



## **BLACK METHODIST CONSULTATION**

*[A formation within the Methodist Church of SA]*

### **CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS**

### **CONNEXIONAL CONSULTATION**

**9-12 JULY 2015, JOHANNESBURG**

**THEME: LET THY KINGDOM COME: AFRICA'S URGENT CALL**

#### **1. GREETINGS AND WELCOME**

The Presiding Bishop of the MCSA, the Rev. Z Siwa, the Secretary of Conference, the Rev. C. Morgan, the Bishop of the Central District, the Rev. P. Witbooi, all District Bishops present here today, the general President of the Women's Manyano and her executive, the General President of the Young Women's Manyano and her executive present here today, the General President of the YMG and his executive, the General Secretary of our Movement the BMC and the entirety of its leadership, the District Chairpersons and District leaders of our movement, members of the BMC from throughout the connexion, our honoured guests and friends I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord, liberator and transformer Jesus Christ. IMCSA!!! Ilifa labazali Bethu!!

As I greet you my fellow pilgrims I welcome you with a deep sense of humility and respect. Your attendance is a sign of respect and loyalty to all that the BMC stands for. It is an honour to deliver this address on behalf of the entire connexional leadership of the BMC. We are acutely aware as this executive that there is nothing in us that is inherently deserving of this honour. It is simply through the power and providence of God that we are here. We know that our parents were correct when they taught us to Sing "Kungawo amandla Avel'nkosini, esoda sifke Phezulu". As we are about to deliberate on our calling as a movement we see the foot prints of the God who carried us throughout these years; and all we can say is "Morena Thuso tsa gago fa ke li gopola tsotlhe o molemo le tsotlhego O ntsamaisitse sentle". We know that it is this God that brought us here through your faith and prayers. We thank God for you.

#### **2. INTRODUCTION AND SETTING THE SCENE**

We are gathering in the next four days accompanied by the aspirations of our people who gathered in Kliptown, Soweto, not far from here sixty years ago to consider what it means to be a new nation born out of the struggle against white supremacy and racism. It is there at the Congress of the People that our forebears dared to proclaim that "South Africa belongs to all who live in it" and that indeed "The people shall govern."

A year later our own Deborahs and Esthers refused to be in the background when Samsons and Gideons were in the forefront of the battle against evil. Our grandmothers and mothers, educated and uneducated, risked limb and life, less than a hundred kilometres from here, marched to the seat of apartheid power in all its pomp and splendour refusing to be defined by the pass laws. They shouted into the air reaching the ear of Strydom; “ Wa thinta bafazi wathinti imbokodo.”

That march was not only a statement against apartheid. It was a repudiation of all patriarchal notions that women exist to be servants or supporters of men. They led the struggle in their own right and thus took history in their own hands.

We are also accompanied by the cries of children who not only braved a cold winter’s day, but dared to stand up with courage and conviction to challenge the might of apartheid as they marched in Soweto thirty nine years ago.

These children did not only reject Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, they also rejected the whole edifice on which white supremacy was built. Their song and stepping feet was interrupted by the bang of a gun, and their cries echoed throughout the world as the barbaric acts of violence that propped up Apartheid South Africa were exposed for the whole world to see. As their voices sung “ Senzeni na? Sono sethu bubumnyama” the psychological power of oppression that breeds silence was broken by the frail voices of children who were accompanied by nothing except a belief in a better society.

#### **THE TIME TO CELEBRATE AND REFLECT**

These voices and rhythms of struggle are the melodies that gives depth to the heart beat of the BMC. Our history as the BMC is made sweeter and more glorious by the company of these, our people. This Consultation meets against the backdrop of the forty years celebrations of the existence of our movement – the Black Methodist Consultation. As instructed by our Annual Consultation that met in 2014 – the 39<sup>th</sup> year of our existence, we are in the middle of celebrating that history. It is a time set aside to tell our own story, in our own words, with our own metaphors. We are tired of being interpreted by others. We assert our right to tell ourselves who we are and who we have been. We do not tell this story because we have a morbid need to feel big or to live in nostalgic self-congratulatory mode but we do so in order to acknowledge our journey, see our struggles, engage our weaknesses and begin to dream new dreams for our time. We tell this story because in it lies the fight from black people to expose the hypocrisy of the 1958 MCSA statement that we are one and undivided. We tell this story because in it lies the courage of our leaders, as epitomised by our founding chairman, the late Rev Dr Ernest Nkathazo Baartman and his generation, who stood in front of the 1972 conference and declared that the time has passed for black people to be defined in categories that are foreign to them and defined by white people. We tell this story because in it lies the self-discovery of the beauty of blackness. Our people had to learn to declare that black is beautiful and is God-designed.

