

“THE WORLD IS MY PARISH”
—IS IT? WESLEYAN
ECCLESIO-MISSIOLOGICAL
CONSIDERATIONS FROM A
CONTEMPORARY LATIN
AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

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What mystery is this! . . . Is not scriptural Christianity preached and generally known among the people commonly called Methodists? . . . Why is not the spiritual health of the people called Methodists recovered? . . . Why has Christianity done so little good, even among us? . . . Plainly because we have forgot, or at least not duly attended to those solemn words of our Lord, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.” . . . But why is self-denial in general so little practised at present among the Methodists? Why is so exceeding little of it to be found even in the oldest and largest societies? . . . The Methodists grow more and more self-indulgent, because they grow rich. . . . But how astonishing a thing is this! How can we understand it? Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be!) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency in process of time to undermine and destroy itself? . . . Riches naturally beget pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity.¹

As Wesley neared death, Methodism had become sick. In this sermon of 1789 Wesley recognized that after five decades of revival

it was not holiness, “inward and outward in all its forms,” that had spread over the land, but the sickness of “wickedness of every kind.” As in Wesley’s latter days, it seems to me that Methodism today is sick in many parts of Latin America, as it may be elsewhere.

A problematic theological issue for Latin American Methodism is a weak ecclesiology. I would therefore like to explore, from a Latin American perspective, within the context of changes in North American Methodism that have affected Latin American churches, the following missiological affirmations of John Wesley: “I look upon the world as my parish,”² and “you have nothing to do but to save souls.”³ These affirmations will guide us as we seek theological criteria for an ecclesiological reorientation that may help our Latin American churches overcome our corporate weaknesses, and, at same time, reaffirm our missiological calling “to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and spread scriptural holiness over the land.”⁴

IS THERE A WESLEYAN ECCLESIOLOGY?

Raised more than four decades ago, Outler’s question, “Do Methodists have a doctrine of the church?”⁵ is still a controversial issue in the field of Methodist studies. David Carter has pointed out that this is not a new question for Methodism, particularly for British Methodism, due to its genetic *vinculum* with the Church of England.⁶ North American Methodism is another story. The lack of interest in ecclesiological themes among North American Methodist theologians during the nineteenth century is one of the striking consequences of the changes the new church experienced.⁷ In the twentieth century as well, not much attention has been given to the theme in mainline North American Methodism.⁸

One of the most crucial problems faced by ecclesiological studies among Methodist scholars today is the subordination of the doctrine of the church to the doctrine of mission, that is, mission as the key for the church’s self-understanding, as illustrated by the maxim “church is mission.” Kissack affirms that “Methodism has traditionally been less concerned with what the Church is, than what it is for, and has found no activity more important than

soliciting the right response of faith to the preaching of the gospel. The word ‘sent’ has more significance for the Church’s understanding of itself than the word ‘is.’”⁹ Much has been said about the missional understanding of Methodist ecclesiology, according to Outler, and later Baker, as functional. This rationale often goes back to Outler’s argument that Methodists are much more concerned with church *in actum* than with church *per se*.¹⁰

In light of the tendency that Kissack has rightly articulated, Bryan Stone makes a somewhat surprising statement from a Latin American perspective:

The ecclesiology that currently underwrites the contemporary practice of evangelism—at least that which predominates in North America—is at best an ecclesiology where the church is either instrumentalized in the service of “reaching” or “winning” non-Christians, or a reduction of the church to a mere aggregate of autonomous believers, the group terminus of individual Christian converts. *Such an ecclesiology derives from an alternative social imagination made possible by modern, liberal philosophical and capitalist economic assumptions about history and about the nature of the self and its agency in the world. . . . The Church becomes a whole that is actually less than a sum of its isolated, autonomous parts, each of which is busy pursuing its own private self-interests (including “getting saved”).*¹¹ [emphasis mine]

Furthermore, reacting to the notion that in Methodism church was derived from mission, which makes mission a central and crucial mark of the church, Stone makes a sharp comment:

Especially in North America, missional ends are . . . developed as if the salvific social creation called “church” does not really matter. Mission becomes the central and crucial mark of the church rather than ecclesiality being the central and crucial mark of mission. It is then a simple step to disembody mission, separating it from the worship, practices, disciplines, and saintly lives—in short, “the body”—that constitute the church as God’s holy new creation. From this development, I think, Wesleyans in North America have never quite recovered.¹²

With Stone's methodological approach, in which missiology depends on ecclesiology and ecclesiology on soteriology, we will surely reach different conclusions about the relations between Wesley's soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology.¹³

WESLEY'S ECCLESIOLOGY

Wesley's ecclesiology is defined sometimes as Anglo-Catholic, other times as classical Reformed, and yet again as radical Protestant. Without ignoring the importance of such contributions to the discussion of Methodist ecclesiology, I would like to take another entry point for this discussion, trying to explore a different trajectory at the center of Wesley's theology and practice: Christian life as *via salutis*. Wesleyan theology in Brazil, particularly the work of Rui Josgrilberg, prioritizes this soteriological emphasis in Wesley's theology.¹⁴

