

# Methodist education as an alternative for the future

The World is My Parish: Good News of Salvation in an Age of Crisis 15 Oxford  
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“We forgot that the world did not belong to us. We forgot that it had to be protected, that it was necessary to stop and take time. But the problem was not speed, not even acceleration. It was haste. We forgot that to inhabit the world one must not be in a hurry, that one must know how to delay in the present, that one must link up with those who have gone before us, that one must learn to live in provisionality, uprootedness and uncertainty. We forget that, without this delay, without this attention, the world becomes a desert.”

Joan-Carles Mèlich. The Fragility of the World. 2021. Tusquets

“The future is a complex construction...  
The present, that strange country that is also past and future at the same time.”

Jorge Carrión. Solaris, sound essays to be more contemporary.  
Podcast. Ch. 1 Accelerated time

## **Introduction**

I am grateful for the invitation to participate in this 15th Oxford Institute. This is the first time I am participating in this important event. I received the invitation to participate with enthusiasm and joy as it is a great challenge: what concepts to share as an educator at a table of political economy in an institute of Methodist theological studies.

When we talk about economics we talk about education, when we talk about politics we talk about education. Economics and politics have a full impact on education and education also has an impact on them. Political economy has a strong impact on educational projects and the programmatic definitions of institutions.

On the other hand, Methodism has a long and strong educational tradition since its beginnings with the establishment of Kingswood School founded by John Wesley on 24 June 1748. Methodist education has developed significantly and today has more than 1000

institutions in 80 countries. With teaching proposals with a strong emphasis on the integral formation of people, attending to academic, social and spiritual aspects, they consider that education is key to promoting peace, development and the wellbeing of society.

I bring here some ideas that may help us to think about this current context, and to review, in this global economic panorama, what we Methodists have to say, in addition to our churches, with so many educational institutions through which many lives pass in formation. Institutions in which we have the enormous opportunity to witness that 'the world is our parish and that we have good news of salvation to give'.

When we look at our educational spaces and projects, it is necessary to ask ourselves: What educational institutions do we need in this contemporary world? How do we need to think about our institutions (churches and schools) so that they can be spaces of transformation of this prevailing economic system? Do we offer tools from our educational or ecclesial communities to face these times of uncertainty? Do we generate alternatives that are delayed in the present to create better and hopeful futures?

I would then like to present some axes on which to reflect:

- **The new scenarios** that are being defined and in which the ways of thinking, knowing, socialising, living and working are being reconfigured.
- The **new subjectivities** that are being defined in order to cross the provisionality that characterises these scenarios.
- The **good news as an alternative for the future** that allows us to build hope in the possibility of transforming the world.

## **The New Scenarios**

I start from an initial idea: to inhabit the world we need to understand it.

We are living in a time of dizzying and constant change brought about by technological developments that modify our lives. Continuous and portable connectivity is a phenomenon that has radically transformed the way we interact with the world and with each other. Thanks to the explosion of new media and formats, such as smartphones, tablets and IoT (Internet of Things) devices, we are constantly connected to a global network of information and communication. In this context, the portability of devices plays a crucial role. The ability to carry with us powerful communication and information access tools allows us to be present and active in multiple spheres of our lives, whether personal, professional or social, regardless of our physical location, enabling us to access data, news, entertainment and social networks anytime, anywhere. The dissolution of time and space as we conceived it has become a palpable reality. These developments not only transform the way we

communicate, but also redefine our perceptions of time and space, erasing traditional barriers, opening up a range of possibilities for human connection and social interaction.

Constant interaction through mobile devices and online platforms allows people to be present even in their physical absence, creating a sense of proximity regardless of distance. This ability to be 'present in absence' is enhanced by the explosion of these new media and formats, such as virtual reality, augmented reality and social networks, which offer immersive and personalised experiences.

Another characteristic of this era is cultural convergence, which refers precisely to the intersection and fusion of old and new media. This media convergence leads to the flow of content across multiple media platforms where the barriers between producers and consumers of content are blurred. In this context, consumers are not only passively receiving information, but also actively participating in the creation and distribution of content, a participatory culture that implies a change in people's behaviour. This phenomenon is driven by collective intelligence, i.e. the conception that knowledge is shared and built collectively, transforming the way we interact with the media, information, with each other and also in work and production environments. Jenkins points out that this cultural convergence occurs not only in the media, in the circulation of information and in exchanges, but also in our brains. And this then also impacts on the way we engage with knowledge (H. Jenkins, 2008).

