

Evangelism: a Catholic Methodist approach

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by

R. F. Leao Neto

Introduction

This paper is written in a rush just before going off for the summer holiday. Apart from other obvious limitations it suffers from a condition that could be corrected had I had more time. It lacks a distinction between two of its themes, i.e., at times the paper equates mysticism with evangelism. My only hope is in what Paul Ricoeur believed that there is communication of meaning and new revelation in predicative imprecision.

Not least because in the case at stake there are startling proximities between evangelism and mysticism, as there is proximity between evangelism and service. The feast of the church, Pentecost, is the best example of this confusion and lack of distinction. The mystical and pentecostal experience of receiving the Holy Spirit, which led to visible signs like the blowing of a violent wind, the tongues of fire and the gift of other tongues became an evangelistic experience. It also was a plural experience of the Gospel as the whole commotion was about including the culturally and linguistically different 'other': "each one heard them speaking in their own language... how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?" (Acts 2. 6).

This helps me not to feel so bad about the slight confusion in this paper. I hope there will be communication of meaning and new dimensions that confusion will suggest to the reader.

The theme for this paper comes from one of the questions proposed for the Systematic Theology group, 'how is it possible to engage in evangelism without precluding the "other?'. It tries to deal with the fear that evangelism, or communicating the means of grace, cannot be combined with the social responsibility dimension of the life of the church.

I recently got a present from a member of Hinde Street Church of an unwanted sculpture of John Wesley on horseback. A certificate proudly announces: "[This] is No 21 [casting] of a worldwide limited edition of 150 copies by artist, Jackie Warren, in celebration of 250 years of experience in education, 1748-1998". I don't know yet how other members of my family will react when I bring the (peculiar) sculpture home. I love it. Love at first sight. I just notice a gap, almost a contradiction between the statement on the certificate and the scene cast in bronze. In the sculpture, John Wesley presents a Bible to a young Kingswood scholar. This, I think implies a religious act of teaching how to read and also teaching something about Christianity. However, the accompanying certificate certainly does not state this as it says: "Kingswood School was founded by John Wesley in 1748 and is the world's oldest Methodist educational establishment. For 250 years it has shown that Christianity has something special to offer education by developing a caring, compassionate, self-disciplined environment in which young people can achieve their potential and learn to serve the community." I think we lost something along the way in these 250 years of history.

Although it is appropriate that the education should be secular, the above still points to a contradiction within socially related church initiatives that have to do with the message we have to proclaim. How do we regain the ability to talk about God in the context of present day culture?

1. The Methodist duality

By nature of their theological heritage, Methodists have or should have a two fold approach to the Christian faith, namely, a mystical strand within their spiritual life and at the same time a prophetic expression of their faith. This characteristic does or must impinge on the way they live and proclaim their faith, the way they seek to invite others to join in the path and the Way of Jesus.

Although Methodists should or must own this heritage, it is not an easy or comfortable tradition to be faithful to. It demands the Christian Methodist to carry in their very identity this duality. They belong to two different spiritual worlds, to two different religious fields, with their specific languages and cultures. Because of this complex profile, this ambiguity in the very root of their being, Methodists paradoxically tend to struggle to let it be and to live the entirety of both a mystical and prophetic Christian life. Where and when this combination happens and the duality is allowed to produce its unique fruit, that is when Methodism is found at its best.

Anybody who lives in and belongs to two completely different cultures, who have to use two distinct languages as my own family has to do, knows that it is an art to be both at the same time. We as parents have to remind, and encourage, and require that our bicultural and bilingual children have faith in themselves to be a hundred percent Brazilian and a hundred percent English. Although it is a mathematical impossibility, a

geographical oddity, it is culturally enriching and makes life full and abundant, and in fact, that is what they are.

The duality of my children's identity illustrates what it is that Methodists are. They have a dual identity, they are both, in what concerns the inner life and the life of corporate worship they are mystics; in what relates to the social, political, economic and environmental context they are the ones who help the needy and then they ask, in the way of Dom Helder Camara, the former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Recife and Olinda, why are there poverty and poor people?

