

ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

(Minutes of Conference 1980, p. 62, para. 20 and p. 64, para. 26)

The administration of the sacraments is a matter of doctrinal importance and ecclesiastical order that is central to several debates in Methodism today. These extend beyond the issues raised in the above references to the Minutes of Conference 1980.

There is in fact a growing list of matters of pertinent concern for the Church in this regard. These include the question of the celebration of the sacrament by ordained deaconesses and evangelists (Letter from M E Dep. dated 20 Feb. 1981); the proposed order of local ministers; the dispensation given to probationers to administer the sacraments and the contradictory positions adopted by Conference in respect of the use of lay-men for the distribution of the elements in Holy Communion.

While accepting the 1975 Methodist Service Book (Minutes 1976) which specifically allows for the participation of laymen in "the Preparation; the Ministry of the Word, including the intercessions; and in the distribution of the bread and wine" (B1 para. 2.), Conference has now resolved that "lay-persons are not permitted to assist in the distribution of the elements" (Minutes 1980 p. 64 para 26 b). These matters are all related to our theology of both the sacraments and ordination. Rather than make pragmatic adjustments to our practice and Laws & Discipline it seems more appropriate to consider these issues in terms of our theological tradition and then to come to informed decisions on each of these matters in turn.

It therefore seems a worthwhile exercise to provide a preliminary background paper concerning Wesley's attitude on the significance and administration of the sacraments. A consideration of this tradition in which we stand will enable us to respond in a sound theological manner and with evangelical creativity to the challenging and urgent need to ensure that our people are not denied the administration of the sacraments.

- JOHN WESLEY: AN ORTHODOX CHURCHMAN AND A CREATIVE  
EVANGELIST

---

(A consideration of Wesleyan sacramental  
theology)

It is common knowledge that John Wesley was not an academic theologian who sought to provide a system of doctrines in logical dependence on one another. His theology is one of reaction to and interaction with theological, ecclesiastical and socio-political trends of the day. His style is eclectic and reveals an abiding tension on dialectic between Anglican orthodoxy and an ecclesiastical creativity compelled by his evangelical zeal. To deny either of these poles in his thought, or to play-down this tension to enable a neat and non-dialectic "Wesleyan synthesis" to emerge, is to fail to present Wesleyan theology in its unsystematised creativity.

This Wesleyan tension is presented in this paper by first providing a brief historical consideration of Wesley's struggle with these two poles of thought with regard to the administration of the sacraments to Methodist societies in his time. Comment is then made on Wesley's sacramental theology - not in its entirety, but again in an attempt to portray the suggested tension. Some tentative remarks are then made on a Wesleyan doctrine of ordination, and finally a brief analysis is made of the ordination liturgy in contemporary Methodism.

1. A historical comment on Wesley's attitude to the administration of the sacraments

It is useful at this point to consider the origin of the name Methodist. The group at Oxford, under John Wesley's leadership, earned this sobriquet because of "their methodical observance of the practices of a sacramental and high churchly religion" (1). They were also called "Bible Moths" and "Sacramentarians". This position held by the

early Methodists was re-affirmed later when John Wesley abridged the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England. The first paragraph of article XIX with minor alterations became article XIII in his abridgement - which reads as follows:

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. (2)

Wesley thus sees three things necessary for the Church: a community of faith, the proclamation of the pure Word of God, and sacraments duly administered. The problem for us has become one of priority. Wesley, true to himself, seems to have held the three aspects in tension, sometimes apparently emphasising one and then another. These clauses may however be used to support various points of view, the Catholic emphasis on the "due administration" of the sacraments, the classical Protestant proclamation of the "pure Word of God" and, thirdly, that of those who reduce the nature of the church to a disposition of the heart, giving rise to a 'community of the faithful'. For Wesley these were not alternatives but essentials. The unresolved tension between the various elements in his theology are clearly visible here. John Lawson correctly reminds us that the "evangelical revival started among high-churchmen, and thus it came to pass that the original and truest Methodism was both Catholic and Evangelical in emphasis" (3). One would therefore expect both Catholic and Evangelical aspects in Wesley's sacramental theology.

Wesley affirms the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, amending them only slightly where he deems it necessary. In article XVI he defines "sacraments" as follows: "Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only

badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they are certain signs of grace and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him" (*italics added*) (4). Wesley thus holds that sacraments are not merely tokens of "men's profession" but are also "certain signs of grace". In this statement he emphasises both the objective and the subjective, or Catholic and Evangelical aspects of the sacraments. His is clearly a "both-and" rather than an "either-or" theology.

Concerning baptism he writes: "Baptism is not only a sign of profession ... but it is also a sign of regeneration" (5). On holy communion he holds: "The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death" (6). In all these points Wesley showed his Anglican orthodoxy by closely following the Thirty Nine Articles. We shall consider his sacramental theology below, but this preliminary discussion of the matter is necessary to understand his concern for the "due administration" of the sacraments.

Wesley showed his high regard for the sacrament of holy communion by being a regular communicant. At a time when many parish churches celebrated the sacrament three or four times a year, Wesley communicated at least once a week. Wesley's high-church view of the Lord's supper as a means of grace motivated his concern that the preachers and members of the Methodist societies should have access to the sacraments. Superintendents were instructed to arrange their appointments in such a manner that "no preacher may be hindered from attending the Church [of England] more than two Sundays in a month" (7). In some instances it was not possible for society members to have access to parish churches - and there were insufficient priests

among the Methodists who were episcopally ordained to administer the sacraments in the Methodist societies. In spite of this urgent need, the bishops of the Church of England were unwilling to make episcopally ordained priests available to meet these needs. By the 1760's pressure was mounting from the larger Methodist societies to receive the sacrament in their own chapels and some twenty years later there were approximately 15000 Methodist members in America, with no provision for receiving the sacraments. Yet in spite of having had certain biblical convictions much earlier on, he refused to simply resort to ordaining ministers himself - and he was faced with a crisis.

We need to briefly consider some of this biblical evidence. His Journal entry of 20 January 1746 reads:

On the road I read over Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught; but, if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order, and that originally every Christian congregation was a Church independent of all others. (8)

This same conviction, that in New Testament times a bishop and a presbyter exercised the same office, is also reflected in his Notes on the New Testament, first published in 1754. (See especially his notes on Acts 20:17, Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8.) Yet in spite of this firm biblical conviction that as a priest he was also an episcopos, he made strenuous efforts to obtain ordination for his preachers by bishops of the Church of England, or by bishops recognised as valid by that church. In the meantime he steadfastly refused to allow unordained preachers to administer the sacraments - but the needs of the societies for the sacraments continued to grow.

Wesley's first move to ameliorate the situation came with the appointment of Thomas Maxfield, who had been ordained by an Irish bishop, to administer the sacraments in London during his absence, but by 1764 Maxfield had left the Methodists, due to pressure from Wesley - which becomes clear from a letter written in 1762 to his brother Charles. We then find the strange events surrounding the ordination in 1764 of John Jones by Erasmus, whom Wesley believed to be a Greek bishop. We do not need to go into the details of the affair other than to note that when it appeared that Erasmus had acted irregularly in further ordinations, those so ordained were removed from the list of preachers. Even Jones was obliged to leave.. It is clear that while Wesley believed that uninterrupted succession could not be proved,<sup>(9)</sup> he nevertheless held the episcopal form of church government to be scriptural.

Only when faced with considerable needs of the American Methodists due to the withdrawal of many of the Church of England priests during and subsequent to the American War of Independence in the 1770's, was he motivated in 1784 to ordain Richard Whatcoat, Thomas Vasey and Thomas Coke. (This provides an interesting precedent to minister to people "on the other side" of a conflict!) The ordination of Thomas Coke, already an ordained presbyter as superintendent is a controversy not directly relevant to the ordination debate in the British (and South African) brand of Methodism. What is important to note, however, is that he resorted to this step only after the Anglican Bishop of London had refused to ordain a priest for service in America.

Yet, as already noted this followed his conviction on scriptural grounds that the office of presbyter and bishop were of the same nature. Interestingly, he found comfort in doing so by identifying a precedent in the church of Alexandria in the first three centuries, where presbyters appointed and consecrated their own bishops without intervention from other sees.<sup>(10)</sup>

Yet he still refrained from taking a similar step in England, while he considered Scotland in the same light as America, there - like in America - the Church of England had no jurisdiction because English law did not apply - and the members of the Scottish societies had no access to the sacraments. We thus find him ordaining ministers to serve there in 1785. Yet when John Pawson, who had been ordained for Scotland, returned to England, Wesley refused to allow him to administer sacraments in an area where the Church of England had jurisdiction. Finally in 1788 and 1789 he was compelled by the needs of Methodists to ordain three men for work in England. He did not see this as schism but as a necessity for the continuation of the societies, but still urged Methodists where possible to attend parish churches to receive the sacrament.

The Plan of Pacification of 1795, four years after Wesley's death, continued to urge Methodists to go to parish churches to worship and receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper. To this end the times of services in Methodist chapels were not to clash with those of the parish church. There were two exceptions: In some chapels where it was already the practice to administer the Lord's supper it was to continue, and secondly, where a majority of trustees and stewards of a chapel requested it Conference could give permission for the administration of the sacraments. It was nevertheless not to clash with Sundays on which Holy Communion services were held in the parish Church.<sup>(12)</sup> Following Wesley, the Conference considered the sacraments of the Church of England the norm and their celebration in Methodist chapels to be a necessary expedient responding to the needs for their administration among Methodists. Furthermore, it was to be administered in the societies only by ministers who were ordained for this purpose.

We must therefore conclude that Wesley saw ordination as necessary prerequisite for men to celebrate sacraments. It is therefore not surprising that in the ordination liturgy in the Books of Offices, ordination is to a pastoral,

teaching (preaching) and sacramental ministry.<sup>(13)</sup> This tradition, goes back at least to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. It is also instructive to note that these three functions correspond to the definition of the things necessary for the church, a community of faith, the proclamation of the pure Word of God and the due administration of the sacraments. Although, he rejected uninterrupted succession he nevertheless held that ordination had to be by those competent to do, namely presbyters or bishops. Because he considered the sacraments to be means of grace he was most anxious that members of the societies have access to them, and particularly to the regular celebration of holy communion. It is here in particular that the tension between his Anglican orthodoxy and ecclesiastical creativity is most clearly visible. It was a combination of these factors which prompted him to ordain ministers to administer sacraments.

## 2. Wesley's sacramental theology

When asked in 1739 in which doctrines the Methodists differed from the (Anglican) Church, Wesley responded: "To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church, clearly laid down, both in her Prayers, Articles and Homilies."<sup>(14)</sup> And as late as 1790 (the year before his death) he writes to an Anglican bishop as follows: "The Methodists, in general, my Lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her services and partake of her sacraments."<sup>(15)</sup> John R. Parris points out that the Anglican Reformation, although it had obvious affinities with the Continental reform movements, produced a unique blending of Catholic, Protestant and humanist emphases.<sup>(16)</sup> This tension is clearly displayed in the Anglican understanding of the sacraments, as well as in Wesley's own sacramental theology.



## 2.1 Baptism

The tension between Catholic and Protestant theology is most apparent in both the Anglican and Wesleyan discussions on infant baptism in the eighteenth century. On the one hand it is stressed that grace is actually conferred in baptism - a position which leans toward an ex opere operato view of baptism. On the other hand it is emphasised that the faith of the recipient is a crucial factor in making the sacrament effective. The renowned Anglican apologist Richard Hooker incorporates both these tendencies into his doctrine of infant baptism.<sup>(17)</sup> In one place he writes that faith is present in the infant in a rudimentary form, for "the Holy Ghost might truly be said to work giving that grace which is the first and effective cause out of which belief groweth". This thought corresponds to the position taken by Wesley in his sermon on "Salvation by Faith" in which it is stressed that even the faith by which we respond to God's grace in Christ is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8).<sup>(18)</sup> Then elsewhere Hooker maintains that the sponsors of the child at baptism "accepted on behalf of the child that acceptance and faith which it would later take up for itself".

