

Methodist-Episcopal Dialogue

**The Role of Doctrine and Confessions
in The United Methodist Church**

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Introduction

When we affirm that the church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic,” I understand that part of the meaning of “catholicity” has to do with the church’s intended universality with respect to regions, race, culture, and much of the other forms of variety that characterize humankind in general. The catholicity of the church also refers to the “fullness” or completeness of Christian teaching, but this has embraced a variety of theological points of view insofar as its statements of unity (like the Nicene Creed) allow diversity in matters not defined as *status confessionis*.

Now if the latter term seems foreign to Methodists and Anglicans alike, one of our discoveries in NCCC Faith and Order Work as we have engaged in dialogue with churches of the American “Restorationist” tradition, which have been historically “anti-credal,” is the extent to which communities that profess to be anti-credal can in fact have very specific and almost uniform theological expectations even though they are not written down anywhere. Whether our churches are comfortable defining themselves as “credal” or “confessional” or “non-credal” or even “anti-credal,” we cannot easily escape the issues of theological unity and diversity. That is to say, there are some matters that are *status confessionis* whether they are written down or not.

The truth is that both Methodists and Anglicans can be accused of wearing

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doctrine rather lightly through their histories; indeed this is probably a trait that Methodists inherited from the Anglican gene pool. I recall from my years in Oxford the story of rather conservative Anglican priests who would wear cassocks with 39 buttons (representing the Articles of Religion) and would regularly leave specific buttons unfastened as a sign of their objection to Puritan-leaning Articles. Such a distinguished Anglican theologian as Dr. O. C. Edwards argues that continental European law and culture were grounded in the statutory law codified in the Roman *Codex Iuris Civilis*, whereas British law and culture relied on a body of precedents and statutes represented in “common law.” He believes, following this, that Anglicans inherited a cultural tendency to emphasize precedent and usage over statutory requirements. It’s an intriguing thesis, and if true could explain a good deal about Methodist as well as Anglican life.

The role of doctrine, creeds and confessional statements has become an emotionally contested issue in The United Methodist Church in recent decades. The denomination’s attempts to clarify its doctrinal and theological heritage through theological study commissions (1968-1972 and 1984-1988), new disciplinary statements on “Our Theological Task” (1972, revised in 1988), the process of study of the issue of baptism (1988-1996) and eucharist (2000-2004), the processes of liturgical reform (on-going) and hymnal revision (1984-1988) and long-standing ecumenical dialogues have compelled the denomination as a whole to reconsider its corporately agreed-upon doctrinal inheritance. A sense of liberality in doctrinal issues, coupled with a contemporary concern to reassert historic teachings, has given a particularly emotional tone to these discussions.¹

The United Methodist Church is grounded in two distinct Christian traditions,

¹Cf. William Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

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each of which brought its own doctrinal inheritance to the church. On the one hand was the Anglican tradition mediated to United Methodism by the Wesleys, with its inheritance of Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, the *Book of Common Prayer*, episcopal polity, and its sixteenth-century *Homilies*. On the other hand was the tradition of German Reformed Pietism mediated to United Methodism by Philipp William Otterbein, with its inheritance of the Heidelberg Catechism, and a polity that was in its origins presbyterian, but developed a form of episcopacy (or at least superintendency) in the nineteenth century. A catalytic element in the formation of these religious movements (both for the Wesleys and for Otterbein) was the pervasive presence of what I and others have called a “religion of the heart,” a turn toward the heart and the affections in spirituality that often carried a notable tendency to de-emphasize corporate doctrinal consensus.²

The religious movements of the Wesleys and of Otterbein became churches in the period after the American Revolution: Otterbein was himself present in Baltimore in 1784 when Wesley’s American societies constituted themselves as the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the congregations allied with Otterbein’s church in Baltimore developed their own ecclesial structures through the decades of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. When these two traditions came together in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church, they brought two centuries of doctrinal development, which we might summarize roughly in the following schematic manner: 1) the inheritance of Anglican and German Reformed faith and worship presupposed by the Wesleys and Otterbein, respectively, 2) a trend towards doctrinal minimalism bred in the pietistic background of these groups and encouraged by the revivalism of the American frontier, 3) an even stronger trend towards doctrinal liberality encouraged by the influence of

²Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

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Protestant Liberalism very late in the nineteenth century and through the twentieth century, and 4) a countervailing trend to recover the importance of doctrinal consensus, growing in strength through the twentieth century.

