

The 15th Oxford Institute for Methodist Studies, Keble College, Oxford, August 4-11,
2024

“The World is My Parish: Glad Tidings of Salvation in an Age of Crisis”

Glad Tidings of Salvation as public theology of Methodism in Argentina (Case studies 1880-1980)

Daniel A. Bruno

Professor of Church History- Director of Theology Studies of Faculty of Religious Sciences –
University of the Latin American Center (UCEL)

Rosario - Argentina

Introduction

The parish-world is the terrain where the works of mercy operates. Wesley's open mind allowed him to articulate different cultural mediations as “holy tools”, although not strictly religious, so that these works of mercy were effective at different levels of creation, for example, education, medicine, economics, physics, electricity, etc.

The parish-world concept opens the doors to activate a gospel that, as the ancient philosopher Terence said, “nothing human is indifferent to me,” although in the case of Wesley it went even beyond the human, since animals and all creation are objects of salvation.

The terrain of the parish-world then allows us to an understanding of evangelization much broader than converting individuals.” The encounter between the gospel and the agenda of the great parish provokes a dynamic exchange of evangelical interaction that goes beyond recruiting members” but rather, it reaches to different spheres of public life with which Methodism has worked as part of its non-religious language evangelistic task.

Today, this parochial world is called public theology, a place for mission on the frontier of the challenges that each time presents.

In this paper, I will introduce four moments (case studies) in which the Methodist Church in Argentina materialized the call of the Great Parish through concrete commitments in society as part of its broad mission in the parish-world.

The Methodist mission enterprise to Argentina was the third, since the Missionary Society was created in 1819. The first was among the Wyandotte Native American people in Ohio, the second to Liberia in 1833, and to South America, only Argentina first, in 1835. This placed the mission early in the first missionary wave of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which still retained in its theology the influence of the second revival and its emphasis, clearly Wesleyan of a holiness with social commitment, within the framework of a postmillennial eschatology.

This will be an imprint that will mark the characteristics of the testimony in the society of Argentine Methodism, regardless the theological influences which they experienced along the way.

In fact, Argentine Methodism was influenced by at least four theologies: 1865-1910 Evangelical liberal optimism of human progress (controversial against Catholicism); 1920-1940 Social Gospel ; 1948-1965 Neo-orthodoxy and 1965-1990 Theology of liberation . All of these theologies have not been an impediment for the original imprint of social holiness to appear in different circumstances.

Furthermore, these theologies helped - in different ways - to develop what we call the parish-world system, by reaching different spheres of public life where Methodism had to testify “the glad tidings of salvation” in a non-religious language evangelistic task.

Among others, we will briefly introduce four cases:

- Parliamentary work in favor of secular laws and against religious State
- Alliance with socialism and freemasonry in the fight against vice and the reform of customs
- Construction of citizenship through education
- Defense of Human Rights in dictatorship

- **Parliamentary work in favor of secular laws against religious State**

At the local level, Methodism was the first Protestant church present in the country that designed an “outward” mission. Until 1867 his missionary task had been enclosed as an “ethnic chaplaincy.” In 1867 he began his task in the Spanish language, thus the Catholic Church’s hegemony in the Río de la Plata since colonial times, faced for the first time an organized Protestant threat in its own territory.

However, the threat was not posed by Methodism in religious terms, rather the conflict was due to its insertion -and common strategy- with the rising liberal bloc and the civilizer symbolic universe that they carried as a banner.

In this sense, Methodism fought and was fought not for the defense of religious dogmas, but rather for the production of a symbolic universe that contributed effectively to the consolidation of the underway liberal project.

Liberal governments in power in Argentina so, were undermining, through the promulgation of "secular laws," the prerogatives that the colonial Catholic Church had in all areas of society.

Thus, in 1878 the Law on Cemeteries under the State's responsibility was enacted, and in 1882 it was decided to remove religious instruction from public schools. In 1888, the government promulgated the civil marriage law, which among its items included a prison sentence for priests who celebrated weddings without the prior signature of a civil judge.

The binding divorce law will have to wait a few more years. In 1903, socialism's discussion began in which Methodism took an active part in its defense.