Mystical

I opened one of the volumes of the Letters of John Wesley, randomly and in great expectation for a confirmation and a reference to Mysticism. The Wesleyan methodology, although very risky, seems still to work. My first try comes across like a spiritual revelation. It is unveiled at the bottom of the very first page I tried, straight way, a phrase on the very subject matter: "I am no great friend to solitary Christianity"¹. Here Mr. Wesley is writing to Lady Maxwell in August 17, 1764 on what we would call today spiritual direction, trying to help her with issues around her spiritual journey.

The letter as a whole has a very spiritual and mystical tone to it. Wesley asks, "Shall you stop here?" then he remarks, "God forbid! This is only the beginning of wisdom. You are not to end here... you shall know that love of God which passeth knowledge. You shall witness the kingdom of God within you, even righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."²

¹ John Telford, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, Standard Edition in eight volumes, Vol. IV, p. 261, August 17, 1764, London, Epworth, 1931.

² Telford, *Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 260-261, August 17, 1764.

The letter encourages as it spells out a thirst for God: “faith living, conquering, loving faith, is undoubtedly the thing you want.” The language is all about desire, and promises, not for the future but for now, it is also about the ability to see with the third eye, the eye of the spirit, to be a visionary: “and see, as it were, Jesus Christ set forth, evidently set forth, crucified before your eyes? O hear his voice... all this is for you”³. The letter carries on talking about “the religion of the heart” as Wesley exercise his own mysticism: “I seem to see you just before me... upright of heart, full of real desires for God, and emerging into light. The Lord take you whole!”⁴

Prophetic

The spirituality and mysticism encouraged by John Wesley was not a ‘solitary’ or a ‘stillness’ Christianity, but one of love for our neighbour and service to humanity. At the very beginning of Methodism this was established when they had to face the controversy of stillness brought by a Moravian missionary to the societies in 1739. “John Wesley at once attacked this mischievous form of Mysticism”⁵. This form of search for spiritual grace had for a period of time affected many of their number, including Charles Wesley, by abstaining from taking part in the ‘Means of Grace’. John preaches to them to encourage all those who are seeking salvation to take a proactive approach and partake in the Lord’s Supper and also all other means available, bible reading and prayer, fellowship and practical service to the poor.

The comparison in the relevant Sermon with Moses and the liberation of the slaves from Egypt is startlingly because it goes to the very heart of the matter. The faith we believe and follow is of the heart but like the sacraments it has an outward manifestation. In the

³ Telford, *Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 261, August 17, 1764.

⁴ Telford, *Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 262, August 17, 1764.

⁵ John Wesley, *Wesley’s Standard Sermons*, Volume I, edited by Edward Sugden, third annotated edition, London, the Epworth Press, 1951, p. 237

case of Moses, the outward sign was the liberation of slaves from an oppressive regime. And how did it come about? Not by an inert or passive spirituality.

Enthusiastically the preacher writes: "The Lord said unto Moses, speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward... This was the salvation of God, which they *stood still* to see, by *marching forward* with all their might!"⁶ The emphasis in italics is Wesley's, one can hear him shouting out these points.

The active engagement this Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford is talking about cannot substitute faith and trust in God. The active engagement is a manifestation of that faith and trust. In liturgical terms it is the means of Grace, or the personal devotional life; and in terms of works, it is helping a neighbour or struggling to change unjust structures, both prayers and works he says "God was [is] there... you see, you know, you feel, God is all in all"⁷.

Catholic or Protestant

Because Methodists relate salvation to works (James 2), or because they live their faith in two ways, in terms of acts of piety and works of mercy, they can be considered Protestants with something of a tendency towards Roman Catholicism. For instance, the doctrine of a distinction between salvation and sanctification leads to the idea of the necessity to 'work out your salvation'. This clearly leads to a suspicion that Methodism has an eye on the Vatican. Things are made even more muddled, because they distinguish conversion from Christian perfection, and place great emphasis on regeneration, and assurance.

⁶ *Wesley's Sermons*, p. 250.

⁷ *Wesley's Sermons*, p. 260.

