible, prayer, personal interaction, and personal example.

In terms of evangelism, Wesley had an extremely high view of the power of the Bible, read, preached and applied, to bring about conversion<sup>438</sup>. Wesley loved the metaphors of the Word of God being a “fire”, a “hammer” (Jeremiah 23:29) and a “sword” (Hebrews 4:12), and in his *Journal* he writes of his preaching as if he were witnessing a supernatural outside force forcefully gaining access to his audiences (1827-4, pp. 82, 114), and acting to miraculously quell hostile opposition (1827-2, p. 128). He passionately advocated a view of Scripture as the “simple Word” that made it accessible to the simplest of hearers – as well as the most sophisticated<sup>439</sup>. What Christians were meant to do was to somehow get the Bible into contact with those who disregarded it (or who had never considered it)<sup>440</sup> – and if they managed to do that with winsomeness, power and integrity, then their job was done. Whether people responded positively or not was over to them and God. Some would understand and give it the “hearing of faith”. And others would ignore it or dismiss it<sup>441</sup>: and hostile rejection could well even be the sign that the job had been done correctly<sup>442</sup> – especially if much care had been taken to avoid unnecessary offence (1827-4, p. 448).

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<sup>438</sup> “At seven I preached to a far larger congregation than before. And now the word of God was as a fire and an hammer. I began again and again, after I thought I had done; and the latter words were still stronger than the former; so that I was not surprised at the number which attended in the morning, when we had another joyful, solemn hour” (1827-2, p. 69).

<sup>439</sup> He experienced his preaching getting through to highly mixed audiences: “I preached at Warrington, about noon, to a large congregation, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. I never spoke more plain; for have I ever seen a congregation listen with more attention” (1827-3, p. 250).

<sup>440</sup> I will deal with the modalities of this communication below [p.355].

<sup>441</sup> Wesley frequently notes blank reception of his efforts with disarming frankness – not all of his preaching was a raging success! (1827-3, pp. 369, 372): “A more civil and unawakened audience I know not when I have seen. The bulk of them appeared to be no more affected than if I had been talking Greek” (1827-3, p. 473).

<sup>442</sup> Wesley reports on the outcome of his brother’s sermon one day; he was “constrained ... to show, in plain and strong words, that God “willeth all men to be saved.” Some were equally offended at this; but whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear, we may not “shun to declare” unto them “all the counsel of God.” (1827-1, p. 230). Wesley sarcastically derides “prudent Christians, as careful not to give offense, as if that were the unpardonable sin: And as zealous, to “keep their religion to themselves,” as they should be, to “let it shine before men.” (1827-1, p. 349).

Wesley's high view of the agency of humans in the conversion of people to saving faith in Jesus was intimately related to his understanding of the role of prayer. People were saved, in his understanding, partly because God moved Christians to pray for them to be saved – the image of Jacob wrestling with the angel was one of his favourite pictures of prayer (1827-4, p. 482). He himself modelled daily personal prayer; from the sea voyage to Georgia at the start of the *Journal* to his last days, Wesley “used private prayer” daily (1827-1, p. 17; cf. Wesley, 1988). He expected all Methodists to pray for “the lost” (1827-2, pp. 135, 477). He especially expected any preachers associated with him to pray to God on behalf of those who did not believe in God, that they might wake up, repent and believe (1827-4, p. 345).

The other agency was that of the converts themselves. Wesley virulently opposed the Calvinist notion of limited atonement<sup>443</sup>: he was deeply committed to the possibility that every human being could be saved<sup>444</sup>. At the same time he was painfully aware that every human being would not be saved (1827-1, p. 312). He solved this dilemma by stressing the elements of Scripture that appeared to show that humans had the right of choice in relationship to God. To the poor masses of Britain, the idea that they had a choice in *anything* must have been a truly empowering concept. And very many of them chose to put their faith in Christ and live the Christian life.

To summarise, it appears that for Wesley conversion happens through the agency of God through the prayerful witness of the people of God on the one hand, and the prayerful search for God on the part of those who wished to be reconciled to him on the other. I next turn to look at the dimensions of evangelism as recorded and taught in the *Journal*.

### **Evangelism in the Journals**

*“I preach about eight hundred sermons in a year” (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 215)*

Outler argues intriguingly that “Wesley became an effective evangelist when he was finally enabled, by grace, to offer himself to his hearers as an importunate herald and servant of God – rather than flinging the gospel at them like a soteriological brickbat” (1971, pp. 22-23). My reading of the *Journal* corroborates this: he often spoke of feelings of love, compassion,

<sup>443</sup> Although he came to the point of downgrading it in his thinking from “a dangerous mistake” to an “unhelpful opinion” (1827-3, pp. 214-217).

<sup>444</sup> He frequently preached on “God commands all men everywhere to repent” [Acts 17:30] (1827-4, pp. 46, 205, 393, etc.) In his sermon *Free Grace* Wesley makes this an absolute principle – God commands repentance of “every man [sic] in every place, without any exception, either of place or person” (Wesley, 1986, p. 559); and it is logically impossible, to Wesley, that God should demand something that a person cannot do. In a lengthy interaction with Calvinists over theology, he maintains that “I cannot believe, that all those who are not thus elected to glory, must perish everlastingly: Or, that there is one soul on earth, who has not ever had a possibility of escaping eternal damnation.” (1827-1, p. 429).

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and tenderness, and advised his preachers to take care that they were speaking out of love, gently and with respect – with “calm boldness” (1827-2, pp. 38-39). Interestingly, Outler considers the change in Wesley’s attitude from bigoted legalism to friendly grace to have been one of the major turning points in his career – a conversion from self-righteousness to self-giving love (1971, pp. 23, 33).

One of the first things one notices, however, is that “evangelism” is not a thing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the word does not occur in the *Journal*<sup>445</sup>. Wesley’s big concern is to “preach the word”, “apply the word”, “enforce the word”. But if I return to my working definition of evangelism [2.4.10], it becomes clear that one can indeed see aspects of “... *the work of the Spirit of God through the people of God in the contextual narration of the Gospel*<sup>446</sup> through adequately communicative signs, in social connection with the alternatively-faithed, to invite, without coercion, every human being to seek the truth about God as set out in the Bible Narrative, and to invite every human being to pursue that quest until they receive the gift of faith that enables them to live liberated, humble, just, and peaceful lives in community with those who are also disciples of Jesus Christ”.

The *Journal* makes it clear that Wesley had a habitual, ritual-rich way of going about his work. His practice was to arrive at a village or town square, or at an appointed meeting place (such as a parish church, or an outdoor venue such as the vast natural amphitheatre Gwennap Pit<sup>447</sup>). He would ride up, as often as not, on horseback, hitch his horse to a rail, swap his riding coat for his preaching gown<sup>448</sup>, and seek out or organise a raised place to speak from (he was a tiny man, and his *Journal* is strewn with references to the tables, platforms and specially dug pulpits that he needed in order to be seen and heard above the heads of a crowd (1827-2, p. 412; 1827-3, pp. 47, 304, etc.). He would choose a place where there were likely to be many people, especially those with leisure to interact, typically in the roughest, “poorest and most contemptible part of the town” (1827-1, p. 374; 1827-2, pp. 172, 293, etc.); sometimes in an apparently unfavourable location that nevertheless

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<sup>445</sup> The word “evangelist” only occurs once when not part of a church name; “evangelism/evangelise/evangelisation” do not occur at all.

<sup>446</sup> “narration of the Gospel” in my formulation speaks more to the current situation where the Bible has only a miniscule residue in popular culture: that residue would have been larger in Wesley’s time, but still insufficient for people to make informed decisions about conversion.

<sup>447</sup> Wesley describes one of the quintessential Methodist outdoor venues: “... the natural amphitheatre at Gwennap; far the finest I know in the kingdom. It is a round, green hollow, gently shelving down, about fifty feet deep; but I suppose it is two hundred across one way, and near three hundred the other. I believe there were full twenty thousand people; and, the evening being calm, all could hear” (1827-3, p. 270).

<sup>448</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> century clerical garb was not convenient for horse riding. But when he preached, Wesley always looked like any other minister in a church building, even when he was outside (1827-1, p. 433).

would turn out to be a good place for connection<sup>449</sup>. He was usually accompanied by a few travelling companions, and they would start by singing a hymn. This would usually attract a little attention (1827-4, pp. 269, 403, 479, etc.). When a few people had gathered, often starting with some curious children, he would begin to preach. The preaching topic was sometimes one of his favourite texts, but was more than likely to be extracted from the day's reading from the lectionary<sup>450</sup> (1827-4, pp. 216, 289, 397, etc.).

I would argue that Wesley's *Journal* paints a picture of the street preacher very different to the straw-man street preacher that is so repugnant to the Methodist ministers I interviewed [0]. Here we have a picture (albeit self-drawn) of a street preacher who seems to be affectionate, gentle, broad-minded, humble, frank, compassionate, intellectual, and uniquely attuned to the ordinary struggles of human life, for whom the terms, "plain", "simple", and "affectionate" might be most appropriate<sup>451</sup>. If the Methodist church were to read the *Journal* of John Wesley with more attention I suspect that it would be highly likely they would find a significant challenge to their assumptions of what evangelism in a public setting might entail.

Looking carefully for the outlines of a Wesleyan theory of evangelism in the *Journal* one comes across several emphases that mark his persuasive ministry.

The first is a point we have already looked at: Wesley had a single focus in all his preaching, what can be called a "Salvation Hermeneutic". As I have shown, for Wesley, the whole of theology was summed up in two movements – the movement from perdition to salvation, and the movement from salvation to perfection. He was apparently deeply convinced that by preaching he could set up a dynamic for change that would revolutionise the lives of anybody who truly believed what he had to say<sup>452</sup>. And both those within the church and

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<sup>449</sup> "I was desired by a gentleman of the town to preach in the market-place; and there a table was placed for me, but it was in a bad neighbourhood; for there was so vehement a stench of stinking fish, as was ready to suffocate me, and the people roared like the waves of the sea; but the voice of the Lord was mightier; and in a few minutes the whole multitude was still, and seriously attended" (1827-3, p. 64).

<sup>450</sup> The "lectionary" is the official Bible-reading plan of the Anglican Church, which was designed to take a congregation through the whole Bible on a three-year rotation (cf. Cranmer, 1549). Methodist Churches in Cape Town now often follow the Revised Common Lectionary in their preaching (cf. Vanderbilt Divinity Library, 2016).

<sup>451</sup> Wesley spoke actively against sarcastic or condemnatory preaching. He very instructively comments that "the continually telling people they are dead, is the ready way to make them so" (1827-3, p. 443). Even a rebuke, if necessary, should be delivered in a "mild and gentle manner" (1827-4, p. 339)

<sup>452</sup> This tension between effort laid out in compassion for suffering and effort laid out in compassion for lost-ness is well illustrated by passages such as this: "At the request of Mr. Whitaker, of New-England, I preached and afterwards made a collection for the Indian schools in America. A large sum of money is now collected; but will money convert Heathens? Find Preachers of David Brainerd's spirit, and nothing can stand before them; but without this, what will gold or silver do? No more than lead or iron. They have indeed sent thousands to hell; but never yet brought a soul to heaven" (1827-3, p. 300) It is important to notice that the ambivalence expressed here never stopped Wesley from energetic raising of money and awareness for important social projects.

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outside of the church were in the same predicament<sup>453</sup>. What also concerns me in this research, however, is an investigation into how Wesley approached the task of persuading people to consider conversion to Christianity.

### ***Ethos: Qualities of an Exponent of Evangelism***

In Aristotle's theory of persuasion the character of the persuader is considered key for her/his capacity to persuade; and that character is made uniquely manifest in the persuader's lived example. Wesley certainly recognised the power of character/example<sup>454</sup>: "... Of what importance is every step we take, seeing so many are ready to follow us" (1827-2, p. 505). Wesley intended the *Journal*, apparently, to be one long testimony to his example and that of the early Methodists (cf. Hammond, 2014, p. 10). So what are some of the hallmarks of an evangelist through Wesley's eyes?

*Firstly, a persuasive evangelist has a preferential option for the poor.* There can be little doubt that Jesus' address in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4 was a central element of John Wesley's self-understanding of his life's work<sup>455</sup>. His capacity to notice and respond to their systemic misery arose from his daily exposure to their lives where they were lived. This was an ideological commitment, and not a mere tactical necessity. Towards the end of his life Wesley could have spent all his life going from church to church – but he constantly (and stubbornly) insisted on stopping in between churches to interact with people. Although the poor increasingly sobered up, got jobs on the credit of their good reputation, started rising towards middle class (1773, p. 22) and building comfortable Methodist preaching rooms, Wesley frequently reminded them that their origins were on the street and that they should not forget those who were still outside (1827-4, pp. 10, 11, 102, 113, etc.).

Associated with this was that a Methodist should preach for free. The Gospel must be freely available to all, and that meant no muddying of the motivational waters by introducing payment for preaching. Wesley insisted that any Methodist preacher should only preach for

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<sup>453</sup> As Bosch notes, "Methodists could see no real difference between nominal Christians and pagans" (Bosch, 1991, p. 278).

<sup>454</sup> "I had observed to the society last week, that I had not seen one congregation ever in Ireland behave so ill at church as that at Athlone, laughing, talking, and staring about during the whole service. I had added, "This is your fault; for if you had attended the church, as you ought to have done, your presence and example would not have failed to influence the whole congregation." (1827-3, p. 95)

<sup>455</sup> After one frustrating interlude, late in his life, where he had begun to be inundated by demands to preach in churches of the wealthy, he complains: "If I might choose, I should still (as I have done hitherto), 'preach the gospel to the poor.'" (1827-2, p. 488)

free, never, ever for pay<sup>456</sup>. He recognised that the credibility of a messenger of free Good News would be deeply compromised by charging a fee, or asking for a reward.

*Secondly, Wesley demanded, and apparently himself delivered, a gentle, humble affection from all his preachers.* He could apparently not think of anything he would rather have received than his own sense of forgiveness, reconciliation to God, and employment in God's work; and so he could not think of something kinder to do for somebody else than to jolt them awake to those same realities: "Knowing it to be the greatest charity to awaken those that sleep in sin, I preached on, 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'" (1827-2, p. 135). It is not best practice to take Wesley's word for his description of his own character<sup>457</sup>, but it does make sense of his wide following that he came across as a roughly kind man, caustic and blunt but basically well-disposed to anyone who took religion seriously, and disinclined to harangue (even if he might occasionally be restrainedly vitriolic when pushed into debate)<sup>458</sup>. He frequently argues for irenic rules of engagement in debate<sup>459</sup>, arguing that just because one disagreed with somebody one didn't lose the Christian obligation of speaking with "tenderness and good nature" (1827-2, p. 14). It was not only in debate that he required "tenderness, meekness and wisdom; he demanded it in preaching: "O what a harvest might there be, if any lover of souls, who has time upon his hands, would constantly attend these places of distress, and, with tenderness and meekness of wisdom, instruct and exhort those on whom God has laid his hands, to know and improve the day of their visitation" (1827-1, p. 337).<sup>460</sup> The "indexical" correspondence between preacher and message would have been extremely high (cf. Hughes, 2003, p. 140).

And this love demanded personal expression in warmth, affection and connection to be truly persuasive: "...By repeated experiments we learn, that though a man preach like an angel,

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<sup>456</sup> Writing against a con-man who was defrauding people under the disguise of being a Methodist preacher, Wesley took out a newspaper advertisement declaring: "no Preacher in connection with me, either directly or indirectly asks money of any one" (1827-2, p. 70).

<sup>457</sup> Hammond gives a very helpful exposition of the difficulties of handling the *Journal*, due to its inevitable bias. His conclusion is that it is an important document, but must be read critically – and by critically he does not mean that it will be inevitably and everywhere inaccurate! (2014, pp. 9-11)

<sup>458</sup> He describes preaching on a very challenging topic: "I *strongly, but very tenderly* enforced that caution, 'Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall'" (1827-4, pp. 375 - emphasis added)

<sup>459</sup> Wesley reports instructively on an anti-Methodist sermon he has just sat through in an Anglican church: "I scarce ever heard so fine a defence of a weak cause,....wherein he laboured much to prove the unlawfulness of laymen's preaching; but *with such tenderness and good nature*, that I almost wish the sermon were printed, for a pattern to all polemical writers" (1827-2, pp. 14 - emphasis added). Wesley hated the bickering that happened amongst Christians, the quest for an ever more narrowly demarcated doctrinal stance that progressively, in Wesley's view, shut out others: "O that all men would sit as loose to opinions as I do! That they would think and let think!" (1827-4, p. 91).

<sup>460</sup> And again: "O how patient, how meek, how gentle toward all men ought a Preacher, especially a Methodist, to be! (1827-4, p. 385).

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he will neither collect, nor preserve a society which is collected, without visiting them from house to house" (1827-2, p. 435). Evangelism required constant, interested, loving contact, contact that extended into a responsible relationship over time; if not, people would get discouraged and fall away<sup>461</sup>. The character of a persuasive Methodist evangelist was that she/he did not abandon newly awakened people, but laboured with them through loving contact over a lifetime, if needed, and Wesley modelled this in person<sup>462</sup>.

*Thirdly, and possibly unexpectedly to our contemporary sensibilities, Wesley modelled and expected a capacity to let those to whom one spoke make up their own minds.* No matter how strongly one felt about the truth, it was never incumbent on a preacher to harangue, bully or otherwise try and overpower the will of the other party. He considered it only fair to extend to others the respect he would like to receive [0]. In addition he pleaded for others not to give in to a condemnatory prejudice against whole groups or classes of people<sup>463</sup>, but rather to deal with each person on their own merits. John Wesley shows no sign of using the rhetorical stock in trade of emotionalism in order to manipulate the perceptions of the crowds he spoke to. In fact he disassociated himself clearly from those who screamed unintelligibly, pranced around indecently, and manipulated people into saying they were saved when they were not<sup>464</sup>.

*This was important for Wesley because, fourthly, as we have seen, he showed a very high regard for the role of God in conversion* [0]. When God did not act and bring about widespread conversions, it was as much a fact to be reported as any other<sup>465</sup>. Wesley's bottom line on the use of unethical or hostile tactics in preaching was "the work of God does not, cannot need the work of the Devil to forward it" (1827-4, p. 258). If God did not work,

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<sup>461</sup> "Upon examination, I found the society at Newcastle, also, smaller than it was two years since. This I can impute to nothing but the want of visiting from house to house; without which the people will hardly increase, either in number or grace" (1827-3, p. 481).

<sup>462</sup>A sermon was never enough – it had to be followed up not only by another sermon, but by a personal visit to talk through its implications; he often notes something along the lines of "... I visited as many of the people, sick and well, as I possibly could" (1827-3, p. 390).

<sup>463</sup> "Why should a good-natured and a thinking man ... condemn whole bodies of men by the lump?" (1827-3, p. 418). This important insight did not entirely free Wesley from stereotypical criticisms, but his general evaluation of all human culture (when unrestrained by the Gospel) was so low that it probably all evened out in the end to a kind of resigned openness to all.

<sup>464</sup> He wrote up his position in an open letter in the Journals (1827-3, pp. 119-122). Harrison makes the interesting suggestion that "Wesley... sought to construct a kind of inductively grounded experimental religion by gathering histories of personal religious experiences. This would serve as a check against enthusiasm" (cf. Harrison, 2011, p. 432).

<sup>465</sup> "I rode to Sundon, and preached in the evening to a very quiet a very stupid people. How plain is it, that even to enlighten the understanding is beyond the power of man? After all our preaching here, even those who have constantly attended, no more understand us than if we had preached in Greek" (1827-3, p. 161).

then nothing ought to happen – the preacher should not fake the work of God by coercive behaviour and manipulation.

But Wesley also showed a very high regard for the agency of the evangelist in conversion. A persuasive person persuades through speaking. A person might be rough and untutored, but they had to have capacity to speak. God then took the word spoken and used it to stir the hearts of others<sup>466</sup>.

There is probably much more that could be said as to the character of Methodist preachers and witnesses, but under Wesley's tutelage a group of increasingly well educated, honest, patient and kindly preachers seem to have expanded outwards into the general population. People in every rank of society were confronted by thoughtful, creative, talkative Christians who seemed unstoppable in their efforts to help everybody to experience love, joy and peace in believing.

But Aristotelean persuasion theory also requires pathos, action that expresses the ethos of the persuader. The *Journal* describes and enjoins a very particular set of evangelism activities.

### ***Pathos: Tasks and Tactics of Evangelism***

Wesley didn't ever systematically articulate his evangelism tactics, but rather played them out through the *Journal's* periodic instalments. I have sketched his general *modus operandi* in the introduction to this chapter, but there is much more to be noted.

*Firstly, communication was for Wesley a settled intention to have "close conversation" with individuals.* For John Wesley, a Methodist was a messenger<sup>467</sup> with a message. And the primary medium for communication was apparently always the conversation. Wesley seemed to be primarily looking for opportunities to deal with people individually. The *Journal* is littered with one-line records of significant conversations<sup>468</sup>, right to the end of his life<sup>469</sup>.

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<sup>466</sup> John Wesley highly approved "uneducated" preachers such as John Brown: "... By his rough and strong, though artless, words, many of his neighbours had been much convinced, and began to search the Scriptures as they never had done before" (1827-1, p. 426). Of Dr Conyers he says "... He was quite an original; his matter was very good, his manner very bad; but it is enough that God owned him, both in the conviction and conversion of sinners" (1827-4, p. 248).

<sup>467</sup> He derived this from many places in scripture: the parable of the wedding feast (1827-2, pp. 32-33); Isaiah 44:26 (1827-4, p. 39); Luke 2:10 (1827-1, p. 114)

<sup>468</sup> Wesley had "close conversation" with many, many people: he conversed with a clergyman who was prejudiced against Methodists (1827-2, p. 6); he talked with a man cursing his horse (1827-2, p. 174); he exchanged a few meaningful words with an innkeeper's wife (1827-2, p. 425); and he spoke to a woman who is a fellow passenger on a ship, shortly before her death (1827-2, p. 503). This serendipity was apparently of great delight to him. He records, as I have noted, a conversation with a smith shoeing his horse, or a young gentleman trying to ride away from him on a slower horse (1827-1, pp. 371-372). He speaks to a labourer who has had an injury from a bull – but a narrow escape from death (1827-2, p. 127).

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One instance he record is, I feel, paradigmatic: he speaks with a group of people gawking at a corpse in the road (1827-2, p. 101). I think this shows how Wesley crossed the conceptual bridge between conversation and sermon. He joins the crowd as another member of a group conversation, and ends up preaching about mortality and life. When speaking “severally” to individuals he could tailor the message directly to their needs; but when more were gathered, he would speak more generally, and follow a general line of thought, in the hopes of awakening some – who would then in turn perhaps come into the orbit of close conversation.

Wesley did not always find it easy or congenial to speak out on Christ’s behalf; but if he found himself reluctant to speak it tormented him<sup>470</sup>. The psychological angst of opening conversations about God apparently became much less than his angst about not speaking out, and in the end, as he gained mastery of the art of speaking to people’s situations, relaxed conversation with strangers seems to have become second nature. Wesley manifestly respected alterity (although, as I have shown, he did not uniformly value cultural differences). Although he planned out the minutiae of his life obsessively, he included in his calculations and appointments broad margins of time for encounters with people literally *en route*. Because of his constant travel, he had many hours of discretionary time on horseback in his life, which he would use either for reading (if the weather was fine), or for making the most of the random encounters he had with people of every sort. These conversations are noted in the same *Journal* that records great crowds and weighty theological debates; the picture emerges of an evangelism practitioner who values the small and the ordinary as much as the great and extraordinary. I suspect that this constant conversation with ordinary people who were not involved directly with the Methodist movement would have kept Wesley attuned to the needs and hopes and fears of ordinary humanity. It was in itself context-specific communication, and it would have enabled him to relate his message more effectively to the people who gathered in great crowds to hear him.

*Secondly, if there were too many people for “close conversation”, he would freely preach sermons.* There was always a concern that as many as possible could hear the message; and his communication medium of choice, after that of “close conversation”, was the sermon. This was completely normal for his age. Monologue lectures were what people

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<sup>469</sup> This inspired me one year to keep a record of all the significantly gospel-freighted conversations I had in one year in Thailand. Delivering sermons might be particularly gratifying to preachers, but the *Journal* encourages the ordinary work of evangelism that is within the range of any disciple.

<sup>470</sup> Wesley vividly records this inner ambivalence: “I went several times the following days, with a design to speak to the sailors, but could not. I mean, I was quite averse from speaking; I could not see how to make an occasion, and it seemed quite absurd to speak without. Is not this what men commonly mean by, “I could not speak?” And is this a sufficient cause of silence, or no? Is it a prohibition from the Good Spirit? or a temptation from nature, or the evil one?” (1827-1, p. 71)

expected, and apparently audiences had a cultural capacity to hear and remember (cf. 1827-4, pp. 248, 282). Wesley expected that the word, preached, could accomplish first-level communication for many,<sup>471</sup> a move towards a shared interpretant (Hughes, 2003, p. 147).

For his era, Wesley seems to have been able to preach a memorable, moving address: he valued clarity, what he referred to as “plain speech”, and brevity<sup>472</sup> (1827-3, p. 449; 1827-4, p. 484). He shied away from excessive emotion [0], but he was never averse to emotion as such<sup>473</sup>. His talks were apparently scriptural, logical, and undemonstrative, at least to judge by his published sermons, and always “applied”. By “applied” he seems to have meant making sure people understood the implications of the truth they had heard for their choices of attitude and lifestyle – he reckoned that a sermon without application was as much use as the “singing of a lark” (1827-4, p. 159). However, there must have been in his day a general capacity for attention on the part of audiences that is not common in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And perhaps the most memorable thing was not the sermon content, but as I have mentioned, the high indexical value of the preacher himself – a little clergyman with his posh accent and MA degree being prepared to stand out in the sun, wind, rain or frost and endure having stones and muck thrown at him...all for the edification of the poor and low-status crowds of industrialising Britain. McLuhan might have observed that in this context this medium [preacher + sermon] constituted an impressively powerful message<sup>474</sup>.

Wesley gives us a taste of what his sermons must have been like through various comments on the craft of preaching scattered through his *Journal*. He aimed for a direct, clear exposition of the Scriptural truth on particular subjects, a style that could make the message accessible to the ordinary, uneducated listener, and he aimed to challenge hearers to examine their lives and wake up to the realities of God<sup>475</sup>. On the other hand, he did not

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<sup>471</sup> A startling example of this was the sermon of a John Lancaster, a condemned felon who had been converted on death row; as he was being taken to the gallows on the wagon he “... frequently spoke to the people, exhorting them to repentance. To some he said, “Ye poor creatures, you do not know where I am going. See that you love Christ; see that you follow Christ; and then you will come there too.” ... All the people who saw [him] seemed to be amazed...” (1827-2, p. 89).

<sup>472</sup> Wesley preached short sermons, generally, appreciating that the audience might feel differently to the preacher about the time: “I never exceed, but when I am full of matter; and still I consider it may not be with my audience as with me. So that it is strange if I exceed my time above a quarter of an hour” (1827-3, p. 414).

<sup>473</sup> He often describes his mood as he preached as something beyond his control: “I spoke with such closeness and pungency, as I cannot do but at some peculiar seasons. It is indeed the gift of God, and cannot be attained by all the efforts of nature or art united” (1827-3, p. 440)

<sup>474</sup> Marshall McLuhan's famous thesis is that “The medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (cf. McLuhan, 1964, p. 24)

<sup>475</sup> A good summary of “plain speech” is the following summary Wesley gives of a sermon and its reception: “I preached at Bath. Some of the rich and great were present; to whom, as to the rest, I declared with all plainness of speech, 1. That, by nature, they were all children of wrath. 2. That all their natural tempers were corrupt and abominable; and, 3. All their words and works, which could

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have an over-optimistic view of the effectiveness of any particular sermon<sup>476</sup>. In a significant exposition of the problem of response, he says "...almost in every place, even where there is no lasting fruit, there is so great an impression made at first" (1827-2, p. 343). Fuelled by such pessimism (realism?), one of his metaphors for preaching was that of the punches thrown by a boxer – more effective if one blow was shrewdly followed by another (1827-1, p. 418; 1827-4, p. 380). One had to persist in order to get through.

Wesley recognised the psychological principle that one cannot be persuaded to accept a new idea before one has first rejected it due to such risk-aversion factors as doubt of the persuader's intentions, reluctance to change, and fear of being controlled by others (Griffin, 1976, p. 52; Rambo, 1995, p. 35). As Wesley understood it, it was impossible that the preaching of the Gospel should *not* produce "offence" at times – if it did not, something suspicious was going on: either the preacher was setting out to please his/her hearers, a bad thing in Wesley's view; or else the hearers were too dull/sleepy to realise how great their eschatological danger was, or how great a threat the Gospel might be to their way of life<sup>477</sup>.

*Thirdly, in all his communication he believed he should be waking people up to spiritual realities:* People who are asleep generally do not wish to be awakened. But if the necessary precursor to conversion is an awakening to the realities of God, as Wesley believed, then there is nothing for it but to go ahead and shake some grumpy people. And sometimes, Wesley seems to have felt, they need to be shaken repeatedly before their eyes open<sup>478</sup>. Wesley deeply desired that people would have a deep inner worldview change, to stop being dreamers and start being actors. He expected the Word of God to deliver a rousing shock to the system of every person who heard it. Sometimes he could nominate the theme, as when

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never be any better but by faith; and that, 4. A natural man has no more faith than a devil, if so much. One of them, my Lord, stayed very patiently till I came to the middle of the fourth head. Then, starting up, he said, "'Tis hot! 'Tis very hot," and got down stairs as fast as he could" (1827-1, p. 413).

<sup>476</sup> One often finds in the *Journal* he expresses doubt as to the actual effect of any one sermon: "I had not designed to preach; but seeing such a congregation, I could not think it right to send them empty away; and therefore expounded the parable of the barren fig-tree. O that it may at length bear fruit!" (1827-1, p. 298; 1827-2, p. 436).

<sup>477</sup> "Mark the tendency of this accursed principle! If you will speak only to those who are willing to hear, see how many you will turn from the error of their ways! If, therefore, striving to do good, you have done hurt, what then? So did St. Paul. So did the Lord of life. Even His word was "the savour of death," as well as "the savour of life." But shall you, therefore, strive no more? God forbid! Strive more humbly, more calmly, more cautiously. Do not strive as you did before; — but strive while the breath of God is in your nostrils!" (1827-1, p. 33).

<sup>478</sup> This pugilistic metaphor was typical of Wesley: "I am more and more convinced, that the devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened, and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow" (1827-1, p. 418).

he chose a preaching topic<sup>479</sup>; but at other times the wake-up call had to cut across the trend of the conversation, and even then some people remained aggressively asleep<sup>480</sup>.

One strategy was to use what Wesley referred to as “warning” or “reproof” – finding an aspect of life where the person whom he was addressing was not living up to the perhaps the social norms of the day – and appealing to the his/her conscience (1827-1, p. 217). Sabbath breaking and cursing were two such areas he often addressed (1827-1, pp. 409-410, 419, 467, etc). It speaks a lot for the general Christian awareness of his age that this often apparently produced gratitude rather than resentment<sup>481</sup> (although I do wonder whether negative responses might not perhaps be as well represented in Wesley’s record as positive ones). But Wesley was not mean-spirited or condemnatory. He appears to have been well-enough attuned to the practicalities of rhetoric – at handling the teaching, delighting and persuading process of moving the hearts of people to consider the challenge of the Gospel. And part of that was that he understood the dark side of rhetoric too. He knew the dangers of judgemental, condemnatory preaching, and avoided it scrupulously<sup>482</sup>.

*Fourthly he was deeply concerned with acoustics – people had to be able to hear.* Wesley’s obsession with being heard comes through clearly in his constant interest in issues related to acoustics<sup>483</sup>. His sense of calling seems to have made him very aware of whether or not his

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<sup>479</sup> “I ... endeavoured, if possible to rouse some of the sleepers, by strongly, yea, roughly enforcing those words, ‘Lord, are there few that be saved?’” (1827-3, p. 300)

<sup>480</sup> Wesley describes an amusing evangelism failure in which he once failed in this quest to wake somebody: “I overtook one who immediately accosted me with so many and so impertinent questions, that I was quite amazed. In the midst of some of them, concerning my travels and my journey, I interrupted him, and asked, “Are you aware that we are on a longer journey; that we are traveling toward eternity?” He replied instantly, “O, I find you! I find you! I know where you are! Is not your name Wesley? — ’Tis pity! ’Tis great pity. Why could not your father’s religion serve you? Why must you have a new religion?” I was going to reply; but he cut me short by crying out in triumph, “I am a Christian! I am a Christian! I am a Churchman! I am a Churchman! I am none of your Culamites;” as plain as he could speak; for he was so drunk, he could but just keep his seat. Having then clearly won the day, or, as his phrase was, “put them all down,” he began kicking his horse on both sides, and rode off as fast as he could.” (1827-1, p. 410)

<sup>481</sup> Wesley tells the tale of some swearing colliers and a local preacher: “as some of them were cursing and swearing, one of our Local Preachers going by, reproved them. One of them followed after him, and begged he would give them a sermon” (1827-4, p. 184).

<sup>482</sup> Wesley notes acutely that “the continually telling people they are dead is the ready way to make them so” (1827-3, p. 443).

<sup>483</sup> He estimates how far his voice can reach with wind factors (1827-2, p. 266; 1827-3, p. 263), acoustic properties of amphitheatres and other outdoor venues<sup>483</sup>, which pillar to preach at in a certain parish church in order to be heard throughout the church (1827-4, p. 243), and what the best shape for a preaching-hall might be (octagonal, according to Wesley 1827-2, pp. 71, 263; 1827-4, p. 42). He positions himself so that people both inside and crowding around outside a church building can hear him (1827-3, p. 499), and often abandons a building as being simply too small for the number of people who want to hear – relocating to some large civil structure or a suitable outdoor venue (1827-4, p. 319; 1827-3, p. 319). His interest is not in big crowds alone – a smaller gathering in a home might need him to relocate to the foot of the stairs so that both those upstairs and downstairs can hear him (1827-4, pp. 201, 379). He opens windows and doors so that those who cannot fit in can at least hear what is happening<sup>483</sup> (1827-4, p. 508). Even so, he has to acknowledge sadly that in

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message could be physically heard. Although the Methodist church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not evoking such widespread interest, this attitude of Wesley's, wanting the church walls to be porous enough to allow outsiders to participate, will be a key element in my grounded theory.

*Fifthly, conversations and preaching had to happen where people were, whether in church or between the churches.* Tactically, it has become clear by this stage that John Wesley preached to the poor where they were. But he was not bound by that. He also preached to the rich where *they* were, on occasion – everybody needed rescue<sup>484</sup>. The principle was that of making the message audible and understandable to the hearers, and to that end Outler notes that John Wesley "...felt entirely free to adapt and develop his own contemporary modes of interpretation and communication of the gospel" (1971, p. 39). His journals are full of reflections on the communication process, and examples of him going out of his way to cross language barriers. As a scholar he was easily able to converse with other scholars in Latin (cf. Wesley, 1827-4, p. 258). He learned German on the voyage out to Georgia in order to communicate with fellow-settlers (1827-1, p. 15), and generally excelled at learning European languages, although he recounts his humiliating struggles with Irish and Welsh<sup>485</sup> (1827-2, p. 141). He used translators when he had to (1827-4, pp. 256-257; 1827-1, p. 23; 1827-2, p. 29; 1827-3, p. 125). He records cultural differences in Scotland and Ireland and the Netherlands, although with a rather naïve understanding of race, perhaps typical for his times, as I have noted (1827-3, p. 418); he reflects on how he has managed to get across to the wealthy and the poor<sup>486</sup> (1827-2, pp. 71, 148); he describes how when one approach does not appear to work he comes at the communication from a different angle (1827-3, p. 468; 1827-4, p. 380). In this arena as in all of his life he was an incorrigible experimenter, and a lover of alterity<sup>487</sup>.

*Sixthly, John Wesley believed in experimenting with whatever medium would effectively carry the message.* Although he was primarily a "speaker", Wesley did not ignore the

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some instances many present would not have been able to hear anything he said (1827-2, pp. 32, 227, 228. etc.).

<sup>484</sup> "It seems as if the good Providence of God had prepared this place, for those rich and honourable sinners, who will not deign to receive any message from God but in a genteel way" (1827-4, p. 377).

<sup>485</sup> He complains bitterly about the Irish language: "The difficulty of reading it is intolerable, occasioned chiefly by the insufferable number of mute letters, both of vowels and consonants" (1827-4, p. 317).

<sup>486</sup> A rainstorm drives his party to seek shelter in a rural homestead in Ireland, "... where were a company of children with their mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. They seemed much frightened; but one of our company, who spoke Irish, soon took away their fears. We then sang a hymn, and went to prayer. They gaped and stared abundantly; and when we went away, after giving them a small piece of money, followed us with a thousand blessings" (1827-3, p. 228).

<sup>487</sup> Wesley made a point of speaking with others who were different to himself – Spanish Jews and Chicasaws (1827-1, pp. 46, 36), slaves and little girls (1827-1, p. 47; 1827-4, p. 316), soldiers and prisoners-of-war (1827-1, p. 161; 1827-2, p. 486). He had an insatiable appetite for interacting with people who were ignored by others.

newspaper, the tract market, or the book market – these were all media which he worked diligently to use for communicating the Methodist message. Besides the sermon, Wesley seems to have endorsed as wide as possible a use of communications media of his time: the *Journal*, published in instalments; he waged war via letters to the press (1827-3, pp. 40, 277; 1827-1, pp. 456, etc.); broadsheets and tracts<sup>488</sup> (1827-4, pp. 318, 487). Wesley even expressed a qualified approval of graffiti, in his concern to use all possible means to communicate his message (1827-2, pp. 354-355).

*Seventhly, evangelism was a life-long study of Wesley's.* Wesley had, as I have shown, had clear outcomes in mind when preaching, teaching, speaking or writing: he wanted people to become “convicted and converted”. Although he had to spend increasingly more of his time on Methodist insiders as the movement expanded, he never lost his taste for helping people set off on the journey of discovering God. Evangelism was not an activity of Wesley's youth – it was the labour of his entire life. He did not delegate evangelism to other preachers because he wished to focus on other areas of ministry – he simply wanted more people to be reached with the rousing message of the Gospel. He never intended to stop, and got back to the task as soon as he could after conferences and visitation of Methodist members.

### ***Logos: Evangelistic Message***

There were certain directions that Wesley seemed to travel down in conversation with fellow travellers or through sermons preached around the British Isles. In his context he found, by experiment, that certain topics usefully touched a nerve, leading to either a very negative or very positive reaction. This needs much closer study, and I am not suggesting that what would have keyed into the psyche of an 18<sup>th</sup> century person is the same topic that would key into the psyche of a 21<sup>st</sup> century person. My suggestion is simply that there might be some value in finding what works now in the same way that John Wesley found what worked then.

*Firstly, the Gospel was good news for people living in the shadow of death.* Death and mortality was a frequent theme of Wesley's. People were dying everywhere of childbirth and old age, disease and natural disaster, war and work-related injury, crime and judicial processes. The *Journal* is full of good deaths and bad deaths, deaths of friends and deaths of criminals, deaths of the famous and deaths of the poor, deaths of soldiers and children and women and the elderly; in some ways it is a register of deaths.

In 1752 Wesley recorded the report of Rose Longworth's life after finding “peace with God” in June 1749 – especially her last days of illness, and her unwavering faith until her

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<sup>488</sup> For Wesley the message is the thing, and he studiously projects a strictly non-mercenary image through his *Journal*: “Why do persons who treat the same subjects with me, write so much larger books? Of many reasons, is not this the chief, — We do not write with the same view? Their principal end is to get money; my only one, to do good” (1827-3, p. 359).

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remarkably peaceful death in 1751 (1827-2, pp. 238-239). This is only one example of a constant stream of death narratives, Good and Bad. The emphasis was usually on the wideness of God's mercy for condemned felons, ordinary labourers, soldiers and miners, men and women and children – many are portrayed as ending their days in a sort of plebeian glory, with a good death being presented as the proof that this faith works. The awful alternative is the Bad Death, attended by terror and despair<sup>489</sup>. The task of the evangelist was to make sure that "...death, heaven, and hell, come to the ears, if not the hearts, of them that 'care for none of these things'" (1773, p. 306), and to use the opportunity of the natural awe and solemnity aroused by a death<sup>490</sup> to drive home the truth people need to live their lives so as not to fear dying. There were two situations which always called out an evangelist's warning about mortality from Wesley: a funeral, or a visit to a country house<sup>491</sup>. The constant sub-text was the question: what sort of life, and what sort of death do you really want?

*Secondly, Wesley had an extremely low view of humanity's capacity for self-improvement.*

The poor were prone to vicious sinfulness, the rich were prone to the cruelties of power, and everyone, high and low, was asleep in the torpor of frivolity and self-pleasing. But I have dealt with this in my section on conversion [0].

The positive aspects of Wesley's *logos* I dealt with in covering his hermeneutic of straightforward interpretation of the Bible, and that people could expect to experience, inwardly, being saved by God through faith in Jesus. One could perhaps summarise his message as "You need to be rescued, although you might not realise it. God is ready to rescue you, and all it takes is for you to believe that Jesus died to make that possible. And

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<sup>489</sup> Wesley notes the funeral of a local gentleman who had been "...emphatically poor though while he lived he possessed (not enjoyed) at least a thousand pounds a year" (1827-2, p. 222). He recounts the (doubtful) anecdote of a dying sceptic: "Mr. Voltaire, finding himself ill, sent for Dr. Fronchin, first Physician to the Duke of Orleans, one of his converts to infidelity, and said to him, 'Sir, I desire you will save my life. I will give you half my fortune, if you will lengthen out my days only six months. If not, I shall go to the devil, and carry you with me'" (1827-4, p. 140)

<sup>490</sup> This might sound like using emotionalism, but Wesley himself noted, often sarcastically, that any "serious impressions" did not seem to last. An instructive example is the execution by firing squad of a deserter, in front of his assembled company: "Numberless crowds ran together about this time, to see ... And I believe some of them retained serious impressions for near four-and-twenty hours! But it was not so with the soldiers: Although they walked one by one, close to the bleeding, mangled carcass, most of them were as merry within six hours, as if they had only seen a puppet-show" (1827-3, p. 97).

<sup>491</sup> It was typical of Wesley to tweak the tail of an aristocrat with a message that impugned his status: "— I preached, about noon, in the great hall at Llandaff, on, 'It is appointed unto men once to die.' Strange doctrine, and not very welcome to the inhabitants of palaces!" (1827-4, p. 25). Derelict country homes gave him particularly good grist to this mill: "the great mansion-house built by the late Mr. Pinder's father, when I was a little child. His grandson has left it desolate and without inhabitant, has taken away all the pictures and furniture, blocked up the windows, and cut down the fine rows of trees which formed the avenue! So fleets the comedy of life away" (1827-4, pp. 442-443).

once you realise that, your life will be transformed and you will experience love, joy and peace in devoting your life from then on to the service of God and his world [0].

### ***How the Alternatively Faithed saw Methodists***

Methodism emerged within a society of cultural adherents to Christianity: its original members were mostly functionally estranged from the formal church establishment of the time. The positive and negative perceptions of the “unawakened” towards the Methodist Anglicans was a major theme of the *Journal*. John Wesley gives us many glimpses into the mixture of bemusement, fear, horror and disgust, but also longing and sometimes deep awe which the rise of Methodism instilled. For all its strangeness, it nevertheless rapidly became what appears to have been a genuinely popular movement. By the end of his life Wesley found himself puzzled by the widespread honour and recognition he was given – freedom of cities (1827-3, p. 469; 1827-4, p. 470), and too many invitations to accept to preach in churches which fifty years earlier had banned him from their pulpits<sup>492</sup>.

As I have noted, the gentry saw the Methodists as a threat to their power base, being very wary of the motivation of these strange new players on the religious scene. And the poor saw the Methodists as unwelcome intruders into their pleasures and freedoms. As I have also noted, rejection of this new message was inevitable at first. There was a deluge of reaction. A huge amount of creativity was unleashed against the Methodists to try and deny them any right to public space for communication<sup>493</sup>.

This meant that evangelism partially involved out-manoeuvring and pacifying the mob, in order to win them over to a hearing of the message. Wesley resorted to the law when necessary in order to challenge injustices perpetrated against his Methodists (1827-3, p. 167). Sometimes he or another Methodist preacher would be driven out of the field by mob violence (1827-2, p. 16; 1827-2, p. 128). But many times he reports that he simply faced down those who were hostile to him and time after time this approach brought the most

<sup>492</sup> He notes wryly that “The tide is now turned; so that I have more invitations to preach in churches than I can accept of” (1827-4, p. 248).

<sup>493</sup> Cattle were driven into the audiences (1827-1, p. 399); church bells were rung and horn orchestras were hired to play (1827-1, p. 558; 1827-2, p. 269). Men tried to disperse crowds by riding their horses through them (1827-2, p. 170), and a miller released the water in the mill race to try and drown out the preaching (1827-1, p. 498). Soldiers were marched through the crowd (1827-4, p. 194) and a fire engine was deployed to douse the people listening to the sermon (1827-2, p. 228). Stones and muck were routinely hurled at Wesley (1827-2, p. 253). In isolated instances Methodists even had their houses looted and stripped of furniture, woodwork and windows (1827-1, pp. 453-455). Some opponents tried distraction, hiring a fiddler (1827-1, p. 559) or showing off a dancing horse (1827-2, p. 149). One gentleman even threw the crowd into disarray by throwing out a handful of coins for people to scabble over (1827-2, p. 73). And then there were always the old brutal standbys of beating and kicking (1827-2, pp. 74-76). At one stage local magistrates encouraged press-gangs to target Methodist preachers as “vagrants” and therefore lawful prey for being pressed into army or navy (1827-1, pp. 467, 468, 470). The ultimate message must have been that something really serious was happening if the Methodists were inclined to endure such treatment for its sake.

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rowdy of attackers into submissive listening, and sometimes to conversion<sup>494</sup>; at other times God seemed to intervene in mysterious ways<sup>495</sup>.

On the other hand there was a gradual rise in Wesley's popularity. There would have been no hostile mobs if there had not been remarkably widespread interest in the first place. And eventually Wesley and the first Methodists' tenacity won out. Nobody was stoning the Methodists by the time Wesley was in his seventies. But what is interesting for this study is that Wesley was in direct contact with those who both agreed *and* disagreed with him; part of the discomfort of being a Christian doing evangelism in contestable spaces is that those spaces will at times be hotly contested. The *Journal* contains a lifetime of conversations in summary which constitute Wesley's ongoing education in what it felt like for people to not be in the same position of faith as he was.

### Liturgy that Connects with the Alternatively Faithed

Wesley did not lose his identity as a Clergyman, or seek to lose it, amongst the people of the world. He would have decisively disagreed with a Hoekendijkian stance on clerical Non-involvement in evangelism (cf. Hoekendijk, 1964, p. 63). As we have seen, Wesley sought to embody the priesthood and to consecrate holy ground in the spaces between the churches. Reading the *Journal* we see that he had a liturgical connection with the world, in the world – and that concern is central to my construction of a grounded theory of a liturgy of conversion. With this in mind, Wesley raises some very challenging questions about leadership in the establishment church.

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<sup>494</sup> Wesley seems to have been fearless. He describes one instance where he and some Methodists are trying to take refuge in a house: "Among those without, were the crews of some privateers, which were lately come into the harbour. Some of these, being angry at the slowness of the rest, thrust them away, and, coming up all together, set their shoulders to the inner door, and cried out, "Avast, lads, avast!" Away went all the hinges at once, and the door fell back into the room. I stepped forward at once into the midst of them, and said, "Here I am. Which of you has any thing to say to me? To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? Or you? Or you?" I continued speaking till I came, bare-headed as I was, (for I purposely left my hat, that they might all see my face,) into the middle of the street, and then raising my voice, said, "Neighbours, countrymen! Do you desire to hear me speak?" They cried vehemently, "Yes, yes. He shall speak. He shall. Nobody shall hinder him." (1827-1, pp. 508-509)

<sup>495</sup> A classic example of this was a mob leader who accidentally got swept into a house in which Wesley and his Methodists had been forced to take shelter: "... they began throwing great stones, in order to break the door. But perceiving this would require some time, they dropped that design for the present. They first broke all the tiles on the penthouse over the door, and then poured in a shower of stones at the windows. One of their captains, in his great zeal, had followed us into the house, and was now shut in with us. He did not like this, and would fain have got out; but it was not possible; so he kept as close to me as he could, thinking himself safe when he was near me. But, staying a little behind, — when I went up two pair of stairs, and stood close on one side, where we were a little sheltered, — a large stone struck him on the forehead, and the blood spouted out like a stream. He cried out, "O Sir, are we to die tonight? What must I do? What must I do?" I said, "Pray to God. He is able to deliver you from all danger." He took my advice, and began praying in such a manner as he had scarce done ever since he was born" (1827-2, p. 46)

John Wesley shared with James<sup>496</sup> (James 2:1-26) the determination that the marginalised take their rightful place in the liturgy of the church. Poverty is one criterion for keeping outsiders outside and silenced, and so Wesley went out to create disruptive and disruptable church where they *could* be heard<sup>497</sup>. Another is disease or disability. Wesley is acid in his condemnation of a superintendent who excludes a woman who seems to have been suffering from Tourette's syndrome<sup>498</sup>. Soldiers were mostly conscripts from farming and slum populations, and were marked for death on behalf of the state; but Wesley rewrote the public narrative about them by turning ravaging "monsters" into god-fearing men<sup>499</sup>. Condemned criminals were likewise in a liminal state, as were imprisoned debtors – Wesley's tender anxiety for them turned them from caged animals into human beings. There were very many ways of being excluded. Whole populations of colliers or tin or lead miners were written off as scum of the earth, but Wesley referred to them as gentry in their own right<sup>500</sup>. Prisoners of war were doubly outcast, but Wesley dealt with them on the same footing as local free Britons (1827-4, p. 166; 1827-2, p. 486).

The reaction to the outcasts and marginal people of society was (and is) generally segregation and avoidance. Wesley challenged all that, and the *Journal* was a constant record of the existence and value of the marginal people of society. Wesley raised the consciousness of the poor in many ways. The first was that he told their stories in the *Journal*; then, he let them speak for themselves through letters and recorded conversations.

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<sup>496</sup> Wesley's careful harmonisation of Paul and James in the *Notes on the New Testament* (Wesley, 1755, pp. 575-578), and his frequent *Journal* entries of preaching to the "poorest of the poor", illustrate his bias "in favour of the poor man" (1755, p. 576).

<sup>497</sup> He observes combatively: "I preached on the quay, where multitudes attended who would not have come to the other end of the city. In the afternoon I preached near the new Square. I find no other way to reach the outcasts of men. And this way God has owned, and does still own, both by the conviction and conversion of sinners" (1827-3, p. 147).

<sup>498</sup> Wesley is at his most scathing of the sensibilities of those with power when he says: "I talked at large with one whose case is very peculiar. She never loses a sense of the love of God; and yet is continually harassed by the devil, and constrained to utter words which her soul abhors; while her body feels as if it was in a burning flame. For this her father turned her out of doors; and she had no money, nor any friend to take her in. To cut her off from every human comfort, our wise Assistant turned her out of society. Yet in all this she murmured not, neither "charged God foolishly" (1827-4, p. 82)

<sup>499</sup> Even Wesley, at first, had little hope for the soldiers, and a low opinion of them: "The neighbouring camp had filled the town with soldiers, the most abandoned wretches whom I ever yet saw. Their whole glorying was in cursing, swearing, drunkenness, and lewdness. How gracious is God, that he does not yet send these monsters to their own place! At five I preached in the corn market, and at six in the morning. A few even of the soldiers attended" (1827-2, p. 248). But they responded in droves to his message of acceptance in Christ. Sometime later he was able to record a changed situation: "Two hundred soldiers, I suppose, and a whole row of Officers, attended in the evening. Their number was increased the next evening, and all behaved as men fearing God" (1827-2, p. 485).

<sup>500</sup> Wesley's affectionate irony in describing a wealthy chapel is as much a challenge to social norms as it is an affectionate nod to some key constituents of the early Methodist movement: "I think the preaching-house here is the most elegant of any square Room which we have in England; and we had as elegant a congregation: But they were as attentive as if they had been Kingswood colliers" (1827-4, p. 79).

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A poor person could come to have their thoughts and experiences recorded in a book! Wesley also records taking legal action on behalf of the poor, and encouraging them to take up their legal rights. And he touted interaction with the poor as a vital component of discipleship for the rich; all issues which I raised in my section earlier on urbanisation [0]. Wesley not only raised the profile of the marginal populations of Britain, but he put them centre stage in a liturgical milieu that most people of the time would have considered impossible outside a church building. He elevated the dispossessed and oppressed to the same status as the genteel congregation of St. Paul's<sup>501</sup>. He carried his persuasive message of "awake, O sleeper and rise from the dead" to both the most sacred of spaces and the most secular. He would speak the same message, as we have seen, to high prestige audiences of gentry, or low prestige audiences of coal miners. He would seem at home equally with a small handful of listeners, a single riding companion, crowds of thousands of poor people, or a critical university audience. All of this makes this *Journal* a very important record of somebody using the means at hand to promote the cause of those who are disadvantaged in their society. I shall reflect in due course on the means available to 21<sup>st</sup> century Methodist churches in Cape Town, and the use that is being (or could be being) made of them.

Wesley was fully alive to the indexical gap between the church as it was and the church that it might have been, with Jesus as the "commodity of the Church" rather than the "Hero of the people". He was excoriatingly abrupt, as we have noted, with anything about the Church that seemed out of line with what he considered to be "primitive Christianity", the Christianity of the New Testament. He constantly contrasted the church as it was in his time to the Church as it had been in the first century. This turned out to be a surprisingly popular approach – a clergyman on the side of the disregarded commoners against the blatant hypocrisy of the church superstructure<sup>502</sup>.

On the other hand, Wesley set the bar very high for converts. There was little scope to remain in Methodist fellowship without a radical personal scrutiny of one's lifestyle and motivations. Wesley openly and continuously doubted the veracity of emotional conversions – he adopted a "time will tell" approach to reported or observed emotional responses to his or others' preaching. He was constantly vigilant against the abuse of the

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<sup>501</sup> He often contrasts rich and poor for rhetorical effect: "I wonder at those who still talk so loud of the indecency of field preaching. The highest indecency is in St. Paul's church, when a considerable part of the congregation are asleep, or talking, or looking about, not minding a word the Preacher says. On the other hand, there is the highest decency in a churchyard or field, when the whole congregation behave and look as if they saw the Judge of all, and heard him speaking from heaven" (1827-2, p. 77).

<sup>502</sup> There are interesting parallels between this anti-hypocrisy stance and the possible approach of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church which I will revisit in the next chapter. The church was and is in need of an Ecclesiodicy as much as a Theodicy.

conversion/evangelism process for financial gain. No Methodist preacher was allowed to receive payment for preaching, an ethic that still obtains today<sup>503</sup>. Wesley made the whole process of conversion appear very daunting: he never made things look easy for a potential convert. One had to wake up to the reality of God, but then one had to follow that “clue” with a great deal of personal commitment. He held up a very high standard for conversion – people were expected to wrestle and struggle before they came to a sense of assurance. The church, and especially the Methodist fellowship, was wide open to those who did not yet experience themselves as believers, but whose experience was one of spiritual quest or struggle. People were expected to welcome others who were at extremely different stages of commitment to the cause of Christ – coming to Christ was painted as an enormous commitment. Outsiders could see that it was a very serious step to consider becoming a Methodist...and yet that did not seem to deter them. The implications of this for my grounded theory will have to be carefully weighed

### **4.3. Conclusion & Transition**

If decline in the mainline protestant denominations, and in the Methodist Church in Cape Town in particular, seems demographically inevitable, then perhaps we need to return to what woke the Church up in the days of Wesley. Perhaps if we look more closely at what the Methodist Awakening brought to the Anglican Church of Wesley's time we can discover useful clues for the Methodist Churches in Cape Town today.

John Wesley was a man who had known the words, but was also too honest to pretend that he really believed them. The authenticity of his leadership sprang from the discovery that it was logical, and possible, to resolve those anxieties through faith in Christ alone.

He felt no anxiety with the role of tradition. Wesley based innovation on deep collective memory. In some ways he could be regarded as a “rogue” academic, holding an MA from Oxford<sup>504</sup>. This meant that he had the capacity, inclination and the leisure to study and reflect on the way the tradition he inherited related to his current context, and so when he emerged from the world of academia and plunged into his life's work of itinerant preaching, he had deep background knowledge of the Bible and Church History, and an appetite for ongoing learning. But even though he respected the tradition and was planted in it, Wesley was ready to experiment with ecclesial forms, both on-site and off-site, in order to find working cultural solutions of implementing Scriptural principles and concepts. The constant contact with people who were outside the orbit of the church compelled Wesley to

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<sup>503</sup> I always get offered an envelope of cash when I have been invited to preach at a non-Methodist Church. I never do when I preach at a Methodist church!

<sup>504</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century an MA was a very rare, and very advanced, degree. It was required for an academic to gain tenure (cf. Hattersley, 2002, p. 69).

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experiment with ways of more effectively communicating with those he wished to persuade. Wesley was prepared to revisit many aspects of liturgy, based on the response (or lack of it) of his outside audiences. Given the massive weight of custom in the Christian community that limits liturgy to the spaces controlled by Christians, it is worth emphasising how emphatically Wesley found a home for himself in the world between the churches.

Reading the *Journal* makes it clear that Wesley was deeply concerned with people experiencing a reconciliation moment, a transition from either formality or profanity to intense personal owning of a faith experience. What he infers is that preaching this possibility will achieve results like this – in his view the emotionally satisfying conversions of so many people was a gloriously successful public demonstration of an experiment in religion.

Wesley, as I have shown, went way beyond the evangelism of those attending churches. He passionately, devotedly and energetically spearheaded the actual communication of the Gospel to people beyond the reach of the Church<sup>505</sup>. It appears that John Wesley never reached a point where he considered it tactically more important for himself to sit in some headquarters somewhere and administrate his forces of renewal remotely, through proxies<sup>506</sup> (1827-1, p. 201).

Wesley believed that a one-off presentation was nowhere near enough. His aim in his itinerant preaching was not to simply broadcast<sup>507</sup> the Gospel message, but to cultivate the crop produced by the Gospel seed and bring it through a process of growth to fruition. Wesley recognised the fragility of his entire enterprise. A naïve public transparency is part of the charm of his *Journal*. Although he undoubtedly tweaked and edited his account for instructional purposes, he does not project the sort of sanitised public persona we have come to expect from the “great” Christian leaders of our era.

An important issue to consider at this point is one raised by Jaroslav Pelikan:

“Whatever...rediscoverers of tradition may have supposed they were doing, it is up to us to be sensitive to the reconstruction and revision of the past that any such rediscovery entails, our own discoveries no less than theirs” (1984, p. 15). In my next chapter I will set out to show the logic of investigating these issues in pursuit of a solution to the problem of the loss

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<sup>505</sup> During his unhappy early mission-trip to America Wesley had already noted that the First-Nation Americans liked the way he moved around amongst them, rather than inhabiting a defensible position and expecting people to come to him (Wesley, 1827-1, p. 38). So did the Colliers and Tin Miners of Cornwall (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 419; 420-421)

<sup>506</sup> This opened him up to severe criticism for micro-management and despotism (Methodist Conference, 1862, p. 61/62), but it is remarkable that for seven decades he never withdrew himself from the firing line. If rocks were being thrown, he was as likely to be hit as any of his preachers (Wesley, 1827-1, pp. 399, 423)

<sup>507</sup> “Broadcast” in its original meaning of wide and indiscriminate sowing of seed (Collins, 2001).

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of vitality of the Methodist Church, keeping in the forefront of my mind Lucie-Smith's warning:

*"...tradition is more than just raiding the store cupboard of history for useful opinions and a notching up of gobbets from approved authors"*  
(2007, p. 27)



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# ***Chapter 5. DEVELOPING A GROUNDED THEORY (Interpretive & Normative)***

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## **5.1. Introduction**

*“A narrative theology is one that starts not with abstract first principles, but with a particular story; it is inductive rather than deductive” (Lucie-Smith, 2007, p. 1)[2.1.2: 12].*

My investigation into the thoughts of the ministers I interviewed and my reading of Wesley’s *Journal* have brought out a great deal of material that appears germane to my abductive inquiry that there might be grounds for a liturgy of conversion appropriate to the effective evangelism of the alternatively faithed in Cape Town. My task in this chapter is to superimpose the two sets of data like two diagrams on a light-table, and see how the continuities and discontinuities suggest a grounded theory for a liturgy of conversion in 21<sup>st</sup> century Methodist churches in Cape Town

### **5.1.1 Synthesis of the Analysis of the Interviews with Ministers**

Reading through my analysis of the interviews with the ministers in chapter two, I am able to extract a summary of the issues involved in evangelism and conversion from the ministers’ point of view. This summary is a sketch of a working synthesis of the findings from that chapter.

