

- (3) What is the essential relation between systematic theology and ethics? How can we avoid the danger of collapsing theology into ethics? Is this a particular danger for a liberation theology?
- (4) Much of our criticism has centered on the present economic order. For many of us the "option for the poor" means opting for some form of socialism. Are there values in capitalism which should be incorporated into any new economic order? What are the givens in any economic order which have to be taken into consideration by those seeking change?
- (5) What is the role of Marxist social analysis in our critical theology? Is it possible to separate Marxism as an analytical tool from Marxist ideology? Are there other tools of analysis?
- (6) Is poverty a critical factor for doing theology in every context? How do we relate the poor to the Wesleyan quadrilateral: Scriptures, tradition, reason, and experience? In what ways do the Scriptures require specific attention to the poor?
- (7) How can we balance psychological-existential themes with social themes of liberation? What is the bridge between the personal and the social? Are there particular insights offered by Black theology and feminist theology?
- (8) How are traditional theological categories, such as prevenient grace, justification, and the kingdom of God, related to salvation in a liberationist perspective?
- (9) What is an adequate Christian concept of justice? How is justice related to truth, equality, and freedom? Can analytical philosophies, challenged by liberationist concerns, contribute to clearer definitions and understanding?
- (10) Is violence ever a legitimate Christian option in the struggle for justice and freedom?

## Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation

Geoffrey Wainwright

### I. Schism and Pluralism

When, in the teaching of fundamental theology, I come to the church and tradition, I begin, tongue-in-cheek, with a rapid sketch of ecclesiastical history. It shows how, in the fifth century, the non-Chalcedonians split from the hitherto undivided church. Then the Byzantine East broke away in 1054. The unreformed Roman Catholics were left behind in the sixteenth century, while the continental Protestants had the misfortune of being foreigners. In the eighteenth century, even the Church of England refused Wesley's mission, so that finally only Methodists remained in the body of Christ. At this point in the recital, general laughter occurs. Closer inspection of the emotions released reveals that English Methodist students usually experience a little *Schadenfreude* at seeing the tables turned in this way, but they retain after all a certain guilt at the responsibility of their forebears in the separation from the Church of England, and while being forced by historical circumstances to reject the ecclesiological model ironically employed in the sketch, they cannot quite be content with an alternative understanding that renders all divisions innocuous. On the other hand, Roman Catholic students are sometimes shamed into awareness that their instinctively Cyprianic view is not entirely satisfactory either, when it takes all schism to be schism *from* the church and rejects the "other party" into an ecclesiological void. Anglican students are caught in the middle, marooned on their bridge. In contrast to the English, American students of

all ecclesiastical stripes tend to be surprised that one should begin thus diachronically at all, rather than synchronically with the existing state of denominational pluralism; and to this contrast between the two approaches I will return in a moment.

But first a paragraph about the theological seriousness of the strictly ecclesiological question in the Christian faith, particularly with reference to recent ecumenical discussion. The decade following the 1952 Lund Conference brought a welcome christological concentration into the work of Faith and Order as well as the explicit introduction of the Holy Trinity into the membership basis of the World Council of Churches. Attention should never stray from the divine center of the message, which is being proposed for the world's belief and salvation. But it was a mistake to suppose that the earlier concerns of "comparative ecclesiology" had then been surpassed. It is no accident that the church figures among the realities confessed in the classical creeds. The official entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the modern ecumenical movement, and then the bilateral conversations that followed Vatican II, probably did most to recall the fundamental importance of the ecclesiological question for the ecumenical movement as its very *raison d'être*. At stake in the understanding of unity and schism, of continuity and discontinuity, of integrity and fragmentation, is precisely the *identity of the church* and therewith the nature and substance of *truth* and the conditions of its *authoritative expression*. To seek and confess the ecclesiological location of one's community is an act of discerning and proclaiming the gospel itself. There is no preaching and living of the gospel without at least an implicit ecclesiological claim being made.<sup>1</sup>

Now to return to the diachronic and synchronic approaches to the matter of Christian unity. From his observations of the United States in the 1930s Dietrich Bonhoeffer drew a contrast between a European sense of a unity once given and now sundered and an American sense of a given pluralism which might perhaps, though not certainly, call for the construction of an eschatological unity.<sup>2</sup> On the European side, Bonhoeffer's own preferred emphasis on the divine gift of unity may have derived as much from a

Constantinian nostalgia as from the once-and-for-all redemption recorded in the New Testament. On the American side, the varied escapes from Europe, the hard-won development of internal tolerance, and the effort of building one nation from the many peoples have all contributed to a semicompetitive, semicooperative denominationalism whose strongly voluntaristic character is seen as an acquisition not lightly to be set at risk for the sake of a unity that might mean restrictive uniformity. In the republic of God, pluralism rules O.K. Individual crossovers from one denomination to another are achieved fairly easily, while the denominational structures remain intact. To the European churchman with a diachronic sense of schism, American Christianity may appear as too ready a synchronic acquiescence in an existing fragmentation whose murkier historical and theological origins are best not inquired into. Something of this contrast underlies the well-known tension between British and American Methodists in their understandings of ecumenism; and one result which may be hoped for from the work of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies is increased mutual understanding and correction on these issues. The contrast between the British-diachronic and the American-synchronic is not, of course, absolute. American scholars such as Albert Outler, John Deschner, and I think, William Cannon have placed their loyal investigation of Wesleyan origins and the Methodist tradition in the context and service of historic Christianity and its search for full unity; while the dearest desire of some British Methodists at present seems to be the further dilution of the Wesleyan content in the principal vehicle of our tradition (namely, the hymnbook), though they yet remain content with a denominational life thus largely deprived of its distinction.

In the final section of this essay I will return to the fundamental ecclesiological question concerning necessary unity and legitimate diversity. The intervening six sections will particularize the Methodist application. Sections II, III, and IV will be largely diachronic in method. Their purpose is to illuminate the way in which we have reached the present situation and so to help show what factors will shape our

choices if we are to be recognizably Methodist in face of our synchronic options as set out in sections V, VI, and VII.

## II. A Part, Not the Whole

The notion of "a part, but not the whole" was recurrently employed by Wesley in ecclesiological controversy. Thus in reply to Bishop Richard Challoner's *The Grounds of the Old Religion*, he notes: "In the first thirty pages the author heaps up scriptures concerning the privileges of the Church. But all this is beating the air till he proves the Romanists to be the Church, that is, that a part is the whole."<sup>3</sup> Conversely, in response to the same Roman Catholic bishop's *Caveat against Methodists*, Wesley claims that all sinners converted to God by preachers and teachers of the faith once delivered to the saints, even if they be Methodists or any other kind of Protestant, "although they are not the whole 'people of God,' yet are they an undeniable part of his people."<sup>4</sup> As far as Methodism is concerned, our question must be: *What kind of part did, does, and might Methodism constitute in what kind of whole? Let me give one answer that is phenomenologically certain, another that is historically speculative, a third that is scripturally indefensible, and a fourth that is eschatologically possible.*

### 1. A society within the Church of England

That Methodism began as a society within the Church of England is certain, whether we think of the Holy Club at Oxford<sup>5</sup> or of "the rise of the United Society, first at London [The Foundery] and then in other places."<sup>6</sup> A minor complication stems from the fact that some who were admitted to membership—upon the sole condition of their "desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins"—were not Anglicans but belonged to Dissenting bodies. Wesley no more desired them to interrupt their old allegiance than he would countenance the withdrawal of Methodists from the Church of England. Internal pressures for separation from the Church of England arose early in the Methodist movement, but Wesley resisted them at successive Conferences.<sup>7</sup> Neither the early violence of the mobs,

nor the persistent hostility of the parochial clergy, nor the recurrent rebuffs of the bishops could weaken John Wesley's self-understanding as "a Church of England man."<sup>8</sup> He rejected his disappointed brother Charles' acceptance that "ordination was separation,"<sup>9</sup> and it is true that not even Wesley's ordination of men for America, Scotland, and finally England brought forth an official expulsion from the Church of England. Yet there is no doubt that a certain "unstitching" (the image is Wesley's own)<sup>10</sup> had already begun during Wesley's lifetime; and his death soon removed the final reticence from his English followers,<sup>11</sup> so that on the ground plan which he himself had drawn—notably in the Deed of Declaration of 1784—an ecclesiastical structure was quickly built. The process is usually called the transition "from Society to Church."<sup>12</sup> Certainly by 1795 the Plan of Pacification was allowing Methodist worship at the times of church services (Wesley's discouragement of this liturgical "competition" had been a key element in his resistance to separation<sup>13</sup>), and the Methodist people were being permitted to receive the sacrament at the hands of their own preacher-pastors. As distinct from those nineteenth-century Methodist bodies with less direct origins in Wesley's work, the Wesleyan Methodists for longer saw themselves as retaining certain links with the Church of England, such as occasional communion and the use of "Mr. Wesley's Abridgement" or even the *Book of Common Prayer* itself. But the growth of Methodist "self-confidence,"<sup>14</sup> coupled with a perceived Romeward drift of the Church of England,<sup>15</sup> had by the middle of the nineteenth century undeniably put an end to any but the most romantic idea of English Methodism's *continuing* as a society within the Established Church. That option was closed; but the sense of our partial character remains with us from our origins.

