

METHODISM'S PAST IN PENTECOSTALISM'S PRESENT

A Case Study of a Cultural Clash in Chile

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This paper tells the story of the early Methodist mission to Chile, concentrating on the revival under Willis Hoover, the blending of Wesleyan and Chilean popular cultures, the clash which arose between the Chilean Protestants and the American missionaries, and the subsequent establishment of the first theologically and financially self-sufficient Protestant church in the Third World.

The second section of the paper analyses the theological, cultural and missiological questions which the story raises and suggests that a solution to such theologically disguised cultural clashes is a truly intercultural theology.

The Story

The mission work of the Methodists in Chile started with William Taylor and his self-supporting mission in the late eighties of the last century. Because Taylor did not agree with the mission board's policy, which he felt provided too much financial support and so undermined the new converts' sense of responsibility, he was unwilling to place the proposed mission under the Board's control. For that reason the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church felt that they could not ordain Taylor's missionaries and could not allow them to retain their conference connection in the United States.¹ Taylor had hoped to finance his missionary enterprise through missionary schools and colleges. This proved impossible and the work was taken over by the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States in 1897.²

Nevertheless the short attempt at a self-supporting church is in my opinion at the root both of the difficulties of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Chile in 1909 and the emergence of an indigenous Methodist

(Methodist Files, Methodist Letter-books, Presbyterian Microfilms, referred to hereafter, are located in the Interchurch Center, New York.)

¹Wade Crawford Barclay, *History of Methodist Missions* (New York, 1957), III, 792.

²Christian Lalive d'Épinay, *Haven of the Masses. A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (World Studies of Churches in Mission, London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 5 (quoted hereafter: Lalive).

Church (later the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal).

As Taylor's missionaries had — up to 1897 — no official church backing, they tended to be drawn from the less cultured, revivalist fringe of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. No wonder that a Presbyterian, Florence Smith, stated bluntly that the Chilean Presbyterian Mission "is far and away ahead of the Methodist Episcopal Church in education, culture, sound judgment and worldly wisdom." But she also had to admit that, "We do lack warmth of spiritual life and love, or is it that we do not know how to express the warmth and love we feel? Mr. Hoover, the Methodist Episcopal missionary in charge of the work here, is a man of one idea. He is not too cultured to call the Chileans brothers. He is narrow, even bigoted, but I believe he can truly say: 'This one thing I do' and 'I count all but loss that I may win the Chileans to Christ'. He is inordinately proud of the remarkable success of their work — to us offensively so! There is a great deal of froth and bombast and other defects it is easy to point out, but the fact remains, the poor have the Gospel preached to them."³

The "froth and bombast" produced very interesting results. Between 1893 and 1897 the Methodist Church in Chile more than doubled in size; between 1897 and 1903 it doubled again, and from 1903 to 1907 it doubled a third time. In 1906 their members numbered more than 4,000.

The most important of these "bigoted" and "inordinately proud" but successful missionaries was the already mentioned Willis Hoover. He was born in 1858 in Freeport, Illinois.⁴ He studied medicine in Chicago but the work of a doctor did not satisfy him. In 1889 he offered himself to William Taylor's self-supporting mission. He learned to speak Spanish well and was pastor at the church in Iquique. In 1902 he replaced E.E. Wilson as pastor of the church in Valparaiso. He felt that the members had rather vague ideas on the vital Methodist teaching of sanctification. During a series of studies on the Acts of the Apostles for the Sunday school teachers, one of them asked what prevented their church from being like the apostolic church. Hoover replied that the only impediment to this lay in themselves.⁵

³Florence Smith's letter to Speer written from Valparaiso, dated January 22, 1906 (Presbyterian Microfilms); quoted in Jean Baptiste August Kessler Jr., *A Study of the Older Protestant Missions and Churches in Peru and Chile. With Special Reference to the Problems of Division, Nationalism and Native Ministry*. (Goes, Holland, Oosterbaan and Le Cointre, 1967), 105 (quoted hereafter: Kessler).

⁴Methodist Files; Kessler, 108.

