

Chapter 8

METHODISM AND THE APOSTOLIC FAITH

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It is tempting simply to declare that Methodism's best contribution to the World Council of Churches study on the Apostolic Faith would be to sit still and listen. But denominational honor requires that we participate more actively. The hope must be that the exercise will prove mutually beneficial to ourselves and to other participants.

The present chapter will correspondingly unfold in three stages. In the first part, we shall examine what Methodism might receive from the WCC Faith and Order project as it has been set up and is developing. In the second part, we shall suggest how Methodism might add to the project. In the third part, we shall try to discern more synthetically some possible results from the engagement in a common process.

In examining, in the first part, the Faith and Order program, we shall find the Apostolic Faith study to be marked by four characteristics that need to be restamped on contemporary Methodism. The study is: (a) creedal; (b) trinitarian; (c) ecumenical; (d) homological, that is, in the service of confessing the faith. These same four points will then also be used to structure Methodism's own potential contribution to the project (part two), and to discern some elements in a desired synthesis (part three).

In suggesting, in the second part, an authentic Methodist contribution to the project, we shall take as our paradigm John Wesley's "Letter to a Roman Catholic" of 1749. As is well known, this "olive branch," as Albert Outler calls it,¹ is not all that Wesley had to offer to the Romans: he could be polemical as well as irenic, as may be seen in "A Roman Catechism faithfully drawn out of the allowed writings of the Church of Rome, with a Reply thereto."² Nor is it claimed that Wesley was interested in relations with Roman Catholics to the exclusion of others. Our choice of paradigm depends on the fact that, in setting out "the faith of a true Protestant," Wesley proceeded by way of an expansion upon the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed, the very procedure being followed in the Faith and Order study. The wider range of Wesley's ecumenical interests will be represented

by our drawing also on his more generally intended sermon of 1750 on a "catholic spirit" (where the c is lower case).³

In the third, and more synthetic, part, we shall declare our desire that, in the give and take of study and the common pursuit, Methodism may be reconfirmed in a faith which is scriptural, patristic, Wesleyan, and (we hope) synchronically ecumenical. By its active and receptive participation in the Faith and Order project, Methodism may perhaps recover its Wesleyan heritage where we have abandoned it, reenter the catholic path where we have strayed from it, and maintain or restore Wesleyan impulses where the broader Christian Tradition needs them.

I. The Apostolic Faith Study

The current state of the WCC project "Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today" is represented in Faith and Order Paper No. 140, a study document which bears the title "*Confessing One Faith: Towards an Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as Expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*."⁴ The words I have underlined, coupled with the fact that the councils of Nicea and Constantinople settled precisely the *trinitarian* faith of the church, provide the four characteristics highlighted in our description. The project is, first, creedal.

1. *Creedal*

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (NC), not to the exclusion of the Apostles' Creed, is taken as "the theological basis and methodological tool for the explication of the apostolic faith."⁵ The creed was chosen for these purposes after a lengthy debate involving such questions as: (a) Why not simply take the Scriptures? (b) Why fix on such an antique formulation as part of confessing the faith today? (c) Why be bound to a form that some have experienced as authoritarian? Answers were reached along the following lines respectively:

(a) The decision was taken in the conviction that this Creed represents "an exemplary and authentic summary of the apostolic faith"⁶, "the same apostolic faith that was expressed in Holy Scriptures and summarized in the Creeds of the Early Church."⁷ The councils of the fourth century would have preferred to stick entirely to scriptural language but needed to include a minimum of other terminology (e.g., the *homoousion*) in order to reject mistaken interpretations of the biblical witness. In any case, in the present project each phrase of NC has its "biblical foundation" carefully laid out.⁸

(b) "The decision was also taken in the recognition that the Nicene Creed served as an expression of unity of the early church and is, therefore, also of great importance for our contemporary quest for the unity of

Christ's Church."⁹ The project is thus employing NC as part of the recognized ecumenical technique of getting back behind divisions to common ground, of rediscovering and reappropriating "common roots."¹⁰ This procedure has enjoyed considerable success in the liturgical movement of our century and in such doctrinal convergences as are expressed in the Lima document on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."¹¹

(c) An anecdote may help. A Jamaican Baptist began by expressing all the suspicions which his cultural and denominational background would naturally lead him to entertain towards the "Greek metaphysical" vocabulary and "imperially oppressive" uses of NC; but he came to value its substantial affirmation of the deity and sovereignty of Christ over against theological liberalism.