Wesley's irregularities, particularly after 1738, were justified not only by pragmatic and functional reasons raised out of the missionary-evangelistic demands faced by the Methodist revival¹⁵ but also by other theological opinions and pastoral experiences that came to influence Wesley's thought and practice over those years. By the late 1740s, in the context of his "irregularities," Wesley had gone through some crucial theological reinterpretations of the doctrine of the church in his pastoral and evangelistic practices, and more "lawful or unlawful" actions were in store for the Methodist movement in the next four decades. Willingly or not, Wesley developed throughout his life an ecclesiology that much of today's Methodist scholarship recognizes as a complex balance between the Anglo-Catholic understanding of the church and Moravian-Pietist traditions.¹⁶

It seems to me that this insight is crucial for a more accurate understanding of Wesley's ecclesiology, a corrective to its "functional" understanding. To define Wesley's ecclesiological developments as functional is, in my opinion, to downplay the critical balance between his soteriological and sacramental views of the church. Wesley's theology and practice were primarily centered in his soteriology. If soteriology, as "the scriptural way

of salvation” more than “the order of salvation,” was the pivotal element in Wesley’s preaching and teaching, then to characterize his ecclesiology as functional says too little. I would prefer to characterize it as soteriological ecclesiology. Wesley understood salvation as “the entire work of God, *from* the first dawning of grace in the soul, *till* it is consummated in glory.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Maddox insists that Wesley was much more than a pragmatic evangelist.¹⁸ Wesley was a practical theologian, pastor, and evangelist who kept theology and pastoral work in relational interconnectedness.¹⁹

Another soteriological axis present in Wesley’s work was the church as a means of grace. It is in the context of the Church of England that the Methodist revival and its societies promoted and developed its soteriological work. Wesley believed that the original design of the church of Christ was “a body of men compacted together, in order, first, to save each his own soul; and then to assist each other in working out their salvation: and, afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all men from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ.”²⁰ Henry H. Knight reminds us that Wesley did not consider being a faithful member of the Church of England and at the same time a committed participant in the Methodist society at all contradictory. Because the Church of England was presupposed to be the context for Wesley’s Methodist societies, he “saw the means of grace associated to the church as complementary to those of the societies, and as themselves necessary to the Christian life.”²¹ Thus “Wesley had no reservations about encouraging his people to seek God’s grace through the various outward signs, words, and actions that God has ordained as ‘ordinary’ channels for conveying saving grace to humanity.”²²

It is with this soteriological perspective that we must understand the famous emblematic directives of early Methodism: “You have nothing to do but to save souls,” “I look upon the world as my parish,” and “to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and spread scriptural holiness over the land.” These directives constituted an intrinsic and indivisible unity of Wesley’s practical divinity between soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology.

*THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LATIN
AMERICAN AND NORTH AMERICAN METHODISMS*

After an initial unsuccessful attempt to bring Methodism to Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay in the 1830s, Methodist missions were established and consolidated in several Latin American countries by both northern and southern Methodist churches in the second half of the nineteenth century. After so many decades of work, mainline Methodism in many parts of Latin America is yet weak. This observation does not ignore, much less deny, the transformations that thousands of people have experienced in their lives through the work of Methodism. However, many of our Methodist churches in today's Latin America live through serious instabilities and deficiencies in their praxis as God's people. Within the recent globalized capitalistic context, under neoliberal market economy, surrounded by all sorts of postmodern "evangelical" extravaganzas, many of our local congregations and their pastors have succumbed to a new spiritual idolatry of "novelties," as Wesley surely would describe such events. Many of our churches exist largely in a grave crisis in their Methodist identity.

Latin American Methodism cannot be understood without taking into consideration its North American origins. Therefore, the study of the historical developments of early North American Methodism that shaped its ecclesiological doctrine is fundamental for the understanding of the Methodism that was carried to Latin America by the missionaries of both Methodist Episcopal Churches, especially in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century.

I will now explore from a Latin American perspective some ecclesio-missiological considerations related to crucial alterations in North American Methodism. The following considerations are not intended to be a judgment of good or bad, right or wrong, purity or impurity, but are offered as an understanding of continuities in discontinuities and also of discontinuities in continuities in these mutations. The intention of this approach is the development of a theological critique that may help us understand the sources of an ecclesiological weakness in those churches established by the missionary enterprise in Latin America of both Methodist Episcopal

Churches during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the last century. I am aware that this kind of approach may fall easily into what Russell Richey has identified as a jeremiadic historical reading of North American Methodism.²³ However, in light of Richey's argument, my intention is not to deploy criticism as a strategy of coping with our scarce membership growth or with the continuing feuds in some of our churches. Nor do I want to employ any uncritical positivistic reading of and claim to Wesley's teachings to cure our present ecclesiological troubles in Latin America. But neither do I want to ignore their historical mutated mediations in and by North American Methodism.

