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**THEOLOGY WHICH LIBERATES ITSELF  
BECOMING LIBERATOR**

**Proposal of a contextual Methodist Theology  
Coming from Latin America**

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*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*

*Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

*Jesus Christ*

*Luke 6,20,21*

*If this is God's Will, we are totally disposed to leave you, you the rich ones, the honorable ones, the great ones. Leave us only the poor ones, the vulgar ones, the ones of low condition, the outcast. Take for yourselves the saint ones of the world, but let us call the sinners to repentance, even the meanest, the most ignorant ones, the most abandoned ones, the fiercest, the most savages ones from whom we have notice. We will go to those in the Name of our Lord, not wishing anything to anybody (...), and let's see whether God has sent us<sup>1</sup>*

*John Wesley*

Today in this first decade of the twenty-first century, Latin America and Caribbean keep on being one region of the planet with numerous social-political problems, inequalities in economical sectors and with a high index of poverty<sup>2</sup>. Mexico ---the country I come

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Wesley, *Un Nuevo Llamado a personas razonables y religiosas, parte III*, (A New Call to reasonable and religious persons, part III. Wesley Works Vol. VI (Tennessee: Wesley Heritage Foundation, 1996), pp. 365, 366

<sup>2</sup> According to data from The Economical Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (CEPAL), in its inform "Economical Panorama Study for Latin America 2006", we read the last available estimates for Latin American countries, referred to the year 2005, indicate that in that year a 39,8 percent of the population in that region was in poverty. The extreme poverty or indigence included a 15,4 percent of the population, consequently the total of poor people amounted to 209 million of persons, from which 81 million were indigents. According to data furnished in this same inform, a 35.5 percent of the Mexican population live in poverty and a 11.7 percent in extr4eme poverty or indigence. In the meantime, the minimum salary was reduced in comparison with 1990. In Latin America there is a total of 18 million of people in productive-age who do not work, and that represents a 10.3 percent of the population. In 2005, Latin America and Caribbean had an inflation rate of 6.1 percent; therefore, this region has a major

from--- is still a Nation with a high index of poverty and extreme poverty, in addition to other social problems, such as lack of security, the growth of traffic of drugs and its consequent violence, has hurt considerably the health of the youth. Government has reacted by militarizing the country, and the need to create a true democracy<sup>3</sup>. Taking into account the afore-mentioned, I am convinced that the Methodist Theology has still today so much to give and serve in this historical crossroad in that part of the continent where I come from, love and serve. But, to make this Methodist Theology be a significant one in that part of the continent, it has to incarnate in our race, and up to now it has not occurred in general terms.

In the presence of the growth and influence of theologies of the prosperity and other alien theological corruptions that have appeared since last quarter of twenty century and early Twenty-first, and fundamentalisms, Rev. John Wesley reminds us once again with his work that the Christians, and especially the Methodist and Wesleyan families, have a specific engagement with the poor ones of this world. This responsibility has been overlooked, but it is necessary to recover it beginning Twenty-first century in Latin America and Caribbean.

### **I.- METHODIST THEOLOGY AND THEOLOGIES OF THE LIBERATION.**

It is true that Methodist Theology, in general terms and even among Methodist members in Mexico, is not sufficiently well known and understood today, therefore its contribution to Mexican popular culture is quite reduced. Even now, we depart from inherited patterns of western theology and specifically from the North, that is from the U.S.A. and Europe, and we just copy their teaching and liturgy, without considering our Latin American context. This is one of the reasons why Methodist Theology has not got a blended, brown and indigene face<sup>4</sup>.

As Dr. Justo González states, it is necessary to pay attention to the new “maps”<sup>5</sup> that are being created all over the world, geopolitical, religious, language, ideological, cultural, and even weather maps. It is a fact that the Christianity map that we used a few decades ago, has no use any more; in other words, the western Christianity has decreased its presence and influence considerably. In the ancient map, the center was located in the U.S.A and Europe, the new map has poly centers; it is known that from the point of view of economy, the center is still the same, but when we think about evangelical, missionary and growth zeal, the centers go southern.

In the decade of the 50s of last Century, half of the Christians of the world lived in Europe, now they are less than the fourth part. Early last Century, the 80 percent of the Christians were white, now they are less than the 40 percent. Simply, and in order to be

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distributive inequality in the planet: The level formed by the 40 percent of the families placed in the inferior extreme of the distribution structure gets, in average, scarcely a 14 percent of total income. Mexico and Dominican Republic showed a significant deterioration in the income breach among extreme groups of the distribution structure during this period.

<sup>3</sup> The actual President of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, is member of Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) National Action Party, a party with a right and conservative tendency. He got republican presidency with a polarized population, since an important sector of it, considers there were serious anomalies in presidential election and that former president intervened in the results. The main candidate of the opposite party, the left one, together with a lot of his followers, feel they were displaced.

<sup>4</sup> As it has happened in Bolivia

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Justo L. González work, Mapas para la Historia Futura de la Iglesia *Maps for the Future History of the Church* (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2001), 119 pp.

objective ---if we want to do a representative Christian Theology in this beginning of the new millennium--- we would have to take as a basis now to the poor countries, the ones who live in the third world, that are the countries where the Christianity is located now. It is true that the Latin Americans are debtors to that classical Theology, but it is imperative now “Latin-Americanize” our own Theology and continue elaborating own Theologies. As Dr. González declares, nowadays we have a new map, quite different from the one of the last Century; therefore, any theologian has to take that into consideration.

