

HOLINESS IN MISSION:
 MISSIO DEI IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE
 CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE IN LATIN AMERICA
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A Christian and Missional People

The clarification of the English theologian J. G. Davies is especially relevant today: “The church should not consider itself the author of the mission.” For Davies, mission is in God’s hands; it “is never the proper mission of the church.”¹ This anchoring has allowed us to distance ourselves from impure motivations, such as conceiving of the mission as a cultural transfer, the imposition of a supposed superior culture. Even more seriously, reducing it to a machinery aimed at turning the original peoples into docile subjects before colonial powers.²

Understanding that the mission is not the property of the church radically transforms its attitude: the church participates, commits, and aligns, but it does not constitute the starting point. Mission is not an instrument to expand the church, but the means by which God expands his Kingdom. When the church sees itself as the center, imbalances arise. Faith and motivation are formulated from the institution, forgetting that the church is, above all, the fruit of the mission of God.

From this perspective, the church cannot find its definition from itself; this also includes its missionary actions, which should not operate independently.³ Every initiative must respond to God’s previous work, because it is the mission that gives the church meaning and shape. She has been called to respond, embody, witness, and actively participate in the mission of the Triune God.

While this approach has enabled new approaches, it should not come as a surprise to those from Wesleyan traditions. The doctrine of prevenient grace proclaims that God always takes the first step. This is seen in Genesis, where God initiates creation and, even after the fall, takes the initiative to *reunite* with human beings. Mission is therefore the “yes” of God to the world⁴ through his redemptive work. Hence, the church participates in a mission that precedes it and that constitutes its reason for being.⁵ Mission is not an occasional project; it is the very DNA of the church.

¹ John Gordon Davies, *Worship and Mission* (SCM PRESS LTD, 1966), 33.

² David J. Bosch. *Mission in Transformation: Paradigm Shifts in Mission Theology* (Challenge Books, 2000), 11–13.

³ Darrel L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Eerdmans, 2015), 317.

⁴ Bosch, *Mission in Transformation* 14.

⁵ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 33.

This missional DNA⁶ comes from the nature of God. As far back as 1934, Karl Hartenstein coined the term *missio Dei* to express the Trinitarian dynamic⁷ by which the Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and the Triune God sends the church. The Second Vatican Council took up Protestant statements and dared to affirm that: “The pilgrim church is missionary by nature, since it takes its origin from the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of God the Father.”⁸ David Bosch adds one more element to the formula: “The Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and finally the Triune God sends the church into the world.”⁹ Thus, the church is missional because it arises from a God who is, in himself, missionary.¹⁰

Missio Dei is the living confession of Scripture that proclaims that “God so loved the world.” That love drives God’s deliberate action to restore holiness, reconcile his creatures, and make them participants in his work in the world.¹¹ That is why, when the Church of the Nazarene affirms that it is a Christian and missional church, it does not present two parallel affirmations. It is describing its deepest identity. It is not simply about carrying out missionary activities, but about existing because God, in his Trinitarian movement, sends it as an extension of the mission of Christ.

On the other hand, the church does not have an identity disconnected from Christ;¹² any other form of self-definition is foreign to her. Therefore, their understanding of themselves must remain anchored in apostolic witness, being recognized as a sign of the new creation inaugurated under the lordship of Christ. The church is, first and foremost, a witness and community in communion with him, shaped by his Word, and sent out to the world that God loves and for whom Christ gave his life.¹³

Missio Dei is a confession of “yes” to the world founded on self-giving love for reconciliation. But, as Bosch warns, this “yes” also implies a prophetic “no.”¹⁴ As Elsa Tamez

⁶ Alan Hirsch, *Forgotten Paths*, Digital (Missional Press, 2009), 26, http://www.theforgottenways.org/media/pdf/Caminos_Olvidados_Hirsch%20libre_e-texto.pdf.

⁷ It first appears in Hartenstein’s article about the 1952 Willigen missionary conference. View on: Jürgen Schuster, “Karl Hartenstein,” *Mission Studies* 19 (January 2002): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338302X00053>.