Cultural convergence has a complex and strong impact on contemporary society as it brings a number of benefits. The participatory culture that makes consumers become producers of content, which in turn fosters creativity and innovation, as well as the democratisation of voices and expressions. The convergence of media diversity, which, as we said, occurs in the integration of different platforms and formats, enriches the user experience by allowing broader and more varied access to information, knowledge and entertainment. Collective intelligence, which through collaboration and knowledge sharing enhances the creation of better quality content and more efficient problem solving. Global access as cultural convergence facilitates the spread of ideas and cultures, promoting greater understanding and tolerance between different communities.

But it also presents us with challenges: information overload, where the abundance of content can be overwhelming, making it difficult for those of us who use it to discern relevant and truthful information. Unequal access, as not everyone has the same access to the technologies needed to participate fully, which can widen the digital divide and complicate social and labour market insertion. Ethical and legal questions about the use and abuse of information, personal data, images due to the ease of sharing and modifying content. Loss of privacy and security as participation in multiple platforms can expose us to risks that are difficult to notice and manage.

Today's world is empty of things and filled with disturbing information, like disembodied voices, Byung-Chul Han tells us in his book *No Things*, because digitalisation dematerialises

and disembodies the world. We move from thing to non-thing. We no longer inhabit the earth and the sky, but we inhabit Google Earth and the cloud. Nothing is solid and tangible, we consume and produce more information than things. The Industrial Revolution reinforced and expanded the sphere of things and the need to possess them, while digitalisation subordinates things to information. We do not handle the things in front of us, but communicate and interact with infomata, which act as actors. This information sometimes falsifies events, it feeds on the surprise stimulus, but this stimulus does not last long, new stimuli are needed and this makes us get used to perceiving reality as a source of stimuli and we do not see, recognise or perceive those silent, discreet, habitual things, which do not stimulate us, but anchor our being (Byung-Chul Han, 2021.).

Another aspect to consider is that information is not as easy to possess as things, this may give the impression that it belongs to everyone, that we all have the possibility to possess it, but the world of information is governed by access. Links to things or places are replaced by temporary access to networks and platforms. 'Information capitalism is an intensified form of capitalism. Unlike industrial capitalism, it also turns the immaterial into a commodity. Life itself takes on the form of a commodity. Many human relationships are commercialised. Social media exploit communication to the full'. (Byung-Chul Han, 2021, p. 17).

The digital revolution we are going through is a process of profound and accelerating transformation. It has radically changed the way we live, communicate and work. It has had a profound and multifaceted impact on the world of work, transforming both the nature of jobs and the way they are performed. Real structural change has taken place.

Some of the effects of digitalisation on the workplace are that it has enabled the automation of repetitive and administrative tasks, which increases efficiency and reduces operating costs, in turn freeing up time and opening up the possibility of concentrating on more strategic and creative tasks. New digital skills are in demand, competencies in areas such as programming, data analysis, cybersecurity and the use of increasingly valued tools in which we will all need to be trained. It facilitates remote and flexible working as technology makes it possible to work from anywhere with an internet connection, which changes the work dynamic and modifies the work-life balance. And it leads to the offshoring of jobs, allowing companies to hire talent from anywhere in the world. This can reduce costs and access a greater diversity of skills, but it can also generate global competition and put pressure on certain salaries or make others more precarious, generating greater possibilities of exclusion. Not everyone has the same access to technology and digital skills, which can increase inequality in the labour market.

Another consequence is that a certain paranoia about productivity has developed and this leads to a sense of burnout in many workers. It not only affects processes, but also generates a transformation of organisational culture. Companies must adapt to a more agile and collaborative environment, promoting a culture of innovation and continuous learning, training and support to improve interpersonal skills. These changes reflect both the

opportunities and challenges that the digital revolution brings to the world of work. Adapting to these changes is essential if we are not to remain on the margins of society and the workplace.

These labour changes and the development of the global economy do not expand without consequences, and these consequences include growing inequality, unemployment, displacement of populations and also the destruction of the environment.

The advanced, global capitalism of this era confronts us with new logics of exclusion, where individuals, companies, peoples are expelled both from places and from the socio-economic order pre-established by an increasingly extreme system of accumulation. Saskia Sassen calls these devastating effects 'expulsions' and they affect people, companies, communities all over the world. For Sassen, these expulsions are not spontaneous, but require the creation of 'predatory formations'. These formations are a combination of complex public policies and technological, financial and market developments that affect not only the wealthiest individuals, but also large corporations and powerful governments. There are different types of expulsions that are pushing many people out of the system, out of institutions, out of social exchanges, out of their land. This concept helps us understand how today's global capitalism is reshaping the economy and society, and how these transformations affect people and the planet (Saskia Sassen, 2015).