#### **Conceptual Tools for Analysis of Context**

The ministers were aware of incongruities and alterity in the contexts in which they move. But it seemed to be the case that they lacked the conceptual tools to effectively describe and interact with the micro-contexts within which their churches were operating – micro-contexts which showed signs of being extremely complex. They also exhibited a relatively low capacity for imagining what the church might look like from an outsider’s perspective. They often used the word “context”, but gave very little data as to what they meant by the concept. My impression was that perhaps due to a lack of critical vision of their context, the ministers seemed to be somewhat bewildered by the forces at play both amongst their congregants and amongst the alternatively faithed around them [0].

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I was particularly struck by two things: the apparent lack of appreciation of power-imbalances, one of the key insights available through a sociological reading of an environment; and the seeming lack of understanding of how micro-historical factors impinge upon human populations. It seems to me that the development of socio-cultural analytic capacity might boost their capacity to see their communities as they are, and help to frame responses to their worlds, rather than being paralysed by the immensity of the hostile/unconcerned world and perhaps subsequently trapped within the reduced context of the church. Perhaps my model of a post-modern/post-rural/post-Christendom/post-colonialism-apartheid/post-Wesleyan/post-evangelism matrix might be of help in at least suggesting a more nuanced way of reading individual cultural and sub-cultural contexts in Cape Town [0]. But if not, it seems to me that the Methodist church leadership needs to do urgent further research into the *principles* of understanding and relating to varying and changing contexts. Perhaps Ministers would perhaps have more hope for the people around them if they were to become socio-cultural scholars and innovators, establishing their own unique insights into their own unique situations, and using those insights as the basis for uniquely Christian contemporary social interventions.

### Theological Commitments

The Methodist ministers represented a wide range of theological opinion, as is customary in the Methodist Church. But it seems to me that their theologies were strangely aligned against concrete engagement with their surrounding urban cultures rather than towards such an engagement. Their three most general conscious theological concerns in terms of conversion and evangelism were the Kingdom of God, love, and discipleship [0] - but all these had interestingly inward interpretations.

The Kingdom of God apparently had two dimensions, as far as I can tell from the interviews – one was that God is mysteriously at work in the world around us, doing many inscrutable things, and he surprises us by bringing the occasional person through to faith – without active Christian agency [0]. The other was the Kingdom of God is loving service that Christians build by their labour of love – but the human actors of that building were always already Christian, not alternatively faithed people becoming Christian [3.2.3].

Love was considered to be a no-strings-attached benevolence, loving others for love's sake, and almost always expressed as meeting the needs of those less fortunate than oneself. In this model the rich cannot very easily be loved; the moderately well off also perhaps do not need to be loved. Love is limited to compassion for those in crisis [0]. This is not a bad thing; it is just that its frame of reference is not as wide as perhaps it might be.

And discipleship seemed to be primarily seen as motivating members to be more active in ministries of the church – worship, compassionate ministries, Sunday School teaching, preaching, etc. [0]. It is undeniable that such involvement often does facilitate growth in skills and competencies. But there appeared to be no concrete, specific plan for helping people to shed bad habits and attitudes. Sin appeared to have been minimalised as a heuristic category [Table 2 Bible References in interviews]. Faith appeared to play a much-reduced role in the thinking of the ministers, too. There appeared to be no cognitive timeline for the development of disciples; and no sense that discipleship might need to start at some point and proceed with some concrete agenda; the assumption seemed to be that all Methodists are somehow encapsulated in the faith and out of that Christian character would emerge without self-aware intentionality on the part of either leader or congregant [0 above].

In terms of ecclesiology, the ministers seemed to believe that by the mere existence of a worshipping Christian community in the area, society at large was able to accurately decode the meaning of the Gospel [0]. Nobody queried whether their worship was truly “public”, although all ministers were genuinely welcoming of outsiders. But they did not display much awareness of the social and psychological barriers that might need to be overcome by an outsider before they were able to enter a church building, let alone participate in the liturgy. So the functional reality appears to be that Sunday liturgy incorporated insiders and excluded outsiders – it seemed that the opportunity to spectate the church was not available to outsiders.

Ministers were not happy that so many of those who do attend church showed little sign of conversion or enthusiastic participation in the life of the church. Part of this was due to the fact that there seemed to be a general belief that people ought to grow in faith by osmosis as they are exposed to the liturgy of the church. Since a faith-crisis seemed to not be considered a central issue in the encapsulation of members, minimal creedal assent appeared to be all that was required. A result of this state of affairs was that ministers seemed frequently discouraged at the lack of keenness shown by their congregations – they were able to detect relatively little appetite for a deeper spiritual life or a wider compassionate involvement (or perhaps a great deal of appetite for such things, but only amongst a very small percentage of their congregants) [0].

Ministers seemed to have a very rudimentary, undeveloped missiology. Although there was awareness that God is at work in the world, and some ministers were consciously seeking expression of the *Missio Dei* in the life of their churches, for the most part the ministers seemed to believe that they did not need to take much cognisance of the cultures and sub-cultures of people between the churches. Their attitude appeared to be that there was an unspoken truce between the church and the world – we will not evangelise you and you, in

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turn, must not evangelise us. There was little sign of an appreciation that the alternatively faithed might come to want to share the truth held by the Christians as well [0].

Christian laity was expected to be the church at work in the world, silently loving and caring for people from different faith and cultural positions [3.2.3]. However, the only evangelistic gauge seemed to be whether or not the youth group was well attended or not – the proper person to be encouraged to convert to Christianity appeared to be a young person [0].

A dynamic conversion was, nonetheless, highly valued by the ministers – they recognised that some people have experiences that seem to transform them into active, loving, high-energy participants in the life and ministry of the church – people whom the ministers did not have to struggle to motivate; people who actively made opportunities to serve and love others [0].

The ministers seemed to see the key sign of conversion, then, to be this access of enthusiasm for the church, and ungrudging attendance on Sundays. These congregants went on to be long term disciples who appeared to enjoy church and grow in knowledge and grace. Typically they would be somebody with some close connection with the church who “came alive”, and grew in compassion and capacity to love and serve [0].

This was seldom framed in terms of sin and forgiveness, although, paradoxically, there was an expectation that they would be repentant people [0]. Ministers seemed to expect that the sense of a need to repent would be brokered directly by God, perhaps through the agency of some liturgical occasion. And certainly, although the converts were expected to be dutiful to church and loving towards all, they were not expected to specifically do evangelism. Some did, but that was considered an untutored extra.

There was a strong emphasis on what people should convert to – a holy, loving lifestyle; in fact, the ongoing process is so important that the ministers invariably downplayed the experience of initial change – which was frustrating, because that is precisely the area that I was examining in this study [0].

Evangelism theory was similarly diffuse: ministers longed for conversion in their congregation members, but seemed unclear about the processes, conditions, or concepts that might facilitate it. They did not appear to be looking at the diverse population of the city as potential communities from which believing Christians might emerge. And they did not seem to expect people to actually talk about faith with others – their model seemed to be entirely a model of exemplary behaviour and extraordinary love that somehow communicates the essence of faith to others [3.2.3].

The ministers seemed scrupulous about avoiding offence – offending an alternatively faithed person was apparently regarded as counterproductive and ungodly. One of the corollaries of that was that they strongly discouraged people using the categories of hell and judgement – using fear as a motivator was not allowed [Table 2 Bible References in interviews]. And they were hostile to judgementalism, by which they seem to mean any negative evaluation spoken to anybody about their ethical, social or religious behaviour or attitudes [0]. The ministers did, however, acknowledge that there are certain destructive behaviours and attitudes that ought to be left behind in the interests of self and society - although those are framed exclusively as drunkenness, drug addiction, theft, etc. – offenses mostly against middle class mores rather than a conception of sinfulness that encumbers everybody: little mention was made of socio-political sin or exploitation, the genteel sins of the wealthy, or the “respectable” sins of Christians. The bad news against which the good news was framed seemed to be defined socially and physically (not politically, not emotionally, and not spiritually) [0].

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Ministers**

In all of this, certain roles and responsibilities emerge – that which the ministers expected of themselves in the process of evangelism and conversion.

The ministers all seemed to be people of high integrity and deep honesty. They were often men and women who had had experiences of conversion of their own [0], but they did not seem to flaunt their spirituality in any way – they practiced humble integrity and seemed to be eminently reliable people. They were loving, stable, kindly servants of God and their people, and they appeared to be in some pain that so many of their people did not seem to realise their full potential as believers [3.2.5].

Ministers seemed to understand their duties as running Sunday worship services and preaching at them, leading Bible Study and prayer groups, and generally maintaining church buildings as centres of liturgy. They officiated at weddings, baptisms and funerals, shepherded their flock through the church year and its festivals, and were generally available as counsellors and servants of their people. They came across as seeing themselves as custodians of the church culture, and in some instances appeared to have a rhetoric of a universally open church which perhaps hid a strict expectation that outsiders would conform to church culture: to be (or become) respectable; responsible; conservative, and “decent” [3.2.6 – footnote 181]. This might well be what Hoekendijk referred to as evangelism becoming “civic propaganda” (1964, p. 64)

The ministers understood that they have a major educational role with regard to their congregation [0]. This was carried out, chiefly, through the modality of the sermon, and they

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studied to speak clearly and comprehensibly. They seemed to assume that learning must be happening because they are teaching, with little expressed awareness that lack of change in people might be due to anything in the content or projection of the message. In addition, they apparently treated any church attender as if they were already a converted Christian: in any case, it looks as if they worked on the assumption that people had secure faith and a Christian knowledge-base. Ministers believed their teaching should be influential, but were puzzled and troubled by evidence of lack of change or growth in their congregation members [0].

A significant instance of this was the issue of confirmation. Ministers worked very hard at educating their older young members in the lead up to confirmation, but every year the fall-away was disappointing. While some of the more aging congregations dispensed with confirmation class because there were so few who wished to be confirmed, the ministers still mostly appeared to have the forlorn faith that more or better or sharper teaching would motivate people to change and grow [0].

With regard to evangelism, they generally considered it their role to train and equip their members to do the task of evangelism in the world, and some of them had invested church money in proprietary courses from overseas to accomplish the task. These courses, however, have subsequently not appeared to change the status quo. Generally the ministers seemed to have a weak rhetoric of evangelism, which seemed often to come across as them egging others on to do what they themselves were not prepared to do [0].

It appeared that the ministers did not feel themselves either empowered or duty-bound to engage in evangelism as a key element of their ministry. Their understanding of the “ministry of word and sacrament” seemed to entail them spending all their energy within the circle of “liturgy as it is”. Their capacity for pastoral compassion for the alternatively faithed non-Methodist world seemed limited (but not absent). The issue that alternatively faithed people might be in metaphysical pain and hunger (for which the Ministers could supply metaphysical redress) also seemed limited. Evangelism of the alternatively faithed was generally construed as invasive rather than compassionate [0].

Although they believed that Jesus and faith in Jesus was at the heart of conversion, they did not appear to be mentioning this to many people outside of their congregation. There appeared no avenue for them to explain or communicate the immanence of the Lord Jesus to those who did not inhabit Methodist culture. None of the ministers I interviewed were methodically seeking to persuade those with no connection to the church to consider converting to Christianity. The existence of the Order of Evangelists and Biblewomen was not a factor in their thinking on evangelism and conversion. [0].

The ministers. In consequence, appear to inhabit a paradigm where their whole and sole ministry is to the faithful. “Evangelisation” was seen as the formation of Christian disciples according to the values of the Gospel, passively excluding any consideration of how to persuade anybody from another faith commitment to move to Christianity [3.2.6: 150]. They spent a great deal of energy trying to maintain the loyalty of their youth, and did not expect their elderly members to have much more than a token presence in their church, relegating them apparently to inactive members (perhaps sometimes without ever having been active members) [0]. Most ministers seemed to believe that a live church could only be alive if it had energetic younger members actively involved [0].

### **The Real Situation**

The space between the churches seemed to be a place of anguish and doubt for the ministers, who all seemed to avoid it. Evangelism, in this study’s sense of persuading the alternatively faithed to consider converting to Christian faith, hardly ever happened, at least not to the knowledge of the ministers. Evangelism was possibly not considered an important task because the alternatively faithed were not considered to be in any urgent danger [0]. In fact, the basic frame of reference for evangelism appeared not to be understood in terms of competing ideologies or worldviews: there was no church platform to even consider such issues [0]. The net result was that the Methodist church seems to have withdrawn itself from the streets.

Having said that, the ministers seemed to be resentful of the lack of recruitment of new members by their congregants from those who share their weekday micro-contexts [0]. The ministers felt that the church should be a steady, central reality that bore witness to the Gospel by its enduring presence, and that that presence was under threat due to the failure of the laity. They seemed to think this was due to the fact that the laity were not being an extraordinarily loving and compassionate people who arouse curiosity and awaken conversations with those around them due to the Christians’ adorable goodness [0].

And so evangelism devolves into an in-house affair where Methodists evangelise Methodists, where the aim of evangelism becomes to mobilise the greatest number of adherents rather than communicate with the greatest number of people. Anything called “evangelism” happened in areas under the control of Christians [0]. Meanwhile the vision of a mobilised laity came to nothing<sup>508</sup>.

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<sup>508</sup> The Methodist Church in Cape Town appears to have reached the same place as the Church in the Netherlands in 1964, where Hoekendijk claimed “that it was simply not true that the church at least lived and was present in the world through her members” (1964, p. 76)

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In terms of church life, it appeared that many well-accredited Methodists lived their lives in a tenuous relationship with a church, in which life's rites of passage were mediated by the Methodist church. In return for this they attended church occasionally. Teenagers, who had attended Sunday School all through their childhood, routinely left the church having just "confirmed their faith" [0].

But the ministers seemed nevertheless somewhat in denial about the magnitude of the crisis facing the church [0]. Ministers did not equate emptying churches with people not believing what they have to say. Ministers seemed unaware that outsiders faced barriers to attending church-based liturgy such as acute psychological discomfort. In addition, only one minister noted that many congregation members might possibly not intend to devote any of their time to communicating any message of love to outsiders, and were resistant to ministers doing so.

The alternatively faithed appeared to have no place or role in the liturgy. There was no current place for them in what happened in a church on a Sunday. Ministers, as chief liturgants for their communities, have no convocation, time and place, word, rite of grace or quest to offer the alternatively faithed [0].

And lastly, ministers acknowledge that few of their members have experienced any noticeable start to a conversion process. From the ministers' point of view, very few of their members ever noticeably come alive. Churches emanating from a conversionist movement apparently have very few people who experience conversion [0].

### **Institutional Memories of a Liturgy of Conversion**

But there appear to be residual hints in the Methodist Church that I suspect might be significant in considering a re-introduction of a systemic, ritual concern for the alternatively faithed to the liturgy of the Methodist Church.

In the pre-occupation the churches have with feeding the hungry there appear to be many elements of off-site liturgy. This weekday activity that makes the world a better place often takes the form of a prayer, a sermon, and a shared meal. That is patently liturgical, at least *in potentia*. The facts of hunger call forth the liturgy of feeding, and one could perhaps inquire into whether other facts of suffering might call forth similar liturgical responses [0].

Another important element is that an army of ordinary Christians are involved in feeding schemes that benefit those who are in no position to benefit the Church in response. They are motivated by a practical altruism that gets on with a practical task [0]. If the church can act on this impulse on an issue that is obviously important, then it should be able to act beyond itself on any other issue that it comes to value as urgent and important.

A third element is that the ministers are very proud of the compassion ministries of their churches. These initiatives apparently constitute an important part of their identity as ministers, and they seem to believe that these ministries display the true nature of who and what they are. This means that there is no issue *in principle* with the church being involved beyond itself, given sufficient urgency of need [3.2.3].

Since these ministries actively involve laity in the mythical weekday diaspora ministry, the feeding schemes might perhaps be taken as a sign of hope for other ways in which the church might come to conceptualise itself as active in the space between the churches.

Apart from the structures involved in feeding schemes, there were other clues that there is a deep institutional understanding of the need for a liturgy of conversion. The ministers did what appeared to be “hobby-evangelism” [0]. They regarded their opportunities to conduct weddings, funerals and baptisms as important opportunities to reach out to strangers and communicate the Gospel truths to the alternatively faithed. But these were often presented as peripheral to their core ministries, an interesting side issue rather than an important aspect of ministry in which they were modelling weekday diaspora liturgy for their congregants. As it is, it came across as if the ministers almost felt they are cheating by taking on evangelism opportunities which were technically the domain of their congregants.

The dream of multi-culturalism was also alive for many of the ministers, as their congregations were being culturally shaped by the influx of migrants [0]. This wish to meet the needs of the alternatively-cultured was a signpost, in my thinking, to the alternatively-faithed. As the ministers grapple with the issues of alterity within the community of the faithful, I hope that insights will emerge into conversation with the alternatively faithed.

It also became apparent that the ministers dreamed of a weekday foment of interaction between their congregants and those in the spaces between the churches [0]. That dream might perhaps become a reality if the enterprise of evangelism was moved from the periphery of the liturgical life of the church to its centre, as the liturgical life of the church expanded conceptually to include, potentially, all the spaces between the churches

Yet another clue to the possibility of the liturgy of conversion is that the ministers did believe in the importance of the spoken word [0]. If there were to be some way of repackaging the concept of communicating, taking it out of its preaching format and putting into a mode of interaction that was neither a cold-call patter nor a monologue harangue, then the church might be able to see its way to a spoken element to a liturgy of conversion. Ministers expected their sermons to communicate. Perhaps there are other ways of communication that might be effective in a 21<sup>st</sup> century urban setting? The ministers were alive to the power

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of story, so perhaps there might be a way of bringing the message of the Gospel into an acceptably narrative mode.

Finally, there are seriously atypical, “odd” enterprises that seem to beckon the whole church out into the public arena [0]. One church grew vegetables for the poor on the sidewalks around the church. Another church had a prayer couch on the pavement that invites whoever would like to “free prayer”. Ministers envisioned pro-active participation in public protests and demonstrations. Ministers ran courses on truly provocative topics that outsiders attended. Ministers tried to recruit members to be peace and justice volunteers. Ministers tried to broker peace in the ganglands of the Peninsula. It seems to me that the idea of a liturgy of conversion is not foreign to the Methodist church – the church simply lacks the theological concepts with which to articulate it. And an important source of such concepts is John Wesley himself.

### Help from the Tradition

John Wesley, however, is not considered a relevant source of guidance by many Methodist ministers. Although there are strong echoes of Wesleyanism in the interviews, the ministers seemed to have been only tangentially influenced by his *thought* – some of them even specifically distanced themselves from it [Table 1 John Wesley References in Interviews]. Wesley-memories do not seem to inform the praxis of the church. But Wesley was constantly at work in the spaces between the churches where the Methodist Churches of Cape Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century seem to be so absent. I believe that thinking about the world and the church in ways that Wesley did might truly help the Methodist Church. It might well generate a great deal of creative contact with the world that has perhaps slipped from the church’s grasp over the years.

### 5.1.2 Synthesis of the Analysis of Wesley’s *Journal*

Reading Wesley’s *Journal* with an eye to evangelism and conversion issues, I realised that in many ways Wesley would have answered my questionnaire very differently to the Methodist ministers of the Methodist Church in Cape Town. I argued that Wesley’s insights have value, however, not through uncritical mimicry, but through a re-appraisal of his methods of inquiry, his motives, and his attitude towards outsiders [4.1.1].

### **Context Analysis**

Wesley apparently came at social analysis in a similar way to the ministers, and appears to exhibit similar naivety about social dynamics<sup>509</sup>. It emerged that society was in a bad state – the weak were being predated upon by the strong with depressing familiarity. Wesley noticed and noted, and plotted for ways of making practical changes that would help. We see that his perceptions of socio-political issues clarify as he deals with those who are being affected by the political will and actions of the powerful. Perhaps one of the most decisive disruptive notes sounded by Wesley was his assault on the “Christendom” principle. He found the idea of a “Christian Nation” to be ridiculous [0]. Which is not to say that he did not expect the Church to exert more influence on the state than it did – it was just that he envisaged the role of the Church as being necessarily adversarial to power. This meant that he was deeply disappointed in the way the Church had become suborned by the ruling elite: and his Methodist movement was a powerful move to reform the Church in exactly that dimension [0].

David Bosch, citing Lesslie Newbigin, argues that for all its inadequacies, the light of the enlightenment was “true light” and cannot ever be discarded or disregarded – although we need to have a cautious and critical attitude towards it (1991, pp. 273-274). Wesley creatively pushed what he was learning of the Enlightenment principles to aid him in his revolt and search for reformation of the Church and world. He seems to have instinctively realised that a new situation needed either a new symbol set or a renewed symbol set to cope with the categories of change [4.2.2].

And Wesley creatively used the dimension of radical doubt to back up his notion of radical faith. He was content that people should initially reject his message, and acknowledged their right to rejecting it – because he knew instinctively that a new idea needs to be rejected before it can be honestly accepted [0].

### **Theological Commitments**

This capacity for social and spiritual analysis was founded on a raft of theological commitments. First of all, Wesley believed that all of humanity was in desperate danger – facing judgement and hell, and because of the demonstrable incapacity of humanity to reform itself, the only avenue of rescue he knew of was by the grace of God through faith

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<sup>509</sup> The difference is that the Journal covers more than fifty years of his observations, and so a reader has the opportunity of seeing his growing realisation of cause and effect chains. The interviews with the ministers consist of a single hour in each of their lives. However, one could also argue that Wesley was a reader of philosophy, and would have read the sociologists - had there been any. His interactions arose in a situation where there was no body of intellectual thought and knowledge. The ministers live in a context where a great deal of social and cultural analysis is easily available.

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alone. No amount trying to be good enough would ever bring even the most religious of people to salvation [0].

And this was founded on his apparently unshakeable conviction that all people were radically equal in God's sight; "equal in sin" led by direct logic into "equal in fact" in his mind. Wesley could not distinguish between socially acceptable sin and socially unacceptable sin. Both had to be dealt with and – very importantly - both could be dealt with [0]. The same principles could be applied to micro-sin like scandal-mongering and to a macro-sin like slavery.

Along with this belief in equality came a conviction that all *denominations* were equal – equally prone to sin and equally expressive of a heart towards God, and therefore nobody should be prejudiced against somebody else for their religious observances.

And in Wesley's mind this meant that each *individual* had equal integrity – the feelings and thoughts of each were significant; nobody ultimately got lost in a crowd. Each person stood naked before God, and each person was responsible to act according to their God-given integrity [0].

The fact of the need for salvation was the guiding principle of the early Methodists. Conversion was a major pre-occupation because everybody needed to be saved, both those within the church and those outside of it. The benefits of conversion were enormous - ultimate rescue from hell, but also freedom from guilt, freedom from fear, freedom from destructive behaviours, and freedom from destructive attitudes [0].

Wesley had a clear model of the conversion process in mind – steps or processes that he expected people to pass through *en route* to salvation. This was not based on his theology, so much as on observation – people needed to be drawn to the unknown "other", attend preaching and find out what it was, then be convicted of their desperate situation. After that they should discover and experience peace with God through faith in Christ, live out the Christian life with or without backsliding episodes, try if possible to get to the point where they only felt only love for everyone, and then die a good death [Figure 8 Wesley's Conversion Schema & Life Plan].

The mark of true conversion, both to oneself and the watching world, was an increase in love that overflowed in good will towards others and motivated an ungrudging and humble service to all humanity [0].

The Great Actor in conversion, Wesley believed, was God. God took the first steps towards human beings, and stirred them up to begin the process of conversion. Often God would use the liturgy of the church – communion, prayer, or conversation, preaching and singing either

in the church or out of the church. God was not controlled by liturgy, but graciously used it to touch and move people [2.3.6: 49].

Human beings, although in a very minor role, were also actors in conversion, according to Wesley's theory. They could choose whether or not to respond to the stirrings of the Spirit. And on the other hand, human agents could be used by God to shake others awake through conversation or preaching [0].

The way God stirred people was specifically an emotional interaction. For Wesley emotion was part of the human capacity to reason, specifically when it came to "dispositions" or "affections" that the Bible emphasized, such as love, joy, and peace. He very logically believed that you could not claim to have such things without feeling them, and that therefore they were in themselves evidence of a change God was working in a convert [0].

The importance of "godly tempers" spilled over into every aspect of Christian life. Preachers, for instance should be affectionate, gentle, broad-minded, humble, frank, compassionate, intellectual, and uniquely attuned to the ordinary struggles of human life, for whom the terms, plain, simple, and affectionate might be most appropriate [0].

Wesley was well aware that claims of experiencing "godly tempers" could be falsified, and therefore set checks and balances in place. His discipleship method emphasized both critical introspection, and sharing the fruits of that introspection with fellow travellers in complete honesty [0]. This should not have had a very wide appeal, but apparently it did. Wesley required people to be convicted and converted - not to simply say the Christian words without meaning them. The aim of Methodism was never to be a large movement, but to be a dedicated movement.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Ministers**

John Wesley read everything through the filter of salvation: God saves humans from sin and God saves sinners for love. A minister, in Wesley's view, was primarily called to be a person who loved others. That love, he would have argued, would only have true value for anybody if the minister himself<sup>510</sup> had a sincere faith in Christ; and it would only be through faith in Christ that the flow of love would be sufficient for his task – a truly converted minister would tenderly cherish his parishioners. Conversely, a minister who did not pay close attention to his parishioners was probably not yet converted. And the love for the flock that Wesley had in mind necessarily extended to their congregation's temporal well-being – poverty and oppression issues. Wesley expected a parish priest to be a voice for the voiceless [0].

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<sup>510</sup> I have established that Wesley was not able to think about the ministry in gender-inclusive terms. That change would eventually happen in Methodism following his logic of radical equality.

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This loving pastoral life could be very conveniently and conscientiously worked out within the Anglican system, not because of what the system had become, but because of what it had aspired to. He was not interested in separation, but in reformation. He believed the church had a solid foundation but badly needed renovation [4.2.2].

A key issue for Wesley was that every human being in the geographical area of the parish was the responsibility of the minister, either directly or through delegation. The minister should visit every church member in their homes on a regular basis, know their names, and always be attempting to ignite a passionate love for God and others in every person. However, the minister was also responsible for those who were not the members of his flock, whether they belonged to another church, another faith, or no faith. His responsibility towards them was to methodically try and awaken or encourage faith in everybody he met. The minister had as much of a divine right to be moving in and amongst people in the spaces between the churches as in the church premises themselves [0].

To this end the minister should run solemn and piercing liturgy – meaningfully read prayers and scriptures, and rousing sermons with practical applications that appealed to the consciences of the congregants. The liturgical year, and the liturgical rhythms of Sunday worship, were to be embraced as potential channels for truth to awaken faith in the alternatively faithed [0]. He should also find places for interacting with non-congregants, through close conversation about their lives and faith, and if necessary through preaching in the spaces between the churches. A natural meeting place between people of the ministers' divided constituency was in rites of passage such as weddings, baptisms, and funerals, which also provided opportunities of intense communication through conversation and preaching. A minister was always on duty as a shepherd seeking lost sheep as well as a shepherd caring for his settled flock [0].

John Wesley wanted people to try and understand the Bible from his point of view – as the source of a message of salvation, as a revelation of the character and nature of God, and as a guide to the authentic Christian life. All his communication was based on trying to explain something from the Bible or about the Bible [0]. He expected ministers to share this passion, to discuss the implications of the Bible with parishioners and strangers through close conversations and sermons and any other media that served the purpose of awakening those that were sleeping [0]. But he refused to allow manipulation or bullying, and insisted that people must be free to respond without coercion [0; 0]. And emotion had to arise spontaneously, not be suggested and fuelled by rhetoric. Communication ought to be a major preoccupation of every minister.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Christians**

Every individual Christian was expected to take responsibility for the state of his/her own soul, and his/her own salvation [0]. Nobody could outsource salvation to Church membership or the membership of a “Christian Nation”. Once this alarming realisation had been accepted, there were the advantages of experiencing the feelings promised in the Bible, and attaining a sturdy independence not amenable to social manipulation and control. Spiritual agency would have been a powerful boost to self-identity to those who had been denied identity for generations [0].

But this faith, experienced in conversion, led to social effects far beyond the personal. Compassion to other humans was the natural response to receiving compassion. In fact lack of interest in temporal wellbeing of others would have been unimaginable for a convert - because no love indicated that a person had no faith. And so amongst Methodists the Gospel arguably made people both more human and more humane [0].

Conversion effected certain other changes too. Although Wesley strenuously asserted that church attendance could not *make* you good enough, Wesley believed that converts would suddenly *want* to attend church services: literally for pleasure [0]. And the only way to *stay* converted (since fatal backsliding was a dreadful possibility for any Christian) was to join an accountability group which demanded radical openness and honesty, and openness to mutual correction. Constant vigilance the price of growing in holiness [0].

And one of the key ways of showing love, for the early Methodists, was to get the word which had awakened them into the hearing of the unawakened world around them; persuasive verbal witness was also a logical outcome of conversion [0; 0]. Wesley demonstrated that everyday life had countless opportunities to awaken, instruct, and exhort others, and so Methodists Christians insatiably prayed for others to believe the Gospel and convert to Christian faith. Persistence was recognised as vital – one seldom prayed or communicated enough at the first go [0].

### **The Real Situation**

The real situation on the ground was fraught with social ills and suffering of all kinds. Violence was endemic, sickness was a mysterious threat, starvation and malnutrition took their toll, and death was at the forefront of public consciousness [0; 0].

Wesley did what he could to address these issues, using the knowledge he had to provide medical and legal aid, as well as experimenting with poverty relief – micro-loan initiatives, micro-industry initiatives, and education-initiatives, along with prison reform and anti-slavery agitation, as well as primary level feeding and clothing initiatives [0].

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But the real situation was also, for Wesley, the need of both the poor and the rich to be able to hear a message that could transform their relationship with God and humanity, and usher them into the very presence of God – through a faith based conversion that turned their priorities upside down and revolutionised their communities: a message that promised personal identity, meaning through service, and inner security and peace. Wesley's genius was to make the spiritual practicable along with making the mundane spiritual. He would not have known the phrase, but he spearheaded a movement of truly holistic Christianity.

Having said all that, it was already apparent in Wesley's lifetime that this area of Christian life was prone to almost immediate erosion. Early Methodists quickly lost their taste for field preaching; the poor rapidly lost touch with their roots as they sobered up and build chapels [0]. I think that loss of focus on the main people and the main thing is the perennial problem of the church, and one to which the Methodist Church in Cape Town might very well be being recalled.

### Liturgy of Conversion Moves

Unsurprisingly, I found Wesley's Journal to be full of signs of the Liturgy of Conversion – I got the idea from reading the Journal in the first place! Having been highly influenced by the *Journal* over my own career as a public communicator, it is precisely this aspect of Wesley's thinking that I that I have always looked for or tried to reproduce in church situations I have found myself. If anybody doubts the importance for this aspect of ministry to John Wesley, I suggest they do their own close reading: I am not imagining it. Wesley did church outside of the church buildings habitually and with intention, throughout his life.

Wesley invaded the domain between the churches and contested the space. He considered that itineration was an essential duty of the clergy – or at least close contact with the alternatively faithed outside of church premises [0]. Whether people wanted to be woken up or not, one had to try and rouse them, and to do that Wesley became an inhabitant of the spaces between the churches, not a passing traveller or even a tourist – he belonged outside churches as much as he belonged inside them. This did not necessitate being outdoors always, since the rich tended to have access to large built spaces; but since both rich and poor were equally in danger, communicators were obliged to find ways to communicate with them where they might be inclined to listen. For the poor that was usually outdoors; but Wesley would preach in a palace if one lost soul might find her way home [0].

Wesley had a deep respect for (and interest in) alterity. No linguistic or cultural divide was too wide for him to try to cross with his vision of the universal malaise of humankind and its universal cure [0]. But that respect also enabled him to trust the judgement and allow the freedom of every person he spoke to: he explained the truth as plainly and affectionately as

he could and then left it up to people and God for any response. He had compassion for those who disagreed with him rather than irritation – he genuinely seemed to feel that the possession of truth was a privilege not a virtue. This meant that Wesley could thrive in direct contact with those who disagreed with him; and so he was able to derive his knowledge of what it felt like to not have faith in Christ from constant conversations with those who did not [0].

Given the silencing of the outsider in church in his day, Wesley went to where they could either speak or listen – at their own initiative and without oppression. In fact, he went to where power relations were so reversed that if they chose they could persecute him. He avoided segregation and avoidance of the marginal, seeking out the marginalised and using every means to promote their cause [0].

It made complete sense to John Wesley that the liturgy of the church itself, its most holy essence, should be made truly public. He renounced the *de facto* limiting of liturgy to socially respectable citizens. Wesley believed the liturgy of the church had power in itself to bring about conversion through communion, preaching, singing, and so he took these elements out into the world: for him the church building was not the functional limit of Christian liturgy [0].

If the role of a minister of the Gospel was to awaken every soul in their parish, then the Church-year rhythms should inform the liturgical part of outreach too, and ministers must expect that something is achieved for the Kingdom outside the church premises that cannot be achieved on site. Churches needed to be open to the gaze of the outsider, and that effectually meant taking the church to where it could be seen; Wesley saw himself, as a priest, entitled to consecrate holy ground wherever he went [0].

In terms of evangelistic praxis, Wesley intended to “awaken, instruct & exhort” everyone he met, setting out to persuade people to consider converting to Christian faith (partly by pointing out that what they might have thought of as faith was hardly sufficient to meet their true needs) [0]. But as I have noted, this had to avoid manipulation or coercion. A confession without free-will meant nothing. In addition, it was particularly important that if God was doing nothing, then we must not try and make something happen by sub-ethical means - that would make a mockery of the faith that God could work in people’s hearts [0].

Although Wesley is famous for preaching, what the *Journal* shows is that he considered the conversation to be the primary mode of communication [0]. Constant conversation with the alternatively faithed, he felt, would enhance one’s capacity to communicate. Sometimes a wake-up call had to cut across the trend of the conversation – and sometimes one had to risk being disliked, because at times the kindest thing to do might be to warn somebody of

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the outcomes of their choices and attitudes [0]. Preaching may be the fall-back for reaching many people when one cannot have conversations with everybody. The large crowds were not Wesley's objective; he felt that they could only be a forum within which individuals could weigh up whether or not to respond to the call of God. Close conversation with a few must always be the goal of a sermon [0].

Evangelism was Wesley's obsession, and he expected it to be the obsession of every one of his Methodists. It required constant, interested, loving contact, contact that extended into a responsible relationship over time. It required experiment with media of communication until something got through – and Wesley believed one should use any means available to carry the message across, demonstrating the importance of improvisation and experimentation throughout the *Journal* [0].

The question of the significance of a human life should, for Wesley, always be the communication sub-text: what sort of life/death do you want to have? And following on the consideration of the infinite value of each human life, he would feel the need to communicate something like: "You need to be rescued, although you might not realise it. God is ready to rescue you, and all it takes is for you to believe that Jesus died to make that possible. And once you realise that, your life will be transformed and you will experience love, joy and peace in devoting your life from then on to the service of God and his world: and then your whole life will be eternally significant to God in his Kingdom" [0].

But Wesley never allowed people to take the words and settle for a spoken acknowledgement alone: if you were claiming to have been converted, you needed to inwardly believe that you had been completely changed. So Wesley made the process of conversion costly and meaningful; conversion was portrayed as a dangerous but essential search, and a prize which one could lose by falling away into apathetic slumber [2.3.1].

The *Journal* goes part way towards answering why Wesley was so effective as a communicator. From his perspective he would have said that it was God who was waking people up, and that he, John Wesley, was merely planting the seeds which the Lord then brought to spiritual life in the lives of new converts.

But there are some clues as to Wesley's unlikely-seeming rhetorical effectiveness. Firstly, he was there [2.4.1; 0; 0]. He was actually present and despite the stones and clods of earth and attempt to disrupt him, he seemed extremely determined to pass on a message. I have noted the high indexical value of Wesley as a communicator, which became steadily higher over a long a consistent career of public liturgy.

But there were many other factors: communicators *must* communicate for free [0]. They must be gentle and humble, and never bully or manipulate – but rather let people make up

their own minds on the evidence they presented [0]. Roughness or lack of education was no barrier to a communicator of the Gospel, and might possibly be an advantage: what was wanted was “plain truth for plain people”.

### **Help from the Tradition**

Wesley himself benefited from a deep study of the Bible and the early centuries of church history, as well as a thorough knowledge of his Anglican roots. The way that these resources of tradition helped to shape his approach to ministry was very great. But he did not simply slavishly imitate: he had established through his Georgia experiment that liturgical reform did not affect the springs of human motivation, and that through applying ecclesial law one could never bring others to the freedom of salvation by grace through faith [0].

But what he did was interact critically and creatively with his sources of tradition, and out of them he shaped an appropriate response for his time [4.2.2].

### **5.1.3 Similarities and Differences: Irreconcilable Dissonances?**

There are interesting similarities and differences between these two data sets. It needs to be noted that the two sets are unequal, and therefore the conclusions I draw must needs be tentative and suggestive, and in no way definitive. However, I do believe that the juxtaposition of two approaches to conversion and evangelism in two different eras at least has the merit of provocation: why are things so different? Are the contexts sufficiently close to warrant even attempting a cross-reading between the two? Are there areas where, through reinterpretation, “resources of meaning we had not yet realised are liberated”? (LaCocque & Ricoeur, 1998, p. 229). If such resources emerge they might in fact be very helpful for informing the praxis of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town.

### **Comparing 18<sup>th</sup> Century and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Contexts**

It seems that broadly speaking social conditions and the human predicament show strong similarities between the two data sets. People live and die under a similar range of social and economic disparities. The churches were often effete and formal, catering largely to the interests of the gentry<sup>511</sup>. They were part of the system that kept the ruling elite in power and the poor in servitude. In this lies a similarity and a difference. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the church was disconnected from the poor but nevertheless highly influential in society. It seems that in both centuries the church shows a need to be challenged and awoken to a significant aspect

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<sup>511</sup> An example of the sort of clerical life Wesley would have reacted against is found in James Woodforde’s diaries from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: where the “country parson” is obsessively concerned with such trivia as money won or lost at cards, details of meals (daily), and attention received from the local gentry; very different in tenor to Wesley’s concerns. (Woodforde, 1782)

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of its responsibility – the communication of the Gospel in such a way as to persuade people to consider converting to Christian faith, and a reconsideration of the priority of the poor.

### Theological Commitments

Wesley and the contemporary ministers share an acknowledgement of the Scripture as normative for the church. The question is through which hermeneutic are they trying to establish norms.

In terms of soteriology, Wesley is clear – all have sinned, all are in danger of hell, the only way to be saved is through faith in Christ alone, experienced as real and demonstrated as real by the outpouring of love. The Methodist ministers are extremely diffident on this point: people need forgiveness but there is apparent uncertainty as to what they need forgiveness for.

Wesley preaches that God's unconditional love leads everyone towards repentance and faith; the ministers mostly preach God's acceptance and unconditional love of everybody with no particular purpose.

Wesley is completely certain that people need to be woken up even if they do not want to be – the Methodist ministers mostly seem to prefer to not risk offence by challenging anybody's point of view.

Wesley is committed to real inner change as the only basis for discipleship; the Methodist ministers seem to believe that a process of improvement and acculturation to the church community will educate people in and into faith. Wesley would have insisted that for people to advance in discipleship they must first (or very early on) experience freedom from guilt, shame and fear. The Methodist ministers do not even mention these as categories that people might want to escape – although to be fair they are probably issues that now reside in the category of pastoral counselling rather than evangelism. However, the impression that I gain from the interviews is that the ministers seem to operate as if guilt and fear have no real referent, and should perhaps be discarded as interpretive categories for the human condition; Wesley, on the other hand, regards guilt and fear as merciful signposts to the forgiveness available in Christ.

I can imagine Wesley and many of the ministers in the Methodist Church in Cape Town glaring at each other at this point. However, there are significant areas of theological commitment that could form some sort of bridge between the two positions.

*Firstly*, the Methodist ministers are not pastorally naïve. They recognise that people are living sub-optimal spiritual lives, and that there are many destructive and self-destructive

behaviours that their congregants need to gain freedom from. And they truly want people to become free.

*Secondly*, many of the ministers recognise that people are not getting a lot of pleasure out of the Christianity they are involved in; they are not happy or content, they lack joy and peace. They also note that many of their congregants do not have much of a love-footprint in their communities and recognise the need for deep and lasting change.

*Thirdly*, the ministers generally have a dream of their congregants being a force for change in their weekly diaspora into the world between the churches.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Ministers**

The Ministers of today and John Wesley would have agreed over many things – the need to preach sermons, pastor Christians, run liturgical services that communicate the core gospel truths, challenge people to read the Word and apply it, challenge people to radical discipleship and genuine love towards each other and those who inhabit the spaces between the churches.

But the ministers would find Wesley's insistence on ministers personally spending time with the alternatively faithed hard to follow – they experience their lives as over-full of demands with their congregations as they are. The people who inhabit the world between the churches seem to be only dimly part of the ministers' awareness, who appear to consider them the responsibility of their congregants. This appears to be because of a lack of theological rationale – the danger of judgement is minimal, the Kingdom of God functions largely without human agency, human agency in evangelism and conversion of others is limited to the witness of good deeds, and the key to persuading others to consider conversion to the Christian faith is to not offend them. Wesley chose a different stance on all those issues.

But they would agree with Wesley's contention, on the other hand, that a minister is a teacher, a purveyor of knowledge and insight. And mostly they would agree that a minister needs to equip and inspire his/her congregants to take up their responsibilities in ensuring the success of the church project.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Christian Laity**

However, the ministers of Cape Town do not seem to have such a high expectation of involvement as Wesley had of his Methodists. Partly this has to do with the Methodist having functionally become an establishment church like the Anglican Church was in Wesley's day. But the Methodist ministers hanker after the dream that the majority of their members would enthusiastically participate in making the church succeed.

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Nevertheless, a steady – if small – percentage of each church’s members do take their mark at the crease and perform small miracles of education, feeding, leadership and teaching. But the relationship between clergy and laity has changed over the centuries in the Methodist church, and that must be factored in to the norms of any liturgy of conversion

### The Real Situation

The problem of why the Methodist Church in Cape Town is not “expanding vigorously” through a process of “evangelism and conversion” is clearly not going to produce one easy answer. It becomes obvious from the study of the *Journal* that the Methodist Church started off as an awakening movement that *did* expand vigorously through evangelism and conversion. And it becomes obvious from the study of the interviews with Methodist ministers that the Methodist Church in Cape Town *is not now* expanding vigorously through evangelism and conversion, and has only feeble growth in one of its sectors, and that growth cannot be attributed predominantly to evangelism and conversion. What Lucie-Smith might refer to as “the tradition” of Methodism in Cape Town *now* seems very tenuously related to what the church *was* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. What emerges seems more like two stories of conversion and the praxis of evangelism in the context of the liturgical life of a church in two different stages of its organisational existence (Adizes, 1988, p. 2).

But in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a similar decline and decay seems to have been the characteristic of the Anglican Church. In Wesley’s day the taking up of the task of reformation – or the return to this task, was spearheaded by educated clergy like Wesley and Whitefield, and then carried forward by a wave of men and women who lacked formal education but received upskilling through a specific discipleship process. There is no reason why similar conditions might not be found in our times. The balance between formally educated and the other members of the church is roughly similar in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town. The mobilisation of the poor to preach was accomplished by a particular reading of the Bible by a particularly gifted and committed leader. It is quite possible that such an approach might be effective in the context of Cape Town.

Because of the generally high general knowledge of the Bible, it was possible to preach theologically in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and still make sense to people. John Wesley’s printed sermons are extensive nets of Scripture, woven together with a minimum of personal commentary. This was in itself culturally highly authoritative in that world. But whatever the method, Wesley found an unexpectedly effective communicational pathway into the local culture of people wherever he travelled. A difference is that in our days the knowledge of the biblical narrative is very eroded. This suggests a homiletical task that would perhaps need to be more narrative in character. The story needs to be retold because people cannot now be

expected to know the narrative thread of the Bible<sup>512</sup>. With regard to the general authority of the Bible, that too is increasingly disappearing<sup>513</sup>. This means that our communications options are different to those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: we are in some ways back in the situation of the earliest church, where the story has to be recounted, and accepted or rejected on its own merits, rather than being the embodiment of some mutually agreed and unquestioned social foundation.

Wesley had a passion to reach out to those who would not hear the Gospel in a church building; the ministers I interviewed are pleased if any outsiders come into their services, or become involved through fetes, baptisms, weddings or funerals: but are largely not concerned with personally reaching people between the churches in a liturgically engaged way - one of Wesley's great concerns. As I have noted, his understanding of what a minister should be and do became apparent in the context of him struggling to persuade his fellow clergy to adopt a different view of their society [0]. This is a reality that needs to be addressed in developing norms for a contemporary liturgy of conversion.

### **Liturgy of Conversion Moves**

Liturgy, it can be agreed, only achieves its purposes if it is culturally attuned to its context (Keifert, 1992, p. 76). The only place to test the functionality of liturgy is in conversation with that context (Hughes, 2003, p. 17). So if evangelism is the faith community in conversation with the alternatively-faithed, then the context of such a liturgy logically needs to be the *agora*, literally the "market place" (cf. Wesley, 1773, p. 137). We cannot have evangelism-cake and eat it in the church building.

The arbiter of whether the liturgy is culturally attuned is *not* the church alone, but also the alternatively-faithed communities amongst which it finds itself. It seems logical that if conversion is part of the intention of the liturgy then liturgists need to have the alternatively-faithed as interlocutors as well as Christians<sup>514</sup>. Symbol and ritual is only meaningful from within a cultural matrix. Intentional incomprehension is achieved by limiting liturgy and liturgical development to exclusively Christian environments. My argument is that intentional

<sup>512</sup> I was involved in an inductive Bible study with somebody who asked me whether Moses lived at the same time as Jesus – an important question, but a sign of spectacular ignorance of the Bible narrative.

<sup>513</sup> On 2016-12-17 I had a conversation with a young Xhosa security guard who claimed the "all that stuff in the bible – somebody just made it up" (personal conversation) – this sharply illustrates the eroded authority of the Bible.

<sup>514</sup> On reflection I find that this is yet another flaw in my design-plan for this research project. It gradually became apparent to me that there are at least five different stake-holders in developing a liturgy of conversion: The current liturgant; the historical liturgant; the Christian congregant; the historical Christian congregant; and the alternatively-faithed congregant. In this research I have only really involved current and historical liturgants as co-researchers. The Christian and Alternatively-faithed congregants are only tangentially consulted, even though my interest is in the church learning to craft context-specific connective liturgies. Further research is urgently required.

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comprehension – through the development of shared interpretants – is only likely to be achievable through genuinely public liturgy [2.1.1].

Wesley constantly tested the meaningfulness of his symbol system against the measure of those who existed in the spaces between the churches, and he would have considered that without conversation with the Alternatively Faithed, the service of the Priesthood of All Believers was incomplete. On the opposite side, contemporary Methodist ministers gave very sketchy answers to questions about what outsiders might think of Christians and Church in general. Outsiders appear to be consistently out of their frame of reference.

### Help from the Tradition

In my view this establishes certain key areas for the Methodist church to consider in terms of its own sources of tradition: the Scripture, as ever; and the Wesleyan tradition, particularly the *Journal*. If we exclude the *Journal* from our consideration, we are likely to completely miss the prominence Wesley gave to a lively interaction with the people in the world between the churches, and his emphasis on the importance of the condition of the poor to the life of the church. Wesley's effective hermeneutic was a hermeneutic of salvation: is that still operable in our times, or is there another hermeneutic, some other controlling narrative, which might be appropriate for our times? Is there still a place for a straightforward reading of the Bible within that hermeneutic? And in which ways ought we to push the limits of our current ecclesial praxis? What impossibilities dare we attempt to promote?

Do the ministers see that they have a responsibility for the physical and spiritual well-being of all those in geographical proximity to their church premises? Do they need to? Can they come to see it? Does Wesleyan scholarship pay adequate notice to attempts to work out the trajectory of the original Methodist impetus of evangelism in culturally new contexts? Do the apparent challenges of the *Journal* obligate the Church to consider changes in form and function? These considerations take us into a consideration of what Liturgy of Conversion principles might entail in terms of ethical, socio-cultural, theological and best practice interpretations of the data. My "grounded theory" (or, in Lucie-Smith's terms, my "embodied theory" [2.1.2: 12]), is based on reading of two stories in parallel - the story of conversion and evangelism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the story of conversion and evangelism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Conclusion

The two stories of this research could almost be a textbook footnote illustrating the beginning and ending stages of the growth-cycle of an organisation. At this point the Methodist Church in Cape Town seems to be exhibiting an alarming number of symptoms of the end stages of

an institution, as described by Ichak Adizes: “It justifies its existence not by the fact that it is functioning well, but by the fact that it exists” (1988, p. 79). This is partially indicated by the fact that the organization does “...not like outside interruptions and actively creates obstructions to outside interferences” (1988, p. 81). The organization becomes incapable of change because “a single executive cannot mobilize all the people needed across organizational lines to make [the] necessary changes” (1988, p. 82). And in fact the whole organization seems to be only kept alive by the vested interests of the existing hierarchy members and a largely nominal, captive audience (1988, p. 83).

Can these bones live? Adizes has developed what he calls a “therapeutic sequence”, consisting of an 11-step process (1988, pp. 267-327), through which he anticipates that an organisation in difficulty can be rescued. One of those steps is a (re)definition of the organisation’s mission – a return to what all its members can understand as a foundational direction (1988, p. 305). This dynamic of renewal of vision is a recurring theme in the *Journal* narrative [4.2.2]. And it is with hope that I might perhaps contribute to a similar renewal that I need to work out a “grounded theory” of a liturgy of conversion<sup>515</sup>.

It is important to repeat that the normative principles I suggest are tentative. I develop them with a profound hesitation; I merely offer them as suggestions for consideration in the ongoing debate about the purpose and future of the Methodist Church in Cape Town. Read together with my pragmatic survey, I consider that they are perhaps promising leads. But there is infinitely more work required on the ongoing praxis of the Church in our times and beyond. I am trying to establish what MacIntyre might have referred to as the virtues of the “practice” of evangelism: “...an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (1984, p. 191) In my view, the grounded theory ought to establish the norms for the practice of a “virtuous evangelist”.

## **5.2. Ethical Interpretation of the Data**

At this stage I need to place my hypothesis under scrutiny from four different viewpoints – Osmer helpfully suggests that to establish the credibility of my proposed solution to the problem of the shrinking Methodist Church in Cape Town, it needs to be ethically credible, socio-culturally credible, theologically credible, and credible from the common-sense criteria of “good practice” [Figure 5 Outline of Research Plan].

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<sup>515</sup> My underlying assumption here is that all churches, as institutions, go through at least one of these cycles of aging. I have no personal interest in being involved in the start-up of a new church – at least not without having seriously examined whether, when that church in turn gets to the later stages of growth, something can be done about its organisational renewal.

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### 5.2.1 The Ethics Emergency

Evangelists are a stock figure of derision in public culture. In the cartoonist's arsenal they represent bigoted and insensitive communicators, a caricature that reinforces the general perception that Christian evangelism is an exercise in judgemental and psychosocially untenable behaviour.<sup>516</sup> I typed "cartoons of evangelists" in to an image-search engine, and the top fifty cartoons displayed (that were not from how-to Christian manuals or of a pro-evangelism nature) gave the following reasons for deriding evangelism: being politically right-wing (2); psychopathology (4); cultural ineptitude (4); judgementalism (4); ignorance (5); hypocrisy (5); coercion (6); financially unethical manoeuvres (19)<sup>517</sup>. Taken as a cultural indicator, the cartoonists indicate two things: evangelists are untrustworthy; and the most notable incidence of evangelism appears to be televangelism<sup>518</sup>. It appears, therefore, that the issue of ethics needs special attention in any attempt to rehabilitate or reconfigure evangelism as a viable Christian practice.

The derision of evangelists appears to be founded on two main springs of risibility: the Christians who are supposed to be so good turn out to be actually bad; and though they are just as bad as (or worse than) anybody else, Christians pretend, laughably, to be better than others. And those two perceptions are, from my experience, two major factors that dissuade people from considering Christian truth claims. As Os Guinness observes, people "often listen to us with a default position of prejudice, scorn, impatience, and sometimes anger" (2015, pp. 22-23). Christian truth claims are then themselves a further issue in conversion, of course, but the first hurdle to evangelism appears to be the perceived character of the evangelist him/herself.<sup>519</sup> This is in line with Aristotelian rhetorical insights: without "good character" a rhetor is unpersuasive (Cunningham, et al., 2004, p. 18)[2.4.7].

This would imply that all Christians, whether they are aware of it or not, and whether they are involved in evangelism or not, are in a state of apologetics with regard to the alternatively

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<sup>516</sup> This is another area awaiting research.

<sup>517</sup> My favourite cartoon was one by Phil Selby of two mice addressing another mouse at the entrance to its mouse-hole, captioned "*we'd like to talk to you about cheeses*" (Selby, 2017).

<sup>518</sup> "televangelism" has become a word in English dictionaries; the Collins Concise Dictionary defines a "televangelist" as "an evangelical preacher who appears regularly on television, preaching the gospel and appealing for donations from viewers" (Collins, 2001).

<sup>519</sup> I also did an open poll on my Facebook page – 1.1.1.1Appendix A – asking what negative impressions people had of the Christian Church as an institution. 22 of my 386 "friends" responded, and the result was that a "... picture emerges of an extremely unattractive social institution, which is being treated with the contempt it deserves by the people it itself disdains" [1.1.1.1Appendix A]. Further research needs to be done into disaffiliation from the Methodist Church, specifically; and also disaffiliation of people in different cultural settings. Although I specifically asked the ministers about this issue, they were not able to give me much data.

faithed (Guinness, 2015, p. 37). Any consideration of the ethics of evangelism has to include reflection on the integrity of the evangelist as an agent of the church.

In the first place, since I am an evangelist researching evangelism, I affirm that research by Christians into evangelism needs in itself to be seen to be ethical. I need to stress that my research procedure, and specifically my research questions, were approved by both the theological department's ethics sub-committee, and subsequently by the Ethics Committee of the University of Stellenbosch, as being in line with the university's ethical standards (Senate Research Ethics Committee, 2016). My intention has been to be completely open about all my methods, with a full intention of complete integrity.

But simply ensuring that I follow ethical means for producing data does not mean the end of ethical issues surrounding my data generation. However, Murphy and Dingwall point out that "researchers have relatively limited control over the use of their findings in the public domain" (2001, p. 341). It is always possible for others to use any new insights to either advantage or disadvantage others, and so the researcher finds her/himself in a chain of responsible usage<sup>520</sup>. It seems unlikely to me that my research will offer scope to anyone to use the information so as to have a negative effect on the life of the church; on the contrary, I believe that the implementation of these suggestions is likely to benefit both the Methodist Church and wider society. Nonetheless, I ought to monitor the future use or abuse of these findings and respond quickly to counteract any unethical use of my insights<sup>521</sup>.

It seems axiomatic that Christian institutions are obligated to act ethically. Wesley certainly believed so. Although I did not specifically ask the question of the ministers in the interviews, I cannot imagine them disagreeing. In fact, what emerges from the interviews and the *Journal* are a number of unique ethical considerations.

When it comes to the pragmatic dimensions of evangelism, no unethical practices by any Christian are ever acceptable, anywhere. However, for some ministers it seems to have been pre-decided that evangelism is by definition an unethical undertaking. The appearance of evangelism-as-Christian-duty in the Biblical narratives needs to be explained away as a cultural phenomenon of the time which may now be dispensed with in the changed

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<sup>520</sup> As far as I can see, the greatest danger would be to help unscrupulous Christians to manipulate others, by exposing psycho-social levers: "...ethnographic studies typically increase knowledge of the adaptive behaviours that actors use to accommodate to structural and institutional pressures. By uncovering such behaviours, ethnographers offer tools for those with power to control or manipulate those without." (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, p. 341)

<sup>521</sup> There are academic search engines that keep a record of the number of times a piece of academic research is referenced in other peoples' research. This is usually used as a metric of the usefulness of the work. But for a scrupulously ethical researcher, they could be used to track whether others are using their research ethically (google, 2017).

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circumstances of the post-modern world, perhaps [0]. But then again, I am committed to the idea that evangelism ought still to be a feature of Christian discipleship – which is a pre-judgement from the opposite stance<sup>522</sup>.

So the task before me here is to advance my argument by investigating whether it is theoretically possible to claim, without fear of being trapped in an oxymoron, that there is such a thing as *ethical evangelism*. This is done with the assumption that, as with any aspect of Christian praxis – preaching, or counselling or ecumenical relationships or anything else - a constant watch and reflection on the ethics of our praxis is essential

### 5.2.2 Ethical Principles for a Liturgy of Conversion

#### Christian Ethics for Ethical Evangelism

John Wesley operated on a theological ethic in which he considered no action to be truly “good” unless it resulted from the grateful overflow of a changed heart (1827-4, p. 225). His basis for that was the Law of God, the Sinai code, and he was a forceful proponent of “working out one’s faith with fear and trembling” [Philippians 2:12]. He was, as I have shown, scrupulous about honesty, openness, good intentions and ethical action, by which he understood that converts to Methodism were supposed to be engaged “with the utmost care and diligence” in making their world a better place as well as fighting an ongoing battle with sin as it affected the individual (1755, p. 495).

Hays argues that the issue of ethics is not reducible to a list or grid. Scriptural precedent must be applied according to principles of wisdom, and must reference “the full range of canonical witnesses” (1996, p. 310). He considers that if we took into account the original purpose for which the different applicable portions were written, it would enable us to make ethical determinations on complex contemporary issues that are in line with what he perceives as the three “focal images” of the New Testament: community; cross; and new creation (cf. 1996, pp. 193-206).

The net effect should hopefully be an adaptive, narrative based ethic that was able to navigate complex ethical terrain. Hays contends that ethics has always been complex, and that the New Testament models an approach to complexity from which we have much to learn in our contemporary multi-cultural world: “When the community of God’s people is

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<sup>522</sup> An assumption shared by theorists such as David Bosch (1991, pp. 411-420), Lesslie Newbigin (1989, pp. 222-233), and Os Guinness (2015). I assume that evangelism ought to be part of the life of the church – we would probably not be at liberty to edit out an aspect of our discipleship duty solely for fear that we might get something wrong. That would conceivably cripple us from trying anything, given our human propensity for error and evil in any undertaking.

living in responsive obedience to God's Word, we will find, again and again...grace-filled homologies between the story of Scripture and its performance in our midst" (1996, p. 460).

From what I have been able to infer from the interviews, the current Methodist ministers of Cape Town also function on a similar intuitive, narrative ethical basis. It would require specific research to formally establish the basis of the ethics of the ministers, but they did show a strong aversion to being regarded as unethical; they seemed to have an ethical instinct, in which pastoral (and evangelistic) choices needed to be made on the basis of kindness, fairness, honesty, responsibility and humility, with an overarching appeal to fairness/justice [0].

### **Professional Ethics for Ethical Evangelism**

Alfred Allan, who works in the field of law and psychology, has developed a framework of ethical principles for those who deal with people (2008, 2011, pp. 112-145). Allan represents a legally useful distillation of the ethical basis used by legislators world-wide in psychology related law-making: Kant, Gilligan and the utilitarians (2008, 2011, p. 122). While the philosophical value of these sources might have been strongly criticised by philosophers such as MacIntyre, who dismisses them as "philosophical fictions" (1984, pp. 64, 70), these principles are generally accepted by the broader globalised community as being valid explications of the "do good/do no harm" principle, even though, in the absence of Divine law or a tradition of the elders, they perhaps often only amount to wishful thinking. What Allan does is give us a framework for which a theological rationale could be found at every point, but which also finds agreement in the majority of alternatively faithed communities amongst which the church might be situated. My rationale for using a secular structure like this is that the evangelism I am considering in this research is by definition engaged with the alternatively faithed [2.4.3]. Any ethical stance must therefore be one upon which both sides can agree (Fisher, 1987, p. 92). Christians might resent having to abide a less-than-optimal, less case sensitive standard; but the consideration of agreement on ethics must weigh heavily here, since the object is to reassure both parties that a liturgy of conversion is an ethical undertaking. Following this logic, I have used his set of categories in my ethical interpretation of the data from chapter 3.

Allan's list consists of seven considerations for ethical behaviour: respect for the dignity, moral and legal rights of others; justice; autonomy; non-maleficence; veracity; fidelity; and responsibility. These seem to constitute a potentially unobjectionable framework for either Christians or alternatively-faithed people. Even though their philosophical basis might be

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open to doubt to each other, these elements seem to represent an acceptably functional basis for shared ethics<sup>523</sup>.

### Advertising and Marketing Research

A third field which is of interest in this argument is the field of advertising and market research, which in our contemporary, globalising, urban contexts is the field most obviously concerned with persuasion. There is no hidden agenda here, as there might be in politics, commerce or education (or religion): the purpose of advertising is to persuade people to buy one product rather than another, or to use one service rather than another<sup>524</sup>. Having said which, marketing then sets out to hide its self-seeking objectives from those it seeks to persuade. Marketing unapologetically seeks to create arbitrary personal commitment to particular brands<sup>525</sup>. Evangelism, by my definition, is also intentionally persuasive. It would therefore be reasonable (and, I submit, tactically astute) for the church to comply at least with the minimum articulated ethical standards of the advertising industry. The church may surely not be *less* ethical than the advertisers!

