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**FACING A MCWORLD: REFLECTIONS ON SOME CHALLENGES FOR METHODIST
MISSION AT THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.**

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Testimony: Our World

When we last met five years ago there was a general feeling that the radical changes that had taken place were pushing the world more and more into the unknown. The topic was Wesley and The Poor. I recall one presentation in particular from Latin America by Rosanna Panizo in which it was said that the poor in the “new world order” have fallen from the radar screen of the powerful. No longer visible, they die their own kind of death. Rosanna argued that in the previous decades, it was a privilege to live in a situation of dependency (North-South relations) - at least the poor were needed for exploitation. The reality, she said, looked more like moving “from dependency to nothingness” on the part of the poor peoples of the world in the face of cruel, greed-driven political economies around the world.

I live in two worlds -Africa and North America. I encountered the West as a Methodist because my father was a Methodist evangelist. Going to school was part of being a good Methodist and so one might say I was modernized through Methodism (my primary school was prefixed “M.C.S” or Methodist Church School). In this school system I learnt how to be a Christian as well as, in retrospect, a member of the modern world. (Notice the sequence of events). Kenya, the part of Africa where I was born and raised, has now been largely Christianized (not all Kenyans are Methodists) and fairly modernized, but not really industrialized. In about one hundred years of interaction with the West we have been fully “hooked up” to the system in which we find ourselves.

Here is the problem: modernization and Westernization on the surface without industrialization at the core produced a straw economy -mass unemployment, underemployment,a

repressive quasi-military administration, deflated hopes and displaced values in the scramble for meager resources. This is the reality we live with, and there is enough blame to go around.

Spiritually, I bear the wounds of this reality found not only in Kenya and Africa but in much of two-thirds world.

Historically, as I came to learn through my encounters with the West, industrialization preceded modernization in Europe, and led to the incorporation of Kenya and other countries as raw materials to fuel this project became more and more necessary .So as this project expanded globally ,wars were fought, ideologies were propounded and whole peoples subjected to what later became a Euro-American vision of the world. This vision was fundamentally materialistic at its core and religious only on the surface. It thrived on power and beauty contests on a global scale. In Kenya and much of Africa, colonization came and left, but the shift of gears did not alter the reality of dependence (technological, military, economic, political and religio-cultural). Our Methodism was born in a smoky room, to use as a metaphor, and because our “parents” smoked, we naturally inhaled the fumes. On the surface, good Methodists must not smoke tobacco we were told, but at the very core, we are now incorrigible ‘ smokers’ of Western materialism.

At the collapse of the cold-War in the last decade of the twentieth century, Westernization and modernization have been linked to sporadic industrialization of the whole world in the context of “MCWORLD”(B. Barber’s term, The Atlantic. March ,1992).

We are told there are real possibilities for every country to move up the ladder of economic prosperity using the new information, communications and other technological highways. The password is “free” market economies, based on a new regionalism. The big picture shows “stateless” globalism, now an increasing reality. The cliché “living locally acting globally”

has been vindicated at least in the material sense. Spiritually, new wine is bursting the old bottles- new ideas have hit old structures head on, and a demolition of sorts is occurring without any certainty what the new structure shall be.

The tensions, challenges and opportunities of the present moment in history color our personal and national narratives. We each have a hard time catching up with things, and must now try to see what we have become. I live and work in North-America as a university professor with Methodist pastoral sensibilities divided between Kenya and North-American contexts. This for me is a sign of the times. I have experienced first-hand what it feels like to engage the global cultural, economic and technological process from two perspectives- African and Euro-American. I feel the tension of John Wesley's concern for the "New World" which must now be carried to a new level. What would this concern be beyond our preaching of the gospel?

I would like to present in outline form what I consider to be some of the challenges facing us today and end with some suggestions as to how we can engage the new world more meaningfully in especially socio-economic (therefore spiritual!) matters from a Wesleyan perspective. As this is not an academic paper, I will not develop or defend in full the ideas put forward in order to keep our discussion focused, open-ended and reflective.

II.

1. McWorld: The Shape Of Things Present-And To Come

The new forces of a commercially homogenous global network which are with us include:- fast computers, symbolized by brands such as Macintosh; fast foods symbolized by McDonald's; fast travel symbolized by the conglomerate air-craft manufacturer McDonnell Douglas of North America; Satellite television on a global scale (CNN, BBC etc.). This is a McWorld:

small, ubiquitous and highly mobile. More features of this new reality include:-

a). Globalized Politics -- All national economies are under pressure from transnational, transideological and transcultural forces characterized by free trade, convertible currencies, open banking with international law taking center-stage to enforce treaties, etc.

-- Nationhood and national sovereignty have little control as viable concepts.

-- Isolationism and procrastination on the global network are being challenged at every turn.

-- People are voting money and goods, not ideas, values and beliefs based on competing political candidates and ideologies.

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b). A Pervasive Common Market- A common market has emerged demanding a new class of people using a common language beyond their cultural languages, (logarithms and Math). Culture and nationality are taking a backstage in everyday existence of this "Cosmopolitan" class on a global scale. Well-paying jobs and consumerism (the quest for more and more) become, in this scenario, the reason to vote (not ideology). (While the vote may be easier to acquire, consumer goods in many countries may be more difficult to get!). There now exists a general political fatigue generated in part by the violence of a new economic dispensation around the world.

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2. New Hegemonies And The Clash of Civilizations?

