



A critical evaluation of the context and history of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's "One and Undivided Church" statement

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Abstract

The statement "one undivided church" has always been at the centre of theology since New Testament times. Jesus in his greatest prayer in (John 17) appealed to God that his followers *may be one*, as he and God are one. For Jesus, oneness was proof that he was sent by God. In the history of Methodism, John Wesley, as late as a month before he died in 1791, wrote to Ezekiel Cooper in Philadelphia saying, "lose no opportunity of declaring to all people that the Methodists are one in all the world and that it is their full determination so to continue" (Wesley, 1997:260). Furthermore, the oneness theme was underscored by the World Methodist Council as their theme and logo for the 2016 Conference. The theme was used both to reflect the Council's goal of being a body that unites the eighty member-churches and also to recall John Wesley's quote. In 1958, the Methodist Church of Southern African (MCSA) Conference, added "and" to the statement and proposed the statement that the MCSA is a "one and undivided church". Using the examples of Jesus, John Wesley and the World Methodist Council, this paper interrogates the MCSA's 1958 statement to find out to what extent the MCSA is in fact one and undivided. The paper will conclude by proposing a novel theological approach that MCSA can consider, for it to be one truly undivided church. The article uses desktop methodology and reviewed credible and relevant academic literature available on the topic under study.

Keywords: One and undivided, John Wesley, World Methodist Council, Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

Introduction

The "one and undivided church" motif has always been the centre of theology. Biblical scholars generally agree that the theme comes out clearly in the Johannine literature, especially in John 17. This prayer was a request to God that Jesus' followers may be one and was a proof that Jesus was sent by God. The oneness motif became central in some Pauline epistles, especially in Ephesians 4.1-6. Different ecclesiastical bodies grounded their theology on the



above text. In the history of Methodism, John Wesley emphasised that Methodists are one people in all the world (Wesley, 1997:260). Given this call, the oneness theme was underscored by the World Methodist Council (WMC) as their theme and logo for the 2016 Conference (WMC Website, 2016). The theme was used to reflect the Council's goal of being a body that unites the eighty member-churches as well as recalling Wesley's quote. In 1958 the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) added "and" to the phrase, thereby declaring itself to be a one and undivided church. Using the examples of Jesus, Wesley and the WMC, this paper interrogates MCSA's statement to find out more concerning the divisibility or indivisibility of the ecclesia. The paper concludes by borrowing some aspects from biological studies where the researchers are proposing MCSA to be a zygotic church which has to revisit its bio-theological traits to appreciate that the parents are one though the zygote is divided, and the Church is one although it is also divided.

Theological Premises of the "One" Motif

Biblical scholars generally agree that the theological "one" motif was central to Johannine literature – the Pauline Epistles in general and the letter to the Ephesians in particular. Appold (1976:10) argues that the "Fourth Gospel is conceived to be the development of Jesus' oneness with the Father and the theme constitutes the indispensable key of the Johannine Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology". Jesus' oneness with God is the key centre of the Johannine proclamation and the content of faith. The "one" language of each passage in the book of John has its religio-historical roots not in the Old Testament or Judaism, and neither is Jesus' oneness with God understood morally or metaphysically, but is described in both relational and revelational terms of Jesus and Father (Appold, 1976:23).

The oneness motif comes out clearly in Jesus' prayer in John 17. The discourse is divided into three sections. First, Jesus prays for himself, asking God to glorify him; second, Jesus prays for his disciples; and third, he prays for those who will believe in him on the account of the disciples' testimonies (Appold, 1976:35). According to Kruse (2003:345), Jesus' prayer was for all his disciples present and future, that they might be one, in a oneness modelled upon his oneness with God. The unity was more than that of purpose and action, and rather a unity of being (Kruse, 2003:345). Harris 111 (2005) reiterates that the disciples would carry on Jesus' ministry and in doing so would see others come to trust in him. This carrying of Jesus ministry to the world would include not only Jewish Christians, but also Gentile Christians, thus Jesus' prayer for unity is especially appropriate in light of the probability that most of the readers of the Gospel are Gentiles. In spite of these cultural differences, the oneness of being was supposed to define the disciples' relationship with Jesus and God. For Appold (1976), the model for this unity is the unity which exists between the Father and the Son, a unity which allows for a diversity of persons while maintaining essential unity. It is for this reason, Mosoiu (2021:4) says, that the unity of the Triune God is the archetype and the model of all Church unity. The church is also the nation of God (*laos tou theou* Gk.) and as such should be united under the triune Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Nicolaidis, 2010). Dalcour (2016:17), speaking of the Oneness of God says, "Oneness theology maintains that God has revealed Himself as three roles, modes, manifestations...the entire Godhead consists in one Person."

