

the *temporarily* characteristic American theological mood of self-reliance which appears so patently to be in rebellion against the sovereignty of God, and which, in most cases, unquestionably is. The heritage of Methodism is unequivocally involved in the Puritan ethic of New England (in spite of the fact that American Methodism has been, from the beginning, predominantly a movement of the South and Mid-West). The Puritans wanted to build the 'Kingdom of Christ' in this new world—witness the discerning lectures of Mr H. Richard Niebuhr at the Harvard University Tercentenary published under the title *The Kingdom of God in America*, or the numerous books and essays of Mr Perry Miller, who adroitly suggests that the early Puritan divines really hoped to make out of New England an ecclesio-political 'boot-camp' wherein to receive training for the ultimate task of directing the establishment of the Kingdom of God in England (cp. *Errand into the Wilderness*, Harvard University Press, 1956). This desire to plant the Kingdom of Christ—even through the inevitable vicissitudes of Protestant pluralism—remained part of the Methodist dynamic through most of the nineteenth century, and in many irrelevant ways still asserts itself in American life.

In this context the theological schools of Methodism meet the responsibilities flooding in through the tasks of the twentieth century. Of interest to many may be the fact that no Methodist theological faculty in America today is staffed by Methodists alone. Every faculty is characterized by confessional pluralism. Furthermore, the work of the school is enjoined in the struggle for words, concepts and ideas which express the faith. Every precaution must be taken to make sure that the Gospel is not perverted by the false understandings others may have of our Christian words and concepts. The definitions which we have used in our propaganda now need responsible linguistic analysis; otherwise our apologetic may be misunderstood.

Methodism in the United States has now many new frontiers. May we face them in the spirit of the pioneers.

DAVID C. SHIPLEY

THE FUTURE OF THE METHODIST TRADITION

THE STORY of Saul and the Witch of Endor is a reminder of the danger involved when we turn to the past in order to interpret the future. But the historian can do no other, even though to mingle history with prophecy is the hall-mark of the second-rate historian and the false prophet. It was the great Catholic taunt of the sixteenth century to cry to the Protestants, 'Where was your Church before Luther?' And we might begin with the question, 'Where was our Church before Wesley?' since there is some evidence for the impression that for 80 per cent. of British Methodists Church history begins in 1738 (and for the remaining 20 per cent. in 1810). There were two answers given to the

sixteenth-century question—what we might call the oak tree and the mistletoe views of the Church. Martin Luther and John Jewell and Richard Hooker said that the Church did not begin with them, and pointed instead to the one People of God which began with Abraham, or perhaps with Adam. The radical reformers turned away from the oak tree of a Church with a continuous pedigree to the mistletoe of a truly believing People which consisted of isolated pockets of spiritual religion—in an idealized Primitive Church before the fall of Christianity in the second century or in the time of Constantine, in such medieval sects as could be plausibly reckoned as Reformers before the Reformation, and in themselves, the Anabaptists or the Puritans or the Methodist societies. They pointed to a community within history whose real existence lay beyond it. And of course we need both concepts. We must not cut the knot which joins Israel after the flesh with the New Israel after the spirit, but we must give another answer to those who ask, 'Where was your Church before Luther, before Wesley', by saying: 'where it has always been, in the Heavens in Christ Jesus.' And so we must join together both truths as they are joined in the magnificent preamble to St Augustine's *City of God*—'that glorious and celestial city of God's faithful people which is seated partly in the course of these declining times, but chiefly in that solid estate of eternity.'

By the Methodist tradition we do not mean a static, rigid, fossilized worship of the past but a living partnership between the generations, ever changing, ever renewed by the pressures of human history and the creative power of the Holy Spirit, a communion of saints which is at once a fellowship between believers and a sharing in holy things. Within the unity of the Christian tradition there is a Methodist tradition. Something came into being in the middle of the eighteenth century with the rise of the Methodist Preachers and the emergence of the People called Methodists. There began then a recognizable, distinct flow of corporate life which has grown into a world-wide community of many millions. If we look for a moment at some of the 'notes' of that tradition, it is not for sectarian ends but that we may consider what we have to contribute to the Church of the future, what, with a little perhaps of Ecumenical 'enthusiasm', we might call the 'coming great Church'.

