

Oxford Institute 2002 - Group V: "Christian Mission and Globalization"
MISSION IN LATIN AMERICA:
"THE LAND OF ONE THOUSAND RELIGIOUS FACES"
A Wesleyan Perspective
Mortimer Arias

INTRODUCTION

The overall phenomenon of globalization today, doesn't need to be emphasized, particularly for regions and countries which are experimenting the economic, financial and technological globalization from the seamy side of the planet. There is, as well, a religious side to globalization, by the impact of massive communications.

"Mission and Globalization" belong together. Mission is global, by its object and content, and also by its addressees and agents. Which means that mission is inclusively a human mission, *missio humanitatis*, a mission to be shared both ways with the whole human community¹. This mission already adumbrates in the first biblical commandment, which is, indeed, the First Missionary Mandate: "To work and to care" for the earth and for life on the planet (Gen. 2:15ss).

And yet, nothing can substitute for Christian mission, the specific mission of the Christian churches, under the Missionary Mandate of our Lord, to "make disciples of all nations", "to proclaim the gospel to every creature", "to go to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:16-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 20:21).

Consequently, global mission is an ecumenical mission: to the *oikoumene*, "the inhabited world". As such, it demands the totality of the Christian church, the ecumenical church of God, the subject of Christian mission.

Today we cannot reduce ecumenism to Christian interchurch relationships, when the issues are human survival, justice, peace and the Ecological Mandate. Hunger has no denominational tag and the destruction of life on the planet is not a confessional issue². "Evil has also a perverse way of being ecumenical"³.

¹ See M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.

² "Arms race, poverty in the two thirds of humanity, the destruction of nature, nuclear threat, the world economical order and narcotraffic, are problems affecting everybody and each human being, independently of race, sex, color, language, and, also, religion. They are ecumenical problems". Carlos Duarte, "Las religiones populares", I Encounter of Bishops and Pastors of Latin America and the Caribbean", on **New Religious Movements** Cuenca, Ecuador, 1986.

³ "Here lay the great challenge to contemporary ecumenism... The struggle for the construction of that unity and ecumenism, must take into consideration this fragmented and plural reality. It must include the (silent) S.O.S. cry of the impressive 'excedent mass' of human beings... the hostages of global influences, inside a daily life signed by ephemerality Guilherme Lieven-Sérgio Sauer, "Globalization,

The challenge to a "wider ecumenism", or "macro-ecumenism", has been the agenda of the last decade for many Christians in Latin America, since the events related to the Quincentenary of Columbus "Discovery"⁴.

"Mission in Latin America", our subject in this paper, is already five centuries old, born out of a globalizing venture: Discovery, Conquest and Colonization by Western Christian powers in our part of the world. A land supposed to be a "Christian land", even though finally recognized as a "mission field" by the dominant Roman Catholic Church at the Medellin Conference of Bishops in 1968, and reaffirmed by the Pope John Paul II with his call to "A New Evangelization" at another Latinamerican Episcopal Conference in Santo Domingo 1992.

Here we are already in a familiar context for the inheritors of John Wesley, the one who found himself, in a supposedly Christian land, himself a member and a minister of the supposedly true Christian Church of England, and yet who discovered the God-given mission for the Methodist movement in such a context:

*"To reform the nation, and particularly the church, and to spread Scriptural holiness over the earth"*⁵.

Our assumption, then, is that our mission in the present Latin American context has to be a shared mission for all Christians. It is from this common mission, inside an ecumenical context, that we raise the question put to us for this Oxford Institute: "Does John Wesley provides any clues?"

I. THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The overwhelming impression of half a millenium of Christianity in Latin America is that of a unique religious uniformity, the result of a prodigious missionary enterprise, as the accompaniment of discovery, conquest and colonization⁶.

During the last century, however, this religious uniformity has been gradually breaking down, particularly by the presence and development of Protestantism in all of its forms, creating a new religious map. Dr. José Míguez Bonino has identified "four faces of Latin American Protestantism" in its historical development, namely, the ethnic "transplant Protestantism";

fragmentation and ecumenism", in *Desafiosa la Fe: En Tiempos de Globalización*, Quito, Ecuador: CLAI, abril 2000, pp. 60-62.

