



## THE CENTRALITY OF GRACE IN WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY

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All of the papers in the conference thus far have focused on our common concerns for holy living in the Benedictine and Methodist traditions, which is the overall objective of the conference. Yet, hidden within the scope of this paper are some of the major doctrinal perspectives that now divide us. In the topic which was assigned to me are matters of our respective understandings of "the Church" and "the order of salvation," traditional places where we have clashed in a significant way. Happily it is not my assignment to discuss those crucial theological problems, so I will only give you a Methodist "witness" on the subject of The Lord's Supper, leaving the spinning out of differences and their meaning for us to the discussion period which follows this block of lectures.<sup>1</sup>

It is an honor to be in the company of a tradition with which we Methodists have so much in common. Our "Father in God," as the late Methodist historian Albert C. Outler used to call John Wesley, drank deeply from the wells of Roman Catholic spirituality. It is well known that he especially loved the great mystic Thomas á Kempis, as well as many other Catholic thinkers.<sup>2</sup> It is lesser well known but equally true that he was shaped by much in a Catholic understanding of the Lord's Supper or, as Wesley seemed to prefer, Holy Communion.<sup>3</sup> It was in this Sacrament, he believed, that the uniquely focused presence of Christ was experienced by the faithful community as the people gathered in what were called in

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Wesley's day "sacramental meetings," times of song, sermon, and Supper, where participants were more and more formed in likeness to Christ.<sup>4</sup> In this Sacrament the hopes of Benedict and Wesley were not far apart; they believed communicants received in the Supper graces to live the Christian life, extend the Christian mission, and anticipate the Christian hope.

At the outset we recognize that St. Benedict and John Wesley were unusual spiritual leaders who lived at vastly different times and under wholly different circumstances. Nonetheless they did have much in common, such as a desire to live a life that becomes the Gospel, to give unbridled zeal in reforming the Church, to make an attempt at influencing others to live the holy life, and in providing organizational skills that in effect thrust them to the forefront of new religious groups. They were both given to a life of prayer. It is for reasons like these that the legacy of both men is enduring.

John Wesley based much of his own quest for "Christian perfection" on early Christian sources. Wesley loved to learn from the past. He believed himself a member of the Church catholic, and one with the best of its holy tradition, and that is one reason we are meeting here this week. Both men, Benedict and Wesley also wanted to be first and foremost men of "the book" [the Bible]. Both wanted to be men of the Church, but to be honest, on their own terms, terms each one believed were inspired by God. Probably most of us here agree in whole or in part with their separate self-understandings, own for ourselves to some extent their visions for the Christian life, and certainly identify with their desire to relate lovingly to God and neighbor. As Wesleyans it is easy to embrace Benedictines as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

It is my reading of history that Benedict and Wesley accepted their church's teachings on Holy Communion, which is to say, that is, that the Supper of the Lord (or the Holy Eucharist) is a God-ordained opportunity to come face to face, so to speak, with the reality of the risen Lord.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding this important similarity in theology, however, it is true Wesley shared some of the standard Protestant criticisms of Roman Catholic wording with respect to the consecrated elements.<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, however, Wesley was no Protestant, especially since he distanced himself from the overall Reformation movement in both its Calvinistic and Lutheran expressions.

While it is a matter of speculation what Benedict might think in a post-Vatican II Catholicism, it is my opinion that he would tend to side with the traditionalists (as did John Wesley). Both men would be upset with the contemporary tendency in the Church, at least in America, to look for help from the behavioral sciences more than the spiritual wisdom of the Church in solving the dilemmas of human nature, especially the problem of evil. It would be interesting if Benedict and Wesley could sit down today and talk more definitively about these matters. (Perhaps they have already!) Wesley could do that with ease and I suspect Benedict could as well. We do not read long in Wesley's sermons before being impressed with his sincere desire to engage in ecumenical dialogue with other Christians, of whatever conviction. It is only the seriousness with which Wesley approaches the Gospel that makes him sometimes appear a bit brash. This tendency is noticeable in Benedict as well, and in other Catholic spiritual guides. As with Benedict, for Wesley it was plain talk for plain people, for the glory of God!

