

# WHEN HISTORY TEACHES US TO THINK THEOLOGICALLY

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## **The case of the Methodist Church in Uruguay**

Reviewing the collective memory of the *Methodist Church in Uruguay*<sup>1</sup> it is significant that in both sides of that historic line, that it is in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the Church avoided the temptation of a Christendom ideology at the time of witnessing.

In the 19th century, the *Methodist Church* weaved networks with several institutions and people, such as Freemasonry and intellectuals. They helped the church to be known and its members to have a quick integration in the country.

In the last decades of the 20th century, during the civil-military dictatorship, working with several people and social organizations, sometimes outside the Christian faith, but they had one mind: DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS.

We believe that revising that historical reality will be useful for the testimonial praxis of the Methodist Church in post-modernity. It will mean a reaffirmation of the Methodist identity that looks for at History looking for building and living a theological model adequate for today's world.

**Key words:** Church, History, Social networks.

## **The upstart of a church: The *Methodist Episcopal Church* in Uruguay (19<sup>th</sup> Century)**

Since it settled in the country in 1868, the *Methodist Episcopal Church* has fostered networks with organizations and individuals which allowed its fast integration into the society.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the end of the sixties, when Rev. John Thomson<sup>2</sup> started the preaching in Spanish for the first time in the country, Uruguay had an economy dependency on foreign markets. In the political issues there was a big instability with armed clashes. On the religious level, Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the State<sup>3</sup>. It had extensive powers that the State demanded for itself. Parish records registered births, weddings and deaths, compelling

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<sup>1</sup> Uruguay is a country on the east coast of South America, south of Brazil and east of Argentina. The name Uruguay is a Guaraní language, the etymology is uncertain, but the official meaning is "River of the painted birds". Today (2013) it is a home to 3.3 million people. About half of the population lives in the capital city Montevideo.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Thomson, Scotland 1843 - Argentina 1933.

"After the "Guerra Grande" (1838-51) there was a steady rise in the number of immigrants, above all from Italy and Spain. The number of immigrant had risen from 48% of the population in 1860 to 68% in 1868. In the 1870s, further 100,000 Europeans arrived, so that by 1879 about 438,000 people were living in Uruguay, a quarter of them in Montevideo." (Wikipedia). Thomson was one of the immigrants. Most of the indigenous population was exterminated by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and those who survived were assimilated.

<sup>3</sup> Complete separation of church and state was introduced with the Constitution of 1917.

Traditional Christian holidays have been secularized and renamed, *Christmas* is called *Family Day* and the *Holy Week* is called *Tourism Week*.

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people to go to church for those purposes, although their beliefs were opposite to that.<sup>4</sup> Catholic Church also managed cemeteries and it had even denied the burials when it has known that the deceased joined Freemasonry.

At the time, streams of liberal,<sup>5</sup> positivism<sup>6</sup> and rationalist<sup>7</sup> thought had entered the intellectual field. They confronted the *Roman Catholic Apostolic Church* and sometimes even any form of religious expression<sup>8</sup>.

The religious debate was present among the intellectuals and from there it extended throughout the society. Intellectuals gathered in the institution called *University Club*<sup>9</sup>, and later *Ateneo*<sup>10</sup>. Rev. John Thomson would act right there defending his religious convictions and he would even be the President of that institution (1873). In that environment the Methodist pastor will meet young intellectuals who, in some cases, will be part of the *Methodist Episcopal Church*. Or at least kept close relationships with the church.

Besides liberals and rationalism defenders, Methodist pastors and lay people had to confront faith against popular subjects at that time. In the *University Club* and the Methodist Press they defended the veracity of the Bible, the divinity of Christ and the miracles of Jesus that were denied by the rationalists. The Methodists confronted the *Catholic Church* about topics such as faith and works, the role of the Virgin Mary, confession with the priests, etc.

Some young rationalists of the *University Club* admired the United States because they had democracy and religious freedom in addition to industrial and political development. For Thomson the answer was found in the fact that in the United States people practiced Protestantism.