In the midst of this conflict, Methodism joins the "liberal forces." It was to be expected that the secularist ideology of the period would be received very favorably by the Methodist church:

*"As evangelical Christians, we have the sacred duty to do justice to governments that not only do not hinder freedom of conscience, but also have the necessary courage to clear the way of precipices that can endanger honor, future and national dignity"*¹ Public Statment, 1883.

One of the first laws was the one enacted in 1882, related to secular, free and compulsory education for children from 6 to 14 years old.

Once the law was proclaimed, it was necessary to train teachers who could accompany this initiative. (We will see the role of the methodist church in a next case).

This whole situation had greatly strained the relationship with the Vatican to a breaking point. The Argentine government dismissed the Apostolic Nuncio. This led to an active participation of Protestants in general and Methodism in particular, supporting governments and the projects and laws which aimed for promoting freedom of conscience and the separation of Church and State. Methodism explained it in this way:

¹Public Declaration, August 1883, The Evangelical Standard

"In the name of freedom of conscience, it seems to us that the declaration of the separation of church and state would be the most radical means of ending the abuses of clericalism and freeing modern society from the regression to which that union has condemned it." ...But for this measure to produce beneficial results, they must first of all free the family from clerical influence, our government establishing mandatory Civil Marriage, and Civil Status registries..."²

Methodism actively participated in promoting these laws, in the pages of *El Estandarte Evangélico*, the official organ of Argentine Methodism. These became a reflection of what was happening in the country and the position of the main Methodist leaders can be clearly seen:

*"Every Christian, every man who loves the freedoms of his country, must cooperate with the efforts of a government that knows how to challenge the hidden powers that still seek to stifle the freedoms of the people in the name of God."*³

Catholic Church, for its part, resisted this advance, proclaiming the new legislation as "impious and atheistic" and its defenders as "heretics."⁴

On the other hand, there was rejoicing in Methodist ranks about the law, since it opened new possibilities for their educational task, as it happened, indeed:

*".. it was the triumph of progressivism, democracy, it was the victory of freedoms over ultramontane sophistry and absurdities... It is the victory of the Gospel of freedom"*⁵

The next step was the Civil Marriage law. The presence in Buenos Aires of a great mass of immigrants who in those years arrived in the country with different faiths and cultures, made it necessary to accelerate the Civil Marriage law, otherwise thousands of non-Catholics would be unable to legalize their marriage.

Methodism was a strong ally in the growing awareness of this need, so they promoted its benefits:

²The separation of the Church from the State, *El Estandarte*, June 21, 1884, p1

³The Banner, August, 1883

⁴Emilio Corbiere, *Freemasonry, Politics and Secret Societies in Argentina*, (Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1998) 252

⁵"The sure triumph", *The Evangelical Standard*, June 28, 1884, p.2

“Civil marriage is today a necessity proclaimed by all citizens, the obscurantists work in vain stirring the spirit of the masses, preparing them for an all -out struggle because the mastery of force culminates where the mastery of consciousness begins...”⁶

But, together with Civil Marriage law could also come the possibility of the dissolution of the marriage bond. What in fact, it did.

When this happened, Methodism expressed publicly and clearly in favor of the abolition of the concept of **indissolubility of marriage** and in also for a legislation that contemplated **divorce** .

“Jesus himself declares that there may be cases in which the marriage bond can be declared annulled ...(Luke 2, 29) In the name of Christ, in the name of morality, and in the name of a multitude of innocent and defenseless creatures we ask for absolute divorce, the possibility of absolute annulment of the marriage bond for justified reasons.”⁷

A divorce law it would have been a mortal wound for Catholicism, because it would have helped to cut the last ties that still bounded the Catholic Church to the State.

But the project ultimately lost by two votes.

Despite this, Methodist Church had definitely adopted the divorce campaign as its own and although the project had already been defeated, they carried on with the matter.

At the 1904 annual conference Methodism officially assumed a divorce creed, without too many pretensions of theological depth, of course:

We believe that the marriage bond is a divine institution.... .

We believe that the human race is of a single species and this taken together with experience establishes monogamy...

*However, in view of the abnormal conditions introduced by man, we admit the dissolubility of the marriage bond.*⁸

Although the divorce law had to wait a hundred years to be enacted (1985), the discussion that it had been generated, it has marked a milestone in the development of methodism social ethical narrative.