### 2. A province of the Anglican Communion?

The adaptation that sticks closest to our original position was put forward some years ago in the brilliant hypothesis of a non-Methodist historian of Methodism to a Strasbourg colloquium on "Aspects de l'Anglicanisme." Writing at the time of the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme in England,

C. J. Bertrand suggests that Methodism might be viewed and treated as a hitherto "unrecognized province of the Anglican communion."<sup>16</sup> Bertrand shows how Methodism was the first body—with the possible exception of the Scottish Episcopalians?—to display an ensemble of characteristics which later came to mark the various ecclesiastical "provinces" that developed beyond England but remained in communion with Canterbury and one another: a doctrinal kernel well within the limits of Anglican "comprehensiveness," an independent liturgy but with family resemblances to the Prayer Book, a spirituality and a ministry adapted to the people, an autonomous administration, and withal a certain *je ne sais quoi*, which can only be called Englishness. Interestingly, Bertrand recalls the proposal made by Fletcher of Madeley to John Wesley at the Conference of 1775, that Methodism should become an independent denomination—the Methodist Church of England—in close association with the Church of England itself: article one of his plan suggests that "the growing body of the Methodists in Great Britain, Ireland, and America be formed into a general society—a daughter church of our holy mother," with article five "asking the protection of the Church of England, begging that this step might not be considered as a schism."<sup>17</sup>

Bertrand's hypothesis deliberately left out of account American Methodism, which at least since the War of Independence has enjoyed little "special relationship," whether real or imagined, with Anglicanism. It remains questionable how far even English Anglicans, at least since the latter part of the nineteenth century, have viewed Methodism with any greater affection than they have the other "Free Churches." The biggest obstacle in the way of Bertrand's proposal has proved to be a very legalistic understanding by Anglicans of their claimed episcopal succession, which was shared neither by Wesley nor by many other Anglicans before the Oxford Movement.<sup>18</sup> British Methodism has repeatedly declared its willingness to accept an episcopal ordering of the church, but English plans for unity were blocked in 1969 and 1972 and again in 1982 by Anglican doubts concerning the generation of living Methodist or other ministers who would not have received

ordination from a bishop meeting Anglican approval. It grieves me to say it, but I think that Bertrand's kind of ecclesiological interpretation and the consequent possibilities for a relatively easy (re)integration of Methodism into the Anglican communion now have been killed stone dead.

### 3. A church within the church catholic?

As early as the Christmas conference at Baltimore in 1784, American Methodism declared itself the Methodist Episcopal Church; and its nineteenth-century historian Abel Stevens had little hesitation in writing of the "catholicity of Methodism."<sup>19</sup> In England, Wesleyan Methodism took a century longer before officially calling itself a church—as part, no doubt, of its late nineteenth-century assimilation to the "Free Churches," but then H. B. Workman showed little doubt as to Methodism's churchliness when he wrote his celebrated essay *The Place of Methodism in the Catholic Church*.<sup>20</sup> In 1932, the Methodist Church in Great Britain declared at the start of the doctrinal article in its Deed of Union: "The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the body of Christ."<sup>21</sup> The problem with such formulations is that all *denominational* claims to the word *church*, for example, "The Methodist Church," run counter to the New Testament. The 1937 British statement *The Nature of the Church according to the Teaching of the Methodists* was being a little self-sparing when it said that "The Church today is gathered for the most part in certain denominations or 'churches.' These form but a partial and imperfect embodiment of the New Testament ideal."<sup>22</sup> As Wesley rightly recognized in his sermon "Of the Church" (1786), the New Testament writers mean by *church* either the church universal or a local church, whether its size be that of a family, a city, or a country. The nearest things to denominations get short shrift from the apostle Paul: "Each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:12-13). The existence of *denominations*—which so far in history always implies *divisions*—calls into question the reality of *the church*. As Howard Snyder has

recently observed concerning certain paradoxes in Wesley's own ecclesiology: "The paradoxical nature of the church in a sinful world . . . makes a totally consistent, systematic theory of the church difficult, if not impossible, from a human standpoint."<sup>23</sup> But it is not simply a matter of theology in a pejorative sense: the very power of the gospel is at stake if it fails to unite those who claim to respond to it.<sup>24</sup>

The question is: What is the *Ecclesia* in which Methodist writers sometimes rather too cozily claim for Methodism the status of an *ecclesiola*?<sup>25</sup> A befitting tentativeness in respect both of the *Ecclesia* and of the *ecclesiola* marked the words of the English Wesleyan Methodist J. E. Rattenbury in *Wesley's Legacy to the World* (1927):

The struggle of Methodism to remain a mere Society within the Church of England, when she had no longer association with a Church of which she could be called a Society, lingered on till our days. It was one hundred years before [Wesley's] society called itself a Church. . . . Methodism seems to be standing at the crossways. Much of her distinctive denominational life has gone, and she is feeling, perhaps subconsciously, after Catholicity.

Colin Williams used that text thirty years later to illustrate his description of Methodism as "a society in search of the Church."<sup>26</sup> Retain the tentativeness and shift the model from "society" to "order," and I think we may even today find the direction for a dynamic self-understanding with which to share in the ecumenical task and pursue the ecumenical goal.

#### 4. An order within the *Una Sancta*?

In his contribution "Methodism and the Catholic Tradition," made to the 1933 volume *Northern Catholicism*, R. N. Flew observed that "from Southey onward, the biographers of Wesley have compared him to the founders of great orders in the Church of Rome. His genius for organization ensured discipline in his 'societies.'"<sup>27</sup> But Flew himself drew no broader ecclesiological consequences from this observation. Albert Outler once described Wesley as "rather like the superior-general of an evangelical order within a regional division of the church catholic," and elsewhere he has proposed a Methodist ecclesiology consonant with his view

of Methodism's founder.<sup>28</sup> In a paper given to the Oxford Institute of twenty years ago, Outler showed how reluctantly Methodism became a denominational church, always retaining a memory of its *ad interim* beginnings:

[Methodism] has never developed—on its own and for itself—the full panoply of bell, book, and candle that goes with being a "proper" church properly self-understood. This makes us *une église manquée*, theoretically and actually. . . . One of our difficulties, I suggest, is that Methodism's unique ecclesiological pattern was really designed to function best *within* an encompassing environment of *catholicity* (by which I mean what the word meant originally: the effectual and universal Christian *community*). . . . We need a catholic church within which to function as a proper evangelical order of witness and worship, discipline and nurture. Yet, it is plain to most of us that none of the existing unilateral options are suitable alternatives to our existing situation. The way to catholicism—i.e., Christian unity—is *forward*—toward the *renewal* of catholicity rather than in *return* to something that has lost its true status as truly catholic.<sup>29</sup>

As a sympathetic Roman Catholic writing before Vatican II, John M. Todd held John Wesley's inspiration and faith to be consonant with Catholic doctrine and considered that "for that very reason [they] could only find [their] proper fulfillment in the Catholic Church."<sup>30</sup> Much more recently, Francis Frost, author of the substantial article "Méthodisme" in the encyclopedia *Catholicisme*, recognizes the fundamental unity of Methodism in its spiritual heritage, and again the image of the religious order suggests itself: "Modern Methodism owes this heritage in the first place to John Wesley, just as a religious order or spiritual family in the Roman Catholic Church draws its spirit from its founder."<sup>31</sup> In a most accurate and appreciative essay, Frost treats Methodism as "une confession chrétienne autonome" and recognizes the institutional part already played by Methodism within the comprehensive ecumenical movement in which the Roman Catholic Church now also shares. But Frost's conclusion may be even more significant:

The churches' efforts to draw closer together on the doctrinal and institutional levels must be rooted in spiritual ecumenism. Division between Christians is a sin; in other words, it is produced when the

divine life in us grows cold. Obedience and humility point the way to unity because they make it possible for love to expand again. Is not witness to these truths an integral part of the spiritual heritage of Methodism?