However, other members of the *University Club* saw in the whole Christianity, catholic or protestant, an enemy for the civilization. Methodism agreed with the liberals on that a modern country needed to have religious tolerance and a clear difference between religious sphere and the duties and rights of the State. So, the context in which Methodism comes and develops shows that: "At the end of the seventies positivism emerges as trend of thought, after the argues between Catholicism and spiritualist rationalism (...) In 1880 (...) positivism begins its fight in the University, finally achieving its hegemony."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that in 1877 the *Episcopal Methodist Church* managed to be recognized by the State to register births just as the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church had been doing.

<sup>5</sup> *Liberalism* is a political philosophy or worldview founded on ideas of liberty and equality. Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of these principles, but generally they support ideas such as free and fair elections, civil rights, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, free trade, and private property. (Wikipedia).

<sup>6</sup> *Positivism* is a philosophy of science based on the view that information derived from logical and mathematical treatments and reports of sensory experience is the exclusive source of all authoritative knowledge, and that there is valid knowledge (truth) only in scientific knowledge. (Wikipedia)

<sup>7</sup> *Rationalism* is defined as a methodology or a theory "in which the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive." Rationalists believe reality has an intrinsically logical structure. (Wikipedia).

<sup>8</sup> Anticlerical ideas spread to Uruguay, particularly from France, further eroding the influence of the church.

<sup>9</sup> *Club Universitario 1868-1877*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ateneo de Montevideo (1886)*.

<sup>11</sup> E. Méndez Vives, *El Uruguay de la Modernización*, Montevideo, Banda Oriental, 1998, p. 39.

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This context of controversies contributed to the establishment of the *Methodist Episcopal Church*, which several times had found allies among Freemasonry members and even among liberals and rationalists, who saw a common enemy in the *Catholic Church*.

### The process of secularity

The *Methodist Church* understood that the faith and the politics were not antagonistic concepts. The different spheres between religion and the role of the State defined another point that led to important arguments.

Another important issue was related to education. In 1876 an Education reform takes place in Primary Education sector driven by the Government. From that moment on, Education became a State duty, which should provide it in a free of charge, and compulsory way to all the children in the country. The Methodist Press supported the reform and expressed “(...) the Roman Church has always confronted popular education”. For the Methodism it was essential that people were educated since “The more popular intelligence, the less clergy domination. But the more popular intelligence, the more national prosperity.”<sup>12</sup>

### Methodist Church and Freemasonry

At that time the Masonic lodges had been organized in the country for a long time. And it will be with Freemasonry and political, philanthropic and social associations, in addition to particular persons, that the Episcopal Methodist Church will weave networks that favor its action in the midst of society.

According to Rev. John Thomson, the *Methodist Church* never paid the rent for the buildings “used for the services”. Sometimes the Church used the country house that belonged to a British rich industrialist and lender, Samuel Fisher Lafone<sup>13</sup>.

In other occasions the freemasons’ philanthropic school room was used<sup>14</sup>, by influence of the British rich investor John McCall, who achieved the 33rd degree of Freemasonry<sup>15</sup>. And when the Church bought a building for its meetings, it was an old theatre that had a triangle with a

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<sup>12</sup> *El Evangelista*, Montevideo, 2 de febrero de 1878, Tomo I, No. 23, p. 197. It is published by the *Methodist Episcopal Church* (1877-1886).

In the year 1877 Rev. Thomas Wood organizes the *Methodist Episcopal Church of Uruguay*, Common Education Act was adopted. It had been driven by the reformer José Pedro Varela who had been inspired by the United States Education System. The Government Minister who supported the reform in education motivated by Varela, was the same who gave protection to John Thomson when this Methodist pastor went to the city of San José to preach.

For *El Evangelista*, José Pedro Varela was “a reformer, a progressive” because in the Nation the most important thing is “the public education.” Cecilia Guelfi a Methodist Church member worked as a teacher under the supervision of José Pedro Varela (1872-1878).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Fisher Lafone, (Liverpool, 1805-Buenos Aires, 1871) a prosperous Anglican business man. He was a decisive promoter of the creation of the first Protestant church built in Uruguay (1843/44), *The Holy Trinity Temple*.

