

**This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion**

*An Episcopal Response*

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I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to **This Holy Mystery**, approved by the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church. I have been privileged to be an informal and thoroughly unofficial participant in these conversations for a long time. While on the Faculty of The General Seminary in New York, I also taught in the liturgical studies program at Drew University. The classes generally meet in the second-floor conference room of the United Methodist Library and Archives near the reliquary of George Whitefield. While at the School of Theology in Sewanee, I taught alongside United Methodist colleagues and encountered a regular procession of United Methodist seminarians who prepared for ordination among us. Now in Atlanta, I delight in an ever-closer relationship with wonderful colleagues at Emory’s Candler School of Theology, to which I regularly entrust some of my own seminarians into the able hands of its Anglican Studies Program. All of this is simply to say that I am delighted to have had the opportunity to stand along the sidelines and watch the rather extraordinary convergence in theology and practice – liturgical, sacramental, United Methodist, catholic, and ecumenical – that this document represents.

From the title of the document, I am led to understand that this is “*a* United Methodist understanding.” By the same token, this is “*an* Episcopal response.” Our common heritage means that there is inevitably some family DNA in our make-up. Evidence of that, I believe, is the tendency among both United Methodists and

Episcopalians to have almost as many interpretations of “the tradition” as there are willing spokespersons for it. It’s not as if either tradition has ever been bashful about setting forth its doctrinal, disciplinary, liturgical, and pastoral principles, but we have generally given our bishops and clergy, our theologians, and our people, a rather wide berth within which to function. While it frustrates some among us who relentlessly desire precision in all things, I prefer to see it as an open and gracious space, between us and within us, that is the arena of the Holy Spirit’s work among us. As hard as it is to pin us down at times, I believe this manner of living the Gospel is a marvelous gift to us, a strength we share in common, and as such it holds enormous potential for a gracious evangelism in these dogmatic and ideologically-driven times.

In this paper I want respond at three different levels: (1) a general response to the entire document with an emphasis on Part One; (2) some specific reactions to the content of Part Two; and (3) some thoughts toward further developments around common celebrations among United Methodists and Episcopalians, toward the goal of full communion.

**Part One: There is More to the Mystery.** The strengths of the document are three: (1) It speaks in ways that are faithful to its Wesleyan-Methodist heritage. In the ecumenical conversations of the last couple of generations, each of the churches so engaged has been required to reach back into its history and to bring fresh clarity to what it means to bear their name and live their tradition in an ecumenical context. Although not without our critics, I believe all of us have been well-served to re-discover those things that give us our unique identity within the larger family of Christian churches.

There is, of course, the risk of getting stuck in replicating the past and becoming slavish to a vision of the church or the work of the Gospel that “pertaineth not” to the living of these days. Reclaiming our roots, if not everything that has sprung forth from them (and certainly there is much to leave by the wayside), is necessary for the strength and vitality of our present and future ministries.

Our churches were both born on another shore and we set up shop here as missionary movements and pastoral outposts before the constitution of the nation. The missionary demands of the new environment were not always conducive to the maintenance of received tradition and considerable adaptation was required in order to spread the Gospel in the new world. The Methodist tradition in particular took a strong and effective lead in evangelizing the new territory and showed an incredible ability to adapt its worship and pastoral ministries to the spiritual needs of a growing new nation being born.

The charisms of the early American Methodists that made them well suited to responding to the spiritual needs of the frontier, in practical terms worked at odds with the profound sacramental (and I would say, liturgical) foundations of the Methodist tradition. I am not unaware of more sympathetic readings of the history on this point, and any number of exceptional “eucharistic communities” in the history of American Methodism. John Wesley’s 1784 revision of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer for Methodists in North America provided a “full connection” to emerging American Methodism’s English roots and Anglican heritage.<sup>1</sup> The missionary context and the

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<sup>1</sup> *John Wesley’s Prayer Book: The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*. Introduction, Notes, and Commentary by James F. White. (Cleveland, Ohio: OSL Publications, 1991).

political environment of the new nation, however, were not conducive to Wesley’s directives. By the time of Wesley’s death in 1791, much of American Methodism had discontinued the use of *The Sunday Service* as the weekly norm of Methodist worship.<sup>2</sup> James White characterized Wesley’s program as “pragmatic traditionalism” with the emphasis on traditionalism.<sup>3</sup> After Wesley’s death, and under the energetic leadership of Francis Asbury, what became traditional was a decided preference for the pragmatic. This is, in my judgment, a piece of the heritage of Methodism in North America to which the present document has been faithful. It is at once both traditional and pragmatic representing with style and grace this balancing act at the heart of the American Methodist tradition.

