

Hybridisation as a Normal Process of Life: A Contribution to the “*Ukuthwasa*” Conversation within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

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Abstract

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is currently engaged in a conversation on *ukuthwasa* (initiation into an ancestral calling). The conversation has sparked different reactions within the Church. Some are uncomfortable engaging in this conversation as it is seen as an unnecessary and unChristian conversation to have within the Church. There are also some who have gone through the *ukuthwasa* and feel that the conversation is long overdue within the MCSA. Furthermore, some believe in *sangomas* and are happy about this conversation. While this conversation is taking place within the MCSA, it is shrouded in suspicion and fear. There is fear that it might lead to the conversion of the Church to African traditional religion, which many feel is the opposite of Christianity. This paper is intended as a contribution to this conversation by using secondary or desk research as a methodology. Firstly, the paper defines the African worldview in which *ukuthwasa* is embedded. Secondly, it explores the meaning of hybridisation. Thirdly, it indicates areas within the Christian faith where hybridisation has become part of worship and belief. Finally, the paper concludes by recommending openness in this conversation as a likely solution that could lead to the Methodist vision of a “Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations.”

Keywords: hybridisation; *ukuthwasa*; conversation; Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

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Introduction

The Methodist Conference¹ of 2022 entrusted the Doctrine, Ethics, and Worship Committee (hereafter DEWCOM)² to produce a discussion document and lead a discussion in the MCSA on *ukuthwasa* (DEWCOM 2023, 3). The article uses the Nguni word “*ukuthwasa*” as used in the DEWCOM document and the conversation is known as such within the MCSA. However, in Tswana and Sotho ethnic groups the word “*bongaka*” is used (Dennis 1978,54). Several issues informed the need for this conversation. The first is the negative experiences of both lay and clergy persons who have undergone the *ukuthwasa* process or who have been initiated into ancestral calling (DEWCOM 2023, 4). Secondly, this conversation has come about in the MCSA because the Church acknowledges that it has no theological position when it comes to ancestral veneration, or on how Methodist members navigate their cultural heritage with their theological persuasions, let alone on the practice of *ukuthwasa* or initiation into ancestral calling (DEWCOM 2023,4). This touches on aspects such as African Christianity and the decolonising of Christian spirituality. Thirdly, this conversation further seeks to explore what it means to do ministry while also practising an ancestral calling, and at the same time to consider the ethical ramifications of such a situation. The MCSA sees this as an opportunity to engage in its understanding of Christian vocation in line with African traditional healing practices (DEWCOM 2023,4). The DEWCOM discussion paper notes that “divergent views spanning between separatist and integrationist approaches exist across the MCSA” when coming to African traditional religious practices. Therefore, the conference has tasked all the MCSA Circuit quarterly meetings and districts to have a conversation about this topic of *ukuthwasa*. This paper is a contribution towards this sensitive, and yet necessary, conversation within the MCSA, bearing in mind that little or no work has been done to engage the African worldview.

Methodism, a Product of Colonialism

MCSA³ traces its roots to the missionary work which was initiated by the Wesleyan Methodist Church through the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in the early 19th Century in the Cape region, now known as the Republic of South Africa (Williams and Bentley 2020,1). However, it is important to note that lay people were the pioneers of the spread of Methodism before the arrival of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Forster (2008,4) says that the first mention of a Methodist in the Cape was in

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- 1 Conference in the MCSA refers to the highest decision-making body of the Church led by the Presiding Bishop. The Conference meets annually to deliberate and make final decisions for all MCSA structures and congregations.
 - 2 DEWCOM plays the role of a think tank on behalf of the MCSA when it comes to issues of doctrine, ethics and worship. This body does not operate independently, and its mandate comes directly from MCSA conference.
 - 3 There are many denominations which use the name Methodist. In this article, the MCSA refers to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, which is formed by six countries namely, South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Botswana, and Mozambique.

relation to a person by the name of George Middlemiss, who was stationed there as a soldier of the 72nd Regiment. Whilst in the Cape of Good Hope, he started a small group of like-minded people. Mention is also made of Sergeant Kendrick, who was a lay leader who started a small class meeting that eventually grew into a congregation of 142 members. The Wesleyan Missionary Society therefore took over from the work that had already been established by lay Methodist people (Forster 2008,4).