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. Here in the history of Methodism, and rather specially at the point of our origin, the one Church has been pegged down at a certain point and level, as it was pegged down with the Benedictines in the sixth and the Franciscans in the thirteenth and the Lutherans in the sixteenth centuries. Here is a distinctive historical pattern of theology—yes, but theology not disembodied as a floating system of ideas, but imbedded in a historical pattern of infinite complexity, including a pattern of liturgy and confession and proclamation, and not least in companies of real men and women. One of the difficulties I have, for example, about a direct confrontation or comparison of Luther and Wesley is that it ignores the vast differences of pattern, the extent to which what Wesley has to say about justification by faith is related to eighteenth-century questions and the problems raised with immense intricacy by the Puritan and Anglican divines of the seventeenth century. Our history is the distinctive thing, and our doctrines are to be seen within that context.

One of the striking things about the emergence of Methodism is what, to use the language of another profession, we might call its '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. It is not easy to say when this break became inevitable. One can obviously point to 1784 when John Wesley ordained preachers for North America and set apart Thomas Coke. And there was point in Charles Wesley's famous quotation from Lord Mansfield: 'Ordination means separation.' But John Wesley did not think so. Moreover, his ordinations for Scotland and England had hardly any effect on the over-all situation. The really important events had happened long before. More important than 1784 is 1739, when the London churches closed their doors on John Wesley, and when, following Whitfield, he did in Bristol what he had already done in Georgia and preached in the open air. The real manifesto is indeed the phrase in the letter to Hervey that the world was his parish, when he set out on his tremendous itinerancy like a human sputnik, a Don Quixote for Christ's sake. The troubles of these years, the antagonism of magistrates, of the mobs, of the local clergy, arose because for such men the parish was their world, and at that time each new parish boundary required another Act of Parliament and the Church machine, rigid and inflexible was unable to undertake either the evangelism or the pastoral care of the unchurched multitudes. Through John Wesley and his little band of helpers there came into existence companies of men and women living by rule, singing their hymns and praying together with a simple fervour the like of which England had perhaps not seen since the first coming of the friars. They were at first wholly encompassed by the Church of England. They still went to the parish church for baptisms, weddings, funerals, Holy Communion and, when Bishops did their duty, confirmation. And yet in an amazingly short time they had their own framework of edification, intended not to supersede but to supplement the ordinances of the Church of England, their fasts, vigils, watch-nights, love feasts, and their band, class and society meetings. These were not the result of some prefabricated, doctrinaire scheme. The Methodists did not, like the Puritans, claim to find the whole pattern of Church existence laid down by divine law in Holy Scripture. They were of all the Churches of the English Protestant tradition the least doctrinaire. Many of their usages had been invented or adapted by John Wesley in Georgia. What Wesley said of his field preaching was true about most of the apparatus of Methodism: 'What I did was no matter of . . . premeditation. There was no scheme at all previously formed . . . it was a sudden expedient.' As one of the Preachers was to put it in the Conference of 1836, 'Methodism came down out of heaven, as it was wanted, piece by piece'—a little exuberant, but a recognition of the truth that almost all the characteristic institutions of original Methodism were inspired improvisations, and because of this became, it may be, the most flexible instrument of large-scale evangelism in Christian history.

