

## Towards an Anglican Wesleyanism Today

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*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul,  
both sure and stedfast, and which entereth  
into that within the veil;  
Whither the forerunner is for us entered,  
even Jesus, made an high priest for ever  
after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 6:19-20 AV/KJV).*

*When darkness veils his lovely face,  
I rest on his unchanging grace.  
In every high and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds within the veil (Edward R. Mote, 1834).<sup>1</sup>*

For those of us in The United Methodist Church, the last few years have felt like a “high and stormy gale.” Most obviously, divisions within the denomination over issues of whether “self-avowed and practicing homosexuals” should be ordained or appointed and whether clergy can perform marriages or unions of same-sex couples have led to calling a special general conference to be held in February 2019 to deal solely with these issues.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), no. 368.

<sup>2</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶ 161G (p. 113), ¶ 304.3 (p. 226), ¶ 341.6 (p. 278), and ¶ 2702.1 (p. 788).

But these issues have raised larger questions about our unity within the denomination. To what extent is agreement with positions expressed in the “Social Principles” necessary for unity? Do the constitutionally-protected doctrinal statements *imply* a conservative or restrictive position with respect to gay ordinations and unions, even if these matters are *not explicitly* mentioned in these doctrinal standards? Fundamentally, the issue has come down to whether the enforcement of the denomination’s current and restrictive legislation on these matters is a point of necessary Christian unity.

In the midst of this denominational turmoil, I have been weathering a continuing “stormy gale” of discerning whether my own calling or vocation is the way of a Methodist with a strong proclivity towards the Anglican culture that John and Charles Wesley bequeathed to Methodists, or the way of an Anglican Christian with a strong proclivity towards the Wesleyan communal form of seeking Christian holiness. To this point in my life I have been fairly determined to pursue the former of these two ways, formed as I was by the ecumenical insights of Albert C. Outler and Geoffrey Wainwright and their particular take on John and Charles Wesley and Methodism as a religious movement within the *unam sanctam*. But the UMC 2016 General Conference’s overwhelming and repeated rejection of legislature to elevate the Nicene Creed to the position of a formal doctrinal standard within the denomination leaves me wondering if I should remain an Anglican-inclined Methodist, whether I should at last become a Wesleyan-inclined Anglican, and whether, in addition to either of these options, I should seek some other fellowship as a means of living as a Wesleyan-Anglican Christian today.

Despite all of these “high and stormy gale[s],” our “anchor holds within the veil,” that is, we are grounded in Christ’s incarnation as “the ground of our hope, and the promise

of our deliverance from sin and death.”<sup>3</sup> And in the very midst of personal and ecclesiastical turbulence, I have found encouragement for the possibilities of an Anglican Wesleyanism today. A collection of essays edited by Daniel Castelo, *Embodying Wesley's Catholic Spirit* (2017), contained a number of essays—many from representatives of more Evangelical institutions and Wesleyan church bodies—calling for renewed attention to the ecumenical and “catholic” dimensions of Wesleyanism.<sup>4</sup> As the title of Dan Castelo’s volume suggests, it is not Anglicanism *per se* that is the focus of these essays, but rather the broader inheritance of ancient and ecumenical faith that came to Wesleyanism by way of its Anglican roots. Another source of encouragement has been Facebook groups, some of which I myself initiated, that have offered a space for reflection on the catholic and Anglican inheritance of Wesleyan communities, and some concrete possibilities for a visible form of Anglican Wesleyanism today.

Building on these grounds for hope, this paper will ask **how we might envision an ecumenically- and denominationally-responsible form of Anglican Wesleyanism today focusing on those within Methodist and Anglican church bodies who share a common vision involving two and possibly three of the following components:**

1. ancient and ecumenically received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity;
2. the distinctly Wesleyan tradition of the cultivation of Christian holiness in groups organized around accountability to a rule of life that would entail a contemporary re-visioning of the Wesleyan “General Rules”; and possibly

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<sup>3</sup> From “A Modern Affirmation,” originally authored by Dr. Edwin Lewis; in *United Methodist Hymnal*, 885.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Castelo, ed., *Embodying Wesley's Catholic Spirit* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

3. distinctively Wesleyan forms of itinerant evangelism leading to the formation of new Christian communities sharing elements 1 and 2 above.

As we will see, the third item involves elements of early Methodism (like parish-invading itinerant preaching and the use of lay preachers, to mention just two matters) advocated by John Wesley, but to which Charles Wesley objected and from which Charles abstained from at least the 1750s, raising the question of the extent of the Methodist or Wesleyan components of a contemporary Wesleyan-Anglican form of Christian faith envisioned here. But I use the term “Anglican Wesleyanism” in what follows to denote the conjunction of the two or three elements named above.

In what follows I shall: 1) offer a rationale for thinking of the cultivation of holiness by accountability to a rule of life as the distinct contribution of early Methodism worth following today; 2) consider problems raised by John Wesley’s modifications and violations of Anglican Church culture (in contrast to Charles Wesley’s “Church Methodism”); 3) discuss existing structures for Anglican-Methodist unities and the ways in which these do and do not contribute to the possibility of an Anglican Wesleyanism today; 4) describe a contemporary proposal for a form of Anglican Wesleyanism today; 5) offer some further rationale for this proposal; and finally, discuss some remaining questions.

### **1. Early Methodism as a Movement for the Cultivation of Holiness within in an Anglican Ecclesial Context**

The claim that the distinct contribution of early Methodism worth following today was a movement for the cultivation of holiness within an Anglican ecclesial context is not without its challenges. Although American Methodists retained a core of Anglican liturgy, doctrine, and episcopal polity, by the end of the nineteenth century the surviving liturgical

core had been challenged and, in some cases, supplanted by extempore prayer and revivalistic forms of worship. In its growing tensions with the Holiness Movement, moreover, mainstream American Methodists (Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal, South) began to craft an image or what I identify as the icon of John Wesley that focused on his evangelistic work as the distinctive essence of Methodism.<sup>5</sup>

At about the same time, Anglican barrister Richard Denny Urlin crafted a contrasting image of John Wesley that I identify as the icon of “the High-Church Wesley,” an image or icon that emphasized John Wesley’s consistently professed loyalty to the Church of England, his conformity to Anglican liturgical practices, and his attraction to a patristic and ascetic vision of Christian life.<sup>6</sup> British Methodist theologian James Harrison Rigg was quick to point out that Urlin had anachronistically substituted a Tractarian definition of “High-Church” for the eighteenth-century conservative political meaning that John Wesley had associated with the phrase.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that Urlin wanted to convince Methodist church members that in order to be true to John Wesley, they needed to be Anglican, the Anglicanizing icon of John Wesley proved to be attractive to urbane and socially-rising Methodists in the United States and Canada as well as in the United Kingdom. An example is the African Methodist Episcopal Church Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, whose book on *Methodist Polity* has been a

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<sup>5</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *Encoding Methodism: Telling and Retelling Narratives of Wesleyan Origins* (Nashville: New Room Books, 2017), 78-84 and 92-94.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Denny Urlin, *John Wesley's Place in Church History: Determined with the Aid of Facts and Documents Unknown to, Or Unnoticed by, His Biographers* (London, Oxford, and Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1870) and his *The Churchman's Life of Wesley* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1880). See also Campbell, *Encoding Methodism*, 85-87.