When John Wesley and Methodism were attacked by accusations of popery, amongst other accusations, he was too quick to deny it. Wesley enters into a dispute with the Bishop of Exeter, who had written a pamphlet entitled 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared.'⁸ The sad exchange between the two clergy of the Church of England distorts the true nature of the contribution Methodism brought to the Christian denominations: to be a living expression of two Christian traditions of Pauline and of Saint James' paradigms. Methodism being indeed a movement or the religion of the heart with clear expressions and manifestations in the way people lived and the way history is shaped. If the XVIII Century were a more ecumenical time, maybe Methodism could have been more of a bridge between the two camps, Protestantism and Catholicism, being really true to its duality: an expression of the Christian faith able to proclaim the Gospel in preaching and in serving our neighbour in the Samaritan sense of the word (Luke 10).

Paul Tillich, the theologian who coined the term 'the Protestant Principle', although he was an admirer of the work of Martin Buber, the Jewish thinker of 'I and Thou', Tillich was quite suspicious of Buber's refusal to commit himself to particular political and ideological movements. Tillich considered that fact the result of an obstinate mysticism that prevented Buber from engaging with the reality of the world. The life of the spirit to be true to the human spirit has to relate to the history and the condition of humankind.

Maybe presently, a good example of this proximity of mysticism and prophetism, this proximity of prayer plus all means of Grace meanwhile standing up for justice for the oppressed can be found in the movement of the church of the poor in Brazil, to speak domestically. In that expression of the Church, proclaiming the Gospel is to announce

⁸ Three letters to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compared', John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, Letters to several opponents, and tracts on various subjects of polemical divinity*, Volume VIII, London, the Conference Office, 1812. pp 1-73.

salvation in Jesus and political awareness and action. There in a Roman Catholic movement the duality Methodists are born with is to be found. Not surprisingly some of their theologians have been reprimanded for being close to or influenced by Protestantism.

Because Methodism is two folded it should be able to engage in service and prophetic ministry and meanwhile announce meaning and salvation.

2. Evangelism in the context of Social Work Ministry

In our opinion, Prophetism and Mysticism can express itself in service with a difference. The service to the needy with the difference of offering a relationship. What one offers is a cup of tea and a sandwich then one sits down and talks. The conversation of God is simply part of that conversation.

I see in the context where I minister the difficulty of being true to the duality Methodists should be natural with. The West London Mission, of honourable history and present extensive social work ministry expresses well one very important dimension of the duality mentioned above, namely the social engagement, whilst it seeks ways in which the proclamation of the word and the offer of the means of Grace could be exercised more explicitly.

Evangelism and the encouragement of what concerns the inner life and faith is a problem for church related social work provisions. At the WLM it is a problem because although being owned and managed by the church the social work provisions are at the same time the provision of professional services, operating within all the constraints of a highly regulated activity and above all being run for the church by people who in the majority have no commitment to the Christian faith.

For these very deep-seated reasons and within complex arrangements, the duality of Methodism seems to have been broken. How to restore it? The dilemma, the puzzle that the WLM finds itself with is, how can the church offer good and professional social provisions and be true to its duality of mysticism and prophetism, to its heritage of evangelisation and service, faith and works back together?

This puzzle involving the life of the circuit where I work is a reflection of a wider trend of rejection of religion in society at large, at least in Western Europe. In the face of such a trend the church in our case seems to have softened its stance allowing the uncompromising message it has to proclaim to be reduced to only one of its dimensions, the service to the needy. Although important and carrying the seeds of the Gospel I dare to suggest that the church is not only a provider of social service but rather of a message of salvation that includes social well being but cannot be reduced to it only.

When Donald Soper, WLM Superintendent minister over four decades, died, in 1998, this imbalance became more evident. Whilst he was alive, Lord Soper's ministry veiled the changes imposed by the professionalisation of the social work ministry. He was a champion of religious socialism and evangelism. His ministry was notorious for political advocacy for justice and proclamation of the Gospel for today in the media and in the open air at the speakers Corner and at Tower Hill where he preached for over sixty years every week and to almost the end of his life save for few weeks. In his ministry of socialism, pacifism and evangelism, the duality of Methodism of prophetism and mysticism were fully alive.

In recent years, the WLM has tried to respond to this identity crisis with a new initiative which is directed to having Christian volunteers, students or otherwise, supported by a theological reflection group and mentoring programme in the social work services of the Mission, empowering them to be a Christian Presence within the social work ministry. Spearheading this programme are a number of staff, presbyters and deacons, trying to implement a Chaplaincy to the WLM social work services. Although courageous, this new initiative is incipient and small to tackle the problem.

