

Oxford Institute 2018: **“Entre el encuentro con los otros y el Otro : la experiencia renovadora de la Gracia divina y sus problemas . Desafíos para la misión y la teología wesleyanas.”**

**Oxford Institute 2018: "Between the encounter with others and the Other: the renewing experience of divine Grace and its problems. Challenges for the Wesleyan mission and theology. " Pablo Guillermo Oviedo**

### **I- Introduction**

Considering that Wesleyan theology has been defined as a full theology of God`s grace, and taking into account that the global crisis that we are living in, at this change of time marked mainly by imperial subjectivity, with consequences of misfortune in all human and ecological dimensions, I propose a reflective debate on how we can renew ourselves as ecclesial communities of grace in our contexts. Starting from these presuppositions, one of the most common ethical and practical problems in the experience of grace and in the mission of the ecclesial communities is the fundamental relationship between our practice of personal piety with God and the connection with other human beings, in Biblical terms “with our neighbor and his culture”, his being “another one”. And that, for theology in general -and for the Latin American one in particular- the problem of “the other one” (human) has been one of its fundamental aspects. In this work I propose to pose how the inseparable relationship between the Other (divine) and the others (human) is an inescapable challenge -with great implications -for our theology, the Wesleyan movement and Latin American Christianity.

When we speak of Latin American Protestantism - and of Methodism within it - from a theological and sociological analysis together, we cannot fail to mention that it is expressed as a crisis of identity, meaning and mission<sup>1</sup>. Now, within this scenario, evangelical churches will undoubtedly have a place - which will not be peripheral - in that Latin

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<sup>1</sup> Westhelle Vitor: *Voces de protesta en América Latina*, (México: LSTCH, 2000), p.98-99. Ver Alvarez Carmelo, “¿Hacia un nuevo protestantismo en América Latina y el Caribe?” en Tomás Gutierrez (comp.) *Protestantismo y Cultura en América Latina*, (Quito: CLAI-Cehila, 1994) , p.269-277,p.270. In the Latin American reality, religion, far from disappearing in this change of era, will continue to occupy an important place. The search for a horizon of meaning in some transcendent way continues to occur, albeit with a plurality of horizons. The crisis of confidence in Western culture reinforces the need for religion in both middle and high sectors, as well as in marginalized sectors. Whether as a provider of senses, as a re-enchantment of the world that allows life to be sacralized, or as an experience of ecstasy, religion in Latin America will continue to occupy a key place.

American religious field which is presented as complex and diverse - in demands and offers- and largely dynamic. The question is: How will they understand their presence and their mission in these new historical crossroads among our people?

When we speak of Protestantism crisis in a context of cultural fragmentation, as it is the Latin American one, we place ourselves in the interpretative hypothesis of V. Westhelle:

"The crisis of Latin American Protestantism is precisely this one: it oscillates between adapting to the situation instituted and becoming a supplementary institution without charisma or becoming a charismatic extreme without formative power. The first is the trend observed among historical churches. The second is the case of Pentecostalism."<sup>2</sup>

This forces us to mention the definition that P. Tillich makes about the Protestant principle:

"The Protestant principle, a name derived from the" protestant protest "directed to counteract the decisions of the Catholic majority, contains the divine and human protests against any absolute demand regarding a relative reality, and opposes it even when it is carried out by a Protestant church. The Protestant principle is the judge of all religious or cultural reality. "<sup>3</sup>

When we speak of grace and the Protestant principle in our Latin American context, we start from this difficulty of incarnating and inculturation that Protestantism has had and that brings great challenges to our Wesleyan theologies and communities in their mission.

Therefore, we will first present Wesley's theology as a theology of divine grace in relation to God and especially to our neighbor - personal and social essence - and how, from the encounter with others, we are renewed. Then we will briefly analyze how this problem has been key in the Latin American liberation theology and philosophy and the present moment.. Then we will see how it has been and is a pastoral problem exemplified in Argentinian Methodism, to conclude presenting some missionary, ecclesial and theological challenges-such as the reality of gender inequality. It is in this context of liquid relationships marked by exclusion, individualism and consumerism that we ask ourselves: What can we contribute from the Wesleyan theology in the light of these ethical and social

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<sup>2</sup> V. Westhelle, *Ibid*, p.100. However, it is precisely Protestantism, given that it has the initial experience of the cleavage in the asymmetric relationship between principle and form, which can give us the hope of the possibility of resolving the disturbing split in Latin American cultural formation. Protestantism still belongs to the promising territory that lies between the extremes of charisma and power, linking the poles, but without identifying them.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *La Era Protestante*, (BsAs: Paidós, 1965), p.245-246.

challenges? What call does Jesus Spirit make us in our world?<sup>4</sup> We believe that the debate on this theme can illuminate us for our spiritual, theological and missionary journey. And for the renewal and transformation of the Wesleyan communities, if we want to be faithful to the work that God is doing in our midst, as Wesley liked saying: to the extension of his reign of grace and justice.

## **II. Wesleyan Theology as a Theology of Grace: encounter with the Other and the others**

Many have claimed that one of the hallmarks of Wesleyan theology is the experience of Divine Grace. "Wesleyan theology is a full theology of grace," says R. Heinzerater.<sup>5</sup> And Wesley as a theologian of grace, with an inclusive and encompassing concept, and an emphasis on sanctification, returns to the believer his responsibility before the God of grace. Albert Outler, in his classic work on Wesley's theology, observed that "For Wesley, the initiative of the Spirit is the dynamic essence of all grace," and years later in his monumental edition of Wesley's Sermons, he states bluntly:

"The heart of Wesley's gospel was always a very vivid sense of grace working at all levels in creation and in history, in people and in communities ... The 'Catholic substance' of Wesley's theology (which includes the Protestant and the Catholic, the Western and the Eastern) is the theme of participation - the idea that all life is grace and all grace is the mediation of Christ by means of the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

And Theodore Runyon, in his most representative and up-to-date work of Wesleyan theology, reaffirms this same conclusion: "The key to all of Wesley's soteriological doctrines is his understanding of God's grace."<sup>7</sup> For Runyon, interpreting Wesley's theology for the present implies emphasizing that it identifies the essence of Christianity as the renewal of creation and creatures through the renewal of the image of God in humanity<sup>8</sup>. Citing Albert Outler, Wesley's greatest knower of the twentieth century, who calls this

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Klaiber, Manfred Marquardt, *Viver a Graca de Deus, un compendio de Teologia Metodista*, Editeo, S. Pablo, 1999, p.178.