<sup>7</sup> James Harrison Rigg, *Was John Wesley A High Churchman? A Dialogue for the Times* (London: The Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1882). See also Campbell, *Encoding Methodism*, 87-88.

standard in AME Church culture since the early twentieth century. Raised by a free black family in South Carolina during the period of enslavement of other African Americans, Turner rose to prominence in the AME Church after the Civil War. His *Methodist Polity* devoted an entire chapter making a case for what he called the “presbyteral succession” of Methodist clergy.<sup>8</sup> Under his influence, the AME denomination in 1880 authorized an edition of John Wesley’s revision of the Anglican Prayer book, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, as the official liturgy of the denomination.<sup>9</sup> One result is that many of the older, urban AME churches today maintain a form of eucharistic worship, including the recitation of the Ten Commandments with chanted responses, that is as close a replication of eighteenth-century Anglican eucharistic practice as any Methodist church has maintained.

In the early twentieth century, British Methodist leaders espoused an image of John Wesley that I have called the “Social Activist” icon of John Wesley. Welsh Evangelist Hugh Price Hughes, for example, who was pioneering central-city missions in Methodist central halls, called John Wesley the first Christian leader since St Francis of Assisi who had shown genuine concern for working people.<sup>10</sup> Responding to secular social critics who maintained that religion always plays a repressive role in society, Robert F. Wearmouth argued that

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<sup>8</sup> Henry McNeal Turner, *The Genius and Theory of Methodist Polity, or the Machinery of Methodism: Practically Illustrated through a Series of Questions and Answers* (Philadelphia: Publication Department, A.M.E. Church, 1885), chapter 1, “Whence the Church?” 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Liturgy of the A.M.E. Church* ([Philadelphia: AME Publishing House, 1892]; this is a revised edition based on the liturgy originally published in 1880). Bishop Turner’s influence on the 1880 version is noted in a preface to the revised edition written by Bishop J. C. Embury, “I was in hearty sympathy with Bishop Turner and others who moved the General Conference of 1880 to authorize the use of an abridgement of the Wesleyan prayer book” (p. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Price Hughes, introduction to *The Journal of John Wesley* (originally published in 1903 by the Fleming Revell Company of New York; reprint edition; Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 11-12. See also Campbell, *Encoding Methodism*, 112-113.

Wesley and British Methodists following him had consistently sought to empower poor and working-class people.<sup>11</sup> It seems to have been decades later that American Methodist leaders associated John Wesley with the image of a socially reforming leader.<sup>12</sup>

By the middle of the twentieth century, discerning the central and distinctive core of early Methodism had become a complicated matter, complicated especially by the evolution of Methodist churches and their internal as well as external controversies. The variety of competing images or icons of John Wesley could conceal what John Wesley and his conferences of preachers consistently stated as the central mission or purpose of Methodism:

Q. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called "Methodists"?

A. To reform the nation, and in particular the Church, [and] to spread scriptural holiness over the land.

Q. What was the rise of Methodism, so called?

A. In 1729, two young men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw, holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise that men are justified before they are sanctified: but still holiness was their point.<sup>13</sup>

There is of course nothing in this about creating a new church; in fact, later editions of the text incorporated into the "Large Minutes" made this very clear by expanding the text to

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<sup>11</sup> Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London; Epworth Press, 1945), and on Wearmouth's reaction to the criticisms of Marjorie Bowen (pseudonym of Gabrielle Margaret Long *née* Campbell), see Campbell, *Encoding Methodism*, 114.

<sup>12</sup> Campbell, *Encoding Methodism*, 177.

<sup>13</sup> "Large Minutes," following the versions of 1763, 1770, and 1772, as given in Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 10:875, and referring back to 10:845 for the text of the first question (from the 1763 edition).

say “*Not to form any new sect, but to reform the nation...*” etc.<sup>14</sup> There is no sense that the Wesleys understood their movement to do principally with evangelism, no sense of a particularly “high church” understanding of their work or of their idea of holiness, and no sense that social reform as contrasted with personal and ecclesiastical reform was at the heart of their endeavor. The claim made by the Methodist conferences was that the purpose for which God raised up “the preachers called Methodists” was “To reform the nation, and in particular the Church, [and] to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” That is to say, the foci of the Methodist movement were “the reformation of manners” that denoted reform of one’s way of life, and the cultivation of holiness. The impression one gains from this foundational claim is born out in longer published narratives of the origins of Methodism that sought to explain to those outside of Methodism what the movement intended, and focused on the teaching about holiness as the central mission of the “people called Methodists.”<sup>15</sup>

The distinctive theology advocated by John Wesley in sermons and other writings, and by Charles Wesley in his poetry including his hymns, all sought to inspire believers and to inform them about “the way of salvation” or “the way to heaven,” that is, the path of Christian holiness involving preparatory divine grace, justification, the process of

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<sup>14</sup> My emphasis. The version with the phrase “Not to form any new sect, but ...” appears in the Thomas Jackson edition of the Works that date from the 1820s: Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (14 vols.; London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), 8:299.

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, a) “A Short History of Methodism,” in Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, vol. 9; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 367-372; b) “A Short History of the People Called Methodists,” appended to Wesley’s *Concise Ecclesiastical History*; in Davies, ed., *Societies: History*, 9:425-503.



sanctification, trials of the soul, and other spiritual conditions that affect believers, and the ultimate goal of entire sanctification or Christian perfection, complete love for God.<sup>16</sup>

The distinctive structures put in place by the Wesleys in the Methodist movement served the purpose of the cultivation of holiness within an Anglican ecclesial context. Methodist classes examined members quarterly about their adherence to the General Rules, a rule of life published by John (and sometimes Charles) Wesley from 1743, and among these rules, Methodists asked each other if they had “attend[ed] upon the ordinances of God” including the elements of Sunday Anglican services, “The public worship of God,” “The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded,” and “The Supper of the Lord.”<sup>17</sup> Methodist bands offered opportunities for deeper spiritual conversations involving personal confession and sharing of trials that believers faced, and Methodist societies met quarterly to engage in the Love Feast. None of these activities conflicted with the Anglican culture and they were intended to complement and reinforce Anglican practices. John Wesley could claim that Methodism is in fact none other than:

... *the religion of the Church of England*, as appears from all her authentic records, from the uniform tenor of her liturgy, and from numberless passages in her Homilies. The scriptural, primitive religion of love, which is now reviving throughout the three kingdoms, is to be found in her morning and evening service, and in her daily as well as occasional prayers; and the whole of it is beautifully summed up in that one comprehensive petition, “Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2010), 63-85, 106-115.