As Methodists, we need to recover our credal inheritance, and participation in the Faith and Order project can help us to do so. It is true that Wesley omitted Article VIII ("Of the Three Creeds") in his selection of the Anglican Articles for American Methodism (we know that he particularly disliked the damnatory clauses of the so-called Athanasian Creed), and that he removed NC in his abridgement of the Prayer Book communion order in *The Sunday Service*. He had, however, no quarrel with the substance of NC, as we shall see; and he retained the Apostles' Creed in his American service book. The "inheritance of the apostolic faith" and "the fundamental principles of the historic creeds" are part of the constitutional basis of the British Methodist Church. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds figure in the current liturgical books of Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic and in many other parts of the world. We should make better use of them, both in the recitation of them, as a "performative act" of our faith, and in the evangelistic and catechetical tasks of *explicating* the faith (the need for which the WCC study fully recognizes).

2. Trinitarian

The Faith and Order project is necessarily trinitarian if it follows NC in substance and in structure. For the council of Nicea declared the Son of the Father to be "true God from true God," and the council of Constantinople proclaimed the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit who is worshiped and adored with the Father and the Son. And NC follows the threefold pattern common to creeds based on the baptismal interrogations that match the triune Name.

The tripartite structure of "Confessing One Faith" is in fact as follows:

- I. We believe in one God
- II. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ
- III. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the life of the world to come.

Substantially, the text stresses the oneness of God, which is a unity of tripersonal communion, with the First Person as "the eternal source of that living trinitarian communion of love."¹² It is insisted that the Father is always the Father of the Son, and the Son is always the Son of the Father;¹³ and the only Holy Spirit is "the Spirit [who] belongs to the eternal being of the Trinity" and is never "dissociated . . . from the work of Christ in the economy of God's salvation."¹⁴

The *doctrine* of the Trinity, as bound to the *reality* of the Trinity, is vital to our knowledge of God and to our salvation. As Athanasius and the Cappadocians argued at the various stages of the Arian controversy: only God can reveal God, only God can redeem, and only God can give participation in God. In our time and place, Methodists must not acquiesce in, let alone create, patterns of understanding, speech, and prayer that some are proposing in an effort to overcome "patriarchy" but which in fact threaten the Trinity.

Quite apart from the difficulty of principle in knowing whether one has lighted on a formulation just as good as, or now even preferable to, the divine Name used by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament, the alternatives or substitutes concretely proposed appear unsatisfactory in the light of the Christian doctrinal tradition. "Creator, Christ and Spirit" has an Arian ring; and, by reducing Christ and the Spirit to creatures, we should, as Athanasius and the Cappadocians argued, be undermining our salvation. "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer" sounds Sabellian and is in any case purely functional, forfeiting the internal divine communion in which salvation gives us a share. Even at his most "catholic spirited," Wesley refused his hand to Arians, semi-Arians, Socinians, and Deists, for their heart was not right with his heart.¹⁵

A denomination which in practice allows baptisms to be performed under a divine name changed at the discretion of the minister or the candidate will, in the longer historical term and on the wider geographical scene, eventually bring all its baptisms into disrepute. This appears to be the danger in which the United Methodist Church in the United States finds itself at the moment.¹⁶ Nor is it a matter of baptism alone, fundamental as that is. An isolated use of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" in baptism would lead to its becoming a petrified, or even a magical, formula. Father, Son and Holy Spirit need to be named as the story is told, as the word is preached, as candidates are baptized, as the congregation prays, as the eucharist is offered, as ministers are ordained, and as the people are blessed. As Methodists in America, we in particular need to regain the confidence to do that.

3. *Ecumenical*

The Faith and Order project also grounds its employment of NC in (a) widespread existing usage, and (b) the ecumenical aim:

(a) NC is "officially recognized and used by many churches within the ecumenical movement"; "the main content" of NC and the Apostles' Creed "is also present in the thinking and life of churches which do not explicitly recognize these Creeds or use them in their teaching and worship."¹⁷ Here again the study is following a familiar principle in ecumenical work, this time that of building on what the churches already have in common. The need now is for what is called, in an ungainly expression, the "re-reception" of the ancient creeds. For that reason, the *explication* of the creeds is important, even internally to the Christian community, let alone vis-a-vis the world (a point to which I shall return).

(b) The aim of the Faith and Order project is ecumenical in the classical sense of the ecumenical movement. "It serves the primary function and purpose of the WCC 'to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship' [*Constitution of the WCC*, III.1]. The common confession of the apostolic faith is one of the essential conditions and elements of visible unity."¹⁸

As Methodists we should not jettison what we already hold in common with other Christians, either for the sake of emphasizing a "specific difference" or for the sake of a new will-o'-the-wisp that might bring us closer to other revisionists while severing the ties that bind us to the continuing historic Tradition. Rather we should find our strength in unity with others who hold fast to common Christianity.

