

This paper was delivered at the Conference on Family Life, hosted by the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. A copy of this paper can be downloaded from www.mcsadewcom.blogspot.com

Neither the bible nor the state defines marriage

Only civil society, despite church and state, defines it

Brian Wilkinson

Seventh Week in Pentecost 2012

Proposal for Deregulation

The goal in deregulating civil society is to affirm an 'inclusive, non-hierarchical, non-sexist, non-violent and restorative'¹ civil society of equality and freedom in the image of God.

Introduction

This paper moves away from biblical and state authority and looks instead for a new reasoning on marriage and family life. The disagreement in biblical scholarship and in political ideology on our subject leaves many people frustrated and impotent to bring change. This paper focuses on an ontological means to marriage and family life.

An image of God that is exclusive, hierarchical, male dominating, violent and retributive dominates much of society. Janet Trisk reveals this monotheistic residue of thinking conflicts with our experience of God as inclusive and restorative.² A skew translation of certain words supports a violent God exacerbating our perception of God. Most of the church has tolerated a faulty translation of justice as 'judgement'.³ Furthermore, it has supported a narrow definition of love.

Then again, many members of the Christian church have openly supported the state definition of marriage. At one time, some denominations had inserted the wedding ceremony in an act of Parliament, so closeted was the church with the state. We would do better to disregard the state, the bible and the church for a solution to family life.

The State has no right to dictate what marriage is. Equality does not exist. An infrastructural correction to the constitution will produce actual equality without losing freedom and so produce a healthy society. New evidence demonstrates that with equality family life, marriage and intimacy will improve as violence, teenage pregnancies, divorce and sexual abuse drop.⁴ The Church has no right if its scriptural authority is ambivalent about sexuality, marriage and family life. Throughout *apartheid*, many church members meekly took on the state's definition of marriage and fell in with the division of people by race.

¹ Erlander, Daniel. *Manna and mercy: a brief history of God's unfolding promise to mend the entire universe*. 2003.

² Trisk, Janet. "The violence of monotheism" in *JTSA volume 140*. 2011. 73-90.

³ Birch, Bruce. *Let justice roll down: the Old Testament, ethics and Christian life*, 1991.286ff. Nolan, Albert OP. 1982. *Biblical Spirituality*, 29.

⁴ Wilkinson, Richard and Pickett, Kate. *The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone*. 2009. 19.

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Together with migratory labour, relocation camps and a pseudo-Calvinist hold on the rules of marriage, these members meekly submitted to the Revelation 13 demon, all the while bleating that they were following the Romans 13.1 instruction to 'submit to the state'. I was one of them.

We are still suffering from migratory labour laws that dictated that men only could live in white areas as labour units and go home once a year to enjoy family life. Meanwhile, for eleven months, all sorts of sexual arrangements redefined 'marriage' in new and heart-breaking models of family life. Various Southern African cultures could not survive that onslaught and so everywhere, men still dominate women with the mantra of an adapted response to *apartheid's* social engineering, 'but this is my culture'! Today this cry to return to culture is to misrepresent culture, which ideally is a vibrant and creative force in life. In this cry to nostalgia, while understandable, is a quenching of the various African cultures that are still active and giving life in many parts of Africa. The demon *apartheid* destroyed culture by forcing the idea of 'tradition' in many rural areas refusing to allow modernity to play a role in revitalising culture in South Africa.

By deregulating marriage and intimacy, the state sets civil society free to define and manage marriage and family life in cultural, religious and gender diversity. Culture, as opposed to tradition, is a healthy way of life that adapts to its environment like HIV/AIDS and the new Constitution, so sexuality with family life is a fluid, adapting, process of life. Tradition, on the other hand, is a fixed state of mind stuck in the past and refusing to adapt. The state, however, across the region depends on various forms of religious and cultural institutions to declare non-interest in a state definition of marriage and intimacy. People will naturally align with self-interest groups in civil society. For example, fundamentalist Christians will exclude gays. Traditional polygamists and gender sensitive groups will engage one another to sort out equality and freedom in polyandrous and polygynous marriages. Muslim fundamentalists will target Muslim progressives. Groups will set their own parameters and accountability structures. Lawyers will learn the different models to facilitate resolution from conflict and to process censure.