Whereas H. B. Workman regarded "experience" as the governing "Idea" of Methodism and considered "assurance," as its primary corollary, to be "the fundamental contribution of Methodism to the life and thought of the Church" (and John Todd vigorously defended Wesley against the charges brought against him in Ronald Knox's *Enthusiasm* on these scores), the more recent consensus—represented by writers as diverse as Todd, John Kent, and Reginald Kissack—has in fact returned to seeing the original inspiration, the motive force, and the abiding goal of Wesley and of Methodism as residing rather in HOLINESS. The early Methodists understood that their providential call was to "spread scriptural holiness through the land,"<sup>32</sup> and for this purpose Wesley was ready to "look upon all the world as [his] parish."<sup>33</sup> The proclamation and pursuit of holiness reached as far as "entire sanctification," "perfect love" of God and neighbor. The traditional Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection can in fact be extended into the realm of ecumenism. The prayer of Jesus was that his disciples might be "perfected into one" (John 17:23: *hína ósin teteleioménoi eis hén*), and the apostle's vision was that the church might grow into "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-16). These texts were seized upon a century ago by the English Wesleyan Methodist Benjamin Gregory in his Fernley Lecture of 1873, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints*. Gregory recognized that "the unity of the Church and the spirituality of the Church must progress together equably"; it is encouraging that the contemporary Roman Catholic Francis Frost should think that Methodism might have a special part to play in precisely that process. Reginald Kissack, whose great merit it was to recall attention to Benjamin Gregory, comments:

The "original" unity of the Church is a logical concept, existing first in the mind of God and the will of Christ. It enters into history in the

prayer of Jesus, and has had an imperative force as great as the call to holiness. . . . History has so far known only original sin among men, and original disunity in the Church. . . . The Methodist uses of Church unity the words Wesley uses of Christian Perfection. He "goes on to it." It is one of his "oughts" that is yet to be realized in history.<sup>34</sup>

The relation between the "already" and the "not yet" might be differently phrased, but the eschatological tension toward unity and holiness is definitely a dynamic mark of the *Una Sancta*. A Methodism true to itself would engage in the common pursuit, and if Methodist holiness has sometimes taken such problematic forms as those of revivalism, the nonconformist conscience or liberal activism, we should hope that while it may serve as a "leaven" (one of Wesley's favorite images in connection with the spread of holiness) in the ecumenical movement, a more catholic environment will in turn restore to it the sacramental dimension which the Wesleys' teaching and practice never lacked. The visibility of the church and of its unity is at stake. The alternative to visible unity is not spiritual unity but visible disunity, and that is a countertestimony to the gospel.

### III. Our Own History

In one of his more triumphalist utterances, Gordon Rupp told the 1959 Oxford Institute: "What is distinctive about us is not our faith, for that we share with the whole catholic Church, but our history. The way that God has led us and what He has said and done among us—that really is our very own."<sup>35</sup> As to our official doctrines, I, too, would be fairly optimistic concerning their catholicity; but there is something rather divisive in this use of "our history." Even worse, Dr. Rupp went on to talk about our "painless extraction" from within the Church of England: "Call it separation, call it schism, there has never been a break as thoroughgoing and yet as undamaging on either side in the history of the Church." Can it be that our most eminent historian had forgotten Wesley's sermon "On Schism"? A "causeless separation from a body of living Christians" is "evil in itself," being "a grievous breach of the law of love" ("The pretences

for separation may be innumerable but want of love is always the real cause"); such a separation is also "productive of mischievous consequences," bringing forth in ourselves and in others "unkind tempers," "bitter words," "ungodly and unrighteous actions." "The love of many will wax cold," and they will be led astray from the way of peace into everlasting perdition. And as to the effect on nonbelievers:

What a greivous stumbling-block must these things be to those who are without, to those who are strangers to religion, who have neither the form nor the power of godliness! How will they triumph over these once eminent Christians! How boldly ask, "What are they better than us?" How will they harden their hearts more and more against the truth, and bless themselves in their wickedness! from which, possibly, the example of the Christians might have reclaimed them, had they continued unblamable in their behaviour.<sup>36</sup>

There can be no doubt of Wesley's loyalty to what later Methodists called "the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation," at least as they were expressed in the Anglican *Homilies*, but Wesley chastised Luther and Calvin for some unnecessary provocativeness in their "open separation from the Church":

When the Reformation began, what mountainous offences lay in the way of even the sincere members of the Church of Rome! They saw such failings in those great men, Luther and Calvin! Their vehement tenaciousness of their own opinions; their bitterness towards all who differed from them; their impatience of contradiction, and utter want of forbearance, even with their own brethren.

But the grand stumbling-block of all was their open, avowed separation from the Church; their rejecting so many of the doctrines and practices, which the others accounted most sacred; and their continual invectives against the Church they separated from, so much sharper than Michael's reproof of Satan.

Were there fewer stumbling-blocks attending the Reformation in England? Surely no: for what was Henry the Eighth? Consider either his character, his motives to the work, or his manner of pursuing it! . . . The main stumbling-block also still remained, namely, open separation from the Church.<sup>37</sup>

As early as the very first Conference in 1744, Wesley and his preachers faced the question: "Do you not entail a schism

in the Church? That is, Is it not probable that your hearers, after your death, will be scattered into all sects and parties, or that they will form themselves into a distinct sect?" The answer they gave was: "We do, and will do, all we can to prevent those consequences which are supposed likely to happen after our death." Yet despite Wesley's lifelong efforts, Methodism did separate from the Church of England, and worse still, the sixty or seventy years after his death witnessed, both in England and in the United States, a further fragmentation of the Methodist movement. Does Dr. Rupp believe that Methodist fissiparity in the first half of the nineteenth century did not result at least in part from our original separation from the Church of England? And was not our loss of sacramental sense at least partly due to our absence from a church whose own Tractarian revival we might have been able to moderate in such a way as to prevent the excesses and intransigencies of Anglo-Catholicism? And who can calculate the loss to Anglicanism of that Methodism which, in the judgment of such an outside observer as C. J. Bertrand, was best organized in both Britain and America to meet the needs and opportunities of evangelism?

We must face up to that nineteenth-century fissiparity. Outler describes it thus:

The British Methodists experienced five years of turmoil after Wesley's death before their first schism broke wide open. Thereafter in America and England, schism followed schism in controversy after controversy over a bewildering variety of issues: ecclesiastical authority, racial equality, lay representation, slavery, the status of the episcopacy, the doctrine of holiness, and many another. When the first "Ecumenical Methodist Conference" was held in London in 1881, there were ten separate denominations from the British side, eighteen from America—all Methodists!<sup>38</sup>

Yet the Ecumenical Methodist Conference was positively significant, for it helped to begin that series of reunions which has brought so much of sundered Methodism together again at the national level in the twentieth century: first in Australia (1902), then in Britain and its missionary areas with the United Methodist Church of 1907, and the subsequent union of that body with the Wesleyans and the Primitives to

form the Methodist Church in Great Britain in 1932, and finally in the United States with the reunion of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church in 1939, and the formation of The United Methodist Church as a result of the merger of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1968. These reunions within the Methodist family demonstrate that, for all the early fissiparity, "fellowship" is more than an invisibilist sentiment for Methodists and is rather grounded in the

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,  
Perfecting the saints below,

and in whom

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,  
Rendered all distinctions void;  
Names and sects and parties fall:  
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

It is no accident that it should be the Methodist Outler who powerfully interpreted the WCC as a recovered *koinonia* in whose ambit the members press on to fuller unity.<sup>39</sup> Outler insists that it is important for all to reappropriate "our common Christian history," and he himself has greatly helped to render *our* history as Methodists accessible to others, so that the possessive pronoun may acquire an inclusive rather than an exclusive sense.<sup>40</sup>

Individual Methodists have in fact made prominent contributions to the modern ecumenical movement from the early days of John R. Mott, the roving American, and Sir Henry Lunn, the British travel agent. In Faith and Order, there have been Ivan Lee Holt, Clarence Tucker Craig, the unforgettable Robert Newton Flew, Albert Outler himself (so important in the Montreal agreement on Scripture and Tradition), J. Robert Nelson, and A. Raymond George. Philip Potter, the present general secretary of the WCC, is unmistakably Methodist.