We tell this story because in it we discover, again, that black people stood up and said that they cannot be bystanders when others dictate the journey forward for our Church. They stood up straight and declared for all to know that black people have the capacity, the intellect, the vision and the moral courage to lead the MCSA as it forges forward to be an instrument of God in the world.

They stood up and said; there might be a JB Webb that exists but for goodness sake, there is also a JC Mvusi, an Andrew Losaba, an Abel Hendricks, a Simon Gqubule, an Ernest Baartman, a Khoza Mgojo, and a Stanley Mogoba who all led the MCSA with distinction.

We tell the story my fellow BMC members, because in it we see how the birth of our movement- the BMC was not only a repudiation of white supremacy culture. It was a radical affirmation and birth of a new consciousness of the fundamental humanity of all people especially black people. Black people stood up, straightened the backs, dust off the shackles of mental and psychological oppression and said we a human and we matter!! This led black people to asserting their status as one above that of servant hood and to that of active beings created by God for his purpose of love and service in the world. Our story is of a people who stand and say;

- No more will I be put in a corner and be held in chains!
- No more will my history be rejected as a sub-history in the greater human story!
- No more will the stories of our mothers and father be relegated to mere fantasy whilst the stories of others are elevated into eternal truths and meaning!
- No more will the songs of our musical geniuses be relegated to mere sounds without depth and creativity whilst the music of others is elevated to universalism!

Our story is one of the birth of a new dream and a new vision for our continent and our Church. A vision so aptly captured by Tiyo Soga: “Abantsundu nabamhlophe mababulele kunye”. In this vision lies the depth of our people’s imagination. For though the oppressor did not see the humanity of our people, our people have had the depth of vision to see the humanity of the oppressor.

### **3. COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP**

We tell our story because in it, we find the stories of courageous, moral and visionary leadership. In this story we know that leadership for our people is not founded on popularity, self-serving personality cult and demagoguery, and exploitation of our people. In these stories we learn that true leadership is self-less service and love of our people. Our leaders found gratification neither in possessions nor material gain but in the liberation of our people. As the dignity of our people is affirmed they knew they were leading. For those leaders, there was less interest in competing for stations. There was no pandering to those in power at the expense of truth and justice. They were motivated by the need to serve our people and their willingness to pay the price necessary.

This story informs, as it challenges, our gathering in this 40<sup>th</sup> year of our consultation. We must begin our deliberations with a deep sense of gratitude to God for the journey and accept the challenge placed upon us by those who came before us.

### **4. THE THEME**

It is only those who are fools of history who in the moment of reflection remain in the glory of their past triumphs. Those who are committed to the radical transformation of their life situations are

always pulled forward by the eschatological vision of God which is never satisfied with the present, no matter how majestic the victory moments may have been.

We can all climb the mountain. We can all see Jesus surrounded by Moses and Elijah in the glory of heavenly images, yet our work is never done on top of the mountain. It is always done at the foot of the mountain as we leave the euphoria of that mountain. Though we will be inspired by what happens on the mountain, we must have the courage to confront the paradoxes and pains that surround the mountain. From that confrontation, we must design strategies and tactics to change our reality so as to reflect what God's vision is for his creation.

It is in this light that we have chosen the theme; **Let Thy Kingdom Come: Africa's Urgent Call**. It is important to note that what informs this theme is the dream of Methodist people which emerged from the first Triennial Conference that met in Durban in 1998. Where our people declared that God's dream for Africa is "A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of Nations." It must therefore, be the conviction of the BMC that the MCSA cannot pay lip service to that call. It must be the BMC that reminds the MCSA that Africa is not a mere epilogue in the chapters of the MCSA's life. It is a chief concern and it must inform and direct our activity. Africa's pain and lament must find a way into the rituals and prayers of the MCSA. Africa's hopes and dreams must be infused into a future dreamt by the MCSA. The weaknesses and failures of Africa must be confessed with a deep sense of sadness and contrition by the MCSA, whilst anticipating the renewing work of forgiveness, reconciliation and transformation that comes from being in Christ. The commitment must be to hold hands with the marginalised and despised children of God; those Franz Fanon calls the wretched of the earth, as they shape a different future for Africa.

Our theme is drawn from the Lord's Prayer as recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke. This recording is based on Christ teaching his disciples how to be in conversation with God who is not only their parent but the author of life. This teaching clearly indicates that prayer is a living conversation between this God and those who believe and trust in the same God. This conversation is predicated on the understanding that there is a dream that this God has for his people and creation, and the need for his people to be open to that dream.