Thus to all the Church of England the 'mother Church' meant something deeper than the common use of the metaphor. In fact Methodism grew within the greater Church as a child within its mother, drawing nourishment, growing from embryo in brain and nerve and tissue until in due time it merged as a separate life. To understand how remarkable this was, remember what a life

and death struggle had followed the attempt of sixteenth-century Puritanism to grow within the Church of England. Then there had been a life and death struggle ending in the violent repudiation of Puritanism. Now Wesley did what the Puritans had failed to do and neither the government nor the bishops interfered. Individual bishops might (and did) attack the Wesleys, they might give pastoral addresses to their clergy on the errors of 'enthusiasm', but Charles Wesley could write to his brother in 1785 about the bishops: 'They have left us alone and left us to act just as we pleased, these fifty years. At present some of them are quite friendly towards us, particularly towards you.' Moreover the very temper of Methodism was different from that of the religion of the day. Here again, many of the things which Methodists did and said seemed like echoes of that Puritanism which the Church of England had rejected and which had bred in it a distaste for 'enthusiasm'. The Puritans had used itinerant preachers, lay preachers, field preaching; in their smaller conventicles they exercised a stricter Christian discipline than that of formal Christianity. They had been exponents, in a vast and impressive literature of spiritual and moral and dogmatic theology, of doctrines of 'inward religion', of a personal walk with God, of conversion, assurance, perfection. John Wesley himself owed more than he ever knew to this Puritan tradition of his own ancestors; the very language of his theology and many of his categories are conditioned by seventeenth-century Puritan controversies. In that wonderful collection of fifty odd volumes of divinity, the *Christian Library*, the Puritans are the largest company, even though Puritanism was a largely Calvinist tradition. The fact which differentiated the Church of England from the Churches of the Reformation was not the appeal to history but to reason, and John Wesley was himself always a very thorough Church of England man; even when nearest to Luther or Calvin or Richard Baxter, he never lets go of Hooker, and always couples reason with tradition, subject to the grand scriptural norm.

The full exploration of Wesley's debt to the Christian Platonists and of the Holy Club to the Non-Jurors is one of the last clues to Methodist origins which have yet to be worked out. Moreover his contacts with the Germans enabled him to bring to a tired English piety a genuine and refreshing blood transfusion by bringing together three things: the Pietist concentration on the Bible (his use of Bengel is a symbol here) and on practical philanthropy, Lutheran devotion in the great German hymns, and the Moravian stress on Christian experience, on simplicity of life and behaviour and on the reality of saving faith.

One result of this is that the mood and temper of Methodism, as of Wesley's Arminianism, were different from that of Puritan or Evangelical Calvinism. A Catholic writer, M. Rondet, has spoken of what he calls a 'pessimism of grace', a one-sided seventeenth-century Augustinianism which had emphasized so much the sinfulness of sin as to make the Fall rather than the Cross and Resurrection the real pivot of history, and which believed that only a few could be saved, a handful plucked from the vast mass of doomed humanity—a doctrine which could dry up the nerve of missionary effort. But now, in the mighty works of the revival there came a new 'Optimism of Grace'—worlds apart from eighteenth-century philosophic optimism, but a joyful and triumphant affirmation of the power of the divine love, mighty to the overthrow of strongholds and reaching out to embrace all mankind:

*For all my Lord was crucified,
For all, for all my Saviour died.*

And so Methodism spilled across from England into new worlds, into America and the West Indies and Africa, India and the islands of the south seas. And about its piety, too, there was nothing dour or morose or gloomy. At the end of the Victorian Age Dr Scott Lidgett spoke of the 'generosity and geniality of temper which has from the beginning characterized Methodism at its best'. 'Happiness' is a great key word in the first Methodist hymn-book, which began with a section entitled 'Of the Pleasantness and excellence of religion'.

The pattern of Methodist belief and edification was grounded in the famous four-fold definition of 'Our Doctrines', 'Our Discipline', 'Our Literature', 'Our Hymns'—yes, and they also spoke of 'Our liturgy', the Book of Common Prayer. For their standards, the Methodists have preached sermons; their theology was believed and preached and sung. What then, of 'Our Doctrines'—believed, preached, sung? John Wesley himself was at pains to show that the stresses of Methodism were not simply a few 'favourite ideas' of himself and his friends. He found support for them in the Bible, in the classic confessions of the Church of England, her Homilies and Prayer Book, and in her learned divines, as well as in the fathers and in the early Church.