As Methodists, again, we need to recommit ourselves to the goal of unity, "visible unity" as the 1986 Nairobi Report of the Joint Commission between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church puts it; and to the search for appropriate models and means to realize that unity. In the 1970s and 1980s, British Methodists were frustrated by failures in the plans for reunion with the Church of England and for a covenant with other churches in England; American Methodists show little enthusiasm for the various proposals that have emerged from the Consultation on Church Union (COCU). What lessons, positive and negative, are to be drawn from Methodist participation in the United Church of Canada, the Church of South India, the Uniting Church in Australia? How are we to respect both the truly local and the truly universal dimensions of the unity to which the church is called? In any case, agreement "in the faith" is required for visible unity; and NC, as a common global text for common particular explication, appears to provide the best hope for progress in that direction.

4. Homological

In the title of the Faith and Order project, the broader term “common expression” is employed, but the elemental form of expression is the *confession* of the faith. Common confession of the faith is needed for united worship, life and mission. Made both *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*, confession is at once (a) doxological, (b) evangelistic, and (c) ethical, in intention and scope. The Faith and Order document brings this out:

(a) The commentary to I/10 speaks of “the mystery of the triune God celebrated in the liturgy of the Church.” Under pneumatology and ecclesiology, the doxological vision is extended to what the Orthodox have taken to calling “the liturgy after the Liturgy”:

Christians, therefore, glorify the triune God through prayer, common worship and the *daily service which is their acceptable sacrifice* (cf. Rom. 12:1f.).¹⁹

The Church is the eucharistic community . . . whose basic calling is the glorification of the triune God in worship and service.²⁰

(b) The WCC study shows a strong awareness that the apostolic faith expressed in NC has to be “explicated” in relation to the “challenges”—perennial and contemporary—that it faces. In appropriate circumstances, evangelism may be served either by direct proclamation of the gospel, or by apologetic, or by learning from outside critiques.

(c) The explication exemplified in Faith and Order Paper 140 also relates “doctrinal affirmations to ethical problems.”²¹ Thus the project is linked to other ecumenical concerns for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.

As Methodists, we need to recover the Wesleyan fusion of confession *coram Deo* and *coram hominibus*. One of the most remarkable features of the Wesleyan revival was in fact the combination of hymnography, eucharistic observance, evangelistic preaching, changed lives, and charitable action.

II. The Wesleyan Paradigm

Apart from a few ill-formulated sentences scattered in his writings, Wesley did not minimize orthodoxy of belief. When he writes, for instance, that “orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at best a slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part at all,”²² it must be remembered, first, that Wesley was prepared to “think and let think” only in those matters of theological “opinion” that did not “strike at the root of Christianity;”²³ and second, that orthodoxy in the stricter sense of doctrine was, for Wesley, not so much unnecessary as insufficient—if it was not believed, experienced, and lived.

1. Creedal

Attention to Wesley could help the Faith and Order project to keep together “the faith which is believed” and “the faith which believes,” the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur*. Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (LRC) first sets out the *content* of “the faith of a true Protestant,” and then goes on to the *attitude, act, and conduct* of faith.²⁴

That Wesley’s substantive statement of faith is based on NC, rather than the Apostles’ Creed alone, receives confirmation at several points:

- The fuller form of “one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible” appears to provide more ground for Wesley’s “I believe that this one God is the Father of all things, especially of angels and men”; and it may even be that the Greek παντοκράτορα, rather than the Latin *omnipotentem*, stands behind Wesley’s ensuing “I believe this Father of all not only to be able to do whatsoever pleaseth him but also to have an eternal right of making what and when and how he pleaseth; and of possessing and disposing of all that he has made; and that he of his own goodness created heaven and earth, and all that is therein.”²⁵
- The Nicene phrases concerning the eternity and consubstantiality of the Son are repeated in Wesley’s “the Father of his only Son, whom he hath begotten from eternity,”²⁶ “the proper, natural Son of God, God of God, very God of very God.”²⁷
- The Nicene “who for us human beings and for our salvation” is expanded by Wesley’s reference to the threefold office, prophet, priest and king, of “the Saviour of the world.”²⁸
- The Nicene σαρκῶθεντα is given Chalcedonian precision by Wesley’s “I believe that he was made man, joining the human nature with the divine in one person, being conceived by the singular operation of the Holy Ghost and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”²⁹
- When Wesley explicitly makes the Spirit “equal with the Father and the Son,”³⁰ he is benefiting from the council of Constantinople.