⁸ Vaticano II Concilio, *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, II (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 2, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_sp.html.

⁹ Bosch, *Mission in Transformation*, 447.

¹⁰ Aaggard says Bishop Birkeli summed up the idea of *missio Dei* such as: “a predicate of God. God is a missionary God. It is this God who addresses the whole world, both inside and outside the Church.” Anna Marie Aagaard, “Missio Dei in a Catholic Perspective: Missionary Theological Tendencies,” *Protestant Theology* 34, no. J.G. (1974): 421, <https://doi.org/10.14315/evth-1974-jg35>.

¹¹ Guder, *Called to Witness*, 319–20.

¹² For Wesley, faith in Christ is essential; No one can be considered a brother if he does not share this faith. He himself poses it with his well-known question: “Is your heart right as mine is right with yours?” Juan Wesley, *Works by Wesley. Sermons, II*, ed. Justo L. González, II (Providence House Publishers, 1996).

¹³ Davies, *Worship and Mission*, 320.

¹⁴ Bosch, *Mission in Transformation*, 26–27.

points out, God rejects what denies human dignity and distorts the original meaning of his creation.¹⁵ Therefore, participating in the mission includes both announcing salvation and denouncing injustice, violence, idolatry, oppression, and any structures opposed to the Kingdom.

A Holy People

If mission finds its origin in the Trinitarian dynamism of God, then its purpose cannot be limited to ecclesiastical expansion or the transmission of doctrines.¹⁶ In its deepest sense, mission aims at the restoration of what sin distorted: the image of God in humanity. Along these lines, Federico Meléndez points out that theology is at the service of the mission, a conviction inherited from the Wesleyan movement that understands theological reflection as a task oriented to discern and accompany the redemptive action of God in the world.¹⁷

Mission has, therefore, a fundamental purpose, which consists in the restoration of the image of God in human beings. In his sermon “The Image of God,” Wesley states that with the fall, humanity lost the fellowship that allowed it to reflect the divine image. Sin introduced corruption and disorder, although it did not eliminate the possibility of restoration. For Wesley, the image of God is that of dynamic, relational love, and it is fully realized only in living communion with God.¹⁸

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop elaborates on this idea by pointing out that, for Wesley, love is not a static sentiment but a living and relational force that can be understood only within a coherent vision of the human being as the bearer of the image of God.¹⁹ According to Dunning, that image operates as a reflection. When people live in a right relationship with God, the divine reality is projected in their lives, like an image in a mirror, without being confused with it.²⁰ Consequently, it must be properly said that human beings *are* made in the image of God, and it is only manifest when people live in relationship with him. Although sin has affected God’s

¹⁵ The Latin American theologian maintains that the doctrine of justification is evidence that the human being possesses a dignity granted and recognized by God himself. Elsa Támez, *Against all condemnation: justification by faith from the excluded*, with Princeton Theological Seminary Library (Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano : DEI, 1991), 38.

¹⁶ An example of this is Elsa Támez’s effort to articulate the doctrine of sin from its social dimension. For her, it is not possible in Latin America to reflect on grace without considering the critical situation that millions of people face daily: economic, social, cultural, and spiritual misery. Elsa Támez, “God’s Grace and Human Dignity,” *World Council of Churches*, el 4 de octubre de 2005, disponible en: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/gods-grace-and-human-dignity>, 25/11/2025.

¹⁷ At this point, Federico Meléndez explains that theology is always at the service of the mission and that the reality from which the praxis of the church is exercised determines the approach. Federico A. Meléndez, *Ethics and Economics. The Legacy of Juan Wesley to the Church in Latin America* (Ediciones Kairós, 2006), 10–11.

¹⁸ John Wesley, “Sermon 141: The Image of God,” The Wesley Works Digitization Project, 2024, 5, <https://wesleyworks.ecdsdev.org/sermons/Sermon141>.