<sup>5</sup> R. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the people called Methodist*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995 (2001)), p.290.

<sup>6</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 33; *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1984), Vol. 1, Sermons I, p. 98-99. Outler adds: "Wesley did not naturally invent any of these ideas, but neither did he find them joint and integrated in the special way that he tried and achieved to a large extent."

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Runyon, *A Nova Creação: A Teologia de João Wesley Hoje*, (S. Bernardo do Campo: EDITEO, 2002), p. 39. *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1984), Vol. 1, Sermons I, p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> T. Runyon, op.cit. p.16. *Wesley's Sermón 44.*"El pecado original", en Ibid, p.292.

renewal of the divine image "the axial theme of Wesley's soterology." Therefore, the cosmic drama of the renewal of creation begins with the renewal of the image of God in humanity-this is the indispensable key to all of Wesley's soteriology. It affirms that:

"Despite the importance in Luther's own experience of the doctrine of justification by faith, which was mediated by the Moravians, Wesley distances himself from the identification of salvation with justification alone, insisting that "salvation great "is not completed before the renewal of that original vocation for which humanity was created: to live the image of God in the world".<sup>9</sup>

As citizens of the 21st century and of the ecological era, he warns about a fundamental point of the divine purpose: the salvation of the human being as a recovery of the original vocation: to be responsible for the administration (administrator) of the creation and co-creator of the new creation in the Spirit of Christ. Or as Runyon reinterprets the essence of Christianity from a Methodist perspective: the renewal of creation, through the renewal of the image of God in humanity. In this eschatological approach to Wesleyan thought, we can see that by discerning God's original intention for creation in the perspective of the end of times, (contrary to the Calvinist approach, which understands that all history is determined before creation), "New possibilities open continually (in current history) through the creative power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>10</sup>

In relation to the means of grace and renewal , according to Míguez Bonino:

"Wesley refuses to dissociate the elements that represent both traditions: the objective elements that represent the Protestant tradition (the Word, the sacraments and the order) and the subjective elements that represent the pietist tradition (experience, inner holiness, meditation, spontaneous prayer, fraternal communion) ".

In other words, he theoretically rejects all privatizing trend of sanctification of the Spirit, all individualist "enthusiasm" which, instead of building community, divides it valuing, in this way, tradition, order in worship and unity in church<sup>11</sup>. But we can, also rescue the disposition of constant surprise in the light of the free actions of the Holy Spirit in the "great and extraordinary work" that God is doing among us, in times of deep major changes and of a phenomenal "undoing" in the life of his people. <sup>12</sup>It is in this context , that Wesley

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,p.21. See the cap.6: "Wesley para os dias de hoje: Os cuidados com o meio ambiente" ,p.250-258

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,p.17. Cf. Henry H. Knight III, *The presence of God in the Christian life, John Wesley and the means of grace*. (Metuchen, NJ.: S.Press,1992),p.73.

<sup>11</sup> Miguez Bonino J. *Hacia una ecclesiología evangelizadora. Una perspectiva Wesleyana.*, (san Pablo:Editeo-Ciemal, 2003),p. 72. The ecclesiola or the bands were his way of linking these two currents in practice.

<sup>12</sup> J. Gonzalez, *Wesley en América Latina*, (Ed.Aurora,BsAs, 2004) p.84-85. He says "... of disposition to let God do, to do theology where God is acting, what I called ..." theology on horseback ".

makes use of the work of the Spirit as the one who unites the separated parts, rescues the rejected and restores the love and unity of the community.

Míguez also warns us that renewal and mission are inseparable, that is why it is necessary to rethink the totality of the Church in light of the Incarnation of the Son, since we will clash with Wesley's spiritualism and individualism-the proper of his time. "The Wesleyan Christ sometimes seems only concerned in souls little connected with his concrete reality, due to his weak doctrine of the humiliation of the Christ and his earthly life."<sup>13</sup>

A perception that glimpses the new possibilities that are opened in history by the creative force of the Spirit. For us today it implies that with its sanctifying air it wishes to renew, in its agapic communion, all creation in Christ: human beings, society with its structures and the whole nature.

Taking into account this general framework, we focus on the praxis of grace, that is, on the relationship between the means of grace and our spirituality: between works of piety and works of mercy. In this regard a recent contribution problematizes on this topic, Joerg Rieger says:

"A new reflection on the works of mercy as a means of grace can help us overcome the old impasse that has led the traditional division between Orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Placing together both works of piety and mercy as the means of grace, love Wesley manages to join the Other (divine) and the other (human) in a special way that deserves to be analyzed in detail. This challenges not only Methodism but contemporary Christianity as a whole. Could it be possible the fact that the relationship of the Divine Other cannot be separated from the relationship with the human other and, in this way, it helps to overcome one of the most damaging and paralyzing impasses of the church today?"<sup>14</sup>.

An example of how Wesley puts on this practice incipiently, is - says the author - the brief statement of John Wesley that says "Religion should not go from the greatest to the least, or power will appear as if it comes from men"<sup>15</sup>. Now let's see how this is expressed in theology Latin American.

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<sup>13</sup>Míguez Bonino, Ibid.p.78. Take this idea, J. Deschner "Wesley's Christology, an interpretation (Dallas, SMU, 1960)c.2.

<sup>14</sup> Joerg Rieger, *Gracia bajo presión*, (Buenos Aires, Aurora, 2015) p.49. In English: ¿What do margins and center have to do with each other? The future of Methodist traditions and theology?, in Rieger and J. Vincent(eds) *Methodist and Radical: J.Rejuvenating a Tradition*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2003), or "Between God and the poor: rethinking the means of grace in the Wesleyan tradition" ,en R. Heitzenrater (ed): *The poor and the people called Methodist*(Nashville:KingswoodBooks,2003.) There he mentions the term ortho-pathy coined by Runyon.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Wesley, Works, ed. Tomas Jackson, 3ra ed. (Londres: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), Vol. III, 178.