Then Wesley describes the *fides qua creditur* in this way:

A true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in his mercy, fears him with a filial fear, and loves him with all his soul. He worships God in spirit and in truth, in everything gives him thanks, calls upon him with his heart as well as his lips, at all times and in all places, honours his holy Name and his Word, and serves him truly all the days of his life.³¹

The integration of the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur* is even more clearly and powerfully expressed in the sermon on "Catholic Spirit," when he sets out in section I what he means by the question "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?"³²

12. Is thy heart right with God? Dost thou believe his being and his perfections, his eternity, immensity, wisdom, power, his justice, mercy and truth? Dost thou believe that he now "upholdeth all things by the word of his power" [Heb. 1:3], and that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory and the good of them that love him [cf. Rom. 8:28]? Hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction, of the things of God [cf. Heb. 11:1]? Dost thou "walk by faith, not by sight," looking not at temporal things but things eternal [2 Cor. 5:7; cf. 4:18]?

13. Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "God over all, blessed for ever" [Rom. 9:5]? Is he revealed in thy soul [cf. Gal. 1:15]? Dost thou "know Jesus Christ and him crucified" [1 Cor. 2:2]? Does he "dwell in thee and thou in him" [1 John 4:13, 15]? Is he "formed in thy heart by faith" [Gal. 4:19; cf. Eph. 3:17]? Having absolutely disclaimed all thy own works, thy own righteousness, hast thou "submitted thyself unto the righteousness of God" [Rom. 10:3], which is by faith in Christ Jesus? Art thou "found in him, not having thy own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith" [Phil. 3:9]? And art thou, through him, "fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life" [1 Tim. 6:12]?

14. Is thy faith *ἐνεργουμένη δι' ἀγάπης*, "filled with the energy of love" [Gal. 5:6]? Dost thou love God—I do not say "above all things," for it is both an unscriptural and ambiguous expression, but—"with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength" [Luke 10:27]? Dost thou seek all thy happiness in him alone? And dost thou find what thou seekest [cf. Matt. 7:8]? Does thy soul continually "magnify the Lord, and thy spirit rejoice in God thy Saviour" [Luke 1:46f.]? Having learned "in everything to give thanks" [1 Thess. 5:18], dost thou find "it is a joyful and pleasant thing to be thankful" [Ps. 147:1]? Is God the centre of thy soul, the sum of all thy desires? Art thou accordingly "laying up" thy "treasure in heaven" [Matt. 6:20] and "counting all things else dung" and dross [Phil. 3:8]? Hath the love of God cast the love of the world out of thy soul? Then thou art "crucified to the world" [Gal. 6:14]; thou art dead to all below and thy "life is hid with Christ in God" [Col. 3:3].³³

The trinitarian structure of these three paragraphs is clear, particularly when it is remembered, in connection with paragraph 14, that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). Wesley then continues in similar vein with questions concerning the service of God, love of neighbor, and good works.³⁴

2. Trinitarian

Wesley refused to speculate on *how*, while firmly believing *that* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. Although he sometimes hesitated to impose the terms “person” and “Trinity” (apparently on account of their not being directly scriptural), he knew that the game would be lost with a surrender to mere functionalism: “The quaint device of styling them three offices rather than persons,” he wrote to Jane Catherine March on August 3, 1771, “gives up the whole doctrine.”³⁵ Wesley knew that the divine work in the world, the experience of believers, and the final kingdom all found their basis and implicate in the ontological reality of “the Three-One God.”

Wesley’s trinitarian preaching carries a strong soteriological interest. Listen to a sermon of 1775 directly “On the Trinity,” in which he shows how “knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion”:

I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till “he hath” (as St. John speaks) “the witness in himself”; till “the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God”—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit “even as he honours the Father.” Not every Christian believer *advert*s to this; perhaps at first not one in twenty; but if you ask any of them a few questions you will easily find it is implied in what he believes.³⁶

And again, in the final salvation envisioned in a sermon of 1785 on “The New Creation”:

And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him.³⁷

In Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” this soteriological dimension of the doctrine and reality of the Trinity comes to the fore already in the exposition of the first article of NC:

I believe that this one God . . . is in a peculiar manner the Father of those whom he regenerates by his Spirit, whom he adopts in his Son as coheirs with him and crowns with an eternal inheritance.³⁸

The insertion of the *munus triplex* in the second article has already been referred to:

I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Saviour of the world, the Messiah so long foretold; that, being anointed with the Holy Ghost, he was a *prophet*, revealing to us the whole will of God; that he was a *priest*, who gave himself a sacrifice for sin, and still makes intercession for transgressors; that he is a *king*,

who has all power in heaven and in earth, and will reign till he has subdued all things to himself.³⁹

Christ's sovereignty is likewise presented soteriologically:

I believe . . . that he is Lord of all, having absolute, supreme, universal dominion over all things; but more particularly *our* Lord (who believe in him), both by conquest, purchase, and voluntary obligation.⁴⁰

The soteriological orientation of Wesley's confession concerning the Holy Spirit will appear in a moment.