The most important document on baptism to be published in John Wesley's name is in fact a treatise first published by his father, Samuel, in 1700, which John reissued in a slightly revised form in 1756. Apart from this, Wesley provides little direct teaching on the subject.<sup>(19)</sup> In this treatise Wesley allowed a form of baptismal regeneration. In speaking of the benefits of infant baptism he writes:

The first of these is, the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ's death ... By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its Head ... By water then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again ...

Herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness. (20)

Samuel had spoken of baptismal regeneration as follows:

We say not that regeneration is always completed in baptism, but that it is begun in it; a principle of grace is infused, which we lost by the fall, which shall never be wholly withdrawn, unless we quench God's Holy Spirit by obstinate habits of wickedness. There are babes as well as strong men in Christ. (21)

Colin Williams shows that this teaching is not an inconsistent inclusion of his father's teaching, because John Wesley expresses similar thoughts in his sermons and in his Explanatory notes upon the New Testament.<sup>(22)</sup> In these references Wesley refers to baptism as "the beginning of total regeneration", to spirit of adoption being "ordinarily annexed by baptism" and to baptism as "the outward sign and means" of "that great inward change by the Spirit".

Clearly Wesley did not believe God to be bound to this sacrament as a means of regeneration - this was the ordinary means, not the exclusive means. He did not regard baptism as necessary for salvation but as being in accordance with "the mind which was in Christ". He also believed emphatically in infant baptism: Infants, he thought, need baptism because they are involved in original sin and they are capable of entering into a covenant with God. He further believed that the New Testament reference to "households" included children and that simply because the Jews had circumcised their infants they would readily have committed their children to God in baptism on becoming Christians.<sup>(23)</sup>

To summarise Wesley's teaching on baptism: He believed that it is a sign which declares it is God who initiates

the process of regeneration. Baptism is the outward sign of this. God's ultimate plan is to bring us to a conscious acceptance of the new birth. "If we do not experience this, our baptism has not answered the end of its institution." (24) And beyond this conscious realisation of having been justified by grace, Wesley thought that God's plan for the regenerated person is perfect sanctification. Reacting, as he was, against institutionalised and external religion, Wesley stressed the importance of the conscious response and inward regeneration of a person in the new birth and the subsequent inner witness to salvation in the doctrine of assurance. (25) This emphasis must not, however, be allowed to negate the Wesleyan tension identified earlier in this paper.

Several Wesleyan scholars have identified a dual interpretation of the new birth, or two senses of regeneration, in Wesleyan theology.

There is an initial sense in which God imparts grace to the unregenerated person, without which it is impossible to know God or to respond to him in faith. This sense of regeneration is best understood in relation to Wesley's discussion on prevenient grace - although he himself nowhere discusses the direct relationship between prevenient grace and baptism. At the 1745 conference of preachers, Wesley stated that Methodist doctrine came within a "hairsbreadth of Calvinism". Wesley believed in the total depravity of man, and salvation by grace through faith alone. Denying all natural free-will and all power antecedent to grace - the question emerges: why then should some be saved and some not? George Whitefield's answer was a simple one - because some are predestined by God to be saved and others are not. Wesley's answer was in the form of the doctrine of prevenient grace. By the infusion of grace - described by John and his father before him as the beginning of the

regenerative process which ordinarily begins with baptism - the one form of new birth in Wesleyan doctrine is identified. To resort to the Catholic-Protestant dialectic earlier identified in this paper as being part of the Anglican and Wesleyan discussions of infant baptism, this form of the new birth can be referred to as the ex opere operato leaning of Wesleyan thought.

The other side of the dialectic comes to expression in the Wesleyan stress on the believer's appropriation of or conscious acceptance of the offer of salvation in Christ. In affirming the importance of this form of the new birth and reacting against those who know only external religion and take refuge in talk about baptismal regeneration, Wesley states (in apparent contradiction to his other emphasis) "baptism is not the new birth: they are not one and the same thing".<sup>(26)</sup> This apparent contradiction can only be resolved in light of the reference to the two forms of regeneration which have been identified.

Some Wesleyan scholars have suggested that this dualism in Wesley's thought is overcome with the "later Wesley" emphasising an evangelical zeal that negates his earlier orthodox churchmanship. Colin Williams's identification of this debate and his own affirmation of the dualism in Wesley's thought until his death is of importance in this regard.<sup>(27)</sup> Williams notes, one feels correctly, that "while Wesley kept both sides of the tension, he did not spell it out with sufficient force, with the result that there has been great confusion on the subject in Methodism since his death". The result is that, as Williams suggests, American Methodism has reduced the service of baptism to little more than a dedication. On the other hand, British Methodism, while retaining more of the structure of the service, excluded all references to regeneration in 1882. South African Methodism has followed the tendency of the British - while providing an important affirmation of infant

baptism being more than mere dedication in the conference statement of 1976, entitled A Short Statement on Baptism. Here it is stated that "baptism is a sacrament not of our decision but of God's saving grace". As such it is "the seal of membership of the New Covenant". Emphasis is also placed on the close connection between baptism and faith, with reference being made to the "faith of the Church" within which baptism takes place. One feels, however, that there is an important lack of Wesleyan emphasis here that is so well articulated in the earlier reference to Richard Hooker and Wesley's sermon on "Salvation by Faith". To return again to Williams - what one misses in Wesley's doctrine of assurance is an objective counterpart to the inner witness of the Spirit, such as Luther's vigorous "I am baptized". The South African statement fails yet further in this direction in not explicitly emphasising Wesley's "Salvation by Faith" recognition of faith itself being a gift of God, which he would say is ordinarily a consequence of baptism. It is this rudimentary faith, he would argue, that ultimately, by God's further grace, results in justification and ultimately sanctification.

Methodism has within its earliest tradition a dualism in its doctrine that provides a natural dynamism that can only contribute creatively to church unity talks on baptism. It will be both a pity and a denial of Wesleyan roots to allow this dialectic to dissipate into a simple shift toward either mere Zwinglian symbolism or a Roman Catholic type ex opere operato doctrine.

## 2.2 Eucharist

The Wesleyan tension or dualism identified in the discussion on baptism is again present in Wesley's doctrine of the eucharist or holy communion. And again the place to begin the discussion is with the Anglican protagonist, Richard Hooker. Opposing transubstantiation as well as an ex opere

operato doctrine of the eucharist, he argued that the bread and wine are moral instruments of salvation, rather than physical instruments. His position regarding the eucharist comes fully to expression in these words: "The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of sacrament." This position known as receptionism, indicates that while the bread and the wine continue to exist unchanged after consecration, the faithful communicant receives together with them the true body and blood of Christ.<sup>(28)</sup> Wesley never deviated far from this basic position. For him the eucharist was the means of grace par excellence. Throughout his life he partook regularly of this sacrament and during the festivals of the church he did so daily. He constantly urged Methodists to follow his example and to communicate regularly - because this he thought was the command of the Lord and the means whereby the forgiveness of sins is secured. His basic teaching on this sacrament was first formulated at Oxford in a sermon entitled "The Duty of Constant Communion" and republished over fifty years later.

Essentially Wesley repudiated both transubstantiation (the conversion of the elements into the body and blood of Christ) and consubstantiation (real presence of Christ together with the elements) - yet he insisted that something does happen in the consecration of the elements, although, like the Anglicans of the day, he remained agnostic about how it happened.<sup>(29)</sup> In his sermon "The Means of Grace" it becomes clear that Wesley maintains, in a way similar to his position on baptism, a middle position between the Roman and Puritan extremes. In the following extracts from this sermon, Wesley's position in opposition to an ex opere operato view of the sacraments becomes clear. He stresses that "the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion" and that "means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity".

Consequently, "whosoever imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err". He further tells us that God has the freedom to bestow grace outside of the sacraments, even "though there were no means on the face of the earth". Yet when rightly used there is a promise of a gift of grace which will be fulfilled in them.

Is not the eating of the bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken, and the blood of Christ once shed for us? (*italics are added*). (30)

From this quotation it becomes clear that there is also a strong objective character in the sacrament. For him the elements are not "bare signs", but, when rightly used, the means of bestowing grace and spiritual sustenance on the faithful recipient. Thus does Wesley continue in the same sermon: "By the grace of God, I will thus trust in them, till the day of my death; that is, I will believe, that whatever God hath promised, he is faithful to perform." Ultimately Wesley's evaluation of the Lord's supper is based in his trust in the New Testament promise: "All who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord's supper; for this also is a direction (He) Himself hath given."

Yet Wesley's evaluation of the eucharist was that it was more than a means of grace for regenerated Christians. In opposition to those who held "that the Lord's Supper is not a converting, but a confirming ordinance", he states "many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God ... was wrought at the Lord's Supper".<sup>(31)</sup> Clearly Wesley is allowing for an objective, regenerating power within the eucharist and not merely regarding its efficacy

to be dependable on the assuring faith of the recipient. Driven by the strong evangelical zeal that motivated him after his Aldersgate experience he sought to use the eucharist as an evangelical instrument and invited both the converted and the unconverted to the table. Parris says, however, that there is no evidence that Wesley ever abandoned the prerequisite that a person should be baptised before sharing in the eucharist.<sup>(32)</sup> What he did abandon was an earlier insistence on episcopal baptism. Wesley held that communicants come with nothing to give and stressed that the desire to be saved was all that was required: " ... no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness."<sup>(33)</sup> Then later, apparently under pressure to preserve order at the sacrament, he again restricted those who came to the table.

Wesley further held that the sacrament depended not on the worthiness or the good intention of the celebrant. In accordance with this basic belief that the validity of the sacrament is based not in him who administers it but the faithfulness of him who ordained it - he continually urged Methodists to attend the churches to which they belonged in order to receive the sacrament. As already mentioned, Methodist services were in fact arranged at such an hour to make this possible. As the rift between Methodists and Anglicans grew, Wesley stressed that the receiving of the elements from a priest whom the communicants regarded as heretical or unworthy, did not affect the validity of the sacrament, but he conceded that it greatly lessens the comfort of receiving.

In concluding this discussion on the eucharist, summarised reference needs to be made to what is regarded by most Wesleyan scholars as the essential ingredients which Wesley held to be part of this sacrament.



2.2.1 Real presence

Consistent with his view on baptism he was not content with mere Zwinglian symbolism. Sacrificial language is present throughout Wesley's writing. In the Hymns on the Lord's Supper published jointly by John and Charles Wesley in 1745 there is a section of hymns entitled "The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice".<sup>(35)</sup> The sacrifice of the eucharist is seen in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews as a dramatic representation of the eternal sacrifice of the Priest-Victim in Heaven. At least one of the hymns included in the anthology of eucharistic hymns, already mentioned by John and Charles, includes what Rattenbury identifies as being "in substance the doctrine which lies behind, and is assumed in all Wesley's sacrificial teaching":

O Thou eternal Victim, slain  
 A sacrifice for guilty man,  
 By the eternal Spirit made  
 An offering in the sinner's stead,  
 Our everlasting Priest art Thou,  
 And plead'st Thy death for sinners now.

Thy offering still continues new,  
 Thy vesture keeps its bloody hue,  
 Thou stood'st the ever-slaughter'd Lamb,  
 Thy priesthood still remains the same,  
 Thy years, O God, can never fail,  
 Thy goodness is unchangeable.

O that our faith may never move,  
 But stand unshaken as Thy love!  
 Sure evidence of things unseen,  
 Now let it pass the years between,  
 And view Thee bleeding on the tree,  
 My God, who dies for me, for me. (36)

Yet in stressing the sacrificial character of the sacrament, Wesley repudiated the Roman interpretation which involved either a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ or a supplementary offering for the atonement of sins. Rattenbury quotes from Brevint's Treatise to suggest that for Wesley the sacrament becomes "a kind of sacrifice".<sup>(37)</sup>

Wesley likewise rejected any corporeal view of the presence of Christ in the sacrament and he exegates the words of John 6:51-2, "eating his flesh" as meaning "believing in Christ". "We freely own that Christ is to be adored in the Lord's Supper; but that the elements are to be adored, we deny."<sup>(38)</sup> For Wesley the real presence of Christ is the Holy Spirit - and he reintroduced the ancient Epiclesis (prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit) in the Church of England liturgy.<sup>(39)</sup> This was in the form of Charles Wesley's:

Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,  
And realize the sign;  
Thy life infuse into the bread,  
Thy power into the wine.