The first Methodist preachers appointed by Wesley arrived in America as representatives of a renewal movement within the established Church of England, in connection with and under the supervision of earnest Tory churchmen. They arrived in North America a few years before the independence of the thirteen colonies. Their task was to support the early North American Methodism established by migrant lay people outside Wesley's connection in Great Britain. The North American context, however, was quite different from eighteenth-century England. In fact, America at that time was on the periphery of a colonial power. On the one side of the Atlantic, a new industrial and urban society was being engendered in the womb of British power; on the other, the rural and agrarian periphery as the source of raw materials for the imperial center struggled against the exploitation imposed by the metropolis. Preachers sent by Wesley were very early confronted by a political revolution that did not believe in divine royal rights and proclaimed that all people had the right to political and religious freedom. John Wesley's Methodism and revolution were at odds. However, a few years later, in 1784, in order to assure that in the new country Methodists could preserve their soteriological design, Wesley felt that there was a necessity to form an independent Methodist connection in America, albeit still under his supervision but "at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church." In order to assure full spiritual assistance to Methodist people in America, Wesley considered his providences the "more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness."²⁴ But his first concern above all in

the formation of a church was to provide an order that could assure believers' access to the instituted means of grace.

The new religious world remained in its labor pangs for some decades. The Great Awakening that swept New England not only created a new religious mood unknown before, but, with the cooperation of George Whitefield's irregularities,²⁵ had challenged the established religious monopolies in the colonies. Market economy development was the context for the construction of a North American religious setting in which free enterprise and competition shaped the constitutional separation between church and state and the rise of the American Protestant denominations, a different sort of religious voluntary society.

The experimental reinventions of Wesleyan theology took place within a process that Thomas Langford has defined as the "Americanization of Wesleyan theology."²⁶ North American Methodists had to reinvent their soteriology, particularly Wesley's understanding of the fundamental place and role of the poor in the sanctification process;²⁷ reinvent their ecclesiology, in particular the practice of the different Wesleyan expressions of Christian conference as means of grace; and reinvent the nature of their missiology, changing the original Wesleyan design for Methodist preachers, not "to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."

In my opinion, Wesley's soteriology was deeply changed by the early controversy over slavery immediately after the Christmas conference. Soon the struggle against American slavery, "the vilest that ever saw the sun,"²⁸ became, gradually but persistently, a political affair subordinated to planters' economic interests, instead of an article of holiness of heart and life. The soteriological presence of the poorest among the poor in North American Methodist ecclesiology and spirituality was left behind, and discrimination and later segregation were theologically and ecclesiastically sanctioned.²⁹

Notwithstanding, British Methodist preachers appointed by Wesley to North America strongly witnessed to the Methodists' deep aversion to the sin of slavery. Russell Richey reminds us that "freedom from sin and freedom from slavery belonged together, so early Methodists thought."³⁰ In the organization of the Methodist

Episcopal Church, American Methodists followed faithfully Wesley’s admonition regarding the exercise of their full liberty. Under the leadership of Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, the 1784 Christmas Conference once again openly reiterated Methodist opposition to slavery. Yet, when the Methodist founding fathers determined that all Methodists who owned slaves between the ages of forty and forty-five should emancipate them in twelve months, they also opened an exception to their strongly worded opposition. The rule would be applied only when the law of the states in which Methodists lived allowed such emancipation. The whole issue of slavery was going to receive a reinterpretation quite different from that understood in Wesley’s General Rules. Within the political framework of the North American capitalist society, “the cost of antislavery proved high, too high for Methodism to sustain. But the cost of giving up proved high as well.”³¹

In 1780 Asbury considered “purity, as he defined it, . . . far more important than unity—an admirable sentiment—as purity for Asbury at this time included both sacramental and social purity, but four years later Asbury was of opinion that unity was more important than the loss of purity that attended slaveholding.”³² For the next three decades a soteriological necessity would yield more and more to a very controversial political expedient, within and outside the Methodist camp; freedom from slavery became more and more a “spiritual” matter and institutional slavery was viewed as an economic necessity. General and annual conferences sometimes had fierce confrontations on the issue of slavery, but several of them were quite silent on it. The 1792 Conference deleted the expression “of the bodies and souls” from the *Discipline* that restricted “the buying or selling of the bodies and souls of men, women, or children, with an intention to enslave them.”³³ Thus salvation of the soul was to become the core of North American Methodist soteriology. Amelioration instead of emancipation was accommodation to worldly standards—to the slaveholder’s world.³⁴

In the decades following Asbury’s death, the change in the understanding of slavery among North American Methodists was motivated by their increasing concern for growth and organization.³⁵ However, church growth, understood as increasing membership numbers, was not a major priority in the very beginning of

the Methodist Episcopal Church—holiness was. Despite facing internal and external troubles for their antislavery witness, Coke and Asbury in their introduction to the 1796 Minutes of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church would still dare to affirm, “Our grand object is to raise and preserve a holy and united people. Holiness is our aim; and we pay no regard to numbers, but in proportion as they possess the genuine principles of vital religion.”³⁶ Political pressures against Methodist antislavery preaching increasingly became an obstacle to Methodist evangelistic work, including among the slaves. In the retreat to a more introverted understanding of Christian salvation, “Methodism lost something of itself. . . . For Methodists, as for many religious movements, growth and development may look like progress and success from some angles but appear retrogressive and ambiguous from others.”³⁷

