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Restructuring The United Methodist Church In an Age of Empire

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Since the 1960s, The United Methodist Church has regularly advanced studies and proposals aimed at restructuring the denomination to be a “global” (now, “worldwide”) church.¹ In spring 2007, the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table’s Task Group on the Global Nature of the Church (hereafter, “Task Group”) presented a report to the full Council: “World-Wide Ministry Through The United Methodist Church.”² The report concludes with proposed legislation “as a first step toward living more fully into the world-wide nature that already exists in our church in a limited way.”³ In essence, the legislation sets the stage for transformation by proposing, first, constitutional changes that would allow future legislation to create equivalent structures within every geographical region and, second, an ongoing study to conclude with a report presented to the 2012 General Conference.

Most notably, the report calls for living “differently in the world” and offering “the world a better version of unity and interdependence.”⁴ In this proposal, there exists an opening, a possibility for change—a moment in which the church can begin to resist “Empire,” or to use the latter’s processes for the flourishing of human life and the whole of creation. But this moment also presents the possibility that nothing will change and that the neocolonial and exilic practices of United Methodism will continue under the influence of Empire and existing U.S. ideological commitments. By “exilic practices,” I mean the ways in which churches that chose “affiliated autonomous” status rather than “central conference” status within the denomination have largely been forgotten and marginalized by the U.S. church. Nonetheless, what seems evident is a growing recognition that the United States cannot continue to dominate a church that is embodied in diverse ways throughout the world (or, at least, it cannot *appear* that the United States is the center or dominant segment of the church).

The term *Empire* has come to reflect the growing reality and potential dangers of globalization. In their book *Empire*, Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri define the concept of Empire as a system or regime “characterized fundamentally by a lack of boundaries.”⁵ As the world becomes increasingly interrelated and interdependent economically, politically, culturally, and even religiously, national sovereignty and power are destabilized and eroded. United Methodist theologian Joerg Rieger explains that Empire “has to do with massive concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life and that cannot be controlled by any one actor alone.”⁶ In other words, the structures and processes of the global order are changing and evolving. In themselves, these processes of globalization are neither positive nor negative, even though, at present, they tend to concentrate resources in the hands of the few rather than the many. The ways in which these processes are structured and controlled, as well as the uses to which they are put, determine their value or harm in relation to various peoples and nations around the world.

The reality of globalization and the processes of Empire lead us to ask: Can The United Methodist Church begin to use these processes to further the reign of God on earth and the mission of the church, without succumbing to their logic and dehumanizing consequences? *This is the crucial task now facing the denomination as well as the church universal.* But the history of our church’s approach to being a world body is less than ideal and requires critical reflection if a genuine desire is to come to fruition to develop structures of interdependency and interrelationship that lead to the flourishing of all people and the whole of creation.

A Brief Background: The Impetus to Structural Change

The commission known as COSMOS (Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas, 1948–1972) was established by The Methodist Church and continued within The United Methodist Church to provide the theological and practical conversation that would enable indigenous churches to opt for “affiliated autonomous” status or to remain as “central” conferences tied to the structural authority of the U.S.-dominated General Conference and its *Book of Discipline*.⁷ For the churches in many nations, the desire to elect their own bishops was a driving force, as was the sense that the churches needed to reflect indigenous features, rather than the culture, concerns, and ideologies of the United States. The late 1960s and early 1970s was a time of awakening for nations long subjected to colonialism and imperial desires. Latin American liberation theology emerged with its powerful claim that

the church needs to take seriously the poor and the “human dimension.” Yet it was also a time of political upheaval and an ongoing Cold War in which the United States sought to delimit the spread of Communism, at times through covert actions supporting brutal dictatorial regimes around the world. Political circumstances, combined with the new theological consciousness, made the idea of autonomy urgent and necessary.