<sup>14</sup> *El Estandarte Evangélico*, Número Extraordinario, Año de jubileo, Buenos Aires, 1911, p. 47. It is published in Buenos Aires by the Methodist Church, since 1882.

<sup>15</sup> Mario Dotta Ostria, *Caudillos, Doctores y Masones. Protagonistas en la Gran Comarca Rioplatense (1806-1865)*, Montevideo, Ediciones de la Plaza, 2006, p. 98.

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light delta at the front, symbols used by Freemasonry, and that remained intact until the building was demolished in 1929.<sup>16</sup>

The Methodists extended throughout several parts of the country, counting on the Freemasonry and political authorities support. The press articles are significant. It is announced that Juan Correa, member of the Methodist Church, will use the *Hiram* Masonry Lodge rooms in the city of Salto, for his religious lectures, which provoked the anger of the priests of that place.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, in the city of San José an assault to a Masonic Lodge is produced. Rev. John Thomson accepts an invitation to conduct a lecture “in that hostile environment (...) where he conducted defense of the Gospel.”<sup>18</sup> He had the recommendation of the State high authorities, so that after the speech the militaries guarding him subscribed *El Evangelista*, which belonged to the Episcopal Methodist Church. This shows that Rev. John Thomson had such important connections as to have the Government protection.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, the press of the city of Trinidad informed that in the Lodge *Unión y Virtud*, in the celebration of two funerals (“*tenidas fúnebres*”) in honor of deceased members, pastor Guillermo (William) Tallon from the Episcopal Methodist Church, took part as speaker and in the same Lodge he was later chosen Senior Warden, “*Primer Vigilante*”.<sup>20</sup>

Just as other pastors and lay people, Rev. John Thomson was also member of Freemasonry. He began in Ohio when he studied theology in Delaware. In Buenos Aires he was part of the Lodge Progreso No. 28.<sup>21</sup>

So, when the Methodist Church settles down in Uruguay, no doubt that its members got close to other members of Freemasonry, getting benefits that allowed the progress of the Mission.

### The women in the Episcopal Methodist Church

Although this paper doesn't pretend to analyze the role of women in the Methodist Church, it is necessary a brief mention of their work, since they also were part of the congregation. Still, many years would pass before women were allowed to minister in the Church in equality with men.

While disputes aroused in the intellectual environments, Methodist women gathered in the *Charity Societies* or they participated together with men in the *Temperance Lodges*<sup>22</sup>. Those organizations included women of different ages and social strata. Thus, they could weave networks in and out of church too. An example of this is the *Methodist Church Charity*

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<sup>16</sup> Mirtha Coitinho, *Testigos de un silencio. Metodismo y Masonería en el Uruguay en el siglo XIX*, Montevideo, Planeta, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> *El Evangelista*, 23 de agosto de 1879, Tomo II, No. 51, p. 407.

<sup>18</sup> *El Estandarte Evangélico*, Año del jubileo, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Alejandro Peláez, *Estudio sobre Masonería. Antecedentes y Proceso en el Departamento de Flores*, Trinidad, Imprenta ECOS, S.R.L., 2006, pp. 80 y 81. *El Independiente*, 6 de noviembre de 1890, Trinidad, Flores, Uruguay, No. 325.

<sup>21</sup> Alcibíades Lappas, *La Masonería argentina a través de sus hombres*, Buenos Aires, 1965, p. 376.

<sup>22</sup> Mirtha Coitinho, *Op. Cit.*, p. 117.

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*Association* of the city of Trinidad<sup>23</sup>, which in 1883 had relationships with institutions and particulars that were relevant in the area, with the objective of launching a hospital in the city.

While Charity Societies could be seen as an extension of the housewife role, they allowed women to feel useful. There they shared their faith and socialized. We have to remember that some of them were immigrants or immigrants' daughters and they gathered hopes and developed their abilities. They managed money, decided who and how to help, received and answered correspondence; they could choose and be chosen to be part of the Women Directory.

In a society in which women's role was inside her home, and in which they had limited decision-making power, these Charity Societies and the Temperance Lodges allowed a space to make their own projects, develop the actions to achieve them and build a group of power in the scenario in which they moved.