In Faith and Order Paper 140, the soteriological orientation of the exposition of the second article emerges clearly from the titles of the sections on the Son:

- A. Jesus Christ, incarnate for our salvation
- B. Jesus Christ, suffering and crucified for us
- C. Jesus Christ, risen to overcome evil powers.

Perhaps the explication concerning the Holy Spirit could be clearer in its soteriology, not only in the paragraph headings but in the substantive connections made between the divine ontology and human salvation. True, the ecclesiological section includes a paragraph on the church as "communion of saints in the Spirit." But many Evangelicals, and not they alone, would be helped by a corresponding emphasis on the direct work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and lives of believers. Wesley shows the way in *LRC*:

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us: enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adopted of sons, leading us in our actions, purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.⁴¹

3. *Ecumenical*

Wesley's *LRC* can set an example for the conduct of the Faith and Order dialogue in at least three ways:

(a) The *human, and Christian, respect and concern* which are shown towards one's conversation partners. Wesley considered the Roman Catholic Church to be in doctrinal error on a number of important points; but he could at times regard it as at least *part* of the church catholic, and certainly he recognized individual Roman Catholics as Christian. In *LRC* Wesley grounds his regard for his interlocutor not only in the universally creative and redemptive work of God but also in the Christian intention of serious Roman Catholics:

I think you deserve the tenderest regard I can show, were it only because the same God hath raised you and me from the dust of the earth and has made us both capable of loving and enjoying him to eternity; were it only because the Son of God has bought you and me with his own blood. How much more, if you are a person fearing God (as without question many of you are) and studying to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man?⁴²

The partners ought at the least never to hurt one another deliberately, either in deed, word, or thought:

In the name, then, and in the strength of God, let us resolve first, not to hurt one another, to do nothing unkind or unfriendly to each other, nothing which we would not have done to ourselves. Rather let us endeavour after every instance of a kind, friendly and Christian behaviour towards each other.

Let us resolve, secondly, God being our helper, to speak nothing harsh or unkind of each other. The sure way to avoid this is to say all the good we can, both of and to one another; in all our conversation, either with or concerning each other, to use only the language of love. . . .

Let us, thirdly, resolve to harbour no unkind thought, no unfriendly temper towards each other. Let us lay the axe to the root of the tree, let us examine all that rises in our heart and suffer no disposition there which is contrary to tender affection.⁴³

More positively yet:

If God still loveth us, we ought also to love one another. We ought . . . to provoke one another to love and to good works.⁴⁴

The goal is eschatological:

Let us . . . endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom.⁴⁵

I hope to see *you* in heaven.⁴⁶

(b) Wesley sets a *methodological and hermeneutical principle* by his distinction between vital “doctrines,” on the one hand, and the “opinions” on which theological schools may differ as long as they do so on the same basis of faith. “I say not a word to you about your opinions,” writes Wesley to the Roman Catholic⁴⁷ and calls for a stop to the “endless jangling about opinions.”⁴⁸ True, the distinction between doctrine and opinion is not always easy to make; but all Christian traditions do in fact make such distinctions *within* their own fellowship (e.g., Molinists vs. Thomists within the Roman Catholic Church), and there is no reason why the propriety and inevitability of making such distinctions should not be recognized *across* confessional boundaries from the very start of the search for agreement in the faith.

Similarly, Wesley allows variety in “outward manner of worship” in a way which would allow diversity of “rites” within a single communion:

Be your form of worship what it will, but in every thing give him thanks; else it is all but lost labour. Use whatever outward observances you please, but put your whole trust in him, but honour his holy Name and his Word, and serve him truly all the days of your life.⁴⁹

Again, it is not always easy to draw the limits of possible and welcome variety within a worship that is to remain solidly scriptural and trinitarian; but distinctions of the kind that were made between doctrine and opinion with respect to the “lex credendi” are surely allowable between, say, a sacrament and the ceremonial manner of its observance in the “lex orandi.”

(c) ~~There is the matter of openness to other traditions.~~ Wesley was prepared to make what may at first blush appear to be “accommodations,” even in matters of significant doctrine and practice; but it could well turn out that Wesley was bringing forward in dialogue with the Roman Catholic certain items that had not entirely disappeared from Protestantism, and whose recovery might even now help Methodism’s settlement in the catholic tradition in both East and West. Thus he confesses Christ to be “born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, as well after as before she brought him forth, continued a pure and unspotted virgin.”⁵⁰ And he believes that Christians “have fellowship with the holy angels who constantly minister to these heirs of salvation, and with all the living members of Christ on earth, as well as all who are departed this life in his faith and fear.”⁵¹ Participants in the Faith and Order study on the Apostolic Faith should be willing to open themselves to treasures that have been better preserved, insights that have been more vitally lived, in other parts of the great Christian Tradition than their own.