Again we are confronted with the Wesleyan tension or dualism. Christ is both objectively present in the sacrament and yet present for those who worthily and with faith receive the bread and wine. To change the language - the sacrament was seen by Wesley as both a converting and a confirming ordinance. It is effective, both for those with no more than a desire to be saved and for those who receive the elements in the fullness of faith: " ... the Lord's supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities." (40)

### 2.2.2 A reminder of Christ's death

The sacrament of holy communion is thus seen by Wesley as pointing beyond itself as a sacrifice to the sacrifice of Christ. Several authors have shown that for Wesley the word "memorial" or "memory" (anamnesis) of Christ's death means to "recall" or "bring back" the presence of Christ. Bowmer thus concludes (and Williams agrees) that the Lord's supper is "the extension of an act done in the

past until its effects are a present power".<sup>41</sup> Again the emphasis is on an objective presence of Christ in the sacrament.

### 2.2.3 Eschatological

Bowmer comments:

First, there was the belief that the Lord's supper is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, "The Sacrament as a Pledge of Heaven". Second, there was the belief in the "Communion of Saints", and third, that in the Lord's Supper as "Heavenly Food" (*italics are added*): (42)

In this emphasis the Wesleyan eschatological hope and expectation is seen to be grounded in the sacrament. This seems to confirm Wesley's firm belief that the best of all is, God is with us - and that the best is yet to be!

This brief survey of Wesley's doctrine of the eucharist confirms the creative dualism already discerned in his doctrine of baptism. Both tendencies, high church objectivity and the evangelical need for faith by the recipient, are present in his eucharistic doctrine. Authors have from time to time opted for one of these poles and neatly concluded "this is Wesleyan doctrine". However, a careful reading of the non-systematic, non-synthesising Wesley who battled with the demands of the day and responded creatively (and at times polemically) to the challenges of his age reveals a complex doctrine. Methodism will clearly be the poorer in an ecumenical age for trying to arbitrarily put asunder what her tradition has so agonisingly put together.

### 3. Ordination

The by now familiar dualism of Wesley's thought again becomes clear in his doctrine of ministry. Any "concession" he allowed away from the ecclesiastical order and practice of the Anglican church to which he belonged was based on a reinterpretation of orthodox teaching on ordination rather than on disregard for it. The historical comment on Wesley's attitude concerning the administration of the sacraments has made it quiet clear that his willingness to even consider the possibility of ordaining ministers to administer the sacraments in America and Scotland was an agonising and extremely cautious one.

In 1745 his position concerning the ordained priesthood becomes clear in a letter to his brother-in-law:

"We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian Church ..., and an outward sacrifice offered therein, by men authorized to act as ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (*italics are added*). (43)

As already discovered in the discussion on Wesley's sacramental theology, there is an objective, "from-above", grace conveying dimension to his understanding of baptism and the eucharist. This we now discover from the above quotation is directly related to an outward priesthood, authorized to be stewards of the mysteries of God.

As a direct consequence of this Wesley clearly distinguished between the priestly and preaching offices of the minister. Parris rightly shows that those who suggest that Wesley later retracted this distinction are offering too simple a view of the situation, for in his sermon "On the Ministerial Office" written in 1789, only two years before his death, he commented:

In 1744 all the Methodist preachers had their first conference. But none of them dreamed, that being called to preach gave them any right to administer sacraments. And when that question was proposed, "In what light are we to consider ourselves?" it was answered: "As extraordinary messengers, raised up to provoke the ordinary ones to jealousy." In order hereto one of our first rules was, given to each preacher, "You are to do that part of the work which we appoint." But what work was this? Did we ever appoint you to administer the sacraments; to exercise the priestly office? Such a design never entered into our mind, it was the farthest from our thoughts: And if any preacher had taken such a step, we should have looked upon it as a palpable breach of this rule, and consequently as a recantation of our connexion. (44)

What scholars do not ask is whether the mere fact that Wesley made this statement does not imply that Methodist preachers were beginning to agitate for the right to administer the sacraments - and whether this was not a logical consequence of Wesley's repeated stress on the importance of the eucharist even as a converting instrument together with his cardinal emphasis on the need to save souls. Yet whether this was the beginning of a liberation of Methodist preachers from ecclesiastical captivity or whether it indeed contained the seeds of the destruction of the Methodist connexion, Wesley himself obviously opposed any indication of a separation between the sacraments and an ordained, duly authorised priesthood.

Wesley regarded the priestly office of the minister as representative of the priesthood of all believers - with the responsibility to exercise the priestly functions of the sacraments as outlined above. The question concerning who were called to this priestly office and by whom they were to be ordained has already been considered from an historical perspective. It remains therefore only to make a few concluding theological comments in this regard. Once compelled by his evangelical zeal and the

growth of Methodism to ordain preachers to exercise the priestly office, he acted irregularly from the point of view of the Anglican church, but he was consistent with his own theological principles. In ordaining preachers he affirmed his belief that only those suitably ordained could administer the sacraments. And in so doing affirmed the traditional teaching that the priestly function was dependent on ordination in apostolic succession. John C. Bowmer's discussion on this matter and Colin W. William's extended footnote on the problem provides a concise insight into Wesley's theological stance in this regard.<sup>45</sup> Wesley regarded any argument concerning an uninterrupted episcopal succession from the time of the Apostles to the present day as unacceptable, but he never discarded the belief in succession. What he did (as already mentioned earlier) was to relocate the function of the episkopoi in presbyters. That is, he argued that not only bishops per se but presbyters or ordinary ordained ministers could in turn ordain others to the same office. He believed that when he exercised the function of ordination he was, as a presbyter, exercising the inherent right of a New Testament episkopos or bishop. In a word, Wesley argued that the office of bishop and presbyter was theologically one and the same thing.

What can be concluded is that Wesley refused to allow lay persons to administer the sacraments. In his sermon entitled "The ministerial office", already referred to, he traces the distinction between the office of a priest and a preacher throughout the Old and New Testaments and in the history of the early church to his own times.<sup>(46)</sup> We also note that early in his ministry he insisted on rebaptising so-called Dissenters on the grounds that they had not been baptised by episcopally ordained priests, yet we have also noted that he later admitted persons to holy communion who had not been so baptised. There is positively no evidence, however, of Wesley making any

concession on ordination being a prerequisite for administering the sacraments.

This raises a number of important issues concerning the administration of the sacraments in present discussion in Methodism and beyond this denomination. It can well be argued that any church is entitled to ordain whoever it likes to the priestly office but Methodists cannot claim to be affirming their own tradition and allow persons to administer the sacraments without being duly ordained to do so. (This matter, as it affects present practice in Southern African Methodism, is discussed in a separate, attached appendix.)

It is now necessary to comment on present liturgical doctrine of Methodism, which clearly affirms the traditional Wesleyan distinction between the preaching and priestly office of the minister.

To this end a cursory analysis of the orders of service for ordination is necessary, for here we state our present doctrinal convictions regarding the role and office of a minister and of ordination.

Several extracts from both Methodist and Anglican ordination services are provided for consideration. This is done primarily to show the similarities between them, derived from a common origin, namely, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. It is thus not surprising that the Methodist Book of Offices of 1936 (substantially the same as the service in the 1882 Book of Public Prayers and Services) bears close resemblance to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of the Province of South Africa.

### The Book of Offices

The President and other Ministers present shall lay their hands severally upon the head of everyone of the Candidates, who shall humbly kneel upon their knees, the President saying:

Mayest thou receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Christian Minister and Pastor, now committed unto them by the imposition of our hands. And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God and his holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### The Book of Common Prayer

... The Bishop and the Priests shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one that receiveth the Order of Priesthood; the receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees, and the Bishop saying:

Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his Holy Sacraments. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The roles of preacher and dispensers of the sacraments are in both cases dependent upon ordination by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Proclamation and the administration of the sacraments are therefore functions of the office to which persons are ordained. This interpretation of the liturgy is affirmed by the Anglican tradition and clearly fits Wesley's practice of not allowing unordained persons to administer the sacraments, while at the same time not restricting the proclamation of the Word to the ordained ministry. This apparent anomaly was probably due to the tension between the Catholic and Evangelical aspects of Wesley's theology. His evangelical zeal enabled him to accept that non-ordained preachers could be called of God to preach the gospel whereas his Anglican orthodoxy convinced him that the celebration of



the sacraments should be reserved for episcopally ordained persons.

This basic liturgical distinction is again explicitly affirmed in The Methodist Service Book of 1975, from which the following quotations are taken:

The President lays his hands upon the head of each ordinand in turn, (they are already kneeling see No.13) other Ministers also laying on their right hands.

The President says over each one:

Father, send the Holy Spirit upon N., for the office and work of a Minister in the Church of Christ.

16 The President says:

Seeing that you have been duly ordained by prayer and the imposition of hands, I declare in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church, that you have authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the holy sacraments as a Minister in the Church of Christ.

The "authority to preach" and to "administer the sacraments" are here quite clearly seen to be functions of the office to which a minister is duly ordained.

This brief analysis of the ordination liturgies motivates one to conclude that it is the formal intention of contemporary Methodism that the celebration of the sacraments be a function of the office of the ordained minister.

## NOTES

- (1) J.W.C. Wand, A History of the Modern Church (London: Methuen Press, 1965), p.187.
- (2) "Articles of Religion", No.XIII, The Book of Public Prayers and Services (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room 1882), p.321 - Hereafter cited as Articles.
- (3) J. Lawson, Selections from John Wesley's 'Notes on the New Testament' (London: Epworth, 1955), p.167.
- (4) Articles, p.322.
- (5) Ibid., p.322.
- (6) Ibid., p.322.
- (7) Minutes of Conference 1766, quoted by Colin W. Williams (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), p.213.
- (8) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley (London: John Mason, 1829), Vol.II, p.6.
- (9) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.III, p.44f.
- (10) John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism (London: Dacre Press, 1951), p.165.
- (11) J.S. Simon, John Wesley, the Last Phase (London: Epworth, 1934), p.229 and Williams, p.227.
- (12) "The Plan of Pacification" in H. Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.359.
- (13) The Book of Offices (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1936), p.149 - and, Public Prayers and Services (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1882), p.278.
- (14) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.I, p.224.
- (15) "Letters", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.XIII, p.144.  
See also Wesley's lengthy discussion on this matter in Vol.VIII, pp.32f. He here tells us inter alia, " ... I observed the rubrics (of the Anglican Church) with scrupulous exactness - for conscience' sake".
- (16) John R. Parris, John Wesley's Doctrine of the Sacraments (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), p.2.
- (17) Ibid., pp.4f. Also G.W. Bromiley, Baptism and the Anglican Reformers (London: Butterworth, 1953), pp.175f.

- (18) John Wesley, Forty-four Sermons (London: The Epworth Press), 1961.
- (19) Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), p.116, footnote 55. The limited references to baptism in Wesley's sermons are indexed in John Lawson, Notes on Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons (London: Epworth Press, 1952).
- (20) John Wesley, "A Treatise on Baptism", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.X, pp.190f.
- (21) Samuel Wesley, "A Short Discourse on Baptism", quoted by Parris, p.13.
- (22) Colin W. Williams, p.117.
- (23) "A Treatise on Baptism", and John Wesley, Notes on the New Testament (London: Epworth Press), Acts 16:15.
- (24) Notes on the New Testament, Col.2:12.
- (25) For example, his sermon on "The New Birth" and "The Witness of the Spirit", in Forty-four Sermons.
- (26) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.VI, p.73. See also his sermon on "The New Birth", IV, I and IV, 4 in Forty-four Sermons - and John Lawson's Notes on Wesley's Forty-four Sermons.
- (27) Colin W. Williams, pp.120f.
- (28) John R. Parris, p.9.
- (29) Ibid., p.8.
- (30) Sermon on "The Means of Grace" in Forty-four Sermons.
- (31) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.1, p.279.
- (32) John R. Parris, p.70.
- (33) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.I, p.280.
- (34) Sermon CIV, Ibid., Vol.VII, pp.174-185.
- (35) Published in J.E. Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1948), pp.195f. The specific section referred to is on p.231f.
- (36) Ibid., pp.103-104.