There was first, Justification by Faith alone, that 'sola fide' which article XI declared to be wholesome and full of comfort, but which became comfortable for Wesley only when through Peter Böhler he had come to understand the experimental character of saving faith, and the need for a man to loose all hold on his own righteousness that he might find himself apprehended by the righteousness of God. It is Justification by Faith very strictly in an historical context, related to the eighteenth rather than the sixteenth century, and missing, as indeed most of Protestantism has missed, some of the poignancy and joy of Luther's intuitions at this point, Luther's enormous contribution not so much to theology as to ethics—his concept of Justification as the whole standing ground of our forgiven relationship with God, the term of all our commerce with God until our perfecting, in a joyful, free, spontaneous, creative life in the Holy Spirit which is well-spring of ever new and more wonderful patterns of behaviour.

The doctrines of Assurance and of the Witness of the Spirit declare it to be the privilege of believing Christians to know themselves to be forgiven children of God. It is the mood perfectly captured in the lines of Charles Wesley:

*Shall the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?*

There was nothing new in this. Wesley himself could point to many testimonies to his preaching in classical Anglican writings. You cannot read much Luther without coming up against *Heilsgewissheit* and *Glaubensgewissheit*. And this for Luther is not something connected merely with the promises declared in baptism, but is a real present, joyful confidence.

Wesley's Arminianism took him away from the Calvinist doctrine of Assurance which related it with Final Perseverance (see Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes Nach Calvin*, Göttingen, 1957, pp.202ff.). It is true that the doctrine

was easily misunderstood. The emotional scenes of the Revival, and the innumerable examples of drastic conversion, brought on the Methodists Pusey's charge of teaching 'Justification by Feeling'. Sometimes, too, Charles's hymns were not as guarded as his brother's sermons. John once wrote to his brother: 'Beware of enthusiasm. I have much constitutional enthusiasm. You have much more.' Nevertheless, when Charles Wesley wrote:

*What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible,*

he probably did not intend 'feel' to refer simply to emotion, and the signs infallible were the fruits of the Spirit in new patterns of behaviour. It is true that there are still problems and I have sometimes wondered how Wesley would have answered the attack in *Pilgrim's Progress* which Christian makes upon Ignorance:

Christian. Why, or by what, art thou persuaded that thou hast left all for heaven?

Ignorance. My heart tells me so.

Christian. The wise man says that he who trusts his own heart is a fool.

Ignorance. That is spoken of an evil heart, but mine is a good one.

Christian. But how dost thou prove that?

Ignorance. It comforts me with hopes of heaven.

Christian. That may be through deceitfulness, for a man's heart may minister comfort to him in hopes of that thing for which he yet has no ground to hope.

Ignorance. But my heart and life agree together; and therefore my hope is well grounded.

Christian. Who told thee thy heart and life agree together?

Ignorance. My heart tells me so.

The statement that Methodism combines a Protestant doctrine of Justification with a Catholic doctrine of holiness is one that is so much over-simplified as to be dangerously misleading, and I would not accept it without grave qualification. But we might suggest that Wesley combines in a marvellous way the Pauline and Johannine elements in the Christian testimony when, within the safe orbit of sovereign grace and pardoning love, he insists on the power and good pleasure of the Father to fulfil in us his perfect will. Combining these doctrines, and of great interest, is John Wesley's doctrine of the use of the law in relation to believers—about which the document of cardinal importance will be found in his letter to Ebenezer Blackwell, *Letters*, 3.79ff. Here his emphasis is different from the Calvinist doctrine and from Melancthon's Third Use of the Law, and there is evidence in Lauri Haikolas's recent valuable study *Usus Legis* (Uppsala, 1958) that it has some links with Luther. By the law he means the Sermon on the Mount, preached to the converted believer, preached not so much as command but as promise and therefore forming a framework on which the soul can grow:

Whenever God gives a new degree of light he gives likewise a new degree of strength. Now I see that He that loves me bids me do this. And now I feel that I can do it through Christ strengthening me.