4. Homological

Wesley’s *LRC* instantiates the same three aspects of confessing the faith as we noted in Faith and Order Paper 140: (a) doxological; (b) evangelistic; (c) ethical. Wesley’s example and exhortations concerning process and goal could be heeded by all participants in the WCC project:

(a) with regard to glorifying God:

All worship is an abomination to the Lord unless you worship him in spirit and in truth, with your heart as well as your lips, with your spirit and your understanding also.⁵²

Do you do all as unto the Lord, as a sacrifice unto God, acceptable in Christ Jesus?⁵³

(b) All Wesley's evangelistic activity is set under the initiative of the *missio Dei* and the free grace of God, as confessed by Wesley to the Roman Catholic:

I believe that Christ and his Apostles gathered unto himself a church to which he has continually added such as shall be saved. . . .⁵⁴

I believe that God forgives all the sins of them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel. . . .⁵⁵

Evangelism was not directly Wesley's theme in writing to the Roman Catholic, but it is interesting for Faith and Order purposes that his language in the Letter may at times reflect an awareness of contemporary philosophico-theological controversies, if not an apologetic intent. In the century of the Enlightenment, he precedes his credo with a subordinate clause: "As I am assured that there is an infinite and independent Being and that it is impossible that there should be more than one, so I believe that this one God is [the Holy Trinity]."⁵⁶ The same issues live on in the efforts of Faith and Order Paper 140 to situate the God confessed by Christians in relation to Judaism, to Islam, to the religious search of humankind, to idolatry, and to atheism.⁵⁷

(c) Wesley writes that "a true Protestant loves his neighbour (that is, every man, friend or enemy, good or bad) as himself, as he loves himself, as he loves his own soul, as Christ loved us. And as Christ laid down his life for us, so he is ready to lay down his life for his brethren."⁵⁸ It is important that the WCC, in its battle against systemic evil, should not neglect to address the sanctification of the believer as part of Christian witness. If the dimension of personal conduct finds little place in the present study, many Evangelicals, and not they alone, will find it difficult to recognize the description of the apostolic faith.

III. Hopes For Unity

We saw, first, some needs of contemporary Methodism, which participation in the Apostolic Faith project might help to meet. We offered, second, a Wesleyan paradigm which might both encourage Methodist participation in the Faith and Order study and provide substantive and procedural help for the whole project. In this third part, it is now time to express more synthetically some further hopes concerning the results of the Faith and Order exercise for both Methodism and the church universal.

1. *Creedal*

The focus on the creeds allows an understanding and practice of the relation between Scripture and Tradition in ways that were convergently

expressed by the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal in 1963 and the near-simultaneous Vatican II text on "Divine Revelation" (*Dei Verbum*). Scripture was there understood as the internal norm of Tradition, and Tradition as the immediate interpretative context of Scripture. Now, the traditional creeds are grounded in the same apostolic faith as comes to expression in the Scriptures:

- they provide a summary of the biblical story of creation, redemption, and consummation;
- they clarify the implied ontological basis of the story in the reality of God;
- they engage the believing church in the transmission of the story and the reality through reception and proclamation.

Thus the creeds and the study of them provide both content and methodological model for all controversial questions where the relation of Scripture and Tradition is at stake.

Participation in the present project should help all partners to understand better (certainly some Methodist responses show a lack in this regard) the procedures that were followed in producing the Lima text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and perhaps to improve on the results achieved in the Lima document. The kind of interplay between Scripture and Tradition represented by the Apostolic Faith study should prove fundamentally congenial to Methodists. That Wesley was "a man of one book" (*homo unius libri*), namely the Scriptures, does not indicate a "boundary of his reading" so much as "the center of gravity in his thinking."⁵⁹ He sought thereby to live in the continuing Tradition of the apostolic faith. The credal basis and method of the Faith and Order project should allow the churches to grow together into a commonly accepted understanding and practice of Scripture and Tradition.

2. Trinitarian

The trinitarian shape and content of the WCC project brings us to the most vital point of action at the level of fundamental faith. The signs are that the doctrine of the Trinity is becoming once again, as it was in the fourth century, the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. For the doctrine expresses who the God is, who is the source, sustenance and goal of the redemption of humankind. At stake is the identity of God, and the nature of God's presence and action in the world.

