

ECCLESIOLOGY IN WESLEYAN THEOLOGY  
ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF WESLEYAN  
THEOLOGY FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTINENT

Carlos Martín Abejer

*1 – Introduction:*

There are always several ways to reflect upon a given subject, especially when we scrutinize the theological world. When we talk about theology we are referring to linguistic expressions and metaphors that serve to uncover new hermeneutical synthesis about God's activity in the world.

For that reason, when we think about an ecclesiology within the Wesleyan heritage, and particularly within the framework of our Latin American reality, it is possible to observe several different approaches. However, this paper will follow a specific course by utilizing the intersection of a historical-social crossing. It is possible to find favorable points of connection between what motivated John Wesley to articulate a more effective ecclesiology and those points that can result in a serious challenge for our day. As an international entity, it is truly important that the Church of the Nazarene observe the way in which our legacy has shaped our theological direction from the beginning of our denomination. Thus, we may be able to develop not simply a reflection upon a more pertinent theology but also a practical and more effective ecclesiology that will offer answers and lay out a foundation of hope for the future regarding the countless challenges that Latin America faces as a continent.

*2 – John Wesley: A historical legacy and source of inspiration for our contemporary time*

Our ecclesiastical identity has a name and an origin, referring specifically to a historical person: John Wesley. To meet him is to not only encounter the history of his life, his works, and his thought, but also the history of the church. John Wesley comes to us with a personal, familial, and ecclesiastical history, a history that has followed him for more than three centuries. Wesleyan scholars have noted that there are several currents that converge together: the Early Church with its ecumenical creeds, the tradition of Eastern and Western Fathers of the faith, and the liturgy contained in the *Common Book of Prayer*. John Wesley also carries on the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, as seen in the "Articles of Faith." It also entails the spiritual contributions developed in the Middle Age, the Moravian Pietism of Lutheran origin, the Calvinist puritanism of English ancestors, and the Arminian series of questions regarding double predestination and the affirmation of freedom and human

responsibility.<sup>1</sup> However, the most important aspect of John Wesley is that in him we do not only encounter all these historical, theological, and dogmatic intersections, but also and primarily the gospel of Jesus Christ, adopted and interpreted for the people of Wesley's time. For this reason, Wesley remains a historical figure and is able to inspire us centuries later. After all, his contribution is a heritage of fidelity to the gospel, a biblical gospel, Christocentric and holistic for both the personal and social life of the individual. It is a call to live the new creation, proposed by God for the entire human race.

Therefore, although we may be aware that Wesleyan theology has limitations, when we follow the steps that John Wesley has left us we are able to promote a new and necessary incentive that will enable us to reflect upon the praxis of the church in the daily life of Latin Americans.

Just like John Wesley, we need to "step outside" and see things from a different angle to understand our reality more clearly. His comprehensive character should inspire us. The breadth of his vision and his profound ecclesiological conscience should propel us toward new hermeneutical horizons, able to revitalize our ecclesiastical understanding. His calmness and coherence in handling theological issues of great relevance should permeate our reflection. Just as Wesley had the habit of thinking theologically, so should we nourish the same discernment in our lives. If for John Wesley ecclesiology was a decisive factor in his ministry, it should also be for us Nazarenes in Latin America today.

### *3 – Intermediary Words: The value of a Wesleyan approach for the creation of a Latin American ecclesiology*

As the writings of John Wesley indicate, the Wesleyan tradition is committed to a practical theology.<sup>2</sup> Included in the community of faith, this theology is placed on the way of salvation and for the transformation of the individual according to the purposes of God and revealed through the person of Christ. Its supreme objective is to propose a life of holiness and promote the new creation by the work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's most profound motivation can be summarized in the declaration found repeatedly in his works: "Faith expressing itself through love."<sup>3</sup>

For that reason, Wesleyan theology does not simply fit into a confession of orthodox principles; on the contrary, it remains in harmony with life and history, valuing experience as well as the other theological references: Scripture, tradition, reason, and creation. Such

harmony explains its functionality and its resistance to all efforts toward restricting it to nothing more than a rigid and lifeless system.