The Christian Initiative

The Christian body begins this process by rehearsing its encounter with God, uniquely in the power of the Holy Spirit to demonstrate another way of bringing justice into the Spiritual Community. As a particular offer, the Methodists will rescind the L&D and live by grace. As the Spiritual Community embraces its diverse forms of marriage and intimacy, Methodists will engage people with a diverse range of models of families in gracious encounter. We will sometimes 'fight' in grace. We will 'set people free', 'forgive' and 'empower'. These are my synonyms for grace. In this way, families discover the power of Christ. This power drives change in behaviour. The leaders, the ministers and the L&D defer to grace. Christ inspires us to grasp God's mind for gracious living. Despite the experience of Christ, injustice across the Spiritual Community will emerge. Christians then, will confront people graciously with a model developed from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Instead of excluding people, like rapists, women abusers and paedophiles, the Spiritual Community in its diversity will hold culprits accountable within the unique ways of that culture or religion. Grace will ensure the restoration of justice, not the punishment of the unjust person. The state will monitor and hold accountable the way each system adheres to their ways. In the Christian or Methodist way, the state will ensure we hold to a gracious accountability. The disdain for 'cheap grace'⁵ is to see grace without accountability. The declaration in

⁵ Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The cost of discipleship*. 1948.

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my gospel presentation that 'heaven is free' immediately admits with Wesley that holding on to our salvation is tough.⁶

The Christian body invites, secondly, other forms of faith to adopt the same process after the above internal exercise. The critical point is in the approach to the state via the Constitutional Court. A large percentage of civil society speaking up for change will merit attention from the state to deregulate all laws relating to family life and intimacy. Paedophilia alone is a huge problem but if the Constitutional Court also declares a new period of actual equality and freedom, the goodwill of civil society should make it possible to enter into a social compact assuring the state that we can run our own diverse setting of Spiritual Community components. In my experience of paedophiles and the state, especially state psychological services, a hard, retributive and unforgiving policy meant the state incarcerated perpetrators promising never to allow them free in society at all. State officials derided the mere mention of Christian forgiveness and a medical investigation into possible healing as idealist and dangerous for society.

My Tillich roots

In some of his major works⁷, Tillich persuaded me right at the beginning of my love affair with him, not to be heteronomous. Ironically, that is what I am doing right now, allowing a foreign god, Tillich, to rule my thoughts. In order to produce my own thinking on Tillich, that is, to become autonomous, I use another simpler language⁸ and so I will not keep acknowledging Tillich. In brief, though, the following ontological principles drive my thinking:

- Love is the power that overcomes separation.
- The effect of love is justice.
- Morality, culture and religion form an integrated whole.
- The Spiritual Community is greater than convention allows.

From judgement to justice

Finding a public expression of our personal justification

Instead of arguing for a proper biblical translation of 'making just', instead of 'judging', Methodists simply, in reflecting on the personal moment of 'justification', will find in the power of the Spirit a public expression of being just, making just and holding others accountable to justice. Over two thousand years, Christians lived justly. It has not come about by obedience to biblical rules but by living in the Spirit's sanctifying power of grace.

⁶ Storey, Peter. "And are we yet alive?" *Revisioning our Wesleyan heritage in a new southern Africa*. 2004.

⁷ Tillich, Paul *et al.*

⁸ Wilkinson, Brian. *Radical contemplation: economic ethics in Tillich, Gandhi and Jesus*. 1999. 17ff

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The continued use of retribution and judgement

Much of the bible records God as inclusive and restorative but some translators of the bible fall for the problem of eisegesis: reading their legal worldview into the bible! Without getting rid of the very real judgemental passages – like most of the Wisdom literature – it is possible now to re-read passages using ‘justice’ and ‘making just’ so that we enjoy the inclusive, restorative God in Christ in most of the bible.

The church and state succumbing to the ‘law’ grieve Christians. Civil society and the Spiritual Community are way ahead of us. Examples of family life in polygamous (spousal practice), in gay relationships, in living together or ‘shacked up’, in the child-headed models from HIV/AIDS decimation of mothers and fathers, demonstrate that people are naturally adapting to family life. The gift of Wesley to the broader Christian body is that the salvation process is an organic⁹ event. If we remind all our members that the Holy Spirit brings about justice in their own lives or if we review our evangelical praxis we will transform our entire denomination. Where in my experience, we visited members to rehearse again the Good News that heaven is free, those communities now see justice emerging in their society. Certainly, this is true in those areas where my members took seriously the basic task of Methodism to keep the evangelism pillar of our mission imperative alive. In other words, where evangelism puts the focus on an organic change in people then naturally, mission takes off as groups work for justice. So too we will find justice in marriage and intimacy emerging.

