

These are my 'prolegomena to any future Methodist doctrine of the Church', as Immanuel Kant would have said if he had come under the influence of John Wesley. But I am equally sure that anything that we might formulate on the subject would need to be enriched by what other communions have to teach us. I do not know, for instance, that we have yet fully understood the Anglican emphasis on historical continuity, or the need for its expression through outward forms of the ministry; I suspect that the relation between the Church and the sacraments is still somewhat obscure to us. I look forward to the time when the whole doctrine of the Church will be revealed to a united Church. Meanwhile, let us be very sure that we preserve what has been revealed to us, neither assimilating ourselves too readily or too completely to other forms of Christian thought, nor boasting too much about our own; but always willing both to learn and teach with equal humility, acknowledging that we have often scorned the heritage of other Churches and abused our own. And 'if we be otherwise minded may God grant that this also may be revealed to us'.

RUPERT E. DAVIES

CAN THE DISTINCTIVE METHODIST EMPHASIS BE SAID TO BE ROOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

THE SUBJECT is bristling with difficulties. Is it, by any unlucky chance, a possible after-thought, that, having discussed and established the character of our distinctive emphasis, we feel in duty bound to make sure that this is, after all, in accordance with the Scriptures? We are all too familiar with the practice of finding the text after the sermon is written. How much, in this case, does it matter to us whether or not the sermon has a text? Does it weigh on our minds sufficiently to make us 'Bible-conscious' in theology and churchmanship?

Next, what is the distinctive Methodist emphasis? Can we take it for granted that there is common agreement upon a list of items represented in our programme here at Oxford, containing Justification and Sanctification, Assurance and Perfection, Witness of the Spirit and Priesthood of all Believers, Fellowship of Worship and Service and Universal Mission of the Church, Grace free in all and for all? And can this list be narrowed down to an irreducible basic minimum, bearing in mind that our venerable father and founder could at different

times point to different doctrines as the grand deposit of Methodism,¹ the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*?²

Finally, in what sense is our emphasis said to be 'rooted' in the New Testament? Do we mean (Wesley uses this category) 'prescribed' by the New Testament,³ or consistent with the New Testament, or analogous to the New Testament? Is it a matter of proof-texts or of what is nowadays called 'biblical insights'? I shall not presume to dispose of all these questions within the next twenty minutes. I merely want to indicate that I am aware of them. And having confessed my perplexity, I invite you to turn with me directly to Wesley.

Someone challenged him that 'singularities are your most beloved opinions and favourite tenets, more insisted upon by you than the general and uncontroverted truths of Christianity'; he answered:

And so, I doubt, it will be to the end of the world; for in spite of all I can say, they will represent one circumstance of my doctrine (so called) as the main substance of it. . . . 'No singularities' is not my answer; but that no singularities are my most beloved opinions; that no singularities are more, or near as much, insisted upon by me as the general, uncontroverted truths of Christianity.⁴

So much for his initial interest in any kind of 'distinctive Methodist emphasis'! You note that he can go so far as to say 'my doctrine (so called)'—recalling Karl Barth's early description of his own theology as merely '*ein bisschen Zimt zur Speise*'. The whole point at Aldersgate and Mr Bray's house in London is that the decisive discovery of the Wesleys is made from the sacred text itself and that their charge against the mother Church, in terms of Galatians 1, reinforced by the Articles and Homilies, is plainly the loss of her New Testament roots, the removal into another gospel.⁵ Maybe their charge today would, in the same terms, have to turn against the Methodist people; they would certainly say that apart from the New Testament roots no Methodist emphasis is worth maintaining; if we have lost those roots, we have lost our *raison d'être* as a Church.