⁴ The suggestion of "macroecumenism", was made by the Roman Catholic Bishop from Brazil, Dom Pedro Casaldáliga, at the Quincentenary "Congress of the Peoples" in Quito, Ecuador, 1992.

⁵ Minutes, First Annual Conference, 1744, *Works* (Jackson) V, 212. It is instructive to see the slight and significant translation of this mission in the new North-American context: *"To reform the continent (the church is dropped out) and to spread Scriptural holiness over these lands"* (Discipline 1785).

⁶ M. Arias, "Contextual Evangelization in Latin America: Between Accommodation and Confrontation", *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1978.

the missionary "historical" churches; the "evangelical missions"; the "holiness" denominations; and finally the many forms of pentecostalism"⁷. Carlos Duarte, entitles his study of the NRMs "The 1001 Faces of Religion in Latin America"⁸

Roman-Catholicism still is the overwhelming majority throughout the subcontinent, 79%, which means a nominal membership of 418 million, in a total population of 520 million by the year 2000. This fact already qualifies our mission perspective: How can Protestant churches fulfill their mission in Latin America without considering that we are partners in a mission greater than any of our churches⁹?

The number of Protestants, barely 368.000 in 1916, when the Congress of Panama convened the Protestant missionary societies to plan the future missions in Latin America, today has reached a total of some 60 millions adherents¹⁰, an average of 12-13 % of the total population (in Guatemala is 31%, Chile and Puerto Rico 28%, and more than 20% in Brazil and Central America). At least three-fourths of the total Protestant population, more than 40 million, is Pentecostal of one form or another¹¹.

Beyond the phenomenal growth of Protestantism, and particularly Pentecostalism, we have seen the multiplication of "New Religious Movements" (NRMs) usually called "sects", an apparent mélange of Christian and non-Christian components, including "a diversity and variety of autochthonous cultures and religions... previous to the European conquest, which have survived in many forms under the uniformation of Roman Catholicism for five centuries"¹².

⁷ José Míguez Bonino, "Las Iglesias Protestantes y Evangélicas en América Latina y el Caribe: Un ensayo interpretativo", *Cuadernos de Teología*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Buenos Aires: ISEDET, 1995, pp. 29-38; *Rostros del Protestantismo Latinoamericano*, Buenos Aires: ISEDET/Nueva Cración, 1995; "The Protestant Churches in Latin America since 1930", in Leslie Bethel, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. VI, part 2, pp. 583-604, 704-707). Caio Fábio Araújo Filho describes a similar process in three stages in the Portuguese speaking Brasil, with a more extensive and radical contextualization of Protestantism in its Pentecostal and Charismatic forms, almost to the point of syncretism in the later stage of "folkloric Pentececostalism", in Rubem M. Amorese, Ed., *A Igreja Evangélica Virada do Milenio: A Missão da Igreja Num País em Crise*, Brasília: Comunicar, 1995, pp. 298-303 (Report of the I Congresso Nacional da Associação Evangélica Brasileira, julio 1994).

⁸ Carlos Duarte, *Las Mil y Una Caras de la Religión*, Quito, Ecuador: CLAI, 1995.

⁹ A question that has been present already in the First and the Third Latin American Evangelical Conferences (I CELA and II CELA) in Huampani 1961 and Buenos Aires 1969, with specific inputs by Emilio Castro, the future General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

¹⁰ Other estimations by historians go as much as 75 millions in 1997, 15% of the total population. Pablo Deiros, *Protestantism in Latin America: Ayer, Hoy y Mañana*, Nashville: Editorial Caribe, 1997.

¹¹ Carlos Fábio D'Araújo Filho, estimated the evangelical population of Brasil up to 35 million, tentatively distributed like this: historical Protestants 15%; historical Pentecostals 50% (Assemblies of God); recent Pentecostals 15%; Neo-pentecostals or charismatic communities 7%; folkloric or syncretistic Pentecostals 13% in 1995. *Loc. cit. p. 303*.