The topic originally given to me for this unique conference was THE CENTRALITY

OF THE LORD'S SUPPER IN METHODIST SPIRITUALITY. While this is a topic of merit, especially considering Wesley's concern about the neglect of the Lord's Supper in many Anglican congregations, it does not quite catch the realities of his theology and practice of this Sacrament. I suggest that the significance and role of the Lord's Supper for the Wesleyan awakening in eighteenth-century England (and in our own time for Methodists generally) can best be considered under the title of THE CENTRALITY OF GRACE IN WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY. For in Methodist theology and practice the Lord's Supper is located under the general idea of the manifestation of God's grace, being one of the "chief means" of experiencing the loving, saving will of our benevolent and just God.<sup>7</sup> By "Methodist theology and practice" I mean Wesley's understanding and work, and what I think to be its interpretation in the various main branches of Methodism, with which I am most familiar. This means that for this conference I prefer to stay with the Wesleys, especially John, and influences on him, rather than spend too much time with his modern-day interpreters. This limitation may not be helpful since Benedictines know at this point in our meetings that Methodist groups, so-called, can have less in common among themselves than one might at first think. The plain fact is that just as we are trying to discover our larger common roots at this conference, Methodism is trying to recapture its sacramental past. Both efforts are painful, though the prospect for happiness on all sides is great.

#### THE CENTRALITY OF GRACE

Like many classical thinkers, Wesley is convinced that human nature is steeped in an original sin brought about by the "fall" of Adam and Eve. Consequently, he does not place confidence in any ungifted human ability to please God and fulfill the moral law. He believes humans tend to use their God-given freedom in ways that eventually break divine law and bring the human community under the just judgment of a moral God.<sup>8</sup> But surprisingly, the divine response is not one of condemning self-centered human beings, rather a reaching out with a love that forgives and reconciles. Judgment thus leads to salvation! So startling is this love, especially in the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, that humans can only confess and give thanks. "In this is love," St. John writes, "not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."<sup>9</sup> Grace or love, however, becomes the foundation for a Christian understanding of God. And the Psalms, our basic prayer book, show us ways of expressing our appreciation and amazement at this God who gives Himself so we might live according to his good will. On the basis of this traditional view of God's self-giving one can see why Wesley will have nothing to do with what he sees as "works-righteousness," that is, attempts to gain God's favor apart from the principle of faith.<sup>10</sup> Humans may, indeed must, cooperate with God's will, but that in no way accrues merit, rather it demonstrates the "prevenient" (or common) grace of God in all human life. Any good accomplished or cooperation in the human family is the direct result of God's graciousness. This is a common theme to both Wesleyan and Roman theology.

Grace, then, is the ground of all life. Recognizing this grace and living it out in the Church and in the world is the agenda for all human life.<sup>11</sup> Since, according to Wesley, we are naturally hindered in grasping the overwhelming reality of divine grace, God helpfully enables us

to both understand (at least its elemental features) and appropriate it.<sup>12</sup> Methodists also have confidence in God's gracious self-display in nature, at least to the showing of God's existence, power, and harmony.<sup>13</sup> St. Paul seems to hint that nature supplies us with enough of the sense of God that we may be led to deeper insights if we apply ourselves diligently to what we know naturally.<sup>14</sup> Wesley had hopes for those people who while never hearing the name of the Redeemer yet would be acceptable to God because of their tireless search for truth as they were given it. Of course, the best is revealed in the person and work of Christ the Lord, and it is the Church's responsibility and joy to be in mission to the world with this good news.<sup>15</sup> Following God's lead, grace translates into compassion for others. The ways God shows compassion, apart from the incarnation, are called, in the Methodist tradition, "means of grace." Ways of demonstrating God's grace through human activity are called "works of mercy" (or "piety"). Means and works are not to be confused because means always precede works. Any way one looks at it, (that is, through Methodist eyes) grace is central to natural and spiritual life. Properly understood, grace surrounds us, energizes us, and, in the words of a popular North American gospel song, "leads us home" (to heaven). This "leading" is a primary function of the Sacraments of the Church, those means of God's self-sharing for our improvement.