This doctrine of the Law in relation to believers safeguarded the subjective stress on saving faith as an experience and saved the doctrines of perfect love from becoming an enthusiastic antinomianism. On the other hand the doctrines of perfect love saved his use of the law from turning into a petrified and static moralism such as came to Puritanism and Pietism in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. And this stress on active love and on the practical demands of Christian philanthropy gave to John Wesley and his movement its sanity and creative power, and enabled them to do those works which are written deep in the history of England. About Christian Perfection I would say only one thing: it is this doctrine which, more even than Predestination, separates the Methodist from the Calvinist-Evangelical wings of the Revival. What Wesley says here I find only one person saying firmly in the 1800's, and that is Wesley's Irish High Church friend Alexander Knox. Knox says:

John Wesley's chief business was to form a more effectual connexion between the two schemes, of first principles and perfection than had ever been attempted before.

And the tie that binds the two men is surely that both for Wesley as for Knox the doctrine of Christian Perfection is no mere vague Spiritism as in modern holiness movements, but that the content is for him the example and pattern of the New Testament filled in with a great impressive literature of Anglican Puritan and Roman Catholic divines, not forgetting the catholic saints—as the famous M. de Renty. But it is not our doctrines taken singly, but rather taken all together in their coherent shape of the gospel, which are significant. Together with the mighty works of the Revival they contribute to a new articulation of the doctrine and work of the Holy Spirit.

It is well known that the opinion is abroad in the Ecumenical Movement that the only significant Methodist contribution to it is organization and finance. Now it is true that John Wesley was neither a Luther nor a Calvin. Nobody among us, not even Dr Hildebrandt, is likely to say 'Mr Wesley says . . .' in the way in which some Lutherans seem to imply '*Luther locutus: causa finita est*'. But if in a real way the Churches of Luther and Calvin have brought into the ecumenical conversation the authentic accents of those giant reformers, must it not be meaningful for the men of our time to be reminded of John Wesley the great Apostolic Man at this time when the most urgent part of our task is to bring the gospel to the estranged multitudes without its borders?

What of our doctrines? In this Conference we have only begun to face the question whether the tie which binds us is Methodist theology or a common concentration on Biblical study—our participation in the examination, by a learned world which extends beyond the ecumenical movement and includes the Church of Rome, of the content of the apostolic faith in the light of Holy Scripture. There is an important principle here. The Protestant doctrine of the Church implies that she is always '*Ecclesia Reformanda*', always being renewed and reformed and criticized by the Word of God. In comparison with this the greatest Fathers of the Church, or all of them together, are of minor importance. Luther once said:

The Papists have many holy Fathers, but apart from John the Baptist and Paul I have none on my side save Augustine—and he it was who said, 'Don't in any wise believe

my works'. And he said more strongly in another place, 'I only will believe any teacher however greatly learned and holy in so far as he shows from scripture that he teaches the truth. That is how I want my books to be read.'

The historic creeds and confessions of the Church, the sermons of John Wesley, the hymns of Charles, are still immensely important. It matters that we can go back historically to the days of our origins and study our forefathers in those hours of crisis and decision in which they were raised up by the Spirit. These are the beacons, the lighthouses, the buoys, warning and guiding and beckoning the ship into the right channels; but the important moment is when the Pilot comes aboard and the supreme necessity is that He Himself should be at the helm. So it is with the Spirit in the Church.