To take only one case: Western liberal Christianity, or in U.S. terms the "mainline churches," are for various reasons in danger of losing their grasp on the understanding and practice of the Triune God. Evidence can be found in recent liturgical compositions. The 1986 *Book of Worship* of the

United Church of Christ practically limits the use of the scriptural and traditional name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to baptism. The successive revisions leading to the United Methodist *Book of Services* (1985) manifest an increasingly feeble grasp of the Trinity (although, happily, the 1989 *Hymnal* fares better). The same is true of the "Supplemental Liturgical Resources" in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (although, as an invited advisor, I was able to restore a few modest trinitarian references in the eucharistic prayers for *The Service for the Lord's Day* of 1984).

To touch on the most neuralgic point: the Faith and Order text, while sensitive to the motherly as well as the fatherly aspects of God's care for us, roundly declares:

In Jesus' language about God, "Father" is not only an image, it is primarily the *name* of the God to whom he relates in his mission and whose kingdom he proclaims. It is the name used to address God in prayer. In its function as a name, the name of God in Jesus' own teaching and prayer, the word "Father" cannot be replaced by another one. It would no longer be the God of Jesus to whom we relate if we were to exclude the name Jesus himself used.⁶⁰

Deeper reflection in the context of the ecumenical study might help the truly liberating character of God to emerge from the overlay of obfuscating and oppressive practices of "patriarchalism":

Paul indicates that God is our Father because he is first the Father of Jesus, who graciously allows us to share by adoption in that unique Father-Son relationship. Furthermore, it is the Spirit who unites us with the Son and who sets us free as his sisters and brothers, to call God "Abba." What Paul says of "sons" he says also of daughters (2 Cor. 6:16–18): communion with the Father is open to all human beings without differentiation (cf. Rom. 8:14–15; Gal. 4:6).⁶¹

This, again, should be congenial to Methodists. For Wesley, "adoption" was a major soteriological category. To call God "Abba, Father" was the privilege of believers, not an alien imposition. One of the Wesleys' greatest hymns, dating from the *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1739, runs as follows:

Since the Son hath made me free,
Let me taste my liberty;
Thee behold with open face,
Triumph in thy saving grace,
Thy great will delight to prove,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Abba, Father, hear thy child,
Late in Jesus reconciled;
Hear, and all the graces shower,
All the joy, and peace, and power,
All my Saviour asks above,
All the life and heaven of love.

Heavenly Adam, Life divine,
Change my nature into thine;
Move and spread throughout my soul,
Actuate and fill the whole;
Be it I no longer now
Living in the flesh, but thou.

Holy Ghost, no more delay;
Come, and in thy temple stay;
Now thine inward witness bear,
Strong, and permanent, and clear;
Spring of life, thyself impart,
Rise eternal in my heart.

3. Ecumenical

The Apostolic Faith study sets the wider dogmatic context for particular doctrinal discussions in Faith and Order—a context whose incapability was in fact recognized as early as the First World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927. Renewed attention to the full scope of Christian belief, as expressed in the creeds, would “correct” what some, including some Methodists, have felt to be the “narrow” sacramentalism of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. (Carefully read, *BEM* covers a wider dogmatic range, since the sacraments themselves are there shown to have—as, say, the Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* make clear—trinitarian, christological, ecclesiological and eschatological reference.)

The Apostolic Faith study is valuable, too, in so far as it provides the multilateral context needed to keep all the churches honest in their respective bilateral dialogues. It should prevent them from saying contradictory things to and with different partners. This is an important consideration for the World Methodist Council in its various dialogues with the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, and the Reformed.

Finally, the Apostolic Faith study should help all churches together to rediscover what Wesley understood by the *analogia fidei*, the “proportion of the faith”:—the place and connection of the main elements of belief within a range of patterns that are recognizably ecumenical in time and space.

4. Homological

By combining the doxological, kerygmatic and ethical components in the confession of faith, the WCC project should help to hold together the varying dominant interests of particular groups within Methodism and across the confessional board: the liturgical, the evangelistic, and the social-activist. This is vital to the integrity of a denominational tradition that looks to Wesley, and to the rounded prosecution of its calling by the whole church universal. We need to ensure that it is the *same faith* which is being confessed in the *various modes* of worship, mission and service.

Last of all, the gathering of Christians from the four winds around the theme of the Apostolic Faith should facilitate that proclamation and embodiment of the *one gospel in diverse cultural circumstances* which have been the aim of Christianity, and of Methodism, since their beginnings.