It was not yet a time when economic forces propelled change—at least within the First World—even though Third World nations had already begun to speak of the problems associated with global economic dynamics and conditions. Indeed, the COSMOS files contain assessments from church leaders and theologians from Latin America and Asia related to economic dependency and the need for change. Mortimer Arias, bishop of the Bolivian Methodist Church in 1970, wrote a “Manifesto to the Nation” that was published in the Bolivian press and included in the work of COSMOS. He argued clearly and forcefully:

At the bottom of this situation [of dehumanization] are international oppressive structures, such as imperialism and the war-like and economic interests of the great powers. Like the rest of the Third World, we are obliged to sell our new materials cheaply and to buy manufactured goods which represent ten, twenty, and even thirty times the average [wage] . . . paid to the Bolivian worker. Foreign investors are willing to exploit our riches.⁸

This is the situation that José Míguez Bonino, who participated in the COSMOS conversations, identified in 1975 when he wrote, “*Latin America has discovered the basic fact of its dependence.*”⁹ While pointing to the fact that “Bolivian and Argentine pronouncements of the Methodist church . . . expressly reject the capitalist system and urge the Methodist people to participate actively in the shaping of a new and more human society,” he also demonstrated that the church’s pronouncements seldom become enacted.¹⁰

Conversely, while the U.S. church and commission members were aware of the financial and economic concerns, they often viewed the situation quite differently. For example, in 1962, reporting on a consultation held in Buenos Aires, Max Warren noted that Latin America sees the Board of Missions as a “gold mine,” without understanding the “real facts.” He then stated that the Board and missionaries must interpret financial realities to the churches in Latin America.¹¹ A similar sentiment is expressed in a 1965 COSMOS report which, in the final three sentences of a 24-page document, addresses economic concerns: “In any change in structure, the Board of Missions faces real

problems in the use of money. This raises the question of stewardship. If a new world structure is to emerge, how do we deal with the question of stewardship?"¹² This brief reference indicates that the economic question was little considered on the part of the U.S. church; and when it was, it generally conveyed a sense of paternalism. Latin America may have awakened to its economic dependency, but the United States had not yet become aware of its contribution to creating and sustaining dehumanizing economic conditions.

Due to the volatile context of the 1960s, the U.S. church essentially required all national churches established by its missionary efforts to choose autonomy or central conference status. Even so, as the process unfolded the meaning and implications of "affiliated autonomous" status versus a "central conference" relationship were only vaguely delineated. There is evidence that not all of the national churches opting for affiliated autonomous status sought a complete separation from The United Methodist Church. Indeed, some expressed a clear desire, based upon theological grounds, to remain in relationship. But given limited economic and personnel resources, as well as a desire to have some control over how resources are used, the central conferences have proven to be the church's priority (especially in Africa). In this situation, a twofold sense of "exile" has emerged.¹³ First, the central conferences, whose churches are entangled with the United States in various ways, experience a sense of exile from their own cultures and perspectives. This problem has decreased with the end of Methodist "missions," in which churches often used English in worship and were led by U.S. bishops. Yet there remains a perception that the U.S. church controls The United Methodist Church and, therefore, the central conferences. In other words, a neocolonial relationship pervades The United Methodist Church as it remains U.S.-dominated.¹⁴

The second form of exile is experienced by affiliated autonomous churches that, to a large extent, have been marginalized by their choice for autonomy.¹⁵ In recent months, The United Methodist Church has initiated conversations with these churches, recognizing a need to reestablish and deepen relationships, given that connectionalism (in one form or another) has been a basic Methodist principle since Wesley's day.¹⁶

Thus, an awareness that the church needs to change has existed since the 1960s and COSMOS. The call for new structures arises on a regular basis. Yet an examination of the church's processes over the past thirty or forty years reveals that, despite years of study, the U.S. church has lacked a critical consciousness of the forces at work. To be sure, the United States was aware of the sociopolitical

dynamics during the dismantling of colonial relationships and the rise of the revolutionary spirit in the Southern Hemisphere. And the U.S. church knew of the volatile sociopolitical situation internal to the United States (i.e., the Civil Rights Movement and the opposition to the Vietnam War). But the COSMOS deliberations never questioned the church's practices in light of the U.S. role in other nations, its politics of intervention, or its economic policies. We might suggest that the work of restructuring The United Methodist Church under COSMOS was a reaction to shifting conditions and political and social forces around the globe that could not be ignored and not a critical theological and sociopolitical reflection on the church's role or mission in the world. The result is the conditions of exile and neocolonialism present within The United Methodist Church today.

In sum, the processes that created the current structures of The United Methodist Church—U.S. domination, central conferences, affiliated autonomous churches—are the outcome of insufficient critical consciousness on the part of denominational leaders. As we move toward another round of structural change in 2008, the need for critical engagement with the socioeconomic, political, and social forces that are shaping our world becomes a key to substantive transformation.