This paper attempts to lay out some parameters for the understanding of the role of doctrine and confessions in The United Methodist Church as a background for Methodist-Episcopal discussions. The paper (a) describes historic United Methodist doctrinal “standards” and discusses both their legal status and their status by customary use, (b) describes the manner in which the Church’s *Discipline* enforces doctrinal standards, both for candidates for ordained ministry and for lay members, and (c) discusses in brief the content of Methodist doctrinal statements.

A. United Methodist Doctrinal “Standards”

The United Methodist Church has a number of doctrinal statements, referred to in our *Book of Discipline* as “Doctrinal Standards.” The UMC follows the pattern of its Methodist Episcopal predecessor denominations in identifying specific doctrinal statements as protected by “Restrictive Rules” in the denomination’s Constitution. The effect of the Restrictive Rules is that the denomination (represented by its General Conference) cannot alter the protected documents without altering the Constitution itself and in fact these documents have not been altered since they have been protected by Restrictive Rules. This degree of protection (which I have designated in the descriptions below as “constitutionally protected”) offers a higher degree of doctrinal status to the documents named, but we must note in the text following which documents are in fact named as constitutionally protected.

A.1 The Articles of Religion (Included in *Discipline* and constitutionally protected). The United Methodist Church inherited from the Methodist Episcopal Church

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and its successors Twenty-Five Articles of Religion, which John Wesley edited from the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. In the pattern typical of Protestant doctrinal statements, the Articles deal with issues of Trinitarian theology and christology. the grounds of religious authority, issues of human nature and salvation, and issues of sacramental theology and practice. Since 1812 the Articles have been protected by a Restrictive Rule in the denomination’s Constitution in its *Disciplines* and have never been altered. The Articles of Religion are also utilized as doctrinal standards in the AME, AME Zion and CME denominations.

A.2 The Confession of Faith (Included in *Discipline* and constitutionally protected). Otterbein’s successors in the United Brethren in Christ adopted a brief doctrinal statement in 1816 that was revised numerous times subsequently. The Confession, like the Articles of Religion, deals with issues of Trinitarian theology and christology, grounds of religious authority, human nature and salvation, and sacramental theology and practice. This “Confession of Faith” was inherited by the United Methodist Church upon its union in 1968, and placed alongside the Articles of Religion. The denomination’s new constitution protected the Confession of Faith in the same manner in which the Articles of Religion had been protected in the past.

At the time of union in 1968 it was felt that the Articles and Confession were “substantially” in harmony, but a Theological Study Commission was appointed by the Uniting Conference. Chaired by long-time ecumenist Albert C. Outler, the Commission was given the task of reconciling the Articles and Confession into a single doctrinal statement for the denomination, but the Commission elected instead to let the two historic documents stand and to create a new, contemporary theological statement (see A.6 below).

A.3 The General Rules (Included in *Discipline* and constitutionally protected).

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The “General Rules” were drawn up by John Wesley in 1743 and functioned as a kind of contract by which members of early Methodist Societies agreed to hold each other accountable for specific moral behaviors (under the three categories of “doing good of all kinds,” “avoiding evil of all kinds,” and “attending upon the ordinances of God”). These have been protected by a Restrictive Rule since 1812, and up until 1939 all Methodist elders were required to read the General Rules to their congregations once annually. The prohibition against slaveholding and slave trade in the General Rules was the grounds for the most significant division in the Methodist Episcopal Church (1844), but because the General Rules are concerned with issues generally appropriate to eighteenth-century Britain (such as avoiding goods that have not paid import tariffs), they have not been consistently utilized by Methodists in the twentieth century. The General Rules also stand as doctrinal standards in the AME, AME Zion, and CME denominations.