#### A METHODIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH

As already suggested, Wesley accepts a pre-seventeenth century Anglican definition of the Church. For him the Church consists of three essential components. As found in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, these are (1) living faith, (2) true preaching of the Scripture, and (3) the proper administration of the Sacraments.<sup>16</sup> Wesley brought this working definition of the Church into the theology of the Methodist movement and there it remains to this day.<sup>17</sup> The Sacraments (two in number for the Anglicans and early Methodists, at least according to the official doctrinal statement in the Discipline of the Church, to which Wesley implied exceptions) are absolutely necessary to any proper understanding of the nature and work of the Church. No Sacraments, no Church. It is that simple.<sup>18</sup>

The Sacraments become even more significant to a Wesleyan view of the Church when one considers that the "essence" of the Church is not in its structure. Allowing for rather wide varieties of structure, as implied in his ecumenical sermons, Wesley was able to accept other Christian groups without judging their fidelity to Christ's gospel and fitness for worship. But if the essence of the Church is not in its structure, then where is it? For Wesley it is in the living faith of all true believers, whatever their label, in their commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture, in their sincere desire to live out the implications of holy love, and in their active "participation" in the Sacraments. Christ comes near through the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His followers by enlightening their minds regarding God's will, energizing their faith through the Divine and human fellowship of sacramental life, and in all their Christian living by providing a hope for the future, especially eternal life. Institutions naturally provide order and are necessary, though they are secondary to the principle of faith. Even today, with all of its history, polity, discipline, and liturgy, Methodism, broadly conceived, is more a movement than an institution.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE "MEANS OF GRACE"

We Methodists believe that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is as important to the spiritual well-being of the faithful as prayer and the reading of Scripture. Actually, liturgically speaking, it is a combination of both.<sup>20</sup> As far as ranking the means of grace is concerned, Wesley says prayer is first, the use of the Scriptures is second, and observance of the Sacrament third. Wesley considered these three spiritual "means" (ways God uses to increase grace in the Church) as the "chief means" of grace, that is, the primary ways God uses to communicate Himself to His people. On the face of things, it would seem then that Methodists ought to participate in the Lord's Supper at every possible opportunity, as with daily prayer and Bible study. In fact, this was Wesley's general practice, especially during certain seasons of the Christian year. It is important to note that the "chief means" were not the only means of grace available to the faithful; there were also other *instituted* means (fasting and Christian communion) as well as *prudential* means (means specially suited to the particular gifts of individual Christians). In a very real way, all Christian life is uniformly graced, and every way to increase grace is in one way or another a "means" of grace.<sup>21</sup> This is to say that Christian life is sacramental in nature, and whatever one does in faith has in it the potential of being a bearer of God's goodness to someone else. In individual or communal formation, or in mission, the Church receives grace and becomes a means of grace to the world.

This brings us to a very important part of Methodist sacramental life, the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Recent studies in Wesley's life and thought reveal his rather heavy dependence on Orthodox Christian sources.<sup>22</sup> So to Wesley, the Holy Communion is a mystery of God. Well, of course it is, but I mean that Wesley believes in Christ's presence in the Supper but without feeling confident about being too prescriptive about details. He sees himself sort of in the middle between two widely divergent views, the ultra-Reformed teaching of Zwingli, who saw the Lord's Supper as a mere memorial, and the Roman view of transubstantiation, though he leans toward the Romans and the Orthodox. Since Anglicanism was highly influenced by the Reformation, Wesley took much criticism from those Protestants who thought he was too comfortable with a more sacramental view. As I have said, he views the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a "Holy Mystery," and is able thereby to hold in tension, at least for himself, the reality of Christ's actual presence to bless without limiting Christ to a material substance.<sup>23</sup> Is Wesley then a "closet" Catholic? Many in his day thought so! And perhaps he was, especially when he regards the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a "converting ordinance." Saying this he means that God is uniquely and really present in the totality of the Lord's Supper with the same intensity as He is at prayer and in the study of the Holy Bible, and with grace to save.<sup>24</sup> Thus the themes of repentance and faith are automatically included in a right observance of the means of grace. For the present, what this means for confirmation I leave to my colleague, Dr. Laurence Wood.