For this reason I have chosen a university text, which must necessarily take the ethics of advertising seriously as it trains the rising generation of advertisers. The McGraw-Hill text, *Contemporary Advertising*, seems to be an appropriately representative recent text (Arens, et al., 2009).<sup>526</sup> The ethics for advertisers are strictly utilitarian: “the most good for the most people.” (2009, p. 60). The framework is negative – the avoiding of elements that could be construed as criminal, and therefore taking the lead from court cases where advertisers have been found guilty of malfeasance (Arens, et al., 2009, pp. 42-43). Apparently there is no inner incentive to do free-will good in the advertising world. The eight ethical considerations, duly established by legal precedent, are: no false promises; no incomplete description; no false and misleading comparisons; no bait-and-switch offers; no visual distortions or false demonstrations; no false testimonials; no partial disclosure; and no small-print qualifications. (2009, p. 67).

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<sup>523</sup> Ethics is a massive and complex field, into which I cannot delve any further at this point. The bottom line here is that no move or attitude of any Christian should ever not be defensible on ethical terms. If Methodists cannot show that their evangelism is ethical, they ought not to do evangelism.

<sup>524</sup> The advertisers always claim that what they are doing is ethically transparent. And, technically, it usually is. But that is not to say that they don't exert considerable ingenuity in persuading people as deceptively as they can. But quite frankly, the techniques on view as used by the televangelists would scarcely be given the credit of even the advertisers' code of ethics

<sup>525</sup> Advertisers use many manipulative techniques to get people to choose their brand over other similar brands – one such technique is “emotional branding”, according to Kevin Dutton, which sets out to completely by-pass rationality (2010, p. 148)

<sup>526</sup> The tentative authority of advertising and market research ethics guidelines is poignantly expressed by another text book: “Unfortunately, violations are difficult to identify or assess, and even gross violations will not prevent a researcher from practicing and continuing with further unethical behaviour. The codes of conduct therefore have no real effect apart from sanctions by colleagues” (Tustin, et al., 2005, p. 52)

Where the psychology-based text speaks to the ethics of the practitioner with regard to the client, the advertising-based text speaks to the dynamics of the process of persuasion. The usefulness of abiding by these industry-standard schemata is that since the church's ethical stance on evangelism ought be open to the scrutiny of the other-than-Christian world, the public church would need to be able to withstand public evaluation.

### **5.2.3 Ethical Norms for a Liturgy of Conversion**

The articulation of these norms then makes up part of the bridge from the grounded theory to the pragmatic section of my study as tentative summations of the interpretive process.

#### **Respect: Compassion not Condescension**

A major doubt in the minds of ministers seems to be that evangelism with a view to persuading people to convert to Christian faith is rude, and perhaps coercive by its very nature. Is it possible to evangelise people as well as respect them?

Wesley would have not had an issue with this: he did not apparently believe that the word he spoke had ultimate effect either way in people's decision making, but that conversion happened at the level of direct interaction between God and the individual. He modelled an expression of evangelism as an expression of disinterested, non-partisan love. Wesley would have argued that love loses sight of the lover in the advantage and honour of the beloved.

A key component of "compassion" that we can learn from Wesley needs to be the "suffering alongside" component, the close fellowship with those under the whip of circumstances or human oppression. This necessitates costly personal sacrifices in order to provide real-time contact, permanence, reliable presence, sharing of the hospitality offered by the other. In missiological literature, this is "incarnational ministry" (Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, p. 370). If this is in place then the question of coercion and manipulation largely drop away.

Christian believers have been dulled, perhaps, by unbroken fellowship with other Christian believers in a context where the "gospel may have been twisted, pressed, tailored and gerrymandered until it is comfortable" (Brueggemann, 1989, p. 2). It seems to me that evangelism has suffered badly from such "gerrymandering" – the strategic moving of boundaries to deal with a problem constituency. To follow the train of Brueggemann's logic, people need shocking contact with their context, and to be exposed to what life is like in other faith-worlds, to jog them out of their complacency into a realisation of what it means to have to make do with some alternative cosmic story. Living with/alongside people who are trying to make sense of issues like suffering, low self-worth, addiction or guilt (without the heavy-duty grace available to those who have entered the gospel) is possibly the most

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natural inducement to give full expression to what one understands of the gospel. Once it becomes an issue of life (or life and death), one's scruples about the other's right to privacy are put into a different perspective.

Both the Ministers through their interviews and John Wesley through his *Journal* share this concern. It seems that it must therefore be an agreed norm here for evangelism praxis: a liturgy of evangelism, if such a thing were to exist, should be an expression of love in itself, *and must be perceived by the alternatively faithed as an expression of respectful love*. Evangelism cannot have rhetoric of "love and respect" while at the same time expressing disdain – and disdain can be readably encoded in either words or actions. One of the clearest expressions of disdain might be the refusal of the Christian to interact with the alternatively faithed, by "keeping themselves to themselves". Whether this is possible (in the context of contextual persuasion of others to convert to Christian discipleship) will need to be considered in the consideration of pragmatic options.

### **Justice: Justice-through speech not Justification-of-silence**

Potentially, there is a vast range of justice issues to consider when it comes to evangelism and conversion. Is it fair for some to enjoy the putative blessings of salvation, whilst others miss out? Is it just for God to save some but let others be lost? Is it fair for Christians to enjoy the benefits and blessings of salvation without making any attempt to share them with others? Is it equitable for Christianity to be inculturated into a culture and then for that enculturated version of Christianity to forbid or obstruct the enculturation of Christianity into other cultures? Is it fair to deny the freedom of conversion to any faith position to anybody, based on culture? Is it just to apply cultural pressure on others to convert to Christianity (or any other faith system?) If people have the right to freedom of association, is it just to set any legal restrictions on any religion, anywhere – including Christianity? On the negative side, if Christianity reduces happiness, restricts freedoms unnecessarily and creates confusion, hostility and resentment, is it not fair and just to require Christians to keep their faith to themselves?

A key question needs to be decided by Christians – do others need to know and believe what Christians know and believe? For some, there appears to be a tacit belief that Christian faith does indeed make life more difficult and unhappy. If that is someone's faith position, then I could not imagine requiring them to be involved in evangelism. They do not have good news to share, and so silence would be the position of greatest integrity<sup>527</sup>.

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<sup>527</sup> Although they should also then perhaps review the ways in which their attendance at church services and general engagement with the Christian community do not carry undue persuasive weight with observers. They seem to intend them to be communicative signs.

But all of the ministers believe that Christianity is a good thing, and commend it, at least to their congregations, as a faith-position that makes sense of the world and enables people to live well in society. Justice demands equitable distribution of good things amongst all who have a right to receive a part of the whole. If the Gospel is a “good thing”<sup>528</sup> then everybody has the right to hear it. John Wesley’s insistence was based on the principle that all people indeed had a right to hear the Gospel, spoken in words that they could understand in a place they felt at home in. This would speak to David Bosch’s concept of a “valid opportunity” to hear the Gospel (1991, p. 420). The decision on whether people would be saved or not was not within the competence of the evangelist to determine, so s/he had to act as if anybody *could* be saved. John Wesley’s itinerative evangelistic project was partially based on this principle.

The flip-side of this was that if a messenger did not then fulfil his/her mandate to pass on the message from God, s/he would be found in dereliction of duty. This sense of the need to share a good thing with others because it is their right does not appear to be a motivating theme for the ministers I interviewed. As it appears from the interviews many of the ministers seemed to believe that the individual’s right to privacy was the dominant principle governing evangelism. The dignity proper to each human certainly includes the right to not be harassed or insulted by attacks on the probity of their ethics or faith-commitments. Everybody has the right to their own opinion (with which Wesley would have fervently agreed), so justice demands that we give them the space to enjoy that liberty. For others, they seemed to believe that the convened church has no mandate for evangelism, and that evangelism was solely the task of the laity of the church in their weekday diaspora.

This leads to the need for an argument for argument. When is it justified to break into somebody else’s privacy and right to self-determination in order to present a different reading of our shared life circumstances? Common sense dictates that faced by clear and imminent danger one should intervene on the person’s behalf – even if they themselves did not perceive that danger; and even if having perceived the danger they might have chosen to ignore it. Such intervention would logically involve trying to persuade somebody to look at their surroundings in the light of your perceptions, and come to share your risk-assessment, and thus to join you in seeking escape, defence, or rescue. The fact that people might be *hostile* to such an intervention does not necessarily make the intervention *unethical*. Perhaps the contemporary apologetics movement can help us here; Guinness says that: “there are all

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<sup>528</sup> Being a “good thing” of course might consist in the very fact that it contains “unsettling news” and “unwelcome threat” (Brueggemann, 1989, p. 1), and that it “assaults imagination and pushes out the presumed world in which most of us are trapped” (Brueggemann, 1989, p. 3)

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too many people who do not want to believe what we share or even to hear what we have to say, and our challenge is to help them to see it despite themselves” (2015, p. 26)[2.4.7; 0].

The Methodist ministers, however, seem to have reduced the areas of contestation they are prepared to be engaged in. This distaste for argument is understandable, if their perception of “argument” is based on models of hate-filled invective inherited from our Christian past or manipulative deception copied from our cultural present. David Bosch poses the relevant query: “How is it that preachers who appear to have an interest only in the otherworldly destiny of their listeners can be so thoroughly worldly in their ethos and methods?” **Invalid source specified..** I suggest that we need to look to Wesley and his attempt to revive the New Testament method of godly, humble, loving argument. We also might do well, along with Wesley and his classical education, to recover the Aristotelian concept of argument as an ethical process of persuasion, designed to inform, to delight and to move (cf.

Cunningham, et al., 2004). Argument’s appropriate place is in the winning over of people, not in coercing agreement or reinforcing the barriers between two opinions.

A Liturgy of Conversion needs to be predicated, then, on an acknowledgement that the good things of God are not intended to be hoarded by the Church – justice calls us to act, and it is natural and ethical to apply reasonable persuasion to others to try to win them over to one’s viewpoint. And a liturgy of conversion needs to positively embrace the need to persuade others *in order to give them a fair chance of sharing what we claim to have been given*.

### **Autonomy: Ethical Persuasion not Manipulation**

Ministers are concerned, and rightly so, that evangelism threatens to encapsulate converts in a community that overwhelms their individuality, reduces their autonomy and restricts their freedoms. It becomes, or is seen to have become, a remorseless, reductive force that turns all its converts into mindless drones, sucked dry of creativity, integrity and independence, echoing a common attitude on the part of the alternatively faithed in a post-modern urban context [1.1.1.1Appendix A – LF; NF; NM; RF].

The general consensus on ethics at this point is that people are supposed to be allowed complete autonomy of self-determination<sup>529</sup>, a key tenet of the Enlightenment and a principle tenet of post-modernism. But it is a moot point whether such a situation exists for any human being. All humans are already determined in many ways by their history, their culture, and

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<sup>529</sup> Much advertising is based on the fiction of self-determination – aimed at manipulating people into buying goods or services that will enable them to feel that they are completely unique, autonomous beings. Beer advertisements, for instance, appear to be divided into persuading people who want social structure to feel more encapsulated when they drink, and to persuading those who want to be free spirits to feel as if they are making a unique self-determining decision each time they drink (cf. Arens, et al., 2009, p. 158).

their position in their webs of social power, and most of them do not feel lessened in self-identity and personhood (cf. Oduyoye, 1986, p. 110). From a social science point of view, even the most manipulative and controlling forms of religious community cannot impose conformity through “brainwashing”. People adopt the Christian faith in any form, including that of the so-called cults, because they intend to. They want the certainties that are on offer (cf. Anderson & Taylor, 2004, p. 113).

An important issue here is that the country is emerging from the shadow of the dehumanising, identity-denying system of apartheid. Although it is difficult to access from the interviews, it would be interesting to research whether the diffidence about speaking a word of judgement on the part of white ministers might not be partly informed by a wholly appropriate post-apartheid humility and penitence – a deeply Lutheran concept (Luther, 1517/1995).

Wesley had no such scruples; but his approach to persuasion might nonetheless give us some inkling of a way ahead. Wesley placed agency firmly in the grasp of his audiences. Eternal consequences rested on the shoulders of each human being; the radical democracy of human sinfulness left each person with a choice and responsibility to make the right choice. If presented in the right way, the presentation of the path of judgement or forgiveness might be a way of honouring the autonomy of the other. If not, it would indeed be just another form of colonisation [FE004: 3716]. Perhaps more interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds at the level of personal conversation and evangelism might set ministers free, especially as they realise that for many of their congregants the Gospel was one of the few signs of respect they received during the apartheid years.

### **Non-maleficence: Free Gift not Fraud**

Doesn't any attempt to persuade another person to adopt Christian beliefs necessarily involve the potential convert in all sorts of transitional discomfort and hardship? Some people will almost certainly face ostracism from their own culture group if they convert, and some people might even face extreme hostility. Since these effects are easily predictable, is it not irresponsible – even maleficent - to precipitate the harm that will ensue?

In the light of the predatory practices of the televangelists, it sadly needs to be stressed that evangelism should never be used as a means to the ends of self-advantage on the part of the evangelist. This is not the mode appropriate to making money or to garnering political or social influence – although it is sadly used for all these ends [1.1.1.1 Appendix A – BF; RF].

Evangelism should also not be used as a hiding place for sexual predation on the vulnerable – children and the emotionally needy. None of the ministers raised this as an issue in

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evangelism, but the general public are extremely sensitive to incidents of this sort. The exposure of sexual impropriety or crime on the part of Christians is immediate headline news in the print, broadcast, and social media. Protestants do not escape the taint of the revelations of systemic sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church, and no doubt the crimes of Protestants do not make evangelism easier for the Roman Catholics. From the outside looking in, Christians are all united in the ugliest of sin and hypocrisy.

This needs to be emphasized, because the distressing reality is that any social role where one individual encourages the development of a therapeutic trust relationship with another is one that will be targeted by predators as cover for their social hunting<sup>530</sup>. There is no particular reason why an unscrupulous predator should not select the role of evangelist (especially in a religiously inclined society) rather than that of a teacher or psychologist.

Another malfeasance of those claiming to be bearers of “good news” is the use of dogma to promote violence. The anti-Semitic rhetoric against Jews as the “killers of Jesus” in the teachings of Martin Luther is a famous example (cf. Jewish Virtual Library, 2017). Others exist, notably the strident anti-gay propaganda of such churches as Westboro Baptist (cf. Westboro Baptist Church, 2017)[1.1.1.1Appendix A]. Any approach to evangelism that draws a line of demarcation between believer and the alternatively faithed, and then condemns those on the other side of that line (by the standards of this side of the line), has pre-empted the day of judgement without access to the full story, and without any noticeable compassion. What ensues is physical or emotional violence, which should be subject to the same rigorous internal sanctions as sexual predation or financial crime.

These are strong arguments for articulating a code of ethics for a liturgy of conversion! If evangelism is serious about not allowing itself to be abused for the sake of causing harm, then good ethical practice needs to have a self-regulating compliance with transparency about motives, and an undertaking on the part of the Christian community to severely censure those who derive personal benefit (including pleasure) from evangelism to the physical, emotional or financial harm of others.

### **Veracity: Truth, not Lies or Omissions**

Is it true that it is critical to choose to believe the Gospel? Isn't the truth of the matter that Christianity is simply one amongst many options? And isn't it true that evangelism is a process of deceptive influence, the offering of inducements and unfounded promises to

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<sup>530</sup> Peter Rutter, who writes with a primary reference to the field of Psychology, but whose survey includes the whole range of societal, interpersonally imbalanced power-relations, comments that tragically “rape, incest, child molestation, sexual harassment, date rape, adultery and sexual addiction all ... share many of the psychological and cultural dynamics underlying sexual exploitation by professionals” (1989, p. 20).

persuade people to change institutional allegiance? This is one of the obvious areas of discomfort amongst the ministers I interviewed, and perhaps an important reason why they confine their activities, largely, to those who can be expected to already agree with them about the Christian faith. These are legitimate concerns. The second part, about evangelism being a manipulative process, I shall handle separately below under the heading of the ethics of communication. But it would be important for the process of a liturgy of conversion that nobody was perceived to be trying to promote anything that they did not believe in.

If the ministers are not convinced that Jesus actually rose from the dead and that through that sign God has sent a signal to all humanity that he is the god who is Lord of the universe of time and space, they should neither perpetrate nor encourage “evangelism”<sup>531</sup>. But Lesslie Newbigin has made it clear that Christians are logically and legitimately (1989, p. 125) allowed to hold their truth as public truth – as is anybody else. The nature of pluralism is not that people do not hold truth positions; they inevitably do. The nature of a plurally-faithed society ought to be that truth claims are expected to be contested and contestable without hostility: the ethical question is not whether one should publicly promote one’s truth claim, but whether one is promoting it in accordance with the truth that one is proclaiming. For Christians, then, the issue of “truth” has two aspects: firstly, do they believe their own truth or not; and, secondly, are they proclaiming a God of truth, love, justice and mercy using truthful, just, loving and merciful means.

Wesley spent painful years in internal doubt, trying to find a way to truly believe what he was supposed to believe as a Christian. His standards were simple – where was the effect of what was apparently on offer? Where was the love? If the truth was supposed to set one free, why was he still so imprisoned? If the Scriptures promise love, joy and peace to those who believe, why did he struggle to love others, and why did he feel so frightened and unhappy? He sets an example of an honest doubter. But when these doubts were eventually honestly resolved, he also sets the example of taking faith to Newbigin’s logical destination – putting the truth into the public arena to be disputed and either accepted or rejected. Some of the ministers are more comfortable with this, but many seem to have no taste for this particular battle. A liturgy of conversion, it seems to me, would require liturgical leadership that is or becomes eager to make “public liturgy” truly public. In a sense, evangelism then models the faith that it proclaims – that Christian faith is not a private preference, but a faith that carries a responsibility for the whole world. And if Methodists believe that the liturgy

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<sup>531</sup> I have no direct evidence that any of the ministers fall into this category of radical doubt; but “faith” was not a frequent topic of interest, and so I suspect that there might be a lack of interaction with the issues of doubt and faith with regard to evangelism and conversion. This would require further research to resolve.

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expresses the core tenets of the Christian faith, then that liturgy could be argued to be an essential component of such “publicity”.

### **Fidelity: Integrity not Bureaucracy**

The issue of “public truth” speaks to an openness to public scrutiny. Do Christians actually follow the teachings of Jesus? Are evangelists trustworthy? Are Christians disguising a need to recruit more adherents in order to shore up their failing institutions under a cloak of pretended interest in the spiritual welfare of others? These were some of the issues raised by the ministers in their interviews, and if evangelism shows that Christians hold their truth as public truth, Christians need to expect to be judged by the standards they proclaim. In a society heavily influenced by post-modernism (even if not uniformly so [0]) the appearance of favouring procedural rules over common-sense considerations is widely regarded as “bullshit” – a common non-ecclesial phrase which might be translated roughly as “that which is self-evidently an imposition of self-serving/structure-serving motives through manipulative rhetoric”<sup>532</sup> [1.1.1.1Appendix A - PF].

Seen through post-colonial or post-Uhuru eyes, evangelism that favours the hegemony of those entrenched in possession and power would also be bullshit [1.1.1.1Appendix A – BF; RF]. It appears that the bureaucratic superstructure of the church, its hierarchy of leadership and its great buildings and possessions, its power and magnificence, are all a betrayal of its integrity<sup>533</sup>.

An ethical liturgy of conversion will therefore need to deliberately not seek to reinforce the bureaucracy. It will, in fact, be an exercise in democratising salvation, making it freely available to outsiders with no pressure on people who experience conversion to then become financial contributors to the hierarchy<sup>534</sup>. This might be problematic to much church leadership, especially where the theories of the business world dictate that institutional loyalty is the primary mission of its members. The subversive reality is that public liturgy in disputed spaces cannot by its nature be predicted to result in increased membership of particular churches, especially if conducted by the values Wesley displayed. From a management-model perspective, however, any religious effort by any member must somehow be able to be construed as adding value to the institution. If it cannot be an obvious advantage to the organisation in terms of adherents and finances, it is likely to be

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<sup>532</sup> The tentative definition of bullshit is mine – for an insightful exploration of this topic, with references to Augustine and Wittgenstein, see Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt’s article *On Bullshit* (Frankfurt, 2004).

<sup>533</sup> The current Pope appears sensitive to this, choosing to sit on a completely plain and un-gilded official throne (Thompson, 2013).

<sup>534</sup> I would see this as having particular reference for the television Christian dynasties, where the so-called televangelists spend so much manipulative effort on getting people to donate money to their causes.

regarded as irrelevant even hostile - to its goals and aims [0 - FA011:12003]. If that obtains, then perhaps the side-lining of evangelism by churches might even be seen as a badge of integrity. However, if were to become to be seen that such self-giving effort was simply another aspect of the overall liturgical life of the church, as well as an ordinary part of the Church's mission of compassion, then such objections might well fall away. Ministers do not preach or conduct Holy Communion in order to boost membership numbers – they do liturgy because that is what constitutes the identity of the church [0]. The same ought presumably apply to a liturgy of conversion.

### **Earnestness not Efficiency**

Evangelism is not about using the best methods to convince and control the most people. In Wesleyan terms, and recognised by at least one of the ministers I interviewed, it needs to become an essential outpouring of an inner infatuation: a witness to one's miracle cure, perhaps, rather than the marketing of a miracle drug. Efficiency, as a doctrine of the enlightenment, involves the simplification of processes to standard procedures, the suppression of outliers and the concentration on the average. If Christian theology in general were to buy into this (and I suspect that it does tend to do so), then our anthropology has to abandon capacity for uniqueness, and operate on the assumption of infinite similarity. That in turn might well lead to the alternatively-faithed, as outliers from the Christian norm, being regarded as distinct inefficiencies in the running of an efficient church. And that would in turn effectually spell the end of evangelism. It would, incidentally, also spell the ultimate end of the church, as fewer and fewer people fitted the standard model. A production line is only efficient if it has an unending supply of parts for the model it is making, and an unending market for its product.

This throws the motivation issue back into the realm of evangelization. Is the discipleship regimen of the church, the catechesis, geared towards promoting the sort of inner simplicity and gratitude that overflows into passionate evangelistic speech and action? Are there teaching strategies in place to minimise the glorification of efficiency? (cf. Hoekendijk, 1964, p. 146).

Evangelism then becomes, as ME005 suggests it might, the response of a faithful disciple, rather than a strategy for the desperate maintenance of an institution. The norm for a liturgy of conversion would be its openheartedness to the infinite variety of humanity, and a healthy indifference to *where* any new convert might find a Christian spiritual home (although not an indifference to the fact that they would need to become part of *some* Christian community).

This would mean that a liturgy of conversion would need to take ecumenism seriously. In a church culture where the adherence to a particular interpretation of Scripture on all points

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was the cardinal emphasis of conversion and membership, I suspect it might be more difficult to incorporate such an open-ended approach to outsiders. But as I have shown, the Methodist approach to doctrine and Scripture leaves the door conveniently open to this approach – perhaps because the Methodists started off in a situation where the liturgy of conversion was part of the shape of the liturgical shape of the movement.

### ***Loyalty to Humanity not Institution***

This openness to converts finding a home not with us is due to the fact that we are to hold our faith, as Lesslie Newbigin would say, with universal intent (1989, p. 47). And that involves, paradoxically, the possibility of coming to make a certain set of anti-local choices, as African feminist Oduyoye explains (in the context of revolt against patriarchy), we have the gospel-freedom “...to be able to obey God rather than man” (1986, p. 149). In terms of a liturgy of conversion it would require a re-reading of the “local” to include the alternatively-faithed (the local-but-ignored), and decisions to be loyal to a complete locality, not the limited alternative-locality constructed by the church<sup>535</sup>. For Wesley, Jesus was characterised by non-partisanship. Wesley would also have seen it clashing with his romantic picture of the hard-won insights of the early church not to exclude the Gentiles. Wesley, as I have shown, always promoted the narrative of the Church as one of inclusive concern for all of humanity.

An important connection here is that the ministers I interviewed seemed to strongly believe that their churches have a responsibility to look out for the well-being of the whole of their surrounding societies, not just Methodist-related people. There is no objection to the church pouring itself out in loving service to those in need, without demanding corresponding loyalty or adherence to the church in return. This seems to be a very promising starting point in envisaging this aspect of the ethics of a liturgy of conversion.

The bottom line is that one important ethical norm of fidelity for a liturgy of conversion is that it must be, and be seen to be, disinterested with regard to the Methodist Church, just as Wesley strove (admittedly with mixed success) to be disinterested with regard to the Anglican Church of which he was an agent [0].

### **Responsibility: Competence not Carte Blanche**

Are Christians not already doing everything they should, without indulging this evangelism fantasy? Is evangelism not an irresponsible side venture, likely to destabilise the precarious

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<sup>535</sup> At Claremont Methodist people (often including myself) refer to themselves as “Claremont” – as in “Are you coming to Claremont this Sunday or not”. The subtext of this is that we are obviously Methodist, and are unquestioningly exclusive of the alternatively-faithed. Members of Claremont Methodist Church apparently inhabit a universe where any “Claremont” other than Claremont Methodist Church has been excised.

ecosystems of local churches, and compete with more important priorities for funding and personnel, or social engagement and denominational development?

Due to the marginalisation of evangelism as a practice of the church, it appears that actual performance of persuasive evangelism has been relegated to the least theologically competent members of the church, due to theological considerations. It has become to be seen as, perhaps, the domain of the young people, or the less well educated [0]. Theological education seems designed to produce theological practitioners who function at the heart of Christian Institutions, at an institutional distance from the alternatively faithed, and largely insulated from them [0]. Ministers seem to occupy a position central to and embedded within the Christian community, in the view of the authors of *Missional Church*, as “priest, pedagogue or professional... dispensers of spiritual resource” (Guder, et al., 1998, p. 195).

It appears, therefore, that the last thing an evangelist might be expected to need is a theological degree. The nominal standards of education - the evaluation of the interpersonal and intellectual capacity of individual practitioners – are not considered appropriate to be applied to evangelists. And this in turn perhaps results in the “public face” of the church being presented by those the church has self-deselected. The Bishop might make occasional public pronouncements on television – but the train preacher will be communicating a vision of the church to the public every morning.

One ethical stance on this would be to regularise and train specialised personnel for duties in evangelism, and to this end the Methodist Church does have an “Order of Evangelists and Biblewomen”. But as I have pointed out, this is considered to be an adjunct or minor clergy role, and not central to the primary mission of the church – at least not in the city [0]. In my understanding, the concept of a liturgy of conversion will only be of help to the Methodist church in its current urban standing if the chief liturgants include evangelism in the ordinary liturgical rhythms of the local churches, and in the ordinary rhythms of training and preparation.

### **Ethics of Communication**

One of the frequent accusations levelled against evangelists is that they manipulate people through emotionalism, stirring corporate hysteria and then manipulating them into commitments guided by the evangelist. This seems unlikely. Audiences do indeed become hysterical, and they are indeed manipulated, but apparently not by the emotion. People in fact *want* to feel emotion – terror, joy, peace, love<sup>536</sup>. But it appears that people only *feel*

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<sup>536</sup> The entire entertainment and recreational industry is built on satisfying the desire for authentic feeling, from bungee jumping, to movies, to live music performances. Somebody who attends a rock concert or a symphony orchestra performance (out of their own free choice) expresses remarkably

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emotion if they already *believe* in the narrative of the manipulator. And permanent change never happens in the direction of more fear and less pleasure – so persuasion is automatically linked to a judgement by the convert about whether the new faith position will bring greater good than their current position. So that brings us back to the issue of truth: if there is real danger, fear is appropriate; if God really loves people, then love is an appropriate emotion; if somebody has done something or held an attitude of which they are ashamed, then guilt is an entirely appropriate feeling. Wesley would have argued that feelings are the indicators of the state of the soul. Of course, having told a narrative that gets people to believe certain things and therefore feel in certain ways then presents one with a raft of considerations as to how to proceed. If the “evangelist” suggests that a money payment is an appropriate way to assuage their guilt by purchasing some sort of indulgence, then they run right against not only Wesley’s strictures but also Martin Luther’s 95 theses.

As he tried to persuade people to consider converting to Christian faith, Wesley’s preaching did seem to arouse hysteria, as well as guilt, fear, pleasure and peace. But according to this understanding, the ethical test is not about the emotions, but about the intentions of the persuader and the intentions of the persuadee. Studies into the so-called “brain-washing” effect have shown that the human psyche is remarkably resistant to long-term persuasion against the will (cf. Andersen & Taylor, 2004, pp. 113-114). What Wesley modelled was a “think this through” attitude, and a follow-up that required some rigorous and uncomfortable commitments. There was never any question of financial transaction. To my mind, it seems that a direction to somebody (who has been emotionally overwhelmed by a presentation of the Gospel) to think about it further, and to join a prayer and accountability group to explore the implications, is an eminently ethical procedure [0]. One of the ministers interviewed does exactly this [ME012: 2429]. In Wesleyan terms, a liturgy of conversion could well envisage such an approach to persuasion.

But as mentioned, there is great scope for malfeasance in the area of persuasive communication. As I argued above [0], it seems reasonable to assess evangelism ethics against a grid of universally acceptable standards for such processes: advertising and marketing, because the liturgy of conversion envisages a shared environment with the alternatively faithed. So, following Arens, ethical communication should (at very least) have no “false promises”, no “incomplete description”, no “false and misleading comparisons”, no “bait-and-switch offers”, no “visual distortions or false demonstrations”, no “false testimonials”, no “partial disclosure”, and no “small-print qualifications” (Arens, et al., 2009, p. 67).

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intense emotional reactions during and after the event. If they remain unstirred, it is because they somehow do not believe in the authenticity of the event (Cupchik, 2011).

*For atheists, Christianity falls at the first hurdle of “no false promises”<sup>537</sup>. But that is an argument for a different, specialised forum<sup>538</sup>. Wesley ardently believed that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, and that this signalled a path into forgiveness and eternal life for those who could believe. He interpreted and reconciled all the ensuing improbabilities of the Gospel through that lens of faith. A liturgy of conversion has to be truthful to this conviction – and if not, should not be envisaged. Where Christianity might fail on this issue of ethical communication is in promising, perhaps, financial success and physical healing contingent upon faith and commitment to a Church cause. Wesley’s *Journal* was refreshingly modest about the likelihood of being healed, and I have shown Wesley himself was hostile to using faith in the Gospel as a get-rich algorithm [0].*

The Gospel does, from the point of view of a Wesleyan theology, promise feelings such as love, joy and peace, and the power to resist sin and move towards holiness. But it does not promise those to anybody who is not prepared, in a Wesleyan formulation, to undergo rigorous self-evaluation and readiness to be open with others.

On the other hand, faith in the Gospel will also expose one to unpleasant possibilities such as rejection by friends, struggle with the sinful structures of society (and one’s own self-destructive but alluring temptations), and potential hardship and difficulty. It seems to me that for a liturgy of conversion to fulfil the ethical requirements of the principle of “no false promises”, liturgants need to be alive and aware of both the limits and demands of the good news, and the extent of the difficulties to be expected by anybody who dares to be persuaded to consider conversion.

*If “no incomplete description” is to be a hallmark of the communication project of a liturgy of conversion, this would speak perhaps to those abbreviated theologies of conversion such as the Four Spiritual Laws. Here the entire domain of faith is contracted into a four-point plan which leaves out much more than it includes (Bright, 2017). In my view a narrative and inductive study approach, designed to take as long as needed, is more ethical. The liturgy of conversion then becomes a repeated presentation of the truths of the Gospel through Scripture, and leads any prospective convert through pre-conversion thought and study, in an open-ended way that allows the alternatively faithed person to enter, leave, re-enter and re-leave the process at will, until they are satisfied that they can reject or accept the propositions of faith.*

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<sup>537</sup> Atheists are one category of hearer never mentioned by the ministers; it seems clear that a liturgy of conversion would include taking the task of persuasion to convert to Christian faith into the domain of these uncomfortable critics.

<sup>538</sup> A good introduction to the world of contemporary apologetics is Os Guinness’ book *Fool’s Talk* (Guinness, 2015)

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*“No false and misleading comparison” seems to speak for itself.* Ethical communication embodied in a liturgy of conversion should present the truths of Christianity, and leave the alternatively faithed the “head-space”<sup>539</sup> to make their own comparisons with alternative worldviews and faith positions. Wesley demonstrated a strikingly hands-off approach to allowing people the room to doubt, think and decide.

*A Liturgy of conversion should not attract people with an appearance of grace only to substitute a system of law once the person converts to Christianity – or any other form of “bait-and-switch”.* The same freedoms should apply to the person once they have converted: the same respect and gentleness, and latitude in finding one’s own feet in the new faith. Spiritual companionship should be guidance and companionship, not turn out to be instruction and control. On the other hand, evangelism as envisaged as a liturgy of conversion should not bait a potential convert with warm, focused fellowship, only to leave them all alone in a new cosmic wilderness once they have made a decision to believe in the Christian worldview. Liturgy envisages the celebration of truth in a community, and one of the reasons for my plea for a habitual liturgy of conversion on the part of local congregations is to take the conversion transaction out of the hands of invade-and-disappear external missionary organisations<sup>540</sup>, and to re-establish conversion as part of the regular rhythms of life of the church.

*In terms of the ethics of communication, “no visual distortions or false demonstrations” would apply to what politicians call the “optics” of persuasion.* A much despised example would be hypocritical Christians pretending to be have more joy and peace than they actually have, and pretending to love more warmly than they actually do [1.1.1.1Appendix A]. If the public liturgants of a liturgy of conversion have a real interest in and affection for those with whom they interact, then this is legitimate persuasion. Faking it is hypocrisy.

*There is a line where “witness” crosses over into “false witness”, which takes Christians back into their own ethical heartland of the Ten Commandments, but which the alternatively faithed recognise as bullshit.* Advertisers have reluctantly been forced to pay legal penalties for resorting to what the law calls “false testimony”. In my understanding a liturgy of conversion should play everything straight up by the book, with no garnishing of stories or well-intended inventions. John Wesley would not have approved [0]. The Methodist ministers I interviewed would not approve [0]. The alternatively faithed would not be impressed.

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<sup>539</sup> I first came across the useful concept of “head-space” while listening to a late-night Rasta music radio show.

<sup>540</sup> I once conducted a correspondence with Campus Crusade for Christ about their name and methods (about twenty-five years ago). I felt I made no headway then, but I see that years later they are now making concessions to the extreme offensiveness of their name in some cultural contexts (CRU, 1994-2015).

*“No partial disclosure” also makes a great deal of sense. A liturgy of conversion should ideally not deal in partial truths or aim to communicate anything less than the full range of God’s character and intentions. In my mind this speaks to the frequent limitation of evangelistic appeal to the personal salvation and comfort of an individual, without at the same time opening the door to the vast compassion of a God who has antipathy to every social, political and environmental injustice perpetrated on the earth. The Gospel presented as a convenient patch to the guilt-glitch of an old program is deeply unhelpful – what is on offer is a whole new operating system.*

*And of course there should be no hint of “small-print qualifications”. Perhaps the most common surprise discovery on the part of the new convert that the church accepts converts very warmly...but only if they culturally align themselves (or submit themselves) to the dominant subculture. Sometimes the importance of the Bible comes as a surprise to a new convert. Sometimes the expectation to be involved in transforming their worlds is likewise an unexpected demand. A more leisurely, conversational approach to evangelism seems to offer a better approach to helping the convert through the culture shock period of conversion.*

### **Conclusion**

My contention is that if a liturgy of conversion could be shown to follow such scrupulous ethical principles, it might well allay the fears of many ministers. Wesley’s Journal shows how somebody could approach an ethical liturgy of conversion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – there is no reason why such an ethical liturgy of conversion could not become again part of the church life of the Methodist church. But I acknowledge it might need the church to take a very vocal stance against much of what passes for evangelism in our times. The Methodist Church would need to speak a contrary word against evangelism abuses in the media and in the wider society.

### **5.3. A Socio-Cultural Interpretation of the Data**

The ministers discussed many of the socio-cultural dynamics of the state of the church: increase in the percentage of elderly, apparent disconnection with the young, disaffection of members, lack of connection with outsiders, factional disintegration, increasing isolation and falling off of wider cultural influence, and a preoccupation with promoting the loyalty of those who are currently members. But they did not show much evidence of a theological and socio-cultural interpretation of what they were seeing. Yet an accurate reading of “the present age” could be regarded as crucial in terms of evangelism. Outler considers that “evangelism’s secret of success has always lain in its vivid awareness of the actual sense of

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human existence in the current age, whenever it was, in its ability to translate the eternal verities of the perennial gospel into new idioms for new generations” (1971, p. 86).

Hiebert and Meneses draw our attention to the fact that the Church – while it is more than just a human institution – is not less than a human institution (1995, p. 21). They argue that in order to understand the church we need to understand *the church as human institution* as well as *the church as a theological institution*. In addition, they point out that we who live in cities (and in terms of this research, who work as Christian leaders in cities) often “...live in cities, but know little about how they operate. Until we do we will not be able to minister to people in them in relevant ways” (1995, p. 257)

### 5.3.1 A Liturgy of Conversion in Touch with its Context

#### Evangelism in the Postmodern City

Postmodernism affects the church primarily by posing a challenge to its authority. Lyotard portrays postmodernism as a democratised contestation of authoritative narratives – a logical intensification of Descartes’ principle of radical doubt that comes in full circle to doubt Descartes himself – and human rationality (cf. Bosch, 1991, p. 350; Adam, 2004, p. 62).

The burden of having no automatic truth structure appears to leave the postmodern psyche in the position of either neurotic self-doubt or hedonistic fatalism, with what MacIntyre outlines as an almost universal “emotivist” reading of ethics from the point of view of self-interest (1984, pp. 6-22). Both of these would result in deep suspicion of an institution which proclaimed a universally valid ethic based on a universally valid metanarrative.

Whether the ministers acknowledge it or not, the Methodist church is being squeezed into a smaller and smaller sector of the urban landscape. But it is not the only factor at play. I have tried to show that the concept of “postmodernism” will have better explanatory power for the context of Cape Town - a contemporary African city - if it is used alongside other historically significant factors [0]. Ministers in Cape Town need a Cape Town-specific interpretational matrix for their social environment<sup>541</sup>. Nevertheless, postmodernism restricts the former communicational privileges of the Christendom church. What prevails now is perhaps not so much a free pluriverse of options, as much as the domination of the ideas that have the most

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<sup>541</sup> Because of the domination of research discourse by representatives of the westernised power-cultures, a phrase like “*at the present time in North America*” (Hunsberger, 2008, p. 59) is found in perhaps the majority of texts available on the subject. As a pertinent example, in the collection of articles collected by Chilcote & Warner in the book *The Study of Evangelism – Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*, there are constant references to the North American/Western context in conversation with which the studies have been done (2008, pp. 1, 20 (footnote), 29, 46, 47, 101 (title!), 174, 203, 206, 227, 228, 231, 237,247, 267, 346, 370, 409). To their credit, the editors *do* identify this as a difficulty in their attempt to collate a truly diverse and fully representational collection of sources! (2008, pp. xiii-xiv)

advertising power, and perhaps those that are the least scrupulous about how they set about persuading people. Against this background, my argument is that the Church should not meekly allow itself to be silenced. A liturgy of conversion would then stand as a sign of *ethical* communication – giving those with eyes to see the option of at least seeing that Moses' staff swallows the staffs of the sorcerers. What form that "ethical sign" might conveniently take is the subject of the next chapter.

### **Evangelism in the Post-Rural City**

As I have noted, post-ruralism is an essential factor to understanding the city. The fact that so many migrants do not feel "in their bones" that they are "Capetonians" means that the liturgy of conversion can and should be conducted in such ways that it mediates and reinforces the cultural identity of the Xhosa and other strongly post-rural communities in the city. The work done by the YMG and the Manyanos should be celebrated and reinforced. And to my mind that other great expression of the Liturgy of Conversion tradition still alive in the Methodist Church, the Order of Evangelists and Biblewomen, might well be deployed and expanded in Cape Town with good effect. These are women and men who understand the hearts of the dispossessed and oppressed, and from whose lips the gospel would sound eminently credible. Although perhaps we need a cadre of evangelists recruited from the city itself, which can bridge the rural/post-rural culture gap.

Having said that, there might be an aspect of this issue that the Methodist Church needs to take account of in crafting appropriate liturgies of conversion. Not every Xhosa person in Cape Town hankers after a rural homeland<sup>542</sup>. There are long-term residents with property and careers in the City who do not feel an attraction to the old homestead and the old church. Many of them are increasingly estranged from the traditional Xhosa Methodist Church, and at the same time not encapsulated into the other cultural morphs of the Church. These are people who need to forge a new urban identity alongside a Christian identity. A liturgy of conversion is needed that addresses the consciousness of these urbanites, too.

### **Evangelism in the Postcolonial/post-apartheid City**

There is an understandable reticence on the part of white ministers to appear in any way coercive or proscriptive. There is also an ongoing undercurrent of resentment at any apparent flaunting of residual power, privilege and entitlement by the white officials in the

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<sup>542</sup> In personal conversation with a Xhosa friend, Ms Rita Toto, she said words to the effect of "I don't belong in the Eastern Cape, I belong in Cape Town. My house is here, my business is here. And my daughter doesn't want anything to do with the *ombadesho*" [2017-10-15].

## The Liturgy of Conversion

eyes of black and coloured office holders<sup>543</sup>. The issue of who holds power in the hierarchy of the church continues to be a contestation that is sometimes very embarrassing to rank-and-file Methodists<sup>544</sup>.

Given this internal dynamic, the possibility of a unified theory of liturgy of conversion might appear unlikely. But it is not the whole picture. There seem to be a number Methodist ministers who are already quite active liturgically beyond the culture-fields of their churches. And there are many who work very harmoniously with each other across former culture barriers. The most acrimonious hostility appears to be related to positions of power and influence. But by its nature the liturgy of conversion is unlikely to attract the attention of those who are primarily interested in ecclesial power. In fact, liturgy of conversion might be seen as an alternative avenue of attention and development for those who feel impatient with the battle for prestige and power that others are engaged in. It is certainly the route that Wesley took in the light of the power relation politics of the Anglican Church of his day.

### **Evangelism in the Post-Uhuru City**

The presence of waves of migrants from the rest of Africa poses specific challenges for churches. Some of these issues might well be addressed by the inclusion of a liturgy of conversion in the liturgy of the churches. Large populations of French, Portuguese, and Somali-speaking people are now resident in Cape Town. A liturgy of conversion that had such people in mind would need a linguistic policy – the learning of new languages is not an inconceivable objective, nor the mobilisation of seed-populations of a particular culture, nurtured in the matrix of an English language congregation, perhaps, in order to be the liturgical catalyst for evangelism and conversions.

### **Evangelism of the Post-Wesleyan Church**

My argument has been that a liturgy of conversion would need a reactivation of certain Wesleyan principles that have largely fallen into abeyance. The idea of concern for the welfare of outsiders (other than those who are physically hungry) would require an apparently unlikely access of energy and focus. It is not an exaggeration to say that any revival of Wesley's concern for the alternatively faithed would be extremely difficult.

Advocacy for the outsider has been an ongoing concern of mine for many years and it has

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<sup>543</sup> Nobody would admit to this on voice recording – but my experience as a culture insider has exposed me to numerous uncomfortable and emotionally fraught situations where this has been the issue at stake.

<sup>544</sup> I know of one church where the minister was locked out of the manse by the stewards; I know of another Methodist church infamous for the bloody fist-fight that broke out there one day amongst its leadership. I have been accused of abusing my white privilege by a minister whilst attempting to broker peace between him and congregational members of yet another race-group. Church politics is not for the faint-hearted.

not been conspicuously successful – I sometimes get the feeling that people are either indifferent to my attempts to draw attention to the possibility of investing church personnel resources on the alternatively faithed, or else pleased to be able to relegate the responsibility to the few who have the vision. Perhaps I have not been the best advocate. But it seems to me that it would be necessary for there to be serious, focused advocacy from the clergy for the corporate cultures of the churches to change to incorporate a liturgy of conversion as part of the life of the church.

### **Evangelism of the Post-Evangelism Church**

There is a need, in my view, for the church to understand, accept and articulate that it has by and large moved away from a concern for evangelism. As I have noted, when the Ministers spoke about evangelism they probably meant what I have termed “evangelisation”, the formation of Christians according to the principles of the Gospel. It seems that it would be operationally helpful to distinguish between the persuasion to consider conversion to Christian faith, and the formation of converts according to that faith. This would have two tactically important outcomes, in my view. Firstly, the church might become more concerned with coming into contact with the alternatively faithed, and more attuned to the spiritual and intellectual problems of those who inhabit different faith paradigms. Secondly, it might give the ministers a diagnostic for pastorally helping those who might find themselves trapped in a cultural form of Christianity which might not be particularly satisfying or helpful to them. Because of their tacit lack of faith, such Christian-related people appear to be Christians but are not amenable to evangelisation – the mass of unmotivated members that the ministers find so disappointing [0]. They lack commitment to the faith, and therefore cannot be expected to be enthusiastic about Christianity. According to Wesley’s paradigm of the life of faith, such people need to be awakened, convicted and converted before any other pastoral intervention can be expected to do them much good – and before Christianity could be much fun for them. A liturgy of conversion would require liturgants to be much clearer about the objectives of evangelism and conversion. Notional space needs to be created for those who are solid Methodists but not yet believers, just as Wesley made space for Anglicans who were not yet awake to God [0]. It might be helpful to return to Wesley’s “dispositions” diagnostic.

### **5.3.2 A Liturgy of Conversion as Broker of Socio-personal Identity**

Theorists consider the drive for meaningful identity to be a universal motivator for all people of all cultures (cf. Mbiti, 1969, 1989, p. 106; Rambo, 1995, pp. 11,100). In another context, as he develops his investigation into African philosophy, Masolo argues that “the first need of American blacks was that of redeeming their own dignity, trodden underfoot for centuries, to

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confirm the lack of foundation for discrimination and *to regain self-identity*" (1994, pp. 11 - emphasis added). This identity might be perceived by the individual as either more individualistic or more corporate in essence, depending on cultural and sub-cultural norms – because cultural norms dictate what is meaningful on the macro-societal level (cf. Kraft, 1996, p. 150). Psychological idiosyncrasies dictate what an individual will perceive as meaningful existence within the macro-cultural framework (Kraft, 1996, pp. 148-163). But the quest for identity is either enhanced or retarded by the interactions one has with one's world.

From the viewpoint of an individual, s/he is in need of a sufficiently satisfying relationship to the human world around him/her. The chief satisfaction of relationship is honour or dignity, understood as worth attributed to an individual by her/his group<sup>545</sup>. This is brokered to individuals - as a personal identity - through social institutions: families; clans; birth cohorts; school age cohorts; gang membership; Sports supporters' clubs; etc. Every urban resident is thus on a quest to find identity, but it seems to be prevalent that in urban settings "...their relationships are superficial and functional and they do not feel that others see them as real persons" (Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, p. 276).

The effectiveness of a liturgy of conversion might therefore very well depend on its capacity to confer, or to continue to confer, meaningful personal identity on its participants through engendering a sense of dignity or honour. Augsburgers helpfully points out how honour is increasingly less valued as a source of identity in globalised society, since honour is "...associated with a hierarchical order of society.... one's persona, one's social mask, and the mask is what is valued, what is real" (1992, p. 107). By contrast, in society where traditional hierarchies have broken down, as in urban middle class/aspirant middle-class communities, "dignity" is what confers satisfactory identity. Dignity, says Augsburgers, "...always refers to the intrinsic humanity apart from socially imposed roles or norms." (1992, p. 107). Social institutions are required to accord this role-free dignity to people who are discombobulated by "...technology and industrialisation, urbanisation and population growth, the communication explosion between all groups<sup>546</sup>, social mobility, the pluralisation of social worlds, and the profound changes in the social contexts of childhood development." (1992, p. 108). He characterises the plight of the individual caught up in a storm of change where "the institutional fabric has been fragmented, its plausibility lost" as being "...thrown back on subjective experience to create a foothold in reality, to dredge up the meaning and stability which we require to exist" (1992, p. 108)

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<sup>545</sup> For a helpful discussion of honour as role-based identity within society and dignity as self-based identity within society, see Augsburgers, 1992, pp. 107-109.

<sup>546</sup> This was written before the cataclysmic introduction of the cell phone and social media.

If the establishment and maintenance of personal identity is an ongoing basic social need, then it seems legitimate to enquire how the Methodist Churches are fulfilling this function for people from their constituent culture groups, and how (and whether) they intend to fulfil this function amongst people from various alternatively faithed backgrounds. A reading of the interview data seems to suggest that the more traditional churches in more hierarchically structured communities are still providing a strong locus of identity to many people, specifically through honour-conferral mechanisms. Higher church attendance could well be attributed to this. Conversely, the data could legitimately be interpreted as showing that the less traditionally Methodist churches are failing to provide a culturally viable sense of identity-through-dignity, indicated by their falling numbers and especially their disaffected youth. In terms of identity brokering, it would appear that a decreasing number of people want to be identified as Methodist. That would mean that Methodism was becoming less and less meaningful to urban populations.

Wesley, as we have seen, maximised the honour of the un-honoured, and dignified the despised. What the Methodist Church of Cape Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century then perhaps needs to consider, is in what ways do people in Cape Town society at large experience themselves as deprived of dignity/honour; and in which ways the Gospel might be communicated in such a way as to clearly offer honour and dignity to all?<sup>547</sup> A person from a rural area will naturally wonder "Where do you keep your cows" [personal conversation between Joanna Reynolds and Onke Nqwili, 2014-06-15]. Even a person with multi-generational roots in the city, perhaps even from a formerly advantaged background, stands to find the pressures of seeking work, poverty, isolation due to working conditions, and depersonalisation in the workforce - driving them to a place where they find themselves feeling profoundly bereft of honour or dignity.

The critical principle can perhaps be articulated like this: How can the Methodist Churches of Cape Town convey a promise of dignity/honour to those of alternative faith commitments who inhabit and control the spaces between the churches? And how can it substantiate that promise?

The ministers of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town seemed to accept the state of the church as inevitable, given social conditions [0]. This was not the standpoint of John Wesley, who simply assumed that the church, having fallen asleep in its cultural comfort, would resume its powerful influence in society if only it could be woken up. It seemed that the ministers lacked this burning vision of what the church could be if only it woke up to its potential. I suggest that such a vision might well result from retaking the steps that John

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<sup>547</sup> This would require further socio-cultural investigation which is beyond the scope of this study.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

Wesley took – actively seeking out the most alienated in society at large and learning to interact with the culture as a whole, rather than limiting time and energy to the Christian congregations: the world perhaps needs to be seen as each minister’s parish once again, and a liturgy of conversion might well be a key part of such a move.

One of the insights that is needed to fuel this new open-parish perspective is the vision of community in poverty, turmoil and change. And the message, whatever it turns out to be, needs to offer a rock to people whose footing has slipped in the flood of change. The old hymn decries “change and decay in all around” (MCSA, 1983, p. 665); but we could be facing a similar but different “change and unsustainable technical advancement in all around”. Since Alvin Toffler, we have been made aware that one of the poisons of late modernity is the wave of change that stresses those on its crest and submerges those in its wake<sup>548</sup>. Ministers need to be able to articulate a vision of history that gives steady footing in the present by plotting the rocky path of the past, whilst sketching out a safe way to go forward to a meaningful future. Both the broad and narrow paths seem to be under the flood of change. A liturgy of conversion, in my view, wades in the flood of change with the lifeline of Christian tradition. A liturgy of conversion could be an important sign that the church is still what it has always claimed itself to have been – the community of those who have found the heart of the eternal storm.

### 5.3.3 Liturgy of Conversion as a Mediator of Cultural Change

Social institutions broker cultural transition: this is a second key that cultural anthropology gives us for understanding urban contexts and the social role of the liturgy of conversion. In these terms, the liturgy of conversion can be seen as an exercise in the inculturation of the church into a situation of liminality, in order to bring about identity and development (Magesa, 2004, pp. 268-271). A cultural institution should ideally enable people adjust to contextual changes – large or small – whilst maintaining a healthy sense of identity that satisfies them in the new circumstances that obtain around them. This is a process that Hiebert and Meneses refer to as individual and structural transformation (cf. 1995, pp. 373-374).

What a liturgy of conversion might be able to do for the church is to signal - to both the church and the world - that the church is open to contact, and therefore open to challenge and change. This would then generally delimit the approaches available to the Church for enactment of the liturgy of conversion. It would certainly mean a refusal to use triumphalist and coercive persuasive methods. A liturgy of conversion that brokered identity-in-transition

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<sup>548</sup> In 1970 Alvin Toffler defined “future shock” as “the distress, both physical and psychological, that arises from an overload of the human organism’s physical adaptive systems and its decision-making processes” (Toffler, 1970, 1971, p. 297). The rate of change has kept on accelerating.

would have to be humble, open, adaptive and creative. It would have to involve a respect of alterity, and provide a source of hope and potential for those who might never have considered Christianity to have valued such things. And it would have to be solidly grounded in tradition – and a tradition of public liturgy might be something rare and significant.

### **5.3.4 A Liturgy of Conversion as Rejectable (or Acceptable)**

One of the characteristics of urban life is the availability of an apparently endless supply of social associations and institutions that a person can join in search of meaningful interaction (Hiebert & Meneses, 1995, pp. 279-281). As I have tried to show, conversion ideally involves encapsulation in a community of like-minded adherents. The urban experience, however, is most likely to consist of the possibility of multiple encapsulations, and commitment to many causes. Competition for any individual's time and attention is therefore fierce, and any individual can expect to feel valued and actively sought after (targeted?) by many different institutions. The urban experience is often one of *turning down* invitations to join communities: the advertising industry constantly refines its tactics of persuasion, focusing in on ever more specific target populations with ever more sophisticated techniques of manipulation. And every sale is packaged as the joining of a desirable community. One can indeed be a member of multiple social institutions simultaneously, but there comes a point where the pressure to join further communities has to be resisted, or else some less significant community commitment has to be dropped. One's shebeen company has to be relinquished in order to have time for Church, perhaps, or Church attendance has to be dropped in order to make time for mountain biking club rides on Sundays.

A liturgy of conversion would then humbly offer a connection with God through his church to whoever might need it, without compulsion. It would also be a way of *insistently* making the offer. Aware that acceptance always involves prior rejection, the liturgy of conversion is a way of ritually and repeatedly speaking the Gospel invitation to people who have initially disregarded it as one of the many options of affiliation that they have turned down. This does not speak to repeated attempts to enter people's homes to try and persuade them, which frankly is quite creepy. But it does speak to creative positioning in publicly shared spaces, using media and approaches that raise the questions and tell the story in different attractive ways. Wesley gives numerous examples of the failure to communicate at first via his conceptualisation of a liturgy of conversion. It took years, sometimes, for there to be any noticeable acceptance of the message [0].

It seems to me that Christian disciples need to learn how to cope with the reality of multiple allegiances. There appears to be a conspiracy of silence, where everybody pretends that everybody's sole adherence is to the church. Perhaps a new norm for discipleship should

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include a compassionate involvement in the conflict of allegiance faced by every member of an urban congregation. Further investigation needs to be done into how holding allegiance to the Christian community can threaten and disrupt one's encapsulation in other communities.

It seems that an effective way for pastoral leadership to teach this - how to be fully Christian and yet have multiple allegiances to social institutions - is to model the skill. A leader's openness about her/his experiences, struggles and strategies for living as a disciple of Christ and a member of multiple institutions should be part of every minister's teaching set. The equivalent of John Wesley's Journal – a blog, perhaps, or a Facebook page or Twitter feed – showing how the leader of the community is living a life amongst the cultures of the world would potentially be of great benefit in developing a Christian culture of witness in the world, and a rationale for the inclusion of liturgy of conversion as an ordinary part of the life of the church.

### 5.3.5 Conclusion: A Sociologically Sound Liturgy of Conversion

It seems that from the point of view of sociological principles, a liturgy of conversion shows promise for fulfilling important functions in amongst both Christians and those inhabiting the spaces between the churches, the alternatively faithed. There appear to be good reasons to expect that establishing liturgical evangelism as part of the ordinary praxis of the church might lead to deeply changed relationship between world and church, and result in the potential for many more people to consider conversion to Christian faith than is currently possible, given the generally defensive posture of the churches.

## 5.4. Theological Interpretation of the Data

*“For the study of evangelism to have integrity it must be established upon solid biblical foundations and students of the church's mission must develop acute sensitivities with regard to historical contexts. A failure to take biblical and historical sources seriously can lead to truncated or deficient understandings of the mission of the church and its evangelistic ministry.” (Chilcote & Warner, 2008, p. 55)*

The ministers are all thoughtful men and women, and their insights into the subject do seem to have certain chaotic-coherence<sup>549</sup> as a collective. John Wesley speaks with a singular voice, but one with which each of the ministers has a cultural connection through the medium of the ongoing organisation which he founded, the Methodist Church.

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<sup>549</sup> A reference to the meta-patterns discernible in many apparently random natural processes. (Gleick, 1987)

The way the ministers understand and interpret church history and the Scriptures seems to indicate that they are searching for an adequate hermeneutic for a church in a time of radical cultural change. But it seems to me that, due to a weak sociological reading of the cultural contexts of their situations, they have tended to adopt what I think of as a defensive hermeneutic – one in which they define the things they can control well (liturgy, pastoral care, compassion ministries) as their core business. Their hermeneutic does not seem to be able to cope with the out-of-control world between sacred Christian spaces. As a result they appear to be using their theology to defend against change and maintain the *status quo*. For a Christian community with a theological identity, resources for surviving and thriving in changing contexts must necessarily be theological – and I contend that there are a wide range of theological resources that might be helpfully applied to the church as it finds itself in the urban vortex of global change. My argument is that a Wesley-informed liturgy of conversion might well be an important aspect of that theological resilience.

Part of Wesley's persuasive power seems to have derived from the clarity of his hermeneutic: the world is divided between the rescued and the lost, a divide that cuts through every nation, every culture, every social institution, and especially, every church community [0]. The power of his "Four Alls" analysis still has residual influence in a milieu where the force of Wesley's influence has otherwise become very much weakened. From Wesley's perspective, a pastor, and any Christian disciple, has a grave responsibility to waken and strengthen disciples, and mobilise them in turn into an awakening force 0.

I have shown how much the ministers seem to have lost this "word to the lost" [0]. Perhaps a way of renewing the communicative force of the lost/saved discourse is by a renewed examination of how attractive a message of hope and mobilisation might be in our current milieu. In a pluralist society, or a society that is headed inexorably towards urban pluralism, the startling question perhaps then changes from "Are you saved (rescued, acknowledged, loved and accompanied)?" to "Are you lost (Do the things that give you meaning truly give you meaning?)"

#### **5.4.1 A Theology of Confidence in the Christian Faith**

I have shown that the Methodist ministers I interviewed mostly had a profound diffidence about the Gospel. I don't read this as a lack of personal faith – many of them seem to know and enjoy the sort of inner peace that Wesley would have expected from anybody who had broken through the faith barrier. They seem able to rest in the assurance that God's rescue was intended to include them, and that the way to have appropriated it had been through faith and trust in Jesus. But they seemed nevertheless to exhibit a general lack of confidence in terms of evangelism. It seems as if most of them felt that it was neither appropriate nor

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possible to present their truth as public truth. And as I have noted, they curiously avoided direct references to faith in describing evangelism and conversion [0].

I have dealt with some of the apparent causes for this lack of confidence, which perhaps include a fear of offending others, a doubt about their role in proclaiming it, an ethical aversion to manipulation, and a deep doubt about their own capacity to persuade anybody to believe. And in addition, it seems that many of them might have been intimidated by a sort of intellectual bullying – an educated person knows better, the narrative seems to go, than to try and convert others; a minister is an expert in running a church, not in winning over the alternatively faithed<sup>550</sup>.

I cannot indulge in a defence of apologetics here, but I do note the opinion of an apologist like Os Guinness, who maintains that the "...combination of the abandonment of evangelism, the divorce between evangelism, apologetics, and discipleship, and the failure to appreciate true human diversity is deeply serious" (2015, p. 17). All these are themes that have emerged already in this study; if the liturgy of the church communicates the truth of the church through liturgical signs, then liturgy is at its core a proclamation and defence of truth. And just as apologetics only half achieves its goal if only Christians are exposed to it, I would argue that liturgy cannot be expected to achieve its apologetic mandate unless the alternatively faithed are present. I envisage that the liturgy of conversion would complete the circle by doing liturgy in the spaces between the churches, proclaiming truth where the alternatively faithed could at least try to decode the message, and then decide whether or not to accept or reject it.

It is hard to envisage how somebody who is timid about the public validity of their faith would ever find the courage to conduct liturgy of conversion. John Wesley, however, was able to record a staggering list of those who had found it to be valid and vital, so perhaps part of the answer might be to speak with as many Christians as possible who *have* been converted out of an alternatively faithed matrix, in order to realise with Newbigin that there can be no apartheid measures in place for Christians, and that the "beaches of heaven" could not conceivably be limited to culturally church-adjacent humans alone<sup>551</sup>. And indeed, grasping Newbigin's "critique of doubt" (1989, p. 9) expressed in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* could quite conceivably transform a reluctant witness into a willing one.