This document is faithful to its heritage in another sense as well. In an essay from December 1789<sup>4</sup>, Wesley sets out what might be considered criteria for liturgical reform:

- a. the primacy of Scripture;
- b. the normativity of Christian antiquity;
- c. the example of the Church of England and its liturgy;
- d. the use of reason;

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<sup>2</sup> Don E. Saliers, “Divine Grace, Diverse Means: Sunday Worship in United Methodist Congregations,” in Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (ed.) *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism*. (Studies in Honor of James F. White). (Nashville: Kingswood Books (Abingdon), 1996) 137-156.

<sup>3</sup>James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Know, 1989) 151.

<sup>4</sup> “Farther Thoughts on Separation From the Church,” *Works* 9:538. See the fine essay by Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, “Form and Freedom: John Wesley’s Legacy for Methodist Worship,” in Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (ed.), *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism*. (Studies in Honor of James F. White). (Nashville: Kingswood Books (Abingdon), 1996) 17-30.

e. the necessity of evangelical “experience.”

John Wesley’s Anglican heritage and affections are clearly showing here, not to mention the significant influence upon him of the Non-Jurors from his Oxford years.<sup>5</sup> To whatever degree the present document was created intentionally in response to these criteria, I cannot say. It seems, however, that the results are very consonant with them. The “balance” between faithfulness to the Wesleyan-Methodist liturgical heritage (with its roots in the Book of Common Prayer), the pragmatism of Methodist worship and piety in the mix of American evangelicalism, and making use of the principles of catholic liturgical reform and renewal of the last century or so (with its heavy reliance upon the norms of Christian antiquity), is quite visible in the present document. This is, I believe, one its greatest strengths.

This leads me to the second strength I would like to identify. (2) **This Holy Mystery** is not only sensitive to its historical Methodist roots, it is well-grounded in the principles of catholic liturgical reform and renewal, and, it seems, unapologetically so. However closely the framers may have been keeping one eye on Wesley’s legacy and its American Methodist adaptations, the other eye is fixed on Justin Martyr, Hippolytus, *Apostolic Constitutions*, and any number of other documents of the first five centuries of the church that have become the foundational documents for liturgical revision. The document places the current United Methodist liturgical practice in the mainstream of

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<sup>5</sup> See Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books (Abingdon) 1991).

what we might call the “ecumenical ordo” of traditional catholic liturgy.<sup>6</sup> Liturgical scholarship has established, with due allowances for details (*i.e.* local differences, textual variants, nuances in sacramental theology) common ritual structures based upon patristic models, but not without some attention to medieval, Reformation, and more recent concerns.<sup>7</sup> This ecumenical ordo has been widely adopted in the recent round of liturgical revisions in most churches that claim for themselves some historical participation in the catholic tradition. **This Holy Mystery** makes it quite clear that United Methodists have embraced rather fully the ecumenical ordo and its implications for their eucharistic worship. Again, what I find impressive is the level to which the ecumenical ordo has been embraced while still holding tightly to some of the unique spiritual and sacramental aspects of the Wesleyan eucharistic tradition.

The third strength of **This Holy Mystery**, speaking in general terms, is this: (3) The document expresses an admirable balance between the historical, theological, and pastoral (practical) dimensions of eucharistic faith and practice. I was hugely impressed with much of the background material in Part One. Trying to cram centuries of complex sacramental theology into a few sentences is a perilous undertaking. Sweeping generalizations usually demand protracted caveats, but not here. I was delighted to see, for example, that the document points out the near universal misuse of the term

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<sup>6</sup> For a full exposition see, Gordon A. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> It should be pointed out that these “models” are often composites of a variety of practices, sometimes representing a conflation of liturgical materials, and do not represent the rites of actual communities of the ancient church.

consubstantiation as shorthand for the Lutheran position on the nature of the presence of Christ in the sacrament.