In the words that we have chosen: "**Let thy Kingdom Come**", we encounter Jesus telling his disciples that no matter how beautiful or powerful the present is, God always has a much more beautiful and more powerful dream for his people. Theologically speaking, we are always in the meantime, anticipating the eschatological in-dwelling of God's reign in the world. The present, it does not matter how powerful it might be, always points to something more substantial than what it is right now. It is Paul who says; "For now we see in a mirror dimly but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part then; I will know fully even as I have been known fully." 1Cor 13:12

Yet in this instance the cry of this part of the Lord's Prayer is much more than simply seeking perfection. It is a fundamental dissatisfaction that Jesus finds in being human and what it is to be religious in his time. This prayer is Jesus's call for a critical reflection of every status quo. Jesus finds the status quo of his time falling short of God's vision. He meets religious leaders who, rather than lead people to God's love, stand in judgement and cold morality against God's people. He meets religious people who fleece God's ordinary people and derive their riches and their livelihoods on

the back of God's people. No wonder he goes into the temple and turns the tables' upside-down. Jesus is dissatisfied with and rejects strongly the current state because when he goes around, he encounters a Lazarus who eats left-overs at the gate of the rich. It is whilst the hearts of the rich are so deaf to the cries and pains of Lazarus, their eyes are blind and cannot see the wounds that occupy his body; yet dogs notice him and lick his wounds. Jesus is dissatisfied with the current state because he meets a Pontius Pilate who knows the truth and yet for career advancement and narrow self-interest decides to sell it at the altar of expediency. It is in this state that Jesus goes into Jerusalem and says; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." Luke 4:18. All of this indicates that in a world where the little ones of God are wounded, the Church of God can never be satisfied and in her restlessness have to cry out; "Let thy Kingdom come." Whilst others are blinded by the glitter and opulence of the moment, the Church of Christ has to pray louder and say; "Nkosi sithembe wena! Let thy Kingdom come!"

This prayer to God is an act of faith rather than a sense of being overwhelmed, paralysed, cynical and feeling powerless when confronted by the tragic in life. It is important for us to understand that the word "Thy" is an appeal to a Subject whose continued involvement in human history, on behalf of the weak and the vulnerable, is the foundation of our faith. It is a God who is an active agent because God speaks into chaos and says, let there be order and things come to being. It is the God who breathes and clay becomes human. It is the God who speaks and darkness gives way to light.

We believe in no God, except the one who comes down and says; "I have heard the cries of my people." We know no God except the one who says; "All flesh is like grass. It withers away like the flower of the forest but my word lasts forever." We know no God except the one who says to us; "Do not despair for I will be with you to the end of the ages." We know no God except the one who comes when the sea is roaring and the storms are raging and he seems to be asleep and we wake him up in desperation and we say; "You seem not to care" and he commands the sea to be quite. So when the prayer says; "Let thy Kingdom come" we affirm our faith in that God who is a verb for he is always in action on behalf of his people. This prayer is a call for God to infuse his ultimate dream for the world into the present.

Any close study of the gospel of Luke reveals that God's salvation is never something for tomorrow. There is no postponement. There is a sense of immediacy and urgency. It always has an impact on the now. It is this Jesus who meets Zacchaeus and says to him; "Salvation has come to this your home." Not tomorrow but now. It is this Jesus who meets the one hanging on the cross and when he pleads to be remembered Jesus assures him: "Today, I will be with you ..."

When Jesus speaks about God's Kingdom, he never leaves us with doubt of what this is about. Our scriptures are littered with what God wants us to be like. For Jesus, the centre of this Kingdom of God is where justice reigns and the rule of God is the overarching expression of life. It is the Kingdom of God when love embraces all, even in its woundedness, transforming all even with the same wounds. In this reign of God those who are outcasts are brought from the periphery into the centre,

or as Koyama Kosuke (1998) would say; God turns the periphery into the centre.<sup>1</sup> In this reign of God the poor are called blessed. The mourning are called blessed. The meek are called blessed. The hungry are called blessed. The merciful are called blessed. The peacemakers are called blessed. Those persecuted for righteousness sake are called blessed.

In this Kingdom of God, when the spirit falls down we are not excited with speaking in tongues we ask the question; “Is the prisoner set free? Are the hungry fed? Are the sick healed?” In this Kingdom, as Micah reminds us; “The Lord requires of you to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” Mic 6:8.