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<sup>550</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon make the surprisingly hostile comment regarding at least North American Seminaries that "contemporary pastors are chained because so much of the current thinking about the church and its ministry is meant to disempower rather than to empower people" (Hauerwas & Willimon, 1989, p. 161). It would be interesting to ask if the current training of ministers in South Africa has taken their insights from thirty years ago into account for the South African context.

<sup>551</sup> Newbigin wryly comments about what he portrays as the English tendency to consider that they ought not to disturb the pluralist peace of society: "the Gospel is, like the facilities in the parks in South Africa, 'for whites only'. It is a conclusion", he continues, "which the Asian Christians in our cities find exceedingly odd" (1989, p. 4)

I am not arguing here for the return or affirmation of the bigot who cannot see his own hidden hermeneutic and imagines that he has the pure Word of God exclusively at his command. Newbigin makes it clear that “it is essential to the integrity of our witness to this new reality that we recognise that to be its witnesses does not mean to be the possessors of all truth” (1989, p. 12), which is almost verbatim John Wesley [0]. But true faith means relying on what one knows to the point of acting upon it, and so in some senses conducting habitual liturgy of conversion could be seen as a powerful expression of faith in itself.

A plea for faith is most probably most persuasive coming from somebody who *has* faith. This was a key area for Wesley to sort out early in his career. Once he was personally, self-consciously a “believer”, his preaching seemed to pick up power and persuasiveness. But at the same time as he gained access to the peace of faith, his friend George Whitfield introduced him to field preaching, and so that power had a pathway to spread in the spaces between the churches. Newbigin expressed the sentiment echoed by many that “it is a striking fact ... that almost all the proclamations of the gospel which are described in Acts are in response to questions asked by those outside the church” (1989, p. 116). In terms of a liturgy of conversion, and in the spirit of stating explicitly what might have been overlooked, such questions were not raised within the closed circle of the Christian community: the Christians who answered the questions had to be outside to hear them.

A liturgy of conversion, then, appears to need a humble confidence that the truth one has found is a truth worth having. The value one places on the truth for oneself might very well correlate to one’s capacity to share it with others.

#### **5.4.2 Evangelism as Missiological Homiletic**

For something to relate to the field of homiletics, it must have to do with communication; for something to be missiological, it must have something to do with the other-than-Christian world. Those two concerns meet, in my formulation of it, as evangelism [2.4.10]. From a missiological perspective, the study of evangelism falls within a cluster of other concerns. Bosch’s concept is that it is part of a matrix of concerns that involve the interface of the Church and the world that is other-than church. This is perhaps best expressed by a diagram, and my favourite way of explaining Bosch’s system is that of a strand of DNA

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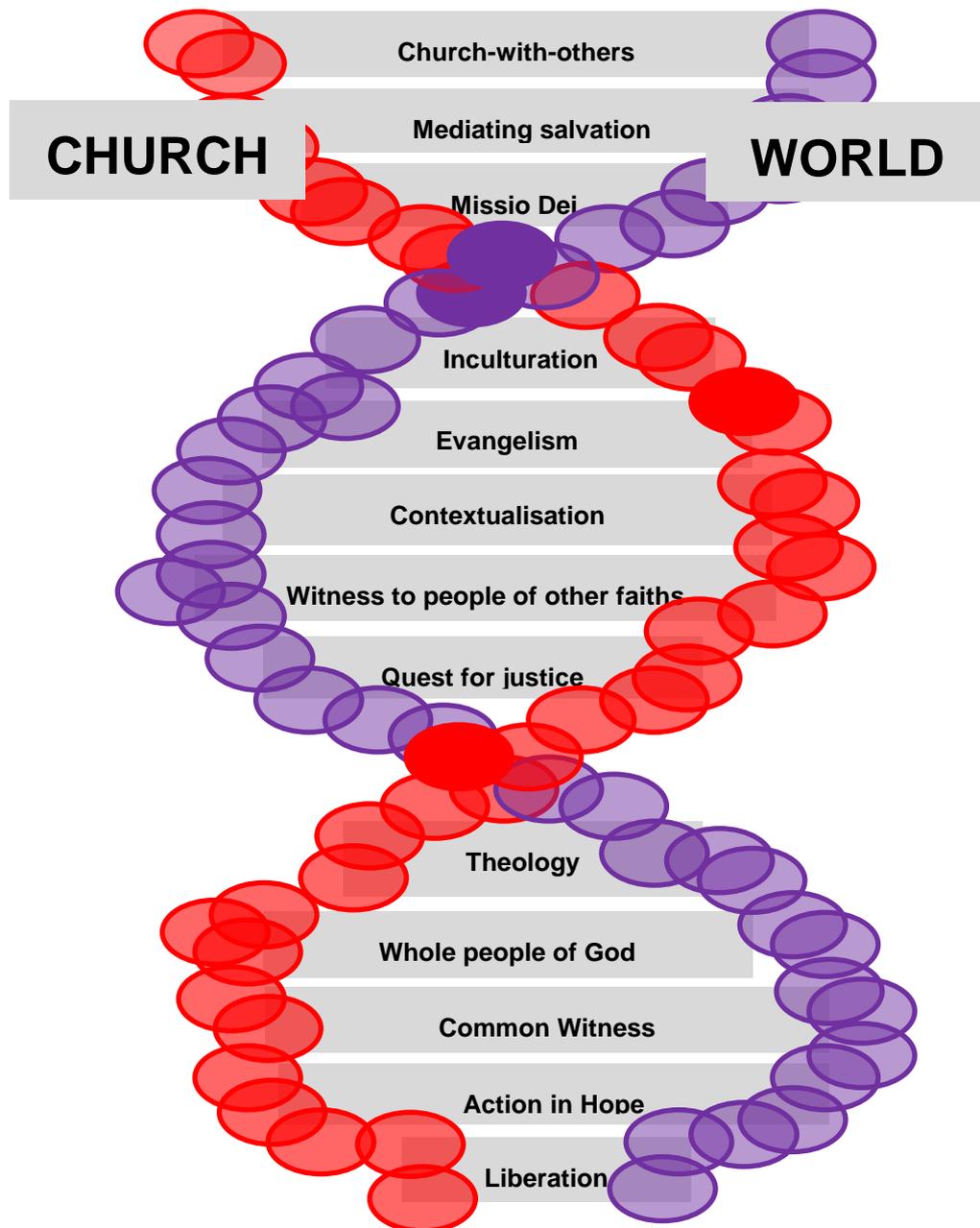


Figure 9 Bosch's Elements of an Emerging Missional Paradigm Represented as Strand of DNA (1991, pp. 409-420)

As Bosch is careful to explain, none of the elements of mission is independent of the others, and he intends his model purely for analytical clarity. In my grounded theory so far, it is already possible to see how many more elements of mission creep into my explanation of evangelism – Wesley's insistence on it being the task of the whole people of God, and an ecumenical imperative; the need for justice to be an inalienable concern of evangelism, and for the key mode to be a mediation of salvation, etc. Each missional element stands in automatic connectedness to all the others. The value of Bosch's perspective is that it alerts us to the need for evangelism to be an integral part of the whole; which in turn speaks to my

concern to locate evangelism within the matrix of the liturgy of the church, and to matriculate the liturgy into the world.

In terms of homiletic theory, I judged that the most appropriate theoreticians for a liturgy of conversion were likely to be Saunders and Campbell, with their theory built upon their experience with fellowship with the homeless in Atlanta. For them the entire institutional church needs to be conditioned by the conditions of the poor. They find it unacceptable the preaching has become functionally private, or even that “the Eucharist has become a practice ... limited to the private confines of the church, where it happens out of sight of the world” (Saunders & Campbell, 2000, p. 35).

Evangelism, then, from this point of view, can helpfully be seen as a missiological concern of homiletics.

### 5.4.3 A Theology of the Church

It seems from the interviews that the Methodist ministers are working from a quasi-Christendom paradigm of the institutional church – a view of the church which mirrors the rights and responsibilities of the Anglican Church in Wesley’s time, although with a much-reduced official role in maintaining control of society on behalf of the reigning power structure. The ministers, as we have seen, see themselves as both privileged and duty-bound within their church-bounded sphere of activity. But all of them are concerned with fostering and maintaining a welcoming church that offers right worship to God and a true path to salvation for all who adhere to it.

The main way this differs from the situation which spawned the Methodist Church is that the entity which has now become static and is struggling to maintain meaningful contact with its culture is the former reform movement itself. And so to apply a Wesleyan solution to the problem would perhaps involve treating the Methodist Church now in some ways as Wesley treated the Anglican Church of his day.

The colloquium-created book *Missional Church*<sup>552</sup> proposes a theory of Church that correlates with Wesley’s concept of church quite closely. The ongoing formal church, with its depth of tradition and remnant of legitimacy, is to be encouraged to see itself as a “centred set” rather than a “bounded set” (Guder, et al., 1998, p. 207). Guder and his co-authors plead for a conceptual shift, where the pastor is not seen as occupying the controlling centre of the church-set, but as belonging to a missional core group on the periphery of the church, looking both inward and outward and leading the church into interaction with its surrounding

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<sup>552</sup> This is an interesting concept: a group of academics came together for a conference and then published their proceedings as a coherent book, edited by Darrell Guder (Guder, et al., 1998) .

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context . This is best illustrated by the following diagram, based on the diagram found in *Missional Church*:

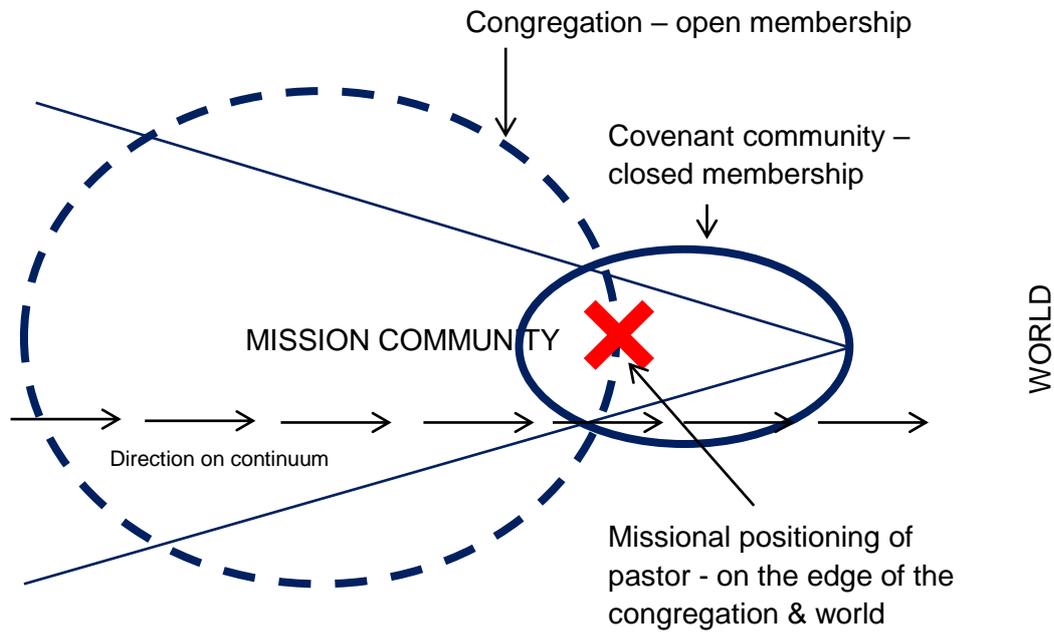


Figure 10 Missional Church conception of the church and world relationship (Guder, et al., 1998, p. 210)

What Wesley did was include other leaders – local preachers and class-leaders – as lay missionary leaders, in their own bonded covenant groups leading small segments of the church out into the surrounding world. The local Parish Church was considered to fulfil the function of Guder’s centred set, whereas the Methodist Society was intended to be a peripheral structure (consisting in itself of missional structures).

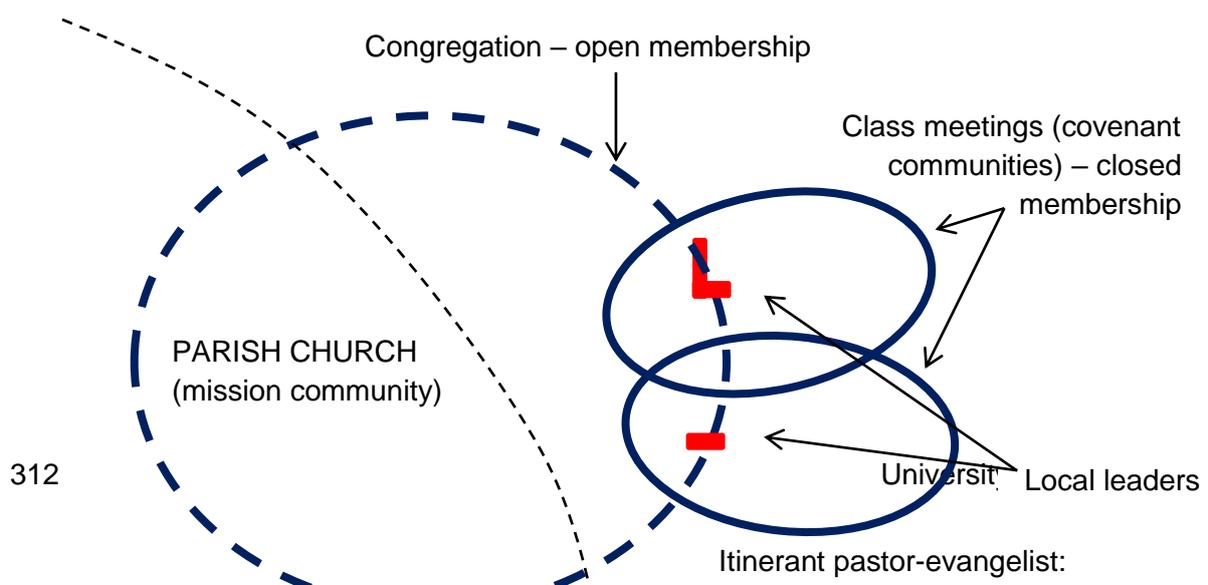




Figure 11 Wesley's Methodist Solution in Guder's Terms

This arrangement hardly lasted for Wesley's lifetime; the organisational power of his vision created a Connexion, never given official recognition, and which was regarded as a threat by the leadership of the Parish Church. Leadership within the new, closed "covenant community" organisation also militated against subservience to the leadership of the traditional church, and a consensus amongst the Methodists soon developed that they should function as an independent church organisation. This had never been Wesley's intention, but his moves towards empowerment made it almost inevitable.

So the question is whether the Methodist Church cannot perhaps now generate a reform movement like the original Wesleyan movement. Is it possible to use theological insights into what the church can be with regard to its surrounding society in order to evangelise people meaningfully in their new global-urban context? Wesley's *Journal* suggests that the church at that time, unlikely as it might have seemed, was capable of growing "... vigorously through evangelism and conversion". The *Missional Church* colloquium suggests that the North American church (at least) is now capable of doing the same. What seems to be called for is a radical understanding of how leadership might be deployed, and how membership might be re-envisioned.

The *Missional Church* colloquium accepts the possibility – and desirability - of a large non-missional cohort of church attendees developing, as part of the centred-set "congregation" (1998, p. 206). Part of their strategy is embracing the reality of a hinterland of semi-committed, ambivalent adherents, and preaching and teaching in such a way as to mobilise from amongst these a bounded "covenant community" of missional people around the pastor, who then is able to lead the church as a whole out and forward into God's mission in the surrounding culture. I would argue that this would require some sort of awakening/conversion experience. John Wesley similarly functionally acknowledged the reality of a mass of non-responsive and less-responsive church-goers, as much a target of his pleas for awakening as the tin-miners, prostitutes and soldiers on the outside.

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From my point of view as an experienced campaigner for the churches to be directly involved in their surrounding cultures, however, it seems that *Missional Church* does not deal with the vigorous resistance from Methodist congregations that would be likely to occur if such a change were to be mooted. I suspect that people would feel aggrieved if the minister they were financing began to spend “equivalent time and effort” (or even, say 10% of his/her effort) on those who occupy the spaces between the churches. This is another area that needs research – resistance of old paradigm to any new paradigm in evangelism, something I was not able to test in this project.

Wesley, however, *did* address that issue of inertia. His approach was to develop a large number of lay-led “covenant communities”, the classes. These in turn were gathered into larger units of “covenant community”, the societies. This two-tiered structure functioned (albeit briefly) on the periphery of the “congregation” as communities of mission, rich in a liturgy of conversion<sup>553</sup>.

I suggest that the ecclesiological challenge constituted by these reflections on Wesley and the *Missional Church* colloquium is that ministers of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town might see better effectiveness at drawing people into a conversion experience if they accepted that the “congregation” was as much a field of evangelism (not evangelisation) as the world between the churches. And they might see more interaction, and thus potentially more evangelism and conversion of the alternatively faithed, if they could position themselves less at the centre and more at the periphery of the congregation – and if they investigated the potential of convening covenant groups around themselves, consisting of people who shared their concern for evangelism. A key issue would be a re-examination of the theory of conversion – whether it was functionally necessary, and what it might involve for Methodist church members.

### 5.4.4 A Theology of a Transformational Conversion

Faced with such a complex set of data from the interviews with the ministers, I find that Rambo’s concept of conversion occurring in a “dynamic force field” promises sufficient nuance to be helpful. (1993, p. 5)[2.3.3]. This would be an appropriate place to illustrate Rambo’s concept of the conversion matrix, to which I have referred so often, in the form of a sequence. Rambo introduces the “sequence” model purely for reasons of exposition. It is always understood that none of the “steps” are disconnected from the other, although there might be a rough temporal sequence in many instances of conversion. But in order to be awake to insight-generating outliers, it is important to hold the “list” lightly.

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<sup>553</sup> What I have not been able to address, and what the *Missional Church* does not address, is the distressing propensity for such closed-group covenant communities to collapse back into “normal church”, leaving the ensuing congregation both a closed set and not particularly missional any more.

In whatever form it is presented, Rambo's categories are pastorally and evangelistically helpful. When dealing with an alternatively faithed person, or group of alternatively faithed people, is there something in their context that the Gospel would make sense of? Are they in some crisis requiring a re-examination of worldviews? Are they on a quest to discover more about Christianity? Are you in an encounter with them – once off or ongoing? Are they willing to make a commitment to Jesus, or have they recently done so? Are they struggling with perhaps unforeseen or not fully anticipated consequences? The answers to these questions would impact directly on the sort of input required in terms of the Gospel

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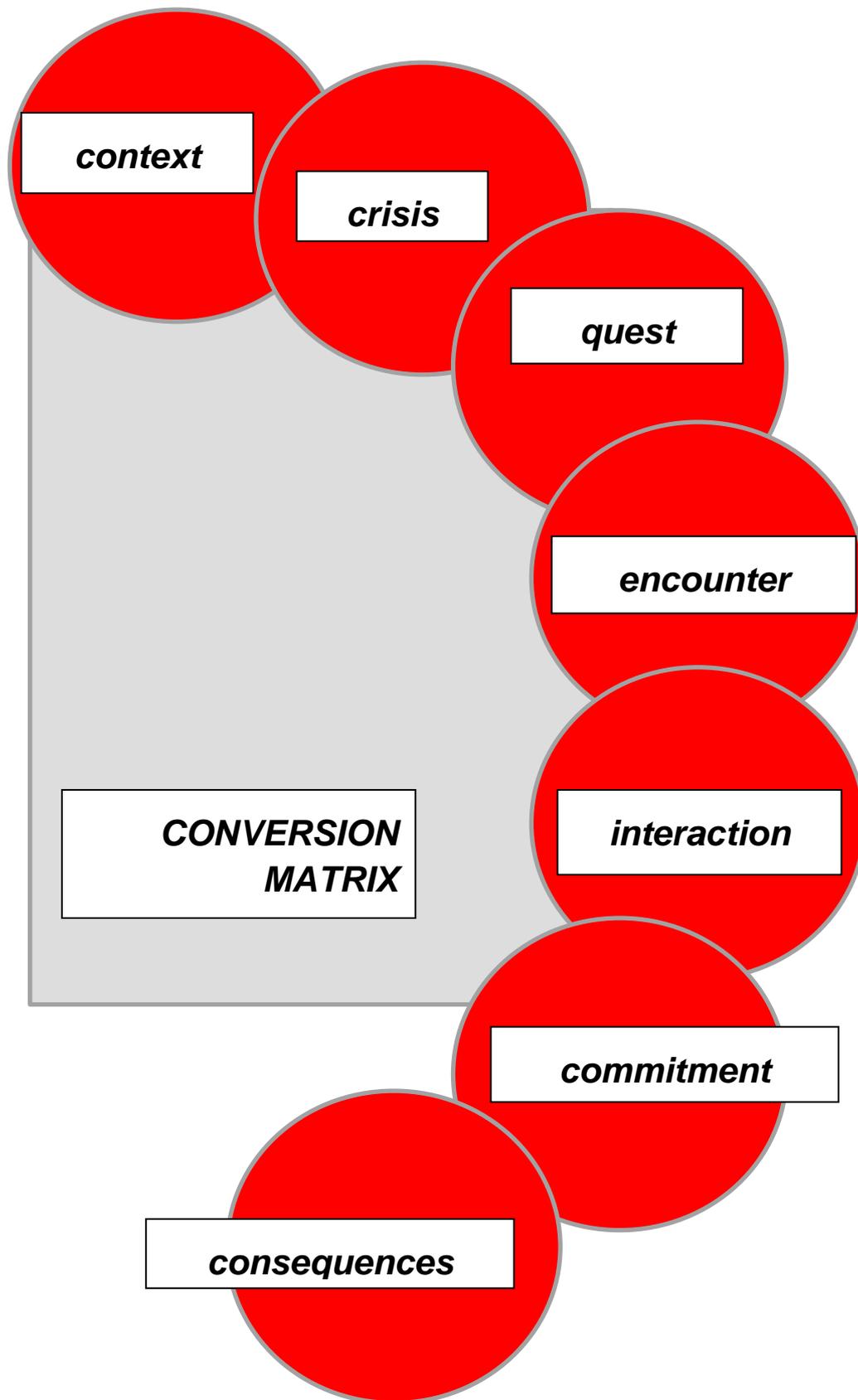


Figure 12 Rambo's matrix of conversion expressed as a sequence (Rambo, 1995, p. 7)

This seems to be an area of deep agreement between the ministers of the Methodist Church whom I interviewed and John Wesley - still in place, in the minds of the ministers, after all these years. Disciples are considered to be in need of the sort of conversion that nourishes and motivates, and generates the energy needed for a life of happy discipleship.

Part of the problem the ministers now face is that they are heirs to a situation where perhaps everything that happens to anybody in the church is defined as “conversion”, and perhaps if “everything is conversion, then nothing is conversion”. Conversion itself, it would seem, has, in Methodist circles, become for many a nebulous category of thought that conforms to a socio-ecclesial norm, rather than referencing a worldview-shattering event that relativises, shakes and reshapes every other commitment. And so “salvation” seems to have sadly become a word representing the usage of generations of judgementalism by Christians with a culturally inherited rhetoric of conversion which did not match the ethic of astonished, world-view-blasted gratitude and compassion which seems to have been the coin of the realm of Wesley’s Methodists.

In Wesley’s time that impoverishment was never anticipated. Salvation and conversion were shiny new concepts (or concepts that had acquired renewed impact, perhaps) that seemed to carry potential for shaking the world in every aspect of its existence. For Wesley, trudging through the snow in wet boots begging for subscriptions for the poor, or trying out a lending-stock system or a pharmacy service for the poor, was as natural a response to the need of the world as preaching a rousing message of faith and salvation. Evangelism was the verbal, persuasive testimony of a radically altered individual. If you didn’t love, it meant that you didn’t have faith. And not having faith was a theologically acceptable category of thought. We need to perhaps recover our belief in unbelief – or better still, develop a capacity to believe in the existence of alternative faith. Conversion seems now to have become rare to the point of almost disappearing. People do occasionally experience a radical revitalisation of their faith, but the ministers find it difficult to account for it in theological terms.

This is where a theorist like Rambo (or Wesley) can help us. Rambo establishes that conversion at different levels, both into Christianity and from it, and into and out of other faith positions, is still a feature of global humanity (1995, p. 1). People still consider faith claims and then either reject them or pursue them. And those who pursue them are often subject to conversion experiences, shifts in worldview which result in intense commitment to a new faith system (Rambo, 1995, p. 4). What this demonstrates is that the desire on the part of the ministers for deep-level change in people is something that is still actually on the agenda of people in our contemporary society. It is a known phenomenon. It is not archaic to desire it

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in congregants, and perhaps not unreasonable to expect it of people in the general population in between the churches.

If conversions to Christian faith may then be phenomenologically expected, and if they express real needs and aspirations on the part of converts, then it becomes legitimate for Methodists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to methodically plan for - or at least allow for – such conversions to happen. This theology would then affirm the role of habitual, consistent liturgical practices aimed at expressing, encouraging and celebrating conversion: a liturgy of conversion.

Of course this would face the usual issues confronted by liturgy – especially the easy leaching of meaning and domestication of the profoundly disruptive nature of the Gospel. In the same way that we are not to consider ourselves virtuous because we pray prayers of penitence (in fact, quite the reverse), so we would be expected not to consider ourselves virtuous because we have experienced conversion – that somehow we must have been better candidates for conversion because we have converted. A liturgy of conversion simply seeks to place conversion in the domain of the ordinary spiritual life, and in Wesleyan “means of grace” terms would be the agent, reminder and celebration of the possibility of God’s bringing about change in intransigent humanity [0].

### 5.4.5 A Theology of Discipleship

A strong common thread between the two data sets is that of “discipleship”. According to the Methodist ministers, the church exists to disciple people into the life of God. John Wesley, in turn, is famous for his organisation of the Methodist Church around the structure of multiple small discipleship cells.

The question is how does this theory work out in practice: which church looks more like a discipleship movement? As I have observed, it seems that the Methodist Church in Cape Town displays many of the marks of an establishment church focused on the maintenance of a certain ecclesial structure, involving buildings, a hierarchy of paid personnel with different status levels, etc. The praxis does not apparently match the discourse very well – or at least only partially so.

As I have noted, John Wesley made the formation of accountability-and-support groups a priority wherever he worked. People were set up for independent, decentralised local leadership. He made his intentions very clear. It is not clear from the interviews, however, whether the ministers have clarity on what they would like to influence their hearers towards. Discipleship for Wesley was based on the great project of conquering sin. Sin was seen as a force for evil that would constantly batter the believer throughout her/his life, and from which

s/he could only escape by extreme effort, constant help from others, and a constant stream of grace from God. He never envisaged a life in which sin was somehow in abeyance. Every day was a risk for a disciple of Christ.

The ministers generally seemed to take a considerably more optimistic approach to their church members. Discipleship was apparently seen as a process of formation, too, but there was generally more emphasis on teaching and moulding rather than the life-and-death struggle envisioned by Wesley. In the face of a great deal of disappointment, the ministers seemed to believe that steady teaching of the truth would bring about deep inner change. There was little apparent expectation that God might reach in and empower their sermons in such a way that people would suddenly catch on and convert.

Where these two approaches meet, however, and where perhaps a useful insight emerges, is that both Wesley and the Methodist Ministers of today recognise that something needs to happen on a micro-cultural level. It is insufficient for Christians merely to attend large meetings. There has to be interpersonal openness and accountability of a close group of friends sharing a common desire to follow Jesus as a disciple – in Barth's terms a conversion from the private to the public [2.3.2]. What is being searched for seems to be a subset of the Christian community who want to take the rhetoric more seriously, perhaps, and find a deeper personal satisfaction in more intense way of expressing their commitment to God. As I have noted, the primary vehicle of communication for willingness to submit, open-eyed, to that process is for Wesley a true sign of conversion<sup>554</sup>.

### **Alcoholics Anonymous – Sinners Anonymous?**

A helpful approach to the discipleship of Christians viewed as being fellow sufferers in a Wesleyan democracy of sin is the model used by Alcoholics Anonymous and related organisations such as Narcotics Anonymous and Eating Disorders Anonymous (cf. AA, 1939, 2001; Narcotics Anonymous, 1988; Eating Disorders Anonymous, 2016). This theory seems to me to hold potential as a helpful liturgy-of-conversion bridge to the world between the churches, since it is widely known and understood as an effective therapeutic approach

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<sup>554</sup> An obvious psychological pitfall that gapes at this point is the tendency of people who work very hard at something (in the context of Wesleyan discipleship theory, at "personal holiness"), to assume (or come to assume) that one's efforts at being good actually make one superior to others who are not trying so hard – or not trying at all. This is a sad misunderstanding of grace and faith, and a moving away from the democracy of sin towards a hierarchy of sinfulness, which grants differing social rewards to people who have "reached" different levels. I would suggest that the church is always inclined towards a drift from the democracy of sin to the feudal pyramid of the self-righteous.

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to addiction<sup>555</sup>. The twelve-step process is the theoretical heart of the AA (1939, 2001, pp. 59-60), NA (1988, p. 17), and EDA process (2016, pp. 110-237).

All elements of liturgy seem to have small groups corresponding to them, close fellowship around some or other aspect of the liturgical realities of the church that inspire and support deeper discipleship in those functions: music has choirs or bands; prayer has prayer groups; preaching has bible studies (and local preachers' quarterly meetings); fellowship has small groups. I suggest that it might be important also for the liturgy of conversion to have something like "sinners anonymous" groups in action<sup>556</sup>.

In the AA and related groups the therapeutic steps are worked through in the context of a small community of caring fellow sufferers (cf. EDA 2016, p. 70; AA, 1939, 2001, p. 17). The main assumption of the community is that the addict is never cured – simply keeping their addiction in abeyance – an attitude that inculcates both watchfulness and humility (AA, 1939, 2001, p. 30). Nobody is required (or allowed) to speak as if they have finally dealt with their addiction to the point that it is no longer part of them, even if they have been clean for many years (AA, 1939, 2001, p. 33). Utmost compassion and acceptance is shown to those who relapse and restart (NA, 1988, p. 116). Everybody has an unpressured opportunity to talk with the others about their life experiences as addicts. Milestones of sobriety are celebrated corporately, and group members are encouraged to never give up attending at meetings in order to maintain their own sobriety and to encourage others in their struggles in a spirit of acceptance and tolerance (but never dishonesty about the power of addiction) (AA, 1939, 2001, p. 103). Newer members are strongly encouraged to find themselves a mentor, somebody who has been fighting the addiction for longer and has time for interpersonal interaction with the recently sober addict (EDA 2016, pp. 199-237). The corporate culture is religious but respectful of religious differences – the single conversion in mind is the ongoing conversion from addiction. I will consider what the twelve steps might look like in a liturgy of conversion context.

### **Step 1. Admit powerlessness over Alcohol/Drugs/Eating Disorder**

If some influence on your life is out of your control, the first logical step to overcoming it is to admit its power, and to admit your relative powerlessness. Interestingly, this is very similar to how Wesley positioned sin – a force that far outmatches even the most committed will to

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<sup>555</sup> The AA process is a major theme in such currently popular television series as *Mom* and *Elementary*. Marva Dawn would disagree – she holds that “sermons cannot form the character of believers when sin is treated merely as an addiction and redemption only as therapy” (1995, p. 210). I would counter that there is nothing trivial (“merely”, “only”) about addiction.

<sup>556</sup> For an overview of the roots of the AA movement in the Oxford movement of the 1920-1940 era, see chapter 2 of the Narcotics Anonymous website (NACR, National Association for Christian Recovery, 2017).

holiness. Another feature of sin that Wesley understood well, but that seems to have not much traction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban church, is that sin is not necessarily a grim evil that we do not want anything to do with, but often something we find ourselves deeply attracted to. Or else they may be attitudes or actions that we ourselves consider to be evil or irrational. The devil in the detail is that evil is often *what we want to do*, not what we *do not want to do*<sup>557</sup>.

### ***Step 2. Believe a Higher Power Can Restore Sanity***

AA seems to function quite happily in a cultural landscape that generally decries the value of religion. However, for some reason concepts like “faith” and “spirituality” still seem to have widespread valency. The issue that AA addresses here is that people need to come to a point where they find they believe that some unseen entity is concerned with their wellbeing, something both Wesley and the ministers are eager to stress.

There is nothing that is more derided by the atheistically inclined alternatively-faithed than this odd belief in an invisible deity. Faith is regarded by many as the wishful thinking of the desperate. Philosophically, that strikes very near the truth for a Christian – certainly for the sort of Christian Wesley was: he was truly desperate. Extraordinary, scrupulous and fearless self-examination did not seem to offer him any grounds for confidence. His view of sin was very similar to our understanding of addiction: obsessive indulgence in harmful behaviour in return for a paltry gratification and evanescent benefit. All the addicts who find help through the AA program find that they have some level of faith in some “higher power” that mysteriously wants to help them despite themselves.

### ***Step 3. Make a Decision to Turn Life over to God (as we understand him)***

AA taps into volition/agency at several crucial junctures. The idea that we as humans are not swept along on a tide of determinism seems to be very appealing – and therapeutic - to recovering addicts. In terms of actually helping people to handle their addiction, it seems to be highly effective. If our addiction is to sin, then conversion involves a decision to hand over the ultimate responsibility for our lives to somebody else.

But in the act of abnegation one is also taking a step of self-actualization. One’s life is already arguably in abject subservience to a drug or behaviour, or a mixture of destructive behaviours. In conversion one is at least choosing what set of values one is submitting to, by choosing allegiance to somebody whom one believes embodies the best values.

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<sup>557</sup> In my experience a lot of the interpersonal flack that evangelists get is from people defending their right to do things they partly wish they weren’t involved in – often I will have been as non-judgemental as anything and somebody will already be reacting to me as if I had been scolding them. The condemnatory voice might perhaps be a memory of previous scoldings – but it also partly comes, I suspect, from people feeling that they “ought” to be scolded. This cannot be settled here.

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One problem here is that many people do not consider that they are particularly addicted to sin in any way. Perhaps they have relational integrity, avoid excess or addiction, and generally contribute to the wellbeing of society. If sin is taken as the addiction to evil, they experience themselves as non-addicts, mere recreational sin-users, perhaps. Members of churches are often in this position – they might be exhibiting unkindness or perpetrating injustice, but they feel themselves to be a class apart. We have seen that the primary recipient of evangelism in the ministers' thinking seems to be poor, criminal, addicted and sexually promiscuous. A liturgy of conversion requires a different gauge of "sin". John Wesley would perhaps have been more direct in denouncing self-righteousness, as would Bill W, the anonymous author of *Alcoholics Anonymous*<sup>558</sup>. But in our age, where self-righteousness has perhaps become a characteristic element of the wider church, it is possibly harder for those who are active and consistently attending members of the Methodist community to read their own status as one of addiction. They ought to.

### ***Step 4. Make a Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory of Ourselves***

This is where the spiritual discipline of examen has its place (Foster, 1985/1992, pp. 27-36) . The addicts in this process are not asked to use any other standards for evaluation than their own. Whether or not their standards are too strict is not an issue here. Contrary to the standard psychological advice that people should learn to love themselves and thus find freedom, addicts under the twelve-step program seem to find freedom under a more robust regimen. It seems helpful to addicts to investigate their attitudes and actions and to admit if they have actually been destructive to themselves or others.

The advantage of this approach to healing (a very cognitive behavioural therapy<sup>559</sup> approach (cf. Tshabalala & Visser, 2011) is that it acknowledges that it might be frightening to quantify just how bad one has been. But if one has hurt others and oneself, damaged society and environment, abused trust and pretended to be good whilst doing wrong, and many other possibilities, then any attempt to come to peace with oneself – to love oneself again, as it were – needs to work with the truth about oneself, not a public persona of social acceptability one has perhaps even been using in order to manipulate others. The element of Christian truth that lies behind this is that God sees the real person behind any social posturing. And the addict to sin, under this treatment, comes to see that person too.

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<sup>558</sup> Bill W's chapter on *Working With Others* is a masterpiece in gentle but relentless truth-telling as the foundation for a therapeutic relationship (1939, 2001, pp. 89-103)

<sup>559</sup> Tshabalala and Visser define "cognitive behaviour therapy" as "... a structured, problem-orientated approach that uses cognitive and behavioural methods to challenge dysfunctional beliefs. It also promotes more realistic and adaptive ways of thinking in order to bring about emotional and behavioural change" (2011, p. 18)

***Step 5. Admit to God, Self, and One Other Human Being Exactly What Wrongs We Have Done***

At stage five the therapeutic process takes another Wesleyan turn. Where this process meets the Wesleyan mind-set is in the searching questions asked in the class meetings. An alcoholic assumes that s/he will always have to struggle with temptation to drink. Under this model, a sin-addict will always find him/herself liable to lapse into sin. Psychologically, what this ideally brings into play is something what happens in any counselling theory. By sharing personal issues openly, one opens oneself up to receiving encouragement and support in one's efforts at self-redefinition, which is how Stromberg defines conversion in his psychologically based investigation into conversion narratives (1993, p. xi). What the AA program does is to limit the confession to one single person. And if this person is part of the circle of recovering addicts, the confessee is less likely to have the damaging experience of either having their experience trivialised, or of experiencing condemnation and rejection. The Wesleyan model can only be envisaged as working properly if there is an unusually accepting atmosphere in the group, and that is only likely if everybody has the same self-perception as being a sinner-in-recovery.

Another good thing about this provision is how specific it is. It is not a light liturgical token request for forgiveness – it is what one could perhaps call “deep liturgy”, a recounting of specific wrong things that have caused damage in specific ways, and liturgically more akin to the Roman Catholic confessional than the Sunday liturgy's general provision for repentance. This leads into another level of the conversion away from addiction.

***Step 6. Be Entirely Ready to Have God Remove Defects of Character***

Step six is another volitional step. In the context of the AA community, the alcoholic lets go of a certain unlovely self-love, and acknowledges the right of God to change him/her. This is a terrible blow to autonomy and pride, and only the humble are likely to be able to endure it. It points to a growing awareness of areas that a convert had thought were perfectly fine up until new insight had developed. Perhaps the unpleasing spectacle of arrogant Christians, or patriarchal Christians, or frivolous Christians is an indication of a discipleship failure at this point. How can a Christian disciple be sinful without trying to change? The answer is that although only the sinful can be Christian disciples, psychologically it is impossible to change without wanting to change. From a liturgy of conversion point of view the discipleship process needs to envisage a searching of the psyche that constantly opens up human beings to letting go of sub-Christian attitudes and actions. If a Christian is not willing to place themselves into this process of interpersonal transaction, then Wesley noted they were unlikely to have been converted yet. A liturgy of conversion, on this metric, needs to envision a frightening therapeutic openness about one's inner motivations. And only an

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enormously powerful inner experience – conversion - is likely to move anybody into this difficult path.

### **Step 7. Humbly Ask God to Remove Our Shortcomings**

This is the lowest and most abjectly dependent a human being can go – the autonomy of an individual would seem to be completely stripped away if they are asking somebody else to do such inner work on their behalf. Wesley, with his strong belief in original sin, can see no way around this. For him nobody could turn us into the person we secretly want to be except God himself through a miracle of re-creation.

A key element of the process has been clarified by now in the AA project: only the humble can be rescued. Any personal arrogance/pride prevents the agency of God within the inner regions of the human psyche. This is the one area that nobody can compel, the one area of self-respect that is left to every slave. But if the slave-master is an addiction, as opposed to an oppressive human master or socio-political system, then as I have suggested already, choosing *against* a self which sides with the oppressor might well be the only way to freedom. Conversion involves a strategic alliance with God as the new master who promises greater freedom<sup>560</sup>.

Another key element is that unless conversion is experienced as a human response to a divine impulse, it cannot yet be termed “Christian” conversion. There might be a deep inner transformation, but unless it is understood by the convert as relation to Jesus, it is not yet “*Christian*”. But if the impulse *is* attributed to God through Christ by the convert her/himself, then a liturgy of conversion can be said to have succeeded in its intention – interpretants are sufficiently overlapped. And in order for this to happen, in contradistinction to the anonymity accorded to the “higher power” in AA theory, the Higher Power must be named in a Christian liturgy of conversion. That in turn speaks to the need for the liturgy of conversion to have a component of articulation via “adequately communicative signs”.

### **Step 8. Make a List of All We Have Harmed, and Become Willing to Make Amends**

Step eight brings the addict within sight of a resolution to the issue of addiction/sin. AA envisages the setting up of a concrete plan to retrace one’s steps through life, attempting to act *now* as one would have wished to have acted *then*. This speaks to the genuineness of repentance, and the seriousness of the addict in journeying to freedom and self-respect based on truth, not illusion. Again the will is evoked. One has to reach a place where,

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<sup>560</sup> Complete freedom is never an option for such relational beings as humans, as Bob Dylan points out helpfully in his song “You gotta serve somebody”.

whatever it might cost, one chooses to retrace one's steps in life to repair the damage one has caused<sup>561</sup>.

This speaks to the issues of guilt and forgiveness in a liturgy of conversion. Despite the rejection of guilt/forgiveness as a therapeutic category by popular psychology<sup>562</sup>, it seems to me that many people do indeed experience guilt, and wish that they had not violated either society's or their own values, or a combination of the two. They would quite possibly find a clear process of confession, atonement and forgiveness a great psychological relief. Pop-psychology, by indiscriminately denying the valency of all<sup>563</sup> guilt feelings, denies the possibility of forgiveness-feelings, one of the great liberating emotional affects offered by a classic formulation of theology such as Wesley's. By retrieving guilt issues from an unhealthy attempt to bury or deny feelings, to the domain of consciously acknowledging and owning responsibility for one's own (genuine) misdemeanours, the AA approach, as with Wesley's, potentially provides hope for the haunted. A liturgy of conversion might offer words and rituals to bring great peace to many.

### ***Step 9. Make Direct Amends Where Possible (Except if it would Injure Anyone)***

And step nine puts that process into action. It might take a very long time to reach this point. And it might take a very long time to achieve it, even a lifetime. This is where a mentor and non-condemnatory friends help one to remain accountable, and keep on trying.

It is interesting to note that the process does not stipulate that the amends one makes are only for directly drink-related wrong-doings. It recognises that the whole of life is relevant to the whole person. This is an area of conversion that seems to be frequently omitted in hasty presentations of the gospel and haphazard approaches to discipleship. The model of a contact-rich, labour intensive approach to proclaiming the Gospel modelled by Wesley is one which takes the AA line on evangelism rather than the reductionist line. Conversion is a

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<sup>561</sup> It is important to note here that each addict moves through this process at their own pace. No pressure is put on people to either start the process or to rush through the process – only openness is required about where each recovering addict currently finds themselves (AA, 1939, 2001, pp. 90-91).

<sup>562</sup> Etxebarria summarises recent attitudes towards guilt in the psychotherapy field in an interesting article in *Psicothema* (Etxebarria, 2000). She concludes her study by commenting that "...in this way, guilt feelings favour consistency between cognition and action. ... their practice[might] not always [be] congruent with the values they defend (even ardently). [But] the observable incongruencies in such situations do not contradict the important 'bridge' role that guilt feelings play between cognition and action... Guilt feelings always favour the consistency of behaviour with the values to whose transgression they are associated with" (2000, p. 107).

<sup>563</sup> I am not referring here to the so-called "false guilt" feelings that are so destructive to many – but by "false guilt" I understand psychologists to be intending those feelings which are generated by either imaginary transgression of one's personal and social ethics, or else the transgression of a code of ethics that is designed to ensure failure, and hence trap people in feelings of unforgivable guilt. In Wesley's formulation, guilt is always forgivable through the mechanisms God has graciously made available to sinners. Augsburg gives a very helpful exposition of the dimensions of guilt, shame, grace, and healing in inter-cultural contexts (1986, pp. 136-143).

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serious matter that requires serious consideration, and will only happen if a great deal of energy is spent on it. The life-long energy reserves that some people do apparently spend on a life of conversion are most easily explained, in my view, by a genuinely cooperative action between God and the person in an initial awakening-style conversion. The penitence and humility required to continue to make restitution until everything is paid is incalculable, especially where harms have been done that cannot be undone, and whose damage cannot be calculated. But this is the promise of a liturgy of conversion – it would be able to raise exactly these difficult issues and incorporate their consideration into the ordinary life of the church. The Spanish Catholics have a procession for hooded penitents during Holy Week. I would suggest that the Methodist ritual place for penitence would possibly be in the ongoing work of the accountability group. The value for both adherents and the alternatively faithed might well be considerable.

### ***Step 10. Continue to Make Personal Inventory, and where Wrong Promptly Admit it.***

The founders of AA realise that it is possible to quickly slip back into a sort of unhealthy self-satisfaction with where one has got to; and also that one easily slips and falls into attitudes and actions that are destructive. Wesley would have referred to this simply as “falling asleep again”. It appears to be one of the besetting sins of the church that its members tend to come to think of themselves as somehow better human beings than the alternatively faithed. Christians, it seems, fail to see the raft of new sinful options that open up to the newly religious. Wesley attempted to root that out at every opportunity, and some of the self-examination questions he asked himself in the company of friends would be distinctly sobering in our age of media Christian personalities with their cult of hyperspirituality. In terms of a liturgy of conversion, this is where peer accountability needs to be in force.

This step also speaks to the ministers’ concern that people tend to make a spectacular start to the Christian life and then go nowhere with it. An ongoing commitment to the change once begun is going to result in a life of true integrity in terms of the Christian faith. However, having said that, it seems that the ministers’ frequently expressed fear of the failure of conversion to prove genuine is moot, since they are only able to point to so very few conversions happening, whether genuine or not. Wesley was faced with countless people claiming conversion, and so he put specific processes in place to nurture the converted and to gently weed out those who were playing destructive religious games.

### ***Step 11. Pray/Meditate to Improve Conscious Contact with God for Knowledge of His Will and Power to Carry It Out***

This is straight-up discipleship 101 – this is where the ministers are focusing their attention. It could be claimed, however, that they are starting way too far along the line. Wesley was

happy to require people to pray for guidance towards God before they were ever consciously converted to faith in Jesus.

What a liturgy of conversion might be able to do would be to introduce an entire range of prayer that has no particular place in current liturgical formulations – the prayer *for* those who had no faith; the prayer *of* those who were searching for God; the prayer *of* those who found faith a difficulty beyond their reach; the prayer *of* those merely making polite inquiries about the truth claims of Christianity without a commitment to follow up their interest in any way. It would also make space for the brusque dismissal of the message by the alternatively-faithed, expressing disgust or distrust: the (prayerful?) cry to be left alone. Inclusion of prayer at this level – where perhaps most of the world's prayer takes place – could only enrich the prayer liturgy of our churches in terms of integrity and conscious inclusion of the alternatively faithed.

That being said, it is eminently plausible to locate the prayer of the church in contested spaces, amongst the various needs and faiths of the world between the churches. Some of the ministers I interviewed are already very attuned to this aspect of the liturgy of conversion. They move through the world as those who pray for people.

***Step 12. Pass on These Principles to Other Alcoholics, and Practice these Principles in All of Life.***

Ministers are generally disappointed that their congregants are not passing on the Gospel to others. They are conscious of living in a shrinking pool of believers, but exhort them as they might through Sunday sermons, the congregants do not seem to be taking up their God-mandated task of evangelising their friends and families, colleagues and bosses. The impact of the church on the world seems to be minimal; few people are taking up the Methodist Christian option.

The AA model seems to suggest that it is only the converted addict that will actually have the energy and commitment to reach out to help other addicts and perhaps the plausibility to do so. This would seem to indicate, if my analysis here is valid, that the Church is perhaps not starting the discipleship process where the point of addiction is.

The problem with starting with the issues of sin and sinners is the objection of the ministers and society in general that to do so is to be judgemental. I agree that Christians should never be, or appear to be, judgemental – as if Christians were somehow in the position to pre-empt the judgement of God on his behalf, making executive decisions about who was acceptable to God in the Church and who was not. And they cannot *avoid* appearing to be judgemental if they inhabit a sin-paradigm that envisages Christians occupying some privileged place on a sin-sinless continuum. But humble people, witnessing to their own

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sinfulness and struggles, transparent about their current values and self-disappointments, are likely to get a sympathetic hearing and gather others around them who share those struggles. It happened in the 18<sup>th</sup> century where the liturgy of conversion converged with the ordinary people of the time. The key, I strongly suspect, would be to regain a democratising paradigm of sin, enshrined in a liturgy of conversion that is truly spiritual and truly public. And I would argue that it also requires a theology of crisis.

### **Conclusion: A Conversion-Based Discipleship**

What the twelve-step process reminds us of is that the process of conversion can be for some an incredibly important issue – without which life can only deteriorate, and without which there is no prospect of peace in this life. Conversion from addiction to alcohol or narcotics or an eating disorder enables the convert to move from danger to safety, from disharmony to peace, and from exploitation by merciless industries to self-aware personal agency. By looking back from the AA 12-step process to the source from which it derives its power, I believe that Churches would be able to rediscover the simple power of a Methodist conversion-based discipleship process.

An important point to emphasize here is that the twelve-step process is now famous amongst the public at large. If a liturgy of conversion could position sin as “addiction” the churches might find the uptake amongst the alternatively faithed to be surprisingly ready. If the problem is partly a cultural reaction to abusive Christian preaching in the past that has employed the concept of “sin” as a dismissive and coercive category, then the rebranding of “sin” as “addiction” might possibly make a great deal of sense, and provide “good reasons” for many to consider converting to Christianity.

### **5.4.6 A Theology of Crisis**

In cultures which currently use the English language, there is a distinction between the word cluster “judgemental/critical”<sup>564</sup> and the word cluster “crisis/discernment”. Both refer to deciding whether something is good or bad, helpful or unhelpful, true or false, safe or dangerous, acceptable or despicable. But the cultural appraisal of “judgemental/critical” cluster is that this denotes bad attitude that leads to bad behaviour [1.1.1.1Appendix A – AF, KF, MF, NM, PF, RF, SM, UM]. On the other hand, the culture accepts the utilitarian value of the “crisis/discernment” cluster: here the connotation is positive, honest and useful.

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<sup>564</sup> I refer to the general usage, here. Any theological or literature lecturer will have experienced the difficulty of persuading first-year students that “critical thought” is a good thing, not a bad thing.

One concept that highlights this distinction is the two words based on the Greek word for “judgement”<sup>565</sup>: “critical” and “crisis”. We perhaps need to develop a theory for the liturgy of conversion that takes account of the “shared symbol system” of both Christian and alternatively faithed, and the two “worlds of discernment” represented by these terms are useful for our approach to people who inhabit worldviews other than Christian.

The first world is represented by “critical”. In this world people are sensitive to any erosion of their autonomy, and resist the perceived attempt by others to control them. They read judgements of their attitudes or behaviour as a rejection of them as autonomous individuals – and they are often (perhaps usually?) not mistaken. Confrontational as he undoubtedly was, John Wesley was sensitive to this issue. The *tone* of the rebuke was of infinite value in receiving a hearing<sup>566</sup>.

The second cluster, “crisis/discernment”, is considered to be either value neutral or positive. For people in general, it seems that “crisis” involves an objective “discernment” of a real issue in society, business, or personal life. When circumstances enter crisis mode, people are then open to consider permitting a variety of interventions, because they perceive the crisis as a threat to their well-being. “Crisis” is the universal danger-signal in urban cultures. Matters have reached a point where something urgently has to be done.

Into this argument David Bosch brings an interesting analysis **Invalid source specified**.<sup>567</sup>. He points out that the Japanese ideogram for “crisis” depicts “danger over opportunity”, and then goes on to use these two criteria in a risk/benefit analysis of the mission of the church. There seem to be two areas where a similar analysis can be applied to the evangelism project of the church: the danger/opportunity the liturgy of conversion might pose for the convert/converts; and the danger/opportunity the liturgy of conversion might pose for the church.

One critical category that Wesley used freely was the idea of Hell. As I have attempted to show, for Wesley the overwhelming risk for those who rejected Jesus was eternal

<sup>565</sup> The Greek word *κρισις* is defined by Liddell and Scott as, variously, “a separating; power of distinguishing”, “a decision; judgement”, “a trial”, “the result of a trial; condemnation”, and “the event or issue of a thing” (Liddell & Scott, 1889)

<sup>566</sup> Wesley was obviously the veteran of many failures to persuade people to reform. He developed a radical approach to “rebuke” that I have seldom met with (nor, sadly, often enough exercised): “...see that the manner in which you speak be according to the Gospel of Christ. Avoid everything in look, gesture, word, and tone of voice, that savours of pride or self-sufficiency. Studiously avoid everything magisterial or dogmatical, everything that looks like arrogance or assuming. Beware of the most distant approach to disdain, overbearing or contempt. With equal care avoid all appearance of anger; and though you use great plainness of speech, yet let there be no reproach, no railing accusation, no token of any warmth [= anger - ed.], but that of love. Above all, let there be no shadow of hate or ill-will, no bitterness or sourness of expression; but use the air as well as the language of sweetness as well as gentleness, that it may appear to flow from love in the heart...” (1787, p. 569).

<sup>567</sup> He develops it in the context of the mission of the church, which is appropriate in some ways; but it can be used for the purposes of establishing a rationale for a liturgy of evangelism as well.

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damnation. He had an earnest fear of judgement and hell, as potential outcomes for his own life, even after his conversion. This would have made sense at the time, because the generality of people were living lives in which since childhood they had been put in fear of hell as punishment for misbehaviour. The threat of hell was freely used as a technique to coerce compliance, a tool of social control<sup>568</sup>. It could perhaps be argued that the Methodists continued to abuse this powerful corporate sense of fear, but one could also make a credible argument that the theory of rebirth actually set people *free* from fear, and so fear of hell functionally ceased to be a major force for control of members (1787, p. 5). In Wesleyan terms you stood to develop a self-confidant cadre of people for whom the threatened sanction of hell held no more power of social control. And if people were radically free enough then they might (and did) attempt other projects of political emancipation.

In Wesley's time perhaps very few people would have doubted the existence of hell, but in our time the very opposite is the case in some communities (cf. Bell, 2011, p. viii). This raises a critical communications issue in terms of symbol systems that do not seem to mesh. Part of society at large is now happy to deny the reality of hell, and to decry it as a tool for religious manipulation. Most of the ministers seem to share this view. But on the other hand, I suspect that perhaps the majority of people in Cape Town actually *do* believe in the frightening prospect of hell. So the ministers need to steer some sort of path through the maze of expectations and counter-expectations of their preaching. Much theological work needs to be done on establishing what the Bible might have been referring to in its hell-references, how the concept informed Wesleyan theology, and how the concept might inform our Christian theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>569</sup>. In terms of a liturgy of conversion, it seems that a pressing current Christian theological issue is a re-examination of hell-concepts in the light of the perceptions of emerging postmodern urban culture<sup>570</sup>.

Bracketing further discussion on this point for the sake of this research, however, perhaps a search needs to be made for what there is in the shared symbol world of Christian and alternatively faithed that speaks to *crisis*? What is there in the liturgy of evangelism that *will* make sense to the alternatively faithed? It seems that there are personal, social and environmental issues that need to be considered, and Rambo offers important insights, here, into the importance of crisis as a category of conversion. He considers that there are two

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<sup>568</sup> Kirkpatrick explores these issues helpfully in his *Attachment, Evolution, and the Psychology of Religion* (2005, pp. 82-84).

<sup>569</sup> As an evangelical I am committed to making some sort of contemporary sense of this and other currently "embarrassing" biblical concepts. This is one of the least popular scriptural ideas amongst both the ministers I interviewed and the alternatively faithed (except of course for those who belong to the Muslim faith, for whom hell still seems to be a major motivating concept (cf. Rashid, 2012, p. 25). Rob Bell's book is a helpful place to start, with its street-view of the doctrine and its inquiry addressed to the Bible texts.

<sup>570</sup> Yet another avenue for possible evangelism related research.

main crises that are part of the trigger mechanism of conversion: “crises that call into question one’s fundamental orientation towards life, and crises that in and of themselves are rather mild but are the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back” (1995, p. 44)<sup>571</sup>.

Rambo addresses the importance of understanding the context in which the crisis occurs. Hoekendijk argues that “business as usual” is always suspended in the face of life-and-death situations (and he says that in actual fact, the old “normal” of the church has now become the de facto “abnormal”, so the church constantly finds itself in a crisis mode) (1964, pp. 153-156). In attempting a recovery of crisis for a liturgy of conversion, a few sociological observations might be in order. People in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town are demonstrably enmeshed in personal, social and environmental crises. In terms of personal crises, people are apparently more sensitive than ever in the recent past to their mortality. The rise of such cultural memes as “the bucket list” and YOLO (“you only live once”) is significant: secure suburbanites are feeling the need for something to add significance to their life as a whole, and are afraid that they might die without having lived properly [2.2.4 above]. In more vulnerable communities the sense mortality is extreme and immediate – and social crises are an ever-present reality: violent crime and starvation call forth a longing for meaning in chaos<sup>572</sup>. And in the whole city of Cape Town, at the time of writing, more and more people are realising the threat of environmental crises, with the potential for such a basic commodity as water to be taken from their grasp due to severe drought.

In the light of this, the liturgy of conversion would seem to be able to offer faith as a rock that has withstood the crises of the millennia, and will last to eternity. If the ministers were to explore the match between the Gospel message of eternity and the deep longings for security in and beyond this life, in ways similar to Wesley (but of course always culturally appropriate for the context of the churches), then they might find that they were speaking the language of the alternatively faithed. A liturgy of conversion, in this formulation, would need to take both the threats and longings of the context seriously, and, without either trivialisation of the dangers or exaggeration of the powers of the Gospel, speak a word of security to the anxious<sup>573</sup>.

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<sup>571</sup> The third chapter of Rambo’s *Understanding Religious Conversion* is a helpful survey of the issue of crisis in conversion (1995, pp. 44-55).

<sup>572</sup> Hoekendijk argues that we are always and constantly in a state of life-and-death, and since rules have to be abandoned in favour of grace *in periculo mortis*, therefore rules are now permanently in abeyance and only grace should exist in Christian structures and ministry (1964, pp. 160-161).

<sup>573</sup> One must note that the dismissal of the importance “heaven and rest” as a significant component of the Gospel message seems to me to be more a pre-occupation of the comfortable middle class than the poor. The poor are longing for heaven, because life is so terrible. It would be interesting to research whether a longing for heaven does actually prevent the poor from seeking earthly solutions, as Marx would have had it. Wesley’s poor Methodists seem to have been highly active in changing

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### 5.4.7 A Theology of Contextual, Relational, Expressive, Evangelism

Evangelism as I have defined it intentionally includes the concepts “narration” and “invitation to seek the truth about God” [2.4.10]. It does not refer to the actual bringing about of conversion – if conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, then all that an evangelist can be expected to do is tell the story of Jesus and the Gospels, and encourage people to work through the implications of what they would mean if the Gospel were to be true. One such implication might be found to be the need to convert to Christian faith. The persuasion is to a search; as far as I can see this is the only ethical option for evangelism.

The ethical and theological objections raised by the ministers to evangelism are not trivial. And their concern for people to experience radical conversion seems genuine. Their dilemma is that they apparently find themselves disinclined to use the evangelism methods and techniques that in other contexts mediate, or have mediated conversion; they might be Methodist in name but they seem to lack a “method” or strategy to cross the socio-cultural and religious divides between the Christian world and the multi-faceted world of the alternatively faithed. And lacking a theory of evangelism, contemporary Methodism seems deeply ambivalent about making genuinely public pronouncements about the Gospel. However, the intention to persuade people to consider following a certain conversion path is universally present in Wesley; he expected and experienced that converted disciples would speak out of the confidence and compassion acquired by their conversion. They would seek out different people, driven by a motive of interest, responsibility and compassion. They would express their witness in ways that strangers could understand. The liturgy of conversion that I am developing is an attempt to suggest a model that might acceptably fulfil that same purpose in the contemporary Methodist churches of Cape Town.

What a re-reading of Wesley’s emphasis on articulation of the Gospel suggests is not, perhaps, that ministers begin to try and preach eight hundred sermons a year as Wesley did. But it could be taken as suggesting that ministers in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town might seek out ways of becoming more articulate about the conversion that they long to see happening, and to pursue a process of emphasising the need for rescue along the same tangent as Wesley in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Wesley actively sought multiple daily opportunities to communicate his message. The sermon might not have the same effectiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did in the 18<sup>th</sup>, but there is an argument to be made that ministers might be much more articulate in a wider range of communication platforms available to us in our technological age. Not omitting also in the much neglected public fora of everyday life.

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their worlds. And perhaps the well-off think less of heaven because they believe they are already experiencing its privileges? In my view, *that* would be more likely to discourage social engagement.

It seems to me, therefore, that a three-part missional homiletic emerges from the interviews and the *Journal*: a liturgy of conversion needs to be contextual, relational, and expressive.