Knowing that the Wesleyan tradition is capable of making many contributions in this area, it is possible to affirm that the legacy it has left us can be called a “hermeneutical key” for theological reflection in Latin America. Although some individuals think that to revitalize Wesleyanism would imply going back to the times of Wesley and using his same methodology, this document proposes something different. Certainly, John Wesley is a figure who inspires us, but the challenge is found in the possibility of relating this theological heritage in the contemporary world by forging an identity and mission that will be worthy of the Gospel.

Thus, Wesleyan ecclesiology can make positive contributions by considering the dimensions of religious life as guided by a right understanding of the kingdom of God,<sup>4</sup> the dynamics of Church,<sup>5</sup> and the functionality of ecclesiastical structures.<sup>6</sup>

For that reason, when we analyze John Wesley’s ecclesiology and, primarily, his theological developments and pastoral experiences, we do so with hope. Not only in terms of his contributions to our own life of faith, but also from our overall perspective and traditions that nourish the expectation that new ecclesiological understandings will be able to permeate every culture as well as the times subsequent to our own.<sup>7</sup> I say this because those who intend to fix the Wesleyan identity as if it were an *aeternum* established system or as a heritage that is embraced or rejected without variations or even as a theological package formulated without our participation, deceive themselves.<sup>8</sup>

#### *4- Theological emphasis on the ecclesiological structure of John Wesley:*

Wesleyan theology is not speculative. John Wesley was able to connect personal redemption with social and cosmic transformation. His theological emphasis can be defined as a rediscovery of the truths that had been previously been made clear by the reformers, Church Fathers, and, naturally, by the Bible itself, combined with human experience. This allows Wesley’s theological development to be addressed, studied, and reinterpreted for today.

*4.1 The “Kingdom of God” as ‘analytical axis’ of Wesleyan Theology:* For John Wesley ecclesiology had its origin in the kingdom of God. It is a “present spiritual reality” according to Scripture: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Wesley understood that righteousness,

peace, and joy were fruits of the Holy Spirit, which God granted those who surrendered their lives to His authority in the present time. According to Wesley, these virtues referred to the most profound sources of spiritual life and, according to the Apostle Paul, this is the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup>

For John Wesley, the kingdom was also an “inheritance” that God would give to His people when Christ returned in His glory: “Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”<sup>11</sup>

Another perspective considered by John Wesley reflects the fact that the kingdom was a “dominion” into which the followers of Christ had already entered. In that respect, Paul wrote that God “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.”<sup>12</sup> This verse clearly says that the redeemed are already in the kingdom of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, Wesley rightly discerned that the kingdom of God was a “future dominion” in which one would participate upon Christ’s return.<sup>14</sup> Jesus referred to this eschatological reality several times: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>15</sup>

Wesley’s theology also affirmed that the kingdom of God was a “sphere” that made it possible not only for redemption as a salvific act to exist, but also for the divine government to exist as a lifestyle. For Wesley, the kingdom of God was not restricted to a fact, a person, or an institution, even though they may be important for the manifestation of His divine purposes. Projecting this perspective would simply dilute its deepest meaning.

Wesley also notes that “numerical growth” is not always synonymous with the kingdom. However, Wesley indicated that when the kingdom of God “grew” people would find liberation.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, for John Wesley, the kingdom of God was both a present and future reality.<sup>17</sup> It was a gift that God would give in the future through Jesus Christ but which had to be received in the present. He also referred to it as both a present and future dominion. Wesley’s reflection regarding this matter provides concrete possibilities. It allows us to harmonize the different dimensions of the church, confirming its diversity, and, at the same time, revitalizing the hopes of those who desire to fulfill the eternal purposes of the Creator with integrity.

*4.2 The 'Church' as a 'visible instrument' for Wesleyan ecclesiology:* John Wesley held a clear conviction that the church was a complex theological and social phenomenon that demanded renewed clarification. This conviction urged him to remember that the church was under construction and, therefore, it demanded a constant interpretation without disregarding the fundamental criteria of the Christian faith. For Wesley, the Church faced concrete challenges that needed to be dealt with by creating progressive and different understandings of the Church through its presence and action in the world.