The strong argument in favor of a more cautious and moderate attitude toward slavery accompanied the unquestionable church growth of North American Methodism in the following years.³⁸ The increasing membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church manifested God’s approval of Methodist preaching and practices. Donald Matthews calls our attention to this point when he states,

The great success of Methodist preaching was interpreted as the result of Divine pleasure. Excited evangelical oratory, emotional ecstasy, and the constant organization of new societies swept converts into the new Zion at such a speed that it grew from 15,000 members in 1784 to 58,000 in 1790. Confronted with such spectacular results, many preachers might have turned away from enthusiasm for emancipation and contented themselves with religious instruction of the slaves.³⁹

Thus Methodist soteriology in North America was to suffer deep change in its content and form, particularly as regards the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification in its close and inseparable connection with works of mercy and works of piety. This process was influenced by the social and economic transformations experienced within North American society and ended by focusing on individual soteriology, thus disregarding the church’s teaching.⁴⁰ In face of such theology, ministry with the poor as a soteriological mark of the church lost its theological relevance.

Now we turn to an ecclesiological issue in order to clarify matters. North American Methodism in its early stage in the late eighteenth century reproduced Wesley's social religion of societies, classes, and bands as prudential means of grace and as an intrinsic part of his soteriology and ecclesiology.⁴¹

Wesley is clear on this point of social religion when he says, "By Christianity I mean that method of worshipping God which is here revealed to man by Jesus Christ. When I say, this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society, without living and conversing with other men."⁴² Thus, reflecting on the character of the social religion in the process of the growth in holiness of heart and life, Wesley affirms that in order that "his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the Church, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the Church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation."⁴³ Wesley's revival was built on the necessity for social religion.⁴⁴ Christian experience can take place not in solitary encounter with God but only in the relational context of Christian community.

The emphasis of ecclesiology on social religion, however, later suffered a deep alteration when Christian conference as a means of grace became, gradually but persistently, merely a meeting that focused on church polity and business, while revival was engulfed by camp-meeting, and sanctification turned into subjective and individualist experiences. Richey has noted that in North American Methodism "when revivalism became an end in itself, an interiorization and individualization of religion resulted . . . as Methodism found its place in American society."⁴⁵ However, Richey recognizes that while early Methodist revivalism was indisputably individualistic, it is nevertheless possible to portray it "as a communal affair."⁴⁶

As the Church prospered numerically, financially, and institutionally, the spiritual aspect of conference gave way to business and legislation. The Methodist response for the split between conference and revival was, in Richey's view, the "miracle" of camp meeting.⁴⁷ Camp meeting with its individualism, and its instantaneous and emotional message of salvation, radically changed the corporate

nature of the Wesleyan Christian conference. As a consequence, Methodist soteriology increasingly lost its social character and the balanced tension between social and personal holiness, between the works of piety and works of mercy in their interconnectedness, so characteristic of Wesley's social religion.

North American Methodist soteriological holiness became more and more a private and domestic affair.⁴⁸ It became an intimate and introverted experience motivated by and lived in camp meeting revivals and nourished in Methodist chapels and homes, and over the years, less and less at class meetings. A unilateral emphasis on the subjective works of piety displaced works of mercy and tended to obscure the nature of "the church as a means of grace."⁴⁹ In its multiple diversity, from the bottom to the top of the "Methodist machinery," from class meeting to General Conference, Wesley's Christian conference lost its ecclesiological dimension as a means of grace. According to Maddox, this began "the eclipse of the Church as a means of grace in American Methodism."⁵⁰

Such ecclesiological mutation was also expressed in North American Methodist reinterpretation of God's design for Methodism on this continent, evidenced by a deep change in the original Methodist missional self-understanding. Twenty-five years after Aldersgate, when John Wesley in 1763 faced the well-known question, "What may we reasonably believe to be God's design, in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?" his reply was "To reform the nation, and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land."⁵¹ The evangelical revival was a spiritual response to England's national and ecclesial crisis. At stake was the evangelical missional calling vis-à-vis corruption in nation and church. Wesley's concern for the salvation of his soul and the souls of others made clear that not only the nation should be reformed but, in particular, the church. The soteriological importance of the church as a means of grace made its reformation an urgent necessity. Wesley's perception of Methodism's urgent missional calling derived from his soteriological ecclesiology: doing defined by being, being expressed by doing.

The Christmas Conference in 1784, reflecting a different self-understanding in response to a different historical-missiological context, affirmed that God's design in raising up Methodist

preachers in North America was “to reform the continent, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.”⁵² “Continent” instead of Wesley’s “nation,” no more reference to “the church,” and the singular “land” replaced by the plural “lands.”