⁶May 31 , 1884, p 1

⁷The Evangelical Standard, January 18, 1883, p 1

⁸Minutes Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1904

The theological affirmation expressed by Methodism in this context, must be read, without a doubt, as the development of a process of discursive construction that demonstrated absolute permeability to the burning issues of its time.

The fight for secular liberties is among the most fruitful forays of Methodism into the public arena. These struggles served to forge in early Methodism a paradigm of public presence that will be replicated in different formats and, languages throughout its history.

- **Alliance with socialism and freemasonry in the fight against vice and the reform of customs**

Within the framework of the reform of habits for the progress of society, the practice of temperance was undoubtedly the most desired virtue. It is interesting to note that this ideology was not actually exclusive to the Methodists, but socialists, anarchists and liberals also agreed with it!!

Actually, the socialists were who began the fight against alcoholism in Argentina in 1896. The alliance against alcohol pursued the goal of eradicating vice as an scourge of the people and an obstruction to progress.

The particular and relevant thing that Methodism added to this campaign, was the “redemptive” character they gave to the task.

In a temperance manual’s cover it is read:

“Among the redemptive tasks of the church, the first place is to redeem human beings from: a) harmful inheritances caused by drink. b) burdens that vice places on the family. c) chains that alcohol forges in people. d) moral and material misery that it causes in society and the family.”⁹.

The strongly immanent emphasis that the evangelical-liberal theology of the Methodists in Argentina possessed, it is revealed here. Salvation is not explained in spiritual-individual terms, but rather in the moral response for social transformation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the temperance movements in Argentina were united in various and sometimes contradictory sectors. The socialists and anarchists sought in temperance a working class not dulled by alcohol and lucid for social struggles; the bourgeoisie so that its workers had greater productive performance; Methodism, for its

⁹ ibid

part, coincided with the socialists and also fought against the evil that obstructed the path to the progress of humanity.

Each one of these sectors highlighted a particular benefit, but together they formed a crusade for the most important reform of public morality in the country.

In 1916, on the occasion of the visit of Hardina K. Norville , delegate for South America of the *World Women's Temperance Union* , the *National Temperance League* was founded in Buenos Aires . ¹⁰The League's proposal was in line with prohibitionist movements in the United States, this position led to a local discrepancies regarding the emphasis between **prohibitionism and reformism**.

Although both tendencies coexisted within Methodism, the deterrent reforms campaigns were the more common practice of the church, so it were developed through abundant literature, hymns, artistic expressions, conferences and scientific explanations on the benefits of temperance. The central theme of the moralizing campaign is undoubtedly the fight against alcoholism. The one that will produce the greatest number of books, articles, sermons, conferences, specific actions and a very particular poetics.

The reasons presented by the Methodist discourse to oppose alcohol are varied, it is interesting to note that the fundamentalist argument: " the Bible prohibits it", or "because it is a sin", never it appears, instead, the arguments were based on moral, social and scientific observations and, when the religious aspect appeared, it was to remember the care of the body as a "temple of God."

The other vice combated in order of importance is gambling. The basis of criticism of gambling is basically of the same nature as that of alcohol.

Religious admonitions such as "*Trust in God and not in chance!*" were not found as the main axis of the campaign, although such a warning may appear as a secondary reflection in sermons and devotionals. Rather, the center of concern is purely social. The game destroys the culture of work, which is the progress's main axis:

No one can see with indifferent eyes that vice dominates in a dignified and industrious society, where only the love of work, which is earthly happiness, should prevail...

¹⁰Arnoldo Canclini, *400 years of Argentine Protestantism* , (Buenos Aires: FIET, 2004) 296

The fight against social vices reveals a gospel engaged with the freedom and plenitude of people, with their productive and dynamic social insertion, and with the development of a clear mind to use it creatively and in controlled finances for the economic health of the family.

The education in temperance at 1930s begun to expand its boundaries. The qualitative step will be taken by the creation of the Social Action commissions. This marked the transition between a merely educational moral model, into an awareness on poverty as a social evil which had to be mitigated through concrete action.

The Social Action commissions has created, in times of the full force of the Social Gospel, the awareness that **it is not enough to be mere *Christian social workers*, but *social fighters. for the change*.**¹¹

.....