This Kingdom subverts the dominant values of our society. In a world that worships Number One, this Kingdom says: The last shall be first. In a world where we bow our knees to the mighty and powerful, this Kingdom says the lowly shall be lifted up high and the mighty will be brought low. In a world where leadership is about position and power this Kingdom says that the greatest amongst you is the servant who is willing to wash the feet of the other. In a world where the mighty rides chariots of war, this Kingdom says that your king comes riding on a donkey. In a world where we get noticed by the company of the powerful this Kingdom says we will be noticed by being born in a stable and walk among the wounded and despised. This Kingdom says power is best when it is in the service of love. Leadership is at its best in the service of justice. Lordship is at its best in the service of compassion and solidarity. These are God’s values and this is God’s Kingdom.

It is with this kingdom in mind that we encounter our current African reality. There is no doubting that we are a people of great courage and hope. I dare say it that this continent of ours is one of the best hopes for the salvation of the human Soul in the rampant domination of the material over the soul and the destruction of creation in the altar of greed and soulless civilisation. I believe that Steve Biko is correct, when he echoed our forebears like Pixley ka Seme and Albert Luthuli, when he said; “We reject the power based society of the westerner that seems to be ever concerned with perfecting their technological know-how while losing out on the spiritual dimension. We believe that in the long run, the special contribution to the world by Africa is the field of human relationships giving the world a more human face.”

Linked to this, we also know that Africa has had many a dream which were to be our guiding lights as we envisioned a great future. These dreams had advocates and proponents that paid a high price in the attempts to bring them into reality. The voices of Kwame Nkruma disturbed the powerful voices of colonialism and told us of a dream of an Africa which can only be free when all her peoples are free. Patrice Lumumba, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda and many more echoed the sweet melodies of this dream to carry us all into the dawn of a liberated Africa.

We all know the euphoria that came with the promise of a new birth for our continent. This euphoria was best expressed in the birth of a new South Africa with the ascension of the iconic Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. Who can forget the moments when the world fixed its collective eye on the southern tip of the continent with renewed optimism and awe? We all stood a little bit taller

---

<sup>1</sup> This thought he explores in a Bible Study titled, *Rejoice in Hope*, which he conducted at the 8<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly in Harare, 1998.

when Thabo Mbeki stood in Parliament, where bigotry reigned supreme in the past, and said “ I know that none dare challenge me when I say- I am an African.” In this dawn we pinned our hopes as we anticipated the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be an African century.

As we( as this consultation) today gather, we know that we have fallen short of that glorious promise of the birth. We soon lost our innocence. We soon produced our own Idi Amins, Mabutho Seseko’s, Sanni Abbatcha’s. In South Africa, buying of arms became more important than investing in the fundamental transformation of the lives of the poor (to say nothing of the issues around corruption in the arms deal), we lost our innocence. From Tatane to Marikana police under black liberators command unleash violence that fills the streets of our country with the blood of our people. The country is in a grip of leaders who do not serve our people but use the public purse as their private banks to feed themselves to obesity whilst our people starve to death.

The people of Lesotho are tittering on a brink of a civil war as the violence defies the power and glare of broad day light. In almost obscurity and deafening silence the ordinary people of Swaziland live under an iron fist of a despotic monarch and his elite, whose opulent life style in the face of a sea of poverty, is a betrayal of the values of ubuntu and the Kingdom of God. Many people risk their lives and limb to cross the Atlantic Ocean as they turn their backs to the continent of their birth and approach a continent that does not want them, a continent that sometimes allows them to drown in the hundreds. This they do simply because they have lost hope in the continent of their birth and choose a life of quasy slavery as the only chance they have for a life worth living.

We kill one another simply because we don’t speak the same language and use words like foreigner, alien and Kwere-kwere to define the other who must be destroyed in order for us to be secure in our material needs. We lost our innocence. Dare we say it; even religion has become a curse for the continent. Many Africans have lost their lives simply because they are Christian or Moslem, indeed we have lost our innocence. Too many women and young girls are raped and killed in our homes, streets and war zones. This cannot be our dream! This cannot be God’s Kingdom.

So the BMC must encouraging the MCSA, we have to call on our people to go to the top of every valley, hill and mountain and ultimately mount Kilimanjaro and pray “ Let thy kingdom Come!!” This must be Africa’s urgent call. We make this call knowing that prayer is also a call to action for those who are on their knees. We ,who pray must have the faith that makes us stand up and act. God is waiting for us, at the end of our words, to engage us in concrete steps in bringing his kingdom to life.

We will do this because we know our God, in the midst of darkness, raises stars that point the way forward. Africa is still a continent that blessed with wonderful resources, courageous leaders, and brilliant minds, young people who are energised to rekindle and work for a dream of a better Africa.