The Christian and restorative justice

In the introduction, I assume a constitutional correction on equality. Without that infrastructural change, nothing we do to bring about a healthy society will work. This paper assumes that equality and freedom are continually in transcendence under the impact of the Holy Spirit, not simply by Christians but in the Spiritual Community, some of which already exists in pockets. They successfully facilitate healing in people for family life.

Because we worship the God who is inclusive, non-hierarchical, peacemaking and restorative in justice, we seek out models of restorative justice. My focus is on the organic experience of Christians and the potential for a public expression of justice. Being justified is a state of being in a person that has found a new relationship with God, an attitude of gratitude. This is the result of grace. The person responds to God’s outpouring of grace by becoming gracious too. Just as God sets the person free, the person now sets others free. In this continuing action by many individuals, a movement of grace begins to develop and so more people ‘are justified’ as, they too become Christians with an attitude of gratitude. Thus, the state of justice emerges in society organically not organisationally through the change to both church and state law. In this way, we avoid using biblical imperatives, the legalistic way.

Under the impact of the Holy Spirit, we can bring justice to marriage and intimacy

When church and state lawmakers accept that restorative justice is the preferable way to ordering society, we will seek out the truth in the Holy Spirit for all kinds of marriage options already extant in civil society. We will focus on the misdeed and not the perpetrator, looking for correction not punishment, as God does with us in Christ, without the encumbrance of narrow archaic ‘cultural’ bans on sexuality and various forms of intimacy. The Holy Spirit will facilitate just relationships for marriage and intimacy, within various worldviews.

⁹ Tonnies, Ferdinand. *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. 1957.

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Transcending equality and freedom

Theology of '*The spirit level*'

Although the book appears to carry a religious connotation, it is the scientific act of measuring the balance in society. Japan, Scandinavia and some few European countries have resisted the 'global village' mantra of economic growth by holding a firm grip on equality for over sixty years.¹⁰ Using empirical data from across the world and verified by the United Nations, the authors of *The spirit level* prove that where countries successfully keep the balance between equality and freedom, family life is healthy. In the process, these countries maintained a high state of health in twelve different health and social welfare categories: the death rate is down, teenage pregnancies have dropped and violence has dissipated. The countries that South Africa traditionally looks to for guidance, the United States and Great Britain, show escalating inequality and growing social problems. The church and Southern African states are crying out for solutions that are succeeding in the above countries. They are first world countries but unless we learn from them now, we will never become like them. Widely different in cultures, religion and class, from each other, nonetheless they commonly hold high health figures because they hold the tension of freedom and equality! Some of us are free but the answer for Southern Africa lies in making equality real. We mouth it but at the same time, we say it is impossible to realise. It will take decades to emerge but we must start the process now. For Christians, the task is to seek a theology that supports this secular solution, which I propose in the next section.

Equality means everyone is equal – owning land, money and participating in all the resources God created. Equity is another stage in the economy where no one loses out even though some earn more like the manna economy in the bible. In his treatise on justice, John Rawls says that the secondary or substitute idea of 'equity' is only acceptable if at some stage in the history, the country in question has been equal. Everyone, somewhere in the life of a country has to be able to look back and say 'we were equal' and I think he would say for South Africa the Constitution should be that moment.¹¹ The other countries in our region of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa may not have that moment unless in their independence they were equal but not free. The problem with South Africa is that our Constitution only aspires to equality! In the compromise with the old regime, the Communist onslaught petrified them. It still scares them today. They persuaded the ANC and its allies to promise to **work** towards equality, rather than **be** equal from the start of the constitution. Economic democracy, for example, is anathema to business in some countries in our region. Inequality, already skewed by Colonialism and *apartheid* has gone out of control: the wage differential alone is huge. Inheritance still evades the poor because the state not only disenfranchised them they kept them out of the Stock Exchange, not allowed them to participate in equity markets for three hundred years. The few black participants now do not bring even equity to bear in the region.