¹² See the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) study on the subject: Carlos Duarte, *op.cit.*, pp. iii-iv; v-vi, notes 4-8.

Looking phenomenologically to the "new faces" of Protestantism, Pablo Deiros, the Argentinian historian of the church, suggests that we have to deal with a "postdenominational Protestantism", something "incomparable since the times of the Reformation".¹³ Oneide Bobsin, Lutheran theologian from Brazil, points to the religious trends of "transversality", the interpenetration of practices and charisma (the smuggling of religious symbols from one movement to another), which is producing a "dislocation of traditional confessional identities". A new charting of the geography of the sacred and the religious, is taking place by "the flexibilization and dissolution of the confessional boundaries"¹⁴.

Jean Pierre Bastian, the Swiss anthropologist with a extended work as church historian in Mexico, speaks of "a religious mutation" in the last 40 years, that has fragmented the religious field¹⁵. Carlos Duarte, contends that the NRMs have deep social roots and functions, that cannot be dealed with the traditional religious-sociological category of a "sect", since "they express and signify deep changes in our societies; they channel, one way or another, the protest against injustices and contradictions in the world we live in"¹⁶.

So, to understand these religious phenomena and their challenge for Christian mission in Latin America, we have to take note of our social context in a globalized world.

¹³ Pablo Deiros, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-58. "Deep changes can be discerned in their spiritual attitude and missiological focus, in the use of the supernatural, in the concept of authority and submission, in the ministerial structures, in the use of the gifts of the Spirit, in the effect of their Christian witness, in the style of worship, in the handling of their finances, in the training of the leadership and other characteristics... No name has emerged to describe what is happening ... my preferred suggestion is "postdenominationalism". "Inside the puritan-pietistic-evangelical ethos (K. S. Latourette), shared by all Latin American Protestants, it is possible to discern a double current: an "anabaptist mood" (Samuel Escobar) and a "fundamentalist tendency" in different grades and combinations... for a good part of Protestantism up to this day".

¹⁴ Oneide Bobsin, "Tendencias religiosas y transversalidad", in *Desafíos a la Fe en Tiempos de Globalización*, Quito: Ecuador, CLAI, 2000, pp. 29ss.

¹⁵ Jean Pierre Bastián, *Breve Historia del Protestantismo en América Latina*, México: CUPSA, 1986, pp. 167-171; *Protestantismos y Modernidad Latinoamericana*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. "In general terms, it can be affirmed that if protestantisms of the XIX emerged from the political culture of radical liberalism, democratic and promoting a pedagogy of the individual will, the present popular protestantisms y pentecostalisms on the contrary, emerge from the religious culture of popular catholicism, with its corporative and authoritarian traits... With some exceptions, the Latinamerican protestantisms and pentecostalisms are sincereticistic... characterized by intrinsic messianism and milenarism" (pp. 300ff.).

¹⁶ Contra Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Ernst Troeltsch typologiers, and their "superposition of the sociological and theological languages". *Op. cit.*, ch. 1.

II. THE GLOBALIZED CONTEXT

According to a recent symposium published by CLAI, human fragmentation is the overall impact of the globalization of society, the result of the concomitant forces and trends of the transnational dominion of economic life; the exclusion underlying the neoliberal ideology; the reduction of the state to a minimum; the transformation of everything into a disposable commodity in the free market; the homogeneity of consumerism; the dissolution of solidarity networks in society; and the blurring of boundaries through the informatic bombardment; etc.. The effect of all these concomitant forces and trends is a crisis of identity, a loss of the meaning of life, a fragmentation of the human being, abandoned to survive with his/her own individual resources over the waves of a general shipwreck. Some sociological studies describe this new human situation as an "individualization of societies", "a plural world" that "installs the person at the center of things and decisions", opening at the same time the chance of "participation in communities in which the human person can be developed", allowing for "dis-incorporation" from and "re-incorporation" into society¹⁷.

Are we looking for clues from Wesley?