AMAS, which in this case is not the conjugation of love in Latin for the present tense you singular, but the acronym for **A**ssociacao **M**etodista de **A**cao **S**ocial, the social work ministry and provisions in Brazilian Methodism, in my limited personal experience teaches me that the WLM experience might not be unique. AMAS seems to carry some similar brokenness in terms of its identity. It is common to find AMAS parochial schools, creches, or orphanages on the margins of the life and ministry of local Methodist churches in Brazil, rather than at the centre. At the centre there is preaching and the means of grace. But I wonder if that is in detriment of a more vigorous engagement with the social responsibility of the life and ministry of the church.

The gap between the worshipping congregation and the social work ministry, usage and renting and hiring of the church premises seems not to be exclusive to WLM or the AMAS but a day to day experience of many churches in the UK.

Next, I would like to take a wider view, including a biblical, a roman catholic, and Methodist legacies on how we could serve the present age in prophetic and mystical ways, how that might inform a particular way of engaging in evangelism and mission.

3. Bible two fold emphasis on proclaiming the message and on striving for justice

In the bible one can find an integrated two-fold approach to proclaiming the message and in striving for justice. This duality permeates its texts. Here I will present but a few examples of this emphasis of proclaiming good news and campaigning for justice.

Old Testament

Maybe the more obvious example in the Old Testament is to be found in the prophet Isaiah: “how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation” (Isaiah 52. 7). However this emphasis is all over and in particular in the Prophets. Amos, who was not a preacher, is called to preach the word of the Lord of condemnation and of demand for righteousness. Let us hear: “You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground... You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine” (Amos 5.7-11). And then the very direct text about the link between religious life and justice: “I hate, I despise your religious feasts... I will not accept your offerings... Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-falling stream!” (5. 21-24). “Hate evil, love good; maintain justice... Perhaps the Lord God will have mercy on you” (5.14-15).

The Gospels

This two-pronged way of bringing together justice and intimacy with God is also present in the Gospels. It might be enough if I take the Gospel according to Saint Luke as an example: The Manifesto at the beginning of Jesus ministry in Luke 4 sets the scene of a Mission clearly on the side of the oppressed for their liberation and “proclaims the

year of the Lord's favour". The whole of that Gospel puts forward an agenda of social engagement, healing and helping people plus making disciples. Jesus in the Gospel drives out evil spirits, heals the sick and still calls the disciples, including women (Lk 8). There is the parable of the Sower and the saying about the Lamp on a Stand. There is the sending of the twelve and then of the 72 and in the same chapter 10 the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In so many places in the Gospel of Luke the poor receive special attention, for example the Parable that unfortunately is not in the lectionary of the Rich man and Lazarus in chapter 16. In all of it there is the message of the Gospel and of justice set hand in hand, justice for the oppressed and proclamation of the Good News.

Letters

Just a very brief reference to one of the letters from Saint Paul, Galatians 2, because in this verse the link between mission as evangelism as well as mission as the demand to attend to the social needs of the poor is made very clear and in a positive way: "[Peter, James (the Lord's Brother) and John] agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do" (Galatians 2. 9-10).

4. Charles Wesley legacy

In the recent published biography of Charles Wesley in the year of the anniversary of 300 years of his birth, the author strives to highlight the legacy of Charles beyond writing hymns. In that book, Charles appears as someone who contributed to the Methodist Movement in many ways including making friends and keeping them, writing to them for a long period and sometimes for long after he had met them. According to that book some of the people connected to Methodism could relate much better to Charles than to John, even in some family situations Charles was able to offer friendship that went out of its way to help and to be there for people. Obviously

friendship had to cope also with a difference of opinion and disagreement: “it was two of Charles close friends among the preachers... who posed a far greater challenge... as they took the law into their hands and administered communion... Charles was distressed...”⁹. He starts his elegy at George Whitefield’s funeral with this verse about a friend:

And is my Whitefield enter’d into rest,
With sudden death, with sudden glory, bless’d?
Left for a few sad moments here behind,
I bear his image on my faithful mind;
To future times the fair example tell
Of one who lived, of one who died, so well;
Pay the last office of fraternal love,
And then embrace my happier friend above.¹⁰