Independently of our positions, nobody can deny that the major contribution to Theology made by Latin America and Caribbean ---so far--- is the Theology of the Liberation, that appeared late the decade of the 50s, last Century, till its multiple developments and faces, with transcendence not only for Latin American, but also for other regions in the world, mainly among the poor and margined ones, especially in Africa and Asia.

It is known for many theologians and scholars, that today the Theologies of the Liberation<sup>6</sup> are surpassed and in decline due to the official persecution of the Roman Catholic Church, by the Popes John Paul II and Benedicto XVI. For this document, I depart from the certitude that while in the world be poor and oppressed people with the longing to walk to their full development as human beings, the methodologies of the Theologies of the Liberation not only will be in force, but, even more, they will be needed for our Latin American people.

On the other hand, the Wesleyan theological particularities, as well as their inheritance and history, they have so much to furnish to the human being of the Twenty-first Century<sup>7</sup> and particularly to the clamor of million of human beings who are claiming for justice and for a dignified life. Supporting the afore-mentioned, I sustain that it is feasible to elaborate a Methodist theology partly with the methodology of the Theologies of the Liberation from Latin America and Caribbean<sup>8</sup>.

Even now, when it is heard the phrase “Theology of the Liberation”, a lot of people relate it only to a Theology of the Roman Catholicism and that is why it is seen with fear and suspicion. In the presence of that it is convenient take into consideration what the Argentinian Methodist theologian says, he, who is one of the most outstanding theologian we have in our continent and the one who was invited as the unique Latin American non-catholic observer at the II Vatican Council:

I believe that the Theology of the Liberation is a name that has been given to a new theological conscience in Latin America; it is neither catholic nor protestant, it seems that it is simply a new Christian conscience in our continent

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<sup>6</sup> I prefer to call them “Theologies of the Liberation” in plural since these theologies have multiplied and it is not adequate to consider them as if it were just one

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Míguez Bonino writes: Our mission is not to “preserve”, but distribute our Methodist inheritance. Consequently, we have to see our efforts as the ones of the executor, with a double task: distribute the inheritance, in such a way that at the end of the process one becomes irrelevant as executor, and make sure that the legitimate heirs take full possession of what they are entitled to...The Methodism today would be gravely guilty if it kept for itself what it has been given or if it wasted it irresponsibly or let it lose...”

<sup>8</sup> Of course, the work of the Argentinian Methodist theologian, Míguez Bonino, is emphasized in the development of this work.

(Latin America and Caribbean). The conscience that it is impossible to talk about the Gospel if it is not related to the real problem of our population in our country, the misery, the poverty, the oppression. This new conscience is the matrix from which a series of theological efforts have emerged to interpret the reality. Some have been catholic, other protestants, obviously, the majority has been catholic because of the majority of the population in Latin America is catholic.

(...) if I believe that this new conscience of the need to bond the Gospel with the social, political and economical liberation, if that is what defines the Theology of the Liberation, I would consider myself a theologian of the liberation.(...)<sup>9</sup>.

It is true that we cannot affirm that Wesley was a Theologian of the Liberation as he is named in Latin America. Let's remember several of his conservative political positions, regarding to the independence of the thirteen English colonies in America and concerning to the ideas of democracy which he related to as the "mobs" government. On the other hand, Wesley demonstrated that the "religion of the heart" cannot be lived in isolation, but in community, which does not only have individual implications, but also social and structural ones that had to be translated into concrete facts. If we cannot assure that Wesley was a theologian of the Liberation, we cannot also deny that he had a preferential option for the poor, margined and suffering ones, the way as the prophets and Jesus Christ himself had.

For that, Wesley placed the structure of the Methodist movement to the service of the mission and not vice versa, as we do now, allowing privileges to the institution and not to the reason for which we exist.

## **II.- CONTRIBUTION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES TO THE THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS.**

A true Methodist theology from this Latin American perspective requires, among other tools, the methodological contribution of the sociology. Sciences, and especially, the social ones, offer to theology and theologians in general, essential tools to elaborate a diagnosis of the reality, they reveal the causes and the roots of the oppression experienced by our poor people. They discover the processes and structural dynamic energy, they show the working and tendencies of the *neoliberal* system that is present in nearly all of the nations of the continent and that can supply alternatives to the same.

The social sciences are, in addition, an instrument that allows to draw more precisely the challenges that social reality is presenting to the preaching of the Gospel and, therefore, to a theological reflection. Definitely, theology will take major historical lucidity, and because of that, it will be able to have an effective dialogue with our people. Likewise, it will liberate the theology form falling into naïve visions of the reality making our praxis a real one.

The accusations to socialize the theology that have been made against the Theologies of the Liberation, do not heed another thing, that the return, now impossible to an assumed pure theology ---as if such a theology could ever exist---, unmindful theology of the historical realities and beyond analytical mediations that protect the *status quo*.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview made to Dr. Míguez Bonino by Eliseo Pérez Álvarez, published in Fe Cristiana, Teología Protestante, Iglesia y Misión en América Latina (Christian Faith, Protestant Theology, Church and Mission in Latin America. (México: Casa Unida de Publicaciones, 1987) pp. 8 and 9.