The negative forces of McWorld are represented by the rise of fundamentalisms of all kinds --ethnic- related or religious, or both. Some have warned of a possible retreat not to ideologies but to "blocks" of culturally homogeneous groups or "civilizations" . It is said that there are still "fault lines" between civilizations-eg Western, Confucian, Japanese, Latin American and African Civilizations. The argument is that the very forces which unite the world through

common interactions will intensify civilization consciousness also- more so because the West is seen as an aggressor by the rest: successful regional economic blocks, we are told, will arouse powerful culturally-based age-old animosities(S .Huntington ,Foreign Affairs:Summer,1993)

3. Retribalization?

At a more local level within each nation we have witnessed are signs of a new kind of tribalism- attempts to retreat to age-old cultural differences(Cases of Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, Yugoslavia, India, Sri-Lanka and the former Soviet Union come to mind). One theme, quite troubling does emerge for the global community: coming together reluctantly and falling apart at the same time. Nations, peoples, religious groups and economic groupings (the poor and the rich) appear to play within this paradox. Great opportunities are mixed with great dilemmas. The only option we seem to have is to be as realistic as we can about current socio-economic issues around us.

III

Riding A Tiger: Coming To Terms With Our Reality.

1. A troubling sociological fact, it would appear at least historically, is that the church tends to follow the patterns of forces outside her domain in economic and socio-political matters. John Wesley and his brother Charles arrived in the New World that America was on February 5, 1736 not to challenge the very idea of colonization and the stealing of Indian territories by the European adventurers, but to preach to the Indians (whom they really never got to meet!) Later, it was people like Captain Thomas Webb, an officer in the British army of occupation who spread Methodism in America. . To know our stories can help us avoid our self-deception and move us to new levels of engagement with ourselves and others. Wesley and later Methodism in North

America was riding the tiger of colonization. And so it was in Kenya and much of Africa (and elsewhere) much later: those who ride a tiger as the proverb goes, soon find themselves in its belly!

2. Back home in England, Wesley dealt with his own spiritual condition- the Aldersgate experience of personal renewal through complete dependence on God's grace. It could be argued from the record that Wesley's rejuvenated and refocused life led to his sharp engagement with the social ills of his time, and especially his counsel to Methodists in regard to the realities and dangers of a monetary economy, and the need of increased education of the masses. This is Wesley driven by a narrative-the world is treacherous and evil but God's grace is available for all and dependable. Wesley is realistic about himself and the world around him, but ironically he is not complacent. People make history, but only so much history can one person make. Realism dictates that we should now be fully engaged in the world as it is so that our influence may "leaven" it. This is no time to feel overwhelmed and to shut ourselves in.

3. More precisely, it would be pertinent for us to examine the relevance of Wesley's tripartite economic ethic which may be summarized thus: **Gain as much as you can; Save as much as you can; give as much as you can.** Put differently the issues are: **Industry, Thrift and Charity.** [Wesley: Sermons On Several Occasions, Vol.2, pp.441ff.; and Letters, Vol.6 pp.207 ff.].

a. Industry/ Profiteering

Were we to focus on the need for employment opportunities in the new global environment, what shape would Methodist mission take locally and beyond? Perhaps in today's world such issues as involvement in small scale industries and job-creating enterprises for the poor in the inner cities and those of us from the less advantaged parts of the world would be on

top of our agenda. Teaching job skills and even creating financial institutions would be no longer an outside task for Methodists from this perspective. However, Wesley put strictures on gaining wealth: no fraud, no indecency etc. What might this mean today?

b. Thrift/ Lifestyle Change

Thrift means the thoughtful and deliberate stewardship of resources at hand so that there is no waste or unnecessary pampering of human greed at the expense of the future. Thrift depends on the development of a *new culture of savings*. Middle-class Methodists in America and Europe (and the entire developed world) are, by the standards of the less developed parts of the world, very wealthy indeed. As it is today however, they carry the biggest debts and have nothing put away for the sake of the spread of the gospel. This indictment cuts across all middle classes of the developing world as well: the more we gain materially, the poorer we become in financial and spiritual terms. This is the second tiger: economic prosperity (the first was colonization).

c. Charity

What would Wesley's teaching to "give as much as you can" mean to Methodists without a culture of savings? Some have argued that we should stop focusing on individual charity and instead see the state as fulfilling this role through taxation. (a la Germans). It appears that charity (self-giving, sacrifice, self-emptying for the sake of others welfare, etc. is a necessary though not sufficient condition for the practice of the Christian life. Is this possibly what Wesley had in mind?

In a close-nit global village of the 21st century, self-interest (that terrible human "capitalist" phantom!) may well lead persons, enterprises and nations to acts of charity-by-default. So be it. An ethic of charity cannot be approached in a vacuum: it is in our material and spiritual interests to give of ourselves and money, but surely the larger question is still that of the creation and

sustaining of a theocentric community, the subject of our institute this summer. In other words, where do our personal stories merge with God's story revealed to us as community of Child and Spirit in Jesus Christ?

Open-ended Questions

1. In the context of the suggested realistic approach to the current on-going global changes, what other socio-ethical approaches are possible from a Christian-Methodist perspective?
 2. What theological issues arise today due to the current changes around the world in relation to resources available, and the possible self-deception which may arise out of a "prosperous" world?
 3. In which way have you been impacted upon by the new global atmosphere, and how do you and your community plan to respond?(eg .using computer technology for mission).
 4. Is it possible for Methodists to take leadership/ responsibility in modeling new perspectives beyond a Wesleyan understanding of economic issues while being faithful to Wesley's theological intent?(Wesley considered response to the love of God for us as the basis for Christian social "responsibility", for example).
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