Methodist churches have been members of the WCC from its inception. They have also engaged in various official

bilateral dialogues in the different countries, notably with Roman Catholics and Lutherans, and it is with these that the World Methodist Council has engaged in conversations at the "world confessional" level. By this stage of the ecumenical movement, however, the crucial test must be that of Methodist participation in concrete transconfessional unions. First in Canada and then in Australia, the Methodists have joined with the Congregationalists and the majority of Presbyterians to form, respectively, the United Church of Canada (1925) and the Uniting Church in Australia (1977). In 1938 most of the French Methodists entered the *Église Réformée de France*. The more difficult, and perhaps therefore more exciting, unions have issued in the Church of South India, which in 1947 brought Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists together with Anglicans in an episcopally ordered church, and the Church of North India (1970), which included Baptists and Brethren, in addition to the others. The American Methodists remain outside the two Indian churches, and we gather that the reasons are more financial than theological. Apart from their forcible inclusion in the rather unsatisfactory unions contrived by the secular authorities in Japan (1940) and Zaire (1970), American Methodists have—in comparison with the British achievement in India and the rather thwarted promises in Sri Lanka and several African countries—a somewhat poor record of participation in unity schemes.<sup>41</sup> Financial reasons apart, we may wonder whether the contrasting perceptions indicated in our first section have not also played a part in the attitudes fostered among those who have received the gospel from American and British missions respectively. That makes all the more crucial the outcome of participation by The United Methodist Church, and indeed the three black Methodist Churches, in the U.S. Consultation on Church Union as it seeks to move, by way of some form of mutual recognition, toward a Church of Christ Uniting. In Britain, the Methodist Church was twice jilted at the altar by the Church of England—in 1969 and 1972. And more recently a somewhat looser covenant arrangement has been rejected by most Baptists, by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference, and at



the last minute by a sufficient spoiling minority of the house of clergy in the Church of England synod. It seems unlikely that the Methodists, the United Reformed, and the Moravians will proceed into the episcopally ordered relationship that the covenant envisaged as a step toward fuller unity. In 1979, the Methodist Synod in Scotland turned down a union with the Church of Scotland despite the fact that the latter staunchly Calvinist body, while retaining its inveterate opposition to the very name of "superintendent" and rejecting the stationing implications of connectionalism, had been willing to accept a statement of faith that was all an Evangelical Arminian could desire. This experience with the difficulties of a tiny minority church in relation to the national Church of Scotland should give British Methodists as a whole some fellow feeling with the small Methodist churches in the midst of the *Volkskirchen* of Germany and Scandinavia. What two very small minority churches can do together is illustrated by the "integrazione" (1979) of the Methodists and the Waldensians in Italy, where the governing synod is united while the scattered local congregations retain their traditional name and flavor.

One final aspect of "our history" needs to be mentioned in the present connection. Wesley's stand on the universal offer of the gospel naturally led Methodism to play a leading role in the great missionary expansion of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a fact of abiding ecclesiological significance that membership in the British Methodist Church has carried with it automatic membership in the Methodist Missionary Society: the mission is recognized to be part of the church's very being. Yet historically, as Outler once again notes, "the very success of denominational missions served to expose the anomaly of a divided Christianity trying to carry the Gospel message to every creature," and we recall that the modern ecumenical movement is conventionally dated from the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910.<sup>42</sup> If "the mission is one," a divided Christianity is no more tolerable "at home" than it is "overseas": the being of the church and the credibility of its message are everywhere called into question by division.

#### IV. The Eponymous Hero in the Communion of the Saints

It may not be superfluous to admit and explain that Wesley's name has already been, and will again be, invoked in this essay with an intention that goes beyond the historical into the theological and even into the spiritual. For Albert Outler, John Wesley is both the "eponymous hero of [our] particular denomination" and an "ecumenical theologian."<sup>43</sup> For Colin Williams, it is by sympathetically and critically "analyzing the Methodist tradition at the point of its origin," namely *John Wesley's Theology*, that we shall be enabled to make an authentically Methodist contribution to the changed ecumenical situation of *today*.<sup>44</sup> As already mentioned, Francis Frost recognizes the theologically and spiritually decisive imprint of Wesley on the whole of Methodism, and the other Roman Catholic, John Todd, not only recognizes the continuing historical influence of an inimitably great man but ends up confessing: "As I have come to know Wesley I have believed him to be [in heaven] and have prayed to God through him—not publicly as the Church prays through those declared to be saints—but privately as I pray for and to those who have been close to me."<sup>45</sup> The Wesley brothers figure in the new Anglican calendars in both England and the United States and in the calendar of the new North American *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Should Methodists be less open to the Wesleyan presence, in person, words, and deeds?

A few catchwords removed from their context have sometimes been used to make out that Wesley was an ecclesiological laxist, particularly in matters with a doctrinal import. But in his sermon "Catholic Spirit," he gives a full credal, experiential, and practical content to "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" before he will say "Give me thine hand."<sup>46</sup> In the third part of the sermon, Wesley expressly denies any charges of "speculative latitudinarianism" ("A catholic spirit . . . is not indifferent to *all* opinions. . . . A man of a truly catholic spirit . . . is as fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine") or of "practical latitudinarianism" whether in worship ("The man of a truly catholic spirit . . . is clearly

convinced that [his] manner of worshipping God is both scriptural and rational") or in ecclesial allegiance ("A man of a truly catholic spirit is fixed in his congregation as well as his principles"). In other words, while "a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union," the "union in affection," which it need not prevent, is limited to those who are recognizably Christian, "brother[s] in Christ," "joint heir[s] of his glory." Again, when in *The Character of a Methodist* it is stated that "we think and let think," this magnanimity is limited to "opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity."<sup>47</sup> And when Wesley writes in the *Letter to a Roman Catholic* that "if we cannot as yet think alike in all things, at least we may love alike," he has already expressed the faith of "a true Protestant" through an amplified version of the Nicene Creed that is set in a context of worship and Christian practice.<sup>48</sup> An unfortunate phrase in *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*—that "orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at best a slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part at all"—is best understood along the lines of Saint James' refusal of saving efficacy to the devil's impeccable monotheism.<sup>49</sup>

Nor may Wesley's exegetical point in his sermon "On Schism"—that Paul's usage of the word *schisma* in I Corinthians refers to divisions within a religious community which continues outwardly united—be used fairly to father on him the view that renders Christian disunity as we know it relatively innocuous by talk of the church as being in a state of internal schism.<sup>50</sup> Internal disunion was already bad enough in Wesley's eyes, but we have heard earlier his even fiercer description—in the latter part of that same sermon—of the nature and consequence of visible separation, and *that* is what the ecumenical problem is about. Wesley's position on Christian disunity and the unity of the church is in fact rather complex. Taken as a whole, it is not directly applicable to our situation two hundred years later—with Methodism having become "an autonomous Christian confession," the modern ecumenical movement having grown and developed the way it has and the possibilities for institutional relationships with the Roman Catholic Church having opened up in a manner quite unforeseeable in the eighteenth and indeed the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but there are elements in Wesley's historically conditioned position that may help us toward a characteristically Methodist perspective on the present form of some apparently perennial issues.

To the Roman Catholic bishop Challoner, Wesley defined "the Catholic Church" as "the whole body of men, endued with faith working by love, dispersed over the whole earth, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. And this Church is 'ever one' [the quotations are from Challoner]; in all ages and nations it is the one body of Christ. It is 'ever holy'; for no unholy man can possibly be a member of it. It is 'ever orthodox'; so is every holy man, in all things necessary to salvation; 'secured against error,' in things essential, 'by the perpetual presence of Christ and ever directed by the Spirit of Truth,' in the truth which is after godliness."<sup>51</sup> To the Baptist minister Gilbert Boyce, Wesley wrote: "I do not think either the Church of England, or the people called Methodists, or any other particular society under heaven to be the *True Church of Christ*. For that Church is but one, and contains all the true believers on earth. But I conceive every Society of true believers to be a branch of the one true Church of Christ."<sup>52</sup> How far this insistence on "true believers" and on holiness is removed from invisibilism or from Donatism will appear in a moment. Meanwhile we note, on the one hand, the practical generosity which flows from this attitude. The Anglican Wesley refuses to damn Quakers.<sup>53</sup> The words of the sermon, "Catholic Spirit," concerning congregational loyalty—matched by Wesley's practical advice to all his hearers and followers not to separate from the ecclesial body in which they found themselves—imply an unwillingness on the part of the mature Wesley to unchurch the Dissenting bodies.<sup>54</sup> Wesley also followed the hitherto traditional Anglican recognition of continental Protestant churches, even though they lacked the preferred form of episcopal government.<sup>55</sup> At times he appears to hold that Roman Catholics could be Christians only in spite of their Church.<sup>56</sup> Thus he says to Boyce: "If I were in the Church of Rome, I would conform to all her doctrines and practices as far as they were not contrary to plain Scripture."<sup>57</sup> But that limitation would surely have presented difficulties for one who, say,

shared the view of the Anglican Articles on Roman eucharistic doctrines and practices. Wesley, in fact, points to much "error," "superstition," and even "idolatry" in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup> But his attitude even on doctrinally more significant matters appears to have been in line with his remarks on the miracles at the grave of a certain French *abbé*: "The 'times of ignorance' God does 'wink at' still; and bless the faith notwithstanding the superstition."<sup>59</sup> Wesley aims not only at popular but also at official credulity when he calls Roman Catholics "volunteers in faith," "believing more than God has revealed." Yet, he says, "it cannot be denied that they believe all which God has revealed as necessary to salvation. In this we rejoice on their behalf." And "we are glad that none of those new articles, which they added at the Council of Trent to the 'faith once delivered to the saints' does so materially contradict any of the ancient articles, as to render them of no effect."<sup>60</sup> What, we may wonder, would Wesley have said of the subsequent Marian dogmas and, more fundamentally, that metadogma of 1870 which qualifies all the others, namely papal infallibility?