A.4 Wesley’s *Standard Sermons* (Constitutionally protected, not included in *Discipline*). John Wesley’s “Model Deed” for Methodist chapels stipulated that preachers in the chapels could not express doctrine at variance with those expressed in the first four volumes of his *Sermons on Several Occasions* and in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (see A.5 below). This deed was utilized by British Methodists, who still regard the “Wesleyan Standards” (*Sermons* and *Notes*) as their formal doctrinal statements, and by early American Methodists at least until the time of the Christmas Conference (1784). One of the disputed points of American Methodist history is whether the founders of the Methodist Episcopal Church presupposed the Wesleyan Standards, which they failed to name in their earliest *Disciplines*, and whether the Restrictive Rules adopted in 1812 presupposed that the Wesleyan Standards were constitutionally protected along with the Articles of Religion and the General Rules.

Although Methodists had consistent reference to Wesley’s *Sermons* through the

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nineteenth century, it is unclear whether they functioned as doctrinal standards. At the time of the adoption of “Our Theological Task” (A.6 below) in 1972, the denomination’s Judicial Council ruled that the Wesleyan Standards *were* constitutionally protected. This decision was challenged by Richard P. Heitzenrater on the basis of historical scholarship,³ and defended by Thomas Oden.⁴ At the time of the adoption of a revision of “Our Theological Task” in 1988, the General Conference adopted legislation clarifying that the Wesleyan Standards should be understood as part of the doctrinal standards protected by the Restrictive Rules of the Constitution. Although the number of Wesley’s sermons constituting a doctrinal standard has been disputed by British and American Methodists, the *Sermons* bear particular importance in laying out the distinctly Wesleyan understanding of the “Way of Salvation” that lies at the basis of Wesleyan spirituality.

A.5 Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Constitutionally protected, not included in *Discipline*). What has been said above about the Wesleyan Standards applies formally to Wesley’s *Notes*, although it is relevant to consider that Wesley’s *Notes* have been utilized far less frequently than the *Sermons* in Methodist theological reflection. This is because (1) Adam Clarke’s *Commentary* replaced Wesley’s *Notes* early in the nineteenth century as the favored Biblical commentary used by Methodists, and (2) Wesley’s biblical scholarship, though progressive and up-to-date for the eighteenth century, seems quite antiquated since the developments of mid-nineteenth-century biblical scholarship.

A.6 Statement of “Our Theological Task” (Included in *Discipline* but not

³Richard P. Heitzenrater, “‘At Full Liberty’: Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism” in *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), pp. 189-204.

⁴Thomas Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1988).

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constitutionally protected). The Theological Study Commission established by the 1968 Uniting Conference was to have produced a new and reconciled theological statement incorporating the teachings of the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith. The Commission chose, instead, to leave the two historical doctrinal statements in place and to adopt in addition to them a contemporary theological statement, interpreting the Wesleyan tradition in the light of contemporary (including ecumenical) issues. Their new statement, which included the first official assertion of the so-called “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” (the use of scripture, tradition, reason and experience in theological reflection), was adopted by the General Conference of 1972 with little opposition, but in a surprise move the Judicial Council determined that the new doctrinal statement was to be considered simple legislation (amenable by a simple majority of the General Conference), and not a constitutionally protected doctrinal statement as Outler and members of the Commission had intended. This has proven to be a helpful theological document in Methodist theological reflection, and was revised by the General Conference of 1988 to make clear the “primacy” or priority of scripture among the elements of the Quadrilateral and to make clear Methodist commitment to ecumenical and “apostolic faith” underlying all of our doctrinal statements.

A.7 The Role of *Hymnals* in Mediating Methodist Doctrine. All of the previously mentioned doctrinal statements have a degree of constitutional or at least disciplinary force within The United Methodist Church. This and the next item do not, although I want to make the case that the *Hymnal* and the historic creeds included in Methodist *Hymnals* function in practice as *de facto* standards of commonly agreed-upon teaching or doctrine. Methodist hymnals uniformly begin with the praise of the Trinity, recalling the worship underlying the ancient ecumenical creeds, and almost uniformly have a lengthy section on the “Christian life,” laying out the more distinctly Wesley

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spiritual tradition that focuses on the “way of salvation” from recognition of sin and repentance, to justification and “assurance of pardon,” to sanctification and the quest for “Christian perfection.” Thus, the *Hymnal* reinforces the faith taught in the Articles and Confessions, as well as the distinctly Wesleyan spirituality explicated in Wesley’s *Standard Sermons* (A.4 above).