### III. The other's problem in Latin American theology and philosophy

It has also been one of the greatest problems of Latin American theology - both Catholic and Protestant - it has been and continues to be a quagmire, a permanent problem of discussion. According to Jose Míguez Bonino - called the Dean of Protestant Latin American theology - from his Wesleyan heritage, he stated, a few years ago, how religious individualism and egocentrism marked Evangelical theology and spirituality. When referring to the search for unity and diversity in Latin American Protestantism - and within it in Methodism - it was fundamental to leave behind all Christological, soteriological and pneumatological reductionism, presented in its individualism and in its high degree of inherited subjectivism. This has made among broad sectors of Latin American "evangelical" Protestantism an "individualist, christological-soteriological space in a basically subjective key with an emphasis on sanctification".<sup>16</sup>

Another Protestant theologian, Vítor Westhelle - a recently deceased Brazilian great referent of Latin American liberation theology - stated that "...one of the great difficulties of Latin American theology has been the problem of the other." ... "Like Latin American literature, having inherited the European paradigms, theology must assert itself, presenting another question, and especially the question of what the other is within the theological construction. By locating this other among the poor-or the victims-who have become invisible, and constructing the subjectivity of the non-person, theology points towards the implosion of inherited models. And this is the ironic task of theology within the rhetoric of official Christianity."<sup>17</sup>

In this way an autonomous doctrine of Creation - separate from the trinitarian framework - transforms one's own ethnicity and culture into something immutable and closed that can only be conceived from the relationship with the other as a domain or instrumentation for ecclesial purposes. At the other extreme, an autonomous doctrine of redemption -without the holistic trinitarian framework- reduces the human being to a sinner without name, land, people, culture or family, and, in the subjective and individualistic version that has affected us so much as Protestants, a human being turns into a person without body or community!

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<sup>16</sup> J. Míguez Bonino, *Rostros del protestantismo latinoamericano*, (BsAs.: NC,1995),p.46

<sup>17</sup> Vítor Westhelle : *Voces de protesta en América Latina*, (México: LSTCH, 2000),p.54 There he argues that Bartolomé de las Casas was a pioneer in this task of recognizing otherness in Latin American theology in the sixteenth century, in the midst of the harshness of Spanish colonialism. Also see from the same author, "Re (li) gión, the Lord of history and the illusory space", LWFS: *Region and Religion*, (Printshop Ecumenical center, Geneva , 1994). P82, 94-95. The expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula coincides with the arrival of Europeans in the Americas and their inability to see the natives as humans outside their own frame of reference.Cf. Vítor Westhelle, *After Heresy. Colonial Practice and Post-Colonial Theologies*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2007), 15-32.

The theological task then, starting from the criticism of liberal modernity and light ethical-relativistic tendencies of postmodernity, must from "that recognition of "otherness" - turn my own space to get a religious-sacred meaning- , because in its limit the other becomes epiphanic.

From Roman Catholicism the Latin American theologian Juan Luis Segundo posed the problem "of the other" connecting it intelligently with our unshaped idea of God, in his work entitled *Our Idea of God* (part of the series of five volumes "Open theology for the adult layman") where it provides a renewed Trinitarian understanding of God, surpassing both the earliest monarchical forms of Christianity (modalism, subordinationism) and the later Western theist of the Enlightenment. These models are not naive because, as Segundo argues in the introduction to this book:

"Precisely, because in deforming God we protect our egoism, our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our brothers make close alliance with our falsifications of the idea of God. Our unjust society and our deformed idea of God form a terrible and intricate pact."<sup>18</sup> These "atheistic" or "idolatrous" images of the Christian God have terrible consequences on Christian existence and on their dialogue with the world. This was illustrated by an Argentine folkloric singing poet, Atahualpa Yupanqui, when he said: "*That God cares for the poor, maybe he does, maybe he doesn't, but surely he has lunch at the owner's table*".

The Catholic Gustavo Gutiérrez, in his spirituality of liberation book, begins with a series of questions about spirituality more or less accepted in ecclesiastical environments but very little concerned about the existence of others. It is criticized, in the first place because it has been presented as a question of minorities, and secondly, because it shows an individualist perspective that derives in a spiritualistic piety of escape or mundi flight (that of the religious orders, ideal state in opposition to the secular) There he returns to the question of how these spiritualities have distanced themselves from others, especially others in suffering, presenting the concept of non-person, which will be key to making the poor, excluded and victims visible in liberation theology<sup>19</sup>.

In Latin American philosophy, in allusion to the paradigm of modernity, Enrique Dussel from his Latin American perspective on Modernity, Globalization and Exclusion, expands

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<sup>18</sup> *Teología Abierta para el laico adulto (3): Nuestra idea de Dios*, (BsAs.: Ed C.Lohlé, 1969), p.13.

<sup>19</sup> G. Gutierrez, *Beber en su propio pozo. En el itinerario espiritual de un pueblo*, (Salamanca: Sígueme,1984),p.15ss. Also see the joint work of both theologians , *Salvación y construcción del mundo*, (Barcelona:Nova Terra, 1968).

our perspective by stating that in order to understand Modernity, we must recognize that there are two ways of seeing it. : a) The first, what he calls, the "paradigm of Eurocentric modernity", which means that modernity is a purely European phenomenon, which has been developing since the Middle Ages and spread from there to all The humanity"; b) The second that conceives modernity as a non-European phenomenon, but as part of the world-system: it is central. Modernity, from this perspective is worldwide, being a simultaneous phenomenon in Europe, Amerindia, Africa, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Is it not our being in the world a being-in-the-world with others? Our world is a shared world, which frequently belongs to all horizons. The world is the place where many moral systems, many worldviews, many systems can fight, coexist, disappear or succeed. They aspire to totalize themselves and, even, to become hegemonic, aspiring to fairly submit the world. The preceding statements answer the question of how the world should be thought about so that the transcendence of the other becomes possible. But it is clear that Dussel has not raised the question in those terms, because, for him, the world can not constitute the sufficient condition of the revelation of the transcendence of the other. Although we find the other in the world, the encounter of the other is done through corporality, which is prior to opening in the world. The world itself opens up and is possible only within a sensitive corporality. It is that, before the world, "I am corporally sensitive ". It is in this opportunity before the world that lies the possibility of understanding the other as another when it appears in the world, that is, not as something defined by the world but as something that comes beyond the world. The two Dussel thesis I mentioned, the one related to the world and the one related to the first philosophy, are closely linked by their reference to the