Faced with this scenario, I ask again: How do we bring the good news? What tools do we have to design other futures? How do we recover, from our educational and ecclesial spaces, the people expelled by the system? How do we build conscious and disruptive leaderships that delay in the present to create better futures? How do we build a new economic policy that needs time to develop in these times of immediacy of answers?

### **New subjectivities**

New subjectivities emerge in the new scenarios offered by the digital era that we have just described. Subjectivities are ways of being and being in the world, and these ways are elastic and change under the protection of diverse cultural traditions, they are constructed in the everyday practices of each culture. It is also in these traditions that bodies are sculpted: they are disciplined or liberated. Subjectivity is not rigid, but is modulated by interaction with others and with the world. We must bear in mind that the influence of culture on what we are and what we do is fundamental. If cultural conditions change, so does subjectivity, and in these scenarios the new practices of displaying intimacy are decisive. In educational exchanges we must bear this in mind, especially if we are thinking of exchanges or encounters in which we can transmit the Gospel message.

In a highly mediatised society, there is an incitement to visibility. There is a collapse of internalised subjectivity (characteristic of another era, elaborated in classrooms, homes,

factories) and new spaces emerge in which to build one's own subjectivity based on new ways of relating to others and acting in the world. Social media exposure has become an everyday practice, where people share aspects of their lives, thoughts and emotions with a global audience. Social media filters, which function as make-up 2.0, allow us to modify and embellish images and videos, creating idealised versions, in which we edit reality and edit ourselves. The mirror has been transformed into a screen (Carrión, 2020). These filters not only alter physical appearance, but also influence the perception of identity and self-esteem, generating a new form of media subjectivity.

We speak, then, of intimacy as spectacle. Paula Sibilia analyses the exteriorisation of the personality. We are users and consumers of media that stimulate performative ways of being and being in the world: acting before the gaze of others. This performativity adds a layer of theatricality and creativity to everyday communication, transforming the way we interact and relate to each other socially and economically. As we have already noted, we interact, we include, we include ourselves or we expel.

These performative modes of communication involve the creation of content, users become performers, using various tools and live streams to express their ideas and connect with their audience. This exhibition not only redefines how we perceive ourselves, but also how we present ourselves to others. A subjectivity is built into this interactive exhibition: altered directed personalities no longer intro directed, no longer directed by one's own gaze but rather oriented to the gaze of others (Sibilia, 2008).

In this subjectivity we move from the desire to possess things to the desire to experiment, we are immersed in the society of experimentation. The image, the brand is worth more than the use value of things, because we perceive from them above all the information they contain. We buy and consume emotions. Today, identity is essentially determined by information. We produce ourselves in social media. We act ourselves out, we represent our identity (Byung-Chul Han, 2021). In a society as spectacularised as ours, the boundaries between the real and the fictional are blurred.

Digital communication changes human relationships, we are all on social networks, but we are not always connected to each other. Digital communication changes the personal encounter. Moreover, as if we consider what Baricco warns us, we all reside in two worlds: the physical and the virtual, the analogue and the digital, the world and the ultra-world. The habitat of the hyper digital man is a reality system with a double driving force, in which the differentiation between the real world and the virtual world becomes a secondary frontier, because one and the other merge into a single movement that together generates reality (Baricco, 2019).

The concept of 'double driving force' refers to the coexistence and fusion of the two worlds: the analogue and the digital, which coexist, integrate and enhance each other. The analogue world, the physical and tangible reality in which we live, with its own rules and limitations. It

is characterised by direct interaction and traditional sensory experiences. Whereas the digital world is the virtual realm, in which, as we have already said, information and communication flow instantaneously, globally and offer new possibilities for interaction and experience, overcoming the limitations of the physical world.

The dual driving force refers to how these two worlds combine to generate an augmented and enriched reality. Digital technology not only complements the analogue world, but also transforms it, creating new ways of living, working and relating. It is important to understand and harness the synergy between the analogue and digital worlds in order to navigate and thrive in the contemporary era.

Baricco points out that this has produced a paradigm shift, a real mental revolution, because beyond the new tools and new ways of life, the way human beings think has been transformed, which generates a new idea of humanity. It is not changing something, it is simply changing everything. For Baricco, there has not been a mental revolution as a consequence of technology, but quite the opposite. First came the mental revolution and then the technological one. That is why he points out that we must stop trying to understand whether the use of the smartphone disconnects us from reality and we must try to understand what kind of connection with reality we are looking for when we create it, when we create these devices and the constant connection. Because the new man is not the one produced by the smartphone but the one who invented it, who needed it and built it (Baricco, 2019).