¹⁹ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamics of Wesleyanism* (Casa Nazarena de Publicaciones, 2012), 2.

²⁰ H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Casa Nazarena de Publicaciones, 2018), 247–61.

original purpose for humanity, there remains a tension between a damaged image and, at the same time, an image that remains permanent.²¹

Understanding this allows us to recognize that restoring the relationship with God is a fundamental task. Therefore, divine grace is indispensable to renew in human beings the image of God. Although this image was profoundly distorted by the fall, it has not been eliminated. For Wesley, the fall deprives humans of their primary relationship with God and disorganizes all other relationships.²² However, as Diane Leclerc points out, even though these relationships are distorted, the desire to love and the hope for renewal remain.²³

Prevenient grace, granted to all, makes it possible for this capacity to love to be reactivated and for the spiritual senses of human beings to be opened to God again. This grace prepares, awakens, and guides, allowing the divine image to begin to be restored through God's redemptive action.²⁴

From this perspective, the Church of the Nazarene, by affirming itself as a "holiness church," recognizes itself as a community called to live in the restored relationship that the Triune God offers. In Wesley's theology, salvation is not reduced to the eschatological expectation of "going to heaven," but designates the present work of God that renews human beings from the depths of their being.²⁵ Being "clothed in Christ" implies a real transformation carried out by the Spirit, so that a person becomes a new creation, in Pauline language.²⁶ This renewal has as its center love, which Wesley understands as a dynamism received from God and returned to our neighbor.²⁷ The journey of salvation encompasses the entire process of grace, from the divine initiative to the believer's full transformation. It reconfigures the image of God and empowers each person to participate in synergy with him²⁸ as an agent of reconciliation.²⁹ From this perspective, mission cannot be separated from the transformational character of salvation, for both share the same purpose, the renewal of humanity in God's image.

²¹ Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 257.

²² Wesley, "Sermon 141: The Image of God," 6–7.

²³ Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), 158.

²⁴ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 158–59.

²⁵ John Wesley, *Works by Wesley. Sermons, III*, ed. Justo L. González, III (Wesleyan Heritage Publications, 1996), 70–74.

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

²⁷ Here is how clear Wesley expresses this movement. We feel that God's love has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that was given to us, producing love for all humankind, and more especially for the children of God. Expels the love of the world, the love of pleasure, leisure, honors, money, along with pride, anger, self-centeredness, and every other bad tendency; in a word, exchanging the earthly, sensual, diabolical mindset¹⁴ for the mind that there was in Christ Jesus. Wesley, *Works of Wesley, Sermons*, III, 72.

²⁸ Thomas A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Theology of Christian Perfecting (Didsbury Lecture Series)* (Cascade Books, 2013), 58.

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:16-20

Thus, the church understands itself in the same movement, as Christian, missional, and holy, sent by the Triune God, renewed in his image, and placed at the service of the world that God loves.

The Mission Between Context and Scripture

Every expression of faith arises from a concrete context. Words, concepts, and practices are embodied in historical realities. Latin American theology has recognized the importance of taking this contextual dimension into account to make a responsible reading of the Gospel. A mission that ignores context risks repeating patterns of cultural domination or preaching a message disconnected from the real suffering of the people.³⁰

This same line was developed by Methodist missiologist and anthropologist Alan Tippett, who emphasizes that *context determines everything*. For him, the existential situation in which people live is not a secondary element but an essential factor in understanding how they interpret their reality and respond to the Christian message. Tippett warned that many problems arise when someone acts outside their own context or when individuals see themselves as isolated entities, disconnected from the social relations that constitute them. Hence, he concluded that all selfishness arises precisely from the inability or refusal to recognize the social context that shapes a person. In missional terms, this implies that decontextualized mission is not only ineffective but potentially harmful.³¹

