

**EXPRESSION OF JOHN WESLEY'S SOCIAL ETHICS IN FREE METHODIST
CHURCH SOUTHERN KWAZULU NATAL IN TIME OF HIV AND AIDS:
A Post Apartheid Gender Sensitive Liberation Theological Perspective**

By

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Introduction and Background

The present study uses a post apartheid gender sensitive liberation theological perspective to enquire how social ethics of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodism, is expressed by the Free Methodist Church of Southern KwaZulu Natal (FMCSKZN) with regard to HIV and AIDS pandemic. John Wesley (1703-1791) was an Anglican priest.¹ During his studies, he was interested in religion and religious practices. He was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1725 and priest in the same church in 1729.² His brother, Charles Wesley was also ordained into the Anglican ministry in 1735.³ These brothers started working together in 1729 in the Holy Club at Oxford school where Whitefield joined them in nearly 1738.⁴ The three men created a vast religious revival. They were well organised and followed their programme strictly.⁵ The intention of J. Wesley was not to break up the church or to create competing denominations but to be a church in the church.⁶ However, soon after his death, his successors decided to form a separate church.⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, the Methodist Church had become an organised and permanent church.⁸

However, there came a time when the Methodists developed a practice of renting seats in their churches as a way of collecting financial support from church members. This practice became hard and oppressive to the poor who could not afford the seats.⁹ With this concern, B.T. Robert, a Methodist Episcopal minister in New York State, sought the renewal of earnest Christianity in the Methodist Episcopal Church and the commitment to meet the needs of the poor. But, the church resisted and excommunicated him together with other clergy and laypersons in 1860. Thus, this group formed the Free Methodist Church (FMC).¹⁰ In 1885, the first group of FMC Missionaries came to South Africa. The group consisted of five persons,

¹ William J. Abraham, *Wesley for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 4; Rupert E. Davies, *Methodism* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), 30, 103; Nell Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 9.

² Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 9.

³ Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 9.

⁴ Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 10, 11.

⁵ Davies, *Methodism*, 97.

⁶ Semple, *The Lord's Dominion*, 14.

⁷ Davies, *Methodism*, 104.

⁸ Davies, *Methodism*, 103-104.

⁹ Ubunye Cooperative Housing, Annual Report (1999), 4.

¹⁰ Ubunye Cooperative Housing, Annual Report, 2, 4.

of whom one couple was installed in Natal Province.¹¹ Later, the church has expanded into all provinces of South Africa and other Southern African countries.¹²

Southern Africa in which Free Methodist Church has expanded is the most affected by HIV and AIDS in the world. According to UNAIDS' report of 2009, Sub Saharan Africa is the most affected by this pandemic in the world and "Southern Africa remains the area most heavily affected by the epidemic."¹³ In Swaziland, the prevalence of HIV was 25.9% in 2006-2007. In Botswana, it was 25.2% in 2004 and 25.0% in 2008. In Lesotho, it was 23.4% in 2004.¹⁴ In South Africa, the two first diagnoses were found in 1982. But the epidemic exploded since 1990s when the prevalence was estimated at 0.73%. In 1995, it was 10.44%.¹⁵ It became 15.6% in 2002, 16.2% in 2005, and 16.9% in 2008.¹⁶ In KwaZulu Natal, prevalence attains 40% among women attending antenatal clinics.¹⁷ Does the church have anything to do with people who are suffering? Let us see in the next section the example of John Wesley's social ethics.

John Wesley's social ethics was based on the love of God and neighbour. For him, **love** was "the indispensable conditions for all deeds that might in the strict sense be called good."¹⁸ When referring to 1 Corinthians 13, Wesley asked: 'What does it profit us to have done everything good and nothing wicked, to have given all our goods to feed the poor, if we do not have love?'¹⁹ Wesley considered the love for one's neighbour as unconditional. In this regard, Manfred Marquardt writes: "Out of the relationship with God defined by love grew unlimited love for all humanity, even in the face of a neighbour harbouring hatred."²⁰ It was therefore out of this unconditional love that he was expressing this neighbour's love with actions in favour to different people who were suffering.²¹ He was distributing clothes, caring for, visiting, and providing free medical assistance to widows, poor and prisoners. He was

¹¹ Free Methodist World Mission. "About FMWM." Online: Free Methodist World Mission (http://www.Fmwm.Org/Countries/Africa/South_Africa.Php. Accessed August 27, 2008).