If Wesley's position on "true believers" and on "holiness" allows in some directions a certain ecclesiological generosity, it also permits him to be more restrictive on other scores. In his *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, he denies the name of "true Protestant" to "all common swearers, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, all whoremongers, liars, cheats, extortioners—in a word, all that live in open sin. These are no Protestants; they are not Christians at all. Give them their own name: they are open heathens. They are the curse of the nation, the bane of society, the shame of mankind, the scum of the earth." Wesley was no Donatist in the technical sense, for he maintained the Roman and Anglican position that the unworthiness of the minister does not hinder the grace of the sacrament.<sup>61</sup> But he certainly held that holiness belonged to the essence of Christianity and was indeed the realization of the human vocation: "That course of life tends most to the glory of God wherein we can most promote holiness in ourselves and others."<sup>62</sup> Holiness is thus the key to all Wesley's ecclesiology, theoretical and practical. But the broad terms of admission to the Methodist societies ("a desire

to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins")—coupled with fruits evidencing the desire of salvation as a condition for continuing in membership—show that the holiness is one of aspiration before it is one of achievement.<sup>63</sup> Methodism cannot fairly be accused of being a perfectionist sect, as long as its members consider perfection as a goal to be pressed on toward (Philippians 3). Nor can Wesley properly be charged with invisibilism, when we note his insistence—over against Moravian quietism—on the use of the instituted means of grace even by seekers, let alone by those who have already received the new birth. Wesley's teaching and practice of the Lord's Supper are firmly sacramentalist. Nor would an anti-institutionalist have devoted such attention as Wesley did to questions of church order.

The historical context and chief practical problem of Wesley's preaching of a New Testament holiness Christianity were of course provided by the large number of purely nominal Christians in the Church of England. The qualitative tension of growth in holiness that marks all original and authentic Christianity had been turned into a daunting quantitative discrepancy between the vast number of the baptized and the much smaller "congregation of English believers."<sup>64</sup> The gap between the "multitudinous" and the "gathered" conceptions of the church is one of the problems bequeathed by what Wesley called "that evil hour, when Constantine the Great called himself a Christian."<sup>65</sup>

The relics of Constantinianism remain a major though rarely named issue in contemporary ecumenism. They affect in yet another way the question of a national church. In his sermon "Of the Church," Wesley finds some New Testament justification for the use of "church" to refer to the Christian congregations dispersed throughout a civil province or country. But Constantinianism meant legal establishment—what Wesley calls "a mere political institution";<sup>66</sup> and even the Reformation retained *cuius regio eius religio*. Already by the time of his 1749 sermon "Catholic Spirit," Wesley was confessing the abatement of his earlier zeal for the view that "the place of our birth fixes the church to which we ought to belong; that one, for instance, who is born in England ought to be a member of that which is styled the Church of England

and, consequently, to worship God in the particular manner which is prescribed by that church." He realized that on those principles "there could have been no reformation from popery." Wesley, in fact, respected the laws of the Church of England only to the point where conscience or evangelistic need obliged him to vary. If he loved its liturgy and preferred its episcopal constitution, it was on account of their consonance with Scripture rather than for their Englishness. The test remained the primitive church, and it is interesting that from first to last, Wesley considered America a place where those pristine conditions might be approximated, away from the constraints of England. A line leads from his attempt to restore supposedly apostolic rites and disciplines in Georgia in the 1730s to the closing statement in his letter to "Our Brethren in America" of September 10, 1784: "As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the state and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free."<sup>67</sup>

This section may be closed, and the next prepared, by briefly noting the specific views of Wesley on some questions of faith and order. Wesley held the creedal truths concerning the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, and he viewed Arians, semi-Arians, Socinians, and Deists as having departed from the Christian faith.<sup>68</sup> Their heart was not right with his heart, and he did not offer them his hand as brothers and sisters in Christ. For collaboration in preaching to non-believers Wesley demanded agreement—as, for instance, his "Letter to Various Clergymen" reveals—on the articles of "original sin, justification by faith, and holiness of heart and life."<sup>69</sup> Granted this unity in evangelistic witness, Wesley was willing to allow that differences over predestination or perfection—which "are important in the nurture of Christians," as Colin Williams says, "rather than in the missionary proclamation of the gospel"—should not be church-dividing, though they would be apparent in the distinction between his own societies and, say, Whitefield's.<sup>70</sup>

In its more official sense also, the ordering of the church was strictly subservient to the conversion of sinners and their edification in that holiness without which no one shall see the Lord: "What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God; and to build them up in his fear and love? Order, then, is so far valuable, as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth."<sup>71</sup>

With that, we are structurally at the midpoint in this essay. The second half will be shorter, however. The diachronic lines drawn in the first half still allow a vector of choices on various issues in our present ecumenical situation. I will in each case simply indicate my own preferences within the authentically Methodist range. Section V—on Faith and Order—links up with section IV on Wesley. Section VI—on choice of partners—corresponds back to section III on our institutional history. Section VII—on Methodism's ecumenical contribution—matches section II on the parts and the whole. The opening section on schism and pluralism finds its pendant in the concluding section on reconciled diversity and costly unity.

## V. Faith and Order

The most important ecumenical document before the churches at the moment is the Lima text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), a fruit of fifty-five years' work in Faith and Order. Under the mandate given by the WCC's Fifth Assembly at Nairobi in 1975 and renewed by its Central Committee at Dresden in 1981, the Faith and Order Commission "now respectfully invites all churches to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority, whether it be a council, synod, conference, assembly or other body." Having worked closely for the past several years on the final stages of its production, I am persuaded that this document can be received from a Methodist standpoint as stating "the faith of the Church through the ages." The ecumenical question then becomes that of "the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches,

particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith."

The treatment of infant and believers' baptism perfectly reflects the persistent tension in Wesley—which he himself never clearly thematized theologically—between a baptismal regeneration in infants and the necessity of a subsequent spiritual rebirth.<sup>72</sup> The statement on the eucharist might well have served as the text for the Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, and Dean Brevint himself would have been pleased with it; it is actually the fruit of the recent biblical, patristic, and liturgical renewal. The knottiest problems in ministry are those concerning the priesthood and the episcopal succession. While the relation of ministerial priesthood to the general priesthood is directly addressed only in section 17, the whole document presents a description of the ordained ministry within the whole church, which is fully in line with the emergent consensus expressed by three such different voices as the following. First, the *British Methodist Statement on Ordination* of 1974:

As a perpetual reminder of this calling [of the whole people of God to be the body of Christ] and as a means of being obedient to it, the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focused and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world.

Second, the seventh chapter of the text of the Consultation on Church Union in the United States, *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting* (1980): "Their ordination marks them as persons who represent to the Church its own identity and mission in Jesus Christ."

Third, David N. Power, a leading Roman Catholic theologian on orders and ministry:

The needs of the church and of its mission are what determine ministry. . . . The office-holder, through the service of supervision and presidency, represents back to the church that which in the faith of the ordination ceremony it has expressed about itself. . . . Because [the eucharistic president] is empowered to represent the

church in this vital action, to represent to it its own very ground of being, we say that he is empowered to represent Christ. . . . The role of the ordained minister is to represent in the midst of this community its work for the kingdom, its eschatological nature, and its relationship to Christ. . . . The validity of ministry, to use the word loosely, is not assessed on the ground of its ecclesiastical provenance, but on the ground of its benefit to the church.<sup>73</sup>

Wesley had no difficulty in defining the ministerial office in priestly terms.<sup>74</sup> He also believed the bishop and the threefold order to be scriptural and apostolic, though not exclusively prescribed for all times,<sup>75</sup> and he valued continuity in ministry highly, while denying the provability of an uninterrupted episcopal succession.<sup>76</sup> This is consonant with the Faith and Order text on ministry—which suggests that all should now adopt the existing episcopal succession as a *sign* ("though not a guarantee") of continuity in that apostolic tradition whose *substance* may be recognized beyond the episcopal churches, which themselves need to "regain their lost unity." Granted Wesley's views on the historical variability of church order and its subservience to evangelical needs, Methodists may without disloyalty now accept an historic episcopate for the sake of a unity whose absence is a countertestimony to the gospel.<sup>77</sup>