This approach explains the reason why Wesley desired to renew the official Church. He believed that the Church was more than a congregation in which Christians nourished their faith and pious life. The Church should be marked by a powerful combination of three aspects: evangelism, mission, and witness.<sup>18</sup> The first, evangelism, was simply heralding the Gospel and summoning people to accept it. This is one of the vocations of the Church. On the other hand, mission revealed how the Church should operate in society; that is, in the areas of public health, education, and social justice, through the manifestation of spiritual gifts and ministries. Finally, for John Wesley, witness pointed to how people perceived Christians since the mere fact of existence projects a certain image upon people.

Hence, the Church, scripturally speaking, was a moment of visitation or movement of God's grace that was extended toward humanity. It was God's movement through Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit toward humankind in their need and sin. For Wesley, the Church was a divine mission in which a chosen people would witness to its active and dynamic instrumentality. In this movement, the Church becomes the workshop of the Kingdom, the place where the cosmic reach of atonement is visible through the demand and reception of faith. To see the world through a Wesleyan lens means to never lose hope for the Church.

*4.3 'Functional structures' as fruit of a 'new Wesleyan ecclesiological model':*

John Wesley had the audacity to not sanctify all the structures and traditions that constituted the church. He experienced the weakness of the Church as an institution without belittling its functions as a means of grace. This vision allowed him to work incessantly so that the church would be a clear, visible and authentic manifestation of the community as a people of God.<sup>19</sup> As a result of this sensible act, John Wesley promoted a myriad of innovations that led to the expansion of the Kingdom of God on earth during his time.

For instance, Wesley was innovative by “taking the Gospel to the crowds” and going beyond the territorial barriers of the official Church. It is possible to find in Wesley a Protestant classical ecclesiology containing strong Catholic elements. At the same time, his ecclesiology, permeated by a missional and evangelical passion in a historical context in which the “authority” of the church was the most prominent ecclesiastical feature, created an unavoidable conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Wesley was also innovative in the way he organized the people based on a “personal appropriation of God’s grace.” In his sermon about the Church, this living faith is explained as a trust and sure dependence upon God where sins are forgiven and reconciliation back to God is made possible by Christ’s own merit. Wesley was not satisfied with simply announcing the good news to individuals. He wanted people to have concrete initiatives as a response to divine grace in order to embody a true transformation in their lives.

Furthermore, John Wesley was innovative when he created a “practical evangelism structure” by allowing lay preachers to minister, enduring countless criticism because he chose common people, socially speaking. In the majority of the cases, these were people who did not have any university or theological education. However, in his discernment, Wesley understood that these individuals showed gifts and graces that, coupled with sincerity and dedication, were enough to be useful in the expansion of the Kingdom of God here on earth. The lay preachers had three functions. First, they were called to “preach” in the fields and villages. Second, they “created new class meetings” among those who had responded positively to the Good News. And finally, they practiced a “ministry of supervision” with the classes and their leaders. In this way, there was a clear organization, discipline, and responsibility.

He also established “social service structures” since he was not satisfied simply with the numerical growth of Methodism. For Wesley, the Methodist people should genuinely and visibly manifest their character, which consisted in serving the neighbor according to their given gifts and opportunities. An example of this structure is seen through the way in which he integrated his followers in works of service in orphanages, jails, visitation to the sick, and seeking jobs for the unemployed and resources for the neediest of society.