It would not be hard to find in the present ecumenical concentration on the Bible truths which are going by default. There is lacking what I have called the 'optimism of Grace', which is very different from a secularized optimism or the conflation of liberal theology with the American and British ways of life, but is also different from a good deal of modern eschatological thinking, set so often in the minor key, reminiscent often of the seventeenth-century 'pessimism of Grace'. There is room for a gospel which does not flinch at the dire consequences of human depravity (since it is a theology of the Cross), and which sees as deeply into the tragic facts of human existence as any nihilist or existentialist, but which confidently proclaims the triumphant presence of the Risen Christ in this present evil age and a power of grace mighty to the overthrow of strongholds of evil. That same awareness of the divine power which comes from the living experience of the work of grace must give a new thrust to Christian thought and behaviour among the huge problems of our modern world. I understand, sympathize with, and much agree with the revulsion which Barth has carried through against the subjectivism which set in with Schleiermacher. I understand though I do not share the phobia about eighteenth-century Pietism which besets modern *Lutherforschung* and threatens to bedevil it. But here is something needing to be said which our Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian and Anglican friends are not saying. When Karl Barth began to write his great *Dogmatik* he had a Methodist housemaid in his house in Basel, and one day he showed her the MS. of his first volume which begins so magnificently with the objectivities of revealed religion, with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. 'Ah, Herr Professor,' she said, 'why do you spend your time on such things? Why don't you write about the new life of the children of God?' And when, a few months ago in London, Karl Barth spoke of the new truths he had learned in recent years, he came very near to saying something which he might have learned from a Methodist housemaid who knew what it was to cry with Charles Wesley:

*And shall the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?*

Between us and the eighteenth century lie 150 years of history—and what crowded, tumultuous history, what wars and revolutions, what vast changes in the mind of men! The great ages of political and social revolution, the new learning in science and history and Biblical criticism, the new forms of Churchmanship in Victorian Nonconformity and in the Free Church Alliance and in the movements in the Church of England and the Church of Rome—all these

were taking place when the self-contained world of Methodist thought was slowly becoming more aware of and sensitive to outside currents of thought and influence. We must at least face the possibility that the religion of modern Methodists bears more deeply the stamp of these things than of the original Methodism of the Wesleys. It is one of the clues to Protestant existence that it lies close to new currents of historic influence, is deeply sensitive to them, and is in danger of being tossed about by every new wind of doctrine. There are in that nineteenth century, moreover, important 'insights', Biblical insights, which we seek in vain in eighteenth-century religion.

There is in Luther much which is of beauty and value about a theology of the natural, and more than most people think about natural law. But it is in the nineteenth century, in Frederick Denison Maurice and his friends, that there is a return to the doctrines of Colossians and Ephesians, to a doctrine of Christ as the Head of the whole human race and the inspirer of all truth wherever it may be found, which, it seems to me, alone offers a theology of reconciliation to the estranged traditions of truth and justice in the modern world. I think we may say, that though this is not explicit in our inheritance, it is congruous with it, and that Scott Lidgett was right in finding in it something congruous with the temper of John Wesley and with the stresses of evangelical Arminianism. Similarly with Christian Perfection. With due deference to Dr Baker, I do not think the search for a corporate application of Christian Perfection is a logical inference of Wesley's doctrine. I think that when Dr Dale raised this question, he put us on a new and fruitful but essentially nineteenth- and twentieth-century line, though such exploration of the Christian ethic of love is of course congruous with the whole of Wesley's notion of salvation; but it would be better to seek it in the New Testament, and in Biblical theology rather than in Mr Wesley's *Plain account of Christian Perfection*.

So there are perhaps two words of Scripture which apply to us as we turn towards the future—the first the word from the Old Testament about possessing our possessions; the second from the New Testament, that we are to look not on our own things but on the things of others. Of all the great Protestant Churches, we and the Baptists, because of our freedom from state control, face in this age the deadly temptation to become and complacently remain great World Sects. Recently, in a fine and important study of the Church of England and its failure to win the working classes of our great Industrial cities, Canon Wickham pays tribute to Methodism; he finds in the flexibility of its evangelism, in the close solidarity of the class meeting, in its use of the laity, clues to the way in which in our time the Church must go forward. On the Continent, through the Church struggles of our time, the state Churches are learning to value the confessing, witnessing fellowship of believers; and when Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller speak of it, how tempting it is to say: 'Ah yes, at last you are coming to understand what we Free Churchmen, we Methodists, have known all along.' How easy it would be to take Canon Wickham's tribute and say, 'Ah yes, we Methodists have the clues', when we have them no longer, and when instead of patting ourselves on the back in our Ecumenical Methodist conferences we ought to be on our knees because we have let our house get into such grievous disrepair, on our knees with the grave and poignant cry: Can a man be born again when he is old? We have to earn our inheritance, to learn it