The ultimate result of such unity among believers will be that the world comes to believe that Jesus was truly sent by the Father (Appold, 1976:12). The word "one" appears four times in John 17. 21-23, where Jesus prayed that "that they may be one [...] as we are one, [...] that they also may be one in us [...] that they may be made perfect in one". In analysing this projection of the oneness motif, Keener (2003:1061) states that "the way believers treat one another is an essential component of proclaiming Jesus to be the Word". The same theme can be found in the writing of Paul in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV).



Although Jesus places the oneness motif at the centre of his message, “disunity and division later characterised the Early Church and intercity rivalries were common”, according to Keener (2003:1061). In the view of Muddiman (2001:183), “the image of the Church as one indivisible Body of Christ had become so well established in and beyond the Pauline circles. In these epistles, the Church is presented as a single body infused with the same Holy Spirit of God and living in corporate hope of an eternal inheritance” (cf Romans 12:4; Colossians 3:15). People who read 1 Corinthians 12:13 would naturally interpret the words, “...for in One Spirit we were all baptised into One Body” as being part of this theme. In addition, the reading of the Book of Ephesians unveils a thread of the call for unity in the Church. The theology of unity in Ephesians 4:1-6 has also become common among many churches as they try to recall this unity. According to Jackson (n.d.), the writer of the book of Ephesians addresses unity in the church in the first three chapters as providing its theological basis, with the last three being principally concerned with the practical implication of oneness. For Muddiman (2001:181), “unity in the book of Ephesians is not something already given but something to be striven for...”. This unity is expressed in Ephesians 4: 4-6 as something to be embraced in one Body and one Spirit, just as the Ephesians were called by “one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and God of all who is ever all and through all and in all”. Muddiman (2001:181) concludes that John 17 and Ephesians 4: 4-6 are the two central texts where oneness is the central theme.

The Ecumenical Interpretation of the Oneness Motif

The theological premises of the oneness motif set the ground for the ecumenical ecclesia resulting in the theme becoming evident in several denominations and congregations. For example, Mgauley (2016), writing about the Reformed Presbyterian Churches¹, argues that “the Church must be one, undivided and unseparated...Churches that form the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) are inspired by Christ to promote the renewal and oneness of the church”. Equally so, the World Council of Churches (WCC) is directly inspired by the prayer of Jesus (John 17.21), “...that they may be one that the world will believe” (Kobia, 2010:1333).

Moreover, the United Methodist Church of Baltimore Metropolitan District Conference of 2017 anchored its focus on the need for oneness in the church, drawing from Ephesians 4. 1-6. The oneness motif is also central in the Bilateral Conversation between the Lutherans and the Baptists, in their 1989 Document which was bound on one Lord, one faith, one Church and belonging to one Baptism (Malinga, n.d:7). The Document further states that God made the Godself one with our world and showed us what it means to be true human beings (Malinga, n.d:7). In their letter to congratulate Pope Francis, the WMC president, Bishop Paulo de Tarso Oliveira, and the General Secretary, Ivan Abraham, confirmed that, “Catholics and Methodists find themselves together in almost every part of the globe and the theological dialogue of some 45 years, have discovered how much the churches hold in common, ‘one faith, one Lord, one Baptism and one God for all’ (Ephesians 4:5)” (Lockmann & Abraham, 2013). According to Malinga (n.d:7) Methodists and Catholics concur on being one in Christ and as a consequence, must try to express in words the unity they are in by drawing from Ephesians 4:1-6. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:13, teaches that “Church as the Body of Christ is one and cannot be divided”. “Though there may be divisions and quarrels within particular congregations, the Church remains indivisible” (Muddiman, 2001:183). St Ignatius wrote that “there is only one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup of his blood, that makes us one on one altar”. Irenaeus adds that the Church is holy, and that this holy Church is one. Though scattered in the world, the Church is preserved as if it is living in one house. “It believes things as if it has

¹ The World Alliance of Reformed Churches with a membership of 75 million Christians in more than 200 churches in about 100 countries seeks to be a communion of churches joined together (Kirkpatrick 2010:1332).



one heart, and one soul, preaches harmoniously, teaches its members, and speaks as if it has one mouth” (Whitehead, 2007).