The work of Faith and Order on *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, together with a more limited study, *How does the church teach authoritatively today?*, will be taken up into the next big project, entitled "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today."<sup>78</sup> I know of no more ecumenically acceptable description of the interdependence of authoritative functions than that provided by the thoroughly Wesleyan statement on doctrine and doctrinal standards included in the 1972 *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church: it speaks of "a 'marrow' of Christian truth that can be identified and that must be conserved. This living core . . . stands revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."<sup>79</sup> And the Lima decision to take the Nicene Creed as the determinative foundation for the project on "the common expression of the apostolic faith today" follows exactly the

procedures of Wesley's own confession in his "Letter to a Roman Catholic."<sup>80</sup>

## VI. Choice of Partners

I have concentrated on WCC Faith and Order work because—whatever other denominations may believe concerning their own achievements in bilateral conversations—those multilateral WCC statements, in whose elaboration Methodists and indeed Roman Catholics have strongly participated, are doctrinally much further advanced than anything yet produced by Methodist bilateral dialogues with the Roman Catholics or, more recently, the Lutherans. At least since Vatican II, considerable tensions of procedure and emphasis have run through the ecumenical movement: multilateral versus bilateral, local versus worldwide, organic versus federal. People tend to opt consistently for either the first or the second term in the series of pairs, so that the multilateral, the local, and the organic line up against the bilateral, the worldwide, and the federal. At the Lima meeting of Faith and Order in January 1982, Father Jean Tillard suggested that the local unions among non-Catholics should see themselves as a rather loose "communion de groupes," which did not prejudice the particular denominational constituents in their respective worldwide confessional relations, notably with the Roman Catholic Church. Granted that any entry into communion with Rome would be a great step for another confession or denomination to take, might we not look for a concomitant stride by Rome which would in fact reverse Tillard's emphasis? Could not Rome—in bold application of its own principle of subsidiarity—permit Catholic Bishops' conferences to enter into local unions with other churches in ways that did not impair their own relationship with the Roman see but rather invited the other local participants to join them in it?<sup>81</sup> The most significant version for Methodists of the general tension concerning "choice of partners" is put in the very title of Gerald Moede's article in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*: "Methodist Participation in Church Union Negotiations and

United Churches: Possible Implications for Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue."<sup>82</sup>

In ecumenical relations, much depends on the partners we choose or get chosen by. If the partners are Lutheran, we deal with a denomination which—in the Lutheran World Federation—has a strongly developed world confessional structure, where the dominant model for ecumenical unity is one of "reconciled diversity" among the continuing confessions. If the Roman Catholics are the partners, we are dealing with a church that is organically united throughout the world, and the model nearest to hand for integrating other traditions is a kind of uniatism in the Roman obedience—though that existing model itself includes the problem of geographically overlapping jurisdictions among the various rites.

Whatever the complexities of interpreting *place* when the New Delhi definition speaks of "all in each place," unity must first or last find a *local* embodiment.<sup>83</sup> It is locally that the scandal of disunity is most obvious, and it is locally that the day-to-day need arises for united worship, mission, and decision-making. That is doubtless why the World Methodist Conference in 1951 declared that it could only rejoice to see Methodism giving up its denominational existence in order to find new life in the wider community of the United Church of Canada and the Church of South India.<sup>84</sup> And that is what British Methodists have realized from the earliest days of modern ecumenism. It explains their positive response to the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon in 1946; and had the Anglican-Methodist scheme succeeded in 1969 or 1972, it would have created in two stages an organic union with the possibility of an interesting modification of the Constantinian pattern, so that the new church's national responsibilities would have been fulfilled in its mission to the peoples of Britain (which is not an un-Wesleyan thought). Later on, the British Methodists joined with several other bodies to explore an invitation from the United Reformed Church. With the adverse decision of the Church of England's Synod in July 1982, the heart has gone out of the ensuing covenant proposals, for full ecumenism in England cannot get on without Anglican participation. These disappointments are serious, not only nationally but also in their international

repercussions. Of the Anglican refusal of union with the Methodists, the Roman Catholic writer Francis Frost has observed that "this unhappy event has contributed to a tangible lowering of the influence of British non-Roman Catholic churches in the ecumenical movement as a whole."<sup>85</sup> The effect of the 1982 collapse of the English covenanting proposals on the Consultation on Church Union in the United States remains to be seen. Unity in England, where several of the now universal confessions took their origin in whole or in part, could still have a powerful effect for good elsewhere in the world.

That unions at the national level need not cut churches off from the wider world is shown by the newly developing relationships of united churches among themselves within the context of the WCC. Internationalism will also be furthered by the world confessional bodies, as long as they exist, and by whatever universal structures emerge from a process in which the special position of the Bishop of Rome is recognized more and more widely. That is why it may now be the moment for British Methodists—without giving up their concern for unity at the national level, and without turning their backs on the historically close Moravians or the United Reformed Church with which they now have hundreds of joint local congregations in one shape or another, or indeed on those Anglican friends who have desired unity with us—for British Methodists (I say) to abandon the reticence of the last generation toward the World Methodist Council and find in it an organ of international ecclesial fellowship and a valuable instrument in carrying on negotiations with the Roman Catholic Church in particular, but also with the Lutherans and with any others who are willing. In his last letter to America, written to Ezekiel Cooper on February 1, 1791, John Wesley summoned American Methodists to "see that you never give place to one thought of separating from your brethren in Europe. Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men that the Methodists are one people in all the world." Perhaps that same summons, *mutatis mutandis*, will now be heard by the British brothers and sisters. Their commitment to the WCC need in no wise be impaired.

## VII. Methodism's Ecumenical Contribution

It has become rather unfashionable to envision the denominations bringing their separate treasures into the service of the coming great church. Perhaps we have all become aware that our partners do not always see our gifts as we ourselves see them but sometimes even look upon them as an embarrassing and unwanted offering. Certainly we need to be aware of the temptation to compare our ideal self-image with the unpolished actuality of others' conditions. With all due tentativeness we must, however, state the values we would like others to share for the sake of the gospel. Let me briefly risk it for Methodism. Two points will suffice.

First, I consider that Methodism holds what Wesley called the "proportion of the faith."<sup>86</sup> I find it typically expressed in the liturgical corpus of the Wesleyan hymns. What I mean is the connected, coherent, and balanced configuration of the great doctrinal truths of Christianity held with a real assent as the content of a living relationship with the God confessed. At the level of theology, it is remarkable how often writers refer to what Howard Snyder calls "the Wesleyan synthesis." Colin Williams sees Wesley's theology as enabling the combination of traditional Catholic, classical Protestant, and Free Church Protestant concerns. Albert Outler manages to see Wesley's "evangelical catholicism" as vitally fusing such eclectic elements as "Marcarius the Egyptian" and Jonathan Edwards—a "conjunctive theology" indeed.<sup>87</sup> The spiritual integrity of the Wesleyan synthesis—important both for its own substance and as an example of method—is evident even to some observers outside of Methodism, particularly Roman Catholics. Maximin Piette's brave thesis in the 1920s—that Wesley represented a Catholic "reaction" to the Protestant extremes of Luther and Calvin<sup>88</sup>—was followed by John Todd's recognition in the 1950s of "Wesley's genius to combine two commonly separated Christian truths, the truth of the divine call to every man to surrender himself, totally, to God, and the truth of the Church established for the purpose of enabling each man to respond in the fullest possible way to the call."<sup>89</sup> Recently there has been the most perceptive and

generous article, already several times referred to, of Francis Frost in the encyclopedia *Catholicism: Methodism* there appears as a unified spiritual heritage with a precious witness to bear in the reconciliation of divided Christianity.

The second value is the drive for holiness which characterized Wesley's manhood, ministry, and mission, and which has never entirely disappeared from Methodism, however serious our mistakes and failings. It is a comprehensive thrust, embracing the person, the church, and the world—linking the present age with the age to come. At the moment it is finding expression in the often transconfessional search for patterns of spirituality, in Methodist participation in the liturgical movement for an ecumenical renewal of worship, and in those widely desired connections between sanctification and liberation to which the Oxford Institute gave special attention in 1977.<sup>90</sup>

There is a third Methodist contribution to ecumenism which I will reserve for the concluding section.