The reference to the widespread acceptance of the Zwinglian view, especially among evangelicals, reminded me of an interesting article in *The New York Times* that appeared during the week of the pope’s most recent visit (1995). Several hundred Roman Catholics were interviewed on their way to Giants’ Stadium for the Papal Mass. They were asked, among other questions, how they would explain the mysteries of the mass. The data gathered was then turned over to an ecumenical group of theologians, including Roman Catholics, that later declared that an overwhelming majority of those interviewed spoke of the meaning of the mass in what generally would be considered Zwinglian terms. As much as I hate to admit it, I don’t suspect a similar survey of faithful Episcopalian communicants would reveal a different result. In fact, I suspect most Christians, of whatever affiliation, conceive of the Eucharist most naturally in something close to Zwinglian terms. As a student of mine once argued in a paper, “The Zwinglian position is what comes naturally to most people; the other views have to be learned and reflected on.”

I have little quibble with the suggestion that a similar view to that of John Calvin is what is embedded in the Articles of Religion of the Church of England and, I might add, implied by many of the theological expositions of the 1552 and 1662 Prayer Books. What is not referred to here is the richer eucharistic theology of the Elizabethan Settlement given eloquent expression by Richard Hooker in Book V of *Of the Lawes Of Ecclesiastical Polity*, nor the theological work of the Non-Jurors, the Caroline Divines, or

the theological convictions of the Scottish-American Episcopal liturgical tradition. That being said, I believe this is a “down and dirty,” “broad brush” summary statement of exceptional quality.

I also highly commend the section, “The Meaning of Holy Communion.” It is as fine and complete a brief summary of basic eucharistic catechesis as I know of. It was particularly pleasing to see *anamnesis, sacrifice, and eschatology* so carefully highlighted. These dimensions of eucharistic theology, and the action of the Holy Spirit so wonderfully expressed in the Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, 1745*, while deeply rooted in the Methodist tradition, have largely been absent from the vocabulary of much of the church’s evangelical wing, especially where the influence of the Reformed tradition has been strong, including much of the evangelical tradition of Anglicanism.

To conclude this first part, I want to commend, in the strongest possible terms, the section entitled, “Toward a Richer Sacramental Life.” Because we live in a world of instant foods and instant communication, we want everything else in our lives to be instantaneous as well. In the religious marketplace, people seem to want their relationship with God and their fellowship with the church to be characterized by a similar sense of immediacy. By contrast, I was pleased to see that the **This Holy Mystery** has taken a clear position with respect to the lifelong process of spiritual formation growing out of a disciplined life of eucharistic worship. I can’t think of many things more important to the church in these days than helping our people learn to “sit comfortably” with God in their lives, to “relax” into God’s gracious presence, and not try to do for ourselves today what

God will do for us tomorrow. This comes, I believe, by way of faithful and frequent eucharistic worship, “constant,” as Wesley would be pleased to remind us.

**Part Two: Christ Is Here: Experiencing the Mystery**

This section underscores yet again the profound impact of ecumenical liturgical renewal on present-day United Methodist thinking. Reading both from the perspective as a liturgist, but perhaps also with the concerns of a pastor, this is the place where the rubber hits the road. The threefold structure – principle, background, practice – provides a clear and compelling (and necessarily brief!) explanation that will be useful to parish clergy doing their catechetical work. It is impossible to comment on every detail, but I do want to raise up several important points of agreement where the best of our two traditions seem to coalesce.

**The Presence of Christ.** At a theological level, I am quite happy to see the affirmation that “The divine presence is a living reality and can be experienced by participants; it is not a remembrance of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion only.” This is an extremely important theological point that our traditions share, though on both sides I wonder if we have done adequate catechesis of our people and theological training of our clergy. I am embarrassed to say that I recently saw a “statement of beliefs” (unofficial, I hasten to add) hanging on the wall of a large and influential Episcopal institution. In explaining the Eucharist, the document stated that Holy Communion “is a reenactment of The Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples on the night before he was betrayed.” I think that is quite in error. The church’s Eucharist is the eschatological banquet of the Resurrection. The sharing of bread and wine as Jesus did with his

disciples, and the “one oblation of himself once offered” at the Crucifixion, are most certainly caught up in the sweep of the eucharistic action. The Lord’s Supper, however, is not a tableau of the Last Supper. It is not a replay of a particular moment in the history of our salvation, but the celebration of the fullness of that redemption in the power of the Resurrection.