A.8 Use of Historic Creeds. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of Wesley’s Church of England formally sanctioned the use of the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian creeds. Wesley himself omitted this article in revising the Articles of Religion for the American Methodists, and in fact he omitted the creed from the eucharistic rite in his revision of the Prayer Book, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (1784).⁵ His exclusions certainly do not indicate any objection to the doctrines of the creeds (he did object to the anathemas attached to the “Athanasian” Creed), but are significant nonetheless because they left Methodists without a formal affirmation of the historic creeds. As we shall note below (part C), the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith utilize the language of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed and of the Chalcedonian Definition of Faith, so there could be little doubt that the Methodists agreed with the content of the historic creeds.

Methodist *Hymnals* from the middle of the nineteenth century began to utilize the Apostles’ Creed in worship, and it has become the customary creed recited in American Methodist churches, including the historically African-American Methodist denominations (AME, AMEZ, and CME).⁶ Only in the twentieth century (beginning with the 1964

⁵ Cf. Nolan B. Harmon, “The Creeds in American Methodism” (in *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, s.v. “Confession of Faith,” 1:563).

⁶An AME declaration on Apostolic Succession and Religious Formalism (1884) states that “we grant that the orderly repetition of the . . . Apostles’ Creed . . . may conduce to the attainment” of spiritual worship (cited in the AME *Discipline* 1976, p. 31).

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Hymnal) have American Methodists utilized the Nicene Creed in worship, and my own impression is that its use remains relatively rare. Perhaps the most explicit affirmation of Nicene Faith on the part of United Methodists comes in the denomination’s formal acceptance of the COCU Consensus.⁷ One can make the case that exposure to the Ecumenical Movement in the twentieth century has led The United Methodist Church and its predecessors to be more explicit than in the past about its commitment to historic Christian doctrine.

B. The Role and Enforcement of Doctrine in the UMC

Given the inheritance of doctrinal standards listed above, we may now ask in what ways The United Methodist Church utilizes and enforces its stated doctrinal commitments. Put differently, to what extent is The United Methodist Church serious about its doctrinal commitments?

We must state in the first place, as is customary for Methodists to do, that the Methodist tradition in general allows a wide latitude in doctrine and teaching. This comes as no coincidence, given the rise of our denominational traditions in the context of a “religion of the heart,” and the prominence of various forms of Protestant Liberalism in our churches in the twentieth century. Wesley himself insisted on a “Catholic Spirit” that agrees in doctrinal “essentials” but allows for a wide range of difference on “opinions that do not strike at the root of Christianity.”⁸ He insisted on the content of the ancient

⁷“The COCU Consensus” (in Joseph A. Burgess and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, eds., *Growing Consensus: Church Dialogues in the United States, 1962-1991* [Ecumenical Documents V; New York: Paulist Press, 1995, p. 42]).

⁸The distinction between “doctrines” and “opinions” is drawn most clearly in the sermon on the “Catholic Spirit” (1749), where Wesley insists that although we may not share the same opinions or ways of worship as others, our hearts should nevertheless be right with God and with all our neighbors, and our “hands” should be extended to them (I-II). Wesley insists, however, that a “catholic spirit” is not to be confused with a “speculative Latitudinarianism,” an “indifference to all opinions” nor with an “indifference to all congregations” (III:1-3). Wesley’s sermon entitled “A Caution against Bigotry” (1750) maintains that we should not forbid the efforts of persons who do not have an outward connection with us, who are not of our

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creeds, but did not insist that believers should subscribe to their precise words.⁹ There is, I think, broad agreement that Methodism has historically embraced a considerable degree of latitude in “indifferent” matters; there remains, however, some disagreement on what constitutes the “essential” doctrines on which unity is imperative (see part C below). Acknowledging this problem, though, we can describe some specific ways in which a degree of doctrinal unity is expected in The United Methodist Church.