His missionary context in the midst of the XVIII century Industrial Revolution, was already the first explosion of *human fragmentation* in the modern times, the dehumanization and deterioration of human life by rural migrations to the cities, the demise of the artisans, the excess human power, the impoverishment and proletarianization of the masses... Wesley's movement was a reaffirmation of the worth of each human being and the creation of communities of mutual support with a sense of mission, rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Here, in the globalized world of Latin America, lies the challenge and the opportunity for ecumenism as the appropriate response to fragmentation. The possibility of resistance and mutual support and self-realization of persons, the raising of signs of the Kingdom in the world through the body of Christ. "Not a 'sentimental ecumenism' but one marked by the purpose

¹⁷ Guillermo Lieven and Sergio Sauer in "Globalización, fragmentación y ecumenismo: los desafíos de un mundo plural", Manuel Quintero, ed., Quito, Ecuador: CLAI, *Desafíos a la Fe en Tiempos de Globalización*, pp. 43-64.

¹⁸ See Frank Hinkelammert, "Las condiciones económico-sociales del Metodismo en la Inglaterra del Siglo XVIII"; Elsa Tamez, "Wesley y los Pobres"; José Míguez Bonino: "¿Fue el Metodismo un movimiento liberador?"; in Joss Duque, Ed. *La Tradición Protestante en la Teología Latinoamericana: Lectura de la Tradición Metodista*, San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1983. See also the thesis on "a new Reformation" by the American anthropologist David Stoll, *Is Latin American Turning Protestant?*, University of California 1991, and *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, by the British sociologist of religion, who sees parallels between the present pentecostal movement with the Methodist movement in Great Britain in the XVIII century, as "a religious response to traumatic social transition", Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.

of the mission of the church: to announce life... for all the peoples of God.... It doesn't mean the construction of a new society, but at least, in the era of globalization, to show the way of life with compatible traits with the icon of the Gospel"¹⁹.

Or, to use Theodore Runyon's proposal, our ecumenical task in a globalized world would be "to show the way of life through compatible traits with the icon" of... *The New Creation*²⁰.

"Does Wesley provides any clues?"

John Wesley lived in a time if not of "religious mutation" at least of religious plurality, in the aftermath of religious struggles, confrontations, persecutions, and political-religious conflicts, as his own family story was a showcase. Wesley's response was from his own Established Church but it was an ecumenical response. It is not a minor detail that Wesley, in describing "the Character", "the Principles" or "The Marks" of a Methodist, he did it in the most ecumenical formulation, as "the religion of love of God and neighbor". The condition to participate in the societies had no doctrinal or confessional requirement, other than "a desire to be saved from their sins", and apart from "doing no harm", "doing good" and "attending all the ordinances of God"²¹. His judicious distinction between "doctrine" and "opinion" is a useful criterium for ecumenical mission everywhere; his sermon on "The Catholic Spirit" still can evoke fraternal feelings among Christians and remains as a compass to chart the ecumenical map in Latin America²²

Wesley's record is always a necessary and fruitful reference on ecumenical mission for successive generations of the Wesleyan descendants around the Word²³

So, the fact that Wesley's Works have been translated into

¹⁹ Lieven-Sauer, *op. cit.* pp. 61-64

²⁰ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, Introduction, pp. 7-12.

²¹ Rupert E. Davies, Ed. , *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, Design*, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, Nashville: Abingdon, 1989, chs. 1-4; Spanish Translation by Elena Hall and Luis E. Odell, *Las Primeras Sociedades Metodistas*, Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Pub., 1996, pp. 15-60;

²² One of the most popular songs among evangelicals of many persuasions (and some ecumenical catholics) in Latin America says, "It doesn't matter the church that you attend... give me your hand", an obvious adaptation of the Wesley's motto in the above sermon.