afresh and possess it anew. We need to nourish dogmatic thought, but even more to give heed to our spiritual and moral theology, and to remember that Wesley's *Christian Library* was like that of the Benedictine order, 'lectio divina', practical divinity able to build and edify the soul, at a time when the Free Churches are being out-prayed by the Anglicans and the Protestants are being out-prayed by the Church of Rome. Here, English Methodism owes a debt to, and should look to, its deaconess order, whose theological training is superior to that of the ministry in respect of prayer and the life of the soul—and we might remember that it was through congregations of devout women that the great mystical treasures of the medieval Church were preserved and handed down, and ask ourselves whether our women's movements do not need pointing to a deeper level than that of Women's Fellowships and Young Wives' Clubs.

We are to possess our possessions because we are looking, not only on our own things, but also on the things of others. This is a time when many of the traditions of many Churches are losing vitality, and when we need blood transfusion from one another. One of the deepest impulses of the ecumenical movement is the awareness of new enrichment which comes when separated Churches share together, in some new and living way, the gifts God gave their fathers. We have many things to offer to our separated brethren. Let us remember what we said at the beginning: what is distinctive is our history; what we have to give is, in the end, ourselves, for what are separated are not ideas and liturgies and institutions, but living companies of men and women. At our 1958 Conference in Newcastle we had been talking rather cagily and defensively, all of us, about relations with the Church of England, assuring one another that whatever happened we would not sell the pass. And then the Bishop of Newcastle came and shocked us into silence by telling how he had come from Lambeth where leaders of the Church of England had been talking of how their Church might die that the wider Church may live.

The whole life and history of Methodism constitute a treasure of the Church, but let us not idolize it or suppose that it must go on in history for all time. Let us realize that in history Churches have their day and cease to be. If it ever happens that Methodism becomes part of the past, like the seven Churches of Asia Minor, the Spirit will still be speaking to the Churches in other ways, and giving bounteous gifts. It may be that we are still at the beginning of Church history; it may be that what God waits to do for the Church in the future will far eclipse all the great things all the Churches have seen and enjoyed.

So in God's good time, as Dr Hildebrandt would say, we may make way for a greater Church. That will be a moment not of failure but of joy—not because, tired and old, we have petered out, but because, led by God, we await new energies from His creative Spirit. There was a day in the nineteenth century when a ship was towed down to Greenwich to be broken up—one of Nelson's ships of the line, second to the *Victory* at Trafalgar—now no guns, no sails, one of the wooden walls of eighteenth-century England towed by a smoky tug-boat, sign of a new age, in the red afternoon sun. And as it passed out of history, it re-entered it in a new way. Slowly it passed along the river, held in the eye and imagination of a great genius, and in the skill of J. M. W. Turner's famous painting, the *Fighting Temeraire* found a new life, a new perpetuation of its existence as an inspiration to coming days. What matters in Church history is

not man's experience of God, but Christ's experience of us. Our history is distinctive; but it is part of His history. He is the one who has experienced the whole from the very first.

He followed as a Rock His pilgrim people through all their wanderings in the desert; despite all their backslidings and their disobedience He came to them, and ruled them as a Shepherd King, faithfully, prudently, with all His power. In Him history and faith were one; for He was born, He suffered, He died, He rose again.

Last Sunday, after spending all day in Wesley's room in Lincoln College, and in moments trying to remind myself that this was after all our 'Montgomery caravan' where Wesley lived and thought and planned, I went to the Lord's table in Wesley Memorial Church and got my perspective right. Wesley Memorial—but the Lord of the Church is alive. And what we did in remembrance of Him at the table we did in His memory—who has known all His scattered companies from the beginning of their ways. Blest be the tie that binds, for it is the love of the Triune God which was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. *Amen.*

E. GORDON RUPP