For three hundred years in our region, Colonials and whites, treated the disenfranchised like children. The new South Africa treats us all like adults but some of the newly enfranchised are still treated like children by not having access to property or capital of any kind. Like children, they behave badly saying they are entitled to it. Of course, they are! For three hundred years, they peered through the crack in the door of the Colonial nursery ogling the wealth. The fight for liberation was to bring people out of the nursery and into the wealthy living rooms. This should have been the joy of the Constitution and Independence

¹⁰ Wilkinson and Pickett 50

¹¹ Rawls, John. *A theory of justice*. 1971.

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heralding the ‘coming out party’ of people denied inclusion in the wealth. Instead, they are poor adults promoted from the nursery to the kitchen without the opportunity to own South Africa, or Swaziland, or Botswana or Lesotho, or Namibia or Mozambique. They are still not trusted to own anything except the vote. You cannot share something you do not own. Our social problems stem from inequality in the Constitution. The problem of entitlement is one of many symptoms of a much deeper problem. Everyone owning the land will solve our social ills! Owning bits in a collective, or owning tribal lands is a cop out. Quoted in *The Sunday Times* 5th August 2012¹² Professor Sampie Terreblanche uses another metaphor and more biblical than mine above.

After 40 fat years, in biblical terms, from 1933 until 1973, when the Afrikaners experienced their rise to the bourgeoisie, South Africa’s poorest 50% experienced 40 lean years. From 1973 to 1994, they experienced 20 lean years. From 1994 to 2012, they experienced another 20 lean years during the years of global corporatism.

Now, says the Professor, we have a gap between African elites and almost 24 million poor receiving less than 8% of total income! Up to 10 million people do not receive any form of remittance or social grant.

The double use of Galatian 5.1 – you are free, now live free

As a liberal, I love the letter to the Galatians. I did not give Galatians 5.1 much notice, not the double use of the word freedom until Gys Loubser¹³ gave me this amazing challenge: if there are two references to freedom in such an urgent letter by Paul to the factions in the new church who were fighting over law and grace, what did Paul mean? I may have moved away from Loubser, I hope not, but reading *The spirit level*, referenced above I had to review my understanding of Galatians 5.1 and the second ‘now live free’ phrase. Paul is not referring to our freedom but the freedom of others in the second use of the word; Christians have to set others free. Effectively this means the practice of equality. In a regional search in the Spirit for the perfect balance between freedom and equality, this text is a start. The Holy Spirit is insisting that we dwell on this text as a Christian community. Many other paradigms reveal God as a lover of equality but today God engages the world split over the two concepts. The Holy Spirit holds the two in transcendent courage. Human beings see the Spirit but we shy away from the task in hand of holding them both in God’s presence; we yearn for an answer. In practice, we are too committed either to equality or freedom but most of the world still obsesses over freedom. The task is to hold the two in perfect balance in life and practice and especially in marriage and intimacy. Of course, we fail all the time until we defer to the Spirit giving us the power of grace (2 Corinthians 12.9) to transcend both poles.

Is there not a similarity here to an exclusive God’s unequal distribution of wealth to Cain and Abel? When Paul says ‘live free’ is he not assuming that the people have the same resources to restore equality? At least, does he not see the equity of the desert people living with Moses? Judging by commentary on his bold statement in Galatians 3.28, the effect is that we are all equal in Christ, even if in practice “Paul did not invest Galatians 3.28 with emancipatory or egalitarian meaning.”¹⁴ On balance, the bible believes in equality. The key challenge for us is that Galatians 5.1 holds freedom and equality in tension. This proposal suggests that under the impact of the Holy Spirit people are able to transcend the tension on new creation models for economics, politics and society.

¹² The quote is from Terreblanche, Sampie. *Lost in transformation: South Africa’s a new future since 1986*

¹³ Loubser, G.M.H. “Paul’s ethic of freedom: no flash in the Galatian pan” in *Neotestamentica* 39(2). 2005. pp359-388

¹⁴ Punt, Jeremy. “Power and liminality, sex and gender, and Galatians 3.28: a postcolonial, queer reading of an influential text” in *Neotestamentica* 162. 2010.

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The SA Constitution invites people to fix inequality. I did not check for other countries.

The colonialists set up artificial paradigms over the last three hundred years in our region, artificially propping up small elites of wealthy people who lived equally with a high standard of living. The disenfranchised saw this possibility and bought into the myth.

Besides the Southern African myth based on a finite fossil resource base, which has no future, the 'Great American Dream' and the Soviet utopia are other myths gurgling in death throes. The implosion of Wall Street like the Berlin Wall is not far off. A whimper, like the imploding Communist empire, is the likely end to the ideology of Libertarians. Alan Greenspan admitted in an excerpt from *Fortune Magazine* 15 March 2010 by Geoff Colvin in October 2008 that Wall Street had played humpty-dumpty.

