

The Significance of Autonomy on Methodist Theology in Zimbabwe: A 50-Year Journey

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Abstract

It is essential to focus on the pivotal moment in 1977 when the then Methodist Church in Rhodesia (MCR), now named Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ), gained autonomy from the British Methodist Church. This study investigates the theological development of the MCZ following its attainment of autonomy in 1977. For over 80 years, the church operated under a Eurocentric theological framework established by British missionaries. This research critically examines how the 50-year journey of autonomy has facilitated a transition toward indigenisation and contextual theology, particularly in areas such as worship, leadership, and the healing ministry. Key themes include the shift from missionary leadership to the appointment of native leaders like Rev Andrew Ndhlela, the first black President of the autonomous conference, and the later transition from the title of “President” to “Bishop” in 1989 to distinguish ecclesiastical authority from secular political roles. The study also explores the tensions between traditional African cultural practices, such as *nyaradzo* (remembrance), and inherited Missionary teachings, highlighting how autonomy allowed for a win-win syncretism that remains biblically correct yet culturally relevant. Utilising a historical-analytical approach and MCZ archival data (1977–2026), the research concludes that the MCZ has successfully moved towards a self-sustained, inculturated model, offering insights into theological development in post-colonial contexts. This study explores the MCZ’s theological shift towards an autonomous, African-led church. It highlights how autonomy impacted worship and leadership, offering a model for contextualised ministry and addressing syncretism in African Christianity.

Keywords: autonomy; contextual theology; indigenisation; Methodist Church in Zimbabwe; theological evolution

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Introduction

The narrative of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) is deeply intertwined with the nation's turbulent transition from colonial rule to the attainment of independence on 18 April 1980. Within this profound historical framework, the church marked a significant milestone in 1977 when it gained autonomy from the British Methodist Church, ending over 80 years of missionary oversight (South African History Online 2011, 2017). This pivotal moment initiated a new chapter in the church's history; one characterised by a quest for self-identity and theological relevance in a post-colonial context. As the church navigated its newfound autonomy, it faced the challenge of reconciling inherited Wesleyan traditions with the cultural and spiritual realities of its African context. This study explores the impact of autonomy on Methodist theology in Zimbabwe, tracing the church's 50-year journey towards indigenisation and contextualisation.

Methodology

To capture this 50-year theological journey, the study employs a historical-analytical approach and qualitative research design. The paper used both primary and secondary data. MCZ archival¹ records located at 5 Central Avenue were accessed to find resources such as conference agendas, minutes of conferences, constitutional documents, and official reports from 1977 to 2026. Furthermore, a comprehensive review of literature by prominent Methodist scholars such as Clarence Thorpe (1951), Chengetai J.C. Zvobgo (1973, 1991), Canaan Banana (1991), Simon Madhiba (2000, 2010), Kennedy Gondongwe (2011), Martin Mujinga (2017), and Peter Masvotore (2019) was conducted to trace the historiography of Zimbabwean Methodism.

A theological analysis using Grounded Theory (GT) and Social Scientific Approaches is used in the study to interpret the symbols and practices developed during post-autonomy, such as the MCZ logo (designed in 1987) (Mujinga and Chagudhuma 2024) and the impact of the Ruwadzano/Manyano (Women's Fellowship group) movement on establishing authentic, indigenous religious piety. GT acting as the inductive data engine allowed the researcher to collect observed raw field experiences, oral histories of the clergy, and church archival records. By executing stages of open, axial, and selective coding, theories emerge directly from the Zimbabwean lived experience rather than forcing the data into Western ecclesiastical templates (Pieterse 2024). The Social Scientific Approaches lens treats the church as a human social institution responding to

1 Permission to access the archives was granted by Conference through a resolution which stated that: Conference approved that those publications to mark 50 years of Autonomy be made. Professor P. Mashiri, Rev Dr P. Masvotore and Rev Dr M. Mujinga together with a team from Media, Research and Publications shall do the research and publication of the books (Minutes of Conference 2025, 115).

shifting political, economic, and cultural realities in Zimbabwe's economic crisis and patriarchal social structures. Last but not least, the theological analysis lens evaluated findings against classical Wesleyan theology (e.g., John Wesley's views on free grace and holy communion), while placing them in dialogue with modern African Contextual values.