On the other hand, the social analysis should not be taken as a dogma that has to be accepted without any discussion; it requires a critical examination and a permanent confrontation as every science. The Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez does a pertinent shading: *even when the faith respects the specific field of the social sciences and respects its own epistemological status, it does not behave before them as a silent witness that has nothing to say or like a non-critical receiver that has nothing to object, it has a labor of discernment to execute, and over all when time comes to decide on for one or another type of the analysis of the reality, in that case, the theology is not and cannot be neutral.*

The theologian must decide upon that type of analysis that comply with the following requirements: to be able to translate accurately the exigencies of faith; to adequate to the direction and global horizon of the Christianity; to be able to describe in a global manner, the mechanisms that constitute the structural sin; to propose alternatives that be in consonance with the “options that faith considers the most adequate for the salvation and to the integral liberation of the human being, to promote more efficiently the justice and the qualitative transformation with major participation and fraternity”.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to precise that the Theologies of the Liberations are not defined by its contents ---not even, of course, by its vocabulary that could be adjusted to oppressive theologies as it has been made several times--- but to its method to face our reality. As Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms, the theology that is engaged with the Kingdom of God is, indeed, a second act, the engagement of charity is the first act. Perhaps this statement seemed naive in the 60s, but it really planted a true revolution of the theological methodology.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Classical Wesleyan Theology does not share the method exposed for the Theology of the Liberation, we can find coincidences and convergent points. It is true that John Wesley departed from the examination of the Holy Scriptures to elaborate his theology, it is also certain that he also found ground-work in other sources such as the Tradition ---which is God’s Revelation to the Church through the history---, the Reason, the Experience<sup>12</sup> ---which is one of his contributions to the Theology and that acknowledges the need to perceive the experience of the forgiveness and the salvation that the risen Christ grants not only to a personal level but also in a community form---, and to the Creation or the Nature, as a form through God reveals himself to the human being. But, all the tools were not exhausted there, he also considered the natural religion, the conscience, the sciences, the community and the culture<sup>13</sup>. The necessity

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<sup>10</sup> Leonard Boff, Teología del cautiverio y de la liberación. *Theology of the captivity and the liberation*. Ediciones Paulinas, Madrid 1978. p. 45 cite in Para comprender la Teología de la Liberación. To understand the Theology of the Liberation. p. 74

<sup>11</sup> Juan José Tamayo Acosta, To understand the Theology of the Liberation. (Navarra: Verbo Divino, 1991), p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> However, we have to clarify that for Wesley experience was understood as the empiric, that is, what is perceived through the senses (in the past it was known these were five senses: ear, smell, taste, sight, touch)

<sup>13</sup> For this topic I recommend to read: Una Propuesta para nuestra hermenéutica actual. Una propuesta como Juan Wesley elaboró sus creencias. A Proposal for our actual hermeneutics. A proposal as how John Wesley elaborated his beliefs, written by Rev. Jorge Alberto Ochoa L., and presented in the III Latin American and Caribbean Encounter of Wesleyan Studies in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 2003, and

not only to know but to be skillful with these sources and theological tools is evident in his document named "A discourse to the clergymen"<sup>14</sup>, written in 1756<sup>15</sup>; there he recommended to the clergymen, ---among a vast list<sup>16</sup> of knowledge and virtues, to have knowledge on sciences --- including what we call today social sciences--- in order to apply this knowledge to the daily praxis. That means that for the Methodist theology, it was not and will not be acceptable to practice a Biblicism of fundamentalist source --- that abounds in our churches---, but that the deep and serious study of the Holy Scriptures must have a constant dialogue with the reality of the human history taking the contribution of several tools.

The theology, then, from the proposal of this work, is comprehension of the Word of God and simultaneously the comprehension of the world and of the human being to whom this Word is addressed, and who, at his turn, questions and inquires. Since the Bible does not speak of God without showing us what He wants for the human beings, we affirm that the Bible is word about God (theology), but it is also word about man (anthropology)<sup>17</sup> and his society (sociology). That is why we cannot set them apart.

### III.- THE OPTION FOR THE POOR IN THE METHODISM.

Following the tradition of the Holy Scriptures<sup>18</sup> and specifically the prophetic one and the one of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Methodism, in England in the Eighteenth Century, marked as a "Religion of the Heart", was presented to the most simple and not-educated ones as a possibility of inclusion of the poor. As Methodism took distance from the doctrines of the election for the salvation and predestination, it created a complete feasible alternative for the spiritual protagonist roles of the poor who found in the religious experience of the societies, classes and Methodist bands, a confirmation of their humanity in the middle of a society that oppressed and margined them. Methodism articulated the personal experience with a community discipline, creating a social weaving that responded to the necessities of a subjectivity in a new social imaginary that corresponded to the transformations of his time.<sup>19</sup>

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published in *Teologia e Pratica Uma lectura a partir da America Latina e Caribe*. (Sao Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, 2005), pp. 343.

<sup>14</sup> John Wesley, *Wesley Works*, Vol. IX (Tennessee: Wesley Heritage Foundation, 1996), pp. 195-221.

<sup>15</sup> That is twenty years before Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*.

<sup>16</sup> A knowledge of original languages in which the Bible was written  
A knowledge of secular history, its habits, chronology and geography  
Knowledge of sciences. Among them logics and metaphysics.

To be familiar with natural philosophy to understand some verses of the Scripture

Knowledge of geometry to clarify the comprehension and the habit of thinking carefully examining the whole

The knowledge of pre-Nicene Fathers and other commentators of the Scriptures.

To have a knowledge of the world and the human beings: their proverbs, temperaments and customs.  
Common sense.

