Ministry in the Tempest: A Reconstruction of the Life, Work, and Legacy of Rev. Andrew Ndhlela of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper focused on the gap in the historiography of Methodism, where the legacy of Rev. Andrew Ndhlela was undermined. Ndhlela was appointed the first native District Chairman and General Superintendent of Rhodesia Synod in 1965 and later president of the Conference in 1977. The first appointment coincided with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Rhodesia imposed by Ian Smith, which created a crisis between the country and the church and between the Africans and the Europeans. This schism resulted in tensions, frustrations, and mistrust in the country and the church. Politically, Ndhlela saw himself leading a church divided based on the tensions between Rhodesia and Britain's relationship. Ecclesiastically, his appointment also caused conflicts as some Europeans felt that the natives were not yet ready for such leadership positions, and others felt belittled to be led by natives. Although Ndhlela succeeded in leading the church in these tempest times, the historiography of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe did not pay particular attention to a man who was the dividing line between the first and second phases of Methodist history. Using qualitative research methodology, the paper aimed at reconstructing Ndhlela's life, work, and legacy, focusing on how he maintained the church together when there was a possibility of splitting. The paper concluded by challenging the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe to honour the legacy left by Ndhlela of a united, inculturative, autonomous, and self-sustained church in the context of sociopolitical and religious conflicts.

Keywords: Ministry; Rev. Andrew. Ndhlela; Methodist church; Zimbabwe

UNISA university of south africa PRESS
Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae
Volume 50 | Number 3 | 2024 | #14231 | 14 pages
https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/14231
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)
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Introduction

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa became autonomous in 1882 (Zvobgo 1991, 17); however, in the same Conference, the Transvaal District remained an extension district of British Methodism (Weller and Linden 1984, 81). In 1891, the British Methodist administration sent Rev. Owen Watkins, who was the District Chairman of the Transvaal District, to cross the Limpopo River to Mashonaland (now Zimbabwe) to plant Methodism, thereby making the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) have the influence of Methodism in South Africa and from Britain (Weller and Linden 1984, 81). Watkins was accompanied by Rev. Isaac Shimmin (Thorpe 1951, 24). The two missionaries were assisted by ten teacher evangelists from South Africa (Mujinga 2017, 117). From 1891–1893, Methodism in Zimbabwe was controlled as an extension of the Transvaal District. Wakins left the church under the leadership of Isaac Shimmin, who led the Methodist movement between (1894–1901). Shimmin was succeeded by Rev. John White, who led from (1901–1926). White left the church under the leadership of Rev. Frank Noble (1927–1938). The succession went further with Rev. Herbert Carter leading from (1938 to 1954) and the last European leader was Rev. Jesse Lawrence, who led from (1955 to 1965) (Mujinga 2017, 162).

MCZ, whose headquarters were in Britain, trained and sent missionaries to Africa. Ndhlela became the first native minister to lead the church as a district of the British Conference from 1965 to 1977 and as an autonomous conference from 1977 to 1980. Regardless of Ndhlela being the dividing line between the first and second phases of Methodist history that defines the current MCZ, his stories were given little attention by Methodist scholars. For example, works on the history of Methodism in Zimbabwe, such as those written by Thorpe (1951), Banana (1991), Zvobgo (1991), Madhiba (2010), Gondongwe (2011), and Mujinga (2017) mentioned Ndhlela in passing without paying particular attention to his legacy in the MCZ's historiography. In addition, Kadenge (1991) worsened the historiography when he wrote only 11 pages on the leaders who led MCZ from 1891 to 1991. This pigeonholing of historical narratives justifies the need for a deeper engagement in the life, ministry, and legacy of Ndhlela, the trendsetter of the new face of Methodism in Zimbabwe. Ndhlela died in 1984 due to a car accident.

The paper will start by presenting the methodology and defining some key terms. The definitions will be followed by a description of how Ndhlela ascended to the leadership position of Methodism in Zimbabwe as a native person chosen among other natives and Europeans. The paper will further present Ndhlela's pastoral role in the tempest of the socio-political environment where he ministered. Lastly, the legacy of Ndhlela found in the unique inculturation and contextual structure of Methodism brought by the autonomy of the church in Zimbabwe will crown the discussion.