#### METHODIST SPIRITUALITY

The grace of God is the ground of all spiritual life, faith is the way in which this grace comes alive in the hearts of the faithful, and the perfection of love is the goal of Christian

existence. Both Benedictine and Methodist spirituality affirm grace, faith, and love as the heartbeat of the life that pleases God. Put in a slightly different way, Christian spirituality is an unbalanced combination of God's action on our behalf and our reaction to what God is doing. As Wesley says, God acts and we react. This is a Wesleyan way of saying, as the Benedictines do, that we seek "conversion of life."

Wesley wrote and edited a large number of works during his life. It is difficult to single out one or two documents that can in any way be called "the" definitive standard for his spirituality. Even the doctrinal standards of Methodism cannot be found in a single creed or affirmation; one has to look at many selected sermons, Wesley's Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, as well as the Articles of Religion, to get the sense of what Methodists believe. Yet there is one short statement that remains constant in Wesley's writings, called "The Character of a Methodist." This ten paragraph paper (in its short form) stands at the beginning of Wesley's tract, "On Christian Perfection." In this tract we get a hint of the essentials of Christian spirituality, at least its expectations. The means to the ends he proposes in "The Character" are: prayer, sermon, liturgy, Sacrament, and good works. In sum, the holy life is characterized by *happiness* in God, *hope* for one's salvation, a life of *prayer*, *love* of God and others, *gentleness* of spirit and manner, *sincerity* in following Christ, *obedience* to the will of God, continued *growth* in the graces of the Christian life, a lively witness to others of the grace of God, and dogged *faithfulness* to the essentials of vital faith.<sup>25</sup> These characteristics of Methodist spirituality are matters of faith and practice, not feeling and "quietism" (inactivity, a simple "waiting" for God to act before we act). Spiritual life is vigorous and intentional.

It is common in spiritual writings, at least in some classics, to steer as far away as possible from too much dependence on feelings ("consolations"). Wesley is also extremely distrustful of feelings, his or anyone else's. In some ways he is a Christian rationalist, with Scripture as a constant guardian of the mind. His sermons betray a penchant for logic, and this sheds some light on the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The Sacrament, for example, is a subjective and objective experience. Subjectively, participation in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist) may result in some sense of assurance, of deep spiritual warmth, and of love for God. Such a sense of worship is wonderful but it can be misleading, especially if such feelings become criteria for determining the value of worship. On the other hand, the material and liturgical aspects of the Sacrament offer an objective participation in worship. The action of God is recognized and honored in the elements and liturgy of the Sacrament. Such worship is valid because there may be a number of reasons why, subjectively speaking, worship may be less meaningful at the moment. Even in the most formal liturgy of "objective" worship the Sacrament brings help to us because Christ's actual presence in no way depends on our psychological state. Thus, even when we feel "dry," so to speak, spiritual formation is happening and the value of the Holy Communion is being actualized.

Like Benedict, Wesley believes spiritual growth takes place best within a community. Although Wesley is in reality something of a loner, unlike his brother Charles, he knows interaction is good when the subjects are God and holy living. Observance of the Lord's Supper, like baptism, is a public act of identification as well as blessing. We are people of the Supper, the holy meal, the fellowship of the table. Such fellowship produces a sense

of togetherness. Eating has symbolic value for us as well as spiritual benefit. Every meal is a reminder of the Lord's Supper. We need food and drink in order to sustain life. Correspondingly we need spiritual food and drink (the body and blood of Christ) in order to grow in faith and fellowship. The holy meal fills us with grace and helps us anticipate the common life of the coming marriage supper of the Lamb in the kingdom of God. The joy of the heavenly banquet is anticipated here below when we gather at the Lord's Table.<sup>26</sup> For this reason alone, the Lord's Supper should be an occasion of happiness and celebration. It is at the Table that our essential unity can best be seen, and Christ be witnessed to as the only legitimate hope for a world on the brink of ruin.