"For America's most famous libertarian, an Ayn Rand acolyte, that is most troubling. It is foundation-shaking. It put him into 'shocked disbelief,' he told Henry Waxman's House Energy and Commerce Committee in October. "I found a flaw in the model I perceived is the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works." Self-interest failed, Greenspan believes, mainly because no one including himself understood the costs of the extremely unlikely risks the big banks faced. "This is a once-in-a-century event," he says. It may seem unsurprising that in those rare circumstances the banks disastrously misjudged their counterparties, mainly other institutions that owed them payments. But a central element of Greenspan's belief system was that such things don't happen. "Counterparty surveillance failed to protect the system this time," he says. "I always thought it would. I held that belief for 60 years."

The world will be a better place without it. Southern Africa can only benefit from a 'setting free' from arrogant American growth 'laws'.

Persuading the state before the event, that is, before the world collapse, without any viable alternative economic models does not help the prophetic work ahead of us. If nothing else, giving all economic models God's blessing would go a long way to dampen the friction in the world. In particular, persuading South Africans to declare everyone equal within this conventional 'growth' model of an economy means that ideologically bound Egalitarians and Libertarians in opposing camps bent on destroying each other's economic model, quench all the gracious Spirit-driven ideas emerging from the Spiritual Community.

If we follow my definition of morality, culture and religion and in detail study the human life process, we will see that God loves all economic models. God wants us as the human race, through the Spiritual Community to transcend equality and freedom, egalitarian and liberal camps so that every idea has value once we slough off the ideology. This follows below where we will at least see the place for people as persons in family life and intimacy.

Ubuntu and the ontological polarities

Before the imperialists from the West and the East overwhelmed Africa with their various ideological and alien thinking, *Ubuntu* was the standard by which people lived in a tight but manageable transcendence of liberal and egalitarian life. The phrase, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, the Zulu for 'a person is a person by people' nicely held my reference to the life process in morality, culture and religion but it means we should unpack more detail about this process by detailing the ontological polarities. There are six elements or poles and in a normal society like Africa, they hold the poles in tension. Certainly, even in

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abnormal society, we oscillate between poles trying hard to be ‘centred, creative and courageous’ but often failing to do so and becoming ‘disintegrated, destructive and idolatrous’. In the latter example, we find Africa falling in love with or finding obligation in Liberal or Egalitarian ideas. The result is that either *umuntu* or *ngabantu* took precedence and *Ubuntu* fell into a corrupted model. A graph of the possibilities follows.

Ideological captivity and the gospel

We look at the six elements in the first graph. They are the basic ontological elements that all human beings display as the basis of the process of life. These elements in reality are on the move, much like the DNA, in a spiral constantly moving internally to produce a ‘centred’ person and constantly reaching out to others in the phase of becoming ‘creative’ and lastly reaching up for the transcendent place (for Christians this is God). When healthy, this last phase is courage or when unhealthy it is idolatry. The words are simple but represent a more technical activity, which makes up the last graph further down.

Alone	Participating
Risking	Playing Safe
Free	Destined

In the next graph, we see the possible consequences. When the two demonstrate a tension or we transcend them we become healthy. If we do not hold them in tension, we become unhealthy. This next graph then is critical for Christians to work at and to prepare us for marriage and intimacy.

Centred	Alone	Participating	Disintegrating
Creative	Risking	Playing Safe	Destructive
Courageous	Free	Destined	Idolatrous

In the following graph the same poles are displayed as if Africa has recovered its original balance freed from the ideological captivity, which the table after this shows!

<i>Ubuntu</i>	<i>Umuntu ngumuntu</i>	<i>Ngabantu</i>
Centred	Alone	Participating
Creative	Risking	Playing Safe
Courageous	Free	Destined

Most of the world struggles to free themselves from the fix in the table below. The seduction of arbitrarily short-circuiting the life process into artificially vertical poles results in an unhealthy life.