<sup>17</sup> “General Rules” § 6; in Davies, ed., *Societies: History*, 9:73.

<sup>18</sup> John Wesley, sermon, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Near the City-Road, London” II:4; in Albert C. Outler, ed., *Sermons* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; 4 vols., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-1987), 3:586.

His concluding quotation from the collect for purity aptly summarized the intention of Methodism to cultivate Christian holiness. But the paragraph as a whole conceals a tricky claim, because its definition of the Church of England included its liturgy and Homilies and other “authentic records,” but it did *not* include obedience to bishops or to the canons (ecclesiastical law) of the Church of England.<sup>19</sup> And this raises a further set of issues related to Methodist practices of preaching and the conference of preachers that would eventually become the basis of separated Methodist churches, practices that did not fit as well with eighteenth-century Anglicanism as the classes, bands, societies and the General Rules did.

## **2. John Wesley’s Modifications and Violations of Anglican Church Culture in Contrast to Charles Wesley’s “Church Methodism”**

How much of the Anglican inheritance was presupposed by Methodists, and especially those under John Wesley’s guidance? Since the publication of Gareth Lloyd’s *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (2007), we have become aware of the deep tensions between John and Charles Wesley, significantly overlooked or deliberately deemphasized by Methodist interpreters in the past, that revolved around Charles’s refusal to engage in specific practices that modified or violated Anglican church law.<sup>20</sup> We are now much more aware of John Wesley’s independent-leaning tendencies in contrast to what Lloyd calls Charles Wesley’s “Church Methodism.”

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<sup>19</sup> This definition is consistent with a definition of the Church of England given in a manuscript cited in Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 327: “that body of people, nominally united, which profess to uphold the doctrine contained in the Articles and Homilies, and to use Baptism, the Lord’s supper and Public Prayer, according to the Common Prayer Book.”

<sup>20</sup> Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 227-233.

In what specific ways did John Wesley modify and violate Anglican church law and culture? I identify five specific, problematic areas as follows:

1. John Wesley preached within the bounds of dioceses to whose bishop he was not responsible, and within parishes in which other priests had been installed as spiritual leaders and in which he had not been licensed to preach by the bishop of the diocese, violating the provisions of the Council of Nicaea governing clergy operating within the dioceses of other bishops, and violating specific canons of the Church of England governing preaching within parishes.<sup>21</sup>
2. John Wesley preached in locations (and encouraged others to preach in locations) not sanctioned as Anglican churches or chapels or not sanctioned by the terms of the Act of Toleration (1689) governing Dissenting places of worship, and he presided at the Lord's Supper in locations not sanctioned for Anglican worship and that did not meet the canonical and Prayer-Book exceptions for administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the sick and dying.<sup>22</sup>
3. John Wesley appointed lay preachers and he himself gave them "license" or permission to preach, violating the provisions of Anglican Article of Religion 23:

It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard.<sup>23</sup>

4. John Wesley ordained clergy and consecrated one clergyman as a "superintendent" with the authority to ordain other clergy, violating ancient Christian precedents and the canons of the Church of England as well as the rubrics of the Prayer Book that provided that ordinations of clergy must be

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<sup>21</sup> Council of Nicaea, canons 15-16; in Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols.; London: Sheed and Ward; and Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:13. Church of England canons 46-54 (Canons of 1603; in Gerald Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947* [Church of England Record Society no. 6; Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998], 334-343) governed preaching within parishes. It provided that only those licensed to preach by the bishop of the diocese were allowed to preach their own sermons, and forbade the preaching of persons not licensed within the diocese.

<sup>22</sup> Church of England canon 71 (Canons of 1603), "Ministers not to preach or administer the communion in private houses" (in Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947*, 362-363).

<sup>23</sup> Twenty-third Article of Religion of the Church of England, in Valerie Hotchkiss and Jaroslav Pelikan, eds., *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (3 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 2:534. See also the provisions of Church of England canons 46-54 noted above.

performed by a bishop and that consecrations of bishops must be performed by at least three other bishops.<sup>24</sup>

5. John Wesley altered the Articles of Religion in a number of ways; perhaps most significant with respect to his modification of catholicity is the fact that he removed the Article on the Three Creeds and, further, removed the Nicene Creed from the service for the Lord's Supper in *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, leaving Methodists following this liturgical pattern without a formal affirmation of the Nicene Creed.<sup>25</sup>

Methodists in the past have accepted at face value John Wesley's justifications for these modifications and violations of Anglican church order, for example, his argument that an elder should have the same right as a bishop to ordain clergy.<sup>26</sup> But these were not merely matters of personal opinion because he had made specific commitments to the Church of England by sacred vows in the presence of witnesses, and the vows he had made committed him to observance of most of the Anglican provisions I have noted him as violating or modifying in the five points above. The solemn oaths required of clergy according to the canons of the Church of England specified:

- 1) an oath of allegiance to the reigning monarch as the head of the Church of England,

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<sup>24</sup> Canons 31-37 of the Church of England specified the processes for the ordination of deacons and priests and for the consecration of bishops, placing responsibility for ordination solely with bishops (in Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1547*, 308-323). The Book of Common Prayer stipulated that bishops ordain other clergy, and that three bishops were required to consecrate another bishop: 1662 Book of Common Prayer; in Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 623-632 (deacons), 633-643 (priests), and 644-651 (bishops and archbishops). Church of England canon 8 (Canons of 1603) calls for excommunication of those who would impugn the forms of ordination authorized by the Book of Common Prayer (in Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947*, 274-277).

<sup>25</sup> The extent of John Wesley's revisions of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England can be seen in the parallel tables supplied by Nolan B. Harmon in "Articles of Religion. In American Methodism"; in *Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (2 vols. Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1974) 1:146-157. On Wesley's revision of the Prayer Book, see James F. White, ed., *John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (Methodist Bicentennial Reprint; Nashville: Quarterly Review, 1984), 9-37.

<sup>26</sup> He used this justification in his September 1784 letter "To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Our Brethren in North America," § 2; in Jackson, ed., *Works*, 13:251-252.