B.1 Doctrine and Church Membership. Methodists have made few doctrinal requirements for church membership, but have consistently reserved the possibility of removing church members for “dissemination of doctrine contrary to the established standards of doctrine of the Church.”¹⁰ Through the beginning of the twentieth century Methodist churches and churches of the United Brethren in Christ tradition practiced a form of catechumenate that they described as “probationary membership” in a local congregation. An individual was received temporarily and upon training and evidence of Christian conduct was later received as a full member of a congregation, but the focus was overwhelmingly on morality and spirituality rather than profession of doctrine.

In fact, it has been only in the twentieth century that Methodists have made more explicit doctrinal requirements for church membership. The ritual for reception of adult members in the *Hymnal* of 1935 included the question, “Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ?”¹¹ This

"party," with whose opinions we differ, with whose practices we differ, who belong to a Church we consider to be beset with error, or who hold bitter affections towards us, so long as their ministries bring forth good fruits (II-III). Lawrence Meredith lays out a number of loci where Wesley maintains the distinction between “essential” doctrines and “opinions” (Meredith, pp. 2-6).

⁹Wesley, sermon “On the Trinity,” ¶ 4 (in Jackson, 6:201; Outler, *Sermons* 2:377-378).

¹⁰*Book of Discipline* 1996, ¶ 2624.3.d (p. 656).

¹¹*Hymnal* of 1935, p. 543.

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doctrinally dubious question appeared at odds with the sixth Article of Religion, which asserts the unity of the Testaments, so the question was revised in the 1964 *Hymnal*, “Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?”¹² At the same time, the order for the baptism of adults added the question, “Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life?”¹³ These same questions remain in the current (1988) *Hymnal*, although the profession of faith in the Trinity is set as three separate questions and allows the use of the whole of the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed (said with the whole congregation) as a response.¹⁴

One could argue, then, that in this case as in the use of the historic creeds, ecumenical dialogue and contact have influenced The United Methodist Church to be more explicit about its doctrinal commitments. I would note again, that although church members make a minimal profession of doctrine, they still remain liable to dismissal on grounds of teaching doctrines contrary to those of the denomination, although actual cases of dismissal on doctrinal grounds became increasingly few in the twentieth century.

B.2 Doctrinal Profession and Methodist Ordination. Candidates for ordination in The United Methodist Church are examined on a variety of topics, including historic Christian doctrine and specific Wesleyan teachings. Although it would be difficult to demonstrate, I have the general impression that in the last two decades Annual Conferences (the United Methodist synodal body that functions as a presbytery in presenting candidates for ordained ministry) have examined candidates with increasing

¹²*Hymnal* of 1964, ritual section, no. 829.

¹³*Hymnal* of 1964, ritual section, no. 828.

¹⁴*Hymnal* of 1988, p. 35.

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attention to issues of doctrine and Wesleyan spirituality. Beyond these general examinations, all candidates for the presbyterate (the Methodist order of “elder”) and the diaconate (we have just moved from a transitional diaconate to a permanent order of deacons in 1996) are asked the following questions before the Annual Conference:

Have you studied the doctrines of our Church?

Upon full examination do you believe them to be in accordance with the Holy Scriptures?

Candidates for the order of elder are asked the following additional question:

Will you preach and maintain them?¹⁵

This is an interesting way to put the questions: the candidates are never directly asked if they themselves subscribe to “the doctrines of our Church,” only if they have studied them, find them to be in accord with Scripture, and (in the case of elders) will “preach and maintain” them. We may note, further, that “the doctrines of our Church” are not specified, although this presumably refers to the content of the constitutionally protected doctrinal standards named above (A.1 through A.5).

As in the case of lay members of congregations, ordained ministers can be removed on the grounds of teaching doctrine contrary to the church’s doctrinal standards,¹⁶ and again, there have been increasingly few (but some) cases of removal on doctrinal grounds in the twentieth century.

C. The Double Content of United Methodist Doctrine

It is impossible to summarize in this space the content of the varied doctrinal standards indicated in part A above. But it is, I believe, possible to state in general that

¹⁵UMC *Discipline* 1996, ¶ 327, questions 8-10.