<sup>17</sup> Evangelina Vilanova, *To understand the Theology*. (Pamplona: EVD, 1992) p. 67

<sup>18</sup> There are a lot of biblical references for the preferential option for the poor on God's account or on the people of God who have responsibility towards the poor; here are some: Ps 12.6; 22.27; 25.9; 69.34; 113.7. Prov 14.31; 19.17; 28.27; 31.9; Isa 1.17; 61.7; Mt 5.3; 19.21; Lk 4.18; 14.13; 1 Cor 1.26; Gal 2.10; Jas 2.5

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Cardoso Pereira, *Fragmentos e cacos de Experiencia. Relacoes sociais de poder e genero na teologia wesleyana. Publisher in Revista Caminando, Ano VIII, n 12-2 semester 2003*, (Sao Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, 2003) p. 195

Precisely, before that the theologian of the Liberation of the Twentieth Century were talking, as if it were a novelty the “preferential option for the poor”, for Wesley and Methodists it was already a common practice and this initiative can be easily implied from the cite I began this work.

Dr. Hugo Magallanes founds, at least, four evidences<sup>20</sup> of Wesley’s devotion for the welfare of the poor:

1. His personal notes in his diary, his sermons and letters show his legitimate interest and sincere concern
2. In spite of being a very cultured person, his preaching of the Gospel was with unaffected words, easy to understand and with relevant illustrations for common people.
3. For his interpretation of Christian stewardship. One of this principles is the responsibility that we, as Christians have, to supply for the needs of the poor: “Give all what you can”.
4. Contrary to the fact that the poor are the result of their laziness, Wesley never blamed them for their poverty. Contrary to the beliefs of his contemporary fellows, he did not affirm that wealth be a sign of heavenly blessing. He made the privileged social classes responsible of the poverty, lack of employment, and indolence of the Church.

At least we also have to add a fifth evidence and it is especially related to his dedication for the development of women. We cannot deny that in Latin America there is a saying: “*the poorest of the poor are the women*”, who are victims of *machismo* and discrimination in many spheres. But what we must emphasize is that the major part of the leadership in the Methodist classes and bands, in its early stage, were formed by women. Taking into account the customs of the Eighteenth Century, Wesley, not without having so many problems, he encouraged the development of the Methodist women in the Mission, which is a legacy for us till now, and a distinctive feature of Methodism, at least in Latin America.

In order to make consciousness among Methodist of the importance to work in favor of the poor, Wesley, as the theologian Theodore Runyon writes in his work “The New Creation”<sup>21</sup> was convinced that there is no substitute for the personal contact with the one who is in need. It is not sufficient to have some abstract knowledge of their situation, the first-hand experience, in their houses, in their places of work, is a requirement for the *ortho-praxis* and for the consciousness of their pinching social situation. Wesley followed his own advice and made a regular practice to go and look for the poor:

On Friday and Saturday I visited so many poor as I could. I found some of them in their underground cells, others in their attics, half of them starving of being cold, in weakness and pain. But I found no one unemployed. It is devilishly false the common concept that “they are poor just because they are lazy”. If you

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<sup>20</sup> Hugo Magallanes, Introducción a la vida y teología de Juan Wesley. Introduction to the life and theology of John Wesley. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 92-98.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore Runyon La Nueva Creación, la teología de Juan Wesley para hoy. The New Creation, the theology of John Wesley. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006)

could see this with your own eyes, could you spend your money in ornaments or superfluous things?<sup>22</sup>

Wesley did not only defend the causes of the poor workers of the Industrial Revolution and unemployed one, but went further; he denounced with prophetic vehemence the exploitation of the black slaves who came from Africa. He criticized very toughly his own Nation for encouraging this inhuman traffic, though it was considered legal in his work "Reflections on slavery" in 1774. Wesley understood he had to combat against the idea of race or cultural superiority of white people and felled the legal-cultural statements and other ones that were used to justify that "execrable villainy". He denounced, in prophetic tune, that God preferred justice, mercy and truth instead of slavish expansion of his Nation. He backed the anti-slavish leaders and encouraged the Methodist Conferences of the U.S.A. and England to ask Parliament the abolition of the slavery. All of this was a decisive contribution to the success of the efforts against slavery.

In first place, his own personal and pastoral experience was based upon the going and searching the poor and pleading in favor of oppressed people. In 1725, he began looking for integral sanctity, in 1738, the experience of Warmed Heart. As the Brazilian theologian José Carlos de Souza, says, we should not overlook 1739; when

Wesley experienced a *conversion to people*<sup>23</sup> starting with his preaching outdoors and having direct contact with the crowds that the Anglican Church despised.

He was convinced he had to work with the poorest ones, and it was due to the fact that he admitted the permanence in every human being of the *Imago Dei* ---though limited--, after the original sin<sup>24</sup>, which took him to what we call now the human rights. As well as the derivations and consequences of the Prevenient Grace, which every human being advantages without making any distinction of any kind. It is also important emphasize his proposal on *Vía Salutis*<sup>25</sup> including his Christian Perfection doctrine and certain elements of synergy<sup>26</sup> as human response<sup>27</sup> to divine Grace. In summary, this option for the majority who are in need, derived not only from theology, but similarly from its own experience with the exploitation that the Industrial Revolution generated, doing an analysis with the tools he had by his time.

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<sup>22</sup> Journal, entry for February 8, 1753, Works 20:445 published in La Nueva Creación, The New Creation. p. 219

<sup>23</sup> José Carlos de Souza, Fazendo teologia numa perspectiva wesleyana. Publisher in the magazine la Revista Caminhando, Year VIII, No. 12-2 Semester 2003. (Sao Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, 2003) p. 125

<sup>24</sup> For Wesley the human being with the Original Sin, distorted his image of God, but he did not lose it completely

<sup>25</sup> I prefer using *Vía Salutis* that better evokes the idea of a road that is traveled over, instead of common *Ordo Salutis*, which calls for the idea of a process as if it were a sequence of steps.