This background gives context to the fact that the ecclesiology, doctrines, accountability of presbyters, liturgies etc. replicated those of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in England (Williams and Bentley 2020,1). Having said this, the reality that should be acknowledged primarily is the fact that Methodism comes from Britain; it does not have any African origins. Hence Forster (2008,4) says, “Missionaries were dispatched from England to establish and spread Methodist work throughout the subcontinent.” Williams and Bentley (2020,1) point out that “the Christianity proclaimed by the Methodist missionaries carried a deeply colonial worldview, hence, its doctrines and practices reflected those of its ‘mother’ denomination.”

Amongst the commendable work these Wesleyan missionaries did was to work hand in hand with and among the indigenous communities (Forster 2008,5). Williams and Bentley (2020,2), however, mention that human nature crept in, as the emphasis on the dominance of Western culture over African culture emerged. Williams and Bentley (2020,2) elaborate on this by stating that “the Indigenous people were regarded as heathen together with many of their traditional values, religious beliefs and cultural practices being rejected.” Schmidt (2015, npn) adds that the Christianity that the missionaries proclaimed in Africa led to cultural assimilation. This later led to the missionary version of Christianity being rejected by Africans over time, as they started developing their own version of Christianity that was liberated from the colonial version. Molobi (2019, 320) says that this led to the growth of African indigenous churches (AICs) around 1885 to 1914, due to being disappointed by missionaries who did not oppose the slave trade and abuse, and the missionaries’ views that African culture was feeble and doomed to collapse. Molobi (2019, 320) further states that “the Western ethnographic literature was ignorant of African worldviews and the societal practices of traditional faith.”

Schmidt (2015, npn) further explains that the ideology that influenced the European expansion in Africa included the notion that the conquest of Africa was ordained by nature and science because Africans were inferior to Europeans. To the missionaries, Africans were so primitive that they needed Christianity to advance them, while at the same time, African natural resources were looted. Nel (2020,100) highlights what he terms “a pillar of mission institutions...” which is the link between religion and education. According to Nel (2020,100), the indigenous people at mission stations were taught to read English and Dutch, which was aimed at empowering them to read the Bible. However, education also had other benefits for those indigenous people who pursued it, such as being integrated into colonial life through the inculturation of notions such as respectability and civilisation. Education at the time “had benefits like regular

labour for monetary rewards, monogamy, chastity outside marriage, sobriety, attendance at church on the Sabbath and a thoughtful rather than emotional demeanour in church, literacy, European-style clothing and housing in which possessions could be kept and decency maintained” (Ngubane 1984,77).

Ngubane (1984,77) elaborates on how Africans responded to missionary Christianity as follows: “It was expedient to belong to a church; Africans appreciated the discipline of church membership and accruing benefits, such as acceptance by missionaries and colonial powers, access to schooling, acquisition of jobs etc.” To a certain degree, for other Africans, this meant that Christianity had economic benefits rather than spiritual nourishment. Schmidt (2015, npn) further asserts that “Christianity played an important role in the colonization not necessarily of the African continent, but rather the hearts and minds of Africans...” Having said this, it is a fact that the doctrines and teachings of the MCSA have touched and had an impact on many African communities, hence its influence on the lives of many prominent South Africans such as Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Justice Dikgang Moseneke, and others, who were all educated by the Methodist Church. This article argues that the British heritage should first and foremost be acknowledged when reflecting on the topic under study. The undermining and sidelining of the African worldview is a fact that should be acknowledged, even though the MCSA has deliberately put this on the periphery. If the African worldview was taken seriously by the MCSA, the Methodist Book of Order and other official documents of the MCSA would have documented this, and engaged with it as a reality that Africans wrestle with in their daily lives.