Take the issue of Christian Perfection. 'The opinion I have concerning it at present', says Wesley, 'I espouse because I think it scriptural. If therefore I am convinced it is not scriptural, I shall willingly relinquish it.'⁶ On the other hand, when William Law insists upon a certain speculative detail in his doctrine of the New Birth, Wesley retorts: 'Neither can I believe this till I find it in the Bible.'⁷ This is typical, and it is central. The famous letter to James Hervey, one of his old pupils here at Lincoln College, which describes the world as his parish, has this solemn self-defence: 'If by catholic principles you mean any other than scriptural, they weigh nothing with me. I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures; but on scriptural principles I do not think it hard to justify whatever I do. God in Scripture commands me. . . .'⁸ Whether it applies to doctrine, or to church polity, such as the itinerant 'Plan', or to the historic step of ordaining the preachers for America—in every case Wesley acts not 'as a Methodist' in his own right, but, as he preferred to be called, a 'Bible Christian' (and in the last of these instances as a 'scriptural Bishop').⁹ 'God in Scripture commands me' remains the key-note throughout his lifetime. So it was the distinctive Methodist emphasis which prompted the late Dr Ryder Smith to write all his books under the title '*The Bible Doctrine of—*' Sin, Grace, Man, Salvation, and the Hereafter.

At least on paper, the Methodist Church, on either side of the Atlantic, has remained faithful to this. Our doctrinal standards are still Wesley's Sermons and Notes, written into the constitution of British Methodism, sanctioned by the American General Conference of 1808, enforced on the mission field; and these are exegetical documents. We can, in fact, boast this as our distinction among our ecumenical partners, that our theological position is defined, not in confessions and not primarily in articles of religion, but in two sets of expositions of the New Testament. To these we must add the less official, but no less important source of the Wesley hymns. Volumes of them appear quite specifically as 'short hymns on select passages of Scripture'; these still serve the preacher in his study of the text as well as the congregation in the reception of the message, and this, of course, is true of the whole of Charles Wesley's hymnody. More than one of us has discovered that in the preaching of the Gospel the Notes become his standard dictionary, as the Hymns become his standard accompaniment, and he really cannot do without either.

In the Methodist standards are embodied the principles of the Protestant Reformation—above all, the one fundamental principle of the Church's perpetual reformation by the Word of God. This has an active and a passive meaning; it is the criterion by which the Wesleys judge the Reformers and by which they themselves stand judged. What they have to say in criticism of their ancestors is essentially a reminder of certain New Testament passages that Luther and Calvin were apt to overlook or to qualify; for example, from Romans 7 we have to go on to Romans 8, and in Romans 8 to follow the turn 'if children, then heirs', and again: 'whom He justified, them He also glorified'. Thus the progress in Church history is progress in biblical exposition. What we, in turn, have to say in criticism of Wesley must likewise be rooted in the New Testament if it is to be valid at all; and so far we have said very little. His doctrine of perfection, for instance, has been found wanting on various philosophical, ethical, social and psychological counts; nobody has yet undertaken to hold it up in the light of the First Epistle of John and of the whole framework of the peculiar biblical categories such as the perfect man in the Old Testament, the perfection of Christ, the perfect disciple and the hour of perfection. The absence of New Testament references in nearly all our modern restatements of Methodist doctrine is a telling—Wesley would say a shocking—fact.

Now, what about our distinctive emphasis? First of all, is it emphasis in the singular or emphases in the plural? There is peril in both, but the singular which appears in the authorized version of my assignment is undoubtedly the lesser risk. Even so, it is an unhappy word and one which in our current usage is fraught with quite grave ecumenical implications. It seems to suggest that Methodism is quite content to represent an 'emphasis' which it would like to see preserved within 'the coming great Church'; and where other traditions defend a doctrine, all we have to contribute is, in the end, 'evangelical fervour'. This reduction from substance to attitude indicates the direction in which most of our customary attempts at self-definition are tending to move. The very name of Methodism lends support to this. We are supposed to stand for a certain method in the order of salvation¹⁰ and in the order of Church life; and the test we must pass is not one of orthodoxy, but of efficiency. Again, experience is the thing that counts and that must be accounted for in the life of every

Methodist. 'If a man is to be a Christian', says Kierkegaard, 'it is doubtless requisite for him to be quite definite that *he* believes. In the same degree that thou dost direct attention exclusively to the definite things a man must believe, in that same degree dost thou get away from faith.'¹¹ Take this sentence in isolation, with its heavy emphasis on the second requisite, and subjectivism becomes the Methodist Creed; this is, in fact, what has happened wherever Wesley has been interpreted through the eyes of Schleiermacher, of Personalism, or of Existentialism. It 'has left Methodism', in the words of Stanley Hopper, 'open both to the scientific criticism of liberal theology and the more stringent, if strident, prophetism of the theology of crisis';¹² it has, in the words of another critic, 'rendered the church peculiarly vulnerable to the infiltration of alien ideologies', so that it 'most readily aligned itself with pietistic sectarianism and thus reinforced that strain of its constitution which leaned toward moralistic and emotionalistic individualism'.¹³ The most popular of those alien ideologies which has triumphed in our midst is the replacement of what Wesley knew as total depravity by what Outler has called teetotal depravity; this is commonly believed to be our dominant distinctive emphasis, but it will be hard to find it rooted in the New Testament.