- 2) an oath promising to use the liturgy of the Church of England (unaltered), and
- 3) an oath affirming the orthodoxy of the 39 Articles of Religion.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the service for the ordination of priests in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer required candidates to respond positively to a series of questions including the following:

Will you reverently obey your Ordinary, and other chief Ministers, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting your selves to their godly judgments?<sup>28</sup>

It is pertinent to note that neither the oaths required in the canons nor the questions asked of candidates in the ordination service called for allegiance or obedience to the canons of the Church of England themselves, though church courts presumed obedience to the canons on the part of clergy and prosecuted clergy for disobedience to them.

With respect to obedience to bishops and to the canons of the Church of England, the first Wesleyan conference of preachers in 1744 recorded the following question and answer:

Q. 8. How far is it our duty to obey the bishops?

A. In all things indifferent. And on this ground of obeying 'em, we should observe the canons, so far as we can with a safe conscience.<sup>29</sup>

Bishops were to be obeyed “In all things indifferent.” Explaining this in his *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, John Wesley wrote, “I answer, in every individual point of an indifferent nature, we do and will (by the grace of God) obey the governors of the Church.

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<sup>27</sup> Church of England canons 36-37 (Canons of 1603; in Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947*, 318-323).

<sup>28</sup> Book of Common Prayer 1662, in Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer*, 638.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes of 27 June 1744; in Rack, ed., *Minutes*, 10:135.

But the ‘testifying the gospel of the grace of God’ is not a point of an indifferent nature.”<sup>30</sup> And he wrote further, quoting the precise words of the examination of priests in the ordination service, “We then promised to ‘submit’ (mark the words) ‘to the godly admonitions and injunctions of our ordinary’. But we did not, could not, promise to obey such injunctions as we know are *contrary to the word of God*.”<sup>31</sup>

With respect more specifically to obedience to the canons of the Church of England, we have seen that the Wesleyan conference of 1744 declared, “And on this ground of obeying [the bishops of the Church of England], we should observe the canons, so far as we can with a safe conscience” (as in the quotation given above). John Wesley questioned whether the canons were in fact legally established, since, he maintained, the Convocation of the Church of England had never formally authorized them.<sup>32</sup> What was particularly at stake with respect to the canons was whether field preaching was ruled out by them. He disputed the claim that the canons explicitly forbade field preaching, and he argued further that, even if the canons actually forbade field preaching, such canons were effectively nullified by the “connivance” of church leaders, that is, their “winking at” or “pretending

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<sup>30</sup> John Wesley, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, ¶ 83; in Gerald R. Cragg, ed., *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, vol. 11; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 11:81.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, in Cragg, ed., *Appeals*, 11:82 (italics as in original).

<sup>32</sup> In the *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, ¶ 82, John Wesley asked, “How can these be called ‘The Canons of the Church of England’, seeing they were never legally established by the Church, never regularly confirmed in any full Convocation?” (in Cragg, ed., *Appeals*, 11:80). Cragg pointed out in a note on this passage that the canons were adopted by the Convocation of Canterbury in 1604 in a period between Archbishops, which might explain Wesley’s claim that they were “never legally established.”

ignorance of” church law.<sup>33</sup> It was a difficult argument to make (I think), though it does offer a precedent for clergy in the United Methodist Church today who argue that they must violate the vows they themselves made to obey the church law of the UMC in the case of what they have come to regard as immoral church laws, referring here to the current UMC disciplinary stipulations against ordaining gay clergy or performing gay marriages.

John Wesley was far more willing than his brother Charles to violate or modify Anglican church rules for what he perceived to be the divinely-given task of proclaiming the gospel and cultivating Christian holiness. This makes discerning how extensive the “Wesleyan” component of an Anglican Wesleyanism should be a complex task today. If we include ways of preaching and evangelization that appear to have been ruled out by the Church of England and other Anglican churches, we could envision only a “Charleswesleyan” but not a “Johnwesleyan” form of Anglican Wesleyanism. For the purposes of this paper and the proposal that I will make in it, I will leave this issue open and acknowledge the problems that it raises for incorporating a possibility for sanctioned evangelization within the proposal.

### **3. Existing Structures for Anglican-Methodist Unity**

Up to this point, I have tried to make a case that the core of early Methodism worth reviving today centers on the cultivation of Christ-like holiness within the context of a church that receives and values a set of ancient and ecumenically received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity such as the Anglican tradition has historically

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<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, *Journal* for 6 June 1755; in W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-2003), 21:16-17.

maintained. I see the central core of early Methodist spirituality as comprising the teaching of the “way of salvation” leading to entire sanctification, the definition of a way of life (in the General Rules), and the implementation of a system of small groups that hold believers accountable for their behaviors and their progress towards the goal of Christ-like holiness. I hold open the question of whether (or the extent to which) a contemporary form of Wesleyan praxis could implement specific evangelistic practices that have been at odds with Anglican definitions of church polity.

Why could not existing Methodist or Anglican denominations themselves serve as a Wesleyan-Anglican form of Christian faith as I’ve envisioned? At this point, as I see it, it’s *not* a question of Methodists lacking Anglican elements and Anglicans lacking Methodist elements. Rather, I would argue, *neither* Anglican nor Methodist denominations have been consistently able, as denominations, to implement the kinds of intimate and disciplined spiritual accountability that early Methodism implemented within its own sphere.

To illustrate this, the 1603-1604 canons of the Church of England that were in effect in John Wesley’s time, and the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, envisioned forms of disciplined spirituality led by clergy: the canons provided that priests should instruct parishioners utilizing the Prayer Book catechism for at least a half-hour every Sunday before evening prayer, they should exhort parishioners to observe holy days and fast days, they should visit the sick and offer prayers and possibly the Lord’s Supper to them, and they should set the example of a sober, godly way of life, avoiding luxuries and inappropriate games, “that they ought to excel all others in Purity of Life, and should be



Examples to the People to live Well and Christianly.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer envisioned priests playing an active role in the spiritual oversight. The rubrics for Communion specified, “So many as intend to be partakers of the holy Communion, shall signifie their names to the Curate at least sometime the day before.”<sup>35</sup> They went on to instruct priests to inquire of those who intended to commune if they had committed sins that would offend the community, and had not expressed repentance for doing so. In such a case, the priest should allow the person the opportunity to express repentance, but if they failed to do so, the priest was not to admit them and was to inform the bishop subsequently.<sup>36</sup> That is to say, the canons and rubrics envisioned clergy as inquiring actively about the lives of their parishioners and warning any who had committed “grave and open sin” that they might be excluded from the table.