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<sup>20</sup> Enrique Dussel , *Globalización, Exclusión y Democracia en América Latina*. (México D. F.: Editorial Contrapuntos, 1997) p.91-92, 96-98. In this regard, Enrique Dussel, declares that modernity, or as Noam Chomsky calls it "the system of the 500 years", entered the twentieth century, after five centuries of development, in a deep crisis, but that is not exclusive of Europe, but a phenomenon of the world population. In such a way that in the present time, the absolute limits have reached their maximum, such as the ecological destruction of the planet, because in modernity it was only seen as a means of production; also the destruction of humanity itself, since today we see that misery is the law of modernity and postmodernity; and finally, there is the impossibility of restoring all those nations, economies, peoples and cultures that modernity attacked so harshly in its origins, which continues to exclude them and corner them in misery. Another author is W. Mignolo who insists on talking about modernity only in conjunction with coloniality, dividing the terms with a bar: "modernity / coloniality". There is a "double edge," writes Mignolo, in the "coexistence and intersection of modern colonialisms and colonial modernities." Walter D. Mignolo, *Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinkin. Local Histories / Global Designs*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3.



constitutive sensible corporeality. Indeed, since ontology is rooted in the world and ethics, thanks to the most original phenomenon of corporeality, rooted in transcendence, Dussel maintains - coinciding in this with Levinas and Appel - that ethics is prior to ontology. It is worth mentioning:

"The other will be the other woman / man: a human being, an ethical subject, the face as an epiphany of living living human corporeality .... In the victim dominated by the system or excluded, the concrete human subjective empirical subjectivity is revealed as an interpellation, it is the interpellation of the one who exclaims I am hungry! Give me something to eat please! The Other is the possible victim caused by my functional action in the system. I am responsible."<sup>21</sup>

#### **IV. Wesleyan theology from the margins: an alternative inter-subjectivity from a Christology from below**

Among other recent Wesleyan voices, who seek an alternative subjectivity from the encounter with the other sufferers, the theological proposal of the book *Beyond the Imperial Spirit* with new theological perspectives in politics and religion appears. There the authors argue that the ethos of postmodernity in which the battles between individualism and community occur, does not help to solve this dilemma, since it questions subjectivity, precisely at a time when marginalized people are winning it. They do not speak of subjectivity in general, but of the subjectivity that emerges in the margins, and that therefore places us in a different way. They affirm that we have to pay attention to what it really is happening at the base, since this gives us a clearer understanding of the fact that the oppressed retain a kind of subjectivity and capacity for action, even in the conditions of the postmodern or postcolonial empire.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la Liberación en la edad de la Globalización y de la Exclusión*. (Madrid, Trotta, 1998) p.16 y 524.

<sup>22</sup> N.Miguez, J.Rieger, J.M.Sung, *Mas allá del espíritu imperial .Nuevas perspectivas en política y religión*, (Ed La Aurora, BsAs, 2016) P. 227. In english *Beyond the Spirit of the Empire*(SCMPress,2009).The authors refer to Rieger's book, *Christ and Empire*, chapter 7, where he introduces the term "postcolonial empire," which at first glance seems to be a paradox. In this book *Christ and the Empire*, a new Christology is worked from below, where the author seeks to reclaim Paul's notion of the lordship of Christ, the insistence of the complete divinity of Christ and humanity developed in the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, the notion of Anselm of the human God, the notion of Bartolomé de Las Casas of the Way of Christ, the appropriation of Christ by Schleiermacher as prophet, priest and king, Christus Victor de Aulén, and the Cosmic Christ of Mateo Fox. Another exalted work is Michael Nausner's, "Homeland as Borderland. Territories of Christian Subjectivity ", in: Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, Mayra Rivera (eds.). *Postcolonial Theologies. Divinity and Empire*. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004).

There are aspects of the divine that can not be controlled by the Empire and that continue to reappear despite the efforts of the system to subdue them. This is called a "theological plus" or a "Christological plus". (To affirm that Jesus Christ is the Lord and that he was merciful to the marginalized is a challenge that continues to bother him).

If the subjectivity of people cannot be totally controlled, why should we assume that there is a divine reality that can be? This is one of the fundamental keys of this book, which is developed in each chapter. The difference is that this alternative type of plus occurs in the reverse of history. Unlike reality - the way in which the world is perceived from the hegemonic perspective- the real thing is pain common of repression that creates new forms of solidarity and alternative subjectivities and activity. But there is also a positive aspect that should not be overlooked, and it is how something new is produced that is not part of the system ("it is in the world but it is not of the world", paraphrasing John 17: 6-19) and that makes the difference<sup>23</sup>. Subjectivity and social action produce positive alternatives that create what realism and the dominant religion never understood as possible. However, we must not forget that these alternatives hold an opening that can not be found in the dominant system, and therefore can never ultimately be immobilized. Finally, there are new forms of intersubjectivity that emerge here form the basis of a new humanity.