<sup>26</sup> Read the document : Juan Wesley y su experiencia con el Espíritu Santo, Sinergia e Implicaciones Sociales, John Wesley and his experience with the Holy Spirit, Synergy and Social Implications, by Rev. Jorge Alberto Ochoa, 2005, México, 14 pp.

<sup>27</sup> Maddox calls it "Responsible Grace".

#### **IV.- THEOLOGY AT THE SERVICE OF THE MISSION.**

The social science of economy just was born and the work of the Scotch economist and philosopher, Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, would not be written till 1776. However, John Wesley, having an integral vision of the Gospel and making an analysis of his social reality as his *locus theologicus*, reflected on the main themes with the view of the mission that God had commanded him, taking advantage of the new born social sciences. Then he wrote: "A serious discourse to the people of England on the status of the Nation", printed in 1778, and "Reflections on the present scarcity of food", in 1773. Wesley, in these works, and without being an economist, considered that though the social and economical indicators seemed to be positive, he advised, on his part, that poverty, misery and hunger were growing tremendously due to the change from a field economy to a new born economy based on the industry.

John Wesley, making reference to the origin of the hunger and unemployment of his own people, concluded that the causes were in the excessive luxury of the rich ones, the monopolies of the food producers; the bad use of the grains by the distilleries, as well as the bad application of the taxes. These circumstances can be found and are present in Latin American societies.

The problem with the academic traditional theology, including the Methodist one, is that, it follows and inverse order in its methodology, the reflection from the faith comes before and the engagement becomes irrelevantly, at the most, as a moral derivation.

Theology starts being significant and relevant for the human being when it departs from an assumed option in a determined context. The difference between the theology of Jesus and the one of his opponents, the pharisees, is in the contents and in the methodology followed by one and the others. While Jesus places himself in human level and pays attention to the signs of the times and make entrance to the relative and provisional in theology, the pharisees are immersed in the theological truths of their religion, and from there they want to land in concrete situations that are judged according to the truth of their religion.<sup>28</sup>

Jesus identifies himself with the poor, according to Matthew:

*40 And the king will answer them: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me".*

*45 Then he will answer them: "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."*

*Matthew 25.40,45*

Following the Gospel according to Matthew, the eternal salvation and condemnation play the roll, at last, in the historical praxis of the liberation of the poor and the ones who suffer, and in their disregard from our part, respectively. Consequently, the Methodist theology affirms that the salvation is not static, but dynamic, where the responsible response of the human being to the Grace of God is fundamental to keep on growing in the *Via Salutis*, and who does not grow in the Grace, he will decrease in the Grace.

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<sup>28</sup> Juan José Tamayo-Acosto, *op.cit.* p. 60

As it was seen, Wesley departed from his pastoral experience and not from the mere theological speculation, in such a way that he incarnated a ministry sustained by a principle of the union among theology and praxis, pastoral and church, church and society. This principle reminds us that from the particular angle of the Wesleyan movement, the theology is always at the service of the mission of the church, and that the social and economical conditions, from which we execute our ministries, determine our particular focuses concerning the mission, evangelism and pastoral assignment, the way as Wesley expressed it through his life and thought<sup>29</sup>.

Bonino affirms that it does not exist a way that leads us directly from the revelation to the theology, the mediation of the praxis is required, and this obliges us to suspect the attempts of the idealists to do theology; it also shows that the definitive ambiance of the praxis, as well as the theological reflection is the social-political.

### V.- LOCUS THEOLOGICUS

Every theology is done from some place ---it has a *locus theologicus*--- sometimes it is done in a declared and explicit form, sometimes in a latent and not-confessed form. Theologies of the Liberation are located, decisive and consciously, in a political and social place of the poor, In the route of the oppressed ones, in the route of the margined ones, the poor ones constitute the hermeneutical place and the historic subject of the theology of the liberation.<sup>30</sup>

I still remember when in 1994 I was glad to meet Samuel Ruiz, a catholic bishop who lived in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, some months before the indigenous revolt in the Mexican state of Chiapas. He was designed intercessor between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). As time went by, the Mexican government got distant with the bishop, arguing that he couldn't perform a role as an intercessor because he was in favour of the indigenous cause. In a press interview, bishop Samuel Ruiz<sup>31</sup> was asked about his presumed partiality and he answered in a natural way: "*Of course, I am partial. I am in the side of the poor ones, the margined ones, and the indigenous ones because it is a command of our Lord Jesus Christ to do it in this way, I don't understand why are you surprised.* Obviously the Mexican government decided to deny recognition bishop Samuel Ruiz as a mediator in this conflict which has not been solved until today.<sup>32</sup>

Paraphrasing theologian Juan Luis Segundo<sup>33</sup>, we affirm that all theology is political, even the one which does not talk or think in political terms, and doing theology without taking count the conscious form of politics, it is a bad decision, because this form of theology is commonly associated with the status quo. Jürgen Moltmann, a Protestant German theologian agrees saying that it is completely impossible to elaborate a non

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<sup>29</sup> Federico A. Meléndez, Ética y Economía, el legado de Juan Wesley a la Iglesia en América Latina, Ethics and Economy, the legacy of John Wesley to the Church in Latin America. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Kairos, 2006) pp. 10 y 11

<sup>30</sup> Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, op. cit. p. 62

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Ruiz García, a Roman Catholic bishop was born in 1924, he performed the episcopacy in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas Mexico from 1959 to 1999. This diocese is characterized by having the poorest people and the highest number of indigenous.