The author is cognizant that Zimbabwe changed some of the names of the country and its cities after 1980; this paper will deliberately use the colonial names for the events before 1980 to locate the research within a proper historical perspective. For example,

Rhodesia was renamed Zimbabwe in 1980, and all references before 1980 will use the term Rhodesia, Salisbury for Harare, Gwelo for Gweru, Selukwe for Shurugwi, and Marandellas for Marondera.

Methodology

This paper used qualitative research methodology. In this methodology, both primary and secondary sources were employed. The paper used archival data gathered from the MCZ archives through the consent of the MCZ administration. In addition, secondary data was also gathered from the literature on the Methodist history. Data from the two sources was analysed using thematic data analysis.

Definition of some Key Terms

The term Synod was used by MCZ from 1891 until 1977 to refer to the Methodist church in Southern Rhodesia, which was under the British Conference. The District Chairman and the General Superintendent led the Synod. From 1891–1964, the Europeans. Today, the term Synod in the MCZ refers to the district meeting that gathers annually in April to discuss the mission of God taking place in the geography of that district.

The Methodist Church in Rhodesia first used the term conference in October 1977, when the British Conference gave the Synod autonomy/ independence.

The title president was borrowed from the British Conference to refer to the leader leading the Conference. When Rhodesia Methodist became autonomous, Ndhlela, the General Superintendent and District Chairman, first used the title from 1965–1977 (Zvobgo 1991, 121). When Revd Prof. Canaan Banana, who was a Methodist clergy became the State President in 1980, MCZ changed the title of president to Bishop to avoid the use of secular terms to refer to ecclesiastical leaders in the presence of a secular leader who was also a cleric. The title changed again in 2004 from Bishop to Presiding Bishop when the MCZ followed the trends used by other Conferences, such as the Methodist Church in Southern Africa, Kenya, Ghana, and The Gambia, just to mention a few. The change of terms led the chairpersons of the districts to be titled District Bishops.

Lay President refers to the layperson who is a deputy of the Presiding Bishop. Before 2004, the term only referred to the conventional lay leader. The laypeople leading the district under the district chairperson (later bishop) were called the District vice chairpersons. When the chairperson was renamed bishop, the vice chairperson changed to District Lay President.

Background and identity of Rev. Andrew Majoni Ndhlela

Born in 1912 at Nyatsanga Village in the Mhondoro Communal Lands, where his family migrated and settled from Chipinge, Rev. Andrew Majoni Ndhlela became a beacon of Methodism in Zimbabwe. Ndhlela, who belonged to the Ndau ethnic group from Chipinge, was born into a poor family. His father was a miner working in Selukwe (Shurugwi) and later Hartley (Chegutu). Although Ndhlela's father was not educated, he could read, while his mother was a dedicated Christian who led her husband to a Christian marriage in 1923 (Methodist church in Zimbabwe 1985:10).

Ndhlela spent most of his time herding cattle and farming in the Mhondoro Communal Lands. After completing Standard One in the village, his father did not see a future in this routine work, so he sent him to Waddilove Institute to pursue his studies at a boarding school. At Waddilove Institute, Ndhlela was welcomed by Rev. John White, the General Superintendent from 1901 to 1926 (Mujinga 2017, 162). White gave Ndhlela some manual work until he started Standard Two in 1928. Upon his baptism, Ndhlela was renamed Andrew (Methodist church in Zimbabwe 1985:10). After passing Standard Four, he did the teacher's training course and was appointed to practice the profession in the rural Selukwe Circuit, where he served for four years. Ndhlela worked single-handedly to save money for his education. In 1935, he was appointed as a District Evangelist and was sent to Tegwani Training Institution in Plumtree, where he completed Standard Seven and was awarded an Elementary Teacher's Certificate (ETC). In July 1935, Ndhlela married Sarah Gombera, his fellow student at Waddilove Institute, who was now a trained teacher working in Nengubo Circuit. The two were blessed with six children, three boys and three girls: Tongasi, Sitolile, Chisi, Haaneti, Joy, and Job.