The Methodist Church’s Theology of One Undivided Church

The oneness motif in the Methodist Church traces from its founder John Wesley, who had anticipated that tensions within the Methodist movement during his lifetime might escalate to breaking point at his death. In 1769 he recognized that he was the centre of the union and at his death, many of the preachers² would separate from the Connexion,³ either taking ordination in the Church of England or taking independent congregations (Mujinga, 2017:101). This prediction was followed by a succession plan that Wesley reinforced by continual pleas for unity in order to avert the potential division. In 1744, he established the conference as an avenue to put in plan ways to deal with the increasingly fragmented revival (Heitzenrater, 2013:157). Wesley made several calls for unity among the Methodist societies. One such call was a letter written to Ezekiel Cooper in Philadelphia in 1791 saying, “...lose no opportunity of declaring to all that the Methodists are one people in all the world and that it is their full determination so to continue” (WJW8:260).

It was unfortunate that Wesley’s words of unity had a hollow ring, given that the American Methodist (Methodist Episcopal) Church had long exhibited, if not declared, their independence from Wesley and the British ecclesia (Heitzenrater, 2013:154; Mujinga 2017:101). According to Heitzenrater (2013:154), “The American Methodist’s changes from the British traditional ecclesiastical structure, their choice of nomenclature for the episcopal office, declared that their new denomination was free from the British pastorate”. In addition, Francis Asbury’s proclivity to call Wesley, somewhat irreverently, “our old daddy” signalled the familial love for Wesley’s legacy but that they were no longer dependent on the British patriarch’s leadership (Heitzenrater, 2013:245). After Wesley’s death in 1791, the movement disintegrated both in America and Britain (Heitzenrater, 2013; Mujinga, 2017). However, the call for unity remained central.

In 1819, the British Conference President William Smith emphasised the oneness of the Methodists across the globe:

As Methodist Preachers we are united by one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism and one God of all who has made us partakers of his grace and inspired us with one heart, and one soul. All the efforts used to divide us have been employed in vain, or only reverted more closely and permanently the bonds of our union with Christ; so that whether you come to see us, or else be absent, you may hear of our affairs that we stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel (Smith, 1819:67).

In 1881, people from the Methodist tradition worldwide gathered to form the World Methodist Council which today is made up of eighty groupings in the name of Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes and related Uniting and United Churches representing over 80 500 000 (eighty million, five hundred thousand) worshippers (WMC, 2017). According to Abrahams, the WMC came out with the theme and logo for the 2016 Conference “One” based on two reasons. First, the theme reflected the Council’s goal of being a body that unites the member churches. Second, the theme was a reminder of Wesley’s quote that “Methodists are one people in all the world” (Wesley, 1997:260; Abrahams, 2016).

The logo of the 2016 Conference summed up the purpose of the WMC, which is the unity of Methodist people from all over the world (Abrahams, 2016). In his remarks to the WMC

² Wesley referred to both the laity and the clergy in his fellowship as the preachers.

³ Connexion was the term coined by John Wesley to refer to the connection of societies scattered across the land (Heitzenrater 2013: 140)



Conference, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Olav Fykse Tveit, maintained that "...to be one is about life, to be together; finding new ways forward together; and it is about contributing to real hope and accountable to the Triune God" (Tveit, 2016). Tveit adds that Jesus' prayer in John 17 not only shows Christ praying that his community of disciples may be one in relationship and love, but that in this oneness the gospel might more profoundly transform the world (Tveit, 2016).

We are not called to be one so that the world may understand that Christians cannot disagree about anything but that the world may have this faith in the hope of the world. The call to be one must reflect the values of the kingdom of justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. There cannot be a unity in the Church that is not a real unity among us as human beings, all created in the image of God. This is a global issue, but we feel how significant it is that we together say this (Tveit, 2016).

The theme of "one" means, according to the WMC, one God, one faith, one people and one Methodist family, and for Abrahams "the Methodist family is united but not uniform; diverse but not divided" (Abrahams, 2016).

The Context and Critique of MCSA as *One and Undivided Church*

The year 2023 marks the 65th anniversary of the MCSA "One and Undivided" statement declared in the year 1958 (Dlamini, 2019:1). It is important to have in mind that the discussions previously undertaken did not present the church as one and undivided, but as one undivided. The word "and" is typically MCSA coinage in specific reference to its denomination. There are conflicting statements in the context of the statement: MCSA one and undivided church. According to Kumalo, when the Nationalist government instituted the Group Areas Act of 1950, the MCSA did not stand and look on the further dehumanisation of the people. Dlamini (2019:3) says that the MCSA started engaging the apartheid government in 1948 when its conference met in Cape Town in the same year and drafted a declaration to the government saying: "No person of any race should be deprived of constitutional rights or privileges merely on the grounds of race ... this Conference respectfully appeals to the government to reconsider its intention to exclude the Native Representatives from the House of Assembly" (Dlamini, 2019:3)