Deeply rooted in the dreams of our people, aware of the crisis of our time, knowing the trustworthiness of our God we will pray this prayer in fervent hope. It is also with this prayer in mind that we have to engage seriously and critically the new commitments that emerge in this continent. If “A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations” is our guiding vision, the BMC has to say to the MCSA please take time to engage critically what the AU has put before all of us recently in what is called Agenda 2063. The AU describes it in the following way; “Agenda 2063 is both a Vision and an Action Plan. It is a call for action to all segments of African society to work together to build a

prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny". As people of the kingdom of God we will need to engage Agenda 2063 with God's demands in mind.

## **5. READING THE SIGNS OF OUR TIME AND LISTENING TO OUR CONTEXT OF THE MCSA**

As we gather in this 40<sup>th</sup> year of the BMC, we must commit ourselves to a deep reflection of what our particular historical challenge is as the BMC in the MCSA. We have to grasp the opportunities that our past victories have given us in order for us to shape new terrains of struggle and transformation. Through our gains there is no leadership position in the MCSA that doesn't take into account black people as viable options for those responsibilities. In the last twenty years there has been no time where black bishops were less than seventy percent of the Connexional leadership in the MCSA. The BMC takes pride in the fact that the overwhelming majority of the MCSA's unit directors are black. We in particular, celebrate the appointment of the first black and woman Lay Treasurer.

We as the BMC have been so successful in identifying leaders that even those who do not pledge allegiance to the BMC always want to know what the thinking of the BMC is and sometimes interpret the silence of the BMC, where it exists, as the betrayal of the black cause. The BMC has further enhanced the awareness of lay people as legitimate co-pilots in the navigation of the plane called the MCSA. We, through our collective efforts in the past, have even convinced the MCSA to delay the "Journey to the New Land" programme so as to better prepare and maximise the participation and contribution of all laity in general and in particular black people. The BMC made sure that the concept of the geographic circuit is deepened beyond simple administrative centres. It called and worked with the church to move beyond the concept of geographic to that of integrating circuit.

There is no doubting that there are more black superintendents of geographic circuits today. Even a cursory look at those geographic circuits will indicate that there has been a considerable increase in the number of black circuit stewards. Perhaps our outstanding battle is the lack of black faces in the responsibilities of black treasurers both in the geographic circuits and district level. These gains have resulted in the predominance of black faces in the annual synods and consequently also conference. Indeed we do have black faces in high places in the MCSA.

The presence of these black faces in high places forces the BMC to ask a slightly different question. The question is no more whether the person in power is black or white. The new question must be; What is the ethos that drives the life of the MCSA as an institution. This makes us ask of ourselves; Do the cries and hopes of the black experience occupy the centre space of the MCSA? Do our people's dreams guide the future direction of the church? Do the poor, the excluded and marginalised have a place of pride in the life of the MCSA? Do the weak and vulnerable, the wretched of the earth, become the conscience of our church? Does the experience of women, especially black women, occupy the heart of the MCSA? Do we hold power accountable on behalf of the powerless? What do we do when we have power? Is our leadership selfless and serving of others? What does the ethos of Ubuntu do to our understanding of salvation and the eschatological dream of heaven? In summary, my dear brothers and sisters, our contest is no more for faces but is about ethos and character of the MCSA.



When ethos is gone, vision gets poorer, and when vision is poor imagination stagnates and therefore leadership becomes a contestation of characters rather than a contestation of visions. We get more interested in personalities, the ability to make the loudest noise without substance and we end up appealing to our selfish interests and small identities. In these contestations there is no place for vision or alternative visions contesting against each other. The most important thing is: What can you give me? Or, do we speak the same language? Are we from the same ethnic group? Or the latest phenomenon; is the candidate in our district?

If the ethos of the MCSA is to be inclusive and deep, the BMC must help the church to fight and defeat the scourge of ethnicity. In our midst we must be very intolerant of any attempt to elevate others because of their ethnicity. Our identity is not founded on the places or languages of our birth, those are contexts of birth. Our identity is founded in our common humanity derived from the image of God. The BMC, the MCSA is our common home. The BMC must lead the charge, as we did to declare apartheid a heresy and a sin, to declare any claim of ethnic superiority a heresy and a sin.

If the ethos of the MCSA is going to be all encompassing and deep enough, it has to take seriously the struggles, emancipation and gifting of women. The heart of the MCSA has to be inspired, enlivened and encouraged by the women who form the majority of our church. They can no longer be there to serve men but must be equal participants in reshaping this church. We have to move beyond occasional and ceremonial activities around women. Their agenda must be the Church's agenda. Women, especially black women who know double oppression, must lead us in that struggle.