### **A Contextual Liturgy of Conversion: Entering the Space-between-the-Churches**

Since the world does not come to the church, the church must go to the world. This is basic to Wesley's thought in the *Journal*. He anticipates the contemporary ethnographic and missionary interest in "incarnational ministry"<sup>574</sup> – the necessity of living amongst those from whom one needs to learn and whom one seeks to influence<sup>575</sup>. Wesley's *Journal*, compiled from field notes recorded daily, constitute the basis for a highly personal awareness and understanding of the living conditions and spiritual needs of a cross section of human society – but with a unique bias for recording the situation of the poorest of the population. That is not to say that his preference for the poor prevented him from inserting his message into the context of the rich and powerful. He made himself at home in whatever world was required in order for him to be able to deliver his message. In my mind, then, a liturgy of conversion should have at its core, firstly, *the intention of inserting itself into the world of the alternatively faithed*.

This concept of finding an acceptable social role amongst those who occupy the space between the churches, the rejects and outcasts, the poor and oppressed, the rich and famous, even the powerful elites - the "alternatively-faithed" of this world – all of whom are non-participants in the liturgical rhythms of the church – seems to resonate for the current situation of the Methodist Churches in Cape Town. Are there any ministers who have the same iconic standing in the world between the churches?

The primary requirement for the establishment of the sort of rapport that Wesley built up with those outside the churches is this one issue: "presence". He was a man who travelled amongst the people, slept and woke up amongst the people, struggled with the social needs of the people and constantly observed and prayed for the people. Although he spent a lot of time amongst Christians, he also spent a great deal of time amongst the ordinary

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<sup>574</sup> For some reason David Bosch hardly deals with this important aspect of mission – he comes close in his arguments for interculturalism (1991, pp. 447-457), but it seems to me that given the demonstrated propensity of the church to resist "inculturating" itself in the spaces between the church, much more could be said. Hiebert and Meneses' text on *Incarnational Ministry* is a conceptually helpful entry into this topic (cf. Hiebert & Meneses, 1995).

<sup>575</sup> This is possibly implicit in the ministers' tendency to relegate the responsibility for evangelism to their congregants. In terms of "incarnational ministry theory", the laity would then be seen as properly incarnated in the culture and appropriately placed for evangelism and other areas of mission. The problem lies in the corollary that this would mean that the institution of the church in its liturgical aspect is specifically *not* incarnated in its culture, and that its members and potential converts have to *dis-incarnate* themselves in order to participate in it.

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alternatively faithed people in the spaces between the churches. He was a man who lived out the rhetoric of evangelism.

By contrast, the ministers of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century appear to be people who largely keep themselves to ecclesial spaces. Although they do have occasional connection with the alternatively faithed – notably through weddings and funerals – their everyday business is with the church. They are either involved in business regarding the hierarchy and structure of the church, or in teaching and pastoral care. There seems to be no expectation on their part that they could spend significant time with other-than-Methodist people as an ordinary part of their pastoral duties. The opportunities that come their way for interaction outside the church seem to be *ad hoc* only, without any “methodical” planning. They consider themselves, and are considered by their congregants, as functionaries of the institution<sup>576</sup>.

The challenge of the life of John Wesley, as presented to us through the *Journals*, is that he managed to do both things: he spent a great deal of time teaching, training and discipling Christians. But he also spent a great deal of time pleading with those who had not yet experienced the living presence of God to seek it out. Theologically, this suggests an administrative overhaul of the working life of our ministers might be in order, in order to free up time for building intimate contact with outsiders the urban poor, refugees and generally connecting with the alternatively faithed. Any overhaul of administration of that scale would require serious recalibration of priorities – and the will to revisit priorities on that level would need something akin to the cataclysmic energy of conversion.

It therefore seems imperative that the church regains and then never loses sight of the primary action, the action without which other aspects of a liturgy of conversion cannot happen: meaningful contact between a Christian and somebody who is alternatively-faithed. Wesley shows us that the space in which this happens abundantly is in the space between the churches, in locations not under the control of the Church, and often firmly under control of the alternatively faithed. Without this actual encounter, I contend that we cannot talk about the existence of a liturgy of conversion. Nor can we legitimately talk about “public” liturgy.

### **A Relational Liturgy of Conversion: Embracing Alterity**

I have tried to show that in order to fulfil its social mandate for its members, the local church has to have a strong local identity. Churches tend to exert a culturally centralising influence on their members. And the culturally uniform nature of a social institution will in turn attract

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<sup>576</sup> There are encouraging signs that some ministers do not live comfortably with this reigning paradigm, and rebel in favour of the alternatively faithed in significant ways. It would be very helpful to interview representatives of this cadre and find how they are managing to broker a concern for the alternatively faithed world in the church and the denominational corridors of power.

those who need the reinforcement of cultural allies in their struggle with adjustment to the wider urban community. There is thus already a powerful engine running to maintain and extend the control of what Bosch refers to as the “centripetal” dimension of the church

**Invalid source specified..**

The question arises as to whether, given this strength, the church can be expected to cope with alterity – people who conspicuously do not fit the cultural profile of the church. Bosch refers to this as the “centrifugal” dimension of the church **Invalid source specified..** Both the *Journal* and the interviews present data from Christians in churches trying to cope with social interactions with “strangers”. In both 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain and 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town there are a lot of different people interacting with (or avoiding) each other, great social and economic differences between classes, the intrusion of migrants and the intersection of different worlds of experience at different levels. The Church is potentially either an enforcer of separateness or a force for community. Critical as I have been of Keifert’s apparent incapacity to notice the world between the churches as a location for liturgy, his insights on alterity is helpful at times: “Rather than seeking oneness, a pull that would surround and coerce the stranger, the public actor hospitably appreciates that irreducible difference” (1992, p. 80).

Although the “Homogenous Unit Principle” theorists argue that the way to strengthen and extend the church is by concentrating on developing monocultural Christian communities (McGavran, 1970, 1980, pp. 326-328), it seems to me that the church in the cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can ill afford to do that in the light of the memories of apartheid and the emergence of such evils as xenophobia. Bosch has trenchantly argued for the need of radically inclusive churches (1980, pp. 208-209). In my view, a liturgy of conversion that offers a democratised criterion of church membership - conscious conversion - offers much potential for such healing. If conversion loomed larger in our thinking, maybe our tendency to react to alterity with fear, anger, or contempt might be reduced, since Christian identity would inhere more in common grace than in common culture. And if our self-perceptions were modified by the issues of conversion – for instance that we ourselves were sinners addicted to sin – then the church might incline more to mercy and less to judgement.

So much for alterity amongst Christians. But the church has another constituency to relate to – the alternatively faithed. It is not respectful to pretend that difference at worldview level does not exist. Walter Brueggemann writes that “...the persons and communities called by ... God for praise and obedience and sent by ... God for justice, mercy and faith also live among *and in contestation with other gods, other loyalties, other authorities.*” (2008, p. 219 emphasis added). Outler had earlier called for a “...wholesome and yet wholly unintimidated respect for the mind-sets of our own time and for the people who hold them – since *this is*

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‘the field white unto harvest’ into which the Lord is sending us, *now*” (1971, p. 97). And Keifert argues that instead of pretending to more intimacy than is appropriate, we should consider how best to take people and their concerns seriously, without assuming that they want to be friends with Christians simply because they have ended up in the close proximity to Christians (cf. Keifert, 1992, p. 79).

A theory of liturgy of conversion, in my understanding, would place alterity front and centre in the thinking and decision making of the church. It would constantly ask whether what the church was doing was actually crossing into the physical space and comprehension domain of the alternatively faithed, and investigate not only whether those of the Christian community who were hearing the church’s message were understanding it, but whether those who were not in the Christian community were hearing and understanding it. It would also ask itself, in line with Wesleyan introspection, whether it did experience “an intense pleasure in the alterity of the other” (Hoekendijk, 1964, p. 103), and if not, why the love of God was so faintly “shed abroad” in its heart.

### **An Expressive Liturgy of Conversion: Speaking a Comprehensible Word**

Which neatly segues into an observation that Outler makes: “If evangelism means God’s good news to man’s bad news, then its success always depends on how this message is understood and interpreted and applied” (1971, p. 15). One of Bosch’s concerns in his study of evangelism is that people can only be said to have experienced evangelism if they can understand what has been said – which lies behind my definition referring to “adequately communicative signs” **Invalid source specified.** [2.4.10].

John Wesley would have argued that this meaningfulness can only be generated in conversation, in respectful speaking and listening. The *Journal* records an infinite variety of conversations, but the ministers generally recalled very few anecdotes from Wesley’s life around the subject of communicating perspectives on faith, and very few of their own direct experience. So it seems to me that if a liturgy of conversion is intended to be expressive, it needs to incorporate a readiness to be *speaking* with the alternatively faithed in order to *listen*; to discover what others – in all their diversity - think. We need to do this so that we can learn things we have not known, and so that we can honour those who know things as human beings. I am not advocating the sort of approach to learning that simply focuses on developing better handles for manipulation and control of others. We also need, however, to work out whether we are wasting time with effectual interpretants that don’t match our intentional interpretants – and wasting others’ time as we in turn fail to grasp their intended meanings. In my view, this process would be aimed at achieving clarity, not manipulation. Wesley believed that the Gospel, clearly and persistently presented, provided all that an

alternatively faithed person needed in order to access whether they should pursue the Methodist vision of faith. Whether they then did so was out of the hands of the evangelist.

### **An Inductive Gospel Message**

I suggest that one of the elements of comprehensibility is the need for a return to narrative evangelism, telling the actual story, and inductively arriving at insights into faith and conversion together with the alternatively faithed. This is partially called forth by one great difference between Cape Town in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and Britain in the 17<sup>th</sup>. Capetonians now only have the vaguest idea of the story of the life and ministry of Jesus<sup>577</sup>.

It seems to me that both the method and content of the Gospels needs to be re-examined. The character and lifestyle of Jesus needs to be portrayed for people once again – especially his simplicity and compassion, and his strong word against social injustice. Most people, I suspect even most Christians, have a very inadequate image of Jesus.

And Jesus' methods were not contemptible either: pointed stories and pointed questions, told in a context of social meetings - meals and journeys. The constraints of this research prevent any fuller treatment of this here. More work needs to be done on the "what" – but this research focuses on the "who" and "where" of evangelism.

### **Conclusion**

For the purposes of my grounded theory, then, it seems as if a liturgy of conversion would require a clear expression of the Gospel narrative and its implications in ways that made sense to each different person in each different sub-cultural context of the city and world. How that might be accomplished is the endeavour of my next chapter.

#### **5.4.8 A Theology of Public Liturgants**

Wesley's perception was that the role of the clergy could perhaps be viewed as that of "pastor-evangelist" [0]. It became apparent that the ministers I interviewed seemed to have the idea that evangelism was not technically a part of the job-description of the pastor [0]. This seems to have deep theoretical roots; even Albert Outler comes to the strange conclusion (given his deep and extensive reading of John Wesley's works) that "...it is the laity who are the church visible in the world....the church's evangelistic mission is still, first and last, a lay enterprise." (1971, p. 29). What is problematic about this is not that the laity were not meant to be completely and inextricably an active part of the church's evangelism – perhaps even carrying the majority weight of the process. That much is very clear, and well

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<sup>577</sup> Scriptural knowledge has been on the decline in the West for a long time now: in 1907 Forsyth was already complaining that "most Christians hardly know their Bible at first hand at all" (1907, p. 37)

## The Liturgy of Conversion

demonstrated by Outler, and certainly a close reading of the *Journal* bears it out. But where it appears wrong is that it apparently cedes leadership and participation in evangelism *entirely* to the laity (“first and last”, he says). This gives the impression, which has indeed seemed to have come to be the majority opinion of the church, that the minister is somehow *not supposed to be involved* in evangelism amongst the alternatively faithed *at all*; that her/his involvement is secondary to other putatively “more important” aspects of ministry. As I have argued, this would have the odd corollary of expecting the clergy to lead in evangelism without participating in it themselves. And it has also resulted, perhaps, in the ministers not being able to give their own instinctive “hobby” evangelism a coherent place in their concept of the church. My argument in this study is that evangelism, if it is to be truly the evangelism of the world by the church, needs to be embraced as “first-and-last” a ministry of the whole church, lay *and* clergy, young *and* old, recent *and* long-term. Just as the concept of liturgy involves the whole people of God in worshipful service; evangelism, likewise, needs to be seen as the whole people of God in liturgical participation in the persuasion of others to consider becoming conscious participants in God’s present Kingdom.

I have not been able to explore the issue of the preparation of ministers for ministry by the institution. A liturgy of conversion approach might ask what current liturgical theory goes into preparing candidates for Methodist ministry – and in what ways does it equip them for the rigours of public liturgy<sup>578</sup>? Ministers manage the current in-house liturgies of the church with expertise, but the interviews suggest that they might have a limited capacity to handle the interplay between Christian and alternatively-faithed in public spaces beyond the control of the Church.

However, hidden in plain sight in the *Journal* and in the current Methodist church, there is another way of looking at liturgical leadership. Wesley fought for the recognition of the right of the laity to exercise leadership according to their spiritual and intellectual capacities [0]. In arguing for the imperative leadership by the clergy, I cannot ignore the fact that the Methodist tradition has a very strong heritage of mobilising “lay” capacity. In the interviews I noted how many of the local church projects function because of committed laity. And there is a whole cadre of “local preachers” who function as regular liturgical leaders. This speaks to a liturgy of conversion in two ways. Firstly, there is a much wider pool for the appropriately gifted public liturgists than just the Methodist ministers. Secondly, an important step against domination by clergy has already been taken by John Wesley – institutionally the Methodist church has long since resolved the question of only allowing university-educated clergy to

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<sup>578</sup> Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary kindly gave me access to their course outlines, but I realised that an analysis of the curriculum in terms of liturgy of conversion theory would have to wait for a subsequent research project.

lead<sup>579</sup>. If there is a task in the world that needs to be done, and the clergy cannot or will not get round to it, then congregants take it upon themselves to organise themselves to fulfil the task.

This is not to suggest, however, that the liturgy of conversion does not require all liturgants to be trained – there is already a very effective apprenticeship program in place for local preachers (although that is currently focused exclusively on training operatives for liturgy within Christian-controlled spaces). But it seems that for the Methodist church to be able to return to its original methodical compassion for the alternatively-faithed, it needs to perhaps re-train leaders who are of a similar calibre and outlook to John Wesley's first Methodists. In terms of the Public Liturgy of Conversion that I have been arguing for, I suggest that such leaders should have (and develop) the following aptitudes and skills for off-site ministry in our complex contemporary South African urban situation – whether developed through seminary training or through an apprenticeship approach.

*Firstly, liturgical leaders for a liturgy of conversion would perhaps do best if they were able to read their contexts through a deep collective memory.* Wesley was constantly looking to tradition to establish precedent for his brand of intense and enthusiastic Christianity. My suggestion, unsurprisingly, would be to require a contemplative and critical reading of the *Journal* as part of any training, and a reflection on what a contemporary life's journal might look like. In conversation with the ministers I found that the role of Wesley's thought appeared minimal – there was extremely little reference to his salvation hermeneutic, his call for radical awakening of churchgoers, and his experimental and incarnational approach to the people inhabiting the spaces between the churches. These need to be noted, thought through, and then either adapted or consciously rejected in favour of methods with greater utilitarian promise in Cape Town.

South African universities are probably the most sensitively attuned to postmodernism of all social institutions, and as such the university educated ministers, from whatever cultural background they might have come, will have been influenced by the dominant thought forms of the age, consciously or unconsciously. The base position of postmodernism is one of heightened suspicion of plausibility structures<sup>580</sup> – which seems to have had its due impact

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<sup>579</sup> The power of this “tradition of doing things differently” can be seen in the Methodist church (eventually – in 1976 in South Africa) following the logical step (given the value of women local preachers) to ordain women for ministry.

<sup>580</sup> Another tempting side-road is the concept of the transmission of knowledge. Lyotard's chapter on *Education and its Legitimation through Performativity* is an important resource here: he argues that “the question, (overt or implied), now asked by the professionalist student, the State, or the institutions of higher education, is no longer ‘Is it true?’ but ‘What use is it?’” (1984, p. 51)

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on the ministers<sup>581</sup>. But Schreier has alerted us to the reality of multiple “cultural logics”, by which he means various different contextually modified responses to globalisation and post-modernism that can operate in local contexts as people frame local metanarrative to oppose the invader: “antiglobalism”, “ethnification” or “primitivism” (1997, pp. 21-27). In terms of this research I cannot delve further into this interesting field, but theologically it appears as if one needs to recruit the work of someone like Jaroslav Pelikan to establish the credibility of interacting with tradition in the contemporary world (cf. Pelikan, 1984). And of course this entire project of mine is a plea for the importance of a critical return to the sources and resources of the Methodist church history, particularly Wesley’s *Journal*.

*Secondly, there is no way that liturgants in a public liturgy of conversion might be expected to be able to celebrate without having evangelical confidence.* It is entirely possible for a leader with deep uncertainties about faith, and about his/her faith, to lead a liturgy that is warmly embedded in the safety of the Christian community, with no likelihood of challenge from the alternatively faithed. In that case, it would seem that the liturgant would be buoyed up and empowered by the faith of the people – it is the community that is celebrating, and the liturgant then becomes, strangely, a welcome spectator at his/her own liturgy. The communicative power and pedagogic symbolism of the liturgy can then be understood as being directed towards the liturgant him/herself.

But the welcome and protections are stripped away in public. I would not recommend that any minister without a robust, clear-eyed faith attempt to celebrate liturgy of conversion. S/he would be exposed and humiliated in most situations of liturgical interaction with the alternatively faithed. If a liturgant does not believe that her/his truth is public truth, s/he dare not take it out into the public square. And as I have noted, the work would in any case be of little value – just as the converted drunkard is the only credible witness to an alcoholic, I suspect that the only credible witness to those addicted to sin is a sinner recovering under the grace of forgiveness and faith.<sup>582</sup>

*Thirdly, public liturgants would need to believe that evangelism has a distinct, though limited, role in the conversion of the alternatively faithed.* The concept of persuasion I have been working with is a persuasion to consider converting to Christian faith [2.4.7]. Wesley, I have noted, could be interpreted as conducting an experiment in evangelism [0]. He was in effect claiming, through his *Journal*, that if one understood the Bible a certain way, preached a certain message, devoted energy in a certain direction, and prayed along certain lines, then one could expect God to break through to people and convince them to convert to a life of

<sup>581</sup> This can only be speculative at this stage: it cries out for research on plausibility structures and faith amongst Methodist ministers.

<sup>582</sup> This is an area which needs further research – does the level of personal conviction of the minister affect the number of people who convert to Christianity? Sadly, this is beyond the scope of this study.

Christian discipleship<sup>583</sup>. This claim is backed up by a constant stream of direct evidence from Wesley himself, and letters of testimony from many witnesses.

What this suggests is that ministers in 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town should perhaps become more articulate about the conversion that they long to see happening, and pursue a tangentially similar process of emphasising the need for salvation through a process of a certain kind of conversion. Wesley actively sought multiple daily opportunities to communicate his message. Perhaps the sermon might not have the same effectiveness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it did in the 18<sup>th</sup>, but there is an argument to be made that public liturgants could be much more articulate in currently effective communication platforms.

*The fourth skill and capacity is that of being actually<sup>584</sup> present as an articulator of the Gospel amongst the alternatively faithed.* The data from the interviews suggests that the Methodist ministers do not appear to enthusiastically embrace the sort of evangelism that Bosch considers to be an aspect of the emerging postmodern paradigm of mission – specifically, there is little sign of them energetically “offering” a “direct challenge” to “every person and community, everywhere” in their reach and beyond (Bosch, 1991, p. 420). Much as I am in sympathy with Bosch’s formulation, it appears that either the Methodist church is not emerging into this new paradigm of evangelism, or that something about the paradigm itself does not take account of the local churches and their contexts<sup>585</sup>.

On the other hand, some of the anecdotes the ministers tell about evangelism do refer to actual encounters through weddings, funerals, and serendipitous encounters. It could be argued that as publicly identified liturgants in these circumstances, they are effective *because of the public liturgy of the church* which they embody and enact. In addition, some of the anecdotes the ministers tell are of lay people engaged as visible Christians in some or other contact with the alternatively faithed. It is obvious that certain people have great talents in moving seamlessly between the Christian world and the worlds of the alternatively faithed – in that case, a liturgy of conversion as an ordinary part of the liturgy of the church would celebrate the gifts and capacities of these Christians. And it is quite conceivable that the recognition of the validity of such ministry might well empower more people to undertake it. That in turn might result in many more of the alternatively faithed considering conversion to Christianity; which would then quite possibly lead to more conversions...and perhaps some

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<sup>583</sup> There is no way of predicting similar awakening in Cape Town if the churches simply follow a formula – not if God is the God of conversion. But if some effort was made, perhaps some fruit might follow? An important discovery of this research is that we cannot know whether people would believe the Gospel, because nobody seems to be being asked to consider it.

<sup>584</sup> I am leaving open for the present how “actual” an online presence might be. I favour physical presence, but there is an argument to be made that one could be “actually” present to people in more than one communicative modality.

<sup>585</sup> This is another fascinating area to pursue, which I cannot do here, with regret.

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of those might decide to join a church which demonstrated its concern for aliens by its loving presence: and that series of outcomes, it would seem to me, might arguably constitute “effective evangelism”.

*Fifthly, a liturgy of conversion celebrant would know that they had to do liturgy in ways that communicated with the alternatively faithed, from whatever point of view the alternatively faithed person might approach Christianity.* The way Wesley’s “innovation-for-connection” concept transfers to application in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that a liturgy of conversion requires liturgants now to acquire the same level of knowledge of the urban sub-cultures and micro-cultures amongst which they move, in order to make the adjustments needed for meaningful communication. Wesley’s insights were worked out in close contact with those outside the church of his day. In the same way, Methodist ministers’ insights need to be worked out not in conference with Christians<sup>586</sup> so much as in dialogue with those who live in the spaces between the churches. Albert Outler was calling for this forty-five years ago: “...the evangelist must also find where the action really is and go there: in patterns and forms of witness and service that may yet have to be invented” (1971, p. 77).

And a liturgy of conversion would therefore need to consciously explore the symbolic world which Methodists share with those around them who inhabit other-than-Christian worldviews. “The hearing of faith”, says Outler, “takes place in the context of the hearer’s worldview” (1971, p. 76). For Outler, it was a key to understanding Wesley that he was one of those who, down the ages, have been engaged in “...translating the perennial gospel of God in Christ into new rhetoric in successive ages” (1971, p. 84). As I understand it, a liturgy of conversion offers the hope of finding “new rhetoric” for all the micro-cultures of the city.

*The sixth capacity of a public liturgant, in my understanding, is the willingness to play and lose.* Evangelism has not necessarily only been effective, as I have shown from Wesley’s viewpoint in the *Journal*, if people have believed. It might have been equally effective if *nobody* has believed. That might of course indicate a tactical or spiritual failure on the part of the messenger. But if the message has been encoded in the best way the liturgist knows how, as consistently over time and as lovingly in attitude, and the result is rejection or apathy, then the purposes of the Kingdom have nonetheless been served. A liturgy of conversion should not be part of the church’s permanent liturgy as an effective gimmick in raising numbers and finances - it should be a permanent part of every church’s liturgy because the alternatively faithed are of permanent interest to God.

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<sup>586</sup> I stress the concept of “not with Christians” not to deny the value of mutual consultation amongst Christians, but to ensure that the conversation partners include a majority of alternatively-faithed people and their insights.

Wesley faithfully recorded failures: failed congregations; empty pews; people falling back into sin. If people did not enter the class system and continue, self-motivated, to seek God, he accepted there was nothing he could do to make them do so. An application of the liturgy of conversion, it seems, needs to have the same attitude: a take it or leave it message, insistently repeated but never forced; a structure to join in order to grow; encouragement to continue but no compulsion. I consider that perhaps this attitude of radical openness to rejection might be an essential capacity of leadership in the public arena [0].

In addition, Christians are in no way responsible defending the propriety of God, nor the security of the Kingdom of God. They are mandated to risk, and God is mandated to maintain or dispose of his Kingdom structures as he sees fit. Hoekendijk comments that the usual attitude of the church seems to be “as if the servants, who had been sent out to the highways and byways to invite whoever they found there to the feast, had to behave as bodyguards...defending the Lord of Hosts against his royalty that was all too inclined to take risks” (1964, p. 167)

#### **5.4.9 Theological Norms for a Liturgy of Conversion**

If these theological interpretations hold true, then the theological norms for a liturgy of conversion would be world-focused whilst centred in a local context. Liturgy of conversion would be would be unshakeably ethical, and unashamedly persuasive. It would deliberately locate itself in areas of shared or disputed control, and it would deliberately facilitate functional participation from both Christian and alternatively faithed people<sup>587</sup>. It would be ecumenical in its action and intention, with no pressure placed on converts to repudiate their existing tradition if they could deepen their faith in Christ within it; although it *would* offer clear path of discipleship through fellowship. It would be free for all, with no shadow of commercial gain. Hunsberger says “A consciousness of ... cultural dynamics and an approach to people that envisions giving the gospel away to them are crucial for a warranted form of evangelism in our current pluralist environment” (2008, p. 70). A liturgy of conversion, further, would ideally be ready to function in the teeth of unresponsiveness and rejection. One of its key liturgical properties would be that it could persist in hope that its purpose of conversion would come about. It would function with a clear sense of the presence and guidance of the Spirit of God, relying on a straightforward reading of Scripture

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<sup>587</sup>John Wesley demonstrated that with sufficient will, places could be readily found to interact with the alternatively faithed where such conditions obtained. This involved envisaging a new paradigm for ministry, one that did not only seek to maximise the liturgical potential of the church buildings, but also explored the liturgical potential of the spaces between the churches. Hiebert and Meneses likewise insist that “Neutral territory is public space where secular people can look at Christianity without being pressured to convert. It is a place of evangelism, similar in ways to the Court of the Gentiles in the Jewish temple.” (1995, p. 332). Which takes us back to the logic of Jesus’ whip.

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to communicate liberating truths about God to ordinary people through ordinary language and great creativity. A liturgy of conversion would offer a symbolic-ritual space for conversion by convening sacred space in the spaces between the churches. In this sacred space a liturgy of conversion would offer to take people on a liturgical journey closer to God and then away again, leaving the decision to take any further liturgical journeys with the erstwhile participant. A liturgy of conversion would then involve the entire rebranding of evangelism – away from sharp accusation and truncated theology, towards loving narration of the Bible story and persuasive exposition.

### 5.4.10 Conclusion: Liturgy of Conversion as Liturgical Commonplace.

The thread that I have tried to trace throughout this theological reflection is that Christian truth has certain logical consequences, one of which is a deep compassion for those who, for no particular fault of their own, do not share it. So on a theological level, the theory of a liturgy of conversion is an attempt to put in place in the ecclesial praxis of the church a new “normal element”, as unexceptional as the singing of hymns, praying of prayers, or preaching of sermons - the deliberate exposure in the world between the churches as the worshipping, praying, preaching and sacrament-carrying<sup>588</sup> people of God.

## 5.5. “Good Practice” Interpretation of the Data

I observed earlier that with regard to ethics it was important to interact with generally held cultural norms for ethical standards, partly because in evangelism Christians are dealing with those who do not share their faith position, and because someone from an alternative faith position needs to be offered a neutral referee in the context of persuasion<sup>589</sup>[5.2.2]. The same reasoning would then also apply to the principles of “good practice” that the church adopts with regard to its evangelism praxis. The source I have chosen in this case has been a legal study of international ethics in the field of psychology: *Law and Ethics in Psychology* by Alfred Allan (Allan, 2008, 2011).

In terms of “best practice” legislation with regard to professional fields Allan says that professionals should abide by “reliable and valid methods, techniques and procedures that

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<sup>588</sup> Because of the current reservation of the celebration of baptism and Holy Communion to ordained ministers alone, and wanting to specifically capitalise on the potential of lay involvement already allowed in the Methodist church, I considered it tactically wise to leave a debate about the extent of the priesthood of all believers with regard to the liturgy of conversion to another forum.

<sup>589</sup> Coupled with which, a Christian too would perhaps want a “neutral referee” rather than having to submit to an ethical code based on some other faith position – especially since such positions as are often suspicious of Christianity as such.

are based on scientifically and professionally derived knowledge” (2011, p. 133)<sup>590</sup>. Pressure is currently being exerted on the South African churches in general for government control through standardization<sup>591</sup>. Whilst government control of churches is a highly contentious issue, it does alert the church to the fact that the watching world is interested in whether or not the Church has “professional standards” like other social institutions, with its own “reliable and viable methods” derived from “scientifically and professionally derived knowledge”.

“Best practice” norms are always, by the nature of the case, institution-specific. Although they are established in part as a criterion for any outsider to evaluate the institution, they are above all intended as bench-marks for maximum effectiveness of the institution in achieving its mission<sup>592</sup>. Osmer notes that within a pastoral context “good practice” can only be worked out through an ongoing trial-and-error process to constantly yield procedures that accomplish core outcomes in changing contexts (2008, p. 153). This relates directly to my concern for “effective evangelism praxis” [title;1.2.3; 2.5]. Since my task in this research is to seek that which might possibly reverse the apparent ineffectiveness of the evangelism of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town, the “good practices” I need to articulate must have practical potential; they must have a pragmatic purpose. In this case, if I may now take it that I have made my point that the church needs to have a liturgy of conversion as part of its ordinary liturgical life, what might the “institutional standards” be for its execution? The path I have followed thus far leads to the point where I am able to suggest tentative norms for the due praxis of a liturgy of conversion.

Firstly, it needs to develop out of an interaction with Wesley’s concepts of church life and proclamation – through critical insights into differences of contexts and tactical variables. The story teller of the good news always understands and strives to understand better the bad news that is plaguing others<sup>593</sup>.

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<sup>590</sup> They should in addition be free of personal psychopathology, be in a healthy psychological state themselves, use “substances” appropriately, and display integrity, good judgement, respect and sensitivity (cf. Allan, 2011, p. 135) – all perfectly fair and appropriate from a Christian standpoint.

<sup>591</sup> Recent moves in South Africa to control excesses of fringe religious leaders through proposed legislation arise from perceptions of malpractice through, *inter alia*, the use of insecticide in exorcism rituals (Pollitt, 2015). This move is viewed with suspicion by those who fear state control of the church, with memories of the co-option of the church by government down the centuries from Constantine to the Apartheid Nationalist Government of South Africa.

<sup>592</sup> If praxis theory refers to theoretical “effectiveness” (with regard to my hypothesis for “effective evangelism”) then good practice theory refers to operational “effectiveness”.

<sup>593</sup> the Gospel needs to apply the right good news to the right bad news. Saunders and Campbell plead for street preaching that is concerned with reform, reconciliation, resistance, and solidarity – for the gospel has a word for each of these situations (2000, pp. 100-104). The ailments of humanity, as Wesley so clearly observed, are personal and social, economic, political and spiritual. The norm for a liturgy of conversion is that the liturgant is always a story teller, and knows which part of the story to tell when.

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Secondly, It needs to be intentionally persuasive, and thus needs to aim at being intentionally “moving”<sup>594</sup>. Specifically, like any good liturgical worship, it should aim to take participants consciously into the presence of God, with a sense of risk and danger<sup>595</sup>

Thirdly, it needs to happen primarily outside the security of Christian-controlled spaces, in shared or contested spaces<sup>596</sup>. This is not to discourage liturgy of conversion elements from being included at times in “home liturgy” contexts [6.2.5], particularly at festival times when edge adherents are more likely to attend.

Fourthly, it not only takes place in public, but it is open to public scrutiny. It is the place where those who differ from the Christian community in every possible way are invited to spectate or participate. Evangelism without the presence of the alternatively faithed is not yet evangelism<sup>597</sup>[2.4.3].

Fifthly, a liturgy of conversion tells the story of the Gospel, rather than summarising the theology Christians have built around the Gospel. It relies on inductive interpretation alongside the alternatively faithed<sup>598</sup>[2.4.5].

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<sup>594</sup> Hughes stresses the emotional valency of worship and our need to recoup the great loss we have often suffered in performing liturgy: “The identification of worship with ... moments of intensification is...at once a judgement and a challenge to so much that goes in the name of worship. To include worship and the sorts of human encounter we have reviewed within a single frame of reference is to lay bare the conventionality, the domesticity and mildness into which worship seems so easily and routinely to descend” (2003, p. 276). This sharp experience of God is possible because “The phenomenon of edge experience...directs worship itself back to an original evocative power, a force which seems mostly to have been overtaken by the mundanity it was supposed to overcome.” (2003, p. 276)

<sup>595</sup> Any Christians involved will of course often be assured of a sense of “risk and danger”, so at least that element of worship stands to be restored for the Christians in the interactions of a liturgy of conversion. Marva Dawn expresses justifiable concern that in Christian worship “the awesomeness of God is repeatedly swallowed up by coziness” (1995, p. 97) I contend that in order to restore the likelihood of untamed religious perceptions of approaching God on the edge of chaos, we need to leave the tamed environment of our religious spaces and see what happens in the uncontrollable spaces between the churches.

<sup>596</sup> By “space” I intend any physical or notional space where meeting between Christian and alternatively faithed is possible. This could be an open public space; or in a public meeting hall; in a boardroom or coffee shop or shebeen. Or it could be on one of the social media platforms, or a television debate, or some other electronically constituted platform. John Wesley actively hunted out such places, dealt with distractions and put his message out in as many different forms as he could find. And his ingenuity turned up a surprisingly large number of such places.

<sup>597</sup> The norm for the liturgy of evangelism is that it is relaxed in the presence of alterity, and open to learn new ways of being human. Outler expressed this well when he said “...the difference between healthy and unhealthy evangelism has less to do with the fervour of a man’s [sic] faith or the pure truth of his doctrines than with the quality of his love for others....an openness of heart and mind that cherishes diversity within the larger unity of essential faith and commitment” (1971, p. 36).

<sup>598</sup> In my view it is important that we move away from the micro-theologies of conversion that have been the backbone of so much evangelistic effort for many decades [0]. I would contend that people do not have the biblical data on which even a few theological laws can be developed. Summary theologies of conversion might be useful for an evangelist to have in the back of their mind, but a

In sixth place, Exponents of a liturgy of conversion are deeply involved in action to confront evil systems and make the world a more humane place. Often liturgy of conversion spills over from social action, or into social action<sup>599</sup>[0].

Seventhly, a liturgy of conversion both means sense and makes sense to others – it pays extremely close attention to how others interpret what is encoded<sup>600</sup>[2.1.6].

In eighth place, a liturgy of conversion is run by those who are deeply attuned to both their theological bases and their social contexts, and are able to be nimbly adaptive. It is not another religious algorithm, but a mode of existence in a domain of contestation [5.4.8].

In ninth place, a Liturgy of conversion is based on conversation as its primary mode of communication. Any communication with larger audiences, when it becomes necessary, remains open to audition and interruption [0].

And tenthly, a liturgy of conversion allows conversation partners to interact at different levels of intensity<sup>601</sup>, interacting with the Gospel at the pace that the conversation partners choose [0].

Under this dispensation the world becomes the parish of the Christians again...they care for every “soul” [whole person] with whom they come into contact, not only on Christian ground, but in every part of God’s creation [0].

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Word-rich telling of Gospel in interaction with an alternatively faithed person is more likely to move them towards conversion.

<sup>599</sup> “When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating ‘blah’. It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.” (Freire, 1970, p. 68). If we are not concretely compassionate in terms of connecting with the needs of our surrounding communities, then we are not truly speaking a valid “word” for God. Secondly, evangelism is a concrete action, a moving away from self-preoccupation and isolation into a concern for others; it is, further, a compassionate action, addressing the needs of our surrounding communities. It is not holistic to say that feeding a hungry person is somehow more compassionate than trying to convince a hungry person that s/he should wake up to the reality of God. The integrated Gospel way is that you talk over a meal. And hunger is not the only need amongst which the word of evangelism finds its compassionate place.

<sup>600</sup> Evangelism as I have defined it does not take place until a Word is spoken in signs that are meaningful to an alternatively faithed person [2.4.5]. Good news has to have cognitive content: I have suggested that this needs to be framed in terms of the story of Jesus, and against a shared concept of crisis and potential resolution of that crisis. In addition, the Word has to be enacted through speech and action as one aspect of a wide-ranging hunger for being compassionate and just [2.4.9].

<sup>601</sup> This is essential if we are to proceed without suspicion of coercion. Liturgy enacted in the public square is not to be protected from interruption. Members of the congregation may either pay attention or ignore the liturgy. They may participate briefly or at length – they can come or go whenever they choose. The liturgant proceeds completely at the whim of the alternatively faithed. Since the liturgant has no official standing in this sphere, anybody else may speak. A monologue lecture is not necessarily permitted. Hostility from the congregants is acceptable – expressions of derision or disagreement are to be embraced. The liturgant stands or falls with the story s/he tells, and the acceptance of the story cannot be compelled in any way whatsoever [0].

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### 5.6. Conclusion: A Matrix of Norms

My working definition of a Liturgy of Conversion is the “*complex of ritual words and actions, spoken and enacted both inside and outside of the sacred precinct, by every member of the believing community, which reflects and articulates a meaning-enriching, identity-(re)defining and commitment-shaping process of change in worldview, initiated by God, described by the convert, and experienced by converts in a social context; and which socialises both existing and prospective members into the ethos of the church*”[2.6], for which I have now developed a matrix of norms. If the Methodist Church were to adopt these as regular liturgy, there can of course be no guarantee that it would experience *any* growth or change. A liturgy of conversion approach could only be a means for setting out to bridge the gaps between churches and world – without demanding, as is customary, that those who inhabit the world do all the bridge-building work.

The application this suggests for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that leaders need to acquire a much deeper knowledge of diverse contexts through constant contact, in order to make the adjustments needed for meaningful communication. In my next chapter I shall look at some ways in which the evangelism of the church already carries these marks of a liturgy of conversion; and I shall suggest some pragmatic examples of what could be done in different contexts to mobilise the church to worship God through the liturgy of conversion.

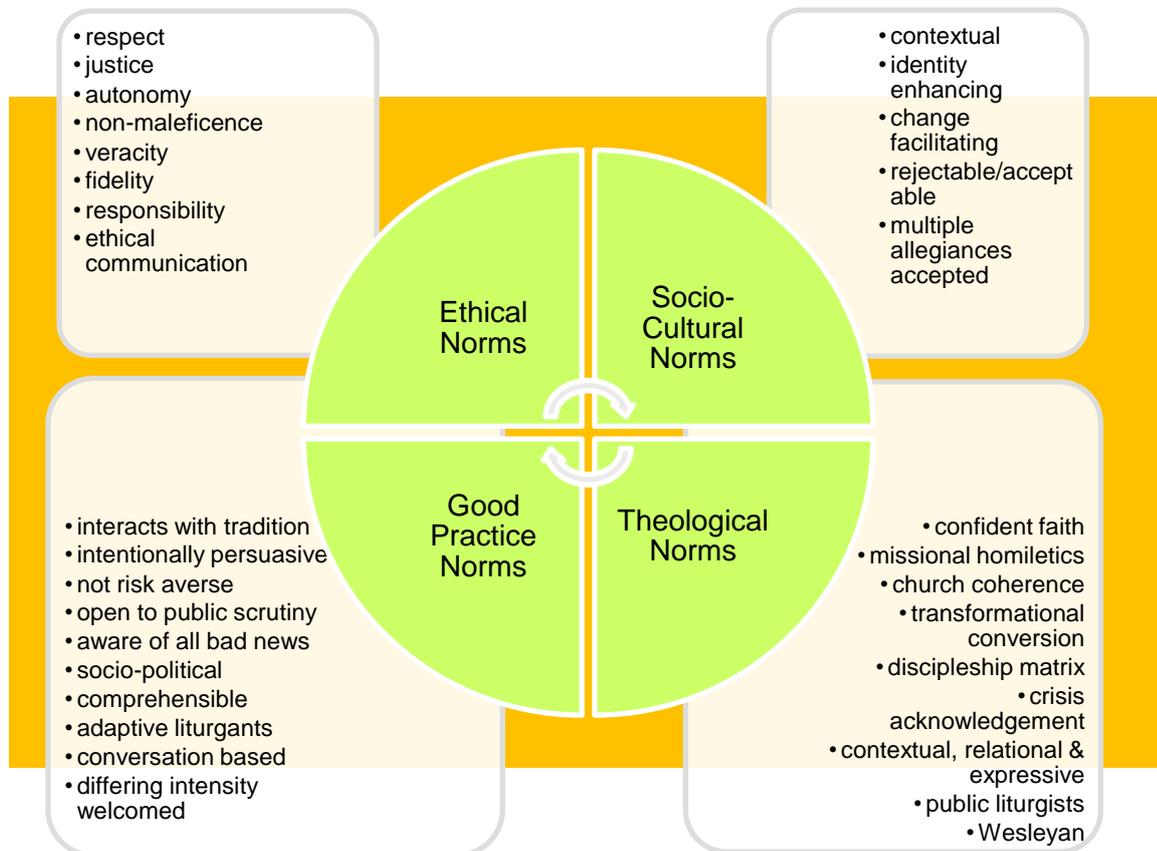


Figure 13 Ethical, Sociological, Theological & Good Practice Norms for a Liturgy of Conversion

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## **Chapter 6. ASSEMBLING RULES OF ART, TACTICS, & MOBILISATION (pragmatic)**

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*“Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 106)*

And so we reach the denouement of the story I have been telling. The plot-threads of the interviews, the *Journal* and my theological reflections bring us back to the cusp of action<sup>602</sup>. I turn now to the pragmatic implications of this idea of a Liturgy of Conversion.

The definition of a Liturgy of Conversion which I developed in chapter 2 was “... *the complex of ritual words and actions, spoken and enacted both inside and outside of the sacred precinct, by members of the believing community, in the presence of the alternatively faithed, which reflects and articulates a meaning-enriching, identity-(re)defining and commitment-shaping process of change in worldview, initiated by God, described by converts, and experienced by them in a social context; and which socialises both existing and prospective members into the ethos of the church*” [see 2.6 above]. Osmer considers that fourth “task” of practical theological research is “...determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the ‘talk back’ emerging when they are enacted” (2008, p. 4)

### **6.1. Reflexive Issues: Some Reflections**

Before expressing my opinions of what my research might mean in practice for the Methodist Churches of Cape Town, I need to reflect on some possible unintended consequences of my project. Murphy and Dingwall point out that even “ethnographers who think of themselves as sensitive, respectful, and caring people may be surprised and chagrined to discover how their published accounts offend and distress those about whom they have been written ...There is ample evidence that publications from ethnographic fieldwork can, and do, cause hurt and offense to those studied.” (2001, p. 341). I sincerely apologise if my reflections, which were based on only a single, very brief encounter with several highly dedicated ground-level practitioners, has caused any of them hurt. If I have misrepresented anybody, I

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<sup>602</sup> By the nature of the case, in terms of Freirian theory of praxis, action happens next, as it has happened before the research began.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

sincerely desire to be put right<sup>603</sup>. I have tried to be scrupulous about not saying “all” when I meant “only some”, or “none” when I meant “very few” – your viewpoint might well have been an outlier to the norm that compelled me to insert such exclusions; but in the heat of the argument I might have slipped. I do not imply any derogatory judgement towards any of the ministers – my intentions are to try and help the ministers I love and the church I love, and my own fanatical interest in this field might have led me to express myself less than charitably. However, I also feel a deep responsibility for those whose voice is frequently not heard in debates on evangelism or liturgy – the often hostile or apathetic, but sometimes wistful voice of the alternatively faithed.

Murphy and Dingwall go on to observe that however careful an ethnographer is with anonymising the data, “...they are rarely able to give absolute guarantees that the identities of people and places will remain hidden” (2001, p. 341) - field notes and interviews simply provide too many clues, so that people who were involved can be made out, especially by those who might know them (in my case, congregation members and fellow ministers).<sup>604</sup> Where my insights differ from or contradict the insights presented by those who gave me interviews, I acknowledge that this research is not intended to disrespect anybody in any way. Although I need to state my views clearly, I do not mean to imply that I am the wiser person. I am simply making choices that are consistent with my viewpoint, biases and the “angle” from which I approach this research. I am arguing for a certain case – and in some instances I may well be reducing those with whom I disagree to straw men. As Murphy and Dingwall put it, “ethnographers are, at least potentially, able to exploit their authorial position by imposing interpretations on their data” (2001, p. 345). However, I would welcome anybody who feels I have misrepresented them to take up the issue with me and perhaps from that further interaction we might together find much better ways of addressing the problems of the shrinking church. I have studied to follow the advice of Murphy and Dingwall: “It is ..incumbent upon researchers to make themselves visible in the texts they write...and to present the evidence upon which their interpretations are made. By making the process of data analysis ‘public and reproducible’...and separating out the data from the researcher’s interpretation, authors open the possibility that their interpretations may be challenged.”

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<sup>603</sup> I am following John Wesley as closely as possible on this issue: But some may say, I have mistaken the way myself....It is probable that many will think this; and it is very possible that I have. But I trust, whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, “What I know not, teach thou me” (1787, p. vii).

<sup>604</sup> One extra step I have taken towards maintaining the anonymity of the ministers, in consultation with my promotor, is to save the transcriptions securely on figshare.com. If examiners wish to see the file, I can give them access if they contact me on [martinjohnmostert@gmail.com](mailto:martinjohnmostert@gmail.com) .

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(2001, p. 345)<sup>605</sup>. In my defence I have not consciously reduced the position of anybody to the point of ridicule. I have not intentionally left out important data that would have made a difference to these recommendations. And I do not offer these pragmatic observations as the final solution.

I further acknowledge that I must, as far as in me lies, avoid malfeasance, and actively promote beneficence (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001; Allan, 2008, 2011, p. 122) – I trust that this exercise will indeed prove to be helpful to the church rather than harmful in any way: “the justification for research lies at least partially in the belief that it will ‘make a difference’, although the benefits may accrue to the collectivity rather than to the particular individuals who take part in the research.” (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, p. 347). I also acknowledge that my work should actively promote the autonomy and self-determination of both the Methodist ministers I interviewed, the churches they pastor, and the alternatively faithed they live amongst (cf. Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). In addition, I understand that I may also not use anything I have discovered to perpetrate injustice in any way (cf. Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, pp. 346-7).

However, pragmatically, I do not anticipate any possible “real cost” to the ministers that I interviewed (cf. Murphy & Dingwall, 2001, p. 343). The circulation of this research is likely to be extremely limited – extending to my promotor, examiners and (possibly) the occasional research student. Any attempt of mine to publish my ideas further will be through more informal channels, and without the need to expose details of the interviews at all.

## **6.2. Rules of Art for a Liturgy of Conversion**

In the spirit of John Wesley, the great experimenter [0], what follows is my proposed method for potentially introducing or nurturing an organic approach to evangelism to the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Having argued for what I consider are the key elements of best practice in a liturgy of conversion, I now face the task of suggesting appropriate actions and communicating them: either the continuation of effective practices already in place, or the introduction of culturally and contextually effective strategies that will help local Methodist churches to evangelise and grow through conversion-growth once again<sup>606</sup>. It seems to me that the logic of my argument leads to a number of appeals to the Methodist Churches in Cape Town and churches of the world.

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<sup>605</sup> As I have noted above, this is difficult, given the confidentiality required for this study. But if required by a legitimate researcher I could give access to the interview transcriptions on figshare.com if contacted at [martinjohnmostert@gmail.com](mailto:martinjohnmostert@gmail.com) .

<sup>606</sup> Osmer refers to this process as developing “rules of art” which he defines as “open-ended guidelines that provide direction in carrying out an activity but require the creativity, skills and good judgement of the performer in a particular context” (Osmer, p. 227).

## The Liturgy of Conversion

I am at this stage in a position to respond to all the questions I posed myself in my introduction [see 1.1 above]. The ministers have made it clear that evangelism as they understand it is often unacceptable because they consider it to be behaviourally deviant: rude and insensitive, coercive and untruthful. They have shown a generally high level of embarrassment at this sort of undertaking, and are subsequently generally reluctant to endorse or promote evangelism. I have sought diligently to understand their evangelism theory, and it seems as if they generally hold a very tenuous account of how somebody is supposed to move from being not a Christian to being a Christian. There is an almost universal acceptance that the core executive mode of evangelism is silent witness: living an exemplary life that theoretically provokes questions about the faith commitment of the Christian. In addition, what ministers tend to call evangelism actually aligns to what I have called “evangelisation”, which may include elements of (my understanding of) evangelism, but focuses on formation of Christian disciples according to the values and precepts of the Gospel. Culturally I have shown that there are indeed different acceptable modes of evangelism – street preaching is still acceptable in some communities, for instance, if not in others. I have noted how threatening it is to consider spending time in the company of the alternatively faithed and persuading them to consider conversion to Christianity, and I have noted how liturgy as it is generally performed precludes a sense of concern for the outsider. There is no apparent fear of an influx of new believers disturbing the settled cultural norms of the churches – ministers generally expressed no anticipation of any conversions happening as a result of the life of the congregation; conversion was seen as a happy but uncommon (and unpredictable) by-product of being the authentic church. Where evangelism was envisioned it was indeed only seen as a voluntary compassionate activity on the part of wealthier people directed towards poorer people<sup>607</sup>. Congregations were generally focused on being a witness amongst people of their own demographic profile. Many ministers had tried to “patch” their congregations’ discipleship profile with some or other franchised course on evangelism, but only one (the Alpha Course) had generated any reports of conversions, and those only once. Despite pointed questioning, the ministers had remarkably little to say on the process of evangelism, other than a few who explained how they used their own conversion stories as an illustration in explaining the concept to others. Ministers made it clear that they were generally highly suspicious of manipulative and unethical evangelism, but were not able to counter-define an ethical approach to evangelism that might be of value to the church. There was hardly any concession to the fact that communication of the gospel might need to vary according to varying sub-cultural needs in the city.

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<sup>607</sup> Hoekendijk notes that “the classic examples of the objects of evangelism are always the drunkard and the sceptic....We can no longer reassure ourselves by disguising the heathen as moral and intellectual mavericks” (1964, pp. 18 - my translation).

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However, in conversation with John Wesley's *Journal* and the ministers' reported experiences, I have been able to formulate certain norms for what I consider to be an authentic, ethical liturgy of conversion. The ministers seemed to value conversion very highly, and acknowledge its usefulness in the spiritual lives of their disciples, and so I hope that the pragmatic suggestions in this chapter will be helpful in generating Methodist approaches to evangelism that are effective (in terms of leading to people seriously considering converting to Christianity) for the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century urban context.

In all the following suggestions, I have tried to take account of the norms that I developed in my previous chapter, and it is against these norms that I suggest all evangelism should be judged:

*Ethically*, is this attempt to persuade respectful, fair, allowing of the autonomy of the other, non-maleficent, truthful, faithful to the Bible, and responsible? Do the means that I use to communicate contain no false promises, no incomplete descriptions, no misleading comparisons, no bait-and-switch offers, no false demonstrations, no false testimonials, complete disclosures, and nothing hidden in the fine print? [5.2]

*In terms of socio-cultural norms*, does whatever I am setting out to do or say have a strong option for the poor, a clear reading of what must change and what must stay the same, and an easily understandable vision for the future? Does Methodism offer an acceptable counter-cultural identity to the inhabitants of the culture in which the church finds itself? [5.3]

*From a theological perspective*, does this evangelism arise out of the church's sense of mission, is it ecumenical, does it aim to bring Christians and the alternatively faithed together into the presence of God, does it find its own symbolic-ritual space, does it take people on a symbolic journey, and is it known to others as the liturgy of conversion? [5.4]

*And in terms of good practice*, does this projected action or message take people to the edges of their existence, does it take them outside their cultural structures, does it open people to alterity, sharpen the telling of the Christian story, enact the Word, adapt nimbly to contexts, and does it invite participation at multiple levels? [5.5]

From all of this it appears that the convening of liturgy of conversion would need to be a highly nuanced phenomenon – requiring sophisticated thought, authentic spirituality, and a tender and compassionate conscience. Wesley reminded his preachers that this was a task for which "...you will need all the grace and all the sense you have; and to have all your wits about you" (1779, p. 14). A matrix of norms with 32 variables might seem difficult to hold together conceptually, but I suggest that this complexity appropriately matches the complexity of the task; a liturgy of conversion is by this definition a complex socio-theological phenomenon.

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### 6.2.1 The Arts of Action for a Contemporary Liturgy of Conversion

A liturgy of conversion would need to have pragmatic rules of art for what it was expected to accomplish, and where it was expected to accomplish such actions.

#### **The Art of Serendipitous Reading of the Space between the Churches**

Many of the elements of symbol and ritual that we are familiar with (over-familiar with?) inside church buildings would be perfectly at home on the street as well. John Wesley was comfortable in his cassock at the town cross [0]. We don't have town crosses in Cape Town, but we can easily bring a cross with us; or constitute a cross from a pattern of refuse or a configuration of branches. We can just as easily kneel and pray on a pavement with street people as we can at a cushioned altar-rail in a church building. Serendipity is partly the capacity to look in detail at the potential for off-site symbol and ritual, using what one finds to encode the Gospel in meaningful ways; and it also makes use of stereotypes and half memories running in the minds of the alternatively faithed<sup>608</sup>. Since one norm for a liturgy of conversion is the intention of constituting sacred space for conversion off-site, then sometimes a tree or a set of steps or an empty shop-front can become the place where God can meet humanity through liturgy.

Most approaches to liturgy emphasize planning and control. Like the Fat Controller in Thomas the Tank Engine stories, everything of importance that happens has to be on schedule, planned down to the last minute for fear of dreadful confusion and inefficiency. In fact, Thomas the Tank Engine's major plot theme is the crisis caused by some or other threat to managerial order<sup>609</sup>. But if a liturgy of conversion is to embody the virtues of respect and inclusion of the outsider, and all the others, then the "liturgical plan" needs to be held very lightly by the liturgant. The time and the place might be agreed on and proposed by any Christian participants, but the alternatively faithed must be given complete liberty to join the convocation or not: one random variable is the always the will of the outsider to join in<sup>610</sup>. At other times the meeting time and place is nominated by the alternatively faithed, and the Christian liturgist must take the opportunity offered. Another issue is which specific outsiders will join in, and what will their specific needs be; will it be many, or a single person with all the significance of his/her unique personhood? Everything must be ready for the banquet,

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<sup>608</sup> One example of which might be the minister's white collar – still a powerful symbol in the eyes of many, and very useful in sending a message that "the church has arrived".

<sup>609</sup> MacIntyre offers the concept of three contemporary cultural "characters", one of whom is the "manager" – representing a cultural imperative for control of messy human variables in order to achieve maximum efficiency of output (1984, pp. 27-29).

<sup>610</sup> This is a highly inefficient use of Christians' time, waiting around for people to respond. But as Hoekendijk put it, "without 'calculated inefficiency' the character of freely given help is irrevocably lost" (1964, p. 146).

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but the invitees must also have the option of not turning up for the party; and perhaps the Methodist church might end up with a random assortment of humanity, rather than an easier-to-manage self-selected group of socially and religiously similar people.

One of the pleasures of reading the *Journal* is this sense of adventure that John Wesley reports: he ends up in ridiculous and uncomfortable situations. People he expected a good reception from reject him, and those from whom he fears rejection welcome him. He encounters unexpected dangers and hardships; and in the midst of them there are a constant stream of serendipitous encounters of grace and faith. Large planned meetings fail; venues are taken over by the competition or turn out to be uninhabitable, and sometimes they even collapse. But then some other venue opens up, and the Gospel is preached in unexpected places, and the unsought-for stranger becomes a believing friend.

The “liturgical mode” here is that planning can only get Christians out of church and into the public arena. After that liturgants need to be theologically and culturally nimble enough to cope with situations they encounter which might become impossible to control. This requires a humility to make do with whatever happens – harassment or interest, emotional conversion or emotional hostility, rudeness or respect or simply being ignored.

This is so counter-intuitive to what appears to be the usual direction of liturgical thought that I anticipate that it might be difficult for some conventionally trained liturgists to appreciate or even see the liturgical thread here. Liturgy is, in many people’s minds, planned down to the finest detail, by explicit definition. But there are signs that some liturgists understand that there is more to liturgy than the rubric; when Senn says that “As the whole of human life and endeavours is a system of rituals, so is the life and mission of the Christian community a system of rituals” (1997, p. 4) he seems to be saying that the only way any life is lived is through some sort of liturgy-infused serendipity. Some liturgies already even contain a scripted “off script” element, especially more contemporary liturgies of the white-majority Methodist churches, the Pentecostal-style liturgies of some coloured-majority Methodist communities, and even the traditional prayer-book liturgy used by the Xhosa-majority Methodist churches.<sup>611</sup> But my argument is that as soon as you admit the other-than-Christian into your liturgical calculations, the one thing you can expect is chaotic variability of interaction ...a recipe for chaos (which I argue would be entirely acceptable).

What embracing serendipity does is to throw open the incalculable happenings of the world as an arena for the potential action of God which *includes his people* and does not only reference the alternatively faithed as unchallenged in their domain. It affirms that God is the

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<sup>611</sup> In the Xhosa liturgy for morning prayers, this off-script element is the sometimes very volatile prayer in response to the preached word. It cohabits very comfortably with the unvarying formulae of the set liturgical prayers.

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God of all the earth. And it affirms a faith that God is active both in the churches *and* in the space between the churches, restoring the world to both God (as its rightful owner and creator) and the church (as the responsible stewards of even the unruly parts of the Kingdom Vineyard). In addition to that, it affirms that God's people are not in turn excluded from the secular world. God is not limited to acting in mysterious ways that bypass the church with regard to people "out there". Also, Christians have no reason to fear being publicly known as Christians by the alternatively faithed in the arenas that are not controlled by Christians. They are not obligated to be silent – they have a social (constitutional!) and theological right to speak and act *as Christians* in the public arena. We have to act, of course, in loving, wise, and ethical ways. But there will be moments when we can be liturgants in truly public liturgy, leading whoever responds with us into the presence of God. The church would then certainly be in a "...risky adventure of constant extreme improvisation" (Hoekendijk, 1964, p. 163)

## The Art of Interceding with and for People in the Spaces between the Churches

Prayer is one of the characteristic but unquantifiable elements of Christianity and Christian liturgy (cf. Senn, 1997, p. 41). Liturgy is the natural home of prayer: certain words are spoken at certain times by certain participants; ritual choreography of lament, confession, intercession and worship is solemnly scripted and enacted; and, as we have seen, in some Methodist formulae space is even given for ecstatic or impassioned solo or group expression that has not been specifically scripted. In the interview process the discussion of evangelism, conversion and liturgy did not bring out a great deal of data relating to prayer<sup>612</sup> [Table 3 Liturgy References in the Interviews]. It seems that those who are alternatively faithed, and, from the Christians' point of view, distant from God<sup>613</sup>, occupy little of the liturgical attention of the church in the "public" liturgy as it stands. There are the occasional references to Christians being witnesses (MCSA, 1975, pp. B7, B8), but not much of a sense of actually articulating the concerns of those who are being witnessed to. If, as I have argued, the evangelism of the alternatively faithed is a core concern of the Church, and if (as I have argued) the liturgy expresses the complete core concerns of the church in microcosm, then there seems to be a logical necessity for the conversion of the alternatively faithed to

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<sup>612</sup> Once again, if I had specifically jogged the attention of the ministers by including a specific question about prayer, there might have been more data. But perhaps this indicates a conceptual rift between evangelism and prayer that contributes to the general conceptual rift between "normal church" and "church-in-evangelism". Here again there needs to be further research.

<sup>613</sup> Christians debate whether or not the alternatively faithed are distant from God. But as I pointed out in [2.2.2], I am going on the creeds here – that is a debate for another place.

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occupy a more dominant position in the prayer of the church, articulated expressly in the lament/repentance/worship/petition/intercession of the church.

In many Methodist Churches the liturgy includes an element of serendipitous, extempore prayer. The liturgant is free to pray for whatever s/he chooses, and the scope of socio-political, healing, international affairs and psycho-spiritual concerns is impressively varied. But I cannot recall anybody except a very few liturgants ever praying for people to be converted to Christ<sup>614</sup>.

The rule of art application here seems to be fairly straightforward. Liturgical prayer can already include a very wide range of prayer for such subjects as the governments of South Africa and the United States, and legitimately applied to people suffering through Ebola outbreaks, poverty, wars and crime – people who are manifestly beyond the circle of the church itself. What is needed is a small conceptual adjustment that simply includes the possibility of another important category – those who are unconnected to the Methodist Church and distant from God. Christians experience conversion as transformation of their own lives – liturgical prayer for the conversion of others extends the courtesy of the possibility of this transformation to others.

The liturgy of conversion, however, can also take prayer one step further: out onto the street. I will deal with the practicalities of this later, but the rule of art is that prayer is the most characteristic – and the most transportable – of all the elements of liturgy. The Methodist liturgy expects Christians to be those who indiscriminately pray anywhere and everywhere<sup>615</sup>. The tradition of prayer thus has a tension between personal prayer and corporate prayer, and between private prayer and public prayer. If a liturgy of conversion is going to be an authentic part of the life of the church, it must be possible to harness this elemental force of Christian spirituality. My suggestion is that once again there needs to be a conceptual shift from the necessity to limit prayer to “home liturgy”, to the necessity to open it up as a public liturgical practice. The ground has been broken, as it were, by calling the in-house liturgy “public worship” – there is no objection in principle to the presence of strangers at Christian liturgy. The logical extension of a liturgy of conversion is to change the location and to increase the percentage participation of these outsiders.