Dlamini (2019:3) further notes the Rev. Allison Garret, speaking at the 1951 Conference, said, "The most effective contribution we can make as a church and its individuals to the removal of the disorders that are in our midst, is to make love our aim." Despite these snippets of historical engagement that the MCSA had with the then apartheid government, they seem insignificant compared to the 1958 Conference "One and Undivided" statement (Dlamini, 2019:3). At the 1958 MCSA Conference, Methodists discerned the voice of God calling them to defy this Act by declaring the church to be a one and undivided Church (Kumalo, 2009:105; Mtshiselwa, 2015:1). For Kumalo, the word was coined by Rev. Herbert Rist (Kumalo, 2009:147) and the statement was a form of resistance against the apartheid laws. MCSA confirms that one and undivided church was a response to the government's pressure on the churches to divide along racial lines (MCSA Website). Dlamini (2019:4), however, says that this 1958 statement cannot be said to come from all sectors of the MCSA. Instead, he says "The credit of this policy goes to the Black clergy and laity who were robustly vocal at synods and Conferences attacking the conformity of the church to apartheid regulations" (Dlamini, 2019:4).

Although Foster (2008) adds his voice to this discourse, he is however not clear whether the 1958 Conference made a statement or a resolution to regard MCSA as a one and undivided Church. Foster uses the words Conference resolution and statement interchangeably (Foster,



2008). On the one hand, he states that “this resolution was a truly significant and a courageous one, not only for its time but also certainly for the decades to come when the pressure to segregate would increase manifold” (Foster, 2008:9). On the other hand, he comments that the one and undivided “Statement of 1958 was a movement from above where the MCSA stood against the structural sin of racial segregation” (Foster, 2008:8). Foster concludes that “the 1958 Statement set the tone for the church to work pragmatically, through the vehicle of social holiness, towards the Christian ideal of scriptural holiness and perfect love” (Foster, 2008:11). From the arguments of Kumalo and Foster, one is compelled to conclude that the 1958 one and undivided church was an urgent church’s response to apartheid. Furthermore, the “One and undivided” MCSA Conference was the church’s attempt to demonstrate that it should be “an agent for healing and transformation within the turmoil and pain of South Africa’s past” (Forster, 2008:1). Obviously, the church at the time was fighting against the apartheid government system and to a certain extent the church’s quest was successful in the sense that it contributed to the discourse of how the church had to respond to the apartheid system, as well as conscientise its members about the evils of apartheid. This is beautifully captured by Storey (2004:79) when saying that every Methodist should aspire to fight against the disease that was dividing people, and he says “It happened because we continued to search for each other even at our times of deepest division”.

The Conference resolved to read the statement to the entire MCSA family (MCSA, 1958:198). The minutes of that Conference used the term “address” and not “resolution” or “statement” (MCSA, 1958:198). The Address buttresses the term “one and undivided church” by emphasising that “the greatness of MCSA as a Church is not limited by the boundaries of Society or Circuit but measured in millions, of every race, colour, now living by faith in our Lord... as a loyal and vigorous part of the Church, holy, catholic and apostolic” (MCSA, 1958:201). The Address also highlights the evangelistic efforts that were being undertaken by the church and how the young people were being called to ministry. In the absence of the qualification of youth, it can be concluded that:

It refers to all races and colours. In the fourth paragraph, the Address highlights that, ‘like other parts of life in South Africa, the Church is facing choices which will determine her future development, and in particular the choices between unity and division [...] it is the will of God for the Methodist Church to be one and undivided, trusting to the leading of God to bring this ideal to ultimate fruition [...] to be a Christian Church means to be a fellowship in which differences of race and language are transcended by our brotherhood in Christ (MCSA, 1958:202).

Unlike Foster, who oscillates between the semantics of resolution and statement, Saddler (2014:94) prefers to call the one and undivided statement “a missionary policy that was taken by Wilkinson as his theme, *Ministry of Reconciliation* that tried to guide the church in its application of one and undivided church”. Despite the Conference’s wise decision to take the Address to the congregants of the MCSA, however, the Minutes of Conference are silent on the possible action that the MCSA members were supposed to take after hearing the reading of the Address. It also remains unclear to MCSA outsiders whether “one and undivided church” was a Conference resolution, an anti-apartheid statement, missionary policy or the MCSA president’s address to the Methodists across the connexion. Kumalo insists that:

This resolution was a huge and courageous step towards faithfulness to the fundamentals of the gospel. Many other churches that were in communion with the MCSA decided to disassociate themselves from it following this radical statement. Many white middle-class members left the Methodist Church in protest against this statement that was dismissing apartheid (2009:17).