²³ . It was not by chance that a Methodist layman, John R. Mott, became one of the decisive church leaders to put the ecumenical movement on course, or that so many Methodists and other Wesleyans around the globe have participated in the World Council of Churches, including two of our contemporary General Secretaries: Philip Plotter, from the Caribbean, and Emilio Castro, from Latin America. "We are moving from the epoch of mission purely confessional to ecumenical mission", wrote J. Míguez Bonino fifty years ago... "the evangelistic and the ecumenical tasks cannot be divorced" (Report on "The missionary obligation of the church", International Missionary Council, *El Estandarte Evangélico*, Buenos Aires, 1-IX-1952, pp. 258-59)

Spanish, through the initiative and sponsorship of the Wesleyan Heritage Foundation, an unparalleled feature in any other language apart from English, gives particular poignancy to the question of what relevancy they might have for "Mission in the Land of the One Thousand Religious Faces"

III. A PROVIDENTIAL INSTRUMENT: "OBRAS DE WESLEY"

Actually, the translation and publication of "Obras de Wesley" in Spanish has been a major editorial achievement²⁴, and a historical event in the church history²⁵.

The fact that Wesley is not confined to the land of his birth or to the English speaking nations, that Wesley himself, so to say, is now speaking and preaching in Spanish of the XXI century, is already part of the impact of this major enterprise. Millions of Christians, descendants from the Evangelical Revival and from the Wesleyan stream of Christianity can use now their own hermeneutical keys, from their own historical and geographic context, to open the treasures of Christian faith and theology, of Christian life and ministry, of Christian spirituality and ethics, that are part and parcel of these fourteen volumes of *Works*²⁶.

"Obras de Wesley" has the potential of becoming an ecumenical event. To begin with, it represents the filling of a vacuum in the availability in Spanish of the Protestant-Evangelical Tradition, after the publication of an important set of Luther's Works and Clavin's *Institution*²⁷ in former years.

John Wesley is not only one of our Evangelical Fathers of the Church but he has all the qualifications of an ecumenical figure. If I speak for myself, after some time looking for the specificity of our Methodist identity, and looking for the distinguishing traits inherited from Wesley and his movement, I came to the realization that what distinguishes Wesley, is

²⁴ This achievement, in a total period of five years, has been possible only through the combination of the vision, generosity and determination of Leweth Elbert Wethington and his family as the founders (founding and funding) of the Wesley Heritage Foundation, and the masterful and efficient work of the Editor, Dr. Justo Gonzalez and his group of translators, who complied with the demanding datelines in a record time. This is already an achievement in Wesley scholarship, which this Oxford Institute can proudly recognize.

²⁵ Justo L. González, *La Historia También Tiene Su Historia*, Buenos Aires: Kairós-ASIT, 2001, pp. 106-112.

²⁶ Justo L. González, Ed., *Obras de Wesley*, Volumes I-XIV, Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers, 1996-1998 (from 300 to 500 pages each). It includes Sermons I-IV; The First Methodist Societies V; Defense of Methodism (Appeals), VI; Christian Life, VII; Theological Tracts, VIII; Spirituality and Hymns, IX; Notes on the New Testament, IX-X; Journal and Diaries, XI-XII; Letters, XIII-XIV.

²⁷ There are 10 volumes of Luther's Works, published by La Aurora, Buenos Aires, in a period of about a decade, and the last and most complete edition of Calvin's *Intitucion*, 3rd. Edition, 1559, Juan Calvino, *Institucion de la Religion Cristiana*, Buenos Aires- Grand Rapids: Nueva Creación, 1988.

not just one particular emphasis, doctrine, liturgy, evangelical spirit, moral integrity or social concern, but his catholicity!²⁸

Does Wesley provides any clues? How about his catholicity?

Wesleyan scholars have worked out the ecumenical portrait of John Wesley, like Albert Outler's classic work, *John Wesley*, characterizing his theology as "evangelical catholicism"²⁹. Stresing his multiple heritage, Theodore Runyon points to the fact that "John Wesley emerges from the eighteenth century as a surprisingly ecumenical figure"³⁰. Colin W. Williams deals with Wesley's theology in the wider contemporary ecumenical context, affirming his doctrinal inclusivity and his catholic spirit, particularly his concern with unity for mission³¹.