Mainline Churches Struggle to be African

Bompani (2006,1137) notes that the mainline churches (MC)⁴ acted as “a vehicle of modernisation and westernisation of the Indigenous population...” There seems to be a struggle in the mainline churches to forsake Christianity which has embodied the European culture. This is why Ezekweke and Kanu (2012, 72) argue that, due to the European missionaries undermining the African worldview, the Christian faith they preached has remained an implantation of the Christian message that reflected Western culture, without in any way having any aspects of Indigenous beliefs and practices. Ntombana (2015,105) argues that scholars within the mainline churches (MC) write extensively about the history and beliefs of the African-initiated churches (AIC) “but are silent on their position as far as Christianity and ancestor relationship are concerned.” Ntombana (2015,105) goes further to criticise the mainline churches for they do not freely express what he calls “their Africanness” in church, arguing that outside of the church, they practise African traditional practices:

such as *ukubuyisa* (the ritual reincorporation of the living-dead), *imbeleko* (ritual inclusion of babies into the clan), *ukwaluka* (rite of passage into adulthood), and visiting

4 Mainline churches in this article refers to former missionary churches that were introduced in Africa, or South Africa to be specific.

of traditional healers to seek guidance from ancestors. The other reality is that as much as elders of the MC are comfortable with the practice of African rituals behind the Church doors, young people find problems with this as to them it translates into two identities.

Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021, 3) state that there has been a decline in membership within the MC Protestant churches in South Africa. One wonders if the arguments of Ntombana (2015, 105) have anything to do with this decline. Ferreira and Chipenyu (2021, 4) go on to say that the MC has indicated that Black African people are recorded to have the highest percentage of membership decline.

What is *Ukuthwasa*?

Booi (2004,1) defines *ukuthwasa* not as an illness, but as a process of becoming a traditional healer. *Ukuthwasa* is a Nguni word which means “to come out” or “to be reborn.” It is understood as a calling by the ancestors to become a healer. It is interesting to note that Booi (2004,1) states that *ukuthwasa* is not an illness. This is because in Western medical terms, especially in the field of psychology and psychiatry, *ukuthwasa* symptoms are associated with what is referred to as “psychoses or diseases of unknown aetiology” (Booi 2004,1). Booi (2004,2) opines that in the process of *ukuthwasa*, sicknesses are imminent as indefinable symptoms in this path of becoming a traditional healer. The sicknesses in question are what in Western or scientific terminology are called hysteric, neurotic, epileptic, and schizophrenic. Mokgethi (2018,19–20) argues that this comparison is not helpful as it creates an impression that *ukuthwasa* is an informal educational process and it is “contrasted to the Western view of education without understanding the theoretical dilemmas, conceptual limits of our own thinking and without the critical engagement with the intricate details and propositions within Indigenous practices...” Again, this comparison dilutes the conversation because it does not allow the African worldview to define terms for themselves.

Furthermore, the visionary experiences of those with an ancestral calling are labelled as hallucinations or neurotic dreams, whereas in the African traditional context, such experiences are understood as normal processes of *ukuthwasa*. From the start of this study, therefore, it is evident that there are clashes in the understanding and interpretation of the symptoms or sicknesses associated with *ukuthwasa* from the Western and the African perspectives. Many may conclude that symptoms of *ukuthwasa* are signs of possession by evil spirits or demons, which is a different understanding from that of the African worldview (Mokhutso 2022, 1). In African understanding, the symptoms mentioned are normal as there is an understanding that sickness and suffering are manifestations of the body’s inherent wisdom. Sicknesses during *ukuthwasa* are understood as a process of self-realisation and self-development that the ancestors take one through (Booi 2004,2).

There are several symptoms that different people may experience as a part of their call to *ukuthwasa*. These symptoms may be the following:

The symptoms manifest themselves in separate ways, such as anxiety, fear, mental confusion, auditory and visual hallucinations, delusions, mood swings, social isolation etc. Buhrmann (1986) describes the symptoms as restlessness, violence, abuse, and aggression. There is also a marked tendency to aimless wondering; the afflicted often disappear for days at a time. They neglect their personal appearance and personal hygiene, eat poorly, often look, and become, really ill physically. They become promiscuous, or have loss of libido, they may become infertile and not bear children, they may violate other people's rights and commit crime, they may have multiple physical complaints, joints are the most affected parts of the body. The most constant feature is excessive dreaming...Persons afflicted with *intwaso* dream of water and rivers, of being submerged in a river pool or actually immersing themselves in a river, it is believed that such people are called by the ancestors to undergo training in the river. Others dream of forests and wild animals; it is believed that this indicates that they are being called to train in the forest. Animals in dreams are said to represent the ancestors, and animals that are mostly dreamt of are lions, tigers, crocodiles, and hippopotamus (Booi 2004,4).