The challenge that one grapples with is why the MCSA responded to the Group Areas Act after almost a decade of human suffering and segregation. More so because Dlamini (2019:2) posits that apartheid officially came into being after the 1948 elections which he says "...was a favourable ideology to the English and Afrikaans-speaking people since it was to preserve white supremacy in South Africa. This was to be achieved by degrading non-white South Africans." It is probably against this background that any insider can express the statement freely, although the claims made by different scholars on this point remain unclear and continuously seek lucidity.

A Critique of the One and Undivided Church – A Compromised Statement

From the arguments raised above, most of the scholars in general and MCSA in particular (Balila, 1994; Foster, 2008; Kumalo, 2009; Bentley, 2014; Mtshiselwa, 2015) agree that although the MCSA declared itself to be one and undivided, it became a centre of fragmentation according to the colour of its congregants. Worse, Dlamini (2019:6) postulates that in 1963, history was made within the MCSA when a first-ever black clergyman by the name of Rev. Seth Mokitimi was elected as the President of the Conference (Sadler, 2014). The 1963 Conference had 60 Europeans, 44 Africans, and 10 coloureds and 1 Indian. From this Conference, the Rev. Seth Mokitimi received 73 votes, which shows that the majority of the white attendees voted for him. That as it may be, racial segregation persisted within the MCSA, which led to the formation of the Black Methodist Consultation, which was established on 23 September 1976, to fight against racial injustices in the MCSA (Dlamini, 2019:6).

This is despite Foster (2008:5) acknowledging that "...from the very beginning Methodist work was multiracial, while some other churches and mission organizations concentrated almost exclusively on one racial group, the Methodist established joint works. This led in part to the MCSA having more black members than any other mainline church." De Gruchy and De Gruchy (cited in Foster, 2008:5) confirm that the MCSA continued to spread because of its inclusivity policy. However, Kumalo does not agree with these scholars. He attests that:

Despite declaring the MCSA a one and undivided church, the church was divided along racial and economic lines. This was, particularly in previously white suburbs, where Methodist churches had a predominantly white membership and were characterised by having more financial and human resources while the majority of black churches, situated in the townships, were characterised by a lack of financial resources. The financial imbalance in these churches manifested itself when it came to the allocation of ministerial staff. There were also class divisions between black, rural, and poor churches (Kumalo, 2009:35).

Kumalo (2009: 1) also maintains that the "Central Methodist Church was kept 'white' until it could no longer prevent black people from infiltrating its pews, making their presence known, and ultimately becoming the majority". Bentley (2014:2), laments that, "although one hails advances in social redress and acknowledges that South Africa is still an economic powerhouse on the African continent, there is a concern for the long-term wellbeing of the country". In the past decade, South Africa has witnessed an increase in the economic disparities between the rich and the poor. Given the above statements, Mtshiselwa (2015:2) is right to conclude that the "Black Methodist Consultation (BMC) emergence as an activist formation within that sought to redress racism during the apartheid rule of South Africa is not only conclusive but generally accepted". Foster (2008:11) agrees with Mtshiselwa and goes further to state that while the top structures of the church officially addressed the evils of apartheid and opposed the state, there were not many congregations that were truly racially integrated or directly fighting against government-led segregation. This led to the next significant marker in the development of social holiness in the MCSA, that is, the formation of



the BMC in 1975. The reports of church leaders and the aims and objectives of the BMC are clear testimony that MCSA wishes to be a one and undivided church.

According to Foster (2008:23), “The current debate on inequitable stipends in the MCSA, as well as the stark reality that a black Methodist minister will serve an average of 3000 members and 12 societies whereas a white Methodist minister will serve an average of 350 members and a single society shows that there are still different standards for black and white Methodists”. This statement is clear evidence that the MCSA is a one and divided church. Hence Kumalo (2009:79) says that, with the dawn of democracy, black people led to the white population leaving the MCSA for what Kumalo terms the “security of the richer suburbs”. This led to white Methodist members leaving the Church as well for other denominations in areas that were predominantly white areas or suburbs. Furthermore, Kumalo (2009:81) says that in 1975 the MCSA encouraged racially divided circuits to be integrated with black circuits “to form geographic circuits that are multiracial and multi-ethnic in character”. Kumalo (2009:81) states that “The MCSA conference had argued that if circuits were divided according to colour...then the church was *de facto* guilty of complicity with the apartheid system.” Foster adds that “white ministers are placed in the position of benefit and privilege” (Kumalo, 2009: 23). Mtshiselwa (2015: 7) concludes that white ministers are immune to being placed in a context of poverty where they could possibly live without a source of income.