### ***The Methodist Church in Uruguay in the 20th Century. The Church before Dictatorship and during Dictatorship (1970-1984).***

#### **The most difficult years.**

It was along these years that the Church saw its faith tested. The report from the Executive Council of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Uruguay about the years 1970 and 1971 expresses:

“**IDEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS-** Problems that affect our country have been also present in our churches (...) practically all churches of the country report members' desertions (...) Against critical situations in Education the Executive Council of the Methodist Church has insisted on the freedom of the local congregations to assume attitudes corresponding to the obedience of the Gospel. Furthermore, a letter was sent to the Senate about the investigation of the torture by police.”<sup>24</sup>

These concepts are enough to understand that just as the country, the Church was going through critical situations. In the country: poverty, economic improvements, claim, strikes, armed groups, repression and torture from the authorities. In that report to the *General Assembly* the situation is defined as division among branches of the congregations, antagonism among part of the church and its pastor and distrust toward the authorities of the *Methodist Church*.<sup>25</sup> The division came from different political and theological positions in face of the social context and how the Methodist Church should act. The Council report adds that there was a

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<sup>23</sup> Archivo de la *Iglesia Metodista en el Uruguay*.

<sup>24</sup> Minute *Executive Council*, “Informe del Consejo Ejecutivo a la II Asamblea General de la Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en el Uruguay”, 1972, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> So that Rev. Emilio Castro who came to be Secretary of the *World Council of Churches*, once needed to be defended by the Executive Council “faced with the serious of the facts, and with the purpose of doing justice.” By accepting Rev. Emilio Castro invitations from a Political Party “(...) to participate in reflection and study meetings (...) has provoked a great reaction by certain people who have criticized him because of that (...) we encourage every person to (...) ignore the slanders (...)” Minutes of *Executive Council* 27 May 1972, p. 100.

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spirit of intolerance in the Church, “Those of us who emerged in the religious level in Uruguay fighting intolerance, have found we can’t be tolerant with one another.”<sup>26</sup>

Although Dictatorship began in 1973, years before the region lived a period of political, economical and social instability. “Since the early sixties human rights have been violated in Uruguay. Insurgent groups did it through some kidnaps and murders, repressive forces of the successive governments did it, civil- military dictatorship did it in an unprecedented way with practices of State terrorism.”<sup>27</sup>

Dictatorship lasted from 27 June 1973 to 1 March 1985 when assumes the power a Government chosen by the citizenship. During those years the *Methodist Church* in *Uruguay* worked defending *Human Rights*.

Because of political opinions, people were kidnapped in their houses, in the street, at work. They were hooded and taken to the barracks or secret detention facilities, where they were tortured, and if they died, they just disappeared.

### Two terrible days

April 14, 1972 was a day full of violence in Montevideo. In the morning an armed group arrived at the *Methodist Church* located in the centre of the city and from there they murdered Armando Acosta y Lara, government figure who was accused of being a torturer.<sup>28</sup>

The *Executive Council* of the *Methodist Church* rejected that death and the fact that they used its building to commit murder and “following its fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is essentially a message of love to men, it decisively condemns violence in all its expressions.”<sup>29</sup>

In retaliation for the murder, days later, a bomb exploded in the church’s door. It produced several damages in the building but there weren’t hurt or dead people<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Minute of the *Executive Council*, January 1972, p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> José Rilla, *La actualidad del pasado. Usos de la historia en la política de partidos del Uruguay (1842-1972)*, Montevideo, DEBOLSILLO, 2013, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> Armando Acosta y Lara lived opposite the Methodist Church building. On April 14 an unknown person knocked at the Church door. That person brought in the hand some literature that seemed to be the Christian magazine *Church and Society*, so the doorman opened.

Quickly behind him entered other people, who locked the doorman, the pastor and others people who were in the church building. They moved toward a window upstairs and from there they killed Acosta y Lara. At once they crossed the volleyball court and they went out to the street by a different place.