Theological discourse in Zimbabwe has increasingly focused on contextualising Christianity within the local culture, specifically addressing the intersections of healing, authority, and African identity. This approach, often termed indigenisation or inculturation, seeks to move away from Eurocentric theology towards a model that addresses the existential needs of Zimbabwean Christians, particularly in the face of political and socioeconomic challenges. Below is an analysis of the history and foundation of the MCZ, indigenisation of healing ministries and the evolution of leadership titles, with relevant references.

Tracing the Roots of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe

In the 1730s, Anglican priests John and Charles Wesley founded Methodism in Britain. While Charles was a musician, John was an evangelist who played a key role in the church until his death on March 2, 1791. His last declaration on his deathbed was that the supreme comfort was, "God is with us" (Miller 2003; Mujinga 2017,48). Adopted as the central motto for all Wesleyans, this message accompanied Wesley as he preached across Europe and North America.² Following his death, the Methodist movement further expanded worldwide, reaching Asia, the Americas, and Africa, where it first took root in the West, particularly Sierra Leone on 12 November 1811 (Gondongwe 2021,40; Mujinga 2025,9). Methodism spread across Africa after missionaries landed in South Africa in 1795 (Kumalo 2009,12–14). This expansion reached several regions over the following decades, including The Gambia (1820), the Gold Coast (Ghana) (1839), Nigeria (1842), and Zimbabwe (1891) (Gondongwe 2021,42).

The Methodist Missionary Society (MMS)³ began its work in the country with Reverends Owen Watkins and Isaac Shimmin arriving in Fort Salisbury on September 29, 1891 (Zvobgo 1991,8, Gondongwe 2011, 42; Mujinga 2017,119). The success of these Methodist pioneers relied heavily on Teaching-Evangelists from Southern Africa, whom Rev. Shimmin believed were essential for effectively spreading the gospel, asserting that native Africans were the best ambassadors for evangelising their own people (Zvobgo 1973, 64–65). A group of African teacher-evangelists from the Cape

2 The "Methodist Movement" first reached North America, where it became a church denomination on 24 Dec 1784—before Wesley's death and after American independence of 1733—as the Church of England in America could not align with allegiance to the King anymore.

3 The London Missionary Society was an interdenominational, evangelical organisation that did not mandate any specific church government, eventually morphing into the Council for World Mission. In contrast, the Methodist Missionary Society was an official, denomination-specific outreach directly managed by the Methodist Church itself.

Colony and Transvaal volunteered for the 1891 Pioneer Column, driven by the presence of a missionary band. Notable individuals, including Modumedi Moleli, James Anta, Wellington Belis, Michael Bowen, Basuto Mustualo, Samuel Tutani Mutyuali, Mulau, Fakosi, Shaku and Josiah Ramushu, participated in this missionary outreach alongside the colonial expedition (Graaff 1988,18; Mujinga 2017,117).

Beginning in 1891, missionaries established key mission centres like Epworth (1882) and Salisbury (1891), later expanding to Waddilove, which started in 1892, Kwenda in 1892, and then Marshal Hartley, established in 1894, as well followed by Thekwane in 1897. Chemhanza was founded in 1912; Sandringham came in 1913, and Pakame in 1920. Moleli was the last to be established in 1962 (Gondongwe 2011,68; Masvotore 2024a,4). The creation of new mission stations served as a primary mechanism for introducing Africans to missionary Christianity, representing a deliberate and strategic effort rather than a random occurrence (Ashdown 2022). Duncan asserts that missionaries intentionally set up these stations to project and enforce Western cultural norms (Duncan 2003,60). Based on Duncan's observations, these institutions actively sought to strip away the native culture of any individuals who entered them, whether they arrived by choice or were forced by external circumstances.

European missionaries clearly operated at the intersection of traditional African beliefs and Western Christianity, and their positioning played a crucial role in how the two belief systems interacted (Duncan 2003,61). According to Oduyoye and Vroom (2003,12), culture encompasses a people's way of living, thinking, attitudes, and worldviews, which distinguishes them from others. This definition highlights a fundamental cultural gap between the missionaries and the indigenous people. Oduyoye and Vroom (2003,13) further note that culture is embedded and transmitted through language, symbols, and rituals, and it both shapes and reflects religious faith. This intersection became the primary meeting point and point of contention between the missionaries and Africans. Furthermore, as Müller and Wepener (2011,94) point out, culture involves the ways individuals use their physical and spiritual agency to shape their environment, leading to partial changes in their surroundings while driving personal and communal growth. Unfortunately, rather than empowering Africans to shape their own environment, mission stations served as outposts for European culture. As a result, the local environment was dictated to them, and their indigenous faith was compromised (Mujinga 2017,121).