The Continuous Call for MCSA to be a One and Undivided Church

Interestingly, the challenges faced by John Wesley in the eighteenth century and his continuous call for one Methodist Church remain alive in the MCSA Conference. The call is coming not only from church leaders but also from ministers and members of the church. In his Address to the 2014 MCSA Annual Conference, the Presiding Bishop Zipho Siwa reiterated that the “MCSA is called to be one church” (MCSA Minutes of Conference, 2014:12). From the Presiding Bishop’s address, it is evident that the MCSA is expected to be one undivided church. This contrasts with the view of Grassow (2015), who feels that “white people in MCSA experience exclusion because of the blackness of the ethos of the church ... reflected by black spirituality” (see also Mtshiselwa, 2016). However, Somwabile (2016) does not agree with Grassow’s remarks. In his Public Address to the BMC, he decries that “the demon of racism still reigns over the South African society and rears its ugly head at regular intervals”. Balia adds that:

MCSA only professed to be one and undivided church but since 1948, the black experiences were very bad. White racism continued to permeate much of religious life like a monster as the church was characterised by relentless discriminatory practices. Black Methodists were feeling the need to strive for freedom from ecclesiastical injustices from *baasskap*⁴ and were seeking recognition in a church that was rightly “theirs” (1994:14).

If one analyses Balia and Grassow’s points of departure, it is evident that they both agree with the notion of divisions in the MCSA although the two do not share the same sentiments. As argued earlier, this imbalance became a seedbed for the formation of the BMC which, according to Mtshiselwa (2015), merged as a prophetic voice in post-apartheid South Africa. While arguments between Balia and Grassow are pegged on pigmentation, Nyobole takes it to tribal and racial barriers. In his report to the MCSA Conference as the General Secretary, he points out that:

Racism and tribalism are rearing their insidious heads and manifesting themselves in assorted forms and shapes within the life of the church. The

⁴ Baasskop is an Afrikaans word which was used during the apartheid period meaning ‘the domination of South Africa by its minority white population generally and by Afrikaners in particular’.



tragedy is that it goes unchallenged as it is no longer politically correct to speak about racists' attitudes and tendencies. We are still trapped in the apartheid ghetto which will in time reverse the gains made in the twenty years of moving together towards a one and undivided church. We must as a matter of urgency create platforms for life-giving, we cement conversations and thoughts that are open to reshaping, rethinking, and reconsidering at all levels of our structure (Nyobole, 2014:15).

There is no doubt that the call made by Nyobole spells out that the MCSA still wishes to be a one and undivided church, but that the political history is further disenfranchising the church, rather than theology enfranchising it. During the 2016 MCSA Annual Conference, the General Secretary, Rev. Charmaine Morgan clarified the route that the MCSA would navigate to be a one and undivided church. First, for Morgan, "Being one and undivided is believing in connexionality. However, some of the obvious challenges that are out-working Connexionalism are the feeling of being different from one another, having different nationalities, or speaking different languages that should not diminish oneness" (Morgan, 2016:17). This is elaborated on by Grassow (2016:1), who argues that white people in the MCSA feel isolated and excluded from the MCSA because of blackness that is dominant. Blackness refers to the use of church uniforms, rigid collective organisation, black caucuses, the attempt to impose black spirituality and to alienate white people or white identity. The MCSA continues to find ways of being relevant and accommodative to all genders, age groups, nationalities, cultures and languages in its quest for "a Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations" vision. Secondly, one and undivided means becoming deliberately hospitable to one another, and those who feel outnumbered are to be specifically embraced (Morgan, 2016). Morgan concludes that "connexionality means as clergy, we are accountable to one another because the way we speak and act as individuals has an impact on the reputation of the church" (Morgan, 2016:17). Having journeyed this far as the MCSA, not only issues of race have come up as a worrying aspect, but also issues such as ethnicity that reigns within the MCSA. Dlamini (2019:8) says that ethnicity has become a big problem where "Methodists tend to represent the kingdom of their ethical groupings rather than the kingdom of God." Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:181) bring another challenge, beyond race and ethnicity, and that is patriarchy because the "...conditions in the MCSA are aggravated by religious and cultural stereotypes" which are still pervasive today. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:181) elaborate on the patriarchal practices and effects when stating:

The rejection of ordained women ministers by their male counterparts, the African culture's depreciating view of women and biblical texts that support such stereotypes, lead to many women ministers leaving the church after their initial training, while others choose not to pursue further studies after their ordination because they do not see themselves receiving any recognition, despite studying further.