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<sup>614</sup> On 2017-07-21, prayers at my church included urgent requests for rain, change in heart for men who oppress, rape and murder women, prompting for us to give more generously to those in need, and for the rise of ethical consciousness in the government of the country. Intercession is completely at the discretion of the liturgant. When I am tasked to pray, of course, I often pray for those who are distant to God or heading away from him.

<sup>615</sup> “It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should *at all times, and in all places*, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.” (MCSA, 1975, p. B51); “...it is our joy and our salvation, *always and everywhere* to give you thanks and praise...” (MCSA, 1975, p. B12)

## The Liturgy of Conversion

### The Art of Aesthetics: Art, Dance, Drama & Music

The default aesthetic mode of Methodist churches is music. Methodists sing and make music: Organs and kudu horns, thump-cushions and guitars, keyboards and tambourines, jembes and drum-sets, formal anthems, contemporary global music, Wesley hymns to English Melodies and Wesley hymns transmuted to rich and rare Xhosa hymnody...but I don't have a musicology brief here.

In addition, although at a much more subaltern level, art, dance, and drama have different ways of enriching the liturgy as it has come to be practiced. In one strand of Methodism it has become acceptable only in its most highly controlled of forms – stained glass, iconography and choral singing; the worship band in another; rhythmic drumming and dance in another. The liturgy of conversion perhaps calls for the release of the *wild* artist (the jazz singer, or the graffiti artist) and also the *folk* artist (the busker, the chalk artist, and the clown), the unpredictable, serendipitous practitioner of the formation of meaning from alternative symbols. If evangelism aims at "...helping individuals cope with the way things are, rather than seeking to form a disciplined people able to stand against the pretensions and illusions of the world" (Saunders & Campbell, 2000, p. 111), then it has lost its way. And one way of finding the path again might be through an assault on the imagination.

Wolterstorff sketches some of the dimensions of this assault – in his view art confirms and realizes elements of our world that we admire, illuminates what we have always known but perhaps not fully understood, shows us possible alternatives, provides an escape – at times – from unbearable reality, moves our emotions, models actions and attitudes, communicates ideas, and offers a vision to a landscape of joy (cf. Wolterstorff, 1980, pp. 144-150). It seems as if moving one's shoulders and hips to the music of faith carries an immense potential freight of meaningfulness.

Here we have another appearance of the first rule of art that I suggested: serendipity. What I suggest that the church might need is a capacity to cope with the emergence of effective liturgy that has not been mapped out fully in advance, but needs the active, voluntary presence of the alternatively faithed. This would appear to be most appropriately spearheaded by those who thrive on fashioning meaning out of debatable symbol. The liturgy of conversion anticipates the crossing of the boundary between some other faith commitment to a faith commitment to the way of Jesus, and as Hughes has it, "...the deep and implicit kinship between the arts (visual and acoustic) and worship lies precisely in the 'boundary pressing' iconicity of the former" (2003, p. 209)<sup>616</sup>.

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<sup>616</sup> I have extended Hughes' concept of "boundary" here in a way that he might not have intended, but I am fairly sure he would not have disapproved.

### **The Art of Counselling as Micro-Liturgy**

From a Wesleyan point of view, close conversation is the primary vehicle through which the specific Gospel interacts with the particular person [0]. A conversation with one may lead to a conversation with many, and then need to become a sermon, perhaps. But the goal of the sermon is yet more close, intimate, and specific conversation about how to cope with being a sin-addict at a buffet of temptations. The communication of the message of the Gospel does not necessarily have to be through a traditional one-to-many proclamation. It often happens best in a one-to-one private conversation, in which the liturgant gathers the minimum number for the promised presence of Jesus – the liturgy of two (Mathew 18:20)<sup>617</sup>. Perhaps the ultimate way to set out to match liturgical communication to a micro-context is to reduce the micro-context to the absolute minimum.

One of the many roles of the pastor of a congregation is as confidante and counsellor for the troubled. S/he listens with a theologically trained mind to the narrative of the trials and anguish of a parishioner, and leads her/him to a point of deeper insight into the character and will of God, and the shape of Christian obedience. This is essentially a micro-liturgy: it has its own rituals of convocation, word, sacrament and dismissal<sup>618</sup>. It is obvious that the alternatively faithed are subject to the same range of human problems as those within the Christian community. This constitutes a field of need that might be effectively met by Christians with compassionate hearts through a micro-liturgy of conversion.

The rules of art for a liturgy of conversion in this instance would involve the minor conceptual change to include the alternatively faithed as possible counselees. This would in turn need to have all the ethical checks and balances that need to be in place in any counselling situation: no preying on vulnerability allowed, no coercion, and the maximisation of agency ceded to of the counselee. But if we follow through the logic of Firet's analysis of the pastoral role, even though he does not seem to envisage a pastor acting outside of the Christian-controlled circle, "the 'change-agent' is one of the aspects of the multifaceted pastoral role" (1977, pp. 263 - my translation). And Firet argues that the change envisaged is not the same as that envisaged by the educator, the training director, the psychologist, or the social worker (1977, p. 256), but that it involves the mysterious but essential element of Christian

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<sup>617</sup> The best exposition of the "two-or-three" principle that I have read recently has been by Volf in his book *After Our Likeness*. His stance is that "Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well, perhaps a bad church, a church that may well transgress against love and truth, but a church nonetheless" (1998, p. 136).

<sup>618</sup> If we take Firet's thesis that the work of the "pastor" is "intermediary in the coming of God in his Word" to somebody else (1977, pp. 24 - my translation), and that the three principle ways in which the pastor acts are through "preaching, catechism, and the cure of souls" (1977, p. 25), then the "cure of souls" is one of the ways in which God comes into contact with people through his word – and it is only a minor theoretical adjustment to observe that those "souls" might well not yet have any allegiance to the Christian faith.

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conversion (1977, p. 257). Conversion involves receiving the inverted world of the Kingdom of God, "...where everything is exactly the opposite of this present age, [the inverse of] what is expected, what is normal – an upside-down world" (1977, pp. 262 - my translation). One such shocking inversion might well be an inside/outside somersault. Perhaps another inversion involved in a liturgy of conversion might be that here, at last, an alternatively faithed person finds a Christian who cares for her/him, who is prepared to listen, and is not cloistered in the Christian round of in-house preoccupations.

## The Art of Truly "Public" Speaking

White ministers mostly seem to assume, dismissively, that street preaching is dead, or an unwelcome survival of a judgemental and legalistic past. It is certainly not dead. Liturgants are constantly preaching on trains and busses, where they are welcomed by many<sup>619</sup>. They are also known for irritating those who feel that they have had their privacy invaded and are being subjected to harassment. But in many situations in Cape Town, it is culturally entirely acceptable to be exposed to street-eloquence, and passers-by seem to enjoy the oratory of passion and humour. People who listen to street preachers do still occasionally come to experience conversion<sup>620</sup>, and as I have shown, the acceptability of public oration is high in some culture groups.

Saunders and Campbell argue that "from the beginning the church's preaching was a missional act directed beyond the walls of the sanctuary, to the surrounding culture(s)" (2000, p. 97). In their view, the public proclamation of the Gospel is the characteristically political activity of the Christian community, since the Gospel challenges any evil indiscriminately (2000, p. 103)<sup>621</sup>. For them, street preaching is a powerful tool in the hands of the Christian community for reform, reconciliation, resistance and solidarity (2000, pp. 100-104). All these are the domain of public theology – so it appears that street preaching stands to bring the church into contact with its true constituency.

I suggest that the "rule of art" here is that preaching should be good oratory with worthwhile content. A constant attack on the supposed sins of the audience is less likely to persuade

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<sup>619</sup> I have a friend who was asked to preach by the bus driver on her long-distance bus trip to the Free State recently (personal conversation with Delia van Rooyen, 2012-05-04). She says that the driver shouted out "Where's the preacher? Who's going to preach to us?", so she spoke for an hour to a willing audience (except for those who turned up their earphone music, no doubt).

<sup>620</sup> I know of one such convert in Thailand, and several in South Africa.

<sup>621</sup> It could well be, conversely, that the diminution of evangelism to "mere comfort and concern with the hereafter" is because it has been taken off the streets and shut away inside the Christian community – where preachers cannot feel the political outcomes of the reigning elite nor feel the heat of the anger and despair of the oppressed.

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than an invitation to what is good, noble and liberative<sup>622</sup>. As I have shown, such scolding was not ever in the Wesleyan spirit [0]. In Aristotelian terms it should aim to persuade through delight and instruction. It should be studiously interactive, open to improvisation based on heckling and contributions by the hearers, acknowledging the shared ownership of the location. And in order for it to be truly Wesleyan it should be friendly, good-humoured, and affectionate.

It might stretch the credulity of some that street preaching could ever fulfil those criteria, but I suggest this is at least partly because truly public preaching has been abandoned by mainstream preachers and relegated to the less sensitive. Also, not many pulpit orators, perhaps, spend time exposing themselves to the varieties of oratories on offer in the city – and some of the pointed, passionate and compassionate preaching out there could perhaps enrich their pulpit work and challenge them to be more public in their proclamation themselves.<sup>623</sup>

### **The Art of Worship**

Liturgy of conversion can take worship from the guarded auditorium onto the open market place. There is no reason, as I have argued, that the Christian worship should not allow for spectators. As I have often noted, there is a verbal acknowledgement of this in the labelling the usual liturgy of the church as “public” liturgy. Visitors are welcome, even if they are not able to fully understand or relate to the symbolic world of the Christians. They are participants by virtue of their being able to witness the worship. The rise of band-led worship has in fact, in my opinion, created a significant spectator gap between liturgants and congregation anyway in many churches, making for more comfortable inclusion of marginally participative congregants, especially in massive auditoria<sup>624</sup>.

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<sup>622</sup> I was subjected to twenty minutes of browbeating once by a preacher on a train on the Southern Line in Cape Town, who hammered away at my supposed sins of adultery and drunkenness; he didn't even get close to my actual sins of pride and hypocrisy – I can only assume that I look more like a drunkard and adulterer.

<sup>623</sup> I am deliberately making no further reference to church-pulpit based preaching here. Keifert has written very helpfully about welcoming the stranger into church buildings (cf. Keifert, 1992); I am trying to make another point through this research: if we want to interact with strangers, the obvious place to meet them is outside the church buildings.

<sup>624</sup> Keifert's critique of the “culture of intimacy” is very helpful here in understanding how Kingdom principles invert our expectations – he argues in his opening chapter that outsiders are more likely to feel at home in churches if they are allowed just to spectate, and not badgered into unwanted intimacy: “Rather than seeking oneness, a pull that would surround and coerce the stranger, the public actor hospitably appreciates that irreducible difference” (Keifert, 1992, p. 80). He describes a condition of disruption by strangers which in my view is more likely to be found in the open *agora* than the closed “sanctuary”: “Provision of hospitality to the stranger is full of dynamic conflict. It requires a de-centering of our self-centered lives that is most disturbing. It requires risk and wisdom, since the stranger can and does do us harm. It means that we must be prepared to have the tables turned, to discover that we are the guests in need of hospitality” (1992, p. 59).

## The Liturgy of Conversion

If, then, the liturgy of the church can welcome and thrive with visiting spectators, then the liturgy of conversion should be able to do the same in spaces where the alternatively faithed notionally form a majority of the participants<sup>625</sup>. The intentionality of gathering in Jesus' name does not have to be shared by everybody before the promised presence of Jesus constitutes the liturgy. And where there are singing hearts it seems to me it would be entirely appropriate to have singing.

I would judge that the rule of art here is that spontaneous, heartfelt worship of God in public is potentially a high-indexical mode for communicating the Gospel. This would draw on the long heritage of Pentecost, and the shorter tradition of Wesleyan Methodist singing – but it would have to take the context of the listeners seriously. The cadences of popular music of the 18<sup>th</sup> century might have matched the cadences of the Wesley hymns<sup>626</sup>; but the Wesley hymns no longer match the cadences of the popular music of today – rock or hip-hop or kwaito. Another difference is that in Wesley's day the general population readily sang for entertainment – but now, for instance, urbanised people rarely sing, except perhaps when drunk and singing karaoke<sup>627</sup>.

This of course does not hold amongst the large population of Xhosa people, and significant groups from other cultures such as the Shona people of Cape Town, who sing loudly, musically, and apparently without embarrassment at seemingly any opportunity. The cadences of the Methodist Xhosa hymns are mercifully free from the straightjacket of Western hymnodic melody, and apparently a hymn is as good as any other song to sing<sup>628</sup>. In such circumstances, the singing of a rousing hymn is very likely to convene a liturgy of conversion, whereas the singing of a Western-style Wesleyan hymn outside a shopping mall is more like to encourage pedestrians to pick up their pace to get out of the area before anything embarrassingly religious happens<sup>629</sup>. In this as in every aspect of a liturgy of conversion, cultural sensitivity and nimble adaptability would be essential. For instance, it is possible to run a liturgy without any singing whatsoever.

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<sup>625</sup> My observation is that guitar playing used as advertising does not draw a crowd. Worship does - worship for the fun of it, unself-conscious and lost in wonder, not sad, self-conscious "kumbaya-ing".

<sup>626</sup> No evidence can be found that the Wesley brothers ever actually used tavern-song tunes for their hymns (McIntyre, 2017), contrary to popular ecclesial myth. But the Wesley hymns were undoubtedly highly popular and effective at carrying liturgical meaning for the first Methodists.

<sup>627</sup> For many people, it seems, music is performed on their behalf – it has been reduced to "that which is listened to".

<sup>628</sup> I have seen a municipal bus literally rocking on its springs as the passengers danced and sang a hymn *en route* to work in the early morning.

<sup>629</sup> I have noticed the recent cultural mode of the "flash mob", where an orchestra or a choir emerges seamlessly from the crowd and performs an unexpected, though minutely choreographed, musical piece (Pierce, 2012). The potential for liturgy of conversion is obvious, but beyond my capacity to research at this point.

### **The Art of Compassion: Affection with a Socio-Political Edge**

In order for a liturgy of conversion to become an ordinary feature of Methodist liturgy again, I suggest that ministers would need to have a key mind-shift with regard to evangelism: From disdain/disgust to approval/promotion [Figure 18 knowledge/feeling/will persuasion diagnostic]. This apparently improbable shift would need to be towards a point of seeing conversion to Christ as a great blessing to anybody who goes through it – a great good, and perhaps the greatest of great goods<sup>630</sup>. Further, it would need, perhaps, a shift towards seeing evangelism as the “proper” or “normal” channel for people to reach the point of conversion, and conversion as being the state of being happily Christian. Every pastor, I think, wants their congregants to be happily and confidently Christian. It seems that most of them invest their lives in leading people into that vision. And so perhaps evangelism could arguably be seen as the best thing that could happen to anybody.

This will be immediately offensive to many, who might see it as an idea that militates against the hard-earned victory of re-instating appropriate socio-political concern and will to the praxis of the churches. I myself would certainly never want the church to go back (or away) to any such life-denying chauvinism. My argument would be that a liturgy of conversion is serious about conversion – and conversion towards God is necessarily a conversion away from any evil, societal, political, or personal. But this then does not mean that I subscribe to the “trickle-out”<sup>631</sup> position that a multitude of personal conversions will inevitably lead to the development of a kindly and righteous society<sup>632</sup>. Christian communities who do not actively maintain an openness to the world will, in my opinion, inevitably drift into a world-despising and world-avoiding position. Wesley teaches us to deeply distrust our own spirituality and take methodical steps to move out into God’s world. Saunders and Campbell have a helpfully grounded take on the evangelism enterprise as an “extreme homiletic” where “...street preachers remind the ...church of the countercultural dimensions of the gospel. In a culture that seeks to relegate the Christian faith to the private sphere, street preachers embody the gospel’s public claims” (2000, p. 105).

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<sup>630</sup> As I have argued, Wesley would have had no concept of conversion not existing alongside, and being expressed in, social justice – he was a salvation-and-sanitation man, a redemption-and-rights man, an evangelist and educationalist.

<sup>631</sup> It seems to me that “trickle out” evangelism is perhaps as unlikely to bring about social justice as “trickle down” economic theory.

<sup>632</sup> To cite a somewhat reactionary theorist, who believes that social justice should never be considered a part of the good news: “Biblical evangelism ... touches society at the level of unregenerate heart and ‘new creatures’ in Christ possess transformed lives which change families, communities, and even nations” (Johnston, 1987, pp. 194-195). This seems like egregious nonsense to me, in the light of the vast inequities and injustices that need changing in the nations, communities and families of the world. Wesley would have said we have a duty of reproving our neighbour (1985, pp. 511-520).

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For many inhabitants of the urban postmodern paradigm, it seems that the idea of holism has often overwhelmed religious practitioners to the point where they tend towards having a social justice ethic *with no evangelism* – which is a logical contradiction of the concept of holism. Myers comments on this helpfully: “Sensitivity is a good thing, but making ourselves silent is not” (Myers, 1999, p. 225). If there is such a thing as ethical persuasion, and I have tried to show that there can be, then evangelism could be seen as one of the nicest things we might do for our fellow human beings – one of the kindest, most self-giving and responsible of attitudes towards the alternatively faithed.

For those who still inhabit a Christendom paradigm, the challenge of a liturgy of conversion is slightly different: it rebukes parochialism and admonishes Christians to make sure they are embracing the stranger. Christian leadership through evangelism, in a context less impacted by globalisation (pre-post-Christendom?), becomes less about maintaining a partisan power base, and more about giving away agency to both Christians and the alternatively faithed.

Compassion, in my understanding, reflecting on the interviews with the ministers and the *Journal*, is intended to be neither naïve nor judgemental. Sin is not a problem because it offends a Christian sensibility, but because it blocks somebody with an alternative faith from reaching their full potential as a human being (in the same way that it might block a notional Christian from reaching *their* full potential.) The rule of art here is that the tone of delivery of a liturgy of conversion should radiate affection and camaraderie.<sup>633</sup> This of course needs to be a genuine emotion: not an appearance of love that hides some other attitude towards the alternatively faithed, but a high-indexical correspondence to a true attitude of deep concern for the well-being of the other. By its nature, then, this would be difficult to describe as a “rule of art”. Dale Carnegie’s classic book on persuasion that prescribes techniques for “winning friends and influencing people” does exactly that, without apology or apparent self-awareness (1936, pp. 196-197). What I have in mind here is an immovable obstacle: without a self-aware sense of compassion for those being evangelised – in themselves and in their own right, and not with a view to any advantage of any sort accruing to the liturgist - I would strongly discourage anyone from trying to convene a liturgy of conversion.

The rule of art here, then, is that a Wesleyan liturgy of conversion is a warm affection for socio-politico-spiritual people and a concern for every aspect of their wellbeing.

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<sup>633</sup> I favour the word “affection” because one does not want to project an offensive air of patronisation – nor an infantilising tone – and it is one that Wesley favoured. The best person-to-person tone is one of adult-to-adult respectful affection: warm but not forced, authentic not manipulative – the adult-to-adult transaction favoured by the transactional analysts (Harris, 1967, 1973, pp. 31-34).

## 6.2.2 The Arts of Site-Selection for a Liturgy of Conversion

Saunders and Campbell argue, with regard to relocating preaching onto the street, that "...the recovery of missionary vision and vitality in ... churches may require just such a move" (2000, p. 88). The same applies, I would argue, to Cape Town and the cities of Africa. What is needed is the location of spaces – contemporary *agora* - in one's local urban landscape where off-site liturgy of conversion might be staged. In the course of trying to live out a liturgy of conversion, I have shared (and investigated sharing) space with the alternatively faithed in the following shared locales – there are no doubt many other places that creative, observant and nimbly adaptive liturgants might identify.

### The Art of Presence at Transport Hubs

It is typical of contemporary Cape Town that a train station, bus station and minibus taxi<sup>634</sup> terminus will all be grouped together by the dictates of urban planning. The newly refurbished transport hubs have wide corridors for the convenient movement of large numbers of people. Typically there is a great deal of physical space for the convening of liturgical events<sup>635</sup>.

There are a number of issues, however, with these spaces. One is that people are wary of crime – robbery and pick-pocketing are a constant low-level anxiety in people's minds, discouraging them from involvement in spontaneous liturgical gatherings. Another issue is that these are *conduits* of the poor. People are often in a hurry to reach their places of work, or do their shopping and get back to work. They are not places of leisure, and a liturgical approach needs to take account of the fact that a leisurely hour might not be available to this harassed humanity. Thirdly, they are often already the site of what I would consider to be sub-optimal liturgical interventions – judgemental orators or exploitative manipulators<sup>636</sup>. As a result any liturgant with a liturgy of conversion will tend to be viewed with disdain or alarm, and will need considerable continuity of presence over time to reassure the public of their

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<sup>634</sup> In South Africa a "taxi" refers primarily to a minivan running along a semi-formal bus-route. We do have metred taxis and the Uber app also works in Cape Town, but they do not feature in the lives of the poor.

<sup>635</sup> Municipal regulations for Cape Town allow for any expression of views or gathering of people (not exceeding 15) on "road reserve" space (pavements) so long as this does not block the flow of pedestrians, involve the selling of goods or promotion of commercial services, or involve a breach of the peace. I have tested these in the face of officious harassment by security personnel on several occasions.

<sup>636</sup> I once was in competition for space at Wynberg Station with a group aggressively selling "holy water" that had been blessed by a particularly "powerful" Christian leader. I had my saxophone and was playing old favourite hymns nominated by drunk people, so we eventually won sole possession of the territory fair and square by dint of popular acclaim and volume. Personality-wise not everybody can do this. But anybody can do something.

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bona fides. And fourthly, these venues often are very quiet on a Sunday, with few commuters passing through – if chosen, then Sunday should not be the day of liturgy.

Having said this, on other days of the week these are very convenient places to interact with a wide cross-section of the population of Cape Town – excluding perhaps the wealthy. In the context of Cape Town demographics passers-by will be largely Christian people, usually with a strong allegiance to some church. As a result, it has become clear to me that any crowd that is convened seems to fail on the criterion of liturgy of conversion in that one seems to be dealing with a self-selected Christian audience. This speaks to the finding of a micro-context-specific approach that actually allows and encourages the alternatively faithed to join in the liturgical process. Gathering a crowd is simple; gathering the alternatively faithed is less easy.

### The Art of Presence on Pavements Outside Church Buildings

A very natural and easily accessible place for convening liturgy of conversion is on the road reserve outside or near the church buildings. A congregation can very conveniently spill out into its own parking lot (if it had one, of course). This has several communicative advantages. The general urban population expects churches to be closed to them, and so the message conveyed by Christians being outside in the areas under only marginal control of the church, or on the pavements, is that this liturgy is genuinely public, not private<sup>637</sup>.

It also allows a more convenient conceptual bridge for the alternatively-faithed: sheer proximity to “sacred space” announces that the liturgy of conversion is about Christianity. Contrary to the doctrine of anonymity<sup>638</sup>, it seems to me that outsiders might well be more at ease if they knew up-front that they were dealing with a publicly persuasive liturgy of conversion rather than being subjected to some covert operation of influence.

A church that habitually sits on its own front doorstep seems to me to have more options for conversations with its neighbours and passers-by than a church which maintains its privacy behind electronic fences and massive doors<sup>639</sup>.

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<sup>637</sup> A minister friend I spoke to, let us refer to him as ME013, although his interview is not included for various reasons, considers that this provides “visibility and an open door to the community” [personal conversation 2017-10-31].

<sup>638</sup> I refer to the commonly held belief that Christians should take care that there is nothing about them to distinguish them as Christians, so that any relationships they might build can smuggle in Christian content. I am not convinced that the alternatively faithed feel respected by this Trojan horse approach (they certainly are not likely to be fooled by it).

<sup>639</sup> The classic image of a church frontage seems to me to be that of a door that appears able to resist determined assault with siege weapons.

### **The Art of Presence in Shopping Centres**

Shopping Centres, especially the great malls, jealously guard their territory and, from sad personal experience, eject any public liturgant who might be inclined to convene any injudiciously overt liturgy of conversion on their premises.

However, municipal regulations *do* allow for public liturgy – subject to the usual municipal restrictions - on any convenient road reserve immediately adjacent to such premises. These spaces represent what seems to be a “true” cross section of the urban population – wealthy and middle-class shoppers and business people, working class shoppers and service providers, and the poor, who find that the bins of the wealthy yield enough for maintaining life. Of course, this cross section is not “true” in the sense of proportional representation.

These are places of marginally more leisure – they are one of the new urban cultural gathering places, and people are strongly encouraged to loiter, with the hope of persuading them to buy the merchandise on offer<sup>640</sup>. Working staff take smoke-breaks during which they constitute multi-cultural gatherings in sheltered outdoor corners, and shoppers spend a considerable amount of time in leisurely browsing of the shops and visiting restaurants. Into this environment of infinite options it seems appropriate to introduce the option of the Gospel at times, specifically through some or other liturgy of conversion.

### **The Art of Presence at Market Stalls**

Markets with various small stalls selling a wide variety of merchandise are a feature of Capetonian urban life. From the *tshisa nyama* (barbecued meat) markets on the entrances to Khayelitsha from the N2 freeway, to the trendy craft markets in Rondebosch Park or Constantia, or to the Milnerton flea-market, they are places used for selling commodities for the stallholders and shopping-entertainment for their clientele. Some of them are daily markets; some repeat weekly, monthly or annually. They are invariably run by renting out the space to the stall-holders, who are then at liberty to sell whatever products or services they choose in order to make a profit from the occasion.

It seems appropriate for churches to consider convening liturgy of conversion in such markets. Some markets might have house-rules against certain types of liturgical interventions; but generally the type of liturgy of conversion I have been exploring could find a comfortable presence by renting a stall and staffing it with public liturgants.

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<sup>640</sup> For instance, the parking tariff at Cavendish Square, an up-market shopping mall about 100 meters from my church building, has a bias towards those spending about three hours there.

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### **The Art of Presence in Pubs, Clubs, Shebeens & Liquor Stores**

Appropriate liturgy of conversion is entirely plausible as an activity conducted in the drinking and socialising places of Cape Town<sup>641</sup>. The Gospel example of Jesus fraternising with drunkards (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34) is currently not taken literally by most Christians that I know<sup>642</sup>, and apparently not at all by the Ministers – at least not according to the interviews. Perhaps I am doing them an injustice and they are simply not emphasizing their ministry in such places out of modesty, or for fear of congregational backlash<sup>643</sup>. But this last point raises the further question of why the Churches seem so implacably hostile to everything about the drinking culture of the city? Although I am acutely aware of the terrible scourge of alcohol abuse at all levels of society (cf. Morojele & Ramsoomar, June 2016), these are nonetheless often exactly the places where a liturgy of conversion might be highly effective. The drinking places are the places where the alternatively faithed often go for the healing effects of conversation and the mood-therapy of alcohol. They are places where people sometimes say what they truly think, and where confidences are shared.<sup>644</sup>

The city-wide cultural range of the drinking places is very diverse. They are well-known for establishing clienteles amongst specific sub-cultures, where self-selecting social groups gather to be amongst likeminded people and, perhaps, to shelter from urban diversity. Just like churches, in fact. If the church were to become interested in interacting with the mass of alternatively-faithed cultures, a familiarity with the drinking establishments might potentially be a cultural-anthropologically important element of establishing liturgies of conversion.

This, then, seems to be another arena in which the church might establish meaningful evangelistic connection, with appropriate creativity and effectiveness.

### **The Art of Presence in Coffee Shops & Restaurants**

In some sectors of society, specifically those of the middle-classed and wealthy, social interaction often happens around a meal or coffee in a restaurant. My suggestion is that this

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<sup>641</sup> So long as one keeps drinking - and one does not have to drink alcohol – barkeepers are happy to have anyone in a pub. There might be house-rules, but a liturgy of conversion that is rich in counselling and prayer, even inductive Bible study, is very acceptable in many drinking environments.

<sup>642</sup> Of all the local preachers in my circuit at the moment, only my friend Rita Toto and I have ever spent time in bars getting into contact with the alternatively faithed.

<sup>643</sup> When I suggested to a Christian NPO that I occasionally consult for that in order to approach their goal of meeting Christian ministers in Gugulethu that they schedule their gatherings at Mzoli's, a popular local meat restaurant, they objected that ministers would not want to be seen by their congregants in a place "where liquor was sold". From my perspective, Mr Mzoli is a Methodist in good standing and they would merely be making use of an appropriate secure meeting space in the township.

<sup>644</sup> Although the general stance of Methodism is hostile to the alcohol trade, some Methodists do not feel bound by their consciences never to enter a bar for drinks. And it is possible to spend time in a bar without drinking alcohol.

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constitutes exactly such a space for the liturgy of conversion as I have been outlining. Wesley modelled a highly open attitude to sharing meals with all sorts of people, from gentry to peasants. There are a wide range of social spaces for meeting with people in and around Cape Town, from the tshisa nyama stalls in the townships to the food malls (more down market) or fancy coffee shops (more up market) in the shopping centres, from hole-in-the-wall food dispensers to university food-halls. In terms of locations between the churches it seems that it would be highly appropriate to convene a liturgy of conversion at a restaurant table<sup>645</sup>.

Another issue is the importance of eating culturally local food for the sake of rapprochement with a different sub-cultural group<sup>646</sup>; next to language, food is perhaps one of the most cherished elements of cultural self-identity. This would be particularly relevant if one were to find an immigrant group setting up their cultural “turf” near one’s church. My suggestion would be that one very effective way to start the process of learning and prayer that could be the basis of any liturgy of conversion might be to seek out restaurants serving culturally specific food. Eating fatty mutton and noodles with one’s fingers might be a good communicative element for a credible liturgy of conversion.

There are, once again, house rules which would determine the form such liturgy might take – singing or dancing might be ruled out (or not), for example, depending on the specific restaurant culture<sup>647</sup>. How this space differs from road reserve is similar to drinking places. Neither the Christian nor the alternatively faithed participants in such a liturgy of conversion have ownership of the space. It is a neutral locale into which both parties enter with the understanding they will both be able to access the community benefits so long as they abide by the rules.

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<sup>645</sup> The cultural range of such potential places of meeting is well illustrated by the amenities available at Cavendish Square, my nearest big shopping mall. There are distinctly up-market restaurants, and then there is the food court. And then there is the boerewors roll stand outside, and the halaal coffee and cigarette shop nearby. There are even slightly different classes of coffee shop in the mall: one serves a palate cleanser of soda water with an expensive small cup of coffee; others sell more robust mug-fulls. But all are very well patronised, although the demographic of the different arenas is strikingly different.

<sup>646</sup> Cape Town Methodist churches have perhaps tended to become victims of their own highly successful enculturation into their sub-cultural groups. This was initially partly a concession to pressure from the apartheid regime culture. However, now there is an influx of economic migrants from the rest of the continent, and as ME004 recognised, they constitute a new urban evangelism concern for the churches between which they domicile themselves. Plus the different subcultural groups might well need cross-cultural evangelism input. But the differentiated Sunday is working so smoothly that it would take a great deal of effort to institute a multi-cultural liturgy – efforts are being made to do so, but with mixed success – this could be a very interesting field for further research and reflection.

<sup>647</sup> And presumably the type of singing or dancing.

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### The Art of Event-Fringe Presence

Society in general has many large social events: music concerts and festivals, sports events, religious festivals, parades, trials and protests. These call out large crowds of people, and are generally accompanied by high emotion and, often, public intoxication. They are the places where people from reserved urban cultures sometimes have transcendental experiences – and the most secular of activities have their own liturgical patterns and liturgants.

These events are normally characterised by the functional absence<sup>648</sup> of Christians – except for those events which are designed by and for Christians, which are sadly characterised by the apparent functional absence of the alternatively faithed. Christians invite the alternatively faithed through advertising and personal persuasion to attend their events - which is one of the prevailing models of evangelism. Christians seem to feel very exalted and open to spiritual sensations at such gatherings, and believe that visitors will similarly experience the closeness of God, and the pleasure of Christian company, alongside them. This might very well be the case. But my argument here is that if Christians expect people to learn Christianity at Christian mega-functions, and if Christians want to learn the sub-cultures of the alternatively faithed it stands to reason that Christians should themselves attend the cultural mega-functions of the alternatively faithed.

This would necessitate a conscious effort to attend events like Africa Burns, KK & K, The Grahamstown Arts Festival, Soccer and Rugby matches, music festivals (like the Flamjangled Tea party and Earthdance), protest marches, and the public festivals of the various alternative religions in Cape Town. The liturgy of conversion requires conversation, conversation requires contact, and at public festivals and events this there is an unrivalled opportunity to listen and learn. However, my argument for a liturgy of conversion would also be that Christians have something to say on their side of the conversation at these events. Christians must learn, but they are also given their turn to speak. Of course that liturgical interchange cannot happen without the prior consideration of affectionate, invested, respectful contact – it will not emerge from an adversarial, hostile approach<sup>649</sup>. I suggest that one needs to actually pitch a tent at the trance party, and pray and sleep and eat amongst the party-goers, before any genuine liturgy of conversion can take place.

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<sup>648</sup> As I outlined earlier, many Christians tend to reduce their faith-footprint to almost zero in spaces not controlled by the church.

<sup>649</sup> An example of outdoor ministry run on a deliberately hostile and confrontational ethos is the breathtakingly abrasive Jedd Smock (Elizalien, 2012).

## Conclusion

The “rule of art” that I argue for here is the prior necessity for actual, meaningful and ongoing contact with those who do not share the Christian world view. It seems to me that liturgy of conversion will *not happen* automatically with the way things are currently set up in our churches; worse than that, it will *automatically not happen*. Somehow the Church needs to have time and effort set aside for persuading the alternatively faithed to consider the way of Jesus; “We must not fool ourselves”, says Mittleberg. “Churches will never become contagious by chance. Contagious churches result when leaders know what they’re trying to build and who they’re trying to reach – and then work tirelessly and prayerfully to fulfil their objectives” (2000, p. 26). Only very rarely will a Methodist outsider ever be converted unless this happens, and John Wesley set the precedent for making it happen.

### 6.2.3 The Arts of Including the Alternatively-Faithed in Formulation of Liturgy of Conversion.

Of all the possible liturgical activities of the church, a liturgy of conversion cannot be credible, in my view, unless it is jointly created by its constituting members: the lost-and-found people of God. This does not simply happen because one happens to be in the physical proximity of outsiders. It is deeply ironic when public liturgants perpetuate the very meaning-barriers the alternatively faithed would have found had they attended a Sunday service through laager-formation and jargon. The few Christians who brave the streets often seem to be acting as if the alternatively faithed were a threat to their existence.

One of the initial issues to be faced in developing this rule of art is that the Gospel will be “*old* good news” for the Christians participating in it, but “*new* good news” for those who are first considering it. This means that the issue of intentional and effective interpretants comes to the fore (Hughes, 2003, p. 146): are Christians helping the alternatively faithed through a liturgy of conversion that encapsulates the “good reasons” for their faith (Fisher, 1987, p. 57) in a way the alternatively faithed might be expected to understand?

I suggest that the only way to get to this point is through conversation – the gradual negotiation of meaning through the telling of stories (Mostert, 2003, pp. 63-68)[2.1.1], which, as I have shown was at the heart of Wesley’s method. This is, once again, a weakness of this research project, in that it has not been practicable to systematically include the voice of the alternatively faithed in the process. The Facebook interaction that I have appended stands for one such move towards their inclusion, but much more work needs to be done [Appendix B]. In particular, liturgants need to interact specifically with the sub-culture (or cultural mix) of the people amongst which the liturgy of conversion is convened. And

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perhaps the only way that this could happen would be by the Wesleyan trial-and-error process of actually attempting liturgy of conversion in different places. In this, as in all revolutionary theory, action and reflection must combine to form a legitimate praxis (Freire, 1970, p. 68).

The “rule of art” that I wish to articulate here is that a liturgy of conversion should operate intentionally within the meaning-field of the alternatively faithed, fashioned principally through the medium of conversation.

### 6.2.4 The Arts of Removing Barricades to the Liturgy of Conversion

A liturgy of conversion should reduce or eliminate unnecessary barriers between Christians and the alternatively faithed, in the quest of making liturgy truly public. In terms of the handling of the built environment of the church, this would then involve such things as opening gates and doors, and building or occupying open-fronted architectural spaces or atria<sup>650</sup>. In the case of a listed building built on English parish-church lines, perhaps an initial move might be made from building-bound liturgy to liturgy in the church parking lot (if it has one), or in a nearby playground, where there could be informal interface with the passing public. Since all the Methodist Church buildings in Cape Town seem to have been constructed on defence-of-privacy principles, any move out of the confines of the church building and into proximity with the alternatively faithed is, in terms of a liturgy of conversion, a movement in the right direction.

But the appearance of openness is not the only element to consider. If somebody, for instance, were looking for a “church” because they felt the sudden urge to pray (after hearing a cancer all-clear verdict, perhaps; or on a sudden whim to pray<sup>651</sup>), depending on their cultural background, they would probably look out for the next building that represented “church” to them. Quite possibly they might look for stonework, steps, railings and those very massive wooden doors that I am so hostile towards<sup>652</sup>. But they would probably find the doors locked, in our wounded and suspicious days. If there is any validity in the theory that a church by existence draws people to the light it exudes, (and I believe there is), then a liturgy of conversion would perhaps seek to find ways to make the building itself to be a serendipitous element in the spiritual search of random passers-by. If we believe that the

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<sup>650</sup> I was involved in conflict over the redesign of our church premises a decade ago: I was strongly in favour of having a glass front to our auditorium, with high visibility for the passing public. In the end we got solid walls and a beautiful glass airlock-type narthex featuring two successive sets of massive wooden doors.

<sup>651</sup> I have met people wandering into our church building on both these counts.

<sup>652</sup> Jacobsen makes the comment that “Buildings not only protect us from the weather, but also communicate with us....Architectural language can tell us about a building’s use” (2003, p. 106).

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alternatively faithed should have open access to our liturgy, then we need to take account of the possibility that the spiritual awakening of outsiders might happen on a schedule other than open-on-Sundays-only. Christians might need to make some moves towards more actual open time for their buildings.

Keifert is an interesting example of the difficulty people seem to have in conceptualising this. His book, *Welcoming the Stranger*, is predicated on the “uninvited visitor”, who carries the appropriately Carrollian name of Barbara Whiterabbit<sup>653</sup> (1992, pp. 1-2). There is no reason given why she should have turned up in church, and no consideration of why she had not been invited. Everything only starts once she has entered the door (1992, p. 99). The “rule of art” in this instance, then, is to re-examine what psychological and physical barriers to the outsider are an “ordinary” part of Methodist architectural personae. This analysis has to be done quite ruthlessly from an outsider’s point of view – Christians often do not realise that their beloved railings and doors and steps might say something completely different to the outsider than they think they are saying to them.

### **6.2.5 The Arts of Maintaining a Home Liturgy**

This is the province of most writers on liturgy – ensuring that the liturgy that happens in Christian controlled spaces is meaningful and effective for all – persuasive to both insiders and outsiders through its culturally relevant formulation. They generally plead for an intensification of worship, a richer, fuller and more meaningful return, perhaps, to the intended meaning of liturgy (Senn, 1997, p. 44). Marva Dawn pleads for a more thoughtful approach being a blessed relief for those wearied by intellectual and aesthetic trivialisation<sup>654</sup>.

They are aware of “strangers”, but by this they mostly seem to mean people who have become culturally estranged from the church rather than those who occupy worldviews formed by alternative faith commitments. Strangers appear only to be of relevance once they have entered sacred Christian space. Liturgist seem to pay little attention to the persuading of people to consider the Gospel: perhaps they assume that such hard work has already

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<sup>653</sup> The inscrutable inner compulsions and random movements of the white rabbit in Lewis Carrol’s *Alice in Wonderland* seem to catch the bewilderment that the alternatively faithed seem to generate in the consciousness of the church. But unlike Alice, we are never allowed into the wonderland world that the white rabbit rushes off into; Keifert keeps us in the domain of the usual and the canny. Perhaps, like Alice in the book, we ought to follow the white rabbit into *his* wonderland.

<sup>654</sup> Dawn makes the good points that “Christian worship at the turn of the century is being affected adversely by aspects of our culture that ‘dumb down’ everything” (1995, p. 5). She fears that our character is at stake: “...the vitality and faithfulness of our personal and corporate lives and the effectiveness of our outreach to the world around us depend on the character that is formed within us” (1995, p. 4).

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been done before the liturgical participant enters the church building. Or perhaps they do not believe that such a conceptual and commitment movement is necessary.

Having said this, I believe that the project of making the in-house liturgy of the church rich and evocative and authentic is an extremely important one. As far as he goes (which, as I have frequently noted, is not outside the church building) I agree with Keifert's evaluation that "effective evangelism and liturgical worship belong together in a mutual apostolic mission" (1992, p. 5). I can see no objection to spending time and taking infinite pains with crafting a worship experience that enriches participants' lives by taking them on Hughes' journey in towards the presence of God at the edge of chaos and safely back again. This constitutes the Church's private privilege, and one which the church should be very ready to allow strangers to enter and spectate. It is indeed part of the public duty of the church to have home/private liturgy too. But this is the Christian's home, the place of relief from stress and a place for healing of the battered soul. From the point of view of liturgy of conversion theory, there is nothing wrong with this. In fact there is everything right with this. I am not advocating for no privacy – human beings, Christians included, need private, energising times in which their responsibilities are lifted and they can refresh the experiences of their faith through focused ritual and intentional worship. After all, as Dawn says, "if worship only attracts and does not disturb or quicken, it will leave visitors and regular participants unchanged" (1995, p. 287). A relaxed, non-exclusionary privacy, where Christians do Christian things, is completely acceptable, in my view. Bosch envisaged this as one pole of a double-centred dynamic ellipse (1991, pp. 385-386).

If, as it appears, only people who are converted or converting take part in the usual liturgy of the Church, then a liturgy of conversion could be seen, in fact, as the opening the door for people to enter this "home" or "private" liturgy. In the liturgy of conversion the alternatively faithed person is confronted, unexpectedly, perhaps, with the mysteriously present Kingdom of God. In the "home liturgy"<sup>655</sup> the new convert is nurtured and socialised into the family of the Kingdom of God. The "rule of art" that I envisage here is the necessity for creating and maintaining a home for Christians where new converts can grow and flourish too. From the perspective of a liturgy of conversion, half the "task of church" is already being done, and being done with grace, focus and energy. A liturgy of conversion concerns what may possibly be the missing half of liturgy.

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<sup>655</sup> It occurs to me that a signal of a mind-shift towards a liturgy of conversion would be to start referring to the church's currently un-public "public liturgy" as "home liturgy"; it would be more accurate, and more helpful in the project of connecting with those who are not yet home.

## 6.2.6 The Arts of Recovering Public Humility

Acknowledgement and confession of sin has its due liturgical place in our services of worship (MCSA, 2014, pp. 15-1.16, 17-1.25). But it does not seem to me that the message being received by the alternatively faithed is that Christians consider themselves to be sinful people who are living a humble, penitent and forgiving lifestyle [1.1.1.1Appendix A]. The liturgy might say one thing, but the effectual interpretant seems to be way off what the church intends to communicate<sup>656</sup>. Christians, it seems, often appear arrogant and judgemental to outsiders.

One idea that appears fixed in the collective consciousness of the alternatively faithed is that Jesus himself was a very humble man, living a simple lifestyle and calling his followers to imitate him<sup>657</sup>. Respondent PF is excoriating when she lashes out at the sort of Church she has grown up with: “Oh DO fuck off with your patronising bullshit and pretending to care. What I find unforgivable are "Christian" families disowning their children for being gay or trans. It doesn't matter what you call yourself, you do not have a shred of decency or compassion and you're not even attempting to follow the path of Christ” [1.1.1.1Appendix A]. Any public demonstration of Christian wealth, power, unkindness or hubris is derided as demonstrating the hypocrisy of Christians and the unworkability of Christianity (cf. Schoeman, 2014).

As a result, I suggest that an important “rule of art” for a liturgy of conversion is that public liturgants should adopt a stance of humility, what Osmer suggests is a uniquely Christian virtue in which the other’s interests are put ahead of one’s own, and one’s competence is held lightly, with an openness about its limitations (2008, pp. 193-194). The most important public outworking of this is that Christians should study to come to be known for their accepting stance towards alterity, and their attitude of fellowship in human need [0]. This might well be enhanced by a preparedness to occupy a powerless place in the public forum, defenceless against the criticism of the alternatively faithed, open to immediate rebuke whenever this standard is perceived to be violated.

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<sup>656</sup> Largely because, I contend, the church is not setting out to communicate with the alternatively faithed in the first place; it is, effectually, leaving them to draw their own conclusions.

<sup>657</sup> Commissar Buyiseni Ndlozi of the EFF party in South Africa recently wrote an insightful article on the contradiction between Jesus and the church in terms of ecclesial wealth accumulation (Ndlozi, 2015).

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### 6.2.7 Conclusion: Rules of Art

It might be helpful if I summarised my Rules of Art in a diagram:

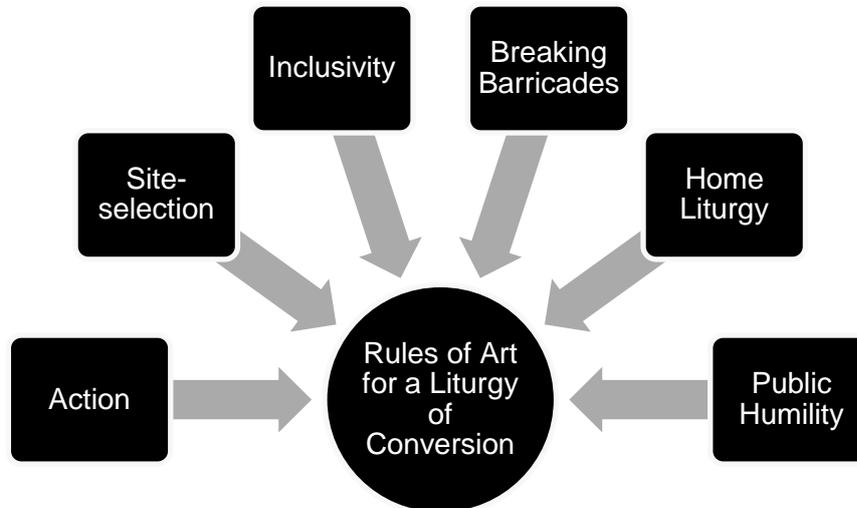


Figure 14 Rules of Art for a Liturgy of Conversion

### 6.3. *Tactical terrain: Mapping Liturgy of Conversion*

These “rules of art”, infused with the logic of a liturgy of conversion, can already be seen modelled in various ways here and there in the life of the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Although none of these options constitute a major element of the liturgical life of any of the churches of ministers I interviewed, it is nevertheless significant that the ideas I have been developing are not novel. I suspect that the corporate influence of Wesley, attenuated though it might be, makes sense of the occasional excursions into the public life around the churches: unarticulated as it might be, the influence of Wesley appears to be still having deep influence on the Methodist church.

Some of the instances that I cite below emerged from the interview process; but many of them are taken from my general experience – and in this I am occasionally alternating with my auto-ethnographic persona, as outlined in chapter 2. I feel extremely diffident about using my own experiences so heavily – I do not consider that the work I have done in this line has perfectly matched my stated values, and certainly the process of research, the interaction with the ministers and Wesley’s *Journal*, are already impacting on my praxis. And also, in fact, a great deal of the insight I have gained in this research has derived from reflection on my own failures and difficulties in carrying out an inarticulate sense of calling to “the outsider”.

What all the approaches I describe in this section have in common is that they have involved Cape Town Methodists and they have played out in the vicinity of Methodist Churches in

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Cape Town – so they are all liturgies of conversion<sup>658</sup> that I have direct experience of. There are many other models that I know of in other Methodist Churches in South Africa, and in other denomination churches in Cape Town, and in churches on other continents and other cities of the world, which I would also consider embody the principles of the liturgy of conversion. This is in no way intended to be an exhaustive list of possibilities. In fact, in the light of my argument to this point, the case studies I record here are intentionally *illustrative*, and in particular illustrative of the opportunities available in Cape Town. The complexity of the network of urban subcultures calls for local insight and genuinely Wesleyan ingenuity in every local context world-wide.

### 6.3.1 Heartland Spaces Tactically Opened up

The first “geographical step” towards a liturgy of conversion is the one that is most well understood. Despite the dangers of looting and robbery that force churches to lock their doors in a crime-plagued city, many churches are riskily opening up their premises to the “dangerous outsider” in significant ways.

#### Alpha

A number of the ministers commented on the role of the Alpha Course (Alpha International, 2010) in the life of their congregations<sup>659</sup>. The Alpha Course is a popular course that teaches the basic precepts of Christianity in weekly sessions over a couple of months. Each session involves a shared meal, a presentation either by a local speaker or a recorded talk by Nicky Gumball, and a rather loosely organised group discussion time where people are encouraged to interact with the material that has just been presented. It was first crafted at Holy Trinity Brompton Anglican Church in London, and has subsequently become an internationally franchised course. One of the ministers I interviewed referred to it as “postmodern creed”, and her point is well made because it has its best uptake in globalising urban settings. Young black urbanites relate to it well – whilst their parents do not. And it finds acceptance in especially the English-speaking churches, where British cultural forms are more likely to be appealing, and less likely to be distracting<sup>660</sup>.

From the point of view of a liturgy of conversion, Alpha seems to operate in a similar space to the car park services I described. It functions as a conversion mechanism for those who

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<sup>658</sup> I have been using both the phrases “liturgy of conversion” and “liturgies of conversion” – my intention is to distinguish between the theory of liturgy of conversion and the individual actions that embody it - along the same lines that Bosch distinguishes between “Mission” and “missions” (1991, p. 10).

<sup>659</sup> I am familiar with the Alpha Course both by having been involved in one and also by being part of a team led by Dr Bowers-du Toit employed by them as an organization to do socio-cultural research.

<sup>660</sup> These are part of the findings of our research team (Bowers du Toit, et al., 2012).

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are for the most part on the cultural fringes of the Church, but more in Firet's sense of a relational-conversional catechumenate<sup>661</sup>. ME005 was quite hostile towards Alpha in that his experience was that the same group of people seemed to be going through the course time after time – so for him he doubted its efficacy in terms of evangelism. I agree that from my experience there seem to be more insiders doing Alpha than outsiders, and yet it cannot be denied that for many Alpha does indeed function as a “postmodern catechumenate”. It marshals the basics and drills people in their meaning, and encourages people to work through the implications of the meaning of the Gospel for everyday life. This systematic instruction is no longer a notable feature of the urban congregations which are more self-consciously postmodern, and I suspect that the longing for help in sifting through the infinite vista of religious choices brings many people to a conversion experience.

There are many other franchise courses available that are advertised as the panacea of church growth troubles. From the perspective of a liturgy of conversion analysis they tend to fail the test of connection to the local sub-cultural contexts<sup>662</sup>. My observations of the Alpha Course is that it seems to have a fairly wide appeal in Cape Town churches – except for the township churches – and because of its intentional re-reading of the New Testament it is a highly appropriate tool in many contexts (Bowers du Toit, et al., 2012, p. 4). I would plead for more intentional cultural adjustments, but what it does have in its favour is that it was created for a globalised postmodern London, and there are some demographic segments of Cape Town that have very similar issues to those faced by harassed Londoners (Bowers du Toit, et al., 2012, p. 2).

## Youth Ministries

Many of the ministers identified the youth ministry of their church as being the most likely, and most appropriate place for conversions to happen. As I noted in chapter 3, evangelism often seems in fact to be relegated to the realm of the young, and particularly the young in the youth ministry of the church.

But the youth have as yet only tenuously been encapsulated in the ethos of the church, and so some of them are critically alert to the logic of the liturgy of conversion<sup>663</sup>. How can their

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<sup>661</sup> Firet refers to “education” as “Everything that happens in the dialectic between the educator and the maturing person, and which is aimed at their independent spiritual functionality in the world” (Firet, 1977, pp. 299 - my translation).

<sup>662</sup> I have become a qualified official facilitator in several of these franchised discipleship courses. In one I surreptitiously changed the picture on a PowerPoint slide dealing with sport and leisure from a man playing golf to a man in a *makarapa* (a modified and embellished safety helmet much beloved by South African soccer fans) cheering a Pirates (soccer) game.

<sup>663</sup> I would contend that once one has been fully encapsulated within a liturgy that excludes reference to outsiders and conversion, one is less likely to pay attention to their faith and other concerns than

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peers respond in faith to Jesus without some attempt at meaningful contact? So the place in churches where the liturgy of conversion is the most likely to be practiced is amongst the youth. Sadly, this seems to be perceived as locating the liturgy of conversion as the domain of a marginalised segment of the church, rather than being a core concern of the *church* which is therefore *also* in operation amongst the youth. It becomes a hot potato issue – too hot to keep in hand so shuffled off quickly to somebody else. One problem here would be that those who are then doing evangelism are not yet enculturated into the existing liturgies of the church, so they are perhaps not necessarily the best representatives of the church<sup>664</sup>. The tensions between the young and critical and the old and reactionary have always forced a divide between old and young; and as we have seen, when the young are confirmed, the intentional matriculation into the adult world of worship goes awry. When I quizzed the ministers on members leaving the church none of them raised the issue of the teenage exodus; the loss of the teenagers was not seen as a shedding of members, which strongly indicates the ambivalent status of the teenagers in the communities. This perhaps indicates that the teenage population is viewed with suspicion and doubt; or else, maybe, that the culture of the churches sees youth participation, unconsciously perhaps, as a threat to the status quo. The end result seems to be that teenagers in the churches' youth programs are simply not accorded membership status. It is impossible to be sure of this without further investigation, but *if this were the case*, then teenagers would be likely to feel the rejection acutely<sup>665</sup>. Teenagers are hungry for acceptance and affirmation, and the respect of adults in their lives<sup>666</sup> (cf. Pinnock, 2016, p. 158).

A poorly paid, young, second-tier clergy person is often employed by the (wealthier) churches to deal with the affairs of the youth. This is, in one way, an acknowledgement of the importance of the youth. But it could also be seen as a passing off of responsibility for those who are not the core concern of the Church. Or perhaps it is a tacit attempt at the formation of a church that is culturally suitable to this sub-culture? The alternatively faithed need to be made to feel accepted, and they will only be likely to feel that if they *are* actually accepted. From the viewpoint of the clergy perhaps, a liturgy of conversion approach might

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somebody who is only marginally (or recently) Christianised. The liturgy in fact becomes a set of sacred blinkers, preventing the outsider in your peripheral vision from distracting you.

<sup>664</sup> In some contexts. In other contexts they might be the perfect fit and the appropriate personnel to be deployed.

<sup>665</sup> Another arena for research in the South African church.

<sup>666</sup> Pinnock writes, in the context of the violence of the gang cultures of Cape Town, that "Fathers...seldom understand how crucial they are as role models to their sons....A young man might be irritated, annoyed, infuriated or simply embarrassed by his father but he's watching him to see how a man acts in the world" (2016, p. 157). If that is the case, it can hardly be said that the younger generation in churches are learning evangelism from the older generations: they are more likely to be learning a sort of closed-shop spirituality that might not be very attractive, and which they decide not to have any part of.

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be a way for meaningfully including these human beings. They are in the process of individuation, and need to know that whatever they end up choosing in terms of the faith of their parents, they have an integral place *as they are* within the life of the church.

A liturgy of conversion should be able to encompass and accommodate any level of alterity; and the strange rising cultures of the youth should be part of the constant study of the entire leadership of the Church. Perhaps this could be one of the first areas of immersion into the world of sub-cultures that the church leadership should consider when contemplating the implementation of liturgies of conversion.

### 6.3.2 Peripheral Areas as Tactical Liturgical Spaces

There are signs in the material I gleaned from the interviews with the ministers that there are some moves to get people out of the “sanctuary<sup>667</sup>” and into less controlled, more dangerous peripheral spaces. A tactical map of such spaces could well become part of any church’s assessment of its potential for liturgy of conversion.

#### **Prayer Chapel.**

One interesting example of a liturgy of conversion approach is modelled by the church referred to by MA002. This has not been easy in the climate of casual crime in the city<sup>668</sup>. At this church it has been possible to maintain a small chapel that is open to the public for prayer. Everything is securely bolted down, but the format is very traditional – three rows of wooden pews, and a small pulpit at the front on which there is a box into which people can deposit their prayer requests. It looks like a very tiny traditional church building. The box is emptied daily and the concerns are duly prayed for.

What this does is pare down the liturgy, in this instance, to prayer alone. People of some faith or no faith can anonymously participate in the prayer life of the church without having to commit themselves. But it potentially provides a psychologically and spiritually safe “sacred space” for the desperate. It does not directly fulfil the “two or three” principle of Matthew 18:20, but the opening of actual church premises to a random public is in effect a gesture of warm spiritual hospitality – Christians have very markedly taken trouble to provide a liturgical

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<sup>667</sup> The increasing popularity of referring to the building on the church premises where the Sunday Liturgy is enacted as the “sanctuary” (in the sense of a place of safety and preservation) speaks volumes for the defensiveness and desire for safety on the part of many Christians. “Sanctuary” (in the sense of a holy place) also refers to a sense of holiness and separated-ness, which in turn reinforces, to my way of thinking, the concept of exclusion of the alternatively faithed.

<sup>668</sup> For a non-Capeonian reader a little context might be in order here. Thieves saw off the metal hand rails of public bridges to sell as scrap metal. They remove metal drain covers for re-sale. At the time of writing an entire sector of the city rail is standing idle because of massive theft of copper signalling cable. Where there is a market there is theft.

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service to the alternatively faithed. And if a Christian is asked for, to turn up in person to pray or listen or advise, they will be able to make contact very quickly.

It is unusual for a church to be in the position to run such a venture, which, due to urban crime, carries such a high risk of damage and vandalism. But it does raise the issue of the use of Church property for conscious benefit of the alternatively faithed and Methodist outsiders. A thoughtful evaluation of the potential of church property for liturgical interventions in the wider world might yield many more similar useful avenues for liturgy of conversion that make a boundary crossing easier for outsiders: toilets and ablution facilities for the homeless spring to mind. This speaks to the rule of art of removing barricades.

### **Car Park Services**

One of the ministers of the Methodist Churches whom I know holds regular seasonal “car-park services” on the church property<sup>669</sup> [personal conversation with ME013]. The car park in his case is a small unfenced triangle of ground, and the steps of the church down into it provide a handy elevated place for preaching and musicians. On Easter Mornings and around Christmas time this becomes something of a bridge venue into the community. This falls within the ambit of liturgy of conversion in that it relocates the liturgy from inside to outside the buildings, and worship becomes truly public. Outsiders are conveniently able to witness the liturgy, and involve themselves to whatever extent they choose – so it fulfils the criterion of allowing participation at different levels.

The events proceed as standard in-church liturgy, assuming that the participants are all (or predominantly) insiders. It draws in a few people who are on the fringe of the community anyway. And occasionally people stop and stare. Sometimes passing cars give a small hoot of approval.

Although the territory is still definitely under church control, the balance of power has shifted significantly towards the outsider. The Church moves one step away from the security of privacy, and places itself in the place to be accepted or rejected by society. In terms of a liturgy of conversion it is a public witness of the existence and openness of the church and a nod towards its intended public persona. It establishes this Methodist Church as one which recognises the existence of the world between the churches.

This is an important statement to be making, and one that seems to have a good chance, in my view, of being read reasonably accurately by those who occupy an alternatively faithed world view. My recommendation would be that Methodist Churches might do well to consider how they might transition from only enacting liturgy in private to regularly enacting liturgy in

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<sup>669</sup> This must surely be the dynamic equivalent of Wesley’s Church-yard.

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public in this way. If this were to become a new norm, it would then be a shorter step towards instituting liturgies of conversion further out in the spaces between the churches

### 6.3.3 Off-site Liturgical Tactics

This is where the church needs to launch into the unmapped *terra incognita* of the spaces between the churches. And there are a few instances of this already happening. I would argue that the more the areas between the churches got mapped and known, the easier it would become for liturgy of conversion convened “out there” to become a regular part of the liturgy of the churches.

#### Protesting with the Protesters

Five of the interviewed ministers reflected on the possibilities of active engagement with issues of civic concern: education; governance; justice issues [0; 0]. There can be no doubt that if the ministers wanted to connect with the alternatively faithed in the spaces between the churches, this would be likely to get them into immediate relationship with many. There are many civic issues where the ministers would consider that they were co-belligerents: marches against gang-crime; protests against abuse of women and children; protests against municipal service-delivery; protests against perceived government corruption; anti-xenophobia protests. From personal involvement I know that protestors prefer Christians to identify as Christians on such occasions; and one gets to have unlimited conversations about the subject of one’s placard.

#### Street Preaching

The one area of the Methodist Church of Cape Town where there seems to have been an uninterrupted continuity of a Wesleyan-style Liturgy of Conversion is in the so-called townships – the sprawling communities of the working class in Cape Town. Here I have seen a sort of liturgy of conversion convened in Langa. A singing procession of church-goers moves slowly through the streets, led by the stick-wielding *amadodana* (young men’s guild – comprising young men up to the age of about 35). There is an epic quality to this liturgy, a sacred procession. The men and women are all dressed in their black, white and red uniforms, which identify them immediately in township culture as *amaWesile* (Methodists – “Wesleyans”). This is the opposite of covert presence – what you get is what you see.