Wesley was also able to innovate the “structure of discipleship groups,” mainly through the implementation of “class meetings” and “bands.” Besides this model, there were also other structures put in place like “societies”<sup>21</sup> and “select groups.”<sup>22</sup> This model became an invaluable tool of renewal for the church in the conception and practice of *ecclesiola*, where

the Christians lived by the Word and led a disciplined and pious life in community enabled by the Holy Spirit in order to be used as leaven in the renewal of the entire Church body. By implementing this proposal, John Wesley walked through paths that had previously been rarely trod. Here, the individual would first become a part of a group and grow in his or her spiritual walk with God and then would become part of the Methodist people,<sup>23</sup> not considered another denomination but rather simply a group within the Anglican Church: “*Ecclesiolae in Ecclesia.*” He knew that the people he led were not the Church of Christ in and of itself. He accepted the legitimacy of the Anglican Church despite all its failures and unfaithfulness. However, he believed that the key to the renewal of the established Church was precisely the formation of communities of faithful disciples within the official Church. This vision was of great benefit to Wesley who ministered within the recognized Church and thus did not have to found an independent church.<sup>24</sup>

Although there were “religious societies” in the Anglican Church mainly composed by young men who were looking to live a devoted life, there was no organized and elaborate system in any part of the country that would help common people grow spiritually and develop a consistent spirituality in their Christian faith.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the functional structures that Wesley implemented were quite innovative within the context of the Anglican Church. Such ecclesiastical structure should not be an end in itself, but simply a means by which God reveals the direction of His purposes.

This idea demonstrates that John Wesley was able to rethink the entire dynamic of the church in light of the reality he experienced. He proposed not simply an institutional extension, but also a functional structure that reflected the nature of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the movement of God towards a world whose first sacrament and full expression was the Incarnation of the Son of God.<sup>26</sup> This vision broke traditional models and subordinated the hierarchical structure to the proclamation of the Gospel.

#### *5- Theological connections between Kingdom, church, and functional structures in the dimension of a Wesleyan ecclesiology:*

In light of the former description and with the desire to make a contribution to the Global Theology Conference, suggestions and implications now follow. They are not given with the aspiration of saying new things or things that have perhaps never before been formulated. On the contrary, the intention is to make reference to premises that may lead us to a concrete connection between the Wesleyan tradition and our reality in Latin America.

On the other hand, knowing that Wesleyan theology seeks to understand and reflect upon the praxis of the Church, which is related to the Gospel as expressed in everyday life, it is thus possible to organize an appropriate approach for our day.

With this in mind, this proposal is sustained by possible connections between the theological concepts that formed part of Wesley's ecclesiology. This connection is made possible first because the content in the Wesleyan heritage is capable of revealing the necessary understandings that will revitalize Wesley's teachings regarding the Kingdom of God. Second, this connection is possible because Wesley's approach regarding the people of God considered the Church to be a visible instrument that professed a historical faith while, at the same time, listened to and received the divine mystery through words and facts. Finally, this connection is possible because the functional structures reveal Wesley's capacity to understand the needs of his own time, without disowning his roots while discerning the divine effect on human contingencies.

5.1 *Hierophanic Ecclesiology*: This aspect allows a better understanding between the divine dimension and the human dimension of the Church. As a hierophanic structure, the divine aspect is revealed through the human perspective without overshadowing either one. The tension between these two poles (charisma and institution) is constant. Although the Church as a divine-human institution may be permeated by grace and be under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, it does not cease to be a human activity subject to many contingencies like the pilgrimage of the church shows historically.<sup>27</sup> Wesley himself reminds us of this matter when he affirms that the church as a divine-human institution is holy and revitalized by the Holy Spirit. It certainly stamps an image on every era that is inevitably imperfect, modifiable and able to be reformed. For Wesley, this aspect mixes certain paradoxes that curiously cannot be separated. It brings together structure and Spirit, form and power, in the context of communion between God and the people.<sup>28</sup>

5.2 *Trinitarian Ecclesiology*<sup>29</sup>: To consider this perspective is to give place to a fundamentally important theological and biblical postulate for the Christian trajectory. The nature of the Trinity provides profound truths relative to the nature of the Church. Understanding that the Father creates, the Son saves, and the Spirit sanctifies allows us to live a dynamic of constant transformation. After all, the Christian is recreated by the love of the Father through the operation of His redemption, through the grace of the Son, and solidified by the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit. Wesley's theology affirms this fact, and

although he did not elaborate an explicitly Trinitarian ecclesiology, his entire spiritual and theological formation was Trinitarian. His writings clearly show that the reality of this concept was not abstract, theoretical, or irrelevant, practically speaking. Wesley himself said: “I do not know how anyone can be a Christian until ‘the Spirit of God’ witnesses with his spirit, that he is a child of God...until God the holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son: And, having this witness, he honours the Son, and the blessed Spirit, ‘even as he honours the Father.’”<sup>30</sup> John Wesley lived with a Trinitarian mentality and, therefore, Wesleyan ecclesiology is deeply Trinitarian.