Drawing upon Hardt and Negri's methodological framework, we can argue that addressing the rise of Empire requires two steps. The first involves a "critical and deconstructive" moment in which the church develops a widespread consciousness of the processes at work and the ways in which the church is implicated in them. Developing a critical consciousness serves as the precursor to the second step, a "constructive and ethico-political" moment that seeks to direct the church "toward the constitution of an effective social, political alternative" to today's connectional system.¹⁷ We might suggest that, instead of simply reacting to the context that seems to demand changes in the church, we first ask the critical questions that have remained tangential in the past. Lacking critical consciousness and self-critique, structural changes are as likely to contribute to and play into the dehumanizing processes of Empire as they are to model a new form of interrelationship and interdependency.

Given this history and the lack of critical consciousness in the past, one wonders whether the latest round of study and restructuring is largely a reaction to the inescapable forces of globalization and the emergence of Empire. As geopolitics change, so must the church. In other words, as happened during the revolutionary, anticolonial 1960s and 1970s, the

church today is experiencing the discomfort of an increasingly deterritorialized world in which national boundaries are increasingly fluid and new centers of power emerge. These changes make for unsettledness: There is no longer a sense of certainty that the economic, political, and military power of the United States is infallible or sure to prevail on the global stage. United Methodists in the United States recognize a need—in part, quite genuine and enlightened—to reduce the U.S. role as dominant power within the church and to participate in the world in a more reciprocal and mutual manner. Of course, the danger is that, without first developing a critical consciousness, the church's structures can be reconstituted to provide the appearance of responding to globalization and its forces while actually sidestepping the most difficult issues. The church can treat the symptoms without treating the causes of this dis-ease.

Lacking a prior critical and reflective moment, structural changes in the denomination are not likely to produce genuine transformation and could possibly foster relationships that contribute to the dehumanizing processes of Empire. Without a critical consciousness on the part of the U.S. segment of the church, it is unlikely that structures can be developed to provide for a church that bears witness in and to the world of a different way of living in relationship and interdependence—the way of God in Christ in the Holy Spirit. Our first step, then, in recreating the church so as to steer Empire's processes in the service of humanity and the reign of God on earth is to engender widespread reflection on the church's theological and ecclesial commitments, as well as the ways in which these commitments reflect or challenge national and transnational commitments.

The United Methodist Church Contra Empire

The fundamental question before us is this: How can the church proceed contra Empire's dehumanizing processes? Or, put differently, how can the church proceed in a way that uses the processes of Empire without succumbing to its logic of concentrating resources in the hands of the few rather than the many? In order to stand against Empire and to provide a distinct vision of interdependency, interrelationship, and human flourishing, The United Methodist Church must reflect upon the contemporary condition in light of the gospel message and the Wesleyan theological heritage.

As we have seen, COSMOS was not entirely successful, at least in part due to unexamined assumptions, processes, and ideologies. Although the commission's work ultimately led to structural changes as The United Methodist Church came into existence, the unforeseen consequences have been neo-

colonialism and exile. Third World participants in the COSMOS process had developed a critical theological consciousness while U.S. participants lagged behind, quite possibly because the United States desired to continue its dominance of the church and its resources. Clearly, at that time, the United States was still ascendant, striving to become the sole superpower in the world. Interestingly, in a confidential statement based upon personal letters sent to Bishop Raines, chair of the COSMOS commission, a number of frank comments were made related to the commission's idea of restructuring to be an "international" Methodist Church. The comment was made that an international church was possible only if it had a "central headquarters that is not in the United States." Another letter issued this prophetic warning: "I want to add here a comment that may seem hard, but which as a friend you must allow me the right to make. Politically and militarily the United States is today in a mood of expansionism."¹⁸ There is no record of the commission's response to these comments or whether they were taken seriously in the COSMOS deliberations. Nonetheless, they provide evidence that these concerns were raised as early as 1965. In light of current U.S. foreign policies, one has to ask whether the "mood of expansionism" or the imperial desires have yet reached their apex. In other words, there remains a prophetic role for the church to stand against U.S. imperial desires, not only in the issuance of resolutions and episcopal pastoral letters but also in tangible structural and economic expressions that seek to bear witness to the gospel within the church as well as the larger society.