In 1937, Ndhlela was seconded for another one-year training as an Evangelist because all natives who would be ministers were trained in this category first. He served as a District Evangelist in rural Selukwe and Pakame Circuits. While in Pakame, he was accepted as a candidate for itinerant ministry in 1941 and served as a pre-collegiate in Bulawayo African Circuit. As the Second World War intensified in the 1940s. Ndhlela was appointed Chaplain of the Rhodesia African Regiment in Salisbury between 1942 and 1943 (Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 1985:11). He visited all the training camps during his tour of duty. During his ministry, native people and the Europeans accepted him as a good leader because he saw Christianity as a body of ordinary men and women who joined an unconquerable fellowship (Wakatama 1996). From 1944 to 1945, Ndhlela entered Ministerial Training at Waddilove Training Institute. After completing his ministerial training, he was ordained and appointed to the Salisbury Circuit as a Minister, where he served from 1946 to 1953. He was later transferred to the rural Selukwe Circuit, where he remained until 1954.

Between 1955 and 1962, Ndhlela served in the rural Pakame Circuit in Shurugwi. In an interview with Evangelist Friday Mukoki, who worked closely with Ndhlela, the minister worked as a Superintendent Minister of the Circuit with 30 societies, Principal

for Pakame Primary School, and Schools Manager for more than 20 schools. Although Ndhlela had many responsibilities, he demonstrated his leadership acumen, and the church could not ignore his leadership gift (Methodist church in Zimbabwe 1985,10).

The 1960s, Political Situation and Ndhlela's rising to be the First General Superintendent of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

From the discussion above, Ndhlela spent most of his ministry in the rural areas of Selukwe and Pakame, where he was at the helm of the Methodist leadership. This is true to the assertion of Harris et al. (2007) that top-quality leadership is essential because it is achieved by having a mission and vision along with coping with the changes occurring in the external environment. Ndhlela's leadership skills were evident in the 1960s when the political situation challenged the church's mission. For example, Mosley presents the political tension prevailing in the country in the 1960s. He wrote:

> By 1963, many of the African people had concluded that the only way forward was through armed struggle. Zimbabwe Africa People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, split – and a new breakaway party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), was formed with its leader as Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole. ZAPU tried to persuade Britain and the international community to isolate the Rhodesian government politically and economically. The leaders of both ZAPU and ZANU were arrested. Mugabe remained in prison from December 1963 to Dec 1974. Nkomo was out of the country when the first arrests were made, but he was arrested on his return on 16 April 1964. In April 1964, the Rhodesian Front party leaders deposed Winston Field from being Prime Minister and replaced him with Ian Smith (Mosley 2007, 10).

The political situation presented by Mosley was very delicate for both the country and the church. The Rhodesia Christian Council (RCC), an ecumenical meeting of church leaders, gathered in Gwelo on November 4, 1964, with Ndhlela in attendance. The Council made its first statement on the political situation in Rhodesia. They expressed grave concern at Prime Minister Ian Smith's excessive emphasis on the need for immediate independence as the process led the country to increased bitterness (Kadenge 2017). The RCC argued that more important than independence from Britain was "establishing better relationships between the natives and the Europeans" (Kadenge 2017). This political tension had a bearing on the ministry and mission of the church because the church was also divided among the political leaders of the Shona and Ndebele tribes. Following these instabilities, it was necessary to change the approach to ministry where the mission was supposed to grow from below.

The country's political situation demanded the church's transition from missionary leadership. This move was made possible in the Methodist church when Rev. Jesse Lawrence was the last European leader from 1955–1965. Lawrence had experience working in missionary work, including in India. The Methodist Missionary Society recommended to the British Conference that Lawrence be appointed as the new Chairman of the District instead of one of the Methodist missionaries already

working there. Lawrence led the church when the political situation proved challenging in propagating the Gospel in Rhodesia. He was also sent when political and ecclesiastical orders were fast, demanding native leadership (Kadenge 1991, 113).

In 1963, Lawrence started to decentralise the church administration by creating four Area Councils, namely Bulawayo under the Chairmanship of Rev. Robert Forshaw, Selukwe led by Rev. Andrew Ndhlela, Marendellas under the leadership of Rev. Roy Rushworth, and Salisbury led by Rev. Shadrack Ushewokunze. (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia Synod 1964,11)