5.3 *Historical Ecclesiology*: This approach includes two focuses. First, a focus on faith, and second, a historical-social focus. Clearly, this ecclesiastical approach stresses the importance of keeping an eye directly on the sources of faith (Scripture and tradition) while keeping the other eye on the present times (acknowledging social phenomena and tendencies). It is by focusing on the past that a biblical and dogmatic knowledge may be rescued, which composes our faith discourse, whereas a contemporary focus illumines and revitalizes our present with the light of the past. There is a clear dialectic between these two foci: the past and the present mutually illumine each other.<sup>31</sup> This perspective was broadly valued and used by John Wesley, primarily when he noted how historical sources inspired him at the time of formulating a contextual theological structure.

5.4 *Pilgrim Ecclesiology*: This theological category does not allow us to reduce the church to a utilitarian activity since this is a substantial reality that is in continual movement. As the Wesleyan tradition clearly shows, the Church is an effective means of grace, the Messianic community, the sacrament of the Kingdom of God, and a people that journey through history and anticipate the future. For John Wesley, the Church was always on its way, which means that its essence is an *ecclesiola in via* and, therefore, should be conscious of its provisory nature without losing sight of the horizon that gives it direction. Wesley understood that as pilgrims, the Church should walk without resting, seeking to do all that is possible to show divine love wherever it may be, trusting fully in Him who is the Lord of history.<sup>32</sup>

5.5 *Conjunctive Ecclesiology*:<sup>33</sup> This approach establishes a linear connection that highlights both the institutional value and the functional value of the *ekklesia*. If the Church loses the first element it also loses its form; if it loses the second, it loses its purpose. John Wesley had two interpretations regarding this issue. On one hand, he recognized that in the long run every institution suffered modifications that damaged it, making it old and turning it

rigid to the extent of diverting it from its mission or losing its original vision. On the other hand, Wesley knew that every form of life requires a structure in order to survive.

5.6 *Reflective Ecclesiology (Theological)*: This category emphasizes the constant need of the church to reflect regarding its nature and mission. This perspective, besides considering pastoral and theological aspects, also includes philosophical, sociological, and anthropological ideas. In the Wesleyan tradition, reflection is never an end in and of itself. Rather, it is understood as a transformative praxis in ecclesial life. As such, theological reflection is developed to subscribe a proclamation and renewal of personal and communal life. For Wesley, theological reflection did not possess independent existence.<sup>34</sup>

5.7 *Inclusive Ecclesiology*: This premise is centered upon an undeniable truth: the Church is objectively universal and it comprises all people of all times. Just as God's love and atonement through the cross are universal so is the divine purpose of uniting everything in Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> John Wesley holistically held this view as his own commentaries on the Book of Ephesians 4:3-6 reveal. For Wesley, the dogmatic definition of *ekklesia*, like a living organism, could not be manipulated to the extent of excluding someone due to his or her denominational affiliation or theological position.<sup>36</sup> For that reason, John Wesley lived his ministry ecumenically. Even his activity reveals that for him there were no strict barriers that created denominational compartments. Thus, the Wesleyan proposal was able to transcend institutionalization.