- (37) Ibid., p.187. The relevant section of Dr. Brevint's "Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice" is included in Rattenbury, p.176f.
- (38) "A Roman Catechism, faithfully drawn out of the allowed writings of the Church of Rome: With a Reply thereto." The Works of John Wesley, Vol.X, p.121.
- (39) John C. Bowmer, pp.86-90.
- (40) "Letters", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.VIII, p.404.
- (41) John C. Bowmer, pp.178-79 and Colin C. Williams, p.160.
- (42) Ibid., pp.145 and 165.
- (43) This letter is quoted in the "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 2, p
- (44) Sermon CXV, The Works of John Wesley, Vol.VII, p.277.
- (45) John C. Bowmer, pp.156-63 and Colin W. Williams, pp.147-48, footnote 13.
- (46) Sermon CXV, The Works of John Wesley, Vol.VII, pp.273-281.

## APPENDIX I

SOME TENTATIVE PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE ADMINIS-  
TRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

(based on the attached theological paper)

1. The Wesleyan tradition affirms that the celebration of the sacraments is an exclusive function of the office to which a minister is duly ordained.
2. There is no theological or pragmatic reason why contemporary Methodism ought to deviate from this tradition.
3. Clearly it is the right of the church to decide who it will ordain for the purpose of administering the sacraments.
4. If the exigencies of stations together with our responsibility to evangelise and extend pastoral care through the administration of the sacraments indicates that we have insufficient ordained ministers to exercise a sacramental ministry, then we as a church must act in accordance with our tradition in meeting this need. That is, we must ordain more people to meet the need. There is apparently no traditional or theological reason why we should not ordain, for example, deaconesses, evangelists and any other duly trained persons who may be included in an order of lay ministry to an office authorising them to administer sacraments. It is necessary, however, that the persons be duly ordained to this office (see paragraph 5).
5. In the light of the above it is necessary that conference reconsider the matter of providing dispensation to probationers (who in terms of our present practice are lay people) - for it is precisely this anomaly that has resulted in the

confusion among our people concerning the Methodist position on the administration of the sacraments. If conference deems it necessary to have probationers administer the sacraments due to the pastoral requirements of our people then it is necessary to ordain such persons, say to the office of deacon. In so doing it can be specifically mentioned that the person being so ordained may administer the sacraments when duly authorised by the President of the Conference. (The SA Prayer Book, p.681 of the Church of the Province provides useful reading in this regard. For example, an Anglican deacon is authorised "in the absence of the priest to baptise infants ..." (italics added).) The point is simply that we recognise there to be a divine commissioning and an ecclesiastical recognition of this at ordination. Ordination is of God (hence the imposition of hands, the invocation and the commissioning) and this is recognised by the church (hence the recognition of the church, or "licensing" by the church of the ordained minister in receiving this person into full connexion or as in the case of a probationer being given dispensation in writing by the President). Ordination as discussed in paragraph 4 must be considered in a similar manner.

6. The above remarks do not preclude unordained persons from sharing in "the preparation, the ministry of the Word, including the intercessions and in the distribution of the bread and wine" as allowed for in the Methodist Service Book of 1975 (B.1, para.7). The person presiding as celebrant is, however, to be duly ordained to this office.

7. In order to maintain both good order in the church and the centrality of the sacraments in our ministry to all those who desire to be saved, sacramental authority needs to be vested in a duly ordained and authorised person. This can be accomplished as suggested above without deviating

from our Methodist tradition and doctrine - and hopefully Wesley would regard this as a case of keeping the rules and not mending them!

#### 8. A postscript

Methodism clearly recognises three orders of ministry:

Lay ministry of which every baptised Christian is a part. This ministry is formally recognised in the confirmation service, which needs to be understood in terms of the long-standing Christian tradition of which it is a part - namely, that confirmation is ordination to lay ministry. At this service confirmands willingly commit themselves to service and ministry.

Commissioned ministry consists of those persons whose particular gifts are formally recognised by the church for specific authorised functions in the total ministry of the church. Local preachers, deaconesses, evangelists, etc. form part of this order of ministry. The book of offices makes it clear that these persons are ordained or invested to these specific offices.

Ordained ministry or priesthood refers specifically to those persons ordained to the specific ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments.

. Clearly no superiority of commitment of service is implied in distinguishing these orders. The distinction is rather based on vocation and call to a specific kind of ministry.

. No fuller amount of grace is vested in one order of ministry than another.

. Different orders of ministry exist primarily for the sake of good order, dignity and ecclesiastical authority.

. What precisely happens theologically at ordination is, at least in Methodist doctrine, a mystery of faith. Biblical teaching in 1 Timothy 4:14 ("Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you") seems to affirm this emphasis.

Whatever may be understood by mystery, it is regarded by Methodist usage and Wesley himself as significant enough not to be easily tampered with nor easily conferred on a candidate. It is also regarded as a permanent imposition on an ordained minister which cannot be revoked. For example, a Methodist minister who resigns and is later reinstated into full connexion is not reordained, nor is an ordained minister from another communion reordained when received into Full Connexion.



Report of the Second International Consultation of the  
World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council  
To The Executive Committee

TOGETHER IN GOD'S GRACE

## INTRODUCTION

The Second International Consultation of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council met in Cambridge, England, from 23 to 26 July 1987. We took up the central questions committed to us by the first consultation in 1985 as the principal issues requiring further discussion. Within the context of broad general agreement on the nature of the gospel and the church, the following main questions were those which were addressed by means of papers and discussion: the Christian Tradition and our particular traditions within it; fundamental questions about salvation and, particularly, its origins in the grace of God and its realisation in the Christian life; the nature of the church as a covenant community; and the ways in which our churches have lived and understood their diverse relationships with the state.

## AFFIRMATION

These conversations have reassured us of our common rootage in the gospel and of the compatibility of our expressions of it. In many places in the world, churches in our two traditions have already entered into close relationships, including both federal and organic unions. These unions were entered after due doctrinal discussions; we wish to affirm that there is sufficient agreement in doctrine and practice between our two positions to justify such answers to the Lord's call to unity for the sake of mission and our common praise of God. Being convinced of the urgency of manifesting the unity God has given, we wish also to affirm that in all places churches in our two traditions are already in a position mutually to recognise membership and ministry, to join in common tasks of evangelism and service, and to share fellowship in Word and Sacrament. Historic differences of theological perspective and practice still maintain their influence, but are not of sufficient weight to divide us. More positively, they should be regarded as mutually corrective and enriching. Under present conditions, both traditions are increasingly benefiting from our common appropriation of new insights into the gospel granted through theological teaching in this century, through common worship and witness, and through our participation in the wider ecumenical movement.

## EXPLICATION

### 1. The Tradition and the traditions

All Christian traditions convey distinctive ways of proclaiming and living the gospel. Both of our traditions regard the Scriptures as the primary authority in matters of faith and practice, and confess the shared faith of the universal church expressed in ecumenical creeds and by witnesses to it through the centuries.

Within the broad Tradition, however, our two traditions originate in different historical circumstances and tend to refer themselves to different kinds of secondary authority. For the Reformed, the major orientation is to "the deeper plunge into the gospel" which was the Reformation, and to the great confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These have often operated, under Scripture, as subordinate standards for the teaching and government of the church. Methodists look to the figures of the Wesleys and to their work on behalf of evangelistic and sacramental renewal within a church already heir to the Reformation. Wesley's Standard Sermons, his Explanatory Notes on the New

Testament, and his abridgment of the Anglican Articles have provided the formal doctrinal basis for the various Methodist churches. In worship, a large part has been played by the Wesleyan hymns which, along with the adaptation of the Book of Common Prayer, have directed and nourished the faith of the people. Both traditions testify to the priority of God's grace, the sufficiency of faith, the call to holy living, and the imperative to mission. The ways in which these realities have been expressed have differed, so that distinctions of ethos, liturgical expression and church order have resulted, both between and within our traditions.

## 2. Grace

Grace has been a principal emphasis in both our traditions. From first to last our salvation depends on the comprehensiveness of God's grace as prevenient, as justifying, as sanctifying, as sustaining, as glorifying. Nevertheless, in seeking to preserve this primary truth, our traditions have tended to give different accounts of the appropriation of saving grace, emphasising on one hand God's sovereignty in election, and on the other, the freedom of human response. This gave rise to the dispute between "Calvinism" and "Arminianism" which has often been seen as a dividing line between the Reformed and Methodist traditions, although in fact not all in the Reformed tradition subscribe to double predestination, nor all Methodists to the Arminian alternative.

In "Calvinism" it is the elect who come to faith and therefore receive saving grace, while in "Arminianism", it is those who in freedom "will to be saved". Despite the apparent contradiction between Calvin and Wesley (who followed Arminius at this point), the debate presupposes agreement on several fundamental matters. Wesley himself affirmed his agreement with Calvin: "1. In ascribing all good to the free grace of God; 2. in denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace; 3. in excluding all merit from man, even for what he has or does by the grace of God."

It was only when, from the basis of this fundamental agreement, the question "who are the saved?" was approached, that the conflicting stances identified as Calvinist and Wesleyan were adopted. In each case the stance taken leaves questions that demand answers consistent with the three accepted tenets just mentioned. Methodists who follow Wesley must face two objections in particular from Calvinists. First, Calvinists object that the necessary freedom to choose salvation was lost in the fall, and that to claim otherwise is Pelagian. Wesley in response agreed that all are dead in sin by nature, but maintained that none is now in a mere state of nature. Prevenient grace, which he saw as the universal inheritance of Christ's atoning work, restores this lost freedom of choice, while not guaranteeing salvation. Calvinists then object that this dishonours God by denying his sovereignty, since it claims that human freedom to deny is greater than God's will to save. Wesley's reply was that in creating people with free will, God chose to limit his power at this point. Therefore the human capacity to say no to saving grace is, according to Wesley, just as compatible with God's sovereignty as is the human capacity to sin.

In their turn, the Reformed who follow Calvin must face two questions in particular from Wesleyans. First, Wesleyans ask how the predestinarian approach avoids understanding God's freedom as anything more than arbitrariness, and human freedom as anything other than illusion, if the eternal destiny of every creature is already determined. The Calvinist answer is that since God as creator is the author of justice and his ways are not our ways, it is a fundamental category mistake for us to judge him at the bar of our human and

limited reason. The second Wesleyan question is, how can the missionary and evangelical imperative be maintained if, no matter what, the saved will be saved and the lost lost? Calvinists affirm in reply that obedience to the sovereign God commits the church to proclamation of the gospel so that people may hear and believe, and thus God's will to save be fulfilled. Consequently, impetus for and results of missionary and evangelistic outreach are evident no less in the Reformed than in the Methodist tradition, although the motivation may be understood and expressed somewhat differently.

These questions that we put to each other lie in the realm of theological problem, and answers can be given which in each case are consistent with the basic agreed affirmations and find scriptural support. But for both Methodists and Calvinists there is a question which cannot be answered, not because it is difficult, but because to propose an answer would be to destroy the very terms of the problem. Those who claim that prevenient grace gives to all the freedom to come to faith cannot answer the question "why do these choose salvation, and not those?" without denying the very human freedom they wish to affirm. Those who contend that only the elect may come to faith, and thus be saved by grace, cannot answer the question "why does God choose these and not those?" without limiting God's sovereign freedom which above all they wish to maintain. That these questions, which are unanswerable in principle, exist at all, points to the fundamental mystery underlying both the theological problem and the answers. Both traditions have gone wrong when they have claimed to know too much about this mystery of God's electing grace and of human response.