### VIII. Reconciled Diversity and Costly Unity

Hints have already been dropped concerning the differences between "reconciled diversity" and "organic union" as models of church unity. But signs of a rapprochement are not lacking. One mediating category may perhaps be found in the idea of "conciliarity" developed in Faith and Order from the Salamanca consultation in 1973. That notion was not intended to present an alternative to "local churches which are themselves truly united." "Conciliar fellowship" was meant to designate the structure of "sustained and sustaining relationships" to be maintained among such churches, which would allow the calling of councils whenever needed to make decisions affecting all. But some supporters of "reconciled diversity" happily appear to have found the notion of conciliarity to allay some of their fears about organic unity. In a positive move from his side, Harding Meyer—the leading Lutheran proponent of reconciled diversity—has allowed that reconciled diversity may in some circumstances appropriately extend to organic union.<sup>91</sup>

At the time of the English unity scheme between Anglicans and Methodists, Reginald Kissack argued strongly for federalism as a left-wing alternative to the catholic model of organic union.<sup>92</sup> Kissack appeared to think federalism desirable in itself, but with an advocate's skill he allowed that it would not exclude a more organic pattern in the longer run. Such a concession was needed if Kissack was to dodge the full force of John Kent's trenchant critique: "Christ is more than the President of a Federal Republic of Christian Associations; He is the Head of the Body which is His Church."<sup>93</sup> We might put the point sacramentally by saying that something more than federalism is required to bring to an end the situation in which it is possible, and sometimes even necessary, to ask whether baptism and confirmation initiate a person into a denomination or into the Christian church, whether the eucharistic celebration is that of a particular communion or of the Body of Christ, whether ordination admits a person to official ministry in a conventicle or in the church of God.

At one point Kissack contemplated the possibility that "scriptural holiness can keep alight and be spread abroad by a company of Christians if they make themselves an Order inside a Church, but not if they make themselves a self-sufficient Church. . . . Does holiness become significant again in the new ecumenical context, in the sense that nostalgia for its traditional function should encourage Methodism to unmake itself as a Church, but to remake itself as an Order inside a new Church in England?"<sup>94</sup> About the same period C. J. Bertrand was suggesting that the reintegration of Methodism into the Anglican communion would make of Methodism the unique historical phenomenon of a "province in time" rather than a province in space.<sup>95</sup> To accept temporal limitations, the Christian might say, is to be ready to die in the hope of resurrection to a more glorious life.

To universalize the scene, let us listen one more time to Albert Outler. He visualizes for the future "a united Christian community really united in *communicatio in sacris* (in membership, ministry, and sacraments) in which the distinctive witness of divers denominations, functioning as 'orders,' societies,' or 'movements' under their own



self-appointed heads, will be conserved within a wider catholic perimeter, organized constitutionally on some collegial and conciliar pattern."<sup>98</sup> That that vision entails more than reconciled diversity is made clear by Outler's ensuing sentences:

Who should know better than we [Methodists] that denominations may be justified in their existence for this "time being" or that, but not forever? We were commissioned by the Spirit of God "for the time being" to carry out an extraordinary mission of witness and service, for just so long as our life apart is effective in the economy of God's providence. We are, or ought to be, prepared to risk our life as a separate church and to face death as a denomination in the sure and lively hope of our resurrection in the true community of the whole people of God. . . . The price of true catholicity may very well be the death and resurrection of the churches that we know—in the faith that God has greater things in store for his people than we can remember or even imagine.<sup>99</sup>

It is because Dr. Outler is so firmly committed to the ecclesiological provisionality of Methodism that I am willing to reappropriate the words with which he closed his lecture at the Oxford Institute in 1962, in order to close my essay some twenty years later: "Every denomination in a divided and broken Christendom is an *ecclesiola in via*, but Methodists have a peculiar heritage that might make the transitive character of our ecclesiastical existence not only tolerable but positively proleptic."<sup>98</sup>

### Notes

1. On the practical tensions, despite the ideal correspondence, between truth and unity, see Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 207ff.
2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes 1928-1936* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 86-118.
3. Entry in John Wesley's *Journal* for Mar. 25, 1743.
4. *Journal*, Feb. 19, 1761.
5. In his Sermon CVII, "On God's Vineyard" (1787-89), Wesley refers to "the body of people commonly called Methodists" as "that Society . . . which began at Oxford in the year 1729, and remains united at this day."
6. The "Rules of the United Societies" (1743)—from which come the quotation in the text and the next following it—define a society as "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch

over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

7. See Albert C. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" in *The Doctrine of the Church*, ed. D. Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 11-28, in particular p. 18.

8. To the very end, "I live and die a member of the Church of England" ("Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church," written Dec. 11, 1789 and published in the *Arminian Magazine*, Apr. 1790).

9. See C. Williams, pp. 230-31.

10. See Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), p. 311: "Dr. Coke puts me in mind of a German proverb, which I may apply to himself and to myself. 'He skips like a flea; I creep like a louse.' He would tear all from top to bottom. I will not tear, but unstitch."

11. For Wesley's own death as the most precise date of Methodism's separation from the Church of England, see Reginald Kissack, *Church or No Church? The Development of the Concept of Church in British Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1964), p. 71.

12. John M. Turner, "From Society to Church," in *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 188 (1963), pp. 110-15.

13. At the Conference of 1766, Wesley declared that Methodist preaching services were intended to *supplement* the public prayer of the church and its celebration of the Lord's Supper (see Williams, p. 213). Note also Wesley's Sermon CIV, "On Attending the Church Service" (1788).

14. On Methodism's "self-confidence," see Kissack, pp. 68-95.

15. The Methodist reaction against the Oxford Movement and later Anglo-Catholicism may sometimes have been overemphasized by historians, but the anti-Puseyism of the 1840s was real enough; see John Kent, *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), pp. 56, 138. Nor should one ignore Methodism's difficulties with a resurgent (Calvinist) Evangelicalism in the Church of England.

16. C. J. Bertrand, "Le méthodisme, 'province' méconnue de la communion anglicane?" in *Aspects de l'Anglicanisme: Colloque de Strasbourg 14-16 juin 1972* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), pp. 103-22.

17. For hints that some Methodists, including Wesley himself, toyed with the idea that Wesley and perhaps others might be made "itinerant bishops," see F. Hunter, *John Wesley and the Coming Comprehensive Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1968), chapters 7 and 8; see also Baker, pp. 279-80.

18. See Bertrand's own remarks, pp. 119ff.

19. Admittedly, Stevens had a peculiar view of the apostolic age and of the "coming great Church," ignoring all the problems of "denominationalism": "Members of any denomination, or of none, can enter the spiritual Church which [Wesley] organized, provided they possess the necessary moral qualifications. 'One condition,' he continues, 'and one only, is required—a real desire to save their souls. Where this is, it is enough; they desire no more. They lay stress upon nothing else. They ask only, Is thy heart herein as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand.' Such was Wesley's 'United Society,' such the Church of Methodism; and as such, is it not a reproduction of the Church of the Apostolic age, and a type of 'the Church of the future'?" (Abel Stevens, *History of Methodism*, II, 1861, p. 353).

20. Workman's essay, under the title "The Place of Methodism in the Life and Thought of the Christian Church," first appeared in W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, and G. Eayrs, eds., *A New History of Methodism*, I (London:

Hodder, 1909), pp. 1-73. A revised edition, under the new title, was published separately in 1921. He wrote: "Unfortunately the dogmatism of certain theologians renders it necessary for us to claim that Methodism has a place in the development of the kingdom of God, and, so far as we can judge from existing phenomena, forms part of His divine plan. . . . No larger reunion is possible which either implicitly or explicitly ignores the fact of a [Methodist] Church which is today the largest Protestant Church in the world, with the possible exception of the Lutherans." Outdated triumphalism? Or a still necessary reminder?

21. The British union of 1932 brought together Wesleyan, Primitive, and United Methodists (the latter dating from a union of 1907). See Kent, pp. 1-43.

22. To be fair, the Bradford statement immediately continues: "It is their duty to make common cause in the search for the perfect expression of that unity and holiness which in Christ are already theirs."

23. Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1980), p. 151.

24. Wesley would certainly not have allowed a "spiritualizing" distinction between a "visible" and an "invisible" church as a way of evading the concrete problems of disunity. In his confrontation with Calvinism, Wesley could admit a distinction between "the outward, visible church" and "the invisible church, which consists of holy believers" (*Predestination Calmly Considered*, 1752, sec. 71). But his more characteristic usage (as in *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, 1743, secs. 76-78) took the visibility and invisibility of the church as referring respectively to its *assembled* and *scattered* existence. This needs to be borne in mind even in the "holy believers" definition he gives to Bishop Challoner: "Such is the Catholic Church . . . the whole body of men, endued with faith working by love, dispersed over the whole earth, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America." For Wesley, even the "spiritual" church remains visible by word and sacraments, and his views on the gravity of "separation" reveal how evangelically intolerable for him was all disunity which could not fail to have an institutional manifestation. For further elaboration, see secs. III and IV.