5.8 *Communal Ecclesiology*: John Wesley always spoke about a "people called Methodists." He had a deep understanding about the communal nature of the people. More importantly, this was not a mere theoretical or theological affirmation. Wesley showed a profound conviction about the communal nature of the Christian life through his actions, which were depicted in the system he created (societies, bands, and classes). Hence, the Methodist people learned a new social reality: small groups. It was almost like a family, where each one assimilated a new way of life and shared their experiences while strengthening each other and exhorting one another when it was necessary. For Wesley, this type of ecclesiology had a double purpose: it was to be pastoral and participative since it stimulated a mutual participation in the process of spiritual formation and pastoral care. With this perspective, it is possible to note that everyone who participated in the care of people and ultimately in this process was placed at the service of the supreme purpose of all the works of redemption: growth toward perfection in love.<sup>37</sup>

5.9 *Charismatic Ecclesiology*: Wesley's ministerial experience clearly reveals a strong openness towards spiritual gifts and a rare acceptance of the Holy Spirit. This allowed him to nourish a spirituality that was committed to growth while keeping him away from false spiritual enthusiasm, transforming him into a spiritual and authentic leader for his time.<sup>38</sup>

5.10 *Ministerial Ecclesiology*: In several ways, the Wesleyan tradition indicates that the Methodist people were essentially ministerial in purpose, both inside and outside the church. In reality, for Wesley, to be a Methodist meant to be a minister, functionally speaking. With the development of his holiness doctrine both internally and externally and his emphasis on loving the neighbor with good works, he produced an extensive "priestly" practice during his lifetime.

5.11 *Ecological Ecclesiology*: This facet, besides revealing that the image of God restored in a human being is capable to connect him with the rest of creation, invigorates the challenge to care for all creation. For Wesley, this reality saw God in the mirror of creation. To understand the world in a Wesleyan sense implies having a vision of the new creation that God is making through the person of Jesus Christ. The promise of God to restore all things was a key element in John Wesley's theology.

5.12 *Social Ecclesiology*: Wesley's practices and writings are strongly linked to the concepts of mission and *diakonia*. Solidarity and preference towards the neediest people are marks of the Methodist movement and Wesleyan theology. *Diakonia* as an ecclesial dimension makes it possible to display a committed faith toward social challenges. This emphasis is solidified through a supportive answer to the real demands that revolve around human suffering.<sup>39</sup> This dimension necessitates inclusive action. John Wesley once wrote the following statement: "I love the poor. I see in them a pure and genuine grace, without any trace of falsehood or ambition... my innermost desire is to be able to preach always to the poor like I have done until now." Without any doubt, this deliberate choice to reach out to the neediest people made an Oxford scholar into a radical person. Wesley thought that giving priority to the ministry "to" and "with" the neediest people was a strategy from God. For Wesley, ministry was not just about the public presence of the church, but a concrete involvement with institutions in order to promote perennial reforms. For Wesley mission demanded an organization whose ecclesial community should provide a depth of the Christian faith to the extent that it would not be reduced to theoretical convictions (intellectualism) or external customs (moralism). This ecclesiological dimension should be marked by a strong feeling of simplicity and

solidarity according to the Wesleyan tradition and perspectives of the Latin American theology.

5.13 *Apostolic and Missional Ecclesiology*: This approach points to yet another theological and biblical component for the present time: giving effective continuity to the proclamation of the Good News. The Church, according to the Nicene Creed, is apostolic by the fact that Jesus sent the first disciples-apostles to disciple all the nations.<sup>40</sup> This sending is fulfilled today because Christ continues to send His Church around the world.<sup>41</sup> For that reason, the body of Christ cannot be an organism directed exclusively for its own preservation or for the strengthening of its internal structures. On the contrary, every initiative must point to the mission. In that respect, the central concept at hand is our witness, a historical continuity in which Jesus Christ is given relevance in the present through ecclesial, missional, and pastoral activities. This reality was never a foreign concept in Wesleyan tradition. John Wesley believed that the Church was more than a congregation where Christians nourished their private lives of faith and piety. A Church should be marked by a strong combination of worship, evangelism, and discipleship filled with love, justice and mercy in the world. Wesley spoke about this in one of his sermons: “It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine to savour which is in you, to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself, on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the task at hand for the Church is to make the only truth a reality to every generation in order to announce the original message.