¹² Free Methodist Church Southern KwaZulu Natal, 105th Annual Conference (Izingolweni, Edwaleni Centre, 24-28 March 2010). (This was announced during the presentation of the programme of Area Fellowship on Saturday 27, 2010. I was present there).

¹³ UNAIDS, *AIDS epidemic update* (Geneva: UNAIDS, November 2009), 27.

¹⁴ UNAIDS, *AIDS epidemic update*, 18.

¹⁵ Philippe, Denis & Charles Becker, *L'Epidémie du SIDA en Afrique Subsaharienne* (Paris: 2006), 32.

¹⁶ UNAIDS, *AIDS epidemic update*, 18.

¹⁷ Republic of South Africa, *Trends in the Percentages of Children who are orphaned in South Africa 1995-2005* (Pretoria: Statistics South Africa, 2006), 4.

¹⁸ Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*. Translated by John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 103.

¹⁹ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 103.

²⁰ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 107.

²¹ Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 27-28, 70-71, 81.

also providing interest-free loans.²² Moreover, Wesley has a negative attitude against slavery and was committed to its abolition.²³ All these social actions were going together with preaching and pastoral care, as well as publications of books on the topics such as prisons, aids to prisoners, and manual for simple illness treatment.²⁴ This mixing of the spiritual and the social was the aims of Methodism. They were concerned about the salvation of the soul and the care for personal well-being.²⁵

With regard to health, Wesley was providing medical care to the poor. He had a well organised programme of visiting the sick. Further, he himself decided to follow medical lectures preparing him to dispense medicines for simple illness in case there is no physician. In treating people, he sometimes used “modern” methods but has never asked them to pay.²⁶ He also wrote the book *Primitive Physic, a manual for proper nourishment, hygiene, treatment of illness, and care of the sick* which appeared in its thirty-second edition in 1828. He freely availed this book in every family and this has been a great assistance for those who were not able to afford physicians’ bill. All these actions were extended to Methodists and non Methodists.

If we refer to the context of HIV and AIDS, many people are being infected by HIV and others dying of AIDS. Addressing this pandemic requires people who have compassion, who are committed and who engage themselves in concrete transformative actions such as caring and supporting the sick from the psychological through the social and the financial to the empowerment. I observe here that Wesley’s social ethics constitute a suitable resource for addressing HIV and AIDS pandemic. Meanwhile, we also know that HIV and AIDS is a gendered disease where women and girls are the most exposed and affected.²⁷ Moreover, the post apartheid South Africa has put in place instruments and structures that protect women

²² Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 29, 81-83; Martin Harold Le Roux,, *The Local Congregations Empowering the Urban Poor with Special Reference to John Wesley’s Social Ethic*. PhD Thesis (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2001), 41-49.

²³ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 70-71.

²⁴ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 28, 81-83.

²⁵ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 81.

²⁶ Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, 28-29.

²⁷ Isabel Apawo Phiri, "African Women of Faith Speak Out in an HIV/AIDS Era," in Isabel Apawo Phiri, Beverley Haddad, and Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) (eds), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publication, 2003, 3-20), 8-15; Beverley Haddad, "Choosing to Remain Silent: Links between Gender Violence, HIV/AIDS and the South African Church" in Isabel A. Phiri, Beverley Haddad, and Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) (eds), *African Women, HIV/AIDS and Faith Communities* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publication, 2003, 149-167), 151-154.

and girls against any discrimination or oppression.²⁸ Therefore, being a resource to address HIV and AIDS, Wesley's social ethics is also a resource for women's liberation and justice. This means that churches founded on Wesleyan model and thereby have Wesley's social ethics as legacy are expected to engage in the liberating people surrounded by oppression. It is here that Free Methodist Church of Southern Africa (FMCSA) is expected to actively participate in addressing HIV and AIDS pandemic which is highly prevailing in Southern Africa. If well applied, Wesley's social ethics can constitute one of the good models that can inspire other faith-based organisations and churches in addressing the problems of the oppressed or other needy. It is therefore worthy to enquire the way social ethics of John Wesley is expressed by the FMCSA with regard to HIV and AIDS pandemic. Hence, the question of this paper is: how Wesley's social ethics is expressed by FMCSA with regard to HIV and AIDS pandemic? Therefore in the following parts of this paper, I review discourses on efforts of FMCSA in activities relating to social ethics. Then, I project a new perspective for the coming research.