In 1895, the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe began its journey as an independent District under the British Conference after separating from the Transvaal (Vika 2008, 59). A significant shift occurred in 1965 when Rev Andrew Ndhlela was appointed to lead the home District. Ndhlela initiated a new era, culminating on October 16, 1977,

when he became the first black President⁴ of the Methodist Church in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) following the granting of autonomy from the British mother church (Gondongwe 2021, 41–42). In 2007, Methodists commemorated 30 years of autonomy and 300 years of music at Kadoma Showgrounds. Following its 1977 transition into a fully self-governing conference, MCZ expanded local missions, growing to nearly 200,000 members and over 250 full-time ministers (MCZ Handbook 2026, 217; Mujinga and Chagudhuma 2024,5).

MCZ, in its evangelism thrust, had a seven-day training for Mission One, which was known as M1, which was open to all those who had the zeal to know God and give their life to Christ. This later developed into Training 1, which was known as T1. It was entirely for the selected few who were trained to be district trainers to help the process of evangelism in different districts of the church. Driven by a commitment to continuous evangelism, the MCZ first appointed a full-time Evangelism Coordinator in 2008. The work of evangelism was later directed to the office of the Mission Director, who became overwhelmed by administrative duties at the expense of evangelism thrust, and later the MCZ appointed a full-time evangelism officer in 2018 to separate the duties of the Mission Director from Evangelism and adopted a holistic approach to ministry through specialised departments (Agenda of Conference 2019: R19). These include dedicated campus ministry, a publishing unit for research and stationery, support for youth and children, a projects office to manage church farms and businesses, and the Methodist Development and Relief Agency (MeDRA) for community support (Minutes of Conference 2019,24).

From the writer's observation, for nearly five decades, the MCZ has maintained unity, growing into a nationwide presence that spans all cultural, ethnic, and regional lines from the Zambezi to the Limpopo. This long-standing cohesion within the MCZ is maintained through a deeply institutionalised, connectional governance system. This robust structural foundation relies on clear hierarchies, centralised decision-making, and highly structured auxiliary organisations that standardise the Methodist identity across the country. The church is governed by committees through the Presiding Bishop as the leader, elected every five years by its main decision-making authority, the Main Conference (Deed of Church Order and Standing Orders 2022,17). MCZ's ongoing existence is a testament to God's enduring nature, mirroring the steadfast faith of its founding fathers, and as such it remains dedicated to continuing this legacy.

Indigenisation of the Healing Ministry

Healing is an essential component of the mission of churches in Zimbabwe, but the indigenisation of this ministry seeks to bridge the gap between biblical teaching and

4 In 1989 Chirisa became the first Bishop of the MCZ. It was felt necessary to change the title from the British President to the more appropriate biblical title Bishop as head of the church (Kadenge 1991,13). See also the development of titles from President to the Bishop, page 8

African traditional understandings of illness, which often view disease as spiritual or relational rather than purely biological. Inculturation of Healing in Mainline Churches shows that traditional denominations, such as the MCZ, have faced challenges with neglect and lack of theological clarity regarding healing, leading to dual membership, where members seek healing in Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AICs). Research suggests that in areas like Mbare, Epworth, and Mabelreign, in-culturating the healing ministry, integrating prayers for healing with understanding local cultural perspectives on illness (e.g., *nhova*/fontanelle management), is essential to make the church relevant (Mujinga 2023; 2024a). When one looks at the AICs and the Prophetic Healing Model, we find that AICs and newer charismatic movements (e.g., Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Forward in Faith (ZAOGA FIF), UFIC) have successfully indigenised healing by making the prophetic figure central to diagnosis and healing (Masvotore 2024b). Prophets in these churches act as mediators, filling the cultural space of traditional healers (*n'anga*). However, while a *n'anga* seeks to manipulate spiritual forces, the Christian prophet operates under the framework of 1 Corinthians 14:3, where spiritual diagnosis through the lens of prophecy serves to edify, exhort, and console the believer.