The larger issue here, I believe, is the historicization of the rites of the church. I am certainly in favor of the liturgical year, the lectionary, proper liturgies for special days, and everything else that gives shape to the “program” of the church’s unfolding year of grace. But in our use of those structures we must be quite careful that we do not fall headlong into notions of “historical re-presentation” or “re-enactment” of the stories and mysteries of our salvation in such manner as to rob them of their eschatological reality and meaning. I worry about this because of the proliferation of Seder meals during Holy Week, and ritual gestures at the Lord’s Table that appear to be mimicking the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper (as though we know what they were), and similar practices. Our religion is historical but our rituals must be profoundly eschatological.

I raise this point out of my experience of moving a congregation from a weekly non-eucharistic worship (Holy Communion quarterly plus Christmas Eve and Good Friday) to weekly Sunday and feast day Eucharists. The breakthrough came, at least in terms of my leadership, when I realized that much of the parish really did think of Holy Communion along the same lines as they thought of the children’s Christmas pageant. If it was a “play,” re-enacting the Last Supper, then four times a year was a more-than-gracious plenty. The resistance began to wane, and the acceptance became increasingly

enthusiastic, when the faithful began to see that the church’s Eucharist was not simply a remembrance of something that had happened long ago, but that it was a richly anamnetic feast of our redemption with both a present and a future.

There is also a pastoral issue that is raised here as well: “Christ’s presence in the sacrament is a promise to the church and is not dependent upon recognition of this presence by individual members of the congregation. Holy Communion always offers grace.” Note here, I believe, another shared position between our two traditions. My own reading of the Reformation debates can be (overly) simplified by suggesting that the two poles were: *valid reception without regard to the faith of the believer vis-à-vis valid reception dependant upon the faith of the believer*. The pastoral genius of the Anglican position was to maintain a sufficient trust in the promise of Christ’s presence to the church to give the faithful something upon which to cling, *while at the same time* affirming a clear role for the faith of the communicant in appropriating (*i.e.* experiencing) the presence of Christ. I believe that is a position we share.

**Christ is Calling You. Invitation to the Lord’s Table.** I found this section of the document particularly engaging. Underscoring the fact that the Invitation to the Table comes from the Lord himself I found to be quite helpful and it provides a strong foundation for much that follows. The call to ongoing age-appropriate “mystagogy” is extremely vital in these days because the church in recent times has, I believe, largely failed at its catechetical and formative responsibilities toward those committed to its care.

The next principle deals with the communion of the unbaptized: “All who respond in faith to the invitation are to be welcomed.” This is perhaps *the* point in the document

that will make many Episcopalians uneasy. The canonical position of The Episcopal Church remains, “No unbaptized person shall be eligible to receive Holy Communion in this Church” (II.17.7). Laying aside the fact that “eligible” was a most unfortunate choice of words, until quite recently this position has gone largely unquestioned in the practice of The Episcopal Church, even if it has occasioned theological debate from time to time. The question of the communion of the unbaptized has now officially been raised and the 2003 General Convention referred the matter to the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops.

In terms of pastoral practice, I know of few Episcopal parishes that would turn away an unbaptized person, largely on the assumption that anyone who presented him/herself at the altar, presumably, would have been baptized. An increasing number of parishes (but still a clear minority) are simply ignoring this canon and welcoming one and all to the table. I am not aware of any bishops who are disciplining those parishes who open their table to the unbaptized, though I am aware of some rather contentious conversations around the subject in several places.

In those parishes that have pioneered in this matter, the reason given usually has to do with the context of their mission. One argument runs something like this: “We minister the Gospel in a multicultural setting with incredible diversity when it comes to age, economics, religious backgrounds, education, and family structure. Regardless of one’s background, everyone understands table fellowship and recognizes that a stranger who shares the family table has become, in some sense, no longer a stranger. To invite

one into our fellowship and immediately tell them they need a bath does not connect with many people in our missionary setting.” Fair enough, I suppose.