<sup>32</sup> The Mexican Government compromised to fulfill the Resolutions of San Andrés Larrainzar Chiapas, but it hasn't done it in any way up today.

<sup>33</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, Liberación de la Teología. In Juan José Tamayo Panorama de la Teología Latinoamericana (Navarra: EVD, 2001) p. 573

political theology. Autonomineed no political theologies have usually done tactics alliances with political movements, often with conservative parties<sup>34</sup> which have reinforced people oppression.

We must be aware that all the theology, be simple or more complex, it has been done, it is done, and it will be done from certain social place we cannot pretend ignoring , it means we cannot liberate ourselves from the *hermeneutical circularity*, the fact is that some theologies are aware of it, and they confess it, meanwhile others are not completely aware, and if they are they will be very carefully to let it knowing. This is the case of theology elaborated in the First World, which resists admitting its partiality and it seldom assumes in a conscious way its social location and its ideological dimension. Another problem is that this theology has a tendency to despotism and to elevate to a usual class something that in reality it is just a thing in a particular perspective, and we must always remember that despotism of a particularity is a tyranny.<sup>35</sup>

As Hugo Assmann<sup>36</sup> a Brazilian theologian wrote, the only way of going of the Christian theology now even in the dominant countries, if they do not want to fall in shamelessness, and if they desire to give historic concretion to the fundamental themes of theology is taking the starting point of going the dependence situation and domination of the two thirds of the humanity with its thirty millions of dead people yearly due to hunger and underfeeding.<sup>37</sup>

When Protestant, catholic or orthodox theologies through the years instead of being liberators they have been oppressive and they have not recognized the dispossessor's voice, we can affirm that indeed, they have been, they are, and they will be heretical. When theologies have legitimated the mighty ones to extend their richness and territories tramping the weak ones, or they have been indifferent to it, they have been, they are and they will be heretical.

When Methodist theology and Methodists of this world are tempted to deny<sup>38</sup>, due to our comfort or defending our status quo, our doctrine and our inheritance –be passively or actively to follow baales we listen attentively to God's prophetic voice and also to John Wesley's:

I beg God allow me, before I go and die, call out my voice once more, like a trumpet call, to alert those who earn and save as much as they can but they do not give as much as they can. These persons fundamentally are who offend the Holy Ghost of God, and they are responsible in a great manner that His grace does not descend in our assemblies. Many of our God beloved brothers, do not have food, they do not have clothes to be covered, they do not have a place to recline their head why do they suffer a lot?

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<sup>34</sup> Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *op. cit.* p. 58

<sup>35</sup> Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *op. cit.* p. 68

<sup>36</sup> Catholic ex-priest , Doctor in theology, "master" in social services. He is a professor of Doctorate courses in Methodist University of Piracicaba, Brazil.

<sup>37</sup> Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *op. cit.* p. 54

<sup>38</sup> An example of this is the terrible villainy of mister George Bush, United States of America president, with his invasion wars to other nations, with the death of thousands of innocent human beings. Up till now, this person has not been ex-communicated from the United Methodist Church.

Because you impiously, unjustly, and cruelly keep back which our Lord, their Lord and yours, has put it in your hands in order to you assist their necessities. Look at the trespassed members of Christ, trespassing of hunger, cold trembling, almost naked! Meanwhile you enjoy so much abundance of these world things: meat, drinks and dress For God sake, what are you doing? Don't you fear God, nor respect men? Why don't you share your bread with the hunger? Why don't you cover the naked one with a dress? Haven't you invested in your own expensive clothes what you should appoint it to correspond these necessities?[...] this superfluous consumption do not have God's consent, no your own conscience's. However your argument is that you can! You should be ashamed to put so imprudent words in your mouth. Never use that stupid and nonsensical expression! [...] The one who is doing this is so mistaken that should be excluded from a Christian society.<sup>39</sup>

The *locus theologicus* of a Methodist theology contextualized in Latin America it is not an institution, nor a classroom, or a theoretical reflexion no matter how ortodoxical it is. But they are best their people avid of salvation and liberation, they are consisted by our people's happiness and necessities, their hopes and desires, their disappointments and demands, they are their streets, their town squares, their markets where our countries heart really beats. This change in the *locus theologicus*, paradigms and above all methodologies will be necessary, first to liberate the Methodist theology itself from its ballasts, and the impossibility to incarnate in the everyday reality, and this, indeed contributing and accompanying the Latin America human being in his/ her fights of construct a truthful freedom and justice, it means participation in his / her salvation which Christ has propitiated and inaugurated.

#### **V.-AN ETHICAL ECONOMY**

John Wesley perceived the description of the unemployment, poverty and hunger phenomena next to the rich ones' comfort and the opulent society indifference in front of the poor ones cry, thus Wesley criticized it from ethics, because for him the economical life could not be separated from the general Christian life, the use of material resources especially property and money was one of his constant worries in his mind.

Eighteenth Century was the beginning of a new economical and social order known as Industrial Capitalism, its father, Adam Smith, affirmed that the objective is to increase to the maximum gains and he confess that the motive is the insatiable egoism of each human being. Adam Smith and John Wesley were coetaneous, but Wesley did not share, in any way, Smith's points of view about the increment of richness or gains to the maximum based on human egoism. As Federico Meléndez<sup>40</sup> reminds us, for Wesley the Basic theme was not how to become richer but how to become more Saint..