Since the Methodist Church was still a dependent extension of Britain's parent body, the Conference appointed the Synod's Chairman. In 1964, the Methodist Missionary Society agreed to appoint Ndhlela as the new leader (Banana 1991, 131). The Southern Rhodesia Synod that sat on 13–15 January 1965 at Trinity Methodist Church in Salisbury endorsed the appointment of Ndhlela to be the District Chairman and General Superintendent of Southern Rhodesia District. The Synod also agreed to rename the District from Southern Rhodesia to Rhodesia District (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Southern Rhodesia Synod 1965, 65; Mosley 2007). Most Methodists heard about the appointment through the radio, and there was criticism from the European community. According to Pritchard (2014, 281), " the European members and missionaries were shocked by the appointment as they were not prepared to have a native leader". To emphasise their resentment, the Europeans in Bulawayo Area Council passed a resolution deploring the lack of consultation by the church in appointing Ndhlela (Gondongwe 2011, 224). Most senior missionaries felt the same and said so publicly. Some senior missionaries said that it should have been one of them. The natives respected Ndhlela as one of the senior African ministers, and most African church members welcomed his appointment. According to Gondongwe (2011, 271),

> There were five other congratulatory letters from indigenous ministers namely Enoch Musa, Charles Manyoba, Elliot Hungwe, Naison Makwehe, and Enoch Mazhandu. In addition to letters conveying congratulations, there were also Quarterly Meeting reports concerning the appointment. One report came from Rev. Stephen Mkuruba. He writes: 'The Lord has appointed one of Africa's sons to lead the district. We wish him well and he deserves our cooperation and prayers to disprove the myth that Africans cannot lead.' All the congratulatory messages found in Ndhlela's file were from African ministers except one which came from his predecessor, Jesse Lawrence.

Such reservations about accepting Ndhlela as the new leader point to both political and tribal divisions mentioned earlier. However, some church members' dissatisfaction could not bring the Methodist Mission Society to withdraw its decision (Gondongwe 2011, 224). For Gondongwe, Ndhlela was the suitable leader to break the missionary thread because he may have seemed a natural choice for the British Methodists because of his history as a chaplain in the armed forces. His experience as a leader in the army exposed him to collaborating with Europeans, and it was this experience that the British Church valued (Gondongwe 2011, 271). In addition, Ndhlela belonged to the minority

Ndau ethnic group in a church where Ndebele and Shona people dominated, making him a preferred candidate (Gondongwe 2011, 271). Moreover, the Ndau people did not participate in the rivalry that characterised the Shona and the Ndebele people. It can be concluded that the appointment of Ndhlela may have been based on a correct reading of the situation by the British Wesleyan Methodist Church (Gondongwe 2011, 272).

The appointment of Ndhlela coincided with both the internal and external politics of his time. Internally, the church was divided along tribal and racial lines of being either Shona or Ndebele, while the racial conflicts were defined by pigmentation. Externally, the Rhodesian Prime Minister- Ian Smith- made a bold political decision that further widened the gap between Rhodesia and the international community and between his political party and other political parties in the country. The giant step taken by Smith was the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965. Apart from calling all the states not to recognise the minority regime of Rhodesia, the Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) between 1966 and 1968 (United Nations 1975, 9; Watts 2012, 2). The United Nations forced Britain to take military action since it was in direct control of the Rhodesian government, but it refused for fear of bloodshed. Instead, Britain banned all imports and exports to and from their colony, Rhodesia (United Nations 1975, 9). The ugly dictates of the UDI culminated in the First *Chimurenga* (the war of liberation), which also had a negative impact on the mission as both the country and the church were craving for local leadership. The need for ecclesiastical changes in Rhodesia was a road toward an inculturative church. For the Methodist Church, Ndhlela was the dividing line between the missionary and local leadership from the church's inception.

Given the political situation in the country, the Methodist Mission Headquarters in London saw Ndhlela as their source of hope for the stability of the church and the reconciliation of the local people and the United Kingdom and Rhodesia (Wakatama 1996). In his Address to the Southern Rhodesia Synod of 1969, Ndhlela -reiterated:

> The church lives and works within the circumstances of the UDI. It is difficult to separate religion from politics. During the past year, there had been hopes for a settlement, fearless negotiations, and the visit of the British team but the task failed to bring the desired results…the continual state of affairs brings a fundamental crisis in relationships between Africans and European Communities in the country (Ndhlela 1969).