The United States of America was a new nation trying to establish and consolidate its political institutions and capitalist economic structures, of which slavery was one of the foundations. It is clear that the Methodist Episcopal Church, in such economic and political context, had to show full loyalty to the new nation, to its regimen and government, especially after many Methodists had refused to take the prescribed oath of allegiance during the Revolution.⁵³ But they did this in a very subtle way, substituting “the continent” for Wesley’s “nation, and particularly the Church.”

The separation between church and state, as it was established in the new nation of the United States of America, did not eliminate the deep structural relationship and interconnectedness between religion and society. Since the very beginning of Methodism’s institutional life as an independent denomination, North American Methodists could not avoid theological and practical adjustments, the religious accommodations that would respond to concrete economic, political, and social needs of the new country. Therefore, even when Methodists in North America were aware of national sins such as slavery, an economic and social structure so fundamental for the development of the agrarian and industrial North America, they pretended to maintain distance from such worldly evils. They erected strict boundaries between the Methodist family and the “world.” The new church did not understand that God’s design for them necessarily implied national reformation as Wesley had discerned for his own England. The American continent was their missional locus, not the North American nation. Not just the “land,” but the “lands,” much land, to be conquered, explored, and, surely, exploited.⁵⁴

Such missional understanding of Asbury and other early Methodist Episcopal leaders in North America about “the continent” reproduced the common ideology of *terra nulla* (empty land) of most colonizers since Columbus⁵⁵ invaded the “lands” that came to be known as Americas. Missing in these descriptions are the peoples of “the lands,” the Native Americans. When Richey

mentions the firsthand experience of the Methodist itinerant preachers vis-à-vis the challenges of the continent, the words he uses have to do mostly with geography, not people: rivers, mountains, swamps, thickets, forests, downpours, snowfalls, and mosquitoes, the “wilderness” of the first colonizers! What about the first dwellers of those lands? Furthermore, in Asbury’s *Journal and Letters* the references to Native Americans are almost always in very negative terms, as dangerous, cruel, and barbaric peoples. It is true that on different occasions Asbury manifested his concern about the evangelization of the Native Americans, trying to follow Wesley’s strong recommendations in his 1787 letter on the neglected evangelization of the Indian nations in North and South America.⁵⁶ However, only in 1815, twenty-eight years after Wesley’s letter and one year before Asbury’s death, was the Methodist work among Native Americans unofficially initiated when an irregular preacher established a mission to the Wyandot Indians in Ohio. This was the beginning of official missionary work.⁵⁷

The understanding of the continent as *terra nulla* led North American Methodism to reinforce and deepen its theological and practical schizophrenia already implied in its compromises with slavery interests and in the alterations that broke continuity with Wesley’s social religion as means of grace. In that sense, Methodism in North America renounced Wesley’s concern for the reformation of nation, as well of church, as part of holy living on the way of salvation. It thereby lost touch with Wesley’s soteriological ecclesiology and missiology. According to Richey, the church adopted a “political passivity that made Methodists relatively uninterested in the nature and the meaning of the American political experiment.” North American Methodists ended up adjusting their theology and missionary practices to hegemonic capitalist political and economic interests that have shaped in many ways North American social and religious structures: (1) soteriological “free grace” was reduced to anthropological “gracious ability,” and later to “free will”; (2) Wesley’s social religion was changed to intimate, subjective, emotional, individualistic experience, in which church became merely an instrument for the salvation of individuals; (3) the mutual accountability of the Christian conference, social and personal, across varying Methodist expressions of Christian conversations,

from the inner circle of class meetings to annual preachers' conferences, dissipated in the midst of the massive camp meetings and in the business and politics of the annual conferences; (4) works of mercy, as expressions of Jesus' option for the poor, lost their soteriological nature when turned into charitable "works of benevolence"; (5) "nation," as a concrete reality, with its corporate virtues and sins, the result of human experiments, an arena in which the divine and the demonic reflected the ways people respond to God's love and grace, was turned into an ambiguous "continent," the empty land to be conquered, subjected to the naturalization of politics and socioeconomic relationships; and (6) evangelization was reduced to numeric church growth and middle-class respectability.

These transformations led decades later to the need many Methodists in North America felt, on one side, for a national movement that promoted scriptural holiness, and, on the other, for a movement that upheld a social gospel. Within Wesley's practical divinity, it seems to me, both movements would be inconceivable, inappropriate, a negation of the holiness of heart and life. The General Rules offered to the Methodist people on the way of salvation the provisions for their growth in holy living. Love of neighbor (expressed in the works of mercy) and love of God (expressed in the works of piety) could not ever be separated in the process of working out their salvation. The results of such mutations may be observed in the increasingly divisive processes that characterized North American Methodism throughout the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, when Methodist missions arrived in Latin America, during the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, they arrived already divided into several Methodist denominations and by different theologies and practices. Within such a missionary context, it is not hard to understand the present ecclesiological and missiological difficulties that those different expressions of Methodism face in today's Latin America.