⁵W.C. Hoover, *Historia del avivamiento pentecostal en Chile* (Valparaiso: Imprenta Excelsior, 1909, 1948) 11 (quoted hereafter: Hoover). This remark shows that Hoover took Arminianism to its logical conclusion and also that even at that time he had decidedly opted for Luke's pneumatology. On this, see E. Schweizer's article "pneuma" in ThDNT VI (1968), 396-451 and W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Publ. House, 1972, 1976²), 336-341.

In 1906 a terrible earthquake destroyed their old church and a building under construction which was to have become their new church. Renewed efforts were necessary in order to build a third church. It was dedicated on March 7, 1909.⁶ It could seat 1,000 people and had been built largely by the gifts of the congregation itself. An important principle had been established which became decisive for future developments, namely the large-scale lay participation both in financial and spiritual ministry.

The younger and "better-educated" missionaries, however, who were now arriving from the United States, disapproved of Hoover's old-time revivalism, his self-assuredness, his friendship with the Chileans and his protest against using the missionaries' finance committee "for dealing behind the nationals' backs."⁷

Methodist Past Revived

In 1907 Mrs. Hoover received a pamphlet on the baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire.⁸ It had been written by Minnie Abrams who had been a student at Chicago Training School¹⁰ at the same time as Mrs. Hoover. The tract describes a Pentecostal revival in the girls' home run by a Brahman Lady, Pandita Ramabai in Mukti.¹¹ Visions, trances and speaking in tongues were features of the revival. Most important was

⁶*Actas de la conferencia misionera occidental de Sud America de la Iglesia Metodista Episcopal*, Temuco 19-23 de febrero 1909; Kessler, 110.

⁷Information given to Kessler by Merayne Copplestone, New York (Kessler, 110). See also Buell Campbell's letter to Homer C. Stuntz dated October 31, 1910 (Methodist Files), in which he complains that Hoover's church felt that they were "more holy than the others." Kessler, 110.

⁸Lalive states that the "birth of Chilean Pentecostalism is still too little known" (p. 7). Yet the source situation is very good. The Chilean Pentecostal leaders have — in good Methodist tradition — kept the records of the past. Part of this material, plus the files of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York, have been used by Kessler. In addition to this there are *Chile Pentecostal* and other religious periodicals in Chile, and Ignacio Vergara (*El protestantismo en Chile*, Santiago: Editorial del Pacifico, 1962). Less important for historical research are the two major sociological works by Lalive and Emilio Willems (*Followers of the New Faith. Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile*. Vanderbilt U.P., 1967). Older literature on Chile extensively in my *Handbuch der Pfingstbewegung* (available from Yale University); Chile under no. 02b.08.

⁹Minnie Abrams, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Mukti," *Indian Witness* April 16, 1906; *The Missionary Review of the World* 19/8, Aug. 1906, 619-20. Minnie Abrams, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire* (Kegdaon, Poona, India, ca. 1907). Miss Abrams' articles were widely quoted in the religious press at the time.

¹⁰Stanley Howard Frodsham, *With Signs Following. The Story of the Pentecostal Revival in the Twentieth Century* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publ. House, 1926, 1946), 175.

¹¹The religious revival sometimes took ecstatic and strange forms. The religious press was jubilant about the "heavenly fire in India." The careful biography of Ramabai by Padmini Sengupta (*Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Her Life and Work*. London, Bombay, etc.: Asia

Miss Abrams' contention that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and Fire was something additional to the experience of justification and sanctification known among the Methodists.¹² Hoover tried to find out more about the early Pentecostal revival and corresponded with, amongst others, T.B. Barratt, the controversial Methodist evangelist in Oslo¹³ who was later to become the "Pentecostal apostle" for the whole of Europe.¹⁴

On a Sunday night in February 1909, when Hoover was at the meeting of the annual conference in Temuco, one of the brothers of the Valparaiso church "called the members of the official board to occupy the front seats at the beginning of the service. Reading the second chapter of Joel, from the 12th verse and onward, he said: 'You and I are responsible for the condition of this church and we must repent and get right with God [even] if it takes all night.' After a season of prayer at the altar he dismissed the congregation, asking the official board to remain with him all night, with any others who might desire to remain with them. Twenty or thirty remained. During the night one saw a brazier of coals within the altar. Others felt the hand of the Lord on their head as they prayed at the altar; such was the blessing received that they asked this man to appoint another all-night meeting, which he did, naming the following Saturday."¹⁵

Upon his return Hoover was asked what should be done about the vigil planned for the following Saturday. His reply was that it should take place. This was another turning point in the course of events. First the Chileans had taken responsibility for their church building, now they took responsibility for the content of their worship life and the direction of church life as a whole — the cause both of the subsequent revival and the difficulties with the American missionaries.