This is another point which shows that the MCSA is not yet "one and undivided" as declared by the 1958 Conference. As much as the MCSA has made inroads about bringing people called Methodists together, there are still elements within the MCSA that show that the 1958 MCSA statement is yet to be realised.

The Place of the Black Methodist Consultation in the One and Undivided MCSA

The origins of the BMC have been oversubscribed (see Balia, 1994; Foster, 2008; Bentley, 2014; Mtshiselwa, 2015). However, its aim and objectives are crucial in the one and undivided MCSA. The first thing to note is that, although the BMC has been much researched, it is however not part of the structure of the MCSA. Mtshiselwa (2015) argues "that BMC was established to promote black thinking, to develop black leadership, respond to the church on the issues of racism, address the exclusion of black ministers from the decision-making process of the church" (see also Bentley, 2014:4; Foster, 2008: 11-12). Foster further argues



that BMC made a meaningful change in the Black ministers through research and education (Foster, 2008:12). Mtshiselwa (2015) maintains that the BMC needs to serve as an interlocutor of liberation in post-apartheid South Africa and this is warranted. It should therefore unmask racism and privileges of whiteness that are passed down from generation to generation. BMC comes as an agent in fighting the divisibility of MCSA. Somwabile argues that the BMC confronts racism both within and outside of the MCSA (2016). However, racism is a “pigmentation” fight, with both sides experiencing segregation in the one and undivided MCSA. This is probably the reason why Grassow (2015) queries whether it would not be ideal to have a White Methodist Consultation to square up with the BMC.

Can one be Divided and Remain One?

One of the most difficult questions that one encounters in trying to understand the one and undivided church is whether can one divide and still remain as one. How can the church claim to be the body of Christ when some of its members have to endure stigmatisation and discrimination? How can the church be one and undivided, when division widespread in the same church? Perhaps these questions can best be answered by Hobgood in his book, *Born Apart, Becoming One: Disciples Defeated Racism* (2009). Writing about the United Church of Christ and Discipleship, Hobgood (2009:79) states that, “the churches are kindred in Christ, members together of one undivided church of Jesus Christ. God did not create racism. It is a sin that humans have crafted and that has brought hatred and divisions into God’s family”. Griffin (cited by Hobgood, 2009) attests “that racism was crafted by the Puritan’s theology that rationalized the belief that racial superiority was right. The Puritans further argue that God did not create humanity equal, but hierarchically. There were three levels, ranging from the lowest, “God Almighty in the Godself Most Holy and Wise Providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind as in all times but making some to be rich, some poor, some high in power and dignity, others mean and subjugation” (Hobgood, 2009:80). According to Griffin, this approach allowed the Puritans to be the first Christians to build a theological fallacy that God had created some human beings immanently inferior to other human beings (Hobgood, 2009:80). Griffin (in Hobgood, 2009) was quick to refute this theology as misdirected because there is only one biblical verse on skin colour.⁵ “The Church as the Body of Christ is ‘one’ because Christ cannot be divided (1 Corinthians 1:13) although there may be divisions and quarrels within congregations” (Muddiman, 2001:182).

MCSA a “Zygotic Ecclesia”

In response to the above question, we are borrowing from the biological discipline of human reproduction. The first answer to this question is to regard the MCSA as a zygotic church. According to the Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary (2008:1699), a zygote is a cell which is formed when a female reproductive cell and a male reproductive cell join. The zygote’s genome is a combination of the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) in each gamete and contains all of the genetic information necessary to form a new individual. In multi-cellular organisms, the zygote is the earliest developmental stage. In single-celled organisms, the zygote can divide asexually by mitosis, to produce identical offspring (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2008:1699). In coining this term, we are proposing that the male reproductive aspect represents both lay persons and white missionaries who came to South Africa in 1795. Just like a male, who has not met a woman, the missionaries had the gospel until they found the oocyte (female reproductive cell) in South Africa.

⁵ “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept (Song of Solomon 1:5-6).



The coming together of the missionaries and Africans in a sociocultural and religious intercourse of the gospel and culture in South Africa formed the zygote which later split to form identical twins, fraternal twins, triplets, or quadruplets. Africa produced many forms of Christianity through these offspring. This point is supported by Genesis 25:19-24: “When Rebecca was pregnant, the babies jostled with each other within her, and she said, ‘Why is this happening to me?’ So, she went to enquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you will be separated’”. If the MCSA is to become a one and undivided church, it is important to appreciate that the church is a product of the same male and female reproductive cells that gave life during the same action. Therefore, the church is one though divided along lines of race, colour, tribe, and borders; we all thus belong to Wesley’s call that we are one church.