In this model, the prophetic diagnosis does not merely identify a problem; it provides edification by unmasking the root spiritual realities of illnesses such as witchcraft or broken family relations, thereby strengthening the believer's faith in God's supreme power. The subsequent deliverance (healing) functions as both exhortations to maintain spiritual vigilance and consolation, bringing profound psychological and spiritual comfort to those tormented by relational or supernatural distress. Consequently, deliverance and healing become normalised alignments of a broader, systematically grounded New Testament prophetic ministry.

An early, significant example of this indigenisation was *Guta raJehovah (GRJ)* (City of God) in the 1950s. It was started by Mai Chaza, who was excommunicated from the MCZ, establishing a community that used African perspectives on healing, prophecy, and deliverance, attracting many who felt neglected by mainstream churches (Masvotore 2024b). Mai Chaza's story is one of evolution from wife, mother and fully recognised or bloused Ruwadzano/Manyano (women ministry) member of the MCZ to elder, GRJ Church founder and spiritual healer. Manyonganise confirms that,

Mai Chaza's prophetic, healing and deliverance ministry to women who were unable to have children offers African perspectives of gender, healing and identity liberation to women who for a long time were disempowered. By becoming a healer, she rises above social hierarchies and rejects her status as a "perpetual minor." She transforms into a respected elder, gaining power and prestige within the same community that once humiliated and exiled her as a mere mother of six labelled a witch (Manyonganise 2020,261).

The correlation of gender, healing, and power is crucial for women surviving marginalisation in Africa today; recasting Mai Chaza's story permits an exploration of

what it means currently to be a liberated African, a freethinking woman and an enlightened Christian (Masvotore 2024b).

Healing ministry is a crucial issue in the MCZ, particularly in Zimbabwe, due to the country's complex history and cultural context. This is because of the legacy of colonialism and the trauma it has caused to the Zimbabwean population. Zimbabwe's history of colonialism and economic struggles has left deep scars that led to intergenerational trauma, which healing and deliverance ministries sought to address these unresolved issues (Bourdillon 1990,99). Additionally, the prevalence of poverty and illness impacted society. Zimbabwe faces significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, HIV/AIDS, and limited access to healthcare; therefore, healing ministries offer hope and support to those affected (Maxwell 2006). Also, looking at the traditional African worldview, where in Zimbabwe, many people believe in spiritual forces influencing daily life, such as ancestral spirits, demons, and witchcraft, healing and deliverance ministries engage with these concerns. Furthermore, the need for a holistic ministry is one aspect where the MCZ recognises the importance of addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, which demonstrates a holistic approach to faith. The growing Pentecostal influence in Zimbabwe has highlighted the need for healing and deliverance ministries within mainline churches like the MCZ (Kurebwa and Nhumburudzu 2018). Last but not least, the Bible teaches about healing, deliverance, and spiritual warfare (e.g., Matthew 10:1, Mark 16:17–18, Ephesians 6:10–18). MCZ seek to reclaim this aspect of Christian ministry.

In the Zimbabwean context, healing and deliverance often involve prayer for physical healing and restoration, casting out demons and spiritual forces, counselling and support for trauma and emotional wounds, reconciliation and forgiveness processes, and community-based support and care (Goto 2006,44). The MCZ has responded by establishing healing and deliverance ministries, training prayer leaders and healers in the evangelism department, integrating traditional African practices with Christian worship, and emphasising the importance of faith and spiritual growth (Minutes of Conference 2024,19).

Observation in major societies like Mabelreign, Epworth, and Mbare reveals an ongoing phenomenon of dual membership. Minutes of Conference (1996,26) reveals that when congregants face illness, they frequently practice dual loyalty, attending MCZ on Sunday morning for status but seeking Pentecostal prophets or African Initiated Churches (AICs) at night for spiritual deliverance. Social Scientific Interpretation Analysts explain this using a socio-cultural mismatch. The missionary legacy imposed a strict biomedical worldview that separated physical medicine from spiritual warfare. In contrast, the Zimbabwean worldview views health holistically; sickness is tied to spiritual disharmony, ancestral ties, or witchcraft (Kadenge 1998). The church's institutional failure to offer a robust pneumatological (Holy Spirit) healing framework directly triggered major historical splits, including the rise of historic AICs like *Guta Ra Jehovah* founded by Mai Chaza (Masvotore 2024b). Theological analysis critiques

this institutional gap by returning to John Wesley's actual ministry in 18th-century England, proving that Wesley himself heavily prioritised a holistic healing ministry among the poor (Maddox 2007,7). This critique challenges the modern autonomous MCZ to move past its inherited Eurocentric biases and actively formulate an inculturated theology of healing that meets local spiritual vulnerabilities.