The vigil became a regular feature in the church. But "the overwhelming flood came on the 4th of July, 1909, which was Sunday. Saturday night was an all night prayer, during which four vain young ladies (three of whom were in the choir) fell to the floor under the power of the Spirit. One of them, after lying a long time, arose and with remarkable power began to exhort, saying, 'The Lord is coming soon and commands us to get ready.' The effect produced was indescribable."¹⁶

Publ. House, 1970), gives some cautious information on the revival, emphasizes the social work of Pandita Ramabai, but plays down the theological and cultural problems of the revival. Today the Ramabai Mukti Mission states that they are totally ignorant on the Pentecostal revival (Letter, G. Fletcher, Superintendent Ramabai Mukti Mission, March 21, 1963 to W.J.H.). Extensive bibliography and discussion in my *Handbuch*, 03.07.013.

¹²Hoover, 14.

¹³Barratt's answer in Hoover, 95-98.

¹⁴Nils Bloch-Hoell, *The Pentecostal Movement. Its Origin, Development and Distinctive Character* (London: Allen & Unwin; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1964), 75 ff.

¹⁵Frodsham, 176 f.

¹⁶Frodsham, 177 f.

When Hoover was questioned about the girls lying on the floor, "¿Llama Ud, eso humano?", he replied calmly, "No." "But what is it then?" he was asked again. "Divino," he said.¹⁷

The emphasis at this early stage was on renewal of life by the Holy Spirit. Sins were confessed in public, debts repaid, hardened wrongdoers converted and people who had been estranged from each other were reconciled.¹⁸ Even Buell Campbell, who was the first permanent pastor of the Methodist church in Valparaiso after Hoover, and who was very critical of his predecessor, admitted that these early meetings had "many elements of good."¹⁹ One brother left a vigil to give back some goods that had been entrusted to him at the time of the earthquake in 1906, but which he had not yet returned. At the next vigil, while he was praying, he was overcome by a bout of gentle laughter.²⁰

Victor Pavez Toro,²¹ William Rice,²² and Tulio Moran (a Presbyterian from Concepcion), were convinced at that stage of the genuineness of the work.

An English girl, Nellie (or Elena) Laidlaw, was an important link between Valparaiso and Santiago. She was a drunkard and a prostitute but professed conversion and became one of the chief prophetesses in Valparaiso.²³ Her most controversial activity was to walk about the congregation with closed eyes, suddenly single somebody out, and order them to kneel down. Nellie then revealed what was in their heart, called them to repentance and laid her hands on them in order to give them the Spirit.²⁴ Even if Hoover had wished, he could not have intervened as he had told his congregation that the pastor was nothing more than the humblest member and that they all had merely to follow the leading of the Spirit. How this leading of the Spirit was to be made operational either in shamanistic,²⁵ Episcopal,²⁶ or in group-dynamic congregational forms — that the Pentecostals had still to learn.

Law and Order

In early September 1909 Nellie Laidlaw visited her sister in Santiago. On September 12, she went to one of the two Methodist churches in

¹⁷Hoover, 30.

¹⁸*El Cristiano*, July 5, 1909; Hoover, 26 f.; Kessler, 116.

¹⁹Buell Campbell's letter to Stuntz, July 25, 1910 (Methodist Files); Kessler, 114.

²⁰Hoover, 20.

²¹*El Cristiano*, June 21 and August 2, 1909; Kessler, 116.

²²*Actas de la conferencia metodista*. Valparaiso 4 — 11 de febrero 1910; Kessler, 116.

²³On Nellie Laidlaw in detail (and documented): Kessler, 117 ff.; see also Lalive, 9 ff.

²⁴Hoover, 35.

²⁵On the Pentecostal minister as a "modern shaman" see W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 474 ff.

²⁶Chilean Pentecostal churches are episcopal; so are most black Pentecostal churches in the USA and many Third World Pentecostal churches.