In the words of Jung Mo Sung: "When one manifests and experiences the resistance to oppressive relations, one can recognize oneself as a subject and, at the same time, recognize the subjectivity of other people beyond any and all the social roles. It is the experience of gratuity in a face-to-face relationship. "<sup>24</sup>

The new relationship that is constructed by those who embody an alternative subjectivity allows a face-to-face encounter that is not possible in a system in which subjectivity depends on power differences, that is, in which the subject can only be understood as subjecting others and placing them under monitoring -an understanding that often perpetuates notions of "leadership" promoted not only in the business world but also in politics and the church. Here we see a transcendental moment because these new forms of intersubjectivity cannot be manufactured or controlled and push beyond any system. This is

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<sup>23</sup> John Beverley, *Subalternity and representation, Arguments in Cultural Theory*. (Duke University Press, 1999). p. 103;

<sup>24</sup> Jung Mo Sung, *Sujeto y sociedades complejas*, (DEI, San José, Costa Rica,2005). p. 63.

a "true spiritual experience of grace and justification by "faith" that "justifies" the existence not only of the oppressed person, but also the one that feels indignation".<sup>25</sup> This kind of justification - a way of realizing God's justice that opposes the notion of the empire of justice, as Christianity discovered at the beginning of the Roman Empire may still be the best antidote to the automatic subject of capitalism. Alternative desire is at the heart of alternative subjectivity. This alternative desire is, then, a true collective phenomenon, and has the potential to create a new human condition. However, this alternative desire also needs to be organized. Without organization, it will disappear. This can be the wisdom incarnated in alternative religious movements and others, when they are part of the reverse of history. There is no middle way in this polarized situation of the Empire:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will esteem the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and the rich ", Jesus declares (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13). Those who are in the middle are generally dragged in defense of existing powers in order to create a sense of stability (mostly illusory). But they can also choose to take a step back from this system that does not allow them to form alternative subjectivities, and join the emergent relationships of base intersubjectivity. Many examples could be given. An example from the beginning of our tradition is the brief statement of John Wesley that says *"Religion should not go from the greatest to the least, or power will appear as if it was of men"*.<sup>26</sup>

*How does this affect our theological understanding and our Christian mission?* If we start from the renewing experience of grace in the Holy Spirit and not from the imperial spirit, life and mission should be carried out from the margins. An anthropology and subjectivity of grace is present from a Christology from below and from the margins. God's plan for the world is not to create another world but to recreate what God has already created in love

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.233. This argument is further developed in Rieger, "Developing a Common Interest Theology from the Underside," in: *Liberating the Future: God, Mammon, and Teology*, ed. Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). Also see the excellent book by M.DelaTorre-SM. Floyd Thomas, *Beyond the pale, reading theology from the margins*, (Louisville, WJK, 2011), the article by Harold Recinos :*John Wesley*. P.95-103. Also H. Recinos "Barrio Christianity and American methodism", in Rieger and J. Vincent(eds) *Methodist and Radical: J.Rejuvenating a Tradition*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2003),p.77ss.

<sup>26</sup> John Wesley, *Works*, ed. T omas Jackson, 3ra ed. (Londres: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), Vol. III, 178.

and wisdom. Jesus began his ministry by affirming that being filled with the Spirit is to free the oppressed, restore sight to the blind, and announce the coming of God's kingdom (Luke 4: 16-18). He undertook the fulfillment of his mission opting for those who are on the margins of society, and no longer from a paternalistic charity, because their situations testified to the sin of the world and their longing for life was combined with the designs of God. Jesus Christ relates to and welcomes those who are most marginalized in society in order to challenge and transform everything that denies life, including cultures and systems that generate and maintain poverty, discrimination and generalized dehumanization, and exploit and destroy people and the earth.

The mission from the margins calls to understand the complexities of power dynamics, systems and world structures, and local contextual realities. The Christian mission has sometimes been understood and practiced in ways that fail to recognize that God opted for those who are systematically pushed to the margins. Thus, the mission from the margins invites churches to rethink the mission as a vocation inspired by the God's Spirit who works for a world in which the fullness of life is possible for everyone<sup>27</sup>. Let's see an example of marches and counter-marches of a specific pastoral case in relation to this topic. (the encounter with others).

## **V. An ecclesial example of this problem of the "others": Argentine Methodism**

In the case of Argentinian Methodism - and I would like to say the Southern Cone - one of the characteristics that made it a dynamic and moving religious space was its capacity for intercultural diffusion and -in theological terms- to be incarnated in different historical moments in Argentina. What made The Methodist Church in Argentina (IEMA), in its missionary vision and practice, become a committed evangelical church socio-politically

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<sup>27</sup> Ver VV.AA.. *Juntos por la Vida: Misión y Evangelización en Contextos Cambiantes*, I, II, III (Ed. Aurora-CMI, BsAs, 2016). p. 266. Nestor Míguez affirms: "The mission of the Christian faith today in Latin America is fourfold: it includes caring for and enjoying the goods of creation, working to build a worthy town, with agreements and conflicts, and engaging in the search of social and economic justice in the continent that supports the most unequal distribution of wealth and thus proclaim and live in open dialogue - with the others - original peoples, women and their voices and many other excluded - a testimony of our hope in the life that we receive through the grace of God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Messiah and the vivifying breath of the Spirit, the community of the divine trinity that inspires the human community ", p. 266

“embodied” between the 60s and 70s? What historical and theological factors made this change possible in its life and mission? We understand that its missionary conception of Wesleyan heritage led Argentinian Methodism to incarnate itself in different historical moments of its diffusion and expansion in some challenges that its context showed.<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of Argentinian Methodism he was the first religious actor to preach in Spanish. It was one of the first evangelical churches in the country that could integrate more Spanish and Italian immigrants - foreigners to their Anglo origin - and “Criollos” in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. He made a key contribution from his social ethic to liberal democratic laws and to the secular, free and public system of national education pioneered in Latin America. But we understand that until the second half of the twentieth century he did it theologically oriented from the *countercultural model*<sup>29</sup> that was predominant in Latin American Protestantism, which considers culture as an enemy that must be redeemed. On the other hand, the revolutionary atmosphere that developed in Latin America between the 1960s and 1970s - a *kayros* that made Latin America a socio-cultural, political and religious "laboratory" in the second half of the 20th century<sup>30</sup>, - and the emergence of Latin American theology of liberation, produced profound changes in the management and laity of a large part of the IEMA, with the consequent institutional autonomy and redesign of its missionary strategy in all areas. These changes partially broke with the inherited liberal - and conservative - theological and institutional model and began to take autonomous steps in the national and Latin American context. Argentine-and River Plate-Methodism contributed great leaders to Latin American theology of liberation and to the regional ecumenical movement in the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) in 1982, as well as to the World Council of Churches. As Bevans says: "Contextual theology is done when the experiences of the past are committed to the present context"<sup>31</sup>. And in

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<sup>28</sup> Various theological traditions shaped (that of original Methodism, the traditions of the social gospel and liberal Protestantism of the nineteenth century, the American conservative and the neo-orthodox Barthian) shaped the theological ideology of the IEMA See

<sup>29</sup> See Bevans Stephen, *Modelos de Teología Contextual* (Quito, Editorial Verbo Divino, 2004).p 14. Oviedo Pablo G., “Análisis del discurso de la Iglesia Metodista Argentina en relación a la auto-comprensión de su tarea (1983-1989)”, en *Revista Evangélica de Historia* Vol 3-4,2005-06, ( BsAs, Ed.AH-IEMA), p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Silva Gotay, *El pensamiento cristiano revolucionario en América Latina y el Caribe*,( Salamanca, Sígueme, 1980).p.17. Y p.367-369 .