To Wesley a Methodist could not be because by law all the resources belong to God. Human being in not the owner but the steward. Thus, he did not only share his famous rules of "Earn as much as you can", in an honest and lawful way, and "Save as much as

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<sup>39</sup> John Wesley, Sermon: El porqué de la ineficacia del cristianismo. Because of the inefficiency of the Christianity. Obras de Wesley Tomo IV (Tennessee: Wesley Heritage Foundation, 1996), pp. 299-300

<sup>40</sup> Federico A. Meléndez, op. cit., p. 81

you can” it means don’t waste in luxuries and delights, but he emphasizes with vehemence “Give as much as you can” as well, provide to you and your family, to the Faith family ones and to all human beings. A Methodist should not accumulate richness, even though he had worked hard or he had tried hard saving. Working and saving were no t ways to become rich but to cover the basic necessities for the person himself/ herself, his/her family, the believers’ ones and to anyone who needed the most essential welfares, in other words, for the poor ones<sup>41</sup>. Thus, in order to the Methodist were conscious of the necessities of the ones who has less, Wesley would request them to visit personally sick people and the poor ones as we have studied before.

Theodore Wesley Jennings well affirms: “*For Wesley the unique lawful clamour of the Earth resources, it is not based on industrial or capital, enterprise or work, but it is in our neighbour’s necessities.* Because of this Meléndez affirms that there is an abyss between the “capitalism spirit” and the “Wesleyan ethics”, and that this Methodist ethics represents an exception in the Protestant ethics of its time.

Nowadays in Latin America it happens that ethics and economy are not entailed. The idea of no relation between ethic values and economical life has facilitated the supporting of corrupted behaviours passing on the human being’s dignity. In our continent pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity live together. However, all humanity is included in an accelerated globalization, in other words, in the procedures of scientific, technological, social, political and fundamentally economical changes. Though reality is this, science and technological advances are not ruled under ethic codes, but they are at the Trade and capital service, no to the human being’s welfare, it jeans that these developments (for instance medical or from different technologies) are usually just accessible to whose have acquiring power enough .

Doctor René Padilla<sup>42</sup> affirms that if poor ones’ poverty increases at the same time that there is an economical increment in a national level, then it is clear that it is not about an economical problem only, but an essential ethical one, many people’s poverty increases because there is goods accumulation in few hands. We must remember that according with CEPAL information in 2006, this continent and Mexico in particular, are the most inequable economical regions in a World scale. In many Latin-American countries experts inform us that the region macro economy increases and that we are going through the “good way”, meanwhile we see how the minimum wages each time have less acquiring power, and this is an example that we do not have just an economical problem but an ethic one too. Franklin Canelos asseverates that the reality of the impoverishment in Latin America and other undeveloped continents is due to the neoliberalism paradigms failure.

Governments’ economical politics and international financial entities, Dr Meléndez says, just privilege and protect great investors and those who have acquiring power to buy. Poor ones are unimportant for trading because they do not have acquiring power to participate in it. The mobiles that impel trading in Neoliberalism are always utilitarian.

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<sup>41</sup> It is commendable to read John Wesley following Works: Sermon Use of money and the good stewardess. Wesley’ Works, volume III. Sermon Richness Danger and About Richness Wesley’. Works volume IV. (Tennessee: Wesley Heritage Foundation, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Padilla, C. René, Economía humana y economía del Reino de Dios, con un ensayo sobre la crisis argentina en el marco de la globalización. Human economy and economy of the Kingdom of God, with a test on the Argentine crisis within the framework of globalizacion. (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2002).

Neoliberalism is discriminatory because it can increase richness but it does always impoverish the mass and on expenses of natural resources over exploitation polluting rapidly our planet. Certainly the economical model of most of the countries of this continent must be changed. Thus Federico R. Meléndez affirms that we need restating an economical ethics based on love and social justice principles, he agrees with René Padilla saying that it is urgent to promote an ethical revolution which indeed contains the values represented by the Jubilee. The great problems aggravating such as environmental pollution, aggravated poverty and unemployment is a proof of that the neoliberal economical system, now operating system in most Latin-American countries, needs a drastic transformation.

Eighteenth Century marked the beginning of capitalism in England and Europe, today our century is about the global capitalism and the planetarian culture, with its incidences on the whole world economy. Emigration from country to city, in the eighteenth century England, is still happening now, but from whole continents and from periphery countries running away of poverty and misery. There are thousands of people who emigrate from Latin America to United States and there are millions of dollars in shipments which such emigrants sent to their families.<sup>43</sup>

Emigration phenomena have necessarily to be considered in the new economical paradigms which must be created from our Latin-American reality. So it is necessary that United States of America have a migratory reform, fair and integral understanding this reality, where immigrants are not regarded as delinquents but as workers with rights and obligations.