Santiago, wanted to speak, but was refused by William T. Robinson, the pastor. So Nellie went out into the courtyard where she gave her revelations.²⁷ Later some of her followers went inside again to remonstrate with Robinson. In the argument which followed, Robinson pushed a man away, but lost his footing and fell off the platform cutting his head open.²⁸

Reports, based on hearsay and stating that "Robinson was struck a blow on the head,"²⁹ were sent to New York. These and other even worse allegations are irreconcilably contradicted by the best evidence available in Santiago.³⁰

In the evening Nellie Laidlaw again wanted to speak in the church. Rice asked her to keep quiet. When she failed to do so, he brought the waiting policeman into the meeting and told him to arrest her. At this Nellie's supporters became furious and shielded the girl so as to prevent her from being taken. The policeman called for reinforcements. These cleared the hall and took Nellie to the police station where she spent the night.³¹

September 12, 1909, is an important date in Chilean church history. On this day the Methodists secured law and order but lost the people's heart. The Pentecostals celebrate September 12 as their reformation anniversary.³²

The vigils in Valparaiso went on in a rather noisy way which disturbed the neighborhood and led to an official investigation by the municipality.³³ A journalist started reporting on the meetings. To arouse the interest of his readers he filed a criminal charge against Hoover for, amongst other things, giving his congregation a pernicious drink called the blood of the Lamb, which made them lie for hours on the ground in a stupefied state.³⁴ Rice felt justified in intervening. Together with Robinson and the American consul he visited the judge in Valparaiso on

²⁷*El Cristiano*, September 20, 1909; Hoover, 36.

²⁸*El Mercurio*, September 13, 1909; Kessler, 117.

²⁹Bishop Thomas B. Neely's letter to Adna B. Leonard, the corresponding secretary of the M.E. Board of Foreign Missions in New York, October 16, 1909 (Methodist Letter-book, Vol. 156, 109). Neely quoted a report by *El Heraldo Evangelico*, the Presbyterian paper in Chile, which in turn had relied on other reports; Kessler, 120.

³⁰Kessler carefully examines the available documentary evidence and gives priority in his report (on which I base my summary) to eye-witnesses.

³¹*El Cristiano*, September 20, 1909. Nellie Laidlaw's further life was a tragic one. She became a drug-addict and died unrepentent. (Stuntz's letter to Sampson Rogers, Hoover's brother-in-law, May 10, 1910; Methodist Letter-book, Vol. 156, 19); Kessler, 121. But ten years later her antagonist, Rice, was expelled from the Methodist mission for disciplinary reasons (Lalive, 12).

³²The third reformation, as Lalive calls it, the first being the reformation of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, the second the reformation of Wesley.

³³Hoover, 51.

³⁴*El Mercurio*, October 2, 1909; Hoover, 38 f.

October 4 and found that an order had been written to close the Methodist church there on the grounds that it was a public nuisance.³⁵ The municipality required Hoover to sign a document undertaking that he would close the meetings at ten o'clock at night, but did not otherwise interfere with his work. The criminal charge was soon dismissed as being absurd. But Rice cabled to New York: "Hoover criminally prosecuted. . .".³⁶ Under the impression that Hoover was under arrest, Homer Stuntz, the field secretary in New York, cabled the finance committee³⁷ to send Hoover on furlough at once, if they thought this was necessary.³⁸ Although Goodsil Arms defended Hoover,³⁹ the scene was set for a great heresy trial.

The Heresy Trial

The place is Valparaiso and the date is February 10, 1910. A commission under the chairmanship of Robert Elphick presented the findings of its examination of Hoover's doctrine and practice to the Annual Conference. Apart from the charges connected with the excesses which have already been discussed and which Hoover by this time had largely eliminated, the commission found Hoover guilty of teaching false doctrines.⁴⁰

A resolution was agreed⁴¹ which rejected the false doctrine that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by tears and visions, miracles and healings and other manifestations. It declared "that such doctrines are antimethodist, contrary to Scripture and irrational."⁴²

As the trial took place in public, the Chilean church members were

³⁵Buell Campbell's letter to Stuntz, July 25, 1910 (Methodist Files); Kessler, 123.

³⁶Stuntz's letter to Bristol, October 7, 1909 (Methodist Letter-book, Vol. 155, 251); Kessler, 123.

³⁷The committee in Chile which was composed entirely of missionaries.