Therefore, that Wesley and Calvin advocated conflicting ways of holding together what they affirm in common should not constitute a barrier between our traditions. Even if Wesley and Calvin are followed without modification (which gives their approaches greater authority than they themselves allowed any human interpretation), what they both affirmed is not only the fundamental mystery of God's saving grace witnessed to in Scripture. It is also the underlying theology of grace that was stated in three points at the beginning of this section and that provides the context within which that mystery is to be recognised, received and celebrated.

### 3. The church as covenant community

Both traditions have found the concept of covenant to be a central way of understanding the church. Nevertheless, there has been diversity of understanding even within the traditions, and our conversations have sought clarification and common ground. The Reformed tradition began as an attempt to reform and restore the Western church on the basis of the newly perceived Word of God and in new obedience to that Word. The Reformed family understands the church as a covenant community called together by God's grace. Election and covenant find their expression in the existence of the church. The church is grounded in the eternal purpose of God to send Jesus Christ into the world as the head and saviour of all things. The Methodist movement began as a mission to the unevangelised, and saw itself at first as a society within the established church. In different places and at different times, it came to understand itself as a distinct church. John Wesley thought of Christian community as a means by which members build each other up in faith and life. Within Methodism, covenanted life has been realised through societies, conferences and Christian fellowship, and is reaffirmed in annual covenant services.

Both traditions confess that we have allowed individualism to undercut our sense and practice of corporate churchly life. Often our religion, under the

influence of contemporary culture, has retreated into a merely private realm. The recovery of the centrality of covenant is therefore urgent. Through a conversion of the heart, one appropriates the covenant relationship with God and with other people. Thus, the sacraments are to be understood as signs and seals of faithful participation in the covenant community, and not individualistically. Accordingly, baptism is the sacrament of adoption into the family of God, incorporation into the Body of Christ, and reception into the koinonia of the Spirit. Likewise, our communion with the Lord and with one another in him is expressed and sustained at his Table. We acknowledge that our life together in our present church structures is in constant need of re-evaluation and reformation as we look forward to the consummation of the covenant when Christ will be all in all. Our acting as if we could exclude others from the covenant, and our failure to exercise our stewardship of the world and its resources, are both a denial of the covenant which God has established with humankind and all creation.

#### 4. Church and state

Our concern to honour God's covenant in the practical implementation of the faith necessarily involves some form of relationship with civil authorities. Within both our traditions there is a wide variety of relationships, ranging from forms of establishment to contexts in which there is considerable tension with the powers that be. We confess that among ourselves there are places where those who are in a position of privilege give less than due respect to Christian minorities. We also acknowledge that the Christian church has repeatedly used its privileged position for social and political aggrandisement. While the church has the permanent responsibility to challenge and to let itself be challenged by society, the forms of challenge and response vary from time to time and from place to place. Both of our traditions share a conviction of the power of Christ as prophet, priest and king to transform all life in the world.

#### 5. Perfect salvation

Both Reformed and Methodist traditions affirm the real change which God by the Spirit works in the minds and hearts and lives of believers. By the sanctifying grace of God, penitent believers are being restored to God's image and renewed in God's likeness. To imitate God, says Wesley, is the best worship we can offer. What God is in heaven, says Calvin, he bids us to be in this world: the lovingkindness of God is to be reflected in the love Christians bear towards their neighbours. Our traditions agree that, on the human side, salvation consists in the perfect love of God and neighbour, which is to have the mind of Christ and fulfil his law. We are to love God with singleness of heart, and to seek God's glory with a single eye. We are to love without reserve the sisters and brothers for whom Christ died.

The work which God has begun in us, says Calvin, he will surely complete. What God has promised, says Wesley, he is ready and willing to realise now. In the two traditions we are taught to strive and pray for entire sanctification. The Reformed stress on election and perseverance gives believers the confidence that God will keep them to the end. The Methodist preaching of perfection affirms that we may set no limit to the present power of God to make sinners into saints.

Methodists and Reformed agree that "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever". The heavenly fellowship of praise and bliss is, by God's grace, to be anticipated now, as we "with one heart and one voice glorify the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and together share his benefits. We are saved into community; and, as Jesus prayed that his disciples might be "perfected into one", so the closer sharing of life between Christians in the Reformed and Methodist traditions will be evidence of growing participation in the communion of the Triune God.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We report, as a result of our conversations, a new-found confidence that our two traditions witness to a common gospel and embody authentic forms of obedience and faithful discipleship. Our complementary ways of Christian thought and life are built upon a shared foundation in God's grace, in covenant existence, and in the goal of perfect salvation. We have found in each other faithful witness to the Christian gospel, and we have been renewed in our sense of oneness in Christ. In particular, we have found that the classical doctrinal issues which we were asked to review ought not to be seen as obstacles to unity between Methodists and Reformed. Certain implications flow from this conviction for the development of our relations to one another as Christian World Communions. We therefore recommend:

1. That our world bodies invite their member churches to consider the implications of our findings and to communicate their responses. Possible questions for consideration are:
  - (a) Can Reformed and Methodist churches cooperate more closely in local worship, study and witness?
  - (b) Can Methodist and Reformed churches cooperate more closely regionally and nationally -- for example, in joint doctrinal commissions, evangelistic outreach, and social service?
  - (c) Are there countries in which Reformed/Methodist union negotiations might be initiated?
  - (d) Ought our two international bodies to grow closer together by tackling common tasks and by sharing human and other resources?
2. That where one or other of our churches is a majority church, the utmost care should be taken to ensure that the smaller partner or partners not be given reason to feel unwanted or undervalued.
3. That in each nation our member churches should together examine the question, "How can the covenant people of God relate to the state and bear faithful witness to their society in a rapidly changing and divided world?"

The people of our two traditions, to whom this report is addressed, exist in varying relationships to each other. It is our earnest prayer that whether they find themselves within a church union, are contemplating such a step, do not have the other partners as a neighbor, or are not yet part of a wider union, they will find both encouragement and challenge in this report.

*Can they enter into unity  
with Ref Ch in the on path?*

## CAMBRIDGE PARTICIPANTS

### World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Dr. William Klempa, Chairperson, Canada  
Rev. Anthony Beeko, England  
Dr. Hugh R. Boudin, Belgium  
Dr. Bruno Corsani, Italy  
Prof. Colin Gunton, England  
Rev. Elijah Lumbama, Zambia  
Rev. Pernet Martin, Switzerland  
Dr. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, USA  
Dr. Alan P. F. Sell, Secretary, WARC

### World Methodist Council

Dr. Norman Young, Chairperson, Australia  
Rev. Urs A. Eschbach, Switzerland  
Bishop Lawi Imathiu, Kenya  
Rev. Lorna Khoo, Singapore  
Dr. Thomas A. Langford, USA  
Dr. Manfred Marquardt, Federal Republic of Germany  
Dr. Keith Rowe, New Zealand  
Prof. Geoffrey Wainwright, England  
Rev. Antonia Wladar, Hungary  
Dr. Joe Hale, Secretary, WMC

## JOHN WESLEY: AN ORTHODOX CHURCHMAN AND A CREATIVE EVANGELIST

(A consideration of Wesleyan sacramental theology)

by C. Villa-Vicencio and L.D. Hulley.

It is common knowledge that John Wesley was not an academic theologian who sought to provide a system of doctrines in logical dependence on one another. His theology is one of reaction to and interaction with theological ecclesiastical and socio-political trends of the day. His style is eclectic and reveals an abiding tension on dialectic between Anglican orthodoxy and an ecclesiastical creativity compelled by his evangelical zeal. To deny either of these poles in his thought, or to play-down this tension to enable a neat and non-dialectic "Wesleyan synthesis" to emerge, is to fail to present Wesleyan theology in its unsystematised creativity.

This Wesleyan tension is presented in this paper by first providing a brief historical consideration of Wesley's struggle with these two poles of thought with regard to the administration of the sacraments to Methodist societies in his time. Comment is then made on Wesley's sacramental theology - not in its entirety, but again in an attempt to portray the suggested tension. Some tentative remarks are then made on a Wesleyan doctrine of ordination, and finally a brief analysis is made of the ordination liturgy in contemporary Methodism.

### 1. A historical comment on Wesley's attitude to the administration of the sacraments

It is useful at this point to consider the origin of the name Methodist. The group at Oxford, under John Wesley's leadership, earned this sobriquet because of "their methodical observance of the practices of a sacramental and high churchly religion" (1). They were also called "Bible Moths" and "Sacramentarians". This position held by the early Methodists was re-affirmed later when John Wesley abridged the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England. The first paragraph of article XIX with minor alterations became article XIII in his abridgement - which reads as follows:

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. (2)

Wesley thus sees three things necessary for the Church: a community of faith, the proclamation of the pure Word of God, and sacraments duly administered. The problem for us has become one of priority. Wesley, true to himself, seems to have held the three aspects in tension, sometimes apparently emphasising one and then another. These clauses may however be used to support various points of view, the Catholic emphasis on the "due administration" of the sacraments, the classical Protestant proclamation of the "pure Word of God" and, thirdly, that of those who reduce the nature of the church to a disposition of the heart, giving rise to a "community of the faithful". For Wesley these were not alternatives but essentials. The unresolved tension between the various elements in his theology are clearly visible here. John Lawson correctly reminds us that the "Evangelical Revival started among High-churchmen, and thus it came to pass that the original and truest Methodism was both 'Catholic' and 'Evangelical' in emphasis" (3). One would therefore expect both Catholic and Evangelical aspects in Wesley's sacramental theology.

Wesley affirms the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, amending them only slightly where he deems it necessary. In article XVI he defines "sacraments" as follows:

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they are certain signs of grace and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him. (4)

Wesley thus holds that sacraments are not merely tokens of "men's profession" but are also "certain signs of grace". In this statement he emphasises both the objective and the subjective, or Catholic and Evangelical aspects of the sacraments. His is clearly a "both-and" rather than an "either-or" theology.

Concerning baptism he writes: "Baptism is not only a sign of profession ... but it is also a sign of regeneration" (5). On holy communion he holds: "The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather a sacrament of our redemption of Christ's death" (6). In all these points Wesley showed his Anglican orthodoxy



by closely following the Thirty Nine Articles. We shall consider his sacramental theology below, but this preliminary discussion of the matter is necessary to understand his concern for the "due administration" of the sacraments.

Wesley showed his high regard for the sacrament of holy communion by being a regular communicant. At a time when many parish churches celebrated the sacrament three or four times a year, Wesley communicated at least once a week. Wesley's high-church view of the Lord's supper as a means of grace motivated his concern that the preachers and members of the Methodist societies should have access to the sacraments. Superintendents were instructed to arrange their appointments in such a manner that "no preacher may be hindered from attending the Church (of England) more than two Sundays in a month" (7). In some instances it was not possible for society members to have access to parish churches - and there were insufficient priests among the Methodists who were episcopally ordained to administer the sacraments in the Methodist societies. In spite of this urgent need, the bishops of the Church of England were unwilling to make episcopally ordained priests available to meet these needs. By the 1760's pressure was mounting from the larger Methodist societies to receive the sacrament in their own chapels and some twenty years later there were approximately 15 000 Methodist members in America, with no provision for receiving the sacraments. Yet in spite of having had certain biblical convictions much earlier on, he refused to simply resort to ordaining ministers himself - and he was faced with a crisis.