- **Construction of citizenship through education**

In the first case, it has been mentioned the successful promulgation of the law of education which mandated a secular and compulsory education for children from 6 to 14 years old. Then, it was needed to train teachers who could accompany this initiative.

In this context, the educational task of the Methodist church has been a constitutive part of the educational system in the country and a central programmatic premise of its mission.

The Methodist strategy also followed the path of progressive liberalism by considering formal education as the key that would open the door to progress through the formation of enlightened and responsible citizens in the construction of a country in development.

President Domingo F. Sarmiento was who shaped the project and put it into practice the educational legislation. In 1858 he promulgated the School Buildings Law, in 1870 the Public Library Law and in 1875 the Common Education Law in the Province of Buenos Aires. In 1882 the National Pedagogical Congress decided to remove religious education from public schools.

All these actions were shared by Methodism in Argentina, not only in theory but, in many cases, accompanying actively by concrete actions. During the period 1869-1898, sixty-five teachers, most of them Methodists, arrived in the country, they helped to

¹¹See EEE, 1935, Nov p 9

create eighteen normal schools. One of them, Clara Armstrong, was appointed president of the Board of Education and Director of the Normal School in 1883. This was possible, in part, because of the relation and personal friendship among Thomas Mann, the person in charge of Education of the United States, and President Sarmiento. So it was open a channel of cooperation between both countries. This was accomplished through the arrival of the normal teachers.

During the superintendence of the Rev. William Goodfellow, Methodism played an active role in the management and supervision of some of the North American teachers in order to activate normal education in the country.

Those normal schools have been undoubtedly a fundamental milestone in the history of Argentine education.¹² By the year 1885, a report of the Minister of Education of the Province of Entre Ríos, José Torres, noted:

*"Although the normal schools have only been in existence for 14 years, their influence on the common schools is already notable...they not only train excellent teachers. "But through their model schools they improve the education of the children of each town where they are located . "*¹³

In addition to this, other initiatives placed Methodism as one of the protestant missions that earliest developed an educational vision as part of its mission.

A few months after the work in Spanish had started, Rev. Goodfellow and Rev. Thomson presented a request the Government for a subsidy in order to start two new methodist schools.

The request was quickly accepted and on August 1867, in a note signed by Governor, two thousand pesos per month were granted for the schools at the neighborhoods of Belgrano and La Boca, *"taking into account that, mainly La Boca, they will be established in places where the considerable increase in the population makes them indispensable"*¹⁴

Another important contribution of Methodism in education was the work carried out by the Women's Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which sent teachers to create normal schools for women in several cities in the country. The work of these missionaries teachers resulted in the creation of the three most important methodist

¹²As we will see later, Methodism brought missionary educators with the same purpose, giving rise to the educational work in Rosario.

¹³Alice Houston Luigi, *Sixty-Five Brave: Sarmiento and the North American Teachers* , (Buenos Aires: Ed. Agora , 1959), 68,

¹⁴Ibid.

schools in the Río de la Plata region, whose recognition and excellence continues to this days. Namely: the Latin American School of Rosario (1875), the Crandon School of Montevideo (1888) and El Colegio Ward of Buenos Aires (1913).

Towards the mid-20s the motto of Methodism was “*Next to every church, a school*”¹⁵ and certainly during those years that motto was consolidated under concrete undertakings.

After the creation of schools was done, a new debate began: what methodism would do with schools and education? Although the central and unanimous objective of the Methodist schools was to “evangelize children and youth,” the definition of what did “evangelizing with schools” means, was not so unanimous:

Was it referred to use schools as a field to make proselytes? or instead, was it referred to use schools as a place to train citizens with the values of the gospel?

On the one hand there were those who considered schools as a gateway to the church, in this perspective, the students were considered as a captive market that had to be converted and gained for church. Actually, this utilitarian perspective revealed a pessimistic vision of education as such, since the only objective of the school was utilitarian.

In fact, the missionaries who promoted education in Argentina and Uruguay were far away of this perspective. They had brought with them the most progressive pedagogical schools of the time. Rev. Thomas Woods, and the North American teachers, Luisa Denning and Jenie Chapin, in Rosario, Celia Guelfi, Minnie Hyde and Mary Bowen, in Montevideo, and Frank Beck, Henry Holmes and Alfred Aden in Buenos Aires were the missionaries who outlined the main guidelines of the pedagogical building that would model Methodist education.