<sup>31</sup> Bevans Stephen, *Modelos de Teología Contextual*, (Quito, Editorial Verbo Divino, 2004).p 15.

that sense the *praxis model* was the one that the IEMA began to experience consciously. Emphasizing the prophetic tradition of Christianity and the obedient following of Jesus; that in the lives of the poor and excluded, he called from his Spirit to act without delay in that context.<sup>32</sup>

Then finishing the twentieth century and beginning the XXI the IEMA has entered into a general rethinking of his life and mission due to the crisis of mission that he began to experience. In this direction, we believe with Andíñach-Bruno that he restates that he speaks of expanding the church with new congregations, of producing changes in theological education, of reforms of its organizational structures and of reviewing service projects, only It is not only due to the search for security and certainty that the society, at the end of the century, did not offer but it is also a reaction to crisis situations when many members of the church are suffering the impoverishment of the middle class. With its ideological reflexes and cultural characteristics - of the middle class in its majority - that generates a certain "passive resistance" to face projects destined to the popular classes, that continue being as aspiration one of the main addressees of the Methodist mission. Perhaps this is why the classic projects of evangelization are more appealing as a way of holding onto the safe actions in the midst of the crisis.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of the neoliberal model crisis that left the region in unprecedented levels of poverty at the beginning of the millennium and with the subsequent appearance of a popular and neo-Keynesian political alternative in the economic sphere, the churches are ecumenically reunited with the challenges that involve rebuilding the country. With a slow democratic and economic recovery, beginning in 2007, Methodism resumed its tradition of

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<sup>32</sup> Bevans Stephen , *Modelos de Teología Contextual*, (Quito, Editorial Verbo Divino, 2004).p 13ss.

<sup>33</sup> Andíñach-Bruno, op.cit. , p.100. See the presentation by José Míguez Bonino "A Church in search of itself. Case: the IEMA. Conference in Sebila, Costa Rica, without edition. p.56-57. There Miguez speaks of the difficulties of the middle class of Argentine Methodism for the encounter with the different others. Also Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., speaks of the "preferential option for the middle class" of the United Methodism in the USA. . See his article "" Wesley's Preferential Option for the Poor, ", *Quarterly Review* 9 (1989), Nathan O. Hatch provides an illuminating chronicle of the journey of Methodism from marginal beginnings to the middle class, see his *The Democratization of American Christianity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.) David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) For a description of the origins of Methodism in eighteenth-century Britain, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

public pastoralism, accompanying the atmosphere of popular participation and efforts to expand the individual and social rights that were achieved during that period. Different ethical issues such as the subsequent law of equal marriage or the decriminalization of abortion in progress, stress in and out, since the differences in the understanding of the political participation of the Christian and some ethical challenges has highlighted the fundamentalism present in the diverse religious traditions and this attempts against the unity of the Christians.<sup>34</sup>

We believe that again the IEMA is challenged interculturally to connect with the new faces of the mission, the others that emerge in a new historical conjuncture- now marked by the regional return of the neoliberal wave-: women, children, youth, aborigines, people with different sexual options, and so many others. But not from paternalistic charity or using others as means to increase their membership. He must once again leave the confinement of religious egocentrism - as he did by God's grace in other times - towards the encounter of others, which today reveal the face of Christ on the margins (according to the parable of the final judgment in Matthew 25).<sup>35</sup>

## **VI. Missionary and theological challenges: the example of feminist theology**

How this challenges our Wesleyan theology is undoubtedly a huge task. As an example, I share what I experienced in an intercultural experience of Methodist connectionism. The recent evangelization seminar for the Latin American Southern Cone-July 2018- organized by the World Evangelism Institute of the Methodist World Council and the Methodist Churches of the Latin American Southern Cone.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Bruno, “ Abordaje y periodización para una historia del metodismo en Argentina” , en *Revista Evangélica de Historia* VII(2012), IEMA-CNAH, BsAs, p.41. And it has highlighted religious and political fascism in sectors of all the churches.

<sup>35</sup> See J.Miguez Bonino, Methodism and Latin American liberation movements, in Rieger and J. Vincent(eds) *Methodist and Radical: J.Rejuvenating a Tradition*. (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2003),p.193ss.

<sup>36</sup> The intercultural experiences in the Methodist connection system give us great wealth, like this Oxford Institute, to find and recognize us. Michael Nausner works this in an article, where he explains how experiences with cultural borders can be understood as the main sources for Christian formation and how the connexional structure of global Methodism has the potential to provide an ecclesiastical format suitable to these essential experiences. In *Caminhando* v. Magazine 1 3, n. 2 1, (January - m a y o 2 0 0 8. S.Pablo, Editeo). p. 8 7 - 9 6.

There emerged voices of different marginalized groups -the Others- that challenge our churches in our Latin American countries, but I believe that - saving the distances - they are valid for other places in the world as well. The reality of exclusion and growing poverty with the return of neoliberal conservative governments in the region, and especially the impact of these policies on children, adolescents and young people, the drama of women victims of patriarchy, among others.