In light of this vision, it is even more important to remember that the Missionary Congress of Panama (1916) was decisive for Latin America. Pagán highlights that this Congress acted as a continental catalytic agent, establishing the Bible as a guiding foundation for missionary efforts, program design, the administration of educational and social institutions, and denominational priorities. In addition, he underlines the organizers' concern to ensure that the missionaries sent to the Americas not only understand the Latin American reality but are also formed in a serious and methodical interpretation of the Scriptures. For Pagán, these recommendations demonstrate that the Congress understood that the mission cannot be carried out without understanding the context, and that biblical reading should dialogue with the culture, history, and social conditions of the Latin American peoples.³²

This articulation between biblical faithfulness and contextual understanding is not foreign to the Wesleyan tradition. In his theological method, John Wesley insisted that the correct interpretation of the biblical text was fundamental, since the Holy Scriptures were sufficient for salvation.³³ Nothing that is not read in them or proven by them is to be demanded as an article of faith or considered necessary to salvation. However, far from promoting a rigid or isolated

³⁰ John Sinclair identifies the Christian Worker Congress of Panama as a watershed in missionary activity but also in theological work in Latin America. Juan A. Mackay, *The Other Spanish Christ. A study of the spiritual history of Spain and Latin America.*, 2a. (Asociación Ediciones La Aurora, 1998), 15–17.

³¹ Alan R. Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (William Carey Library, 1987), 17–18.

³² Samuel Pagan, “Bible Readings and Missionary Implications. Congress of Panama 1916-2016,” *Bible Review*, no. 77 (December) (December 2016): 321-36., <https://doi.org/10.47182/RB.77.N-201661>.

³³ Thomas A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 5.

reading, Wesley recognized that interpretation requires discernment, pastoral responsibility, and attention to the concrete circumstances of the people served. Scripture is authoritative, but its understanding always happens within a time, a culture, and a community.³⁴

Thus, Wesley's concern converges with the intuition of the Panama Congress and with the contemporary Latin American reflection. The mission requires a biblical hermeneutic that, without sacrificing its fidelity to Scripture, is capable of listening to and understanding the context. Tom Noble summarizes this fruitful tension when he warns that no ecclesial tradition, however venerable, has authority above the Word of God. Rather, it is precisely for this reason that each generation must evaluate its doctrinal formulations in the light of Scripture, in dialogue with its own time and reality.³⁵ In other words, the Christian mission requires a biblical interpretation that is free from dogmatic bondage, but also purified from unbelieving prejudices and secular biases.³⁶ The church is called to a permanent dialogue in which its doctrinal convictions are continually submitted to the Word of God, so that, generation after generation and in diverse *contexts*, it can correct, refine, and renew its understanding of truth.

Noble stated it as follows: "For the Protestant tradition, no Pope, bishop, superintendent, council, or assembly is above the authority of the Word of God. No church tradition, however venerable, is unchallenged. All doctrinal formulation after the apostles is subject to Scripture. The Bible is the only source and final criterion for Christian doctrine."³⁷

In short, the Christian mission requires a hermeneutic that is both faithful and profoundly contextual. Scripture must not be held captive by dogmatic systems or subject to secular prejudices. Instead, it must open the church to a continuous dialogue with the Word. Only in this way, generation after generation and in each context, can the community of believers review and renew its understanding of truth.

Toward an Incarnate Mission

In this context, the proposal of the Methodist theologian Pablo Guillermo Oviedo is of particular relevance. He observes that Wesleyan theology in Latin America has been identified as a practical theology. This qualifier, Oviedo specifies, does not imply that the dogma is simply "applied" to reality. It requires discovering God's action in one's context. It is a theology born of the living encounter between God and people; a perspective capable of listening to concrete reality and discerning the divine grace at work in daily life.³⁸

As mentioned above, Federico Meléndez recognizes that the theological work of John Wesley was deeply shaped by its socioeconomic context, and that mission constituted the foundation of his theological formulations, not decontextualized abstractions. Along these same lines, Leclerc points out that Wesley is better understood as a practical theologian than as a systematic theologian. His reflections arise from real situations and concrete challenges in the

³⁴ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 7.

³⁵ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 6–7.

³⁶ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 14.

³⁷ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 5–6.