³⁸Stuntz's letter to Neely, October 19, 1909 (Methodist Letter-book, Vol. 155, 259); Kessler, 123.

³⁹Hoover, 55.

⁴⁰On the sources: The conference minutes deleted almost all mention of Hoover being repudiated because a deal was made at the last minute that Hoover should go on furlough and the case be hushed up, an agreement which in the end did not materialize. Most of the deliberations, however, were published in *El Cristiano* (February 14, 1910, of which Rice was the editor), much to the chagrin of Hoover but to the advantage of today's historian; Kessler is very detailed on this.

⁴¹Formally directed against Nellie Laidlaw, but in essence aiming at the new revival.

⁴²Hoover, 62 f: "Resolucion: Por cuanto ciertas doctrinas falsas, tales como la ensenanza que el bautismo del Espiritu Santo es acompanado por el don de lagrimas y visiones, milagres de sanidad, y otras manifestaciones, han sido diseminadas en varias partes de esta conferencia, y representadas como las doctrinas de la Iglesia Metodista Episcopal, nosotros por la presente declaramos que aquellas doctrinas son antimetodistas, contrarias a las Escrituras e irracionales, y nuestros miembros estan avisados que no deben aceptarlas como las ensenanzas de nuestra Iglesia."

able to follow the proceedings themselves. In their eyes it was not only Hoover but their own Chilean revival that was on trial. There was not only a vital doctrinal issue at stake⁴³ but an even more important cultural issue. "Irrational perhaps," the Chileans said as to the charges levelled against them, "but certainly not antimethodist and contrary to Scripture."

It was not Hoover but the awakened Chileans who finally realized that the break with the American missionaries was inevitable. Hoover was asked to go on furlough but the Chileans asked him to stay and stick it out together with them. He stayed and lost his status in and income from the Methodist Church. The Chileans lost their church buildings, for which they had paid themselves out of their poverty, but they gained what is very probably the first theologically and financially independent Protestant church in the Third World. In this sense September 12, 1909 can be considered as the anniversary of the Third Reformation.

"The considered opinion, even of those Methodists most able to appreciate the good points in the Pentecostal revival in Chile, was that the movement was doomed to become a struggling sect which would probably collapse within a few years."⁴⁴ How wrong they were. It took the Methodists not seven years to double their membership, as in the years previous to the schism with the Pentecostals, but seventy years, whilst in the same period the Pentecostals have reached something around one million members.

The Methodist church cut itself off from what it considered to be antimethodist and irrational. But by doing this it has cut itself off from the very soil in which a Methodist church in Chile could grow.

The Interpretations

The Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal in Chile states categorically that it is a faithful Methodist church.⁴⁵ They told me: "The difference between the Methodists and us does not lie in a different doctrine. It is just that they have merely the Methodist doctrines whilst we experience them."

In fact the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal has not developed what is sometimes called "a typical Pentecostal doctrine," if by that is meant a Pentecostal doctrine of the type of the Assemblies of God. They do not teach the "initial sign," that is to say, that speaking in tongues is the outward sign of the baptism of the Spirit. Other signs and gifts can just as

⁴³Kessler, 128.

⁴⁴Stuntz's letter to Robinson July 7, 1910 (Methodist Letter-book, Vol. 156, 101); Kessler, 130.

⁴⁵The Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal grew out of the Methodist Episcopal Church "no por ningún desacuerdo que tuviera con los principios o doctrinas, sino que sigue el mismo régimen" (*Himnos Evangelicos para el Uso de la Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal*, Santiago, 1940. Introduction; quoted in Vergara, *Protestantismo*, 123).

well fulfill this function. They practice infant baptism, continue the Methodist class system, the Methodist episcopal order, use Methodist literature and liturgical agendas freely, and print the twenty-five articles of the Methodist Episcopal Church without alteration in their hymn books. On the other hand they have strong objections to the USA-based missionaries of the Assemblies of God in Chile, both on doctrinal grounds and in defense of their own cultural, political and organizational independence.⁴⁶

The Cultural Question

The Chilean Pentecostal movement interprets its own beginnings as follows: "The brethren were possessed by dancing and spiritual visions, they spoke in tongues of angels, prophesying about the great spiritual revival. The Holy Spirit seized them in the streets. The authorities took them into the prisons as criminals, but the brethren danced in the prisons, speaking in tongues and prophesying to these same officials."⁴⁷