METHODIST CHURCHES IN LATIN AMERICA

The changes within North American Methodism created instabilities and deficiencies in its soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology

that even today deeply affect the life and mission of the Methodist churches in Latin America. In Latin America the continuous breeding of the struggles and conflicts between liberals and conservatives, between traditionalists and charismatics, between ecumenists and anti-ecumenists, between mainline Methodists and Holiness Methodists, between Methodists in general and Pentecostals, come in part from these nineteenth-century North American alterations. These conflicts centered in particular on the issues of freedom for African slaves, the poorest among the poor, on the issue of Christian conference as means of grace, and on the understanding of God's design for the people called Methodists in these lands.

It is true that during the last thirty years or so, significant endeavors have emerged for working to overcome this "crisis of identity," and God's spirit has not abandoned our Methodist people in Latin America. Under inspiration of the ecumenical theology of the *missio Dei*, some of our churches have decided to begin the process of renewal motivated by and in accordance with the Wesleyan roots of early Methodism, particularly in its mandate to "spread scriptural holiness over the land."

In this process, the rediscovering of Wesley's affirmations about his understanding of the way of salvation in its intrinsic soteriological connection, between personal and social holiness, became a crucial factor for a renewed emphasis on the Wesleyan teaching on sanctification. Many Latin American Methodists have affirmed again and again, with Wesley, that true Christianity cannot exist without both the inward experience of personal holiness and the outward practice of the justice, mercy, and truth of social holiness, not because of some ideological option but because it is a soteriological article for Methodists. Again with Wesley we can affirm, "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness."

Despite the persistent presence of an individualistic salvation and inward holiness in the life of many Methodist local churches in Latin America, a spirituality that emphasizes "one-sided spiritualized introverted" practices, the renewal efforts have created many new missionary possibilities for Methodist commitment to the spiritual needs of our peoples. The Wesleyan teaching on "holiness of heart and life" has found increasingly greater expressions in dif-

ferent forms of personal and social witnesses, through concrete responses to diverse evils present in our societies.

We must acknowledge, however, that the “crisis of identity” that has been affecting Latin American Methodism in the last four decades or so is not over and is being experienced also by other mainline denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church and the well-established classical Pentecostal churches. Furthermore, in the last two decades the tremendous growth and influence of the new Pentecostal churches—established in response to postmodern religious demands, with very little connection with Protestant-evangelical theology, or even with classical Pentecostal theology—are new factors that have brought crises to those denominations.

If the heart of John Wesley’s theology is salvation, then the ecclesial marks of a Wesleyan ecclesiology must be soteriological marks. Albert Outler years ago affirmed,

The Church is *one* in the Spirit rather than in any of its institutional structures; it is *holy* in the Spirit, who calls and leads the faithful into that holy living without which none shall see the Lord. It is *catholic*, both in terms of Wesley’s “catholic spirit” and in its radical commitment to actual inclusiveness; it is *apostolic* in the Spirit, who once turned a dispirited rabble into a company of witnesses and servants, and can work this same miracle again—as the Spirit has so often in the history of the Christian community.⁵⁸

Therefore, it seems to me that Latin American Methodists, in order “to serve the present age, [their] calling to fulfill,” should not try to restore or imitate early Methodism—that would be quite impossible. Our worlds are completely different; the needs, the desires, the possibilities, the limitations are deeply distinct. However, by reappropriating the Wesleyan theological legacy in our context, we can try to be obedient to God’s gracious work, as John Wesley and early Methodists did in their own age. Above all, it is necessary to appropriate again and again the centrality of God’s reign for our soteriology, ecclesiology, and missiology, actualizing in our ecclesial context Wesley’s commitment “to save all people from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ.” Under such spiritual

commitment, it seems to me that we Latin American Methodist churches should do the following: (1) Reappropriate Wesley's charge, "you have nothing to do but to save souls," and develop strong ecclesiological concern for an all-inclusive soteriology, a soteriology in which solidarity *with* the poor, not *for* the poor, must be a soteriological article of faith instead of an ideological option, regardless of resistance by the unjust and oppressive economic and political demands of the present powers.⁵⁹ (2) Reappropriate Wesley's affirmation, "I look upon the world as my parish," and develop a strong ecclesiological concern for a spirituality in which, within this world, all God's people may be accountable to the personal and social means of grace on our way to holiness of heart and life, working out our salvation through the disciplined exercise of the works of mercy and piety in the midst of daily life. (3) Reappropriate as a strong ecclesiological concern Wesley's charge "to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and spread scriptural holiness over the land." This would mean assuming as a soteriological article the challenge to the powers in church and society and overcoming all prejudice, in particular against the most vulnerable people in our midst. Thus, with Wesley, we will be able to proclaim, "So that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory."