Browsing over "Las Obras", we can realize that Wesley's ecumenism is not merely irenism, a mimetizing of differences for the sake of wider acceptance. He disclaimed of controversy, "the offspring of hell": "I have decided not to get involved in useless, if not damaging controversy", "by fear not only of my adversary but of myself"³². However, he would not let go any argument to make his point, his stance on faith, doctrine and practice and to respond to objections or criticisms. As Albert Outler says, "he was a born debater"³³. Unlikely many of his inheritors in our part of the world he would not take the "think and let think" as a lack of identity and conviction. To be ecumenical, in the wesleyan spirit, is to share our particular identities and to assume our common identity³⁴.

We might compose his ecumenical profile as a sort of Christian quadrilateral: 1) *As a Christian Confessor*, in his permanent search for the "essence of religion", "essential Christianity", "Primitive Christianity", "Scriptural Christianity", and "the Catholic Spirit", in his attachment to *The Book of Common Prayer*. 2) *As a prophesing Protestant*, in his use

²⁸ My first bubblings on this line was a booklet for our Methodist people and indirectly for our brothers and sisters of other missions and denominations with whom we were working together: *Los Metodistas Somos Así*, Cochabamba, Bolivia: ICHUS, 1965.

²⁹ Albert C. Outler, Ed. *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 1970 (A Library of Protestant Thought).

³⁰ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, pp. 208ff.

³¹ Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, Nashville/New York: Abingdon Press, 1960, pp. 201-206. Spanish translation by Roy H. May, *La Teología de Juan Wesley*, San José, Costa Rica: Ediciones SEBILA, 1989, Cap. I, "El Genio del Catolicismo: Doctrina y Opinión".

³² *Obras*, T.V, pp. 29,108.

³³ *Op. cit. p. 26.*

³⁴ The *Appeals* are a good example. *Obras*, T. VI, M. Arias Trans., *Defensa del Metodismo*. His comments of the Roman Catholic Catechism, based on the Council of Trento and published as the Pious V Catechism, is another example. *Obras*, T. VIII, Nora Radaelli, Trans., *Tratados Teológicos*, pp. 181-274. His "Letter to a Roman Catholic", is an olive branch, a samble of his own "catholic spirit" but at the same time a confession of a Protestant Christian...

"The Articles of Religion", as seen in his "Letter to a Roman Catholic Person", "Commentaries on Roman Catholic Catechism"; 3) As an *Evangelical Evangelist*, as seen in the soteriologocal nucleus of his "folk theology" (Outler), his "functional theology for evangelism" (Míguez Bonino), in his Letters, Hymns, the Jopurnal and Sermons (i. e. "The General Spread of the Gospel"). And 4) As the *Methodist leader and apologist* in The Appeals, in his volume on The Methodist Societies, in his Journal, his Sermons and thousand letters³⁵.

IV. A MISSIOLOGICAL FRONTIER: THE WESLEYAN FAMILY

Wesley's potential inheritors are millions in the most growing churches in Latin America, the Wesleyan family of Churches, which do not carry the name Methodist or Wesleyan but which are the sprouts of the Wesleyan historical trunk. "John Wesley's grandchildren", so to say³⁶.

In August 1998 I was invited by the Theological Community of Santiago, Chile, to make some presentations on *Las Obras de Wesley* to mixed groups of Wesleyans such as Methodists, Nazarenes, Wesleyan Church, and a great variety of Pentecostal Churches with different names, that amount far over a million and a half members accross the country. In one meeting, at the Theological Community of Santiago, with about thirty different churches of Pentecostal persuasion represented, I proposed to deal with the question: "Was Wesley a Pentecostal?" Some comments and questions during that meeting were indicative of the persistence of the Wesleyan roots and motivations.

One bishop of the Methodist Pentecostal Church stood up and said: "We are the grandchildren of Wesley, and we feel like the Methodist brothers have been our uncles, and we have great respect and gratitude to them". Another bishop of the original Pentecostal church, that grew out of the Methodist Church in Chile, said: "We have no problem with Wesley, we use his Sermons, but we had problems with the Methodist church government"!