We have come a long way from John Wesley! Neither in content nor in form would he recognize our traditional Methodist emphases as his. Would he recognize any? We are back, then, where we began, with his disclaimer of all 'singularities'. This has been interpreted as saying that Methodism has no doctrine. What it means is that Methodism has no pet doctrine; it goes out for the whole of the New Testament. In other words, the only possible thing to single out from the New Testament, in the name of Wesley, is paradoxically, its fulness; it is 'the genuine gospel of present salvation through faith, wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost, declaring present, free, full justification, and enforcing every branch of inward and outward holiness'.¹⁴ Rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2₁₅) is, for Wesley, 'duly explaining and applying the whole scripture, so as to give each hearer his due portion. But they that give one part of the Gospel to all, have real need to be ashamed.'¹⁵ Sound doctrine, hygiene of the Gospel, according to the Pastoral Epistles, implies that the health of the Church depends, very literally, on the right mixture.

Fulness of the Gospel, then, is the Gospel, the whole Gospel and nothing but the Gospel; it is the belief that 'all the promises of God are yea in Him, and amen in Him, to the glory of God by us' (2 Cor. 1₂₀). As Wesley comments in the Notes: 'they are yea with respect to God promising; amen, with respect to men believing; yea, with respect to the apostles; amen, with respect to the hearers'. 'Ay and No too', says King Lear, 'was no good divinity'.¹⁶ Wesley heartily agrees. Nothing is more characteristic of him than his aversion from all dialectic at the central point. When Zinzendorf claims that 'a believer is never sanctified or holy in himself, but in Christ, only; he has no holiness in himself at all', Wesley impatiently replies:

What a heap of palpable self-contradiction, what senseless jargon is this! Does a believer love God, or does he not? If he does, he has the love of God in him . . . you cannot therefore deny that every believer has holiness in, though not from, himself; else you deny that he is holy at all; and if so, he cannot see the Lord.¹⁷

It is of the essence of the Gospel that He who calls us is faithful to do it (1 Thess. 5₂₄); as His Word is promise fulfilled in Christ, so the testament of Christ in turn is fulfilled in the Holy Spirit. For the practice of preaching, this means that 'if we could once bring all our preachers, itinerant and local, uniformly and steadily to insist on those two points: "Christ dying for us" and "Christ reigning in us", we should shake the trembling gates of hell'.¹⁸

'*Te totum applica ad textum; rem totam applica ad te*', wrote Bengel in the Preface to his *Greek New Testament Manual*, and we still find his words on the first page of our Nestlé editions. We can see the importance of his 'manner of applying' when we recall the passage in Luther's commentary on Galatians (2₂₀) which was instrumental in Charles Wesley's conversion:

Who loved me and gave himself for me. . . . Wherefore these words WHO LOVED ME are full of faith. And he that can utter this word ME, and apply it unto himself with a true and constant faith, as Paul did, shall be a good disputant against the law. And this manner of applying is the very true force and power of faith. Read, therefore, with great vehemence these words ME and FOR ME, and so inwardly practise with thyself that thou, with a sure faith, mayest conceive and print this ME in thy heart, and apply it unto thyself, not doubting but thou art in the number of those to whom this ME belongeth.¹⁹

Bengel follows this with a piece of practical advice to every reader of the Gospel:

Are you reading these various stories wrapped up in their peculiar circumstances? Wrap yourself up in similiar circumstances, and when, for example, it is written HE CALLETH THEE, (Mark 10₄₉) then think, Jesus is calling you; or dismiss the circumstances from your own mind, and you will immediately have a general truth.²⁰

Leaving for a moment the phrase 'general truth' (a thorn in the flesh, I know, for some of us), it seems to me that Bengel's illustration gives us in a nutshell quite literally 'all there is to' his and Wesley's biblicism; it is nothing but a very direct, personal and faithful 'manner of applying' the great PRO ME of the New Testament.