In face of the tremendous missionary challenges posed by the present Latin American social, political, cultural, and religious contexts to the rather small Methodist churches, I believe that the time has come for us to assert that our major priority should be reappropriating in our historical contexts the original message of early Methodism on the centrality of the church as means of grace. This requires strong spiritual accountability of Christian discipleship in daily life, based on a radical obedience to God's calling for holy living for all creation, through disciplined works of piety and works of mercy, in personal and social holiness of heart and life.

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15. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 143–44. Donald B. Marti, “Rich Methodists: The Rise and Consequences of Lay Philanthropy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in *Perspectives on American Methodism*, ed. Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993), 265–85.
16. John Wesley, *Sermons* (Abingdon Press), 1:537. Bishop Hope Morgan Ward made this the theme of her sermon to the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies on August 19, 2007.
17. See Ivan Abrahams, “‘To Serve the Present Age, Our Calling to Fulfill’: A Different Church for a Different World,” Chapter 5 in this volume.
18. See Paulo Ayres Mattos, “‘The World Is My Parish’—Is It? Wesleyan Ecclesio-Missiological Considerations from a Contemporary Latin American Perspective,” chapter 8 in this volume.
19. Clive Marsh, *Christ in Focus* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 185–86.
20. See Will Willimon, “What If Wesley Was Right?,” Chapter 2 of this volume.

8. “The World Is My Parish”—Is It?

1. John Wesley, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity” in *The Works of John Wesley* (hereafter *Works*), ed. Albert C. Outler, 4:87, 90, 93, 95, 96.
2. John Wesley, eds., Frank Baker, Albert Outler, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, Gerald R. Cragg, W. Reginald Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); *Works*, 25:616.
3. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* [hereafter *Works* (Jackson)], ed., Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 8:310.
4. John Wesley, *Larger Minutes of Several Conversations, Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the first held in London, by the late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the year 1744* (London: John Mason, at the Wesleyan Conference Office, 1862–64), 1:446.
5. Albert C. Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?” in *The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 11–28.
6. David Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome: A British Methodist Perspective on the Church* (Peterborough, U.K.: Epworth Press, 2002), vii. R. Newton Flew, ed., *The Nature of the Church: Papers Presented to the Theological Commission Appointed by the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order* (London: SCM Press, 1952); Colin Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960); Reginald Kissack, *Church or No Church? A Study of the Development of the Concept of Church in British Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1964); Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth, 2000); Geoffrey Wainwright, *Methodists in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995); *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983); “Methodism’s Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation,” in *One in Christ*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1983), 104–34; David Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome: A British Methodist Perspective on the Church* (Peterborough, England: Epworth Press,

- 2002); David M. Chapman, *In Search of the Catholic Spirit: Methodists and Roman Catholics in Dialogue* (Peterborough, England: Epworth, 2004).
7. Russell E. Richey, "Understandings of Ecclesiology in United Methodism," paper presented at the twelfth Oxford Institute. Methodist "tradition suffered in the rough and tumble of evangelistic, frontier oriented, camp-meeting dominated Methodism. . . . Experience, conversion, revivalism thus upstaged tradition."
 8. A work that in some sense has tried to fill this gap is Russell Richey, Dennis Campbell, and William Lawrence, eds., *United Methodism and American Culture*, 4 vols.; *Connectionalism: Ecclesiology, Mission, and Identity*; *The People Called Methodist: Forms and Reforms of Their Life*; *Questions for the Twenty-first-century Church: Doctrines and Discipline*; *Marks of Methodism: Theology in Ecclesial Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997–2005).
 9. Kissack, *Church or No Church?*, 114.
 10. Albert Outler, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 26.
 11. Bryan Stone, "Evangelism as Ecclesial Holiness," paper presented at eleventh Oxford Institute.
 12. *Ibid.*, 3.
 13. *Ibid.* Stone provocatively affirms, "The criterion for measuring Christian evangelism is not 'effectiveness' in reaching the world or 'winning' people for Christ. Indeed, as the cross makes abundantly clear, Christians are not called to 'win.'" Therefore, in order to challenge the prevailing evangelistic practices in most of our churches' outreach programs, practices that reflect the logic of "liberal, philosophical, and capitalist economic assumptions about history and about the nature of the self and its agency in the world, . . . the logic of evangelism must be the logic of witness rather than the logic of accomplishment, the only criteria governing such logic being faithfulness and incarnation, rather than sheer effectiveness."
 14. Rui Josgrilberg. "A Motivação Originária da Teologia Wesleyana: O Caminho da Salvação," *Caminhando* 8, no. 12 (2 Semestre de 2003): 103-24.
 15. Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 306–7. According to Outler, Wesley's expositions of the doctrine of the church, published in the form of sermons and tracts, have "more to do with the practical issues of churchmanship than with its theological foundations. . . . In all this material the only distinctively Wesleyan accent is the insistence that the church is best defined *in action*, in her witness and mission, rather than by her form of polity." Outler, however, also recognizes that "despite his own irregular position in the Church of England, Wesley seems never to have felt the need to amend the basic ecclesiology which he had developed at Epworth and Oxford, *before* the rise of the Methodist societies."
 16. Randy Maddox, "Social Grace: The Eclipse of the Church as a Means of Grace in American Methodism," in *Methodism in Its Cultural Milieu*, ed. Tim Macquibban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, Westminster College, 1994), 131: "It is now generally agreed that the fruit of this practical venture was a creative synthesis of Anglican and Moravian/Pietist emphases: namely, an ecclesiological