3. *The Ecumenical Review* 35/2 (1983), p. 211.
4. *Towards Visible Unity II*, pp. 32–44.
5. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Commission 1984*, Faith and Order Paper No. 121 (Geneva: WCC, 1984), p. 11–21.
6. *One God, One Lord, One Spirit*, ed. by H.-G. Link, Faith and Order Paper No. 139 (Geneva: WCC, 1988).
7. Faith and Order Paper No. 140 (Geneva: WCC, 1987).
8. Cf. *Confessing One Faith*, p. 3.
9. *Breaking Barriers*, ed. by David M. Paton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 66.
10. *Sharing In One Hope*. Bangalore 1978, Faith and Order Paper No. 92 (Geneva: WCC, 1978), pp. 1–11.
11. Faith and Order Paper No. 100 (Geneva: WCC, 1980).
12. *Spirit of God—Spirit of Christ*, Faith and Order Paper No. 103 (Geneva: WCC, 1981), pp. 3–18.
13. “*The Ecumenical Importance of the Nicene Creed*”, in: *Apostolic Faith Today*. A Handbook for Study, ed. by H.-G. Link, Faith and Order Paper No. 124, (Geneva: WCC, 1984), p. 245ff.

Chapter 8: Methodism and the Apostolic Faith

1. Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 492–99. *Works*, X:80–86.
2. *Works*, X:86–128. See also “Popery Calmly Considered,” *ibid.*, 140–58.
3. *Works*, V:492–504; *Sermons*, 2:81–95.
4. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1987.
5. *Ibid.*, Introduction paragraph 11.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, paragraph 8.
8. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 11–12.
9. *Ibid.*, paragraph 11.
10. *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.
11. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).
12. “Confessing One Faith,” I/18.
13. For example, *ibid.*, I/52; II/93.
14. *Ibid.*, III/180 and 188.
15. See the letter of July 3, 1756, to James Clark, *Letters* (Telford), III:182.
16. Since the writing of this chapter, the 1988 *Discipline* of the United Methodist Church now makes the welcome—and needed—stipulation that ordinations take place in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (paragraph 432), and the same is implied for baptism by the reference in paragraph 1214.3 to “The General Services of the Church.”
17. “Confessing One Faith,” Introduction, 11.
18. “Confessing One Faith,” Introduction, 4; cf. 6.
19. *Ibid.*, III/191.
20. *Ibid.*, III/213.
21. *Ibid.*, Introduction, 13.
22. From “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” in *Works*, VIII:249; cf. the postscript to the letter of July 3, 1756, cited above in note 15 (p. 183).
23. From “The Character of a Methodist,” in *Works*, VIII:340.
24. *Works*, X:80–6.
25. *Ibid.*, paragraph 6.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.

28. *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.
29. *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.
30. *Ibid.*, paragraph 8.
31. *Ibid.*, paragraph 13.
32. Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," paragraph 11, *Sermons*, 2:87.
33. *Ibid.*, paragraph 12–14, *Sermons*, 2:87–8.
34. *Works*, V:497f.; *Sermons*, 2:88f.
35. *Letters* (Telford), V:270.
36. *Works*, VI:205f.; Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," paragraphs 17–18, *Sermons*, 2:385.
37. *Works*, VI:296; Sermon 64, "The New Creation," paragraph 18, *Sermons*, 2:510.
38. *LRC*, paragraph 6, *Works*, X:81.
39. *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, paragraph 8.
42. *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.
43. *Ibid.*, paragraph 17.
44. *Ibid.*, paragraph 16.
45. *Ibid.*, paragraph 17.
46. *Ibid.*, paragraph 16.
47. *Ibid.*, paragraph 13.
48. *Ibid.*, paragraph 16.
49. *Ibid.*, paragraph 13.
50. *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.
51. *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.
52. *Ibid.*, paragraph 13.
53. *Ibid.*, paragraph 15.
54. *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.
55. *Ibid.*, paragraph 10.
56. *Ibid.*, paragraph 6.
57. "Confessing One Faith," I/6–8; 21–34.
58. *LRC*, paragraph 14.
59. G.C. Cell, as quoted by Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Francis and Taylor, 1988), p. 82.
60. "Confessing One Faith," I/51; cf. I/43.
61. *Ibid.*, I/44.

Chapter 9: Pluralism: The Relation of Theology to Religious Studies

1. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973); see also his later *God Has Many Names* (New York: Macmillan, 1980); *The Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), and "Religious Pluralism," in *The World's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honor of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984), pp. 154–64.
2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978); *Towards a World Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1981).
3. *Memoirs of Archbishop Temple*, ed. E.G. Sandford (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 54.
4. Tissington Tatlow, *The Story of the Student Christian Movement of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1933); H. Hans Hoekendijk, "Evangelisation of the World in This Generation," *International Review of Mission* (January 1970), pp. 23–31.
5. For an assessment of this see Part VI of Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920–1985* (London: Collins, 1986).
6. *God and the Universe of Faiths*, pp. 105 and 106.