We are subjects of a world that is no longer what it was. What we did before is not enough. We are subjects redefining our subjectivity. It is necessary to recover the meaning of words in these times of scarcity of words and anxiety for immediate response. In a society with transmedia narratives for some and linear and impoverished narratives for others.

Faced with these subjectivities, I ask myself: How do we give the good news? How do we establish spaces for dialogue in times when words are scarce? How do we generate educational and ecclesiastical projects that take time if cultural changes do not wait for us? How do we recover the value of the transcendental in life? How do we generate spaces for dialogue and slowed-down exchanges for quality encounters with people and the relationship with our world?

### **The good news as an alternative for the future**

The new scenarios and the subjectivities that develop in them are the starting point for educational projects that have to be revised in order to offer meaningful alternatives.

The world has changed so much that we must reinvent everything: a way of living together, the institutions we know, the way of being, the way of knowing (Serres, 2013). We must also reinvent being a church today, to respond to and contain in these complex scenarios the

new subjectivities that are taking shape and that we must shelter in order to build a better world and seek to transform the world towards other possible futures.

The future is a complex construct in which many of the ideas of human societies are structured, it is shaped by a web of interconnected factors that require deep understanding and careful management to maximise the benefits and minimise the risks, and in which the interaction of humans with each other and with technology can generate new forms of creativity and knowledge. The real challenge lies not in the use of technologies but in how people make decisions and manage those changes.

In this context for many people the word future has lost its meaning. Words have lost their validity. Words, which should shape reality, which should help to interpret the world, no longer designate anything.

We need more words that serve as tools that allow us to read our own time in such a way that we can correlate it with what was and with what is to come. We need tools that help us to live, to live through existence, to read the time in which we live in order to be able to rewrite it.

That is what education is, it is offering words that allow us to read and write the world. Educating to open up spaces that help us to build hopeful outlooks. Educational institutions, and above all Methodist institutions, have the challenge of offering paths that our students have not yet travelled and that they may not even know exist.

We need to delay in the present so that we can live in provisionality and uncertainty. We must overcome the accelerated and algorithmic times of this age, bringing from Methodism the good news that the gospel offers us. To live is always to embark on a somewhat uncertain adventure in which we are learning and living in a state of fragility and vulnerability that is deepened at this time.

We should give them words and resources that allow them to construct a grammar that helps them to inhabit the world in which we live. A grammar that allows us to interpret the world and generate options so that we can be builders of new worlds in which we can live in a fairer way, more careful with creation, in which we are careful not to generate expulsions.

The question we must ask ourselves then is whether we are doing so, whether we are educating our children and young people to interpret this world and imagine other possible worlds. If we are educating them, if we are giving them the good news, so that they can lead happy and dignified lives, or if there is a possibility that we are educating them against their own survival.

We can draw a parallel with our Methodist churches: are we recovering, are we giving the members of our community the words that help them to understand today's world, are we illuminating this understanding that we need, are we opening horizons or the opposite?



To ask ourselves how we want to educate is to ask ourselves how we want to live. Education is always framed in a purpose, when we are clear about where we want to go and what we want to achieve, we can make significant decisions about processes, contents and proposals. Teachers always have to make decisions on small details or large projects, which implies taking sides, establishing positions, and that entails a risk. Education is always a political task, it is an ethical and political practice.

Education is not neutral. Institutional projects are never neutral, they always reflect an ethical and political position, which is why they cannot be reduced to a technical question, and it is especially necessary to define positions and commitments. The basis of pedagogical action is ideological and political, not technical, and this is related to the concrete way in which intentions are put into practice. One can speak of the complementarity of pedagogical and political projects, in a broad sense. (Lombardo, 2006).

We do not need an objective education, adaptable to the changing demands of society, but an education that is at the service of society and that helps young people to read their world and to resist when necessary, to learn together while being aware that understanding the world does not mean adapting to it but precisely acting on it to transform it, to discuss together what needs to be changed.

We need to build better strategies and offer spaces of deceleration where there is time for reflection to think about how to build a better world. Recognise the strength of cultural and economic objects to look at them critically, it is not about repeating dogmas or thoughts in a linear way, but we need to understand the relevance of current debates, include them in our dialogues and exchanges to think differently, we cannot change things if we always do and repeat the same thing.