Another description, this time by W.C. Hoover, reads: "Laughing, weeping, shouting, singing, foreign tongues, visions and ecstasies during which the individual fell to the ground and felt himself caught up into another place, to heaven, to Paradise, in splendid fields with various kinds of experiences: conversations with God, the angels or the devil. Those who experienced these things profited greatly and generally were changed by them and filled with praises, the spirit of prayer and love."⁴⁸

For the yellow press (*El Chileno*) it was the "work of a hoaxer or madman." "Shouting, fainting fits and blows" are "tragi-comical scenes." It is therefore necessary that "the Law intervenes."⁴⁹

The Christian and Missionary Alliance described the revival as an excess of religious fanaticism with "gesticulaciones grotescas." "They prayed so loudly, that one could hear the cries as far as a block away. The meetings lasted until midnight and sometimes even into the small hours of the morning. . . .Some cried like cocks, others danced, others thought they were playing a string instrument, others again fell to the floor crying and shouting; their bodies became without feeling; others confessed their sins and the whole thing ended as a real scandal."⁵⁰

For the Methodists, as we have seen already, the revival was simply

⁴⁶W.J. Hollenweger, "Pingstvänner, katoliker och politik i Latinamerika." Svensk Missionstidskrift 60/2, 1972, 90-98, (in German in *Reformatio* 22/6, Juni 1973, 334-341).

⁴⁷*Chile Pentecostal*, September 1954; quoted by Vergara, 111. On the function of dance, see W.J. Hollenweger, "Danced Documentaries. The theological and political significance of Pentecostal dancing," in J.G. Davies, ed., *Worship and Dance* (Birmingham: University, 1975), 76-82.

⁴⁸Hoover, 33.

⁴⁹Hoover, 39.

⁵⁰Arturo Oyarzun, *Reminiscencias historicas de la obra evangelica en Chile* (Valdivia: Imp. Alianza, 1921), 50-52; quoted Vergara, 112 f.

“antimethodist, contrary to Scripture and irrational.”

There is not much theology in any of these interpretations. In fact the Methodist periodical, *El Cristiano*, rejected an article by Hoover which consisted entirely of quotations from Wesley in defense of the revival.⁵¹ If not theologically motivated, what then is the reason for these strong statements by those for and those against?

For the Pentecostals the manifestations gave them a possibility to participate in worship with their own gifts. They could become liturgically and theologically active on the level of and with the means of their own culture. As these means resembled so very much the records of the Methodist and biblical past there was only one interpretation possible. If it was the Holy Spirit then, it must be the same Holy Spirit today.

The Methodists and the Christian and Missionary Alliance were unable to join in worship on that level. Yet these manifestations came dangerously near to the records of their origin. The upsurge of the past with all the religious prestige of treasured church history was the most dangerous threat to a present, which pretended to be a continuation of that past, but which was in fact culturally discontinuous.

What else was there left for the Methodists other than to state that the Chilean revival was not part of their tradition? It was so threatening that it had to be declared foreign and irrational — as if previous Methodist revivals had been particularly blessed by rationality. And, furthermore, where in Scripture did they find “rationality” a touchstone for truth?

The Missiological Question

What is the Western tradition of Christianity going to do when our converts develop a type of Christianity which is not only different from ours but strikingly resembles a stage of our own past? We do, of course, not object to historical research but we are afraid when past history comes alive again. What is the Western tradition going to do if this new type of Christianity not only becomes a vital part of the Christian church but seems to become the most important part of Third World Christianity?⁵²

So far we have tried to invite these Christians into the ecumenical fellowship with some, but not with striking, success. We have convinced ourselves that these Christians are theologically not well informed, that they are evangelically narrow, and not interested in the

⁵¹Lalive, 9.

⁵²On the problems of this cultural clash, see W.J. Hollenweger, *Pentecost between black and white. Five case studies of Pentecost and politics* (Belfast: Christian Journals Ltd., 1974) and Chr. Lalive d'Epinay, “The Pentecostal ‘Conquista’ in Chile,” *Ecumenical Review* 20/1, Jan. 1968, 16-32.

wider church. Thus we have "explained" why the majority of Christianity in the Third World is not related to any ecumenical agency. And that is quite important, if one considers how the World Council of Churches sets itself up as the spokesman for Third World Christianity. The Third World Christians are *not* in the World Council of Churches. Why?