All of them were the heirs of Horace Mann’s thought, who revolutionized the North American educational system through the implementation of some of its basic principles, such as a non-sectarian education in religion and inclusive in social matters, also he strived for an education based on the methods, spirit and discipline of a free society.¹⁶

¹⁵See article by Francisco Barroetaveña, *El Estandarte Evangelico*, 1925, 243

¹⁶Hinsdale, Burke A. *Horace Mann and the Common School Revival in the United States* (New York, 1898)

Education for Mann was not limited to the teaching of knowledge, but to the promotion of values that shaped the personality towards altruistic purposes.

This was the frame of reference on which the ideology of the missionary educators was based. In addition to Mann's influence, other educational streams also impacted the pedagogical principles of Methodist education.

The ideas of both Pestalozzi's "*paedoscenicism*" ¹⁷, and Montessori's learning through the practical activities helped to surpass the old concept of the student as a passive recipient of knowledge, by integrating pedagogy into the cognitive, playful and practical activity of the students. The Emersonian influence, as well as Smiles, Marden and Vincent Peale, ¹⁸ have also left their mark.

These were among others, the theoretical inputs to the pedagogical bases of Methodist schools. The concept of "character education" has also strongly marked the pedagogical imprint of Methodism. This school exalted the Emersonian principles of self-realization and self-control as the bases for the formation of personality and the construction of committed citizens.

Methodist schools have also integrated the Deweyan emphasis related to the practical results of education in the social sphere and its civic and democratic responsibilities.¹⁹

The Methodist ideology in education could be reflected in part in the objectives pursued and expressed in 1926 by a methodist school director:

*" I want to see the School always overflowing with a spirit of altruism; I want each student who passes through the classrooms of our school to feel the satisfaction that comes from having contributed to the improvement of social life and the progress of their country ..."*²⁰

So, the idea of "evangelizing" through the school acquires a much broader and enriched meaning. This will be an evangelization that runs through all dimensions of life specially those related to nurturing good Christians and good citizens.

¹⁷Pestalozzi's educational methods were focused on the needs and possibilities of the child , it was based on individual differences, sensory perception and self-activity of the student. See Dieter, Jedan. "Theory and Practice: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi" Vitae Scholasticae 1990.

¹⁸See chapter IV of this work for a more detailed development of these thinkers.

¹⁹TW Moore, Introduction to the theory of education, Alianza Editorial, 5th ed. 1995, p 63

²⁰Fred Aden Closing Address Ward College 1924. EE,1925, 58

Civic learning was also carried out not only through theoretical studies, but also through practice, as it was expressed by the Ward College's Student Center in its constitutional Act :

*"The Secondary Student Center, which has been organized this year, promises a lot for the external life of the student career, which is so important in a school like ours. It is a true civic education for students to organize and carry out programs of debates, conferences, parties, etc."*²¹

We may observe that the two central columns of the Methodist educational ideology like training in Christian values, and the practical construction of citizenship, both were intertwined attempting to form an unwritten program which could make impact on the different levels of its activities.

Methodist education then, designs its educational mission through a congruent bipolarity which comes to resolve a false dichotomy: on one hand, through *kerygmatic task* the church seeks the formation of good Christians, on the other, through its *didactic task* it builds good citizens.

Two sides of the same task. This ideal ran through the history of Methodist education from its origins, shaping a nation in the making. This objective was expressed conclusively by Rev. Daniel Hall in 1925, a quote that allows us to close this case as a perfect synthesis:

"The Christian must be the best citizen. He must ensure compliance with all good and sound laws. "He must be a defender of the rights of all, but he must also put all his influence in favor of all those social, political and religious reforms that society needs."²²

So, Methodist education was the tool through which a good Christian can become into the best citizen.

²¹ Aden ibid

²²Daniel Hall, "The Christian and the laws of his country ", The Evangelical Standard, 1925, p 175

- **Against military dictatorship and defense of human rights**

The coups d'état in Latin America, particularly those carried out during the 60s and 70s, should not be understood in isolation from the rest of the processes in other countries in the area.