Life Process	Liberal	Egalitarian	Unhealthy
Morality	Individualisation	Participation	Disintegrating
Culture	Dynamics	Form	Destructive
Religion	Freedom	Destiny	Idolatrous

The church needs help to witness to the state

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The state and the whole world, including many in the church, are captive to the above artificial way of life. We are not freethinking when internal politics of power, biblical disagreements, the Black Methodist Consultation or money and other compulsions hold us in thrall and fear. From the ground up, with people calling members to a journey of inner inspection, we will be rid of little gods. Then we approach other forms of faith and the Spiritual Community to join with us in rescuing the state. Taking the above view on our corrupt world together with the incredibly tight text in Galatians 5.1 the answer is clear: the church in witnessing to the state will demonstrate after being in deep conversation with the Spirit, that all ideas are acceptable but not as gods! In particular, we will have to witness to owning our countries as part of the solution to our meditation.

Owning our countries across Southern Africa

The sickness in marriage, family life and intimacy connects directly with inequality.¹⁵ History hid the class distinction. Understandably, across the region because of the preoccupation with race and liberation, we did not address the class struggle, certainly not in South Africa. This may not apply to Mozambique, but the ex-colonial territories followed the British model of informally pushing class distinction so that the vast majority in the region do not 'own' the country. Many citizens can vote, but they do not own property or capital of any kind.

Once the state agrees that neither liberal nor egalitarian policies alone have a future but that both are essential to a healthy society, the way of the future is like CODESA where people meet until a solution appears. It will take the Spiritual Community to facilitate such an intense grappling with an infrastructural change to the region's life.

Freedom is present and active in the region. Only one question challenges us all, under the impact of the Holy Spirit: how do we bring equality to the people? It need only be a moment, because directly thereafter, human beings being what they are will alter the status immediately and others will capitalise on it. As long as no one loses out completely and equity maintains a happy life, so that everyone has three meals a day! Family life will improve dramatically when we transcend equality and freedom.

My idea in the Spirit is to create a public company on the JSE called SA Ltd. Every citizen has equal shares in the company and for twelve years while citizens learn to qualify for this ownership, the Reserve Bank builds up the capital and finds ways to make money. At a public gathering the citizens take ownership either by withdrawing their share or re-investing the money in the company for another period until they make more money, say, to buy property! People do not like it because I am arguing that in twelve years we should accumulate enough money for the poor to buy their own property.

Still in the Spirit, I have reviewed the above idea. Some rich and simple-life people will feed into the total capital and waive the right to draw off the equality-maker enterprise. We can call it the Tutu Protocol, in honour of the Arch Bishop, who first called for whites to pay for the past.

Another attempt in the Spirit I have made is to create a parallel economy where the land composed of 1.2 million hectares including Prince Edward Island, finds equal division among 50 million citizens. We could do the same with the other countries in our Conference. In this parallel economy, we would have a special currency. Our business would follow non-ideological policies. We would adhere to the principle of transcending ambiguities for all decisions; all citizens should participate in the business. Local is *lekker*

¹⁵ Wilkinson and Pickett 49-62

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in this scenario and every enterprise is a Worker-Owned Co-Operative; I have not heard any Spirit-filled comment!

From church to Spiritual Community

In practice, the Methodist Church alone is weakening. Its brittle and fragmented structure, with huge resources in property that is in some cases open for one hour a week, replicated by three or more unnecessary plants within walking distance of one another. We waste money on personnel, administration and volunteers threefold in divisions of English, Afrikaans and the Xhosa-nostra in every nook of Southern Africa. We hide our debt as activists bus people into areas under threat to bolster worship numbers. Simply closing down the English- and Afrikaans-speaking societies will reduce debt, increase income and lower resource wastage. It will bring us one-step closer to joining the broader Spiritual Community. This, however, is the tip of the iceberg of division among people in the Christian sector alone. Nonetheless, it is possible to make friends with other Christians and other forms of faith. I use the phrase on purpose to argue that Jews, Muslims and Hindus are simply other forms of faith. God enjoys them just as much as God enjoys us. This, I hope is the easy part of bringing Methodists out of the dark ages. What the Spiritual Community encompasses is beyond faith in God, including Buddhists, New Age, township syncretists, egoists and all the –isms!

The Spiritual Community is non-existent if you are looking for an organisation with an address and a web site! Organically, though, I encounter it every day in many arenas. The presence of the Spirit is a sign. The presence of grace is another one. In my study of Gandhi,¹⁶ I found a wonderful example of the gracious life despite his strict rules for life in the ashrams.

A more formal approach in different media to people with ‘spirited’ natures or the new media on the Internet, will bring change to society so that marriage and intimacy may find justice everywhere but particularly from the state.