Another dimension of Charles ministry was to be a good pastor. This was evident from the very early days of the Holy Club in Oxford. Charles brought in the numbers. His friends gathered around him to study and develop their spiritual life.¹¹ In Bristol and in London Charles had a firm pastoral input into the oversight of the societies. In London he was practically the ‘chair of the London District’ and the ‘de facto’ Superintendent Minister at Wesley Chapel. He offered spiritual direction to many; he was a ‘chaplain’ to the prisoners, who accompanied people to the Gallows praying for them and comforting them until the time of their execution. He gave of his time and of his life to those most in distress: “... the terrible news arrived that his [Charles] wife Sally had caught small-pox. Charles hurried to Bristol to be by her side. It is tremendous testimony to his Christian faith (and I think to his pastoral ministry) that he agreed to take with him a mentally

⁹ Gary Best, *Charles Wesley, a biography*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2006, p. 236.

¹⁰ John and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*: reprinted from the originals, with the last corrections of the authors; together with *The Poems of Charles Wesley* not before published. Collected and arranged by G. Osborn, Volume VII, London, Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1870, p. 425.

¹¹ “Thus the circle of friends became a religious society whose members would live ‘according to the method laid down in the Bible’”. Gary Best, *Charles Wesley*, p. 37.

disordered man called John Hutchinson, whom he had been seeking to help and who was threatening suicide if Charles left him. The ranting and raving Hutchinson made the journey to Bristol a nightmare"¹². On the issue of John's intention of marrying Grace Murray, it was out of a pastoral concern for the survival and the unity of the Methodist movement that Charles stepped in and prevented the marriage from taking place finding the bride another groom.

Charles with his hymn writing, his preaching in a simpler and more direct way than that of John's, his understanding of church, ordination and the sacraments had a fundamental importance to Methodism in terms of its theology. He was able to translate into prayer the experience and the thinking Methodism was developing. People recited his poems because they expressed their faith. Charles also was able to work across different theological strands. He kept Methodism close to the Church of England by the sheer force of his theological stance. With the Calvinists he even tried to bring together the different societies and brands of the evangelical movement: "Whitefield was surprised by how much the Calvinist branch of Methodism had lost its direction during his absence. Charles promised that, if unity could be restored, George would be 'an equal with his brother'... Whitefield thought John was far too autocratic to agree to any dual leadership".¹³ And it must be said that maybe unity could not be restored because of deep seated theological differences. "John initially refused to see Whitefield so Charles went instead. While their friendship was as strong as ever, both men soon recognized each was not prepared to surrender their theological view. Whitefield himself wrote: 'It would have melted any heart to have heard Mr Charles Wesley and me weeping after prayer that, if possible, the breach might be prevented'."¹⁴

¹² Gary Best, *Charles Wesley*, p. 233.

¹³ Gary Best, *Charles Wesley*, p. 203.

¹⁴ Gary Best, *Charles Wesley*, p. 148.

Charles Wesley's legacy demonstrates that by offering friendship, and being a good pastor, finding ways in which to communicate theology and trying one's best to prevent division, being committed to ecumenical relations he brought a tremendous and fundamental contribution to Methodism. He was able to bring together a mystical and living faith with the care for others and an engagement of service and pastoral caring that went out of his way to seek the other and bring them to Christ in a better condition of life. With his different talents and his human and sensitive nature Charles was an effective Evangelist.

5. Evangelii Nuntiandi

The more recent declarations coming out of the Vatican are not encouraging for those interested in interdenominational and inter-religious dialogue and understanding. To find more edifying Vatican documents one needs to go back a few decades. Paul VI wrote an Exhortation at the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council called *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. In it he takes the theme of evangelism. In paragraph 57 and 58 he links the fact that "the Church is deeply aware of her duty to preach salvation to all" with the church of the poor in Latin America, the 'small communities', the church of the poor and how they are "the special beneficiaries of evangelization and at the same time evangelizers themselves." In this link the Pope shows the same two prong approach to evangelism and defending the poor, mysticism and prophetism that we find in the heritage of Methodism. In doing so the Exhortation represents theologically an Evangelism that one can engage with at most secular time in Western Europe, a time which is critical of religion.