We need to briefly consider some of this biblical evidence. His Journal entry of 20 January 1746 reads:

On the road I read over Lord King's  
Account of the Primitive Church. In spite  
of the vehement prejudice of my education,  
I was ready to believe that this was a fair  
and impartial draught; but, if so, it  
would follow that Bishops and Presbyters  
are (essentially) of one order, and that  
originally every Christian congregation  
was a Church independent of all others. (8)

This same conviction, that in New Testament times a bishop and a presbyter exercise the same office is also reflected in his Notes on the New Testament, first published in 1754. (See especially his notes on Acts 20:17, Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8.) Yet in spite of this firm biblical

conviction that as a priest he was also an episcopos, he made strenuous efforts to obtain ordination for his preachers by bishops of the Church of England, or by bishops recognised as valid by that church. In the meantime he steadfastly refused to allow unordained preachers to administer the sacraments - but the needs of the societies for the sacraments continued to grow.

Wesley's first move to ameliorate the situation came with the appointment of Thomas Maxfield, who had been ordained by an Irish bishop, to administer the sacraments in London during his absence, but by 1764 Maxfield had left the Methodists, due to pressure from Wesley - which becomes clear from a letter written in 1762 to his brother Charles. We then find the strange events surrounding the ordination in 1764 of John Jones by Erasmus, whom Wesley believed to be a Greek bishop. We do not need to go into the details of the affair other than to note that when it appeared that Erasmus had acted irregularly in further ordinations, those so ordained were removed from the list of preachers. Even Jones was obliged to leave. It is clear that while Wesley believed that uninterrupted succession could not be proved, (9) he nevertheless held the episcopal form of church government to be scriptural.

Only when faced with considerable needs of the American Methodists due to the withdrawal of many of the Church of England priests during and subsequent to the American War of Independence in the 1770's, was he motivated in 1784 to ordain Richard Whatcoat, Thomas Vasey and Thomas Coke. (This provides an interesting precedent to minister to people "on the other side" of a conflict!) The ordination of Thomas Coke, already an ordained presbyter as superintendent is a controversy not directly relevant to the ordination debate in the British (and South African) brand of Methodism. What is important to note, however, is that he resorted to this step only after the Anglican Bishop of London had refused to ordain a priest for service in America.

Yet, as already noted this followed his conviction on scriptural grounds that the office of presbyter and bishop were of the same nature. Interestingly he found comfort in doing so by identifying a precedent in the church of Alexandria in the first three centuries, where presbyters appointed and consecrated their own bishops without intervention from other sees. (10) Yet he still refrained from taking a similar step in England, while he considered Scotland in the same light as America, there - like in America - the Church of England had no jurisdiction because English law did not apply - and the members of the Scottish societies had no access to the sacraments. We thus find him ordaining ministers to serve there in 1785. Yet when John Pawson, who had been ordained for

Scotland, returned to England, Wesley refused to allow him to administer sacraments in an area where the Church of England had jurisdiction. Finally in 1788 and 1789 he was compelled by the needs of Methodists to ordain three men for work in England. He did not see this as schism but as a necessity for the continuation of the societies, but still urged Methodists where possible to attend parish churches to receive the sacrament.

The Plan of Pacification of 1795, four years after Wesley's death, continued to urge Methodists to go to Parish churches to worship and receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper. To this end the times of services in Methodist chapels were not to clash with those of the parish church. There were two exceptions: In some chapels where it was already the practice to administer the Lord's supper it was to continue, and secondly where a majority of trustees and stewards of a chapel requested it Conference could give permission for the administration of the sacraments. It was nevertheless not to clash with Sundays on which Holy Communion services were held in the parish Church. (12) Following Wesley, the Conference considered the sacraments of the church of England the norm and their celebration in Methodist chapels to be a necessary expedient responding to the needs for their administration among Methodists. Furthermore, it was to be administered in the societies only by ministers who were ordained for this purpose.

We must therefore conclude that Wesley saw ordination as necessary prerequisite for men to celebrate sacraments. It is therefore not surprising that in the ordination liturgy in the Books of Offices, ordination is to a pastoral, teaching (preaching) and sacramental ministry. (13) This tradition, goes back at least to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. It is also instructive to note that these three functions correspond to the definition of the things necessary for the church, a community of faith, the proclamation of the pure Word of God and the due administration of the sacraments. Although, he rejected uninterrupted succession he nevertheless held that ordination had to be by those competent to do, namely presbyters or bishops. Because he considered the sacraments to be means of grace he was most anxious that members of the societies have access to them, and particularly to the regular celebration of holy communion. It is here in particular that the tension between his Anglican orthodoxy and ecclesiastical creativity is most clearly visible. It was a combination of these factors which prompted him to ordain ministers to administer sacraments.

## 2. Wesley's sacramental theology

When asked in 1739 in which doctrines the Methodists differed from the (Anglican) Church, Wesley responded: "To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the Church clearly laid down, both in her Prayers, Articles and Homilies." (14) And as late as 1790 (the year before his death) he writes to an Anglican bishop as follows: "The Methodists, in general, my Lord, are members of the Church of England. They hold all her doctrines, attend her services and partake of her sacraments." (15) John R. Parris points out that the Anglican Reformation, although it had obvious affinities with the Cotinental reform movements, produced a unique blending of Catholic, Protestant and humanist emphases. (16) This tension is clearly displayed in the Anglican understanding of the sacraments, as well as in Wesley's own sacramental theology.

### 2.1 Baptism

The tension between Catholic and Protestant theology is most apparent in both the Anglican and Wesleyan discussions on infant baptism in the eighteenth century. On the one hand it is stressed that grace is actually conferred in baptism. - a position which leans toward an ex opere operato view of baptism. On the other hand it is emphasised that the faith of the recipient is a crucial factor in making the sacrament effective. The renowned Anglican apologist Richard Hooker incorporates both these tendencies into his doctrine of infant baptism. (17) In one place he writes that faith is present in the infant in a rudimentary form, for "the Holy Ghost might truly be said to work giving that grace which is the first and effective cause out of which belief groweth". This thought corresponds to the position taken by Wesley in his sermon on "Salvation by Faith" in which it is stressed that even the faith by which we respond to God's grace in Christ is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). (18) Then elsewhere Hooker maintains that the sponsors of the child at baptism "accepted on behalf of the child that acceptance and faith which it would later take up for itself".

The most important document on baptism to be published in John Wesley's name is in fact a treatise first published by his father, Samuel, in 1700, which John reissued in a slightly revised form in 1756. Apart from this, Wesley provides little direct teaching on the subject. (19) In this treatise Wesley allowed a form of baptismal regeneration. In speaking of the benefits of infant baptism he writes:

The first of these is, the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ's death ... By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its Head ... By water then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated or born again ... Herein a principle of grace is infused, which will not be wholly taken away, unless we quench the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness. (20)

Samuel has spoken of baptismal regeneration as follows:

We say not that regeneration is always completed in baptism, but that it is begun in it; a principle of grace is infused, which we lost by the fall, which shall never be wholly withdrawn, unless we quench God's holy Spirit by obstinate habits of wickedness. There are babes as well as strong men in Christ. (21)

Colin Williams shows that this teaching is not an inconsistent inclusion of his father's teaching, because John Wesley expresses similar thoughts in his sermons and in his Explanatory notes upon the New Testament. (22) In these references Wesley refers to baptism as "the beginning of total regeneration", to spirit of adoption being "ordinarily annexed by baptism" and to baptism as "the outward sign and means" of "that inward change by the Spirit".

Clearly Wesley did not believe God to be bound to this sacrament as a means of regeneration - this was the ordinary means, not the exclusive means. He did not regard baptism as necessary for salvation but as being in accordance with "the mind which was in Christ". He also believed emphatically in infant baptism: Infants, he thought, need baptism because they are involved in original sin and they are capable of entering into a covenant with God. He further believed that the New Testament reference to "households" included children and that simply because the Jews had circumcised their infants they would readily have committed their children to God in baptism on becoming Christians. (23)

To summarise Wesley's teaching on baptism: He believed that it is a sign which declares it is God who initiates the process of regeneration. Baptism is the

outward sign of this. God's ultimate plan is to bring us to a conscious acceptance of the new birth. "If we do not experience this, our baptism has not answered the end of its institution." (24) And beyond this conscious realisation of having been justified by grace, Wesley thought that God's plan for the regenerated person is perfect sanctification. Reacting, as he was, against institutionalised and external religion, Wesley stressed the importance of the conscious response and inward regeneration of a person in the new birth and the subsequent inner witness to salvation in the doctrine of assurance. (25) This emphasis must not, however, be allowed to negate the Wesleyan tension identified earlier in this paper.

Several Wesleyan scholars have identified a dual interpretation of the new birth, or two senses of regeneration, in Wesleyan theology.

There is an initial sense in which God imparts grace to the unregenerated person, without which it is impossible to know God or to respond to him in faith. This sense of regeneration is best understood in relation to Wesley's discussion on prevenient grace - although he himself nowhere discusses the direct relationship between prevenient grace and baptism. At the 1745 conference of preachers, Wesley stated that Methodist doctrine came within a "hairbreadth of Calvinism". Wesley believed in the total depravity of man, and salvation by grace through faith alone. Denying all natural free-will and all power antecedent to grace - the question emerges: why then should some be saved and some not? George Whitefield's answer was a simple one - because some are predestined by God to be saved and others are not. Wesley's answer was in the form of the doctrine of prevenient grace. By the infusion of grace - described by John and his father before him as the beginning of the regenerative process which ordinarily begins with baptism - the one form of new birth in Wesleyan doctrine is identified. To resort to the Catholic-Protestant dialectic earlier identified in this paper as being part of the Anglican and Wesleyan discussions of infant baptism, this form of the new birth can be referred to as the ex opere operato learning of Wesleyan thought.

The other side of the dialectic comes to expression in the Wesleyan stress on the believer's appropriation of or conscious acceptance of the offer of salvation in Christ. In affirming the importance of this form of the new birth and reacting against those who know only external religion and take refuge in talk about baptismal regeneration, Wesley states (in apparent contradiction to his other emphasis) "baptism is not the new birth: they are not one and the same thing". (26)

This apparent contradiction can only be resolved in light of the reference to the two forms of regeneration which have been identified.

Some Wesleyan scholars have suggested that this dualism in Wesley's thought is overcome with the "later Wesley" emphasising an evangelical zeal that negates his earlier orthodox churchmanship. Colin Williams's identification of this debate and his own affirmation of the dualism in Wesley's thought until his death is of importance in this regard. (27) Williams notes, one feels correctly, that "while Wesley kept both sides of the tension, he did not spell it out with sufficient force, with the result that there has been great confusion on the subject in Methodism since his death". The result is that, as Williams suggests, American Methodism has reduced the service of baptism to little more than a dedication. On the other hand, British Methodism, while retaining more of the structure of the service, excluded all references to regeneration in 1882. South African Methodism has followed the tendency of the British - while providing an important affirmation of infant baptism being more than mere dedication in the Conference statement of 1976, entitled A Short Statement on Baptism. Here it is stated that "baptism is a sacrament not of our decision but of God's saving grace." As such it is "the seal of membership of the New Covenant". Emphasis is also placed on the close connection between baptism and faith, with reference being made to the "faith of the Church" within which baptism takes place. One feels, however, that there is an important lack of Wesleyan emphasis here that is so well articulated in the earlier reference to Richard Hooker and Wesley's sermon on "Salvation by Faith". To return again to Williams - what one misses in Wesley's doctrine of assurance is an objective counterpart to the inner witness of the Spirit, such as Luther's vigorous "I am baptized". The South African statement fails yet further in this direction in not explicitly emphasising Wesley's "Salvation by Faith" recognition of faith itself being a gift of God, which he would say is ordinarily a consequence of baptism. It is this rudimentary faith, he would argue, that ultimately, by God's further grace, results in justification and ultimately sanctification.

Methodism has within its earliest tradition a dualism in its doctrine that provides a natural dynamism that can only contribute creatively to church unity talks on baptism. It will be both a pity and a denial of Wesleyan roots to allow this dialectic to dissipate into a simple shift toward either mere Zwinglian symbolism or a Roman Catholic type ex opere operato doctrine.