The procession winds on, with powerful singing in a quintessentially African mode - African melody and harmony and the unique full-voiced buy-in of all the participants that one never finds in a culturally white dominated congregation. Then one of the leaders senses some sort of compulsion – triggered by the presence of a knot of bystanders, perhaps – and

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launches into passionate, extemporaneous preaching, exhorting sinners to repent and follow Jesus. This is always respectfully received...nobody jeers or swears. Occasionally some onlooker seems to snap emotionally and fall on their knees in tears. They are immediately surrounded by a group of Christians who touch and pray for them. Then the procession moves on, the new convert literally engulfed ("encapsulated" (Wesley, 1787, pp. 103-107)) in the crowd of liturgants, and after a leisurely circuit of the area, with more stops for preaching, the procession winds its way back to the church building. Then there is more singing, more preaching, and any new converts are assigned to a class-leader, and begin the official process of instruction and incorporation into the church.

Questions might be raised about the autonomy granted to the individual in this conversion process. It seems to me that although there is passionate persuasion, it is not overwhelming. Drinkers mostly resume their drinking and shoppers go their way after the procession has passed by. But for those who sense a need of incorporation into a group of people like this who are concerned for issues like these, the path is made clear, and the church is demonstrating its open welcome in a genuinely "public" way. Other than that, there is a unique blend of cultural forms, liturgical forms, and serendipity that appears to be very persuasive. There is no fine print here – the authenticity of the call and the offer are palpable. The invitation is frank and unsophisticated.

In my interviews with ministers, black ministers did not give much consideration to this phenomenon as they described the evangelism of the church – perhaps because the church as a whole has come to de-emphasize such off-campus activity. Perhaps they view themselves as having progressed beyond the wildness of youth, and as having become custodians of a hierarchical establishment rather than being direct witnesses in society. White ministers generally only refer to street preaching as something that is dubiously permissible, and never something to be encouraged. Only one white minister seemed to have anything like a sympathetic understanding of this liturgical aspect of the church (ME005). My contention is that this aspect of evangelism needs to be affirmed and participated in by leadership, and thus given legitimation in the life of the whole church<sup>670</sup>.

The Cape Flats cultures tend to appreciate informal rhetoric. My favourite preachers are those who preach on the grand parade in Cape Town, using a mixture of Cape Flats wit and verbal dexterity that makes their sermons memorable and entertaining (and thus more persuasive, according to Aristotle). People are very ready to jeer and heckle the speakers, who seem to take such interruptions in good spirit; and the crowd expresses much pleasure

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<sup>670</sup> Yet another potential area for research.

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at a clever quip, and enjoy jeering the hecklers in turn when the preacher manages a clever retort.

The essential thing about a liturgy of conversion built around the preached word in public is that it allows for people either to stay and listen *or to pass by*. In my view this freedom is essential for the authenticity of evangelism. There has to be a real possibility that the preacher might be completely rejected. There is no possibility of controlling the situation so that people are obliged to listen. It would be extremely unwise, in my view, to write off this spontaneous homiletic as somehow less sophisticated than sermons preached from a pulpit. It takes a great deal of acumen, knowledge and rhetorical expertise to hold an audience under such circumstances. I would encourage every minister to try his or her hand at preaching such a sermon at least once a quarter.

### Train & Bus Preaching

Anybody who commutes using trains or busses<sup>671</sup> in Cape Town has been an unwitting (and sometimes unwilling) participant in the liturgy of conversion convened by a train/bus preacher. The way this liturgy typically unfolds is that a well-dressed preacher, usually a man in a jacket and tie, stands up with a Bible in his hand and launches into a monologue sermon (cf. Johnstone, 2016). These are often distressingly vituperative, adopting what might be termed an approach of reproach (cf. TFCFBF, 2008). Looking at the body language of those trapped in the carriage or bus, people either roll their eyes, turn up the volume of the music in their earphones, or sit staring stoically and blankly ahead, enduring this as one of the inevitable hardships of a morning's commute. Occasionally there will be an outburst of temper, curses and threats, but that usually fuels the preacher – presumably with a sense of being “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Matthew 5:11-12).

I have been assured by friends that this is not always the case – that some train preachers are sought out because they provide a helpful uplift at the start of the day, and that their carriages are specifically packed with Christians (cf. ericza2008, 2015). I have personally known one such preacher, who worked at the Dairybelle factory and preached every day going to and from work on the train. He has occasionally invited me to preach at his township church (but not on his train). I have also been a passenger on a bus where a service of worship was convened, with hymns, prayers and a sermon, by a group of Christians in the back. This seemed to lack the communicational intention required by the idea of evangelism – although to its credit it was truly public, and might actually be being

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<sup>671</sup> I have never been preached at on a minibus taxi – although I myself usually engage in conversation-based liturgy of conversion when travelling by taxi.

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more effective than I have evaluated it to be in terms of conveying a witness to the Gospel to outsiders who regularly take that route.

From the point of view of the theory of liturgy of conversion, this approach generally seems to fail on the point of allowing agency/autonomy. The audience is unfortunately captive; preaching on a bus or train does not have the grace of freedom of avoidance that street preaching has. In terms of advertising and marketing ethics, it seems to border on harassment – which is not something one would choose to associate with evangelism (in fact one might want to work against this, since it is such a common objection to Christian evangelism). My plea, however, would not be for train preachers to stop, but for them to tone down the vitriol, and emphasize solidarity in the human condition, and the allure of grace more directly. Sadly, since this is an area which appears to have been relegated to those on the fringes of the church, none of these preachers have been thoughtfully trained or apprenticed. Those who espouse grace-filled, gentle and respectful communication have abandoned the field. Many alternatively faithed people are unlikely to be exposed to a more grace-filled, alternative approach to the liturgy of conversion to counterbalance the negative impression left by train preachers.

Having said that, what train and bus preachers alert us to is the possibility of convening liturgy of conversion in another one of the spaces between the churches. It is not something that somehow cannot happen anymore; it has not been made impossible because we have transitioned from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It would be instructive if a group of Methodist Ministers were to perhaps develop a model of amusing, uplifting liturgy for train evangelism – perhaps not even necessarily involving the preaching as the word element of liturgy. A search of YouTube videos of train rappers and other artists might be a good place to begin the discussion (cf. McMooks, 2015; Damiyr & Lee, 2016). In Freirean terms that would then require concrete action in order to produce a relevant praxis, and the report on that process in itself would be an interesting narrative to hear. This thought allows me to segue into the next section for consideration.

### **Creative Liturgical Opportunities**

This is perhaps my most tentative section of this entire project. Nothing here is intended as a panacea; and each suggestion requires thorough-going critical evaluation. These are ad hoc and experimental approaches to connecting with the alternatively faithed in the spaces between the churches. My plea for liturgy of conversion is that Christians cast a loving eye on people in their own urban contexts and craft liturgies appropriate to the varied demands of outsiders they know.

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### ***Outsiders***

“*Outsiders*” is an attempt by two members of a local church to raise the profile of those outside the church amongst those inside the church, and to raise the issues of the Gospel amongst those outside the church. My wife Lesley and I began this enterprise after the mission society we had been involved in had to close down, due to financial pressures and the unworkability of its Victorian-era Missionary funding paradigm in contemporary South Africa. We had been church planting for thirteen years prior to that in Thailand and had had ample exposure to being part of a miniscule Christian sub-culture in a vast alternatively faithed national community. We became increasingly aware that our missiological training and experience had given us an attitude towards outsiders that was not widely shared by many of our fellow Cape Town Methodists, so we set out to begin to connect meaningfully with the local alternatively faithed community surrounding our church, and to lead other Christians into a fresh interest in the people of diverse subcultures that share the spaces between the churches in our rapidly urbanising suburb<sup>672</sup>.

### ***Prayerful Walking***

A Japanese Christian missionary to Thailand wrote a book that has been very influential in my lifestyle choices. Kosuke Koyama wrote *Three Mile an Hour God* out of his reflections on the cultural differences between Japanese, Thai and general Western cultures (cf. Koyama, 1979). The lasting impression this left with me was the need to slow down to walking pace in *everything*, a very sound advice for high-achieving Christians entering a relaxed environment like Thailand. Three miles an hour is walking-pace, and Koyama succeeds in writing in a very persuasive Japanese way about how the God of the Bible slowed down to walking speed in his interactions with humanity. This has deeply influenced our ministry style, since, as Koyama says, I too believe that “...Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed to the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is ‘slow’ yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love” (1979, p. 7). A great deal of our time in Thailand was spent strolling around our neighbourhood, praying for what caught our attention and speaking with those who were not in a hurry (a fairly common cultural condition in Thailand), and buying and consuming snacks (also a most authentic cultural activity). When I was later exposed to the Christian literature about “prayer-walking” I was naturally intrigued, and this prayerful walking has become the backbone of our *Outsiders* ministry in Cape Town. The liturgy of conversion principle here is that serendipitous, processional prayer can easily be part of the lifestyle of any Christian in the

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<sup>672</sup> This research study, then, arose out of more than twelve years of trying to live a Christian missional lifestyle on the edges of the Christian communities in Cape Town. It constitutes a Freirean reflection on that practice, with a view to developing the grounded theory of evangelism which I call the liturgy of conversion.

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spaces between the churches. As Koyama put it, in the Bible we see that “God goes slowly” (1979, p. 6), and Jesus walked so slowly that he came to a “full stop” on the cross (1979, p. 7). John Wesley modelled this walking-speed obedience (even if it was often a horse’s walking speed!). I suggest that the Methodist Church would find that prayerful walking was still easily within the capacity of its 21<sup>st</sup> century disciples.

Issues of safety naturally spring to mind. In some places one cannot walk very far from home – township hazards like dogs, flooding and lack of street lighting dramatically limit mobility, as I have shown. In some areas the prevalence of gang violence makes prayer walking unadvisable unless one can convene a large procession. But it is interesting to know that even with the direct threats, township people walk around more, out of necessity, than upmarket Christians who dash from locked garages to policed parking garages, and largely avoid any actual pavement time. A liturgy of conversion requires a certain sort of courage, and a love that is prepared to face certain risks alongside the poor. It is not possible to soften that requirement<sup>673</sup>.

### ***Coffee Shop Chaplaincy***

A coffee shop has potential in terms of a liturgy of conversion in two cultural directions. It is a natural place to meet with middle class habitués. And it is a natural place to meet with the working-class baristas. In our ministry my wife has become the unofficial chaplain of the baristas at a certain coffee shop in a nearby shopping mall which we frequent. She prays with them on Sunday mornings (when they cannot get to church due to the demands of their job), and she is consulted on pastoral issues. The baristas are a mixture of Christians and alternatively faithed people, who came from South Africa and the other nations of the continent, so the interactions all have a distinct liturgy of conversion flavour, with the convening of Christians and alternatively faithed in intercessory and/or counselling elements of a liturgy of conversion.

The dynamics are different again for the vast array of coffee shop habitués. This particular coffee shop is set up so that it’s seating projects out into the walking concourse, without walls, so that it is easy to see and be seen, and interact with the passing stream of shoppers. Out of this stream “random” people join us for coffee and conversation. The liturgy of conversion principles in play here are serendipitous immersion in the world between the churches. Our time might be spent entirely with Christian or Christian fringe people, in which case we consider our time to have been pastoral in focus. But we also meet many of our alternatively faithed friends and acquaintances here, which plays into the “contact with

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<sup>673</sup> Hoekendijk hits the church with his customary iconoclastic hammer when he says that it is “much too hesitant and careful” in the light of the current emergency (1964, p. 117)

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outsiders” requirement for a liturgy of conversion. If nobody stops to talk we simply pray for the passing stream of humanity, which throws us back into more Wesleyan modes of the injection of the realities of the alternatively faithed life into our personal liturgical lives. This coffee shop has become our unofficial Outsiders “headquarters”.

The good thing about this element of our Outsiders ministry is that it is easily replicable by anyone who can afford the coffee (which we count as a ministry expense). The essential element is the preparedness to loiter in a coffee shop, especially a coffee shop without walls. There are no requirements to persuade anybody to make contact. Contacts emerge organically from the matrix of one’s general relationship pool, with ample opportunity to forge new relationships very naturally. Given the extreme nervousness displayed by many Christians with regard to evangelism, this perhaps offers one of the most relaxed and most meaningful introductions into a way of life that positively incorporates contact with the outsider.

### ***Easter Drama***

*Outsiders* adopted a much more confrontational approach to liturgy of conversion one Easter, with a group of actors committing themselves to an Easter-themed mimed street drama. Centred around a postmodern-style cross made from a collapsible aluminium ladder and a wooden cross beam, the actors each mimed a different possible attitude towards the story of Jesus’ death. We convened these actors from different churches – it is not easy to find enough people who are prepared to be involved in such a production as public liturgants in a single typical middle-class Cape Town Church. Besides my wife and me, we had two members from our church, and two members of two nearby Anglican churches. In addition we had a number of backup personnel praying for the production anonymously from nearby shops. There were seven actors, each with a different “attitude” (disdain, anger, doubt, faith, etc.) written on their shirts, and each performance consisted of a fifteen minute set of four different mime positions, rotating every sixty seconds. The actors’ ages ranged through each of the decades from teens to fifties.

Our stated aim was to place the non-commercial Christian message of the cross into the hubbub of commercial “Easter” messaging. It turned out to be perceived as extremely provocative to the commercial interests of the Mall, even though we only performed on the road reserve at the four corners of the premises. Some people responded very supportively, showing hostility to the opposition shown to us by the mall security. One spectator burst into tears. I don’t recall any jeering, although many people walked through the acting zone showing distinctively discomfited body language. The security apparatus was mobilised to try and get rid of us, but that did not lead anywhere since we were aware of our

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constitutional rights (and our standing within municipal by-laws) and were immune to threats. In fact, the lowest tier security personnel showed us great deference, and seemed reluctant to exert the sort of hostility that they were apparently expected to. Actual threats came from mid-level management; when higher level management arrived they tried to be more conciliatory. We finished all our sets on two days and left as silently as we had come.

Evaluating such an example is difficult from the point of view of a performer. For us it was an attempt at a liturgy of conversion in that although it was visually invasive, it was not verbally harassing in any way. It provided a cognitive input through the symbolism and the t-shirt captions. And it drew in the alternatively faithed into debate and counter-debate, without resorting to preaching. But we only did this one year. It takes a great deal of energy to train liturgants and perform such a liturgy, and personnel are not always available. However, in terms of possibilities for convening liturgies of conversion, it seems that the silent procession and the mimed message are within the reach of some congregations, given enough commitment to the theory of public liturgy. If congregations were to work in cooperation, it would certainly be possible to get together a street-mime theme. Due to the age demographics it was both representative of the whole church and could probably not be read by outsiders as a madcap youth event.

To be fair, this could not be viewed as an entry-level liturgy of conversion. The demands on the liturgants were extremely high, both physically and emotionally. If a church were setting out to introduce an ongoing liturgy of conversion to its congregational life, then I would recommend something less taxing to start with. Not everybody is capable of acting, and not every actor is committed to the liturgy of conversion. Having said that, if there were to be dramatically gifted people who were being disciplined in and through the ministry of a church, then this would be a viable arena for the harnessing of their gifts and abilities in the service of evangelism. Street drama has a long tradition of effectively convening liturgy in the market place<sup>674</sup>. More research needs to be done on this dynamic for a South African setting.

### **Street Art**

As a visual artist, I have had long experience in the drawing capacity of live art, art that happens under the eyes of the viewers, open to their approval or derision. For many years I was under the spell of the *Sowers* movement (now *Renewal and Inter-church Evangelism*), which advocates the use of the painting of a board as an adjunct to a street preacher's address to a crowd<sup>675</sup> (cf. RICE, 2017). I used this approach with mixed feelings in places as

<sup>674</sup> The Mediaeval morality-play cycles are a good example of this. There is even a 12<sup>th</sup> century play about conversion: *The Conversion of Saint Paul* (Bevington, 1975, p. 664).

<sup>675</sup> A good example of this style of evangelism is this YouTube clip of Anna the Evangelist – note the characteristic ladder script - and the typical public response (cf. FMTCM, 2015)

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far apart as Harlow and Bangkok; I always felt uneasy, but it was the only model that offered any scope for the use of visual art. My uneasiness arose from an instinct for authenticity; it seemed as if the art was functioning as an advertising gimmick rather than an aesthetic performance in its own right.

It took me a while to match my enthusiasm for evangelism with a more accurate reading of the cultural dynamics surrounding street art. In every place I have ever sat and sketched in public in a city, I have always unintentionally also drawn an audience. Before I could speak Thai I was already drawing such an audience – or at least a spectatorship - as I sat on a landing jetty on the Jao Phrayaa River in Bangkok sketching temples and river traffic. Later, as I slowly learned the language, these occasions turned into many serendipitous liturgies of conversion. But then, under the influence of Sowers, I would usually spoil the occasion by turning around and formally addressing the people who had gathered. I soon learned that this was a sure way to frighten people off in Thailand – culturally, street oratory is not a *thing* there. But it took me a long time – many years, sadly - to realise that it was legitimate to *never* physically turn and confront the passers-by in a loud voice. I could legitimately carry on having quiet conversations about the deepest and most complex areas of faith and religion, and the widest range of human needs, *while I still continued to draw or paint*. I needed to learn to be a painter talking, not a speaker painting. Looking back now on that learning process, I wish that I had been able to work out better theory of the praxis of the liturgy of conversion much earlier on in my missionary career. In terms of this research, I am not aware of any Methodist churches at the moment which currently have a steady street-art component to their evangelism. A liturgy of conversion could do a lot worse than having parables painted in public on a regular basis.



Figure 15 Street Art in Hanover Park (parable of the lost son)

### ***Easter Art: Adding the Cross to the Easter Bunny***

In the last ten years I have been following the liturgical year on the pavements of my corner of the city. At Easter time I always try to at least paint (or carve) a crucifixion scene. This raises a range of reactions – some hostile, some interested, and some theological. For instance, starting in the lent season of 2017 I began carving a large 30kg wooden cross with a Celtic knot-work design, consciously drawing on deep Christian tradition (cf. Grunke, 2008), and locating my work in public on the pavements near to my church. This has resulted in an interesting range of liturgical outcomes. Sometimes I will hear the word “*umnqamlezo*” (the isiXhosa word for “cross”, with a characteristic click-sound), from more than fifty metres away. Some passers-by break into song about the cross, and some give extempore sermons. Others make hostile comments and flee before I can respond. Some compliment me on the carving work and then stop to talk about infinity and the cross<sup>676</sup>. The common thread is that by my one-concept open air message, the crux of the Gospel has entered public discourse, and serendipitous liturgies of conversion emerge around this relatively simple enactment.

<sup>676</sup> Celtic knot-work features complex regular patterns fashioned out of a single unending chord (Grunke, 2008, pp. 9-11).

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Once again, this only serves as an example for what might helpfully enable a local church to convene liturgies of conversion in the public spaces around their church buildings, building a level of trust and openness, and projecting the concept that the Gospel is not only for the Christians who already believe it. I am not a master-carver – this is my first ever carving project, and I am using low-grade windfall pine that splits and misbehaves under the chisel and mallet. What draws an audience is the location and the genuine intent to produce art for art's sake. What constitutes the liturgy of conversion is the meeting of Christian and alternatively faithed in an area not controlled by the church.

Part of my intention with this project was to encourage other people from the congregation to join me on the pavement in some or other handicraft “cross-themed” art project; my dream was to have a commune of artists all engaged in some or other *homage* to God for the gift of the cross of Jesus. That has not found any takers, which I have become accustomed to over the years. It seems that placing oneself deliberately in the place where the alternatively faithed can interact with one has faded from the vocabulary of discipleship for most Methodists. However, if the local church were to have crafts-people and artists who could un-self-consciously ply their craft in public, it seems to me that the prospect of meaningful evangelistic connection with the world of outsiders might dramatically increase.

### ***Christmas Art: Angels and Realms of Ordinary Glory***

Another important time of year that Outsiders has selected as especially important for liturgy of conversion in the public spaces of our urban area is Christmas. The public at large is used to extra effort being made by commercial concerns to meet them on their own territory. This tends to make outsiders initially view attempts at liturgy with suspicion – they assume that this is yet another ploy to make money. We have always been scrupulous to avoid any hint of commercialism in our engagements in public; an important ethical consideration for liturgy of conversion [0].

My usual approach has been to paint a large canvass. Over the years I have painted a large view of contemporary Bethlehem, a copy of a Rembrandt nativity including a cash-in transit van, and angels. For an “angels” project I was joined by a collaborator, Roland, for whom I drew an outline which he then coloured in – so we had two artists both painting on the same theme at different places. None of these projects was ever finished. Somehow the conversations and the need to be relaxed enough to engage in various interactions along the range of hostility to interest leaves the artist-liturgant with a pile of incomplete canvasses.

Then again, these are not ever intended to be the most finished and studio-perfect examples of art. They are all painted in conversation with outsiders. The situation with my collaborator on the Angels project points the way to a way of easily involving people who are ashamed to

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attempt art in public due to their self-perceived lack of expertise. It is relatively easy to find on-line imagery that can be traced in pencil on a canvass or board, and then coloured in very effectively by a complete amateur with very pleasing results. The great thing about such attempts is not the picture itself, but the picture as the communicational heart – the visible text - of an intentional meeting of Christian and alternatively faithed in a space not controlled by Christians.

In December 2016 I switched from my usual painting project to constructing a set of Javanese-style rod-puppets for enacting the Christmas narrative. I used newspaper, wire, sticks, bottles and other found objects to create the puppets in public, at the one corner of the nearby shopping mall. I had one collaborator from my church again – Andrew MacFarlane. This generated the usual range of institutional hostility, and a wide range of public interest. I was able to tell the Christmas story to people from a wide range of ages, and to a wide range of different cultures<sup>677</sup>, and to people with a range of alternative faiths. It was narrative in the making, narrative about creativity and narrative about the incarnation.

All that this approach to the liturgy of conversion requires is a willingness to risk the uncontrollable interactions of the public world, and the desire to tell the Christian story in a way that is accessible to people who currently perhaps have no access to it. If a church were to desire to raise its public profile, and had a minister and congregation members willing to take on the risks involved, then it seems to me that an aesthetics-based connection between the church and world might be convened at very little cost, and extremely effectively. The issue is whether leadership are prepared to take aesthetics seriously or not with regard to their interaction with the alternatively faithed<sup>678</sup>.

### ***Everyday Art: The Beauty of the Ordinary***

Sketching a rubbish bag against a pole can bring one face to face with the beautiful complexities of the urban environment, and raise profound reflections on the nature of beauty and the function of art. At least, that is what I discovered when undertaking that subject once. By selecting a subject for drawing or painting, one can direct the eye of the passer-by to unsuspected riches. I have sketchbooks full of the people and places of the city, and memories of countless conversations about the value of the ordinary, which is a profoundly Gospel topic.

This approach can take one comfortably into the most deeply contested of spaces. When sketching an old mosque tucked away between high-rise urban commercial buildings, I have conversations with Muslims which emerge very naturally: people come and see what I am

<sup>677</sup> Including, gratifyingly, a man from Ethiopia.

<sup>678</sup> Cilliers expounds the aesthetic process of communication as a fourfold path of preparation/discernment, incubation, illumination, and verification/form-giving (2004, pp. 206-214).

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drawing, and then ask why I am drawing it. Distressingly often they refer me to some other mosque which they consider more “picturesque”. These conversations have often been with rank-and-file, ordinary Muslims, rather than the specialist apologists who generally represent the Muslim faith in public dialogue<sup>679</sup>. The key is that by selecting an item or element for portrayal, the artist can in some ways be seen to be granting it the respect of notice, of noticing its existence. This is very important for a liturgy of conversion, as the role of respect is one of the key value and norm issues of this undertaking.

### ***Story-boarding Teams***

This is a form of art that I developed in Thailand, and is geared towards telling the story so that those who hear the story then naturally repeat it to others. I will typically gather one or more teams of four participants. One I style the “artist”, a person who sits on a straight-backed chair on a pavement edge with a board on their lap and “paints” a parable from the Gospels or an incident in Jesus’ life. They seat themselves on the edge of the pavement looking out over the traffic stream, and include perhaps an item or two of local architecture in the background of their painting. Usually I will prepare a rough pencil outline of the image/story, unless the artist is confident and competent. The artist is deliberately positioned on the edge of the pavement with his/her back to the foot-traffic, so that people have a space to stop and stare over her/his shoulder. This is a conscious embracing of vulnerability on the crime-ridden streets of Cape Town.

The second person I style the “artist’s friend”, who engages with the questions of the passers-by, asks questions, and generally speaks to people who stop and show interest. Everything is done at conversational level – no shouting is allowed, and voice magnification devices are forbidden. This person is the liturgical equivalent of the preacher, whereas the artist is the equivalent, I suppose, of the choir. And the stained glass windows. And the apostles’ heads carved on the hammer beams. Or perhaps they are both together the “preacher”, encoding the Gospel as a team in meaningful signs.

A third person, fulfilling I suppose the liturgical “usher” role, is the odd-job person, ready to get more paint if supplies run low, or take over painting from the artist if s/he needs a toilet break, or prepared to talk with people in the artist’s friend gets too deeply involved in prayer or conversation. This needs, obviously, to be temperamentally the most flexible of the team.

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<sup>679</sup> For those Christians who might rightfully feel diffident about considering the persuading somebody of the Muslim faith to consider conversion to Christianity, a half hour spent in conversation with a *Da’wah* operative will allay their fears of insensitivity to the religious feelings of somebody else. Muslim evangelism of Christians is pungent and direct. I am, of course, not advocating that we model Christian evangelism on Muslim evangelism (cf. Zakariya, 2017).

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And then the fourth member of the little team is the “intercessor”, someone who positions himself/herself about twenty metres away and covertly prays for every person that passes by and glances at the emerging painting, and every person who stops to interact. Committing oneself to an intense two-hour session of open-eyed prayer is rigorous, and is a role that demands a certain set of spiritual aptitudes of its own.

For me this model seems to fulfil all the criteria of a liturgy of conversion: low key (and low budget) but clear narrative presentation of the gospel; direct contact between Christians and the alternatively faithed; prayer rich and respectful; and culturally extremely nimble and adaptable to varying subcultural fluctuations of the passing population. I typically take people through an immersion experience of this ministry model when they are on a camp, visiting a nearby high street and interacting with a random selection of Saturday shoppers. I then encourage them to subsequently convene story-board teams to operate in the vicinity of their home churches. Sadly, I have done this “workshop” about 20 times, now, but no church has ever to my knowledge taken up the model in its regular liturgical life. As with all of these options for a liturgy of conversion, unless there is a conceptual change at a corporate/leadership level to embrace the outsider, nothing is likely to change. Unless the church donates time and attention to the alternatively faithed in her/his own space outside the remit of the church, the church will continue to be locked into private internal liturgy, no matter what options might be available.

### ***Prayer Table***

The idea of a prayer table I mentioned in my introduction was suggested to me about thirty years ago by Lionel Miles, a maxillo-facial surgeon with a gift for playing music by ear. I was not in a position to respond to his idea at the time, but in recent years I have found that it was a very helpful insight. The way I have been approaching it is that on Wednesday afternoons and early evenings, when the church runs an open house for prayer inside, I have set up a prayer table on the pavement outside. My set-up is a simple camping table and two of the church chairs. On the table is a tri-lingual sign saying *prayer/gebed/umthandazo*. I sit on one of the chairs and pray for passers-by. At times a passer-by will sit down and ask for prayer, and the range of pastoral intercession I do is remarkably varied<sup>680</sup>. Some people are Christian, some are not. Some are highly active in their churches, some have no church affiliation. I have spoken with gangsters and prostitutes, and burdened and harassed people of every sort. I make no effort to recruit

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<sup>680</sup> I have even solemnly been paid R2, apparently the going rate for pastoral prayer in that man's church. He would not be turned down, despite my scruples – apparently he believed that for prayer to be efficacious it had to be paid for – so once I had prayed for him I was obliged to accept the payment. This was distressing for me, but also a good cultural learning point.

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people, and place no demands on them. I simply listen to their stories and intercede on their behalf.

In my observation it takes several passings-by before somebody will take the leap of requesting prayer. People need to see me in place week after week before they build up the confidence to engage in this rather odd liturgical interaction. Gradually the church is becoming known, amongst other things, as the church that has an old man sitting outside who will pray with you<sup>681</sup>.

This prayer table idea finds a cognate in the “prayer couch” of MA002, where they put a sofa on the pavement outside the church, with a sign saying “free prayer”; and anybody who wants to pray can sit and be prayed for. It seems to me again that this sort of action is not a difficult move to make in terms of incorporating a liturgy of conversion into the liturgical life of the church. Investment is minimal in terms of materials; but of course the difficult thing to find is Christians willing to put themselves out into the uncontrollable stream of foot-traffic on the off-chance of convening a liturgy of conversion.

### **Street Braai**

A more sacramental approach to a liturgy of conversion was undertaken by one of the congregation members at my church one Christmas – Frank Daubenton. I was dressed up as a monk that year, and sitting illuminating a hand-calligraphed version of the Christmas story, and he fired up his gas braai under a nearby tree<sup>682</sup> and made egg-and-bacon<sup>683</sup> rolls which he handed out to people for free. People found this hard to believe. Many people offered to pay, but he steadfastly declined. Some hungry street people were fed, but for the most part the people who took a breakfast roll were middle class shoppers on their way between their homes or parked cars and the shops. Frank worked his way through a tray of 30 eggs and a large pack of bacon, and then went home.

Culturally, this approach had its limitations. Due to Halaal/kosher considerations the Muslims and Jews who passed were unlikely to feel included in the church’s hospitality. However, for many local flat-residents and street-residents, the church sponsored an unexpectedly bright moment in their day – from this point of view the liturgy of conversion worked in a delightful rather than a confrontational way, and I have shown the importance of delight in terms of the Aristotelean theory of rhetoric. With Frank handling the sacramental side of the liturgy, I covered the Word side with my illuminated message.

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<sup>681</sup> One of the most moving experiences I had was that whilst praying for a home-on-the-street person one day a group of chattering school-girls passed by, and one of them shushed the others and – for a brief moment – a holy quiet fell upon us as the children tip-toed through an unexpected of experience of the sacred.

<sup>682</sup> “braai” is the Afrikaans word for barbecue

<sup>683</sup> “boerewors” is the name of a typically South African sausage that has become a cultural artefact

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The idea of undeserved largess is an interesting one. People found it hard to accept<sup>684</sup>, but it seems that there was a good congruence between Frank's surprising non-commercial treat and the Gospel. He was very careful not to put any pressure on anybody, but the combined message of sight, smell and taste constituted a savoury sensory liturgy of conversion that was at least potentially readable by everybody who passed by. It seems that the price of thirty eggs, thirty rolls, and thirty pieces of bacon was worth a great deal more in terms of evangelism than a much larger outlay on the production and advertisement of a large service of evangelism within the precincts of the church itself. As I have been arguing, a liturgy of conversion is potentially cheap, simple and direct, and well within the range of even the most cash-strapped of communities. I mention this because of the ministers' frequent concerns for the cost of evangelism, as revealed in the interviews.

I should imagine that the scope for such liturgical interventions might be very wide in the different churches in the different communities of Cape Town – but only if they were somehow inspired to take methodical steps to introduce elements of the liturgy of conversion into the ordinary liturgical life of the church.

#### **6.3.4 Conclusion: All God's Creatures Got a Place in the Choir<sup>685</sup>**

It seems to me, in the light of a liturgy of conversion derived from a revisiting of John Wesley's *Journal* and a reflection on the theology of liturgy that the church is not invisible because of lack of signage<sup>686</sup>. The Church is invisible because it is generally not present amongst the alternatively faithed, but rather tucked away in its self-sustaining private spaces. John Wesley shows us that what attracts people to the life of the church is the life of the church itself, as the congregation becomes the public hermeneutic of the Gospel (cf. Newbigin, 1989, pp. 222-233). This is only likely to happen when it is actively interpreting ("hermeneuting"?) the Gospel through shared life with those who are not habitués of church buildings. Once the principle of the necessity of actual time spent in actual contact between Christian and alternatively faithed is accepted, there are an infinitely variable number of

<sup>684</sup> This might have been largely because of the tendency of cold-call sales-people to offer a "gift" in order to initiate an artificial reciprocity cycle which ends up with the mark buying their product. Ethical considerations are always hovering in the shadows of every persuasional transaction.

<sup>685</sup> Lyrics of a song by Bill Staines of the band *Celtic Thunder* (Staines, 2011-2017).

<sup>686</sup> The General Secretary of the 2013 Conference of the MCSA addressed the church's lack of public profile by claiming that "...our churches are invisible because there is no signage. How do we expect people to find us if there are no clear readable signs on the streets that point them to our worship centres? Signage plays a significant role in converting awareness of a church's location. They carry the image and brand of our church, and grab the attention of the passer-by, act as invitations, pointers and greeters. They are the church's public interface with the world, the 'shop window' that most people will encounter first. One cannot underestimate the importance of signage as a way of attracting potential members." (Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2013). It might be helpful to have bold, clear signage, but I would argue that all the functions attributed here to signage would be better performed by human beings.

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models of contact which can be adopted or invented which would be suitable for meaningful, Gospel-rich conversation with any particular local sub-culture.

Some of the congregations seem to have an instinctive inclination towards liturgy of conversion. But it is generally felt by participants to involve extra effort – as if the liturgy of conversion was something not of central concern to the church. I have suggested that perhaps that is because of an unjustifiably limited view of liturgy to a process that is supposed to happen privately amongst Christians in a dedicated sacred space under their control.

What a transition to a seamless inclusion of a liturgy of conversion in the life of the church seems to require, then, is theological will; and the chief custodian of theological will in the Methodist Church is the minister.

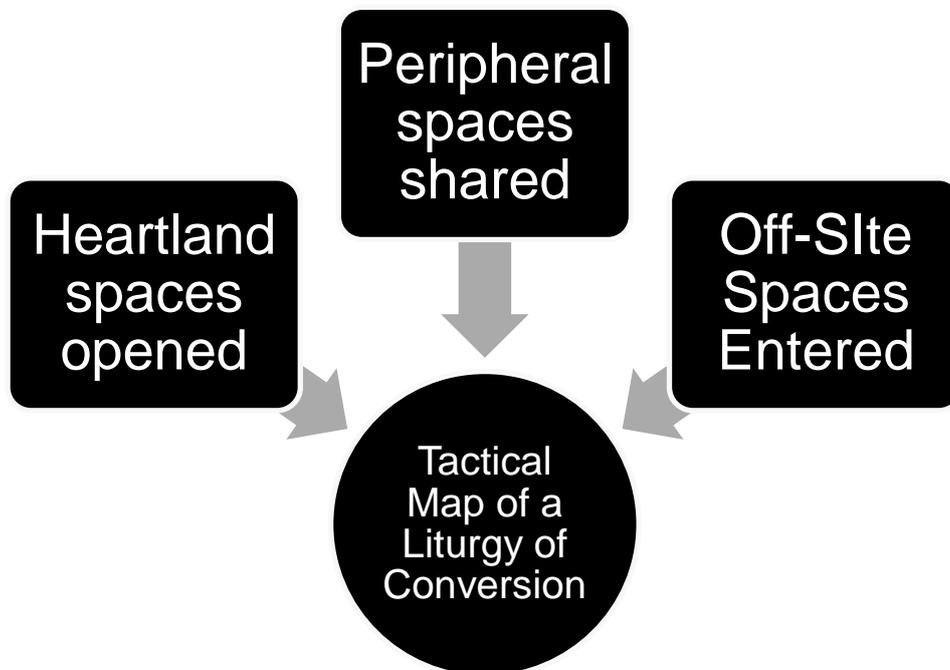


Figure 16 Tactical Map of a Liturgy of Conversion

### 6.4. *Tactical Personnel: The Minister as Public Liturgant*

This leads me into yet another area which I have not been able to research at depth. Regrettably I have had to postpone the consideration of the training of Methodist Ministers in the light of a liturgy of conversion to potential post-doctoral research. However, a few cursory comments based on the research might be in order. One thing seems to have emerged from my interviews – current theological training does *not* seem to prepare young liturgants for

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leading the public liturgy of conversion that I have been describing. We appear to have a shortage of intelligent, sensitive preachers who are serenely at home in an uncontrolled off-site liturgical setting<sup>687</sup>. They are competent to handle the current in-house liturgies of the church with expertise, but they mostly seem to have few skills in handling the interplay between Christian and Alternatively-faithed in public spaces beyond the control of the Church.

It seems, however, that for the Methodist church to be able to return to its original compassion for the alternatively-faithed, it needs to train leaders who are of a similar calibre and outlook to John Wesley and his early men and women preachers. In terms of the Public Liturgy of Conversion that I have been arguing for, I suggest that leaders who perhaps have not had specific training in the liturgy of conversion, but who might be interested, should perhaps consider developing the following aptitudes and skills for off-site ministry in our complex contemporary South African urban situation.

*Firstly, the ministers should embrace their heritage with confidence.* Wesley was thoroughly grounded, as I have noted, in the theology of his denomination – he constantly returned to founding documents of the Church (the Bible) and the Anglican Church (the *39 Articles*). He did not treat them as mere formal elements of his formation, but constantly reflected on them and referred to them. This was partly in order to defend his “innovations”; which he did by demonstrating that they were not innovations, but rather a recovery of authentic Anglican tradition.

I suggest that a similar process would be helpful now for Ministers, especially in the light of what I have noted about the strange ignorance of the sort of life that Wesley lived that seems to be widely prevalent. I am not asking ministers to *part from* Methodism, but to *return* to it - without any qualms that a particular emphasis will somehow make them less authentic in a pluralist urban landscape. A pluralist urban landscape glories in such particularity. What made the Methodist Church distinctive in its inception was not its conformity to other churches – rather it was a conscious return to the basics of what Wesley referred to as the “primitive church”, noting that the Anglican Church at its inception had had a similar impulse.

The issue of confidence is important here. Wesley was fully convinced of the core evangelical truths, and he was “naïvely” confident that everybody else should believe them

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<sup>687</sup> As far as I can make out, all the ministers were intelligent and sensitive preachers! It's their unreadiness for public liturgy that I have in mind here. I think Hauerwas and Willimon are excessively harsh when they say that “the seminaries have produced clergy who are agents of modernity, experts in the art of congregational adaptation to the cultural status quo, enlightened facilitators whose years of education have trained them to enable believers to detach themselves from the insights, habits, stories, and structures that make the church the church” (1989, p. 116). Perhaps the situation is different in the USA – but the ministers I interviewed seemed to be less inclined to separate their congregants from their culture – but it does seem that they do need help.

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too. But this is a counterintuitive position to the prevalent postmodernism of our intellectual environment. All education is geared to fostering a hermeneutic of suspicion, and so dogmatic certainty in any form is viewed as deeply suspicious. But certainty, at the same time, also appears to be profoundly attractive and persuasive to many, a fact which has not escaped the attention of the commercial persuasion industry. This leaves evangelism, as a persuasive element of Christianity, in an apparent bind. It can either present Christianity tentatively as a self-suspicious option amongst options – and be approved but ignored by the alternatively faithed; or it can present it as a self-evident truth with a closed-shop rationality – and be either vilified or blindly believed by the alternatively faithed. Neither of these positions fulfils the values of a Wesleyan liturgy of conversion, with its strong emphasis on both faith and autonomy, both certainty and experimentation, both emotion and intellect.

An issue that is of importance to note here is that in both the “stopping points” in the line of tradition that I have considered, 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain and 21<sup>st</sup> century Cape Town, the prevailing cultural atmosphere appears to have been one of growing religious doubt and pessimism. For Wesley and the first Methodists, Christianity found its place as a form of faith that dealt with both the apparently random chaos of existence, as well as granting agency to the disenfranchised: the slaves and the soldiers, the women and children of an oppressive age. The 17<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment was exploding into popular consciousness in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Deep suspicion of religion was becoming increasingly common, especially since at the same time the state religion had been largely reduced to a genteel force of social control. Methodism was a form of Christianity again finding its cultural home amongst an immense underclass. For faith to work through a viable liturgy in such circumstances, it has to be perceived as being based on truth: faith is belief that something is *true*. Its liturgants can only meet the needs of their communities by sharing such a “straightforward” faith.

*Secondly, ministers should clarify their attitude on persuading people to consider converting to Christianity.* Wesley was concerned with the actual effect of the Gospel on peoples' lives and expected people to convert. As I have argued, in order for people to realise that they need to change, they need to be woken up and shown a path of conversion. I have shown how this pathway appears to be clearer in the Xhosa culture section of the church, although it has perhaps become a little over-formal and perhaps somewhat confused with status-roles in the Christian community and issues of legalism<sup>688</sup>. The issue of change-through-conversion needs perhaps to regain its status as a major element of the teaching ministry of the wider church. It needs to be re-emphasized. It seems that if the Church were to return to Wesley's analysis of church-members as either asleep or awake, and to his democratised

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<sup>688</sup> This deserves further specific research.

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vision of sinfulness and salvability, it might be more likely to create favourable conditions for conversion (and incidental church growth, the philosopher's stone of the shrinking churches).

The assumption on the part of ministers that their congregation members are in the best position to persuade outsiders to consider conversion to Christianity seems to be wishful thinking. The preaching ethos of the Church does not appear to be geared towards conversion (awakening) of church-goers. Church members show little sign of carrying out their public evangelism mandate. In a demanding field such as evangelism, disciples need a model to follow, a model of creative and kind persuasion. There seems to be very little modelling of such public interaction with outsiders on the part of ministers, little intentional persuasion of the alternatively faithed to consider conversion. Since the ministers appear not to have a secure theory of evangelism and conversion, it seems to me to be highly unlikely that their congregation members are being given the tools for their own evangelism of the alternatively faithed in the spaces between the churches.

A liturgy of conversion, I would argue, would potentially restore the confidence of the church and give ordinary disciples a sense of direction in persuasion. It would quite possibly help return this element of the church's mission to the discipleship menu, since the liturgy is intended to model the core commitments of the church [2.2.5].

*Thirdly, ministers need to develop their sociological and anthropological capacity for reading partially postmodern urban contexts.*

Society is once again in a general condition of religious doubt and pessimism. The social needs of a massive underclass in South Africa are obvious and unavoidable. These needs dominate the attention of any amongst the elite who have a conscience about their role in society. The underclass in society, too, is in a daily, deathly struggle with the privations of poverty. But if a member of the elite were to spend time with the underclass, not promulgating a theory of social change or amelioration, but simply listening and learning, s/he would be forcibly struck by the longing for religious reality that people exhibit<sup>689</sup>. In my experience as a tutor of evangelists, Christian disciples in this wide stratum of society express certainty of faith, are more likely to have had some experience of conversion, and are more likely to hold the truth of the Gospel with universal intent<sup>690</sup>. They are much more likely to be confident that the Gospel is true and valid for everyone. In addition, the

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<sup>689</sup> Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" is demonstrably unhelpful. The wealthy might perhaps only attend to "transcendence issues" once they have had all their other needs met, but the poor often seem to find that "transcendence needs" overlap completely with such needs as "food and shelter". Wahba and Bridwell had already noted the theoretical and research flaws of Maslow's theory in 1976 (cf. Wahba & Bridwell, 1976).

<sup>690</sup> Newbigin says that "...while we hold our beliefs as personally committed subjects, we hold them with universal intent, and we express that intent by publishing them and inviting all people to consider and accept them. To be willing so to publish them is the real test of our belief" (1989, p. 126).

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alternatively faithed are much more definite in whatever holds their faith commitment. And since the poor are generally unpretentiously practical, they are interested in faith that “works”: either as a sure way to gaining wealth, or a sure way to coping with spiritual and psychological chaos. Reality is never softened for the poor – as it is for the non-poor - by the illusory curtains of wealth.

I would argue that outsiders looking at the Methodist Church are unlikely to be stirred to consider converting to Christianity through what I think of as the standard Methodist passive-witness stance. The erosion of the valency of the church in popular culture runs too deep. The only way that the alternatively faithed can believe that the Gospel is intended for their consideration is if they come into contact with people who are trying to persuade them so. The form that such an attempt takes is of course crucial in not shutting the door in the very act of trying to open it. And the door can only be truly opened if the minister has a realistic, unromantic, but compassionate understanding of what is happening on the outside.

*Fourthly, ministers should expect to have to devote a certain percentage of pastoral hours to evangelism once they have been put in charge of a congregation.* Even a casual acquaintance with Wesley’s *Journal* is enough to show that he was consistently concerned with the actual communication of the Gospel to people currently beyond its reach. This preoccupation took time. Wesley had a daily schedule that seems to have consistently included time spent in the task of persuading those who had not yet experienced faith in God to wake up to spiritual reality.

Program-space is critical in the allocation of priorities. Priority items that have no actual presence in the minister’s diary might be aspirationally highly valued, but in reality they are not. My contention here is that it would be possible to map one’s commitment to the alternatively faithed by a simple diary consultation. Working as a church planting missionary in Thailand the shape of my ministry was radically changed by my once doing such a simple time-budget, noting hour-by-hour for a week what time I spent on which activities. The result indicated that I spent the vast majority of my working time on the church and fellow missionaries, and a humiliatingly small amount on the alternatively faithed. In the same way that ministers devote time to preparing and performing their in-house liturgies, they should, perhaps, spend devoted time to the preparation and practice of the liturgy of conversion. The necessary corollary of that is that time would then be needed to be docked off some other activity currently regarded as important. Once more, such a change could only be expected to happen under the impetus of theological will: the *choice* to convene liturgy of conversion.

*Fifthly, ministers should programme actual time actually outside of Christian-controlled environments.* Wesley was tirelessly active in the world that was not under Church control.

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He visited prisons and hospitals and insane asylums, he toured villages and towns; he visited the distressingly poor homes of the impoverished and the tastelessly ornate mansions of the rich. In none of these places did he have any natural societal right to speak or act. Clergymen of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were expected to confine their clerical work to their parish, and particularly their parish church building.

It seems axiomatic to me that if a minister desires to have the sort of impact on the alternatively faithed that Wesley had – or at least some approximation of it – s/he should often – and methodically - be active outside sacred precincts. This would have two effects, in my view. One is that outsiders would experience Bosch's "valid challenge" and invitation to consider conversion to Christianity – which they currently do not. The other is that Methodist disciples would have a role model for their own interactions with the alternatively faithed they were engaging with in the spaces between the churches. In Appendix D I show how a typical preaching plan could very conveniently have an added category for each week, into which ministers and local preachers were simply assigned in the same way they are regularly assigned to preach at churches. It might, perhaps, be left open to the preachers to find appropriate liturgy of conversion opportunities and venues in which to interact with the alternatively faithed. I do not anticipate that such a change could realistically be expected to happen under current conditions. But it does show that a liturgy of conversion inclusion into the regular liturgical course of the church *could* notionally happen. All it would take would be the will to do it.

*In the sixth place, ministers should experiment with different forms of communication in different urban contexts.* By suggesting that ministers develop a liturgy of conversion, I am not suggesting a simple correspondence in action between Methodist ministers now and Methodist ministers then. Wesley became ready to experiment radically with ecclesial forms, both on-site and off-site, in order to find working contemporary cultural solutions to the somnolence of the church and the desperation of the alternatively faithed world. In the same way I would be interested to research such things as what sort of presence the ministers have on social media, and whether or not they are finding helpful paths there into the attention of the alternatively faithed. But also, I would not want to downplay in any way the need for risky personal presence in the physical spaces between the churches. Saunders and Campbell talk about the development of an "extreme homiletic" on the street – and that the practitioners of grace-filled public Christian oratory "have much to teach those...who occupy pulpits on Sunday mornings. On the streets, superfluous layers are peeled away, and one is left with the very heart of preaching" (2000, p. 104).

John Wesley experimented tirelessly with ways of reaching different populations in different ways. I believe that what we learn from him is not so much what he did, but his willingness to

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engage in the difficult process of convening liturgies of conversion amongst colliers or gentry, amongst people who received him graciously or suspiciously. In the context of urban Cape Town this would perhaps involve a lot more immersion amongst linguistically different culture groups, and it would surely emerge that the issues of migrant populations would be significantly different to each other *and* to anything in Wesley's time. The need to adapt to religious worldviews that are not nearly as uniform as they might have been in Wesley's time would also become an issue to face. But I suggest that if the Methodist Liturgants were to be serious about the formation of a discipling movement, and being a church that brings healing to the nations through the healing of the nation, then it would need to interact much more positively with people in the range of spaces between the churches I have suggested above and more.

*In the seventh place, Methodist ministers in training need to develop an expectation that there will be new converts to disciple.* Methodist liturgants, I suggest, need to expand the liturgy of the church out into the world, in order for world-changing disciples to emerge. If all the discipleship of believers happens in a sequestered environment, then it is likely that all the new disciples' efforts will be focused, in turn, on that private space. This potentially leaves Methodist Disciples with few resources for coping with an environment that is not under Christian control. Wesley expected, demanded, and planned for the agency of the new converts in their own faith-life, and the plan was laid within a context of discipleship in ministry.

The *Journal* shows Wesley both demonstrating the sort of life he was trying to encourage, and discipling people into his life of evangelism. His strategies were often worked out in a discipling fraternity: for instance, as noted, it was George Whitefield who persuaded him to try field-preaching in the first place. In the same way in the 21<sup>st</sup> century one might hope for the fellowship of discipleship to generate such insights and avenues for witness. Where the class-meeting system is still in place, the same set of questions that was used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is still the basis for examination. As I have shown, these questions are very intense, very personal, and very much aligned to private spirituality. This set of questions for the class-meetings needs perhaps to be augmented to include some of the functions of peer review that Wesley himself submitted to: review of ministry opportunities and evangelism strategy; and I would be interested to see the questions re-cast according to a theory of sin modelled on the twelve step addiction recovery process.

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The Methodist Ministers are in a unique position to make such adjustments – although such a radical change<sup>691</sup> might take extensive hierarchical negotiation through perhaps a number of synods. To do so would involve distinct theological will, and such an intention would need to be backed up by a strong theory of the liturgy of conversion.

For those Methodists who attend more informal small groups, the approach would need to be different. Often these groups operate with a fair degree of autonomy, which is entirely culture-appropriate<sup>692</sup>. However, as part of the minister's pastoral oversight, there could quite reasonably be discussion about the missional aspects of the discipleship occurring in the groups, and specifically anything with regard to evangelism. Small groups might very well be in a position to convene liturgies of conversion in specific sub-cultural groups with which they had natural contacts through work, universities, etc. This would be in line with what the ministers seem to expect from their congregants – but high energy innovations need to be discussed and planned, or else they do not happen.

Whatever the nature of the discipleship forum, the ministers are in a position to introduce reflection on the liturgy of conversion. Again, what it needs is the theological will to prioritise the outsider in the schedule of the insider.

*In conclusion to this sub-section*, it seems to me that this is an experiment that is worth a try for the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Faced with a downward trend in membership, a weakening commitment of the congregation members, and a general struggle with identity, now might be a time to interact with the roots of the movement and recover some of the attitudinal and procedural distinctives that seem to have been eroded over the centuries. The crisis appears to be so deep that I cannot see any downside to experimentation in the direction of a liturgy of conversion. As I have repeatedly noted, this would take a certain sort of theological will, and it is not clear to me that the hierarchical structure of the Methodist Church is capable of this at this late stage in organisational deterioration [3.2.7]. It seems to me that a great deal rests on the possible intervention of a small cohort of visionaries who might be able to exercise the sort of moral and spiritual leadership that John Wesley and his small group of Methodist collaborating clergy exerted on the moribund Anglican church of his time. Although it might be feared that such a revolutionary cohort might result in yet another schism in the protestant church, I think that a reflection on Wesley's steadfast refusal to countenance division, and the challenge to renewed life that Methodism gave to the Anglican

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<sup>691</sup> I anticipate that any change to a practice that has survived centuries will automatically meet with resistance. There would need to be a clear plan and a concerted agitation for it to happen. If it does not happen, though, the issue will probably resolve itself by the demise of the Methodist church as a coherent organisation.

<sup>692</sup> The study of the place of small-groups in the discipleship of Methodist Christians would be another interesting area of research.

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Church, might possibly be replicable in our own times and contexts. Methodism, which started off as a reform movement, now itself appears to need its own reform movement. I propose that the Methodist Church at this point has nothing to lose. Much has been written about Wesley's radical social ethic; it is my belief that his radical evangelistic ethic needs to be considered as well, with a view to restoring a consciously holistic plan for the rescue/healing of this ailing church for the sake of rescuing/healing this ailing society.

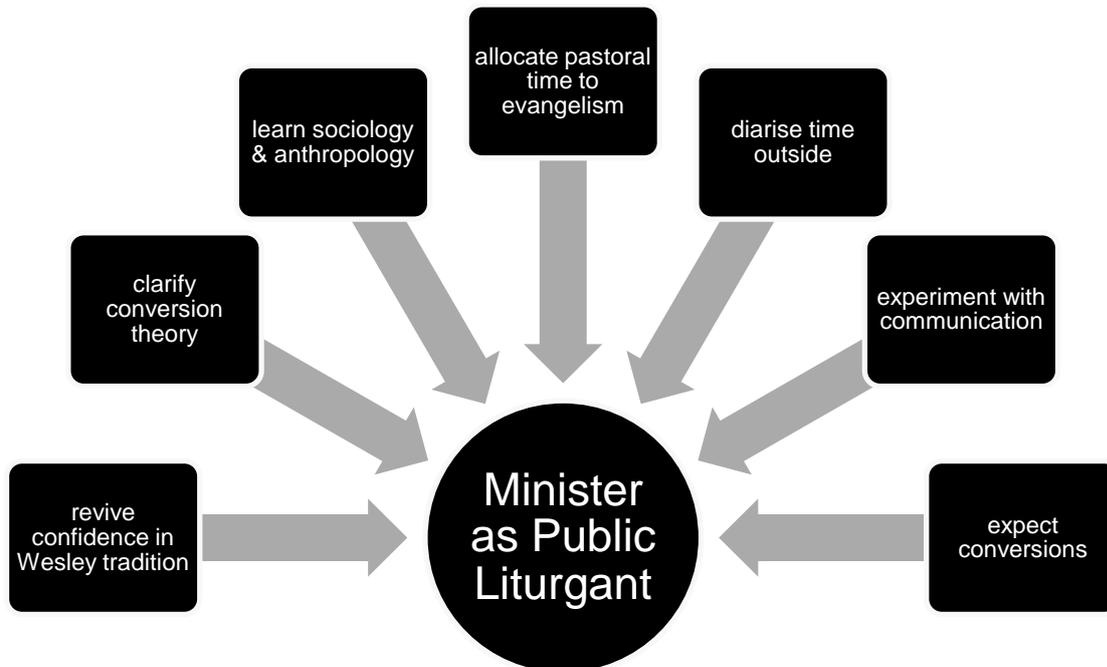


Figure 17 The Minister as Public Liturgant

### 6.5. The Process of Mobilization

Tajfel points out that there is a desperate need to "... systematize and simplify information from the social environment in order to make sense of a world that would otherwise be too complex and chaotic for effective action" (1981, p. 148). If a problem needs action in the socio-political realm, then it unavoidably needs "systematisation" and "simplification". My approach thus far has been to argue for a systemised view of the chaotic cultural and church environment of Cape Town which culminates in these concrete "simplifications" - proposals for developing and enhancing liturgy of conversion – aware of the limitations of predictability that is inherent in any such undertaking<sup>693</sup>. It seems reasonable to cast my argument for the mobilisation of the Methodist Church to include a liturgy of conversion in its ongoing liturgical life in terms of the classic three-fold schema of rhetoric: teaching; delighting; and

<sup>693</sup> MacIntyre describes the limits of social sciences, and how they function within a tension between predictability and dis-conformity, and the absence of "law-like generalisations" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 88 ff.).

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persuading<sup>694</sup>. In pursuit of mobilising such a cohort of revolutionary, socially active, liturgy-of-conversion-promoting ministers<sup>695</sup>, I suggest the following tentative approach to a mobilisation strategy.

### 6.5.1 The First Rhetorical Move: Teach

Teaching, in Aristotle's mind, as with Wesley, was a lucid presentation of "plain truth"<sup>696</sup>. This would involve clear language, clear illustration, and clear structure<sup>697</sup>.

#### Launching Persuasive Narrative about Persuasive Narrative

My primary communications task has been through the writing of this thesis and the process of study, research and review that it reports. In terms of the auto-ethnographic approach of this work, I am not able to pretend to disengaged analysis. My personal life-narrative is bound up in significant ways with the life narrative of the Methodist Church in Cape Town. However, this lack in objectivity is a gain in subjectivity – and it is in the subjective will of active agents that any transformation occurs.

This objective/subjective research is then formally vetted by the University: if it is objective enough to constitute a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing debate on the homiletic concerns of the church, then it will receive a certain sign of acceptance. I would then need to set in train a feedback process that communicates my findings first of all to the interviewed ministers in a "reflective conversation"<sup>698</sup>, and possibly even to the Methodist Connexion (National structures) via synod, quarterly meetings and local preachers' gatherings. The scope of my research intentionally stretches beyond the fulfilling the requirements for my PhD degree.

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<sup>694</sup> Janet Weathers points out that Aristotle "...defined rhetoric as the faculty of discovering the available means of persuasion in a particular situation" (2004, p. 36).

<sup>695</sup> Ministers are not the only cohorts that need to be mobilised: but the focus in this research has been limited to the ministers. Mobilising theory for segments of the laity (such as the elderly [0]) will have to wait for further consideration.

<sup>696</sup> Wesley was apparently unhampered by his capacity for doubt and self-doubt when it came to communicating his message: his attitude was that although (to use Janet Weathers' words) "we can never know for sure how partial and erroneous our understanding of 'truth' is" (2004, p. 38), he was confident enough to say what he had found and recommend it to the consideration of others.

<sup>697</sup> Noting, with Susan Hedahl, that "today...a consciously chosen rhetorical homiletics must make a bid for a hearing in a global context that is far more complex and sophisticated than anyone had previously imagined....A hermeneutic of suspicion towards language's infinite play in community must be balanced with a willing submission and susceptibility to its uses in various contemporary settings" (2004, p. 276).

<sup>698</sup> I have sent a request to some ministers I have interviewed to comment on whether or not I had adequately caught their thinking in my analysis – but at the time of publishing I had not yet received any replies at all.

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I envisage that this communication would involve both critical conversation about the findings, and also experimentation - actually using promising “rules of art” in connection with the alternatively-faithed, and observing or discussing others applying such rules of art.

The analysis of the results of such experiments might potentially be a good direction for my possible post-doctoral studies. In this way this study would hopefully continue to be part of a fruitful praxis-theoria cycle (cf. Segundo, 1976, pp. 7-38), and perhaps even result in a more prominent role for evangelism in the liturgical life of the Methodist church.

I anticipate that this process might involve sharing in and/or observing community-initiated experiments in evangelism action, where others might interact with the concepts I suggest in locally relevant ways. This would necessitate a time-rich involvement in local-level leadership, and further tranches of time spent in contact with the alternatively faithed, bearing in mind that good practice of revolution means that “...revolutionary leadership must ...practice *co-intentional* education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge.” (Freire, 1970, p. 51).

This would only be possible with the permission and active participation of the ministers of the churches. I would like these theories to be tested through actual liturgy of conversion projects run through churches of many backgrounds, within and beyond the Methodist Church.

I judge that a strategically good place to start might be by requesting feedback sessions with the ministers I have interviewed, both before and after I have completed recording the qualitative data<sup>699</sup>.

An important by-product might turn out to be that I could use the insights generated to enrich the training courses I run at various Bible Colleges and Churches in and around Cape Town. The teaching process has its own built in testing processes, relying as it does on student motivation, participation and feedback.

I might find journals, such as the *Methodist Review*, the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, *Missionalia*, *JTSA* or even the *Baptist Journal of Theology* willing to publish parts of my research, or papers related to my research. This would provide significant ongoing peer-evaluation.

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<sup>699</sup> At the time of printing I have one such appointment.

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And I could possibly involve the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, the recently established Methodist Training centre in Pietermaritzburg: an atmosphere of ministers in training should provide further uninhibited testing of my theorial!

In summary, then, I would try strenuously to ensure that the theory I have generated in my studies was rigorously tested at as many different levels as I could – but especially in the crucible of the evangelistic praxis of local Methodist Churches. This is critical, because if nobody is able to align my intentional interpretant with their effectual interpretant, then I will have failed in this project, no matter how interesting it has been to me.

### **Re-reading John Wesley Critically**

According to Hughes (2003, p. 141), the meaning of iconic signs is mediated by the interpretant through using **abductive** reasoning [2.1]: If Methodist ministers turned out to be poorly versed in Wesley; and if Wesley had a strong liturgy of conversion through evangelism; then it could well be, as I have argued, that the evangelism praxis of the Methodist Church might be significantly enhanced by a re-reading of Wesley for a new context.