It is important to notice the step forward that Paul VI offered the Roman Catholic tradition and other traditions in his Exhortation when he spells out the relationship between evangelization and the contexts where the church finds itself: "Evangelization

loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.”¹⁵ Naturally there is the other side of the argument which is well posed by the text, “But, on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if, in other words, one sacrifices this reality and destroys the unity without which there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation.”¹⁶

My way of putting it is that, if there is any truth it has to be universal, catholic. If there is any truth it has to fit any reality, in every geography and time. If there is any truth to fit all circumstances and to be universal, above all realities it has to be fluid like liquid that takes the form of the container. Within different containers, maybe cultural, linguistic, geographical, even religious, a Gospel truth will be able to adapt to it and be moulded by it and fill it with its content. Adaptability and truthfulness belong to each other. There can only be truth if it is highly adaptable, in this case catholic and universal. The Gospel truth Methodism proclaims has to be catholic, fluid and adaptable.

The Papal paper suggests a dual way for evangelization to work, from the church to the peoples and from the peoples to the church. In both directions it is the same process. “...evangelizing, that is to say, capable of drawing upon the universal patrimony in order to enable its own people to profit from it, and capable too of communicating to the universal church the experience and the life of this people, for the benefit of all”.¹⁷

¹⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 63.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 63.

¹⁷ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 63.

The Exhortation goes on to encourage lay people to exercise the ministry of evangelisation, through family life and relations, through friends and neighbourhood organizations. Serious preparations are demanded to tackle this task, including the ministry of the Word.¹⁸ All of this could not be closer to the legacy Charles Wesley left us of friendship, caring pastorally, and working theologically.

I am very aware that the reader might be considering that the way that evangelization is put so far by the Pope although very authoritative and clear, it might not have quite answered our original question (provided for our working group and cited at the beginning of this paper). We have managed to expand on it, to find other formulation, to exchange terms but the reader might consider that the question remains almost unanswered.

So, may I try and push it further with the help of his eminence to see if I am going to say what for an urban pluralist would quite difficult to assert: “It would certainly be an error to impose something on the conscience of our brethren. But to propose to their consciences the truth of the Gospel and salvation in Jesus Christ, with complete clarity and with a total respect for the free options which it presents – without coercion, or dishonorable or unworthy pressure – far from being an attack on religious liberty is fully to respect that liberty, which is offered the choice of a way that even non-believers consider noble and uplifting. Is it then a crime against others’ freedom to proclaim with joy Good News?”¹⁹

6. Two fold Evangelism to secular folk and to religious ones

¹⁸ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 71-74

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 80.

I can envisage evangelism to a secularized environment and in the context of social work ministry as chaplaincy work with all that it involves, listening to people, offering friendship, pastoral care, and meaningful religious formulations to address the complications of life.

I can see also evangelism in terms of attending the physical needs of those who struggle with the basic necessities of life – bread, shelter, education, health, etc. I can see evangelism in terms of responding to psychological needs – to offer the conditions in which people can grow in confidence and knowledge of themselves. I can see how evangelism can be equated to addressing the spiritual thirst - to show that one is accepted by God, and should be accepted by others and by oneself. It can be equated to helping people to find meaning and direction in life, in particular, towards the transcendent, and translate that into day-by-day life.

But I can see how evangelization should also offer all the above, with the possibility of a process of conversion, a change of direction, a re-connection with God and oneself. This is obviously for those who do not have a faith.

For those who have a religious faith already, evangelization demands always respect for their religion, their cultural background, and their options in life. What is demanded is that one tries to enter into dialogue with and never to try and convert those who already have a religious faith. But to try and find growth for all involved. To enter into a proselytizing exercise trying to convert someone who already has a faith is in my view an offence to the God of all.

Dilemma

The dilemma sensitive Christians/Methodists live in relation to living their faith fully openly and engaging, and meanwhile respecting others can be helped by a deeper understanding of a mystical and prophetic faith; by a wider perspective on evangelism in more natural terms of friendship, care, and meaningful conversations; by respect for limits of culture, geography and history; and by a courageous take on truth and its fluidity and adaptability.

The result of the addition of such characteristics could help the church to regain its evangelistic nature within its social work ministry. This is not an easy task, but the survival of the church in its present historical form is dependent on it.