Only with the *New* Testament can this be done. The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1₁₇). Luther once said, '*lex verbum dei ad nos, evangelium verbum dei in nos*'.²¹ A free rendering of this might be that by the word of the Law God addresses us (the German *An-spruch*), by the word of the Gospel He enters in (*Zu-spruch*). We can immediately think of numerous Charles Wesley lines in which it is the burning concern that He should not remain outside, 'nor visit as a transient guest',²² but make His abode with us. This takes us to the heart of the matter. The much-invoked Hebrew Christian viewpoint, the encounter of human I and divine Thou, the *vis-à-vis* of creature and Creator—all this is not sufficient, neither is it evangelical (I remember William Temple's remark: 'I thought I knew all this in the nursery'); it still belongs to the stony tables of Moses, to the mount that might be touched, to the glory which was to be done away. Wesley's whole emphasis falls upon those passages in which the first covenant is made old (Heb. 8₁₃): the Epistle to the Hebrews—to which we must return shortly—the third chapter of 2 Corinthians, and, of course, the mentioning of the New Testament by our Lord Himself at the Last Supper. At the same time, Law and Gospel are not left, as in other traditions, in pure static antithesis; the impasse between nomism and

antinomianism is overcome by the régime of the Spirit which inaugurates the new dispensation. This is precisely what, according to Jeremiah's prophecy (31_{31ff.}), distinguishes the new covenant from the old; and the promise is fulfilled in the Gospel. The Covenant Service, Methodism's one significant contribution to the liturgical treasures of the universal Church, spells this out in practical terms. If even this idea is not originally Wesley's, if the covenanters, as it were, used the music first, still the key remains characteristically different:

*Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
Come quickly from above,
Write Thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love.*²³

So much for the New Testament *versus* the Old; and now the central notion of testament. The very title page of the book says what it is—not just event and invasion, narrative and record, drama and decision, but testament, legacy, last will and bequest, '*verbum dei in nos*', entry of the living Christ into the heart of the believer and the body of the Church, so that we are no longer outsiders and onlookers, but joint-heirs with Him, and that faith's concern is not with past history, but with the real presence of Jesus. If this is the treasure which the New Testament has to offer, the only proper theological question is: 'And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?', and the only possible answer is:

*He only can the words apply
Through which we endless life possess;
And deal to each his legacy,
His Lord's unutterable peace.*²⁴

This is the question asked and the answer given by Wesley. His whole concern is: how do I inherit under the testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? All his characteristic verbs—write, stamp, seal, open, prove, apply, inherit—have to do with the making of the testament, and the outcome of it is the 'partaker of Christ' (Heb. 3₁₄). Note the prominence of this term in the Communion Service, itself the embodiment of the New Testament: 'so shall ye be partakers of this holy sacrament . . . that with them we may be partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom . . . that receiving these Thy creatures of bread and wine, we may be partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood.' It is the language of the Prayer Book, of course, which has shaped Wesley's own diction and which in turn is steeped in the spirit and the letter of the English Bible. 'Divinity', says Melancthon, 'is nothing but a grammar of the language of the Holy Ghost.'²⁵

Grouped round this centre, the several books of the canon fall naturally into a systematic order—but I shall not attempt to develop that now. Let two general observations suffice before we turn to details. First: Wesley would, of course, demand more from the theologian than that his vocabulary and categories should be genuinely biblical (in his case, we think, they are); he would want to be satisfied that a man's whole system was scriptural Christianity, scriptural holiness and the Scripture way of salvation. Secondly: the respect for the system of the New Testament which he shares with Bengel does in no way detract

from the necessity of giving chapter and verse for a theological statement; otherwise it is just not rooted at all in the New Testament. By their texts ye shall know them. The moderns find Wesley extremely irksome at this point, and when he starts to quote his texts, their fashionable way of begging the question is: 'We must see this in the total context. . . .' But you cannot thus evade the force of the Word, and the reminder is quite superfluous in the case of one who all the time is so close to the centre of the 'total context'. The famous recurrent entry in the *Journal*, 'I opened my testament upon . . .',²⁶ can neither be dismissed as simple 'proof text' nor be disapproved because of the manifest possibility of abuse; it is directly in line with the 'manner of applying' of which we have spoken, with the belief in present, free, full salvation, with the conviction that 'the Lord has still more truth to break forth from His holy word', with the 'exceeding great and precious promises' of 2 Peter 1₄ on which Wesley's eye fell on the morning of 24th May:

*I rest upon Thy word;
The promise is for me;
My succour and salvation, Lord,
Shall surely come from Thee.*²⁷

There is time only for the briefest survey as we go through the New Testament now to see how the fulness of the Gospel is reflected in Wesley's distinctive emphasis. We could begin at the beginning, with Jesus preaching that the kingdom of God is at hand; and Wesley would make 'repent ye, and believe the Gospel' the key-note of his own message, would underline the 'at hand' (see the prominence of 'now, now' in the hymns) and would be conscious of the important transition, even at this early point, from the dawn of John the Baptist's proclamation to the marvellous light of Jesus Christ. Take next the Sermon on the Mount and its exposition in the *Standard Sermons*; for Wesley this is not problem, but promise, applicable not only to the Apostles, the first Christians, the Ministers of Christ, but to the generality of men; 'Lord have mercy upon us, and help us to obtain this blessing'. He would have agreed with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* in the three fundamental presuppositions: first that he who claims for himself the comfortable words, taking the place of publicans and sinners, must also accept the call to the apostles, 'Follow me'; second, that only he who believes obeys, only he who obeys believes; third, that those pronounced 'blessed' in the Beatitudes are the same who, in the conclusion of Matt. 7, are known by their fruits and owned by their Master. Promise and command are bound together in the hearing and doing of the Word. That is the synoptic basis of Wesley's practical Christianity. And that is why, having heard that 'thy sins are forgiven thee', he always insists on the sequence: 'go and sin henceforth no more'.

The fourth Gospel takes us a step further and accentuates still more markedly the beginning of the new dispensation; there is the new wine at Cana, the new birth of Nicodemus, the new worship and the new manna. John the Baptist is left behind in the following of the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world. And every Johannine move is traced by Wesley—the invitation 'come and see' (that which he would call 'experimental knowledge'); the advancement of the disciples from servants to friends (or, in Pauline and Wesleyan language, from

bondage to adoption); the assurance of the abiding presence of Christ, of which we have spoken already, in them that keep His Word; and the confidence which takes Christ at His word, whether it be in the prayer of faith ('hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name') or the *imitatio Christi* in His wondrous works ('he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do'). All this is in order that 'my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full' (John 15₁₁)—another aspect of the fulness of the Gospel. He who forgives us those things whereof our conscience is afraid is the same who gives us those good things which we are not worthy to ask;²⁸ and the distinctive Methodist emphasis is never to be content with the one without boldly proceeding to the other.

This places Wesley within the true apostolic succession and makes him claim those parts of the New Testament heritage which conventional exegesis would confine to the privileges of the primitive Church. 'Lord, we believe to us and ours the apostolic promise given.'²⁹ The Acts of the Apostles becomes the textbook of 'normal' Church life, and Wesley's *Journal* (R. E. Chiles has demonstrated this³⁰) is as much a running commentary on it as his letters are on the Pauline Epistles—not only in such 'running' parallels as that of the itinerant ministry, but very much in the fundamentals. Boldness, *parrhesia*, is the operative word. The Spirit of promise fills the life of the community as well as of the individual believer; so that it becomes the order of the day to find people full of grace and truth, full of good works, full of joy, and full of the Holy Ghost. With the Articles and Homilies Wesley defines the Church as the 'congregation of faithful men in which the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly administered'; but his concern, beyond the purity of preaching and administration, is the establishment of the 'congregation of faithful men' after the apostolic pattern. 'To Thy church the pattern give; Show how true believers live.'³¹ The gathering of the Methodist societies, with its underlying concept of membership, discipline and mission, the insistence upon the question 'What must I do to be saved?' and the calm expectation that the Lord adds daily to the Church such as should be saved—all this goes back to the Acts of the Apostles.