But the most startling comment for me was when another bishop, from a Pentecostal Church, which is spread over the long geography of Chile, told the Rector and myself at the end of the meeting: "You Methodists have the pan by the handle ("la sartén por el mango"), you have the future, because you have Wesley". I reacted and said: "Don't be so

³⁵ On these points, A. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*; J. Míguez Bonino, "Conversión, Hombre Nuevo y Compromiso", "Justificación, Santificación y Plenitud", "La Eclesiología Wesleyana", "¿Conservar el Metodismo? – En busca de un genuino ecumenismo", in José Duque, Ed., *op.cit. pp. 207-218; 243-256; 277-286: 329-342;*

³⁶ Mortimer Arias, "El Rostro Wesleyano de América Latina", *Signos de Vida*, Quito: Ecuador, No. pp.

sure, that we have Wesley. But we both can have access to our roots in Wesley, and we may share what we find there and what we have found in our own experience as Wesley's inheritors."

That is the point: "Who has Wesley? Who owns Wesley?" Do we Methodists? Do we, here represented in this Oxford Institute? The point is that both, those who have claimed Wesley tradition for themselves, and those who do not specifically and consciously refer to it, can learn from this common exploration of our roots and from our experience along the way in the continuity of this line of faith, spirituality and mission.

Not many of the "Wesleyan Family" of churches would claim Wesley for themselves, but the challenge is there. *Las Obras de Wesley* are not only an instrument for the renewal and enrichment of the self-recognized inheritors of the Wesleyan heritage, but also an instrument for the deepening, the strengthening, and the enrichment of the potential, and *de facto*, inheritors of this growing frontier of Christianity in Latin America.

Particularly, considering the great risks and dangers of this growing mass of believers throughout Latin America, for lack of historical and theological references, of falling into the temptations of showmanship in worship, salesmanship in preaching, the market orientation of mega-churches, and the seductions of a "prosperity" anti-gospel and the syncretism with old animism and recurrent popular superstitions, as it is happening in some of the most recent neo-pentecostal movements. "It is a promising and dangerous time, that demands great discernment", says the Brazilian theologian Carlos Fábio D'Araújo Filho, speaking from his own situation³⁷.

In this moving and challenging context, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, of Scripture, experience, reason and tradition, is certainly a clue to heed, while being open to the new manifestations of gifts of the Spirit and the new challenges and responses from our globalized context, with that wesleyan openness to experiential reality and the witness of the church in other times³⁸.

Wesley Works in Spanish are becoming a very important tool for the preaching of pastors and the formation of members in Methodist churches in Latin America, where some initial distribution of the 14 volumes collection has been done through the churches related in CIEMAL. There are already signs that the present generations of Methodists are eager to know and to reassume their Wesleyan identity, while trying to recover their former commitment to ecumenical mission and thrust for growth.

³⁷ *Op. cit. pp. 312ff.*

³⁸ On the Quadrilateral, see In the Spanish edition:

I also feel that the best is still to come and that one of the specific challenges is at the level of research, theological education and ministerial formation, particularly through the adequate distribution and use of *Las Obras* all over in the Schools of Theology, Seminaries, Biblical Institutes, Evangelical Universities, and interdenominational groups of Wesleyan Studies, such as those on course in Chile and Argentina. The Study Guide just published by the Wesley Heritage Foundation can be a timely tool for the proposed Third Face of Wesleyan Studies by the WHF and the Latin American Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean (CIEMAL)³⁹.

In 1983 we had a landmark on Methodist theological reflection and Wesleyan studies, with the First Encounter on Protestant Theology in Latin America, beginning with the Wesleyan Legacy. It was a time for re-reading the Wesleyan tradition in its own original context and from the present Latin American context, with the eyes and the tools of the new hermeneutics coming up in the eighties, with a liberation perspective and a declared commitment to the poor. It was a fruitful event in terms of historical studies and new theological insights, inside an ecumenical perspective⁴⁰.