Evolution of Leadership Titles from “President” to “Bishop” and Later to Presiding Bishop

President/General Superintendent was a pre-1980 title used in the church subsequent to the setting up of the MCZ in 1891. The leader was initially designated using British terminology. When the Methodist Church in Rhodesia gained autonomy in 1977, Rev. Andrew Ndhlela was the General Superintendent and District Chairman, with “President” often used to refer to the head of the Conference (Banana 1991,221). This title was later changed in 1980 to the title Bishop, which operated between 1980 and 2004 (Banana 1991, 222; Handbook 2004,3 and Minutes of Conference 2024, cover page). Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, Rev Prof. Canaan Banana, a Methodist clergyman, became the State President. To avoid using the same title for both the church and the state president, the MCZ shifted its leader's title to “Bishop” (Minutes of Conference 1989). Also, in 1989 Chirisa became the first Bishop of the MCZ. It was felt necessary to change the title from the British President to the more appropriate biblical title Bishop as head of the church (Kadenge 1991,13). The shift from the title “Bishop” to Presiding Bishop was done in 2004, and it is operational in the present structural systems. In 2004, the top leadership title changed to “Presiding Bishop,” while the term “Bishop” was subsequently designated for regional or district leaders who were “District Chairpersons” before. The Presiding Bishop holds the position of “first among equals” (*primus inter pares*) and leads the Connexional or the Conference (Masvotore and Tsara 2022).

The Post-Autonomy Shift (1977)

The post-autonomy era of the MCZ, beginning in 1977, marks a significant shift from a missionary-led institution to an indigenous, self-governing church. This evolution, deeply rooted in the post-colonial context, has involved intense navigation between strict Christian doctrines and Shona traditional culture, leading to the indigenisation of the gospel. With independence from Britain on October 16, 1977, MCZ became autonomous from the British Methodist Conference, with Reverend Andrew Majoni Ndhlela appointed as the first black President of the Conference. This then marked the desire to reverse the deculturation where, before 1965, the church was led by missionaries who practised a Eurocentric deculturation policy, which often demonised local African customs. Autonomy allowed for the winds of change to bring indigenous leadership, requiring the church to become contextually relevant to the Shona people. This also precipitated the struggle to grow. Following the country's independence in 1980, the church, which had faced a 50% decline in membership during the 1970s war,

began massive efforts to rebuild, focusing on local training and community-based evangelism.

The appointment of Rev Andrew Ndhlela as President of the MCZ in 1977 was well-timed. The Rhodesian political climate demanded a wise African leader at the helm of progressive institutions. This presented a particular challenge for the MCZ, which was founded with a dual commitment to both black and white populations. According to Kadenge (1991,113), “Ndhlela proved to be the best choice for the time.” Although he faced resistance from segments of the white community unaccustomed to black leadership, he successfully united the MCZ during one of its most turbulent eras. Functioning as the church’s roving ambassador, he ministered to freedom fighters domestically and abroad and served as a Chaplain at the Geneva talks. Ndhlela passed the leadership torch to Rev Crispin Mazobere during the 1980 MCZ Conference (Gondongwe 2011,45).

Interpreting Leadership Change and Social Transformation

The governance of the MCZ transitioned from foreign missionary administrative oversight to native ownership. This evolution is evaluated across three structural waves (Baloyi 2024).