#### CONCLUSION

Perhaps a brief summary of Wesley's general understanding of the Sacrament of Holy Communion will be helpful.

1. The Lord's Supper is a Sacrament, having been instituted by our Lord.
2. The Lord's Supper is a Holy Mystery in which God is both hidden and revealed.
3. No one phrase, such as Lord's Supper or Holy Eucharist, is adequate in itself to sum up the significance of this Sacrament.
4. Divine grace flows through the Sacrament when people reach out to God in faith.
5. Through the notion of the means of grace, especially those called "prudential," Wesley extends the possible number of the Sacraments.
6. Frequent Communion can convey justifying and sanctifying grace to serious persons.
7. This Sacrament is not to become a theological battleground with other Christians.
8. This Supper, when freely shared, witnesses to Christian solidarity.
9. The Holy Supper "leads us" to our eternal destiny in the Kingdom of God.
10. Frequent communion is a necessity for spiritual growth.
11. The themes of repentance, faith, and joy are central to Holy Communion.
12. The Supper of the Lord is not to be denied anyone who sincerely wants to please God and live a holy life.
13. The presence of Christ in the Supper is real, though not understandable.
14. Holy Communion energizes the Church for compassionate ministry in the world.

It was after World War II that many of us were introduced in a serious way to the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran scholar and member of the Confessing Church. Himself a martyr, Bonhoeffer warns the rest of us about the seductiveness of "cheap grace." This is a grace, he says, that makes no significant demands, troubles no one, demands no cross-bearing. By contrast, the Gospel is "costly grace." Benedict and Wesley understand Bonhoeffer completely. Costly grace has requirements: self-denial, cross-bearing, following Christ every day. It is a daring kind of grace-fullness, the kind that flows from a God who suffers, who is angered by injustice, and who is active in the lives of His people. This is a grace that makes us strangers to the world's self-serving systems and values. This is a grace that points us to the future, and urges us to cling to each other for mutual comfort and support while waiting for the arrival of that future.

Nowhere is costly grace more visible than when the Church puts consecrated bread

and wine to its lips, for in this act we are brought face to face with the pain that human nature and human society hand us. In this act of blessing and breaking we are also blessed and broken. As the body and blood of Christ are contemplated, we remember that at this table the Church of Jesus Christ is really one people.<sup>27</sup> Every family member is invited to the meal and everyone passes the plates of food. When we hear the words of institution we hear the call of God to follow Him who has no place to lay His head, who is so tired that He falls asleep in a storm at sea, who must constantly cope with being misunderstood and reviled. To rise from the table is to turn in the direction of the kingdom, regardless of the cost, and go with Jesus to crucifixion while hoping for resurrection.<sup>28</sup> Whether we be Benedictines or Methodists will not be important, I think, when we must face Him whom we profess to serve and give an account of the trust placed in our hands. This conference will rise up one day to praise us or judge us, for it seems to me we are saying this week that belonging to one another, as well as to God, is fundamental to our being the real Church.<sup>29</sup> This conference helps us remember our past and move from that remembrance toward unity in holiness, to which our Lord Jesus calls us. Let us work fervently together so that when the day of judgment arrives we all will hear, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."<sup>30</sup>