Next and as an example; I will briefly mention the challenge to our theology of **women and their struggle for life**. Because I believe that we must make visible the unjust, ruthless and cruel reality that women must live in all dimensions of human life. Since I believe is fundamental in this process that has been called the hermeneutic circle, starting from reality with all its rawness. Here, socio-analytical mediation as an auxiliary source of theology is essential to be able to see and become aware, in this case of injustice and inequality in gender roles, to the detriment of women. In this sense and starting from the Latin American reality but which can be reflected -in part at least- the reality of women in the North, it is essential to draw a panorama that does justice and makes visible this drama worldwide, from theology / s feminist / s. First, to clarify that the reality that challenges me and asks me personally is the relationship with my wife-feminist partner and different women who are part of my friendships and my pastoral ministry- and from the social aspect. The movement that in Argentina has been struggling for decades for women's rights and that in the last three years has been made much more visible by the increase in “femicide”, the questioning of patriarchy as a structure and micro-machismo in everyday life. I believe that this existential situation is the greatest moral dilemma and the biggest challenge-problem of specific Christian faith-ethics that we are going through in our River Plate context. I say specific because it is within the great challenge of the rights of the poor -excluded and of the earth who are the general Other, who proposed Latin American theology of liberation as a theological and ethical challenge. With the particularity that this specific is transversal, since women suffer the ruthless power of savage capitalism and patriarchy with their cultural and religious legitimations. This reality has moved me in recent years and has made me aware of my contradictions, limitations and complicities as a privileged male of the patriarchal system. As for women, three religious imaginaries have been built in Latin America that serve as a justification for women. These images are: the immaculate virgin,



the selfless mother, and the seductress / prostitute<sup>37</sup>. These three roles, as can be seen, define women only from their sexual relationship with men, which reduce their value, the woman is not someone by herself, but is meaning from the male. Traditionally the macho Latin culture has found its religious backing to maintain such a disfigurement of women as that of the male, therefore within the ecclesial communities at least it can be identify three groups of women, by the positions that they assume<sup>38</sup>: those that recognizing their place in history, recognize themselves as dignified, autonomous and of age, come to the conclusion that the Christian faith is such a heteronomous path that it is insufferable, impossible to be faithful to themselves and remain within the faith, therefore they abandon it. A second group that persists in love and commitment in faith, that choose the path of alienation to "survive" in the face of the rigidity and authoritarianism of theologians and leaders who are in charge of maintaining the situation, and consider that the problem is one of women, so they do not accept questions because they arise from women. Finally, a third group are those who recognize that it is this same faith in Jesus Christ, which leads them to recognize themselves as "feminists", in the sense that it prompts them to reformulate their theologies from which transformative discourses emerge, for both men and women. . It is from this

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<sup>37</sup> Irene Tokarski . Para un iglesia, teología y pastoral incluyentes. *Cuadernos de reflexión equidad de género*, ISEAT, disponible en <http://www.iseatbolivia.org/iseat2013/>.

<sup>38</sup> These groups are places of response from where the women are located, mentioned by Nancy Bedford. *La Porfía de la Resurrección. Ensayos desde el feminsimo Latinoamericano* (BsAs, FTI, kayros, 2008), p.16. According to Bedford in this essay, by making a quick historical review of feminist hermeneutics and theology, three moments can be identified: the first arises in the midst of reflection on the theology of liberation, the popular movements, the political struggles in which they find women, it impels them to read the Bible, in a search for a God that confirms the struggle for themselves and for their peoples. This moment seeks to identify and recognize female leaders in the Bible. A second moment, the feminine dimensions of God are sought in the Bible, the non-conformity is declared against the patriarchalism present in the theological discourse. God is Father but also Mother, but the limit of this moment is that there is a reduced vision of masculine and feminine identities, it is associated with the feminine as fragility, tenderness, affection. The relationship between the masculine and feminine is seen as complementary without any criticism of the cultural historical construction of the roles assigned to both. The third moment, in which we find ourselves, is characterized by a search for a holistic theology, where the rigid patterns of masculine and feminine are questioned and it is proposed to overcome them, this implies an epistemological rupture, because it challenges to think in a different way the identities , to know and therefore to build new relationships with the world, with people and with God. This challenge leads us to open dialogue with differences, here at least two important dialogues appear, urgent with culture and diversity. Also Elsa Tamez on Feminist Latin American Hermeneutics, identifies three periods: decade of the seventies, hermeneutics from the oppression of women, decade of the eighties, hermeneutics from the perspective of women, and decade of the nineties, hermeneutics feminist of liberation. See Elsa Tamez. La sociedad y nuestros sueños, in *Las Mujeres valientes y el movimiento de Jesús*, (GBGM, NY, 2001), p.161ff ..

experience of being in Christ, free, autonomous, equal and worthy that they assume the commitment to be disciples of Christ and to promote the Kingdom together with their male brothers! If we start from physical and symbolic violence towards women, it does not represent an isolated panorama. In fact, it does not seem exaggerated to speak of a "femicide" in our countries, that is, of a mass murder of women that seems to be tolerated collectively and sanctioned in practice by the prevailing legal and economic system.

Therefore, if the gospel is opposed to violence - including rape and femicide - the Church will necessarily have to defend gender equality. Here we must remember that "equals" is not the same as "identical" - it is not about erasing the particularities but about insisting on the task of breaking down what the fact that men and women are carriers of the imago concretely and materially means Dei in equal measure. In practice, this leads to the fact that if the Church does not promote equality (for whatever reason and regardless of its good intentions), in practice it ends up disguising gender violence and even promoting it. This does not mean that the profile of gender equality varies; its exact contours can not be prescribed beforehand: it is necessary to imagine respectful and contextual ways of living it, making the way by walking. But the principle of the equality of men and women before God and in the world has to assume a leading role if theological anthropology is to contribute to building peace and justice, instead of contributing to violence and injustice.