Era / Shift	Leadership Dynamic	Social Scientific / Grounded Theory Finding	Theological Interpretation
1965–1977 (Pre-Autonomy)	Initial localisation under pioneers like Rev Andrew Ndhlela	Finding: High social friction; colonial mindsets doubted indigenous capacity	Translation Model: Adapting Wesley’s political neutralism and accountability to survive the Rhodesian-British split.
Post-1977 (Autonomy to 1990s)	Male-dominated, highly institutionalised hierarchy.	Finding: Systematic structural exclusion of women from major leadership pipelines.	Critique of Patriarchy: Contrast between structural exclusion and the massive grassroots spiritual and economic power of the <i>Ruwadzano/Manyano</i> women’s movement.
2000s to Date	Gradual, sporadic inclusion of female bishops alongside a rise in development agencies (e.g., MeDRA).	Finding: Data indicates a structural shift from a passive “maintenance church” to an active agent of social justice.	Prophetic and Practical Theology: Realising the church’s mandate to combat socio-political corruption, gender injustices, and poverty

Through this comprehensive paradigm, one can successfully demonstrate that the modern MCZ is not merely a static relic of British mission work. Instead, it functions as a highly adaptive, continually evolving community constantly renegotiating its identity amid systemic regional crises. The dual deployment of Theological Analysis integrated with Grounded Theory and Social Scientific Approaches allows one to decode how a church shifts from a colonial “maintenance” outpost to an active, indigenised institution. Following its autonomy from the British Methodist Church in 1977, the MCZ entered a critical phase of self-definition (Pieterse 2024).

Indigenisation and Christianisation of Rituals and Adoption of Local Symbols in Worship

The MCZ has undergone an intense process of inculturation, adapting traditional Shona practices to Christian theology, rather than outright rejecting them. The transformation of *Kurova Guva* into *Nyaradzo* was an achievement for churches. *Kurova guva* is a vital Shona ritual, usually done a year after death, that brings back the deceased’s spirit to protect the family (becoming an ancestor, or *mudzimu*) (Daneel 1973). How the transformation took place in the MCZ is when the church adopted the concept but replaced the traditional *kurova guva*, where alcohol (*doro*) was used and spiritual mediums were consulted, with Christian prayer, scripture, and hymns. This Christianised version is commonly referred to as *Nyaradzo* (funeral consolation/commemoration) (Mujinga 2021). Its significance is that it serves to celebrate the dead’s journey to heaven while ensuring they are remembered within the Christianised family context, fulfilling a crucial, once-paganised tradition through a Christian lens.

A significant shift occurred at UTC in 1977 regarding the use of *ngoma nehosho* (drums and rattles), instruments previously banned by nearly all former Missionary-planted churches. UTC lecturer first name Kurewa championed the indigenisation of Christianity, asserting that the gospel must actively engage with African culture to resonate with African people (Mujinga 2020) truly. In his view, adapting the gospel to the local context was a vital stride towards independence. Furthermore, he promoted the integration of African imagery within worship services. This progressive stance raised awareness among his students and initiated the contextualisation of theology at the institution. As noted by Kadenge (1991,113), when autonomy was officially realised in October 1977, the Area Council transitioned into District Synods, which ultimately established the Conference of the MCZ.

Furthermore, indigenous music and instruments were accepted in the church for worship. The church adopted instruments like *ngoma* (drums) and *hosho* (rattles) in worship, which were previously associated with paganism. The autonomous MCZ initiated a drive to write its own songs from its contextual soil. Sons and daughters wrote some of the songs of the soil, the likes of E Samkange, J Chidyagwayi, MB Masuku. Gwen E Marsh, E Mashingaidze, RC Mazobere, CCG Mazobere, JJM Ndlovu, MF Randalls and SMM Ushewokunze (Mujinga 2017,142; Handbook 2026, 52–69).

Through the adoption of indigenous and musical instruments, music has never been the same again. Various groups have recorded, and choirs have developed to sing on various platforms, including showcasing through media channels like radios and television sets.

When the MCZ achieved autonomy in 1977, it inherited a rigid, Eurocentric liturgical structure. Social scientific analysis shows how political independence sparked a psychological and cultural urge among indigenous worshippers to break away from sterile, Western styles. It highlights how local music, traditional drums (*ngoma*), and shakers (*hosho*) migrated from the margins into the main sanctuaries (Baloyi 2024). Using Grounded Theory application, one can deduce from conference debates that started in 1996, where the question was who partakes in Holy Communion? Should it be by invitation or qualification? Minutes of Conference clearly indicated that, “Missionaries viewed local people as pagans, so in the presentation of Christianity they effected rules which they did not observe themselves” (Minutes of Conference 1996,25). The change came in 2019 when Conference adopted the amendment to the Deed of Church Order and Standing Orders to read as follows:

The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, or Holy Communion, is administered to those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and seek to follow him in the fellowship of the Church. Participation in this Sacrament should be regarded as both a privilege and an obligation by all members who have the capacity to comprehend the meaning and significance of the Sacrament and seek to commune with their Saviour (Deed of Church order and Standing Orders 2022, 5–6;250; Agenda of Conference 2019, R8).