When we touch upon St Paul (and more than that we cannot do here), we stand, of course, at the gate through which Wesley entered into the understanding of the saving faith. Let a rapid one-minute course through Romans suffice to illustrate how in each chapter thoughts and phrases are underlined and 'brought out' through the Methodist preaching. 1₁₆₋₁₇ 'The just shall live by faith'—the cardinal doctrine of justification. 2₂₉ 'Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter'—the theme of Wesley's great sermon and the basis for his distinction between the true and the false Church. 3₃₁ 'The law established by faith'—another standard sermon, defending the Reformation safeguard against the abuses of Antinomianism. 5₅ 'The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost'—Pentecost exemplified in the Aldersgate experience. 7₂₄ 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'—the believer seeking for full redemption, and the sweet singer of Methodism longing to 'shout our great deliverer's praise'. 8₁₆ 'The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit'—the answer to the cry of Chapter 7 in the twofold witness of assurance, and the move, in the same context, from 'bondage' to 'adoption'.

10₆₋₈ 'the word is nigh thee'—the search of the Oxford days, heaven of speculation or abyss of mystical experience, is ended through the revelation of the nearby Christ in the written and preached word. 10₁₄₋₁₅ 'How shall they hear without a preacher, how shall they preach, except they be sent?'—the latent prayer of eighteenth-century England answered in the raising of the Wesleys by God Himself, and the warrant for the evangelical mission of Methodism. 11₂₂ 'If thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off'—Wesley's fight against the Calvinist notion of the 'final perseverance of the saints', and his insistence upon the daily need of applying Christ's merit. 11₃₂ 'Concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all'—the other side of the Calvinist controversy: Christ died for all. 12₁ 'That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice'—the response to Christ's self-offering in the Eucharistic hymns of Charles Wesley. 13₈ 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another'—the self-giving, introduced in the previous passage, culminates in the doctrine of perfect love. 14₁₋₁₅ 'We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak'—the Magna Charta of tolerance in Methodism, and the still needed 'caution against bigotry'. 15₁₈₋₂₁ 'Nothing which Christ hath not wrought by me . . . not where Christ was named. . . . I have fully preached the Gospel'—here is, in a nutshell, Wesley's doctrine of the ministry which takes its authority directly from the living Christ, addresses its commission specifically to 'those who are without', and glories in the *plerophoria*, the fulness of the blessing of the Gospel (15₂₉).

Turn from here, still more rapidly, to the General Epistles: Hebrews with its back to the Old Testament, its orientation toward the new Mediator, the new priesthood, the new Jerusalem, the better promises and the better inheritance by which alone we can be justified and made perfect (note that in these all-important verbs the New Testament becomes operative); James with its pedestrian yet inevitable correction of that 'Solifidianism' which Wesley found in Zinzendorf and rashly ascribed to Luther; Peter with the power of the resurrection working in the Church militant here on earth and, in the second epistle, the longing of the pilgrims for the rising of the morning-star (all this echoed in the trials of Wesley's early preachers and the hymns which his brother made them sing); but above all, 1 John, which holds him for ever in its grip—here is the perfect love which casteth out fear; here are the comfortable words for those who confess their sins and the uncomfortable texts about the reborn who cannot sin; here is the two-fold test for all 'real Christians' through the Spirit that confesses the incarnate Christ and the love that serves Him in the brethren; here is the Wesleyan note of assurance in the repeated 'hereby we know'; and here again, as in John's Gospel, the end of it all is 'that your joy may be full'.

What can we say as Methodists about the last book of the New Testament canon? Wesley thought, of course, with Bengel that all the beasts from the abyss were the various popes of Rome, though he was not so sure as Bengel that the millennium would begin in 1836. I trust that our distinctive emphasis is not rooted in those few pages where for once the interpretation of our fathers went so manifestly wrong. There is still enough meat among the bones for us even in the Revelation of St John. Let us take one final look at the seven pastoral letters in Chapters 2 and 3 and see how the witness of the Wesleys responds to what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Charles's famous *An Epistle to the Reverend*