## **6. RESTRUCTURING THE BMC FOR PURPOSE**

The struggle for ethos is one that is not won in a simplistic pursuit of numbers, but it is won in contestation of thought leadership – which is about ideas, thinking and theoretical development. This counsel we have received from our forebears, such as Frantz Fanon in his book, *Black Skin White Mask*. Steve Biko diagnosed it aptly when he says; “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”. This calls for total liberation is summed up in Ngugi wa Thiong'o' calls for the decolonisation of the mind. Our task is to free ourselves of borrowed notions of God and being Church and rediscover our own narratives and metaphors about God and church, and declare with the Latin American Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez that we are; “Drinking from Our Own wells.” We drink in these wells not only to get water but to learn how to dig up our new wells in our time. This must be our most urgent task as the BMC.

This urgent assignment informs our life as this BMC. We gathered at the 2014 Lekgotla in Spirngs to consider what our black theoretical handles should be for our times. What constitute good governance and accountability? What is our response to the continued oppression of women in church and society? What are the areas of influence in the decision making processes of the MCSA?

This consultation's programme is structured to engage this fundamental challenge. We, black people, do not want to be the furniture that has been moved in the house nor do we want to be the chief security guard. In truth we want to own the house in order to transform it from being a house into a homestead.

For this agenda to be successfully pursued, we must re-envision a structurally relevant BMC. We no more can afford to have a BMC that is geared towards only two meetings in a year as a definition of its life. We cannot afford a BMC which has members who come to consultation simply to spend most of their time outside the hall when we are in session and pursue their private agendas at the cost of the image and integrity of our movement. We have to commit into finding smaller and consistently engaging pockets of our movement that lead our thinking, strategizing, implementation and evaluation. Districts that only exist to organise themselves for coming to the Consultation are going to impoverish our progress and contribution. We have to spend time to strengthen the leadership at district level, instil discipline, accountability and coordination. We must have focused and well run districts that are inspired to act consistently in pursuit of the dreams and values of the BMC in the life of the MCSA.

## **7. BLACK RADICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR OUR TIME**

At the core of the contest of the MCSA is the key question of what kind of spirituality is the MCSA propagating, nurturing and encouraging. If the question for Psychologists is what kind of Psychology is the foundation of black thought, for the BMC the question must be, what kind of spirituality is the foundation on which our character is built? Spirituality is the fundamental question, no wonder throughout the Journey to the New Land process the overwhelming cry of our people has been about deepening spirituality. This spirituality is a foundational call of our times for our church.

For us, spirituality cannot simply be about emotionalism, moments of feeling high induced by the singing “noyana” or a search for an immunisation process that somehow makes us immune from the troubles of life. When we talk spirituality we mean that lived relationship in connection with God who loves us and sharing that connectedness with others and creation. Therefore, we seek to understand and live out what it means to be loved by God and reflecting that love back to God and the world. It is with this understanding of spirituality that we affirm the correctness of our Presiding Bishop’s call to the Methodist people to be a transforming discipleship movement. It is also this spirituality that must make sure that we do not degenerate as a church into an exclusive club geared towards making the insider feel warm as long as we are learning in bible study and private cooperate worship.

The starting point of our spirituality is to remind black people of how much they are loved by God. Their relationship with God is founded on the deep sense that God loves them as black as they are. They are not an after-thought, they are not an experiment, they are not sub-human and they are not barbaric; they are God’s image. As dark as they might appear, as yellow boned as they are, they are God’s treasure. As kinky as their hair may be, God knows every strand of their hair. As rounded as their figures may be, God looks at them and says; “Don’t go changing...I love you just the way you are”

Therefore, our challenge is to elevate their belovedness in God as the definer of Black people’s relationship with God rather than a sense of inadequacy and unworthiness. Our spirituality has to reaffirm what our forebears reminded us of: black is beautiful!! Indeed every BMC member must be able to stand wherever they are and declare; “I am black and beautiful!”

For our time, though, we must move beyond that. We must emphasise that imaging of God is more than mere appearance. We also reflect the genius that exists in all of us. So, we are moving further than saying I am black and beautiful. We are going to say that I am black, I am beautiful and I am gifted; I have within me a genius that God has planted in me that allows me to enter the world and become a creative agent rather than a consumer of others' creativity. Therefore, we need as black people, to affirm that we are not just mere consumers but we are creators. That is a spirituality that needs to stop looking at our people as mere recipients. It is a spirituality that also knows that God trusts the creativity of our people. They do not only wait for God to make miracles. They themselves are the miracle of God that is the gift to the world.