Discourses on Efforts by FMCSA in Activities Relating to Wesley's Social Ethics

I present here six discourses accounting the way FMCSA has tried to respond to the population's needs in the way that is in line with Wesley's social ethics. These discourses speak about two projects based in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal Province: the housing project and the domestic violence project. Therefore, in 1998, Dan and Kathleen Sheffield, initiators of Ubunye Free Methodist Church (UFMC) have analysed the impact of the UFMC ministry in the community of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. They explain this impact using a case of a woman who, after being abused by her husband, recovered thanks to Ubunye Cooperative Housing and "The Haven" projects for domestic violence survivors.²⁹

In 2001, Martin Harold le Roux wrote a PhD thesis in which he examined the present South African context of the church and its involvement in addressing poverty. With reference to Wesleyan ethics expressed in distributing clothes, caring for widows, providing medical assistance and constituting small loan funds to the poor,³⁰ he attempts to analyse what the church is doing today to address poverty. He uses three case studies of Methodist church local

²⁸ Chineze J. Onyejekwe, "The Interrelationship Between Gender-Based Violence and HIV/AIDS in South Africa," in *Journal of International Women's Studies* (Vol. 6 #1 November 2004, 34-40).

²⁹ Dan Sheffield and Kathleen Sheffield, "Case Study: Ubunye Church and Community Ministries" in T. Yamamori, B. Myers, and K. Luscombe (eds.) *Serving with the Urban Poor* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1998, 1-13), 1

³⁰ Le Roux, *The Local Congregation Empowering the Urban Poor*, 41-49

congregations with limited resources but making measurable advances in empowering the poor in urban areas with provision of housing and job creation as part of their ministry, namely, Ubunye Co-operative Housing (UCH) in the inner city of Pietermaritzburg, Khulani Housing Project in an upper middle class area in Cape Town, and Ivory Park Methodist Church, an informal settlement in Gauteng. He mentions that the building used by UCH also provides a place of housing for the poor, a shelter for abused women and enlarged venue for church services.

The third document is a Masters dissertation of Ezekiel Ntakirutimana who uses in 2004 used the Wesleyan social teaching and pastoral care and the work of Paulo Freire on “*Dialogical Action*” to reflect critically on the UCH initiated by UPMC³¹. He also mentions “The Haven” project as a service of UCH serving as an emergency shelter for the safety and the protection of women and children survivors of domestic violence, who could no longer stay with their abusers.

The three other documents accounts the church’s efforts to address the problem of domestic violence. Therefore, in 2003, Ezekiel Ntakirutimana through his honour’s dissertation critically reflect on The Haven” project run by UPMC. He analyses its historical background, reflects on domestic violence and the role of shelters, identifies key issues for the church with regard to domestic violence and thereby, establishes an agenda for UPMC.³² Likewise, in the beginning of 2004, Vestine Musabyimana used “The Haven” project of UPMC as case study to reflect critically on the life of women after shelter³³. She showed the role of shelters on the life of domestic violence survivors and established the agenda for UPMC. The last document was a Master’s dissertation written by Innocent Iyakaremye. In 2010, he uses the concept of the mission of the church as *missio Dei* to analyse the response of UPMC to domestic violence. He observes that this church is doing well all caring activities but is falling short of challenging community oppressive structures.³⁴ Though all these documents try to analyse some activities which fall under the Wesley’s moral ethics in FMCSA, they are silent about

³¹ Ezekiel Ntakirutimana, A Christian Development Appraisal of the Ubunye Cooperative Housing Initiative in Pietermaritzburg. Masters Thesis (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2004).

³² Ezekiel Ntakirutimana, A Critical reflection on The Haven run in Pietermaritzburg Community by Ubunye Methodist Church. Honours Dissertation (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Religion and Theology, 2003).