The fact is, then, that just as women who resist violence can sketch their critical path, with the help of the Ruaj / Spirit of God, theological anthropology can do the same, in a multiplicity of contexts, situations and cultures. I think we have to rethink Christology, from a Trinitarian hermeneutics and grace from below and from the margin, to do justice to the ultimate revelation of God in the specific and fully human person of Jesus of Nazareth. In this topic God is deeply committed to the particularity. It is incarnated in the particularity of a human being, so that we can (in all our particularities) share the very life of God (theosis). To suggest that a specific kind of human particularity (such as skin color or gender or sexuality) stands on top of all others is something that is profoundly opposed to the liberating message of the gospel. The use of symbolic or physical violence to impose domination and gender hierarchy is also opposed to the Gospel message. *"A theological anthropology that undertakes a critical path will need to imagine ways of respecting the*

*particularity and to avoid the pitfalls of gender complementarity that are sometimes hidden in the margins of the doctrine of the imago Dei, even in its feminist versions "*.<sup>39</sup>

Recognizing the drama of gender inequality and violence and of some of the conditions that lead to greater violence against women; some signs of hope are glimpsed in the actions of women and men who resist violence to overcome it, in non-violent ways. What could be the role of theology and its ethics in general, and of a particular intercultural feminist theology, in the face of such reality? . The development and promotion of a theological anthropology of grace - coherent with a Christology of grace - and transformation of dominant subjectivity, capable of resisting violence against women is key. A theological anthropology of this kind needs to be consciously freed from the explicit or implicit complicity with violence against women, striving to find a critical path that can contribute to their flourishing. And we need a change in the way in which-work-we work in the ecclesial daily life as in our theological task. Since "*the biggest problem is not only in the gender formation of a Methodist theology, but in a dramatic way, in the relations of power and gender within Brazilian Methodism -and in general*".<sup>40</sup>

## **VII. By way of conclusion: renewal in grace from the encounter with others**

The Spirit of Jesus who acts especially from below and from the margins, points us to directions in this time in which an epoch is falling apart, at the same time that a new time is brewing.

What paths should our theology and our communities follow to be renewed and transformed from the Grace of Jesus, in relation to others who are in a world in disgrace? The cultural and theological reflections that I shared in this essay do not allow me to reach a final conclusion. Such closure would close the possibility of always being open -as I tried to show- to new faces of others that constantly question us in our life and mission. Seen through a theological - cultural lens, our encounters with others marginalized from the life of grace in Christ, remind us of the continuous need for a theological thought - in this case, a Christology and human subjectivity from grace - and a plural hermeneutics that takes into

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<sup>39</sup> N. Bedford, Ibid.p.85

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Cardoso Pereira, "Fragmentos e Cacos de Experiência .Relações sociais de poder e gênero na teologia wesleyana" . *Revista Caminhando*, (vol. 8, n. 2 [12], Editeo, S.Paulo, 2003).p.12.

account the perspective of the different others, which conflict our comfort and religious egocentrism.

Because in the logic of the grace of the kingdom of God "in evangelizing we are evangelized, from the genuine encounter with others and their crosses, we are renewed". In our search for renewal from grace, not only ortho-doxy or ortho-praxis is necessary, but also an urgent *evangelical ortho-pathway of grace*, that transforms our ecclesial and cultural subjectivities. This is our message: The power of death could not quench the faith, hope and love that the Son of God manifested in his life and ministry. The one who died that shameful death was not over for the women who prepared ointments and spices to care on the broken body, according to Luke. Only after doing a work of disinterested love of grace for a body that can not even say a word of thanks, even less of retribution is that we will find ourselves with the surprise of the renewal and liberation of our life. Since the only suffering that has meaning is the suffering we accept in the struggle against suffering. Therefore, the definitive victory of God's love over sin, death and the lie that is the resurrection of Jesus, is not realized if it is not assumed and faces the terrible experience of pain, suffering, and the cross. In the words of the Brazilian theologian Vítor Westhelle: "A theology of the cross is always found on the other side of the practice of the resurrection, and conversely: a resurrection practice can only be exercised in the face of the fatal experience of the cross".<sup>41</sup>

Our praxis of the means of grace must be challenged to integrate this dangerous and subversive memory of the grace of Jesus of Nazareth, who from his humanity was able to "lodge and stay, to be compassionate, merciful, to be transformed from the sacred encounter with the others. As some claimed for years in Latin America a human socialism, we must continue to seek from the compassionate grace of Jesus: a humanized gospel, a humanized, humanized Methodism."<sup>42</sup>

A cultural fact of Argentina and the Rio de la Plata(River Plate) is the original drink of the Guarani aborigines, the so-called *Mate*. It is perhaps the most popular symbol of the

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<sup>41</sup> Westhelle Vitor: *Voces de protesta en América Latina*, (México: LSTCH, 2000),p.126.

<sup>42</sup>Fragment of the *Preaching of the Bishop of the Methodist Church Argentina* AméricoJara, at the close of the Seminary of Evangelization of the World Institute Evangelism- CMM, in Buenos Aires, July 29, 2018.

intimate and genuine encounter with the other, for its inclusive and communitarian dimension<sup>43</sup>. In some churches, for years, *Mate* has been shared in spaces where the means of grace are practiced: in the biblical meetings and prayer in small groups, in the work of evangelization and diakonia; and even in worship services. The *Mate* as a group drink - a symbol of encounter and empathy - that is given, shared, received and includes the different, the new or the marginalized. We need a Christianity, a Methodism - if I may call it that- with roots and a face of Mate.

Not only ortho-doxy, nor ortho-praxis but an evangelical *ortho-pathy of grace* that transforms our ecclesial and cultural subjectivities. Both theologically and culturally I am challenged not to imagine a common future of our Wesleyan Methodist community, and its local and global mission, without the participation of those who have been excluded for centuries. This is nothing more and nothing less than our task, because we are convinced by his Spirit, that from the passage of Jesus Christ through our history; "Every act of love never ends without a future".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> It is also good to clarify, that the rural worker called "yerbatero" and his family is exploited in a ruthless way. The yerbatero receives as value of his work 6 \$ Argentine pesos for kilo of yerba leaf harvested and the price in the supermarkets is 70 \$ Argentine pesos. An unfair approximate difference of 11.5% times for kilo. I am appreciate to Timothy Eberhart for reminding me of this situation in the group's debate, in order to make visible the drama of the rural workers in Argentina, other of those excluded that we are talking about in this essay.

<sup>44</sup> J. Míguez Bonino, *Espacio para ser hombres*, (BsAs, Aurora, 1990).p. 70