Ndhlela went on to mention that these fears have led to unfriendliness between the races, even within the Christian community. This unfriendliness makes it difficult to preach and hear the gospel of reconciliation, which the people of this land desire (Ndhlela 1969). He concluded his address by pointing out that:

> The political situation created Christians of deep understanding who will serve the country and Christians have an important role to play in such a time as this. One of the results of this situation was the banning of the Rev. H.O. Morton the Field Secretary

> from visiting and entering Rhodesia one of the Overseas Districts for which he is responsible on behalf of the Methodist Missionary Society and the Methodist Conference (Ndhlela 1969).

During Synods and Conferences, Ndhlela showed he was a nation-builder by skillfully handling delicate situations. He struck a striking balance between ministry and politics. He synchronised the native and colonial differences, making the British Methodist Church take his advice seriously. Since Methodism was a respected church in Britain, Ndhlela's astute leadership also caused the British imperialist and Rhodesian leaders to hold him in high regard (Wakatama 1996).

Politics and Ecumenical Organisations during the Ndhlela Leadership

Churches in Rhodesia saw no hope of winning the political pressure infiltrating the denominations as a single entity. The Rhodesia Council of Churches (RCC) decided to come together to speak with the same voice. Ndhlela, Bishop Lamont of the Catholic Church, and Bishop Kenneth Skelton of the Anglican Church pioneered the formation of the Rhodesia Council of Churches — now the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). Rhodesia Christian Council was initially confused about how a church organisation should react to political issues. A decision was made that the Rhodesia Christian Council president Bishop Skelton and Ndhlela should go to Britain and the United States to gain public support for resistance to Rhodesian independence from Britain (Murdoch 2015, 9). African ministers pushed the RCC to issue a Pastoral Letter at a meeting in July 1966. However, there was "too much disagreement to proceed with such a letter as there was no common ground on the letter's content about the political situation" (Murdoch 2015, 10). The RCC finally took a stand on the Smith government's separate development. The Council resolved that:

> Legal and physical separation of people into racial groups would be an offence against Christian ideals of the brotherhood of all men under the fatherhood of God. A racial separation policy would frustrate any cooperative efforts to bring about a just and peaceful solution to the country's problems. The RCC urged all churches to reject the Government's new racially based registration fees (Murdoch 2015, 12)

In the late 1970s, Ndhlela went to Geneva for the Lancaster House negotiations as the Vice President of the Rhodesia Christian Council, offering chaplaincy to all political parties (Murdoch 2015, 12). The church's involvement in the Lancaster talks gave hope to different churches in Rhodesia. One of his advantages was that "during the war, Ndhlela took great care to stay connected with the guerrillas, persuading them not to use excessive force during the liberation struggle" (Nyarota 2013, 42). He also tried to get alongside the Europeans and offer them support and pastoral care (Mosley 2007, 6). Ndhlela was one of the church leaders who took a critical non-political position, which was both passive and persuasive to see the national conflict being resolved (Nyarota 2013, 42). Addressing the Synod after the return from Geneva, Ndhlela reiterated that: *"*several people had expressed concern to me and thought I might be able to contribute,

and after prayerful consideration, I decided to go. It was not an easy decision as I belonged to no political group" (Ndhlela 1977, 1). In explaining his role as a pastor during his Geneva trip representing the church, Ndhlela avers,

> When I was in Geneva, I found a way to go to various groups and talk to all the nationalist leaders and members of their delegations, both individually and collectively. I felt my presence in Geneva was greatly valued by the groups. I was freely able to move and talk with them. The nationalists wanted nothing less than an African majority rule and handover of power. I tried to bring them the spirit of give and take and reconciliation (Ndhlela 1977, 1).

Ndhlela's neutral position in the context of political crisis made his legacy in ministry unique.

Ndhlela's leadership after the Autonomous Conference 1977–1980

In 1977, the British Methodist Conference, overseeing the Methodist church in Rhodesia, decided to give independence to the Rhodesia Synod. This independence was called autonomy, and the freedom redefined the new church. Leading the church from an extension of the British Conference to an autonomous Conference meant much to Ndhlela as a leader and the church in Southern Rhodesia. First, the autonomy of the Rhodesian Methodist meant that the church would plant and implement its mission work in its country (Mujinga 2017, 150). Second, the Methodist Church would be self-ruling, self-governing, self-supporting, and self-directing (Madhiba 2000, 7). Third, autonomy means having the power to select local leadership, determine the form of worship, decide financial matters, and direct other church-related affairs without interference from outside, including the government.