No doubts that someone who was part of the group that killed Acosta y Lara knew the church building that is very big and has three entrances that overlook different streets. Also the person knew who were inside at the time Acosta y Lara left his home. Despite suspecting of two people closely connected to the Methodist Church and the magazine *Church and Society* they never found a responsible.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes *Executive Council*. May the 27<sup>th</sup> 1972, p. 97.

<sup>30</sup> Doubtless it was a warning because if they had wanted they could have made explode the bomb during a service. Despite not being in Dictatorship yet the message was clear, the Methodist Church should think carefully how it live its faith.



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Years later, at the Church Assembly these problems were discussed and they sought foster union among the members overcoming “mutual misunderstandings”. However, “some brothers” left church as they didn’t accept the way of acting of the Executive Council. As a way of helping dialog among the church members, the Women’s Federation organized a “Reencounter Campaign” inviting people they hadn’t seen for a long time with the aim of celebrating a companionship day.<sup>31</sup>

In 1978 the *Methodist Church* in General Assembly informed that it had lived “a time in which seemed that problems inside and outside stuck over our heads. No solutions to muddle through have been sought but substantive and long term solutions.” The *Executive Council* “had to bear affronts and even anonymous”.<sup>32</sup>

Facing so much pressure from the Dictatorship as from inside the church itself, it was considered necessary that all pastors were tested psychologically, which results remain strictly secret until today. The Church wanted to help them if it was necessary. In addition to serve the people the pastors provided support for the families of the prisoners and missing persons.<sup>33</sup>

### When UNHCR was the Methodist Church

During Dictatorship the *Methodist Church of Uruguay* formed a network with the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR)<sup>34</sup> to serve refugees in Uruguay. In 1974 an agreement is signed between UNHCR and the Methodist Church.<sup>35</sup>

In the building of the *Methodist Church* in the centre of the city of Montevideo, an office was set up, manager by a woman who was a member of the church and she worked hard over those years, she was María Teresa Olivera de Aiscar.

It was difficult, but possible that the UNHCR Regional Director gave credentials that certificated that María Teresa worked at the request of UNHCR and that that organization paid her work.

A Minute of the Executive Council<sup>36</sup> expresses that the Methodist Church:

“(…) has maintained a close relationship with the High Commissioner in the service of refugees transiting our country. It made available one of the offices and the services of Ms. De Aiscar to deal with the various cases such as the foreign representation process for the definitive refuge. This management has not been easy in a frame of mistrust toward this kind of activity. The Executive Council had various interviews with the United Nations until getting the status of employee for Ms. De Aiscar that allowed a more effective work and with guarantee. This activity has been widely recognized by the United Nations that has not an office in Uruguay for this kind of process, and it has been even recognized by the national authorities. Agreeing with the High Commissioner, it was looked for the formation of an ecumenical commission that took this responsibility, unfortunately

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<sup>31</sup> Minutes *Executive Council*, “Informe a la III Asamblea de la Iglesia”, February 1974, p. 183.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes *Executive Council*, “Informe a la V Asamblea de la Iglesia Metodista”, February 1978, p. 530.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> *Methodist Church Ordinary General Assembly*, 5 - 9 February 1978, p. 531, Oscar Bolioli, *El derecho de hacernos llamar cristianos. Siendo Iglesia en medio de la Dictadura uruguaya: 1973-1979*, (Internal Publication of the *Methodist Church*), Montevideo, 2009 p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> *Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados* (ACNUR).

<sup>35</sup> Minute *Executive Council*, October the 19<sup>th</sup> 1974, p. 158.

<sup>36</sup> Minute of the *Executive Council to the V Methodist Church Assembly*, 5 to 9 February 1978, p 41.

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we didn't find an answer in the sister churches. We understood we couldn't quit what we consider a Gospel task, despite having to do it on our own." <sup>37</sup>

The work done by María Teresa Olivera in UNHCR was confidential. The *Methodist Church* didn't intervene.