³⁸ Pablo Guillermo Oviedo, "Liberation Theology and Wesleyan Theology in Latin America: A historical-theological vision," *Theology and Culture* 22 (2020): 61, <https://doi.org/1668-6233>.

ministry. He worked inductively, drawing on pastoral experience, observing the spiritual lives of people, discerning the action of grace, and formulating his theological conclusions from this.³⁹

Likewise, Wesley avoided unnecessary speculations.⁴⁰ His preaching was aimed at common people and sought to ensure that everyone understood clearly the way to salvation as revealed in the Scriptures. Leclerc concludes that Wesleyan theology is not a simple set of doctrines, but a *theological ethos*,⁴¹ a way of living, interpreting, and announcing the faith whose purpose is a practical Christian life full of love.

Therefore, embodied theological work is essential, sustained by dialogue between doctrinal formulations oriented by mission and the concrete reality of Latin American contexts. Nevertheless, the risk persists of underestimating the irreplaceable value of theological work. The critical thinking of men and women capable of discerning how the mission of God is interwoven in the Latin American reality constitutes a fundamental contribution, for it is in that space where dogma comes to life and offers concrete answers to the social and economic needs of the peoples.

Another important challenge lies in the false idea of perpetuating doctrinal elements “without adulterating them,” under the pretense of safeguarding doctrinal purity that ends up narrowing the margins of reflection and preventing new connections that respond to the context’s needs. It inadvertently produces what American historian Jaroslav Pelikan identifies as traditionalism. His celebrated distinction expresses it clearly: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”⁴²

Nor is this any dismissal of tradition; on the contrary, Pelikan recognizes that Christian tradition is the story of its own critical reexamination. For him, examination occurs when people from other backgrounds raise questions about unexamined assumptions, viewing the sacred texts through different lenses. We can also remember his brilliant observation in this regard: we must not forget that the God who gave the tradition also made the human mind in his image.⁴³ Therefore, the Christian tradition has always contained a creative tension between what was received, what was reasoned, and the new experiences born of critical discernment.

In short, the Christian tradition has been constituted and continuously reformulated through critical dialogue with new voices and historical situations that, in reality, express latent dimensions of their own identity. Tradition, therefore, is a living organism that is renewed in the

³⁹ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 27.

⁴⁰ Tom Noble also recognizes and expresses the reasons why John Wesley should not be considered with the label of a systematic theologian. He warns that it would be asking too much of him to demand that he be one or treat him as such. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 99.

⁴¹ Diane Leclerc uses the term “ethos” to refer to the lived framework from which theology is made, that is, an integrative practice that is not limited to the statement of doctrines but that shapes a Christian lifestyle. According to Leclerc, this ethos reflects how faith is embodied in everyday life, guiding moral action, personal piety, and the mission of the community. In the case of Wesley, it indicates that his theology is not an abstract system but a theological habit, a formative disposition that guides conduct, biblical interpretation, and pastoral praxis. Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 27.

⁴² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

⁴³ Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 72.

encounter with new experiences and questions. Traditionalism, in contrast, seeks to preserve tradition by embalming it.⁴⁴ It is limited to a mechanical repetition, devoid of reflection, impervious to all questioning, and fearful of the reinterpretations that are necessary for the life of the church and the advancement of the mission of God.

At this point, it seems that Tom Noble's statement is not so scandalous when he confesses that: "As long as this 'present evil age' lasts, definitive theology will never be written."⁴⁵ The call is for the church to live in constant discernment of the truth of God revealed once for all in Jesus Christ and expressed once for all in the Holy Scriptures.