In 1984 a Second Encounter of Methodist Latin American Theology, again with an ecumenical perspective, and with the joint sponsorship of the WCC, the Board of Global Ministries, UMC, CIEMAL, took place at the Methodist University of Piracicaba, Brazil. This time there was a more specific interest in detecting the "distorting mediations" of the Wesleyan

³⁹ The Chilean experience has lead the way for several decades, before we had the unique instrument of "Las Obras" in Spanish, by the creation of the Santiago Theological Community, open to wide participation of Pentecostals, both in their student body and in the faculty, and the support of a network of centers of study in different parts of the country, including Programs at Distance. The tentative coming together to study "Las Obras de Wesley" as referred above, may be another point in the right direction for the coming future in other countries. In Argentina the Iglesia Evangélica Metodista Argentina (IEMA) has created an special commission on the "Wesleyan Family". CIEMAL has decided to make of the 300th anniversary of John Wesley's birth the center of its program in the coming Assembly in May 2003.

⁴⁰ It was sponsored by CIEMAL, the Board of Global Ministries of the UMC, the World Methodist Council, and had the participation of theologians and leaders from different Latin American countries, who produced 25 papers gathered in the volume *La Tradición Protestante en la Teología Latinoamericana: Lectura de la Tradición Metodista*, San José, Costa Rica: DEI, 1983. Distorting mediations (Dow Kirkpatrick, Ed. *Faith Born in The Struggle for Life: A Rereading of Protestant Faith in Latin America Today*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. Eerdmans, 1988). Includes some of the papers of the Piracicaba Consultation: J. Míguez Bonino, "Conversion: A Latin American Rereading", "Sanctification: A Latin American Rereading"; M. Arias, "Distortions in the Transmission of the Original Legacy of Wesley"; Hugo Assmann, "Is Social Holiness Enough?". New challenges ("Luta pela Vida"); Julio de Santa Ana, "Heritage and Responsibility in Latin America".

legacy that reached Latin America, a more critical apropiation of the Wesleyan legacy in view of a more intentional engagement in the "struggle for life and evangelization" in our subcontinent. The papers were published in Portuguese, by a Catholic Publishing House, with the title *Luta pela Vida e Evangelizaçao*, Petropolis: Edições Paulinas/Editora UNIMEP, 1984.

Probably this is a good time and occasion to raise the question of the opportunity and the need for another Wesleyan Theology Consultation for Latin America and the Hispanic Wesleyan community in the USA, in view of the publicación of *Las Obras* in Spanish and the phenomenal spread of new churches in the land of the 1001 faces of religion.

Looking back from our vantage point, it looks like J. Míguez Bonino's suggestion in Costa Rica 1983, can now be better heeded, while it sounds for some of us like a marching order, in light of the publication of "Obras de Wesley":

"Our mission is not to 'preserve' but to 'share out' our Methodist heritage... as executors of an inheritance , with the double task of handing out the inheritance so that at the end of the process the inheritors enter into the full possesion of what belongs to them and the executors are no longer neccesary as such... Methodism would be gravely guilty if it were to keep this for itself, with the risk wasting or even losing what it has received..."⁴¹

CONCLUSION

Let's finish with two affirmations by Wesley that represent a call and a direction for us in the present and for the future:

I want to make an offensive and defensive alliance with every soldier of Jesus Christ. Not only because we have one faith, one hope, one Lord, but because we are directly involved in one war. We are carrying this war to the very house of the devil, who for that reason is drafting all his forces to the war. iCome, then, all ye who love the Lord to help the Lord, to help the Lord against the powerful!⁴²

"I am not afraid that Methodism may disappear from the face of the earth, but that it may become a dead sect... as a form of religion without the power"⁴³.

⁴¹ J. Míguez Bonino, "To Preserve Methodism?...", J. Duque, *op. cit.*, p. 338

⁴² Letter to Henry Vann, June 1763, *Letters*, IV, pp. 215-218. Colin Williams-Roy H. May, *op. cit.* p. 8.

⁴³ "Thoughts on Methodism" (1786), "Las Primeras Sociedades Metodistas", T. V., p. 379.