From the above, one can deduce that this means of grace (Holy Communion) is open to all members of the Church. It is now by invitation and not by qualification, as previously administered in the MCZ, which disqualified some members, as shown from the previous Deed of Church Order and Standing Orders adopted from the missionaries, which required only Full Members to partake in the Holy Communion (Deed of Church Order and Standing Orders 2011,3). In Africa, no one is barred from a meal; instead, the ubuntu concept⁵ invites all and sundry to share whatever is available at the table. Church members developed keen interest in worship as a liberating tool. Theological analysis validates these shifts by linking them to Wesley’s validation of popular religious expression and his focus on the Sacraments as a living means of grace (Maddox 1994). God’s grace is re-interpreted as something that communicates natively through local languages, idioms, and expressions.

Additionally, *pungwe* (All-night Vigils) were also adopted as part of worship programmes in the church. The *pungwe*, a cultural gathering popularised for social

5 Ubuntu is a profound African humanist philosophy that translates to “I am because we are.” Rooted in Bantu languages across sub-Saharan Africa, it emphasises our fundamental interconnectedness, asserting that an individual’s humanity and well-being are tied to the community rather than achieved in isolation.

interaction, was rebranded as all-night prayers or worship sessions, enabling longer, more emotional, and emotionally engaging services.

The 1987 Church Logo as a Symbolic Identity

At the 1987 Conference, the MCZ adopted a logo. The MCZ logo represents a visual synthesis of African identity, Methodism, and Christianity. For Mujinga and Chagudhuma,

Logos serve a dual purpose: they broadcast the company's identity to the public, while simultaneously fostering internal alignment by helping staff understand their roles and sense of belonging (Mujinga and Chagudhuma 2024,3).

Beyond aesthetics, a church logo also serves a theological purpose by linking the congregation to its local community while articulating its core mission and values (Pipe-Rougeau 2022,5; Mujinga 2024b, 3). Furthermore, Pipe-Rougeau (2022) notes that a church logo represents a denomination's identity and reputation. A strong logo promotes community growth by attracting like-minded individuals, making the deliberate choice of colour, shape, size, and positioning crucial for articulating the church's mission.



The Cross (Red and Black): The central cross highlights the crucifixion. Its red and black colours symbolise that congregants were once seen as sinners (black here is not the colour of skin, but a behaviour within anyone) but were cleansed by the blood of Jesus (red), referencing the church's roots in Africa (Mujinga and Chagudhuma 2024).

The Map of Zimbabwe: Placed in the centre, this signifies that the church is local, situated within the nation, and that its mission is rooted in the Zimbabwean context.

The Dove: Symbolising the Holy Spirit, the dove represents the church's dependence on divine power in its mission.

The Scallop Shell: Representing the Wesley family crest, this connects the MCZ to global Methodism and the legacy of John Wesley, symbolising Methodist connexionality.

The Circle: Represents the unity, infinity, and protection of the Triune God, ensuring the church remains a cohesive body.

The Logo as Uniform: The logo became a strong identity marker when the *Ruwadzano/Manyano* (Women's Fellowship) printed it on cloth, turning it into a family brand for uniforms, clothing, and church materials.

A social scientific lens tracks how the MCZ logo evolved into a corporate trademark. Through the manufacturing and selling of logo-branded plates, cups, umbrellas, and uniform pins, the *Ruwadzano/Manyano* movement successfully generated an autonomous economic ecosystem. This financial muscle gave marginalised women leverage within a male-dominated ecclesiastical hierarchy, effectively transforming them into the financial engine of the church.