Even in 1982 it was necessary to inform the members of the Executive Council about the agreement of the *Church* with the *United Nations* "to solve the foreign refugee situation who lived in our country. In that agreement our Church has named María Teresa O. de Aiscar. This agreement, as well as Ms. de Aiscar task are done with the approval of the national authorities, in an official way." The report added that the Uruguayan citizens were helped only to meet their relatives that lived abroad "which is done with full knowledge and consent of our national authorities."<sup>38</sup>

The Dictatorship was a time of fear, members of the *Executive Council* and María Teresa Olivera de Aiscar were interrogated several times by the intelligence services<sup>39</sup>. Even some pastors and lay people of the *Methodist Church* suffered jail and torture, as well as some institutions of the Church were researched.

Confidential letter from María Teresa Olivera de Aiscar to the President of the *Methodist Church* Rev. Oscar Bolioli:

"At 7:00 pm 1 September (1980) I was called, or better said, "people" came to my home for me to present before the authorities (...). I said goodbye to my teenager daughter, who showed herself calm, even when she knew what this could mean (...). I was held incommunicado in a dark cell, with broken glasses and without food, I only could get a little glass of water and to be took to the men toilet that was open (...). I didn't sleep that night: noises, shouts, moans and dirty conversations bended my ears, but prayer and my faith filled my mind of other thinking and gave me certainty everything would be fine. Then came the interrogation, very hard and difficult (...) alter hours they gave me freedom. (..) The reason of my detention was generated, according to the interrogation, because of the presence of two Austrian doctors, Claudio Weber Castillo (I think he was born in Chile) and Reinhard Dorflinger, 37 and 27 years respectively. (...) These people sought permission to come to Uruguay to research the reality of our country, but they didn't wait for it and came without it. (...) They visited me at my office. I just took care of them for ten minutes without giving them information, but they interview so many people and showed so much that authorities interrogated them politely in the Director's desk. These men immediately spoke to the consul of their country, Dr. Fritz Kalmar, asking him to hand the envelops over with

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Methodist Church Ordinary General Assembly, p. 536. In Uruguay, the only church that defended *Human Rights* as an institution during the Dictatorship was the *Methodist Church*.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of the *Executive Council*, 138<sup>a</sup> Meeting, 13 March 1982, p 834. This explanation shows that the work UNHCR did was confidential. Probably also people persecuted by the dictatorship were helped. See: Ademar Olivera, *Forjando caminos de liberación. La Iglesia Metodista en tiempo de dictadura*, Montevideo, Ediciones Trilce, 2009, p. 115.

After the Dictatorship ended, the *Methodist Church* continued working through UNHCR with the purpose of "Contributing to the socio-familiar integration of the children of those Uruguayan who had disappeared and their relatives." In 1989 the Executive Council recommends that "due to the amount of money moved by UNHCR and the impossibility of the Methodist Church to control it" UNHCR work now be done by an ecumenical commission."

<sup>39</sup> Report of the *Executive Council* to the V *Methodist Church Assembly*, 5 to 9 February 1978, p. 33 Oscar Bolioli, *Op. Cit*, p. 30. Ademar Olivera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.



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complaints they had. This man, in a completely inexplicable way, since he is a good person, handed over everything without checking the content first. There figured, among other things, lists of visits they had done, with other data, among which was my name (...) They tell me that when the Director saw my name in the list he shouted “here I got her”. These two people have left the country doubtless feeling as heroes but they acted irresponsibly, since they left a big amount of people with records, with the foreseeable consequences. United Nations acted magnificently (...)”.

In different years the *Executive Council* inform about the situation of Methodist pastors detainees.

For the Dictatorship authorities the *Methodist Church* was an enemy, “some sectors prone to subversion focused on the Methodist Church” said a book that the government published in 1978.<sup>40</sup>

People who lived that time claim that inside the *Methodist Church* itself there were whistleblowers who reported to the Dictatorship authorities about pastors and lay people activities that, according those whistleblowers, could arouse suspicious.

There are who claim that a pastor reported to the *Intelligence Service* in the United States Embassy in Uruguay.<sup>41</sup>

But there's also another side of reality. The *General Board of Global Ministries* sent Bishop James Armstrong (from the area of North and South Dakota) to visit Uruguay. The Bishop got the non official support of the government for Methodist pastors to visit political detainees, whether of the Church or not.