Therefore, a diagnosis that the sick person is having symptoms of *ukuthwasa* is made by a trained and knowledgeable person. Mokgethi (2018,20) emphasises that only experienced and trained traditional healers can identify the symptoms and signs that a person must undergo this process of *ukuthwasa*. Moreover, Mokgethi (2018,20) posits that *ukuthwasa* is not just a path one undergoes due to physical symptoms; it is a spiritual calling that is dictated and governed by the ancestors. Kleinhempel (2017,649) points out that one cannot simply decide to be a *sangoma* or undergo *ukuthwasa* out of one's own volition or desire; it is a calling. Within the Christian faith, there is also an understanding that God calls His people. Fowler (1987,28) highlights the following understanding from the Greek word "*klesis*," translated as calling, invitation, or summons which "refers to the special relationship with God to which all followers of Christ are called." The second Greek word is "*ekklesia*" or "fellowship of those who have been called out by God into reconciled relation with one another and with God." Furthermore, in the New Testament, Paul uses the word "*kletos*," which means a calling to a particular office (Nel and Scholtz 2016,2). There is also another word "*klesis*," which refers to one's occupation (Nel and Scholtz 2016,2). Therefore, a call is key in the Christian faith, for all Christians as the people of God called in different vocations. In the Catholic theology, a calling or vocation is understood as an external call and a vocation as an internal call. This refers to a call of a monk and a call of a clergy in the following manner:

This tension already came to the fore in the monastic period, where a distinction was drawn between the call of the priest and the call of the monk. While the priest received his vocation via an external call, the monk received his via an internal call. The call of the cleric came through the bishop or the community. The vocation of the monk came directly from God. It was the monk who bequeathed to the church the notion of the inner call (Hahnenberg, 2010:loc. 1162).

In the Anglican tradition, Rowan Williams (2014, loc.62) notes that “God does not drop a vocation on you, but we need to think of Him speaking over and over again the same word to us – our true name, our real identity.” The Calvinistic understanding of calling goes beyond a spiritual call (either to ministry or Church related) but includes ordinary work people do as a calling from God, and a calling to ministry is working among the working people of the Lord (Nel and Scholtz 2016,5). The MCSA understands a calling in the following manner:

those who are called of God and who have the qualities of Christian character, evangelical zeal and preaching ability to offer for the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The primary qualifications for the work of the Christian ministry are the sense of a divine call, spiritual and intellectual gifts, the graces of Christian character, and the fruits of Christian service (The Methodist Book of Order 2016, 30).

This definition recognises a call as something divine; it is God’s gift; it is spiritual, and it is embodied in a Christian character. Furthermore, a call is understood as an absolute obedience to God and the laws of the Church. In Xhosa, the trained and experienced healers are called *amagqira*, who are:

in the service of the ancestors because they are knowledgeable about their wishes and needs. They can understand and interpret their messages, which appear in the dreams of ordinary people; they are specialists in rituals and customs, which are required to communicate with the ancestors (Booi 2004,3).

Once a person has experienced the symptoms of *ukuthwasa*, and when a call to be a healer is confirmed by *igqira*, that person then undergoes training. The training process involves the novice healer living for a particular period as an apprentice for practical exposure and training (Booi 2004,5). It is only the experienced traditional healer and the ancestors of the initiate who can determine when the training is complete and a licence for the novice can be issued (Booi 2004,5). Kleinhempel (2018, 650) adds that the process of *ukuthwasa* can take several years of training, with a full-time programme of rituals, pilgrimages, vigils, instruction about herbs and traditional pharmaceutical medicine etc. Mokgethi (2018,20) says that *ukuthwasa* varies according to demographic regions, cultures, and various existing schools, with the language used in those schools also varying. Mokgethi (2018,21) highlights that the one with the ancestral calling undergoes training, or what is called *mpande*, *lefehlo*, or *iphehlo*, which are different schools with different specialities. *Igqira* or *gobela* is “a trained expert within a particular field of healing” (Mokgethi 2018,21). Again, each *mpande*, *lefehlo*, or *iphehlo* student is trained to have a sense of knowledge and understanding of an ancestral spirit that one possesses and that leads to specialising in different areas and technologies. Different ancestors use different technologies. Therefore, undergoing *ukuthwasa* is a process “to harness and develop the ancestral gift one was born with and to groom that individual into a specialist traditional healer that is in line with practices used by *idlozi*” (Mokgethi 2018,22). There are various specialists in traditional healing or ancestral calling namely:

i) *Izangoma*: a term popularly used to classify traditional healers, with *Sangomas* being characterised by music and dancing (*ingoma*).

ii) *Abalozi*: possessed and trained through whistles. *Abalozi* are rare as their training process is quite lengthy because they are considered the most powerful traditional healers (Cumes, 2013) who evolve to become *isanusi*, which is a seer, a fortune teller, and a prophet who channels spirits through whistles.

iii) *Umthandazeli*: one who heals through prayer, candles, and water. According to Mlisa (2009), these are the healers who are found in African Christian churches, who relinquish their traditional gifts by not undergoing *ukuthwasa* but instead opt to be faith healers within the church.

iv) *Umhlahli*: this healer indicates and tells or shows you the individual who brings misfortune unto you by using a method called *ukufemba* (Mokgethi 2018,22).

According to Dennis (1978,53), among Batswana people, there are two traditional healers or *dingaka tsa Setswana* as *dingaka tsemi dinaka* (priest-doctors with horns) are traditional healers who use bones for divination through *ditaola* or bones. A second category is *dingaka tsa dichochwa* (doctors without horns) who are herbalists or experts in roots and herbs. Dennis (1978,54) notes that *dingaka tsa dichochwa* did not occupy positions of high status like *dingaka tsa dinaka*. Bakow and Low (2018,437) add to this list other healers in African traditional religion such as “herbalists (*izinyanga*), prophets/faith healers (*abaprofeti*), traditional surgeons (*lingcibi*), and traditional birth attendants.” Due to the scope of this research, however, the focus is on healers who undergo *ukuthwasa* or *lefehlo*. Bakow and Low (2018,437) mention that in these groups, it is only *izangoma*, or diviners, who undergo the process of *ukuthwasa*. Booi (2018,24) adds that *ukuthwasa* is a deeply spiritual process which requires purity when communicating with the ancestors. To emphasise this spiritual aspect of *ukuthwasa*, students are taught during the *ukuthwasa* process different exercises to remain pure, such as refraining from certain foods and sexual activities (Booi 2018,24).

Hybridisation

Jones (2022,7) says that the word “hybridity” is found in biology and indicates where different strains of plants or animals are crossbred. The purpose of hybridisation, according to Jones (2022,8), is to produce an improved offspring from a parent plant or animal species. The word can also be used to refer to humans, especially when referring to cultural hybridity, which reflects a contemporary society characterised by transnational migration, cultural appropriations, and diasporic peoples, all of which contribute to the hybridisation of cultures of the world. This leads to the borrowing of languages, cultures, and practices, all benefiting each other (Jones 2022,8). According to Jones (2022, 8), hybridity can be both negative and positive. The negative aspect of hybridity is the fact that there can be a dominance of cultures and languages, which may lead to the extinction of other cultures and languages. An example of this could be in

reference to the Christian faith and Western culture that has dominated other countries and even continents such as Africa. That is the negative aspect of hybridity. The positive aspect is the mutual benefit of both sides. There are, for example, commonalities in South African culture which are used and understood by all cultures, and certain phrases in language, like the “braai”, which are uniquely South African. It is for this reason Ngubane (1984,77) states:

Religion has always been the medium in which distinct cultures encounter and perceive one another most acutely because it provides the symbol language in which they communicate. But it is also in religion where African and Western cultures clashed, and still clash, most violently with far-reaching consequences.