More compelling, in my judgment, are those who are considering the communion of the unbaptized by re-thinking the meal ministry of Jesus. It has not been lost on some that the ancient church sorted out its Eucharist around perhaps the most exclusive of the meals that Jesus shared with others, pre- or post-resurrection. “What if the church had based its eucharistic life not only around the Last Supper, but on a fuller picture of his meal ministry, his eating with outcasts and sinners, with women, the stranger, and others?” I believe that line of argument has promise, but whether it will be judged to be convincing enough for the church to change a fairly well-entrenched practice remains to be seen. Wesley’s line about the Holy Communion being “a converting ordinance” is often quoted in our church by proponents of communion of the unbaptized, but without the important nuance it received in **This Holy Mystery**.<sup>8</sup>

I applaud the careful articulation of welcome to the Lord’s Table for those persons who, “because of age or ‘mental, physical, developmental, and/or psychological’ capacity, or because of any other condition that might limit his or her understanding or hinder his or her reception of the sacrament.” Although I know of no official parallel statement in The Episcopal Church, I am confident that our pastoral practice is very much of the same spirit.

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<sup>8</sup> **This Holy Mystery** (p.15), “In eighteenth-century England, Wesley was addressing people who, for the most part, although baptized as infants and possessing some degree of faith had not yet experienced spiritual rebirth. Therefore, the conversion Wesley spoke of was transformation of lives and assurance of salvation.”

**The Issue of Unworthiness.** As a parish priest I certainly grappled with persons committed to my care who struggled with a sense of unworthiness in their lives in a variety of ways, not the least of which had to do with their sense of unworthiness around receiving communion. I believe this section is pastorally quite helpful and should be a fine resource for the clergy. I found Wesley’s comments laid alongside the passage from 1 Corinthians to be quite compelling.

**The Basic Pattern of Worship**

Perhaps because I am a liturgist by trade, I found the section of the document the most interesting. It is particularly strong in accomplishing two things: (1) giving an effective *apologia* for the “ecumenical ordo,” (my terminology, not that of the document) received through Wesleyan filters; and (2) calling the church to a deeper appreciation of appropriate ritual behavior in the assembly.

**A Service of Word and Table.** I was particularly delighted to see the emphasis on *the whole* of the service and not the more typical sum-of-its parts. I did catch the quotation from *Book of Worship* that suggests that “the Service of the Word or the Preaching Service -- are a Christian adaptation of the ancient synagogue service.” As a historian of ancient rites, I am increasingly convinced that such a claim is not as true as it was once believed to be, but that detail aside, the larger point of this section is quite important.

Both of our churches went through a period in which the full eucharistic liturgy was not the norm in most of our parishes. For you, as the document notes, it had a great deal to do with the unavailability of elders to celebrate the sacrament. For us, it also had

to do a shortage of priests in the early years, but also with the residual of the Puritan influence in Colonial American Anglicanism, a tradition that, once established, was very hard to overcome. There were, of course, exceptional Episcopal parishes that always had Holy Communion as the principal service of the Lord’s Day, and the Parish Communion Movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had the positive effect of making communion available in most parishes, even if at an alternative hour to the principal service

This may or may not be an appropriate aside, but here goes. The appeal for the restoration of a weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper is quite central to **This Holy Mystery**, and you’ll certainly get no argument from me. Having lived through more than a generation of change in The Episcopal Church, and the shift from Morning Prayer to Holy Eucharist as the principal Sunday service in the majority of our parishes, I can testify to the fact that a shift of this magnitude will change the church! Change the ritual pattern and over time you will have changed the church. This is too large a subject to get into here, but in my observation, those who have grown up in the Episcopal Church in the last generation, in parishes where the Holy Eucharist is all they know as Sunday worship, are a very different bunch from many of their forebears. Mission parishes that have sprung up in recent years that have known nothing but a Rite Two eucharistic tradition are quite different places from some of their sister parishes that maintain a steady diet of Rite One. Although I will not take the time to try it here, I believe that a fairly strong case could be made that at least some of the “tension” in the Episcopal Church, for some years, can be understood with respect to those whose spiritual lives have been shaped by

the centrality of the Eucharist and can’t imagine life in Christian community otherwise, and those who were shaped by a quite different rendering of the tradition in which the Eucharist was more peripheral, and who have become “eucharistically centered” because the church demanded it of them. I am confident that history will show the wisdom of this dramatic shift, not only in my church and yours, but also in the ecumenical family of catholic traditions. In the meantime, however, I believe this is a shift of enormous proportions the long-term impact of which we are only beginning to understand.