The United Methodist Church or, more specifically, its U.S. component, often continues to be entangled in U.S. political and economic ideologies and desires, which do not always coincide with the imperatives of the gospel and the Wesleyan theological heritage. (I am reminded of the large Texas congregation that, each Sunday, processes with the U.S. flag and sings a verse of "America," even on the Sunday when the invited guest preacher was Leslie Griffiths, minister of Wesley's Chapel in London.) Thus, the first step in developing a critical consciousness is to recognize the informal and ideological ways in which the church is entangled with U.S. culture and concerns. Put another way, we must clearly grasp that the so-called "American Way of Life" requires critique. Capitalism and consumerism are not practices taken straight from the gospel. At one time, explicitly or implicitly promoting the "American Way of Life" was part and parcel of the missionary enterprise. This practice can no longer be sustained within an awakened and reconceptualized church. The U.S. church must become conscious of the national imperialistic and neocolonial tendencies that shape its thinking and doing.

Wesley's oft-cited claim, "I look upon the whole world as my parish," is frequently offered as rationale for the "limitlessness" of the church's mission. It is not uncommon to hear United Methodists parrot Wesley's claim as a way of providing an imperative or rationale for being a "global" church. Unfortunately, the report from the Task Force is no exception. Aside from the fact that Wesley's statement to the Bishop of Bristol had nothing to do with being a global or world church (it had to do with his "irregular" ecclesiastical practices), it was uttered at a time when Britain was an empire in pursuit of economic and political advantage. Were Wesley alive today, he would quite likely have proceeded with caution when applying the logic of "the world is my parish" to the contemporary context. The world is not the parish of The United Methodist Church. The world is *God's* parish—and, insofar as they seek to follow the divine mission, United Methodists are invited to undertake mission projects and establish churches. Could it be that the popularity of Wesley's claim among denominational proposals for the global nature of the church reflects the influence of the logic of U.S. imperialism rather than the imperatives of the gospel?

Another case in point is the Task Group's emphasis on considering the connectional system or the church's polity as a crucial factor in understanding the "catholicity" of The United Methodist Church.¹⁹ Of course there never has existed something called *the* connectional system. From Wesley to the Methodist Episcopal Church to present-day United Methodism, various forms of connectional structure have come and gone. A critical component of the connectional system is apportionments, which allow for the transfer of funds from local churches to the larger church to carry out "worldwide" mission. At the heart of the connectional system, then, are questions related to economics and the global economy. Yet the Task Group report gives only a brief nod to the fact that "financial resources are 'centered' in the United States," asking the question, "Will the church in the United States address the matter of 'privilege' that accrues to it via money and membership?"²⁰ In other words, the bishops stop short of asking the hard questions about the global economy, the U.S. role in transnational economic organizations, the growing economic disparities within the United States and between this country and other nations, and the emphasis The United Methodist Church places on financial matters (including profitability, investments, etc.). Until serious reflection is done on the church's implication in global economic matters, new structures are not likely to embody and model interdependency and interrelationship. The United Methodist Church will need to develop a deep

comprehension of the new global transnational economic forces and the relationships and conditions they produce, as well as an understanding of national and local forms of economic relationship and dependency.

Rethinking the Church's Role

The first moment in any restructuring of The United Methodist Church is that of developing a critical consciousness related to the ways in which the church is implicated in U.S. policies, practices, and ideologies. Two forms of consciousness must be cultivated: (1) Awareness of the neocolonial and imperialistic ideologies and practices of the United States and the U.S. church, and (2) comprehension of economic policies and practices on the global and transnational as well as on the national and local levels, including those within the church itself. The following comments relate to this task of developing a critical consciousness:

1. The United Methodist Church has shied away from difficult discussions related to the control and distribution of money within the church, including within the U.S. segment of the church. It is easier to speak in abstract terms about poverty or global economic policies and disparities than to engage in rigorous self-critique. Yet, to counter Empire's dehumanizing tendencies and to model different relational possibilities, the church must demonstrate that honest and painful conversations can take place within its own institutional and organizational elements, followed by transformative financial and economic practices that reflect and further its theological commitments.