#### NOTES

1. This lecture was contained in the last grouping of lectures in the week-long conference. This paragraph was inserted in the manuscript after the conference was completed, though it had been written for and presented in the lecture. No attention was given to differences in the discussion that followed, of which there were two that day.
2. Cf. Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 33ff. for a definitive statement regarding Wesley's sources, especially the ante-Nicene fathers.
3. In the Wesleyan tradition terms like "Holy Communion," "Lord's Supper," and "Eucharist" are interchangeable. No one term is adequate to sum up the whole of the meaning of the sacrament or define its essence. In Wesley's sermon, "The Duty of Constant Communion," he freely uses "Lord's Supper" for "Communion," even "holy mysteries." Cf. Outler, *Works*, vol. III, pp. 428-39. In his sermon, "Public Diversions Denounced," Wesley uses the phrase "ever blessed sacrament." *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 328; in the "General Rules of the United Societies" he calls the Sacrament an "ordinance of God." Cf. *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reproduction of the 1872 edition), vol. VIII, p. 271.
4. Though John Wesley was a poet in his own right, his brother, Charles, is known as the "father" of Wesleyan hymnody. While there were some occasional theological differences between the brothers, John regarded Charles' hymns as fully representative of his own evangelistic concerns, cf. *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House) 7:2ff. "The Wesleys themselves combined a mutual stress on sacramental and evangelical spirituality." Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 28.
5. A particularly striking way to describe one's experience of Christ in the Eucharist for me is Pope Pius XII's words that in the Sacrament "Christ the Lord [is] hidden beneath the Eucharistic veils..." *Encyclical Letter on The Mystical Body of Christ* (New York: The Paulist Press, n.d.), p. 28. More recently in Catholic thought, Edward Schillebeeckx uses the term "transignification" as a way to heighten a more personal way of talking about the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Here Schillebeeckx sounds very much like Hans Küng, when Küng writes, "The essential thing [regarding



the Lord's Supper) is our approval and affirmation of the fact that Christ is present and active in a particular way in the Lord's Supper, in the eating and drinking of his body and blood; theological description of how that happens is secondary by comparison...the Lord's Supper is not about a matter of fact, but about an event of grace; not about sacred objects effective of themselves, but about an encounter with a person..." Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 221. For a discussion of Schillebeeckx, see Horton Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 220ff. For another contemporary Catholic sacramental theology of the Eucharist, see Michael G. Lawler, *Symbol and Sacrament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 126-53.

6. The age in which Wesley lived was more polemic than our own. Judgments could be very harsh as they flowed back and forth between Catholic and Protestant spokespersons. Even though he regarded himself as a "middle way" churchman, more in the line of Erasmus than Calvin, Wesley had some substantial problems with some of the Catholic theology of his time. Cf. *Works*, Zondervan edition, vol. X, p. 117ff., vol. X. In spite of his concerns, Wesley's essential "catholic spirit" can be seen in a sermon by that title (Outler, *Works*, vol. II, p. 79ff.) and in his "Letter to A Roman Catholic" (*Works*, Zondervan edition, vol. X, p. 80ff.). In these pieces he hopes and prays for more of a consensus regarding the practice of love between Christians and less stress on the particulars of doctrine (though he always assumed general Christian agreement on the basics of the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed).

7. "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." Outler, *Works*, 1:381. Emphasis Wesley's.

8. The notion that humans have enough freedom of the will so as to be morally responsible for their choices is fundamental to Wesleyan thought. Cf. Outler, *Works*, 1:81; William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 105-13. The idea of enough freedom of the will to choose Christ and to continue to choose to follow Christ is at the heart of Wesley's argument with Calvinian predestination theology. Cf. Outler, *Works*, 2:99, 415-21. See Oden's "consensus" theology in Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, vol. III, Systematic Theology (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), pp. 88-89, 101ff., 120ff.

9. 1 John 4:10, The New Revised Standard Version.

10. In his sermon, "Salvation by Faith," Wesley says "For all our works, all our righteousness, which were before our believing, merited nothing of God but condemnation, so far were they from deserving faith, which therefore, whenever given, is not 'of works'. Neither is salvation of the works we do when we believe." Outler, *Works*, 1:126.

11. Methodist theologian Thomas C. Oden comments, "The [Holy] Spirit works immediately in the heart and mediately through the word addressed in scripture and sacraments." Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 165. It is the same Spirit conveying the same grace immediately and mediately. Such an insight is compatible with John Wesley's perspectives.

12. Examples of God's redeeming love are easy to find in Wesley's works. The following stanza from a hymn for seekers after God catches up both his theology and spirit.