Clergy were expected in all these ways to serve as spiritual leaders for their congregations. But the Church of England found it difficult, at the level of the denomination, to implement these spiritual roles. Wesley himself did criticize clergy for failing to implement some canons, such as canon 75 calling for clergy to behave themselves in an exemplary Christian manner.<sup>37</sup> He did not criticize clergy for their failure to enact the rubrics regarding expulsion from communion, and the only case in which he attempted to enforce them was that of his former acquaintance Sophia Christiana Williamson née Hopkey in his Savannah, Georgia, congregation. And despite Methodist impressions to the

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<sup>34</sup> Church of England canons 61, 64, 67, and 75 (Canons of 1603; in Bray, ed., *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947*, 350-351, 354-359, and 368-369).

<sup>35</sup> Book of Common Prayer 1662; in Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer*, 389.

<sup>36</sup> The long rubrics following the previously cited rubric on the same page.

<sup>37</sup> John Wesley, *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, par. 82; in Cragg, ed., *Appeals*, 11:81.

contrary, there has been a wealth of historical evidence in the last 30 years for strenuous pastoral activity on the part of Anglican clergy in John Wesley's time.<sup>38</sup> So it's not that Anglican clergy didn't engage in serious catechesis and spiritual counsel; the problem was, I think, that intimate spiritual conversations and accountability to spiritual practices seem to require more personal, voluntary commitment than simply belonging to a denomination required.

I hasten to add that Methodist denominations have done little better at this, at least not in the long run, despite John Wesley's models for discipleship. The experiences of Methodist and other Wesleyan denominations seem to confirm the difficulty of implementing consistent, intimate, accountable discipleship as a program required or at least supported by a whole denomination. American Methodists maintained class meetings and gender-segregated "prayer groups" roughly continuing the earlier Methodist bands into the period beyond the US Civil War in the 1860s, but not much beyond. British Methodists may have done better: my wife and I remember that when we were living in Oxford and were part of the Wesley Memorial Church, we were designated as belonging to a class meeting headed by Mrs. Eleanor Beard, whose husband Geoffrey had been the architect for the renovation of the building in Bear Lane where we lived. Geoffrey would deliver us our class tickets and church newsletter when he came to inspect the property, but the class never met, and we had the impression that this was about the state of class meetings in British Methodism in the late 1970s.

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<sup>38</sup> J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor, eds., *The Church of England, c. 1689—c. 1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2001); and Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660-1828: The Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

There have been some successful attempts among Methodists for reinstating the spirituality of accountability to a rule of life in small groups. I was a participant in David Lowes Watson's renewal of class meetings as "Covenant Discipleship" in the 1980s and 1990s. This became an officially sanctioned ministry of the General Board of Discipleship of the UMC, and even succeeded in getting a reference to class leaders incorporated into the UMC *Book of Discipline* in the 1990s, though I have the impression that the movement has waned in recent years.<sup>39</sup> My doctoral graduate Kevin M. Watson has led a renewal of class and band meetings in United Methodist circles, though his groups have not been incorporated into a wider scheme.

On the whole, then, I conclude that neither Anglican nor Methodist denominations as denominations, at the denominational level, have been able to sustain the component of an Anglican Wesleyanism that enacts or lives out the distinctly Wesleyan tradition of the cultivation of Christian holiness in groups organized around accountability to a rule of life. But I do not fault denominations as such for this failure: my sense of it is that this kind of accountability requires a level of voluntary association that denominations cannot require across their entire memberships through successive generations.

The second component that I identify as part of the Anglican Wesleyanism that I and a few like-minded persons want to renew involves ancient and ecumenically-received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity. This is primarily what we value in historic Anglican church traditions, though I would say that it is also present in some of

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<sup>39</sup> *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), ¶ 256.1b and 1117.2d.

the historic Lutheran traditions as well, and it came to general prominence as a result of Faith and Order work in the twentieth century.

I need to make it very clear that what we value in the Anglican inheritance has almost nothing to do with the misleading issue of “apostolic succession.” This has loomed as an enormous issue in Methodist consciousness since the mid-1800s, and it needs clarification because it has consistently presented itself as an issue in ecumenical discussions.<sup>40</sup> Let me distinguish three matters in relation to this.

- In the eighteenth century, John Wesley’s actions in undertaking to ordain preachers as elders and to consecrate Thomas Coke as a superintendent were problematic because they involved his violation of Anglican canons and Prayer-Book rubrics, the latter of which he had explicitly pledged to observe in his ordination vows. Charles Wesley’s oft-quoted ditty about John’s ordinations (“So easily are bishops made...”) has been cited as presupposing that Charles held to a doctrine of apostolic succession that John had violated and therefore that John’s ordinations would be invalid lacking this “succession.”<sup>41</sup> But I’m convinced that Charles Wesley’s principal concern was the same as other Anglican leaders of his day: John had taken a vow to use the Prayer Book and he violated that vow. His concern was not with a doctrine about “apostolic succession” that would have invalidated Methodist ministerial orders or sacraments.
- In the period after the Oxford or Tractarian movement of the 1830s, some high-church Anglicans developed the opinion that Anglicans had maintained an unbroken succession of bishops from the time of the apostles and that ordinations outside of this line of succession were invalid. This opinion was never accepted by the Church of England or other Anglican church bodies, but it was claimed with such rhetorical force by high-church leaders that many, especially those outside of Anglican churches, supposed that it had the status of doctrine within Anglican churches.
- The claim that “the historic episcopate, locally adapted” should be a necessary element of any future unions with Anglican churches stated in the Chicago-

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<sup>40</sup> The AME Church added to their *Doctrines and Discipline* a declaration on “Apostolic Succession and Religious Formalism” (1884) at the urging of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, mentioned in the text above.

<sup>41</sup> The poem by Charles Wesley including “So easily are bishops made / by man’s or woman’s whim” is cited, for example, in Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to Word Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26.

Lambeth Quadrilateral did not entail the high-church opinion about apostolic succession, and did not call into question the validity of other churches' ministerial orders or sacraments. It simply specified that some form of "historic episcopate" should be a part of any future unions in which Anglican churches would engage.<sup>42</sup>

That excursus was simply to make clear that the notion of "apostolic succession" is not the concern of myself and those who want to enact some form of Anglican Wesleyanism today. Our concern is with the broader sense of continuity with historic and ecumenically-received Christian forms of liturgy, polity, and doctrine. John Wesley explicitly advocated this sense of continuity when he wrote of Methodism:

This is *the religion of the primitive Church*, of the whole church in the purest ages. It is clearly expressed, even in the small remains of Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp. It is seen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian. And, even in the fourth century, it was found in the works of Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius. It would be easy to produce a cloud of witnesses, testifying the same thing; were not this a point which no one will contest, who has the least acquaintance with Christian antiquity.<sup>43</sup>

And in this respect, we can understand the paragraph following this that I have quoted above, still describing Methodism:

And this is *the religion of the Church of England*, as appears from all her authentic records, from the uniform tenor of her liturgy, and from numberless passages in her Homilies. The scriptural, primitive religion of love, which is now reviving throughout the three kingdoms, is to be found in her morning and evening service, and in her daily as well as occasional prayers; and the whole of it is beautifully summed up in that one comprehensive petition, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeks and Confessions of Faith*, 3:376.