If this dynamism is not promoted, the result is a dead orthodoxy, expressed in languages and categories that have petrified. Such orthodoxy holds itself to be the final word and claims a final, inward-looking authority. On the contrary, when tradition is explored from new angles, a living orthodoxy emerges, capable of welcoming the proposals that emerge in each new generation. Its defining feature is the humility with which it approaches the Scriptures, bringing new questions from diverse contexts. This implies a mature fidelity to the tradition received; a fidelity that seeks to articulate it with greater precision, so that it is more biblical, persuasive, and meaningful for contemporary challenges.⁴⁶

As noted above, theology serves the mission. Therefore, all doctrinal definitions must be clearly expressed in an embodied, real, and transformative praxis. There is no authentic orthodoxy that does not lead to a full orthopraxis, because any separation between theory and practice becomes mere empty speculation.⁴⁷ John Wesley himself, in his sermon "The Way to the Kingdom," warned that a person could be perfectly orthodox, zealously defend apostolic doctrines, and even "be as orthodox as the devil." However, there can only be true religion—or, in his words, "a heart upright toward God"—when that faith translates into love for your neighbor.⁴⁸ This love is manifested not only by avoiding doing evil against any human being, but also by acting proactively in the practice of good, full of mercy, producing good fruits for all humanity and the rest of creation.

In one of his most forceful refutations, Wesley responds to the questioning of those who objected to helping the needy, asking: "What is the use of feeding or clothing human beings if, in any way, they can fall into eternal fire?" His answer is clear: "Whether they are lost or they are saved, we are expressly commanded to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked." For Wesley, this practical obedience is so essential that the deliberate omission of feeding and clothing the poor places the believer, according to the very teaching of Christ, before the real possibility of

⁴⁴ Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, 73.

⁴⁵ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 17–78.

⁴⁶ Noble makes a fundamental distinction regarding the nature of tradition, stressing that it must be kept alive and not become a mere vestige of the past. A dead orthodoxy, he says, is either like a stiff corpse or like a family heirloom, an increasingly useless and irrelevant antiquity, destined eventually for the museum. See Tom Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 17–18.

⁴⁷ Nor can you separate the mind from the body, since it is the action of a spirit connected to a body. Wesley John, "Sermon 57, On the Fall of Man," en *Sermons on Several Occasions*, II (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2019), 2:405-6.

⁴⁸ John Wesley, *Works by Wesley. Sermons, I*, ed. Justo L. González, I (Providence House Publishers, 1996), 135–36.

eternal fire.⁴⁹ Active mercy, therefore, is not an optional add-on. It is the concrete way in which a living orthodoxy is verified and a faith that, as Runyon fully demonstrates in his book *The New Creation*, cannot be separated from the continuous synergistic relationship in which God is our covenant partner and co-producer of our works. It is the work of faith, born of participation with the Spirit of God, that marks the true divine image in the human being. Only this synergy, this genuine united work, can renew the world.⁵⁰

As a final point to achieve what Mildred Bangs has pointed out regarding a coherent vision of the human being as the bearer of the image of God, Wesley understood that it is necessary to integrate orthopathy, the correct ways of feeling, because this affective dimension is essential for the transformation of the human being, as Runyon observes. The believer needs to be touched by the Spirit of God and experience a new, binding reality with him. Without this internal experience, the outer work is emptied of its vital energy, and faith loses its regenerative capacity.⁵¹

However, in a context such as Latin America, it is not enough for the poor to “feel” that they are blessed; they need to experience the grace of God through the concrete cooperation of their church, which makes the solidarity of the Kingdom visible. As Táez articulates, *God identifies with the poor to such an extent that their rights become the very rights of God.*⁵² This does not imply spiritualizing poverty or considering it a privilege, but rather recognizing that it is an unworthy state that must be transformed. Poverty is an evil that reveals the inequality produced by sin. It therefore requires a response that unites the spiritual experience with the restorative action of the Christian community.

The Church of the Nazarene did not receive a systematic theology from John Wesley, as noted above; rather, it inherited something even more valuable: a social creed.⁵³ Wesley’s most significant contribution is his conviction that there is no such thing as a “solitary religion,” no secret Christianity, and no false perception of a faith that stands alone without works.⁵⁴

Perhaps the best evidence that the theological heart of John Wesley remained filled with that beneficial warmth⁵⁵ until the winter of his life is his own attitude at the age of 82. In his diary, he writes that one Christmas, he and some employees distributed coal and bread to the city’s poor. However, recognizing the magnitude of the need, they understood they also needed clothes and food. Wesley explains that in just four days, he managed to gather 200 pounds to

⁴⁹ Wesley, *Works by Wesley. Sermons, II*, II, 101.