Listen to the story of one of the leaders of the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal, Alfredo Ramirez-Ramirez, who took part in the Uppsala Full Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1968). I listened to the report which he gave to his colleagues on his return to Santiago. Firstly Ramirez was greatly astonished that in Uppsala sermons were *read*; "As I said, the sermon was read, which seems to be customary [to them]. They do not preach as we do. We speak freely in our sermons with the aid of the Lord, with full spiritual freedom, in accordance with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, because he alone knows the needs of every heart." But he was greatly impressed by the singing in one of the services. "The whole service was unforgettable. So was the band consisting of 120 wind instruments which played the hymns so divinely that I was on the point of being inspired to dance by the Spirit of the Lord, yes, dear brethren, I was on the point of doing so. But I asked myself, 'What would these brethren think, who do not believe in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit?' Perhaps some of them would have been scandalized if they had seen me dance to the Lamb of God. Thanks be to God that He did not carry out this spiritual manifestation in me."⁵³

This last remark shows that — although the Chilean Pentecostals understand their liturgical dancing to be inspired by the Spirit — it does not happen entirely outside their control. In fact, it is beautifully controlled and integrated into their services. The nearest parallel with which I could compare it is a really skillful pianist who knows the technique of keyboard playing. The skill is a matter of many years of practice and exercise. The way in which he uses it is a matter of the inspiration of the moment. This flair for dancing is something which the Chileans have inherited from generations of dancers. The way in which they use it is a matter of the inspiration of the moment.

But what about his other remark: "Perhaps some of them would have been scandalized. . . ." It made me profoundly sad when I learned from him that he did not feel free to bring his contribution to that worship service.⁵⁴ Perhaps he was right. Perhaps some would have

⁵³Alfredo Ramirez-Ramirez, "Uppsala: I Could Have Danced . . ." *Monthly Letter About Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC, Oct. 1969).

⁵⁴On the function of Pentecostal liturgy see W.J. Hollenweger, "The Social and Ecumenical Significance of Pentecostal Liturgy," *Studia Liturgica* 8/4, 1971/72, 207-215.

been scandalized. But why should we be more scandalized when the Chileans bring their liturgy into the ecumenical movement than when we introduce our liturgy to Chile? Indeed they are unhappy about our kinds of liturgy. This uneasiness is — in my opinion — really responsible for the very tenuous relationship between Third World Pentecostals (and other indigenous churches) and the historical churches. The theological reasons which are given are mostly based on mutual misunderstandings and secondary rationalizations.

This is not a plea for the introduction of dancing into our Western liturgies, but I am concerned that we are not really catholic, not really ecumenical. A really catholic and ecumenical movement would find ways of bridging this cultural gap. Some Western Christians may be able to join in a Third World Pentecostal liturgy. All the better for them. But that is not even necessary. What is necessary, however, is a free space of tolerance — allowing these other Christians to remain true to themselves when they meet us. Without such a space of tolerance, a bridge over the troubled waters of cultural difference, the church will never become catholic and acknowledge the fruit of its own missionary work.

The Theological Questions

I am not going to answer the question whether the Chilean Pentecostals were "antimethodist" or not. This is a question I want to leave the Methodists to answer. However, I would like to suggest some hermeneutical principles on the basis of which we can answer that question.

1. A comparison between the descriptions of the revival in Chile and Wesley's revival, a comparison of the theological interpretations of these revivals, is a very crude approach to our question. It should be clear by now that any theological statement and any religious experience is culturally conditioned and can therefore not be judged on its own. We have to evaluate both *on the basis of the function* which they fulfill in a given context. There are theological statements and religious experiences which fulfill a theologically justifiable function in a specific context. There are those which do not fulfill such a purpose. Some instances where the function and disfunction of theological statements and religious experiences can be studied are: First Century Corinth,⁵⁵ the Swiss Reformation,⁵⁶

⁵⁵W.J. Hollenweger, *Konflikt in Korinth. Memoiren eines alten Mannes. Zwei narrative Exegesen zu 1. Kor. 12-14 und Ez. 37* (Munich: Kaiser, 1978).