## CONCLUSION

The oppressed ones, oppression, poor ones, poverty and its consequences were medullar themes for John Wesley, even more; they were not only themes but his true *locus theologicus*:

*Isn't it terrible for a person after working hard during a whole journey, coming back to a poor, cold and uncomfortable house, finding that there is not food enough to restore his/ her wasted energy? You who live comfortably in this land, who does not need more than eyes to see, ears to listen to and hearts to understand all goodness God has given you. Don't you think that there is something worse than looking for food, day after day, without finding it, and maybe having to console five or six crying children asking what their parents do not have to give them? Isn't it true that if it did not exist an invisible hand that impedes them, these persons would be damned God and would die soon? Lack of bread! Lack of bread!*<sup>44</sup>

As we can read Wesley, besides constituting a prophetic force to his generation and the following ones, he give us a legacy which can't do effective theological work based on exclusively in a theoretical and speculative reflexion, including biblical and "orthodox" one as a first act, like if we were on a balcony looking from the top the history way without involving ourselves ( as we used to do) We need to get down from this balcony, as Christ did, and from our walking in the way, love given by God, be manifested in

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<sup>43</sup> Federico A. Meléndez, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, 113

<sup>44</sup> Juan Wesley, Sermón: Afligidos en diversas pruebas Afflicted in diverse tests. Obras de Wesley, Tomo III (Tennessee: Wesley Heritage Foundation, 1996), pp. 174, 175

mercy acts in neighbour's favour, and specially in favour of the suffering ones and the impoverished ones..

If we want that Methodist theology is faithful to Jesus Christ and it incarnates truly in this continent we should not see it as a finished and monolithic product, but as a living organism which is developing. Theology has to say a lot, but it also has to learn a lot and translating the context where it is located, context where God also is revealed. Certainly Methodist theology must be compromised to a suitable study of the Holy Scriptures, to doctrine, but with the same passion it must be compromised to fighting for Justice and Peace, no like obligated exercises in which you can work with conviction, but as our decision fruit of getting down the balcony and walking with the human being in his own history, which is, our own history no matter if we want it or not.

Actions and theology of the Methodist movement of eighteenth century constitute a reminder to us in twenty first century, when the principles of justice, mercy, and truth are ignored by society and State, Christians and specially Methodists – and the whole Wesleyan family – in the World are calling to incarnate the accomplishment Nowadays many ways of oppression, of economical, social and cultural slavery subsist in a planetarian scale. Neoliberalism system keeps on doing damage and It has obligated millions of people to live in extreme poverty. Now we know that there are one hundred ten millions of Latin Americans earning two dollars per day in their dramatic survival, in Meridian Asian panorama is worse increasing to five hundred fifteen millions of persons earning one dollar per day. In Africa, to the south of Sahara, there are two hundred nineteen millions; in the Arabic States, eleven millions, in Eastern, south-eastern Asia and the Pacific four hundred forty six millions. Meanwhile one thousand three hundred millions of human beings live in poverty conditions United States spend six thousands millions dollars in cosmetics and seventeen thousand millions in pets food.<sup>45</sup>.

We should always remember that a great part of the western richness , and in it the English one, as Wesley status was made from African black slave's sufferings and the getting gains by other colonies exploitation, for example India. How could we forget that a very good part of the richness in Europe, was gotten literally, plundering the submitted towns which now they are Latin America, Caribbean, Africa and Asia. How could we forget that United States great part of richness was gains getting in a dishonest way, wars products and countries invasions around the Herat, many of these gains are spotted with blood of millions of innocent beings whose crime was no to be born in the first World. This must not be regarded as a recrimination that supports resentment between countries, but it is indeed a reminder to the first world Nations about a debt and not only a morale obligation but truthful and concreted one with all the impoverished countries of the world, many of them have not been able to leave underdevelopment until today, because the great destruction and exploitation made by developed nations with military power. These developed nations have the obligation to support in a serious manner underdeveloped nations, including Latin America and the Caribbean, not as gifts but as a way of indemnization and compensation to the exploited countries. Doing Methodist theologies, from any part of the terraqueous globe without calling out the prophetic voice about these realities is to bring oneself to cynicism.

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<sup>45</sup> Manifiesto contra el Neoliberalismo, Demonstrate against the Neoliberalism 2004, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

The force and the characteristic of a Contextual Methodist Theology from Latin America radicate in its entailment with the oppressed ones historical project, assuming justice causes, life, freedom, dignity, which will have to concrete historically in the human rights defence of whom are privated of them in giving voice to those who does not have it, specially the subjugated women and the relegated indigenous people. This is about a Theology, which is universal but at the same time goes through a certain and concrete context of Latin America. A theology, any theology, which does not go to the concrete irremissibly falls in abstraction or even worse, in imposition of something particular as universal, like it is frequently happening in United States theologies.

As a final note deserves to say that a distinctive and characteristic item of Latin-Americans that it will be notice in our theology, are the emotional expressions of our faith, which are translating by gestures, liturgies, hymns and chorus, that there are from de more conservative and traditional from American and European inheritance to the charismatic way passing through the Latin-American way. I wish to conclude this paper with a hymn written by Doctor Manuel Vigueras Flores a Mexican Methodist pastor and hymnologist I consider that it can resume this Methodist theological and Latin-American contextual proposal.

#### BREAD AND PEACE

1. - Hunger multitudes  
in cruel abandonment,  
anguished solicit;  
bread and peace  
bread for soul  
bread for body.  
“You satiate them  
Jesus tells us”

2.-This world gets mad  
and the evil super abounds,  
life is despised;  
and terror governs.  
we beg mercy  
Lord of the life,  
forgive your people  
of proud heads.

3. - Wars of hate and revenge  
tear nations,  
Your creatures beg  
bread and peace,  
enliven us  
our sleeping consciences  
doing with you  
a better world.

4.-May the faith I profess  
producing its works  
assisting the thirsty one  
and the hunger of God  
May I assist my bother  
who lives oppressed  
and he may find in your grace.  
bread and peace.

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