Autonomy changed the status of the Rhodesia Synod to Rhodesia Conference, while the Area Councils were renamed District Synods (Banana 1991, 131). The status of becoming autonomous meant a transfer of authority where the Synod reporting to the Overseas Division of the Methodist Church in Britain would manage its administration (Ndhlela 1977, 1-2). Before autonomy, delegates would attend the conference in Britain to give reports on the Methodist work in Rhodesia (Dimingu and Dimingu 2017, 228). Autonomy came in the context of a deep political crisis and racism among the Methodist members. In his review report to the 1977 Synod, Ndhlela narrated the challenges rocking the nation and the church when he was appointed the first native leader of the church.

> As I am presenting this review, the situation in the country is sad and serious. Young and old African people including women are leaving the country for guerrilla training. Schoolchildren have absconded, and the destruction of lives of both native people and Europeans is a disturbing factor in the country. The rural people are in the middle of the conflict. The curfew areas are extensive and protected villages have been created in the country. We have our members in the protected villages and one of our ministers works

> from such villages and one in the Mt Darwin District, the Rev. Morris Masvanhise and his family. The killing of innocent people is taking place in the operation areas…this state of affairs must be condemned. Whoever is responsible for these things has no human feelings. On behalf of the church and the people, I refute these acts of violence and intimidation as a means of achieving an objective. War is contrary to the will of God. In obedience to God, no Christian can support a political party that is based on unjust discrimination on grounds of colour, race, or religion between people who live and work in the same country. Discrimination and separation stand in direct conflict with the Biblical message of reconciliation. It is the root of the trouble in this land (Ndhlela 1977, 1).

Ndhlela went further to explain that,

> Some circuits are in curfew areas, and it is not easy for ministers to travel around to conduct services and visit the members. At the moment about a third of our circuits are seriously affected by the situation and the most affected circuits are Mt Darwin, Umtali, (Mutare) Wankie (Hwange), Nata, Plumtree, Siabuwa, Gwaai, Mzinyathi, Fort Victoria (Masvingo), Wedza, Buhera Shabani (Zvishavane) Marandellas, Lowveld and Kwenda. The people need pastoral care, and it is the duty of the ministers but unfortunately, they cannot afford to perform their duties (Ndhlela 1977, 3).

He concluded by reiterating that:

> The sharpest and most intense controversy with British and Irish Methodism in the 20th Century involved overseas missions and the response of the World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism especially as it related to Southern Rhodesia. The 4th Assembly of the World Council of Churches defined racism as linking with political and religious exploration and with European racism lying at the root of domination and privilege (Taggart 2012, 92).

Ndhlela presided over a District with many problems. First, autonomy meant that the Methodist Church had moved from a foreign Church to a decolonised church. This was a significant paradigm shift as the church had internal conflicts. Second, autonomy meant that the Methodist Church in Rhodesia could now make its own decisions and start decolonising its theology and biblical interpretation tainted by the missionary colonial bias (Dimingu and Dimingu 2017, 228). Third, autonomy also created a conducive atmosphere for the Methodists to become an indigenous church that sought to meet its people's physical and spiritual needs. Fourth, autonomy meant the localisation of the gospel. Methodist churches in Rhodesia needed to be localised to be relevant in post-colonial Zimbabwe (Mosley 2007). There was a need to transplant the gospel from the Western flowerpots into the Zimbabwean soil so that it could start to speak with the language and idioms of the local people. (Mosley 2007: 10). Autonomy meant a new church for new people, and Ndhlela was the face of this paradigm shift.

Ndhlela made several strides as the post-autonomous president of the new Conference. He was able to lead the church into the localisation of music, intensify indigenous

leadership, capacitate districts by empowering them to have their synods, clarification of the succession plan of the indigenous clergy, inculturation of the gospel through the use of indigenous tools, and the self-funding of the church through the introduction of church extension fund that was meant to sustain the local church.