25. Colin W. Williams and Albert C. Outler appear to have popularized the "ecclesiola in Ecclesia" account of Methodism. They personally are to be absolved of all denominational complacency in its use.

26. C. Williams, p. 216.

27. R. N. Flew, "Methodism and the Catholic Tradition," in *Northern Catholicism*, N. P. Williams and C. Harris, eds., (London: SPCK, 1933), in particular pp. 515-31.

28. Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 306. That Wesley tended to look on his traveling preachers as such an order is apparent from his address to the 1769 Conference (see C. Williams, pp. 214-15). It is a broadening of the idea to let it include all Methodists, but from the viewpoint of social organization, Michael Hill does in fact argue that early Methodism had "a status close to that of a religious order in the Church of England." See "Methodism as a Religious Order: A Question of Categories," in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, VI, Michael Hill, ed., (London: SCM Press, 1973), pp. 91-99.

29. As in note 7.

30. John M. Todd, *John Wesley and the Catholic Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), in particular p. 12. This sounds like a "vestigia ecclesiae" understanding of non-Roman Christianity. While that view

probably remains dominant even in Vatican II, A. Dulles has shown that the conciliar documents open up other approaches too: "The Church, the Churches, and the Catholic Church," in *Theological Studies* 33, 1972, pp. 199-234.

31. Francis Frost, "Méthodisme," in G. Jacquemet, ed., *Catholicisme, hier, aujourd'hui, demain* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1948 ff.), vol. IX, cols. 48-71.

32. This phrase or a similar one occurs in several places, for example, the Minutes of the 1763 Conference.

33. Letter of Mar. 20, 1739 to James Hervey.

34. Kissack, in particular pp. 89-95, 142-46.

35. E. G. Rupp, "The Future of the Methodist Tradition," in *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 184, 1959, pp. 264-74.

36. Sermon LXXV, "On Schism" (1786).

37. *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1744-45), III. 4. 6. The Catholic John M. Todd comments: "What seems so admirable about this passage is its serenity, from a man who certainly did believe that the Catholic Church was grossly in the wrong in his own time on fundamental points of doctrine" (*John Wesley and the Catholic Church*, pp. 180-81). In other places, Wesley allows that the Reformers were "thrust out" (see, e.g., Sermon CIV, "On Attending the Church Service").

38. Outler, *That the World May Believe: A Study of Christian Unity and What It Means for Methodists* (New York: Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1966), in particular p. 64.

39. Outler, *The Christian Tradition and the Unity We Seek* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957). The distinctly theological motivation of ecumenism must be maintained in face of such a sociologically reductionist account of the reunion of British Methodism as R. Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968).

40. "The discovery of our total Christian past is the means of fuller initiation into the whole Christian family" (Outler, as in note 39, p. 41).

41. Belgium and Pakistan are voluntary, though small, exceptions.

42. Outler, *The Christian Tradition and the Unity We Seek*, p. 22.

43. Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. vii-xii.

44. C. Williams, pp. 5-10.

45. Todd, pp. 182-83, 192.

46. Sermon XXXIV, "Catholic Spirit" (1749-50); over lesser matters, Wesley is prepared to "talk of them, if need be, at a more convenient season." See also the letter of July 3, 1756 to James Clark.

47. See Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 92. On "opinions" as distinguished from "essentials," see C. Williams, pp. 13-22; and J. Newton, "The Ecumenical Wesley," in *The Ecumenical Review*, 24, 1972, pp. 160-75.

48. Letter of July 18, 1749 (text in Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. 492-99).

49. See Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 92; see also letter of July 3, 1756 to James Clark.

50. Sermon LXXV, "On Schism" (1786).

51. *Journal*, Feb. 19, 1761.

52. Letter of May 22, 1750 to Gilbert Boyce.

53. Letter to Boyce.

54. Under Non-Juror influence, the earlier Wesley favored the (re)baptism of Germans and Dissenters who had not received "episcopal" baptism. As late as Oct. 21, 1738, an entry in Charles Wesley's *Journal* shows John to have taken up a stricter position than the Bishop of London on this point. See Hunter, chapters 2 and 5.

55. On the "foreign reformed churches," see the Minutes of the 1747 Conference (Williams, p. 221).
56. To Bishop Challoner he countered: "Whatever may be the case of some particular souls, it must be said, if your own marks be true, the Roman Catholics in general, are not 'the people of God'" (letter of Feb. 19, 1761). Yet Sermon LXXIV, "Of the Church" (1786), sec. 19, appears to consider the Church of Rome as "a part of the catholic Church"; see also above, at note 3.
57. Letter of May 22, 1750 to Gilbert Boyce.
58. See Sermon CIV, "On Attending the Church Service" (1788).
59. *Journal*, Jan. 11, 1750.
60. Sermon CVI, "On Faith" (1788).
61. Todd shows that Wesley mistook the Roman Catholic doctrine of "intention" for one of "worthiness," but that Wesley then defended the true Roman (anti-Donatist) doctrine against his own misunderstanding of it (pp. 149, 175-76!).
62. The date is early and the context is autobiographical, but what Wesley thus wrote in a letter to his father on Dec. 10, 1734, concerning the incumbency of Epworth, he undoubtedly held to throughout his ministry as universally applicable.
63. See Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. 177-80 for the rules of the United Societies.
64. For "the congregation of English believers," see the Minutes of the 1744 Conference (Williams, p. 208); see also *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), sec. 76.
65. See Sermon CXV, "The Ministerial Office" (1789). For further references to Constantine in Wesley, see Snyder, pp. 80-82, 95-96.
66. Minutes of the 1747 Conference (Williams, p. 222).
67. On this, see Hunter, chapter 2.
68. See, for example, letter of July 3, 1756 to James Clark.
69. Letter of Apr. 19, 1764 to "various clergymen."
70. Williams, pp. 154-55; see also pp. 16-20.
71. Letter of June 25, 1746 to "John Smith."
72. See Robert E. Cushman, "Baptism and the Family of God," in D. Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Doctrine of the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), pp. 79-102; B. G. Holland, *Baptism in Early Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1970). Wesley might have done well to take with permanent theological seriousness the advice of Tomo-chacki, the American Indian in Georgia: "We would not be made Christians as the Spaniards make Christians: we would be taught before we are baptized" (Todd, p. 67).
73. Composite quotation from David N. Power, "The basis for official ministry in the Church," in *The Jurist*, 41, 1981, 314-42, and *Gifts that Differ* (New York: Pueblo, 1980).
74. Sermon CXV, "The Ministerial Office" (1789).
75. See the Minutes of the 1747 Conference (Williams, p. 222).
76. "The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove" (letter of Aug. 19, 1785 to Charles Wesley).
77. On "accidental variations" in church government, see the Minutes of the 1747 Conference (Williams, p. 222).
78. Faith and Order Paper No. 91, reprinted from *The Ecumenical Review*, 31, 1979, pp. 77-93.
79. For the ecumenical dimensions of authority, see the work of the British Methodist Rupert E. Davies, *Religious Authority in an Age of Doubt* (London: Epworth Press, 1968).

80. See Commission on Faith and Order Lima, 1982, *Towards Visible Unity*, I (Faith and Order Paper No. 112, 1982), 89-100; II (No. 113), pp. 28-46.
81. A. D. Falconer, "Contemporary Attitudes to the Papacy," in *The Furrow*, 27, 1976, pp. 3-19.
82. Gerald E. Moede, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 12, 1975, pp. 367-88.
83. For the New Delhi definition, see, for example, L. Vischer, ed., *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1963), pp. 144ff. On the complexities of "place," see the WCC publication *In Each Place: Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (Geneva: WCC, 1977).
84. See Frost, col. 70.
85. Frost, col. 70.
86. In the Preface to his *Notes on the Old Testament*, for example, Wesley writes of "the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness" (*Works*, XIV, p. 253).
87. Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. 3-33; see also his *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975); and "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in K. E. Rowe, ed., *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976), pp. 11-38.
88. Maximin Piette, *La réaction wesléyenne dans l'évolution protestante* (1925); English trans.: *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937; reprint 1979).
89. Todd, p. 183.
90. Theodore Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981).
91. H. Meyer, "'Einheit in versöhnter Verschiedenheit'—'konziliare Gemeinschaft'—'organische Union': Gemeinsamkeit und Differenz gegenwärtig diskutierter Einheitskonzeptionen," in *Oekumenische Rundschau*, 27, 1978, pp. 377-400.
92. Kissack, especially pp. 113f., 131-34, 148-59.
93. Kent, pp. 193-206.
94. Kissack, p. 130.
95. Bertrand, p. 121.
96. Outler, *That the World May Believe*, p. 54.
97. Outler, pp. 74-75.
98. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" p. 28.