

# A View from the Congo



David K. Yemba

The words “global” or “globalization” have frequently been used by the people called United Methodists during the recent decades, both in their documents and in their conversations. This concept has become a part of the vision of the denomination’s understanding of what it means to be a church. Sometimes the word “world-wide” is preferred for biblical and theological reasons. But the two concepts are very often used interchangeably.



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Whatever term is used, our denomination is wrestling with the following question: Is the United Methodist Church a global church? This crucial question is currently being discussed at all levels of church life and answers are also given from different backgrounds. My short comment will reflect some ideas from an African perspective.

**The global concept has an economic connotation. The age of globalization means also the market economy where hegemonic organizers influence the life of peoples in many ways at both local and global levels.** Economically speaking, the world is divided today into rich or developed countries and poor or

developing countries. Sometimes economists talk about the rich Northern hemisphere and the poor Southern hemisphere. This is particularly true since the Second World War when the idea of global development emerged, together with the new states which belong to what is now commonly called the Third World.

The United Methodist Church is a mission-minded church. This is our historic heritage from the founder of Methodism, John Wesley who, in his passion for evangelization, said: “I look upon the whole world as my parish.” Although the Methodist Movement evolved into an ecclesial institution in the course of its history, it has kept its missional-oriented characteristic. It is in this context of an economically and culturally divided world of rich and poor nations, and also of a world which is hungry for the transforming biblical message, that the United Methodist Church is called to evangelize and to minister.

I am not sure I understand well or am competent to describe what United Methodists in the United States generally do not understand and yet are crucial in appreciating the context for ministry in the annual conferences outside the United States. Nevertheless, I can share at least five points that I believe could be a contribution to the current conversation on the global/worldwide nature of the United Methodist Church.

## *The United Methodist Structures*

How is the connectional nature of the United Methodist Church understood, felt, and applied in the variety and diversity of countries it serves? It has been often said that the model of the United Methodist polity is closely related to the United States model of administrating the secular society. One would expect to see such a close relationship as an inspiration at the time the Wesleyan tradition reached the new world. However, after several decades of mission work, the consequences and the results of this mission work should be felt in many aspects of church life, including its structures.

## *The United Methodist Style of Governance*

This point is to some extent a continuation of the preceding point. **With unprecedented progress in the sector of information technology and transportation since the end of the twentieth century, some church agencies, program agencies especially, and services could be decentralized where it is possible.**

We are aware of practical problems which may occur in such a venture, such as problem of language, expertise, equipment, and expenses. But being a mission-minded church also means taking risks to confront

these problems in the name of the gospel. God has already taken the greatest risk for us and for the world in sending His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

### *The United Methodist Partnership*

The United Methodist Church has already moved from a one-way mission to a more comprehensive concept of church mission. The partnerships between annual conferences and local churches are encouraged throughout the countries based on interrelationships and common interests. New initiatives are also encouraged as the Holy Spirit may lead our denomination.

### *The United Methodist Ecclesiology*

The United Methodist Church needs a clear plan of study on the church and its ministries. While it claims to be a worldwide church, it has to claim at the same time to be a catholic church in the Wesleyan sense and spirit. There has been a particular emphasis so far on the church being one, holy and apostolic. The time has come to embark on an ecclesiology study which would include theological and pastoral issues of faith and order, ministry and mission. To say the United Methodist Church is "catholic" means the church being both universal and local.

### *The United Methodist Strategies on Poverty*

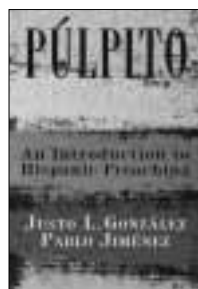
The United Methodist Church has done a lot to alleviate the suffering of so many brothers and sisters through it agencies, programs and services.

In Africa, for instance, elimination of poverty is our top priority. It is expected that the Church will develop strategies which go beyond assistance for emergency cases in order to participate actively, through and with the victims of economic poverty, in more comprehensive worldwide development. Such a development implies working also with respective governments in priority programs of education, agriculture, and health.

The five points summarized above have a common and ultimate goal: facilitating access to our denomination to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world that God so loves. □

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