I pastor a small, struggling bilingual congregation in the Latino/a barrio on Fort Worth's south side. The Rio Grande Conference, to which it belongs, is a small, struggling conference, which is based not (entirely) upon geography but (primarily) on language. The conference's financial situation is perilous. Meanwhile, the conferences that are geographically based and overlap the Rio Grande Conference are urged to develop the National Hispanic Plan locally (and largely apart from the Rio Grande Conference), since the Latino/a population represents a huge source of potential members. Many of these potential members are poor or lower middle class; and so their churches often struggle to be self-sustaining (at least, in the first or second generations). Over the past three years, two geographically based churches have closed in this part of the city, due in part to an apparent reluctance

to transition demographically and due in part to the Central Texas Conference's sense that these churches would not be profitable or self-sustaining.

Economic issues are inseparable from issues of class and race in The United Methodist Church today. The U.S. church has yet to address fully the inequities and economics of class and race internal to United Methodism in this country. Examining local and regional issues related to economics and other marginalizing factors can generate insightful reflection on global issues, especially if the practices of the U.S. church are redeveloped to rectify disparities within the United States. In sum, United Methodism must begin to wrestle with the problem of economic injustice within the U.S. component of the church and not only in relation to the "world."

2. Perhaps the proposed study process should be chaired and guided by United Methodists who are not U.S. citizens and should be constituted in such a way that the U.S. church cannot dominate the conversation numerically or structurally. COSMOS was led and guided by U.S. members. The 2004–2008 Task Group included non-U.S. members but was chaired by a U.S. bishop. The U.S. church predominates in The Council of Bishops and the General Conference. The general secretaries of the church's general boards and commissions are from the United States. Power continues to be concentrated in the U.S. church. Theologically, we must ask whether numerical strength (both in terms of money and membership) should be the basis of power within the body of Christ and the in-breaking reign of God on earth.

The proposed changes are troubling, moreover, because they come at a time when U.S. membership is declining and membership in the Two-Thirds world, especially in Africa, is growing dramatically. Could the impetus for structural change entail a subtle move to protect U.S. interests by establishing regional decision-making authority for the U.S. church and, thereby, protecting U.S. interests from the provisions of a General Conference dominated by members from other regions? In any case, the U.S. church would be wise to allow other regions to develop and lead the conversation.

As we have seen, the reflections of Third World participants in the COSMOS proceedings were often deeply perceptive, but, for the most part, were not taken to heart (or even carefully weighed) by those representing the United States. In the opportunity for

transformation before us now, the U.S. church needs to listen to the insights from the world's citizens with whom it desires a renewed and reconciled form of relationship. The U.S. component of The United Methodist Church has much to learn from those who have already reflected upon these issues and developed a critical understanding. (This means, as well, that the extant documents from COSMOS should be read and considered as background to a new process.)

3. A new study group would be wise to recruit economists (as well as theologians) to reflect specifically upon the financial and economic dimensions of The United Methodist Church and to consider alternative arrangements to the present system. In the past, various quadrennial commissions have drawn upon the expertise of sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, physicians, and other disciplinary experts. I am not suggesting that reports be requested from accountants and financial planners but that background papers on the global economic system, as well as considerations of how the U.S. church is implicated in these economic processes, could prove insightful.

In fact, perhaps The United Methodist Church could develop a markedly new form of economic life or a modified socialized economy for its new structures. Radical as that might sound to some members of the U.S. church, the gospel knows nothing about capitalism and little about the accumulation of wealth and property. Instead, we see evidence in the early church of a redistribution of wealth from the haves to the have-nots and a concern for sharing in common (1 Corinthians 16; Acts 4:32-35). We read that we are not to store up treasures on earth (Matt. 6:19); that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (Matt. 19:24); and that one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). The Scriptures are clear that those who have wealth must not serve money above God and neighbor. In fact, one might argue that the basis for the system of apportionments lies in this biblical mandate.

The gospel calls the church to reconsider the economic relationship and not only the structural arrangements of the U.S. and other First World segments of The United Methodist Church to the rest of the world. Perhaps the renewal of the church in the United States is tied to a deep commitment to economic reform. The gospel compels The United Methodist Church to develop and model economic relationships that differ from the worldly systems

existing today. This imperative includes relinquishing the need to control churchwide funds, under the auspices of various forms of paternalistic logic.