⁵⁰ Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation. John Wesley’s Theology for Today*. (Abingdon Press, 2006), 170.

⁵¹ Runyon, *The New Creation*, 180.

⁵² Elsa Támez, *Don’t Discriminate Against the Poor* (Editorial Verbo Divino, 2008), 55.

⁵³ Elsa Támez, “The Wesley of the Poor - Elsa Támez”, *Argentine Evangelical Methodist Church*, on 9 June 2021, <https://iglesiametodista.org.ar/recursos/el-wesley-de-los-pobres-elsa-tamez/>.

⁵⁴ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: Patterns for Church Renewal: Patterns for Church Renewal*, Kindle (Seedbed, 2016), 125.

⁵⁵ Wesley, “Sermon 141: The Image of God,” 5–6.

provide clothes for the most destitute. It was a difficult task, since the streets were covered in melting snow and his feet remained submerged in icy water almost the entire day.⁵⁶

In short, if the Church of the Nazarene understands its identity through mission, it must embody the theological task through a permanent dialogue between doctrinal formulations oriented by mission and the concrete reality of each context. In Latin America, this dialogue is particularly relevant given the region's social, economic, and pastoral circumstances.

Conclusion

As long as the mission continues to guide the life of the church, it will remain open to the dynamism of love, driven by a centrifugal force⁵⁷ that leads it to manifest itself in each context and to cross the borders that sin has raised in humanity. As noted in the book of Acts, the early church was led by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to cross boundaries that religious and cultural prejudices had erected. This same impulse animates John Wesley's reflection in his sermon "The Catholic Spirit," where he questions whether the energy of love truly animates the faith professed.⁵⁸

In this perspective, the identity of the church is not defined solely by the verbal confession of Christ, but by the concrete expression of his love through a faith that works through love. This living faith is for Wesley neither the result of human effort nor moral discipline. Humanity is not the source of such energy. It is given by the Spirit, who imparts a heart of love toward God and toward all humanity.⁵⁹ The love that drives the mission and makes a church that is Christian, missional, holy, and incarnate possible comes only from God. Through his Spirit, he empowers his people to participate in his reconciling work in the world.

Along these same lines, David A. Busic invites us to remember that the Church of the Nazarene bears witness to its name inscribed in its own history by identifying with Jesus of Nazareth and dedicating itself especially to the needy and those who have been marginalized.⁶⁰ It was this centrifugal force, that is, a faith energized by love, that led the first Nazarenes into forgotten barrios and spaces that others had abandoned.

Finally, the mission of God also incorporates a centripetal dynamic: an energy that leads the church to sanctification. The community is sanctified to the extent that it remains in relationship with God. There is no authentic love that does not flow from the divine initiative. Thus, the Trinitarian mission integrates two inseparable dynamics in a single work: the sending of the church into the world and the internal transformation of the community. Sent by the Father, quickened and sanctified by the Spirit, and configured into the life of Christ, believers are

⁵⁶ John Wesley, *The Journal*, January 4, 1785, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. 4 (Harmer & Harley, 2024), 295.

⁵⁷ Hirsch, *Forgotten Paths*, 132.

⁵⁸ Wesley, *Works by Wesley. Sermons, II*, 406.

⁵⁹ John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit: Discourse One. Sermon 10," with Nazarene University Northwest, Wesley Center Online, accessed December 12, 2025, <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-10-the-witness-of-the-spirit-discourse-one/>.

⁶⁰ David A. Busic, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition* (The Foundry Publishing, 2022), 13.

constituted as a holy people to bear witness in the world to the love they have received. In this way, mission and holiness are not parallel paths but complementary dimensions of the same call that defines the identity of the Church of the Nazarene.

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