For this research, a definition of hybridity is that of Jones (2022,9) who posits that hybridity:

refers to the merging of two well-defined and distinct cultures to form a new hybrid creation. Such merging of distinct varieties—species in fact—is what happens in the process of hybridisation in the botanical world. Rather, a hybrid identity in human cultural and religious experience is often fashioned from multiple sources, whose boundaries and centers may not be clearly marked.

This paper argues that hybridity is a natural process and a common trait in modern society. I, therefore, aim to demonstrate that Christianity as understood currently is a product of hybridisation, as Jones (2022,9) argues that Christian identity is formed by a hybrid identity resulting from an “amalgamation of diverse cultures, religious traditions, and ideologies, as well as different social locations.”

Hybridisation of Christianity

Jones (2022,9) posits that Christian missionaries applied what he calls “forced hybridity” when they insisted that “people who wish to follow Christ must adopt foreign elements into their identity.” Jones (2022,10) opines that whilst the missionaries insisted on forced hybridity, there were some practices which they thought were for the advancement of the Indigenous communities, like teaching reading, writing, and translating the Bible into the native languages, which in itself was a way of importing ideas, assumptions, behaviours, and affections from the local religious traditions thereby creating a hybrid Indigenous Christian identity.

The Bible also records this hybridity in Scripture passages such as Acts 15, where Gentiles were required to adopt Jewish cultural practices for them to qualify as genuine Christians. Orogun (2023, 2) argues that hybridisation has also affected the Christian faith which has adopted some cultural elements from Judaism, Greek, and Roman beliefs. This is a process which does not only affect culture, but religion too (Orogun, 2023,2). Methodism has also undergone hybridisation to a certain extent. Mtshiselwa (2016,103) mentions how worship is conducted in the Black Methodist churches using drums, African rhythms, and applying African idioms when preaching. Such activities

are used in the Methodist Church, which was introduced originally by the British. With hybridisation, as mentioned by Mtshiselwa (2016,103), one can conclude that an African flavour has been added to Methodism. Kumalo (2020,3) laments, however, that when one looks at the historical records of Methodism in South Africa, it appears that native missionaries are overlooked. Kumalo (2020,3) argues that indigenous missionaries should be acknowledged for their contribution to spreading the gospel. He points out that “they did a lot of work interpreting it to their language and cosmology. The factor common to all of these is that they used the Indigenous language and symbols of the people,” which is hybridity.

Hybridity and Identity

Having explored the concept of hybridity, what it is, and how it has infiltrated religion, culture, and the globe, this paper now addresses an especially crucial point that must be emphasised, and that is how hybridity affects identity. The reality which this article aims to address is that the Christianity that was brought by Methodist missionaries was done with the colonial mindset that imposed a view on Black African Methodists that their culture was not to be embraced, and that their perception was negative. This, unfortunately, denied most Africans the opportunity to study and understand the African worldview for what it is. Klaasen (2018,4) says that the missionaries “both Catholic and Protestant, applied inculturation in pastoral care ministries. This leads to monocultural ethnocentric biases. This refers to the domination of one culture as superior to another culture.” Indeed, the European culture, the Bible, and the Christian faith which has been proclaimed were deemed superior to any other religion (Froise 2005,28). Again, this has been used as a measure of African worldview, which has led to a persistent attitude that has made it easy to label anything African as demonic and heathen. Hence, to date, most mainline churches do not possess a policy or doctrinal document that engages the African worldview.

Mainline churches have remained foreign churches in Africa, hence members of these Churches live a dual life—Christians by day, and Africans by night (Ntombana 2015,110). Hence Mokhutso (2023,18) argues that the MCSA is not an African church, but instead a church in Africa because it ignores African ontology and epistemologies. It is for this reason that this article commends the MCSA for taking the lead among other mainline churches to engage with the African worldview. This is a valuable conversation as most Africans are struggling with all sorts of issues and not finding answers in the mainline churches. Forster (2018,23) says that Methodism in Southern Africa is like a potted plant. What missionaries brought to Africa was a potted plant, and it is high time to remove the plant from the pot and plant it in African soil, to be nurtured by African nutrients.