A dynamic, critical re-appraisal needs to be undertaken – Wesley needs to be read once again – but this time as a holistic missional practitioner. In that light a new vision of what the Methodist Church might accomplish again in terms of social and spiritual salvation might emerge. It might also become apparent that an emphasis on evangelism as persuading people to consider converting to Christian faith could be seen as an integral part of the original Methodist praxis – and liturgants in the churches might be encouraged to resume the interrupted ministry of the Methodist Church in the spaces between the churches.

I have earlier quoted Hughes as saying that people put together their agreed meaning from shared “stocks of meaning” (2003, pp. 6-7). It seems to be clear that the Wesley treasure chest needs to be dug up, dusted off and re-opened. However, we do not need a one-eyed, sycophantic hagiolatry – rather we need to consider how John Wesley solved certain problems which we continue to face today – and although the contexts we inhabit differ markedly from his context, the example of his problem solving methods might inspire us to experiment with finding solutions appropriate to our contexts today.

It is important to stress here that there could be many varieties of critical readings of Wesley today. There are, in my understanding, several ways of reading the *Journal* that might facilitate recovering the *Journal* (and his entire oeuvre) from being relegated to the margins of Methodist institutional consciousness. These might be seen as lenses through which Wesley might be read in order to glean many more insights from studying his thought:

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- *He might be read socio-historically*, as a man of his time who sheds light on his era, the dawn of the industrial and colonial age, and the heyday of the enlightenment. Wesley's *Journal* both illustrates and interrogates these great social movements. His writings provide a wealth of detail on society and culture in Britain, the European Continent, and the Americas, as well as a constant stream of contemporary opinion on the politics and literature of his time. These are important pieces in any scientific historical approach to reading the past.
- *Wesley might be read psychologically* – as an obsessed man with a sense of purpose that drove him in certain directions and perhaps incapacitated him in others. The inner and outer effects of his conversion experiences, and his compulsions and interactions with others, are a fascinating source of study. He describes many areas of stress that still naturally occur in any clergy-person's life, and some areas of specific maladaptation that are instructive to examine through contemporary psycho-analytical lenses. His deciphered private diaries could be extremely relevant here too.
- *Wesley might be read missiologically*: he was a man with a very clear idea of how the church should engage with the world around it, and especially with the world of the poor. His personal commitment to a seamless mixture of justice, development, education, and spiritual discovery. The challenge this poses to our era where society assumes that different specialists are needed to handle different specialities is also a challenge to our current conceptions of church. Wesley's ecclesiology was deeply missiological, with at least as much attention devoted to those who did not yet belong to the church as to those who did.

John Wesley proposed and lived out a completely different way of doing church, a revolutionary way of connecting the Gospel with those who had not yet considered its claims. As I have repeatedly suggested, it could be of vital interest for the Methodist Church in Cape Town and elsewhere to seriously consider the approach Wesley took to the church as it was in the world as it was, in order to generate institutionally valid responses to the church as it is in the world as it is.

### ***Wesleyan Evangelism: Theology-formation***

Perhaps the Methodist Church needs to institute opportunities for Methodist Ministers to consciously consider what evangelism is and how a theology of evangelism and liturgy of conversion should impact the mission of each local church. For reasons I have argued it appears sub-optimal to have a theory of evangelism only as the witness of static communities, and the silent testimony of good works (indispensable as these elements might be). It is also sub-optimal to have a theory of liturgy that only envisages performances in the

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sacred precincts. A key part of my argument has been that locus of thought and action should be physically, geographically shared between on-campus and off-campus spaces. Saunders and Campbell point out that "...when we read the Bible in the classrooms of our seminaries and churches, the physical space itself often may function as a domesticating and confining force – a way of preserving the comfortably abstract character of much of our reflection and discourse" (2000, p. 89). They show that through a move out onto the streets, we open ourselves up to a radical change of perspective; although "the only difference is the physical space itself, and our usually heightened sensitivities...., *where* we learn shapes *what* we learn, and *where* we read shapes *how* we read" (2000, p. 89). I do not believe that any training institution or programme can teach us the insights that are available simply from communicating with others in the spaces between the churches.

One method of communication with the churches has arisen during my reflections. I could perhaps try to initiate a "Wesley Weekends" challenge program, requiring participants to pray, study, travel, witness, preach and diarize with a similar intensity to John Wesley, labouring at contextualising Christian teaching to a sub-cultural context in Cape Town. I believe that such an intensive tutorial action would both introduce the theory of a Wesleyan informed liturgy of conversion, and open up prospects for its incorporation into the liturgies of the Churches. However, as I have explained, I do generally feel extremely ambivalent about the idea of seminars and courses. Subject to further research, I suspect that occasional specialisation seminars do not impact significantly on congregational behaviour. It seems to me that the emphases of the ongoing teaching ministry of the church, and action-focused discipleship, have the most influence in actually shaping the church into the entity it is. Seminars, if they conflict with the fundamental character of the church, might be attended (might!), but have little prospect of bringing about change against the corporate grain. Institutional self-perceptions are extremely robust and legitimately function sociologically to preserve the institution in the face of numerous threats. They are the white blood corpuscles of the blood stream of the body of Christ. The introduction of the liturgy of conversion probably would need a specifically immuno-suppressant approach.

### **6.5.2 The Second Rhetorical Move: Delight**

Aristotle envisaged an element of delight in the rhetorical process of persuasion (cf. Cunningham, et al., 2004, p. 18). I have certainly found reading John Wesley's first-hand accounts of his eccentric lifestyle highly delightful. They delight because they introduce one to an inquiring mind, a sensitive soul, and a compassionate human being. Some people find the reading of autobiography tiresome, since the author tends to always be the hero of his/her own narrative. Although Wesley is by no means free from such an attitude, his

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frequent self-deprecating stories – of him riding a pint-sized pony, or falling off his horse (repeatedly), or of that donkey that came to his sermon once (Wesley, 1827-3, p. 167)– largely restore the balance of one’s confidence in his judgement.

Out of such a reading one is left with a sense of Wesley’s own delight in his work, his relish for tough journeys in poor weather conditions, and the glow of preaching simple sermons to simple people and observing miraculous responses to the preaching of the Word. Wesley’s *Journal* has many references to the sort of supernatural miracles that are emphasized by travelling preachers in our time. But they were never the focus of his attention: what excited Wesley, and what I believe can excite us through his enthusiasm, was the extraordinary response to the cognitive content of his message. People believed what they understood.

A second area of delight is the emotional pleasure that those who are newly converted exude<sup>700</sup>. This gladness happens in the lives of people who are in both the *most* desperate and the *least* desperate situations. It is extremely infectious, and if it channels over into a steady life of peace and compassion, the effort and anxiety involved in persuading somebody to consider conversion to Christianity who then actually does so is deeply gratifying to the communicator. The more anybody experiences this mysterious phenomenon, the happier they will become, I believe, in crafting liturgies of conversion.

### 6.5.3 The Third Rhetorical Move: Persuade

I have argued that every act of communication is persuasive, in the sense that we invite people, as Newbigin says, to stand where we are and see if they don’t see what we see (Newbigin, 1989, p. 11). I have further argued that persuasion of people to consider converting to Christian faith is not nearly as troubling a concept as is often thought, since we are constantly embroiled in a seething mass of persuasive messaging anyway, with many different interested commercial and ideological parties vying for people’s loyalty. In addition, we do persuade (albeit faintly) by the life we live and the example we set – so if there were to be an unavoidable taint in persuasion, we are automatically tainted, anyway. Under this logic we could not escape it by living anywhere where we might be seen. It only remains to ensure that the Christian persuasion is ethical, respectful and non-coercive, and since we are persuading people anyway through our lifestyles and attitudes, we might as well be hanged for a sheep as hanged for a lamb, and use “adequately communicative signs” of every sort – including words - to persuade others.

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<sup>700</sup> Rambo notes that psychological pleasure and centeredness occurs whenever anybody converts to anything, not only to Christianity – but that is a discussion to be carried further in a different forum (1995, pp. 160-162).

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Thus the bottom line of this study is persuasional. Those who might agree that the church had a responsibility to convene liturgies of conversion<sup>701</sup> would have every intention of trying to influence other Christians to take steps outside and towards the alternatively faithed: to persuade Christians to persuade others.

### **Personal Operationalisation of my Theory**

The best leaders lead from the front (in my understanding of leadership), and the best persuaders do what they are persuading others to do. Whatever else my studies lead to, I intend to continue working out this theory of a liturgy of conversion by convening liturgies of conversion. I intend to continue reflecting on the data I have received, and the problem that sparked the research in the first place. For me this course of study has been a reflective moment, and I anticipate that I will be able to interact with the alternatively faithed people in my environment with a deeper integrity and renewed hope for their conversion as a result of weighing up the opinions of the many, many people, living and dead, whom I have consulted in the process. Running courses and seminars, and teaching academic courses, is all very well, and has its place. But the most authentic outcome from this study would be if I actually continued to speak to alternatively faithed drunkards and prostitutes, hockey-moms and security guards, rabbis and graffiti artists, soldiers and surfers. And Christians, too, of course: but without the other conversations and other friends this work would stagnate. The alternatively faithed deserve better trained public liturgants.

So the persuasion arising out of this study is directed to both insiders and outsiders. For insiders, I hope that they might be persuaded to consider the appropriate role they could fulfil in the liturgy of conversion; and for the outsiders, I hope many might be persuaded to join in liturgy of conversion, and, through discovering faith in Christ, to become Kingdom insiders themselves.

### **God the Persuader**

No techniques, no theory, no authentic praxis will make anybody believe the Gospel. Nothing that I have suggested will be anything more than peripheral to the moving of the Spirit of God in bringing the alternatively faithed to faith. The agency in the life of faith, as Barth so eloquently insisted, is God himself, working through the Spirit [2.3.6]. Faith is a response to the action of God.

But a liturgy of conversion can be expected to play a role, peripheral as it might be, in the same way that I believe the current liturgy of the church already plays a role in the

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<sup>701</sup> I feel very much alone holding this position, but I have no doubt there are practitioners of this engaged and ethical evangelism that I have overlooked.

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conversion of the alternatively faithed – peripheral as *it* might be. As Methodists we stand in a tradition in which the agency of the unlikely is greatly respected [0]. A liturgy of conversion would be a step towards removing both the offence of absence (disdain), and the offence of presence (harassment). It brings Christians out to witness to what God has done in Christ; and to witness what God is doing through his Spirit. The community of faith worships God for being the God of salvation amongst *all* those who are being saved. They convene the liturgies of conversion.

In my teaching and evangelism over the years I have developed and worked with a diagnostic tool based on the classic teach/delight/persuade schema, which I append here – it helps me to work out where I am in any particular persuasive project. Is the person I seek to persuade ignorant and intensely resistant? Or perhaps highly informed, to the point of being able to teach – but perhaps low in feeling and only half-heartedly exploring? Perhaps they are ignorant, intense advocates? And I can apply it in turn to myself. Am I ignorantly, intensely resistant to the worldview of the other? Can I conceivably inhabit a learning, low feeling and explorative stance? The answers to such analyses sketch out the contours of conversational work that needs to happen. Intense feeling can be intensely positive or intensely negative – another important aspect to note.

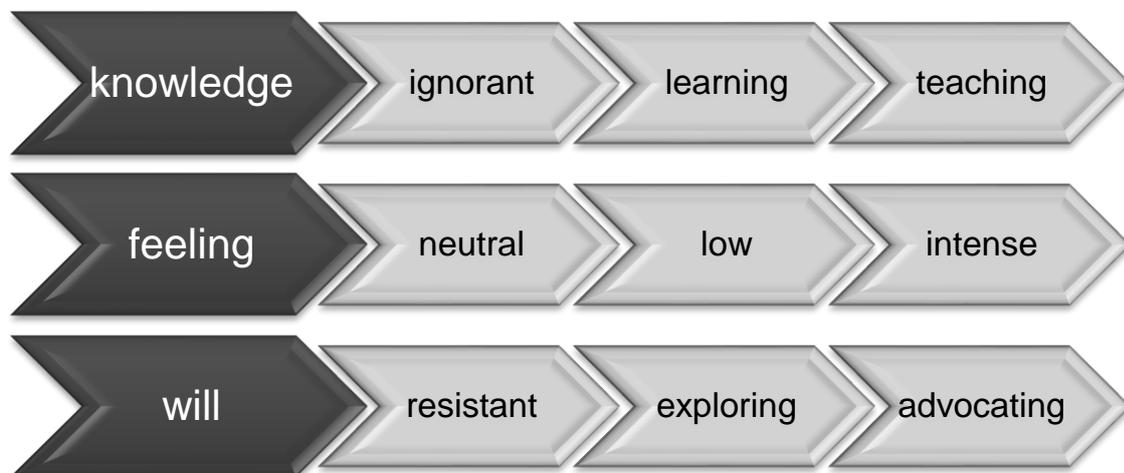


Figure 18 knowledge/feeling/will persuasion diagnostic

## 6.6. Conclusion: Experimental Religion

Infused with the spirit of enlightenment, Wesley believed he could solve the problem of a somnolent church. He quickly lost patience in a formal repetition of tradition. That is not to say he was an iconoclast. From his point of view, he was systematically proving that the old ways – or an appropriate selection of the old ways - had been good ways. In the same breath, he was aware that the old ways had not anticipated contemporary developments in every particular, and needed to respond to the current context.

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As a self-reflexive public liturgant, he mobilised a generation of marginal church adherents to wake up from ecclesial torpor. He developed rules of art for performing this function, and carried it out in a variety of places, both within and outside of Christian sacred spaces.

One major pragmatic outcome of this is that in the same way John Wesley modelled a public liturgy of conversion for his time, I suggest we might do so for our time. And the record of Wesley's efforts forms a potentially very helpful basis for constructing a 21<sup>st</sup> century liturgy of conversion.



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## **Chapter 7. CONCLUSION**

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### **7.1. At a Glance...**

I began my research because of a question that had been thrown up again and again by my experience and observations, in conversations and on church meeting agendas, through sermons and seminar courses on evangelism: *Why do the Methodist Churches of Cape Town not expand vigorously through evangelism and conversions?* I had experienced “conversion” as I had understood it as a teenager, and that had given me so much pleasure and centredness in life that it seemed odd that people were not falling over themselves to become Christians. It seems so obviously true - from the inside.

So I developed a set of aims: I would interview actual ministers and find out what they thought about it; see what Wesley might have said about the situation; and then see if I could develop some helpful suggestions for an effective praxis. My hypothesis was straightforward: *A careful listening to church leaders and observation of the Methodist Church should enable me to gain a clear understanding of the current theory and praxis of evangelism in the Methodist Churches of Cape Town. Bringing Wesleyan writings and the thought of relevant theoreticians into critical conversation with these findings should then enable the development of helpful “best practice” criteria for effective evangelism.*

As I have noted, Lesslie Newbigin notes that a hypothesis is an informed guess that needs to be rigorously tested (1987, p. 31). Hughes refers to the tentative nature of this process as “abductive reasoning” (2003, p. 35). My hunch was that Wesley might have been onto a good thing with his “field-preaching”, and that there might be culture-relevant ways of incorporating a liturgy of conversion into the liturgical life of the Methodist Churches.

I have therefore argued (cf. Lye, 2017) that the Methodist Church might find that an intentional inclusion of the alternatively faithed in liturgical events and processes, convened in spaces not under the control of the church, might enable the alternatively faithed to consider the Gospel and to consider conversion to Christianity. Using Fisher’s modification of Toulmin’s schema in terms of Fisher’s understanding of “good reasons” (1987, pp. 114-115), the narrative logic of my thesis would look like this:

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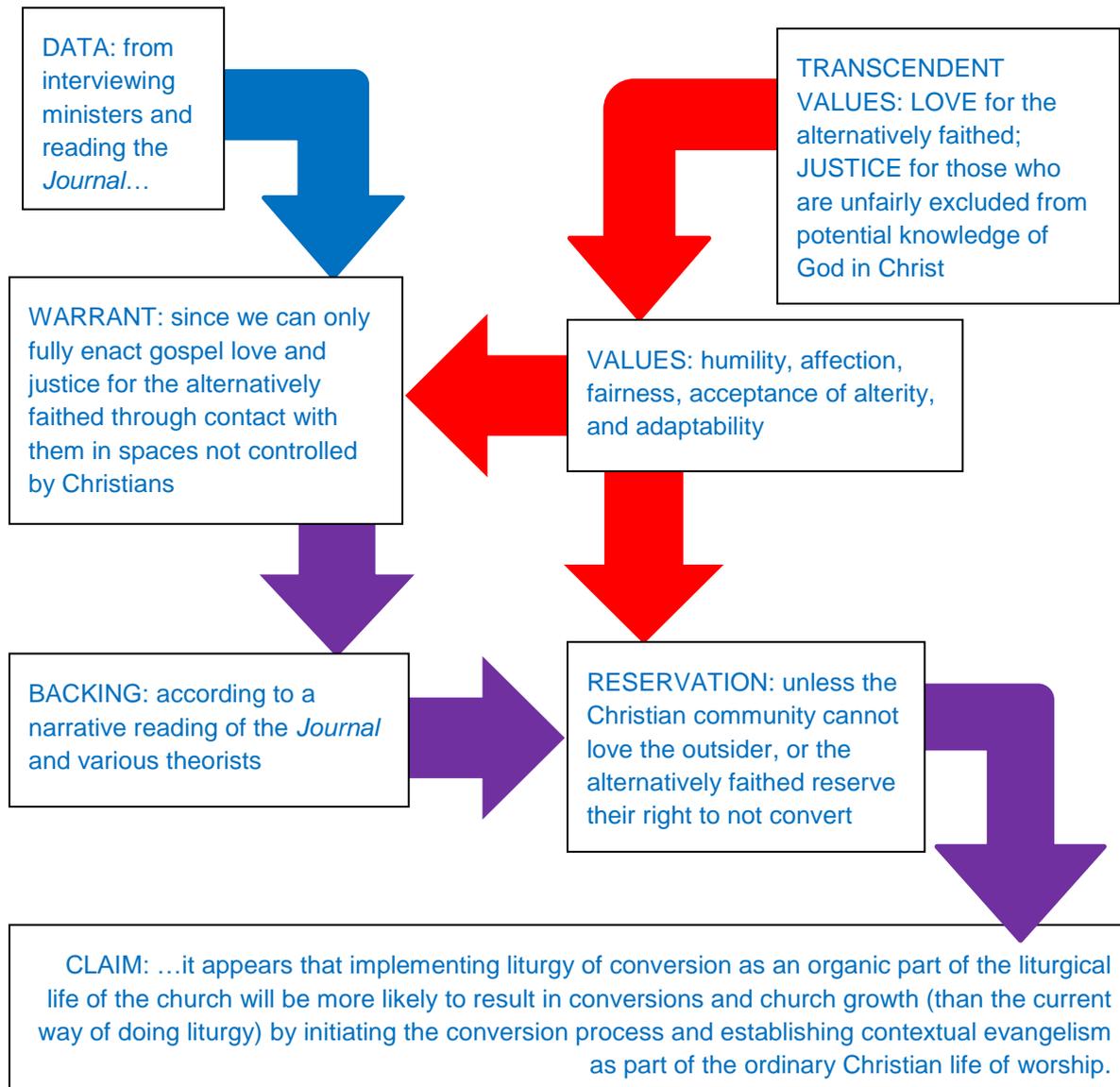


Figure 19 Narrative Logic of a Liturgy of Conversion

### 7.2. Limitations of this Research and its Place in the Field.

As a minor field in theology, this one (evangelism, liturgy and conversion) is particularly small. Not only that, but this study has only delved into a small sample of a tiny part of the world-wide community of churches – and further limitations are that it has not been limited to the Methodist church, but to the Methodist Church in Cape Town. This being the case, the value of this study is more likely to be in the questions it raises than its predictive power. But it is also a conscious attempt to expand the range of the study of evangelism into the much more established field of liturgics.

Alasdair MacIntyre has alerted us to the limited capacity for prediction deliverable by social sciences (MacIntyre, 1981, pp. 88-108). Even if I had been able to stretch my net to cover

more ministers in more places, it is impossible for me to have been able to absolutely prove that a liturgy of conversion was the panacea for the ills of the Methodist Church in Cape Town. What I have simply attempted is to highlight a dissonance between the Methodist Church as it was and the Methodist Church as it is, and through that to raise the question of the logical inconsistency of a church maintaining a cultural and psychological distance from the world around itself. Out of that I have postulated a certain theory for restoration of the imbalance and suggested certain examples of how that theory might enrich the evangelism praxis of a small segment of the Methodist Church.

My research was further limited by the fact that I did not fully appreciate, when I set my questions for the interviews, the difficulty of unlocking narrative about liturgy, evangelism and conversion. As I noted in chapter 3 [3.1], I relied on Bosch's theory, and he did not have a specific interest in liturgical issues. This was compounded by the fact that none of the ministers showed much tendency to bring liturgical issues into the discussion of evangelism of their own accord. Thirdly, I was limited by having to largely learn about liturgy as I went along - so my attempts to demonstrate a natural juxtaposition between evangelism and liturgy cannot be considered the contribution of a liturgical expert, but that of somebody with a distinct missiological bias.

As a result of these considerations, this research is limited to being a small contribution to an ongoing debate amongst relatively few theologians (which is not to say that I consider the topic to be unimportant!). Hopefully that ongoing debate will produce more and more "astute analysis" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 160) of the situations faced by the Methodist churches in Cape Town and elsewhere, and other denominations in yet further contexts. Evangelism has often been brought into theoretical juxtaposition with liturgy; my contribution is to juxtapose liturgy to evangelism in the space *not* controlled by Christians. In doing so I believe that I have given expression to a genuine issue faced by the church – functional lack of connection with its surrounding cultures.

Another limitation that made itself very obvious, was that I found that I needed to argue for the inclusion of a whole new element in the foundational canon of the Methodist Church – making a case for the inclusion of the *Journal* alongside the *Notes on the New Testament* and the *Forty-Four Sermons* – in the teeth of long custom, and even the original *fiat* by John Wesley himself (MCSA, 2014, p. 13). Of necessity I was only able to do a very sketchy job of this; to do it justice would require focused research and reflection on that area alone. Once again, any possible value in this thesis could only be seen as raising a subject, not in settling it.

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### 7.3. *Future research options*

There have been a great many points during my research where I realised that further questions needed to be asked and further thought needed to be applied.

1. Further leisurely interaction with the interviewed ministers would enhance the learning from the interview and reflection process [3.1]. From an ethnographic standpoint the process of culture learning has only just begun with a first conversation.
2. Another area that needed to be referred for further research emerged from chapter 3. Why do similar people in similar circumstances faced with similar options for conversion, not necessarily convert? Would a successful conversion algorithm be too dangerous a thing to discover, anyway, or would a deeper understanding of conversion algorithms help people to withstand the manipulation of commercial interests better? Is the notion of the inscrutable action of God admissible in this process? And, if so, is his inscrutability an encouragement to evangelism or a discouragement?
3. The third issue that I ran across when writing chapter 3 was what appeared to be a major flaw in my research plan. I had completely ignored the alternatively faithed in my research formulation [2.1.3]. I resolved that at the time by considering that this study could be legitimately confined to one side of the argument (and I realised too that there are many more role players in the evangelism process than just the ministers and the alternatively faithed). But that would only be acceptable if I had a settled intention of doing further research into the attitudes of alternatively faithed people towards being evangelised by Christians. As can be seen in my appendix [Appendix B], I have taken the first steps towards doing that already.
4. And the fourth area that needs further research that I identified during the writing of chapter 3 was that I needed to do a wider study of the differences between evangelism and evangelisation – specifically where conversion to Christianity fitted in with the ongoing course of discipleship, and how discipleship functions in a theological milieu where conversion is de-emphasised. Are there any functional replacements for “conversion”; do there need to be?
5. There are signs of a speaking/silent division between Methodist ministers – some are quite positive and active in speaking about Jesus to the alternatively faithed; others seem theoretically opposed. This does not appear to be an ethnic divide. From a research point of view, it would be interesting to probe this specific issue and try to understand its significance for the church.

6. I have not collected enough data to be able to create a plausible model of “contemporary Cape Town Methodist liturgy”. The cultural diversity of the city would make it difficult, but nonetheless it could be important to find out what ministers are aiming at with regard to the liturgy of their churches. What is the interplay between innovation and traditionalism? How do globalising cultural forces affect the choices ministers make?
7. In section [3.2.1] I attempted an essay on analysing the socio-cultural complexity of Cape Town. This could only be a preliminary and partial study. Further work needs to be done in two areas in this regard: more work into specific local cultural and subcultural phenomena is essential for each Methodist church with regard to their communities; and more work needs to be done on developing theory of discovery of the “Other”, including both theological theory and methodologies for doing Christian cultural anthropology. This is an area where much work needs to be done in local congregations and micro-contexts.
8. In section [3.2.2] I noted that the hymnody of the Methodist churches could be a useful index for evaluating their liturgical emphases. I have first-hand experience of the different ranges of hymns sung from the official hymnbook (and a range of the songs sung that are not in that collection) by different congregations, and the range of other songs sung in different communities. I suspect that an investigation into the songs that are known and sung by local congregations would be fruitful in formulating local theologies of liturgy. Another area of interest might be how the hymns have been edited in various editions of the Methodist hymnbook down the years.
9. In [3.2.6] I raised the question in passing of the motivation for running franchised “evangelism training” courses. It would be of interest to discover why the ministers decide to run such courses. It would be important to try and quantify the impact of such courses on the evangelism praxis of the churches, and to hear the ministers’ evaluation of the long-term impact of such interventions – and the evaluation of participants. Should franchise courses be discouraged, or is there a way of shaping global content to local concerns? Is there a way of assessing how helpful/unhelpful a proposed course might be in a local context? Would my proposed Wesley Weekend seminar merely feed an addiction rather than helpfully address an issue?
10. More study could generate helpful insights into why evangelism seems to be something of a “hot potato” issue for the church – the minister deferring it to the congregation and vice versa; the young deferring the task to the old; the minister deferring it to the evangelist, etc. [0].
11. In chapter 3 I also interacted with the ministers’ puzzlement over the drop-off of membership of children after the confirmation liturgy. It seems that more work needs

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to be done in terms of explaining why the encapsulation of the youth fails so spectacularly and so predictably. There was also the odd phenomenon of the popularity of the Alpha Course. Both of these issues seem to me to speak to the need for a different approach to the encapsulation process [0].

12. In [2.2.2] I briefly discussed the puzzle of what alternatively faithed people think about evangelists and evangelism, and what impact that should have on formulating liturgies of conversion. To my mind this indicates that there are immense vistas of research required into how different cultures and subcultures think about *being evangelised*, and what impact their perceptions should have on the strategic approach of Christians who are tasked with convening liturgies of evangelism.
13. In [5.2.3] I looked at how the theory of organizational development and decay can be applied to the church and to the undertaking of evangelism as part of a rescue strategy for an ailing organisation. This needs much further research and reflection – is it theologically permissible to use evangelism for a purpose other than persuading people to consider conversion to Christian faith – for instance, in order to bolster the failing numbers of a local church, or to raise its income through more money in the collection plate? And if it turns out to be so, what are the practical and ethical boundaries for such an undertaking?
14. In [5.2.2] I considered the issue of what the theological basis for the ethical stance of the Cape Town ministers might be. There were some intriguing data points which touched on this issue with regard to a liturgy of conversion, but I realised that specific questions would need to be asked and focused conversations conducted in order to reach a clearer idea of whether there is any consensus, and if there is, exactly what its contours might be. Another issue that urgently needs investigation is the profligate deceitfulness of the televangelists, and their shameless manipulation of their audiences. I strongly suspect that an apologetic for evangelism has to include an admission of the shadow-liturgy of the Christian television dynasties, and the proposal of a positive, ethical evangelism. I think it also requires a truth and justice approach that names this evil as evil and seeks to eradicate it from the public sphere. That needs a great deal more attention.
15. In [5.2.3] I realised that I could not adduce from my data what the ministers thought of the justice issues involved in withholding potential exposure to the Gospel from others. This could only be discovered by asking further questions.
16. In [5.4.6] I touch on the theory of crisis. What might the factors be that would motivate the ministers to incorporate a major new liturgical element to their ministries? What would it take to move from the *status quo* to the *status quo esset*.

17. In [3.2.6] I have interacted with the ministers' self-perception of their evangelistic interaction with outsiders at such occasions as funerals, weddings and baptisms. It seems that the effectiveness of the ministers in these situations might well lie in the fact that they convene the liturgy of the church in situations which are not primarily under Christian control, and are in fact tailored for the interests and capacities of the alternatively faithed. It seems worth investigating.
18. In [6.2.1] I raised the issue that a conversation about the Gospel might be viewed as a micro-liturgy of conversion. It would be interesting to follow up the theory of conversation, ritual and evangelism. I would be very curious to push that subject a bit further and see what insights might get shaken loose.
19. In [5.5] I discuss creative experimentation with media. It seems that in this age of public social media it might be perfectly acceptable to do an ethnographic study of the ministers' social media posts. How do they communicate through this medium, and what concern – or sensitivity towards – outsiders do they show?
20. In [6.5.1] I consider the possibility of monitoring praxis informed by the *theoria* of a liturgy of conversion. Such monitoring would constitute a cycle of testing of the theory and produce useful confirmation/disconfirmation.
21. [6.5.1] deals with different lenses for re-reading the Journals. I suggest that we need more attention paid by Methodist theologians to a close reading of the *Journal*. The contours of such studies would need further delineation
22. In [5.5] I discussed the lack of general awareness of the narrative of the Gospel amongst members of the general public. This suggests two important possible directions of research - how much do people who are not Christians know about Jesus? How is that knowledge incorporated into their stocks of meaning? In connection with that, how aware of the Christian story are Methodist Christians themselves? How much of the Gospel narrative informs their communication of the Gospel to others? Is there any sense of story-telling in the evangelism that Methodist Christians are involved in? A Bible Knowledge Inventory would perhaps provide helpful insights.
23. I also made observations on prayer and liturgy, making suggestions as to how to add a concern for the conversion of the alternatively faithed to the current range of intercessory interests [6.2.1]. However, I can see that in quest of changes in this area it might be very insight generating to analyse the general subject matter of the intercessory prayers in a church (say, for a year?) in order to get a reading on the focus of the church's liturgical attention.
24. In a later section [6.2.1] I suggested a re-examination of the idea of public preaching. Further research here might include ethnographic study of sermons and preachers

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on trains or busses or at the Grand Parade in Cape Town. It might also involve some creative experiments with styles, content, and locations for the preaching of public sermons.

25. With regard to micro-liturgies of the counselling situation, [6.2.1]. I already have a record of many years' worth of counselling encounters with arbitrary people in public situations. The issue is whether I can use such material whilst still maintaining my integrity as a confidante – but it might be conceivable to structure research that could ethically probe the effect of such an approach to liturgy of conversion.
26. I think that one of the most promising lines to take with research of the liturgy of conversion via the medium of worship [6.2.1] might be to follow the worship-rich public processions of the Amadodana. An ethnographic analysis might well throw up very encouraging and useful data for the enrichment of the evangelism of the Methodist Church. Another issue I touched on in a footnote in the same section is that of hymnody – particularly the matching of theology to tunes that people other than Christians could relate to. Hymn/song analysis might generate the same sort of insight I suggested might result from intercession analysis.
27. In [6.2.3] I raise the issue of involving the alternatively faithed in the liturgy of conversion. This could well be a very diverse field of research, but it seems that it is vital for churches who wish to engage in a liturgy of conversion to have theoretical tools with which to read their particular local culture mix. The lowly conversation is, I submit, the basis for an ongoing range of research interventions [2.1.3]. And the liturgies of conversion that arise out of meaningful interaction with the alternatively faithed will then be an ongoing experiment in evangelism for local churches.
28. In terms of the architecture of openness, it would be interesting to conduct an architectural survey of the plant of the Methodist churches, and probe the theologies that infused the original architecture. I don't think that there are any of the police-station lookalikes that is a feature of so many contemporary structures, but it seems to me from my personal knowledge that I cannot think of any church building that portrays anything other than defensiveness and exclusion.

Setting out these areas for further research seems to me to indicate that this research has been extremely limited indeed. I look forward to doing further reading and discovering what others have been doing in this field. And I look forward to doing further primary research, especially in the Methodist Church. But I also have a long-term relationship with the Associated Churches of Thailand denomination, and I could envision that further studies along these lines might prove to be very helpful for the church in Thailand too.

## **7.4. So What? Conceptual Gains Made by this Research**

*Firstly, I have shown that, given sufficient intentionality, the Methodist Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be connected with its surrounding urban cultures as strongly as the Methodist Church in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The current cultural divide between Christian and alternatively faithed is not so much due to its impossibility, as to a conceptual, theological non-connection on the part of contemporary Methodists.*

*Secondly, I have argued that confidence in the Gospel as public truth is as viable now (and equally as “odd”) as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Philosophically one does not have to retreat from one’s cultural and religious particularity in a pluralist context – the pluralist city celebrates the diversity of alterity without enforcing conformity.*

*Thirdly, I have established that it is possible to hold a concept of liturgy that extends itself beyond the confines of sacred spaces. The church can be fully itself with a majority of alternatively-faithed congregants.*

*Fourthly, I have shown that the basis for all conversion can be understand as God’s work through his word, mediated primarily through close conversation. This entails a simple, direct human contact. If necessary, preaching might be utilised tactically, but only in order to open up opportunities for further close conversation.*

*However, I have also demonstrated that the Methodist churches in Cape Town are generally ideologically opposed to publicly disseminating their views as an official entity. I have speculated on the reasons for this reticence, and noted that it needs further research, but I have established that the Methodist church is characteristically publicly silent about the Gospel. It has been noted by Etherington that the early Methodist local preachers in Kwazulu-Natal were mockingly called *nontlevu* – “those who speak too much” (1997, p. 100). In the same way, Methodist congregations that retrieved the art of public speech might put themselves in the firing line of popular opinion and put themselves in danger of being nicknamed and ridiculed. “*Methodist*” used to be another such label. But, in this noisy age, one sad reality might well be that since the church does not speak up, it is perhaps treated as if it had nothing to say. A Methodist Church with a stronger public persona would be more likely to be noticed [6.3.4]; and, I believe, would be more likely to become a conduit for persuasion to conversion to Christianity for many.*

*I have also established that the Methodist Church has now taken on several of the “institutional church” characteristics that characterised the Anglican Church in Wesley’s England. In particular, the ministers make it clear that they are struggling with a constituency that is largely minimally devoted to the cause of the Kingdom and the Church. I*

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could imagine that a move towards a liturgy of conversion might be deeply unpopular, particularly amongst those for whom “traditional Methodism” has come to mean a way of being Christian that segregates believers from the world between the churches, and provides the maximum of insulation against existential angst, in return for the least amount of cultic participation. Its adoption might even usher in initial shrinkage of membership as conservative members sought out more congenial (less demanding) liturgical life. As such, I could see the liturgy of conversion as being profoundly dangerous towards the structures as they are. On the other hand, but no less dangerously, it would be a shift that might potentially result in a large influx of newly converted Christians. Exciting as that might appear, it would cause a jolt to the status quo from which it might not recover.

*I have demonstrated that the ministers are generally not equipped with either the theoretical or practical capacity for a steadily maintained liturgy of conversion. They seem generally at a loss about how to present evangelism and conversion to the alternatively faithed. They seem to lack the will to meaningfully interact with people in the spaces between the churches. The training of ministers would need to become far more missional: a deeper critical interaction with John Wesley as evangelist might prepare ministers for a ministry of Word and Sacrament that would consciously include liturgy of conversion, and a capacity for interacting evangelistically with the alternatively faithed – through Word and Sacrament. This would necessitate a somewhat more rigorous training of ministers in terms of cultural anthropology and sociology – which might be of great help to novice ministers plunged into disorientating new cultural situations<sup>702</sup>.*

*I have shown that Methodist churches have no formal inclusionary mechanisms for the alternatively faithed, no pragmatic will to reach out and connect with the alternatively faithed as a matter of course. Business meetings of the church might possibly discuss the nuts and bolts of evangelism with more enthusiasm, too, if there were to be cultural shift within the church towards a concern for the persuasion of the alternatively faithed to convert to Christianity. This would re-introduce a whole range of concerns for the church, hopefully relativizing many current paltry squabbles and revitalising the entire administration with an increased sense of ultimate meaning that appears to be poorly sustained at present by the regular diet of debates about architecture, status and procedure.*

*Lastly, I think that I have successfully demonstrated the Journal is potentially a mind-altering piece of literature that ought to be studied intensively by Methodist clergy – and anybody interested in the nexus of church and world. It shows the compassion-driven social ethics of*

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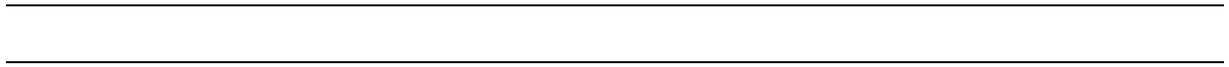
<sup>702</sup> Although Illich would have said that it would be difficult to teach anything revolutionary in a standard academic course: because universities are by their nature centres of conservatism, summarising “learning up to this point” for undergrads and only timidly pushing conceptual boundaries at the research level (cf. Illich, 1971, 1976, p. 100).

Wesley, portraying a Good News that took methodical steps towards redressing legal, social, economic, intellectual, emotional and spiritual bad news. One of the things the *Journal* models is the power of lifestyle reporting by ministers, encouraging those under their leadership to notice and record their own narratives of engagement in turn. ME001 recounted a distressing anecdote about how he managed to successfully sanitise his church from the unwanted attendance at liturgy of an unwashed, smelly street dweller [ME001: 4408]. If that is “delightful”, then I suggest that John Wesley tells better stories. I think this one catches my attention, fires my imagination, and gives me hope for the derelict church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

*“The rough mountains round about were still white with snow. In the midst of them is a small winding valley, through which the Derwent runs. On the edge of this the little town stands, which is indeed little more than a heap of ruins. There seems to have been a large cathedral church, by the vast walls which still remain. I stood in the church-yard, under one side of the building, upon a large tombstone, round which, while I was at prayers, all the congregation kneeled down on the grass. They were gathered out of the lead-mines from all parts; many from Allandale, six miles off. A row of little children sat under the opposite wall, all quiet and still. The whole congregation drank in every word with such earnestness in their looks, I could not but hope that God will make this wilderness sing for joy” (Wesley, 1827-2, p. 12)*

GK Chesterton observed that Christianity had not so much been tried and found wanting, but tried and found difficult, and therefore abandoned (Chesterton, 1910, 2016, p. 1:v). I suggest that liturgical engagement with the alternatively faithed has similarly not so much been tried and found wanting, as tried and found very, very difficult - or not even tried at all. A similar impulse of love and self-forgetfulness might yet yield extraordinary benefits for the Methodist Churches in Cape Town.

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# Appendix A Question Schedule for Interviews with Ministers

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## **Liturgy of Conversion Questionnaire:**

### **Pathos: Experience of Evangelism**

**1. Tell me about any evangelism that happens in your local church, or involves your congregation members in any way.**

- ❖ Please tell me some stories of what evangelism looks like in your local church community

**2. Tell me some stories about people who have experienced conversion in your local church.**

- ❖ What did people convert from?
- ❖ Have there been any changes in those who have converted? If so, what sort of change?

**3. In the last five years, would you estimate that your congregation grown, stayed more or less the same, or shrunk in numbers?**

- ❖ Where have any new congregation members come from:
  - children of members?
  - other Methodist churches?
  - other denomination churches?
  - through specialist outreach ministries?
  - other language and culture groups?
  - Anywhere else?
- ❖ What are some of the reasons people give for leaving your church?
- ❖ Do you have people who attend your church services very seldom, but whom you still count as church members? What do you think are some of the reasons that people keep their membership whilst not attending services often?

**4. Please describe your congregation in terms of languages, culture-mix, and socio-economic factors.**

- ❖ Are there some special things about your congregation you would like a visiting preacher to know before preaching there?

### **Logos: Thinking about Evangelism**

**5. Do you teach people about evangelism? If so, what aspects do you emphasize?**

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- ❖ If you were to preach a sermon in which you tried to persuade people to become Christians, what would you talk about?
- ❖ Do you know any stories from John Wesley's life that you sometimes use to illustrate your teaching on evangelism? If so, please tell me a few!

### **6. Are some members of your regularly attending congregation more involved in evangelism than others? If so, drawing on your pastoral experience, could you explain the reasons?**

- ❖ How popular is evangelism as an activity amongst your congregation members?
- ❖ What do you think persuades Christians to be actively involved in evangelism?

### **7. Does your church take responsibility for situations in the world that are not directly related to your Church life? If so, what responsibilities does your local church have towards society in general?**

- ❖ What, in your opinion, is the relationship between evangelism and any responsibilities your local church might have towards people who are not members of your congregation?
- ❖ Can you think of any ways in which John Wesley's thinking influences what you are trying to teach your congregation? If so, please tell me about them.

### **8. In your opinion, what are the most important factors involved in conversion?**

- ❖ How does conversion happen?
- ❖ In what ways does conversion require people to learn new information?
- ❖ Does conversion make any difference to people? If so, what changes in people when they are converted?
- ❖ Do you think that some people are perhaps more converted than others? Please explain your answer!
- ❖ How does your understanding of conversion relate to Wesley's theological emphases? If so, please tell me some of the key issues?

## **Ethos: Practice of Evangelism**

### **9. If you think of all the languages and cultures there are, and all the types of people and needs - which of these people is your church evangelising, and which people would you like them to evangelise?**

- ❖ What different language and culture groups do your congregation members mingle with, in the world beyond church?
- ❖ Is evangelism a formal part of your church program or an ad hoc activity?
- ❖ Do some people who regularly attend church need to be evangelised or not? Why – or why not?
- ❖ If you take the greater Cape Town area, Hout Bay to Somerset West, Mitchell's Plain to Malmesbury, Simonstown to Stellenbosch – In what places/areas DO your people evangelise, and are there any places/areas they definitely do NOT evangelise?
- ❖ What can you think of in John Wesley's thought that is relevant to evangelism of your local church in its own context?

### **10. What sort of evangelism do you find that outsiders find the most persuasive?**

- ❖ What do you think outsiders in your community would find the most persuasive if they heard it from your church members? What would stop them in their tracks and bring them in?
- ❖ What do outsiders to the Christian community find most offensive about evangelism?
- ❖ Is it possible to limit the offensiveness of evangelism and still be effective at bringing people to a point of conversion? Please explain!
- ❖ What do you think made John Wesley successful as an evangelist?

***11. Is there any budget allocation for such people/concerns? Please explain the reasons.***

Who decides on any budget expenditure for the needs and concerns of people that are not Christians, or who are not members of your church community?

- ❖ If there is an allocation for evangelism, about what percentage of your annual local church budget would you guess is spent on it?
- ❖ Here's a fantasy situation. Somebody gives you R10,000 to spend on an "evangelistic project". How would you spend it?



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# Appendix B Criteria for Analysing Narrative Reality (Gubrium & Holstein)

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Criterion	page
In what ways does the minister reveal her/his identity-in-society? Are my interviews producing biographically sensitive accounts? What is the “location stories” of the minister?	11-12, 73, 140
How can I read the social contexts of my interviews? How do the minister’s’ stories operate in society?	15, 25
What accounts of evangelism are privileged/disparaged? To what extent are the minister’s stories informed by a desire to give “correct” answers? How does MCSA shape the telling of the minister’s stories? Is there a corporate MCSA evangelism narrative? Who controls the meta-narratives? In what ways does the minister deliver a theologically socialised narrative of evangelism? What is the organisationally preferred narrative of evangelism in the MCSA? Who teaches Methodist ministers about evangelism? Am I noting the organisational embeddedness of the account?	16, 46- 47, 110, 129, 151, 162, 174, 196, 176
How do my research needs shape the story of this interview?	16
What is the indigenous code of conduct I need to relate to during this interview? Does this minister have a Code of the Collar? What is the “ministers’ code”? How does it impact his/her storytelling?	30, 208, 143
What specialised knowledge and vocabulary is on view? What is the “jargon load” of the interview?	32, 34
Who are the potential future audiences as far as the minister is concerned? In what ways is the minister worried about repercussions from her/his storytelling?	33, 187
In what ways do I collaborate with the minister in telling this story? How are narrative rights/obligations/power distributed in the interview situation? Am I clear in my mind over my role as a collaborator in the story making? Am I giving the minister the privilege of definition? What “authorisation devices” does the minister use? What “authorisation devices” do I use? Is the “coercive cult of expertise” on view in my interviews? By me? By the minister?	37, 49, 93, 215, 217, 222
How do my interview questions function as activation mechanisms?	43
Is there any evidence of narrative silencing on either side? Does my privilege as a research story-teller conflict with the minister’s authority as a story teller? In what ways does the minister’s objectives clash with mine? Could I perhaps regard some of the ministers as hostile witnesses? In what ways does the minister compete with me to tell alternative stories? How do issues of status, hierarchy and entitlement play out in my interviews? Does the minister experience my status as storyteller of her/his stories as a threat? Is s/he used to have the role of meta-narrator?	52, 53, 83, 93, 106, 109, 149
Are there any patterns in the apparently haphazard answers I sometimes receive? What do I learn from elaborations by the minister? Are there any significant “emergent allied topics”	57, 70, 98
How does the minister forge linkages between what s/he knows and what I am asking? What does s/he compare and contrast?	67, 71, 72
Can I analyse/perceive an intended effect of this interview?	81
What notable metaphors are in play? Dramaturgical? Business?	85
How does the setting of the interview affect the interview? In what ways does the interview situation set up a relationship between me and my interviewee? How well do I establish rapport in my interviews?	123, 128, 200
How does the minister retell stories and become “interpretively reproductive”? What are the intertextual influences on her/his narrative?	129, 190
In what ways do churches function as private/public settings?	142
In what ways does storytelling & status express a reflexive relationship?	152
How do the minister’s stories assign narrative status?	154
How does the minister’s job affect his/her telling about evangelism? How does her/his professional gaze impact his/her reporting on evangelism? Am I taking sufficient note of formalised thought-categories? Do I	161, 164,

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note the Job & Organisation component to the minister's stories?	165, 173
Are there any family resemblances amongst the ministers?	179
In what ways does Wesley's Journal provide a resource for the construction of accounts? In what ways is there continuity/discontinuity between the story of Methodism Now and Methodism Then? What are the reasons for continuity/discontinuity?	180, 190, 191-2
In what ways is the discourse of secular humanism operational as a resource for the stories?	183
What is a good story of evangelism? One that is "narratively adequate"? What story does the minister want to tell about evangelism – that all is fine? What version of the story of evangelism is the minister giving to me?	199, 202, 215
Am I judging the interviews by the minister's standards of adequacy or my own?	202
What makes a minister a credible storyteller to his/her congregation? To me? What makes me a credible storyteller to the ministers? To my examiners?	212
Does the Minister trust me as an adequate story teller?	213
How has the topic of evangelism and liturgy emerged through this interview?	225
How has the plot of evangelism and liturgy unfolded through the interviews?	225
What themes have arisen through the story telling?	226
What intertextual topics have emerged?	226
What narrative environments have been occupied?	227
Have I noted the "scenic presence" of the interview – gestures, pauses, etc.? Roles. Purposes. Audiences. Modes of expression. Emphases	75-76, 85

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# Appendix C FaceBook Poll of Outsiders' View of Christianity

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I cut and pasted this directly from my Facebook page. The thread is still available at <https://www.facebook.com/martin.mostert.16> . I started with a request and a number of people then responded. These friends are both Christian and Alternatively-faithed, and represent a very wide range of background experience.

## **Martin Mostert**

14 December 2016 ·

Hey there everyone! As you know, I inhabit a paradigm completely dominated by the Christian worldview. But many of you do not. It is impossible for me to look at my worldview objectively, but I am doing some studies - as you know - that require me to get some outsiders' input!

Could you PLEASE help me by pointing out what appears to you to be irrational, awkward, dangerous, archaic, inconsistent, or embarrassing about Christianity from your point of view? I promise I won't push the conversation any further - this is not me putting an evangelist's shoe in the door! I just need some data (and some resources) that are not available in the Stellenbosch University Theological Faculty Library 😊:)

1717 Brenda Hector, Nicholas R. Munro and 15 others

**AF** Misogyny.

· 14 December 2016 at 13:33

**BF** Trump white nationalist so called evangelical christians

· · 14 December 2016 at 14:01

**CM** Hell

14 December 2016 at 14:10

**DF** Can I write you an essay? 😊😄

· 14 December 2016 at 15:09

**Martin Mostert** yes please

· 14 December 2016 at 21:04

**EM** Oh, it can be a very long conversation...

· 14 December 2016 at 15:15

**FF** I'll inbox you once I've thought about what most disturbs me.

· 14 December 2016 at 16:23

**GF** · Gosh... As a christian I can add a bunch of stuff...

· 14 December 2016 at 16:33

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**HF** Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles

· 14 December 2016 at 17:01

**IF** Objectivity is only in God's mind-eye, so from my biased backwood, going the extra mile, showing the other cheek and entertaining strangers that may be angels are all of the above.

· 14 December 2016 at 17:27

**IF** I will however concede that I believe all of the above to be true and viable and none of the above from an other-worldly point of view. Contradiction of myself is inevitable until the fulfillment of that, or whom which, I place my faith, hope and trust.

· Reply · 14 December 2016 at 17:50

**JF** Female leadership

· 14 December 2016 at 17:55

**JF** Women who do not fit the traditional view of how a woman should & what she can/cannot do

· 14 December 2016 at 17:57

**KF** Narrow minded attitude to dress, make up, and concept of marriage between two heterosexuals. Plus being very insular, no Muslim friends, or gay friends, ( unless you are trying to convert them. ) that's just for starters!

· 14 December 2016 at 18:02

**LF** the no xxx friends is real! one has to intentionally break from some sort of mould in order to disrupt this status quo.

· Reply · 15 December 2016 at 17:11

**MF** The lack of recognition of historical context and individual subjectivity when reading texts (present most versions of all religions, so I'm not sure if it helps). Misogyny, racism, homophobia, general lack of accommodation for difference consequent to this.\*

\*outside of we'll forgive you but judge you and be patronising and expect you to change to adjust to our normal.

[Of course, does not apply to all proponents of any faith]

Possibly the idea of a singular absolute truth (common to monotheism), which was arguably useful for the development of western science to a certain point but is not helpful in getting along with people and with many current scientific developments (though the middle ages).

· 14 December 2016 at 18:08

**NM** Conflict with evolutionary and natural science; themes of sexism, racism, homophobia, etc, in the Bible and their continuing entrenchment in so many Christian communities. On a personal level, I have experienced many Christians' handling of sexuality to be deeply problematic.

· 14 December 2016 at 22:32 · Edited

**OM** Creating homogeneous feel-good communities where everyone buys into the same common ground narrow rhetoric...

· 15 December 2016 at 15:00

**PF** I agree with what everyone has said here -- especially on gender and sexuality -- so I'll add specifically to the concepts of hell and sin. I cannot reconcile the idea of a loving God with the idea of a God who would send someone to hell simply for not believing in Christ the Saviour. It's nonsensical.

I am resentful of Christians who cherry-pick the sins they choose to condemn. You know, people who cite chapter and verse about why it is a sin to be gay but conveniently choose to ignore everything else Leviticus forbids. And Christians who say they "love the sinner but not the sin", particularly in relation to LGBTI folks. I grew up around the rhetoric of "it's ok if they're gay as long as they don't practise it" and in a church (NG Kerk) that constantly spoke about having "deernis" (compassion) for gay people but soz y'all can't get married and you're still going to hell. Oh DO fuck off with your patronising bullshit and pretending to care. What I find unforgivable are "Christian" families disowning their children for being gay or trans. It doesn't matter what you call yourself, you do not have a shred of decency or compassion and you're not even attempting to follow the path of Christ.

· 15 December 2016 at 16:39

**PF** Hmm. Apparently I'm angrier than I realised.

· 15 December 2016 at 16:39

**LF** the us'ing and them'ing that we tend to do say be. at least overt can be questioned. covert, or just inadvertent 'ings, are even less ayoba.

· 15 December 2016 at 17:39

**QF** · Friends

The absence of doubt

· 15 December 2016 at 21:42

**RF** · Friends with PF

Despite the fundamental basis of Christianity being love, Christians and Churches purposefully and actively discriminate, exclude, hurt, and judge people based on a very limited rule-based archaic world view. Love most often, has nothing to do with it.

15 December 2016 at 22:49

**RF** · Friends with PF

Also, Christianity and Churches operate in a patriarchal world. Those in power (and the structures supporting them), are invested in the status quo, and much like any unwoke privileged person, fights bitterly to defend and retain their position and worldview. In truth, love and humanity are the collateral damage. Dogma and privilege make a deadly combination.

· 16 December 2016 at 09:30

**SM** The church struggles with women in authority, sexual orientation and sexual practice /divorce. These three areas are ones the world appears to have led the way. Judgemental attitudes from the church rather than compassion and love seem to be the norm

· 16 December 2016 at 11:32

**TM** I find it an interesting paradox that in general Christians deem democracy to be the best form of governance and yet their religion is essentially a monarchy.

## The Liturgy of Conversion

· 16 December 2016 at 11:47

**UM** The church makes a lot of hurtful decisions despite the fact that God does not discriminate and love all people

· 16 December 2016 at 20:59

**VM** The Church seems to have little to say to most creative people except to tell them to obey. If we accept that the entire Universe exists because God's Nature is fundamentally creative, why does the Church have so little to say about this?

· 19 December 2016 at 20:35

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### **Martin Mostert**

· 16 December 2016 ·

Hi there everybbody! I would like to say a heartfelt thankyou to all who responded to my recent poll on opinions of Christianity from the outside looking in. I know that it triggered traumatic memories and deep feelings - and yet you were still prepared to put in words things you feel. I must say that while I am not surprised at the emotion, given the framing of my question, I am nonetheless aware of the privilege of not being unfriended! Thank you for modelling tolerance 😊:) I will try and catch your responses (anonymised) and drop them into the academic theological pool. They can potentially do some good in our introspective sub-world 😊:)

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**Table 6 Analysis of FaceBook Interaction**

gender	F:14	M:8
Objection to the Church: Issues		frequency
Right wing politics		1
Hell		2
Too many things to enumerate conveniently		4
Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles		3
Role of women		2
Patriarchy, power abuse		2
Cultural narrowness		1
Exclusive inclusivity, cultural patronization		6
Marriage issues wrt heterosexual marriage/divorce		2
Misogyny, Sexism, racism & homophobia		4
Conflict with science		2
Bible a sexist/racist/homophobic book		1
Poor hermeneutics		1
Judgementalism		3
Hypocrisy		6
Suppression of creative people		1

This is a self-selected group of respondents – of all my 386 “friends” these 22 people who replied were the only ones who chose to respond. However, they did so very vigorously and definitely – they felt that they had something important to say about the state of the church.

Martin Mostert

FaceBook Poll of Outsiders' View of Christianity

What they all have in common is that all of them seem to have been “positively hurt” by church – they are not responding to potential hurt that the church *might* inflict, but to hurt that the church *has* inflicted.

Another trend that emerges is that the church is hoist on its own petard. The core message of love and integrity is very well grasped by these observers – as is the manifest hypocritical double-standard application of the Christian communities.

A picture emerges of an extremely unattractive social institution, which is being treated with the contempt it deserves by the people it itself disdains.

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### **Martin Mostert**

· 10 hrs ·

Hi there, everyone. Last December I asked people who wanted to let me know what negative assessments they had of the Church.

22 people took the time to respond, for which I am very grateful.

Anyway, I am just about to add my preliminary analysis as a footnote in my thesis, and I thought I should let you see it before I publish it - I hope it's a fair reflection

"This is a self-selected group of respondents – of all my 386 “friends” these 22 people who replied were the only o...

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**WM** I do not recall your request, however my penny's worth is: we as congregations are "killing" our pastors, so, instead of them shepherding/leading, they are being browbeaten.

29 April at 11:28

**XF** That is an amazing clear message. Perhaps it is those who are hurt AND once loved the church who care enough to respond.

29 April at 12:00

**YF** Oh dear not good for us who are the church!!! We need to draw closer to God so we can do His work as He would want us to so people are not put off or hurt anymore!!

29 April at 12:03

**ZM** The buzz Word today is "what's trending"? Bottom line is that not many care or could be bothered. Everyone has moved on and no one is interested in taking responsibility. Thank you for your research. Fortunately churches do die. Some rise and surprise. Some rise and surprise us. Others will appear when we least expect it. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. We are Easter people waiting for new birth. Where the spirit is, there is freedom

29 April at 14:10

**AAM** Oops, doesn't bode well for churches!

29 April at 14:13

## The Liturgy of Conversion

**BBF** Can I still respond now if I'm quick - plus ask a few others who may want to respond? Sorry I didn't respond at the time.

30 April at 02:45

CCF· Friends with XF

I don't think I'm friends with Martin on FB so didn't get the message but would like to say that we've certainly been in hurting churches but have not felt hurt by the church. Just been amazed by the huge work done and the difficulty of working with a host of volunteers

30 April at 21:32

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**DDF**

Hi Martin, I have been trying to decide whether I should engage with this post and it really has made me think of how the church has hurt/is still hurting people. I would say that I have been hurt in both a personal and "world" way. Personally, because I have to defend "me" due to gender roles that are perpetuated by the church that I simply do not fit - can't even. "World" wise, because I have so many friends who have been on the side of receiving hate speech - whether it is for their gender ideas/roles, pro life ideas, sexual orientation, personality discrepancies, Western Christian upbringing and the effects it has on a broken country, and a general inability to voice thoughts in church without being slammed for it. I have so many friends who hate the church vehemently, because of the preaching of division that comes from the church, that I sometimes think we need to relook our goal as a church in terms of preaching the gospel and rather start learning about the Christian/Church history to try and stop any division - or at least contextualise our place in this world. I can't blame them for their position in despising the church because I see very clearly what the church has done and in response, from the church, you get the phrase "well, we are just human" which sits uneasily with me. Yes, we are human but we should also acknowledge that by the nature of our teachings we should be compassionate rather than judgemental. I would be glad to meet with you if you still need more people for your study. It might be good for me because I, personally, have held in a lot of these issues to not hurt my church going and non- church going friends but to the detriment of my spiritual health.



Thank you DDF. I'm happy to talk...these are hot issues that lie like magma below the cold crusty continental plates of the church - and I suspect that we should pay MUCH more attention to earthquakes and volcanoes

**EEM** I think that this is somewhat defeatist in the sense that the church has also made amazing positive contributions to society as a whole. Let's think now.... libraries, herbalism, medicine, hospitals, schools, statistics (births, deaths, marriages), counselling, care of the poor, activism against slavery, care of lepers.... In NZ which is the most secular state you could think of, the Salvation Army (admittedly in an altered guise) and the City Mission and similar are some of the biggest purveyors of housing, aid and care to the poor. I have private views on who it is that seeks the downfall of the church. Is it the church as an institution that fails people, or individuals within that system that fail people? That's what humans do. What is your premise Martin, and is it carefully constructed? Can I be a respondent?

11 May at 05:41

**Martin Mostert** thanks, EEM. The interesting question is why, with all the good examples of, say, Jesus (and the Sallies), the day-to-day institution of the church seems to lapse so readily into hurtful legalism? Sadly you will have to wait for post-doc research to be a respondent at this stage, though! NO MORE DATA PLEASE he screamed 😊 :)

**FFM** Now we are starting to move in the right direction. The deeper you dig, the more you find. Perhaps we need to ask the question "what are churches doing. NOW?". I think we have emptied our reserves (auto bank) and traded on our inheritance. We need to start all over again. Even in New Zealand!

11 May at 09:52

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### ***Analysis of second wave of response***

The second wave of response, was from surprised and sometimes defensive Christians. Some are confusingly off point. Some seem relieved to have the issues ventilated. The general trend of surprise shows how badly this sort of interaction is needed by Christians with the alternatively faithed.



# Appendix D Preaching Schedule



## METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA UVWXYZ CIRCUIT PREACHING PLAN OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2017

	Month	OCTOBER				
		<i>Proper 21</i>	<i>Proper 22</i>	<i>Proper 23</i>	<i>Proper 24</i>	<i>Proper 25</i>
	Date	1	8	15	22	29
<b>Church A</b>	07h30	Minister 1	Minister 3	Minister 3	Preacher 9	
	09h00	Minister 3	Minister 1	Minister 3	Preacher 2	
	11h00	Preacher 1	Preacher 4	Minister 1	Minister 3	
	18h00	Minister 2	Minister 3	Preacher 7	Minister 1	
<b>Church B</b>	09h00	Minister 1	Minister 2	Minister 2	Preacher 10	
	11h00	Preacher 2	Minister 1	Minister 2	Minister 1	
	18h00	Minister 3	Minister 1	Minister 1	Minister 2	
<b>Church C</b>	07h00	Minister 2	Preacher 5	Preacher 8	Minister 1	
	09h00	Preacher 3	Minister 3	Preacher 2	Minister 3	
	18h00	Minister 1	Minister 2	Minister 2	Minister 3	
<b>Church D</b>	09h00	Minister 2	Preacher 6	Preacher 10	Minister 2	
<b>Outside: Liturgy of Conversion</b>	<b><i>Outsider venue &amp; time chosen by minister/preacher</i></b>					
		Minister 3	Minister 2	Preacher 1	Minister 1	

## **The Liturgy of Conversion**