<sup>43</sup> Wesley, sermon, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Near the City-Road, London" II:4; in Outler, ed., *Sermons*, 3:586.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Both of these paragraphs from John Wesley's sermon "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Near the City Road, London" (1777) signal John Wesley's continuing attachment to the Anglican sense of continuity with the long Christian past exhibited in what Wesley valued as "the whole Church in the purest ages" and in "Church of England; as appears from all her authentic records, from the uniform tenor of her Liturgy, and from numberless passages in her Homilies..."

My own research into John Wesley's valuing of early Christian writings also shows the depth of John Wesley's attachment to Christianity up to and even beyond the time of Constantine.<sup>45</sup> John Wesley's immediate followers sensed his abiding sense of connection to the deep Christian past, and inscribed on his tomb:

This Great Light Arose  
by the Singular Providence of God  
To Revive, Enforce and Defend  
The Pure Apostolical Doctrines and Practices  
of the Primitive Church<sup>46</sup>

That is the sense of historic continuity, continuity with historic and ecumenically received doctrine, liturgy, and polity, that our I and our group want to cultivate. But we have to do this in a contemporary and ecumenically-responsible way, acknowledging that John Wesley was mistaken in some of his views of early Christianity and of the Church of England, and we need to be illuminated today by contemporary critical reflection on the inheritance of faith of the early Christian church and on such denominational cultures as that of Anglicanism and of Methodism. Wesley made himself vulnerable to new insights

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<sup>45</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Culture Change* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> Transcribed from photograph.

including new historical information, and we should do likewise. Moreover, there is now a vast array of new information on the inheritance of faith to which Wesley could now have had access in his time. To name just a few:

- He was not aware of such crucially important patristic texts as the *Didache*, which was not discovered and published until the 1800s. Liturgical reforms of the twentieth century have drawn on insights from the *Didache*, and we should allow ourselves to draw on such new insights.
- He was largely unaware of the extent to which the Nicene (Nicene-Constantinopolitan) Creed has remained the most universal (catholic) of all Christian statements of faith. Our decision today to acknowledge the authority of the Nicene Creed should not be grounded in the misapprehensions of his culture, nor on his decision to remove the Nicene Creed from the liturgy for the Lord's Supper that was based on those misapprehensions.
- He was unaware of the crucial role of the reception of conciliar teachings in Eastern Christian churches, the democratic role that the principle of reception has played in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox church cultures, and the relevance it could have for our reception of historic Christian teachings and practices today.<sup>47</sup>
- He could not have been aware of contemporary Faith and Order insights, for example, the understanding that the baptism of believers most fully integrates all the crucial elements of Christian initiation, or the insight that presbyteries and other assemblies exercise a kind of communal oversight (*episkopē*) alongside the roles of personal bishops in the governance of Christian communities.

Our concern today with the sense of deep continuity should not be with the replication of John Wesley's understandings of that continuity, but with a parallel quest to understand it and live it out guided by contemporary knowledge and reflection.

There are ways in which this sense of a deep connection to the Christian past has been part of the cultures of Methodist as well as Anglican churches. Methodists held on to the wording of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer liturgies for the Lord's Supper, baptism, marriages, and funerals, retained a central place for the Apostles' Creed, frequently used

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<sup>47</sup> See William G. Rusch, *Reception: An Ecumenical Problem* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press in cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation, 1988).

the Thomas Ken doxology (at least in my upbringing), invoked the divine Trinity a little more consistently than Baptist congregations tended to do, and under the influence of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century began to display crosses in churches (from about the 1930 in the USA), to follow the liturgical calendar, and to wear clergy gowns and stoles. In the late twentieth century, Methodists followed the trend of ecumenical liturgical study and renewal, adopting new liturgies from the 1970s reflecting common trends with the Catholic Church as well as other Protestant churches.

The mid-twentieth-century ecumenical insights of Albert C. Outler, Geoffrey Wainwright, Georgia Harkness, Colin Williams, Frank Baker, and others seemed to foreshadow a Methodist ecumenical flourishing. I myself and many in the group I've begun to organize were deeply formed by their vision of Methodism within the *unam sanctam* and we are looking for a way to cultivate the sense of deep connection to the Christian past even as our own Methodist denominations seem to have become less concerned about that in recent decades.

What, then, about current ecumenical proposals and accomplishments in Anglican-Methodist relations including full-communion agreements? The answer, in short, is that a) we're enthusiastically supportive, and b) we recognize that they alone will not bring about the form of Wesleyan Anglicanism that we are seeking today, because although they may overcome existing difficulties with reconciling our ordained ministries, it is not within their purview to develop a conjunction of ancient and ecumenically received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity with a distinctly Wesleyan cultivation of Christian holiness in groups organized around accountability to a rule of life. Geoffrey Wainwright's proposal to the 1982 Oxford Institute entitled "Ecclesial Location and



Ecumenical Vocation” envisioned Methodist churches becoming an order existing within or even across existing denominations, and that may have come closer than other proposals to what I’m envisioning, but he didn’t envision the Methodists within such an ecumenical setting as having any more a vocation to the cultivation of holiness through accountability to a rule of life than we have presently.<sup>48</sup>

What we envision does bear similarities to the currently existing Order of St Luke (which originated in the UMC and the US-based Methodist Church before it) and the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship within British Methodism. The Order of St Luke defines itself as “A religious order in the United Methodist Church dedicated to sacramental and liturgical scholarship, education, and practice.”<sup>49</sup> As such its focus has been on liturgical renewal, not so much of the larger sense of continuity with historic Christian doctrine and polity as well as liturgy, but their life as a dispersed religious order bears strong parallels to our concern with accountability to a rule of life, and in fact we have discussed the possibility of meeting alongside them. The Methodist Sacramental Fellowship web page defines the Fellowship as:

Methodist Sacramental Fellowship (MSF) exists to affirm the catholic and universal tradition of Christianity within Methodism. It also seeks to promote the sacramental faith and practice which John and Charles Wesley drew from scripture and Christian tradition.<sup>50</sup>

This shows a very strong resonance with the intention of the form of Anglican Wesleyanism (perhaps we should call it “catholic Wesleyanism”) that I have envisioned, though I am

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<sup>48</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, “Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation,” in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 93-129.

