

Introduction to the Bristol Consultation 2001 Collection

By Daniel F. Flores, Ph.D.

In mid-summer of 2000, my wife Thelma and I moved to Bristol, England where I, with her able assistance, assumed responsibilities as Director of Studies for the Charles Wesley Heritage Centre operating from Charles Wesley's historic home. Our first task was to provide logistical support and hospitality for a global gathering of Methodist and Orthodox theologians at Trinity College - Bristol. After a rather successful conference, Dr. S T Kimbrough, Jr. approached me with the idea of a similar gathering of Methodists to a Christian conference around the general topic of the significance of *Las Obras de Wesley*, John Wesley's *Works* newly edited and published into Spanish. The fourteen volume set is an entirely new edition, not merely a translation of the popular Jackson edition. There are some minor omissions, such as the foreign language grammars, which do not detract from the theological *corpus*. It is intentionally devoid of editorial commentary so as to create a wide cross-denominational appeal. Dr. L. Elbert Wethington and the Board of the Wesley Heritage Foundation, publisher of *Las Obras*, appointed Dr. Justo L. González to serve as General Editor for the international staff of translators and editors. Their speed and accuracy in completing the work were astounding. Dr. Kimbrough was convinced that this major publishing achievement was worthy of a global consultation underwritten by the evangelism and interpretation department of the General Board of Global Ministries.

We began assembling a team of consultants related to both the United Methodist Church and the British Methodist Church. They remain two of the largest global connections with direct Wesleyan roots, but operating under different philosophical

frameworks. Dr. David Lowes Watson's extensive experience in both USA and UK connections proved indispensable in navigating the sensitivities and interests of both systems. Rev. Luis Veagra of the Panama Methodist Church, (Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas), was serving in London at the time. He and his wife Sarai were extremely helpful in building a list of invitees from the Central and Latin American contingent. We were pleased to learn that Portuguese speakers can easily read the *Obras* in Spanish. We made arrangements for Spanish and Portuguese interpreters to facilitate discussions. About sixty inquiries yielded under thirty confirmed participants. The conference delegates would represent five continents and several distinctly different nationalities: Chile; Brazil; Chile; England; Equatorial Guinea (Africa); India; Jamaica; Mexico; Peru; Portugal; Puerto Rico; Romania; Spain; Uruguay; Wales; and USA.

The conference was entitled, "*En Su Propria Lengua: A Global Consultation on Las Obras de Wesley.*" Conference participants were asked to read *Tomo VII, La Vida Cristiana*, the ethical papers. The main venue was Trinity College – Bristol, but also included Charles Wesley's House and The New Room. The unique location provided several opportunities for guided site visits which deepened our insight on the Wesleys and the nascence of Methodism. For example, after reading Wesley's letter on slavery, we made an exceptionally powerful site visit to the Slavery Museum on the Bristol Docks. Walking through the exhibit made real the pain of Bristol's role in the infamous triangular slave trade. Doing so in the very presence of brothers from Equatorial Guinea evoked tears of remorse and encouraged a spirit of racial reconciliation. Many excellent discussions – in Portuguese, Spanish and English – also put flesh onto the *Obras* texts. In summary, this historic time of Christian conferencing brought our hearts and minds

closer than ever experienced. Many of the participants asked the question, What will be the follow-up? Although it is unfortunate that the rich discussions on selected texts from *Tomo VII* were not recorded, plenary papers were preserved with the intention of future publication. The plenary sessions covered a wide variety of topics from abstinence to zeal. Those discussions remained all but forgotten for almost three years.

A marvelous thing happened with the creation of the Sociedad Wesleyana, a.k.a, The Hispanic Wesleyan Society, which occurred during the John Wesley Tercentenary Celebration at Perkins School of Theology in April 2003. Decided interest in promoting new scholarship of Wesley studies in Spanish revived the idea of publishing the Bristol Consultation 2001 papers. However, it took several more years to secure permission and complete basic editing tasks. Now, on the Eve of the Charles Wesley Tercentenary 2007, they are being released under the auspices of Sociedad Wesleyana. Keeping with our mission statement, we make these papers public in an effort to stimulate Wesley studies among our global partners, especially *Portugueses* and *Hispanoparlantes*.

We are truly grateful to Dr. Paul Barton who encouraged us to bring select papers to his “Latino Religion” website. We are also grateful to Dr. Mark Wethington, President of the Wesley Heritage Foundation, has afforded us the opportunity to post the complete collection for the first time on the WHF website. Many thanks are due to Dr. S T Kimbrough, Jr. for securing permission for web-publishing from the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church. Of course, we are grateful for the all the contributors who toiled in research and now share their findings with the entire Wesleyan connection. Most of the papers are offered in Spanish; however, English versions appear whenever Spanish or Portuguese translations were unavailable.

Hopefully these papers will also be translated in the future. It is my distinct honor, on behalf of the Bristol Consultation 2001 participants in association with Sociedad Wesleyana to present the Bristol Consultation 2001 Papers for the first time in their entirety.

Sociedad Wesleyana, The Hispanic Wesleyan Society, is a non-profit interdenominational organization with the mission of promoting Wesley studies among *Hispanoparlantes*. For further information on how to support or join Sociedad Wesleyana, please contact the President:

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