## 2.2 Eucharist

The Wesleyan tension or dualism identified in the discussion on baptism is again present in Wesley's doctrine of the eucharist or holy communion. And again

the place to begin the discussion is with the Anglican protagonist, Richard Hooker. Opposing transubstantiation as well as an ex opere operato doctrine of the eucharist, he argues that the bread and wine are moral instruments of salvation, rather than physical instruments. His position regarding the eucharist comes fully to expression in these words: "The real presence of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of sacrament." This position known as receptionism, indicates that while the bread and the wine continue to exist unchanged after consecration, the faithful communicant receives together with them the true body and blood of Christ.(28) Wesley never deviated far from this basic position. For him the eucharist was the means of grace par excellence. Throughout his life he partook regularly of this sacrament and during the festivals of the church he did so daily. He constantly urged Methodists to follow his example and to communicate regularly - because this he thought was the command of the Lord and the means whereby the forgiveness of sins is secured. His basic teaching on this sacrament was first formulated at Oxford in a sermon entitled "The Duty of Constant Communion" and republished over fifty years later.

Essentially Wesley repudiated both transubstantiation (the conversion of the elements into the body and blood of Christ) and consubstantiation (real presence of Christ together with the elements) - yet he insisted that something does happen in the consecration of the elements, although like the Anglicans of the day, he remained agnostic about how it happened. (29) In his sermon "The Means of Grace" it becomes clear that Wesley maintains, in a way similar to his position on baptism, a middle position between the Roman and Puritan extremes. In the following extracts from this sermon, Wesley's position in opposition to an ex opere operato view of the sacraments becomes clear. He stresses that "the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion" and that "means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity".

Consequently, "whosoever imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err". He further tells us that God has the freedom to bestow grace outside of the sacraments, even "though there were no means on the face of the earth". Yet when rightly used there is a promise of a gift of grace which will be fulfilled in them.

Is not the eating of the bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken, and the blood of Christ once shed for us? (*italics are added*). (30).



From this quotation it becomes clear that there is also a strong objective character in the sacrament. For him the elements are not "bare signs", but, when rightly used, the means of bestowing grace and spiritual sustenance on the faithful recipient. Thus does Wesley continue in the same sermon: "By the grace of God, I will thus trust in them, till the day of my death; that is, I will believe, that whatever God hath promised, he is faithful to perform". Ultimately Wesley's evaluation of the Lord's supper is based in his trust in the New Testament promise: "All who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord's supper; for this also is a direction (He) Himself hath given."

Yet Wesley's evaluation of the eucharist was that it was more than a means of grace for regenerated Christians. In opposition to those who held "that the Lord's Supper is not a converting, but a confirming ordinance", he states "many now present know, the very beginning of your conversion to God ... was wrought at the Lord's Supper". (31) Clearly Wesley is allowing for an objective, regenerating power within the eucharist and not merely regarding its efficacy to be dependable on the assuring faith of the recipient. Driven by the strong evangelical zeal that motivated him after his Aldersgate experience he sought to use the eucharist as an evangelical instrument and invited both the converted and the unconverted to the table. Parris says, however that there is no evidence that Wesley ever abandoned the prerequisite that a person should be baptised before sharing in the eucharist. (32) What he did abandon was an earlier insistence on episcopal baptism. Wesley held that communicants come with nothing to give and stressed that the desire to be saved was all that was required: " ... no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness." (33) Then later, apparently under pressure to preserve order at the sacrament, he again restricted those who came to the table.

Wesley further held that the sacrament depended not on the worthiness or the good intention of the celebrant. In accordance with this basic belief that the validity of the sacrament is based not in him who administers it but the faithfulness of him who ordained it - he continually urged Methodists to attend the churches to which they belonged in order to receive the sacrament. As already mentioned, Methodist services were in fact arranged at such an hour to make this possible. As the rift between Methodist and Anglicans grew, Wesley stressed that the receiving of the elements from a priest whom the communicants regarded as heretical or unworthy, did not affect the validity of the sacrament, but he conceded that it

greatly lessens the comfort of receiving. (34).

In concluding this discussion on the eucharist, summarised reference needs to be made to which is regarded by most Wesleyan scholars as the essential ingredients which Wesley held to be part of this sacrament.

### 2.2.1 Real presence

Consistent with his view on baptism he was not content with mere Zwinglian symbolism. Sacrificial language is present throughout Wesley's writing. In the Hymns on the Lord's Supper published jointly by John and Charles Wesley in 1745 there is a section of hymns entitled "The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice". (35) The sacrifice of the eucharist is seen in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews as a dramatic representation of the eternal sacrifice of the Priest-Victim in Heaven. At least one of the hymns included in the anthology of eucharistic hymns, already mentioned by John and Charles, includes what Rattenbury identifies as being "in substance the doctrine which lies behind, and is assumed in all Wesley's sacrificial teaching":

O Thou eternal Victim, slain  
A sacrifice for guilty man,  
By thē eternal Spirit made  
An offering in the sinner's stead,  
Our everlasting Priest art Thou,  
And plead'st Thy death for sinners now.

Thy offering still continues new,  
Thy vesture keens its bloody hue,  
Thou stood'st the ever-slaughter'd Lamb,  
Thy priesthood still remains the same,  
Thy years, O God, can never fail,  
Thy goodness is unchangeable.

O that our faith may never move,  
But stand unshaken as Thy love.  
Sure evidence of things unseen,  
Now let it pass the years between,  
And view Thee bleeding on the tree,  
My God, who dies for me, for me. (36)

Yet in stressing the sacrificial character of the sacrament, Wesley repudiated the Roman interpretation which involved either a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ or a supplementary offering for the atonement of sins. Rattenbury quotes from Brevint's Treatise to suggest that for Wesley the sacrament becomes "a kind of sacrifice". (37)

Wesley likewise rejected any corporeal view of the presence of Christ in the sacrament and he exegetes the words of John 6:51-2, "eating his flesh" as meaning "believing in Christ". "We freely own that Christ is to be adored, in the Lord's supper; but that the elements are to be adored, we deny".<sup>(38)</sup> For Wesley the real presence of Christ is the Holy Spirit - and he reintroduced the ancient Epiclesis (prayer for the descent of the Holy Spirit) in the Church of England liturgy.<sup>(39)</sup> This was in the form of Charles Wesley's:

Come, Holy Ghost, Thine influence shed,  
And realize the sign;  
Thy life infuse into the bread,  
Thy power into the wine.

Again we are confronted with the Wesleyan tension or dualism. Christ is both objectively present in the sacrament and yet present for those who worthily and with faith receive the bread and wine. To change the language - the sacrament was seen by Wesley as both a converting and a confirming ordinance. It is effective, both for those with no more than a desire to be saved and for those who receive the elements in the fullness of faith: "... the Lord's supper was ordained by God to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities." (40)

#### 2.2.2 A reminder of Christ's death

The sacrament of holy communion is thus seen by Wesley as pointing beyond itself as a sacrifice to the sacrifice of Christ. Several authors have shown that for Wesley the word "memorial or "memory" (anamnesis) of Christ's death means to "recall" or "bring back" the presence of Christ. Bowmer thus concludes (and Williams agrees) that the Lord's supper is "the extension of an act done in the past until its effects are a present power". (41) Again the emphasis is on an objective presence of Christ in the sacrament.

#### 2.2.3 Eschatological

Bowmer comments:

First, there was the belief that the Lord's supper is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, "The Sacrament as a Pledge of Heaven". Second, there was the belief in the "Communion of Saints", and third, that in the Lord's Supper as "Heavenly Food" (*italics are added*). (42)

In this emphasis the Wesleyan eschatological hope and expectation is seen to be grounded in the sacrament. This seems to confirm Wesley's firm belief that the best of all is, God is with us and that the best is yet to be!

This brief survey of Wesley's doctrine of the eucharist confirms the creative dualism already discerned in his doctrine of baptism. Both tendencies, high church objectivity and the evangelical need for faith by the recipient, are present in his eucharistic doctrine. Authors have from time to time opted for one of these poles and neatly concluded "this is Wesleyan doctrine". However, a careful reading of the non-systematic, non-synthesising Wesley who battled with the demands of the day and responded creatively (and at times polemically) to the challenges of his age reveals a complex doctrine. Methodism will clearly be the poorer in an ecumenical age for trying to arbitrarily put asunder what her tradition has so agonisingly put together.

### 3. Ordination

The by now familiar dualism of Wesley's thought again becomes clear in his doctrine of ministry. Any "concession" he allowed away from the ecclesiastical order and practice of the Anglican church to which he belonged was based on a reinterpretation of orthodox teaching on ordination rather than on disregard for it. The historical comment on Wesley's attitude concerning the administration of the sacraments has made it quite clear that his willingness to even consider the possibility of ordaining ministers to administer the sacraments in America and Scotland was an agonising and extremely cautious one.

In 1745 his position concerning the ordained priesthood becomes clear in a letter to his brother-in-law:

"We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian Church ... an outward priesthood, ordained by Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice offered therein, by men authorized to act as ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (43)

As already discovered in the discussion on Wesley's sacramental theology, there is an objective, "from-above", grace conveying dimension to his understanding of baptism and the eucharist. This we now discover from the above quotation is directly related to an outward priesthood, authorized to be stewards of the mysteries of God. As a direct consequence of this Wesley clearly distinguished between the priestly and preaching offices of the minister. Parris rightly shows that those who suggest that Wesley later retracted this distinction are offering too simple a view of the situation, for in his sermon "On the Ministerial Office" written in 1789, only two years before his death, he commented:

In 1744 all the Methodist preachers had their first conference. But none of them dreamed, that being called to preach gave them any right to administer sacraments. And when that question was proposed, "In what light are we to consider ourselves?" it was answered: "As extraordinary messengers, raised up to provoke the ordinary ones to jealousy." In order hereto one of our first rules was, given to each preacher, "You are to do that part of the work which we appoint." But what work was this? Did we ever appoint you to administer the sacraments; to exercise the priestly office? Such a design never entered into our mind, it was the farthest from our thoughts: And if any preacher had taken such a step, we should have looked upon it as a palpable breach of this rule, and consequently as a recantation of our connexion. (44)

What scholars do not ask is whether the mere fact that Wesley made this statement does not imply that Methodist preachers were beginning to agitate for the right to administer the sacraments - and whether this was not a logical consequence of Wesley's repeated stress on the importance of the eucharist even as a converting instrument together with this cardinal emphasis on the need to save souls. Yet whether this was the beginning of a liberation of Methodist preachers from ecclesiastical captivity or whether it indeed contained the seeds of the destruction of the Methodist connexion, Wesley himself obviously opposed any indication of a separation between the sacraments and an ordained, duly authorised priesthood.

Wesley regarded the priestly office of the minister as representative of the priesthood of all believers - with the responsibility to exercise the priestly functions of the sacraments as outlined above. The question concerning who were called to this priestly office and, by whom they were to be ordained has already been considered from an historical perspective. It remains therefore only to make a few concluding theological comments in this regard. Once compelled by his evangelical zeal and the growth of Methodism to ordain preachers to exercise the priestly office, he acted irregularly from the point of view of the Anglican church, but he was consistent with his own theological principles. In ordaining preachers he affirmed his belief that only those suitably ordained could administer the sacraments. And in so doing affirmed the traditional teaching that the priestly function was dependent on ordination in apostolic succession. John C. Bowmer's discussion on this matter and Colin W. William's extended footnote on the problem provides a concise insight into Wesley's theological stance in this regard. (45) Wesley regarded any argument concerning an uninterrupted episcopal succession from the time of the Apostles to the present day as unacceptable, but he  
never/.....

never discarded the belief in succession. What he did (as already mentioned earlier) was to relocate the function of the episkopoi in presbyters. That is, he argued that not only bishops per se but presbyters or ordinary ordained ministers could in turn ordain others to the same office. He believed that when he exercised the function of ordination he was, as a presbyter, exercising the inherent right of a New Testament episkopos or bishop. In a word, Wesley argued that the office of bishop and presbyter was theologically one and the same thing.