<sup>49</sup> [http://saint-luke.net/?page\\_id=5](http://saint-luke.net/?page_id=5); accessed 23 July 2018.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.sacramental.org.uk/>; accessed 23 July 2018.

uncertain of the extent to which the MSF understands the cultivation of holiness through accountability to a rule of life as a central contribution to cultivating “the catholic and universal tradition of Christianity within Methodism.” In both cases, our group would need to be in very close contact as we move forward.

But in brief, I do not see a currently viable Anglican or catholic Wesleyanism as defined here, and I am not inclined to fault existing Methodist or Anglican churches for that. The precedent that John Wesley set was to pursue his own vision of voluntary societies alongside existing churches. In our time, the burden is on me and those inclined to join me to pursue a contemporary form of Anglican Wesleyanism as a religious movement alongside our existing churches.

#### **4. A Contemporary Proposal for a Form of Anglican (or catholic) Wesleyanism**

What form might a contemporary, visible form of Anglican or catholic Wesleyanism take? I have envisioned a voluntary society of persons in existing Methodist and Anglican denominations who covenant together as a dispersed religious community with local if not larger gatherings to pursue Christ-like holiness within an Anglican-Wesleyan way of being Christian. Elements of this vision might be explained in a little more depth:

- The **purpose of the society** would be to pursue Christ-like holiness within an Anglican-Wesleyan way of being Christian that includes:
  - a) the cultivation of ancient and ecumenically received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity,
  - b) the cultivation of Christian holiness in groups organized around accountability to a rule of life, and possibly
  - c) the development of new forms of itinerant evangelism leading to the formation of new Christian communities following this way of being Christian.

- The society would be a **voluntary community** of those who share the aims described here. It would not seek to replace denominations nor to claim that its way of life is superior to other ways of life within existing Methodist and Anglican communities. It would be open to all baptized and professed Christians who share the aims of the society and are willing to take on its covenant (see below).
- The society would be a **globally dispersed community** (in this respect like the Order of St Luke), linked by contemporary media, but having local as well as international gatherings in person.
- The society would agree to a **covenant describing a way of life** that would be a contemporary re-visioning of the Wesleyan General Rules. I have attached to this paper as Appendix 2 a proposed “Catholic Wesleyan Covenant” that has been discussed and edited in the Ecumenical Wesleyan Society Facebook group. It is structured like the historic General Rules, making more explicit its connection to our baptismal vows, and with some contemporary issues (like reducing unsecured debt) replacing some of the historic elements of the General Rules.
- The society would insist that participants engage themselves in **concrete, face-to-face interaction with the poor** in their communities and in **systemic forms of engagement for the betterment of their society** as well (consistent with the “Catholic Wesleyan Covenant” proposed below).
- The society would require **responsibility to our own denominations** and their leaders, and consultation with church leaders to be sure that we can all keep our covenant within the bounds of our denominations.
- The society would **work towards implementing full-communion agreements with other church bodies including Anglican churches** at a deeper level than simply interchangeability of clergy.
- The society would have to work on the question raised about **forms of evangelism that could lead to new communities**, refraining from psychologically manipulative forms of rhetoric and evangelism used in the past, respecting our existing denominations and their own procedures for Christian initiation and forming congregations.

At this point, that is about all that I am able to offer. Any further elaboration would require the development of this proposal with the group in mind. But I am concerned in advance of that eventuality to have the feedback of this working group as we consider the development of such a society.

## 5. A Rationale for this Proposal

It's difficult to give a rationale for something that seems more a vocation than an argument for one right way to think or believe or do. And the proposal given here grows out of a sense of vocation, a sense of calling for the present time for myself and those who have helped develop this proposal with me. I have already given something like a historical rationale, that is, to claim that the core purpose of Methodism as it existed before the development of Methodist denominations had to do with the cultivation of holiness in groups that held one accountable to a way or rule of life, within the context of the Church of England and its sense of connectedness to the deep Christian past in England and beyond England to the ancient inheritance of Christian faith in the New Testament and in the early centuries after the New Testament. Part of the calling or vocation that I and others sense is simply a desire to live out the quest for Christian holiness in a contemporary manner analogous to that of early Methodism within its Anglican context.

A rationale for the cultivation of ancient and ecumenically received traditions of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and church polity might make points like these:

- Our understanding of the Christian faith should be grounded in the gospel that was transmitted before the New Testament was written (I Corinthians 15:1-4, I Corinthians 11:23-26), that shaped the canon of the New Testament, and that continued to be expressed in the doctrine, liturgy, and the polity of early, proto-orthodox Christian communities.<sup>51</sup>
- Deep engagement with the Christian past should be a formative element of contemporary Christian spirituality.
- Continuity with historic liturgical patterns and with historic forms of church governance should also be formative elements of contemporary Christian spirituality.

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<sup>51</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *The Gospel in Christian Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

- Living as a Christian in contemporary contexts requires a complementary interplay between deep engagement with our past as well as deep connection to our contemporary situations.

I reflect, further, that the Church of England offered its constituents a sense of connection to the past in the literal places where they lived every day, for example, in the presence of the parish church and the graves of ancestors buried there. Anglicanism outside of England is not able to offer this particular sense of connectedness to the past (including the Christian past) of a particular place, so it should be perhaps a further goal or agendum of our society to cultivate the cultures and histories of our own particular places.<sup>52</sup>

A rationale for the cultivation of Christian holiness in groups organized around accountability to a rule of life might include points like the following:

- Jesus utilized a variety of groups of varying sizes including some smaller groups through which he communicated and enacted the good news of the coming of God's reign.
- Large denominations (including Methodist as well as Anglican denominations) have not consistently proven themselves able to provide long-term structures to nurture Christians in intimate, accountable communities.
- Reform in behaviors needs the grace or help of small groups of people, voluntarily chosen by a believer, who can guide them spiritually.
- Reform in behaviors may also need the grace or assistance of a larger community who share common views of Christian beliefs and practices to be cultivated.

### **Remaining Questions**

Many questions remain. Perhaps the most fundamental for me is simply the question whether this kind of proposal deserves the attention and labor it would take to

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<sup>52</sup> Beauty Maenzanise offered an example of this in her plenary address to the Oxford Institute in 2013, "Christian Worship in the African Context," in Ted A. Campbell, ed., *Wesleyan Communities and the World Beyond Christianity* (Nashville: Wesley's Foundery Books, 2018), 45-99.

make such a vision a reality today. There are plenty of other claimants on our time and attention, plenty of needs that the world and the churches should address.