- ideal of small intentional gatherings linked integrally to the corporate worship of the larger Church (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*). What is not as often seen is that this ecclesiological synthesis was more than a pragmatic compromise. Wesley's pastoral insistence on the integral relation between intentional small groups and traditional Christian worship was grounded in his most fundamental convictions about human nature, the human problem, and the Way of Salvation."
17. *Works*, 2:156 [emphasis mine].
 18. Randy Maddox, "John Wesley: Practical Theologian?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 23:1&2 (Spring and Fall 1988): 122-47; *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).
 19. Maddox, "Practical Theologian?" 135.
 20. *Works*, 2:302.
 21. Henry H. Knight, III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 95.
 22. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 193.
 23. Russell Richey, "The Role of History in the Discipline," *Quarterly Review* 9/4 (Winter 1989), 13.
 24. *Works* (Jackson), 13:252.
 25. See Frank Lambert, "Peddler in Divinity": *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton University Press, 1994).
 26. Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 70-88.
 27. See Steven W. Manskar, "Good News to the Poor? The United Methodist Church and the Ministry with the Poor," http://www.gbod.org/hpmc/docs/poor_manskar.pdf.
 28. *Works* (Jackson), 13:153.
 29. For a later sanction of this process in the formation of The Methodist Church in 1939, see Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).
 30. Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), xii. On *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 1:191.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Paul O. Evans, "The Ideology of Inequality: Asbury, Methodism, and Slavery," (PhD diss. Rutgers: State University of New Jersey, 1981), 205.
 33. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1792* (Philadelphia: Parry Hall, 1792), 47.
 34. Asbury would state in 1809, "We are defrauded of great numbers by the pains that are taken to keep the blacks from us; their masters are afraid of the influence of our principles. Would not *amelioration* in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at their *emancipation*?" *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 2:536. Asbury's changes on American slavery were vividly exposed in the 1804 General Conference episode narrated by James Jenkins in *Experience, Labours, and Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins of the South Carolina Conference* (printed for

- the author, Columbia, S.C., 1842; lithographed and printed by the State Commercial Printing Company, 1958), 142.
35. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 28–29.
 36. *Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church*, 9th ed., 59. Quoted in *History of Methodist Missions: To Reform the Nation*, ed. Wade Crawford Barclay (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church, 1949), 2:79.
 37. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, xii.
 38. J. Gordon Melton, “The Rise of African American Methodism, 1800–1880: An Initial Demographic Exploration,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church, July 20-22, 2007, in Chevy Chase, Md.
 39. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 13.
 40. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 140.
 41. Rupert Davies, “Methodist Societies: Developments in the Early Societies,” *Works*, 9:14. See also the 1810 diagram of the Methodist itinerant system, designed by G. Stebbins and G. King, Broadside, New York: John Totten, 1810–11 [?], Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>.
 42. *Works*, 1:533.
 43. *Ibid.*, 13:313-14.
 44. *Ibid.*, 1:533. See also *Works* (Jackson), 14:321.
 45. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 17.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. For an elaborated discussion on the nature, role, and importance of camp meeting structures in nineteenth-century Methodism see Ellen Eslinger’s *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), and Charles Albert Johnson’s *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion’s Harvest Times* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Press, 1985).
 48. On the domestication of North American Methodism, and its accommodation to middle-class respectability, see Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
 49. Maddox, “Social Grace,” 135.
 50. *Ibid.*, 131.
 51. “The Large Minutes of Several Conversations Published during the Life of Mr. Wesley” in *The Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First, Held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley. A.M., in the year 1744*, vol. 1 (1744–98) (London: John Mason, at the Conference Office, 1862–64), 446–7.
 52. *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., the Rev. Francis Asbury and Others, at a Conference in December 27, 1784* (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785), 4. “to reform the continent by spreading the scriptural holiness over these lands,” in Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions*, 8 [emphasis mine].
 53. Evans, *The Ideology of Inequality*, 223.

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54. The North American Methodist emphasis on the continent is explained in more detail in Richey's "Methodism as New Creation: An Historical-Theological Enquiry," in *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation*. ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 73–92.
55. Homi K. Babha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 246.
56. *Letters*, **A Letter to Francis Asbury, London, 25 November 1787, 8:24**. See also *Works*, 2:67.
57. **Elmer T. Clark**, *An Album of the Methodist History* (New York: Cokesbury Press, 1952), 247.
58. **Albert C. Outler**, "Methodism in the World Christian Community," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 249.
59. See **Walter Wink**, *Naming the Powers, Unmasking the Powers, Engaging the Powers*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984–92).