With the help and advice of the United States, the Armed Forces began to attack the democracies of the countries of the region. Through these coups d'état, the lucrative foreign investments and the implementation of anti-popular economic policies were guaranteed and granted. In this domination project, surely, the role of the Christian churches had to be fundamental. The question was, in what side of the street?

In the so-called Santa Fe Document I, of 1980, the strategy against the churches that were committed to social political processes was implemented:

United States foreign policy must begin to counteract (not react against) Liberation Theology, as used in Latin America by the clergy associated with it. The role of the church in Latin America is vital to the concept of political freedom. Unfortunately, Marxist-Leninist forces have used the church as a political weapon against private property and productive capitalism, infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are less Christian than communist (Santa Fe Document, 1980).

The document goes even further, and links the churches that works in favor of Human Rights, with movements that favored Marxist and the "enemy infiltration" of the United States:

The manipulation of the media through groups linked to different churches and other pressure groups called the defense of human rights has played an increasingly important role in the overthrow of authoritarian governments, *but favorable to the United States.* , and in its replacement by anti-American, communist or pro-communist dictatorships, with a totalitarian character (Santa Fe Document, 1980).

It is no coincidence, then, that since that moment on, a countless fundamentalist evangelical groups began to expand throughout Latin America, financially supported by conservative evangelical groups from the United States. They were (are) reactionary to all types of social and political commitment and popular changes.

In Argentina, these fundamentalist groups, together with the conservative wing of the Catholic Church, have been the main religious support of the military dictatorship.

On March 1976, the Argentine democratic government was overthrown by a military coup. The Board of Commanders in Chief of the Armed Forces deposes and imprisons the constitutional President and her entire cabinet. Dissolves Parliament and provincial and municipal governments. The judiciary has been intervened. Suspended the activity of political parties. Unions and professional associations intervened. Universities throughout the country were also intervened. The media completely controlled and manipulated. Lawyers, journalists, psychologists, educators, actors, writers and progressive sectors of Christian churches were systematically attacked.

According to a subsequent investigation by CONADEP,²³ around 9,000 cases of disappearances were reported during the years of the dictatorship. To this figure we must add those cases that were never reported. It is estimated that there was a total of 30,000 victims of repression by the Argentine dictatorship.

Church reaction in general was poor. Only a short handful of the so-called historical Protestants Churches and some Catholic bishops have had an active critical participation in opposition to the dictatorship and Human Rights violations. The rest of the evangelical and Catholic churches remained outside the situation, or even worst, they favored it.

Some of the churches that made up the Federación Argentina de Iglesias Evangélicas (FAIE) knew the need to organizing for faster and more effective action. Among them, the Methodist church. Methodism had, at that moment, very few experience in such a kind of struggle.

So, in order to understand the intuition with which they prepared to commit themselves to the defense of Human Rights, we must trace a brief key background.

This background has been the work carried out by the Argentine Commission for Refugees (CAREF). On September, 1973, a similar military coup was given in Chile, and many people began to leave their country and crossing the Andes, to prevent possible arrest or assassination.

The CAREF was created as an ecumenical organization in order to provide help to this mass of refugees. The task carried out by CAREF was supported mainly by social workers and pastors who had accumulated great experience not only in service work,

²³Acronym corresponding to the *National Commission on Disappearance of Persons*, created by the democratic Government to receive complaints and channel the corresponding legal actions, an act that led to the trial of the Military Juntas of the dictatorship.

but also in knowing the modality that repression was adopting in the whole region. So that, many church leaders, pastors and lay people who were in contact with the Chilean refugees, were able to access first-hand information of what could come in Argentina.

When, three years later, this finally happened, the leaders of these churches were warned and prepared to anticipate events and to anticipate a fairly realistic picture of what the repressive actions in the country, would be like.

On December 1975, the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH) was created with the aim of providing legal coverage to the victims of state repression and generating a current of opinion in defense of Human Rights with international repercussions. The APDH was not a religious organization, but its board of directors was formed by a wide representation of different personalities from the Catholic Church and the Methodist Church.

Some months later the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights (MEDH) was created. The original idea of the founders was to offer this tool to the Argentine Catholic Episcopate, but they refused to take part. So, only some isolated catholic bishops, priests, and protestant churches gathered in the FAIE, accepted the challenge and were participants.