"But O how soon thy wrath is o'er,  
And pard'ning love takes place!  
Assist me, Saviour, to adore  
The riches of thy grace."

13. See Outler, *Works*, 2:387ff.; Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, p. 156ff.

14. Romans 1:18-23. See Wesley's comments on this verse in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958 edition), p. 521.

15. For Oden, one way to continue the teaching office of the Church and maintain fidelity to the Gospel is in the right use of the liturgy and Sacraments. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God, Systematic*

*Theology*, vol. I (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), p. 348.

16. Wesley does not have a narrow view of the Church. He regards the word "church" to be very "ambiguous." This was typical of Protestantism in his day. He is quite satisfied with the working statement in the "Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England:" to wit, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance; in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." Jerry L. Mercer, *The Destiny of the Church in Wesley's Eschatology* (Unpublished Master's Thesis: Southern Methodist University, Perkins School of Theology, 1965), p. 33. In general, Benedictine monasticism could fit quite nicely in this broad understanding of the Church. On the other hand, Methodism will not fit so comfortably within a Roman Catholic understanding of the Church.

17. In time Wesley will bend this definition almost to the breaking point in order to establish his "preaching houses" and again in his ordaining missionaries for America.

18. Alas, that statement is more theologically than practically true for Methodist groups in the United States, the ones I know best. North American Methodism, generally speaking, seems unbalanced in favor of preaching, much more Word than Table. This can be explained in part by the combined influences of the camp-meeting movement in the nineteenth-century, Calvinistic revivalism in the south in particular, and the general ignorance of many pastors and laity regarding the importance of the Sacraments to Christian identity and witness. Some attempt to repair this imbalance can be found in the most recent publication of *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, but even there, though better than what had been, not much has been done to re-educate a clergy more apt to see "worship" as evangelistic in intent than adoration of the Almighty God who calls us into being and forms us in His likeness. In the strongly conservative Methodist atmosphere in which I usually minister, it is clear that evangelism takes precedence over worship. This means in Sunday "worship" that the liturgy has the congregation rather than God as its primary referent. If my understanding is correct, and some would obviously disagree, then this is a tragedy of unbelievable proportion. It is my belief that only when personal and social holiness are understood to be the result of the faithful living out of Word and Table can there be an authentic renewal of the church local and the Church catholic in the spirit of the New Testament and any hope for a realistic sense of Christian unity among us. For a short but informative article on the attempt in United Methodism to use its new hymnal and book of worship to strike the Wesleyan balance between Word and Table, see Hoyt L. Hickman, "Re-Forming the Sacraments in United Methodist Worship," *Doxology, a Journal of the Order of St. Luke* (1993), 10:5-14. I totally agree with Bouyer that "the whole Mass is a single liturgy of the Word." Cf. Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1954), p. 79. It seems that both Benedictine and Wesleyan spirituality agree that the essentially sacramental nature of worship, with all its movements, is a "liturgy of the Word."

19. Historically, Methodism, in its many branches, has understood itself to be a reforming movement. It has, therefore, been a bit suspicious of institutions, including its own. In this it shares the monastic spirit of a renewing call to serious Christian commitment. Only recently (earlier this year, 1994) a group of highly recognized American United Methodist leaders formed a "Confessing Movement" within United Methodism to protest what they see as a dilution of Wesleyan Standards in the church as a whole by issuing a call to vigorous adherence to what they see as the church's historical doctrinal confession and ethics (in the spirit of John Wesley). A similar call was issued more than thirty years ago, though more concerned with sacramental than doctrinal renewal, by the Order of St. Luke, an order principally of pastors and other United Methodist leaders. Members of this order hope to encourage spiritual renewal through an application of the sacramental principle to the whole of Christian liturgy and life, with a special focus on the healing ministry of the Church. Thus, through an awkward combination of Word and Sacrament in these two movements there is a challenge being offered to the institutional church to keep faith with its the-

ological and practical past, not by imitating it but by letting it speak in fresh ways to a church perceived to be in crisis.