We have to create conditions in our schools and churches that allow us to live in the present because this is the age of the future. We must imagine other possible futures based on the idea that this future is not predetermined, but that we must design it ourselves now, because the future is in our hands, in our classrooms, in our churches.

We have the choice to withdraw or to expand into more open spaces that do not exclude. Education is fundamental to activate solidarity and confront all individualisms because we are not condemned to sociological or economic fatalism. An education that proposes a transformative perspective must promote equality, but with respect for diversity in order to overcome educational and socio-economic inequality and naturalised expulsions. It must start from the valuation of life experience and insert itself as much as possible in a social perspective and in future needs.

Educating today means questioning the notion of inexorable destiny, more than half of all children are marked by the prophecy of failure. To educate today is to interrupt this prophecy of failure, which is embodied above all in the popular sectors. These prophecies

are made by economic theories, political theories and sometimes, unfortunately, educational theories. We are here proposing that this prophecy should not be fulfilled.

This implies standing up to the inexorable in the search for a possible and better future for all. Human beings are marked by their circumstances, but at the same time we are makers of circumstances and these are the result of the work of people. Designing horizons of transformation with our students, in our communities of faith, so that they rebuild and in turn rebuild themselves.

The Methodist Church must present itself as an alternative to the loss of hope. Because there is no possibility of building a better future if we do not feel the desire and do not see a real possibility of social, cultural and economic change. We cannot offer a liberating education, a liberating Gospel message, if we do not think that there is something from which we must free ourselves. We cannot bring about change if we are not aware that there is something that in the midst of all that is changing must be recovered as an anchor of hope. To seek the establishment of a more just and equitable society, committed to democratic proposals that seek the real inclusion of all people.

We have to work to form leaders with a broad commitment to peace, justice, freedom, solidarity and inclusion without leaving people on the margins, in such a way that the Christian message that Methodist institutions have for humanity today becomes valid, new and innovative. Defining positions and commitments, making our principles explicit and recovering our traditions with a view to the future.

Hosting dialogue as a pedagogical meeting that contributes to a critical vision that questions the established discourse and system that naturalises inequalities and expulsions, building a critical participation that sees this new scenario as a place for intervention, in order to modify what this context poses.

That is to say, to engage responsibly and critically with the cultural, social and economic conditions, but with the reference that is based on the Gospel of the Kingdom and the fundamental commitment to transform society in the utopian perspective that the Gospel offers us, establishing alliances to be able to generate these transformations. Educational projects do not bring about the changes that affect social structures on their own; they need to be open to possible commitments, partnerships and alliances with the sectors that are on the frontiers of change.

The presence of the utopia of the Kingdom of God has to act as a driving force for Methodist educational institutions to sustain a responsible dialogue with the world of work, with the managers of cultural developments. In order to build bridges with the excluded, leaving aside paternalistic positions that nullify the dignity of life. Open to real experiences of citizenship, of mutuality in the construction of democracy.

Introducing the dimension of selfless love into administrative processes, in an authentic spirit of service. Giving practical value to the discourse that is supported by effective practices: by the fruits you will know us. Jesus as a social being relates to people by dialoguing with them, challenging them to follow him, inviting them to enter and interact.

Reclaim Wesleyan spirituality by living out the mercy that is expressed in acts of mercy by focusing on a transcendental spirituality. Seek the transformation of society with God's radical justice as its foundation. The school and the church in communication and relationship with the world it serves. Giving the good news that expands into the world with possibilities created by the practice of love, justice and mercy while critically and responsibly articulating with the conditions of the context seeking first the kingdom of God and his eternal justice. The practice of mercy continues to be sought in order to survive in this competitive market world in the conviction that the seeds of justice of the Kingdom can also grow in today's reality. (Barreto Cesar, E.E. 2006).

The teachers' position is not a position of power, but rather one of weakness. Their weakness is that what teachers do is risk-taking, they are not sure that what they do will turn out well. The task of the teacher is creative and creating is always a risky enterprise. Education is an encounter between human beings, it is not predictable, it is an event of openness to the unforeseen and even the impossible (Bárcena-Melich, 2014).

Education as an ethical event and as a spiritual event is at some point an act of faith and therefore of courage. We can build a pedagogy of hope for a better, non-totalitarian world, a poetic and utopian pedagogy. To educate is to create true novelty and that is risky. Risk has a dimension of search, of adventure, of exploration. It has a profoundly hopeful dimension in the love of God. This is the challenge that we must take up in our institutions in order to build an alternative for the future.

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