**The Gathered Community:** Here is a place where I could get into trouble with colleagues of my own tradition. As Episcopalians, matters related to holy orders and their function in the life of the church are very close to our hearts. We affirm much of what we have received from our Latin Catholic past, we place that alongside the various critiques provided by the Reformation traditions, and we participate in the continuing theological development of ecumenical catholicism. Though eschewed by some among us, most Episcopalians would also find a relatively high degree of comfort in the fundamental principles of the liturgical movement, especially as those have come into focus in our post-Vatican II ecumenical context. This is to say that while we may be approaching consensus, we are by no means in agreement with each other on many of the practical details of liturgical celebration represented in this section of **This Sacred Mystery**.

**The Whole Assembly** – This is a case in point. I believe that the idea that the whole assembly “celebrates” the Eucharist is good theology, compatible with the best of Anglican tradition, and certainly a part of the agenda of liturgical renewal. I regularly express my regret that the 1979 BCP adopted the term “celebrant” instead of “presider:”

– the community *celebrates*, the bishop or priest *presides*. That said, there are those in my church who strongly “protect” the terminology of “celebrant” related solely to the bishop or priest, and who would seem to have little concern that this position relegates the laity to a more passive role in the celebration. (I hasten to add that this position is not held only by some clergy, but by some laity as well.)

On a related matter, as Episcopalians we believe that each of the church’s orders: lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons, have their unique “ministries” in the “mix” of the church’s fullness. It makes many of us slightly anxious when the “royal priesthood” or “priesthood of the baptized” language gets used in too tight a reference to holy orders. No one would argue with the position that the church *as a whole* is the priesthood of the baptized (or the priesthood of all believers) of which Christ is the “chief priest.” I believe that most Anglicans would have a deep appreciation of the “priesthood of all believers” when it is intended to describe a “spiritual construct” that says something about the nature of the church as the people of God. We get much more nervous, however, when this language is used too closely with respect to the church’s ordained ministry (the political or organizational construct) because of the tendency of such language to be heard as the “presbyterate of all believers,” and thereby, devalue the role of holy orders in the life and ministry of the church.

**The Prayer of Thanksgiving** – The description of the Great Thanksgiving (21) describes the structure of the eucharist prayer in the UMBOW. The structure outlined there is quite close to the structure of five of the six eucharistic prayers in the 1979 Prayer Book. With due allowances for small details, this structure is known in liturgical studies as the

Antiochene or West Syrian form, to distinguish it from eucharistic prayer forms associated with Alexandria or Rome. What is of particular interest to us here is that this form, West Syrian, established in the Christian East by the fourth century (perhaps earlier), has been received, by liturgical scholars and sacramental theologians of the last generation, as the prayer form that has perhaps the most to commend it because of its theological and ritual clarity. Although not the form of the eucharistic prayer of earlier *non-American* revisions of the Prayer Book, this form has been consistent in all revisions of the Prayer Book in the United States, and has its roots in the 1764 Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church in Scotland. (This is probably not the place to debate whether the Episcopal Church and its Scottish forbears were liturgical geniuses or simply the beneficiaries of a series of blessed historical accidents, but either way, the eucharistic prayer structure of the American BCP tradition, and the theology it bears, has received wide ecumenical acceptance. In analyzing the prayers in the UMBOW, all but one follow this same essential structure, the exception being the prayer in Word and Table IV. (I am curious as to why the description of the structure in **This Holy Mystery** (21) does not mention the anamnesis even though there appears to be one in every UMBOW prayer.)