*Mr John Wesley*²² may be quoted as a commentary at this point. The prophetic alarm sounded by the evangelical revival comes to the mother Church of England almost verbatim in the terms which are addressed here to the seven ancient churches: I know thy works; I have against thee; repent; do the first works. While the official Church can become the synagogue of Satan, having the name that thou livest and art dead, there are yet the few names which have not defiled their garments; there is the divine recognition of thy works, and charity, and service, and faith; the promise: thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name; the task: be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. It is not difficult for us to picture the little Methodist chapel today as we read these words; both threat and hope apply to our situation now as much as 200 and 2,000 years ago. At the heart of it is the Gospel: because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation. And there is a Wesley hymn for each single picture of the New Testament inheritance with which we began and with which the seven letters end: the open door for the Word and the abiding pillar in God's temple; the hidden manna and the white stone; the crown of life and the new name; the white robe, the morning star and the seat with Christ on His throne. This is for him who overcometh, and if it is said to or by one particular Church, it is only in order that all the Churches shall know. The distinctive Methodist emphasis has no other function but to annotate the Gospel in its fulness and to help us in our own day to be more alive, more faithful to what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.

FRANZ HILDEBRANDT

¹ *Letters*, VIII.238; the doctrine of perfection.

² *Works* (Jackson Edition), V.15: the doctrine of salvation by faith. Cf. also *Letters*, II.63f.: 'Therefore the distinguishing doctrines on which I do insist in all my writings and in all my preaching will lie in a very narrow compass. You sum them all up in Perceptible Inspiration. For this I earnestly contend; and so do all who are called Methodist Preachers.'

³ In connexion with diocesan episcopacy. See *Letters*, III.182 and 201. ⁴ *Letters*, II.49.

⁵ *Charles Wesley's Journal*, 17th May 1738. ⁶ *Works*, XI.430. ⁷ *Letters*, III.357.

⁸ *ibid.*, I.285. ⁹ *ibid.*, VII.284 and 262.

¹⁰ A typical example of this brand of Methodism is found in the autobiographical data of the Rev. Hezekiah Calvin Wooster (quoted in Herbert Asbury, *A Methodist Saint*, New York, 1927, p.222): 'Born, May 20, 1771; convicted of sin, October 9, 1791; born again, December 1, 1791; sanctified, February 6, 1792.'

¹¹ From *Christian Discourses*, translated by Walter Lowrie, New York, 1939, p.248. I owe this quotation to Dean Stanley Hopper.

¹² *Drew Gateway*, 1958, p.115.

¹³ Paul S. Sanders in *Church History*, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, December 1957, p.18.

¹⁴ *Letters*, III.228. Cf. also the summary in *Works*, VI, 281: 'Between 50 and 60 years ago, God raised up a few young men, in the University of Oxford, to testify these grand truths, which were then little attended to: "That without holiness no man shall see the Lord; that this holiness is the work of God, who worketh in us both to will and to do; that He doeth it of His own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ; that this holiness is the mind that was in Christ; enabling us to walk as He also walked; that no man can be thus sanctified, till he be justified; and that we are justified by faith alone."'

¹⁵ *Notes on the New Testament*, 2 Timothy 2:15.

¹⁶ *King Lear* Act IV, Scene 6.

¹⁷ *Works*, X.203.

¹⁸ *Letters*, VI.134.

¹⁹ Weimar Edition XL.1.297-9.

²⁰ Oscar Wächter, *Johann Albrecht Bengel*, Stuttgart, 1865, p.58.

²¹ Weimar Edition, IV.9.27ff.

²² *British Methodist Hymn Book* 280.3; cf. Jeremiah 14:8-9.

²³ *MHB* 550.5.

²⁴ *MHB* 275.4.

²⁵ *Corpus Reformatorum*, VII.576.

²⁶ *Letters*, II.245: 'At some rare times, when I have been in great distress of soul, or in utter uncertainty how to act in an important case which required a speedy determination, after using all other means that occurred, I have cast lots or opened the Bible. And by this means I have been relieved from that distress or directed in that uncertainty.'

²⁷ *MHB* 542.4.

²⁸ Collect for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

²⁹ *MHB* 274.1.

³⁰ In the Tipple Lectures given at Drew University, 1956—so far unpublished.

³¹ No. 495 in the 1780 *Hymn Book*.

³² *Poetical Works of J. and C. Wesley*, VI.55ff.