Atheists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, African Traditionalists, New Age

A Methodist colleague of ours now living in Canada visited South Africa recently to tell a story of the potential for all of us. Rev Ric Matthews found the legalism of both the church and the government so bad that they closed the church down in the city of Vancouver. Although still precarious, a wonderful group of what I have been calling the Spiritual community surrounded him with love. He has no pension, no stipend and no backing of a mother church. With bright leaders, an idea for a continued movement is emerging. The government will not let them call it church but they are working among the inner city poor whom the government abandoned. Atheists, Jews and a wide range of people attracted by Ric’s modern and progressive Christian thinking have agreed to keep up the organisation that used to be a mainstream denominational city church!

Without initially closing down, it is the gracious way to make friends with all forms of faith and religious activity. Simply trying to get black ministers to make friends with African Independent churches in the same neighbourhood can prove futile. White churches are no different.

¹⁶ Wilkinson 172ff

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The state and civil society

It is difficult trying to see the region as we debate the regional reality of injustice and neglect in family life. In the next section, the focus is only on South Africa. It should be possible in the region to find a place of recourse avoiding the political administration.

The Constitutional Court

Ordinary people do not participate in the development of the Constitution, which the authors designed for ordinary and poor people to use! As the church, and particularly as the Spiritual Community, working for healthy family life and intimacy, we have an open door to engage with the Constitutional Court. The following statement from within the legal fraternity supports this.

The Constitution appears to envisage a continued relationship of cooperation between State and civil society. This relationship is premised on civil society having a crucial role to play in service delivery and policy-making with the State, where similar goals of transformation and change are shared. Seen in this light, a relationship of cooperation may have many advantages, and can greatly assist in socio-economic delivery in South Africa¹⁷.

Civil society has an open door to the State through the Constitutional Court without necessarily processing its aims through the government. Obviously, the government will want to look at our aims but only the judiciary has the power to review Constitutional matters. It is unlikely that government would dislike what the church is seeking out in improving the health in family life and intimacy.

A strong relationship between civil society and the State can be one way of ensuring that governmental efforts at reconstruction and delivery, and the transformational goals in the Constitution are met through joint efforts.

Nonetheless, civil society will run its own affairs and, with the exception of discrimination, can set up its own way of relating to one another and the rest of society. In fact:

However, strong democracy also needs a vibrant civil society to act independently of and as a watchdog over government – especially in relation to delivery of constitutional goals.

From the State, therefore, the church should seriously find a better way of being influential in civil society participation, in bringing about a healthy society in South Africa, at least, but this does not help members of other countries in the Methodist Conference.

Dropping our pride the church closes down to join other like-minded groups

The ideal sacrificial act of grace is the offer by our denomination in the region to close down. We avail ourselves to anyone else for regular contact and exploration of the 'emergent church'¹⁸ without losing the Christian practice of worship, fellowship and mission. We make friends with all in the Spiritual Community. If we are to rescue diverse models of marriage and intimacy, we need the Spiritual Community as ally. The state will enjoy our effort at a common approach from the Spiritual Community

¹⁷ Jagwanth, Saras. Management of Social Transformations (MOST). 2003. 10-12.

¹⁸ McLaren, Brian D. *Everything must change: Jesus, global crises and a revolution of hope*. 2007. 275.

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even though we demonstrate diverse models of marriage and intimacy. Three important subjects in the life of the Spiritual Community will occupy their minds before we address the Constitutional Court. First, deregulating marriage and intimacy means each sect takes control of the state's old responsibility of physically providing a marriage licence and administering the continued process of marriage and intimacy in the life of that sect, including divorce and possible internal problems like bigamy. The state must find assurance that in its diversity the Spiritual Community will cope! Second, although the state may dislike it, civil society (except for discrimination) will have nothing to do with our adoption of restorative justice. The Spiritual Community, though, may not find agreement among the many kinds of systems to appropriate restorative justice principles. In particular, and I may be seeing monsters where there are none, the practice of Sharia law in some countries seems to be retributive, exclusive, male dominating and a violent law. Third, declaring equality and freedom as the journey to transcendence, should find echoes with all kinds of religious behaviour. The problem, as it will be across the whole Spiritual Community, is our complicity in worshipping the foreign gods of Libertarianism or Egalitarianism, let alone Nationalism!

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