Discussion

African Identity

Mokhutso (2023,18) has raised the argument that the MCSA is not an African church. Among other issues, he poses the question of why it has taken so long for the MCSA to discuss *Ukuthwasa*. What has been happening in all these years to those who were battling with an ancestral calling? How were they treated by the MCSA? Furthermore, when looking at the doctrinal and disciplinary document of the MCSA, known as the Methodist Book of Order, what is African about it? These questions do not imply that the MCSA should take everything African in its quest to be an African church. Instead, the argument is that Black African members are influenced by their worldview, and until the church engages this African worldview, it risks failing to achieve its vision, which is “A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations” (Methodist Yearbook 2022,2). Magezi (2006,510) defines a worldview as follows: “A worldview is the way that people see or perceive the world, the way they know it to be. It is man’s idea of the universe.” Magezi (2006,510) goes on to say that a worldview assigns meaning, gives explanations, and determines relations to others; it gives people perspectives on how they understand death, God, and nature. Simply put, a worldview “...is the lens through which people view life.”

To heal Africa, the MCSA should start by understanding Africa’s worldview. Ignoring conversations about African heritage will perpetuate an ongoing ignorance in this regard and could easily condemn it as nonsensical without fully understanding it. That would be an indictment, especially if directed at a church in Africa. The conversation on *ukuthwasa* should be aimed at re-learning and understanding the African worldview. Re-learning in this context implies taking a new look at the notion that everything African is heathen and demonic. An understanding of this matter could assist all Methodist people to be pastoral and understand those undergoing (or who have undergone) *ukuthwasa*. Lack of understanding breeds suspicion and intolerance, which is too high a cost for the MCSA.

There are commonalities between African traditional religion and Christianity, although the reality is that the colonial stigma that was implanted by missionaries persists. Colonial notions have become a wall that impedes conversations and learning. Hence Mokhutso (2022,1) argues that African traditional religion has been found guilty before being given a chance to speak for itself. This stigma needs to be revisited. Understanding the African worldview is critical if we aim to be a church that is interested in fully ministering in and to African society.

A Pastoral and Ministerial Relevance

Du Plessis (2017:2–3) asserts:

If pastoral care does not take culture seriously, the results can be devastating. The incompatibility of the different cultures, worldviews and religions seems to be at the

root of many evils that manifest as misunderstandings, conflict, racism, sexism, xenophobia, et cetera.

Having considered the African worldview, this article argues that the inclusion in the MCSA of this worldview will lead to more effective pastoral care. Jibiliza (2021,3) says, “Pastoral care of the church as a group should begin by observing and attempting to understand the inner, subjective experiences of the church’s self as a *koinonia* (community).” Therefore, with the conversation about *ukuthwasa*, the MCSA is on the right track. The clergy in the MCSA are not capacitated to offer pastoral care and support, or the skill to interpret dreams, ancestral calling, traditional rituals etc, for those struggling with ancestral calling. The clergy are also not capacitated to determine whether certain behaviours or dreams, for example, are not because of ancestral calling, but are rather ancestors communicating or warning an individual. Currently, the clergy do what they think is helpful but have nothing to lean on as a guide empowering them to give appropriate guidance. Klaasen (2018,4) posits that pastoral care should be appropriated with the awareness of the local habits, environments, traits, morals, systems, and structures. The clergy are critical to this aspect, as Klaasen (2018,1) explains that South Africa is a heterogeneous society where a “pastor or representatives of the church play important roles in the well-being of communities.” This, in turn, has led Black African members to feel less confident with the MCSA, hence some leave for the AICs, or live a double life where they also consult with a *sangoma* for guidance.