The United States Ambassador hosted a lunch in the Embassy in honor of the Bishop. Dictatorship and *Methodist Church* authorities participated. The result was that the Dictatorship gave guarantees to the *Methodist Church* to do this humanitarian work, although it was not allowed that Bishop Armstrong could also visit the political detainees. That possibility was postponed for a next visit.<sup>42</sup>

In order to defend *Human Rights* during the Dictatorship, the *Methodist Church* sought to weave networks with other evangelical churches and with the *Roman Catholic Apostolic Church*, but it was not possible for various reasons<sup>43</sup>.

So, other solidarity networks were sought in Uruguay as well as abroad. The *Methodist Church* could do its work because, besides the own efforts, had the help of institutions and people through the networks it tended, such as the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, the *World Council of Churches*, the *General Board of Global Ministries*, the *Canada United Church*, the Government of Sweden (who sent clothes for the political detainees and their

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<sup>40</sup> *Las Fuerzas Armadas al Pueblo Oriental. La Subversión*, Junta de Comandantes en Jefe, Montevideo, Tercera Edición, 1977, Tomo I, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup> Oscar Bolioli, *Op. Cit.*, p. 45 and Ademar Olivera, *Op. Cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Oscar Bolioli *Op. Cit.* p. 35, Ademar Olivera, *Op. Cit.*, p.139, Minutes of the *Executive Council* p. 454, 491, 497.

<sup>43</sup> Oscar Bolioli, *Op. Cit.*, p. 33,

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relatives and required the *Methodist Church* to distribute it), religious from different countries (United States, Holland, Australia, etc.) lawyers and many individuals.<sup>44</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

Remembering the words of Jesus in John 17 “although the disciples do not belong to the world they are in the world”. The way the *Methodist Church in Uruguay* interpreted those words led it to act inside and outside the temples.

In the 19th century, preaching in Spanish started in Uruguay, it brought Christianity to academic circles and to people and it settled permanently in the society.

Through the press and conferences in the *University Club*, the Freemasonry Lodges and every place it had access, the *Methodist Church* defended its theology and supported changes in the State, such as the Education reform.

It sought an alliance with people and institutions when they were favorable, but it also confronted the rationalist and liberal positions if they were contrary to the Gospel principles, as the Methodists understood those principles.

In the 20th century, in the previous years and during the Dictatorship, the essential thing was to defend life and Human Rights, even talking to who had the power, if it was necessary.

But there was a price, the Dictatorship left deep marks in the country and in the Church itself. Pastors and other leaders emigrated with their family and settled abroad definitely. The congregations decreased in number, several people didn't accept the way of action of the *Executive Council* because they understood it tended to a left-wing ideology and politics, which produced misunderstandings hard to overcome.

On the latter, there may be many lessons to be drawn, that if the leaders, instead of changing in favor of their people, take advantage on their own, they could be confused with the enemy. Maybe, this is the reason why pastors and leaders “had to suffer grievances and even anonymous” from people of the same church.

It was the “Real church with its sores and miseries and also with the grace and mercy of God”, as the *Executive Council* report would say.

Two different stages in the life of the country and in the life of the *Methodist Church*.

What happened in the society determined its way of acting. As the body of Christ it shared the good news of Jesus Christ in History. Even in the midst of criticism or fear, Methodist people remain faithful to what they understood was the message of the Gospel.

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<sup>44</sup> See various Minutes of the *Executive Council* of several years.

## WHEN HISTORY TEACHES US TO THINK THEOLOGICALLY

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History taught it to think theologically, and to find the answers in faith, to put that faith into practice.

If freedom of conscience and expression was sought, if it was necessary to make known the bible principles and to defend them in the controversy, if the essential thing was life, there the *Methodist Church* acted. But, it was not alone, it sought way partners, institutional and individual solidarity networks, that allowed it to be known, settle down in the social environment and carry out its role of service inside and outside the Church.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century the Methodists in Uruguay try to continue the heritage that the 19th and 20th century Methodist Church left us, heritage learnt from the praxis of John Wesley and that distinguishes our denomination.

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