³³ Vestine Musabyimana, A Critical Reflection on Life of Women after Shelters: The Case Study of The Haven Run in Pietermaritzburg. Honours Dissertation (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2004).

³⁴ Innocent Iyakaremye, The Mission of the Church as *Missio Dei*: An Assessment of Ubunye Free Methodist Church to Domestic violence. Masters Thesis (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu Natal, School of Religion and Theology, 2010).

health and HIV and AIDS. Yet such analysis is needed as HIV and AIDS is a big issue in Southern Africa and particularly in South Africa. I expect to cover this gap through my PhD research.

New Perspective

It is upon the research gap identified above that the new perspective is being conceived. As stated above, the problem here is how Wesley's social ethics is expressed by FMCSA with regard to HIV and AIDS pandemic? The reflection on the response to this question will be guided by the following questions: What is the situation of HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa? What entails as the Wesley's social ethics resource in addressing HIV and AIDS pandemic? How has FMCSA used the resource of Wesley's social ethics legacy in time of HIV and AIDS' high prevalence? What lessons can be learnt from FMCSA's experience in using Wesley's social ethics in time of HIV? And what suggestions can be made to give values to Wesley's social ethics in addressing HIV and AIDS?

With intention to respond to these questions, the study will try (1) to provide an overview of HIV and AIDS globally with special reference to Southern Africa; (2) to present Methodism and FMCSA; (3) to critically analyse Wesley's social ethics as the resource to address HIV and AIDS; (4) to assess the use of Wesley' social ethics legacy by FMCSA in time of HIV and AIDS; (5) to draw lessons from FMCSA experience of using Wesley's social ethics; and (6) to make suggestions that help to give value to Wesley's social ethics in time of HIV and AIDS.

Throughout this research, all the analyses will be informed by the liberation theological perspective which will be considered with post apartheid gender sensitivity. Liberation theology was born from the confrontation of faith with the injustice done to the poor.³⁵ Its pioneers developed a new interpretation of the method and the content of theology from the perspective of the poor.³⁶ For Gustavo Gutierrez, known as the father of liberation theology, "the obligation to care for the poor means that the poor are not persons being punished by

³⁵ Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Translated from the Portuguese by Paul Burns (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns & Oates, 1987), 3.

³⁶ Susan IHM Rakoczy, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004), 5.

God ... but rather God's friends. To give to the needy is therefore to give to God."³⁷ Because liberation theology begins with people's experiences of oppression, it has been found applicable in other contexts of injustice and oppression.³⁸ In this regard, feminist theology and other related movements are part of the family of liberation theology.³⁹ During the research, this liberation theology will be taken as analysis framework. It will help to understand whether or not what FMCSA is doing in relation with HIV and AIDS is informed by the love, the commitment, or the engagement for the sake of the oppressed. The oppressed here refers to the people at risk of HIV infection or people already living with HIV, the majority of whom being women.

This will be an empirical study. For practical reasons, the research will be conducted not in the whole Southern Africa, but in Free Methodist Church Southern KwaZulu Natal Annual Conference. It will involve twenty two church leaders: one bishop, one superintendent, ten circuits' appointed pastors or lay supporters, and ten lay board members of the circuits. The information will be collected through individual interviews in which an interview guide will be used. During the data collection and analysis, the study will remain gender sensitive in the context of post apartheid South Africa.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to highlight the expectation from FMCSA in dealing with HIV and AIDS pandemic as a bearer of the legacy of Wesley's social ethics. As characterised by the love, the commitment and the engagement into transformative actions for the sake of the weak, Wesley's social ethics would inspire all those who are called do seek and to fight for the interest of the oppressed. Therefore, as HIV and AIDS is a global problem which is much more affecting Southern Africa, this legacy of FMCSA would inspire other faith-based organisations and individuals who want to engage into addressing it through transformative actions. However until now, the experience of FMCSA in the use of this resource in responding to HIV and AIDS is not documented. It is with the objective of availing and analysing this information that my PhD research seeks to deal with Expression of John Wesley's Social Ethics in FMCSA in time of HIV and AIDS.

³⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Translated from the Spanish by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1987), 40.

³⁸ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 8.

³⁹ Rakoczy, *In Her Name*, 16.

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