¹⁶UMC *Discipline* 1996, ¶ 2624, item “f.”

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these doctrinal standards include two rather different sets of “doctrines.” They include, on the one hand, doctrines that define Christian (we might say, ecumenical) unity, and on the other hand, doctrines that define the distinctive spirituality of the Methodist movement.

We have noted above that John Wesley himself distinguished between “essential doctrines” on which the church’s unity hinges, and “opinions” in indifferent matters on which latitude could be allowed. Earlier Wesleyan scholarship has cataloged a number of doctrines that Wesley identifies somehow as “essential,” but the resultant list is somewhat inchoate and not a list in any order that Wesley himself authorized. Colin Williams, for example, listed the following six doctrines as Wesleyan “essentials”: original sin, the deity of Christ, the atonement (saving work of Christ), justification by faith alone, and the work of the Holy Spirit (including assurance of pardon).¹⁷

I am convinced that closer attention to the contexts of Wesley’s claims about “essential” doctrines reveals a rather clearly thought-out distinction between doctrines defining Christian unity in general, and doctrines defining the more particular theology and spirituality of the Methodists. When writing his “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749), for example, Wesley focuses on the doctrines of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ as the Second Person of the Godhead, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the like.¹⁸ When describing the distinctive teachings of the Methodists, by contrast, he gives an entirely different list of “essentials,” typically, repentance (as the work of “preventing” or prevenient grace), justification (often specifying assurance), and holiness.¹⁹

¹⁷Colin Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 16-17.

¹⁸Wesley, “A Letter to a Roman Catholic” (in Jackson *Works* 10:80-86).

¹⁹Wesley, “Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained” VI:4-6 (in Jackson *Works* 8:472-475).

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That is to say, Wesley understood doctrine in relation to the unity of particular communities. An examination of the Methodist doctrinal standards listed above in part A shows a similar division of materials. Some of the doctrinal standards define the unity of the Christian community broadly (the Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, the historic creeds, and the initial section of Methodist *Hymnals* on the praise of the Trinity). Others define the much more particular inheritance of Wesleyan spirituality and theology focusing on the “way of salvation” and related doctrines about prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace (the General Rules, Wesley’s *Standard Sermons*, and the organization and content of the “Christian Life” section of Methodist *Hymnals*).

This double set of doctrines results, I would argue, from Methodism’s dual identity as a religious movement and then only later as a church. As religious movements within the Church of England and the German Reformed Church, Methodism and the United Brethren had only to define their own distinctive teachings about the “way of salvation,” hence, the oldest doctrinal material (the General Rules, 1743, the *Standard Sermons* from the 1740s and 1750s, and the original *Hymnal* codified in 1780) has to do with specifically Wesleyan spirituality. The more Methodism became a church separate from the Church of England (and this was a gradual process), the more it became necessary for Methodists to define the doctrines that define the unity of the broader Christian community, hence the Articles of Religion (1784), the Confession of Faith (1810s), the addition of sections of material in praise of the Trinity at the beginning of Methodist *Hymnals* from the middle of the nineteenth century,²⁰ and eventually the inclusion of the historic creeds (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

²⁰There was, of course, material in praise of the Trinity in the 1780 *Hymnal*, but the structure of the 1780 *Hymnal* focused on teachings about the way of salvation. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Methodist *Hymnals* began to include explicit sections on the praise of the Trinity.

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Conclusion

Methodism’s dual ecclesial character (ecclesial schizophrenia?) and its origins as a movement for the “religion of the heart” within the Church of England account for much of United Methodism’s contemporary ambiguity on the role of doctrine and confessions. Some contemporary Methodists engaged in ecumenical dialogue, such as Geoffrey Wainwright, have suggested that Methodism remains a church incomplete apart from its location within ecumenical Christianity.²¹ As obvious as this seems to me as a participant in ecumenical dialogue, United Methodists often act entirely on their own (for example, in constructing new understandings of ordained ministry).

²¹Geoffrey Wainwright, “Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation” (in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Wesleyan Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984, pp. 93-129).