We have Siyabulela Xuza, a young man from Mthata who has a minor planet named after him. The tragedy is that he has been honoured and celebrated by NASA rather than by his own people and country. He is a reminder of what God has placed as a genius in black people. Let our spirituality reflect this; let us thank God by celebrating the Siyabulela's in our villages and towns.

The challenge of our spirituality is to unlock the genius in black people and let it flourish. That is why the education conversation that the Presiding Bishop is leading the church on is correct, timeous and urgent for us all. For the BMC and thus the MCSA, education is not purely a technical matter but is fundamentally a spiritual matter. For us education is about the formation of people rather merely passing on of information and skills. In this instance the BMC has to encourage any development in the MCSA that moves the education conversation beyond issues of access. The quality of our education must occupy our collective attention.

The strength of our spirituality has to be self-reflection – it must not be scared to put black people in front of the mirror. In this sense Some of the foundations of our spirituality are to be found in the following reflections from one of our intellectual brothers in the diaspora, Cornel West (2014), who says;

“The fundamental shift from a we-consciousness to an I-consciousness reflects not only a growing sense of black collective defeat but also a black embrace of the seductive myth of individualism.... Black people once put a premium on serving the community, lifting others and finding joy in empowering others. Today, most black people have succumbed to individualist projects in pursuit of wealth, health and status. Black people once had a strong prophetic tradition of lifting every voice. Today, most black people engage in the petty practice of chasing dollars..... The black prophetic tradition- along with the prophetic tradition of other groups is a strong counter force to these tendencies of our time. Integrity cannot be reduced to cupidity, decency cannot be reduced to chicanery and justice cannot be reduced to the market price.”

As it is clear from the above, it is a spirituality that must critique the elitism, meritocracy and exceptionalism that is emerging amongst black people especially the middle class. This critique is found in a spirituality that is based on identity in the connectedness and relationships. It is a spirituality that is based on Ubuntu or what Cornel West calls the 'we-consciousness' of black people. We are therefore advocating for solidarity as a mark and love as expression of that spirituality.

This spirituality must make us all uncomfortable when our identity is defined by our race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. It must lead us to a fundamental connection with God through Christ where all divisions fall away and our divine image emerges beautifully.

This spirituality must make sure that our salvation experience is not a ticket to escape this world but a commitment to live in it with faith, hope and above all with love. When this spirituality is at the core of who we are, God's kingdom begins to blossom with a magnificent light to illuminate our path into the future.

#### TAKING STEPS IN SHAPING OUR FUTURE

The BMC has, in my view, to make the following few steps in its movement forward in praying this prayer with concrete actions:

- The BMC must encourage and facilitate a gathering of black women of our connexion so as to allow them to share with each other what it is to be a woman in these times, unmask the patriarchal nature of our institutions and the culture that continues to treat women as second class citizens in their own home. They must make the church uncomfortable with the sad fact that in the history of the MCSA we can only talk of Purity Malinga as the only woman Bishop. They need to ask the BMC; why is it that we have never had a woman as chair and what must be done within the BMC to change that? This must be initiated and fully owned by Black women themselves.
- We must encourage the MCSA and open conversations with Seth Mokitimi Theological Seminary with the expressed intention of elevating black thought and African history. It is my view that we need to say to SMMS, African history has to be freed from the obscurity that it finds itself in right now and establish itself as a serious area of study and research. If we do not study and research our history and ethos, it simply becomes a footnote in the pages of history as written and told by others. To this effect I believe we need to call for a chair in SMMS that is going to be dedicated to the research, study and interpretation of Black thought and African history. I even dare to ask us to consider naming that academic and spiritual chair the Khoza Mgojo chair. The journey towards establishing this chair could be through organising, in the next two to three years, a black-thought and history month at the seminary.
- It is high time that that the BMC commits to leadership investment and development through an annual leadership program and symposium. This should endeavour to gather Black Methodists in order to engage on an annual basis the understanding of leadership for our time, find new and working models of leadership, expose and train people on emerging trends of leadership and seek to inculcate a culture of spiritual leadership that is founded on love and service.
- The BMC has to find ways that are authentic, safe yet open and frank so as to be able to engage those in our ranks who occupy roles of responsibility in the broader church. In an age where it is possible to find black leaders without black consciousness and connection to a movement it becomes imperative for the BMC to continue the process of contestation and consciounitisation of these leaders. We have to work against the notion of self made leaders,

black leaders especially, who are accountable to no one except to themselves and perhaps their campaign managers.