The Pastoral Ministry of Andrew Majoni Ndhlela

Although Ndhlela was dealing with theological, political, tribal, and racial issues in the church as a leader, he maintained his call as a pastor who created time for those who needed his pastoral oversight. For example, when Rev. Canaan Banana was involved in politics and decided to flee from the country as a border jumper, Ndhlela made several pleas for his release. When Josiah Chinamano was in detention, Ndhlela visited him and other detainees incarcerated in various prison centres. Ndhlela wrote several letters to Chinamano. In one of his letters, he stated: As the church, we will continue to pray for you, and from time to time, we will make sure that you receive Holy Communion. As a church, we will do everything to support your children (Gondongwe 2011, 296). This kind of ministry resonates well with the foundations of prison ministry championed by John Wesley, which became part of the movement's identity.

Moreover, Evangelist Ben Chaendera wrote a letter to Ndhlela on 10 October 1972 after the loss of his wife. Chaendera wrote:

> My dear father in Christ Jesus, your words of service to my late able, and humble wife have indeed been comforting. Mrs. Chaendera was everything to me and her four children…I still remember your word in your last prayer for her that God will take care of the children, so I believe and trust you. I will bring the four children to you and mother so that you will see and know that they will grow under the wings of your prayers. It was at that time when you came that people know that I am not alone (Chaendera 1972).

Chaendera's letter presented Ndhlela as a counsellor who availed himself of needy situations. When he Ndhlela was invited to open the Third Session of the 12th Parliament of Rhodesia in the Chamber of the House of Assembly on 2 June 1972, he turned down the invitation because he had an appointment in Wedza Circuit, which was a demonstration of a minister who gave priority to his mission before prestigious invitations. Moreover, Nelson Ncube wrote a letter to Ndhlela on 21 November 1970. In the letter, Ncube warned Ndhlela to be careful of some individuals in the ministry. Ncube wrote,

> On our radios and televisions, one hears and reads about division, splits, and violence. I do not want to say more… let me repeat my word, be careful about people who show you one face in the church and yet show you another outside the church. People who profess the brotherhood of man and yet practically demonstrate the opposite as the current affairs. I do not doubt whether you do not see where some of our church men are trying to drive you. Make sure individual expressions should be individual

> expressions and not be mistaken for Methodist views. Dad, this is the time to take a serious look at the organisation you lead, those more educated than you are and those younger than you, and the less experienced than you are, and consider everyone as your child (Ncube 1970).

From the few sampled letters, Ndhlela was a father, a pastor, and a friend of many.

Ndhlela's Legacy and Lessons for the MCZ

Although Ndhlela was not very educated, he was able to lead the church in the most challenging time of history. He used his advantage of being from the minority group to reconcile the church that had the potential of collapsing caused by both pigmentation and tribal conflicts. Moreover, Ndhlela found himself at the centre of politics, but he separated his call from party politics compared to his counterparts. There was nothing that could have stopped Ndhlela from being a full-time politician. For example, Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole, the founder of ZANU, was from his home town of Chipinge and was a clergy member of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe but went deeper into party politics. Other church leaders like Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the United Methodist Church, who came close to his rural home in Mutare, formed a political party, and he also led the country as the first native Prime Minister during the transition period of 1979. Rev. Canaan Banana also went deep into party politics and became the first President of independent Zimbabwe under the ticket of Zimbabwe African National Union, the ruling party. Ndhlela remained neutral against all possible defaulting opportunities. In addition, Ndhlela could inculturate the church worship system, localise its leadership and contextualise its preaching. Lastly, the inculturation of theology, localisation of music, contextualisation of the mission, ministry, and the church's autonomy must all be attributed to Ndhlela as the trendsetter and trailblazer of Methodism in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, it is essential to appreciate that the historiography of MCZ is incomplete without Ndhlela, who was the centre of the church's transition from European to local leadership. Having been raised in a poor background and with a minority Ndau group, Ndhlela took advantage of his neutral position to reconcile the church, which could split. Ndhlela ministered during a political tension between Rhodesia and Britain, which also affected the church as the Europeans looked down upon the natives. This lack of appreciation of the natives made it even more difficult to appreciate his leadership. The paper also found that Ndhlela played a significant role in Rhodesia's political and ecclesiastical life, which saw the country gain independence. Lastly, the paper appreciated the legacy of an enculturated church with local leadership, contextual singing, indigenous leaders, and a well-defined succession plan because of the legacy left by Ndhlela as the first native leader. Given these findings, it is, therefore, necessary to challenge the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe to honour the legacy of a

united, inculturation, autonomous, and self-sustained church in the context of sociopolitical and religious conflicts left its first native leader,

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