In the first years of the dictatorship, the actions of many Methodist pastors was fundamental. They opened their churches so that, pockets of resistance could meet there. The tower of a downtown central Methodist church was a refuge for a young student persecuted by repressive forces.

The basement of the Methodist church at the Flores neighborhood, was the safe place where "Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" and "Families of Detained-Disappeared" could get an organization.

As a consequence of their commitment, several Methodist churches and many of their members were targets of bombs, kidnappings and threats on many occasions.

A bomb destroyed the front of the Methodist Church of Mendoza, in the mountainous west of the country. This church had housed Chilean refugees who were escaping from the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.

On January 1977, Dr. Mauricio López, a renowned intellectual in the fields of sociology and philosophy, and an active Methodist layman from Mendoza, was kidnapped and disappeared. On May 1977, Oscar Alajarán, a railway union member, and also member of the Remedios de Escalada Methodist Church and also an active militant of the MEDH,

was kidnapped and murdered. In total 28 members of the Methodist church, most of them young students, were murdered or missing.

Throughout this long dark period, methodism, carried out actions in two ways, in one hand a most visible political and prophetic task expressed in documents, declarations in the mass media, public complaints abroad, specially through the World Council of Churches; and, on the other hand, a silent and patient task of pastoral accompaniment to the relatives of the disappeared people and those who were being released after years in prison.

In this task, the action of the MEDH was fundamental for the testimony of Christians both during the dictatorship and in the subsequent period where the reconstruction of democracy required accompaniment.

After the dictatorship, pastoral accompaniment work has been developed: the help for people released from prison, help for detained or missing people's children, visits to prisons, legal advice for victims, labor reintegration, and on....

During post-dictatorship period, the churches also had to fight another battle, but this time was a conceptual one. Once again, the religious field was divided. The word "reconciliation" has been used and misused in the ecclesiastical sphere.

Some sectors of churches appealed for the reunion and reconciliation of the Argentine people without a serious calling for an investigation that led to truth and justice.

Methodism and other protestant churches and also some few sectors of Catholicism opposed that position. They pointed out that true reconciliation will always be a consequence of justice and truth, and that only real and physical victims can forgive the offenses received.

Conclusion

The Methodist Church in Argentina has demonstrated an enduring commitment to social holiness, deeply rooted in the theological heritage of John Wesley. So, the concept of the parish-world, wherein the church's mission transcends mere individual conversion to engage with broader societal issues, has been pivotal. This expansive understanding of the "glad tidings of salvation" aligns with the idea that nothing human is indifferent to the gospel. This broad vision of mission, now often referred to as public theology, underscores the church's role in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

Examining this cases, the Methodist mission's engagement in Argentina reveals a dynamic interplay of theology and social action. From its inception, influenced by

Wesleyan theology, and the early second revival, Argentine Methodism has navigated various theological currents without losing its core commitment to social holiness. The impact of Evangelical liberalism, the Social Gospel, Neo-orthodoxy, and Liberation Theology each contributed in different contexts to shaping a mission that speaks to the public sphere in a non-religious language, addressing societal needs and injustices.

The four case studies exemplify how Argentine Methodism has materialized its mission in concrete societal commitments. The church's parliamentary work advocating for secular laws and opposing a religious state illustrates its dedication to ensuring a just and inclusive society. Its alliance with socialism and freemasonry in combating vice and reforming social customs reflects a strategic engagement with other societal forces to promote moral and ethical improvements. The construction of citizenship through education highlights the church's role in fostering informed, responsible, and empowered individuals. Lastly, the defense of human rights during dictatorship underscores its unwavering stance for justice and human dignity, even in the face of oppressive regimes.

Through these actions, the Methodist Church in Argentina has demonstrated a profound understanding of its mission as a holistic endeavor, encompassing spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. By addressing various spheres of public life, it has maintained a relevant and transformative presence in society. This engagement not only reinforces the church's commitment to the gospel's message of salvation and justice but also positions it as a vital agent of social change. The parish-world framework thus remains a powerful model for contemporary mission, offering a comprehensive approach to evangelization that is deeply attuned to the complexities of human life and society.

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