What can be concluded is that Wesley refused to allow lay persons to administer the sacraments. In his sermon entitled "The ministerial office", already referred to, he traces the distinction between the office of a priest and a preacher throughout the Old and New Testaments and in the history of the early church to his own times. (46) We also note that early in his ministry he insisted on rebaptising so-called Dissenters on the ground that they had not been baptised by episcopally ordained priests, yet we have also noted that he later admitted persons to holy communion who had not been so baptised. There is positively no evidence, however, of Wesley making any concession on ordination being a prerequisite for administering the sacraments.

This raises a number of important issues concerning the administration of the sacraments in present discussion in Methodism and beyond this denomination. It can well be argued that any church is entitled to ordain whoever it likes to the priestly office but Methodists cannot claim to be affirming their own tradition and allow persons to administer the sacraments without being duly ordained to do so. (This matter, as it affects present practice in Southern African Methodism, is discussed in an appendix.)

It is now necessary to comment on present liturgical doctrine of Methodism, which clearly affirms the traditional Wesleyan distinction between the preaching and priestly office of the minister.

To this end a cursory analysis of the orders of service for ordination is necessary, for here we state our present doctrinal convictions regarding the role and office of a minister and of ordination.

Several extracts from both Methodist and Anglican ordination services are provided for consideration. This is done primarily to show the similarities between them, derived from a common origin, namely, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. It is thus not surprising that the Methodist

Book of Offices of 1936 (substantially the same as the service in the 1882 Book of Public Prayers and Services) bears close resemblance to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of the Province of South Africa.

The Book of Offices

The President and other Ministers present shall lay their hands severally upon the head of everyone of the Candidates, who shall humbly kneel upon their knees, the President saying:

Mayest thou receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Christian Minister and Pastor, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. And be thou a faithful Dispenser of the Word of God and his holy Sacraments; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer

... The Bishop and the Priests shall lay their hands severally upon the head of every one that receiveth the Order of Priesthood; the receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees, and the Bishop saying:

Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of his Holy Sacraments. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The roles of preacher and dispensers of the sacraments are in both cases dependent upon ordination by the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Proclamation and the administration of the sacraments are therefore functions of the office to which persons are ordained. This interpretation of the liturgy is affirmed by the Anglican tradition and clearly fits Wesley's practice of not allowing unordained persons to administer the sacraments, while at the same time not restricting the proclamation of the Word to the ordained ministry. This apparent anomaly was probably due to the tension between the Catholic and Evangelical aspects of Wesley's theology. His evangelical zeal enabled him to accept that non-ordained preachers could be called of God to preach the gospel whereas his Anglican orthodoxy convinced him that the celebration of the sacraments should be reserved for episcopally ordained persons.

This/.....

This basic liturgical distinction is again explicitly affirmed in The Methodist Service Book of 1975, from which the following quotations are taken:

The President lays his hands upon the head of each ordinand in turn, (they are already kneeling see No. 13) other Ministers also laying on their right hands.

The President says over each one:  
Father, send the Holy Spirit upon N., for the office and work of a Minister in the Church of Christ.

16 The President says:

Seeing that you have been duly ordained by prayer and the imposition of hands, I declare in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church, that you have authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the holy sacraments as a Minister in the Church of Christ.

The "authority to preach" and to "administer the sacraments" are here quite clearly seen to be functions of the office to which a minister is duly ordained.

This brief analysis of the ordination liturgies motivates one to conclude that it is the formal intention of contemporary Methodism that the celebration of the sacraments be a function of the office of the ordained minister.



NOTES

- (1) J.W.C. Wand, A History of the Modern Church (London: Methuen Press, 1965), p.187.
- (2) "Articles of Religion", No.XIII, The Book of Public Prayers and Services (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room 1882), p.321 - Hereafter cited as Articles.
- (3) J. Lawson, Selections from John Wesley's 'Notes on the New Testament' (London: Epworth, 1955), p.167.
- (4) Articles, p.322.
- (5) Ibid., p.322.
- (6) Ibid., p.322.
- (7) Minutes of Conference 1766, quoted by Colin W. Williams (London: The Epworth Press, 1960). p.213.
- (8) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley: Thomas Jackson Edition. (Reprint by Baker House, Grand Rapids of 1872 Edition) Vol. II, p.6.
- (9) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.III, p.44f.
- (10) John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism (London: Dacre Press, 1951), p.165.
- (11) J.S. Simon, John Wesley, the Last Phase (London: Epworth, 1934), p.229 and Williams, p.227.
- (12) "The Plan of Pacification" in H. Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.359.
- (13) The Book of Offices (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1936), p.149 - and, Public Prayers and Services (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1882), p.278.
- (14) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.I, p.224.
- (15) "Letters", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.XIII, p.144.  
See also Wesley's lengthy discussion on this matter in Vol.VIII, pp.32f. He here tells us inter alia, " ... I observed the rubrics (of the Anglican Church) with scrupulous exactness - for conscience' sake".
- (16) John R. Parris, John Wesley's Doctrine of the Sacraments (London: The Epworth Press, 1963), p.2.
- (17) Ibid., pp.4f. Also G.W. Bromley, Baptism and the Anglican Reformers (London: Butterworth, 1953), pp.175f.

- (18) John Wesley, Forty-four Sermons (London: The Epworth Press), 1961. p I ff. See also Works Vol V p. 7 ff.
- (19) Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), p.116, footnote 55. The limited references to baptism in Wesley's sermons are indexed in John Lawson, Notes on Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons (London: Epworth Press, 1952).
- (20) John Wesley, "A Treatise on Baptism", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.X, pp.190f.
- (21) Samuel Wesley, "A Short Discourse on Baptism", quoted by Parris, p.13.
- (22) Colin W. Williams, p.117.
- (23) "A Treatise on Baptism", and John Wesley, Notes on the New Testament (London: Epworth Press), Acts 16:15.
- (24) Notes on the New Testament, Col.2:12.
- (25) For example, his sermon on "The New Birth" and "The Witness of the Spirit", in Forty-four Sermons.
- (26) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol.VI, p.73. See also his sermon on "The New Birth", IV, 1 and IV, 4 in Forty-four Sermons - and John Lawson's Notes on Wesley's Forty-four Sermons.
- (27) Colin W. Williams, pp.120f.
- (28) John R. Parris, p.9.
- (29) Ibid., p.8.
- (30) Sermon on "The Means of Grace" in Forty-four Sermons. p 34 ff. See also Works Vol V p. 185 ff.
- (31) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 1, p. 279.
- (32) John R. Parris, p. 70.
- (33) "Journal", The Works of John Wesley, Vol. I, p.280.
- (34) Sermon CIV, "On attending the church service" Ibid., Vol. VII, pp.-74-185.
- (35) Published in J.E. Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1948), pp. 195 f. The specific section referred to is on p.231f.
- (36) Ibid., pp.103-104.

- (37) Ibid., p.187. The relevant section of Dr. Brevint's "Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice" is included in Rattenbury, p. 176f.
- (38) "A Roman Catechism, faithfully drawn out of the allowed writings of the Church of Rome: With a Reply thereto." The Works of John Wesley, Vol. X, p. 121.
- (39) John C. Bowmer, pp. 86-90.
- (40) "Letters", The Works of John Wesley, Vol. VIII, p. 404.
- (41) John C. Bowmer, pp. 178-49 and Colin C. Williams, p. 160.
- (42) Ibid., pp. 145 and 165.
- (43) The Letters of the Rev John Wesley. Telford J. (Ed) Epworth 1961. Vol. II p. 55. Wesley Hall. December 30, 1745.
- (44) Sermon CXV The Ministerial Office The Works of John Wesley, Vol. VII, p. 277.
- (45) John C. Bowmer, pp. 146-63 and Colin W. Williams, pp.147-48, footnote 13.
- (46) Sermon CXV, The Ministerial Office The Works of John Wesley, Vol. VII, pp. 273-281.

## APPENDIX I

SOME TENTATIVE PROPOSALS CONCERNING THE ADMINIS-  
TRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

(based on the attached theological paper)

1. The Wesleyan tradition affirms that the celebration of the sacraments is an exclusive function of the office to which a minister is duly ordained.
2. There is no theological or pragmatic reason why contemporary Methodism ought to deviate from this tradition.
3. Clearly it is the right of the church to decide who it will ordain for the purpose of administering the sacraments.
4. If the exigencies of stations together with our responsibility to evangelise and extend pastoral care through the administration of the sacraments indicates that we have insufficient ordained ministers to exercise a sacramental ministry, then we as a church must act in accordance with our tradition in meeting this need. That is, we must ordain more people to meet the need. There is apparently no traditional or theological reason why we should not ordain, for example, deaconesses, evangelists and any other duly trained persons who may be included in an order of lay ministry, to an office authorising them to administer sacraments. It is necessary, however, that the persons be duly ordained to this office (see paragraph 5).
5. In the light of the above it is necessary that conference reconsider the matter of providing dispensation to probationers (who in terms of our present practice are lay people) - for it is precisely this anomaly that has resulted in the

confusion among our people concerning the Methodist position on the administration of the sacraments. If conference deems it necessary to have probationers administer the sacraments due to the pastoral requirements of our people then it is necessary to ordain such persons, say to the office of deacon. In so doing it can be specifically mentioned that the person being so ordained may administer the sacraments when duly authorised by the President of the Conference. (The SA Prayer Book, p.681 of the Church of the Province provides useful reading in this regard. For example, an Anglican deacon is authorised "in the absence of the priest to baptise infants ..." (italics added).) The point is simply that we recognise there to be a divine commissioning and an ecclesiastical recognition of this at ordination. Ordination is of God (hence the imposition of hands, the invocation and the commissioning) and this is recognised by the church (hence the recognition of the church, or "licencing" by the church of the ordained minister in receiving this person into full connexion or as in the case of a probationer being given dispensation in writing by the President). Ordination as discussed in paragraph 4 must be considered in a similar manner.

6. The above remarks do not preclude unordained persons from sharing in "the preparation, the ministry of the Word, including the intercessions and in the distribution of the bread and wine" as allowed for in the Methodist Service Book of 1975 (B.1 para. 7). The person presiding as celebrant is, however to be duly ordained to this office.

7. In order to maintain both good order in the church and the centrality of the sacraments in our ministry to all those who desire to be saved, sacramental authority needs to be vested in a duly ordained and authorised person. This can be accomplished as suggested above without deviating

from our Methodist tradition and doctrine - and hopefully Wesley would regard this as a case of keeping the rules and not mending them.

8. A postscript

. Methodism clearly recognises three orders of ministry:

Lay ministry of which every baptised Christian is a part. This ministry is formally recognised in the confirmation service, which needs to be understood in terms of the long-standing Christian tradition of which it is a part - namely, that confirmation is ordination to lay ministry. At this service confirmands willingly commit themselves to service and ministry.

Commissioned ministry consists of those persons whose particular gifts are formally recognised by the church for specific authorised functions in the total ministry of the church. Local preachers, deaconesses, evangelists, etc. form part of this order of ministry. The book of offices makes it clear that these persons are ordained or invested to these specific offices.

Ordained ministry or priesthood refers specifically to those persons ordained to the specific ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments.

. Clearly no superiority of commitment of service is implied in distinguishing these orders. The distinction is rather based on vocation and call to a specific kind of ministry.

. No fuller amount of grace is vested in one order of ministry than another.

. Different orders of ministry exist primarily for the sake of good order, dignity and ecclesiastical authority.

. What precisely happens theologically at ordination is, at least in Methodist doctrine, a mystery of faith. Biblical teaching in 1 Timothy 4:14 ("Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you") seems to affirm this emphasis.

Whatever may be understood by mystery, it is regarded by Methodist usage and Wesley himself, as significant enough not to be easily tampered with nor easily conferred on a candidate. It is also regarded as a permanent imposition on an ordained minister which cannot be revoked. For example, a Methodist minister who resigns and is later reinstated into full connexion is not reordained, nor is an ordained minister from another communion reordained when received into Full Connexion.