From a postcolonial inculturation and spatial agency angle, the sociological analysis reads the 1987 logo's outer circle not just as a representation of eternity, but as an enactment of *hunhu/ubuntu* philosophy (*"I am because we are"*). It symbolises an ecumenical and communal safety net against the fragmentations of post-colonial Zimbabwe. Furthermore, Social Scientific approaches use theories of resistance to demonstrate how *Ruwadzano/Manyano* transformed a tool of colonial classification into an elite, indigenous spiritual sisterhood. The rigorous process of "blousing" (admitting a woman into full uniform status) became a localised canon of adult authority and indigenous moral excellence. It bypassed Western bureaucratic standards and directly answered the spiritual and psychological aspirations of Zimbabwean women.

Integrated Theological Analysis to Construct Localised Piety

By marrying GT's data-driven insights with social scientific frameworks, the study produces an authentic Contextual Theology. It transitions from a purely academic exercise to what can be termed as Grounded Theology as demonstrated below.

Artefact / Practice	Colonial / Maintenance Reading	Post-Autonomy Grounded Theological Reality
The MCZ Logo (1987)	A bureaucratic emblem borrowed from Western Methodism.	An inculturated covenant showing a church rooted in the Zimbabwean map, expressing God's Ubuntu through the protective circle.
Ruwadzano/Manyano Movement	A safe, apolitical domestic training group for black housemaids.	A transformational engine of indigenous piety, socioeconomic survival, and holistic spiritual liberation.
Fellowship Uniforms and Regalia	Standardised religious attire.	A "quasi-uniform" acting as a social leveller, stripping away class disparities to enforce Christian sisterhood.

This comprehensive methodology proves that post-autonomy piety in the MCZ was not handed down from Europe. Instead, it was actively constructed from the lived struggles, material cultures, and symbolic imagination of the indigenous Zimbabwean people.

Summary and Conclusion of Post-1977 Evolution

The MCZ has transformed from a Missionary-planted church to an indigenous institution (African Initiative) that actively contextualises the Gospel. The transformation of *Kurova Guva* into *Nyaradzo* and the adoption of the 1987 logo are testament to this journey, serving as primary vehicles for constructing authentic, indigenous African piety, enabling it to "make Christ known" in a way that resonates with local believers. An analysis of the MCZ, gaining autonomy from the British Methodist Church on October 16, 1977, was a defining milestone. This structural shift transitioned the MCZ from a colonial-era mission district into a fully autonomous local conference, paving the way for complete self-governance right before Zimbabwe achieved national independence.

Specific achievements realised through autonomy include, firstly, the indigenisation of leadership, where the church saw the ascension of local clergy. Autonomy broke the glass ceiling for local African ministers, moving away from Eurocentric missionary oversight. Rev Andrew Majoni Ndhlela made history by becoming the first black President of the autonomous Conference. The MCZ established clear, structured succession plans tailored for local indigenous clergy. Secondly, the localisation and inculturation of the Gospel for a Contextual Theology. The gospel was transplanted from Western flowerpots into Zimbabwean soil, allowing it to resonate via local languages, idioms, and metaphors. The MCZ formally integrated traditional local music, instruments, and tools into standard worship services. The MCZ successfully

pivoted to address both the spiritual and specific physical or socioeconomic needs of its local African demographic.

Thirdly, the MCZ witnessed structural decentralisation and empowerment. There was capacitation of Districts. Districts were empowered with the authority to run their own synods, ensuring a shift away from over-centralised foreign power structures. The shift allowed the church to reposition its identity to stay relevant to local populations navigating a post-colonial era. The fourth aspect is financial self-sustainability. Autonomy compelled the MCZ to move away from financial dependence on the British mother church and explore its self-funding mechanism. The local leadership introduced specialised funds designed exclusively to sustain and develop local societies and ministries without relying on the Church Extension Fund from Britain.

In conclusion, the MCZ's journey since 1977 has been marked by significant transformations, reflecting its growth into a truly indigenous and African-led institution. The incorporation of local cultural practices, such as music, instruments, and all-night vigils, has enriched the church's worship and identity. The adoption of the 1987 logo has become a powerful symbol of the church's African identity, Methodist heritage, and Christian mission. As the church continues to navigate its path, it remains committed to contextualising the Gospel in a way that resonates with local believers, while staying true to its Wesleyan roots. The MCZ's development serves as a testament to the dynamic nature of Christianity in Africa, where faith and culture are intertwined.

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