***Ukuthwasa* as a Conversation of Love**

A calling is very complex in many ways. In this section of the article, a contrast between ancestral calling and Christian calling is explored. In the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 3:1–21 and Jeremiah 1:4–19 speak of the calling of Samuel and Jeremiah to be God’s prophets. The main characteristic of this calling, even in the New Testament (such as in Acts 9:15–19) is that God is the one who calls; the one who is called does not have a choice of that call but only surrender. In other words, a calling is God’s gift given to certain individuals to carry out His will in the world. As much as the calling differs from person to person, God is the one doing the calling. Van der Zeijst et al. (2020,7) on the other hand note that ancestral calling is a gift from the ancestors. The one who is called is possessed by the ancestral spirits. Karani (2023,22) notes that according to Africans, their society has a hierarchy of beings, God at the top, divinities, spirits, ancestors, animals, plants, and inanimate beings. All these operate as a unit, God being in charge. Therefore, ancestral calling is understood as God’s will through the ancestors who are God’s intermediaries between humanity and the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being (Or God) is understood by Africans as “the Supreme Being as the eternal Being who is the source of life and the sustainer of the universe.” Again, the one called must surrender to the calling as well.

Jesus Christ teaches that his followers should love (Matthew 28: 18–20). To fully love, there must be understanding. The teachings of Christ about love have been interpreted by Christians in many ways, such as is recorded in 1 John 4:18, “If anyone says, ‘I love

God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar." (NIV). There are Black African Methodists who are struggling with ancestral calling in their lives, and during this struggle, they do not need to be stigmatised, ostracised, judged, or misunderstood. They need love. The best way the MCSA can love these fellow Methodists is by listening to them and understanding what their journey is all about and what it entails. The *ukuthwasa* is a conversation in response to the question, "Where is your brother?" as recorded in Genesis 4:9. This conversation opens doors to two opportunities. Firstly, an opportunity for those who do not know this process to learn and understand what *ukuthwasa* is. Secondly, it gives an idea of what those who are undergoing or have undergone the *ukuthwasa* process understand where they are emotionally, and otherwise, the kind of support they need. Currently, many do not know where their siblings are, and they do not know or understand the journey of *ukuthwasa* that they have undergone or are undergoing. Those fellow Methodists who have undergone this process are in our midst but are lonely because no one understands them. Some have resorted to hiding due to the fear of being stigmatised, and choose to struggle with their calling in private, secretly. It is evident from this study that the journey of *ukuthwasa* is overwhelming, not only to one's spirit but also to the body. Some become physically sick. Again, one wonders how these journeys of *ukuthwasa* affect loved ones. Understanding this process is a gateway to showing love to those who are undergoing or have undergone this journey.

Hybridity and Methodism

Scholars who have studied hybridity argue that it can have negative and positive outcomes, as already highlighted. The worst outcomes are when a particular species causes another species to become obsolete. A positive aspect of hybridity is when the plant, animal, culture, or religion enhances the other. As the MCSA engaging in this conversation, the doctrines, and teachings of the MCSA should not be allowed to become obsolete. Outler (2008,9) reminds Methodists that "we can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its preeminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture." The Methodist brand should remain, and the conversation should leave the MCSA enriched more than it was before this conversation. Tools that Wesley used, or what are called "Wesleyan quadrilaterals," should be applied in this discussion. This *Ukuthwasa* conversation will be a costly exercise for the MCSA to have without the necessary tools that have kept Methodism alive to date. Having said this, one of the most crucial aspects that should not be forgotten during this conversation is the identity of the MCSA. The Methodist Church is premised on Wesley's teachings and convictions, and these should not be placed on the back burner.

Conclusion

This article contributes to an extremely sensitive, yet necessary conversation in the MCSA. This paper submits that the fear and suspicion shared in all corners of the MCSA

are justifiable. Hybridity is not a new phenomenon; it has taken place and continues to take place in all aspects of life, including in the Christian faith. Therefore, the Church should be open to the conversation and where necessary, should incorporate some practices that will enhance the witness of the MCSA in Africa. The *ukuthwasa* conversation has been noted in this article as crucial because the MCSA should be a church relevant in Africa, engaging with the issues of the African worldview, and not only with political and socio-economic issues. The *ukuthwasa* conversation is the MCSA step towards its vision: “A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations.” This conversation is an act of love for the other, also for those who are misunderstood, to be by their side lovingly and to understand their struggles. It is a conversation where the MCSA does not only hear about the presence of those who are experiencing *ukuthwasa* but where it acknowledges that they exist within the Church. The *ukuthwasa* conversation is the MCSA implanting British Methodism on African soil.

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