5.14 *Eschatological Ecclesiology*: This final aspect reaffirms that the Church lives beyond time and space.<sup>43</sup> For Wesley, this condition contextualized the Christian community in the time of hope, overcoming the basic limitations of time and perceiving Christian hope as an active ingredient that works in the construction of such eschatological hope, ushering in the presence of the Kingdom of God to the world. For Wesley, this theological approach was built with confidence on the promises of God.

#### 6- Conclusion:

As several Wesleyan theologians tend to affirm, the attempt to give meaning to certain aspects of Wesleyan theology from such a different and distant reality than the one that originated Methodism is not an easy task. However, it is completely possible.

As we have seen, the contributions found in the writings of John Wesley (sermons, diaries, letters, treaties, among others) have become part of an invaluable heritage and, as Nazarenes, we cannot overlook this legacy. On the contrary, we should adjust our theology with the intention of giving continuity to one of the most beautiful stories that still influences people, ethnicities, and nations today.

For that reason, to propose an ecclesiology for Latin America based on a Wesleyan foundation is to offer effective clues for the Church to come out of itself and head in the direction of the community that surrounds it. The Church must become an innovating tool in the Kingdom of God as revealed in the Scriptures by confronting sinful realities while discerning the signs of the present times and offering answers to the challenges and hopes of the world.

As the international Church of the Nazarene, this is our challenge for the twenty-first century in Latin America: “To reaffirm our values as a Christian people and embrace our tradition as Wesleyans.”

#### *Endnotes*

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<sup>1</sup> Arias, M. (2005). *¿Por qué y para qué estudios wesleyanos?* In: Ribeiro C., Renders H., Souza J. y Josgrilberg, R. (orgs.). *Teologia e prática na tradição wesleyana: uma leitura a partir de América Latina e Caribe*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, pp. 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> La teología práctica es una teología de acción y reflexión sobre esa acción. Estudia como es interpretado el Evangelio en la acción. En este sentido, la teología práctica es la interpretación o reflexión sobre el mensaje cristiano en acción.

<sup>3</sup> Gálatas 5.6.

<sup>4</sup> Significa tener una visión integral del reino sin sobreponer los diferentes aspectos que componen su esencialidad en cuanto concepto teológico y normativo.

<sup>5</sup> Significa tener una visión integral del reino sin sobreponer los diferentes aspectos que componen su esencialidad en cuanto concepto teológico y normativo.

<sup>6</sup> Significa tener una visión integral del reino sin sobreponer los diferentes aspectos que componen su esencialidad en cuanto concepto teológico y normativo.

<sup>7</sup> González, J. (2005). *Wesley para a América Latina hoje*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> No existen dudas de que la teología wesleyana fue elaborada en dialogo con las manifestaciones más expresivas del pensamiento religioso y de la cultura en general. Albert C. Outler, conocido teólogo metodista, describe a John Wesley como un legítimo teólogo de la cultura, más específicamente, como ‘folk-teólogo’, que encontró métodos eficientes para comunicar el Evangelio a las masas.

<sup>9</sup> Romanos 14.17.

<sup>10</sup> Ladd, G. (2008). *O evangelho do reino: estudos bíblicos sobre o reino de Deus*. São Paulo: Shedd Publicações, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Mateos 25.34.

<sup>12</sup> Colosenses 1.13.

<sup>13</sup> Lucas 16.16.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Pedro 1.11.

<sup>15</sup> Matos 8.11.

<sup>16</sup> WJW, vol. 1, 1746, p. 312 – *sermão* 12, §19 [The witness of our own spirit].

<sup>17</sup> Mateos 7.21; Marcos 9.47; 10.23; 14.25; Mateos 21.31; Lucas 11.52.

<sup>18</sup> En la consideración de la doctrina de la iglesia como aparece explícitamente en los escritos de Wesley y en su relación con la iglesia de Inglaterra, es posible advertir un elemento nuevo: el impacto misionero – evangelizador que entra en tensión con los moldes eclesiológicos clásicos. In: Bonino, J. (2003). *Hacia una eclesiología evangelizadora: una perspectiva wesleyana*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Snyder, H. (1980). *The radical Wesley and patterns for church renewal*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, p. 89

<sup>20</sup> Bonino, M. (2003). *Hacia una eclesiología evangelizadora. Una perspectiva wesleyana*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Las sociedades eran compuestas por personas de varias ciudades y aldeas.