⁵⁶W.J. Hollenweger, "Zwingli Writes the Gospel Into His World's Agenda. The Story of the Swiss Reformer's Beginnings (1515-1522), told 'in the mood of theological reflection'," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 43, 1969, 70-94.

the society of Wesley's time, the frontier situation of the United States of America, the situation of "Chile in change" in the twentieth century.

2. This would imply that Christianity, including Christian theology and Christian religious experiences, are not phenomenologically and conceptually the same everywhere and always. In order to see this, one has only to study the history of mission or church history — that is, if one has not already learned it from good Old and New Testament theologies. If Christianity is not the same everywhere and always, and if, furthermore, different stages of church history co-exist nowadays side by side at the same time, if, in other words, the chronological contemporaries are not cultural contemporaries, then we have to come to terms with having "the pasts of Christianity" present in our churches. If cultures from different countries co-exist in one and the same place, if, in other words, local co-habitants are not cultural co-habitants, then we have to come to terms with having different cultures present in one place. That is why we are faced with the quest for an "intercultural theology."
3. If such an outspoken Pentecostalist as Oral Roberts⁵⁷ can become a Methodist minister *without changing his theology*, then it is difficult to accuse the Chileans of being "antimethodist." Judging from the Swiss and German Methodist publications between 1900 and 1910, which I have studied very carefully, it is quite clear to me that the vocabulary and the concepts of the Chilean Pentecostals appear more Methodist than those of their opponents.⁵⁸

A Quest for an Intercultural Theology

If, as we have seen, the Iglesia Metodista Pentecostal and the Methodist Episcopal Church are simply two cultural variations of the same Methodist tradition, then the obvious questions are: *First*, is it possible, and in fact desirable, for the two churches to grow together again? *Second*, how do culturally discongruous churches discuss theology and come to a common evaluation of the advantage (or disadvantage) or the desirability (or undesirability) of specific inculturations of Christianity?

⁵⁷Oral Roberts, *The Call. An Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971); Wayne A. Robinson, *Oral: The Warm, Intimate, Unauthorized Portrait of a Man of God* (Los Angeles: Acton House, Inc., 1976); W.J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 363-65.

⁵⁸In particular *Evangelist and Schweizer Evangelist*. Ernst Gebhardt (pastor in Zurich, P.R. Smith's interpreter, called the "German Sankey") and L.S. Jacoby, *Handbuch des Methodismus* (Bremen, 1855?). Jacoby was trained in the USA. Full bibliography and discussion in my *Handbuch*, 05.28.004.

I do not intend to answer these questions in relation to Chile and the USA, but again I want to make some suggestions on how such an investigation could be carried out. The plain fact is that up to now we have not had a language which enabled us to carry out a theological investigation with theologians from churches outside our culture, with a language of religious experiences outside our analytical tradition.

It seems to me that there are only two ways open. Either they learn our language and our way of doing theology or we learn their way. The first has been tried for almost a hundred years. We call it theological education; *de facto* it is a process of epistemological brain-washing and cultural imperialism. Even the many forms of "theologies of liberation" are still structured and built in our way, although they are directed against the political and economic (but not the cultural) power base of Europe and America. As the first way has proved disfunctional in training an indigenous pastorate in Latin America and Africa, we might consider following the second way. This is where the attempts at "narrative theologies"⁵⁹ become academically necessary, because they at least would give theology the possibility of becoming universal. Either theology is universal and intercultural or it does not deserve the title of an academic discipline.

⁵⁹W.J. Hollenweger, *Glaube, Geist und Geister. Professor Unrat zwischen Bangkok und Birmingham* (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 1975); idem, "Mr Chips Looks for the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 12, September 1975, 39-50; idem, "The Religion of the Poor is not a Poor Religion," *Expository Times* 87/8, May 1976, 228-232; idem, "Creator Spiritus. The Challenge of Pentecostal Experience to Pentecostal Theology," *Theology* 81/679, January 1978, 32-40; idem, "Le Livre oral. Vers une théologie interculturelle," in: *Cultures populaires* (Collection Epoque, Toulouse, Ed. Privat, 1979); idem, "Intercultural Theology," *Research Bulletin ISRAL* (University of Birmingham, Dept. of Theology, 1978).