- The BMC must encourage the MCSA and its leaders to develop a courageous and consistent prophetic stance that speaks truth to power whatever the consequences. It is with this stance that the MCSA must engage all sectors of society and be in forefront of a social movement that harnesses the energies of our people in the fight against rampant corruption, arrogance of power and the lack of accountability from those in power. This must include a campaign of consistent public solidarity in word and action with those who choose the path of truth and justice against all odds. It cannot be enough, for example to issue public statements when the Public Protector or our Judges are under attack. We must find a way of saying to her and our judges in public action, when you choose truth and justice you are not alone we are with you. To publicly say to those who abuse them when they choose truth and justice; know this when you rebuke them you touch us. We as the church we stand with those who stand for justice and truth.

## 8. CONCLUSION

As I conclude my dear friends I know that the journey ahead will not be easy nor straight forward. I have no doubt that our minds will be stretched, our spirits might tire along the way, our resources might seem inadequate and the mountain too steep to climb.

I further know we will be criticised, ridiculed as day dreamers who are guided by wishful thinking. We will be told we have become irrelevant and obstructionist. There will be voices that tell us we have lost our way and need to shut up. I know there will be many who say we are trapped in the past, the world has moved on, we are fighting past battles. We will even be told we are not led by the holy spirit. I say to you my brothers and sisters, this is not the time to allow the dream to die; as you here these voices remember the dream of our people as given to us by Langston Hughes who says:

I dream a world where man

No other man will scorn.

Where love will bless the earth

And peace its paths adorn

I dream a world where all

Will know sweet freedoms way,

Where greed no longer saps the soul

No avarice blights our day.

A world I dream where black or white

Whatever race you may be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free,  
Where wretchedness will hang its head  
And joy like a pearl,  
Attends the needs of all mankind-  
Of such I dream, my world!

Let these dream give strength to you tiring soul. Let your mind, when dreams fade be touched by a place where man no other will scorn, where love will bless the earth and peace adorn its path, where all will know sweet freedom way, a place where greed no longer saps the soul nor avarice blight our soul, a place where every person is free, all share the bounties of the earth and joy attends the need of all mankind. Be touched by that dream and just walk a little longer.

When you are tempted to give up because the road is long and winding, the voices that criticise us are too loud and strong remember what Ben Okri says in his epic poem called the Africa Elegy, he says:

We are the miracle that God made  
To taste the bitter fruit of time.  
We are precious.  
And one day our suffering  
Will turn into the wonders of the earth.  
There are things that burn me now  
Which turn golden when I am happy.  
Do you see the mystery of our pain?  
That we bear poverty  
And we are able to sing and dream sweet things  
We bless things even in our pain.  
We bless them in silence.  
That is why our music is so sweet.

It makes the air to remember.  
There are secret miracles at work  
That only time will bring forth.  
I too have heard the dead singing.  
The sky is not an enemy.  
Destiny is our friend.

So do not give up for you are a miracle from God, you do taste the bitter fruits of time yet one day, there are things that burn you now but will be golden soon, you accompanied by sweet music that the air remembers, accompanied by the singing of the dead marching forward because destiny is our friend.

This is not the time to give up no matter how dark and treacherous the road may be; remember no matter how dark the moment one candle's light dispels the night.

This is not the time to give up. Remember, there is a God who knows you, who knows the loneliness and darkness of the path of the cross and the hope of resurrection. It is that same Jesus Christ who said to you do not be afraid for I am with you till the end of time. So when it seems like all effort is meaningless and in- effective, the criticism rises like a crescendo and muzzles your inner voice just go to a quiet place and let your soul cry out "Let Thy Kingdom Come" " Let thy Kingdom Come!" " Let thy Kingdom Come!!" as you rise up and act for that kingdom; for that is Afrika's urgent call. Hold my hands as I hold your hands; let our action as the BMC be our concrete prayer for the sake of Africa and her healing. Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo, yiva imithandazo yethu. Nkosi sikelela thina Lusapho lwayo. God Bless you all. Thank you.

#### **Reference List:**

- Biko, S. 1987. *I Write What I Like*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Gutiérrez, G. 2003. *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Hughes, L. 1994. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes (Vintage Classics)*. London: Vintage Books.
- Kosuke, K. 1998. *Rejoice in Hope*. [www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/or-01.html](http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/assembly/or-01.html)
- Okri, B. 1997. *An African Elegy*. London: Vintage Books
- West, C. 2014. *Black Prophetic Fire: In Dialogue with and Edited by Christa Buschendorf*. Boston: Beacon Press