20. As we see in the suggested "Prayers of Great Thanksgiving" in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

21. Wesley does not include baptism in his list of the means of grace, although he writes of baptism as "a 'precious means' of God's grace." Outler, *Works*, 3:49.

22. An exception to the notion here called "sacramental life" in Wesley is found in Borgen, *Op. Cit.*, esp. pp. 64-65, in his treatment of John Deschner concerning continental Orthodoxy; also p.272ff., where Borgen concludes that Wesley is really closer to the Reformation tradition (Calvinist rather than Lutheran). To my way of thinking, this is a very difficult position to defend given the Wesley hymns on the Lord's Supper.

23. In one of Charles Wesley's sacramental hymns we catch this sense of mystery. (The emphasis is Wesley's.)

Oh the depth of love Divine,  
Th' unfathomable grace!  
Who shall say how bread and wine  
God into man conveys!  
*How* the bread his flesh imparts,  
*How* the wine transmits his blood,  
Fills his faithful people's heart  
With all the life of God!

Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley*, p. 259. "Sure and real" is the grace imparted by the sacrament, though we are at a loss to say exactly how that happens. It is part of the *mysterion*. For a helpful, ecumenical discussion of this notion of *mysterion*, see Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy: An Ecumenical Model* (Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1985), pp. 36-46. For a compatible Roman Catholic interpretation, see David N. Power, O.M.I., *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p. 292ff. Powers says the reality of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist goes beyond the "substance" of the elements. The presence of Christ, he thinks, both transcends and extends the literal meaning of the Sacrament as a liturgical action.

24. Part of the third stanza of hymn #901 in the hymns for the Lord's Supper in the 1894 edition of John Wesley's, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, "with a new supplement" (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room) reads: (emphasis mine)

*The grace which sure salvation brings  
Let us herewith receive;  
Sate the hungry with good things,  
The hidden manna give.*

25. For a practical contemporary application of the teachings of "The Character of a Methodist" see Jerry L. Mercer, *Being Christian* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1993). For a complementary treatment of Benedictine spirituality, see Joan Chittister, O.S.B., *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990).

26. The kingdom of God, the "kingdom of glory," is "the ultimate, all-embracing eschatological reality for Wesley." Cf. Mercer, *The Destiny of the Church in Wesley's Eschatology*, p. 67. Receiving the Lord's Supper is an "infallible pledge" of the hope we have in eternal life. As such, God's grace in the Supper "assures" us of participation in the kingdom of glory. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

27. The notion of one people of God at one table is a repeated theme in the Wesley brothers' Eucharistic hymns. None is more plain than this.

How happy are Thy servants, Lord,  
Who thus remember Thee!

What tongue can tell our sweet accord,  
 Our perfect harmony?  
 Who Thy mysterious supper share,  
 Here at Thy table fed,  
 Many, and yet but one we are,  
 One undivided bread.

One with the living bread Divine,  
 Which now by faith we eat,  
 Our hearts, and minds, and spirits join,  
 And all in Jesus meet.

So dear the tie where souls agree  
 In Jesu's dying love:  
 Then only can it closer be,  
 When all are joined above.

Cf. J. Earnest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), no. 165. Not only do Methodists believe there is one loaf and one cup for one people, but we share Wainwright's notion that the Sacrament is more than the "seal" of unity but "the way" to it. Cf. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 287ff. Wesley insists that admission to the table be in response to an invitation to conversion (in the sense of personal confession and a pledge to amend one's life) rather than agreement with a creed. Formal theology normally follows experience, in Wesley's mind (though he does appear himself to be an exception to that notion).

28. Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985), pp. 286-87. For this reason the mood of the Sacrament of Christ's self-sacrifice should normally be one of joy and anticipation of the world to come. Cf. Browning and Reed, *The Sacraments in Religious Education and Liturgy*, p. 168f.

29. Here I refer to the essays of Albert C. Outler as edited by Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1991), especially pp. 211-26, 258. Outler makes the point that unity in "essentials" does not mean the abandonment of diversity in opinions and that all of us should seek for that Christian "mingling of our memberships, ministries, and sacraments."

30. Matt. 25:34.