4. John Wesley's concern for just economic conditions and the poor has been well documented.²¹ His sermon "On the Use of Money" is quite simple and practical in its logic of earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. Moreover, at a time when the poor were treated harshly and social welfare provisions were quite limited, "Wesley conspicuously adopted a different viewpoint, seeing the poor as industrious and a source of spiritual renewal. . . ."²²

The Wesleyan theological heritage contains clear guidance on economic matters, on things such as the distribution of wealth and the accumulation of property. Can the U.S. church, in good conscience, sidestep Wesley's guidance on economic concerns, given that the sermons are doctrinal standards and the provisions of the General Rules are expressed within the *Book of Discipline*? How can the U.S. church model Wesley's personal approach to wealth in light of the inescapable economic realities of our day? Clearly, any ongoing study related to restructuring the church should take into consideration Wesley's teachings on money, the poor, and human rights. The United Methodist Church is called to be responsible to its heritage of concern for the poor and the sharing of wealth, consistent with the biblical witnesses. In a very real sense, today's United Methodists, like all Christians, are the children of the poor; and we should not forget where we have come from or whom we are called to serve.

* * *

The United Methodist Church faces an opportunity for substantial transformation. Under the leadership of the Council of Bishops and the deliberations of the General Conference, the possibility of countering Empire's dehumanizing processes exists. But unless the church, particularly in the United States, develops a critical and theological consciousness of the processes—especially economic processes—related to Empire and of the church's biblical and Wesleyan mandate to model a different form of human economic life together, it will continue to represent a version of worldly Methodism, rather than enabling the reign of God to grow among us. The pressing challenge for The United Methodist Church is not simply how to restructure the church but how to address the pervasive problem of economic injustice that exists within the church and the world in an age of Empire.

Notes

1. A prior version of this paper was presented to the working group on Ethics, Economics, and Globalization at the Twelfth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, August 2007. I am grateful to the members of that working group for their insights and perspectives. My thanks go also to my graduate assistant Estee Valendy for her careful proofreading of this paper.
2. Task Group on the Global Nature of the Church, Council of Bishops and Connectional Table, "World-Wide Ministry Through The United Methodist Church," an interim report (Spring 2007). I am grateful to Bishop Scott Jones for sharing a copy of the report and subsequent changes with me.
3. *Ibid.*, 3.
4. *Ibid.*, 2.
5. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xiv.
6. Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 2.
7. The bulk of the commission's work was done between 1962 and 1970.
8. Bishop Mortimer Arias, "Manifesto to the Nation," COSMOS, Latin America I: Bolivia 1968–1970, UMC Archives (Madison, New Jersey), 3.
9. José Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 15 (italics in original).
10. *Ibid.*, 57.
11. Max Warren, "Some Reflections of the Consultation Promoted by the Board of Mission of the Methodist Church of the USA Held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, February 24–March 5, 1962." Latin America I: Latin American Central Conference 1962–1969, COSMOS, UMC Archives.
12. "The Methodist Church (USA)—A Change in Structure Required," author unknown, c. 1965, COSMOS, UMC Archives.
13. I have discussed this phenomenon at length in an earlier paper, "Recovering *Los Desaparecidos*," in *A Living Tradition*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Moore (Nashville: Kingswood, forthcoming). A revised version will appear in *Cuadernos de Teología*, published by Instituto Universitario ISEDET (Buenos Aires).
14. Note that British Methodism, with its direct experience of colonialism, opted for a different relationship than the central conference form.



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It preferred to assist national churches to become autonomous and self-sufficient.

15. For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see my paper on Methodism in Argentina, cited in note 13.
16. I am not suggesting that the autonomous churches wish to come “home,” but rather that The United Methodist Church is beginning to recognize the problematic nature of this structure.
17. I draw here on Hardt and Negri’s argument that the rise of Empire enables the processes of production to be challenged and reconstituted toward liberating ends or, we might suggest, toward the flourishing of human life and the whole of creation. See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 47.
18. “Confidential Statement—Personal reactions to the proposal for an International Methodist Church, expressed in a letter written at the request of Bishop Raines” (November 5, 1965), British Methodism Overseas Conferences 1962–1971, COSMOS, UMC Archives, 1, 5. Note that the comments fail to include economic expansionism.
19. “World-Wide Mission Through The United Methodist Church,” 7.
20. *Ibid.*, 12.
21. See, for example, Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); *The Portion of the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood, 1995); and *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood, 2002).
22. Jeremy Black, *Eighteenth-Century Britain, 1688–1783* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 105.



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