<sup>22</sup> Este grupo se restringía a aquellas personas que daban testimonio de su santificación plena.

<sup>23</sup> ‘John Wesley narra el desarrollo de varias estructuras de discipulado en sus escritos. Las ‘reuniones en clase’ se originaron en Bristol, no como una estructura de discipulado inicialmente, sino como mecanismo para arrecadar fondos, pero rápidamente él adoptó este sistema como fuente de crecimiento y socialización. La estructura de ‘bandas’ fue adoptada de los moravos y después modificada. John Wesley formo y ajusto el sistema metodista promoviendo un sistema funcional de discipulado – o de santidad práctica’. In: Snyder, H., Mello J.I., Wakai, N., Josgrilberg, R y Renders, H. (2012). *Wesley, a Bíblia e o povo*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Snyder, H., Mello J.I., Wakai, N., Josgrilberg, R y Renders, H. (2012). *Wesley, a Bíblia e o povo*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> ‘La Iglesia Anglicana poseía varias estructuras, especialmente de gobierno, de formación de sacerdotes, de liturgia, de doctrina y de organización eclesiástica, pero lo que realmente faltaba, eran medios prácticos dentro de las parroquias para que las personas pudiesen tornar sus buenos deseos en un estilo de vida, o sea, en un andar de vida practico, de santidad interna y externa’. In: Snyder, H., Mello J.I., Wakai, N., Josgrilberg, R y Renders, H. (2012). *Wesley, a Bíblia e o povo*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Brighenti, A. (2006). *A Pastoral dá o que falar: a inteligênciã da prática transformadora da fé*. São Paulo: Paulinas, p.19.

<sup>28</sup> Souza, J. (2009). *Leiga, ministerial e ecumênica: a igreja no pensamento de John Wesley*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Esta eclesiología también rescata la relación fundamental entre la cristología y pneumatología.

<sup>30</sup> Wesley, J. Sermão 55, “*Sobre a Trindade*”, Works [Bicentennial Ed.], p. 2:385.

<sup>31</sup> Boff, L. (2004). *Novas fronteiras da igreja: o futuro de um povo a caminho*. São Paulo: Versus Editora, p. 160.

<sup>32</sup> Souza, J. (2007). *Passos para uma teologia wesleyana brasileira*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> Esta nomenclatura fue articulada por Paul Chilcote en sus estudios realizados sobre el wesleyanismo.

<sup>34</sup> Kimbrough, Jr. (ed.) (1992). *Wesley as Theologian*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, p. 105.

<sup>35</sup> Bonino, M. (2003) *Hacia una eclesiología evangelizadora. Una perspectiva wesleyana*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 87.

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<sup>36</sup> Souza, J. (2007). *Passos para uma teologia wesleyana brasileira*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> Bonino, M. (2003). *Hacia una eclesiología evangelizadora: una perspectiva wesleyana*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup> Realy, D., Souza, J. y Josgrilberg, R. (2007). *Teologia em perspectiva wesleyana*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 53

<sup>39</sup> Renders, H. y Souza, J.C. (orgs.) *Teologiaia wesleyana, latino-americana e Global: Uma homenagem a Rui de Souza Josgrilberg*. São Bernanrdo do Campo: Editeo, 2011, p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> Mateos 28.19.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Wesley, J. *Sermões*. 3 ed. Vol. 1. São Bernardo do Campo: Imprensa Metodista, 1985, p. 505

<sup>43</sup> Boots, W. *Nuestra tradición wesleyana y la comunión de los santos*. In: Ribeiro, C., Renders, H. y Josgrilberg, R. (orgs.) (2005). *Teologia e pratica na tradição wesleyana: uma leitura a partir da América latina e Caribe*. São Bernardo do Campo: Editeo, p. 117.