One interesting note: the commentary takes note of the “epiclesis hymns” of the Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, 1745*, and gives perhaps the best example from that collection. What I find curious about this is that the Prayer Book which John and Charles Wesley would have known, and which John revised for use in North America, was the 1662 Book. The structure of the eucharistic prayer in the 1662 Book is **not** the same structure as we were examining above and it **did not** have an epiclesis. Some have

suggested that John knew of the epiclesis in the first Prayer Book of 1549, but that, I believe, is untenable. An analysis of the 1745 *Hymns* indicates that the stanzas often follow a common structure and, interestingly enough, that structure is very near to the West Syrian structure that is now visible in the UMBOW and 1979 Prayer Books. I think a stronger suggestion is that the Wesley’s relationship with the Non-Jurors at Oxford, and the resurgent interest in patristic studies, influenced the Wesley’s deeply. During the time the Wesley’s were in Oxford, a variety of alternative proposals, based on Eastern models, was making its way toward the 1764 Scottish Book. I believe it was these structures, adopted by Scottish Episcopalians in 1764 and American Episcopalians in 1789, that were the basis upon which the Wesley’s shaped their theological commentary on the eucharist in the form of the *Hymns* of 1745.<sup>9</sup>

**The Community Extends Itself** – Here we are dealing with “extending” the liturgy to those who cannot, for good reason, be present at the celebration of the community. It seems that the text is working hard to avoid language that would be familiar to Episcopalians, such as, “communion from the reserved sacrament.” Allowing for the difference in terminology, it seems that the essential shape of this “sacramental-pastoral” ministry is much the same in both churches.

**The Ritual of the Church** – This section perhaps highlights one of the major differences in “culture” between our two churches. **This Holy Mystery**, while urging the faithful use of the church’s official rites, recognizes and affirms the diversity of practice within the

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<sup>9</sup> See J. Neil Alexander, “With Eloquence of Speech and Song: The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley,” *The Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society II* (1995) 35-50. [Also available in, *With Every Joyful Heart: Essays on Liturgy and Music Honoring Marion J. Hatchett*. J. Neil Alexander, (ed.) (Church Publishing, 1999) 244-260.]

United Methodist Church. By contrast, while the Episcopal Church certainly has its “renegade congregations” that play fast and loose with the Prayer Book, and further, while the Prayer Book is open to a fairly wide interpretation when it comes to matters of liturgical style and ceremony, faithfulness to the received order is canonically required in the Episcopal Church and the institutional culture by-and-large supports that posture. A fair question for discussion, I believe, is whether and to what degree these two “cultural realities” are compatible. That, I believe, could be a very important question if the dialogues move toward the mutual recognition of priests (presbyters) and elders (presbyters).

**Setting the Table: The Communion Elements** – In ecumenical conversations the Episcopal Church understands itself to be bound to the principles set forth in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. This has direct bearing on the question of communion elements which, for Episcopalians, means wine. Although the text of **This Holy Mystery** uses “wine” for biblical and historical reasons, it concedes “unfermented grape juice” as the normal practice among United Methodists. This is a question that the dialogue will need to address. Further, the willingness of **This Holy Mystery** to open the door to “variations” for certain cultural contexts where the “juice of the grape is unavailable or prohibitively expensive” is a concept foreign to Episcopalians and will need to be explored further.

### **Conclusion**

I am aware that this response has touched on only a few the points of comparison between our traditions that arise from **This Holy Mystery**. But I hope that these

reflections raise several important points: (1) that we are branches of a family and that much of our eucharistic theology and practice (at least as expressed in **This Holy Mystery** and the 1979 Prayer Book) are to a large degree compatible. This is rather remarkable given the impact upon Methodists of the demands of “frontier evangelicalism” and the quite different impact upon the Anglican tradition of the Catholic Revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; (2) that in spite of important continuing differences, both traditions have embraced the major principles of the ecumenical-catholic liturgical renewal movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and to a large extent adapted those principles in their respective processes of revision; (3) that nuances in theology remain, but the substantive difference we will have to work through might well be in the area of practice, rather than in the theology that under girds it.

As an Episcopalian, I am grateful to the historians, theologians, liturgists, and pastoral theologians who have given us **This Holy Mystery**. It is an important document for United Methodists and it is the sincere hope of this outside observer that the document will be widely read and embraced by the church. It is also a valuable ecumenical document on the Eucharist that brings together an impressive synthesis of ecumenical, catholic, liturgical and sacramental theology with an authentic Wesleyan-Methodist touch.

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