John Wesley demonstrated that a community cultivating Christian holiness should be constantly “doing good to all men, of the ability that God giveth” (Galatians 6:10 as Wesley rendered it), and this ethos motivated him to produce for all people, Christian or not, a compilation of medical remedies as given in English folk traditions, a more scientific treatise on the use of electricity, and a series of grammars for the instruction of children.<sup>53</sup> That ethos of engagement with the world beyond Christianity was at the center of the last Oxford Institute. Other Institutes have shown that a Wesleyan ethos can offer a liberating message to the poor today.<sup>54</sup> I do think it is worthwhile, then, to consider what voluntary forms Wesleyanism might take today beyond its denominational forms, so I offer these thoughts on the possibility of a contemporary and voluntary Anglican or catholic form of Wesleyanism. And whatever the vicissitudes of our churches, we must continue to believe and to sing that our “anchor holds within the veil” of Christ’s holy self-offering.

[Draft of 10/19/18]

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<sup>53</sup> In a letter to an unnamed correspondent published in the *London Magazine* 12 December 1760, John Wesley stated that his motivation for publishing the *Primitive Physick* as well as his treatise on *Electricity made Plain and Useful* and a series of grammars was simply the intention of ‘doing good to all men, of the ability that God giveth’ (his version of Galatians 6:10); in Ted A. Campbell, ed., *Letters* (Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 27:227.

<sup>54</sup> The 1977 Institute took up the theme of Sanctification and Liberation: cf. Theodore M. Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981); cf. especially the editor's introduction, 9-48). Similarly, the 1992 Institute took up the theme of “Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition”: cf. M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995).

## Appendix 1: Pinned Post Giving Basic Stances on the “Ecumenical Wesleyan Society” Facebook Page

The fellowship stands for:

- **Renewal of the ecumenical vision** of Wesleyan churches by engagement with ancient Christian consensus in faith and liturgy, with Wesleyan and Methodist historical materials, and with the fruits of Faith and Order work and liturgical renewal.
- **Explicit affirmation of the faith as expressed in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, and reception of the faith of the first four ecumenical councils** (I Nicaea, I Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon) understood in the light of ecumenical interpretations of these councils on the part of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, and the Assyrian Church of the East.
- **Renewal of confessional and liturgical life** including **weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper** and **preaching** in accordance with ancient and Wesleyan doctrinal standards following the pattern of the Revised Common Lectionary.
- Renewal of **Wesleyan forms of accountable discipleship** including practices taught in the General Rules such as daily prayer, weekly fasting, the disciplined hearing, reading, and study of the scriptures, and the observance of the Lord’s Day in communities as a genuine day of rest.
- Unity in our denomination and with other churches **without the need for placing issues related to homosexual persons at the highest level of required consensus** (*status confessionis*).

Our fellowship will advocate for the following (items marked with an asterisk [\*] indicate implementing practices so far as our own communities consent to these practices):

- **Local engagement with other Christian communities** seeking greater visible unity of our churches.
- **Weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper** according to historic and authorized liturgies of our churches.
- Regular **use of the Revised Common Lectionary** to guide preaching in our congregations.
- **Ecumenical Christian formation** including the use of ecumenically grounded materials for catechesis, baptism, and profession of the faith.
- **The practice of anointing** in baptism and in prayers for healing.
- the practice of **daily prayer** following historic and ecumenical Christian traditions for daily prayer.
- **Renewed observance of the Lord’s Day** as a day of genuine rest in a Christian community including feasting and possibly abstention from electronic media.
- **Fasting on Fridays** each week from morning through mid-afternoon in keeping with historic Christian practice.

- Use of **the sign of the cross** at the reverent invocation of the three Persons of the divine Trinity including in the creeds, in the act of baptism, and in the eucharistic prayer.

The fellowship will:

- **carry on a vigorous, honest conversation** via contemporary media about the need for ecumenical renewal in Wesleyan churches,
- **meet in occasional national or international gatherings** for common worship, discipline, and discussion;
- meet in **local gatherings** with United Methodists and other Christians who share the ecumenical vision we treasure;
- **hold each other accountable for a Wesleyan discipline** as a way of pursuing Christian holiness similar to the General Rules but adapted to the challenges that Christians face today.
- **develop structures for broader consensus** within our ecclesial fellowship and for dialogue with others in the UMC and in other denominations.



## **Appendix 2: Proposed “Catholic Wesleyan Covenant”**

0.1 In the baptismal covenant, Christians renounce evil, confess their faith in Christ, promise to engage in good works, and pledge that they will avail themselves of the means of grace. The following covenant is our way of fulfilling these renunciations and promises. Confessing our faith in Christ and our own inability to do any good apart from grace, we covenant together to do the following.

1.0 First, we will avoid evil and occasions of causing harm to others, consistent with our renunciation of sin. In particular,

1.1 We will guard our speech and writing so that in our public discourse we avoid speaking or writing irreverently in reference to God, speaking or writing in ways that stereotype groups of people, and we will speak and write as if those of whom we speak or write are present to us.

1.2 We will avoid or practice temperance in the use of any substances that create dependencies, and we will foster communities that enable persons to overcome dependencies.

1.3 We will seek to eliminate and avoid unsecured debt, and will foster communities that seek debt-free lifestyles.

2.0 Second, we will do good, consistent with our baptismal promises. In particular,

2.1 We will take care of our bodies by regular exercise and dietary practices guided by medical insights.

2.2 We will participate in concrete ways of serving the poor face-to-face in our own communities or wider areas.

2.3 We will also participate in ways of alleviating human suffering and improving human life by active engagement with advocacy groups, non-profit and non-governmental organizations, and other groups that seek these ends.

3.0 Third, we will avail ourselves of the means of grace, consistent with our baptismal promises. In particular,

3.1 We will attend worship weekly, normally including weekly participation in the Lord’s Supper, and we will foster communities in which the Lord’s Supper is celebrated at least weekly.

3.2 We will observe a day of genuine, simple enjoyment in communities, free of regular work, and we will foster communities that encourage the practice of

observing a day of rest in communities, consistent with historic Christian observance of the Lord's Day.

3.3 We will fast as we are able on Wednesdays or Fridays from sunrise to midafternoon, taking water, and observing these times as periods of reflection on our hunger for God and for God's righteousness.

3.4 We will pray and read the Holy Scriptures devotionally on a daily basis in a pattern that fosters consistent exposure to the breadth of the Scriptures and to Christian traditions of daily worship.

3.5 We will meet weekly with a group who will hold each of us accountable for the promises made in this covenant, fostering these communities as means of grace for us.

4.0 In addition to these promises made together with my group, I also ask the group to hold me personally accountable for the following promise(s) for the specified period(s):

Promise:

Period:

5.0 These are our solemn promises before God and each other. God help me to keep them.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Date