Second, for the MCSA to realize its one and undividedness, it should move from the politically infested term of a “one and undivided church” to the theological phrase, “one undivided church”. The phrase “one and undivided” needs to be revisited as it allows space to decide whether to be divided and remain one or to divide and disintegrate. This is also true given that the term was coined in response to the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Kumalo, 2009:3). The suggestion to revise the statement to one undivided church augurs well with what Muddiman (2001:182) prescribes, that “the Church as the Body of Christ is ‘one’ because Christ cannot be divided although there may be divisions and quarrels within congregations”.

Third, the MCSA needs to draw inspiration from the secular world and do more in relation to being a one undivided church. An undivided country or organization is not separated into smaller parts or groups. Nelson Mandela once said, “All that we want are our rights not just a few token handouts which the government sees fit to give [...] we want all South Africa’s people to have their rights [...] we want all rights here in a united, undivided South Africa, we want them here and we want them now” (Mandela, 2009:269).

Fourth, in implementing the ideas of Mandela, the MCSA needs to take cognisance of the fact that on 17 April 1994, South Africans came to be known as the “people of the rainbow”, a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe the post-apartheid South Africa (Kumalo & Mujinga, 2017:48). The term had a deeper theological meaning and was intended to encapsulate the unity of the multi-racial society and the coming together of the people of many different nations in a country once identified by strict divisions of white and black. The term was elaborated by President Nelson Mandela in his first month in office. Mandela reiterates: “We enter a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white will be able to walk without fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right of the human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world” (Mandela, 1994). Within the South African context, the rainbow is associated with hope and a bright future. It also represents all the different people, both white and black. In view of this, Kumalo and Mujinga (2017:48) argue that “rainbow colours are equal and they bloom and fade together”. Based on this analysis, the two scholars conclude that “...everyone in South Africa is equal to the other in the rainbow philosophy and must be accommodated without prejudice” (Kumalo & Mujinga, 2017:48) and this also applies to MCSA.

In the fifth instance, MCSA is reminded to revisit the fourth call of the Journey to the New Lands where the church is encouraged to abolish racial divisions (Kumalo, 2009:33-35). According to Kumalo:

...compared to other Christian denominations, it seemed apparent that the MCSA was ahead in terms of facing the ghosts of racism in the church. However, this did not come easy: wars were fought on the floors of synods and conferences, some members left the Methodist Church, several clergies resigned, and some had to face the difficulty of continuing the fight for justice and equality from within the Methodist Church itself [...]



there were just a few of several Methodist leaders who helped the church remain faithful to the fundamentals of the Christian Gospel amid a society infested by the crippling disease of racism (2009:65).

Although Kumalo was discussing the Central Methodist Church, his point however cuts across the connexionality of MCSA. He insists that:

[T]heir church must also realise that the struggle is not only about colour but also gender and ethnicity. These issues which continue to divide the church, especially when it comes to the stationing of ministers, need to be urgently addressed. The future of the MCSA depends on nothing less. This requires a clear conviction that there is: No white no black, no coloured no South African Indian Methodist Church; No Xhosa, Zulu Swazi, Tswana, Sotho, and Pedi Methodist Churches; instead, there is but one and undivided Methodist Church of Southern Africa (2009:66).

The authors agree with Kumalo's inclusivity that the MCSA should portray a united church. However, we must part ways with people who use the term "one and undivided church", proposing "one undivided church" as a new term that will see the church qualifying to be a member of the Body of Christ who is indivisible. The authors further acknowledge that with the legacy of colonialism, racial and ethnic segregation that is embedded within the history of the MCSA, this is a process that may take time, as this process requires, time, conversations and a lot of learning and unlearning by the Church.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the oneness motif threads across the history of Christianity, through theological discourses, and also ecumenical dialogues. Jesus is the trendsetter of the oneness motif. Jesus' trailblazing also occupied the Early Church which resulted in the Book of Ephesians becoming central in the oneness theme in the Deutero-Pauline literature. The paper has also discussed the one undivided church in the Methodist tradition and the actions that were taken by John Wesley to curb divisions. The WMC rode on Wesley's theology of one undivided church to establish the one family body. In addition, the paper challenges the MCSA to appreciate the zygotic theology in order to understand the divisibility in the indivisibility of the ecclesia. MCSA has also been challenged to learn from the "rainbowism" theology that all the colours shine and fade together. Furthermore, "one" does not only divide but also multiplies. Therefore, in the diversity of the church, there should be unity so that unity reigns in the diversity of the Church without disintegrating it. One undivided church is that church with unity in diversity, and it builds its theology upon this diversity in the unity of its members as one body.

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